

# BHS NEWSLETTER

B L O O M I N G T O N H I S T O R I C A L S O C I E T Y

## *Board members take office*

### VISIT US!

- Tuesday
  - Wednesday
  - Thursday
  - Saturday
- Open 1-5 PM.



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Each January the Bloomington Historical Society Board of Directors begins a new year of service. Our twelve board members serve two-year terms, with half of the board up for renewal each year.

In November, members at the annual meeting elected two new board members, Carol Forbes, and Ken Veness, and re-elected four others.

Carol is new to the board and is a history buff. She is interested in learning more about old neighborhoods in Bloomington, genealogy, and the history of Bloomington.

Ken is returning to the board after taking a year off. He is one of the original founding members of the historical society. He has a wealth of knowledge about Bloomington, and usually volunteers on Saturdays.

Re-elected board members were Karl Fiend, Denise Logeland, Barb Bellorin, and Ryan Young.

Any Bloomington Historical Society member is welcome to attend and participate on our support committees. We have openings on the Membership Committee, Event Planning Committee, Long Range Planning Committee and Communications Committee. Let us know if you are interested! Committees usually meet once a month.

The Board of Directors meets the first Thursday of most months at 7 P.M. at Old Town Hall Museum. These meetings are open to the public. Join us!

## ***NEW EXPANDED HOURS***

Several new weekly volunteers have allowed us to add Tuesday afternoons 1-5 PM to our open hours at the Old Town Hall Museum. Would you like to join us either regularly, or to fill schedule openings for vacations or other absences? Email us!

The Board also made the decision to discontinue evening hours on Thursdays. Visitor counts showed we do not get many visitors after dark, especially in the winter months.

## Who Ever Heard of a Square Piano?

Recently, folks who are musically inclined or have been musicians, have been asked if they are familiar with Square pianos. Most think this a “trick” question, responding that they never heard of a Square piano. They are even more surprised to know that one can be seen at the Old Bloomington Town Hall. The piano, donated to the Bloomington Historical Society, once belonged to pioneer families who lived in West Bloomington along the Minnesota River, in an area known as Bloomington Ferry.

The seven-foot Square piano is a Knabe piano built in 1866. It has eighty-five keys and two pedals, while modern grands have eighty-eight keys and three pedals. The Knabe pianos have a rich history being first built by Wilhelm Knabe, who was born in Germany in 1803. Wilhelm eventually immigrated to America, settling in Baltimore where he worked as an apprentice to a piano maker. Knabe eventually started his own company. He built squares, grands, and uprights. The most notable purchaser of one of this Square pianos was Francis Scott Key. That piano still exists and resides at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis. After Wilhelm's death in 1864, his sons expanded the piano business to the West. To give you an idea of how well accepted the Knabe piano was, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky played the piano at the official opening of Carnegie Hall in 1891.

Unfortunately, the piano at the Town Hall can no longer be played. However, if it could, it would play a song of contentment and share its story. The first owner of the piano was Mendon Schutt, who upon moving from the Minnesota River Valley to Minneapolis in 1917 gave it to Minnie Ellingson Tapping, widow of his close friend. Minnie's father, Sever Ellingson, had built a farm and homesteaded the property

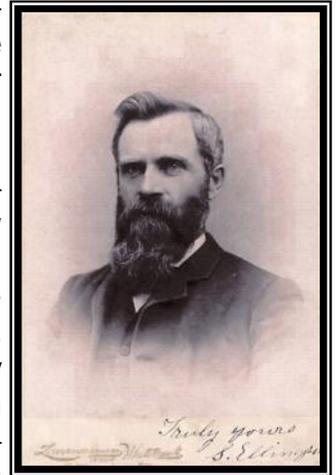


along the Minnesota River bluffs about what today is 110th and Old Shakopee. Minnie, who was widowed quite young, moved back and eventually took over the family farm and raised her two children there.

But the story begins a little before Minnie's father, Sever Ellingson, married and settled along the river. In the early 1800's settlers in what is now known as Bloomington were beginning to move from north to south, and vice versa. They often traveled from Mankato and Shakopee, and needed to cross the Minnesota River. To facilitate this, two early settlers, Joseph Dean and William Chambers built a ferry near today's junction of Highway 169 and Old Shakopee Road in 1854. The following year, in 1855, Chambers built a hotel on the Bloomington side of the river and managed it for nearly fifty years. One might wager to guess this was the beginning of “tourism” in West Bloomington as Minnie Ellingson Tapping went on to build twenty cottages on her property and ran a youth hostel. She enjoyed entertaining folks. This leads us back to the Knabe piano, which was gifted to the Ellingson family for their and their guest's entertainment. If the piano could be played it would sing a song of happy times, early adventure, and challenges.

When we think of Bloomington and all the tourism we've come to know, the multiple hotels, restaurants, the Mall of America, it's fascinating to know it began in West Bloomington along the bluffs of the Minnesota River, and the Knabe piano “played” a significant role. Now, come to the Old Town Hall and admire it's contribution.

*Written by Judith Miller. Photos of Minnie Ellingson Tapping and Sever Ellingson from BHS collection.*



## Upcoming Events

Friday, April 24, 2026 6:30 PM

### OPEN MIC POETRY READING

The Bloomington Old Town Hall Museum, together with the Old Town Hall Poetry Group, will host an open mic poetry reading. It is an opportunity for you to share one or two of your compositions or read one of your favorite poets. If you prefer not to read, just come and enjoy the compositions of others and share some community time. Come and help us celebrate National Poetry Month.

Thursday, June 11, 2026 7:00 PM

### UPLIFTING STORES FROM LIFE EXPERIENCES

Chicken Soup for the Soul has sold over 500 million copies since its first edition came out in 1993, making it a unique collection of stories and memories. Learn how to preserve your own memories and craft pieces readers can relate to with Bloomington author A. L. Padden. Her stories have appeared in *chicken Soup for the Soul Spirit of Christmas* and the #9 and #10 *UP Reader*.



## GRANT PROGRESS

Much progress has been made in the past year entering items from our collection into the CollectiveAccess inventory software we were able to purchase through a State of Minnesota Arts and Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society grant. Over 3,700 items have been photographed and entered.

Approximately 1,700 items from our collection can be seen online at [www.MNCollections.org](http://www.MNCollections.org). Scroll down just a short way and click on Bloomington Historical Society.

Click on the photo of an item, and get even more information about it. What a wonderful way to bring Bloomington History to you! New items are being uploaded weekly.

## 2026 MEMBERSHIP DONATION

Members fund our programs. Join today! See our website for online giving options. **Thank You to everyone who has already sent in their annual membership this year!**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE/ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$ 30.00

\_\_\_\_\_ Family \$ 50.00

Additional donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to:  
Bloomington Historical Society

Mail to: Bloomington Historical Society  
1800 West Old Shakopee Road  
Bloomington, MN 55431

Links for online donations including GiveMN, Venmo and PayPal are on our website under the Donate tab.

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I'd love to volunteer at the Old Town Hall Museum. I'm available: (circle)

Tuesday afternoon    Wednesday afternoon

Thursday afternoon    Saturday afternoon

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**B L O O M I N G T O N   H I S T O R I C A L   S O C I E T Y**

Founded in 1964, the Bloomington Historical Society is dedicated to the discovery, preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the City of Bloomington.

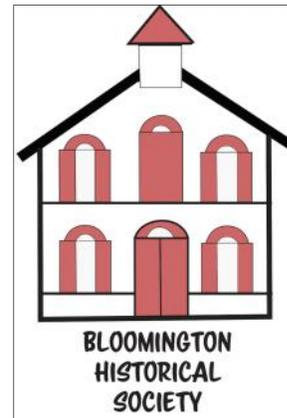
Our mission is to collect, preserve and hold in the public trust the many artifacts, photographic images, memorabilia and life stories of the people who have lived in Bloomington, Minnesota.

The organization is run entirely by volunteers and we depend entirely upon your donations for our operations, programs and displays. We are grateful for your ongoing support.

**Old Town Hall Museum**

Penn Avenue at Old Shakopee Road  
Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays  
and Saturdays 1 to 5 pm.

Additional open hours by appointment



Bloomington Historical Society  
1800 West Old Shakopee Road  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55431