

The Lake Area Preserver



White Bear Lake Area Historical Society

Winter 2007

William Markoe and the First Aerial View of White Bear Lake

By Sara Markoe Hanson

This fall marked the 150th anniversary of the first hot-air balloon flight in what was to become the State of Minnesota. That initial flight took place on September 22, 1857 from the river bluffs of St. Paul. The balloon was aptly named the *Minnesota*. William Markoe, owner of the balloon, and a passenger, William Crawford, were carried at an estimated altitude between one and a half and three miles to Cannon Falls where they successfully landed on that clear and sunny day. In two hours they had traveled a distance that had until that point taken two days to cover.

That initial flight has been carefully recorded in the ledger of Minnesota firsts, but it is actually the second flight that intrigues me even more.

Markoe had a penchant for inventing, creating and developing support for his projects. As part of the balloon endeavor he sold tickets to watch the launch in order to pay for the supplies—including the entire stock of linen from a St. Paul dry goods store—to build the balloon and to provide the gas needed for its inflation to a diameter of forty feet. He also enlisted a dozen women to sew bolt after bolt of the linen together after he had soaked it in linseed oil so it would hold the gas.

On October 8, 1857 the second aeronautical ascension in Minnesota took place as the signature event of the Territorial Fair that year. The Fair itself was known as “The Balloon Fair” and is commemorated on the State Fair Grounds today with a wooden sculpture. This flight was more eventful than the one some two weeks earlier.

The balloon ascended from the southwest corner of the old capitol grounds where the Fair was being held. The wicker basket of the balloon was adorned with two American flags—both for ornamentation and as an indicator of whether the balloon was ascending or descending. Nearly fifty volunteers held the balloon stable while its passengers: Markoe, S. S. Eaton and a Mr. Brown loaded themselves into the wicker “car” that was six feet in diameter and three feet high on the sides with benches for seats.



WILLIAM MARKOE, CA. 1857

Continued from page 1

These pioneer aeronauts were carried from St. Paul to the northeast where they sailed over White Bear Lake. First hand accounts record that Mr. Eaton called attention to the fact that from that height they could see the bottom of the lake through the water. As they continued on past any sign of settlement, the trio decided it best to land their craft and return to St. Paul. Instructions were given on how best to accomplish this task, the most important being that whatever may happen, do not get out until the balloon is secured!

As the balloon continued north during its descent it began to hit the treetops. It was soon discovered that a grappling iron designed to anchor the balloon was lost in the commotion and both of the valve cords had disconnected. As the balloon continued to descend, the trio debated their options and as they neared the ground Mr. Eaton proposed the idea of attempting to attach the balloon to a tree some twenty feet away. Seizing the opportunity, Eaton leapt from the basket while holding the cable to secure the balloon. Once the craft was relieved of his weight it immediately began to ascend again tearing the cable from Eaton's hand and leaving him looking up at the others in amazement.

Mr. Brown, still in the rapidly ascending balloon, determined that he could climb the lines that attached the balloon to its basket and retrieve the cords from where they swung more than twenty feet above. Upon succeeding, the lines were returned to Markoe who was then able to guide the balloon to a safe landing. The two men returned to St. Paul by dawn the next morning.

More than a decade after that fateful flight, Vic Richards of White Bear found the grappling iron in a tree near Pine Tree Lake in what is today Dellwood. The iron was used for a time on one of the steamers that plied the waters of White Bear Lake. Its owner, Colonel Leip (who owned the Leip Hotel which was located on the site of the White Bear Shopping Center today) also claimed to have the flags that had once adorned the basket of the balloon.



THE MARKOE COTTAGE, ONE OF THE EARLIEST COTTAGES TO BE BUILT AT WHITE BEAR, LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF SHADY LANE AND LAKE AVENUE, CA. 1865

Editor's note: William Markoe was the great-great grandfather of WBLAHS Executive Director Sara Markoe Hanson. After the flight that introduced him to our area Markoe did not waste much time in creating a summer haven at White Bear for his family of five sons. He often spoke of the fact that the beauty of the lake from the air is what drew him north from St. Paul. Today dozens of his descendants live in the communities that skirt the shore of White Bear Lake.

In Memory of Stan Hill

Through a generous gift from the Hill Family in memory of Stan Hill the WBLAHS has established the Stan Hill Memorial Technology Fund (HMTF) to increase the online presence of the Historical Society and enhance our ability to record and preserve the stories, photos and artifacts collected. This project is a great fit for a gift in memory of Stan Hill who founded a technology company after retiring from Minnesota Mutual Insurance and served several terms as the Treasurer of the WBLAHS encouraging members and other supporters to match donations from other sources. This legacy will create an ongoing source for future upgrades and serve as matching funds for grant applications. If you would like more information on this project or are interested in contributing to this fund, please contact Sara at 651-407-5327.

Editor's Note: As hoped, the HMTF has already received an additional substantial gift to provide a new laptop.



White Bear Lake Area Historical Society member **Matt Todd** has been instrumental at getting our new computers up and running at the Depot. This upgrade will allow us to catalog and scan the ever increasing photo collection even faster and increases the productivity of the WBLAHS staff. Thank you **Matt** for all of your help!

We would not be able to provide many of our programs and events without our numerous volunteers who make things happen. Whether it is giving tours at the House, sorting papers at the Resource Library or answering questions for visitors, we rely heavily on the help of our volunteers. Thank you to all of you—new and continuing! For more information on what you may be able to do to help please contact Sara at 651-407-5327.



**The WBLAHS 2008
Historic Photo Calendar is
now available at the Depot
Museum for just \$7.95 each!**



Thoughts from the President

I would like to thank all of our Board Members past and present as well as our Membership for helping make the past two years as President productive, worthwhile and enjoyable. As a collective group we have really made a difference in preserving our history. I look forward to serving and welcome our incoming President, Peter Reis.

At the end of 2007 we have three Board Members leaving:.....

Corinna Morse served on the Board in an At-Large position and as Secretary. She is always an inspiration no matter how large or small the task. Thank you for sharing your creative energy and passion.

Jean Woodberry, is also leaving the Board after six years, she started as In-House at the Fillebrown House, moved to Historian and as Educational Liason was instrumental in creating our first 3rd grade curriculum. Jean takes on every role with a directed importance and shares with us many great ideas.

Ray Smith, accepted the position as Treasurer in January of 2007 and will be leaving at the end of the year. Thank you Ray for having such wonderful timing and being there when you were needed.

It is amazing to me that our Board Members share such a significant amount of their time and talents with the Historical Society. It is even more amazing that they also share their family's time and talents. This not only happens during their terms as Board Members but before and after their terms as well. I believe our success comes from this level of commitment from our Members. Thank You!



From the Director's Desk...

The WBLAHS has done it again—pulled off another phenomenal event. This time it took more than 130 volunteers, homeowners and sponsors to make it happen. The Historic House Tour 2007 was a huge success. Nearly 500 people took the opportunity to visit ten fabulous houses on and around White Bear Lake on September 30th. The feedback has been tremendous and plans are in the works to make this a recurring event. All of this would not have been possible without the great support received from the *White Bear Press* in creating the ticket booklets and promoting the event, Veolia Environmental Services for donating the garbage boxes, Auto Glass Express for shoe bags, Commercial Printing for printing signs, Vacation Sports for t-shirts, the White Bear Country Inn and Rudy's Redeye Grill for providing the shuttles, the sponsors for each of the ten houses and especially the ten generous homeowners who opened their doors for us.

It is a great honor to work within such a generous community and at times like this I am reminded of that particular fact. Thank you to everyone who made this event such a success. It could not have happened without each and every piece of the puzzle. I can't wait until next time!

-Sara

Calendar of Events

- Sunday, November 25th* Christmas Decorating at the Fillebrown House 1pm
Everyone is welcome to help trim the tree and deck the halls!
- Saturday, December 1st* Christmas Tea at the Fillebrown House* 2pm
- Friday, December 7th* WBLAHS Members' Party at Fillebrown House 6-9pm

***Registration Required through Community Services & Recreation. Fees apply and space is limited. See program booklet for information or contact the White Bear Lake Community Services and Recreation Department at 651-407-7501.**



TO SHARE YOUR
MEMORIES IN
FUTURE ISSUES,
CONTACT:

SARA MARKOE HANSON
DEPOT MUSEUM
4751 HIGHWAY 61
WHITE BEAR LAKE, MN
55110
651-407-5327

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
WILBERNE, MN
PERMIT NO. 49

White Bear Lake Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 10543
White Bear Lake, MN 55110-0543