



Chanhassen Historian

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Township to Village to the City of Chanhassen

Jack Atkins

In 1852 the first land claim was recorded in this township by Joseph Vogel, a German settler. The following year it got its name, Chanhassen Township. The name is usually credited to a Mrs. Clarissa Cleaveland, a member of the Northampton Colony (originally from Massachusetts), from the Dakota words for tree [chan] of berry juice [hassan] or “maple-syrup tree”. The population of the township grew slowly over many years.



Forty-four years later, in April of 1896, thirty-five adult men (women did not yet have the right to vote) gathered in John Geiser’s carpentry shop located in St. Hubertus on the eastern edge of Carver County. They voted to incorporate a village government and thus, the Village of Chanhassen was born.

According to the U.S. Census, in 1860 the population of Chanhassen Township was 566. One hundred years later, in 1960, it had grown to 3,167 people. When the population of a township surpassed 2,000 people, the Minnesota Municipal Commission was required to hold hearings to determine its legal future.

Chanhassen Census through History

Year	Township	Village
1860	566	
1870	1,084	
1880	1,178	
1890	1,202	
1900	1,219	175
1910	1,368	164
1920	1,194	129
1930	1,272	128
1940	1,483	132
1950	1,795	182
1960	3,167	244
	City	
1970	4,879	
1980	6,359	
1990	11,732	
2000	20,321	
2010	22,952	
2019	26,389	

← Civil War begins 

← after village incorporated

← after WWI & 
1918 Spanish Flu

← after WWII
(Baby Boom begins) 

← after township
& village merge 

← estimated 

According to “Chanhassen, A Centennial History”, Chanhassen Township was the largest piece of unincorporated land in Carver County - and neighboring cities had an interest. Chaska petitioned to annex 3,800 acres (about 6 square miles) that included Hazeltine Golf Course and what eventually became Jonathan. The Chanhassen Township Board was outraged and fought the annexation all the way to the Minnesota Supreme Court, but they lost. Meanwhile, other cities were eyeing parts of the township, including the cities of Victoria and Excelsior.

This resulted in a flurry of activity and legal wrangling over several years. Among other things, the Lake Minnewashta community felt more connected to Excelsior than to Chanhassen, the Village of Chanhassen had concerns about being swallowed up by the Township, and there were disagreements about rural versus urban tax bases. On May 2nd, 1967 the merger was finally approved, and the City of Chanhassen was born, but not before losing parts to Chaska and Victoria. The new City had a population of 4,112 and an area of about 24 square miles, roughly 2/3 the township’s original size.

CHANHASSEN: AN ARMISTICE DAY POEM

As printed in Chaska Valley Herald, Dec. 1943

Cpl. Joe Marschall, in his leisure moments in the territory of Hawaii, composed and dedicated the following poem in honor of his hometown of Chanhassen and the people who live there.

I'm sitting here and thinking
Of a place so far away
The place I'm coming back to
Its where I plan to stay.

It's not a town or city,
It's really not so big,
But what's an oak before it grows
Nothing but a twig!

The place that I am thinking of
Is a village small and fair;
Everything I held so dear
Is waiting for me there.

It's not the town where I was born
But it's where I spent my youth,
Where I realized my first ambition
To wear a three-piece long pants suit.

It's where I spent my school days,
Where I first learned of puppy love,
Where I listened to the pastor
Tell of Him, who's up above!

It will always bring back memories,
Of vacations from our school
Of the times we swam together
In that big Lake Susan pool.

Of the hunting and the fishing
Near this earthly paradise,
The coolness of the water
And the blueness of the skies.

In my dreams again I see it,
Even Albert Pauly's store
On the corner where it now stands
And the place it was before.

I can hear the ringing church bells
Calling all good folks together,
Comin from the farms and village,
Regardless of the weather.

This village is Chanhassen.
It's had its joys, and sorrows too.
Of it, I'll keep on thinking,
Also of you and you and you!

Yes, it is a fine compliment to the little village of Chanhassen and its fine citizens. Cpl. Marschall sends season's greetings to all his friends and wishes to thank many of them for sending him Christmas packages that arrived at his destination a short time ago.

The Railroad comes to Chanhassen



During the 1860's the railroads were rapidly expanding across the Midwest. The arrival of trains meant big changes for the people living in the

region, with transportation and industry becoming possible in otherwise remote areas. Rails were built through Chanhassen, and by 1882 the Milwaukee Railroad had built the first railroad depot in the village.

Many Italian immigrants came to America at this time to seek opportunity, including work on the railroad. Most of the initial track lines, including those in Chanhassen, were built by these immigrants. The crews would set up tent camps along the portion of the rail system they were laying, then move on down the line when the section was complete. The Chanhassen crew set up camp in an area that is now near Chapel Hill Academy. The locals were afraid of these seemingly strange men and kept their children away.

The rail system improved the quality of life for the early village residents of Chanhassen. Locals had permanent jobs with the railroad to maintain the rail sections and depot. Commerce in Chanhassen also expanded as businesses could obtain product by receiving deliveries by rail. The original depot is still standing and can be seen on Great Plains Blvd near the Chanhassen Dinner Theatre.



Quick Museum Update—

Volunteers are refinishing this beautiful display case, generously donated by Excelsior Historical Society, originally from Leach's Resort on Lake Minnewashta.

On Never Losing a Mailbag

Ron Roeser

I was one of eight kids in my household during the 1940s. When I was 9 years old my mother, a very hard-working woman, found a part-time job to fill extra time when she wasn't cooking, cleaning, washing, or caring for her brood. She had previously worked for Albert Pauly in his grocery store starting in 1920 when she was sixteen. Albert also happened to be the Postmaster of Chanhassen in those days.

The new job my mother took on involved the mail deliveries in Chanhassen. There were two postal deliveries every day by train. One came early at 5 a.m., when the train stopped at the depot and dropped off the parcel post. The next train picked up and dropped off the mail. My mother's job was walking to the post office between 9 and 10 a.m. every day with a canvas bag, stuffing the bag with Chanhassen's mail, and bringing it to the depot. She would then attach it to a metal arm with a hook, which hung over the railroad tracks about a foot from passing trains.

Incoming mail was thrown from the train going at a speed of 60 mi/hour. As it sped through town, a man standing on the train would throw the mailbag off the train. At the same time, a metal arm on the train would snatch the Chanhassen outgoing mailbag from where it hung.

Being rather busy, my mother would leave one of her darling kids at the depot to find and transport the mailbag to

Pauly's Store. My older brother and sister had real jobs by then, so it most often fell to me to be that kid. I was well known for being the skinniest kid in Chanhassen. Terror hung over me at the possibility of not being able to find the bag among the tall weeds and cattails in the ditch along the tracks. I was under the impression that if you lost a mailbag, you would spend at least 2 years in Stillwater State Prison.

There was mail for the State Bank, Joes' Place, Pauly's Store, the great Feed Mill, the DX station, the church, the school, and all the heart of Chanhassen's business district. No one thought twice about a skinny little kid hauling this important lifeline connecting our small town with the rest of the world. They knew if it were one of Lorraine Roeser's kids, it would get done. And it did – I never lost a mail bag!



Join the Chanhassen Historical Society!

It is more important than ever to join or renew your membership.

Please consider an additional donation as we prepare for the museum's grand opening.

Check your address label for current membership status.

Membership automatically includes subscription to Carver County Historical Society's mailing list!

Membership Application

Date _____ Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone# () _____ E-mail _____

Individual (\$15) Family (\$25) Additional Donation Amount \$ _____

Make checks payable to: Chanhassen Historical Society, P.O. Box 941, Chanhassen, MN 55317

OR PayPal payments to: contact@chanhistorical.org

Thanks ☆

Notes from the President

In October our Board of Directors passed the motion to officially designate the Historic Village Hall the Chanhassen History Center. In approving this motion we hope to make it clear that while under the stewardship of the Chanhassen Historical Society, the building will not be used as just a museum. We hope to create a central community meeting place for various types of gatherings including educational programs, cultural events, lectures, and study.

We have a small crew of volunteers who have been working diligently on researching, gathering, archiving, and reproducing items for our first display. We had initially hoped to open the History Center to the public in late 2020. I'm afraid we were a bit optimistic. This year has brought about many unique challenges including social distancing guidelines for public spaces. We realize now that opening our small space to visitors would not be safe, especially in winter. That said, we will continue to prepare the first display for when the guidelines are relaxed or when warmer weather arrives!

I would like to personally thank our crew: Nancy Simpson, Sandy Rodenz, Sally Atkins, Lucy Haukoos, Sam Aas, and Peggy Tran for the countless hours spent on making the display educational, interesting, and professional. A special thanks to Jeremy Murray, Curator at Carver County Historical Society, for his invaluable assistance in our preparations, and I encourage our members to visit the Carver County Historical Society's online collection. Digging into the past can be an uplifting experience during the long dark days of winter!

I will keep you updated on the museum grand opening when it is finalized, and I would like to thank you for your support. I believe you will become as fascinated with the history of Chanhassen as I am!

Paula Atkins,
President

Membership includes access to photo archives
from Carver County Historical Society!
www.carvercountyhistoricalsociety.org
Username: cchsOct
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