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## The Historical Geography of Good Thunder, Minnesota, 1870-2005

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The Historical Geography of Good Thunder, Minnesota, 1870-2005

By  
Robert L. Bothmann

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Master of Science  
In  
Cross-Disciplinary Studies  
Geography and English Technical Communication

Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Mankato, Minnesota

December 2005

Date: 2 November 2005

This thesis paper has been examined and approved.

Examining Committee:

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Cynthia Miller, Chairperson

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Kathleen Hurley

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Daardi Sizemore

*For Good Thunder and its Residents  
Past, Present and Future*



## Acknowledgements

The idea for this thesis topic grew out of conversations I had with Dr. Cynthia Miller and Dr. Martin Mitchell in the spring of 2005. I wanted to research a topic that was interesting and would allow the results to give something back to the community. The chance to provide a history geography about the community in which I have made my home was not only ideal, it was fun and rewarding. I wish to extend my sincere thanks to my examining committee, Dr. Cynthia Miller, Dr. Kathleen Hurley, and Daardi Sizemore, for their support and assistance in creating and blending the methodological elements that make this project cross-disciplinary. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Janet Cherrington-Cuore, Kellian Clink, Dr. Kimberly Contag, Dr. James Grabowska, and Melissa Holmberg for their proof-reading, editing, and constructive criticism of the text. Additional thanks go to Cheryl Barnard and the City of Good Thunder for allowing me to rummage in their files for information and the loan of several maps of the village, Jim and Merry Beth Sinkbeil for answering odd questions and loaning me their video tape of the Good Thunder fire burn, and to Bolton & Menk, Inc. who generously provided the digital plat map of Good Thunder.

## Abstract

### **The Historical Geography of Good Thunder, Minnesota: 1870-2005**

by Robert L. Bothmann, Master of Science in Cross-Disciplinary Studies, Geography and English Technical Communication, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2005.

Good Thunder is a small village in south central Minnesota on the Maple River. Founded in 1870, it is named for two prominent Indian leaders, one a Winnebago chief who lived at the site, and the other a Dakota who was active in the conflict of 1862. It began as an agricultural commerce center when the railroad arrived in Minnesota. The purpose of the study is to consider the transformation of the village, focusing upon the origins and significance of its physical and cultural features in the context of historical geography. The changing historical events and geographical features of the village portray this change in five distinct eras of sequent occupance. Commercial, residential, public, and religious spaces in the landscape are examined using historical photographs and maps to describe the stages visually. The study associates the interaction of German, Irish, and old-stock American cultures with the physical landscape, and the development of the cultural landscape in the context of broad social and economic themes in Minnesota and the United States. Good Thunder existed as a small, self-sustained agrarian commercial center for nearly a century before changes in farming practices and transportation technologies undermined the community's economic and social foundations. After three decades of decline, the village experienced a renaissance as a home for local artists. A rekindled sense of community was manifested by a unique public-art mural, which is now a symbol of the village. Cultural substitution, community pragmatism, and a strong sense of place and identity all play roles in the transformation of the village.

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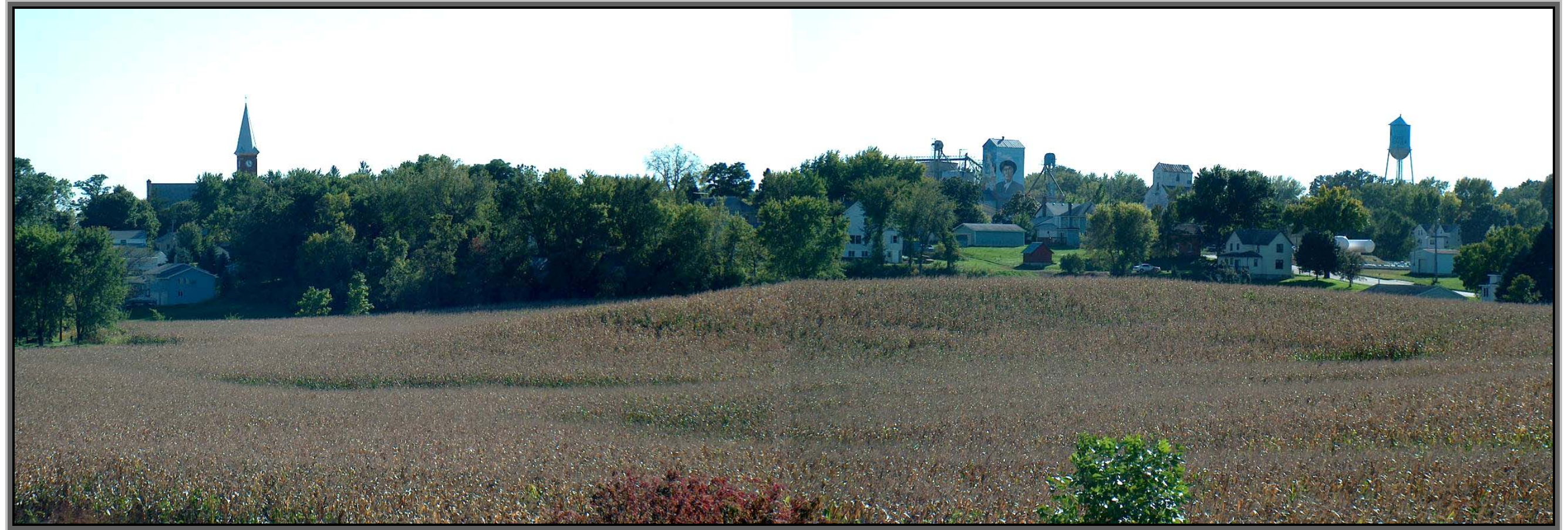


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## Part I

### Foundations of the Good Thunder Historical Geography



**Figure 1: Panorama from the north of Good Thunder, Minnesota, 2005**  
(Photograph by author)

*“The village of Good Thunder lies beautifully situated among the oak groves on the plateaus above the West Bank of the Maple river, in the township of Lyra, being very near the center of Blue Earth county and centrally located in the richest agricultural districts of Minnesota. Strangers after admiring the beautiful surroundings and picturesque scenery invariably ask . . . ‘Why did you give such a pretty place such a horrid name as ‘Good Thunder’?’ It has often been explained why, and we will do so again for the benefit of our numerous readers.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

The tiny village of Good Thunder lies at the geographic center of Blue Earth County in south-central Minnesota not far from the banks of the Maple River. Styling itself as a “unique village with a rich heritage,” Good Thunder is the home of some 568 residents<sup>2</sup> and a handful of businesses. Good Thunder today may be described as a sleepy village offering small town values and safety, and serving as a commuter town, or “bedroom community,” for the city of Mankato twelve miles to the north. In its heyday, Good Thunder was a self-sufficient boom town on the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railway, offering most all of the goods and services a village resident or outlying farmer needed for life in rural Minnesota.

Good Thunder’s name alone often piques interest when people hear it, remarking on the uniqueness of the name. It is one of the few cultural imprints of the extensive Winnebago reservation that encompassed a large part of Blue Earth County in the mid-nineteenth century. The fact that residents past and present are proud of and know of the story behind the name of the village is in and of itself unique, especially when

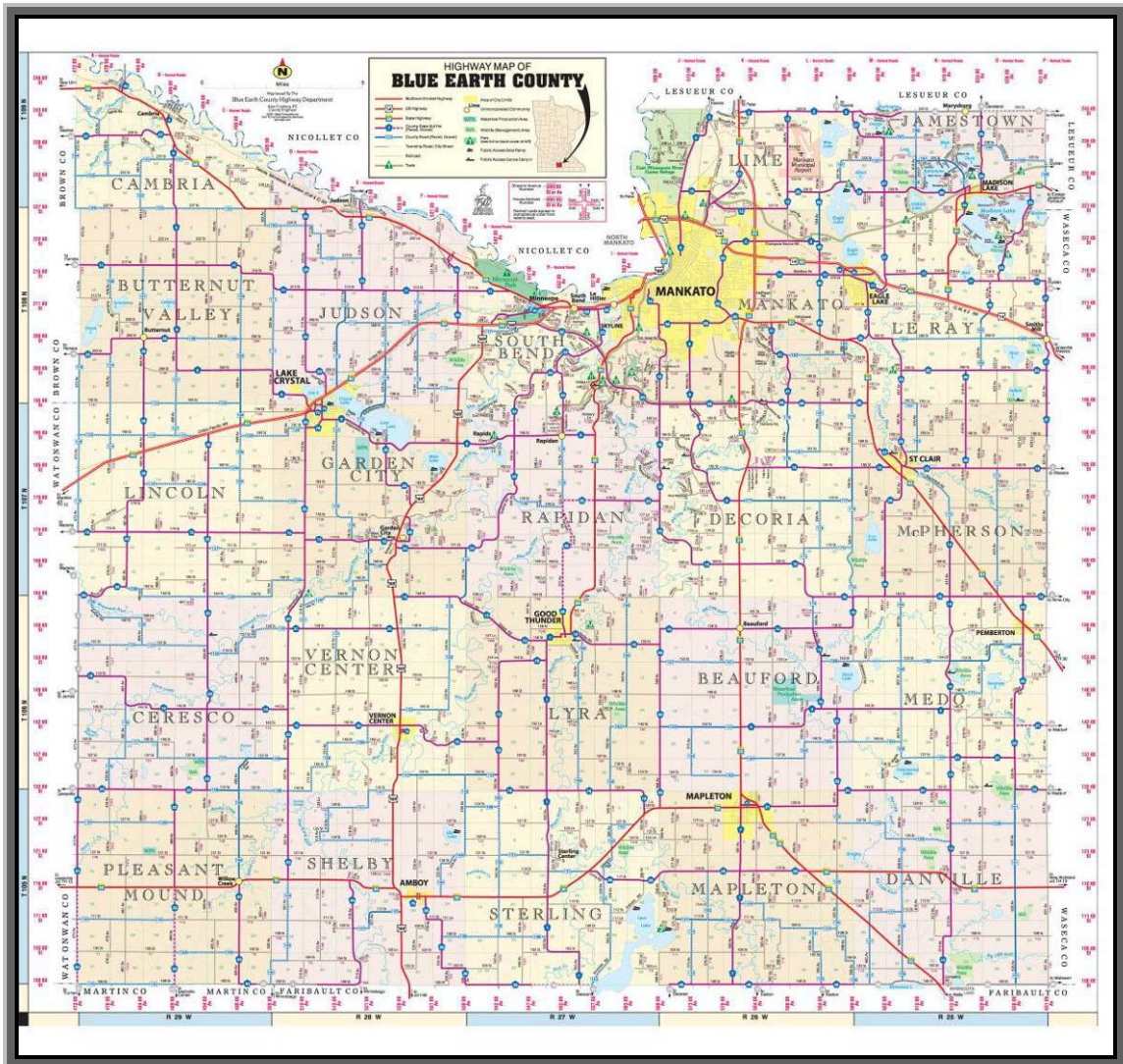
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<sup>1</sup> “Good Thunder! Its Early History, and its Present,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893. Hereafter cited as: “Good Thunder!” *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of the Census, “Population Finder,” <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, accessed 4 August 2004.



Map 1: Highway Map of Blue Earth County, 2003



(Map from Blue Earth County Public Works Department, *Blue Earth County, Minnesota Highway Map* ([Mankato: Public Works Department], 2003).)

considering the negative sentiments and long memory of white settlers and their descendents in the county regarding Indians<sup>3</sup> in general after the Dakota Conflict in 1862.<sup>4</sup> In its heyday, Good Thunder was known by its school, its tidy appearance, and its many shops and services,<sup>5</sup> whereas today many south-central Minnesotans know of Good Thunder by the mural on the grain elevator.

Good Thunder was established during the height of the American pioneer agrarian society,<sup>6</sup> serving as a “city-center” for the residents in the surrounding Lyra township. Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, agriculture was the primary natural resource upon which the residents of Good Thunder based their economic and community life. Even now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, agricultural life remains the mainstay of the area surrounding Good Thunder, as evidenced by the six century farms existing between 1976 and 1989, most of which still exist today.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Good Thunder today is no longer a town with a

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<sup>3</sup> The term Indian is used throughout the text for indigenous North American peoples rather than Native American, because native peoples use and prefer the term, and, as Meinig states in his preface to vol. 2 of *The Shaping of America*, Native American is ambiguous, especially for American-born European Americans who may also have referred to themselves as “Native Americans.” D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986-2005), 2 (1993): xiv.

<sup>4</sup> “The Dakota Conflict of 1862,” *Mankato Free Press*, 29 August 1987, in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 5. The article states: “[T]he National Archives’ records ... reflect the intense fear and hatred many Minnesotans had for the Indians.”

<sup>5</sup> “Good Thunder. A Lively Place Fourteen Miles From Mankato, With Excellent Industries, Schools and Churches. And Some Wide-Awake Business Men—A Bird’s-Eye View,” *Mankato Weekly Review*, 26 May 1885.

<sup>6</sup> Harland Padfield, “The Expendable Rural Community and the Denial of Powerlessness,” in *The Dying Community*, edited by Art Gallaher and Harland Padfield, School of American Research, Advanced Seminar Series (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), 159, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Julie Schrader, “Blue Earth County Century Farms,” in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 39-40.

In this context, a century farm is a farm of fifty or more acres having a continuous family ownership of one hundred or more years. The six family farms by year of establishment are: Yaeger, 1864; Marble, 1865; Cummiskey, 1868; FitzSimmons, 1874; Borchartd, 1879; Bartsch, 1884. A review of these family names in the HickoryTech online phone book shows five of these family names still in evidence on farmland surrounding Good Thunder.

thriving agricultural economic base. It is instead a bedroom community, serving as a residential island in a sea of corn and soybean fields for residents who work in Mankato, Mapleton, or at other industries and towns in outlying areas.

The objective of this thesis is to consider the transformation of the village of Good Thunder, Minnesota over time and address the significance and origin of the village's features, and how it has sustained an identity and viability as a community. This is the story of Good Thunder as a cultural landscape in the context of historical geography, beginning in the pre-settlement era in the 1850s through the present day. It describes the land which the settlers found so bountiful, the brief occupancy of the Winnebagos when the area was reservation land, and the significance of the two Indians, both by the name of Good Thunder, for whom the village was named. This story discusses the social and cultural aspects of the community with descriptions of use and occupancy of commercial, residential, and public buildings in the village for five different eras since 1871. Not all the stories are known, however, and much remains a mystery, especially from the early history, such as the mention of the opera house<sup>8</sup> or the Methodist congregation.<sup>9</sup>

A historical geography of Good Thunder is significant for a variety of reasons. It explores the survival of a rural agricultural community through a period in the 1970s and 1980s when many similar communities were dying. It provides a formal history of the village with an account of the accomplishments of individuals, organizations, and businesses of the community. Furthermore, a historical geography documents the

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<sup>8</sup> Lucille A. Fitzsimmons, "An Historical Indian Village—Its [sic] Heyday," in the possession of the Blue Earth County Historical Society, located in the vertical file on Good Thunder.

<sup>9</sup> Edward D. Neill, *History of the Minnesota Valley, including the Explorers and Pioneers of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1882), 607.

influences of culture and change impelling Good Thunder “to act and react”<sup>10</sup> within the contexts of south-central Minnesota culture and the modern state, national, and global society.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Harold Brown, “The Upsala, Minnesota, Community: A Case Study in Rural Dynamics,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 57 (2): 269 (1967).



*“Historical geography is the study of the geographies of past times, involving the imaginative reconstruction of a wide range of phenomena and processes central to ... the dynamism of human affairs ... in the form and functions of human settlements and built environments.”<sup>1</sup>*

~Robin Butlin

## Chapter 1

### Information Sources and Critical Perspectives

#### Historical Geography

The term “historical geography” invites the question “what is the difference between history and geography?” Alan Baker explains that history, historical geography and geographical history share many of the same experiences with respect to problems, sources, and methodologies, incorporating knowledge and using research tools and methods from the natural and social sciences.<sup>2</sup> Jan Broek elaborates further by discussing the commonalities between history and geography, observing that geography and history both deal with the complexities of social life, synthesize knowledge from other sciences and disciplines, and characterize “explanation” as the demonstration of the “existence of relationships between different categories of facts.”<sup>3</sup>

In order to better understand the relationships and differences, it is important to define the disciplines of history and geography independently. Jacques Barzun and Henry

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<sup>1</sup> Robin A. Butlin, *Historical Geography: Through the Gates of Space and Time* (London, New York: Edward Arnold, 1993), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Alan R. H. Baker, *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography, 36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2

<sup>3</sup> Jan O. M. Broek, “The Relations Between History and Geography,” in *Historical Geography: A Methodological Portrayal*, D. Brooks Green, ed. (Savage, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991), 29.

Graff concisely describe history as the study and reporting of past events and facts, or a recording of actual occurrences that have happened in the past.<sup>4</sup> The key notion for a definition of history is the story; that is to say, documents that record historical events are not in themselves history. History requires the “experiencing mind”<sup>5</sup> to write a story bridging historical occurrences and documents or records.<sup>6</sup>

Defining geography is more problematic because of the various paradigm shifts in the discipline in the last fifty years and the large number of specialties within the discipline, such as physical, cultural, economic, urban, etc. Broadly stated, geography is the study of the interactions between humans and the physical environment,<sup>7</sup> or “the study of the differentiation of the earth’s surface... resulting from complex interactions of man and his habitat.”<sup>8</sup> Geography as a discipline may be divided into two branches of research: physical geography which studies physiography, or the “natural forms of the earth’s surface,”<sup>9</sup> and human geography, which concerns itself with the study of “causal relationships between man and the land.”<sup>10</sup> Within the human, or cultural, branch of geography is the specialty of historical geography, which is the study of geography in a

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<sup>4</sup> Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 5th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Barzun and Graff, 36-38.

The term “experiencing mind” used by Barzun and Graff is emphasized in the text. The meaning is implied in the context of the pages as the writer who records from a specific perspective, for example writing history from direct or personal experience or fashioned from the second-hand research experience.

<sup>6</sup> Barzun and Graff, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald F. Abler, Melvin G. Marcus, and Judy M. Olson, “Contemporary American Geography,” in *Geography’s Inner Worlds: Pervasive Themes in Contemporary American Geography*, edited by Ronald F. Abler, Melvin G. Marcus, and Judy M. Olson, eds., Occasional Publications of the Association of American Geographers, no. 2 (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Broek, “Relations Between History and Geography,” 30.

<sup>9</sup> J. O. M. Broek, *The Santa Clara Valley, California: A Study in Landscape Changes*, Geographische en Geologische Mededeelingen, Anthro-Geographische reeks, no. 4 (Utrecht: N. V. A. Oosthoek, 1932), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Broek, *Santa Clara Valley*, 7.

past time concerning land use and settlement of a specific era or a succession of eras.<sup>11</sup>

Historical geography as a special discipline of study has existed in some form since the early eighteenth century, beginning with Biblical geographies,<sup>12</sup> then moving on to the geographies of classical civilizations.<sup>13</sup> Scholars in the latter half of the eighteenth century began writing historical geographies of the places they lived out of a sense of nationalism, particularly in Latin America.<sup>14</sup> These early historical geographies dealt mainly with the geographic features of the landscapes, and also showed land use, cultures, political boundaries, and cities. During the early twentieth century, geographers in England, France, Germany, the United States began to seriously debate historical geography<sup>15</sup> as a discipline, and each country had its set of “founding fathers” establishing theories and methodologies that added to and enriched the definition of historical geography.

The development and employment of historical geography methodologies in the United States over the past century can best be discussed within a framework of four discourses on landscape.<sup>16</sup> George Henderson defines these discourses as landscape as *Landschaft*, landscape as social space, the epistemological landscape, and the apocryphal (or ideological) landscape. Each discourse employs specific ideas about historical geography, using different types of knowledge claims and empirical sources.

In the United States, Harlan Barrows, Ralph Brown, and Carl Sauer took up the

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<sup>11</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, “Humanistic Geography,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (2): 272, (1976).

<sup>12</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 24-40.

<sup>16</sup> George L. Henderson, “What (Else) We Talk About When We Talk About Landscape: For a Return to the Social Imagination,” in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J. B. Jackson*, edited by Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 182.

role of defining and developing historical geography in the 1920s. Their ideas, which are the basis from which the three other discourses are derived, laid the groundwork for discourse of landscape as *Landschaft*. The change of the rural landscape through its ties to the ideologies of nationhood and territory defines the concept of *Landschaft*.<sup>17</sup> It examines place over space, incorporating humanist elements, such as the “relationships between human societies and the natural” environment.<sup>18</sup> *Landschaft* emphasizes the process of people passing on cultural elements into the landscape, such as houses, farms, and cemeteries. Sauer, who was influenced by the German geographers studying *Landschaft*<sup>19</sup> viewed historical geography as the consideration of change in cultural landscapes which “involves the reconstruction of past landscapes.”<sup>20</sup> Sauer believed that the “geographic expressions of culture” such as mines, roads, pastures, and buildings could not be analyzed without attention to the people who made them. Barrows’ ideas on historical geography evolved to that of “geography as human ecology,”<sup>21</sup> which he presented in area studies that focused on the “formulation of the man-land tradition.”<sup>22</sup> Similar to Sauer’s ideas, Ralph Brown viewed historical geography as the “influence of beliefs and images on the history of settlement and change.”<sup>23</sup> Later in the twentieth century, Donald Meinig utilized and further developed the concept of landscape as *Landschaft* in his seminal four volume work *The Shaping of America*,<sup>24</sup> each volume of which looks at the geography of a portion of United States in the context of that era’s

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<sup>17</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> John Langton, “The Two Traditions of Geography, Historical Geography and the Study of Landscapes,” *Geografiska Annaler, ser. B, Human Geography* 70(1): 18, (1988).

<sup>19</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 35-36.

<sup>22</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 37

history.

The beauty of landscape as *Landschaft* is that the landscape need not be limited to a large area. In fact, smaller areas of landscape study can be equally interesting subjects of study, as evidenced in Broek's sequent occupance analysis of the Santa Clara Valley in California,<sup>25</sup> and even smaller yet as Robert Brown's areal examination of sequent occupance in the small town of Upsala, Minnesota.<sup>26</sup> After descriptions of each of four eras Brown defines for Upsala, he describes the towns economic areal organization, the business district, goods and services, and agriculture. He then describes the political areal organization addressing boundaries at the city, township, state and federal levels, and finally social areal organization which briefly mentions church membership, recreation, and sports.<sup>27</sup> Robert Brown also recognizes that cultural influences provide a framework within which occupants view and use the resources of the area,<sup>28</sup> including the way in which new technologies create opportunities to exploit potential resources and thereby influence land use.<sup>29</sup>

Criticisms of the *Landschaft* discourse include Leonard Guelke's response to Sauerian thought, arguing that the historian does not "recreate or reconstruct the past as it actually was," rather he creates an account of the past based on selected facts.<sup>30</sup>

Henderson presents the idea that *Landschaft* describes a place the way it was, omitting the conditions of life in the current time, a "not-landscape" that is lost in time and is not

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<sup>24</sup> D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986-2005).

<sup>25</sup> Broek, *Santa Clara Valley*.

<sup>26</sup> Brown., "Upsala."

<sup>27</sup> Brown.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, 273.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, 275.

<sup>30</sup> Leonard Guelke, *Historical Understanding in Geography: An Idealist Approach*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography, 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 5.

very useful for the present or future.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s American geographers used postpositivist research methods in their works, particularly by granting more attention to primary source materials.<sup>32</sup> Landscape as *Landschaft* as a methodology relies heavily on a determined problem described within the context of theory, as well as empirical facts from sources such as maps, interpretation from field work, and archival materials,<sup>33</sup> and in more modern times on air photos, remote sensing, newspapers, official records and reports, and diaries.<sup>34</sup> Ralph Brown's writings, for example, made use of in-period resources and oral history. His book *Mirror for Americans* was written through the eyes of an early nineteenth century author, only making use of source material that would have been available to an author of that time. His *Historical Geography of the United States* relies primarily on "eyewitness accounts and contemporary maps" for primary source material.<sup>35</sup> Sauer's approach, known as the Berkeley/Sauerian school of thought, involved field research, the study of cultures and landscapes (particularly of indigenous peoples), and the spread of domestic plants and animals.<sup>36</sup>

Henderson's second discourse is landscape as social space, which is simply human-made space wherein the landscape is what came before, what is there now, and what will come later, but with particular focus on the now.<sup>37</sup> Unlike *Landschaft*, social space emphasizes the change in space, or area, over place.<sup>38</sup> J. B. Jackson is the primary geographer who established the landscape as social space idea. Social space, in Jackson's

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<sup>31</sup> Henderson, 184, 186.

<sup>32</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Butlin, "Theory," 22-23.

<sup>34</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Henderson, 185-186.

view, builds from the *Landschaft* and Sauerian schools because it looks at landscape with respect to cultural influence, but does so in the present with ordinary, vernacular landscapes.<sup>39</sup> He adds a dialectical element to the method by incorporating social theory, such as the influences that individual experience and shared cultural ideas have with each other.<sup>40</sup>

Social space, then, uses the same types of postpositivist methods employed in the *Landschaft* discourse, but also incorporates the constructivist methodologies, particularly where they concern the views of the individuals in the landscape. Again, as with the *Landschaft* discourse, social space makes use of the same primary sources such as field work, maps, and archival information for empirical evidence. Qualitative sources, specifically for evidence on individual experience, such as interviews or oral history are used for the constructivist aspect. Major criticisms offered by Henderson include that fact that social space can be too rooted in the now, without offering a “conception of how things ought to be.”<sup>41</sup> Also, while the social space method makes claims about the social and cultural processes in the context of landscape, these processes are not caused by landscape, they are merely a part of it, and cannot be an argument for the study of landscape.<sup>42</sup>

Henderson’s third discourse is the epistemological landscape, which looks at “landscape as the material revelation of human practice and thought.”<sup>43</sup> The epistemology school is almost entirely constructivist, explicitly stating that “landscape tells us

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<sup>38</sup> Henderson, 186.

<sup>39</sup> Donald Meinig, quoted in Groth and Wilson, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, “The Polyphony of Cultural Landscape Study: An Introduction,” in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J. B. Jackson*, edited by Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>41</sup> Henderson, 187.

<sup>42</sup> Henderson, 188.

important things about who we are as a society and a culture.<sup>44</sup> Time-geography, first promoted in Sweden by Torsten Hägerstrand, is an example of the epistemology landscape, that views the way social events are structured through time and space.<sup>45</sup> Edward Soja and Allen Pred are two of the leading geographers in this realm of historical geography.<sup>46</sup> Although these epistemological geographies use empirical data sources, particularly statistical information, the core arguments come from constructivist assumptions and Marxian perspectives of social theory.<sup>47</sup>

Henderson calls his fourth discourse the apocryphal landscape which looks at landscape as ideology.<sup>48</sup> The landscape as ideology school looks for symbols and representation of landscape in art and literature to distill their meaning and messages.<sup>49</sup> The idea is that the meanings humans give to landscape elements in art and literature can be materialized in actual landscape design.<sup>50</sup> Taking this idea a step further, the ideology of the landscape employs humanist perspectives, making the landscape into a text and a subject of study.<sup>51</sup> Denis Cosgrove and John Stilgoe have idealized landscape in the context of capitalism, respectively as a “lie we live with” and a “truth we have lost.”<sup>52</sup> Ideological landscape studies use narrative forms, such as literature and poetry, for empirical sources and apply social theories as evidence as the context within which to discuss the landscapes.

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<sup>43</sup> Henderson, 189.

<sup>44</sup> Henderson, 189.

<sup>45</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Henderson, 189.

<sup>47</sup> Henderson, 190-191.

<sup>48</sup> Henderson, 192; Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 136.

<sup>49</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 136-137.

<sup>50</sup> Henderson, 192-193.

<sup>51</sup> Butlin, *Historical Geography*, 137.



## Landscape

An evaluative aspect of a historical geography necessitates a closer look at landscape. Landscape, according to Meinig's distillation of Jackson's publications, has seven intrinsic concepts,<sup>53</sup> such as being "anchored upon human life" and being "a wholeness, an integration, of community." The idea is that the landscape is a place shaped by the people just as the people are shaped by the landscape, which is addressed in a cultural and social context for Minnesota by John Adams,<sup>54</sup> Robert Brown<sup>55</sup>, and Hildegard Binder Johnson.<sup>56</sup>

When describing a region, geographers commonly use the term "landscape," which as Baker notes, has had its own history of debate over the meaning of the term,<sup>57</sup> so much so that geographers tend to define the meaning of landscape for the context of their studies. Broek, for example, states that the term cultural landscape has been used in the literature to set it apart from the concept of natural landscape, but prefers to use the term landscape without a modifier, because to him the aspects of cultural occupancy in a landscape are interwoven with the natural landscape, each influencing the other.<sup>58</sup>

Landscape geography may be seen as "an art and science of visual perception" which interprets the significance of cultural expressions in landscapes."<sup>59</sup> In a broader context, landscape and the factors that influence its change in rural settings, such as

<sup>52</sup> Henderson, 193.

<sup>53</sup> D. W. Meinig, "Reading the Landscape: An Appreciation of W. G. Hoskins and J. B. Jackson," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, edited by D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 228-229.

<sup>54</sup> John S. Adams, "Minnesota: A Work in Progress, Shaping the Landscape and the People," *Daedalus* 129, 3 (2000).

<sup>55</sup> Brown.

<sup>56</sup> Hildegard Binder Johnson, "King Wheat in Southeastern Minnesota: a Case Study of Pioneer Agriculture," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 47, 4 (1957).

<sup>57</sup> Baker, 109.

<sup>58</sup> Broek, *Santa Clara Valley*, 8.

multi-functional land use, are addressed by Martin Dijst,<sup>60</sup> and Paul Chris Groth and Wilson.<sup>61</sup> Gary Peterson and Lowell Bennion define landscape as the “distant view” of an area, and prefer the more focused term of townscape for use in describing the “more intimate scene including less of the ‘setting’ and more of man’s doings.”<sup>62</sup>

John Adams, Joel Koepp and Barbara VanDrasek explore landscape change from a specifically rural perspective for Minnesota, which shows a trend in suburbanization and population growth in some rural areas for regional centers, one of which is Mankato.<sup>63</sup> Edward Hassinger,<sup>64</sup> Gerald Hodge,<sup>65</sup> and Kalevi Rikkinen<sup>66</sup> also deal with aspects of landscape change, particularly population change with distance from services and the sustainability of small towns. John Frasier Hart, Neil Salisbury and Everett Smith argue that small U.S. villages are actually thriving and growing despite their decline in services,<sup>67</sup> although Rikkinen points out that distance from larger urban centers and services does have a correlation to the size, growth, and viability of a village.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Baker, 113.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Dijst, Berien Elbersen, and Ken Willis, “The Challenge of Multi-functional Land Use in Rural Areas,” *Journal of Environmental Planning & Management* 48, 1 (2005).

<sup>61</sup> Groth and Wilson.

<sup>62</sup> Gary B. Peterson and Lowell C. Bennion, *Sanpete Scenes: A Guide to Utah’s Heart*, (Eureka, Utah: Basin/Plateau Press, 1987), 70.

<sup>63</sup> John S. Adams, Joel A. Koepp, and Barbara VanDrasek, *Urbanization of the Minnesota countryside: population change and low-density development near Minnesota’s regional centers, 1970-2000*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota, Center for Transportation Studies, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> Edward Hassinger, “The Relationship of Retail-Service Pattern to Trade-Center Population Change,” *Rural Sociology* 20 (1957); and Edward Hassinger, “The Relationship of Trade-Center Population Change to Distance from Larger Centers in an Agricultural Area,” *Rural Sociology* 20 (1957).

<sup>65</sup> Gerald Hodge, “Do Villages Grow?--Some Perspectives and Predictions,” *Rural Sociology* 31 (1966).

<sup>66</sup> Kalevi Rikkinen, “Change in Village and Rural Population with Distance from Duluth,” *Economic Geography* 44, 4 (1968).

<sup>67</sup> John Frasier Hart, Neil E. Salisbury, and Everett G. Smith, Jr., “The Dying Village and Some Notions about Urban Growth,” *Economic Geography* 44, 4 (1968).

<sup>68</sup> Rikkinen.

## Society, Community and Culture

Understanding the social aspects in cultural geography is essential to a cultural landscape study. From the perspective of social science, society, community, and culture have many meanings based on different theories. Society describes social life in the broad context that humans are social and their lives “involve relationships to others.”<sup>69</sup> It may also mean the nation-state to which a person belongs,<sup>70</sup> hence a person belongs to American or Minnesotan society. Another concept of society is that of civil society which has less to do with the nation-state and more with being self-organized outside of the rules established by government. Society is different from community because society is an impersonal joining of strangers to one another.<sup>71</sup>

Like society, community as a concept has multiple definitions, but is generally accepted to mean small-scale, delimited groups of people with personal interaction, traditions, and “strong affective ties.”<sup>72</sup> In the nineteenth century, community was seen as an image of the good life or the way life ought to be,<sup>73</sup> making it an ideology toward which people should strive. In more modern times, sociologists view the concept of community as a “receptacle of values” which struggles against the “perceived threats of modernity” and use it as a measure of modernization and social change.<sup>74</sup> Landscape study includes the idea of place which has humanistic qualities pertaining to people’s perception of community. The exploration of the historical geography of Good Thunder

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<sup>69</sup> “Society,” in *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Oxford Reference Online (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2002), accessed 27 September 2005.

<sup>70</sup> “Society”; Tuan, “Humanistic Geography,” 269.

<sup>71</sup> “Society.”

<sup>72</sup> “Community,” in *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Oxford Reference Online (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2002), accessed 27 September 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Colin Bell and Howard Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 22.

<sup>74</sup> “Community.”

incorporates these humanistic qualities of community and place, allowing it to survive and remain somewhat unique among Minnesota villages. The Northwest Minnesota Foundation identifies three different qualities of place, structural amenities, natural amenities, and stress reducer qualities, that are important aspects of Good Thunder's sense of place.<sup>75</sup>

The notion of culture also has a number of different contextual meanings particularly in ethnography and anthropology. Edward Burnett Tyler, the author of the anthropological definition, defined culture as the "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>76</sup> Franz Boas challenged this concept at the turn of the twentieth century, defining culture as a response to "historical circumstances" that incorporates the diffusion of traits and ideas from other groups.<sup>77</sup> Cultural geographers generally agree upon a definition of culture that means the "learned collective human behavior" that communicates "acquired beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes,"<sup>78</sup> or more succinctly as the "local, customary way of doing things."<sup>79</sup> Spatial isolation is one theoretical approach to a community's "development of distinctive cultural, organization, ceremonial, and ritual forms."<sup>80</sup> In the rural community, it is the ties to the land and sense of control through which the culture

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<sup>75</sup> Northwest Minnesota Foundation, *Quality of Place in Rural Minnesota*, (Bemidji, Minn.: Northwest Minnesota Foundation, 2002).

<sup>76</sup> "Culture," *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Oxford Reference Online (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2002), accessed 27 September 2005.

<sup>77</sup> "Culture."

<sup>78</sup> Terry G. Jordan, Mona Domosh, and Lester Rowntree, *The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography*, 6th ed. (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994), 4.

<sup>79</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, quoted in Jordan, Domash, and Rowntree, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Arthur J. Vidich, "Revolutions in Community Structure," in *The Dying Community*, edited by Art Gallaher and Harland Padfield, School of American Research, Advanced Seminar Series (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), 110.

develops a strong sense of space.<sup>81</sup> Landscape study includes the idea of place which has humanistic qualities pertaining to people's perception of community. Good Thunder has survived and remained unique among Minnesota villages through its sense of community and place.

### Cultural Communication

Social theory hypothesizes connections between communication and culture,<sup>82</sup> one form of which is the oral, written, or visual narrative. Narrative functions as a mechanism to preserve knowledge, to serve as a bridge to connect knowledge and experience,<sup>83</sup> and to understand and interpret culture.<sup>84</sup> In doing so, narrative "binds people to one another in social groups."<sup>85</sup> It is a synthesis of logic and emotion that depicts events in order to "illustrate a truth or to create shared meaning."<sup>86</sup>

The art work in Good Thunder is its chief exemplar of community narrative, incorporating cultural imprints such as the grain elevator or native limestone in the presentation of its public art. John Bodnar addresses the idea of preservation of the community memory through memorials, such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and commemorative celebrations, which Midwestern culture often employs with themes from

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<sup>81</sup> Tuan, "Humanistic Geography," 269; Hannah Levin, "The Struggle for Community Can Create Community," in *The Dying Community*, edited by Art Gallaher and Harland Padfield, School of American Research, Advanced Seminar Series (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), 258.

<sup>82</sup> Charlotte Thralls and Nancy Roundy Blyler, "The Social Perspective and Pedagogy in Technical Communication," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 2 (3): 249 (1993).

<sup>83</sup> Nancy Blyler and Jane Perkins, "Culture and the Power of Narrative," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 13 (3): 245 (1999).

<sup>84</sup> Christine Kelly, "Narrativity and Professional Communication: Folktales and Community Meaning," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 13 (3): 297 (1999).

<sup>85</sup> Blyler and Perkins, 245.

<sup>86</sup> Kelly, 297.

their cultural past like pioneers and Indians.<sup>87</sup> The importance of Good Thunder's art and community memory is evident in the articles and essays published about the town's art work. In particular, Ann Christenson,<sup>88</sup> Alice Vollmar,<sup>89</sup> and Moira Harris<sup>90</sup> write about the mural painted on the grain elevator in 1987 and 1988 depicting historic scenes from Good Thunder's historic past, the community involvement and notoriety the art work launched, and the resulting rebirth of community pride associated with the project.

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<sup>87</sup> John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13-15, 154-158, 165.

<sup>88</sup> Ann Fellows Christenson, "Good Thunder on a Minnesota Grain Elevator," *American Visions* 3, 3 (1988).

<sup>89</sup> Alice Vollmar, "Good Thunder: A Small Town Cultivates the Arts," *Minnesota Calls* 5, 3 (1992).

<sup>90</sup> Moira F. Harris, "Painted History: A Look at Some Recent Minnesota Murals," *Minnesota History* 53, 6 (1993).

*“Whatever else it may be, historical and geographical interpretation remains, to an important degree, an art.”<sup>1</sup>*

*~Andrew Hill Clark*

## Chapter 2

### Approaches to Historical Geography

Using Henderson’s four discourses of historical geography as a framework, this historical geography of Good Thunder falls mostly within the realm of landscape as *Landschaft*, incorporating areal elements of landscape as social space coupled with social theory to discuss the village’s current place in time within the timeframes of five different eras. I structure each era in a chronologic manner to present the areal and cultural manifestation of human activity<sup>2</sup> as an overview of Good Thunder’s social space, discussing elements of community and culture which qualify the era. I construct these qualities out of the empirical data in the model of a sequent occupance landscape study by blending historical research, oral history, and the rhetorical interpretation of photographs and maps through grounded theory. Following this, I discuss the developments in transportation infrastructure which affect the time period under examination. Finally, I describe the sequent occupance of human cultural structures, utilizing photographs to portray them within their eras.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Hill Clark, “First Things First,” in *Pattern and Process: Research in Historical Geography*, edited by Ralph E. Ehrenberg, National Archives Conferences, vol. 9 (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1975), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Broek, *Santa Clara Valley*, 8.

## Sequent Occupance

The village of Good Thunder lends itself to an analysis primarily based on sequent occupance, which is a methodology historical geographers employ to describe landscape transformation in successive time frames as the landscape is modified by successive groups of occupants through time<sup>3</sup> and develops personality.<sup>4</sup> Broek defines three distinguishing domains for a study of landscape modification, which are “alterations in the areal division of water,” “successions in vegetational cover,” and “changes in manufactured structures.”<sup>5</sup> My focus is on Broek’s third phenomenon, the changes in manufactured structures. I present the cultural landscape of each era using empirical data and applying appropriate aspects of Lewis’ seven axioms for reading a landscape, which are: 1) the human-influenced landscape provides evidence of the people we are, were, and are becoming; 2) objects in landscapes reflect human culture; 3) by nature landscapes are difficult to study by academic standards; 4) history is important for explaining the meaning of contemporary landscapes; 5) landscape elements make little sense outside of their spatial context; 6) cultural landscapes and the physical environment are intimately related; and 7) objects in a landscape convey many kinds of “messages,” but not in an obvious fashion.<sup>6</sup>

I reconstruct the cultural landscapes of Good Thunder in a chronologic manner to

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<sup>3</sup> Derwent Whittlesey, “Sequent Occupance,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 19 (3): 162 (1929).

<sup>4</sup> Henderson, 180.

<sup>5</sup> Broek, *Santa Clara Valley*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Baker, 113; Peirce F. Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, edited by D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 11-32.



present the “areal expression of human activity,”<sup>7</sup> modeling the methodologies of Broek<sup>8</sup> and Robert Brown<sup>9</sup> works on sequent occupance. Robert Brown’s historical geography provides a model for sequent occupance based on eras of time and areal organization in Upsala, Minnesota. Robert Brown divides Upsala into four eras: Indian occupance, pioneer occupance, mainstream twentieth century occupance, and the modern era,<sup>10</sup> and follows this description with the social and cultural aspects separated into economic (industry and agriculture), political (boundaries and institutions), and social (religious, educational, and recreational) areal organization characteristics. The social-space aspects of the methodology for Good Thunder are modeled after William Hoskins and J. B. Jackson, in that I concern myself with the landscape of the era in its context with the social and cultural dimensions of the landscape.<sup>11</sup> I portray the ideas of social construction and culture in narrative form within the five selected time frames through grounded theory by analyzing historical facts, census data, and social theories to describe the social context of the different eras.

I divide the occupance history of Good Thunder to present five categories or eras, similar to the model used by Robert Brown in his sequent occupance study of Upsala, Minnesota. However, I include the aspects of areal organization within each occupance era, rather than in separate sections afterward as Robert Brown does. I define the occupance eras of Good Thunder as: 1) Indians and Pre-Settlement: European Exploration and the Winnebago Reservation, 1680-1863; 2) Pioneers and Settlement: The Halcyon Days of Yore, 1864-1900; 3) Good Thunder in the Modern Age, 1900-1950;

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<sup>7</sup> Broek, *Santa Clara Valley*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Broek, *Santa Clara Valley*.

<sup>9</sup> Brown.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, 267.

4)The Dying Community, 1950-1975; 5)The Phoenix Saga: Metamorphosis through Culture, 1975-2005. I chose the time span of each era based on significant events in the history of Good Thunder with some arbitrary application of end-of-era dates. The significant events I chose in order of each era previously listed are the removal of the Winnebago in 1863, the pause in landscape development at the turn of the twentieth century, the cessation of passenger train service in 1951, and the decline of the business district in the mid 1970s along with the abandonment of the railroad in 1978.

#### Historical Research and Empirical Data in Sequent Occupance

I collected empirical evidence through historical research<sup>12</sup> of primary source materials such as plat maps, historic photographs, histories, official village records, newspaper articles, census data, and archival resources to select, analyze, and synthesize events, facts, and dates that serve to reconstruct the cultural landscape in the five different eras in history. The minutes of the Good Thunder Improvement Club,<sup>13</sup> an informal business association, and the minutes of the village council<sup>14</sup> meetings provided a starting point for collecting data on significant Good Thunder events, particularly with respect to the social and cultural climate of the times. The *Good Thunder Herald* newspaper, its successors, and newspapers from nearby towns provided a record of events deemed significant through the eyes of the village residents and their neighboring communities from which the basis of the structure of events can be reconstructed. Because the newspaper began in 1891, I had to use secondary resources to reconstruct events previous

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<sup>11</sup> Meinig, "Reading," 206, 224.

<sup>12</sup> Barzun and Graff, 14-18.

<sup>13</sup> "Proceedings of the Good Thunder Improvement Club, 1912-1954," in the possession of the City of Good Thunder. The Improvement Club would later be referred to as the Booster Club.

to that time, in particular the *History of Blue Earth County* by Thomas Hughes,<sup>15</sup> the archival papers of Sidney Kienitz,<sup>16</sup> publisher of the *Herald* from 1954 to 1972, and *The Heritage of Blue Earth County* edited by Julie Hiller Schrader.<sup>17</sup> To further supplement these resources, I examined the Blue Earth County directories<sup>18</sup> published between 1881 and 1975 at more or less five year intervals through 1900, and then at ten year intervals through 1975 as available volumes would allow. From these directories, I recorded the names of businesses in Good Thunder for that year. These directories generally provide the name of the business owner and the type of business, only sometimes listing or providing the business name. On occasion I make assumptions that a particular personal name was a business based on the knowledge I have learned during the research. With this data, I fill in gaps and identify some structures within specific eras for the sequent occupance.<sup>19</sup>

To describe the cultural and ethnic background of the original settlers of Good Thunder, change in population over time, and agriculture as the natural resource base, I draw on data from the census records between 1870 and 2004. I use the census schedule of 1880, the first one available after the founding of Good Thunder, to tally the number of households. I create the description of origins of the early population by extracting the

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<sup>14</sup> Good Thunder village minutes books, in the possession of the City of Good Thunder.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County, and Biographies of its Leading Citizens*, (Chicago: Middle West Pub. Co., [1901?]; reprint, Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Pub. Co., 1976).

<sup>16</sup> Kienitz, Sidney, 1899 – 1975, Papers, 1888-1971, SMHC Manuscript Collection 1225, Southern Minnesota Historical Center, Memorial Library, Minnesota State University, Mankato.

<sup>17</sup> Julie Hiller Schrader, ed., *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> James Shoemaker, ed., *Shoemaker's Business Directory of the City of Mankato, and County of Blue Earth, Minnesota* (Mankato, Minn.: The Public Spirit, 1881, 1885, 1888).

*R. L. Polk & Co.'s Mankato City and Blue Earth County Directory* (St. Paul, Minn.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1895, 1897, 1900, 1908, 1921).

*Polk's Mankato (Blue Earth County, Minn.) City Directory including Blue Earth County*, (Omaha, Nebr.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1945, 1955, 1965, 1975).

birth place of residents from the schedule to indicate the origins of foreign-born residents and the origins of all the village residents.

To generate the ethnic background of the population, I extracted the birth place of the residents' parents as enumerated in the census. I coded Prussia, Württemberg, and Baden as Germany, England, Scotland, and Wales as the United Kingdom, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont as New England, and the Dakota Territory, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin as the Midwest. I grouped New York and New Jersey together, as well as Pennsylvania and Ohio based on the assumption from historical knowledge that their original settlers were similar within these groups and distinct from each other and New England. I left Canada, Sweden, and Ireland as separate codes, as well as Minnesota, primarily because the Minnesota births represent the children born in or near Good Thunder to the original settlers. After coding these ethnic groups, I used Microsoft Excel™ to generate pie charts for a graphical representation of the population.

I compose a picture of agriculture and animal husbandry as it relates to Good Thunder and Lyra township, I extracted census of agriculture data for Blue Earth County related to grains and cereals, dairy production, and hog farms. The data types I chose are based on the statistical data available in the 1890 census of agriculture. The data provided in the census of agriculture changed from edition to edition, sometimes splitting spring and winter wheat, or feed and other corn, for example, so some of the totals are combined for some years. The point of the data tables providing the agricultural data is not to examine the agricultural practices of Blue Earth County; Donald Straub examined this

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<sup>19</sup> Tim Coles and Gareth Shaw, "A Sign of the Times: Scandinavian Town Directories as Sources for Urban Historical Geography," *Geografiska Annaler, ser. B, Human Geography* 79, 2 (1997).

topic in great detail for the period between 1910 and 1950.<sup>20</sup> Rather, the agricultural data I assembled serve to illustrate changes in the cultural landscape, such as the decline of the creamery business or the relationship of mechanized farm implements and the amount of field crops harvested.

In order to analyze the residential areas of Good Thunder, I extracted the parcel data from Blue Earth County Assessor Office online database into an Excel™ spreadsheet. The spreadsheet lists the parcel number, platted location of each residence, and the year the dwelling was built, along with the street name and house number. These data allow me to determine the number of dwellings existing today and to determine in what part of the village most of the construction took place for each of the five eras. The database also provides photographs for the majority of the homes, some of which I reproduce in the text.

I also make use of historical photographs in the collections of the Blue Earth County Historical Society, the Minnesota Historical Society, and the Southern Minnesota Historical Center, as well as some historic photographs from published works and from some residents of Good Thunder as empirical data. I personally photographed the modern images of the landscape using an HP Photosmart™ 850 digital camera at 4.1 megapixels in July, August, and September of 2005. These photographs communicate elements of place in time, and provide clues or insight into cultural influence and the occupancy of other structures within the Good Thunder landscape. Figure 2, for example, is a photograph of the Community Baptist Church in Good Thunder, which illustrates how an image may communicate information beyond the obvious subject of the composition. The

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<sup>20</sup> Donald J. Straub, "Divergent Agricultural Strategies in Blue Earth County, Minnesota, 1910-1950," (master's thesis, Mankato State University, 1997).

second building to the right is another church, easily identified by the peaked window just under the tree branch. As data, the photograph provides a visual representation of the Baptist church as it appeared in the 1940s and 1950s and supports the claim of a cultural imprint on the landscape as a house of worship for the Baptist community at this point in time.



**Figure 2: Community Baptist Church, Good Thunder, Minnesota, ca. 1952**  
(Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.)

Previous and subsequent photographs of this building demonstrate how the occupancy, use, and location of the building changed through time, when it was used previously as the Episcopal church, and today as a private residential home after the building was moved north and west one block. Furthermore, the building design provides empirical evidence of the “old stock American”<sup>21</sup> cultural imprint on the landscape. Built as an Episcopal church, the building shows that the settlers of Good Thunder brought

<sup>21</sup>John G. Rice, “The Old-Stock Americans,” in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups*, edited by June Drenning Holmquist, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 55, 68. “Old Stock Americans” are European Americans, typically of British descent, whose families have been established for several generations in New England and New York.

with them the cultural habits of New England, using typical New England religious meeting house architecture in their new landscape. As the Baptist congregation has a familial relationship to the Episcopalians, in that both congregations are usually “old stock Americans,”<sup>22</sup> it follows that the Baptists would buy a church building closely associated with their religious culture, rather than constructing another building.

Photographs such as fig. 2 serve as empirical evidence for sequent occupance and placement in the landscape. The church window on the building to the far right of the image demonstrates occupance of another church building on the same street during this era. In conjunction with other data sources, I use the data from this photograph to construct the occupance history of the building in the following manner: the 1910 village minutes book lists property owners by plat assignment identifying the location of the Episcopal church; the Episcopal church records state that the church building was sold to the Baptists in 1946; this image identifies it as the Baptist church; and the 1914 plat of the village, which shows the building’s location without naming the structure, identifies the location of the building to the right as the German Lutheran church. Because the Baptists had three different church buildings throughout their tenure in Good Thunder, and from the date of the photograph, I am able to place this picture on a specific temporal and spatial location.

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<sup>22</sup> Rice, 68.

## Rhetorical Interpretation of Photographs and Maps

Photographic images and maps are an important, if not essential, tool long used in developing a historical geography of a landscape<sup>23</sup> to reconstruct past landscapes. As a tool, photographs and maps are non-art pictures which serve to communicate information, as opposed to art pictures which are used to express an aesthetic response.<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of the Good Thunder historical geography, I used historic and modern photographs, historic maps, and created maps as non-art pictures as interpretation devices for viewing a historical setting, and as narrative devices which communicate a story within a cultural and historical context.

Pictorial perception is similar to perceiving real-world objects, on the one hand, and as a learned response on the other.<sup>25</sup> My interpretations of the images in this thesis entails what I already know about the scene and the history of the village as well as my interpretation and assumptions of the culture of the village at the time the photographs were taken, not to mention my own cultural background.<sup>26</sup> Such cultural interpretations are evident not only in the information I provide in the narrative explanation of the photographs, but also the information I chose to openly or unknowingly omit.

Consequently I interpret the photographs and place them within the narrative of the thesis with a specific purpose in mind, applying aspects of Foss' proposed methodology for the rhetorical interpretation of non-art images. The elements of Foss' proposal include: 1) the function of the image; 2) the assessment of the communication of

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<sup>23</sup> James R. Ryan, "Photos and Frames: Towards an Historical Geography of Photography," *Journal of Historical Geography* 26, 1 (2000).

<sup>24</sup> Dorothy Walsh, "Some Functions of Pictorial Representation," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 21 (1981): 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Kostelnick, "Viewing Functional Pictures in Context," in *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective*, ed. Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1993), 243-245.



that function in the image; and 3) the assessment of the function's legitimacy with respect to the purposes of its use.<sup>27</sup> I have adapted this methodology not only to analyze the rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, and context),<sup>28</sup> but also to select the images I used and their positions within the narrative.

I also use photographs, alone or in comparison, to research and document the historical setting of Good Thunder's landscape and its change through time. I drew cultural conclusions from a rhetorical interpretation of the photographs and maps, particularly when comparing similar scenes in different times. This is an important critical evaluation within a description of a historical landscape, because elements of the culture of the people who built Good Thunder and took the historic photographs or made the maps suggest the importance of the structures in the images.

The use and purpose of maps is similar to that of photographs in that both communicate a representation of geographic reality.<sup>29</sup> Maps are, however, different from photographs because the map is entirely humanistic. Maps are drawn by humans, and therefore incorporate selective and generalized features from a subjective and cultural perspective, despite all the objectivity the cartographer attempts to achieve.<sup>30</sup> As a communication tool, maps represent a reality as an illusion or form of humanistic expression not unlike poetry and literature, and contain metaphorical information in order

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<sup>26</sup> Kostelnick, 244-245.

<sup>27</sup> Sonja K. Foss, "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery," *Communication Studies* 45(3/4): 216-217 (fall 1994/winter 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Charles Kostelnick and David D. Roberts, *Designing Visual Language: Strategies for Professional Communicators* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 5.

<sup>29</sup> David Woodward, "Representations of the World," in *Geography's Inner Worlds: Pervasive Themes in Contemporary American Geography*, Occasional Publications of the Association of American Geographers, no. 2, edited by Ronald F. Abler, Melvin G. Marcus, and Judy M. Olson (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>30</sup> Woodward, 51.

to communicate an experience of a place or landscape.<sup>31</sup> In this manner, maps become a visual narrative of the spatial extent it represents. When reading a map, the reader must look at the map as a representation, rather than literal fact, and question the inclusion and exclusion of the representations on the map.<sup>32</sup>

I use various maps of Blue Earth County and Good Thunder to aid in the spatial organization of human structures while assembling the historical events. The maps I create in this thesis serve to orient the reader visually and spatially alongside the narrative. I also read historic maps for cultural clues of the time period. For example, the Good Thunder plat map circa 1914 marks the locations of the post office, the train depot, the lumber yard, the grain elevators, the livery, the creamery, the bank, and the Graham House hotel, as well as the five churches. However, it does not show the location of the second hotel, the schools, or the water tower, suggesting that it was more important to the cartographer to identify key businesses in the village and that the other details were not important.

### Oral History

A portion of this thesis research involved human participants in the form of informal interviews with village officials, business owners, and some long-time residents. This provides historical information and clarification about occupance and location of specific sites in the village. Oral history encompasses an array of information that, in essence, is communicated verbally from a first-person experience in the form of a story. This story is either relayed to the oral historian by a person who experienced the

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<sup>31</sup> Woodward, 53-54.

information, or second-hand by a person to whom that verbal information was given.

The two-fold nature of oral history provides the researcher with information and detail about a topic that a person would otherwise not record when writing about the same topic,<sup>33</sup> and “insights into how people felt about what happened.”<sup>34</sup>

Good Thunder residents helped to identify business occupants of former store fronts that are now private homes, the locations of past business, churches, and services, and their perceptions of the community. The data I obtained in the interviews allowed for the location of specific features on maps created with ArcView GIS™, the identification of features in historic photographs, and the identification of known locations from which to take a photograph of the current view of the same location.

An unanswered advertisement in the *Maple River Messenger* called for information from residents. Since this failed to produce human participants, I recruited participants by approaching the city office and by word-of-mouth. Potential risks to the participants were minimal. Interview participants provided perceived historical information, which I verified when possible and supported with other source materials, such as village records and directories. I used inconclusive or unverifiable claims only when appropriate and required. However, I do not present such claims as fact, nor do I present them in such a way as to embarrass or otherwise cause undesirable social consequences.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ben F. Barton and Marthalee S. Barton, “Ideology and the Map: Toward a Postmodern Visual Design Practice,” in *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective*, edited by Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls (Newbury Park, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1993), 50-52.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Allen and William Lynnwood Montell, *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local History Research* (Nashville: American Association of State and Local History, 1981), 20.

<sup>34</sup> Allen and Montell, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Permission for interviews was granted by the Institutional Review Board: see Appendix I.

## Grounded Theory

The primary thread that weaves the data together with these methodologies is grounded theory. Grounded theory is an emergent process through which the researcher immerses himself in the primary area of study and allows the relevant theories to surface out of the data.<sup>36</sup> Grounded theory has four central criteria: fit, understanding, generality, and control.<sup>37</sup> These criteria support the theory, because the theory is formulated from the data, therefore making it true for the data,<sup>38</sup> and serve as a guide in selecting literature for review.

In applying grounded theory to Good Thunder, I formulate three distinct theories. The first theory is that cultural substitution, the gradual replacement of a culture by another, accounts for the disbanding of the Adventist, Baptist, and Episcopal congregations in the religious sphere, the broadening and intermixing with nearby communities by exposure to those communities through school consolidation in the social sphere, and the reformulation of the natural resource base from the immigration of commuter residents in the economic sphere.

Second, I posit that the community of Good Thunder has remained pragmatic, building initially out of necessity based on cultural characteristics, such as the smithy, livery, depot, hotel, general stores, churches, and schools. Later in Good Thunder's development, pragmatism is shown by careful use of existing structures, for example the church congregations which bought other church buildings, the village government which bought the old bank building for a village hall and fire station, and later made use of the

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<sup>36</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*, (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990), 23.

<sup>37</sup> Strauss and Corbin, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Strauss and Corbin, 23.

empty clinic for village hall, and the residents who converted church buildings for residential houses, or moved existing buildings rather than building new.

Finally, I propose that Good Thunder's community has always had, and maintains today, a strong sense of community pride in its appearance and history. The early issues of the newspaper through at least the 1910s always had a description of Good Thunder on the front page, describing its beauty and promoting its resources. The formation and almost eight decade existence of the Good Thunder Improvement Club, which worked to promote the village, improve the roads and water works, brought baseball to town, caused a medical clinic to be built, and created the annual Fourth of July parades, and later the Pioneer Indian Days summer festival, is perhaps the strongest evidence of this. Good Thunder also displays its pride in its name and its history in the murals in town, both on the grain elevator and the outdoor silk painting, which portrays a reflection of the current culture's pride and reflection on their history.

*“Landscape: ‘A portion of the earth’s surface that can be comprehended at a glance’.”*  
~John Brinckerhoff Jackson<sup>1</sup>

## Chapter 3

### The Physical and Human Landscape

Tuan wrote that “humanistic geography achieves an understanding of the human world by studying people’s relations with nature, their geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place.”<sup>2</sup> The forces of nature are the primary cause of the physical landscape, its soil composition, its waterways and water bodies, its forests and prairies, and its wildlife among other aspects. Nevertheless, it is the people who live on and use the landscape who shape it and change it to meet their purposes, but only to the extent which the physical landscape will allow and bear. A discussion and description of the physical and human landscape is a traditional, introductory method in old-school historical geographies little used in more recent post-modern works. However, the land and the cultures are integral parts of the character of Good Thunder. It is, therefore, appropriate to begin that understanding by describing the physical landscape within which Good Thunder lies.

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<sup>1</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 306.

<sup>2</sup> Tuan, “Humanistic Geography,” 266.

## Physical Landscape

The corporate limits of the City of Good Thunder today covers 0.6 square miles, or 384 acres, of land (Map 2). The village is located in Lyra township, spanning the east half of the north-east quarter of section 9 and the west half of the south-west quarter of section 10 in township 106 North and range 27 West at an elevation of 990 feet above sea level. In the coordinate system, Good Thunder is at 44.00° North latitude, 94.07° West longitude, placing it near the geographic center of Blue Earth County. Blue Earth County, in south-central Minnesota, is 481,920 acres in size, about 90% of which is in agricultural use.<sup>3</sup> Named after the Indian calque for the color of the waters of the Minnesota River, Blue Earth County has more rivers than any other county in the state. These rivers run through ravines incised through glacial till and commonly have thick stands of timber along the bluffs.<sup>4</sup>

The relief of the land in Blue Earth County is a result of a back-wasting, or melting, continental glacier which deposited a deep layer of glacial drift on the underlying bedrock, leaving behind a rich soil on lake plains and ground moraines. The gently undulating topography of the county has very little extremes, with elevations ranging from 1,000 to 1,060 feet, and relief from a few feet to 20 to 30 feet across the county.<sup>5</sup> The many rivers in Blue Earth County formed during the retreat of the Wisconsin glaciation approximately ten thousand years ago. The rivers occur as gorges

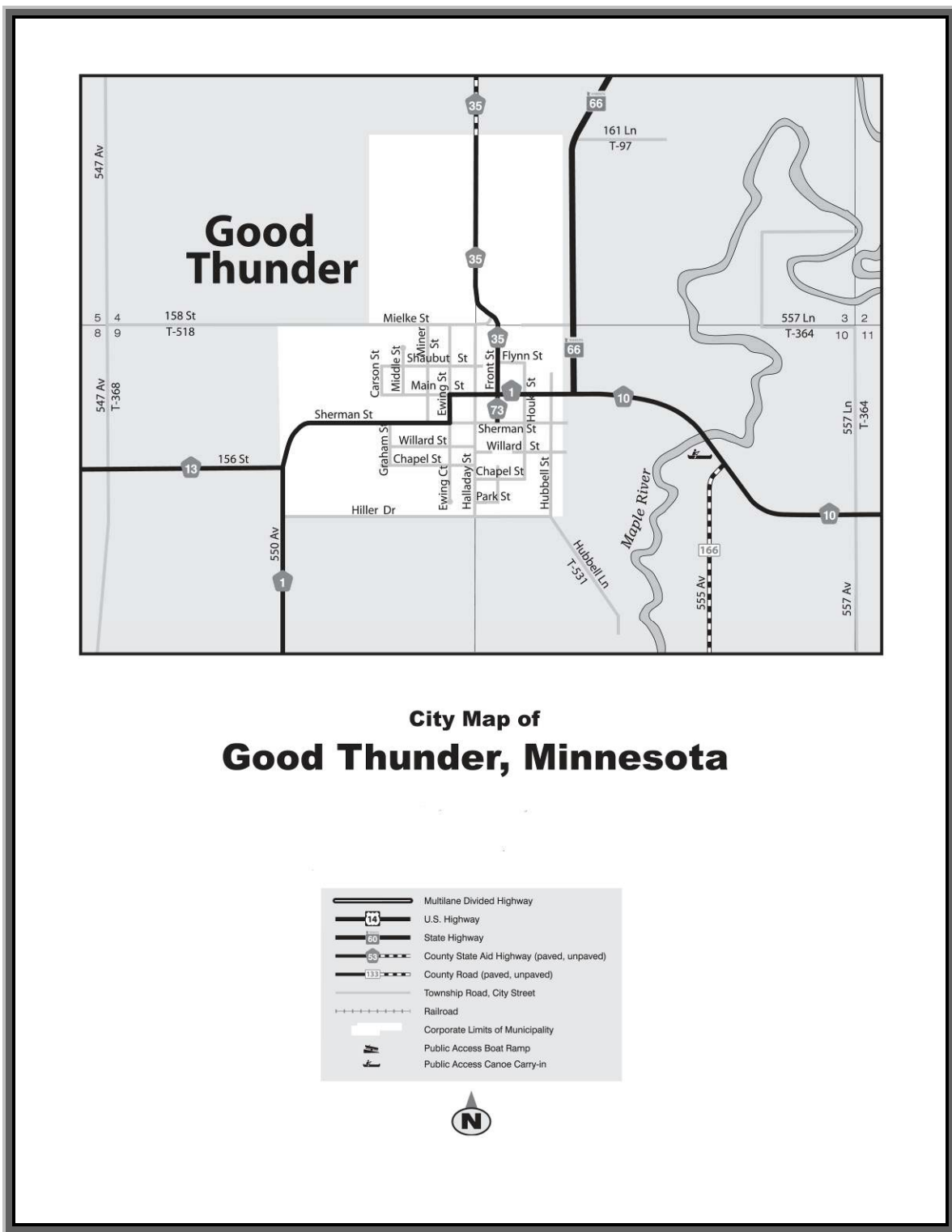
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<sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service and Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, *Soil Survey of Blue Earth County, Minnesota*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1978), 1. Hereafter cited as Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, *History*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 205; City of Good Thunder, "Good Thunder Land Use Plan" (n. p.: n. p., [1978?]), 9, in the possession of the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

Map 2: City Map of Good Thunder, 2003.



(Map adapted from Blue Earth County, Municipalities of Blue Earth County ([Mankato: Blue Earth County, Public Works Department,] 2003).)



within the otherwise level ground of the lake plains and the gently rolling topography of the ground moraines.<sup>6</sup>

The continental climate of Blue Earth County is typical of southern Minnesota, with cold winters and warm summers due to its central location in the North American land mass. In the summer, winds from the south bring moist air from the Gulf of Mexico providing approximately 70% of the region's annual precipitation. The weather in winter is influenced by north and northwest winds bringing masses of frigid, dry air, causing winter precipitation to be light. The average annual snowfall in Blue Earth County is 37 inches. The spring and autumn seasons are transitional periods that have fewer temperature extremes, but also contribute to periods of heavy fog on an annual average of 35 days.<sup>7</sup>

### Soils and Vegetation

The native vegetation of forest and prairie existing in Blue Earth County prior to human settlement has heavily influenced the soil formation. The Le Sueur River forms a boundary between the Big Woods, primarily composed of oak groves, to the north and east and the tall grass prairie to the south and west, a major biogeographic divide in the state of Minnesota. Maple, butternut, and black walnut trees dominate the river valley slopes, with elm, basswood, and aspen along the river bottoms and wetter upland soils. Other common vegetation exists in the form of shrubs like smooth sumac, prickly ash, gooseberries, hazel, and chokecherry.<sup>8</sup>

The soils under the Good Thunder village area (Map 3) are predominately clay

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<sup>6</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 204.

<sup>7</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 205

soils in the west, trending toward a loam and clay mixture to the north, south, and east.<sup>9</sup> The majority of the village sits on four different soil series, many of which are subdivided into series types based on differences within the series such as slope or flood frequencies. The soil series upon which Good Thunder was built are the Clarion, the Comfrey, the Dorchester, and the Minnetonka.<sup>10</sup> The Clarion soil series are well drained soils forming gently rolling to steep slopes in medium textured and moderately fine textured glacial till. Typically the Clarion soils are on knolls and hillsides which supported a tall grass prairie.<sup>11</sup> The Comfrey soil series, which includes the Comfrey clay loam in Good Thunder, are relatively young in the ten-thousand year scheme of soil formation, having formed in medium to fine textured alluvium on stream flood plains. These soils are deep and poorly drained, with a nearly level surficial extent. The native vegetation was aquatic grasses, sedges, and willow trees.<sup>12</sup> The Dorchester series is commonly found along the flood plains of the Minnesota and Blue Earth Rivers and its tributaries, including the Maple River. It is similar to the Comfrey soil series, except that the Dorchester soils are composed of moderately well drained soils and medium textured alluvium, which supported tall grass prairie and bottom land deciduous trees.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the Minnetonka series is a poorly drained soil type “in a mantle of fine textured and moderately fine textured lacustrine sediments over loamy glacial till.”<sup>14</sup> The Minnetonka is characterized by broad level tracts, slight rises, and shallow draws in the high lands

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<sup>8</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 207

<sup>9</sup> City of Good Thunder, “Good Thunder Land Use Plan,” 3.

<sup>10</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*. Extrapolated from soil map.

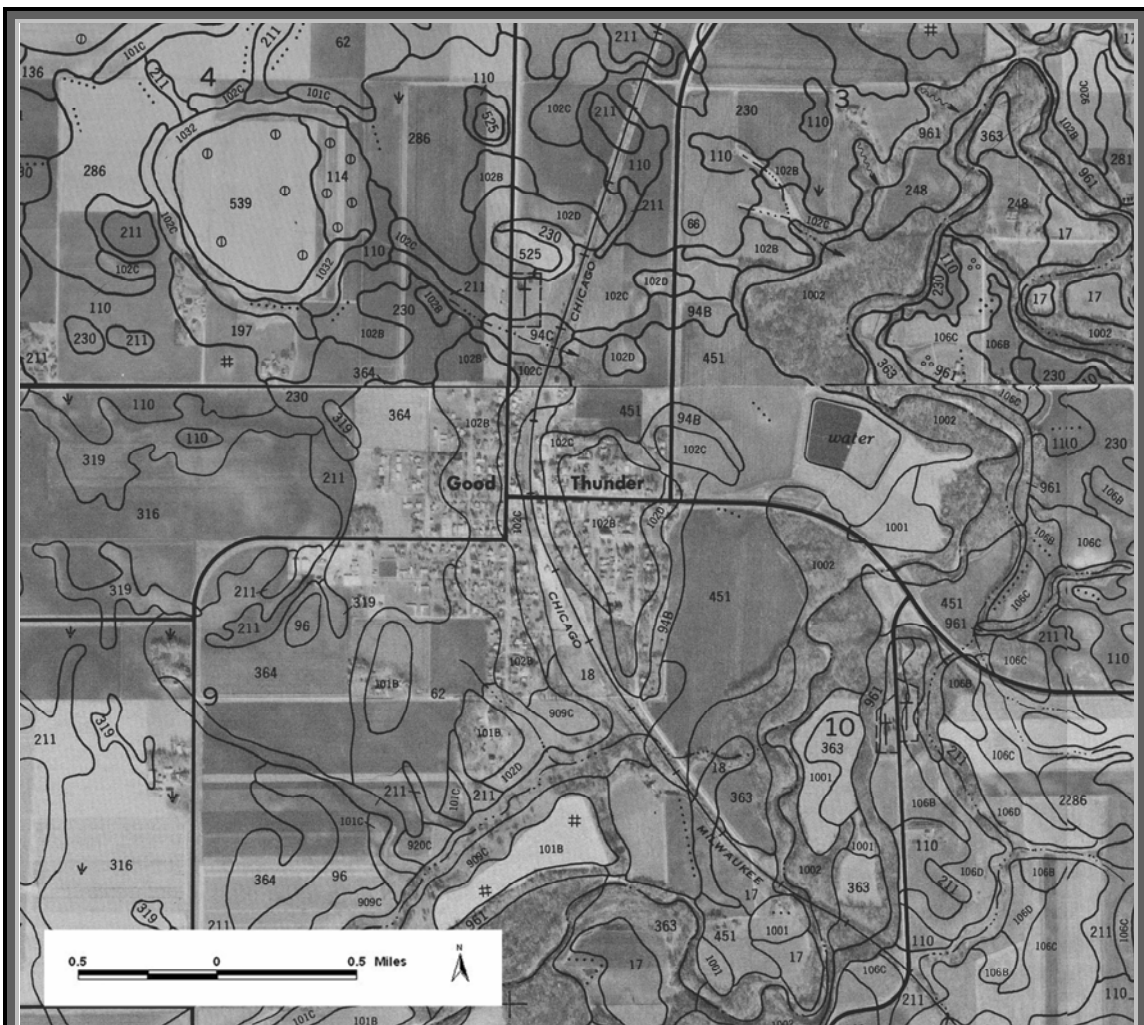
<sup>11</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 61.

Map 3: Soil Map, Good Thunder area, 1978



Soil Map Legend for Selected Soil Types

- 18 Comfrey clay loam
- 102B Clarion loam, 2-6% slopes
- 102C Clarion loam, 6-12% slopes
- 102D Clarion loam, 12-18% slopes
- 287 Minnetonka silty clay loam
- 353 Comfrey clay loam, frequently flooded
- 354 Dorchester loam, occasionally flooded
- 364 Minnetonka silty clay loam
- 451 Dorchester loam, 1-3% slopes

(Map adapted from Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, Composite image from sheet nos. 64 and 73)

which supported mixed deciduous trees and the “wet plant community of the tall grass prairie.”<sup>15</sup>

The Minnetonka series, Comfrey clay loam, and Dorchester loam series are all rated in the city land use plan with a limitation of severe for dwellings with basements and septic tank filter fields, meaning that the soil properties are not favorable for those uses and require greater expense for preparation in construction. The Clarion loam is divided into three sub-series based on slope, with the shallow slope rated as having a slight limitation, the medium slope as a moderate limitation, and the steepest slope as a severe limitation.<sup>16</sup> The majority of the residential and commercial structures are built on the shallow slope of the Clarion loam.<sup>17</sup>

### Agricultural Landscape

The soils in Blue Earth County are particularly fertile and provide Blue Earth County with its primary natural resource base, which is field crops. Most of the land in Blue Earth County is used for grain crops such as corn, soybeans, oats, wheat, and barley.<sup>18</sup> Corn has always been a primary cash crop in the county,<sup>19</sup> rising steadily from 1.2 million bushels in 1890 to 27.7 million bushels by 2002, as shown in Table 1. Second to corn until 1951 were oats,<sup>20</sup> which rose to 3.6 million bushels by 1940 before declining to 56 thousand bushels in 2002. Soybeans surpassed oats during the 1950s,<sup>21</sup> rising to 8.1 million bushels by 2002. In the period between 1890 and 1900, wheat was the major cash

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<sup>15</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> City of Good Thunder, “Good Thunder Land Use Plan,” 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, sheet nos. 64, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, 79.

<sup>19</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 70.

<sup>20</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 70.

<sup>21</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 71.

**Table 1: Grain Crops in Acres and Bushels for Blue Earth County**

Census Year		Barley	Corn	Oats	Rye	Soybean	Wheat
1890	Acres	4,148	42319	35,528	16	...	75,977
	Bushels	110,951	1,286,275	1,329,254	295	...	1,375,050
1910	Acres	12,580	67,157	43,732	1,587	...	85,809
	Bushels	280,765	2,532,182	1,487,907	25,896	...	1,471,598
1940	Acres	30,393	115,342	70,457	1455	...	12,622
	Bushels	1,051,967	5,516,600	3,649,362	25,280	...	162,661
1964	Acres	165	147,309	22,224	437	119,899	10,937
	Bushels	8,883	11,452,377	1,331,243	14,029	3,115,682	285,191
1978	Acres	541	162,132	5,612	...	160,664	5,219
	Bushels	26,762	18,439,955	385,431	...	5,701,207	169,206
1982	Acres	329	166,165	4,866	...	158,660	7,944
	Bushels	13,450	20,555,400	329,861	...	5,708,651	282,129
1996	Acres	...	172,241	868	...	178,915	1,047
	Bushels	...	23,734,842	60,421	...	7,463,481	42,912
2002	Acres	...	176,541	876	...	165,342	763
	Bushels	...	27,675,075	56,194	...	8,117,852	29,808

Sources: Data from Census Office, *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 371: Table 14: Cereal Products, by Counties; Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States taken in the year 1910. Abstract of the Census ... with Supplement for Minnesota* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 664: Table 4. Value of all crops and principal classes thereof, and acreage and production of principal crops, by counties: 1909; Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Agriculture: 1945, vol. 1, part 8, Minnesota, Statistics for Counties* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 51: County Table II Specified Crops Harvested; Bureau of the Census, *1964 United States Census of Agriculture, vol. 1, part 15, Minnesota* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 322-323, 332-333: Table 13: Acreage, Quantity, and Sales of Crops Harvested: 1964 and 1959; National Agricultural Statistics Service, *Census of Agriculture* [Internet database] (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, n. d.), <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>, accessed 14 October 2005; Minnesota Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, U. S. Dept of Agriculture, *Minnesota Agricultural Statistics*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture), 1997, 2003.

cash crop until rust diseases began to hurt the crops. By 1960 wheat fell to the fourth largest crop harvested in the county.<sup>22</sup>

Livestock products come in at a distant second in Blue Earth County's agricultural production. Non-poultry and non-dairy livestock farms generally decreased in number over time, and by the end of the 1950s comprised only twenty percent of all farms. Hog farms once held the lead in the livestock industry of the county. Although they are still the primary food animals, cattle have surpassed hogs as the major income source from livestock, trending away from dairy cattle and maintaining a level for beef production through the 1950s.<sup>23</sup>

Dairy production, once an important part of the economic base for the county, has declined since the middle of the twentieth century, as shown in Table 2. Milk production rose from 4.4 million gallons in 1890 to 13.4 million gallons in 1945 before gradually declining to 7.1 million gallons in 1960. Other important dairy products were cream and butter. Blue Earth County farmers produced 1.0 million pounds of butter in 1890, however, that production quickly declined to a low of 1,395 pounds in 1945 and climbed back into the low hundreds of thousands of pounds through 1964, after which butter production was not counted. Cream production also rose in the first half of the twentieth century, peaking at 3.7 million pounds in 1945. Thereafter only the number of farms producing cream were counted, which dropped from 280 farms in 1959 to 73 farms in 1964. Other livestock farming includes sheep, for which the county ranks second next to Faribault County in southern Minnesota, and poultry farms that produce eggs.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 68.

<sup>23</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 64, 74-76.

<sup>24</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 79.

Table 2: Live Stock Products for Blue Earth County

Census Year	Dairy Cows Reported	Milk Produced in millions of pounds <sup>a</sup>	Butter Produced in pounds	Cream Produced in pounds (or farms)	Swine Sold or Slaughtered
1890	14,953	37.9	1,018,695	...	31,951
1910	28,009	27.2	647,760	80,551	30,686
1945	23,776	11.5	1,395	3,730,581	54,374
1959	8,719	4.6	318,090	(280)	127,628
1964	8,520	6.2	147,263	(73)	94,131
1978 <sup>b</sup>	4,100	41.0	...	...	198,697
1982 <sup>b</sup>	2,722	44.0	...	...	254,614
1996 <sup>b</sup>	1,496	32.0	...	...	910,527
2002 <sup>b</sup>	1,505	26.0	...	...	1,314,862

*Sources:* Bureau of the Census, *Report* (1890), 293: Table 10: Neat Cattle and dairy Products, by Counties; Bureau of the Census, *Report* (1890), 334: Table 12: Miscellaneous Live Stock and Live Stock Products on Farms Only; Bureau of the Census, *Abstract* (1910), 656-657: Table 3: Live stock products and domestic animals sold or slaughtered on farms, by counties, 1909; Bureau of the Census, *Minnesota Statistics* (1945), 96-97: County Table III: Livestock and Livestock Products; Bureau of the Census, *Minnesota* (1964), 298-299, 316-317: Table 10: Livestock and Poultry, 1959 and 1964; Table 12: Dairy Products and Poultry and Poultry Products Sold, 1959 and 1964; Bureau of the Census, *1982 Census of Agriculture*, Minnesota, 263: Table 11 Cattle and Calves; Bureau of the Census, "Minnesota State and County Data," 285: Table 12 Hogs and Pigs; Minnesota Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, *Minnesota Agricultural Statistics*, 1997, 2003.

<sup>a</sup> Census statistics for 1890-1964 give milk production in gallons. The data are converted at the rate of 8.6 lbs. per gallon. Conversion information from the Wisconsin Dairy Board, "Milk Facts [Web site]," [http://www.wisdairy.com/wmmb\\_info/dairy\\_info/milkfacts.asp](http://www.wisdairy.com/wmmb_info/dairy_info/milkfacts.asp), accessed 13 October 2005.

<sup>b</sup> Milk production statistics for 1978-2002 from *Minnesota Agricultural Statistics*, 1980, 1997, 2003.

## Human Landscape

As in most areas in North America, Indians were the first human inhabitants of the physical landscape. The Dakota Indians were the first known people to occupy what is now Blue Earth County when Pierre Charles Le Sueur arrived there in September 1700, having lived in the forests and plains of Wisconsin and Minnesota.<sup>25</sup> As European-American pressures in New England and French traders in the Great Lakes moved farther west, so too did the eastern Dakota, adopting some of the cultural traits of the western Dakota, such as buffalo hunting, while continuing to maintain a woodland culture.<sup>26</sup> The land at the time was filled with game such as beaver, deer, raccoon, prairie chickens, and buffalo. These animals, as well as nuts, berries, roots, sugar maple, and wild rice were the natural resource base for their culture. The Dakota lived in semi-permanent villages and lived a migratory hunter-gatherer lifestyle, hunting buffalo to the west in the summer and living in the forests during the other seasons.<sup>27</sup> As external pressures moved the Dakota into different territories, their cultural adaptations to the physical environment changed only slightly, primarily in the hunting of buffalo.<sup>28</sup> However, not all cultures adapt by adopting customs of nearby peoples when migration brings them to a new locale.

The Winnebago lived near the Dakota in Blue Earth County for a very short period of time, but they did not adopt the migratory hunting aspects of Dakota culture. The Winnebago were a Siouan-speaking people with cultural practices not unlike the Algonquians of the eastern United States.<sup>29</sup> The Winnebago culture was sedentary. They

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<sup>25</sup> Hughes, *History*, 15; Guy Gibbon, *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations*, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Gibbon, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Gibbon, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Gibbon, 54-57.

<sup>29</sup> Harold Andrew Shogren, "A History of the Winnebago Indians in Blue Earth County, 1855-1862," (master's thesis, Mankato State College, 1968), 1.



lived in wigwams as well as bark lodges, hunted game for food and practiced agriculture, typically growing corn, squash, and bean.<sup>30</sup> The Winnebago imprint on the landscape was, however, minimal, probably owing to their very brief stay in the county.

It was during the mid-nineteenth century when European and European-American settlers first began to actively change the landscape. Minnesota's largest ethnic group from 1860-1905 were German immigrants who principally settled in the Minnesota River valley.<sup>31</sup> Political unrest, such as the 1848 Revolution in Schleswig-Holstein,<sup>32</sup> economic depression, and overcrowding in cities prompted many Germans to immigrate to the United States.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the lack of a class system in America and the high social standing of farmers in the United States during the nineteenth century proved to be an attraction for immigrants from Germany.<sup>34</sup> One of the attractions for settlement by Germans in Minnesota, particularly in the Minnesota River valley, was the available land which was already surveyed by the federal government, due in part to the Pre-emption Law of 1841 which required frontier land to be surveyed before it was sold.<sup>35</sup> Other advantages of the Minnesota River valley area were the development of roads and the rich agricultural land on the prairies which required little preparation because of the landscape's lack of trees thus making them prime fields for European agricultural practices.<sup>36</sup> The German settlers came from different areas of the Prussian Empire,

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<sup>30</sup>Paul Radin, *The Winnebago Tribe*, (1923; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), 104-118.

<sup>31</sup>Hildegard Binder Johnson, "The Germans," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, edited by June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 153; Bryce O. Stenzel, "German Immigration to the Minnesota River Valley Frontier, 1852-1865," (master's thesis, Mankato State University, 1995), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Stenzel, "German Immigration," 32.

<sup>33</sup> Stenzel, "German Immigration," 33.

<sup>34</sup> Stenzel, "German Immigration," 34.

<sup>35</sup> Stenzel, "German Immigration," 45.

<sup>36</sup> Stenzel, "German Immigration," 46-47.

bringing with them their own diverse cultural habits, including both the Roman Catholic religion and Protestant sects, which matured in the U.S. as the various Lutheran synods.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the German settlers coming to Minnesota, Irish immigrants and European-Americans from New England and New York were the predominant ethnic groups in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> These people also brought with them distinct cultures and agricultural techniques, as well as the Catholic religion from Ireland, and English forms of Protestantism. Typically, members of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota belonged to the “old-stock Americans,”<sup>39</sup> or people descended from white European families, usually New Englanders of British descent, which were already established for several generations in North America.<sup>40</sup> Of the major “English” denominations in Minnesota in the nineteenth century, only the Baptist church had a membership that was not limited to old-stock Americans, and was brought to the region by the people from the eastern Great Lake states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio.<sup>41</sup>

The United States census of population in 1880 was the first enumeration (see Appendix III) which included Good Thunder since its founding in 1871 and thus is the basis used for the determination of Good Thunder’s population and ethnic background analysis. The 1880 census for Good Thunder enumerates 149 residents in 37 households. There were 41 males aged sixteen years or older, 48 females aged sixteen and older, and sixty children under the age of sixteen. With a few exceptions in the enumeration,

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<sup>37</sup> Binder Johnson, “Germans,” 153.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah P. Rubinstein, “The English: English, Scots, Welsh, and British Canadians,” in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups*, edited by June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 111; Ann Regan, “The Irish,” in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups*, edited by June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 130.

<sup>39</sup> Rice, 68.

<sup>40</sup> Rice, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Rice, 68.

children under the age of sixteen are primarily indicated as being in school, while those sixteen and older had occupations such as dress maker or laborer.

Fully one-third (Chart 1) of the 1880 population was foreign-born, with the majority of these people from Germany, one family from Sweden, and a few of Canadian and Irish birth. The data (Chart 2) indicate that Good Thunder was settled rather equally during its first nine years by German immigrants and “old stock Americans” with a smattering of pioneers or others from areas in the Midwest looking for new opportunities.<sup>42</sup> By analyzing the place of birth of the residents’ parents in the census schedule, two distinct cultural groups become evident. One cultural group is the German population, overwhelmingly indicated in the census enumeration as Prussian, with a few citations of birth in Württemberg and Baden. The other cultural group is the old stock Americans from the eastern United States in New England and New York/New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio. By 1880, a full third of the total population had been born in Minnesota (Chart 3), most of whom were the children born in or near Good Thunder prior to and during the initial settlement period.

The demographics from the 2000 census (Chart 4) show several changes. First, almost half of the population claim German ancestry, followed almost equally by Irish and Scandinavian, with a few claiming other ethnic heritages. The data may be somewhat misleading because forty-five percent of respondents reported only one ancestry and forty percent provided multiple ancestries. This may account for the lack of English heritage from the original old stock Americans, since cross-cultural marriages (e.g. Germans marrying old stock Americans) and lack of knowledge of family histories skewed the reporting. Another, more probable, reason may be that the old stock American families

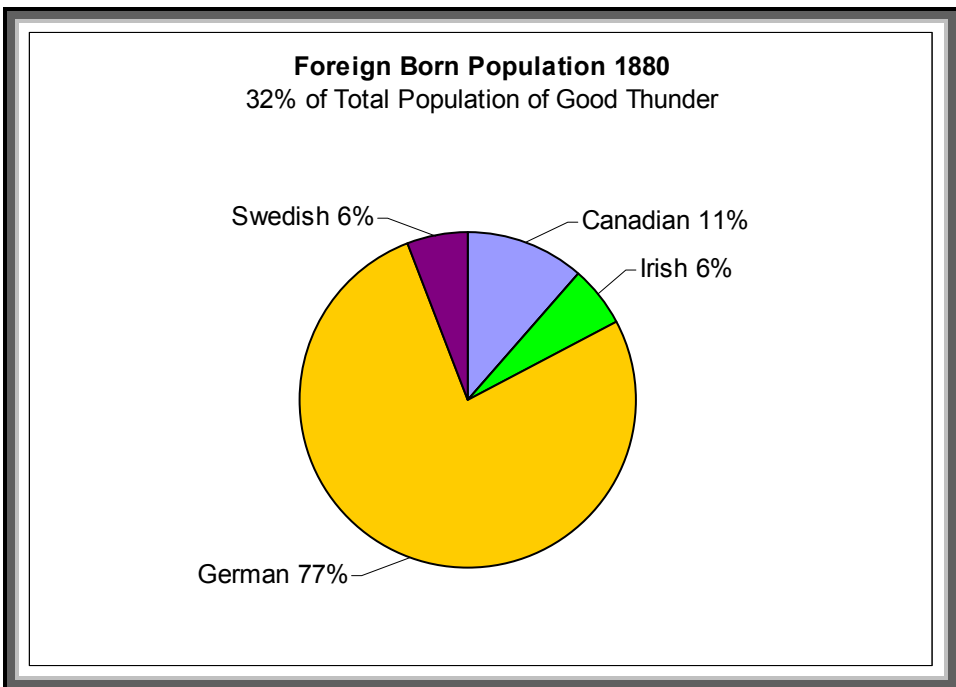
simply moved to other locations, a hypothesis supported by the dissolution of the Episcopal and Baptist churches in the 1940s and 1950s.

The overwhelming majority of Good Thunder residents in 2000 were born in Minnesota (Chart 5) and half of the total population were over the age of 30. However, only a little over half lived in the same house from 1995 to 2000 (Chart 6), while forty-one percent lived elsewhere in Minnesota, the rest of the residents having moved from other states or countries. These data indicate that almost half of the residents in Good Thunder in 2000 moved from other areas, half of whom had commuting times between twenty and thirty minutes, and another quarter with commuting times of more than one half hour (Chart 7), all of which supports the claim that Good Thunder is now a bedroom community. In all probability, some portion of those residents residing in that same house in Good Thunder in 1995 and 2000 are also outsiders who moved in prior to 1995. Yet the fact that almost ninety percent of the residents were born in Minnesota indicates that Good Thunder attracts a predominance of people with a Minnesotan cultural background and thus has a rather homogeneous cultural character.

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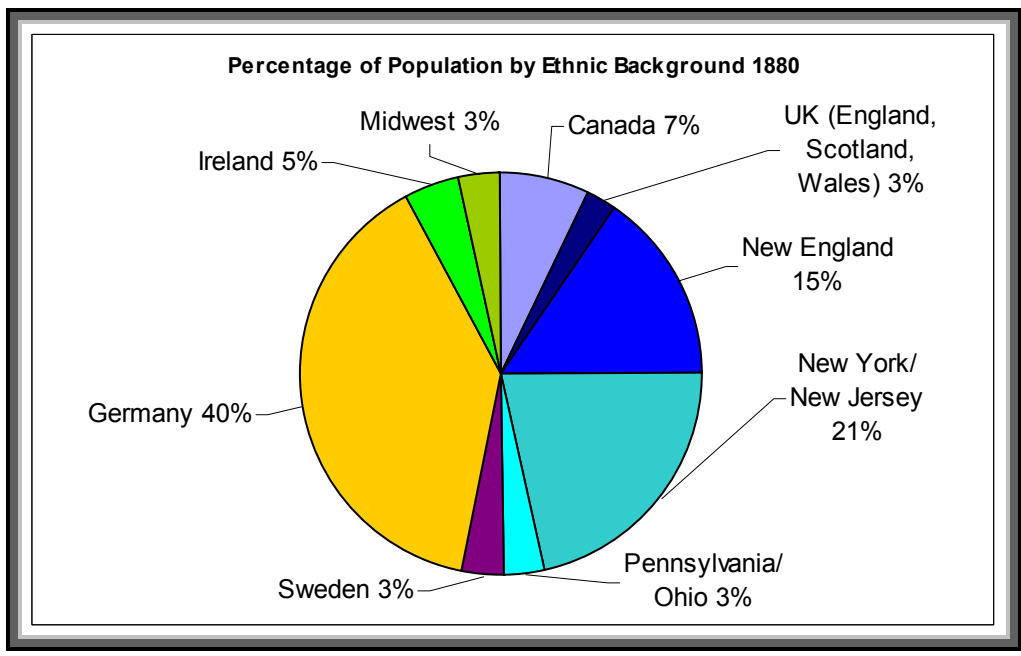
<sup>42</sup> Rice, 57.

**Chart 1: Foreign Born Population 1880**



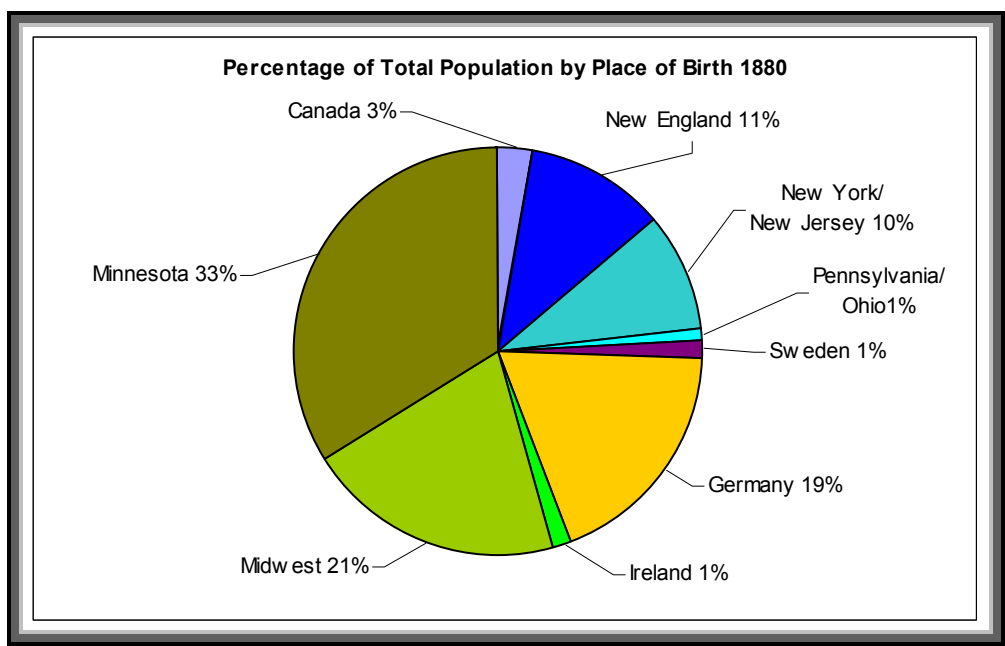
Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population 1880*.

**Chart 2: Ethnic Background 1880**



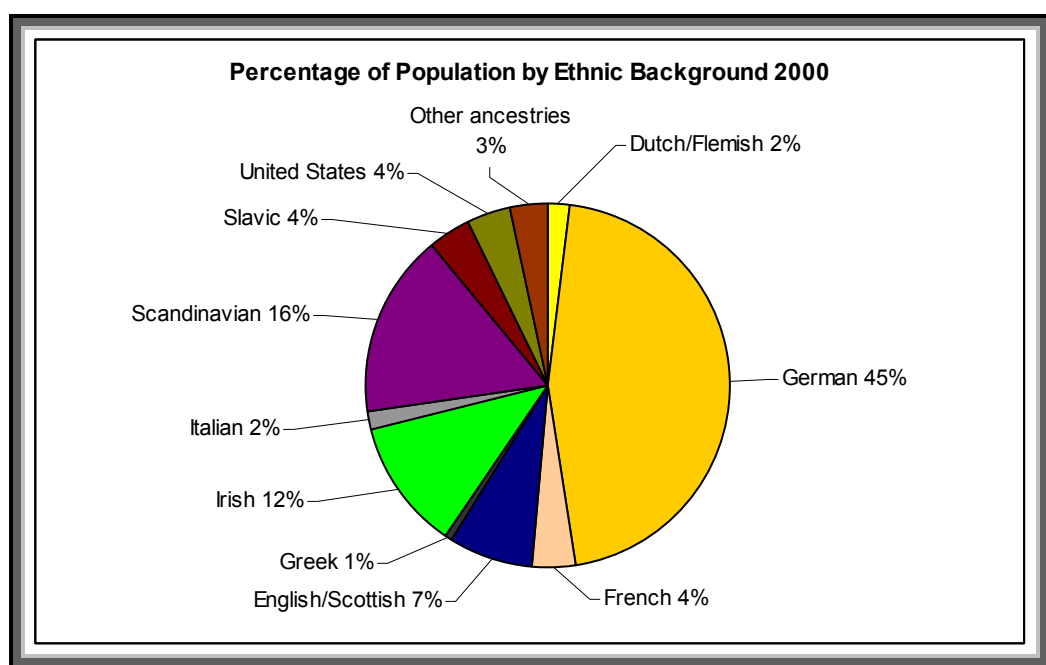
Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population 1880*.

**Chart 3: Population by Place of Birth**



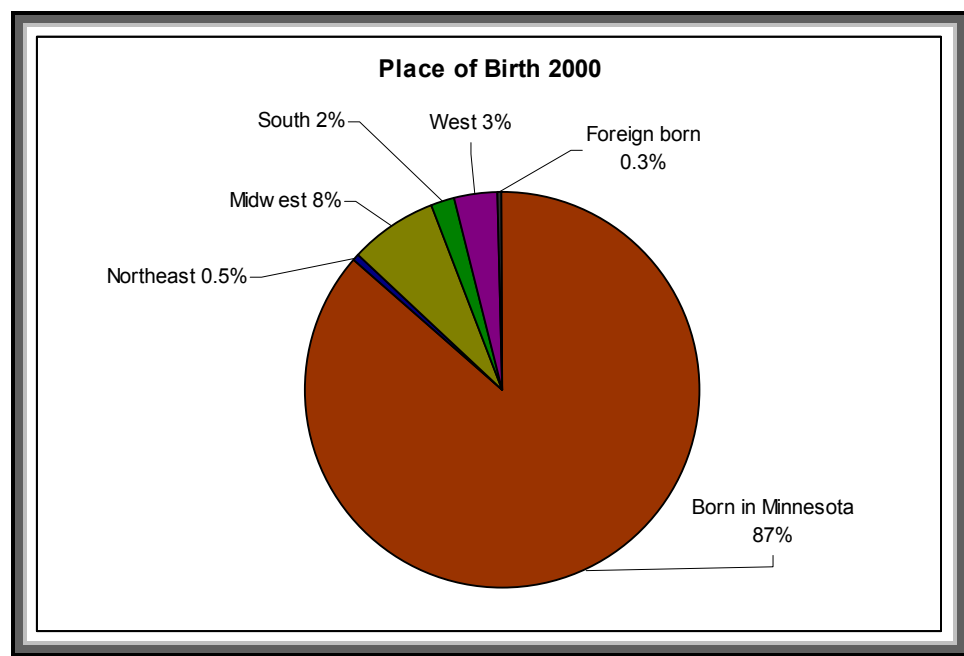
Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population 1880*.

**Chart 4: Ethnic Background 2000**



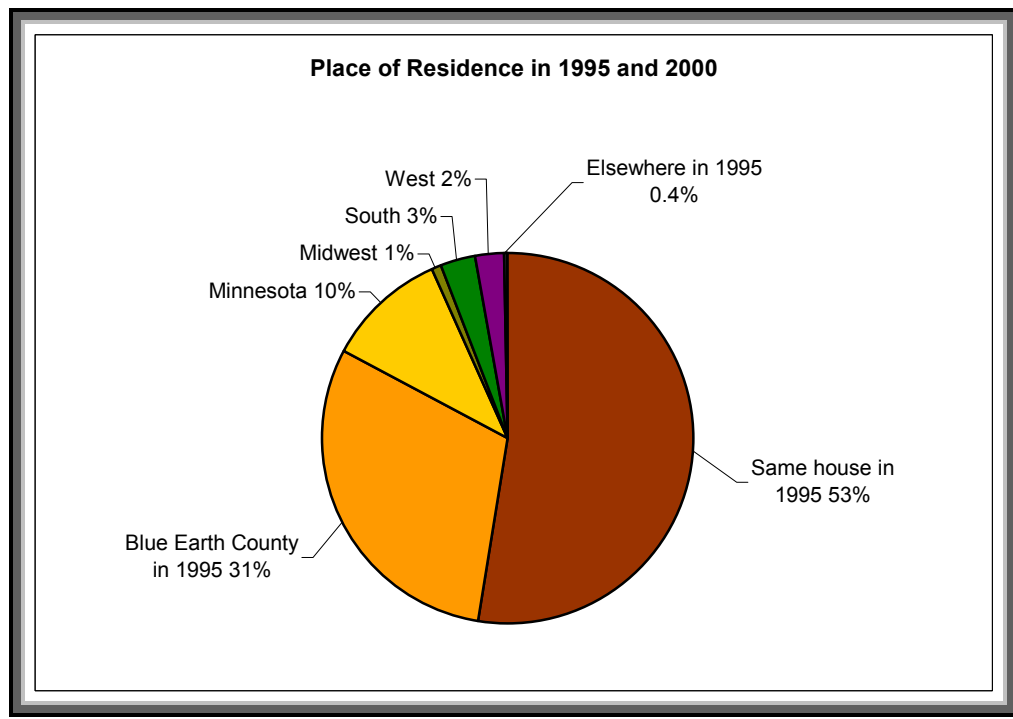
Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, Ancestry: 2000.

**Chart 5: Place of Birth 2000**



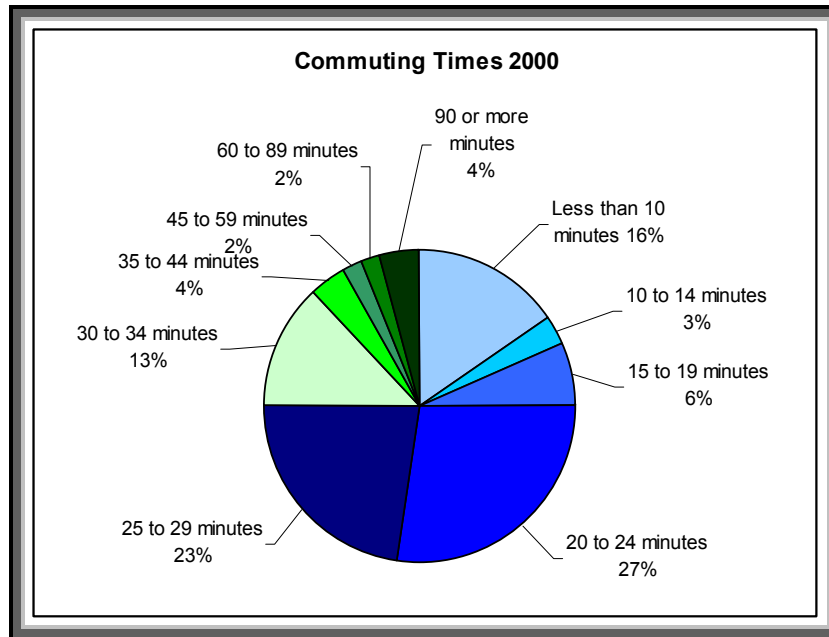
Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, Place of Birth and Residence in 1995 and 2000.

**Chart 6: Place of Residence**



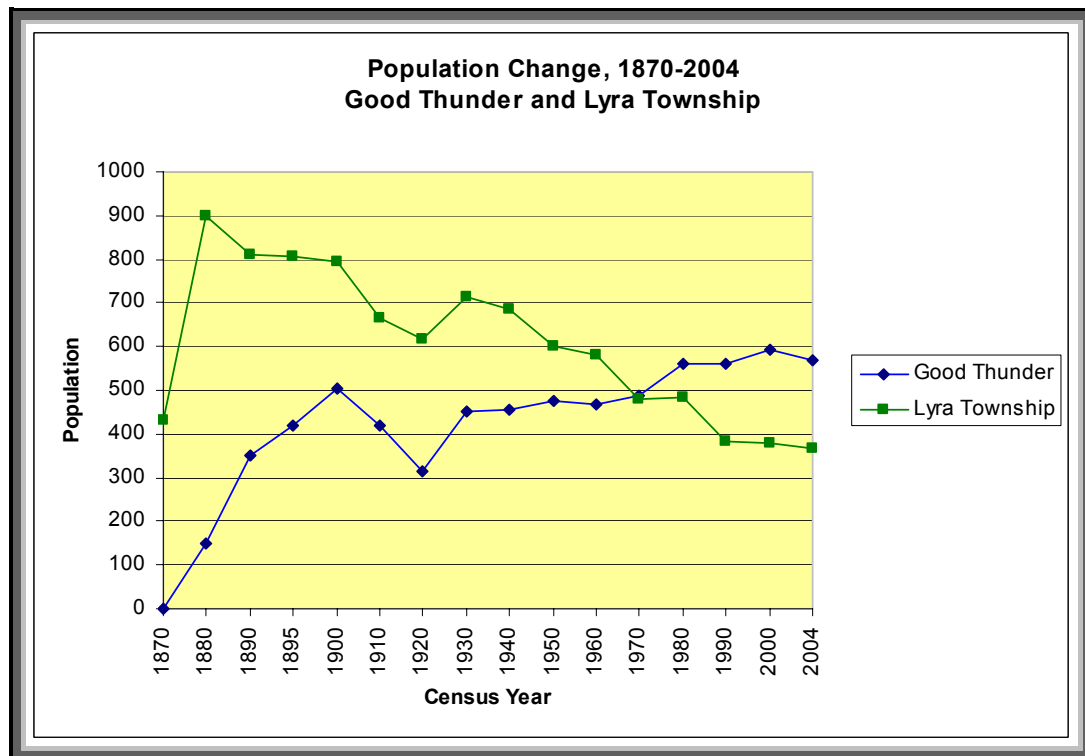
Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, Place of Birth and Residence in 1995 and 2000.

**Chart 7: Commuting Times**



Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, Journey to Work: 2000.

**Chart 8: Population Change, 1870-2004**



Source: Data from the Bureau of the Census, statistical abstracts for Good Thunder, Minnesota; data in tabular form in Appendix IV.



### Population Changes Through Time

During Good Thunders' first nine years of existence, the village grew relatively quickly from a population of two (the Grahams) in 1871 to 149 residents in 1880. This growth in population continued through the year 1900 when Good Thunder topped 500 residents. Thereafter, the population declined, reaching its lowest point in 1920 of 314, before leveling out in the upper 400s through the 1930s to 1970s. Lyra township also shows a similar pattern, reaching its maximum population in 1880 of 900, a low point in 1920 after which the township grew briefly before beginning a steady trend of population loss from 1930 to the present day. By 1970 the population of the township had fallen below that of Good Thunder.

Several factors contribute to the fluctuations in the population over time. The census data depicted in Chart 8 reflect the general trends experienced across Blue Earth County. During the period between 1900 and 1940, the rural population of Blue Earth County saw an overall decline, which continued from 1940 through 1960. This represents a decline in the numbers of the farm population. However, the overall rural non-farm population shows a growth trend from 1930 through the present day, particularly since 1940 as urban and farm families settled in the rural villages.<sup>43</sup> These trends are indicative of the cultural change in the United States as transportation became easier and more reliant upon the automobile and more people began to work in urban areas, such as Mankato. The trends in population are also typical for rural settings in the Midwest, as small family farms closed or were incorporated into larger commercial farms.

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<sup>43</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 12-14.

## Part II

### Sequent Occupance

*“The frontier has been . . . a series of secondary culture hearths, of differing origin and composition, which there began their individual evolution.”<sup>1</sup>*

~Carl Sauer

## Chapter 4

### Pre-Settlement: European Exploration and the Winnebago Reservation, 1680-1863

#### Indians

Scholars do not know when the Dakota came to Minnesota, but they do know the people lived in the prairies and forests of southern Minnesota when the French explorers Daniel Greysolon, sieur Dulhut<sup>2</sup> and Father Louis Hennepin arrived in the area between 1678-1680.<sup>3</sup> Their arrival in Minnesota probably occurred as a result of intrusions from eastern Indians into northern Wisconsin, who in turn were pressured to migrate due to European settlers in the east.<sup>4</sup>

Hughes' description of Indian occupation of Blue Earth County before European discovery is representative of nineteenth-century perceptions of Indians, abounding with phrases like “not at all particular as to their food,” “not overly cleanly,” and “wholly

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Sauer, “Historical Geography and the Western Frontier,” in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, edited by John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Also written as Du Lhut or Du Luth, sieur Dulhut is the aristocratic title of Greysolon, one of the first French explorers in the upper Great Lakes region. The city of Duluth, Minn. derives its name from Greysolon's title. Yves F. Zoltvany, “Greysolon Dulhut,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada, 2003), <http://www.biographi.ca/>, accessed 16 November 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell E. Rubenstein and Alan R. Woolworth, “The Dakota and Ojibway,” in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, edited by June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Gibbon, 50.

unaccustomed ... to any restraint of law.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Hughes provides one of the few available histories available for Blue Earth County specifically.<sup>6</sup> He writes that the Dakota, also known as the Sioux, were the only known Indian inhabitants of the county. The Dakota lived a nomadic life, traveling from the woods to the prairies and back again, residing in tepees, hunting buffalo, muskrats, and other game which lived in the area, and gathering berries, nuts, wild rice and other native edible plants.

For a time, the Dakota lived peaceably with European explorers and settlers as they moved into the territory doing “little injury to the settler or his property.”<sup>7</sup> The relations between white settlers and the Dakota later degraded with the Dakota Conflict. Also known as the Sioux Uprising, the conflict occurred in summer and autumn of 1862 as a result of the U.S. federal government not keeping its treaty promises with the Dakota. The government did not send the promised money or food stipulated in the treaty and the Dakota were facing starvation. Their anger with the government resulted in raids on white settlers in and around New Ulm, Minnesota in which some four-hundred whites were killed. The Dakota took some women and children as captives, and fought with the U.S. Army at Fort Ridgely and Wood Lake when the U.S. defeated and captured nearly two-thousand Indians. Although the white captives were released and the Army brought the situation under control, the whites demanded the execution of all the Indians. An appeal to President Lincoln from Bishop Henry Whipple resulted in a careful review of the charges against the Indians. In the end thirty-nine Indians were executed on 26 December 1862 at Mankato. Then in 1863, the whites used the Dakota Conflict as an

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes, *History*, 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> In his *History of the Minnesota Valley*, Edward Neill devotes only the first paragraph for any mention of the inhabitation of the Dakota in the region before discussing the French explorers; Neill, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, *History*, 5-6

excuse to remove Indians from Minnesota, opening their reservations for white settlement.<sup>8</sup>

### First White Settlers

In July and August of 1854, John Ball and John Quigley from the office of the Surveyor General of Iowa and Wisconsin surveyed what is now Lyra township. The original survey map<sup>9</sup> (Map 4) shows Lyra township as prairie land, indicated by the green boundary, with a few wet small lands. The township is dissected by the Maple River in its ravine, and traversed along most of its western edge by the Blue Earth River, both of which are not labeled, probably because they were not yet named. The survey map also shows no signs of habitation or agricultural fields from either land squatters or Indians. The map itself displays the singular purpose of the surveyors, which was not to locate roads or townsites, but rather to note the general quality of the land as well as natural resources and permanent formations of interest, such as water courses, mines, mill seats.<sup>10</sup> This was the type of information pioneers desired for selection of land to purchase.

The first settler was Noble G. Root who arrived in September of 1854, very shortly after the original survey had been completed. He built some log buildings on the Maple River in the southeast quarter of section nine.<sup>11</sup> Barnabas Simmons followed shortly thereafter, also settling on the Maple River, in the southeast quarter of

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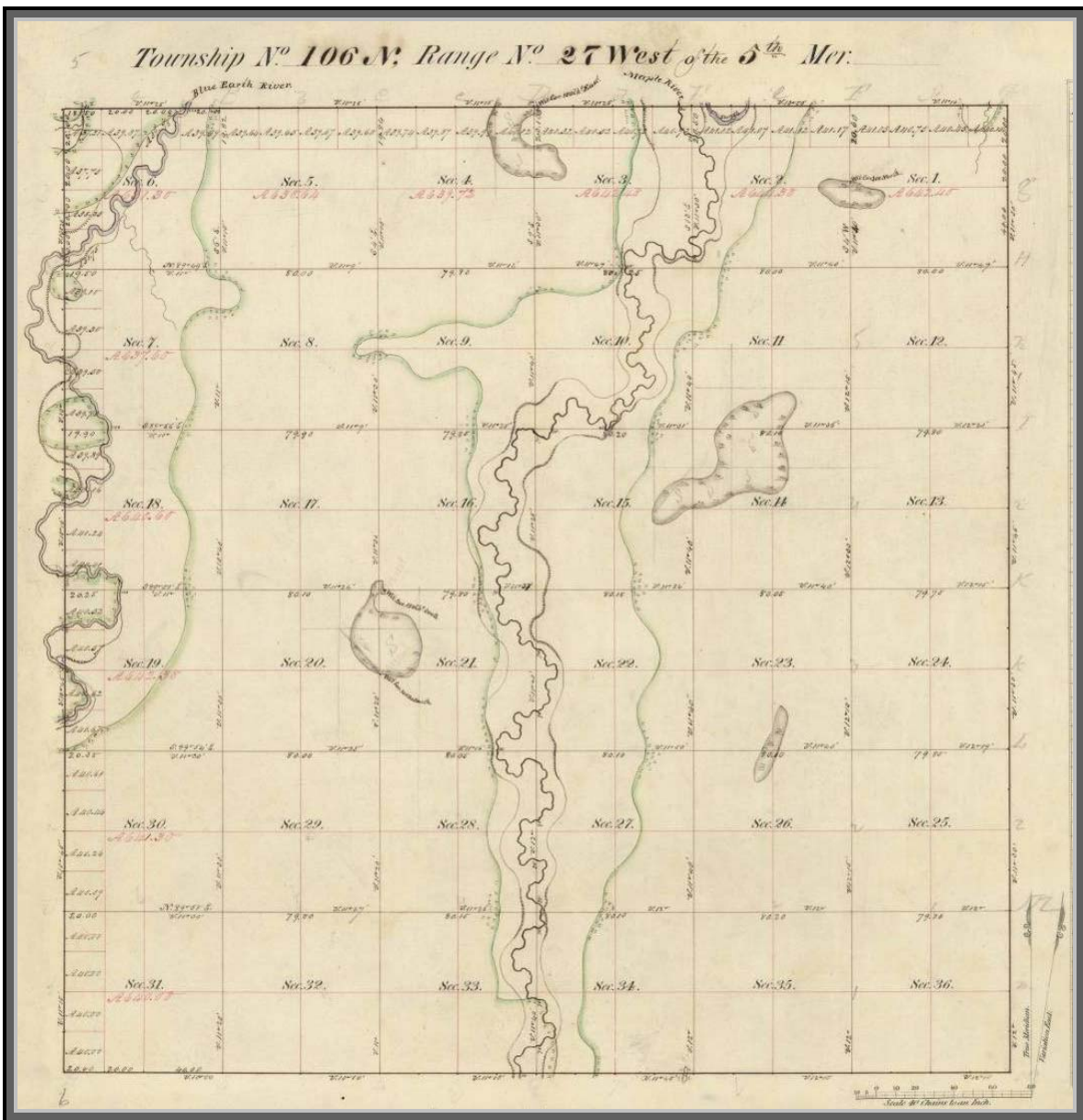
<sup>8</sup> "The Dakota Conflict of 1862," *Mankato Free Press*, 29 August 1987.

<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Land Management Information Center, "Original Public Land Survey Plats of Minnesota [Web site]," (St. Paul: Land Management Information Center, [2005?]), <http://www.lmic.state.mn.us/chouse/GLO/>, accessed 29 September 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Meinig, *Shaping*, 2:241.

<sup>11</sup> Neill, 607; Hughes, *History*, 261; Julie Schrader, "Good Thunder, Minnesota," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 214.

Map 4: Original Survey Map of Lyra Township 1854



(Map adapted from Minnesota Land Management Information Center, "Original Public Land Survey Plats of Minnesota" map for Lyra Township)

section thirty-three.<sup>12</sup> However, both men and their families were compelled to abandon their claims in 1855 when the government created the Winnebago reservation.<sup>13</sup> Simmons later returned to his claim before the removal and lived peaceably with the Winnebago.<sup>14</sup> The year 1855 saw many changes in the areal extent of Blue Earth County when the Territorial Legislature gave portions of Blue Earth County to Le Sueur county. If Hughes' description of this land loss is indicative of the general sentiment of Blue Earth County residents, the loss of land to Le Sueur "was not the worst."<sup>15</sup> A federal treaty with the Winnebago signed on 27 February 1855 created a four-hundred square mile reservation (map 5),<sup>16</sup> thirty miles from east to west and thirteen miles north to south, comprising the whole of McPherson, Medo, Beauford, Decoria, Lyra, and Rapidan townships, with portions of the South Bend, Mankato, and Le Ray townships.<sup>17</sup> Hughes' description of territory loss due to the reservation depicts feelings of resentment, largely because "half of the very best farm lands in the county,—about one-third of its total area, — [was] taken from its very heart and given to the Indians."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Neill, 607; Hughes, *History*, 261; Schrader, "Good Thunder," 214.

<sup>13</sup> Kienitz, Papers, "History of Lyra Township" newspaper clipping.

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, *History*, 262.

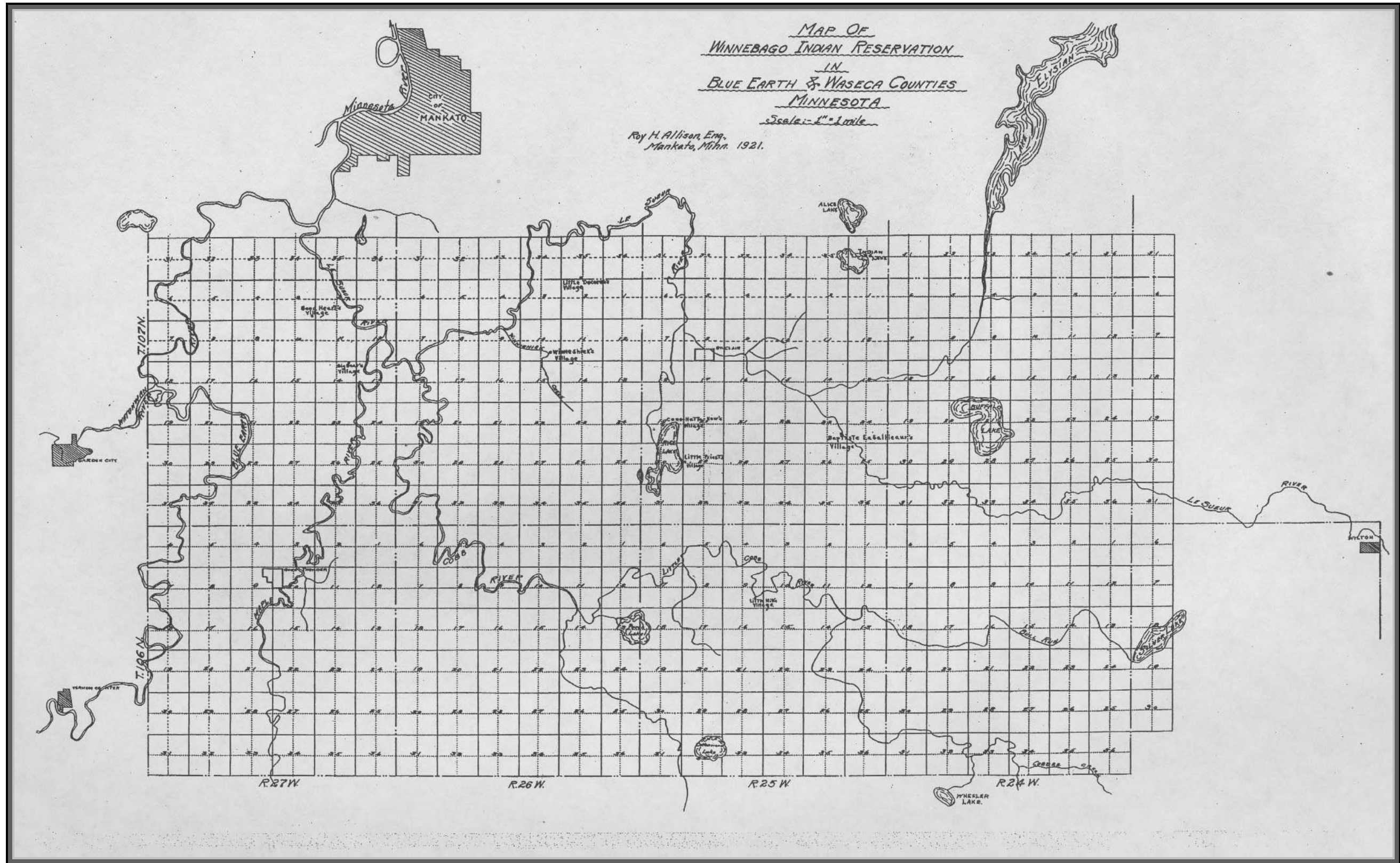
<sup>15</sup> Hughes, *History*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Roy H. Allison, *Map of Winnebago Indian Reservation in Blue Earth & Waseca Counties Minnesota* (Mankato: n. p., 1921).

<sup>17</sup> Hughes, *History*, 59; Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 10.

<sup>18</sup> Hughes, *History*, 59.

Map 5: Winnebago Indian Reservation 1855-1863



(Reproduced from H. Allison, Map of Winnebago Indian Reservation in Blue Earth & Waseca Counties, Minnesota)



### Winnebago Reservation 1855-1863

The Winnebago people originated in east-central Wisconsin, speaking a Siouan dialect and practiced customs similar to the Algonquin. At the behest of miners in Wisconsin, the Winnebago were moved by the federal government to northwestern Iowa after the Winnebago War in 1827. Between 1827 and 1855, the government forced the Winnebago people to move three more times, twice to areas in northern Iowa along the Yellow River and the Turkey River, and again in 1848 to Long Prairie, Minnesota. By this time, the Winnebago were frustrated with the moves and had to be forcibly removed by soldiers from Long Prairie. In 1855, Congress again elected to move the Winnebago, numbering about 2,000 at the time, to a new reservation created in the heart of Blue Earth County, where the village of Good Thunder is located today. The Winnebago lived all over the reservation area in small groups or clans, each headed by a chief,<sup>1</sup> and lived peaceably amongst themselves and with the white settlers surrounding the reservation.<sup>2</sup> Chief Wakuntchapinka, or Good Thunder in English, settled his family and clan of some one-hundred Winnebago along the Maple River at the present site of the village of Good Thunder. The site on the river became known as Good Thunder's Forde because it is a shallow, easy crossing in the Maple River.<sup>3</sup> During the summers Wakuntchapinka's clan lived on the hill west from the river upon land now occupied by the public school and farmed the land between the hill and the river. During the winters, the clan settled near the ford and also lived in the log buildings built by Root on his homestead.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christenson, "Name," 213; Christenson, "History"; "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Christenson, "History."

<sup>3</sup> Christenson, "Name," 214.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, *History*, 263.



**Figure 3: Site of Good Thunder's Forde, 2005**  
(Photograph by author)

By the time of the Dakota Conflict of 1862 white settlers had realized that the land in Blue Earth County, particularly that now occupied by the Winnebago Reservation, was some of the richest, most productive soil for farmland in the country. Although the Winnebago took no part or side in the Dakota Conflict, anti-Indian sentiments among whites made it easy to use the Conflict as an excuse to evict the Winnebago from the Reservation for white settlement and farming. Thus in 1863, the federal government once again removed the Winnebago, with a culture and subsistence based on forest resources, and forced them to a desert reservation at Crow Creek in the Dakota territory, now known as Fort Thompson, South Dakota. The Winnebago were shipped by steamboat down the Minnesota River to Fort Snelling, transferred to other

steamboats down the Mississippi River to St. Louis, where they were transferred again for the journey up the Missouri River to the new reservation. The trip was long and arduous, causing many of them to die en route.<sup>5</sup>

Imprints of Winnebago on Good Thunder appear to be non-existent today. Although William Hall stated that their burial ground was located “on one of the round knolls in the bottom land just north of the present highway leading from Main Street to the bridge,”<sup>6</sup> it is not located on any known map, nor does there appear to be any footprint evident on the land. Residents claim that arrow heads were found in abundance on the site of the summer camp ground where the public school stands today.<sup>7</sup> During the tenure of the Winnebago clans on the reservation, several sites had Winnebago names, such as Winneshiek township to the east of Lyra, and Good Thunder’s Forde. After the Winnebago removal, whites changed the names of many sites with Winnebago names, such as Winneshiek township to Beauford.<sup>8</sup> The site of the ford on the Maple River continued to be known as Good Thunder’s Forde, perhaps because Barnabas Simmons lived for a time with the Winnebago, or the fact that Wakuntchapinka counseled against aiding the Dakota in the uprising and became known to whites as a “good Indian.” Whatever the reasons, Good Thunder kept its Indian appellation, which has been a source of pride throughout its history, and the name itself would later become a key component in keeping the village alive and prospering.

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<sup>5</sup> Christenson, “Name,” 214; Christenson, “History.”

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, *Indian Chiefs*, 189.

<sup>7</sup> “60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Visit from Old Chief,” *Good Thunder Herald*, Anniversary Extra, 4 July 1947.

<sup>8</sup> Christenson, “Name,” 214.

*We will be known forever by the tracks we leave.*<sup>1</sup>

*~Dakota Proverb*

## Chapter 5

Wakuntchapinka and Wakinyanwashte, the Two Chiefs Good Thunder:

A Biographical Interlude

Good Thunder is a calque, or direct translation, of the personal names Wakuntchapinka (Winnebago) and Wakinyanwashte (Dakota). No history or discussion of the village Good Thunder is complete without the story of who the eponymous Indian chiefs were for whom the village was named. The name Good Thunder is as important in influencing the cultural development of the village as any other factors which shaped the personality of the village. The annual Pioneer Indian Days celebration, the peace park in town, and the monument at the ford on the Maple River are all direct results of the Indian name and historic peaceable relations with the Indians of the reservation. The name has also had influence beyond the village itself. Its reputation as an art community in the 1980s made it an ideal choice for lending its name to Minnesota State University, Mankato's Good Thunder Reading Series, an annual series of lectures and readings given by emerging and established Minnesota and Midwestern authors.<sup>2</sup>

The story behind the name seems to have been lost to the collective memory of

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<sup>1</sup> "Native American Proverbs," (n. p.: n. p., 2005), <http://oneproverb.net/bwfolder/nativebw.html>, accessed 3 October 2005.

<sup>2</sup> "The Good Thunder Reading Series: 1981-Present," Good Thunder Reading Series [Web site], <http://www.english.mnsu.edu/gt/history.html>, accessed 4 October 2005.

Good Thunder at least once throughout the village's history. The St. John's Lutheran Church centennial anniversary book from 1970, for example, gives the following account of the name origin. According to the story, Indians from South Dakota, suffering from a long drought, moved east and camped in the present location of Good Thunder. That night a thunderstorm occurred which the Indians took as a happy omen and called out "Wa-Ke-An-Washta" or good thunder. It also happened, according to the story, that a son was born to the chief that night who was given the name Wakeanwashta.<sup>3</sup> Although the church's story has some good dramatic elements indicative of oral traditions, the actual story is quite different. A 1947 newspaper article in the *Good Thunder Herald* states: "The source of the name of our village has been shrouded in doubt to some extent because there were two chiefs by the name of Good Thunder."<sup>4</sup> It goes on to briefly discuss both Wakuntchapinka and Wakinyanwashte.

### Wakuntchapinka

Good Thunder's Forde was the common name of the fording at the Maple River just east of the present site of the village during the middle of the nineteenth century. The early pioneers called the ford by this name, because the Winnebago chief Wakuntchapinka and his clan lived at the site of the ford and the present site of the school between 1855 and 1863 when Blue Earth County was home to the Winnebago Reservation. Very little is known about Wakuntchapinka's life, nor even what he looked like, as there are no known portraits of him; thus the Winnebago village beneath the cloak

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<sup>3</sup> St. John Lutheran Church, "1870-1970, One Hundredth Anniversary," (n. p.: n. p., [1970]), 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 3 July 1947.



**Figure 4: Andrew Good Thunder and a Winnebago camp**

The image of Andrew Good Thunder comes from an existing photograph. Chief Wakuntchapinka is represented as the Winnebago camp. (Photograph by author)

of Wakinyanwashte on the grain elevator mural was used to represent Wakuntchapinka.<sup>5</sup> Most of the biographical information comes from a reminiscence of William Hall,<sup>6</sup> a representative in the state legislature for the district in which Blue Earth County lies.<sup>7</sup>

Wakuntchapinka was probably born in Wisconsin in the native territory of the Winnebago people. In 1832 he lived with his wife and three children at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. During the Black Hawk War in 1832 he is said to have fought on the side of the whites and was a signer of the treaty with the United States that ended the war.<sup>8</sup> Wakuntchapinka also signed the treaty of 1837 in Washington, D.C., the terms of which were for the Winnebago to cede their lands and remove to Turkey River, Iowa. The Indian signers thought the treaty provided eight years for the migration, but it was eight months in actuality.<sup>9</sup> Between Wakuntchapinka's first cited location in 1832 and his death in 1863, he moved with each forced migration, from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin to Turkey River, Iowa, then to Long Prairie, Minnesota in 1846, and in 1855 to the Blue Earth County reservation. When the United States dissolved the Blue Earth reservation in 1863, the Winnebago were removed by U.S. soldiers and Wakuntchapinka died during the journey.<sup>10</sup>

Williams, as quoted by Hughes, as well as other white settlers, remember Wakuntchapinka as a good man, "large of stature and well built," who was fair in his

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<sup>5</sup> John Christenson, "History of Good Thunder," Lecture given for the Maple River Study Club, 19 April 2005, St. John's Lutheran Church, Good Thunder, Minn.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hughes, *Indian Chiefs of Southern Minnesota*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1969), 187.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, *History*, 417.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, *Indian Chiefs*, 187.

<sup>9</sup> Ho-Chunk Nation, "The Ho-Chunk Chronology," Culture History Page [Web site], [http://www.ho-chunknation.com/heritage/culture\\_history\\_page.htm](http://www.ho-chunknation.com/heritage/culture_history_page.htm), accessed 5 October 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Christenson, "History."



dealings with others, respected by his clan, and peaceable.<sup>11</sup> These settlers especially remember Wakuntchapinka for his role during the Dakota Conflict in 1862.<sup>12</sup> In the early part of the conflict, after the Dakota had raided and killed some of the white settlers, envoys from the Dakota came to the Winnebago for help against the whites.

Wakuntchapinka, however, “counselled [*sic*] against warlike action and forbade their [the younger Winnebago men of fighting age] listening to the Sioux promises telling them that the ‘Great Father at Washington’ had always dealt kindly with them, that their white neighbors were their friends, and that he could not listen to their murderous designs.”<sup>13</sup> Because of this counsel, the white settlers remember Wakuntchapinka as a “good Indian,” and this may be a reason why, of all the other Winnebago names in Blue Earth County that were changed after their removal, the name Good Thunder’s Forde remained.

#### Wakinyanwashte

The second man named Good Thunder was Wakinyanwashte,<sup>14</sup> a Dakota Indian born about 1819,<sup>15</sup> who lived in the Lower Sioux Agency.<sup>16</sup> It was there in 1860 that Wakinyanwashte met Henry Whipple, the first Episcopal bishop in Minnesota, who converted Wakinyanwashte to Christianity and baptized him in that same year as Andrew Good Thunder.<sup>17</sup> Like Wakuntchapinka, Wakinyanwashte played a significant role in the aftermath of the Dakota Conflict.

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<sup>11</sup> Hughes, *Indian Chiefs*, 187, 189.

<sup>12</sup> Also commonly referred to as the Sioux Uprising of 1862.

<sup>13</sup> “Good Thunder!” *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893. The Dakota people are part of the Sioux nation, and are alternately referred to as the Dakota or the Sioux in different texts.

<sup>14</sup> There are multiple spellings of the Sioux name for Good Thunder: Wakeau Washti, Wa-kin-yan-washte, Wak-ke-un-washtay

<sup>15</sup> Christenson, “History.”

<sup>16</sup> Christenson, “History.”

<sup>17</sup> Christenson, “Name,” 214.



In the summer of 1862, the Dakota Indians on the Lower Sioux Agency were starving because the federal government had not sent the money or food promised in various treaties, including the Traverse des Sioux Treaty of 1851. In desperation and anger, some Dakota raided white settlements for food and supplies, killing some four hundred settlers in the summer and fall of 1862.<sup>18</sup> In the midst of the conflict, Wakinyanwashte fought with the Dakota at Fort Ridgley against the whites, but he also worked to save the lives of the whites, some two hundred women and children, captured by the Dakota.<sup>19</sup> Henry Sibley, commissioned as a colonel and given command of the military force against the Dakota by Governor Ramsey,<sup>20</sup> employed Wakinyanwashte as a scout and envoy between the Dakota and U.S. forces. Sibley wrote of Wakinyanwashte in an 1887 letter to John Graham of Good Thunder: "I gave him prominent position among the Indian Scouts, and he justified my good opinion of him by a fearless and faithful discharge of that dangerous service."<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, when the federal government moved the Dakota and Winnebago in 1863 from Minnesota to South Dakota, Wakinyanwashte was obliged to go along.<sup>22</sup>

In the late 1860s, Wakinyanwashte returned to Minnesota, purchasing some eighty acres of farm land at Birch Cooley, near Morton, Minnesota, where he became a successful farmer. He donated twenty acres of his land in 1886 to Bishop Whipple for the Episcopal Church, upon which Whipple built the St. Cornelia's Episcopal Mission

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<sup>18</sup> "The Dakota Conflict of 1862," *Mankato Free Press*, 29 August 1987; Christenson, "Name," 214; Christenson, "History."

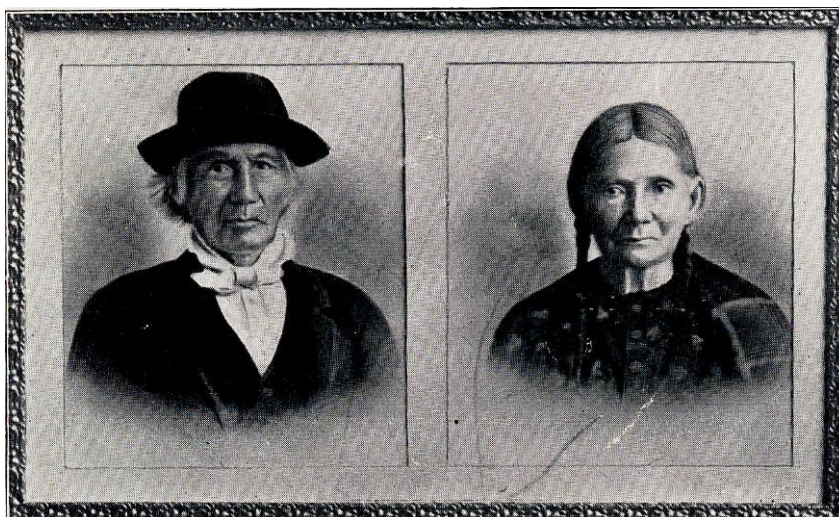
<sup>19</sup> Christenson, "Name," 214.

<sup>20</sup> "Henry Hastings Sibley," City of Mendota [Web site], <http://www.mendotamn.org/sib.html>, accessed 5 October 2005.

<sup>21</sup> "Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found," *Good Thunder Herald*, 19 January 1949.

<sup>22</sup> Christenson, "Name," 214.

Church. Wakinyanwashte died in 1901<sup>23</sup> and was buried in the church's cemetery at Birch Cooley, which still stands today.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 5: Andrew and Sara Good Thunder, 1887**  
(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”)

So far as historical sources show, Wakinyanwashte had never been in Good Thunder until 1887. During that year, the citizens of Good Thunder planned a Fourth of July celebration at which they wished to rededicate the town and have Wakuntchapinka come to the celebration. Upon learning that Wakuntchapinka had died some years earlier, the village also learned that another Indian by the name of Good Thunder lived a short distance away. Thus Andrew Good Thunder was invited by the village elders for the rededication ceremony in 1887. A man from Redwood Falls heard about the invitation and wrote an inflammatory letter about Andrew Good Thunder to the village council. Bishop Whipple learned of this letter and wrote his own in support of Andrew Good Thunder, also requesting that then General Sibley write a letter of recommendation as well. In his letter, Bishop Whipple said of Andrew Good Thunder: “Our dear Savior said

<sup>23</sup> Christenson, “History.”

<sup>24</sup> Christenson, “Name,” 214.

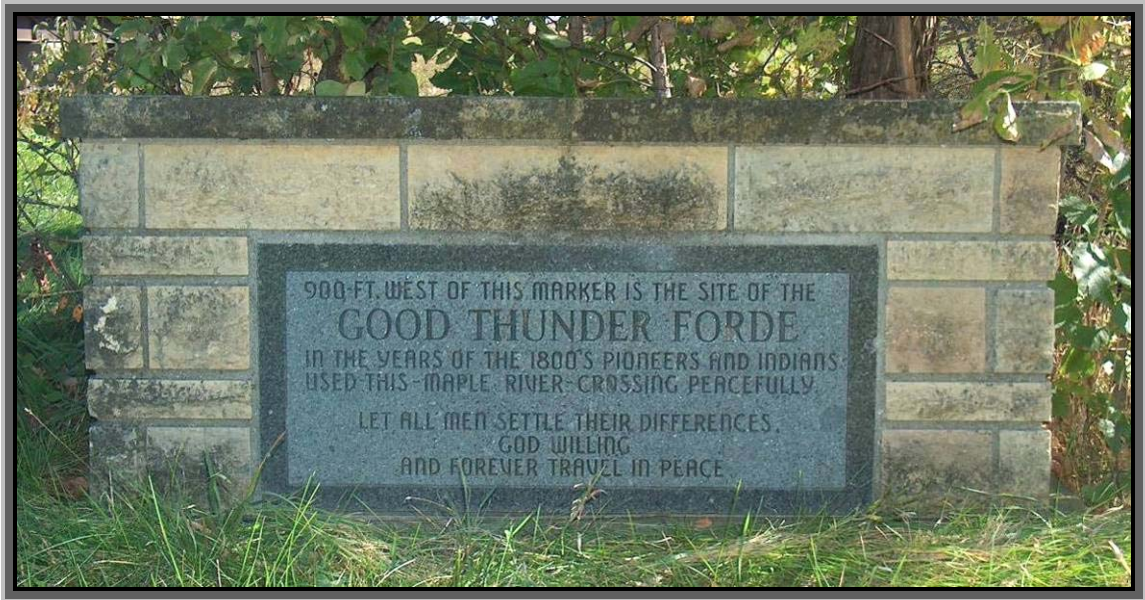
‘a man will lay down his life for his friends’—Good Thunder perilled his life to show his gratitude for a race whom his people counted as enemies.” General Sibley also encouraged the village to go forward with the rededication celebration, saying that Andrew Good Thunder “deserves to have his name perpetuated in the manner you suggest.”<sup>25</sup> So it was that Andrew Good Thunder came with his wife by train to Mankato in July of 1887, with tickets purchased by the village, and then by coach to Good Thunder for the celebration. As the honored guest, he gave a speech to the village residents in the Dakota language, which was translated by his interpreter,<sup>26</sup> the full text of which is in Appendix II.

The stories of these two men show why the village residents of Good Thunder kept the name, especially with the letters of support from prominent leaders of the time, when they could just as easily have changed the name of the village to something else. The ties to their history are very important, and the attitudes of peace from both Wakuntchapinka and Wakinyanwashte are undoubtedly the influence behind the historical marker now standing at the ford on the Maple River and the peace sign post in the park on Main Street.

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<sup>25</sup> “Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 19 January 1949.

<sup>26</sup> “Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 19 January 1949.



**Figure 6: Historical marker at the ford on the Maple River**  
(Photograph by author)

*“The historical geographer . . . needs the ability to see the land with the eyes of its former occupants, from the standpoint of their needs and capacities.”<sup>1</sup>*

~ Carl Sauer

## Chapter 6

### Pioneers and Settlement: The Halcyon Days of Yore, 1864-1900

#### Cultural Landscape

The height of Western expansion in the United States was a series of marked and unsteady settlements, in various locales over a period of roughly fifty years, as white settlers encroached upon Indian territories, or moved into those lands after federal removal of the Indians. Surveyors mapped the land at an incredible rate,<sup>2</sup> under public pressures to make the land available.<sup>3</sup> Pioneers from New England and immigrants from Germany came into the new West looking for opportunities to exploit and control resources for profit and to find farm land.<sup>4</sup> To some degree this type of expansion in Minnesota came later than in other parts of the West, probably due to the lack of railroads in the region. Although well developed in the eastern United States, particularly in the southern Great Lakes regions,<sup>5</sup> railways did not reach into Minnesota until the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Sauer, “Foreword to Historical Geography,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 31, 1: 10 (1941).

<sup>2</sup> The land between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers, for example, was surveyed between 1848 and 1857, not to mention other large tracts of land west of the Mississippi. Except for a few areas in the far north, land surveys in Minnesota were completed by 1907. Minnesota Land Management Information Center, “Survey Plats,” History and Origin section, <http://www.gis.state.mn.us/GLO/>, accessed 10 October 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Meinig, *Shaping*, 2:259.

<sup>4</sup> Meinig, *Shaping*, 2:230-231, 259.

<sup>5</sup> Meinig, *Shaping*, 2:329.

1850s when the Milwaukee and Waukesha Railroad Company finally reached La Crosse, Wisconsin and the Mississippi River in 1858.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, the inevitable railroad expansion into southern Minnesota was all the promise and assurance needed for some forward-looking pioneers.

The settlement in Blue Earth County also followed this broad American pattern. After the Winnebago removal, white settlers began to move back into the territory formerly occupied by the reservation, the first ones arriving in 1864 and settling on the west side of the Maple River.<sup>7</sup> The period between 1864 and the first few years after the platting of Good Thunder in 1871 marked a short phase of isolated settlement with a few family clusters here and there, as well as itinerant preachers.<sup>8</sup> The year 1864, for example, saw the first religious services in the area by a Baptist preacher at the home of M. L. Plumb in section twenty-eight.<sup>9</sup> Lashbrook and Gates built the first mill on the Maple River in 1865, which was followed quickly by several more water-powered saw- and feed-mills. By 1867 a log school house was built near the present townsite, providing double duty as the Baptist meeting house.<sup>10</sup>

When word came in 1870 that the railroad had reached Wells, some twenty-five miles southeast of Good Thunder, Levi Houk, Clark W. Thompson, James B. Hubbell, and John A. Willard arranged for the connecting line between Wells and Mankato to come through the area, including a depot. These joint proprietors and owners of the land created a townsite plan in 1870, and hired O. D. Brown, a civil engineer, to create the

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<sup>6</sup> John C. Luecke, *Dreams, Disasters, and Demise: The Milwaukee Road in Minnesota* (Eagan, Minn.: Grenadier Publications, 1988), iii.

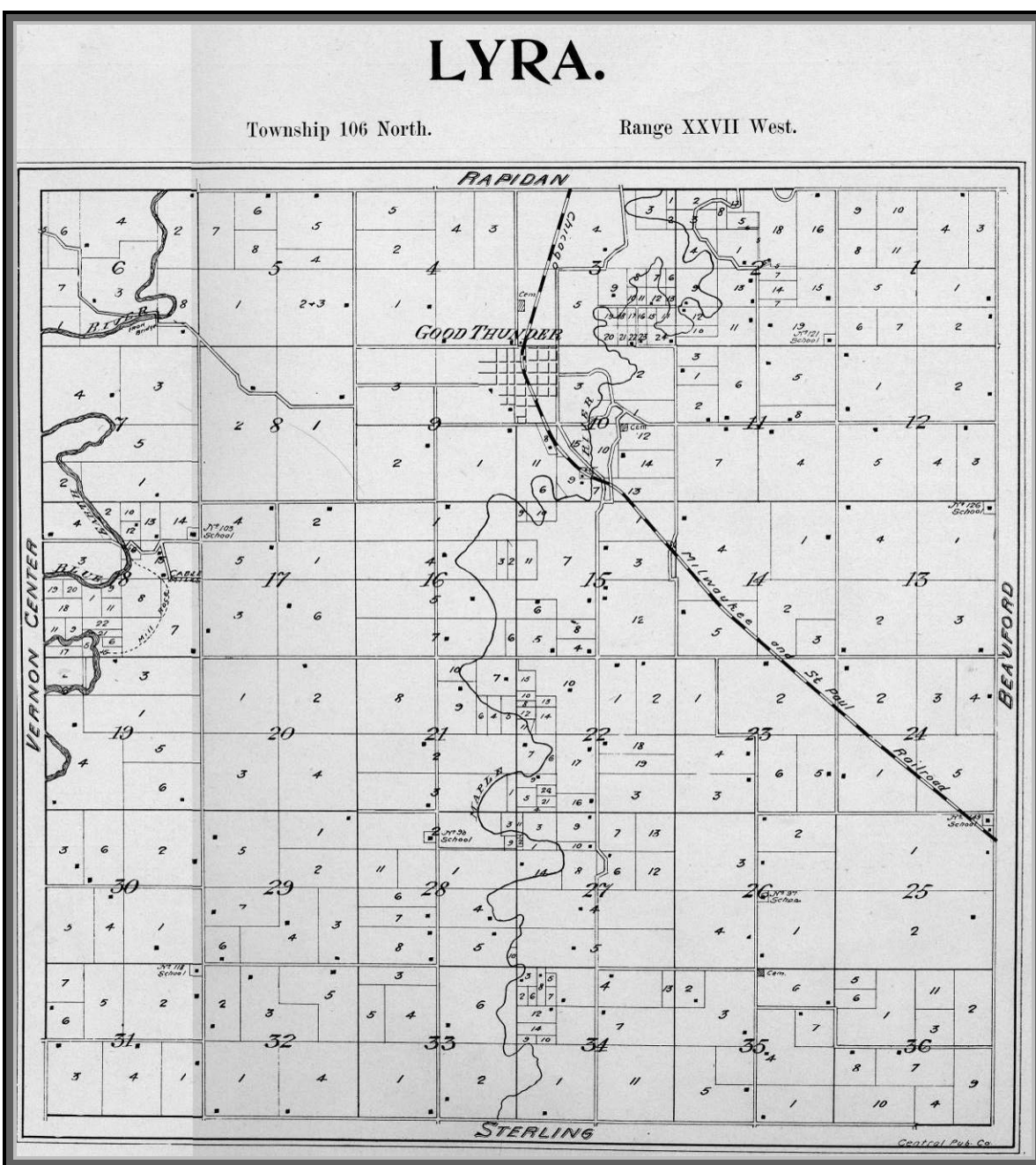
<sup>7</sup> Niell, 607.

<sup>8</sup> Meinig, *Shaping*, 2: 258-264.

<sup>9</sup> Neill, 607.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes, *History*, 262-263.

Map 6: Lyra Township 1895



(Map reproduced from *The Standard Historical and Pictorial Atlas and Gazetteer of Blue Earth County, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: Central Publishing Co., 1895), 44.)



official survey and plat in the west half of the northwest quarter of section ten in April 1871, which they named Good Thunder after the ford.<sup>11</sup> During this time there were no special permits or rules for platting a town. All a land owner need do was to provide a local county office with a plat of any kind of design, commonly a linear grid with rectangular lots and a few streets, to found a town.<sup>12</sup> Houk, Thompson, Hubbell, and Willard brought their plat to the county office in Mankato, where it was officially registered on 26 August 1871. The plat consisted of ten blocks on the east side of the proposed railway and an additional, unnumbered warehouse block.

Immediately following the creation of the Good Thunder plan in 1870, John G. Graham, a mercantile merchant from New Hampshire in business in nearby Garden City, purchased a lot on Main Street and built the first building on the plat, into which he and his wife, Loretta neé Barnard, moved on 30 November 1870, becoming the first residents of the village. Other settlers quickly followed and more stores were built on Main Street.<sup>13</sup> The settlers were industrious during those first years, filling the majority of the original townsite to such capacity with homes, churches, and businesses that the Ewing's Addition was platted and added to the town in 1878 to make room for more houses and incorporate the Catholic church.<sup>14</sup> However, it would be another thirteen years before the people of Good Thunder voted to incorporate on 2 March 1893 by vote of 79 to 14.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893; Hughes, *History*, 263.

<sup>12</sup> Meinig, *Shaping*, 2: 248-249.

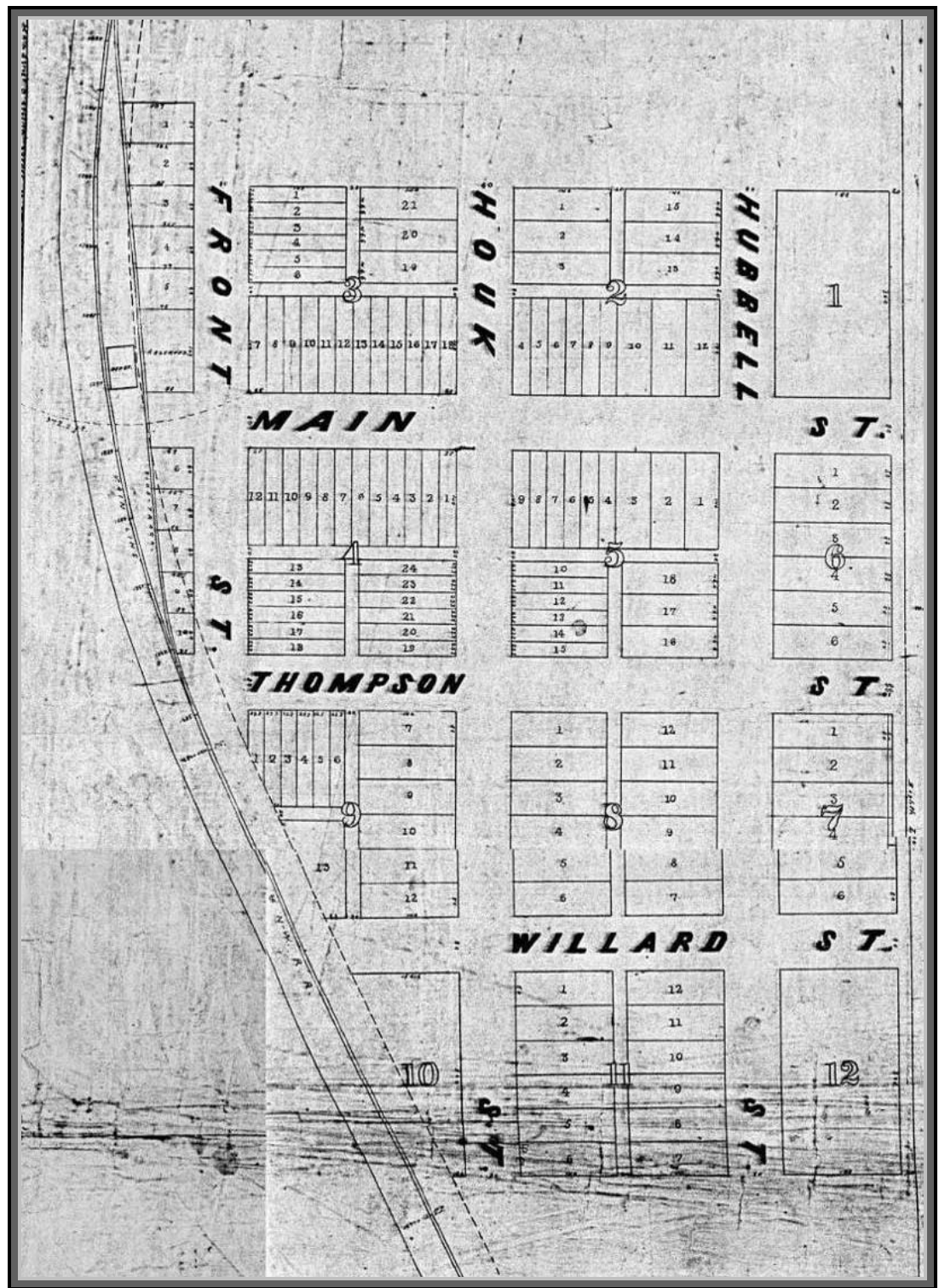
<sup>13</sup> Hughes, *History*, 263.

<sup>14</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

<sup>15</sup> Kienitz, Papers, Typed notes.



Map 7: Good Thunder Original Townsite Plat Map 1871



(Map reproduced from the original Good Thunder plat map in the possession of Blue Earth County, Taxpayer Services, Maps Division.)

Newspaper articles of the times describe the rapid growth and creation of the community in a positive light, suggesting that the settlers and town leaders were pleased with their new landscape and that the community was as it ought to be. The *Good Thunder Herald* published the following description of the town in 1882 which was republished in the Mankato paper: “In looking about our little village we find that

substantial improvement is the order of the day. Henry Wiedenheft’s new store, with iron roof; August Wendtlandt’s new agricultural depot; O. H. Austin’s shop and windmill, Henry Lehman’s residence; Herman Darge’s residence; Lutheran parsonage; A. F. Billet’s Harness shop; Fred Darge’s barn; and then we have a chance in the mercantile business—Mr. Jul. Reim of New Ulm has purchased Benj. Deuber’s interest in the firm of Sohre & Deuber. . . . Chris. Yenter has opened a new harness hop on the corner opposite the hotel.

In the country near town we also note improvements. Henry Westemen is building a brick residence; Thos. and Simon Garvin are receiving cars of stone for residence improvements; O. Cassidy is building an addition to his residence.”<sup>16</sup>

Another article from the Mapleton newspaper describes their neighbor to the north thus:

“Although the population of Good Thunder is about 350, still it has some wide-awake

and energetic business men within its limits. There are five churches; also a fine graded public school. In the line of industries there is a flour mill and a creamery. Good Thunder is not without a hotel and a newspaper. The former is run by Mr. John Graham, while the latter is under the direct supervision of F. N. Griffin. The hustlers in the hardware business are Blum & Schroeder. When we visited their place of business a day or two ago, they were so busy attending to customers that neither member of the firm had spare time to talk at any great length to the writer. In answer to a question, one of the firm said: “You may say that we are doing our share of business.” One of the neatest establishments in the place, is that run by Mr. F. G. Malzahn. He has a smile of welcome as you enter the store that makes one think that he is going to be treated on the square. Mr. Malzahn has many useful articles on his shelves and he is in a position to dispose of the odds at a reasonable figure. Of course there is a barber shop in town. It would not be complete without such an institution. To be sure Good Thunder has a postoffice and while there is a male post-master there is also an accommodating female assistant on hand nearly all of the time. . . . When their new school building is completed it will be one of the finest of its kind, in the state of Minnesota. It is at Good Thunder that the Farmers’ Alliance of Blue Earth county assemble every

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<sup>16</sup> “Good Thunder Items,” *Mankato Review Weekly*, 26 May 1885.

month to learn as to how the work of the party is progressing throughout the district as well as from Atlantic to Pacific.”<sup>17</sup>

Although the list of improvements and businesses are described almost casually, it should be remembered that life in the late nineteenth century was still difficult, nor as “perfect” as the newspapers made it out to be. There was no electric power for tools or lighting, heating came from burning wood, and transportation was by horse and buggy. Money was not something that many people had, so payment-in-kind was a typical practice for many years, by farmers who brought chicken eggs or butter to trade in exchange for other merchandise.<sup>18</sup> Emil Meilicke, who arrived with his widowed mother, older brother, and a cousin, recalls building their log house on their new property in the winter. The house was unfinished in the upper story where he slept with “fresh air in plenty.” The Meilickes’ first years were troublesome because of several years of heavy rains causing poor harvests and making the roads muddy and almost impassable, at times fouling and miring the horses.<sup>19</sup> Meilicke also notes that it was sometimes difficult to integrate because he did not speak English until later in his life, and had trouble learning because the Germans would not speak English. Moreover, he was not always able to go to school because he was needed on the farm and often met people only when he went to get the post or during threshing season.<sup>20</sup>

The social life at this time probably centered as much on the church communities as it did in the saloons. In the beginning of the village’s history Graham’s store “was the

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<sup>17</sup> “Good Thunder: A Lively Place Fourteen Miles From Mankato, With Excellent Industries, Schools and Churches, And Some Wide-Awake Business Men—A Bird’s-Eye View,” *Mapleton Enterprise*, 30 April 1892.

<sup>18</sup> Julie Schrader, “Wiedenheft Bros. Store,” in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 220.

<sup>19</sup> Emil J. Meilicke, *Leaves from the Life of a Pioneer: Being the Autobiography of Sometime Senator Emil Julius Meilicke* (Regina, Sask.: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1997), 21.

<sup>20</sup> Meilicke, 23.

center of attraction for all the young bloods... until Saxton opened the drug store and then the headquarters changed.”<sup>21</sup> There was also a coronet band, organized by Professor Howe in 1875, which performed for several years.<sup>22</sup> Other social interaction, however, was more pragmatic, like the Grange established in 1872. The Grange was a secret society and movement started by New England pioneers and modeled on the structure of the Masonic order, allowing only Americans to join at first, then allowing all of the farmers in the community to join after its first year to build its membership. This movement of farmers was a protection mechanism from the monopolizing tendencies of merchants and railroad companies. Grange members learned secret signs which they communicated to each other if they saw a fellow Grange member being overcharged, alerting him to the swindle and helping each other find better prices for goods.<sup>23</sup>

In all likelihood, it was the strong presence and activity of the Grange that also gave rise to the growth of the Farmers’ Alliance in Blue Earth County. Farmers began forming Alliances in the county in 1881, the first of them in Sterling. By March 1882 there were nine Alliances, all of which met in Good Thunder to form a union called the Blue Earth County Alliance. Another meeting was held in Good Thunder in June 1882, and the Alliance had a celebration on the Fourth of July in the village in that same year.<sup>24</sup> When the Alliance met at Good Thunder on 1 September 1886, the members formed the first Farmer-Labor political party in Blue Earth County and went about selecting candidates for nomination to the state legislature.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “Good Thunder!” *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

<sup>22</sup> Hughes, *History*, 263.

<sup>23</sup> Meilicke, 23-24.

<sup>24</sup> Hughes, *History*, 190-191.

<sup>25</sup> Hughes, *History*, 196; Jeffrey Kolnick, “Rural-Urban Conflict and Farmer-Labor Politics: Blue Earth County, 1885-1886,” *Minnesota History* 54, 1: 32 (1994).

## Transportation

The transportation infrastructure is also an important part of the landscape, without which Good Thunder could not have developed in the manner described. Although there were roads leading away from the village, these were not especially well graded until early in the twentieth century. The residents did, however, build an iron bridge along the road leading east across the Maple River in 1875 to make passage over it easier.<sup>26</sup>

For an agricultural community like Good Thunder, it was the railroad which provided the core transportation need. Railroads were ready to provide that infrastructure during this time, seeing the profit potential in providing shipping centers for farmers and



**Figure 7: Good Thunder Train Depot, ca. 1900**  
(Photograph reproduced from Schrader, *The Heritage of Blue Earth County*, 238.)

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<sup>26</sup> "Good Thunder," *Good Thunder Herald*, 18 January 1893.



**Figure 8: Depot and Hyde Grain Elevator, ca. 1900**

(Photograph reproduced from Schrader, *The Heritage of Blue Earth County*, 239.)

their harvests.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it was the arrival of the railroad in Wells that provided the opportunity for Good Thunder's proprietors to found the site and the Good Thunder proprietors that gave the railroad company the opportunity to serve a village that would almost guarantee business. The railroad made Mankato the leading and only market in southern Minnesota for wheat by the 1860s,<sup>28</sup> and the establishment of the railway through Good Thunder to Mankato provided the village residents and farmers access to that market and, beyond Mankato, to the country at large.

Not all went according to plan, however. The Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul Railroad was still a fledgling company in Minnesota, and the railway between Wells and Mankato was not completed on schedule because of financial troubles. This caused some unrest and rumors amongst the villages that the railroad would never be built, although

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Harvey, "Railroad Towns: Urban Form on the Prairie," *Landscape* 27: 26 (1983); Richard V. Francaviglia, "Some Comments on the Historic and Geographic Importance of Railroads in Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 43, 2: 58 (1972).

<sup>28</sup> Roy Meyer, "The Golden Years of the Railroad," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 50.

Good Thunder had developed into a healthy trading center without the railroad in its first few years.<sup>29</sup>

By 1874 the population of Good Thunder had risen to approximately seventy-five to eighty people and the tracks were finally completed by the end of September. The first official train ride took place on 29 September 1874, when contractors and railroad officials rode from Mankato over the Red Jacket bridge<sup>30</sup> to Good Thunder.<sup>31</sup> Daily service began immediately after tracks reached Good Thunder, with a round trip fare to Mankato costing \$1.40.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, once it was built and operating, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul enjoyed a time of good business: “The freight transactions on the C., M. & St. Paul railroad for the past month are as follows: Freight received, 612,415 pounds; freight forwarded, 654,695 pounds. The charges on the same being \$1889.87, an increase of nearly \$1,100, same month one year ago. This is a creditable showing of the prosperity of our little village.”<sup>33</sup> The depot, however, was not built until 1893. It was a combination, 28 x 80 frame building,<sup>34</sup> which had separate waiting rooms for men and women with the baggage and ticket office in-between.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> “Good Thunder,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 18 January 1893.

<sup>30</sup> The bridge today is part of the Red Jacket Trail, which is a public trail on the abandoned rail bed, used for hiking, bicycling, and skiing.

<sup>31</sup> “To be torn up soon... Work on Railroad Started in 1874,” *Enterprise-Herald (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 17 January 1979.

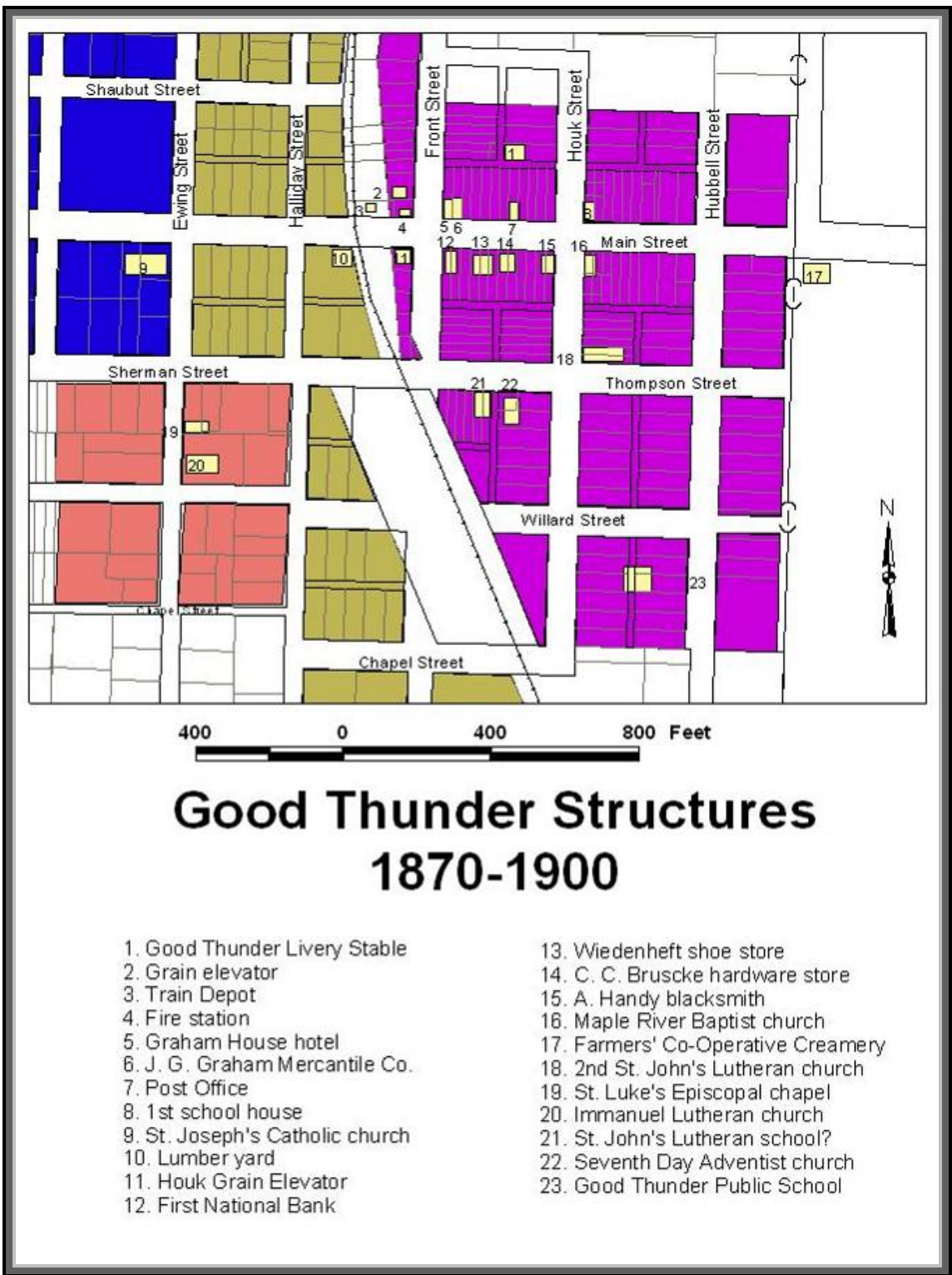
<sup>32</sup> Meyer, 51.

<sup>33</sup> “Good Thunder (from the *Herald*),” *Mapleton Enterprise*, 4 September 1891.

<sup>34</sup> Luecke, 224.

<sup>35</sup> Caption for the Good Thunder depot photograph, in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 238.

Map 8: Good Thunder Structures, 1870-1900



(Map by author; Digital plat lines courtesy of Bolton & Menk, Inc.)



### Sequent Occupance: The Business District

The heart of the Good Thunder business district began on Main Street between Front Street to the west and Houk Street to the east, with light industrial structures situated in areas more convenient to their functions. For example, the two mills built in the township in 1865 and 1866 were on the Maple River<sup>36</sup> to make use of the water for power. As previously mentioned, the first business was John Graham's 16' x 24' mercantile shop on the north side of Main Street, which he built with lumber hauled by a team from Mankato. He opened his store 3 December 1870 and among the wares in the first sale were a broom, a pail and a dipper.<sup>37</sup> Following shortly thereafter in February 1871, L. E. Saxton and his son John of Wisconsin,<sup>38</sup> built a drug store of the same size as Graham's store, and A. S. Handy opened a blacksmith shop at the corner of Main and Houk.<sup>39</sup> Later in that same spring, B. S. Hawes, also of New Hampshire,<sup>40</sup> built a 20' x 20' general store, which his son Charles opened. Overhead, Hawes built a hall which was often used in the winter for social gatherings and dancing,<sup>41</sup> and A.G. Meilicke settled and opened a medical practice, probably from his home.<sup>42</sup>

As the railroad tracks were laid and the anticipation of rail traffic mounted in 1874, John Graham, Cargill & Co., and Wood each built a warehouse along the rail tracks on Front Street, and John Paul opened a lumber yard which stood on the corner of

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<sup>36</sup> Kienitz, Papers, "History of Lyra Township" newspaper clipping.

<sup>37</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893; Hughes, *History*, 263.

<sup>38</sup> Neill, 610.

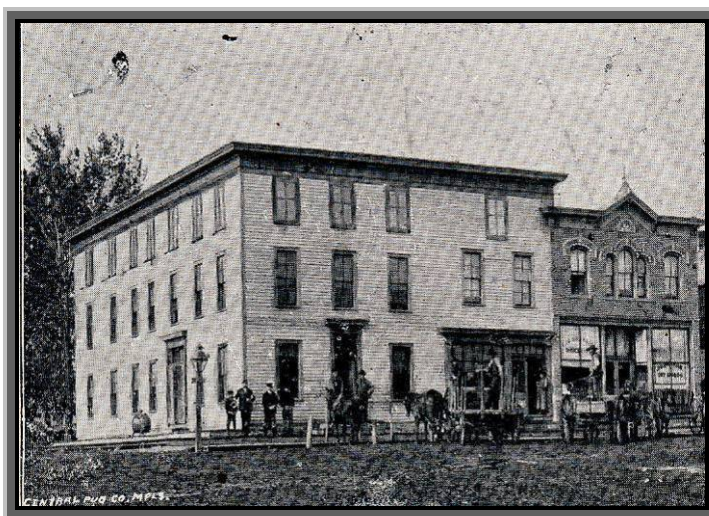
<sup>39</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893; Hughes, *History*, 263; "And the walls came a-tumbling down!" *Mapleton Enterprise*, 10 May 1978.

<sup>40</sup> Neill, 609.

<sup>41</sup> "Good Thunder," *Good Thunder Herald*, 18 January 1893; Hughes, *History*, 263.

<sup>42</sup> Kienitz, Sidney, Papers, SMHC Manuscript Collection 1225, "History of Lyra Township" newspaper clipping.

Main and Halliday Streets on the west side of the tracks.<sup>43</sup> Cargill & Bro. added another warehouse in 1885, which measured 40' by 60'.<sup>44</sup> As trade began to grow and new arrivals came to town, John Graham seized the opportunity in 1877-1878 to enlarge his store with a 40' x 40' addition. He also built a hotel measuring 62' x 50', which he connected to his store with a 24' x 50' hall. The hotel, known as the Graham House, was two stories tall with a false third floor on the façade. Graham opened his hotel to the public with a grand ball on the Fourth of July.<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 9: Graham House hotel and J. G. Graham Mercantile Co., ca. 1900**  
View to the north and east.  
(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”)

By 1881 the city directory listed twenty-five businesses,<sup>46</sup> three of which sold dry goods, groceries, and general merchandise, and another two sold drugs and groceries. There were also two shoe and boot stores, a hardware store, two saloons, two hotels, a

<sup>43</sup> “Good Thunder,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 18 January 1893.

<sup>44</sup> “Good Thunder Items,” *Mankato Review Weekly*, 15 September 1885.

<sup>45</sup> “Good Thunder,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 18 January 1893.

<sup>46</sup> Lucille A. Fitzsimmons, “An Historical Indian Village—Its [*sic*] Heyday,” Blue Earth County Historical Society newspaper clippings collection.

harness maker, and three physicians.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the buildings were made from and faced with wood until 1884 when August Kuhne started a brick yard,<sup>48</sup> the location of which is unknown. This new addition to light industry in Good Thunder changed some of the building patterns after that point. People began building their houses and shops with brick from Kuhne's business. In fact, brick was so popular that Henry Wiedenheft and John Graham both re-built their



**Figure 10: North Side of Main Street at Houk Street ca. 1888**

The second façade from the right is Deering Harvesting Machinery, the fourth is the Masonic Hall. The building out of frame on the left is the post office. (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers)

respective shoe and general stores out of brick in 1885. Then in 1886 Charles Sohre and F. C. Darge razed their stores to rebuild a new double block of stores 48' x 75' entirely from brick, and August Wendtlandt built a double brick hardware store measuring 44' x 60'. Further building and improvements on Main Street occurred in 1887 when August

<sup>47</sup> James Shoemaker, *Shoemaker's Business Directory of the City of Mankato, and County of Blue Earth, Minnesota for the years 1881 and 1882* (Mankato, Minn.: The Public Spirit, 1881), 80-83.

<sup>48</sup> "Good Thunder," *Good Thunder Herald*, 18 January 1893.

Wendtlandt, Albert Ziegler and B. J. Mechelke built a brick business block with a seventy-five foot frontage, fifty feet deep, and three stories tall with tenement rooms in the second story.<sup>49</sup>

As Good Thunder moved into the last decade of the nineteenth century, the village residents added several completing touches to the landscape in support of its agricultural resource base. One important business was the livery stable, a practical business for the care of horses when visiting or shopping in town, since horses were the primary mode of transportation. The first owner of the business was Samuel King, appearing in the Good Thunder directory around 1890, and the stable was later operated by John Weir and his brother. The livery stood behind the store fronts on the north side of Main Street and was accessible through the alley from either Front or Houk Streets, and also offered draft team services.<sup>50</sup>

Another important industry was the cooperative creamery, built in 1890 at a cost of six thousand dollars, which manufactured over one-hundred thousand pounds of butter in 1891 and 1892.<sup>51</sup> Frank H. Griffin began publishing the *Good Thunder Herald* primarily as a mechanism to provide the community, particularly the Alliance members, with its first regular, weekly communication of news from the world at large, Good Thunder itself, and other neighboring communities. Griffin published the first issue on Wednesday, 2 September 1891.<sup>52</sup> Milling was also a common light industry in Good Thunder and its surrounds. Several mills were built on the Maple and Blue Earth rivers.

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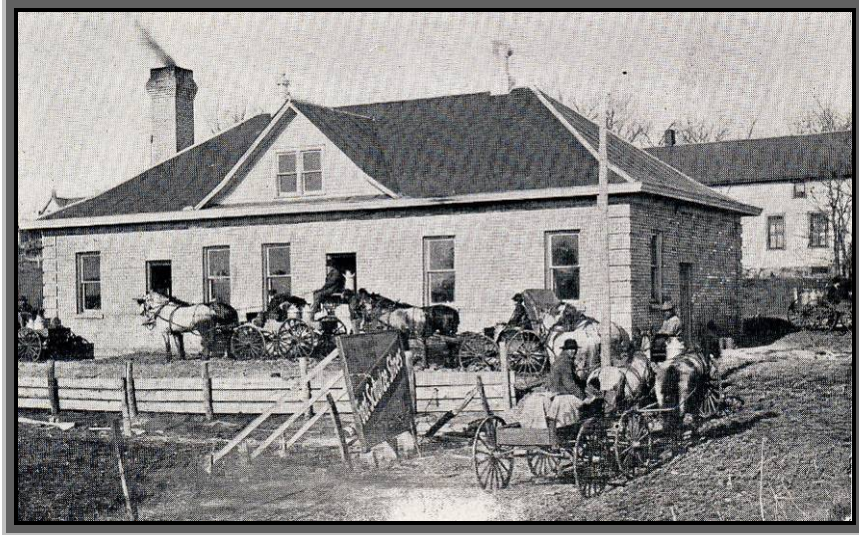
<sup>49</sup> “Good Thunder,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 18 January 1893.

<sup>50</sup> “Good Thunder [plat map],” (n. p.: n. p., [1914?]), in the possession of Blue Earth County Taxpayer Services, Maps Division; *R. L. Polk & Co.’s Mankato and Blue Earth County Directory*, (St. Paul, Minn.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1897), 306.

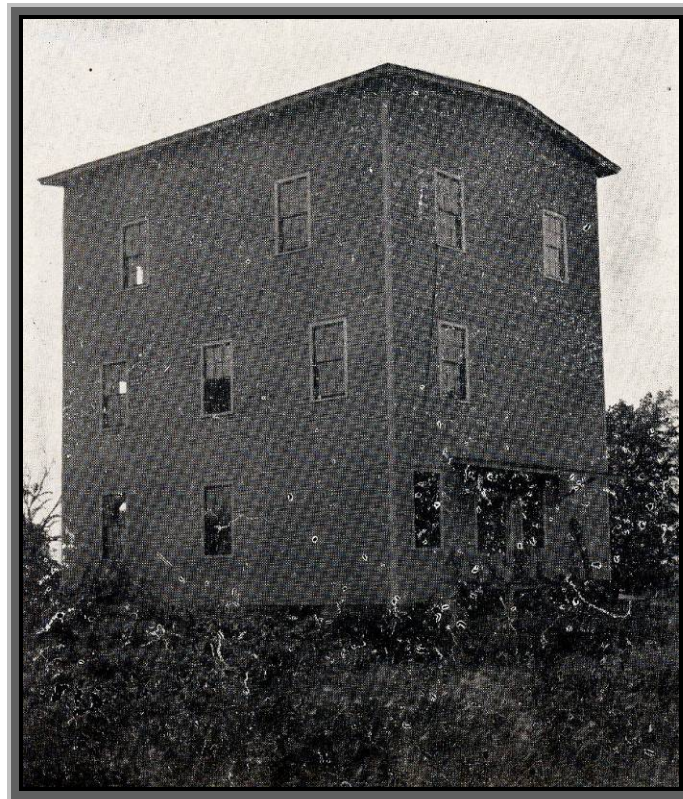
<sup>51</sup> “Good Thunder!” *Good Thunder Herald*,” 4 January 1893.

<sup>52</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 2 September 1891.





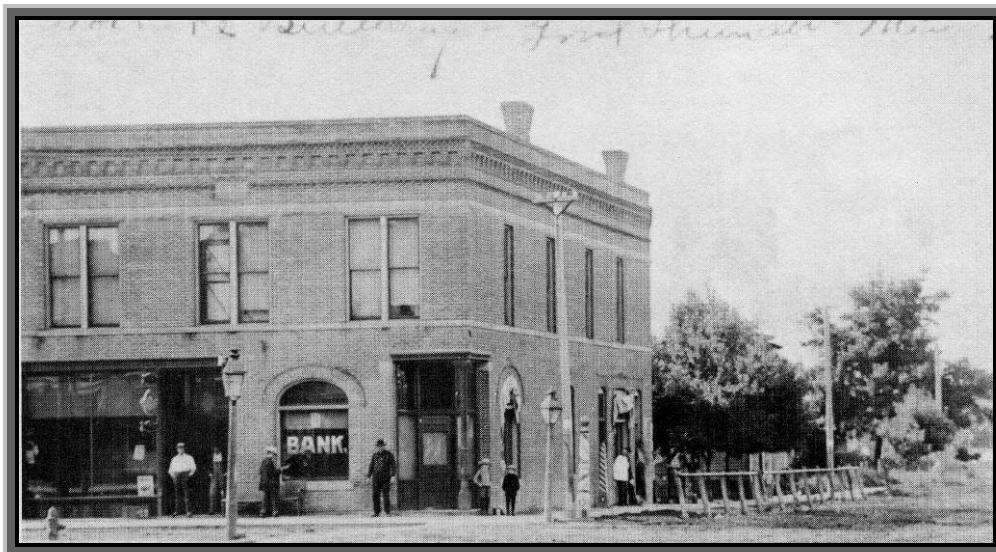
**Figure 11: Farmers' Co-Operative Creamery**  
(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")



**Figure 12: Cable Mill, ca. 1890**  
(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")

One of the primary mills was the Cable Mill first built on the Blue Earth River in 1867. It was moved to the top of the river bluff in 1888 and ran from a water powered wheel which turned a cable reaching to the bluff top, hence giving the mill its name.<sup>53</sup>

One of the last industries to develop in Good Thunder at the end of the nineteenth century was the banking industry. Until this time people had been building without the aid of a local bank, either traveling to Mankato with the train, once it was running, or borrowing from wealthier residents or family. The village business leaders began talking about organizing a bank in earnest in 1892. W. R. Wilmot, A. C. Wilmot, John Graham, William H. McGrew, D. McCarthy, Wm. Ellis, and H. G. Detlaff organized the bank on 7 January 1893. The bank, soon to be known as the First State Bank of Good Thunder,



**Figure 13: State Bank of Good Thunder ca. 1900**  
(Photograph reproduced from Schrader, *The Heritage of Blue Earth County*, 233.)

began with a capital stock of \$25,000 from its stock holders.<sup>54</sup> Not surprisingly, most of the board of directors were old stock Americans who were prosperous and wealthy, and wanted to establish a bank not only for the financial and economic benefits it would have

<sup>53</sup> Kienitz, Papers, "History of Lyra Township" newspaper clipping.

for the town, but also because banks were a cultural attribute common in their original states of New York and New Hampshire. The bank directors erected the building, built with bricks, on the south side of Main Street at the corner of Front Street.

#### Sequent Occupance: The Residential Areas

The first village residents, as mentioned above, were John and Loretta Graham who moved into the upper floor of Graham's store in 1870. The Saxtons probably lived above their store as well. There is no way to know how many houses were built during this era from 1870 through 1900, nor which was the first. However, by 1892 the village boasted "of a number of fine residences and the prospects are that another year will witness the building of a number of others."<sup>55</sup> With the opening of the brick yard, residents had a little more choice in building materials, as evidenced by B. S. Hawes who built the first brick house in the village in 1884.<sup>56</sup>

The village grew fast enough during its first sixteen years that two additions were added to the plat, the first known as Ewing's Addition was platted and added to the town in 1878.<sup>57</sup> The second one is called Barnard's addition, added in 1887, "upon which were built an elegant brick residence and nine frame houses within the year," followed by several other new houses in 1888 and 1889.<sup>58</sup> Two more additions were added in the late 1890s, Houk's First Addition and Houk's Second Addition, both of which lie between Halliday Street and Front Street, each addition having two or three houses standing today

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<sup>54</sup> *Mankato Weekly Review*, 7 January 1893.

<sup>55</sup> "Good Thunder (From the *Herald*), *Mapleton Enterprise* 18 November 1892.

<sup>56</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

<sup>57</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

<sup>58</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

that were built in the 1890s. Today there are eighty-three houses in the village that were built between 1870 and 1900, thirty of which are on the original townsite, nine on Barnard's addition, nine on the Houk's additions, fifteen on Ewing's addition, and the rest in other parts of the village that were not yet platted at the time they were built.<sup>59</sup>

The houses from the time appear to be well-built, as mentioned in the 1892 *Mapleton Enterprise* article and as depicted in the images<sup>60</sup> below from the "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota" published by the *Good Thunder Herald* at the turn of the twentieth century. The architecture of the homes built in the period are representative of the common American architectural styles of the era. There are no log cabins, rather wood and brick structures using Colonial revival, Victorian, Gothic revival, Queen Anne, and national folk house architectures.<sup>61</sup> These houses represent not only the prosperity of the developing village, but also the connections to northeastern Yankee culture, particularly with the Victorian and national folk forms of architecture. These two forms in particular were dependent upon the railroad to bring pre-fabricated building supplies necessary for the architectural details.<sup>62</sup>

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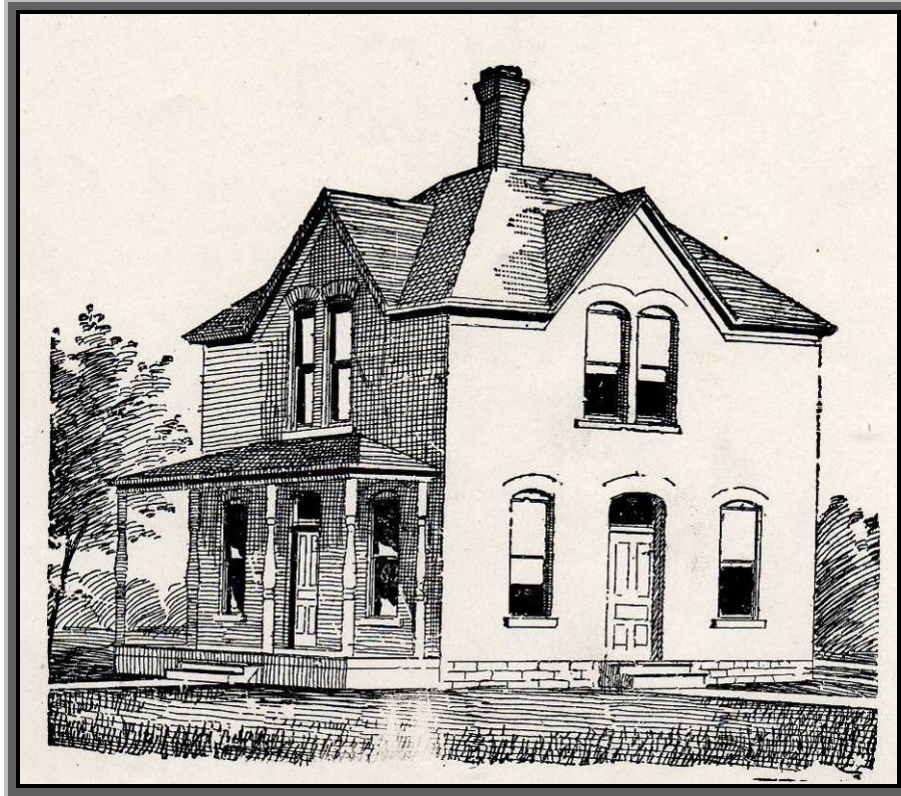
<sup>59</sup> Blue Earth County Assessor Office, Parcel Search [Online database], <http://blueearth.minnesotaassessors.com/>, accessed 11 October 2005.

<sup>60</sup> I have not been able to associate any of the drawings with existing houses today, except for the McGrew residence.

<sup>61</sup> Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 92, 197, 263, 321.

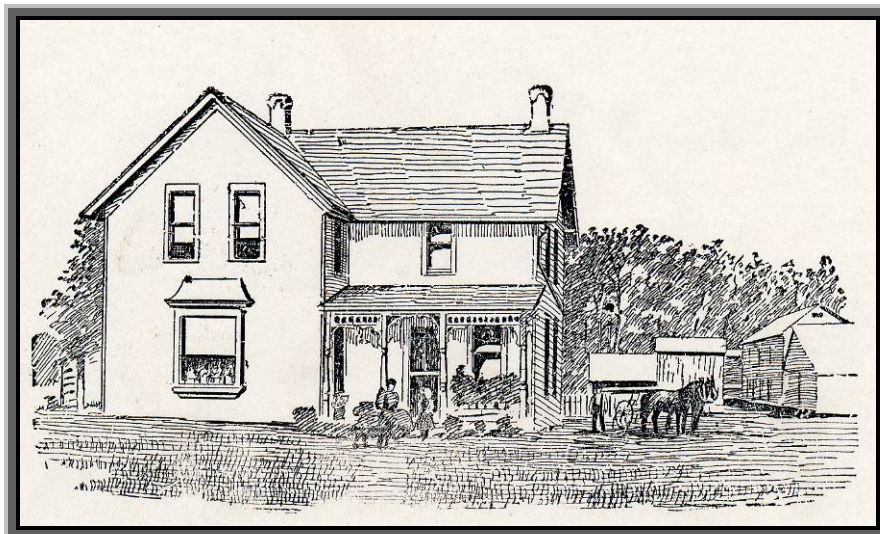
<sup>62</sup> McAlester and McAlester, 310.





**Figure 14: Unidentified Residence, late 1800s**

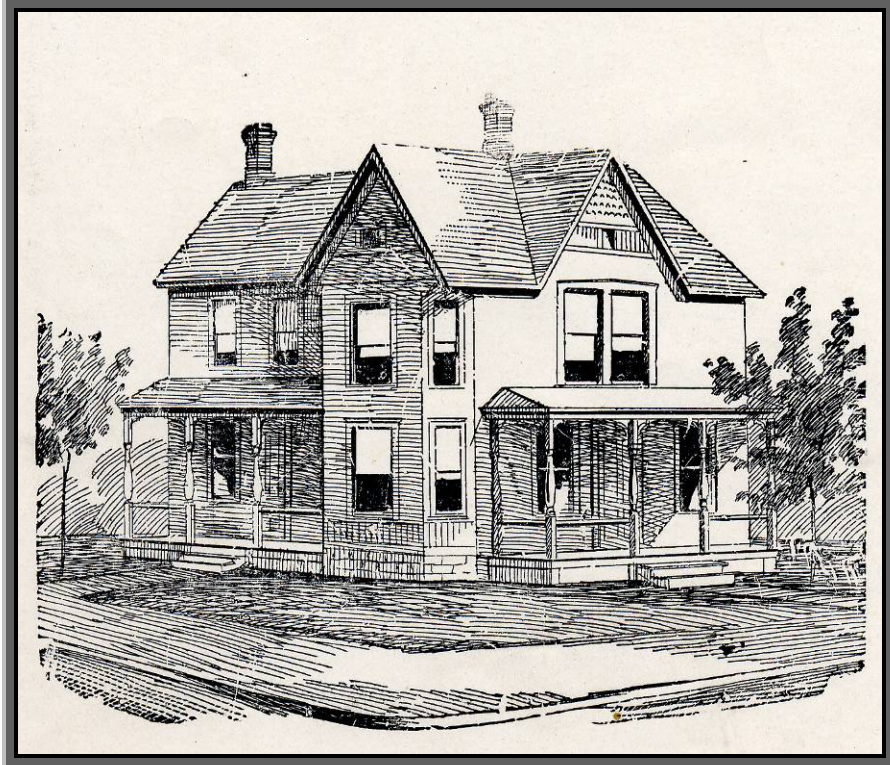
Center-gabled hipped-roof with full-width porch Colonial revival architecture. Also commonly known as a “corn belt cube house.” (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”)



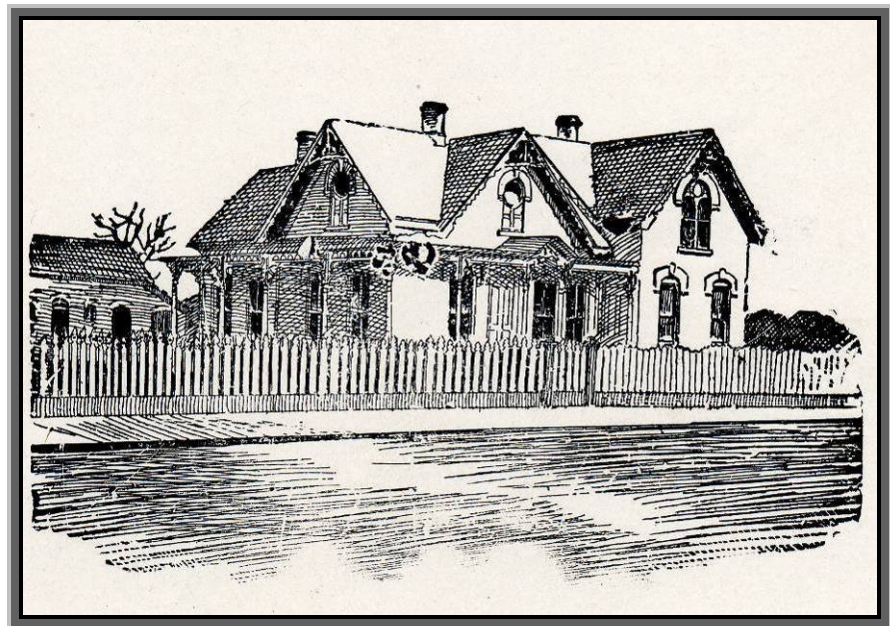
**Figure 15: Unidentified Residence, late 1800s**

Gable front-and-wing national folk house architecture.  
(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”)

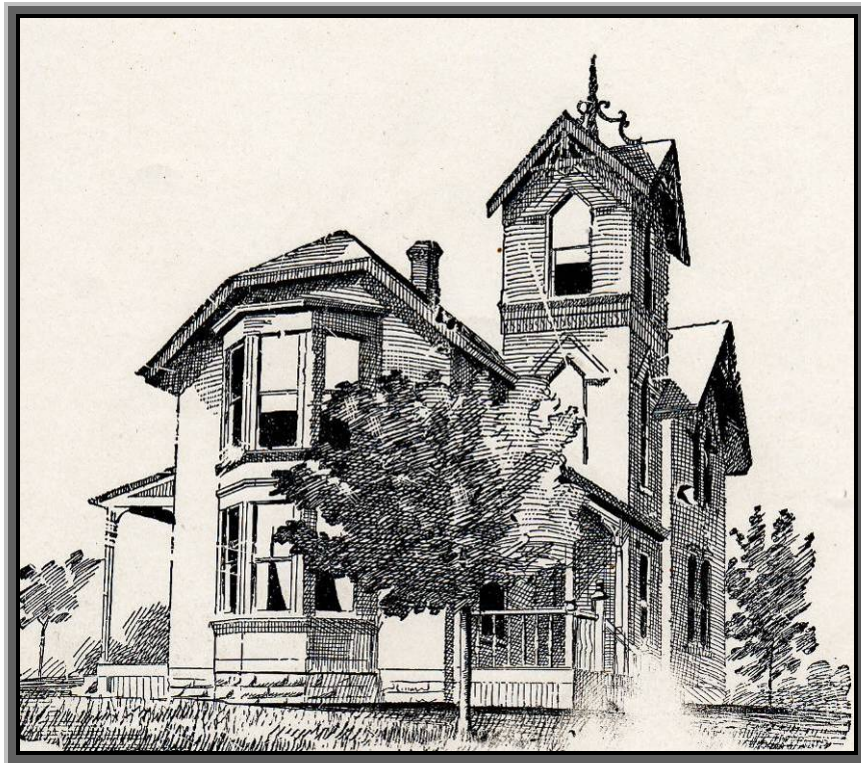




**Figure 16: Unidentified Residence, late 1800s**  
 Free classic, cross-gabled Queen Anne Victorian architecture.  
 (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")



**Figure 17: Unidentified Residence, late 1800s**  
 Spindlework, cross-gabled Queen Anne Victorian architecture.  
 (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")



**Figure 18: McGrew Residence 1890**  
 Asymmetrical Gothic revival architecture.  
 (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”)



**Figure 19: 210 Houk Street, 2005**  
 Built in 1870, this is the oldest known house in Good Thunder. Note the gable front-and-wing national folk house architecture.

### Sequent Occupance: Public Space

Public buildings and structures in the first thirty years of Good Thunder's history served two purposes: public needs and religious life. Religious services were commonly held at a resident's home in the beginning until money could be raised to build a church or meeting hall. Good Thunder did have a village hall, which the Methodists used for services in 1878, but the location of the building is unknown.<sup>63</sup> The first, probably most important public building, however, was the post office. The importance of the post office in the nineteenth century was twofold. First, it was the closest relationship a small town had to the federal government,<sup>64</sup> as the postmaster was a federal appointee. Second, the post office and its postmaster held some influence in the community because they provided a town to some degree with its identity, and more importantly because it managed the flow and dissemination of letters and communication.<sup>65</sup>

The need for the post office was such that the village and township residents petitioned Washington for a mail route in 1871.<sup>66</sup> The Postmaster General granted the request on 6 May 1871, christening the office as Good Thunder's Forde.<sup>67</sup> John Graham was appointed postmaster with an annual salary of twelve dollars, and mail delivery began arriving on a semi-monthly basis on the route from Minnesota Lake to the south up to Mankato, but would sometimes take up to six weeks because the rivers and streams would flood, delaying the carrier.<sup>68</sup> Whether the village built a post office or worked from Graham's home is lost to history. The village did build a post office in 1885 with stone,

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<sup>63</sup> Neill, 607.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Arthur Santer, "A Historical Geography of Jackson, Michigan: A Study on the Changing Character of an American City, 1829-1969," (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1970), 62.

<sup>65</sup> Santer, 63.

<sup>66</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.

<sup>67</sup> Hughes, *History*, 263.

<sup>68</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.



brick, and plate-glass windows in the middle of the block on the north side of Main Street, between Front and Houk Streets.<sup>69</sup>

The first school house in the Good Thunder townsite<sup>70</sup> was built as a two-story 24' x 40' wood frame building on the north-east corner of the intersection of Main and Houk Streets.<sup>71</sup> The school house, as the only public space in the early days, was often used for religious services, particularly by the Episcopalians, Baptists, and Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>72</sup> The building was used as a school until 1892, after which William Meyer opened a furniture store in the building and used it for his residence.<sup>73</sup> The growth of the town and the rising population of school-aged children necessitated the building of a new school house, built at a cost of \$5,000 or \$8,000, depending on the sources.<sup>74</sup> A newspaper article in an 1893 issue of the *Good Thunder Herald* describes the new building thus: “The village boasts of the finest public school building in the county, built and completed in 1892 at a cost of \$8000. It is solid brick, containing four rooms, all finished in modern style and heated by a furnace.... The enrollment exceeds one hundred.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “Good Thunder Items,” *Mankato Review Weekly*, 15 September 1885.

<sup>70</sup> An earlier log building used for a school house was probably nearby, but not in the townsite and was the first school building for the area.

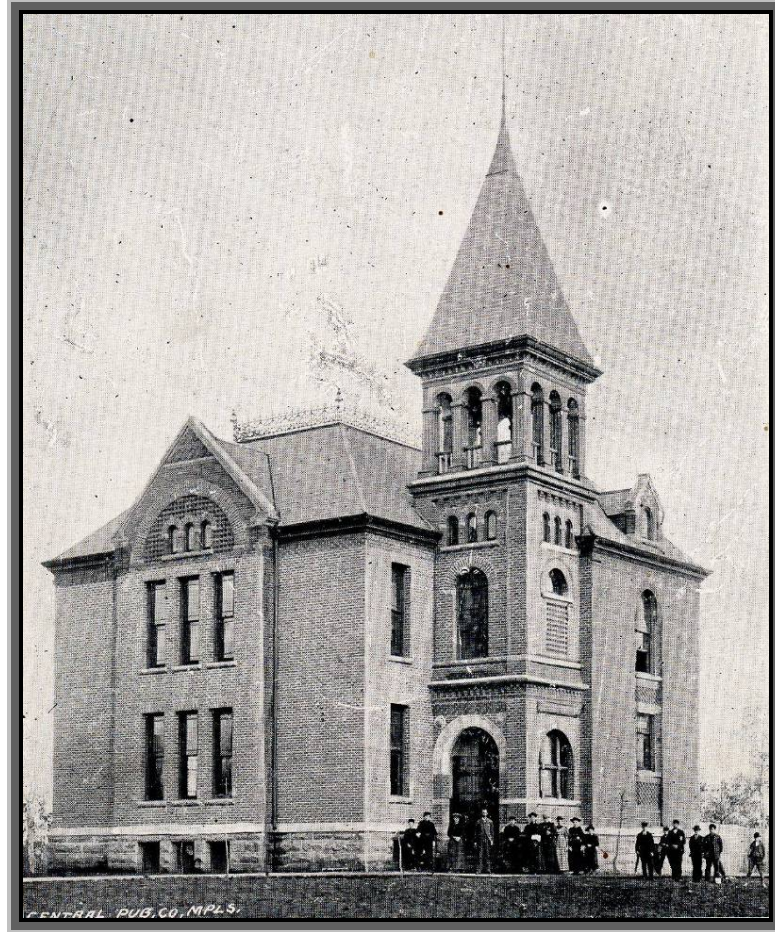
<sup>71</sup> Hughes, *History*, 263.; Schrader, “Good Thunder, 214; Patrick Larkin, “I think we’re going to like it here’,” *Mankato Free Press*, 16 July 1976. 102 year old building; A Parcel Search on the Blue Earth County Assessor’s database gives the year built as 1900, however the site does not vouch for the veracity of all of its data.

<sup>72</sup> Kienitz, Papers, Typed notes; Hughes, *History*, 262.

<sup>73</sup> Patrick Larkin, “I think we’re going to like it here’,” *Mankato Free Press*, 16 July 1976,.

<sup>74</sup> The 25 March 1891 article in the *Mapleton Enterprise* gives the cost as \$5,000 and the “Early Files” article in the *Herald* quotes \$8,000.

<sup>75</sup> “Good Thunder!” *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893.



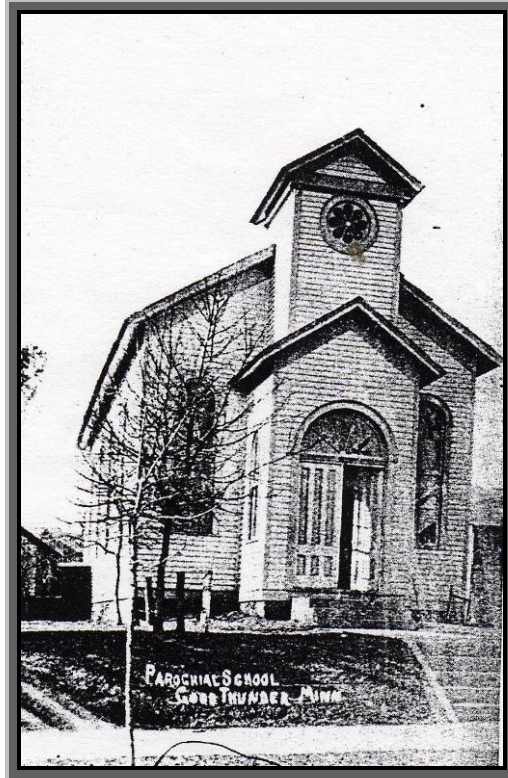
**Figure 20: Original Good Thunder Public School 1892**

(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”)

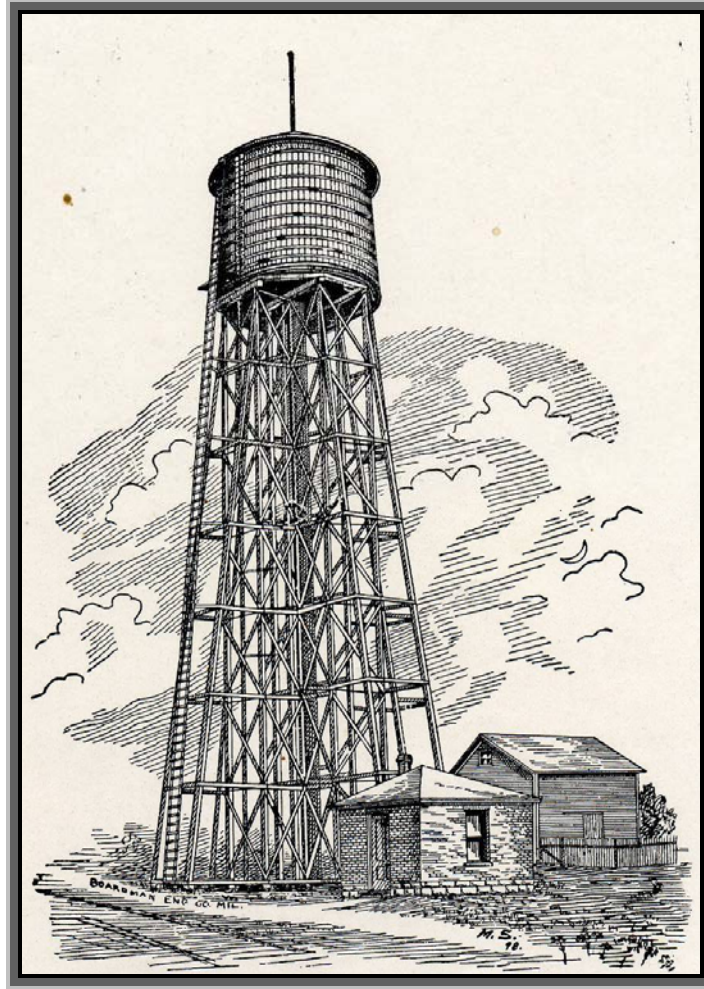
The St. John’s Lutheran congregation also had a school, which they began around 1877 in the church building. By 1885, the congregation recognized the need to build a building for school use. They had already made a decision to build a school when the Seventh Day Adventists decided to sell their church and build a new one. The Lutherans hired their first teacher in 1890 and added a second one in 1894 because of the number of children attending the school. When St. John’s built their new church building in 1895, they converted the old church into use for a school, and operated with two former church buildings into the 1930s.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> St. John Lutheran Church, 18-19.



**Figure 21: St. John's Lutheran School, ca. 1900**  
(Photograph from the collection of the City of Good Thunder.)



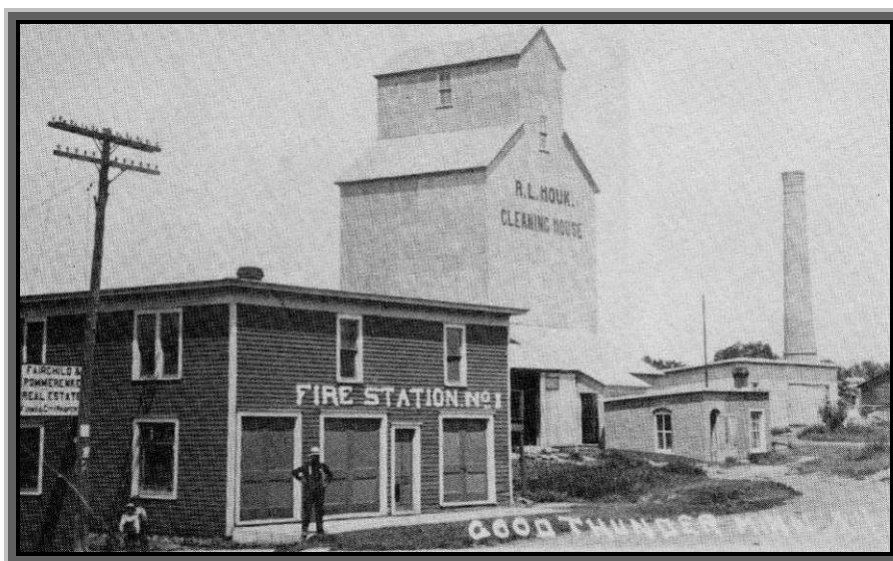
**Figure 22: Original wood water tower and pump house, ca. 1898s**  
 (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”)

Before the end of the century, Good Thunder also had a fairly good water works system<sup>77</sup> with a water tower and pump. The old tower stood at the north-east corner of Sherman and Ewing Streets in block one, lot six, where the modern tower stands today. Boardman Engineering Company of Milwaukee built the tower to hold two-thousand barrels of water,<sup>78</sup> approximately 63,000 gallons. Not only was the water works system an important development for modernization of the village, but it was also essential for another important need—fire fighting.

<sup>77</sup> Schrader, “Good Thunder, Minnesota,” 216.



There is no information about fire fighting in Good Thunder before the fire department was officially formed, nonetheless fire would have been an ever present danger with all of the wood buildings and fires for heating and cooking. On 15 December 1883, the men of Good Thunder met and organized a hook and ladder company, which has been in existence ever since. John Graham became the company foreman, J. J. F. Graf became the assistant, and the village acquired appropriate fire fighting equipment.<sup>79</sup>



**Figure 23: The first Good Thunder Fire Station , ca. 1896**  
(Photograph reproduced from Schrader, *The Heritage of Blue Earth County*, 237.)

On 30 November 1896, the hook and ladder company apparently reorganized, and Frank H. Griffin and F. H. Morlock were respectively named to the offices of chairman and secretary pro tem, and a station was built about that time on the north-west corner of Front and Main Streets close to the train depot. The crew met periodically in 1897 drafting a constitution for the Good Thunder Fire Department dated 26 January 26 1898, “for the purpose of organizing a fire department for the protection of the property of the

<sup>78</sup> Kienitz, Papers, “Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.”

<sup>79</sup> Hughes, *History*, 263.

village from the devastating element known as ‘fire’.”<sup>80</sup>

Good Thunder was able to communicate its prosperity in trade and agriculture during the end of the nineteenth century in aesthetic ways as well. At a meeting on 1 July 1895, when the Lutherans were building their new church, the village met and voted to donate the money necessary to purchase and install a clock tower in the steeple of the new church (see fig. 17). The tower was made at Mainstee, Michigan and on exhibition in Chicago before it was shipped to Good Thunder and installed with the fifteen-hundred pound bell from the first Lutheran church’s bell tower. The clock showed the time to the community—an important communication device at the time because not everyone may have had clocks or watches—and together with the bell rang out the hour.<sup>81</sup>

#### Sequent Occupance: The Churches

The diversity of Christian denominations in the United States during the nineteenth century was, and still is, a rather unique quality in North America. Even in a village as small as Good Thunder this diversity is readily apparent, as no less than eight different denominations held services in homes and the school house in these early years. Thereafter, five of these denominations survived and built churches and meeting halls within Good Thunder by 1895 when the population was only a little over three hundred people. Baptist services were the first to be held in Lyra township, beginning in 1864 at the home of M. L. Plumb with a membership of eight people, before moving into the old school house in the township the following year and organizing as the Maple River Baptist Church. Catholics also met at a home for services beginning in 1874, usually at

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<sup>80</sup> City of Good Thunder. Village minutes.

the home of William Mountain. Other denominations made use of public buildings, such as the Methodists who began holding services in 1878 in the village hall, and the Lutherans, the United Brethren, and probably the Episcopalians,<sup>82</sup> all of whom attended services at the old township school house. The Seventh Day Adventists organized in the early 1880s,<sup>83</sup> but no records state where they met nor much else about them.

The Lutherans in Good Thunder were all Germans and held their services and conducted church business in German until about 1915. Some of the original Lutheran church members were Gottfried Schwan, Fred Bleedorn, John Sompke, John Bosin, Fred Pautsch, Carl Matzke, Edward Malzahn, Herman Darge, and Carl Bruscke. The first church to be built appears to have been the Lutheran church in 1876 which cost \$2,000. They also added rooms attached to the church to serve as the parsonage for an additional \$600. The centennial church history states that the first church stood until 1937 and was used for the Lutheran parochial school building.<sup>84</sup> When the congregation began to outgrow their church, they met and voted to build a new church for a cost of \$8,000 on 2 January 1895. The church members donated their work to the building project by

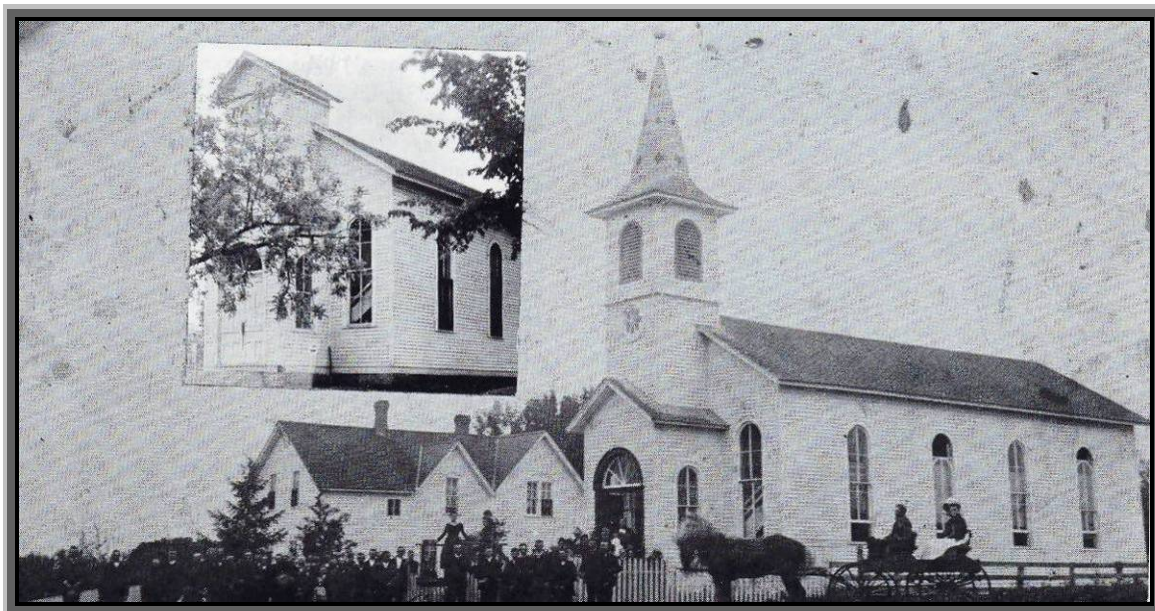
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<sup>81</sup> "St. John Congregation is 100 Years Old. The Church is 71!" *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 18 October 1970; St. John Lutheran Church, 7.

<sup>82</sup> "Parish records of Protestant Episcopal churches in South Central Minnesota, 1855-1963," (Saint Paul : Minnesota Historical Society, [1975?]), microfilm of the church records. The records state services were held in the Baptist church from 1872 to 1897 until they built their own chapel, however, the Baptist church was apparently not built until 1884, per Hughes, *History*, 264. Neill's history was published in 1882 and makes no mention of a Baptist church. Kienitz's notes also say the Episcopal services were first held in the school house.

<sup>83</sup> Hughes, *History*, 264; Neill, 607.

<sup>84</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893; St. John Lutheran Church, 5.



**Figure 24: St. John's Lutheran Church, 1876-1895**

Central tower neoclassical architecture.<sup>85</sup> Inset shows the church as a school building, 1895-1937.  
(Photograph from St. John Lutheran Church, 5)

digging the basement and hauling the bricks and rock needed for the new church. In July of 1895 while the church was being built, the village met and donated the money to purchase a clock tower for the building.<sup>86</sup> The location of the first church is not known; however, it probably was built in the original townsite not far from where the present church stands, as the Seventh Day Adventist church building which the Lutherans bought to use as another school building is just a few lots west of the present building.

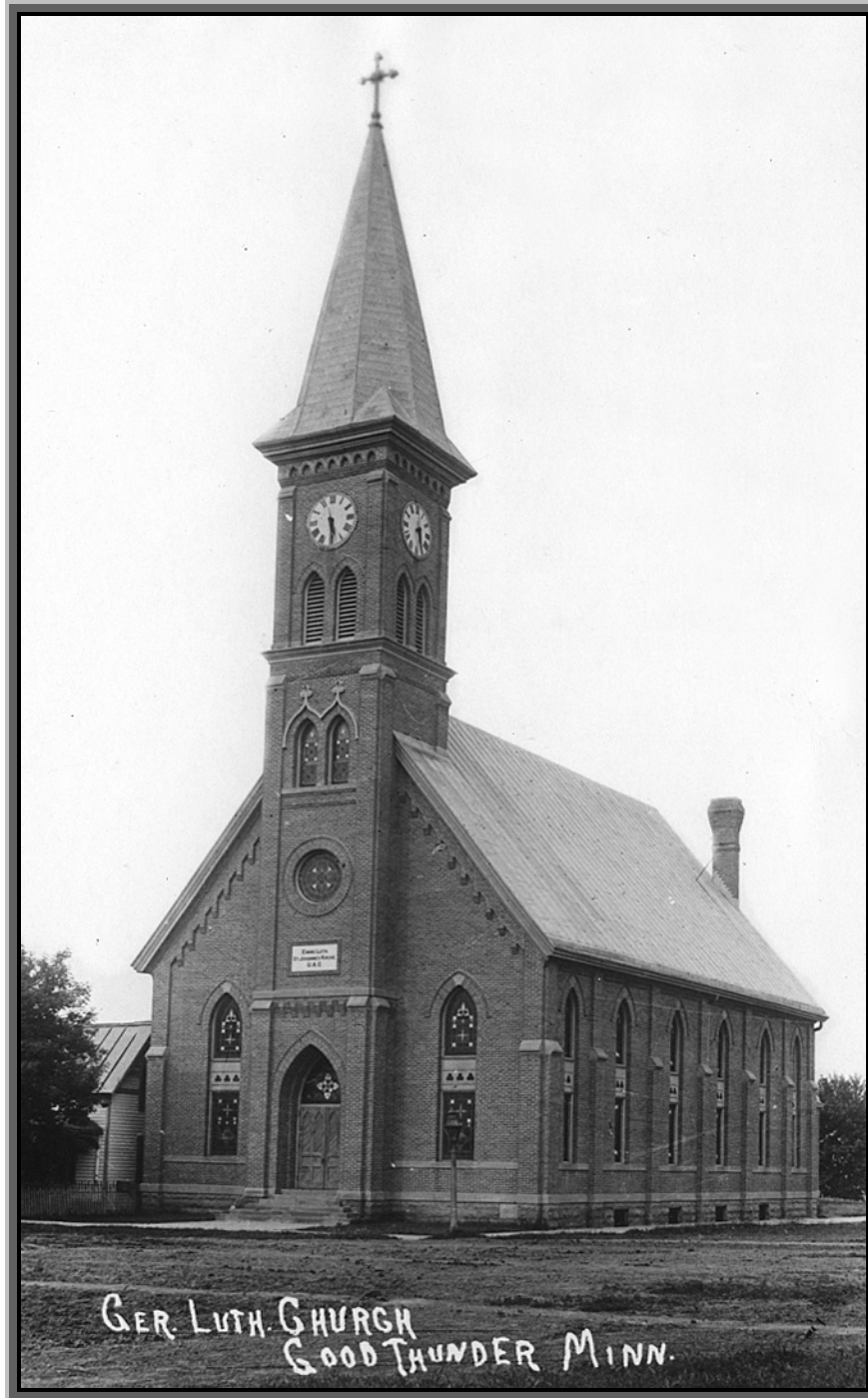
The congregation also used the pews and organ from the old St. John's church in the new building,<sup>87</sup> as well as the fifteen-hundred pound bell from the old church bell tower.<sup>88</sup> Shortly after the new church was built, the congregation began to have some

<sup>85</sup> Jeffrey Howe, *Houses of Worship: An Identification Guide to the History and Styles of American Religious Architecture* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2003), 133-134.

<sup>86</sup> "St. John Congregation is 100 Years Old. The Church is 71!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 8 October 1870; St. John Lutheran Church, 6-7.

<sup>87</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," 225.

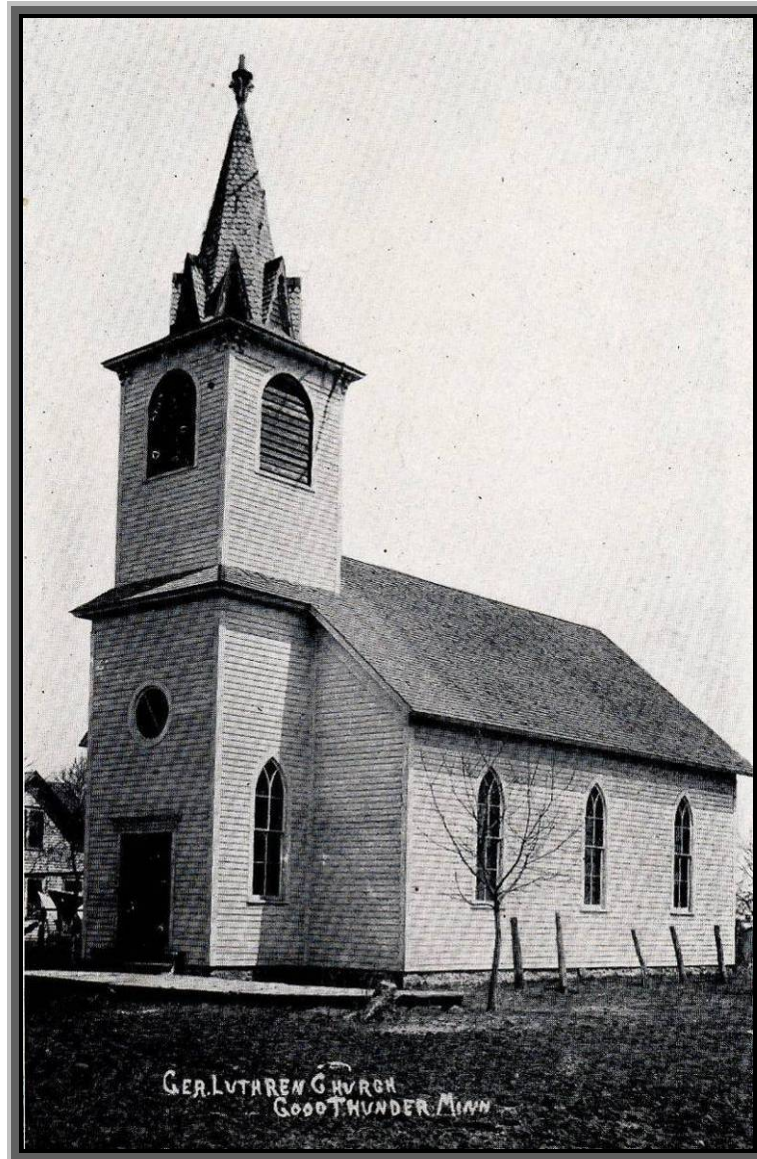
<sup>88</sup> "St. John Congregation is 100 Years Old. The Church is 71!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 8 October 1870; St. John Lutheran Church, 7.



**Figure 25: St. John's Evangelical Church, 1895**  
 Folk style Gothic architecture.<sup>89</sup>  
 (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")

<sup>89</sup> Howe, 186.





**Figure 26: Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1890**

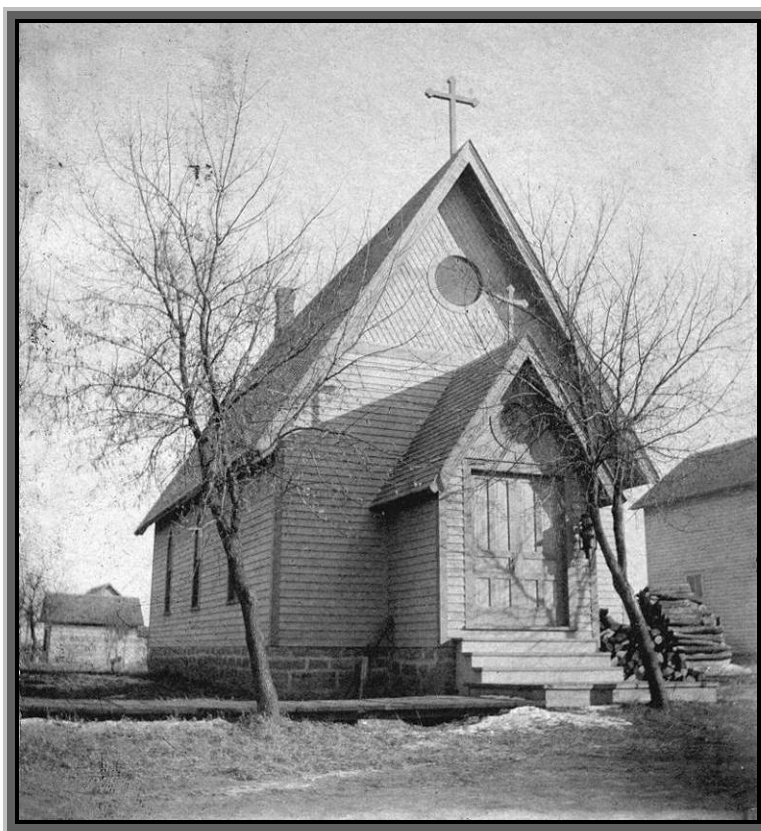
Central tower neoclassical architecture.

(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")

problems, specifically with church doctrine, which the centennial history blames in part on the Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>90</sup> On 6 February 1888 Rev. J. G. Apple led the dissenting members who split from St. John's to form the Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Church. This new group of Lutherans, which included Louis Kranhold, F. C. Witting, and F. Christian Blume, held their German-language services in private homes until they were

able to build a new frame church in Barnard's Addition in 1890.<sup>91</sup>

The first Episcopal services were held in 1872 in the log school house in Good Thunder. The Episcopalians began building their chapel in 1895 at about the same time the Lutherans were building their new St. John's church in the Barnard's Addition on the west side of lot one, block one. They named their St. Luke's Episcopal Chapel on 10 May 1895.<sup>92</sup> The building cost \$1,000 and had a membership of thirty people, among them Mr. and Mrs. B. F. Welch and Mr. and Mrs. John G. Graham.<sup>93</sup>



**Figure 27: St. Luke's Episcopal Chapel ca. 1915, erected 1895**  
Traditional foursquare New England style meeting house architecture.<sup>94</sup>  
(Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

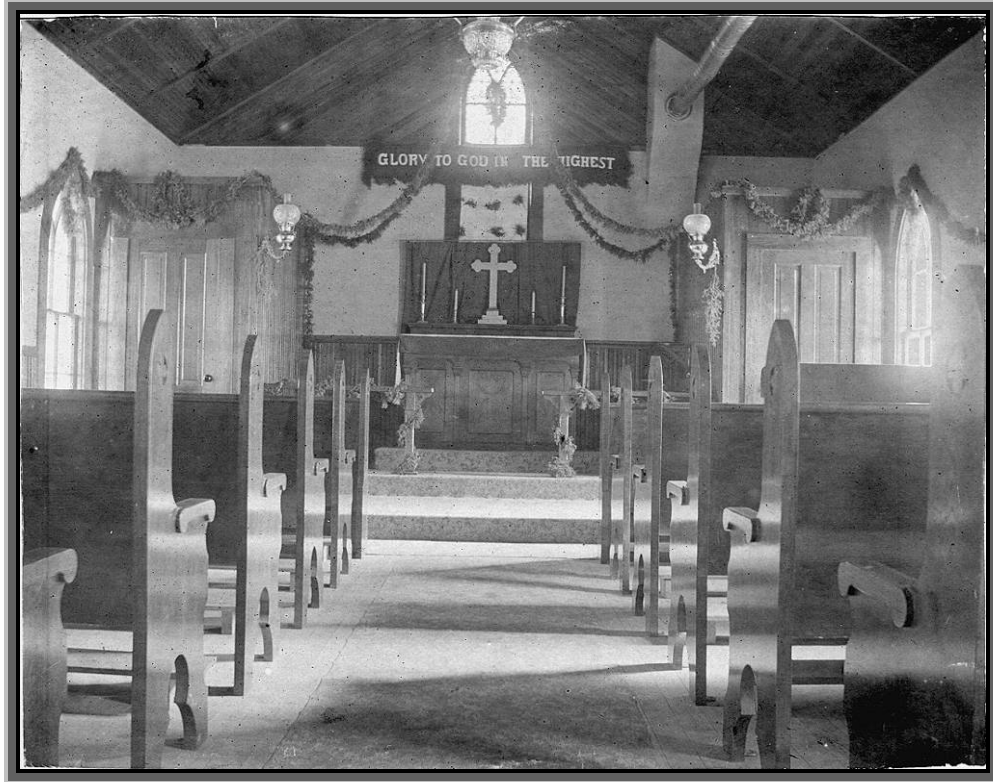
<sup>90</sup> St. John Lutheran Church, 6.

<sup>91</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," 224.; Hughes, *History*, 264; Kienitz, Papers, Typed notes.

<sup>92</sup> "Good Thunder Improvements," *Mankato Free Press*, 3 May 1895; "Lyra Township Churches," 227; "Parish records of Protestant Episcopal churches in South Central Minnesota, 1855-1963," (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, [1975?]), microfilm of the church records.

<sup>93</sup> "Parish records."

<sup>94</sup> Howe, 102.



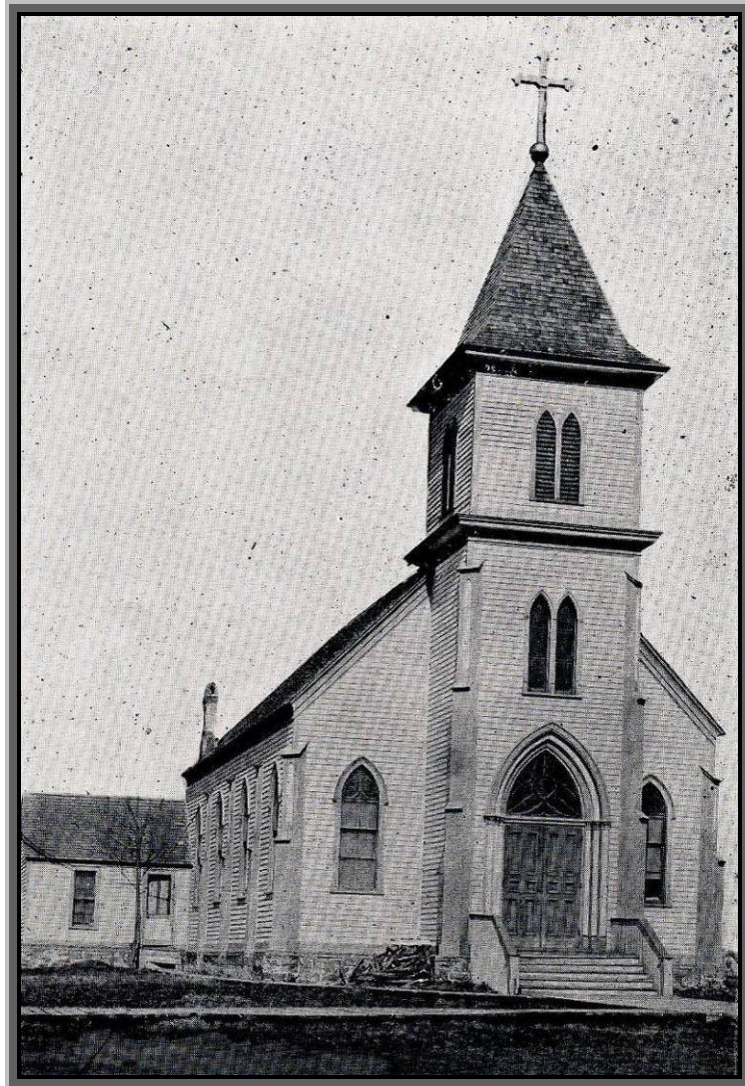
**Figure 28: Interior of St. Luke's Episcopal Chapel, ca. 1898**  
 (Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

Area Catholics did not have services until 1868 when the first mass was celebrated at home of Henry Weir. Two other homes served as places for mass until St. Joseph's Catholic Church of Good Thunder in the New England Gothic style was built in 1879 and completed in 1880. Bishop John Ireland came to Good Thunder on 11 October 1881 to bless the church and administer the sacrament of confirmation.<sup>95</sup>

During the tenure of Fr. Edmund Stack, 1891-1910, the church was redecorated and stained glass windows were installed.<sup>96</sup> In other areas of Minnesota, particularly St. Paul, German and Irish Roman Catholics established their own parishes; however, Good Thunder was different because of the smaller Catholic population. Rather than separate

<sup>95</sup> "Early Times Talk Feature at St. Joseph Diamond Jubilee," *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 3 May 1956.





**Figure 29: St. Joseph's Catholic Church, ca. 1890**  
 (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")

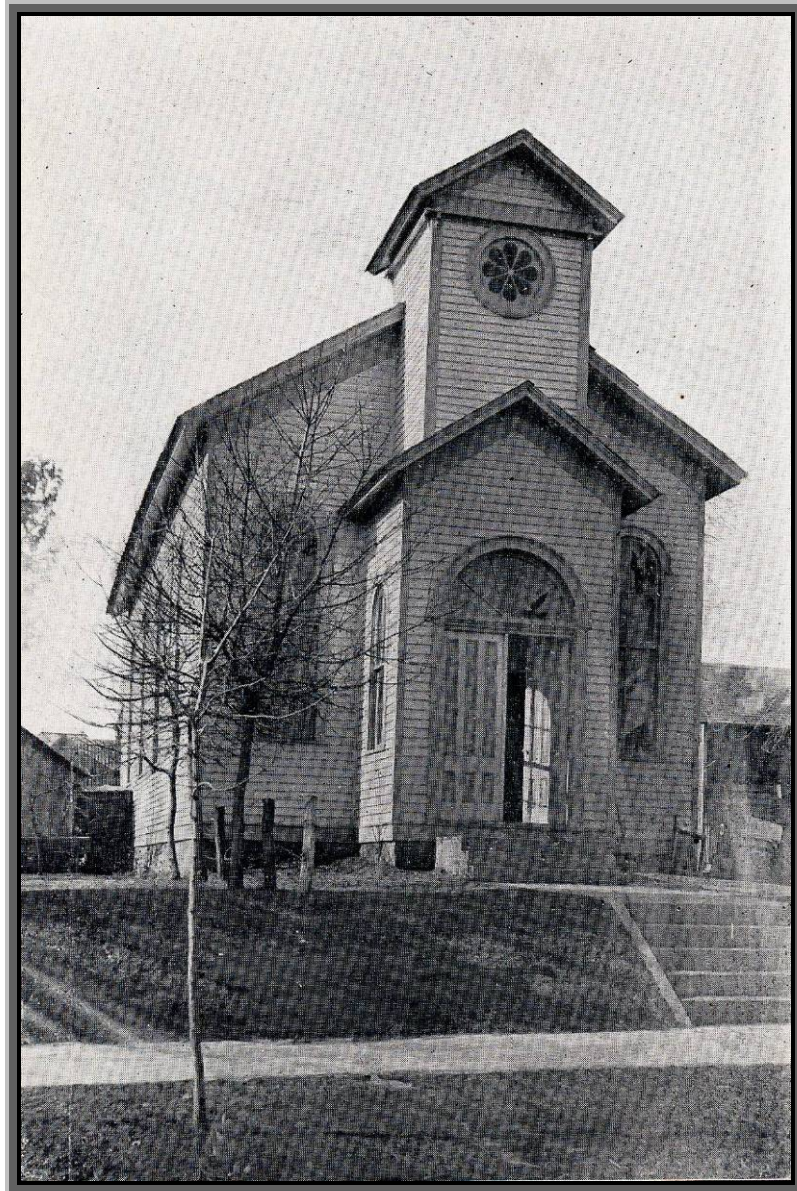
parishes for different ethnicities, the congregation consisted of a mix of German Catholics, such as Schultz, Hollerich, Wandersee, Kruger, Polchow,<sup>97</sup> and Irish Catholics like Henry Weir, Andrew McCarthy, and William Mountain.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> "St. Joseph's Church History is Compiled for Centennial Event," *Enterprise-Herald* (Mapleton, Minn.), 5 September 1979.

<sup>97</sup> St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery headstones.

<sup>98</sup> Hughes, *History*, 264.



**Figure 30: Seventh Day Adventist Church, erected 1883**

Central tower neoclassical architecture. Photograph is of the building when it was the Lutheran School. (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")

The Seventh Day Adventist congregation built their first chapel in 1883, which they quickly outgrew, necessitating the building of a new chapel completed in 1886. The original church stood on lots five and six in block nine of the original townsite and was sold to St. John's Lutheran, who used it as a school building. Their new, larger church



also stood in the same block on lots seven and eight.<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, there is no known photograph of the second church; however, there is a photograph of the first church when it was the Lutheran school.

Although the Baptists were the first to hold services, they were the last denomination to build in the village. The Maple River Baptist congregation built their wood-frame church in 1886 on Main Street at the south-east corner of Houk Street on lot nine of block five, directly across the street from the school house in which they held their first services. The Baptist congregation probably had the most eclectic membership of any of the churches, except perhaps the Seventh Day Adventists, with a mix of old stock Americans, particularly those from Pennsylvania and Ohio, as well as some of the Germans. Notable Baptist members were Marion Hills, Henry Dyer, Charles Hawes, Thomas Garvin, Oscar Cassidy and Gustavus Meilicke.<sup>100</sup>



**Figure 31: Maple River Baptist Church, ca. 1886**

Central tower neoclassical architecture.

(Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")

<sup>99</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," 227.

<sup>100</sup> "Good Thunder!" *Good Thunder Herald*, 4 January 1893; Hughes, *History*, 264.

## Conclusion

Good Thunder's first thirty years were marked by a remarkable, orderly development of agricultural, economic, and social landscape evolution. The proximity to Mankato, which had already been established and growing since 1852, coupled with the services of the railroad provided Good Thunder with a larger city and gateway to the wider world and access to wholesale goods needed for the construction of buildings and the sale of agricultural harvests. The form of civil government for Good Thunder during this time is unknown. There are no village meeting minutes extant, nor any mention of laws or mayors until 1910.

This era of development demonstrates the idea of the United States as a melting pot, as the Good Thunder villages built their community without any apparent segregation of the various ethnicities except in the case of church congregations. The mix of old stock Americans who probably arrived with a good educational background, some degree of wealth, and connections to the eastern United States provided a leadership and guiding hand in the establishment of business growth and development, and village planning. The arrival of German and Irish immigrants who brought trade skills and farming techniques provided the knowledge and work base necessary for the community to exploit the landscape for agricultural purposes, and provide the services necessary for building the structures required to support that endeavour.

The economic landscape is replete with first, second, and third order hierarchies.<sup>101</sup> The various homes built in the village and the four expansions to the plat show the growth of the first order economic hierarchy, supplying the base for trade, which is the needs of the residents themselves. The relatively rapid development of the

businesses, such as the drug, general, grocery, and hardware stores created a sound base for the second order retailers. Finally, the third order of the hierarchy manifests in the grain elevators and the grain agents buying, selling, and transporting the fruits of Good Thunder's labor in the wholesale market.

Good Thunder served as the central hub for both village and township residents. Without it, the farmers would have had more difficulty obtaining goods and services and would have had to expend more money and resources to move their harvested crops off the farm by draft teams to Mankato for sale and trade.

The village also provided important social space. Without the community, the village and township residents may never have developed the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance which were important, influential developments in the state's political landscape. The saloons, grain elevators, train depot, post office, newspaper, and general stores provided many different venues for meeting other residents, and communicating news and information. Furthermore, the village provided a central area for the practice of and participation in the various religious denominations prevalent in the township. It was the blending of all of these cultural, economic, social, public, and physical landscapes in a highly functional and prosperous fashion which directed Good Thunder's entrance into the twentieth century and shaped its development in the new modern era.

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<sup>101</sup> Brown, 294.

*“The created landscapes of man are much like any other product of human creativity. They have much in common with the manifold forms of human art and artifice. . . . They are constrained by need and context, but they are also expressions of authorship.”<sup>1</sup>*

*~Marwyn S. Samuels*

## Chapter 7

### Good Thunder in the Modern Age, 1900-1950

#### Cultural Landscape

The dawn of the twentieth century marked an end to the pioneering expansion of the upper Midwest. The population base in Blue Earth County stabilized, the farm land was for the most part fully occupied, and the new immigrants to the United States tended to settle in the large metropolitan areas where factory jobs were easy to obtain and thus were not inclined to settle in small rural towns where jobs and available farm land were scarce.<sup>2</sup> Good Thunder had established itself by this time as a small but strong economic force and a relatively independent, self-sufficient community for Lyra township and Blue Earth County, which a reporter from Mapleton described as a “wide-a-wake little berg.”<sup>3</sup> During his visit, the reporter noted that the Christmas holiday shopping was just getting started, but still a bit slow. He also remarked on the fine water system in the village and praised the residential areas, but criticized that fact that the town did not yet have any

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<sup>1</sup> Marwyn S. Samuels, “The Biography of Landscape: Cause and Culpability,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, edited by D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 64.

<sup>2</sup> Nason, Law, Wehrman & Knight, Inc., 11-12; June Drenning Holmquist, “Introduction,” in *The Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups*, edited by June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 3.

<sup>3</sup> “Around the County: Good Thunder Visited by an *Enterprise* Reporter,” *Blue Earth County Enterprise* (Mapleton, Minn.), 16 December 1901.

electric lighting and still had old, wooden sidewalks.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 32: Bird's Eye (East), Good Thunder, Minnesota, ca. 1909**  
(Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

The leadership of the business community positioned Good Thunder in an economic niche that fostered small business and supported all of the primary needs of the villagers as well as the farmers in the greater agricultural community. This niche, however, was not necessarily suited for adaptability to the coming social and economic changes about to take place in the United States and the world at large. Good Thunder had already reached its peak population of 505 in 1900, and suffered a slow decline over the next fifty years as World Wars I and II, the Great Depression, the introduction of the automobile and its infrastructure of roads, the decline of rail traffic, the rapid development of technology, the introduction of mechanized farming techniques, and the

<sup>4</sup> “Around the County: Good Thunder Visited by an *Enterprise* Reporter,” *Blue Earth County Enterprise* (Mapleton, Minn.), 16 December 1901.

change from an agricultural to factory-based economy in the United States occurred around the village. These influences contributed to cultural substitution and a change in the character of Good Thunder, as the descendants of the educated and business-oriented old stock Americans left for jobs in urban areas of Minnesota like Mankato and the Twin Cities, leaving the Irish and German descendants who farmed the land and provided skilled labor services.



**Figure 33: Main Street ca. 1900**

View to the north and west.

(Photograph from the collection of the City of Good Thunder.)

During the early 1900s Good Thunder boasted a long list of businesses and services. These services included the train depot with passenger rail service, an express office, a public and parochial school, six churches, a telephone system, a flour mill, a lumber yard; two each of harness shops, millinery stores, barbers, fruit and confection stores, hardware stores, grain elevators, and hose companies; a drug store, a meat market,



a photography studio, a book store, a livery stable, a doctor and a dentist, a jeweler, a cigar factory, a brickyard, a shoe store, a tailor, a newspaper published weekly, a wagon shop, a brass band, and a good water works system.<sup>5</sup> Even with all of these services for residents, businesses began to feel the effects of a more mobile society by 1910. Mail order catalogs, the passenger rail, and later the automobile allowed residents to shop easily in Mankato or have goods delivered to their doorstep. In 1911 the *Herald* began running advertisements to “Keep the Bacon at home” and merchants made periodic pleas to residents to shop at home.<sup>6</sup> Such advertisements became a standard part of most *Herald* issues during the next seventy years.<sup>7</sup>

With the physical structures of Good Thunder’s landscape already well developed by 1900, its real character and personality began to take shape in the social and cultural landscape through a variety of organizations which organized during its modern era. The first to form was a village government, followed shortly by a businessmen’s association. Later in the modern era, the Good Thunder Mother’s Club organized and had a strong influence on the lives and activities of the village children, and the Maple River Study Club formed, hosting lectures on various topics, such as the town’s history.

Civil government in Good Thunder was likely governed by the township officers who first organized by permission of the Blue Earth County Commissioners in September 1866.<sup>8</sup> It was not until 1910 that Good Thunder had its own government separate from the township or the county, which took the form of a village council of three elected councilmen and a president elected for a one year term between 1910 and 1938, after

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<sup>5</sup> Schrader, “Good Thunder, Minnesota,” 216.

<sup>6</sup> FitzSimmons, Blue Earth County Historical Society newspaper clippings collection.

<sup>7</sup> *Good Thunder Herald, Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.), Mapleton Enterprise-Good Thunder Herald.*

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, *History*, 262.

which the term was changed to two years until 1959.<sup>9</sup> Good Thunder's other connection to government was, of course, the post office.

Frank Griffin, the Good Thunder Postmaster, died suddenly in 1933, which caused some confusion in the appointment of the new postmaster and illustrates the importance of the post office to the village residents and the lack thereof in Washington. Carl Young had purchased the *Herald* from Frank Griffin when Griffin became the postmaster. When Griffin died, his widow was appointed acting postmaster and Young actively campaigned for the office, writing to Representative Ryan Elmer, a Democrat, and submitted to Representative Elmer letters of support, chiefly from Nicholas Juliar, a lawyer in Mankato. Young stated that he was a Democrat and the *Herald* had always been a strong Democratic paper. Representative Elmer submitted Young's name to the Postmaster General as the top choice, and Young received the position.

Upon hearing the news of the appointment, the residents of Good Thunder began to flood Elmer's office with letters, calling the appointment a "bombshell" and protesting the appointment of an "outstanding Republican." Elmer wrote back to all of the protest letters, stating that he had several letters of support stating Young was a Democrat, and he wrote to Juliar dismissing the protest letters as unimportant, and asked for Juliar's help in appeasing those writers who worked on the Democratic campaigns. The Good Thunder residents were obviously very much aligned with the Democratic party, no doubt a continuation of the village's association with the Grange, the Farmer's Alliance, and the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. While it had no real power, the post office and the office of postmaster had a symbolic power for the village, representing its character and

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<sup>9</sup> Cheryl Barnard, "Mayors of Good Thunder, Minnesota," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 217.

connection to the federal government.

Whereas the office of postmaster was symbolic and the village council made ordinances and had oversight of village funds, the real leadership of the community came from the Good Thunder Improvement Club, a business association that formed on 12 March 1912. The businessmen who met that day elected Frank Griffin, editor of the *Good Thunder Herald*, as chairman of the club. The club also wrote a constitution which, in article one states: “The object of the club is to secure united action of the people of Good Thunder and vicinity in advancing their commercial and general interests.”<sup>10</sup>

The first years of the Good Thunder Improvement Club’s meetings often centered on discussions and calls for action regarding the safety of thoroughfares over railroad crossings,<sup>11</sup> funds for road improvements and grading of the roads leading into town, especially the road to the creamery,<sup>12</sup> sewer improvements and garbage collection,<sup>13</sup> another hotel for the village,<sup>14</sup> and the posting of directional signs to Good Thunder on the highways.<sup>15</sup>

The Improvement Club also organized and fostered events in the social landscape for Good Thunder. In 1916 the club decided to recommend a Fourth of July celebration, recalling the Fourth of July in 1887 when the village hosted Andrew Good Thunder and rededicating the name of the village as Good Thunder.<sup>16</sup> The Fourth of July celebration became an annual event during this era, with parades and other activities. On occasion the

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<sup>10</sup> Good Thunder Improvement Club, “Proceedings of the Good Thunder Improvement Club,” in the possession of the City of Good Thunder, 12 March 1912. Here after cited as “Proceedings.”

<sup>11</sup> “Proceedings,” 23 April 1912.

<sup>12</sup> “Proceedings,” 12 May 1912, 9 July 1912.

<sup>13</sup> “Proceedings,” 18 March 1913.

<sup>14</sup> “Proceedings,” 20 July 2 1913.

<sup>15</sup> “Proceedings,” 1 July 1921.

<sup>16</sup> “Proceedings,” 31 June 1916.

celebration included a visit from Charles Good Thunder,<sup>17</sup> son of Andrew Good Thunder, who maintained a friendship and relationship with the village, even donating a peace pipe carved by Andrew Good Thunder to the village in 1947, where it was placed on display for all the residents at the bank.<sup>18</sup> The club also recommended and started a baseball team for the town in 1916,<sup>19</sup> which was very popular and continued for many years in the village, began setting up and maintaining an ice rink near the bandstand on Main Street,<sup>20</sup> and began sponsoring motion pictures on Saturday evenings, the first of which was held in January 1949 and was well received by the residents.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 34: Good Thunder baseball club, ca. 1920**

(Photograph reproduced from Schrader, *The Heritage of Blue Earth County*, 239.)

Not all of the club's endeavors were entirely successful, however. Their efforts to convince the village council to upgrade the sewer were "deemed hopeless." However, the

<sup>17</sup> Charles Good Thunder came to the Good Thunder Fourth of July celebrations in 1947 and 1949. *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 January 1949.

<sup>18</sup> "60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Visit From Old Chief," *Good Thunder Herald*, Anniversary Extra, 4 July 1947.

<sup>19</sup> "Proceedings," 27 April 1916.

<sup>20</sup> "Proceedings," 3 October 1930.

<sup>21</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 January 1949.

“business section of the village had gone ahead on a development project for a private sewer, that could be extended into a public sewer if needed.”<sup>22</sup> They investigated having a public library in the village in 1919,<sup>23</sup> although it never materialized, and in 1921 held a contest to create a slogan for Good Thunder.<sup>24</sup> No slogan was ever chosen, however, because the club apparently did not meet frequently thereafter for some years. By 1930 the group began referring to itself as the “Booster Club,”<sup>25</sup> and business of the meetings often revolved more on promotion of Good Thunder and event planning, such as dinners, picnics, and ice cream socials.<sup>26</sup>

World events such as the Great Depression and the World Wars did have some noticeable effects on Good Thunder. The Great Depression apparently did not have as many devastating effects in Blue Earth County as it did in other areas of the country.<sup>27</sup> In Good Thunder, the businesses on Main Street remained intact, perhaps owing to the agricultural basis for the village’s economic resource base. However, evidence suggests Good Thunder had its share of problems associated with the Great Depression, such as vagrants and unemployed people. For example, at a 1931 Booster Club meeting, members called for a motion to appoint a committee to “take up the matter of cleaning up the town of unwanted citizens.”<sup>28</sup> Wars also affected Good Thunder, just as they did other towns and cities across the country. Good Thunder likely sent some of its sons to World War I, but the village does not have a memorial for them. However, there is a marker now on Main Street in the small park, where the American Legion Post erected a

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<sup>22</sup> “Proceedings,” 8 May 1913.

<sup>23</sup> “Proceedings,” 9 May 1919.

<sup>24</sup> “Proceedings,” 17 June 1921.

<sup>25</sup> “Proceedings,” 12 May 1930.

<sup>26</sup> “Proceedings,” 1930-1931.

<sup>27</sup> *Chronicles of a Century: A 100-Year Look at Events that Shaped the History of Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties from 1900 to 1999* (Mankato, Minn.: The Free Press Co., 1999), 38-40.

memorial for the 174 Good Thunder men who died in World War II.



**Figure 35: World War II Memorial**  
(Photograph by author)

It was not only world events that touched Good Thunder's landscape. Technological, economic, and agricultural changes affected farming in the area in various ways. Farmers phased out buckwheat in the early part of the century, and began to grow less wheat as technological advances in farm machinery and genetic modification made corn a better cash crop for the region (see Table 1). Hog farming increased gradually during this era, perhaps due to new techniques in housing larger numbers of animals in smaller spaces. Although the creamery continued to operate and was mentioned a few times a year in the *Herald*, milk production during the modern era began to fall off, which

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<sup>28</sup> "Proceedings," 14 September 1931.

provided fewer raw resources for the creamery operation (see Table 2).

Good Thunder had been established long enough by the 1930s that the new leaders and the population as a whole were a generation or two removed from the pioneering days. The community began to evidence a need for identity and to create a sense of history to delineate their own unique community culture.<sup>29</sup> The Booster Club began this process through narrative when the members formed a historical committee which began to research and relay historical information about the village back to its members. The first evidence of this is the 13 April 1936 meeting when C. F. Bauer reported his investigations regarding the founding of the town and the ownership of the township plats from upon which Good Thunder was built. Bauer visited the Registrar of Deeds in Mankato and found that a part of Lyra township section nine “was conveyed by U.S. patent to Geo. W. Ewing on Jan. 8, 1864.” This fact established for the club the earliest date that land now in the incorporated limits of Good Thunder was purchased from the government and settled by pioneers.<sup>30</sup>

Another example of narrative communication was a talk given by W. J. Lieb, a railroad man from the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad company. Lieb provided the Booster Club with more historical information about the township, beginning with Pierre Charles Le Sueur’s exploration of the county and the claim staked by Noble G. Root in 1854. Some of Lieb’s information was erroneous, however, because Noble Root was never “massacred by Indians” during his brief stay on the claim. Nevertheless, Lieb regaled the crowd with pitches for the railroad, discussing how the railroads allowed the pioneers to make agriculture profitable and continued to be an

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<sup>29</sup> Kelly, 297-298; Blyler and Perkins, 245.

<sup>30</sup> “Proceedings,” 13 April 1936.

active agent in keeping the small town alive.<sup>31</sup> Lieb was able to use the oral narrative to synthesize local history, promote the railroad, and present it in a context of significance for Good Thunder's businessmen.

### Transportation

The importance of the railroad was still significant in Good Thunder's modern era. It provided a few jobs, transported goods and grains to and from Good Thunder, and served the population with passenger service to and from Mankato, which also carried the mail to town. Josephine Barnard, who worked at the depot in 1918-1919, recalled that trains came four times a day, and passengers could take the 9 AM passenger car to Mankato and return at 4 PM.<sup>32</sup> As automobiles and highway construction developed and offered new modes of transportation, the passenger service on the branch lines of the railroad declined proportionally.<sup>33</sup> The signs of the automobile take-over became evident in 1932 when the Milwaukee decided to remove its passenger line on the Good Thunder route. This caused a stir among the members of the Booster Club not because it would remove passenger service to Mankato where people could shop outside of Good Thunder—something that the business men had been discouraging for many years—rather, this train carried the daily mail. Booster Club members contacted other nearby cities on the route, such as Rapidan, Mapleton, and Minnesota Lake, coordinated their efforts, and seem to have convinced the Milwaukee to retain daily passenger and freight

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<sup>31</sup> "Proceedings," 13 February 1939.

<sup>32</sup> "To be torn up soon... Work on Railroad Started in 1874," *Enterprise-Herald (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 17 January 1979.

<sup>33</sup> Luecke, 181.





service.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the modern era, the railroad only offered passenger service in Good Thunder at 1 PM and 7 PM. The fact that automobiles took over this public transportation service of the railroad is evident in Josephine Barnard's recollection that the passenger car often had only her and Mrs. John McCarty on the train.<sup>35</sup>

Other than the railroad, it was road improvement and construction that often occupied the Booster Club transportation discussions throughout Good Thunder's modern era. The earliest action was the appointment of a committee to actively solicit donations from the village and township residents for a general road fund, from which the club was able to donate some one-hundred dollars to have the creamery road leading east out of Good Thunder graded up to the bridge over the Maple River.<sup>36</sup>

The roads leading out of Good Thunder were unpaved in the 1930s, and remained that way until the 1950s, resulting in a long battle for road improvements. The Booster Club began road discussions in earnest in 1936, seeking to provide Good Thunder with better access to the rest of the county and Mankato.<sup>37</sup> The club began circulating petitions that garnered practically unanimous support and sought the backing of the Mankato Chamber of Commerce, who assured the club of their "earnest enthusiastic support." The club's road committee met with the county commissioners who told them that the road development program for the year was already set, but that they would consider making Good Thunder's request a priority for the next year, offering to upgrade Good Thunder road number<sup>38</sup> one so it could be paved in the future. Results on the road improvement

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<sup>34</sup> "Proceedings," 12 December 1932, 10 April 1933, 11 September 1933.

<sup>35</sup> "To be torn up soon... Work on Railroad Started in 1874," *Enterprise-Herald (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 17 January 1979.

<sup>36</sup> "Proceedings," 12 May 1912, 9 July 1912, 8 May 1913.

<sup>37</sup> "Proceedings," 9 November 1936.

<sup>38</sup> Road no. 1 is now Minnesota State Highway 66.



were slow, although the county surveyor drafted a bill that would designate road number one as a federal and state contribution road and the committee caught the ear of state Senator Val Imm, who also worked to get a bill for funding the road improvement throughout the coming two decades.<sup>39</sup> The bill was apparently passed and monies appropriated, but there are no records in the village minutes or the Booster Club proceedings which discuss the matter.



**Figure 36: Main Street with Automobiles ca. 1930**  
(Photograph from FamilyOldPhotos.com, accessed 3 October 2005)

The next step was to have the road to Mankato paved, which the Booster Club began working on in 1948, coordinating with Rapidan and rallying “a delegation of forty or more determined citizens, both business men and farmers from Good Thunder and Rapidan [who] called on the county commissioners on Tuesday to find out more about roads.

“Both villages have been without adequate roadways for a decade and have finally reached the point where they want more than promises and have indicated

<sup>39</sup> “Proceedings,” 14 December 1936, 8 February 1937.

that they intend to keep at it until they are successful. . . .

“Your reporter, who attended the meeting, formed the opinion that the commissioners would have been happier had the delegates remained at home. . . . It was pointed out by the commissioners through Mr. Minks, chairman, that work had started on No. 1 but the group always came back with the statement that after that was done, it still lead nowhere, and the natives of these parts want a road that leads some place.”<sup>40</sup>

The frustrations of Good Thunder residents were not appeased, however, for quite some time. The *Herald* reported again two weeks later that the highway meeting was disappointing because the commissioners and county engineer had nothing to suggest and that “very little action was contemplated on their part.”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the voices of Good Thunder and actions of Senator Imm must have made an impression on the commissioners because a July *Herald* article announced that Good Thunder would have a paved road to Mankato completed by 1950.<sup>42</sup> This, however, was delayed, and Good Thunder did not see a paved route for a few more years.

#### Sequent Occupance: The Business District

Good Thunder’s business district had been built almost to capacity by 1900. Very little in the way of new construction occurred during the next fifty years. A few businesses closed, some were bought and sold, others added new goods and services to compete with other stores, and a few new businesses opened up, usually relating to changes in the cultural landscape such as mechanized farm machinery and automobile services, such as a dealership, repair services, and filling stations. A few buildings changed roles from public to business space, such as the old school house in which William Meyer opened a furniture store. He continued selling furniture there through the

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<sup>40</sup> “A Good Road Demanded from Commissioners,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 8 April 1948.

<sup>41</sup> “Road,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 22 April 1948.

early 1930s, and, for a brief time anyway, the store also served as a funeral home with Meyer as the undertaker.<sup>43</sup>

The mills in the area did not fare so well in the modern era, and the lack of news items about them indicates that they may have all disappeared early in the century. The Cable Mill burned to the ground in 1905 when it was struck by lightning. R. L. Houk and Walter Redfern built a new, steam-powered grist mill later that year, also known as the Cable Mill, which likewise was destroyed by fire about 1909.<sup>44</sup> The lack of evidence showing any replacements for the mills may be due to the fact that it was just as easy to ship grain out by train for milling in Mankato or other places.

Carl Sohre opened a hardware store on the south side of Main Street next to A. S. Handy's smithy in the 1880s, which Carl Bruscke bought in 1897 and operated in partnership with Sohre until Sohre's death in 1928. In 1905 Bruscke bought the smithy from Handy to use for storage for the hardware store.<sup>45</sup> Bruscke's store was also the John Deere™ dealership until 1928 when the John Deere company wanted dealers to increase their inventory. Bruscke, however, opted out of the dealership status for the store, in part because of the Depression but also because of a desire not to have inventory he probably could not sell. Bruscke kept the business going successfully through the Great Depression, bringing his two sons into partnership and adding a new store front in 1933.<sup>46</sup>

Carl Sohre also had a general store in Good Thunder, established in 1882, which he sold prior to moving to Virginia, Minnesota, for a short time. Sohre returned to Good

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<sup>42</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 15 July 1948.

<sup>43</sup> Patrick Larkin, "I think we're going to like it here'," *Mankato Free Press*, 16 July 1976; *R. L. Polk & Co.'s Mankato City and Blue Earth County Directory*, 1908-1909.

<sup>44</sup> Kienitz, Papers, "History of Lyra Township" newspaper clipping.

<sup>45</sup> "And the walls came a-tumbling down!" *Mapleton Enterprise*, 10 May 1978.

<sup>46</sup> Ann Christenson, "C. C. Bruscke & Son Hardware," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 219.

Thunder in 1907 and opened a new general store, which his sons Arthur and Carl took over in 1913. Sohre's slogan was "Give a little treat each time you make a sale to keep the customers friends," which Sohre usually provided as cheese and crackers, sliced sausage and cold soft drinks, a tradition which continued throughout the existence of the store. By 1925 the Sohres had added hardware and farm machinery to their general merchandise lines, and in 1937 they began selling groceries.<sup>47</sup> Other general merchandise stores in existence were the Ulrichs Bros. General Store, and Griffin's Stationary, Lamps, Crockery & Musical Instruments. Shoe and boot stores died out by 1900, but Wiedenheft's Shoes did not disappear. Henry Wiedenheft's sons Gustave and Otto took over their father's shoe and boot store in 1908 as Wiedenheft Bros. They expanded the business to include general merchandise, such as clothing and groceries. Their business did so well, that in 1923 Wiedenheft Bros. required a new building.<sup>48</sup>

Anson Handy built a new smithy around 1905 just south of the Maple River Baptist Church. On 16 November 1916 G. A. Graf began working for Handy as a blacksmith and took over the business at some unknown time later. Graf closed the smithy on 1 June 1924, moving it to a shop on his property by his home which he had purchased a few years prior, reopening on 1 July 1924. Graf had also established a feed grinding business in the early 1900s, which he discontinued a few years later when the R. L. Houk feed mill opened.<sup>49</sup>

In 1924 the Graham House hotel, an icon of the town, burned down in April<sup>50</sup> and was never rebuilt or replaced with another hotel. The Gnadke's erected a building on the

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<sup>47</sup> Julie Schrader, "Sohre Bros. General Store," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 220.

<sup>48</sup> Schrader, "Wiedenheft Bros. Store," 220.

<sup>49</sup> "G. A. Graf Retires After 35 Years in Business," *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 December 1951.

northeast corner of Main Street and highway number one, just across from the creamery. This business was an early service garage and dealership in Good Thunder for threshing machines and tractors. The Gnadkes also housed, sold, and delivered bulk oil and fuel from the building during that time. The business was closed because of the Great Depression in 1932, but the building was later renovated and reopened as a restaurant with a dance floor in the back. It was a popular social gathering spot in the late 1930s and early 1940s. However, business slowed during World War II and the Gnadkes closed the restaurant in 1946.<sup>51</sup>

During the 1940s Good Thunder gained a bakery owned by Ted Kliest in between Marlow's Fairway Foods and Segar's soda fountain shop on the west end of Main Street near where the Graham House stood. Dick Strenge of Mountain Lake bought the Home Bakery from Kliest in 1946. In 1948 Strenge purchased Carl Segar's soda fountain in the building next door, incorporating the soda fountain into the bakery.<sup>52</sup>

Good Thunder business developments between 1910 and 1920 illustrate adaptations to the cultural changes in nation, even though Good Thunder had reached its lowest population level in its history by 1920. The Polk's directory lists J. A. Tyholm & Co. as a Ford dealership, the Darge Garage opened as an automobile repair and service shop, Standard Oil Company had a filling station in town, the Good Thunder Electric Company was going strong, and the Good Thunder-Mapleton Telephone Company provided telephone service for the town.<sup>53</sup> Business growth declined somewhat in the

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<sup>50</sup> *Mankato Free Press*, 21 April 1924.

<sup>51</sup> "Versatile building entering new era: After 71 years, family selling Good Thunder landmark," *Mankato Free Press*, 20 March 1995.

<sup>52</sup> Ronelva Dauer, "Good Thunder Home Bakery," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 219.

<sup>53</sup> *R. L. Polk & Co.'s Mankato City and Blue Earth County Directory, 1921-1922.*

1930s and 1940s due to the Depression and World War II. The *Good Thunder Herald* suspended publication between January 1943 and August 1946. Business seemed to pick up after the war, however, as the 2 January 1947 issue of the *Herald* provided a look back at 1946, noting that the First National Bank surpassed the one million dollar mark in assets, five new businesses started that year, and a new doctor began his practice in Good Thunder as well.<sup>54</sup> These were all good prospects for a continued future for Good Thunder at the close of its modern era.

#### Sequent Occupance: The Residential Areas

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the residential area of Good Thunder was well built and nicely kept. The Mapleton reporter who visited the village in December of 1901 had the following to say: “A drive through the resident portion of

Good Thunder impressed us greatly. Now we do not mean to flatter the town, for vanity might prove its ruin, but we could not help but think of the beautiful residence location of Fairmont as we passed on. The natural advantages of timber slopes compare with Fairmont nicely. Many of the residences command one, two, and upwards of three acres, making handsome places. A few years hence we predict for Good Thunder several of the finest resident streets in the county.”<sup>55</sup>

However, another report in the Mapleton newspaper remarked that “Unless some building is done here in the near future our town must remain at a standstill, as at present there is not a vacant house or room that can be secured under any conditions.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 2 January 1947.

<sup>55</sup> “Around the County: Good Thunder Visited by an *Enterprise* Reporter,” *Blue Earth County Enterprise* (Mapleton, Minn.), 16 December 1901.

<sup>56</sup> *Blue Earth County Enterprise* (Mapleton, Minn.), 17 March 1902.





**Figure 37: Ewing's Addition Bird's-Eye-View, ca. 1900**  
View to the north. St. Joseph's Catholic Church on the left.  
(Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)



**Figure 38: Carl C. Bruscke Residence, ca. 1910**  
Gable-front-and-wing national folk house architecture.  
(Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)



**Figure 39: F. H. Morlock Residence, ca. 1910**  
 Cross-gabled Queen Anne Victorian architecture.  
 (Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)



**Figure 40: Schlesselman Residence, ca. 1900**  
 Center-gabled hipped-roof Colonial revival architecture.  
 (Photograph from Kienitz, Papers, "Souvenir [*sic*] of Good Thunder, Minnesota.")

There is little recorded evidence for the building of residences during the first half of the twentieth century. The Blue Earth County Assessor Office database shows fifty-seven existing homes were built during this era.<sup>57</sup> The majority of the houses from this era were built between 1907 and 1926, three built in the 1930s and ten houses in the 1940s. The earlier houses were built with national folk house, Victorian, and Colonial revival architectural styles. The homes built in the 1940s were built with the minimal modern architectural style.<sup>58</sup> In all probability the effects of the population decline in the 1910s, the Great Depression, and the World Wars contributed to the apparent stagnation in the development of Good Thunder's residential areas. The only addition to the village plat was the Graham's Addition which was a mere two-and-one-half blocks between Chapel and Sherman Streets on the western edge of the incorporated area.

The only two residents of any significance to this era involved St. John's Lutheran Church. In 1917 the congregation built a new parsonage<sup>59</sup> across the street from the church in the common vernacular form of the Prairie School style of American architecture.<sup>60</sup> The parsonage was remodeled in 1931, and some of the old barns on the lot were removed when the congregation made improvements to the church. The congregation also built a new school building in 1937 and thus no longer needed the old church buildings they were using. The old Seventh Day Adventist Church was sold, renovated and became the home of Kenneth Elliot during this era.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Blue Earth County Assessor Office, Parcel Search [Online database].

<sup>58</sup> McAlester and McAlester, 92, 263, 321, 478.

<sup>59</sup> St. John Lutheran Church, 8.

<sup>60</sup> McAlester and McAlester, 440, 443.

<sup>61</sup> Kienitz, Papers, Typed notes





**Figure 41: St. John's Lutheran Parsonage, 1917**  
(Photograph reproduced from St. John Lutheran Church, 13.)



**Figure 42: Former Seventh Day Adventist Church**  
(Photograph by author)



**Figure 43: 631 Sherman Street, built in 1945**  
Minimal traditional architecture.  
(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])



**Figure 44: 621 Sherman Street, built in 1948**  
Minimal traditional architecture.  
(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])



### Sequent Occupance: Public Space

Good Thunder's modern era also saw very little in the way of new buildings for the village government. A brief article in a 1902 Mapleton newspaper issue remarked that the "city hall is undergoing necessary repairs for the accommodation of the fire apparatus,"<sup>62</sup> suggesting that the village president and council shared the space with the fire department (see fig. 23). Another brief article noted that the repairs were completed by March of the same year and that the council was pleased with the accommodations.<sup>63</sup> The needs of the council and the fire department soon outgrew this old space. In 1930, the First National Bank was looking to sell the building next to it. At an October meeting, the council approved borrowing \$4,000 to buy the building and use it to house a public restroom, the municipal liquor store, and eventually the fire station.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 45: Main Street, ca. 1910**

View to the south and east. Far left is Bruscke's hardware, Wiedenheft's in the center, an unknown building, and restaurant in the bank building. The unknown building would later be the fire station and village hall. (Photograph from the collection of the Blue Earth County Historical Society)

<sup>62</sup> *Blue Earth County Enterprise (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 24 January 1902.

<sup>63</sup> *Blue Earth County Enterprise (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 28 March 1902.

<sup>64</sup> City of Good Thunder, "Village minutes," 11 October 1930.

The post office also outgrew its space and moved into the old school house that was formerly William Meyer's furniture store and funeral parlor in 1938.<sup>65</sup> In 1923 Good Thunder built an addition to the school and created its first high school, which included a gymnasium.<sup>66</sup> The St. John's Lutheran congregation built their new school building in 1937 in the lot east of the church.



**Figure 46: Good Thunder High School**

Note the Public School to the left with the steeple.  
(Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

<sup>65</sup> Larkin, *Mankato Free Press*, 16 July 1976.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Ann Landcaster, "Good Thunder Public School," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 228.



**Figure 47: St. John's Lutheran School, built in 1937**  
 (Photograph reproduced from St. John's Lutheran Church, 18.)

Most of the development in Good Thunder's public sphere was directed toward upgrading utilities and services. The village council moved to condemn the wooden sidewalks in part of the original townsite and Barnard's Addition in 1910, and built new cement sidewalks six feet wide.<sup>67</sup> Most of the rest of the original townsite sidewalks were repaired or remade when the council made another resolution in 1936.<sup>68</sup> The Good Thunder Improvement Club petitioned the village council to investigate better sewers and garbage collection in 1913.<sup>69</sup> The council responded to the club's petition in May that no work could be done with the sewers at the present time, so the businesses upgraded their own sewers with plans for extension into a public sewer for the future.<sup>70</sup> Some work on the water system in 1914 resulted from Frank Griffin's petition to the village council for reimbursement on repairs he had done on the village's water main. The council readily

<sup>67</sup> City of Good Thunder, "Village minutes," 11 April 1910.

<sup>68</sup> City of Good Thunder, "Village minutes," 18 September 1936.

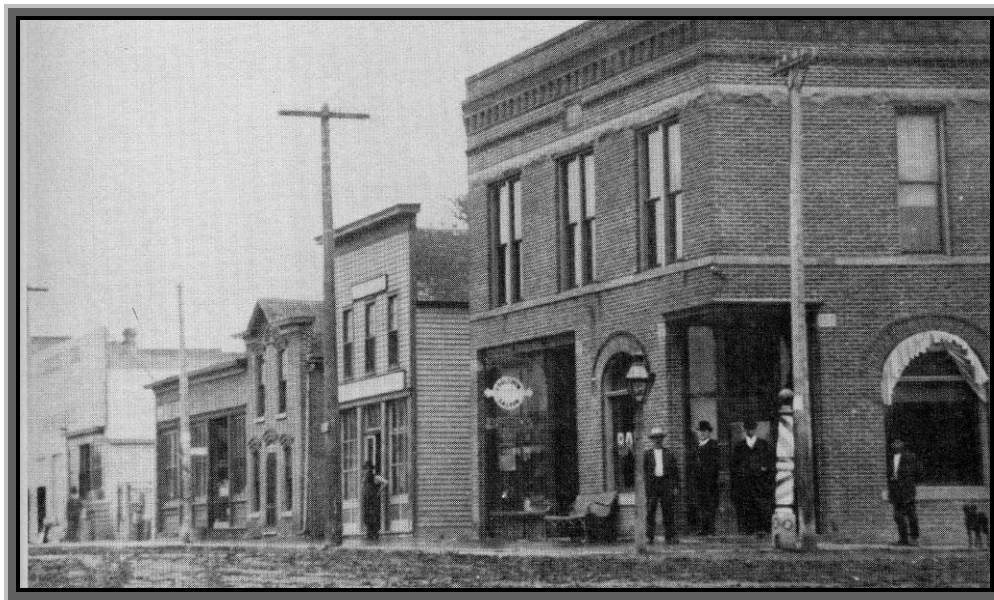
<sup>69</sup> "Proceedings," 18 March 1913.

<sup>70</sup> "Proceedings," 8 May 1913.



agreed to the reimbursement and resolved to extend the water main system.<sup>71</sup>

Good Thunder had enjoyed the benefits of electricity, probably since the late 1890s, since photographs from the early 1900s show electric poles and lines on Main Street. In 1914 the village considered bids for franchising electric lights and their poles



**Figure 48: South Side of Main Street at Front Street, ca. 1900**

Note the electric poles left of center and on the corner in front of the bank entrance. (Photograph reproduced from Schrader, *The Heritage of Blue Earth County*, 233.)

and wires, which it awarded to the local Good Thunder Electric Light Company. The village contracted with the company for five years, agreeing to pay \$41.40 per month in exchange for twenty-two 60 Watt lights. Twenty of the lights ran from dusk until 11:30 PM, and the other two lights ran until dawn.<sup>72</sup> The Good Thunder Electric Light Company lost their contract to the larger Northern States Power in 1927, because it was able to offer a much lower bid.<sup>73</sup>

The new lights added an element of modernism to the otherwise nineteenth

<sup>71</sup> City of Good Thunder, "Village minutes," 6 June 1914.

<sup>72</sup> City of Good Thunder, "Village minutes," 11 April 1914.

<sup>73</sup> City of Good Thunder, "Village minutes," 27 December 1927.

century façade of Good Thunder's Main Street. There was an opera house in the early 1900s, location of which is unknown, providing a stage for plays and other cultural events for the residents.<sup>74</sup> Also, the Improvement Club made an attempt to have a public library for the village, but there is no other information as to their success in that venture, and it presumably went unrealized.<sup>75</sup>

One aspect that was never included in the plat of the original townsite was open public space for outdoor events. The bandstand was, therefore, located in an empty lot in between Wiedenheft Bros. general store and Bruscke & Son Hardware, probably on lots three and four, block four on the south side of Main Street. The lot also served as a skating rink which the Booster Club installed in November of 1930.<sup>76</sup> The Booster Club also purchased a 140' x 274' lot of land in Graham's Addition for \$91 for use as a playground, which the club presented to the school. The club also moved to acquire additional land nearby which could be used for a baseball field.<sup>77</sup> The club was successful, because the 1938 air photo (Map 10) of Good Thunder shows a ball field just west of St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

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<sup>74</sup> Fitzsimmons.

<sup>75</sup> "Proceedings," 9 May 1919.

<sup>76</sup> "Proceedings," 10 November 1930; "Good Thunder Elevator Mural," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 224.

<sup>77</sup> "Proceedings," 9 May 1932.

**Map 10: Good Thunder Air Photo 1938**

(Air photo BIP-3-38 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service air photos of Blue Earth County.)

### Sequent Occupance: The Churches

Only four of the church congregations in Good Thunder survived the modern era, illustrating changes in the village's population and cultural composition. These changes support the theory of cultural substitution of Catholics and Lutherans becoming the dominant culture in the village. The Seventh Day Adventist Church's last known minister was Elder C. Wiest, who ministered from 1933 to 1935.<sup>78</sup> The last time the church was listed in the city directory was 1945, suggesting the congregation disbanded shortly after that time.<sup>79</sup> St. Luke's Episcopal Church also disbanded in October of 1946 because the deaths of its members and removals to other towns made it impractical to hold services



**Figure 49: Community Baptist Church, ca. 1952**

(Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

<sup>78</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," in *The Heritage of Blue Earth County Minnesota*, edited by Julie Hiller Schrader (Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corporation, 1990), 227.

<sup>79</sup> *Polk's Mankato (Blue Earth County, Minn.) City Directory including Blue Earth County*, (Omaha, Nebr.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1945).

with such a small congregation. Therefore the diocese sold the church to the Community Baptist Church,<sup>80</sup> which had apparently supplanted the Maple River Baptist Church, whose building was torn down some years prior.<sup>81</sup>

The congregation of the Immanuel Lutheran Church obviously changed more easily with the times and had a need to service non-German speaking members, because they added English services beginning in 1920. The congregation also remodeled and enlarged their building in 1925.<sup>82</sup> St. John's Lutheran Church also remodeled their church building, adding a basement and new organ, and removing the old barns and buildings to the rear of the church and on the parsonage lot in 1931. In 1934 the church interior was remodeled and redecorated, a second entrance was built on the south side of the building, and new art-glass windows were installed.<sup>83</sup> A smithy stood on the lot just north of the church, which the congregation purchased in 1934, tearing the smithy and the blacksmith's house down to make room for a playground and skating rink area for the school children.<sup>84</sup> Unlike the Immanuel Lutheran Church, St. John's continued to hold its services and conduct its business entirely in German, and only added English services in addition to German in October of 1940.<sup>85</sup>

St. Joseph's Catholic Church also saw a few changes as its congregation became smaller. Since 1884, The church had always been administered by the Mapleton parish,

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<sup>80</sup> "Parish records of Protestant Episcopal churches in South Central Minnesota."

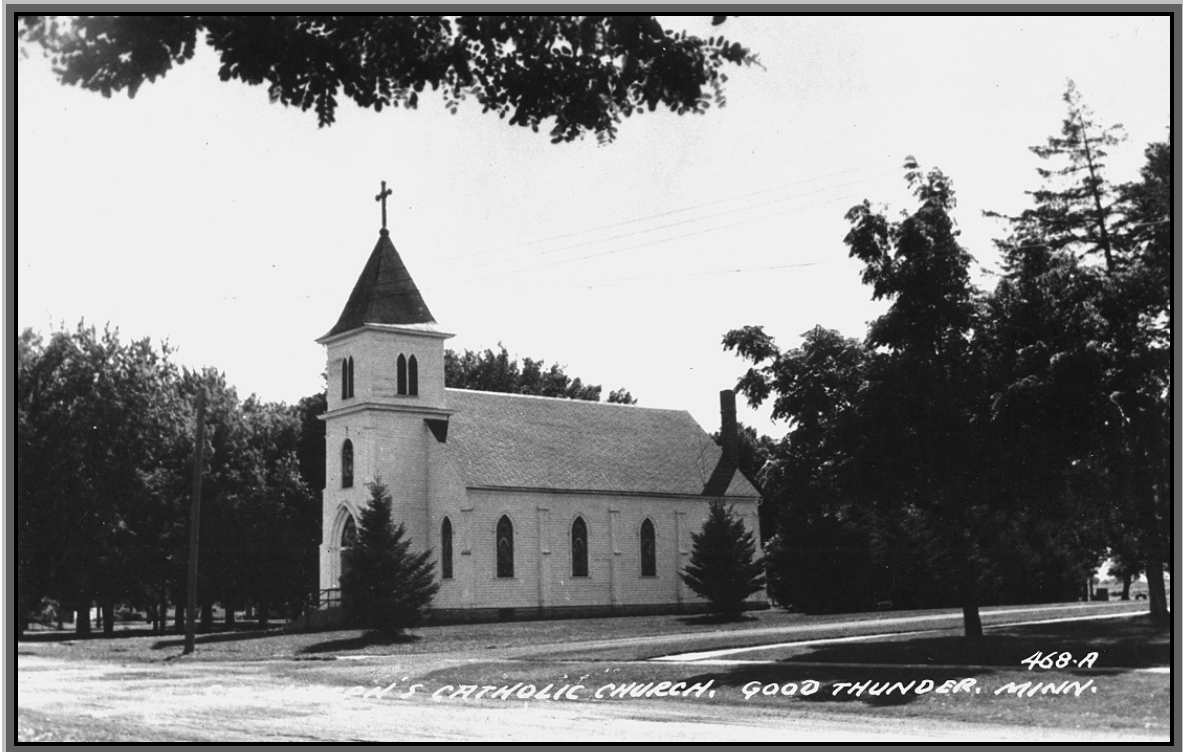
<sup>81</sup> Kienitz, Papers, Typed notes.

<sup>82</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," 224.

<sup>83</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," 226.

<sup>84</sup> St. John Lutheran Church, 9.

<sup>85</sup> St. John Lutheran Church, 10.



**Figure 50: St. Joseph's Catholic Church, ca. 1950**  
 (Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

but was transferred to St. John's Parish in Mankato in 1948, when it became a mission church. The building was also “extensively redecorated and the sanctuary remodeled.”<sup>86</sup>

### Conclusion

Good Thunder entered the modern era of the twentieth century as a well-established and prosperous agricultural support community. The passion for managing the community's social and economic health and survival remained strong and intact throughout the era, primarily supported by the Booster Club. This passion facilitated the solidification of the community into a distinct personality, giving rise to subtle traditions

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<sup>86</sup> “St. Joseph's Parish To Have Diamond Jubilee Celebration,” *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 19 April 1956.

peculiar to Good Thunder and passed on in oral forms of communication. Good Thunder retained its nineteenth century natural resource perceptions of an agricultural resource base, and were able to adapt and work for changes that would continue to support that base.

The effects of automobiles and technology, the Great Depression and the World Wars caused problems and changes that the people addressed in ways which continued their existence as much as possible in the context of their halcyon days of yore.

The modern era saw the continuation of first order residential establishments, albeit with a diminishing population. Nevertheless, the second order business establishments continued to operate and serve the residential establishment, while under the threat of replacement from accessible retailers in Mankato and mail order catalogs. However, the third order wholesaling establishments appear to be almost entirely absent by the end of the modern era, as corporate conglomeration and large urban areas took over all of those roles.

At the end of the modern era, the sons of Good Thunder returned home from World War II, breathing a bit of new life into the community as they sought to build a life interrupted by the war, starting new businesses or taking the reigns in existing business from the elder generation. The community probably felt safe and confident in its role in the greater society, having maintained its current existence through an otherwise tumultuous world rapidly changing around them. However, it would be this confidence and belief in life remaining the same that would set up Good Thunder as a dying community over the next quarter century.

*“The small rural community was extremely vulnerable to the social and economic consequences of resource exploitation and in reality was destined to become a casualty of the very forces that created it.”<sup>1</sup>*

*~Harland Padfield*

## Chapter 8

### The Dying Community, 1950-1975

#### Cultural Landscape

Good Thunder awoke from its modern era in a dawn of seeming prosperity. The Great Depression was long past, the surviving soldiers in World War II had returned home, and the community took up its life with an intention of continuing the traditions of the past in harmony with the twentieth century social changes they had experienced. The streets of the village were recently paved, the clock tower still chimed, and residents still shopped at the general stores and grocery markets on Main Street. Little did they realize that the economic forces of the modern society would bring about the death of their community as an independent, self-sufficient commerce center.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of Good Thunder’s decay can be seen in the stores which specialized their merchandise, or simply closed because the owners retired. Some businesses were taken over by the children of the owners or sold to unrelated people. However, the GI Bill (which provided veterans with an opportunity for education), the Baby Boom and need for young families to provide for their children, and the general job market was such that

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<sup>1</sup> Harland Padfield, “The Expendable Rural Community and the Denial of Powerlessness,” in *The Dying Community*, School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series, edited by Art Gallaher and Harland Padfield (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), 164.



many of the younger generation moved to urban areas to attend university or trade schools where they commonly remained after graduation, or to find jobs in the retail, business, and industrial sectors that were located in the cities. This is not to say that there was a mass exodus from Good Thunder. Indeed, the population in Good Thunder remained quite stable in the period between 1950 and 1975. There were still other



**Figure 51: Main Street, ca. 1952**

View to the north and east. The white building with peaked façade is the Home Bakery. Petrowske Implements to the right, Marlow's Fairway Grocery and Segar Drugs to the left. (Photograph from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

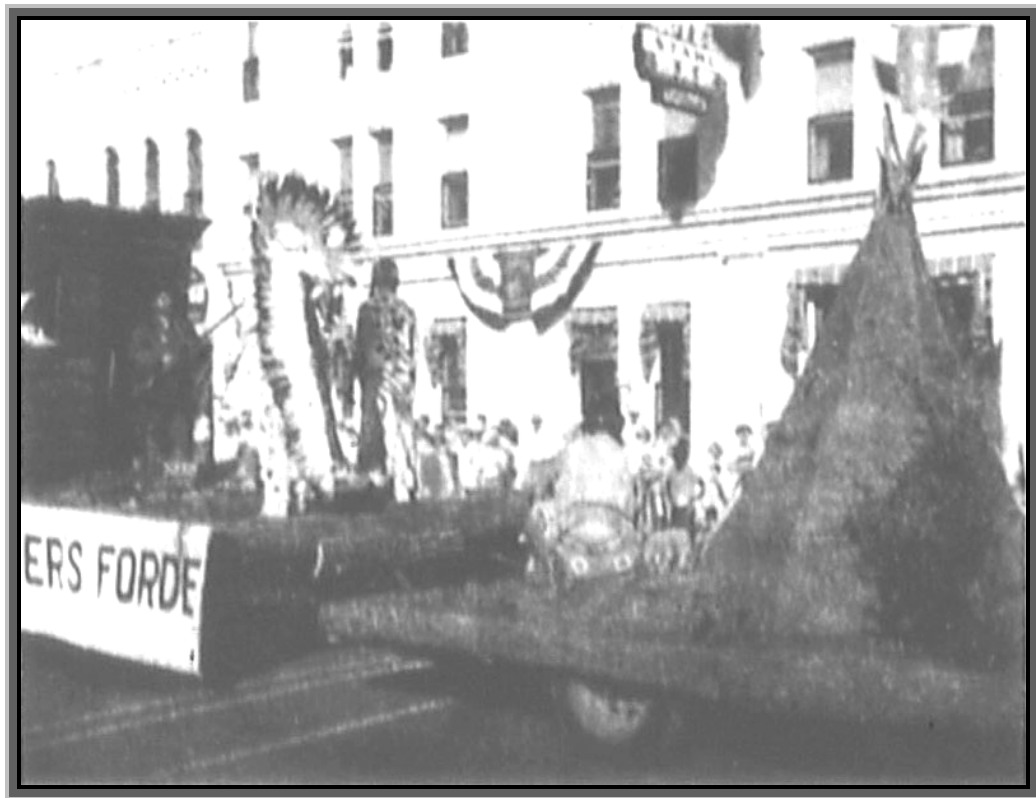
opportunities for employment nearby, such as canning factories and hog farms, allowing longtime residents or those who did not want to leave with jobs, even as the growth of malls, shopping centers, and big box stores in Mankato contributed to Main Street drying up. The people did not abandon Good Thunder, because they were tied to their landscape and traditions through their investment in the social landscape.

Good Thunder's social landscape provided the residents with a strong sense of place and connection to the past. At the annual Fourth of July celebration in 1952, for

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<sup>2</sup> John Frasier Hart, *The Rural Landscape* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 301.

example, there was a float depicting the meeting of the pioneer Erv Sohre with Wakuntchapinka at the ford. In an unfortunate coincidence, Charles Good Thunder, the son of Andrew Good Thunder died at the age of 79 the Saturday prior to the parade.<sup>3</sup> In his will he left the citizens of Good Thunder a bow and set of arrows made by his father,<sup>4</sup> further cementing the ties of Good Thunder with its connections to the past and continuing the promotion of the village as a tribute to the name of Good Thunder and



**Figure 52: Good Thunder's Forde float, 4 July 1952**  
(Image from the *Good Thunder Herald*, 3 July 1952.)

peaceful Indian-white relations. This connection developed into the annual Pioneer-Indian Days, which was created by the Booster Club and the American Legion, and first celebrated on Labor Day weekend in 1960,<sup>5</sup> and continued on that weekend through the

<sup>3</sup> "Good Thunder Float Depicts Early Meeting at Ford on Maple," *Good Thunder Herald*, 3 July 1952.

<sup>4</sup> "Charles Goodthunder Leaves Prized Keepsake to Village," *Good Thunder Herald*, 3 July 1952.

<sup>5</sup> *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 14 July 1960.

1970s.<sup>6</sup> Good Thunder also continued the free movies that it enjoyed since 1949 in the high school gymnasium and continued to hold band concerts at the bandstand in the summers.<sup>7</sup> But there were also some events which marked a break with established traditions. Heretofore the village council had been led by a president of the council elected for a two year term. The council decided to change the name of that office to mayor, and Good Thunder residents voted for a mayor rather than a president for the first time in 1961.<sup>8</sup> While this was not a significant change in the village government, it was a severing of old terminology for the new, carried out to be in keeping with the times and communicating that Good Thunder's government was not moribund in the past.

Another example of Good Thunder's unique culture was the change in practicing Halloween. The Good Thunder Mother's Club decided that Halloween was unsafe for children and promoted irresponsible behavior. So the mothers created a Halloween Party and actively discouraged door-to-door trick-or-treating, asking residents to not hand out candy or answer trick-or-treat calls at their doors. They wanted all of the children to come to the party, which began with a costume parade down Main Street, and had games, a movie, and treats as the main event.<sup>9</sup> The party was a success, with some one-hundred sixty children attending, and for the first time in a while, Good Thunder enjoyed a tamer All Hallows Eve. The police report to the *Herald* remarked that there was little sign of "wild" celebrating except for some dumping of signs on the school grounds and some cattle that were turned loose.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 3 September 1970.

<sup>7</sup> "Free Movies Sponsored By Local Businessmen Start Here First Week In June," *Good Thunder Herald*, 3 April 1952. The article also announced three band concerts to be held in June.

<sup>8</sup> Barnard, 215.

<sup>9</sup> "'To Trick-or-Treat, or Party' Haunts Good Thunder Residents," *Good Thunder Herald*, 20 October 1955.

<sup>10</sup> *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 3 November 1955.

## Transportation

Good Thunder saw very little in transportation developments between 1950 and 1975. The residents' long battle for a paved road to Mankato finally came to fruition shortly after 1950. The surfacing of road number one and its status change from a county township road to State Highway 66 not only provided a smoother ride into the city and likely cut the travel time in half, but as a state highway received priority snow plowing.

The beginning of the dying community era brought a harbinger of things to come when regular passenger train service provided by the Central Railway Company of Minnesota, a subsidiary of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, terminated its service on the Wells to Mankato road on 2 January 1951.<sup>11</sup> Several changes in the overall cultural landscape contributed to the demise of passenger service, not the least of which was the paving and development of highways paralleling many of the railroads and the American fascination with the automobile. The passenger trains also carried the mail, and this was by far the most profitable aspect of the service for the railroad companies. When trucks began to take over this work, the railroads lost a significant reason for their passenger rail service.<sup>12</sup>

## Sequent Occupance: The Business District

Good Thunder's business district began a slow decline in some ways over the twenty-five year span from 1950 to 1975, but in other areas businesses remained steady and even grew. A few of the old guard stores on Main Street closed shop or were sold to new owners. The Wiedenheft Bros. General Store began to phase out general

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<sup>11</sup> Luecke, 214.

<sup>12</sup> Luecke, 181.

merchandise during the 1950s, and by the 1960s they only sold groceries. The brothers sold the store in 1969 to Burke Bartell who continued to operate it for some years before selling it to the Happy Dan convenience store chain.<sup>13</sup> In a similar fashion, the Sohre brothers retired from the hardware business in 1965, selling the store to John Bartell who reopened it as Bartell's Hardware. The store survived for some years more, but eventually closed and the building was demolished.<sup>14</sup>

Another business closing occurred in 1951 when the blacksmith G. A. Graf retired.<sup>15</sup> Good Thunder still had a blacksmith for some years thereafter, however, because a few months before Graf's retirement, Richard Shearer began building a blacksmith shop on property he purchased on the west end of town.<sup>16</sup> Shearer was not the only self-employed person to build new facilities. Roger Dalluge's Dalluge Plumbing and Heating was doing enough business that he was able to build a shop in his back yard in 1951. The shop contained space for sheet metal and a display room in the front with a nice big window for showcasing equipment.<sup>17</sup> Other developments included June Dales' beauty shop, which she opened at her residence in 1953, and the remodeling of the Botsford Lumber Co.'s showroom, which the company wanted for featuring some new lines of goods.<sup>18</sup> During the 1950s the Gnadke family opened a duck hatchery in their former restaurant building.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Schrader, "Wiedenheft Bros. Store," 221.

<sup>14</sup> Schrader, "Sohre Bros. General Store," 220.

<sup>15</sup> "G. A. Graf Retires After 35 Years in Business," *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 December 1951.

<sup>16</sup> "Blrcksmith [*sic*] Shop Taking Shape," *Good Thunder Herald*, 11 October 11 1951.

<sup>17</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 6 December 1951.

<sup>18</sup> "New People in Community Business and Social Family," *Good Thunder Herald*, 3 September 1953.

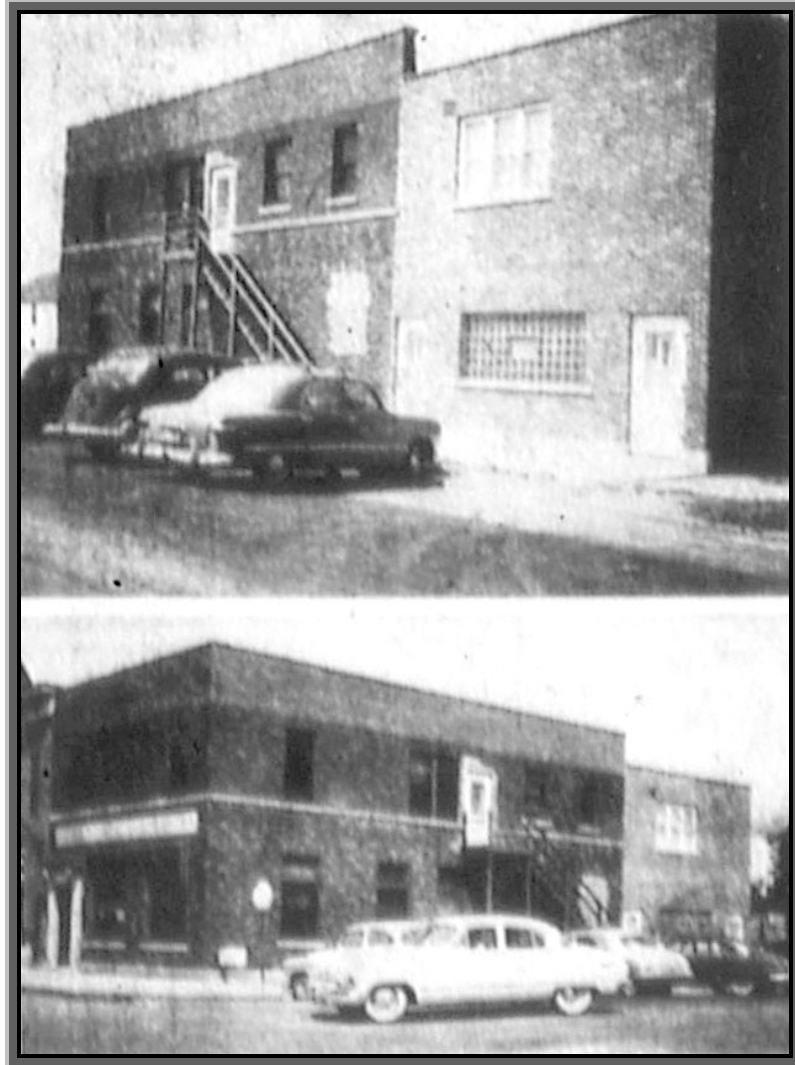
<sup>19</sup> "Versatile building entering new era: After 71 years, family selling Good Thunder landmark," *Mankato Free Press*, 20 March 1995.



**Figure 53: Dalluge Plumbing & Heating, 1951**  
 (Image from the *Good Thunder Herald*, 6 December 1951.)

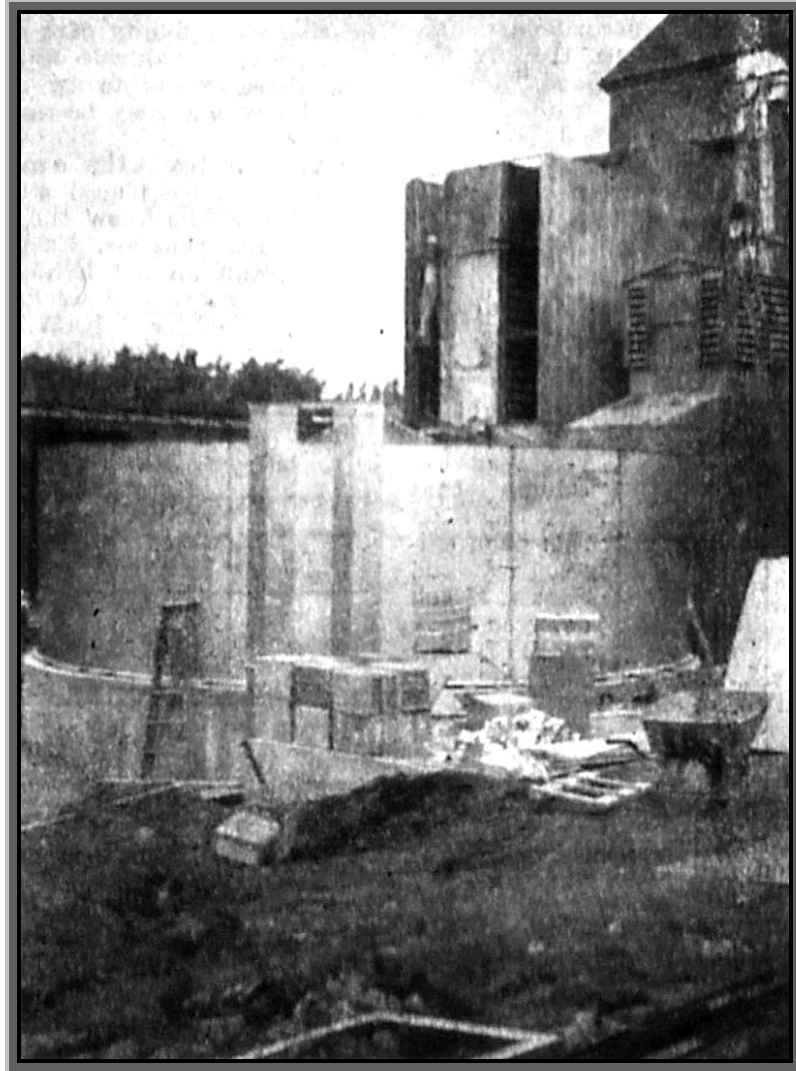
The First National Bank of Good Thunder had excellent business in the post-war years. The bank financed many of the remodeling projects and new homes which were built in Good Thunder in the 1950s, running weekly advertisements presenting the improvements, like the one in Figure 53 above. In 1952 the bank needed more space and erected an extension to the building to add a large director's room for meetings, two conference rooms, another safe deposit box vault and enlarged the basement. The new director's room measured 15' x 18' and was finished with "modern glass block on two sides."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> "First National Bank Will Build Addition To Better Facilities," *Good Thunder Herald*, 3 April 1952.



**Figure 54: First National Bank addition, 1952**  
(Image from the *Good Thunder Herald*, 16 July 1953.)

Modern harvesting and livestock feeding changes also brought growth for the Good Thunder Grain Co., owned and operated by Vince Mongeau. In 1955 Mongeau erected a new \$30,000 storage bin added to the elevator site, as well as a new dryer, to serve the needs of area farmers who wished to have grain dried and stored nearby. The older gas dryer was moved to accommodate the additions. The new storage bin was twenty-seven feet in diameter, rising to sixty-four feet and built to hold 27,000 bushels of



**Figure 55: Grain storage bin, 1955**  
 (Image from the *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 25 August 1955.)

grain.<sup>21</sup> The need for silo storage continued to grow, and the Good Thunder Grain Company added yet another storage silo to the complex in 1958 that could hold thirty thousand bushels. The new silo was three feet wider and eight feet taller than the one built three years prior.<sup>22</sup>

Another sign of Good Thunder's struggle to maintain its traditions of service in

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<sup>21</sup> "Erection of New Storage Bin and Dryer at Good Thunder Grain Progresses," *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 25 August 1955.

<sup>22</sup> *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 31 July 1958.



the village came in 1956 when local business leaders and the village council formed the Good Thunder Area Developments, Inc. for the purpose of recruiting a doctor and building a clinic. Good Thunder had always enjoyed having at least one local doctor. When the last doctor retired in 1955 and moved away a few years prior, the village was left without medical services. The new corporation funded the construction of the clinic through the sale of debenture bonds, which was approved in April 1956 by the Federal Securities Commission. Fred Hiller bought the first bond year, leading the way for the community to fully finance the clinic. The new clinic was designed to house two doctors



**Figure 56: Architectural rendering of the Good Thunder Medical Clinic, 1956**  
(Image from the *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 10 May 1956.)

and a dentist, and included a laboratory, surgery, x-ray, and treatment rooms, with a special room for infants. Additionally the building had a full basement, which the Good Thunder Area Development offered for public library space; however, the county board took no action on the offer.<sup>23</sup> The clinic was completed in the same year and served the community for about a decade before the practices were closed, probably due to the increasing costs of health care and changes in health insurance programs. In 1958 the Good Thunder Area Developments added a new telephone company building in the same

<sup>23</sup> “Clinic Bonds to be On Sale Locally Saturday,” *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 26 April 1956; “This is the Building You Can Help Erect in Good Thunder,” *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 10 May 1956; “First Clinic Bond Sold,” *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 3 May 1956; *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 25 October 1956.

architectural style next to the building, and the Good Thunder telephones were switched over to the new building in August 1959.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the most decisive blow to Good Thunder's business district occurred on Wednesday 16 March 1960 when two buildings on Main Street were destroyed by fire. The fire started in the old Home Bakery store and burned through the apartments upstairs, the roof, and Marlow's Fairway Grocery next door. Although both buildings were destroyed, the fire walls between the bakery and Petrowske Implements on the east, and between the grocery and Segar Drugs on the west probably saved the rest of the block from burning as well.<sup>25</sup> Neither the grocery nor the bakery were rebuilt and neither reopened.<sup>26</sup> It might have been the beginning of the end for Main Street Good Thunder, were it not for the Good Thunder Arts pottery shop that opened in the early 1970s, which, coupled with two thriving antique stores, attracted buyers from around the region to Good Thunder.<sup>27</sup>

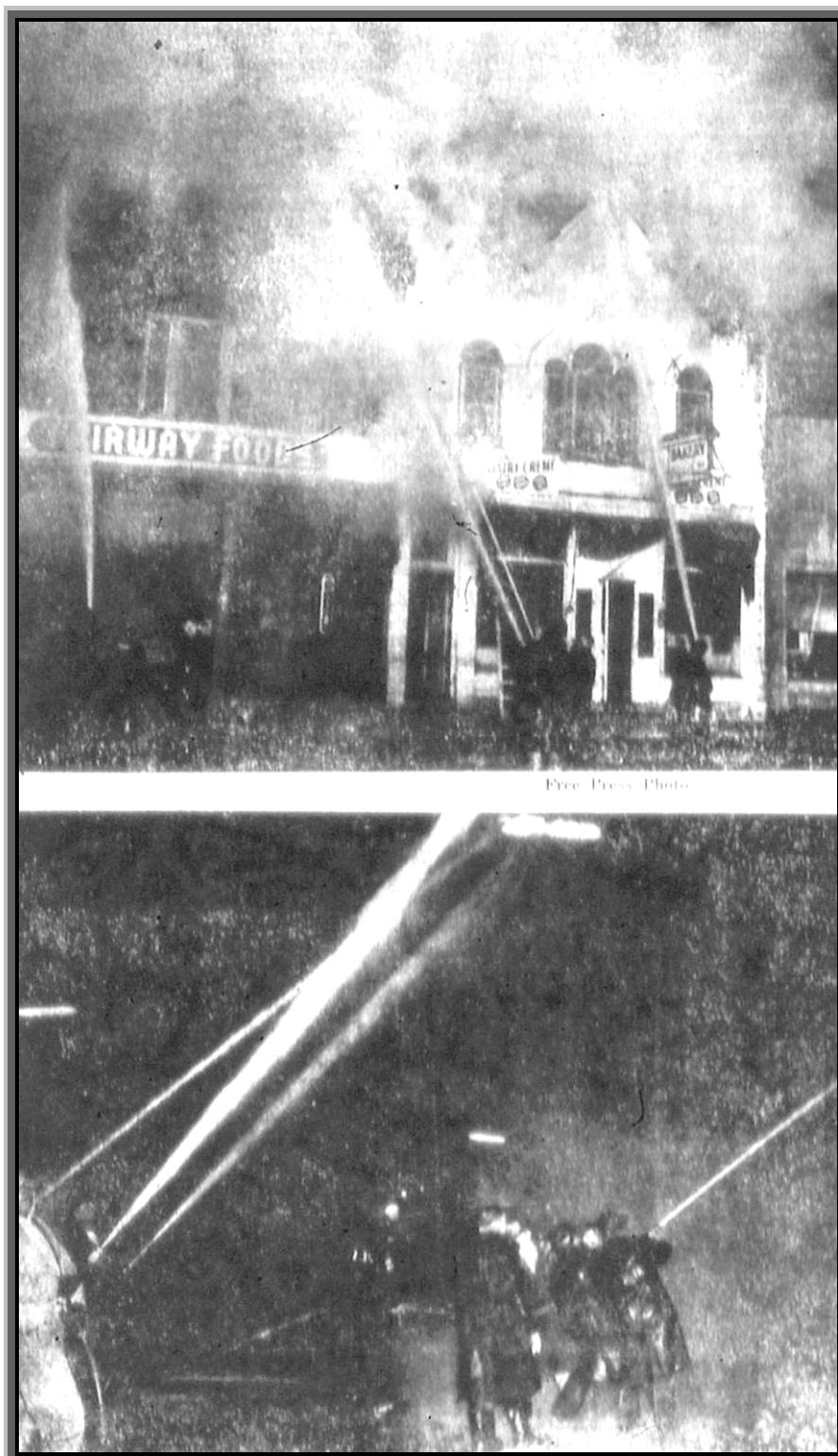
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<sup>24</sup> *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 14 November 1957; *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 20 August 1959.

<sup>25</sup> "Worst Fire Since '16 Forces Family to Jump to Safety," *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 17 March 1960.

<sup>26</sup> Dauer, 219.

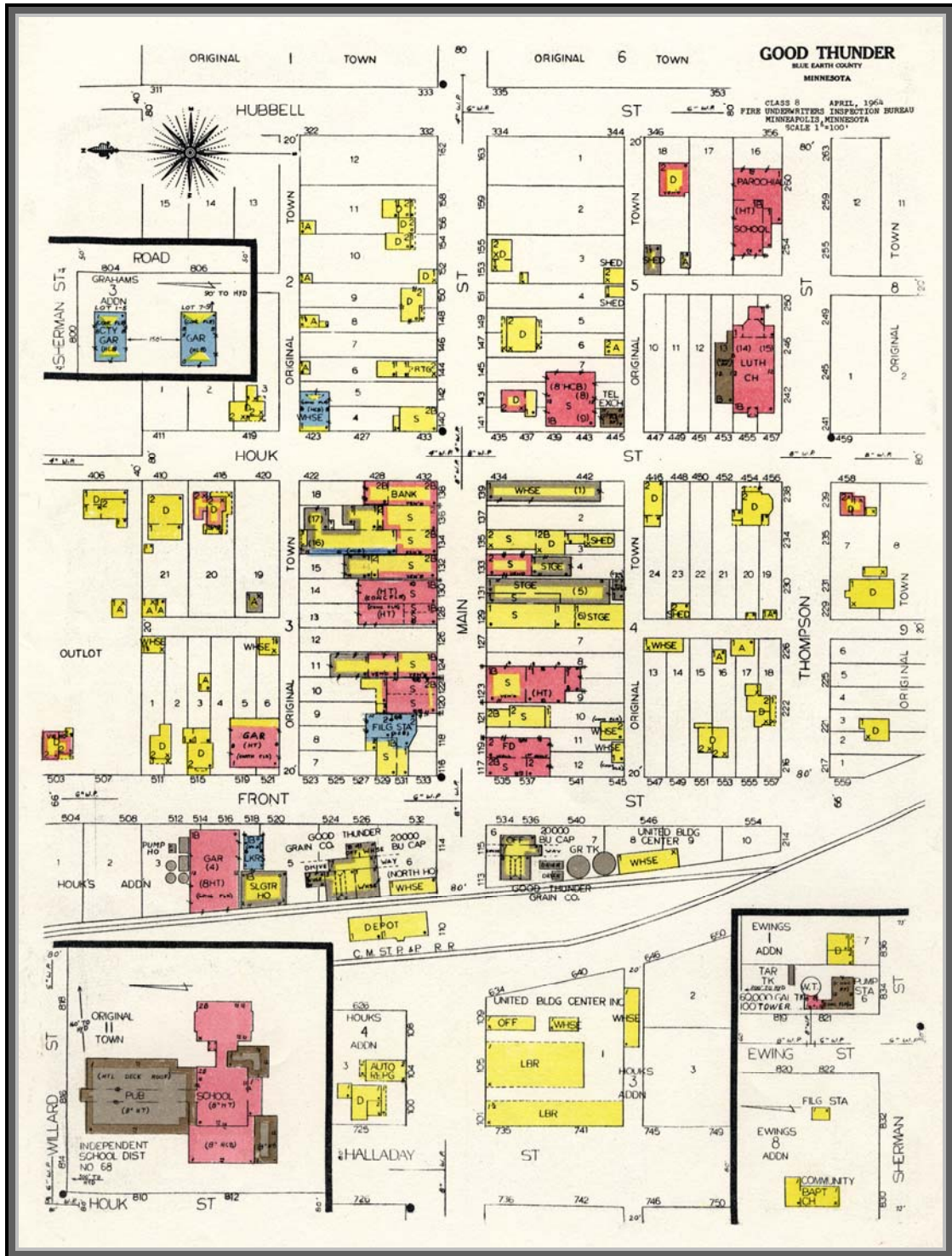
<sup>27</sup> Ann Christenson, "Painting on a Grand Design: A Mural on a Grain Elevator," [1989?], unpublished papers in the possession of the Blue Earth County Historical Society.



**Figure 57: Fairway Foods and Home Bakery destroyed by fire, 1960**  
(Image from the *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 17 March 1960.)

**Map 11: Fire Insurance Map of Good Thunder, 1964**

This map details different types of buildings in Good Thunder. Note the garage on Front Street, the filling stations on Ewing and Sherman Streets (inset bottom right) and Main and Front Streets, the city garage on Sherman and Graham Streets (inset top left), and the two silos at the southern grain elevator.



(Map from Fire Underwriters Inspection Bureau Fire Insurance Maps from the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society)

### Sequent Occupance: The Residential Areas

Good Thunder gained some residential housing during this period. Of the existing houses in 2005, only twenty-one were built between 1951 and 1975 and there were no new additions to the village plat, nor subdivisions or developments of any of the existing plat additions.<sup>28</sup> The development pattern seems to have been one of filling in empty lots in the existing residential areas. Most of the home building appears to have taken place in the early 1950s, as evidenced by the advertisements in the *Herald* in 1951 by the First National Bank of Good Thunder. The bank added a modern apartment in the second story of its new addition in 1953, and refinished the existing apartment over the old part of the bank.<sup>29</sup> When the Gnadke's closed their duck hatchery, they converted the building in 1965 into an apartment, which became residential thereafter.<sup>30</sup> The architecture of the era was typically the modern minimal style.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 58: 421 Halliday Street, built in 1952**

Minimal traditional architecture.

(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])

<sup>28</sup> Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database].

<sup>29</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 1951 issues; "New Local Bank Addition," *Good Thunder Herald*, 16 July 1953.

<sup>30</sup> Versatile building entering new era: After 71 years, family selling Good Thunder landmark," *Mankato Free Press*, 20 March 1995.

<sup>31</sup> McAlester and McAlester, 477.





**Figure 59: 130 Middle Street, built in 1961**  
Minimal traditional architecture.  
(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])



**Figure 60: 129 Middle Street, built in 1974**  
Minimal traditional architecture.  
(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])

### Sequent Occupance: Public Space

The Good Thunder volunteer fire department finally received a new home in 1966 to replace their existing building on Main Street next to the bank. The existing building had been in use as a station since the 1930s, and had been renovated at that time for hand- and horse-pulled equipment. It was too small to hold a modern fire tanker, so the volunteer fire men had to use stock tanks on the backs of their trucks when fighting fires. The village council brought the proposal to the voters in 1965 to decide on the bond issue for funding the new station. The issue was passed for \$12,000 in bonds to be raised for the construction, which was supplemented by an additional \$6,000 from the fire department treasury. The new station was built and completed in the summer of 1966, and the fire department held an open house for the residents on 25 September.<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 61: Good Thunder Fire Station, 1965**  
(Photograph courtesy of Sara Froehlich)

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<sup>32</sup> "Bond Issue for Fire Station to be Voted on Next Tuesday," *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 6 May 1965; "Open House at Fire Station," *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 22 September 1966.

St. John's Lutheran School began an extension to their school building in 1954, which added two new classrooms and a library on the east side of the 1937 building.<sup>33</sup> The Good Thunder Public School also completed a new addition for the elementary grades in 1964, which was one story building just to the north of the old school building and the high school.<sup>34</sup> As the 1960s drew to a close, Good Thunder was faced with prospects of a school consolidation with Amboy, which finally occurred in 1970. The consolidation combined the school districts' Kindergarten through sixth grades in the Good Thunder school, and the seventh through twelfth graders at the Amboy school.<sup>35</sup>

#### Sequent Occupance: The Churches

The churches of Good Thunder enjoyed a time of anniversary celebrations between 1950 and 1975, as well as updates and remodeling to the structures. The first anniversary celebration came in 1956 when St. Joseph's Catholic Church celebrated its diamond anniversary. According to the parishioners, the celebration should have been in 1955, but was delayed by one year because they wanted to make use of the new dining hall for the celebration, which was under construction in 1954 and 1955.<sup>36</sup> Further improvements came in the early 1970s when tiling was laid around the building to prevent water seepage, new carpeting was placed in the sanctuary and nave,<sup>37</sup> and a vestibule that was added to the front of the building in 1975.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Good Thunder Herald*, 16 July 1954; *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 21 October 1954.

<sup>34</sup> "Notice of School Opening," *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 3 March 1964.

<sup>35</sup> Landcaster, 229.

<sup>36</sup> "St. Joseph's Parish To Have Diamond Jubilee Celebration," *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 19 April 1956.

<sup>37</sup> "St. Joseph's Church History is Compiled for Centennial Event," *Enterprise-Herald (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 5 September 1979.

<sup>38</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," 227.





**Figure 62: St. Joseph's Catholic Church, 2005**  
Vestibule added in 1975. (Photograph by author)

St. John's Lutheran Church also had various remodeling projects beginning in 1958 when the congregation decided to remodel the chancel, raise the floor of the church, and add a new pulpit. They also added a kitchen in 1960-1961 on the north side of the church building.<sup>39</sup> In 1970 the congregation celebrated their one-hundredth anniversary, held on 11 and 18 October which was marked by a special ringing of the clock tower bells.<sup>40</sup>

The dying community era also saw the death of Good Thunder's third church, when the Immanuel Lutheran Church closed its doors. The congregation, which had

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<sup>39</sup> St. John Lutheran Church, 10.

become smaller, merged with the Redeemer Lutheran Church in Decoria township in 1960. The building stood unused for some years before it was torn down in the mid 1970s.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

The short period of time during which Good Thunder evidenced characteristics of a dying community also gave rise to themes that would become important in the decades to come. Good Thunder saw the beginning of some growth in its first order residential establishment during the early part of this era when the second order retail establishments were still holding their own. However, the changes in the economy and growth of box stores in urban centers also influenced changes in Good Thunder's economic landscape, particularly the decline of businesses on Main Street and the destruction of some of its buildings by fire. In past eras business owners would have rebuilt and reopened the shops, but the fact that these shops closed down and never reopened points out the economic impracticability of such an endeavour. Although farmers began to bring in larger harvests as a result of agricultural improvements, the farm labor force began to fall off during this time. This was caused by better farm machinery that allowed for farming of more land with fewer employees.<sup>42</sup>

Good Thunder's perception of their natural resource base was still focused on the agricultural economy, with the idea that the town should be a small commerce and service center for this economic base. The brief life of the medical clinic points out how

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<sup>40</sup> "St. John Congregation is 100 Years Old. The Church is 71!" *Herald (Good Thunder, Minn.)*, 18 October 1970.

<sup>41</sup> "Lyra Township Churches," 224.

<sup>42</sup> Hart, *Rural Landscape*, 311-313.

the village attempted to hold on to this concept and keep as many services as possible at home. The inability to keep Main Street alive and provide jobs in the agricultural sector forced residents to look to Mankato for jobs, services, and goods.

Good Thunder had not yet seen the path down which the future would lead it, although the village may have caught a glimmer of that path in 1970 when the schools were consolidated. The school consolidation was another feature of transitional occupance<sup>43</sup> which furthered the process of cultural substitution. Good Thunder began to realize that it could no longer be all things for its residents, and the children of Good Thunder were the first to experience that reality when the consolidation intermixed them with children of other communities, exposing them to the cultures of other towns.

Two important themes for Good Thunder's future and continued existence developed during this time. The first was Good Thunder's continuing connection to its past and its history, which manifests in the annual Pioneer-Indian Days event. The second theme was the growing art and antique community in the early 1970s, which would serve as the basis for a radical idea—community rebirth through an economic base supported by the art community.

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<sup>43</sup> Brown, 282.

*Arts and heritage are key to community health and well-being, distinctive identity, and collective pride. They act to preserve the history and identity of our diverse communities, and offer a way to meaningfully evolve these traditions and identities into the future.<sup>1</sup>*

## Chapter 9

### The Phoenix Saga: Metamorphosis through Culture, 1975-2005

#### Cultural Landscape

Good Thunder's recent history begins with the slow realization that its self-image of place was no longer congruent or adaptable to the reality of the cultural landscape without some sort of fundamental change. Halloween was still a party event for the children until 1979 when door-to-door trick-or-treating was revived.<sup>2</sup> The Booster Club was still functioning, but they were not yet allowing women to join. The existing businesses were trying to hold on, but most closed shop by 1980. The bank still had cages and indoor décor from the early twentieth century with a matching philosophy on banking practices. Good Thunder residents reminisced about the days when the village was self-sufficient, when there were two banks and four grocery stores, when the hotel and the passenger train were active, and when the clinic was offering medical services.<sup>3</sup>

A malaise had settled over the town in the early 1970s, which was particularly

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<sup>1</sup> "Building Community Identity and Pride," in "Creating Economic and Social Benefits for Communities," *Creative City News* special ed. 1, section 5 (2004), <http://www.creativecity.ca/news/special-edition/>, accessed 14 November 2005.

<sup>2</sup> "'To Trick or Treat, or Party' Haunts Good Thunder Residents," *Enterprise-Herald (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 24 October 1979.

evident in 1976 when no one filed to run for mayor. Some of the residents knew of a new family who had moved to town the year before, however, that might offer some hope for the village. John and Ann Christenson and their two children had moved to Good Thunder from Florida in February 1975, seeking a home with land for gardening near Mankato where John worked as the new director of the Traverse des Sioux Library System. Having learned that he had been successful writing and receiving federal grants in his career, the Good Thunder Mother's Club, which was an active group in the village, asked John to run as mayor and created a write-in campaign. The campaign was successful, John won the election with 120 write-in votes, and began a new second career, serving over fifteen years as mayor.<sup>4</sup>

The village began to rise from its own metaphorical ashes under Christenson's tenure as mayor, transforming through community involvement, cultural heritage, and a daring idea to move the village into a new economic niche. The primary tool behind such a metamorphosis, however, would not be possible without communication. The importance of communication for this endeavour is evident in one of the first tasks the village undertook down this new road of rebirth, which was the creation of a land use plan for the village to guide future growth. The village employed a student from Gustavus Adolphus College to conduct the assessment and write the plan under the guidance of the Region Nine Development Commission, which addressed existing land use, soils, sewer serviceable areas, transportation infrastructure, and topography.

The zoning policies are of particular interest in the land use plan, because they

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<sup>3</sup> Interview, 6 October 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, 27 July 2005; Interview, 6 October 2005; "Mayor Keeps Good Thunder Rolling," *Mankato Free Press*, [1979], undated newspaper article in the possession of the Blue Earth County Historical

illustrate a simple, practical approach to maintaining the existing state of Good Thunder while allowing for growth and development. The agricultural zoning policy sought to achieve balance by controlling “the location of future development so as to minimize encroachment” on the important agricultural land in and around the village, as well as promoting the “current farm size and operation trend.”<sup>5</sup> The second zoning policy took the logical stance of developing residential construction in existing vacant lots in the plat before proceeding to expansion in existing neighborhoods or developing other areas for residential purposes. Furthermore, areas identified as prime residential zones were to be shielded from other types of development. The plan specifically called for development south of Chapel Street and the northwest quadrant bounded by Miner and Shaubut Streets.<sup>6</sup> The plan called for commercial development to fill in vacant lots in the existing commercial zone, which was maintaining its viability in the current location, and suggested some expansion for some locations on Sherman Street. Finally, the light industry in Good Thunder was suited to the current locations, primarily along the old rail line, as well as the vacant corner of the village in the southwest that would be ideal because of its fringe location and access to county highways 1 and 13. The plan also identified environmental awareness as an issue to watch closely, especially calling for evaluations of development proposals for areas with steep slopes, and to be mindful of protecting natural vegetation.<sup>7</sup> For the first time in its history, Good Thunder began to define its landscape, put it into writing, and use it as a basis for planning and communicating the needs of the village.

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Society. The article states the railroad was abandoned “last spring.” The “Good Thunder Land Use Plan” gives the date of last train before abandonment as 11 March 1978.

<sup>5</sup> “Good Thunder Land Use Plan,” 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> “Good Thunder Land Use Plan,” 10-11.

With the land use plan established, Good Thunder's next task was to look at community revitalization, particularly for the village's downtown area. With the decline of the Booster Club, due mainly to the loss of business owners and burn-out over the years,<sup>8</sup> Ann Christenson and Dennis Anderson re-formed the club as the Good Thunder Area Chamber of Commerce. They presented a downtown revitalization plan in 1979 to the village council, which incorporated elements from Good Thunder's past commercial district with current needs and cultural attitudes. Christenson and Anderson reasoned that the "downtown area now seems to be at a point where major redevelopment could be undertaken in steps without much disruption to existing businesses." Specifically, the plan called for the existing hardware store with the addition of a new grocery store, lumber yard, and small shops, all of which used to exist and thrive in the downtown block. To meet the current needs of the community, the plan proposed a municipal building and community center, with an enclosed walkway and a landscaped seating area. The plan also incorporated the energy conservation awareness resulting from the energy crisis of the 1970s by including solar heating for the development,<sup>9</sup> thus synthesizing aspects of past and present landscapes. The village council approved the Chamber's request to proceed with a determination of applicant eligibility, a necessary first step in seeking a federal Urban Development Action Grant.<sup>10</sup>

By 1980, the Good Thunder commercial district was ailing, and described in a *Mankato Free Press* article thus: "Downtown Good Thunder today is two rows of dilapidated buildings. The old drug store and one other building are vacant. Others are in

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<sup>7</sup> "Good Thunder Land Use Plan," 11-14.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, 6 October 2005.

<sup>9</sup> "Downtown Redevelopment Offered for Good Thunder," *Mankato Free Press*, 9 May 1979.

<sup>10</sup> "Downtown Redevelopment Offered for Good Thunder," *Mankato Free Press*, 9 May 1979.

very poor shape. The second floor of the liquor store and municipal building, for example, is condemned.” As the downtown had deteriorated over the previous thirty



**Figure 63: Main Street, ca. 1980**

View to the north. Demolition of derelict buildings from the 1880s. The corner of Houk Street is out of frame to the right of the image. (Photograph from the collection of the Blue Earth County Historical Society)

years and was in dire need of rebuilding, Mayor Christenson created a plan to apply for federal funds. The plan involved the assistance of Professor Peter Dahm’s Urban and Regional Studies students in his downtown redevelopment seminar at Mankato State University, who would prepare the village’s Urban Development Action Grant. The only concept the students were instructed to keep was the concept of “Good Thundersness” in their plans.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the students’ redevelopment plans needed to incorporate the flavor of the Good Thunder cultural landscape.

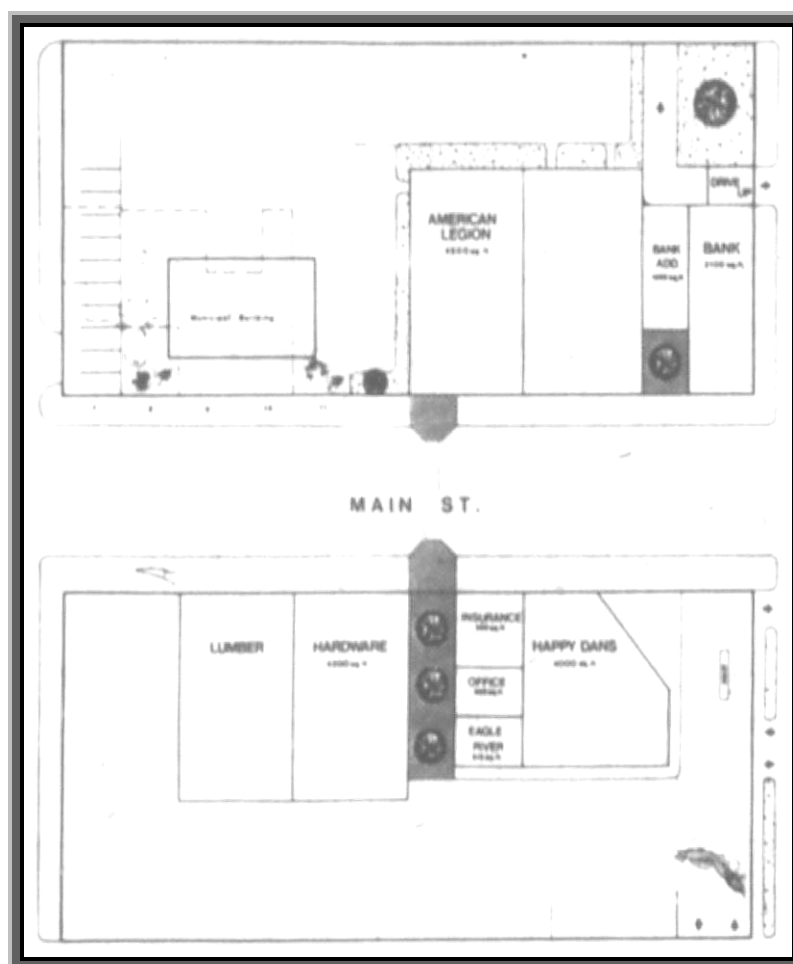
The students broke up into a few groups and created their plans after visiting the village, conducting some field work, and getting a sense of “Good Thundersness.”

Initially, there was some resistance to Christenson’s plan to use students to design and write the grant. One village resident remarked: “What are a bunch of students gonna

<sup>11</sup> Jon Holten, “Good Thunder to redevelop downtown,” *Mankato Free Press*, 15 February 1980.



know? They're just kids, and they haven't lived in Good Thunder." When the students were done, they came to Good Thunder to present their plans to the village. All of the plans called for the demolition of the buildings on the north side of Main Street between Houk and Front Streets except for the bank. The students' plans varied from modern to historical styles. One plan presented a modern-style redevelopment which some of the residents liked, and another sought to preserve "Good Thunderness" by recreating the feel of historic buildings, and added mid-block projections into Main Street to offset the feeling of distance in the eighty-foot wide street. The villagers attending the presentation



**Figure 64: Plan for Main Street revitalization, 1980**  
 (Image from the *Mankato Free Press*, 15 February 1980.)

particularly liked the self-service gas station, lumber store, and earth-sheltered municipal building. The plans were well received by the villages, and even the resident who voiced doubts before the presentation left saying “They really captured the feeling of the town.”<sup>12</sup>

Although the Urban Development Action Grant, as well as all the other grants for which Good Thunder applied, were unsuccessful, they set up the beginnings of Good Thunder’s plan for revitalization for the coming decade. In 1984 the village council applied for a \$30,000 grant from the Blue Earth County Small Cities Economic Development Commission which was successful. With the grant, the village created a \$15,000 revolving loan program which lent \$500 to \$2,000 to local businesses to remodel and refurbish the downtown buildings. Throughout the rest of the 1980s, the program brought an auto body shop, allowed a filling station that had closed in 1984 to re-open, provided financing for Bruscke’s hardware, that otherwise would have closed, and attracted a dentist and beautician to open shop.<sup>13</sup>

### Art and Community

The other half of the grant from Blue Earth County went to the Good Thunder Development Corporation, a non-profit entity formed by Ann Christenson and Dennis Anderson in 1984, which took up the void left by the Booster Club.<sup>14</sup> The purpose of the corporation was to cultivate an arts and crafts niche for Good Thunder in the economic

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<sup>12</sup> Jon Holten, “Good Thunder to redevelop downtown,” *Mankato Free Press*, 15 February 1980.

<sup>13</sup> [Ann Christenson], “Good Thunder Grain Elevator Mural,” (n. p.: n. p., 1987), unpublished paper in the possession of the Blue Earth County Historical Society; Jan Johnson, *Planting Ideas, Cultivating Opportunity, Harvesting Prosperity: a Guide for Rural Economic Development* (Fergus Falls, MN: Communicating for Agriculture, 1988), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, 6 October 2005.

landscape, because the city could no longer afford to “depend on its traditional agricultural economy, nor [was] it in a strong competitive position to attract commerce and industry.” The corporation felt the name Good Thunder was “highly marketable,”<sup>15</sup> and that the village could play off the unique name and the healthy art and antique community developing in the village. The Corporation’s rationale was:

“Rather than compete with every other rural Minnesota community for business or industry, the Good Thunder Development Corporation is trying to create a niche for Good Thunder as a rural center for the arts. . . . We feel our arts thrust has the potential to stimulate cottage industry as well as traditional work in the arts and crafts, providing employment and opportunity to many who have not been able to afford the basics for even part time work of this nature. The impact of their increased purchasing power will affect our local businesses. To our knowledge, no other rural community has undertaken a project of this nature. While we recognize the risk, we feel that an extraordinary attempt to develop an untapped resource is necessary.”<sup>16</sup>

The first step in the corporation’s grand plan was a project entitled “Painting on a Grand Design,” which was to paint a mural of the village’s cultural history, to attract attention and new residents, and to be a “beacon to artists wanting to live in a small town.”<sup>17</sup> The project took “advantage of that ubiquitous feature of Midwestern landscape—the grain elevator—and [turned] it into a vehicle of artistic expression. It [was] the centerpiece and inaugural activity for an ongoing effort to attract artists and craftspeople to Good Thunder.” “Painting on a Grand Design” won the Minneapolis Valspar Corporation’s Minnesota Picture-It-Beautiful Competition that yielded 1,100 gallons of paint for the project.<sup>18</sup>

The project also marked a turning point for Good Thunder. Although the Good

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<sup>15</sup> Ann F. Christenson, “‘Painting on a Grand Design,’ Good Thunder Elevator Mural Project: Fact Sheet” (n. p.: n. p., 1987), unpublished paper in the possession of the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> [Christenson], “Good Thunder Grain Elevator Mural.”

Thunder Development Corporation developed the idea and pursued the grants necessary to realize the project, many of the long time residents were ambivalent about the project at first.<sup>19</sup> The corporation commissioned noted St. Paul muralist Ta-Coumba Aiken, who had always wanted to paint on a grain elevator, to develop and paint the village's history.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 65: "Painting on a Grand Design" mural**  
(Photograph by author)

<sup>17</sup> Mark Steil, "Good Thunder: Main Street Economics," *Mainstreet Radio*, Minnesota Public Radio, 6 October 1997, audio and transcript available at [http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/199710/06\\_steilm\\_thunder-m/](http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/199710/06_steilm_thunder-m/), accessed 16 July 2005.

<sup>18</sup> [Christenson], "Good Thunder Grain Elevator Mural."

<sup>19</sup> Marjorie Casey, "The Arts Revive a Prairie Town," in *A Rural Arts Sampler: Fostering Creative Partnerships* (Washington, D.C.: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 1992), 24; Interview, 6 October 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Steil, "Good Thunder: Main Street Economics," *Mainstreet Radio*, Minnesota Public Radio, 6 October 1997; Christenson, "Good Thunder on a Minnesota Grain Elevator," 17-18.

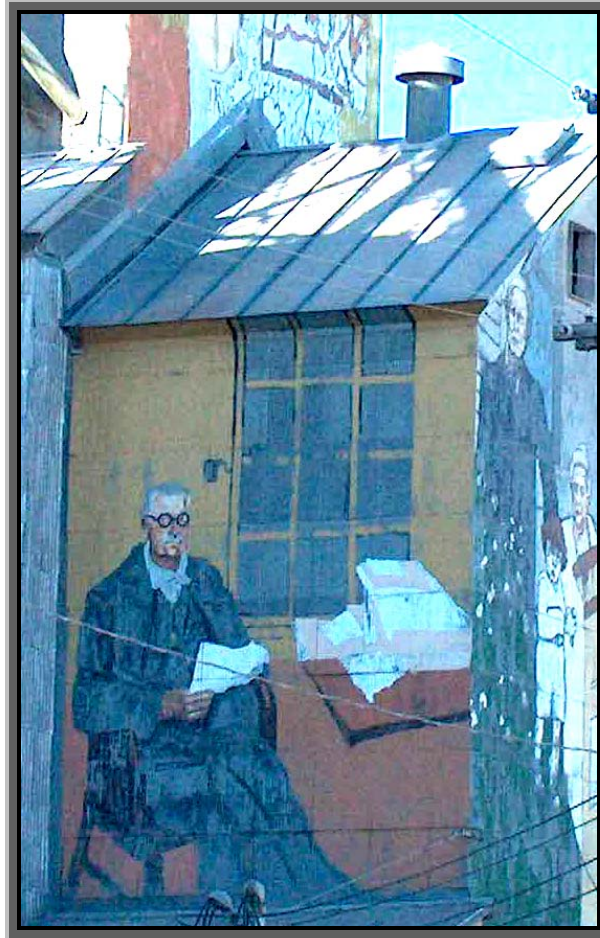


**Figure 66: Detail of storage silo murals**

Clockwise from top left: deer representing abundant wildlife, John Deere tractor, Robert Stratton, VFW color guard, and boys playing in the snow. (Photograph by author)

Aiken worked with the community to select the images that would be painted, integrating photographs and personal memories to create a “family photo album” of Good Thunder on the elevator and two of the storage silos. Aiken began on the mural in the summer of 1987 and completed it in 1988. The first part of the mural to be painted was the forty-foot portrait of Andrew Good Thunder which dominates the north-facing side of





**Figure 67: Mural detail on the south face of the elevator**  
Detail of R. L. Houk. (Photograph by author)

the elevator, and can be seen for miles, greeting visitors and residents as they come into the village from Mankato. Below him, Aiken represents Wakuntchapinka as a Winnebago encampment because there is no portrait of the Winnebago chief, with Andrew Good Thunder's outstretched hand over the encampment linking to two Indian peoples. The west-facing side of the elevator portrays the Graham House hotel with John G. Graham and his wife Loretta Barnard Graham towering beside the hotel. Other images in the mural are a John Deere tractor from the 1970s tractorcade protest, a steam tractor from the early 1900s, a horse-drawn plow from the late 1800s, a large deer representing the bounty of wildlife, children at play in the snow, Robert Stratton, a soldier killed in

World War II, with an American Legion color guard standing in front of his image, and R. L. Houk, one of the original founders of the village and first owner of the elevator. Aiken also added an image of his own to the mural, two children with a computer in a corn field,<sup>21</sup> which embody Aiken's "vision of the future for rural America—a dream that technology, agriculture and small town values can merge and encourage young people to pursue careers in rural towns."<sup>22</sup>

The mural put Good Thunder on the proverbial map. The project was picked up by news media across the region. A Twin Cities news station reporter came in a helicopter and landed on Main Street to cover the story. It was covered in all the Twin Cities newspapers and TV stations, in other newspapers across the region and the state, and on Minnesota Public Radio.<sup>23</sup> The mural also made headlines in papers across the nation<sup>24</sup> and even internationally when the story was covered on the BBC.<sup>25</sup> This recognition of a village portraying its history as art helped to renew a spark of community pride.

But the mural brought much more than just community pride and brief notoriety to the community. Aiken in particular, a likable and dynamic person,<sup>26</sup> was instrumental in bringing the people together to make it their mural, their story, and even had the community participating in painting the portion of the mural depicting the Winnebago encampment.<sup>27</sup> When the Good Thunder Development Corporation began soliciting

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<sup>21</sup> Christenson, "Good Thunder on a Minnesota Grain Elevator," 20; Barbara Krupp Selyem, "Old Time Elevators," *Grain Journal*, June 1999, 34; Casey, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Casey, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Christenson, "Good Thunder on a Minnesota Grain Elevator," 20.

<sup>24</sup> Bob Wiedrich, "The Art of Economic Development: Civic Leaders Aim for Tourism Dollars in Painting Minnesota Town," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 October 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, 6 October 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, 6 October 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Christenson, "History."

donations for the mural as the project took off, they specifically did not ask for contributions from local residents because the recession and the depressed local economy made it a hardship. Nevertheless, donations came in from the local community, ranging from \$20 from a retired priest to \$300 from a retired businessman.<sup>28</sup> The people also came together in planning meetings, bringing their photographs and selecting the images the mural should portray, and created a sense of community that the organizers had not anticipated. “Old enemies began reminiscing, and long forgotten events in community history were recalled. A great deal of pride has been generated.” The mural not only brought new visitors to the village,<sup>29</sup> it inspired new optimism for the art community niche and the future of the community.<sup>30</sup>

As had been hoped, the mural did inspire at least one artist to move to Good Thunder. Gary Fey, a native of Chicago, moved to Good Thunder in 1989, looking for a small town to practice his art where he and his wife could raise their son. Fey is well known for his hand-painted silk and textile designs used by high-end fashion designers like Oscar de la Renta and Bill Blass.<sup>31</sup> Fey knew he needed community support in order to make it in Good Thunder, and with help from a grant from the Good Thunder Development Corporation in 1990, created a unique monument of the village’s history. The monument, entitled “Portrait of a Village,” is a six foot silk painting cast in polyresin and mounted in native Kasota stone on the southwest corner of Main and Houk Streets. Fey wanted the monument to reflect not only Good Thunder’s past, but to also address the village as it was at the time, including the modern commerce and economic landscape

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<sup>28</sup> Christenson, “‘Painting on a Grand Design’,” Casey, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Christenson, “‘Painting on a Grand Design’.”

<sup>30</sup> Casey, 29.



of the present. Fey created six different sketches and invited the community to view and to choose which sketch would become the painting. It is interesting to note that the sketch the community chose was the one that had the most information in it and was the most difficult for Fey to create.<sup>32</sup>

The sense of community that the grain elevator mural inspired also came to light during Fey's work on his art piece. A retired farmer made the plywood frame for the resin cast, a farmer took time from planting season to dig the foundation for the monument with his backhoe, and a local mason helped install the monument in the Kasota stone.<sup>33</sup> The "Portrait of a Village" monument measures seven feet high and nine feet across with the Kasota stones. The painting technique used only red, yellow, and blue dyes which Fey layered to produce "tones and hues that have a translucence reminiscent of stained glass." The images are set against the Maple River and include both of the Good Thunder Indian chiefs, "a frontier soldier, a pioneer woman and a dairy farmer, as well as the public school, the Lutheran Church, the train depot and Bud Barnard's farm just west of town." Fey said the installation of the completed monument is a "technological phenomenon," and the world's first outdoor silk mural.<sup>34</sup> What makes it unique is that the silk painting is cast in polyresin to protect it from the elements and ultra-violet light.<sup>35</sup> Good Thunder had several other artists in and around the community during the 1990s, either artists who moved there, or natives who practiced some form of art. Linda Nicholson, a stencilist, moved to Good Thunder from California to be near her

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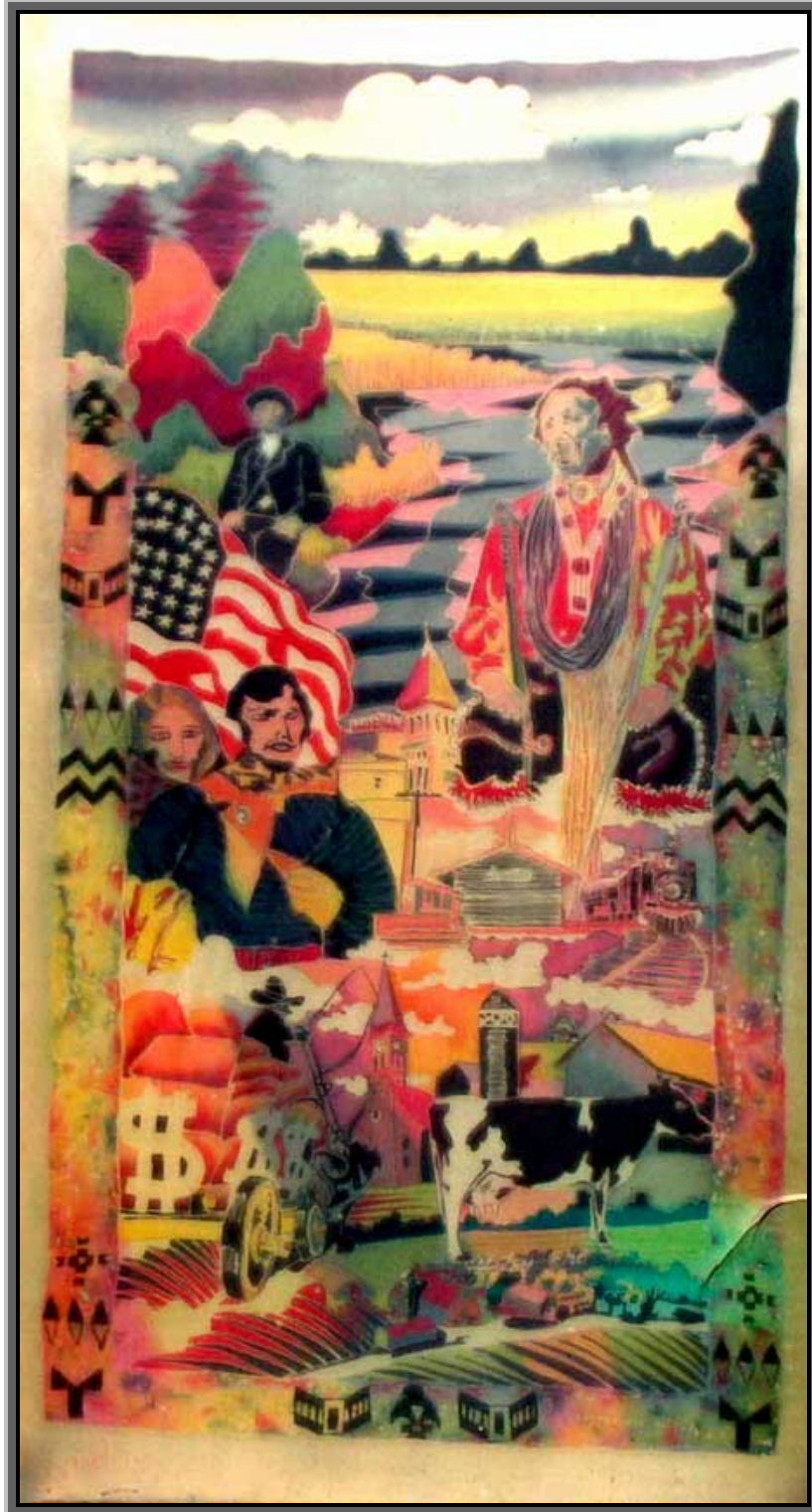
<sup>31</sup> Alice Vollmar, "Good Thunder: A Small Town Cultivates the Arts," *Minnesota Calls*, May/June 1992, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Joe Tougas, "Artist Captures Good Thunder in Polyresin," *Mankato Free Press*, 28 June 1990; Vollmar, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Joe Tougas, "Artist Captures Good Thunder in Polyresin," *Mankato Free Press*, 28 June 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Casey, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Joe Tougas, "Artist Captures Good Thunder in Polyresin," *Mankato Free Press*, 28 June 1990.



**Figure 68: "Portrait of a Village"**  
Silk painting in polyresin. (Photograph by author)



**Figure 69: "Portrait of a Village" monument**  
Monument on Main and Houk Streets. (Photograph by author)

sister. The poet Susan Stevens Chambers lived outside of town with her husband, the nature photographer Richard Chambers. Mildred Hoppe, another poet, lived nearby and her son Tom had a pottery business on their farm. Yet another poet, Mavis Christensen, lived a little farther outside of town near the Cobb River where she ran a bed and breakfast, Carol Wingen created dried flower arrangements in a nearby granary, and Betty Cords created soft-sculpture wall panels at her home just north of the village. It was, however, more of a happenstance that these artists lived in the area, rather than a result of the Good Thunder Development Corporation's plan to foster the art community niche.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Vollmar, 24-25.

The corporation recognized this coincidence, and knew that the community art works had not brought much in the way of economic gain, but that the art and tourism had helped the town hold on to what it had downtown. In the end, the corporation's art niche idea died away, the corporation acknowledging that more knowledgeable leadership might have helped the community sustain and foster their daring idea.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, even as the tumult caused by the art works slowly died away, Good Thunder's population was growing slightly, and new construction in the residential areas was taking place. The village was no longer dying, it was growing and healthy, but not the way it was in those halcyon days of yore. As Good Thunder banker Dennis Meyer put it in a 1994 interview: "Our opportunity is to be a bedroom community to Mankato. That isn't all bad."<sup>38</sup>

### Transportation

As Good Thunder's prospects hit bottom in the mid 1970s before taking an upturn with the development and renewed sense of community, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad was also facing a depression and demise from which it never recovered. Failed mergers, competition from other rail companies, the economic recession of the 1970s, and the highly developed infrastructure of the Interstate highway system which made freight transportation less profitable brought the railroad to its knees in December 1977.<sup>39</sup> The train, which had come through Good Thunder daily since the end of passenger service in 1952 made its last run through the village on 11 March 1978,

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<sup>37</sup> Vollmar, 25; Interview, 6 October 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Joe Spear, "Good Thunder Readies for Big Boom," *Mankato Free Press*, 8 August 1994.

<sup>39</sup> Luecke, 196-200.



after which the rail bed was abandoned and the tracks removed.<sup>40</sup> The rail line today is no more than a relict visible from the air as a sweeping curve through the village and some linear depressions in the fields north of town. The old bed by the elevator has been replaced with a driveway for tractor-trailers transporting grain to and from the grain elevator and its storage silos.



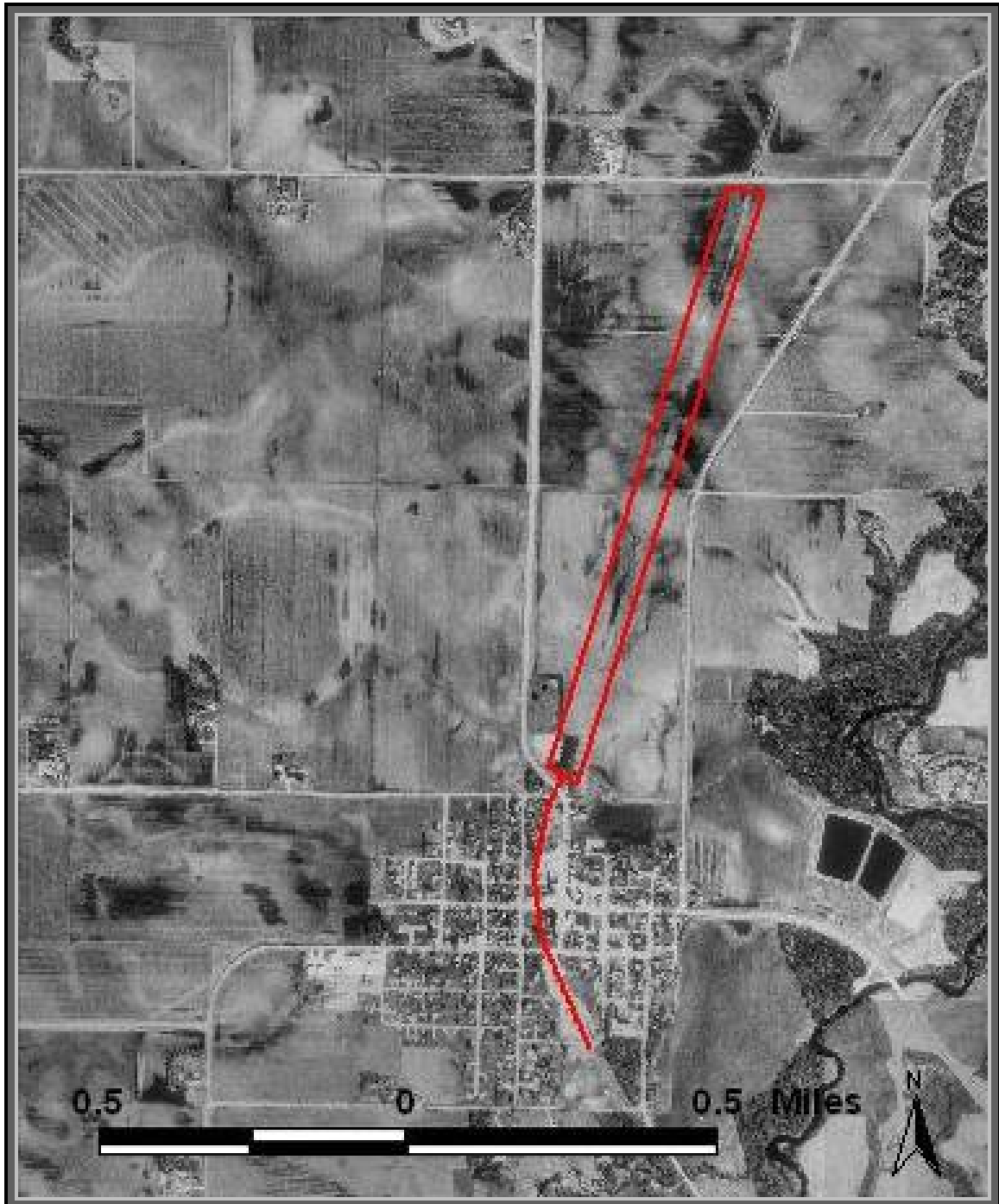
**Figure 70: Abandoned rail bed at the grain elevator**  
(Photograph by author)

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<sup>40</sup> “Good Thunder Land Use Plan,” 8.

**Map 12: Railway palimpsest in the landscape**

The red line shows the course of the former rail line through Good Thunder. The red trapezoid highlights the imprint of the rail bed in the landscape.



(Air photo from U.S. Geological Survey digital orthophoto quad, 1991, available from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Data Deli, <http://deli.dnr.state.mn.us/>, accessed 23 April 2005.)

Today Good Thunder is serviced by four County State Aid Highways and Minnesota State Highway 66. County highway 35 comes into Good Thunder from the north. It is paved within the village corporate limits, turning into a gravel road which parallels State Highway 66, before turning east where it intersects highway 66 about five miles north of the village. County highway 10 leads east of Good Thunder, crossing the Maple River and provides access to the village of Beauford and Minnesota State Highway 22 six miles to the east. Blue Earth County upgraded the road to nine-ton capacity in 1979.<sup>41</sup> County Highway 1 begins at the eastern corporate limits of Good Thunder, running as Main Street, south one block as Ewing Street, turning left as Sherman Street and leading out of the village and curving to the south where it provides access to Amboy. Just after the curve on County Highway 1 is the junction of County Highway 13 which leads west over the Blue Earth River to U.S. Highway 169, providing access to Lake Crystal and Interstate Highway 90. Finally, Minnesota State Highway 66, formerly County Highway 1, leads north through rolling hills and curves over the Blue Earth River past Mount Kato through the Skyline village and into the western edges of Mankato.

These highways have been altered and upgraded over the past thirty years as Good Thunder has developed into a bedroom community. Comparison of air photos over time show how the roads have been altered from right angle intersections and turns into more curving paths which allow automobile traffic greater speeds. Even with these adjustments to the highways, commuters from Good Thunder to Mankato had a thirty minute commute time because State Highway 66 was the only paved course into Mankato. Then in 1994 Blue Earth County completed a bypass, which paved the section

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<sup>41</sup> "Good Thunder Land Use Plan," 8.

of County Highway 35 from its intersection at State Highway 66 east to County Highway 16, which becomes Stolzmann Road at County Highway 90. This allowed for easier, quicker access to the state university and southern entrances into Mankato proper, such as Monks Avenue and State Highway 22, cutting the commuting time for many residents down to a fifteen- to twenty-minute drive.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Joe Spear, "Good Thunder readies for big boom" *Mankato Free Press*, 8 August 1994.



**Map 13: Good Thunder Area Roads, 1938 and 1971**

Note the changes to the highway in the north-east quadrant and the added curvature of the road leading due West from the village.



(Air photo BIP-3-38 (1938) and BIP-2-MM-50 (1971) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service air photos of Blue Earth County.)

### Sequent Occupance: The Business District

As previously discussed, the business district in Good Thunder continued to decline through the remainder of the 1970s. Even with the attempted move to the economic art niche, businesses found it difficult to remain operational in Good Thunder. The Good Thunder Arts pottery shop which had opened in the early 1970s had since closed. The new Good Thunder Pottery opened its doors in 1978 in the space formerly occupied by the last pottery shop,<sup>1</sup> and a glass blower set up shop in the village during this time. Both art businesses remained active for some years before the owners closed their doors in the early 1980s and moved out of town. The two antique shops in the business district also closed by the end of the 1970s,<sup>2</sup> one of which occupied the north space of the former clinic,<sup>3</sup> now occupied by a printer.<sup>4</sup>

During the mid 1970s Dennis Anderson purchased the First State Bank of Good Thunder from Robert Kunkle. He remodeled the bank offices, getting rid of the cages from the 1900s, and modernized the décor as well as the banking philosophy. He later opened a branch in Mankato<sup>5</sup> on Front Street. Anderson sold both branches of the First State Bank in 1990 to the Lake Crystal National Bank, which changed its name to MinnStar Bank in October 1992, and maintains its business in 2005 in those same three locations.<sup>6</sup> At some point during this period of time, the bank building was sold and reopened as a bar. The bank office moved out of its historic home where it had been since

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<sup>1</sup> "Pottery Wheels to Spin Again," *Enterprise-Herald (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 25 January 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Christenson, "'Painting on a Grand Design?'"

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Larkin, "I think we're going to like it here'," *Mankato Free Press*, 16 July 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, 27 July 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, 6 October 2005.

<sup>6</sup> MinnStar Bank, "History [Web site]," (Lake Crystal, Minn.: MinnStar Bank, 2003), <http://minnstarbank.com/history.html>, accessed 8 October 2005.

1893, to a new site on the northeast corner of Main and Houk Streets.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 71: First State Bank, ca. 1993**

New location of the bank on the corner of Main and Houk Streets, view to the north and west. Note the absence of the buildings to the left of the bank building. (Photograph from the collection of the Blue Earth County Historical Society)



**Figure 72: MinnStar Bank, 2005**

(Photograph by author)

<sup>7</sup> The bank was already at the east end of the block and the bar open in the old bank building by 1993, as seen in: Jim Sinkbeil, "Good Thunder Fire Burn," VHS (personal videotape recording, 15 May 1993). The Fire Insurance Map shows the location of the bank at Main and Houk Streets in 1964.

The C. C. Bruscke & Son hardware store, which was still operating in the same location since it opened in 1897, underwent several changes during this time. An old warehouse on the corner of Main and Houk Streets, which the Brusckes had used for storage, was sold and torn down in 1978.<sup>8</sup> Business declined even more, but the Brusckes applied for and received a loan from the village through the grant program and were able to expand and remodel the premises and remain in business.<sup>9</sup> The Brusckes sold their hardware store to Layne and Alice Brase in 1987, which the couple re-opened as Brase Hardware<sup>10</sup> and were able to maintain for about six more years when they closed their doors. The 1980s also saw the end of the only other long-time business left in Good Thunder. The Wiedenheft grocery store, which had also been operating in the same location next to Brusckes since 1885, was sold to the Happy Dan's Market convenience store chain in 1985.<sup>11</sup> In 2001, the old creamery which had shut down operations in the mid 1970s burnt to the ground, leaving the old bank and the remodeled Happy Dan's Market as the only existing relicts of Good Thunder's distant past.

Ken's Service Station, the old filling station on Front Street across from the feed mill closed in 1984, forcing Good Thunder residents to drive elsewhere for gasoline. The village was able to loan \$10,000 to new owners in 1987 to reopen the filling station,<sup>12</sup> which remained for about five years before it also closed. The station was demolished prior to the removal of most of the north-side Main Street buildings in 1993.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "And the Wals [*sic*] Came A-Tumbling Down!" *Mapleton Enterprise*, 10 May 1978.

<sup>9</sup> Fitzsimmons; [Christenson], "Good Thunder Grain Elevator Mural."

<sup>10</sup> Christenson, "C. C. Bruscke & Son Hardware," 219.

<sup>11</sup> Fitzsimmons.

<sup>12</sup> "Welcome, 'Lazarus'," *Mankato Free Press*, 2 February 1987.

<sup>13</sup> Sinkbeil.





**Figure 73: Garage and Filling Station, ca. 1980**  
Located on Front Street north of Main Street.  
(Photograph from the collection of the Blue Earth County Historical Society)



**Figure 74: Thunder Bar and liquor store, 2005**  
(Photograph by author)

By 1993 the business district of Good Thunder consisted of the bar and liquor store in the old bank building and the Happy Dan's Market. The other shops and the filling station had all closed, and the Bruscke hardware building had been demolished. The north-side buildings were razed by the fire department to build a new fire house, and Good Thunder saw its first commercial development in decades. Mark Pentico of Vernon Center saw an opportunity to open a car wash next to the Happy Dan's Market on the site of the old Bruscke hardware lot. His reasoning was that people in the area had to drive to Mankato to wash their cars, and Good Thunder was a central location in the county for people to access this service. To make the car wash more enticing, Pentico had one stall built of a size that could accommodate grain trucks and muddy farm vehicles.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 75: Car wash (left) and Happy Dan's Market, 2005**  
(Photograph by author)

But the village was still lacking another essential service for many years, which was a restaurant. In 1994 residents had to drive at least ten miles before they could reach the closest restaurant. Mayor Robert Anderson wanted to build on the sense of community developed in the 1980s to have local carpenters and community members

build a restaurant, arguing that if the building were provided, it would be that much easier to attract someone to operate a restaurant.<sup>15</sup> That idea finally became reality in 1996 when the community built the new restaurant, which has remained open under a few different owners since that time.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 76: Thunder Restaurant, 2005**  
(Photograph by author)

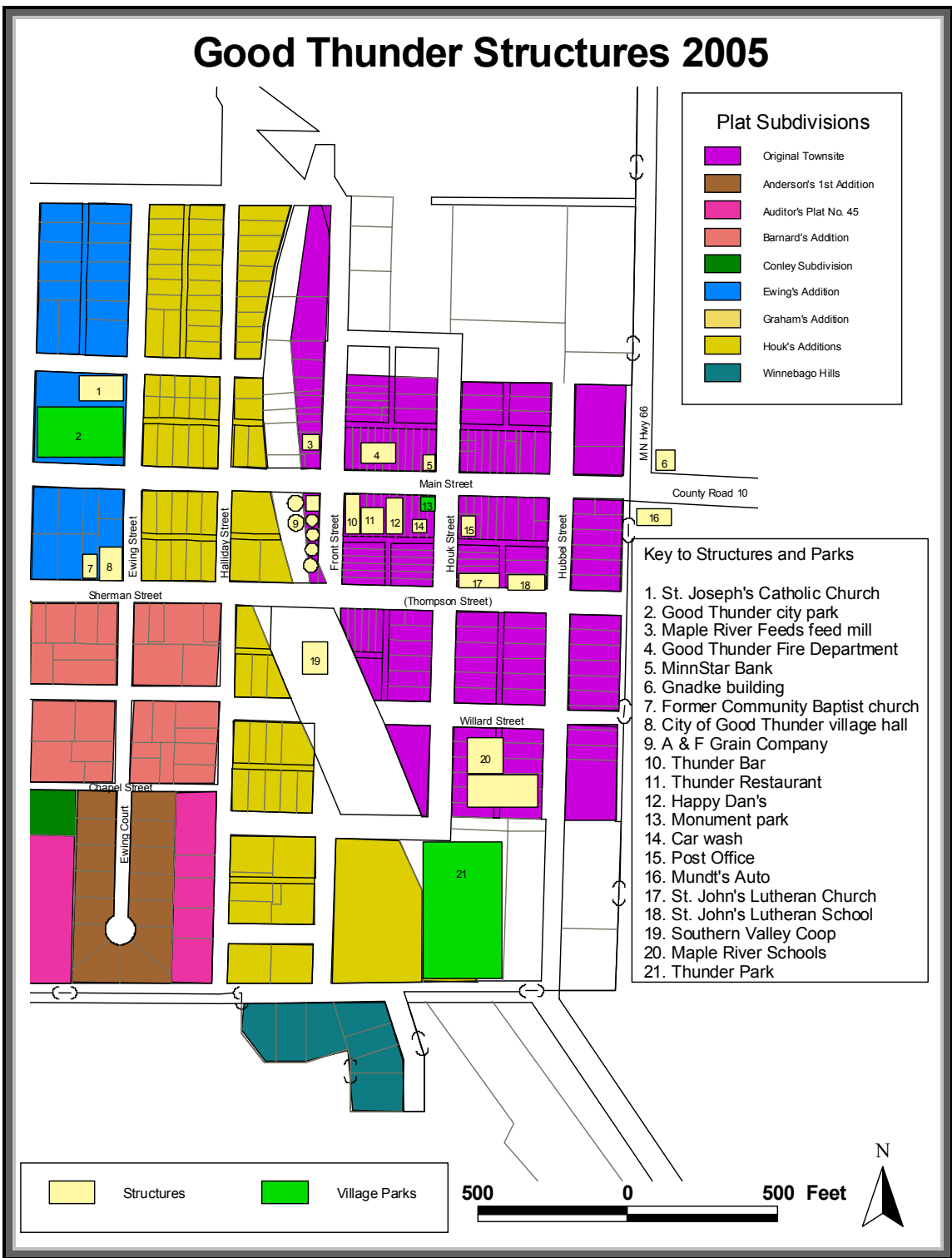
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<sup>14</sup> Joe Spear, "Good Thunder Readies for Big Boom" *Mankato Free Press*, 8 August 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Joe Spear, "Good Thunder Readies for Big Boom" *Mankato Free Press*, 8 August 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Deborah Schubbe, "Jack's Bar & Cafe Opening Soon," *Maple River Messenger (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 21 February 2001.

Map 14: Good Thunder Structures 2005



(Map by author; Digital plat lines courtesy of Bolton & Menk, Inc.)



### Sequent Occupance: The Residential Areas

Good Thunder's era of rebirth is particularly marked by the development of the residential areas, the refurbishment of old buildings into residences, and the construction of new homes. The Baptist church, which had closed in the early 1970s, was sold in 1976, and the building was moved north and west one block to 710 Sherman Street. Today the building has been renovated and stands as a single-family dwelling beside the village hall.<sup>17</sup> The building on Main Street that served first as a school, then a furniture store and funeral home, the post office between 1937 and 1974, and finally as the *Herald* office, was also refurbished as a residential home.



**Figure 77: 710 Sherman Street, 2005**  
Former Episcopal and Baptist church building.  
(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])

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<sup>17</sup> Blue Earth Assessor Office [online database].



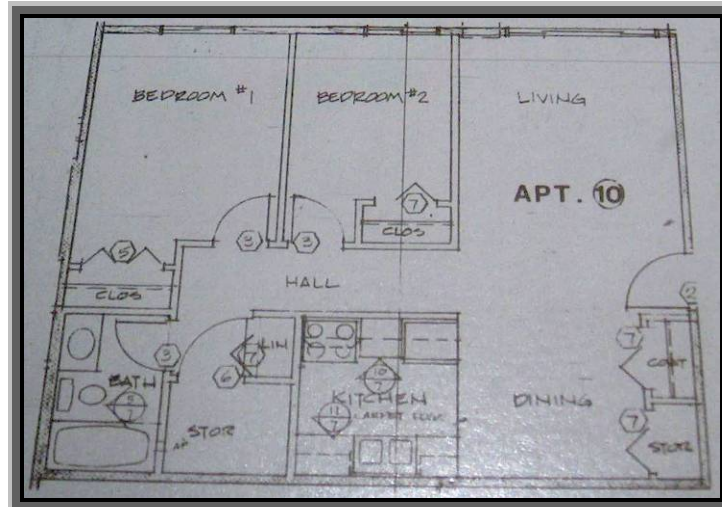
**Figure 78: 344 Main Street, 2005**

Last used as the *Herald* office. National folk house style architecture.  
 (Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])

The late 1970s brought two plans for high-density residential development in Good Thunder, the first an apartment complex, and the second a mobile home park. The apartment complex was constructed in 1978, which was part of a federal program for subsidized housing for senior citizens. One building of the complex was reserved for senior citizens, and the other was built with larger, family sized units. The complex opened for occupancy in March, and was well received by the residents, particularly the senior citizens for whom the complex was a means of remaining in the village as they aged and could no longer take care of their homes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Good Thunder Senior Citizens to See Apartments,” *Enterprise-Herald* (Mapleton, Minn.), 1 February 1978.



**Figure 79: Apartment floor plan, 1978**

(Image from *Enterprise-Herald (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 1 February 1978.)

The mobile home complex was more contentious among the Good Thunder residents. The idea for a mobile home park had been around since 1979, and was mentioned in the land use plan as undeveloped. The land use plan called for a planned park rather than simply allowing mobile homes to be installed in the lots.<sup>19</sup> A developer proposed a plan in 1983 called the Indian Hills Mobile Home Park, consisting of twenty-four lots as a subdivision of block five in Ewing's Addition and part of the Hiller property.<sup>20</sup> The village residents brought a petition with eighty-one signatures against the development of the park to the village council meeting when the rezoning request was brought to the table.<sup>21</sup> Although the village council approved the rezoning request,<sup>22</sup> the mobile home park was never built, and the property stood vacant until it was developed as the Hiller Circle subdivision in 2000. Seven houses have been built on the property between 2000 and 2004.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Good Thunder Land Use Plan," 13.

<sup>20</sup> Blue print in possession of the City of Good Thunder.

<sup>21</sup> "Good Thunder Council Delays Rezoning Decision," *Mankato Free Press*, 24 August 1983.

<sup>22</sup> Mike Zwaschka, "Good Thunder OKs Mobile Home Park," *Mankato Free Press*, 7 September 1983.

<sup>23</sup> Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database].

The village council also looked for opportunities for residents to upgrade and remodel their homes. In 1995 the village revived a grant for \$690,460 from the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development, of which \$310,000 was set aside specifically for home improvements such as “roof repair, insulation, electrical and plumbing work, new siding, and other basic improvements.” The eligibility for money from the grant was based on income, and village officials estimated that they would be able to provide funding to some twenty-eight single-family, owner-occupied homes. The hope was that these improvements would inspire their neighbors to also improve their properties. The remainder of the grant money was used to upgrade the sewage treatment system east of the village, which had only two of its four lagoons in operation because of leakage into the Maple River.<sup>24</sup>

The first new residential construction in Good Thunder occurred during the era of rebirth occurred mainly in vacant lots in Graham’s Addition and Ewing’s Addition in the 1970s. Beginning in 1979, new subdivisions were created from undeveloped areas south of Chapel Street, followed in the 1980s by subdivisions in the undeveloped areas of the Ewing’s Addition. In 1984, a small subdivision was created on the top of a sloped area on the south end of the village with seven half-acre lots; however, only two houses were ever built. In all, Good Thunder gained forty-seven new homes between 1976 and 2004,<sup>25</sup> in various architectural styles, ranging from pre-fabricated ramblers, modern gabled construction, and even an earth-berm home.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mike Zwaschka, “Good Thunder OKs Mobile Home Park,” *Mankato Free Press*, 7 September 1983.

<sup>25</sup> Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database]; Cadastral maps in the possession of Blue Earth County, Tax Payer Services, Maps Division.

<sup>26</sup> McAlester and McAlester, 477-499.



**Figure 80: 210 Miner Street, built in 1979**  
Ranch style architecture.  
(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])



**Figure 81: 511 Hiller Drive, built in 1984**  
Earth-berm ranch style architecture.  
(Photograph by author)

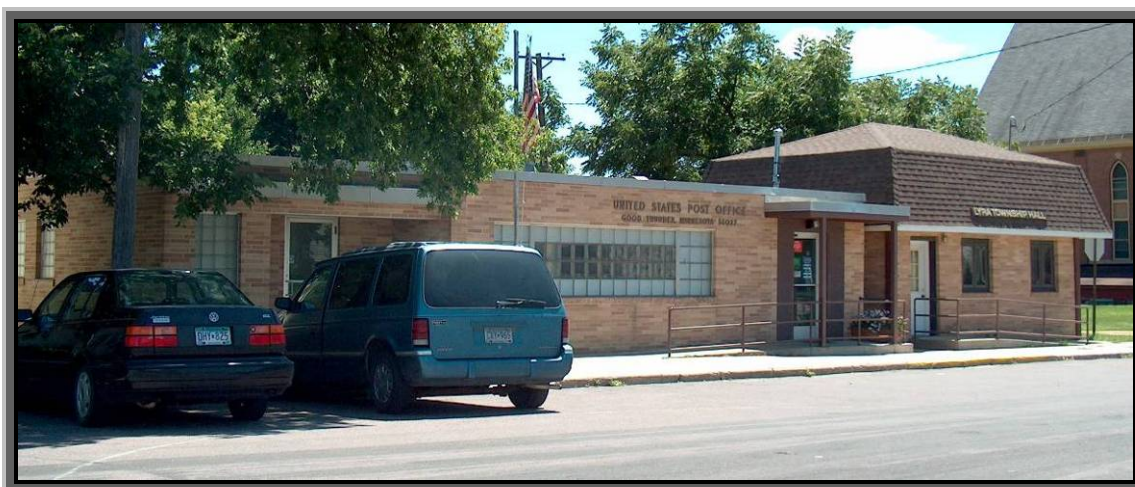


**Figure 82: 216 Middle Street, built in 2004**  
Modern minimal traditional architecture.  
(Photograph from the Blue Earth County Assessor Office [online database])



### Sequent Occupance: Public Space

The closure of the medical clinic in the late 1960s left the village with a rather modern building to fill. During the 1970s, the Good Thunder post office, which was located at 344 Main Street, began to see more mail delivery as more homes were built in the area of service. In 1975, the Good Thunder and Vernon Center rural postal routes were merged, necessitating need for more space for mail sorting. The clinic was remodeled for use by the post office, which moved to its new locale in July 1976.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 83: Printer, Good Thunder Post Office, and Lyra Township Hall**  
(Photograph by author)

The space on the north end of the building served as the mayor and village clerk's office after the antique shop closed until 1993 when the old fire station was remodeled for the village hall.<sup>28</sup> The telephone company vacated the addition on the south end during the 1980s, which was converted into the Lyra Township Hall.

A boon for public park space came to Good Thunder in 1977. The village had always leased space on farm land for its baseball field which has been in various locations over time. The last location was on the southeast part of town just down the hill

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Larkin, "I think we're going to like it here'," *Mankato Free Press*, 16 July 1976.



from the public school. The village acquired the deed for the park for one dollar from the Amboy-Good Thunder school district in exchange for forgiving special assessments for a new sewer line on the property. The village council applied for a grant to install bleachers, ball field lights, and a rest room with a warming house for the ice rink, estimated at \$17,000.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 84: Thunder Park**

The warming house is at the center of the image, bleachers on the left and right of the field under fixed awnings. A pavilion to the lower right has playground equipment, and some playground equipment exists to the right out of the image view. Center left is a tennis and basketball court. (Photograph by author)

More signs of the village’s rebirth and commitment to upgrading the village’s services occurred in 1979 with the approval of the 1980 village budget. The council voted to increase the village’s portion of property taxes to raise the budget from \$28,500 in 1979 to \$34,400. The council ear-marked the additional money to replace village truck, install insulation at the fire station, provide raises for city employees, and provide street

<sup>28</sup> Sinkbeil.

<sup>29</sup> “Good Thunder Gets Siebrands Park Deed,” *Mankato Free Press*, 10 September 1977.

improvements.<sup>30</sup>

The biggest change in Good Thunder's structural landscape came in 1993 when the village council wanted to demolish the condemned buildings on the north side of Main Street, and teamed up with the fire department, which eagerly accepted the task as a



**Figure 85: Condemned buildings on Main Street, 1993**  
(Photograph courtesy of Sara Froehlich)

training exercise. The planned burn occurred on 15 May 1993. Several other volunteer fire departments and emergency response crews also participated in the exercise. The whole of the north side of Main Street between Front and Houk Streets, excepting the bank were demolished in the blazing fire which the majority of the village came to watch. The cleared space became the home of a new, bigger, cement-construction fire hall, with space for growth and for the newer, bigger fire trucks needed by the department. The fire department had outgrown its previous home built in 1965, due to the increasing area of

<sup>30</sup> "Good Thunder Council Approves 1980 Budget," *Mankato Free Press*, 10 October 1979.

coverage in the county for which the department is responsible.<sup>31</sup> Map 15 shows the areal coverage of the Good Thunder volunteer fire department, which serves all of Lyra Township, most of Rapidan, and parts of Beauford, Decoria, and Garden City Townships.



**Figure 86: Burning buildings, 1993**  
(Photograph courtesy of Sara Froehlich)



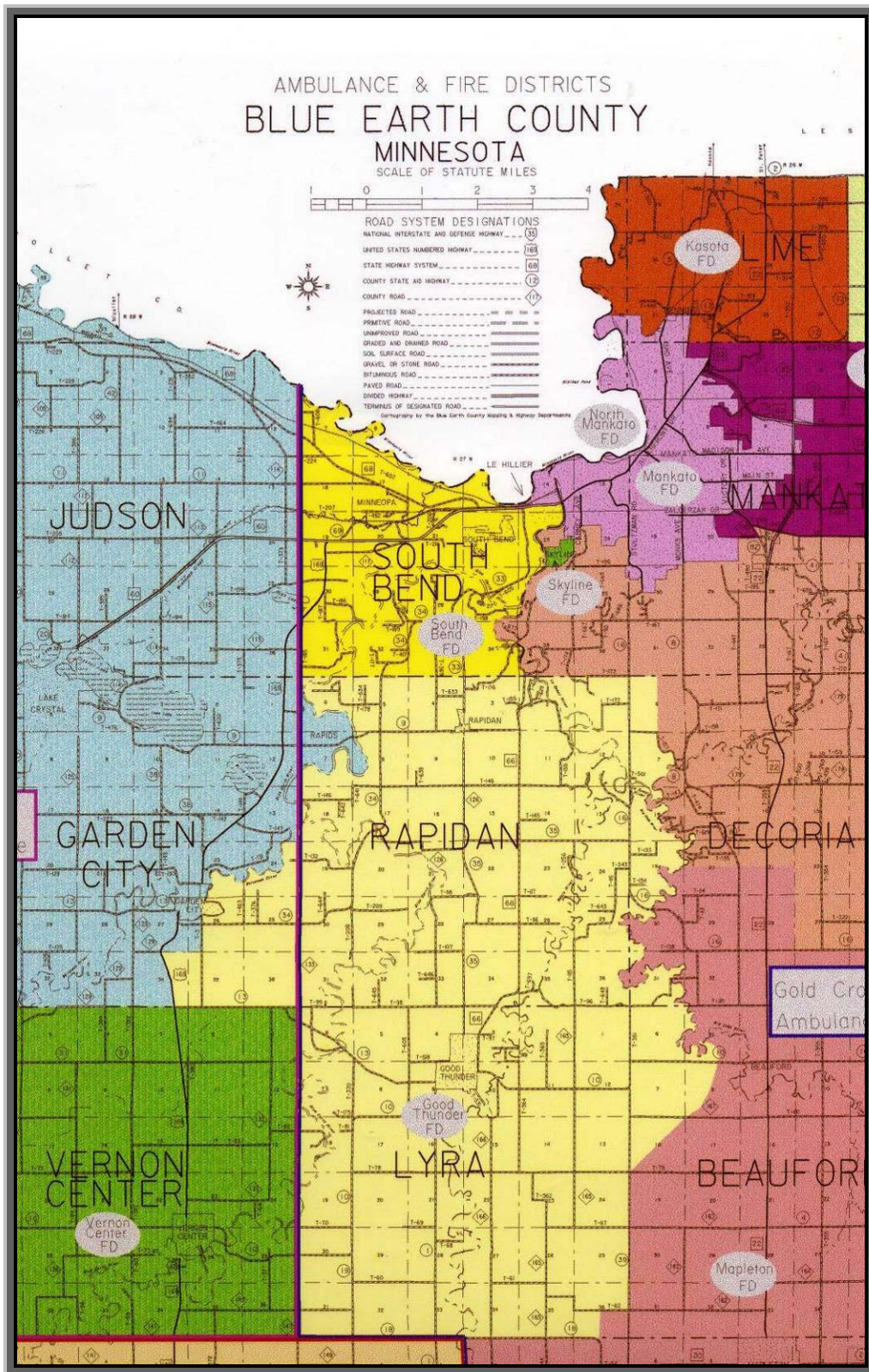
**Figure 87: Good Thunder Fire Department, 1996**  
(Photograph courtesy of Sara Froehlich)

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<sup>31</sup> Sinkbeil.



Map 15: Ambulance & Fire Districts, Blue Earth County



(Section of map reproduced from Blue Earth County Mapping & Highway Departments, *Ambulance & Fire Districts: Blue Earth County* (Mankato: Blue Earth County, 2002?).)



**Figure 88: Good Thunder City Office, 1994**

The fire station built in 1965 was converted for use as the village offices for the mayor and clerk, the police chief, and public meetings. The building also houses the American Legion Post, has a free book exchange, and displays some of the village memorabilia in the refinished oak display cabinets from the old drug store. (Photograph by author)

The public school in Good Thunder saw further consolidation with other systems in the county in 1987. The new system had Kindergarten through sixth grade students at the Good Thunder site, seventh and eighth graders went to Amboy, and high school students to the Mapleton high school. Then in 1989 Minnesota Lake was incorporated into the district, further consolidating the school system. The new system was renamed Maple River Schools. Under the new system, Good Thunder and Amboy students attend Kindergarten through fifth grade students in Good Thunder, and sixth through eighth grades in Amboy. Minnesota Lake kept its elementary and middle schools, Mapleton kept its elementary school and the middle school students attend class in Amboy. All four



communities share the high school in Mapleton.<sup>32</sup>

In 1999, the old school building built in 1892 was torn down. The second floor had been closed for some years because it was unsafe, and the building was no longer needed with the consolidations. However, the residents of Good Thunder decided to remove the tower before the building was demolished. The tower is preserved on a bandstand style deck in the vacant lot where the first smithy once stood, on the corner of Main and Houk Streets,<sup>33</sup> with the “Portrait of a Village” monument and the World War II memorial. In addition to these elements of Good Thunder’s history, the village placed a peace post to the east of the school tower with the text “May Peace Prevail On Earth” in English, German, Dakota, and Spanish. This post not only represents the languages of three of Good Thunder’s cultures, but also adds Spanish in recognition of the growing Hispanic population in Minnesota. The peace post with the quote on the Good Thunder Forde monument (Figure 3) are also representative of the fact that the landscape of Good Thunder was never a site of conflict between the white settlers and the Indians, or between the European cultures that settled the village. Furthermore, the message embodies the character of Good Thunder as a tranquil bedroom community, where residents may live in peace.

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<sup>32</sup> Landcaster, 229.

<sup>33</sup> *Maple River Messenger (Mapleton, Minn.)*, 14 July 1999.



**Figure 89: Old School Tower, 2005**

“Portrait of a Village” monument on the left, World War II memorial on the right. (Photograph by author)





**Figure 90: Peace Post**

“May Peace Prevail On Earth” in English, German, Dakota, and Spanish. (Photography by author)

## Conclusion

The past thirty years of Good Thunder's history may be characterized as an era of sweeping change that touched almost all aspects of the cultural landscape. The village's perception of its resources moved away from the agrarian, and the village leaders attempted to guide the village to a new economic resource by developing an art community niche. The niche had a brief life, but tapered off and was, in the end, not successful. Instead, the changes in the greater society molded Good Thunder into a bedroom community, which the village has taken up with quiet equanimity, maintaining its small town values, atmosphere and sense of safety. The cultural practices of the village altered on many different levels. The people abandoned their version of Halloween in favor of the practice in the greater culture of the United States. The village even obliterated the old town face of Main Street, erasing much of the past in favor of function and practical use, rather than see the business district sit as a crumbling ruin of past days. The most dynamic event by far was not so much the grain elevator mural, but the community it rekindled and the pride in the village which it fostered.

Good Thunder stands today primarily as a residential community. The majority of its occupance is first order residential establishments, with minimal second order service establishments. Good Thunder's move toward the bedroom community status is in part a response to a global pattern of migration, in which the population of the world's cities is increasing. The increasing urban expansion and the ills that permeate those urban areas wear on the soul of many urban residents, who are now looking toward rural communities as places to live. They view these small bedroom communities as ideal because they perceive these communities as having specific standard-of-living qualities,

such as privacy, rural ambience, and safe environments for raising families. So long as this trend continues, and Good Thunder can escape becoming part of that urban sprawl as Mankato grows larger, the village can rest comfortably on its bedroom community economic landscape for many decades to come.

**Map 16: Good Thunder Air Photo, 2004**



*“The rural landscape is constantly changing. It is always in a state of becoming. We must understand what it was in order to understand and appreciate what it is and what it will become.”<sup>1</sup>*

*~John Frasier Hart*

Chapter 10:

Trade Center to Bedroom Community and Beyond

Unique in its details, Good Thunder’s story is typical of the struggles of villages in Minnesota reacting to changes in transportation, economic realities, and the need for self-sufficiency, and the desire to be part of a larger urban world. The historical geography of Good Thunder tells the story of a village as an entity, its relationship to the overall landscape, and the interaction of the various landscapes which produced a village with a unique personality. Air photos, narratives of economic activities, photographs of businesses, churches and homes are all essential in telling Good Thunder’s story. They illuminate the picture of a village comprised of families, commerce, agriculture, worship, and cultures. A drive through Good Thunder today does not necessarily reveal its history, because there is very little visual evidence on the surface today to suggest this history or the village’s deeper personality. In many ways Good Thunder is not unlike any other small Midwestern town with its churches, bar, bank, convenience store, and grain elevators, or even community pride. It is unique in that there are not many small towns that have a mural of their history or a small park devoted to preserving and communicating their cultural relicts and history.

The aspects that make this thesis a history are the numerous facts and events from Good Thunder’s past presented in a chronological narrative covering the past one-

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<sup>1</sup> Hart, *Rural Landscape*, 381.

hundred fifty years. The aspects that make this thesis a geography are the places and descriptions which relate to the geographic area. It is the synthesis of history and geography that make this a historical geography, presenting and interpreting the historical events in the context of the cultural landscape. This narrative is constructed from a selective enumeration of geographic and historical realities, taken from extant documentation and chosen to present a coherent and insightful story of one village. The point is that while this thesis is a detailed history in some ways, it is not and could never be a definitive exemplar of Good Thunder history. It is an interpretation of how the culture of the peoples who have lived here over the past two hundred years, the culture of their greater societies, and their perception and use of the land have served to create a fluid meta-landscape, which shifts and evolves with the changes in culture and society.

Maps and air photos in particular demonstrate how cultures influence the physical environment and vice versa, demonstrating cultural changes. For example, a comparison of Maps 3, 4, and 6 communicate the cultural uses, needs, and perceptions of the landscape in Good Thunder's various eras. Map 4 communicates what the landscape is like in simple concepts. The green shading denotes prairie that is ideal for farming and the location of wet lands and rivers. Map 6 tells the reader who owns the properties, the location of the village, and denotes the roads. Map 3 explicitly details the soil types in and around Good Thunder, overlaid on an air photo. Each map is indicative of the communication needs of the time in which they were created. The mid-nineteenth century settler wanted to know what the land looked like in an overall sense to choose where to settle. The mid-twentieth century farmer or land developer would look to the soil map to determine what crops would grow best in the soil types identified on the map or use those

identifications to plan specific development. It is through these comparisons and interpretations that one can interpret the meta-landscape, viewing it as language, or the perception of the relationship between cultures and the physical environment.

The various perceptions and uses of the physical and natural landscape changes are intimately tied to the cultures of the people who have lived in and around Good Thunder and the economic influences of the times. The Indians' use of the landscape included migratory and semi-permanent settlement, hunting of game, gathering of wild fruits and vegetables, and some agriculture. They had no maps or political lines defining their landscape except for those imposed upon them by whites. Furthermore, the entrance and inhabitation of both the Dakota and the Winnebago in the Good Thunder landscape were direct results of cultural conflicts in landscapes farther east. The white settlers from Europe, Canada, New England, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin saw commercial opportunities in the landscape, which they developed according to their cultural and social attributes.

These social attributes, such as ethnicity, income, profession, and education among others, may be used to describe the inhabitants of a community. The differences and similarities of these attributes in human interaction, especially the manner in which these attributes influence the development of landscape, are what gives a community not only its identity, but also its culture.<sup>2</sup> In the social construction of a community, territoriality is an ideology in which a society exists as a concept, created by those people with the power and social distinction to implement their view on the community.<sup>3</sup> Good

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Construction of Communities*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 247.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald D. Suttles, 1972, *The Social Construction of Communities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.114.

Thunder reflects this ideology throughout its history, chiefly in the reasons behind its founding, its rail depot, and its economic development as guided in the early years by the Improvement Club and later by the Good Thunder Development Corporation. Contrary to the Garrison Keillor portrayal of typical Minnesota culture, that is Scandinavian Lutherans and Irish Roman Catholics who do not intermingle much, Good Thunder's society was a mix of German Lutherans and Irish and German Roman Catholics who did. Together they formed a community that cooperatively built the landscape into the mini-commerce center Good Thunder was in its early history.

The settlers' use of the landscape reflects the economic influences of the time. Towns in the western United States were commonly founded for specific reasons, usually based on or influenced by a natural resource in the economic landscape. Thus the western railroad, mining, timber, and manufacturing towns developed, and as the economic bases changed or evaporated, the towns looked to other resources for sustainability or simply disappeared. The commercialization of agriculture soon after the Northwest Territory was opened to settlement caused a cultural development in agrarian society. Wheat was a cash crop that grew well in the virgin soils. The difference in the climate of the West in comparison to the East and South motivated mechanized farming techniques that allowed family farms to grow larger than forty acres.<sup>4</sup> Good Thunder was one of these towns founded on the commercialization of agriculture, with the specific intent to be a center of commerce and support for an agrarian society. The farmers planted crops tied to the economic influences of the time, such as barley for regional breweries and oats for draft horses. They changed their crops with the circumstances, growing less barley and oats as



the breweries closed and machines took over the work of draft horses, and added soybeans and increased corn crops with the growing demand in the wider world for these resources.

Thus Good Thunder was able to exist with this commerce center status for almost one-hundred years but faced the threat of decline and death due to economic changes and its geographic isolation. Its status as an agricultural commerce center began to fail in the 1950s and 1960s, so that by the 1970s it faced some rather bleak prospects for its continued existence. Good Thunder was slowly becoming a bedroom community, even in the 1970s, as the automobile and good roads provided ease of access to urban centers allowed urban workers to live in these small communities. Had Good Thunder been more geographically isolated, it is probable that it would have died away. It is the proximity to Mankato and its ideal location as a commuter town that allows it to survive. Furthermore, the timeliness of the village convincing John Christenson to run as mayor and Ann Christenson as a community leader, both of whom came from outside the local culture and brought in grants, new perspectives and new ideas, was key to Good Thunder's revival and influencing community development.

Communities are typically open in the economic and social sense because no community is isolated from the world. A community must have trade in goods and services to survive. Communities are connected to the larger world not only through their commercial associations, but also through media such as newspapers, radio and

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<sup>4</sup> Harland Padfield, "The Expendable Rural Community and the Denial of Powerlessness," in *The Dying Community*, edited by Art Gallaher and Harland Padfield, School of American Research, Advanced Seminar Series (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), 163.

television.<sup>5</sup> Social communities form based on the existence of economic communities that make use of natural resources in the area.<sup>6</sup> Good Thunder is an example of this development of a social community out of an economic community based on agriculture. The size of a social community is related to the size of a natural resource base, with the population growing because of the need for labor and the services to support the social community, and declining as the natural resource base and its need of labor gets smaller.<sup>7</sup> These are so intrinsically related that it can be difficult to separate out the threads of cause and effect.

When outside forces threaten a community, community members respond by solidifying bonds, pulling away from the “foreign and big” toward the “small and familiar,” which manifests as a resistance to change and a desire to maintain old values.<sup>8</sup> One example from Good Thunder shows this response, particularly at the end of the 1950s when the doctors retired or moved away. The community responded by building the medical clinic to maintain the tradition of small town services for all of their needs. However, communities may also adapt to threats that cause a community to die, such as the response from Good Thunder in the 1980s when the community attempted to redirect the village into the art community niche. Good Thunder’s choice is what Hannah Levin defines as an adaptive response, or an experiment that rejects “old structural forms and organizational relations for an emphasis on individual responsibility and increased dependence on the creativity and resourcefulness of the individual.”<sup>9</sup> In other words,

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<sup>5</sup> Marion Clawson, “The Dying Community: The Natural Resource Base,” in *The Dying Community*, edited by Art Gallaher and Harland Padfield, School of American Research, Advanced Seminar Series (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), 57-58.

<sup>6</sup> Clawson, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Clawson, 64.

<sup>8</sup> Levin, 267.

<sup>9</sup> Levin, 276.

Good Thunder rejected the idea of developing the community to make it attractive for special businesses and light industries or factories, as many other small towns might do. Instead, the community used its resourcefulness and creativity to examine its strengths and came up with the idea of attracting artists and fostering an art-based economy to draw consumers to the village.

Good Thunder also made structural changes through time to its landscape, as the cultural, social, and economic landscapes changed. Many of the changes reflect the practicality of the people in the functionality of the village for the needs of the time. This is exemplified by the destruction of the historical structures on Main Street. A sense of that history is, however, preserved in the mural, the monument, and the park. These items of cultural communication allow Good Thunder to not only preserve its history, but also to communicate it in a practical fashion that is also congruent with the structural and economic needs of the time. Good Thunder has always been and continues to be a work in progress, demonstrating how many aspects of the town began on the small scale and have moved to the large scale, particularly in the retail centers (small shops in town to mega-stores in the urban setting) and in the agricultural landscape (smaller fields and more variety in crops in the past; now two or three mega-crops over hundreds of acres of land).

In the economic landscape, Good Thunder lost its status as a commerce center due to the development of malls and shopping centers that created consumer convenience, and big box stores that offered lower prices and broader selection than could be found in local mom and pop stores. Although the people attempted to revive the business district, they were unable to recapture that little bit of diversity that comprised the shopping

experience of a small town. Good Thunder is now almost wholly dependent upon a nearby urban center for survival, now that so many goods are available in the big box stores and at large retailers.

All of this ties together to show how a small town can exist and adapt to the cultural and social changes and their influences on the landscape on various levels. Take for example the changes in agriculture over the past one-hundred fifty years. The first cash crops in the county were corn and wheat, followed by oats and barley. Wheat began to diminish as the Canadian territories became the major wheat producers. The patchwork of fields in the early part of the twentieth century gave way to broad expanses of the same crops, typically soybeans, which took up the void left by wheat, and corn. These broad expanses of crops and the focus on fewer types of crops are the result of agricultural mechanization. Good Thunder has even moved its history from the small scale to the large scale. The community had very little in the way of any formal history, most of which was oral. Then the mural came and put the town history on an enormous canvas. The history and culture behind the images in the mural may not be immediately obvious to the outsider,<sup>10</sup> but it shows how the mural is a reflection of the current culture's perception of their history, their way of seeing themselves in the present in context with the past cultures.<sup>11</sup>

The landscape of Good Thunder may be seen as “a living accumulation of history and occupation of place.”<sup>12</sup> The very word living evokes a sense of change and growth,

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<sup>10</sup> Thralls and Blyler, 250.

<sup>11</sup> Lester Faigley, “Nonacademic Writing. The Social Perspective,” in: Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami, eds. *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*. New York: Guilford, 1985, p. 231-248. p.236

<sup>12</sup> Tracy Walker Moir-McClean, “Observations of Faith: Landscape Context in Design Education,” in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J. B. Jackson*, Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 144.

so the historical geography does not end with the writing of the narrative, it continues from the point of the narrative, unwritten but existing in time and space. What Good Thunder kept from its early times and excels at today is its “Good Thundersness.” The village provides a social and cultural landscape that embodies a quiet community where children can play, or leave their bicycles out overnight unattended at the park without fear of theft, where people can leave their doors unlocked and know the neighbors are watching out for them. In other words it is the general small town concept of safety that has contributed to Good Thunder’s continued existence as a village and its niche as a bedroom community. Its “Good Thundersness” is what makes it a “unique village with a rich heritage.”



**Figure 91: Good Thunder welcome sign**

The sign is located at the west entrance to the village on Sherman Street. (Photograph by author)

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## Appendix I

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application  
Interview Consent Form  
IRB Acceptance Letter

Minnesota State University, Mankato  
**Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
in Research**

## **Level I Review Checklist**

Proposals eligible for Level I review must fall under certain categories of activities involving **less than a minimal risk** to the human participants. All components of proposed research activities must fall under one or more of the categories below. Check all categories that apply for proposed research. Department Chairs shall submit this form (signed) with research proposal. **If proposed research involves special or vulnerable populations such as cognitively impaired persons, prisoners, and captive populations, research is not eligible for Level I review.**

1.  Proposed research activities involve children (under age 18). Research will be conducted in an established or commonly accepted educational setting, involving normal educational practices such as standardized educational testing, instructional strategies or techniques, curricula or classroom management methods, or observations of public behavior in which the investigator is not participating in the behavior. This usually requires permission of the participating institution. **(This is the only category that permits the use of children as subjects for Level I review.)**
2.  Proposed research activities involve the use of standardized educational tests, surveys, interviews, or observation of public behavior. However, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews cannot deal with sensitive personal topics. To be eligible for Level I review, research must also comply with either of the following categories (please explain in proposal):
  - a.  Information obtained will be recorded so that human subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
  - b.  Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses will not place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject (financial standing, employability, or reputation.)
3.  Proposed research activities use standardized educational tests, surveys, interviews, or observations of public behavior of elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.
4.  Proposed research involves the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, or specimens, if made publicly available, or if the data will be recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, even by the investigator, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. This cannot apply to educational and medical records, which require additional permission and/or consent as required by law.
5.  Proposed research activities involve taste and food quality evaluation, and foods are wholesome and safe.

**If proposed research activities are determined by the IRB Administrator or the IRB Chair or Co-Chair to be not eligible for Level I review, data collection must cease immediately until further IRB approval, and data collected cannot be used in research.**

I certify that all proposed research activities qualify for Level I review based upon the above criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator (Must be MSU faculty or MSU professional employee) Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Chair Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
IRB Administrator Date

## **Guidelines of an Application for the Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects**

University policy requires that all research involving human subjects be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. In completing the application, be aware that the persons reviewing it may be unfamiliar with the field of study involved. Present the request in typewritten form and in non-technical terms.

**Unless the proposal is submitted as a Level 1 proposal, data collection may not begin until written approval is received from the IRB.** Submit signed proposal to the IRB Administrator, College of Graduate Studies and Research, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 115 Alumni/Foundation Center, Mankato, MN 56001. **Incomplete proposals will be returned without review.**

Please be advised that what follows is an outline for an IRB proposal. Please use as much space as necessary when you submit the proposal. The proposal **must** include the following sections:

### **I. General Information**

#### **a. Principal Investigator(s)**

*For the purposes of the IRB any research under the auspices of Minnesota State University, Mankato must have an MSU faculty member or MSU professional employee as the responsible person.*

Robert Bothmann  
Library Services  
P.O. Box 8419  
ML3097  
Mankato, MN 56037  
389-2010 (office)  
278-4429 (home)

robert.bothmann@mnsu.edu

#### **b. Secondary Investigator (Student)**

*Persons who will be the primary researchers conducting the research (e.g., graduate students for thesis or alternate plan paper research).*

None.

#### **c. Whom the IRB should contact regarding this proposal?**

Robert Bothmann

#### **d. Project Title**

A Historical Geography of Good Thunder, Minnesota

**e. Proposed study date**

*Unless the proposal is submitted as a Level 1 proposal, data collection may not begin until project is approved by the IRB.*

June 2005-December 2005

**f. Location of project**

*Identify the actual site where human subjects will be participating.*

*Note: Include a letter indicating permission of the institution to allow the research to be conducted there.*

In Good Thunder, Minnesota, at their own home, at the home in Good Thunder of the principal investigator (511 Hiller Drive, Good Thunder, MN 56037), or the Thunder Restaurant, Main Street, Good Thunder, MN 56037.

**g. Source of funding (if any)**

*Include funding that has been awarded or has been applied for.*

No funding sources.

**II. General Purpose of Research Project**

*Why are you doing the project and what do you hope to find out?*

The project is part of the research for the investigator's thesis, A Historical Geography of Good Thunder, Minnesota. Informal interviews with village residents will provide historical information about occupation and location of specific sites in the village.

**III. Project Description**

*What are you going to do?*

The principal investigator will informally interview village officials, business owners, and some long-time residents about the history of the village. As a historical geography, the knowledge sought will be related to geographic and constructed features. Specifically, business occupants of former store fronts that are now private homes and the locations of past business, churches, and services.

*How will data be obtained?*

The data will be obtained by informal interviews and conversations.

*What will happen to subjects and the data they provide?*

Nothing will happen to the subjects. The data provided will be used to locate specific features on a map in GIS, to identify features in historic photographs, and provide a known location from which to take a photograph of the current view of the same location.

*How will subjects be selected or recruited?*

Subjects will be recruited through word-of-mouth, and soliciting voluntary communication through an advertisement in the local newspaper and a flyer at the local gas station.

*What are the potential risks and benefits to the subjects? How will these risks be managed and minimized? In addition to physical harm, potential risks may include emotional stress and discomfort, and undesirable social, economic, and financial consequences.*

Potential risks to the subjects are minimal. Because subjects will be providing perceived historical information, the investigator will verify and back-up all claims with other source materials, such as village records and directories. Inconclusive or unverifiable claims may be used if appropriate and required; however, these claims will not be presented as fact, nor presented in such a way as to embarrass or otherwise cause undesirable social consequences. All interview subjects will remain anonymous and their names and identities will not be published or discussed.

**IV. Description of Subjects****a. Ages of subject**

All interview subjects will be 18 years of age or older.

**b. Number of subjects**

Because of the nature of the research, the number of subjects is not something that may be predetermined, since an interview with one person may allow for a referral to other possible interview subjects. It is likely that the total number of subjects to interview will not be more than 20 individuals.



**c. Characteristics of subjects  
(e.g., who will the subjects be? Are they members of a vulnerable population, students, or all of one race or gender?)**

The subjects will be long-time residents of the village of Good Thunder, Minnesota. None of the subjects will be a member of a vulnerable population.

**V. Protection of Subjects' Rights**

*How will the subjects be informed of the intent of study, potential risks to them, and their rights regarding participation?*

Please see the attached consent form.

*How and where will consent documents be maintained?*

Consent forms will be maintained by the principal investigator at his home.

*How will privacy, confidentiality and/or anonymity be protected?*

Please see the attached consent form.

## VI. Signatures

Include the following statement:

**In making this application, I certify that I have read and understand the Policies and Procedures for Projects that Involve Human Subjects, and that I intend to comply with the letter and spirit of the University Policy. Changes in the protocol will be submitted to the IRB for approval prior to these changes being put into practice. Informed consent/assent records of the participants will be kept for at least three years after the completion of the research.**

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Principal Investigator (Must be MSU faculty or MSU professional employee) Date

---

Department Chair

Date

## Attachments

Attach copies of the following, if applicable:

1. Questionnaires, surveys, interview scripts
2. Consent forms and permission forms for parents or guardians
3. Assent forms to be used by children or when subjects are unable to give legal consent
4. Permission from other participating institutions
5. Cover letters or other information that will be given to subjects
6. Other supporting documentation

## Interview Consent Form

This consent form outlines my rights as a participant in the study of “A Historical Geography of Good Thunder, Minnesota” conducted by Robert Bothamann, Library Services, Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The interview will consist of informal questions relating to the history of manufactured structures, history of the village of Good Thunder, and landscape change over time.

I understand that:

1. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
2. It is my right to decline to answer any question that I am asked.
3. I am free to end the interview at any time.
4. My name and identity will remain confidential in any publications or discussions.

**I HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM. I HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO ASK QUESTIONS CONCERNING ANY AREAS THAT I DID NOT UNDERSTAND.**

---

(Signature of Interviewee)

---

(Printed name of Interviewee)

---

(Date)

---

You may decline to participate in this study. You may end your participation in this study at any time. Maintaining your anonymity is a priority and every practical precaution will be taken to disguise your identity. There will not be any identifying information on the notes for this interview. All materials generated from your interview (e.g., interview notes) will remain in my direct physical possession.

---

(Signature of Interviewer and Date)



June 1, 2005

Robert Bothmann  
Library Services  
3097 Memorial Library  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Re: IRB Proposal, Log #2378 entitled "*A Historical Geography of Good Thunder, Minnesota*"

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of June 1, 2005. On behalf of the Institutional Review Board I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year from the approval date. When you complete your data collection, or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled, however under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. Delgado".

Dr. Fernando Delgado  
IRB Administrator

cc: file

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH  
115 ALUMNI FOUNDATION CENTER · MANKATO, MN 56001  
PHONE 507-389-2321 (V) · 800-627-3529 OR 711 (MRS/TTY) · FAX 507-389-5974  
*An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity University.*

## Appendix II

Good Thunder's Speech and Letters of Support

Speech to the villagers of Good Thunder by Andrew Good Thunder in Sioux on 4 July 1887, translated and relayed by his interpreter.<sup>551</sup>

My friends:

I am an Indian, but you have heard my name and invited me to be present at your celebration today. Since I have heard the word of our great father at Washington, I have tried to follow his advice.

I was the first of my people to join the church when the missionaries were sent to us. I was also among the first to try to live by farming. After I had lived for five years in this way, trying to become like a white man, great trouble came upon me.

I mean the time of the Indian outbreaks in 1862. I was very sorry to see the sufferings of the women and children, who in large numbers were prisoners among the Sioux.—I then wrote to Gen. Sibley and asked him to write to the President and to Bishop Whipple.

“I said, I will get possession of all these captives and bring them to you at any place you may appoint.”

He answered me and said, “Good Thunder you have done well in all you have said to me. In the spring you shall go with me to fight the Sioux. I will appoint you a scout.

“Good Thunder, there are seven chiefs of the Sioux, but none of them have written to me and you have made me very glad by your letter.”

This is my record. Our lands have all been sold, but I have bought a piece near my old home at Redwood and am living there with my relatives.

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<sup>551</sup> “Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found,” *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 January 1949.

We are now hoping to have our friends, through Bishop Whipple, build us a little church, and when I die I will be buried by it.

I am glad to hear that your town is also called Good Thunder, so even after I am dead the name will live. Perhaps some one will remember that it was an Indian called Good Thunder, who risked his life for the white people and by God's help saved the lives of over 250 captive women and children.

I hope your town will grow and prosper and be always full of the homes of happy people living under the laws of the Great Father in the peace and fear of God.

Letter from Samuel D. Hinman to J. G. Graham, Good Thunder.<sup>552</sup>

Birch Cooley, Minn.

June 28, 1887

J. G. Graham, Esqr.,

Good Thunder, Minn.

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 25<sup>th</sup> is at hand. Good Thunder is greatly pleased and will come with his wife, leaving Redwood Falls by the passenger train at 4:30 P. M. Saturday which we suppose arrives at Mankato in time for your train. If we find it does not, I will start him on the freight if there is one, or the day before, Friday.

I was about writing you when I received yours, since the Winnebago Good Thunder is dead and the Sioux living and worthy. It would be a pleasant thing in history to have a dedication of your town and as the Masonic Lodges are dedicated to the Holy Saints John (both of them) so have it understood that your town, tho built on Winnebago lands also perpetuates the name of Good Thunder the Sioux Chief who saved and redeemed the captives during the fearful Sioux war in 1862.

His compatriot Taopi is dead, but a town named for him is located on the Iowa & Minnesota Division of the Milwaukee road near the south line of the state.

Good Thunder will be accompanied by his wife and a you man from the Faribault school, a son an Indian clergyman now dead, Henry Whipple St. Clair. He goes as

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<sup>552</sup> "Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found," *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 January 1949.



interpreter and in his Shattuck School uniform will make a good impression on your people.

Good Thunder appreciates your kindness and understands how the first mistake<sup>553</sup> was made and he will enjoy the affair greatly. I do not doubt, as you, that it will be the event of his life.

I will furnish money to pay to Mankato and you can repay me. I suppose it will be about \$5 for the three.

Respectfully,

Sam'l D. Hinman

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<sup>553</sup> Referring to the fact that Graham was asking for the Winnebago Good Thunder, not knowing of the Dakota Good Thunder.

Letter from Bishop Whipple to J. G. Graham, Good Thunder.<sup>554</sup>

Faribault, Minn.

July 1, 1887.

Dear Sir:

I desire to thank you and your fellow citizens for your kindness in inviting the good Cheaf Good Thunder, "Wak-eau Washti." I first met him in 1860. The Rev. Dr. Breck and myself had a long talk with Wakeasha, Taopi and Good Thunder.

I can see their earnest faces as they told me the over true tale of their worries. They said we have six thousand dollars for schools, and there is no school and none of our children have learned to read: They asked me for a missionary. I sent them the Rev. S. D. Hinman and we opened a school and that year taught 70 children to read. That year Good Thunder sent me his little girl whom I named Lydia Segourney after the gentle poetess. She was a beautiful child and became one of the loveliest Christian children. She was taken sick and the wild Sioux laughed at Good Thunder and said you was a fool. You send your child to the white school where there are our old enemies the Chippeway. They have poisoned your child. Poor Good Thunder came to Faribault and told his child his fear. She said, Father, these Chippeways are not enemies. They too are Christ's children. They brought me these berries and flowers and I love them as my own kindred. It was evident Lydia was to be early called and I gave Good Thunder a letter, asking all white people to be kind to him for the sake of this Christian lamb.

He told me with tears of the kindness of the whites. When I visited the Sioux I

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<sup>554</sup> "Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found," *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 January 1949.

found Lydia near her end and never was there a sweeter death bed. She asked her father to meet her and told him of the beautiful home in heaven. It melted his heart and he became a Christian. I shall always believe that the death of his child and the kindness of Christian people helped to make Good Thunder the brave hero he was when he perilled his life to save and did save with others 200 women and children. General Sibley will tell you all he was as a scout. I have known and loved him 27 years and can say to all of you people you will never do honor to a braver or truer man.

It would have been a pleasure if I could have joined you in paying honor to him and his wife. Our dear Savior said “a man will lay down his life for his friends”—Good Thunder perilled his life to show his gratitude for a race whom his people counted as enemies.

With my best wishes

Your friend

H. B. Whipple

Bishop of Minnesota

Letter from Henry H. Sibley.<sup>555</sup>

St. Paul, Minn.

July 1, 1887.

J. G. Graham, Esq.

Good Thunder, Minn.

Dear Sir:

Your favor rec'd.

I have known "Wak-ke-un-washtay" (Good Thunder) for many years, as a respectable and influential member of his band. I placed so much reliance upon his fidelity to the government, during the war with the Sioux subsequent to the outbreak of 1862 that I gave him prominent position among the Indian Scouts, and he justified my good opinion of him by a fearless and faithful discharge of that dangerous service. He deserves to have his name perpetuated, in the manner you suggest. Please remember me kindly to the whites, and the reds who served under my command.

Yours very truly,

Henry H. Sibley

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<sup>555</sup> "Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found," *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 January 1949.

Letter from Samuel D. Hinman to J. G. Graham.<sup>556</sup>

Birch Cooley.

July 6, 1887.

Dear Sir:

Good Thunder and his wife returned safely last night. They report having a wonderful reception, only marred by their being unable to speak English and talk with all their friends.

He says he was given the freedom of the town and its hospitality and not allowed to pay for anything. I have not yet seen his wife, but I suppose her account will be yet more wonderful. Good Thunder intends giving the people here a "feast" to-morrow from your contribution to him, when he will relate his experience at large and tell of the wonderfully kind hearted people who live in his town.

Your ck. is rec'd for Good Thunder O.K. I feel also much obliged to you, for setting the old-man on his feet, after the assault of the Baptiste Elder,<sup>557</sup> as the withdrawal of the initiation injured his pride and self-respect and caused talk among his people.

Ever Fraternaly Yours,

S. D. Hinman

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<sup>556</sup> "Original Good Thunder Letters Are Found," *Good Thunder Herald*, 13 January 1949.

<sup>557</sup> Referring to the letter to Graham denegrating Andrew Good Thunder, which prompted the letters from Whipple and Sibley.

## Appendix IV

### Statistical Data Tables

Age Groups and Sex: 2000<sup>558</sup>

Age	Number				Percent			Males per 100 females
	Both sexes	Male	Female		Both sexes	Male	F	
<b>Total population</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>94.1</b>	
Under 5 years	56	28	28	9.5	9.8	9.2	100.0	
5 to 9 years	49	31	18	8.3	10.8	5.9	172.2	
10 to 14 years	62	27	35	10.5	9.4	11.5	77.1	
15 to 19 years	40	17	23	6.8	5.9	7.5	73.9	
20 to 24 years	39	19	20	6.6	6.6	6.6	95.0	
25 to 29 years	37	14	23	6.3	4.9	7.5	60.9	
30 to 34 years	59	32	27	10.0	11.1	8.9	118.5	
35 to 39 years	52	25	27	8.8	8.7	8.9	92.6	
40 to 44 years	37	20	17	6.3	7.0	5.6	117.6	
45 to 49 years	37	19	18	6.3	6.6	5.9	105.6	
50 to 54 years	25	16	9	4.2	5.6	3.0	177.8	
55 to 59 years	20	10	10	3.4	3.5	3.3	100.0	
60 to 64 years	15	5	10	2.5	1.7	3.3	50.0	
65 to 69 years	12	7	5	2.0	2.4	1.6	140.0	
70 to 74 years	20	9	11	3.4	3.1	3.6	81.8	
75 to 79 years	13	4	9	2.2	1.4	3.0	44.4	
80 to 84 years	14	3	11	2.4	1.0	3.6	27.3	
85 to 89 years	3	1	2	0.5	0.3	0.7	50.0	
90 years and over	2	0	2	0.3	0.0	0.7	0.0	
Under 18 years	194	98	96	32.8	34.1	31.5	102.1	
18 to 64 years	334	165	169	56.4	57.5	55.4	97.6	
18 to 24 years	52	24	28	8.8	8.4	9.2	85.7	

<sup>558</sup> Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, accessed 17 September 2005.

Age	Number				Percent			Males per 100 females
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	F		
25 to 44 years	185	91	94	31.3	31.7	30.8	96.8	
25 to 34 years	96	46	50	16.2	16.0	16.4	92.0	
35 to 44 years	89	45	44	15.0	15.7	14.4	102.3	
45 to 64 years	97	50	47	16.4	17.4	15.4	106.4	
45 to 54 years	62	35	27	10.5	12.2	8.9	129.6	
55 to 64 years	35	15	20	5.9	5.2	6.6	75.0	
65 years and over	64	24	40	10.8	8.4	13.1	60.0	
65 to 74 years	32	16	16	5.4	5.6	5.2	100.0	
75 to 84 years	27	7	20	4.6	2.4	6.6	35.0	
85 years and over	5	1	4	0.8	0.3	1.3	25.0	
16 years and over	417	197	220	70.4	68.6	72.1	89.5	
18 years and over	398	189	209	67.2	65.9	68.5	90.4	
21 years and over	379	181	198	64.0	63.1	64.9	91.4	
60 years and over	79	29	50	13.3	10.1	16.4	58.0	
62 years and over	72	26	46	12.2	9.1	15.1	56.5	
67 years and over	60	22	38	10.1	7.7	12.5	57.9	
75 years and over	32	8	24	5.4	2.8	7.9	33.3	
Median age (years)	31.0	31.5	30.8	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	



Occupation by Sex: 2000<sup>559</sup>

Occupation	Both sexes	Male	Female	
<b>Employed civilian population 16 years and over</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>146</b>	
Management, professional, and related occupations	55	22	33	
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	29	16	13	
Management occupations, except farmers and farm managers	13	8	5	
Farmers and farm managers	6	6	0	
Business and financial operations occupations	10	2	8	
Business operations specialists	0	0	0	
Financial specialists	10	2	8	
Professional and related occupations	26	6	20	
Computer and mathematical occupations	3	0	3	
Architecture and engineering occupations	4	4	0	
Architects, surveyors, cartographers, and engineers	1	1	0	
Drafters, engineering, and mapping technicians	3	3	0	
Life, physical, and social science occupations	0	0	0	
Community and social services occupations	7	0	7	
Legal occupations	0	0	0	
Education, training, and library occupations	9	2	7	
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	3	0	3	
Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations	0	0	0	
Health diagnosing and treating practitioners and technical occupations	0	0	0	
Health technologists and technicians	0	0	0	
Service occupations	25	6	19	
Healthcare support occupations	9	0	9	
Protective service occupations	2	2	0	
Fire fighting, prevention, and law enforcement workers, including supervisors	0	0	0	

<sup>559</sup> Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, accessed 17 September 2005.

Occupation	Both sexes	Male	Female		
Other protective service occupations, including supervisors			2	2	0
Food preparation and serving related occupations			4	0	4
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations			6	4	2
Personal care and service occupations			4	0	4
Sales and office occupations			72	20	52
Sales and related occupations			31	14	17
Office and administrative support occupations			41	6	35
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations			6	6	0
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations			41	41	0
Construction and extraction occupations			29	29	0
Supervisors, construction and extraction workers			2	2	0
Construction trades workers			27	27	0
Extraction workers			0	0	0
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations			12	12	0
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations			105	63	42
Production occupations			65	25	40
Transportation and material moving occupations			40	38	2
Supervisors, transportation and material moving workers			0	0	0
Aircraft and traffic control occupations			0	0	0
Motor vehicle operators			34	32	2
Rail, water and other transportation occupations			0	0	0
Material moving workers			6	6	0

Ancestry: 2000<sup>560</sup>

<sup>560</sup> Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, accessed 17 September 2005. Rows with null ancestries not reported in this table.

Ancestry	Number	Percent of total population
<b>Total population</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Ancestry specified	519	85.6
Single ancestry	274	45.2
Multiple ancestry	245	40.4
Ancestry unclassified or not reported	87	14.4
<b>Total ancestries reported</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>126.1</b>
Czech	11	1.8
Danish	20	3.3
Dutch	13	2.1
English	44	7.3
French (except Basque)	24	4.0
French Canadian	6	1.0
German	348	57.4
Greek	5	0.8
Irish	88	14.5
Italian	12	2.0
Luxemburger	2	0.3
Norwegian	61	10.1
Polish	15	2.5
Russian	2	0.3
Scandinavian	3	0.5
Scotch-Irish	2	0.3
Scottish	12	2.0
Swedish	40	6.6
United States or American	31	5.1
Other ancestries	25	4.1

Place of Birth and Residence in 1995 and 2000<sup>561</sup>

Subject	Number	Percent
PLACE OF BIRTH		
Total population	606	100.0
Native	604	99.7
Born in state of residence	524	86.5
Born in other state in the United States	80	13.2
Northeast	3	0.5
Midwest	43	7.1
South	13	2.1
West	21	3.5
Born outside the United States	0	0.0
Puerto Rico	0	0.0
U.S. Island Areas	0	0.0
Born abroad of American parent(s)	0	0.0
Foreign born	2	0.3
RESIDENCE IN 1995 - STATE AND COUNTY		
Population 5 years and over	544	100.0
Same house in 1995	285	52.4
Different house in the United States in 1995	257	47.2
Same county	165	30.3
Different county	92	16.9
Same state	57	10.5
Different state	35	6.4
Northeast	0	0.0

<sup>561</sup> Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, accessed 17 September 2005.

Midwest	6	1.1
South	16	2.9
West	13	2.4
Elsewhere in 1995	2	0.4

Journey to Work: 2000<sup>562</sup>

Subject	Number	Percent
<b>MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION AND CARPOOLING</b>		
<b>Workers 16 and over</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Car, truck, or van	270	90.0
Drove alone	227	75.7
Carpooled	43	14.3
In 2-person carpool	34	11.3
In 3-person carpool	4	1.3
In 4-person carpool	5	1.7
In 5- or 6-person carpool	0	0.0
In 7-or-more-person carpool	0	0.0
Workers per car, truck, or van	1.09	(X)
Public transportation	0	0.0
Bus or trolley bus	0	0.0
Streetcar or trolley car (público in Puerto Rico)	0	0.0
Subway or elevated	0	0.0
Railroad	0	0.0
Ferryboat	0	0.0
Taxicab	0	0.0
Motorcycle	0	0.0
Bicycle	0	0.0
Walked	13	4.3

<sup>562</sup> Bureau of the Census, "Data Sets with Quick Tables" for Good Thunder, Minnesota, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, accessed 17 September 2005.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Other means	0	0.0
Worked at home	17	5.7
<b>TRAVEL TIME TO WORK</b>		
<b>Workers who did not work at home</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Less than 10 minutes	44	15.5
10 to 14 minutes	9	3.2
15 to 19 minutes	18	6.4
20 to 24 minutes	77	27.2
25 to 29 minutes	64	22.6
30 to 34 minutes	37	13.1
35 to 44 minutes	11	3.9
45 to 59 minutes	6	2.1
60 to 89 minutes	5	1.8
90 or more minutes	12	4.2
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	28.1	(X)

<b>TIME LEAVING HOME TO GO TO WORK</b>		
<b>Workers who did not work at home</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>100.0</b>
5:00 to 5:59 a.m.	31	11.0
6:00 to 6:29 a.m.	26	9.2
6:30 to 6:59 a.m.	40	14.1
7:00 to 7:29 a.m.	40	14.1
7:30 to 7:59 a.m.	45	15.9
8:00 to 8:29 a.m.	19	6.7
8:30 to 8:59 a.m.	8	2.8
9:00 to 11:59 a.m.	13	4.6
12:00 to 3:59 p.m.	23	8.1
All other times	38	13.4

Population of Good Thunder and Lyra Township 1870-2004<sup>563</sup>

Census Year	Population of Good Thunder	Population of Lyra Township
1870	...	433
1880	149 <sup>564</sup>	900
1890	~350 <sup>565</sup>	~809 (1159) <sup>566</sup>
1895	421	808
1900	505	794
1910	419	665
1920	314	616
1930	451	714
1940	457	686
1950	476	599
1960	468	579
1970	489	481
1980	560	485
1990	561	382
2000	592	378
2004	568	...

<sup>563</sup> All data are from the United States Bureau of the Census statistical abstracts published under various titles since 1870, except for the 1895 population data, which are from the census conducted in that year by the State of Minnesota. The \* indicates data not given in the census information.

<sup>564</sup> Population was tallied from the enumeration schedule.

<sup>565</sup> The 1890 population is unknown because the census of 1890 was destroyed by fire. The population of 350 is an estimate taken from "Good Thunder," *Mapleton Enterprise*, 30 April 1892.

<sup>566</sup> The 1870, 1880, and 1890 Lyra township population figures include the population of Good Thunder, which was not given in the statistical abstract. The number 809 is the population of Lyra (1159) less the estimated population of Good Thunder.