

IN THE MIDST OF

Dakota Meaning of Cokato



VOLUME 40, NO. 2

July, 2020

FEATURED AKERLUND PHOTOGRAPH



This Akerlund portrait is of Dr. J. T. and Selma (Eckman) Ahlstrom in 1910. In 1921, these parents faced the diagnosis that their 19-month-old son Sidney was afflicted with polio. Sidney's case, along with Lucille Peterson, were Cokato's earliest reported cases of polio.

COKATO MUSEUM IS NOW OPEN BY APPOINTMENT!

After being closed these past few months, we are thrilled to announce that we are welcoming people back to the Cokato Museum! Please keep in mind, specific Stay Safe MN guidelines regarding COVID-19 are put into effect and will change your visitor experience. These new procedures and guidelines are in place to ensure the safety of our staff, volunteers, and patrons.

The Museum will be open by appointment Tuesday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; and Saturday, 8:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Max group size is eight people, with only self-guided tours available at this time. Masks required. If you wish to make a museum collection donation, you will also need to make an appointment. Please be aware, the Gust Akerlund Photo Studio is closed to the public. If you have a Research Request please call, mail, or email the Cokato Museum and our staff will assist you. The Research Library is also closed to the public.

Please visit our website www.cokatomuseum.org for more information on our safety procedures, then schedule an appointment with us by calling **320-286-2427**.

INFORMATION

IN THE MIDST

Director's Report	3
Cokato and the 1918 Spanish Flu.	4
Cokato & the Polio Epidemic . 6	
Cokato Crossword/ Answers to Trivia	8
Membership Form	9
Cokato Trivia and What is This?	10



Thank you to volunteer Steve Anderson for fixing the Akerlund apartment front screen door and trim!

COKATO HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Bob Gasch, President
Rhea Langemo, Vice President
Sara Keskey-Rufer, Treasurer
Steve Anderson
Carol Barnaal
Paulie Johnson
Kenny Danberg
Ruth Klima
Shirley Larson-Cole
Nancy Monroe
Dorene Erickson

Council Rep

Jarod Sebring

Museum Staff

Johanna Ellison
Rachel Olson
Vicky Janckila

DATES OF INTEREST

August

No CHS Board Meeting

September

17th CHS Board Meeting, 7:00 p.m.

©2020, Cokato Historical Society

MUSEUM OPEN BY APPOINTMENT ONLY! PLEASE CALL US TO SCHEDULE.

320-286-2427

MUSEUM HOURS

- Tuesday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Saturday, 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- Closed major holidays.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- Phone: 320-286-2427
- E-mail: info@cokatomuseum.org
- Web site: www.cokatomuseum.org
- Facebook page: Cokato Museum & Akerlund Photo Studio
- Twitter: @CokatoMuseum
- YouTube Channel: Cokato Museum & Akerlund Studio



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

God dag (Good day),

Although we were closed for three months to the public, museum staff was still busy preserving and sharing Cokato history.

- **In March** the City of Cokato received notification that it got a \$1,050 Minnesota Historical & Cultural Heritage (Legacy) Grant through the Minnesota Historical Society to do an HVAC Evaluation of the museum's system, and a \$9,500 Legacy grant for a Conditions Assessment of the Gust Akerlund Photography Studio. These grants are made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund of the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment. Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants are state-funded by the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund. The Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) administers the grant program on behalf of the state based on recommendations from the Historic Resources Advisory Committee.
- **In April** we released our first and second "Behind Exhibit Ropes" videos on our Youtube channel *Cokato Museum & Akerlund Studio*.
- Staff attended a series of online museum education sessions on collections care and creating online exhibits.
- The Cokato Historical Society Board conducted its first Google Hangouts board meeting.
- We regularly released new blog entries on the Cokato Museum's website about the history of Cokato.
- **In May** we launched the H. C. Bull Online Exhibit, an interactive online exhibit on our website for students and museum patrons.
- We created the first video segment of "No Train, No Town" about Cokato railroad history.
- Volunteers have been doing a fantastic job of weeding the museum garden (see photos on page 2). Thank you!
- Volunteer Steve Anderson fixed and repainted the Akerlund apartment screen door (see photos on page 2).
- Staff is back at the museum and focusing on cataloging donations and organizing off-site storage.
- We released our third "Behind Exhibit Ropes" video on the Round Barn exhibit.
- We were not able to hold our Memorial Day Open House but we still showed our support for our veterans and their families on our social media.



We have taken down the exhibit panels in the Akerlund waiting room to make way for new ones that are being designed!

In June we acquired a new collections management system that will enable us to better manage the museum collection.

As road construction and Covid-19 safety requirements impact our day-to-day operations, please follow us on Facebook and check our website regularly for updates. Cokato has a long history of service and stepping up as a community when faced with adversity. We are honored to be its keeper.

Warmest Regards,

Johanna Ellison

THE 1918 SPANISH FLU IN COKATO



Spanish Influenza, so named because Spain was the first to publicize the crisis, came from unknown origins. In a war torn world brought on by World War I, soldiers carried the disease from one camp to another. By the spring of 1918, the Spanish flu reached the United States with the first case appearing in Kansas. In September of 1918, the virus reached Minnesota and spread at an alarming rate. What was so terrifying about the malady is that victims could be healthy one moment then near death after only a few hours. Symptoms included cough, chills, fever, congestion, body aches, exhaustion and bleeding. On top of all of this, the flu was often followed by a bout of pneumonia, that proved deadly to many. By the time the influenza epidemic waned in Minnesota during the spring of 1919, over 10,000 people were dead. Even small rural communities like Cokato did not escape the reaper. ¹

News of the Spanish flu in Cokato emerged in early October of 1918. In response, Local Board of Health president Dr. O. L. Peterson quickly discouraged large gatherings of people as early as October 10th. Cokato's business community also reacted, and locations like the Cecile Theatre announcing they would close for at least a week or so to help prevent the spread of influenza. The following week, the *Cokato Enterprise* reported the closing of schools, a preventative measure that would last several weeks.

THE 1918 SPANISH FLU IN COKATO

Each week, Cokato obituaries showed that influenza did not discriminate as people of various ages and health were stricken down. Fear grew more prevalent in November, as some Cokato churches even announced the cancelation of services. By the 21st, the Board of Health printed stricter quarantine measures in the *Cokato Enterprise*, requesting cooperation in the community and that “No gathering or crowding on streets or in places of business will be allowed. Whenever any member or any family becomes ill, such illness should be reported in order that its nature may be ascertained.”

By early December of 1918, the Cokato Enterprise announced “Influenza on the Wane.” This brought relief to the Cokato Hospital, who throughout this wave of the epidemic, had treated 70 patients with the Spanish flu, many of whom were in critical condition. Thankfully, nursing staff of the Cokato Hospital were trained in contagious diseases. The nursing staff was comprised of Superintendent Pearl Dunlay, Night Supervisor May Doyle, Nurses Ellen Olson, Mrs. Dahl, and Miss Leaf. Of the 70 influenza patients, the hospital reported 17 deaths.

Numbers of flu cases continued to drop with the December 19th, *Cokato Enterprise*, which stated that no new cases had been reported for several days. In addition, for the past three weeks Cokato schools were operating at 75%. In fact, students, after winter break, would attend school every Saturday and during “usual vacation periods” to make up for lost time.

Although the newspaper mentioned a lull in cases, many people in December were still concerned about a second surge of influenza. One article written in the Delano Eagle and reprinted in the Enterprise railed about how, “Warnings against unguarded spitting, coughing and sneezing have been issued and re-issued...” The concern wasn’t unwarranted. By the end of January 1919, more cases emerged. In response, the Board of Health and Education instituted a stay-at-home order, closing schools and churches, and reinstating the ban on large gatherings.

The restrictions seemed to work against further spreading of the flu. According to the February 13, 1919, *Cokato Enterprise*, the “The strict observance of the board of health’s stay-at-home order has had the desired effects, and as a consequence the stubborn epidemic of influenza seems to be under control.” The following week, schools and churches resumed their usual activities.

Source:

1. Laine, Mary. "Influenza Epidemic in Minnesota, 1918." MNopedia, Minnesota Historical Society. <http://www.mnopedia.org/event/influenza-epidemic-minnesota-1918> (accessed July 15, 2020).

COKATO & THE POLIO EPIDEMIC

From the 1920s-1950s, Cokato residents lived in fear of polio, a contagious disease that particularly targeted Cokato's youth. According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, polio is a virus that attacks the nervous system, with symptoms ranging from asymptomatic, to paralysis, to death. Although most cases of polio were mild with little or temporary symptoms, the severe cases involved permanent paralysis, which was enough to cause panic when an outbreak occurred in the community. Adding to the anxiety, scientists at the time did not know how it spread and there was no known cure. In Minnesota, many severe polio cases were treated at the Sister Kenny Institute in Minneapolis.

In the summer of 1921, Lucille Peterson and nineteen-month-old Sidney Ahlstrom were Cokato's first reported cases of "infantile paralysis." According to the July 28, 1921, *Cokato Enterprise*, "The disease is said to be growing in Minnesota...Wadena and surrounding, have a number amounting to almost an epidemic."



Pearl Norman in the 1946 Cokato High School yearbook.

By 1946, Minnesota had its worse outbreak yet, resulting in 2,881 reported cases of polio and 226 deaths (MN Department of Health, 66). Across the state, schools, events, and large gatherings were canceled, including the State Fair. Cokato had its own outbreak, which filled the Cokato Hospital with polio patients, according to Carl Norman in his interview in the May 13, 2013, *Cokato Enterprise*. According to the article, Carl, along with his other siblings Delores, Ruth, and Pearl, all contracted polio at different times. Ruth's case of polio was so severe she ended up for four months in an iron lung, a negative pressure ventilator. Tragically, the virus claimed the life of 16-year-old Pearl.

In 1952, Minnesota had more cases of polio than any other state with 4,131 cases and 220 deaths (MN Department of Health, 70). By 1953, polio struck another Cokato family—Shirley Peterson (age 17), her nephew Steve Peterson (age 1), and her niece Katheryn Glessing (age 5). According to the January 24, 1990, *Cokato Enterprise*, Shirley's complications with the disease led her to spend the next 37 years of her life requiring 24-hour care and a machine to help her breathe. Still, Shirley lived her life to the fullest, going on trips and participating in as many activities as she could.

COKATO & THE POLIO EPIDEMIC



Shirley Peterson and visitor. Peterson's battle with polio required her to live with a machine to help her breathe.

Thankfully, in 1955 Dr. Jonas Salk developed a polio vaccine. By June 2, 1955, Cokato Doctor Theodore Greenfield gave Cokato first and second graders their first round of the vaccine. The vaccinations throughout the nation that followed led to the eradication of polio in the United States by 1979.

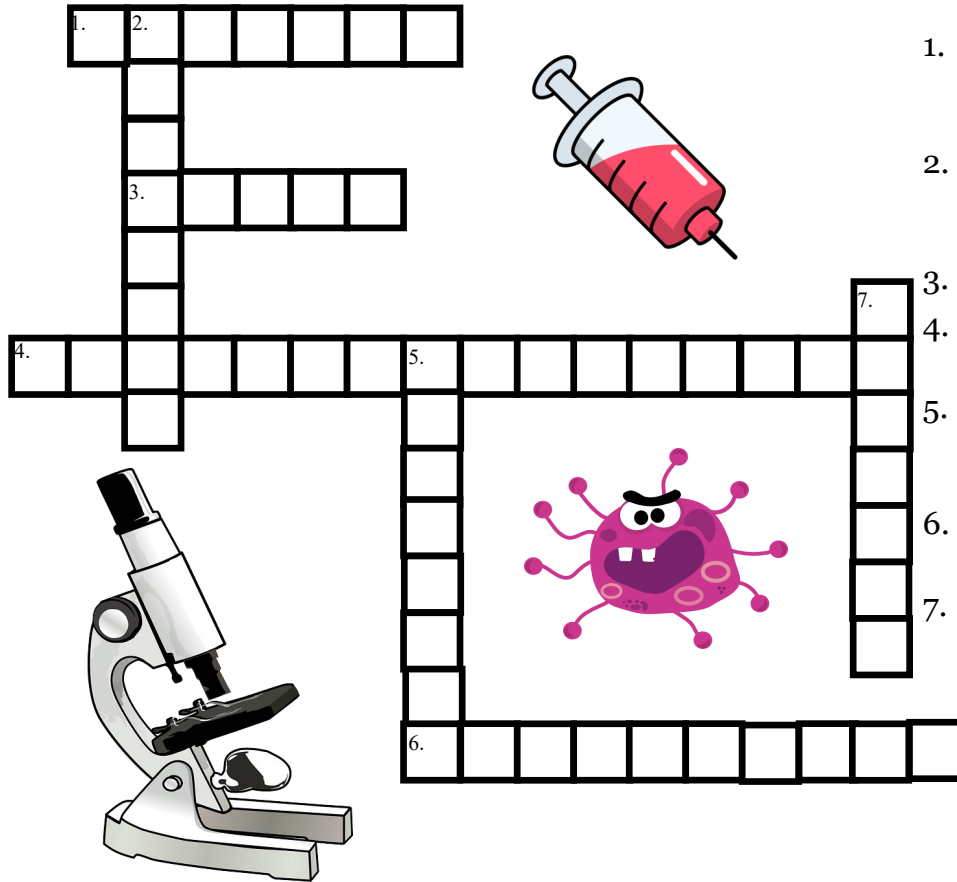
Other Sources: "Chapter 3 Polio: Minnesota's Crucial Role." Minnesota Department of Health. (pages 66-92) <https://www.health.state.mn.us/about/history/Chapter3.pdf> (accessed 7/21/2020).



Dr. Theodore Greenfield administers the polio vaccination to Cokato first and second graders. Also pictured from left to right are Paul Constenius, Sandra Boltz, Karen Boltz, and Keith Barberg.

COKATO CROSSWORD

(Medical History)



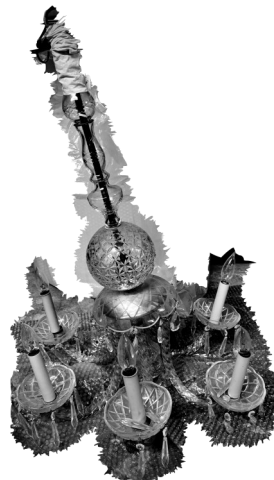
1. What closed in Cokato for a few weeks during the 1918 flu epidemic?
2. Where did over 70 patients suffering from the 1918 flu get treated in Cokato?
3. What virus causes paralysis?
4. What is the name of the 1918 flu?
5. What was Shirley Peterson placed in to help combat polio?
6. What was the last name of a Cokato doctor in the 1950s?
7. What was given to Cokato school children in May of 1955?

Answers found below

TRIVIA ANSWERS

1. A home. Formally Peter Stevenson's.
2. 1975, on June 1, 1975 Tom Keaveny took over the former Peterson Pharmacy.
3. Dr. Theodore Greenfield
4. Apartments.

ANSWER TO WHAT IS THIS?



This is a chandelier from the Cokato Hospital. The Cokato Hospital opened on December 17, 1914 under the care of Dr. O. A. Kvello. It closed on February 15, 1967. The building was demolished in December, 2003.

1. Theatre 2. Hospital 3. Polio 4. Spanish Influenza 5. Iron Lung 6. Greenfield 7. Vaccine

COKATO CREAMERY SIGN



The Cokato Creamery building was torn down last month. Thanks to Brad Halonen, the Cokato Museum & Historical Society received the Cokato Creamery sign. It is the intention of the museum staff and Cokato Historical Society Board to place the sign in the museum garden. Designs of how the sign will be incorporated into the museum landscaping are being discussed.



2020 MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Individual: \$10_____ Family: \$15_____ Business: \$25_____ Supporter: \$50_____ Benefactor: \$100_____

The Cokato Historical Society is a non-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. All memberships run for a calendar year (January—December). Please make your gift payable to: Cokato Historical Society, PO Box 686, Cokato MN 55321-0686. Thank you.

Cokato Museum & Akerlund Studio
175 4th Street West
PO Box 686
Cokato, MN 55321-0686

Address Service Requested

NON PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #76
COKATO MN

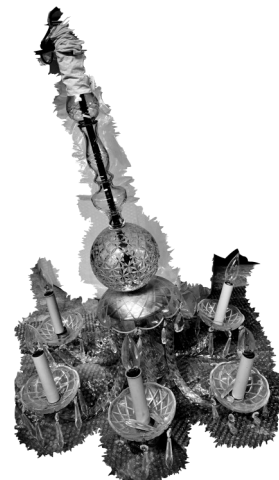
Place address label here

Learn more about the Cokato Hospital at:
<https://www.cokatomuseum.org/blog/lost-cokato-the-cokato-hospital>

TRIVIA

1. What was the Cokato Hospital before it was a hospital?
2. What year did Keaveny Pharmacy come to Cokato?
3. Who was the last doctor at the Cokato Hospital?
4. What is the former Cokato Clinic now?

WHAT IS THIS?



Answers on page 8