

There are so many stories and people who make a community, like Chokio, what it is today. This showcases just a snippet of them. It is impossible to capture them all.

Our goal is that you will find this tour to be an enjoyable outdoor activity, and educational as well. We would like to acknowledge the past research of county historian Edna Mae Busch. Her compiled historical information is a valuable resource to Stevens County. Also, thank you to Carol Ritter for her work on the Chokio Centennial book.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Stevens County
HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

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making history come alive

City of Chokio
Self-guided Walking Tour

Some of the best historical artifacts are right before our very eyes. Take a walk back into time and learn a little bit about some people that helped structure Chokio as we know it. The homes/structures on this tour were built by many of the folks who began businesses, churches, community organizations and were influential in helping Chokio and Stevens County become a thriving place to live, work and play.



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In the middle of the Wadsworth Trail, between St. Cloud and Fort Sisseton, was a stop known as the *Halfway House*. It began as a small trading post, livery barn, grocery store, saloon, and school house. In the 1880s, when the railroad came through, it designated the site for a town and chose a spot 1/2 mile south of the *Halfway House*. The halfway settlement was abandoned in favor of starting a more permanent settlement. The railroad officials suggested "Grandmother Hamlin", who cooked at the Halfway House, to choose a name for the town. She named it after a Native American boy who had worked for her at the *Halfway House*. Chokio is a Dakota word meaning "the middle". Chokio was incorporated as a village in August 1898.



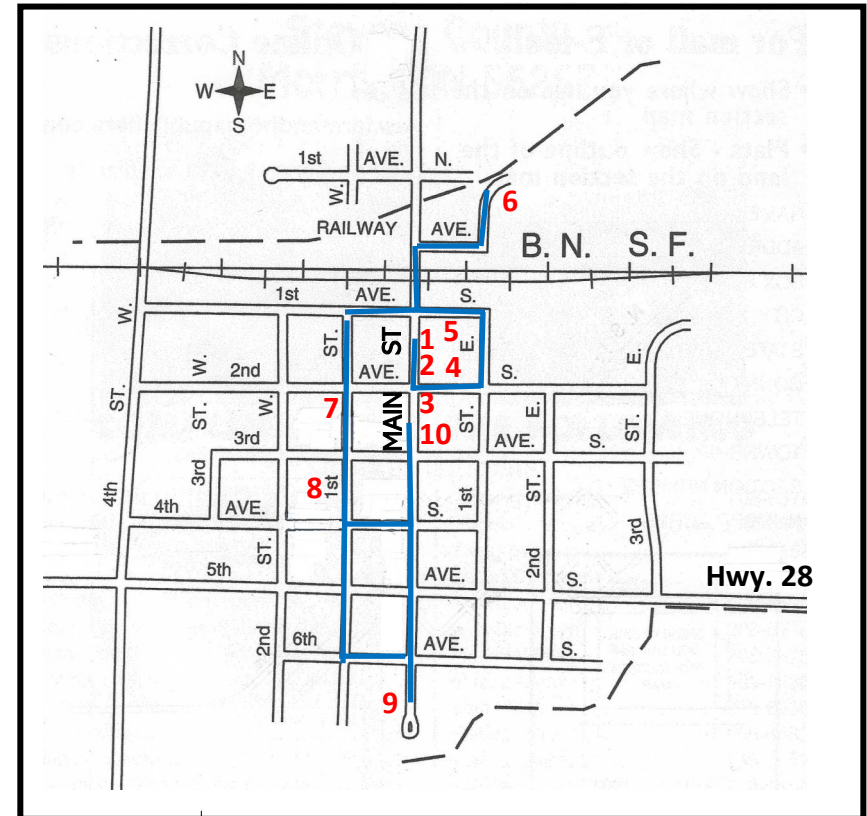
Main Street Chokio 1908

1 120 South Main Street—Memorial Park

Chokio's smallest and sweetest park is on the east side of Main Street next to the Senior Center. It was developed as a garden in 1990 by Joan McNally in memory of her husband, the late Joseph (Bud) McNally, Mayor of Chokio from 1963 to 1988. Each summer people from all over visit the garden to view its beautiful array of flowers and striking mural painted on the wall of the Senior Center building. Shortly after Bud's passing, in 1990, Joan approached the city council with her idea. The council agreed and a decaying building was purchased by the city, a large number of volunteers donated time and equipment, and an eye sore was turned into a lovely space. The garden was designed by Judy VanKempen and Smokey VanKempen directed the work. Joan's original intention was to create the garden in memory of her husband, but soon other people asked to donate in memory of their loved ones. These outside memorials have made it possible to improve the garden space with a mural, painted by local artists Jenny Lee and Doris Benson. There is also an underground sprinkler system, water-rock garden, arbor, bird bath and flag, as well as rosebushes, trees, and shrubs in memory of other local residents. It was declared an official city park in 1995 to insure its care and continuance.



City of Chokio



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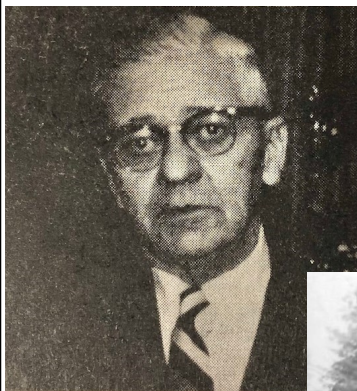
10 222 South Main Street

Henry Carl Kaley was a born business owner. In 1912, when Henry was 15 years old, his family moved to the Chokio area. He farmed with his father for a few years and then joined the Army to serve in



World War I. Upon his return he started the first livestock shipping line out of Chokio. Later he opened the first gasoline station in the village in this quaint building, selling Phillips 66 products. During his years in business he also operated the first Chokio recreation center. For several years before leaving Chokio he owned a coffee shop. He

married Virgil McNally in 1934 and the couple lived here until moving to Spokane, WA, in 1947, to live near their two sons. Henry operated a filling station in Spokane, as well.



Henry Kaley



Kaley's Phillips 66 — 1940s

2 126 South Main Street

The First National Bank began in 1900. It was known as Stevens County's strongest financial institution with all the strongest safeguards against both fire and burglary. The President was Chester H. Cadwell, (his home is #10 on this tour) with Joe Blaisdell as cashier. The First



National Bank later became Farmer's State Bank. Despite its strong beginnings, it was one of four banks in the county that were forced to close in 1921. The building became Chokio Hardware in the 1930s and 40s, with Gambles as part of the building in the 1960s. In 1962, Gerhart Busch bought the hardware store from Paul Dorweiler, Sr. He purchased it as an investment to keep his family together and employed. They operated the store as an "Our Own Hardware". After a

few ownership changes and attempts at keeping a hardware store going, it became office space in the 2000s.



1910s



1940s

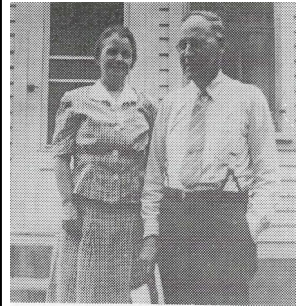


Chokio was notorious for muddy streets. This car is stuck quite badly on Main Street in front of the Farmer's State Bank in 1914.

3

200 South Main Street

The history of the building known as Nelson's Grocery Store has had several changes in its 100+ year existence. This building was erected in 1902 by John and Louis Johnson. It became the Grove and Heberle general merchandise store. In 1912, A.J. Nelson came to Chokio to rent the store and he purchased it in 1918. After WWII, Ervy Nelson joined his father and became the sole owner in 1949 when his father died. Ervy retired from the grocery business in 1991.



Esther and A. J. Nelson

Ervy Nelson was known as everyone's friend. He enjoyed people and visiting with them. He told his employees to treat everyone alike. Employees of Nelson's Store have fond memories of working for a kind owner.



This 1908 photo, right, shows the Grove and Heberle store, which later became Nelson's.



Part of Doris Benson's painting of Main Street Chokio, left, shows Nelson's Store and Chokio Hardware on the other side of the intersection.

9

603 South Main Street

This home was built around the turn of the century, possibly 1901, by Chester H. Cadwell who was the President of the First National Bank of Chokio from 1900-1913. (see #2 in the brochure) Chester's daughter, Lenore, recalls this to be a popular spot for her friends to come and play, as the upstairs bathroom was the only indoor bathroom in the town. It was also one of the first homes in Chokio to have electricity. Mr. Cadwell died suddenly, from an apparent heart attack, at the young age of 43, while in his home. He was found by the housekeeper. Mr. Cadwell's will stated that the house (in which he had put all his life savings) would be divided between his three children and wife. In 1922, nine years after her husband's death, Mrs. Cadwell petitioned to break the will so she might sell the house. The petition was granted and the house was condemned so Mrs. Cadwell could sell it, which she did. In 1933, A.J. Nelson (see #3 in the brochure) purchased it for \$1,630.20 and turned it into three apartments. After changing hands a few times, Chuck and Kay Grossman purchased it in 1976 and have made



many renovations and remodeling upgrades. There is a plaque in the front entryway that reads "It must be nice to know you are where you are supposed to be."



7 203 1st Street West Methodist Church

An Ecclesiastical Society was formed in 1901. They built this 56 X 25 X 15 frame structure and put an old iron pipe fence around it to keep the cattle and horses off the lawn. Any denomination could use the building, but later it became a Congregational Church. That only lasted about 7 years and in 1908, the members organized as the German Methodist Church. They purchased the building from the Congregational Church even though many members were the same. The original church building had no basement and was painted brown and came to be known as the "Little Brown Church in the Vale". In 1928, the building was raised and a full basement dug with shovels, picks, and horses with a scraper. Pastor W.C. Stegner covered many miles between the Pepperton church, which was where the parsonage was, and Chokio, with his horse and buggy. Pastor Stegner was known for announcing in the middle of his sermon which home he was going to for coffee after the service. The Methodist Church no longer meets here.



8 311 1st Street West - School

The first Chokio school was organized on May 3, 1880, as ISD #27. At that time Chokio was just a small settlement 1/2 mile north of the present site. On September 5, 1898, the first day of school was held in a new two story wooden building in the town's new location. Within just a few years, this school was considered too small and a much larger two-story brick building was erected on the same site in 1903. The old school building was moved a block and half north and became an apartment dwelling known as the "Hench House". (It was torn down in 1940.) The town was proud of its modern new school building (pictured below). In 1910, school enrollment was listed at 200 students. Extra curricular activities were held downtown in the *Hippodrome*. In 1952, many of the area rural schools consolidated with Chokio and a new elementary school was constructed. The old building was remodeled. By 1960, small schools throughout the state were discussing the possibility of merging. Neither the people in Chokio or Alberta liked the idea of receiving education in another community, but in September of 1967, the new school of Chokio-Alberta District 771 opened its doors. Today the K-12 students attend school in Chokio, pairing all sports with Morris Area.



1925

No. 3. Public School, Chokio, Minn.

4 107 East 2nd Avenue South—Creamery

The need for a creamery was felt in the community. In 1919, this building was constructed from sand-lime brick and tile. The first manager, N.P. Nelson, was known for the wooden shoes he wore to work. The next manager, who was to keep the job for 36 years, was known for making amazing butter. This was J. H. "Herman" Wensman. Herman and his wife, Clara, moved to Chokio from Gilman, MN in 1921. Herman learned the buttermaking trade while working for Bridgeman-Russell Creamery in Duluth, MN, and creameries in Freeport, MN and Gilman. In its biggest year of business, the Chokio Cooperative Creamery made and sold 500,000 pounds of butter! They also handled poultry and egg buying. Herman



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PHONE 10 FOR DAILY DELIVERY

Chokio Co-op. Creamery
Chokio, Minn.

began a Creamery Picnic which served crowds free ice cream and refreshments and included band music. Later it became the Dairy Day Picnic, and is now known as the Chokio Community Picnic. Herman was an avid gardener and each year raised hundreds of gladiolus, which he gave to the church and brides for their weddings. Both Herman and Clara were very active in the Chokio community and served on many boards, etc. Herman was the mayor of Chokio from 1955-1957. Ill health forced him to retire from his career as manager of the creamery.

5 108 East 1st Avenue South— Depot

The first depot in Chokio was as small as a boxcar and said to have been an insult to the people of this area. In 1896, the Morris Tribune reports “At last Chokio is to have a depot”, with the construction of this 24 X 50 structure. In 1916, it received a new floor, shingles, and improved waiting room. Electric lights were installed in 1923. The “Toonerville Trolley” made its first appearance through Chokio in 1924. This was a twice a day passenger service that allowed people to spend the day shopping and taking care of business matters or visit friends in Morris. The depot was a favorite meeting place for the community members where issues of the day were debated and many a cigar butt or tobacco chew filled the spittoon. The depot managers were very important in the life of Chokio. One of the most well remembered agents was Spencer Klucas, beginning at the Chokio depot in 1937. Spen was very dedicated to the community, his church, local school, and the young people of the area. He served many years as Scoutmaster and directed the Chokio High School Band during the WWII years when an instructor could not be found.

The Chokio depot has been the scene of warm welcomes and desperate good-byes. Mothers and fathers kissed their children goodbye on the depot platform as they went to two World Wars. Some parents never saw their soldier again. This 125 year old building holds many memories. In November 1984, the depot building was moved to its present location across the street from the old lumber yard.



This photo shows a successful hunting endeavor displayed on the Chokio depot.

(Before the depot was painted white)



Pearl and Spencer Klucas

6 108 North 1st Street

Frank Schott was born in Germany and learned to be a master mason from his father and other German influences. Frank is best known for the “stone barn” that he built on his farm south of Chokio. In 1950, Frank, and his wife, Sophie, began building this 1800 sq.

ft. house and finished it four years later. They were in their late sixties when they began the building project. The entire house is built of stone and cement. The stone was hauled in from the field on the Schott farm and the cement was used cement that Frank reprocessed. The walls are solid cement and are approximately 22 inches thick. The house plans were similar to a German duplex. Frank and Sophie lived here together for a very short time, as their son lived on the family farm. After Frank’s passing, Sophie moved back to the farm to live with their son, as she did not want to be alone. However, she would ride her bicycle to town and sit in the house to “visit” Frank. (Frank was a believer in reincarnation) Herman Wensman would give her a ride back home many of the days. The house sat empty for about 30 years before being purchased and has gone through extensive remodeling. It is currently owned by Smokey and Joyce VanKempen.



Frank and Sophie Schott



Schott Stone Barn
8 miles south of Chokio