

There are so many stories and people who make a community what it is today. This showcases just a snippet of them. It is impossible to capture them all. Much of our programming is based on what is available to us in our museum.

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.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

*Stevens County*  
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM**

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*making history come alive*

**East Side, Morris**  
*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 the East Side of Morris as we know it. The homes and buildings featured in this tour were built by, or lived in by, some of the most influential people in our community and contributed significantly to the prosperity of Stevens County.

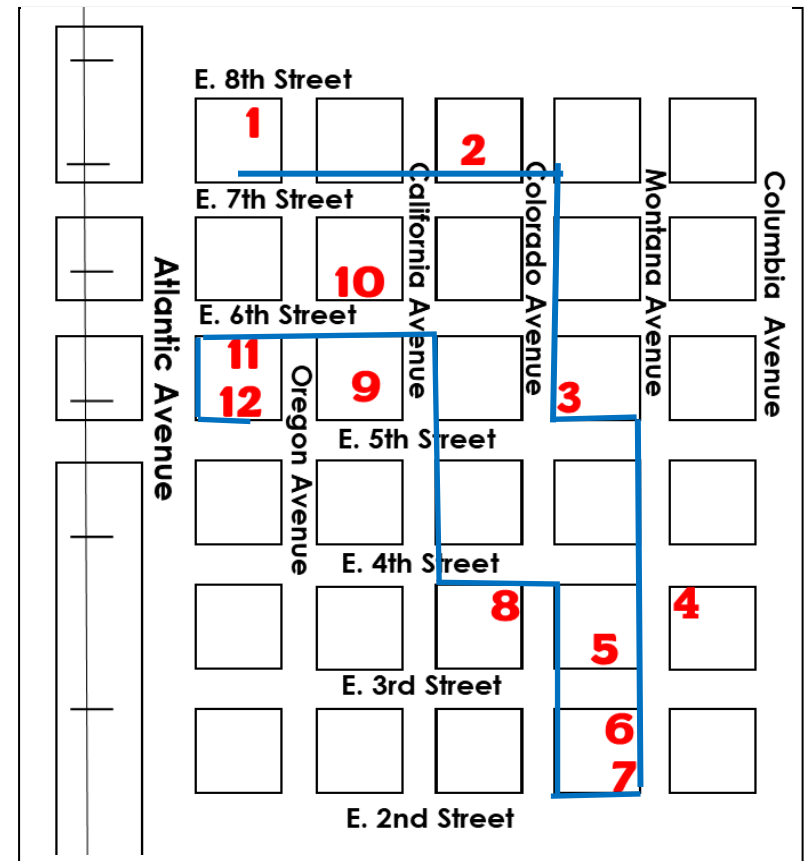


PLEASE DO NOT ENTER PRIVATE PROPERTY AND OBSERVE ALL SAFETY RULES REGARDING PUBLIC STREETS AND ROADS.

# Poverty Hill

The town of Morris flourished when the railroad came through in 1871. Quickly, the railroad served as a feature of the town that divided it along ethnic, economic, and political lines. The west side of Morris was primarily resided in by Yankees, or established Anglo-Americans from the eastern United States. In the late 1890s, all of the English speaking churches were on the west side, leading it to be referred to as "Piety Hill". On the converse, the east side was primarily resided in by new immigrants, laborers, and widows. Out of this came the name "Poverty Hill". However, this was not necessarily uniform. You will notice that many of the homes and landmarks featured in this program have English sounding names, and that is because there were many Yankees living on the east side. The Yankees had greater access to capital and were more involved in civic organizations that lent themselves to documentation in the historical record. Much like the rest of history, it is a story of those who had the means to record it. Many of the early residents of the east side were illiterate and times were difficult for the average laborer or widow. Many could not afford the luxury of a well-built house and thus, those homes from pre-1900 that remain today were those of the wealthy residents of the community. We tried to include as many voices as were able in this short program with what we had available to us in our archives and collections. Surely, there are hundreds of stories about the working class, or the Norwegian laborers who moved to the village, or the eastern widows who moved here for lands. We encourage the sharing of these stories with us so that we can properly incorporate them into the greater story of Stevens County.

# Map of East Side Morris



Thank you to our sponsors!



# 12

## 7 East 5th Street

Rob Lucus came to Morris in 2011 to manage this Pizza Ranch location by way of Tea, South Dakota. He worked his way up in the company from a delivery driver and has owned this location outright since 2017. Many will remember that this location used to be Papa Johns, unaffiliated with the national chain. Rob met his wife, Mel, while exhibiting Pizza Ranch at the Lee Community Center. At the time, she worked for Pizza Hut. Mel made the move to Pizza Ranch in 2012, and they have run the business as a couple ever since. Rob is also the children's director at the Morris Evangelical Free Church. Both Rob and Mel are very involved in the community and enjoy raising their family in Morris. Their "giving back" and support of community organizations is a valuable part of Stevens County.



# 1

## 25 East 2nd Street

Willie Martin founded Willie's Supervalu in 1951 when he purchased the Heart Supermarket, closely followed by the Red Owl that had employed him following his tenure in the US Navy. Several additions were added to the building at the corner of 7th and Oregon Avenue, that was once the International Harvest Building. The current Willie's Supervalu was completed in 1999 due to space shortages in their previous location across the street. Willie was always regarded as an immensely kind man and frequently donated groceries and money to civic organizations and those in need. Some things over the years haven't changed, as Willie's still utilizes "carry-outs", a service long since eliminated from most grocery stores to save on labor cost. Despite Willie's sporting a new look, following the 2018



**Willie (2nd from right) with staff**



**Willie Martin**

renovation, the legacy that Willie Martin crafted can still be seen in the exemplary customer service to patrons and support of community organizations.

2

## 107 East 7th Street East Side Park



East Side Park came as a result of one of Morris' most forgotten scandals. The area between Atlantic Avenue and the railroad was the original location for a proposed park. J.J. Hill did not want a public park next to the railroad tracks and, instead, sold that land to the city at a very low price of \$10,000. The land was placed in a trust with the Morris Investment Company. Between 1899 and 1901, much of this land was sold and developed by the shareholders of the Morris Investment Company and, yet, the city didn't see any profits from the sales. The profits were meant to be utilized to construct a park elsewhere in town. The scandal even went to court, but it is not clear how the story ended in the public record. J.J. Hill found out about this some years later, and donated the land where East Side Park now stands. The park has had a variety of looks throughout the years. At one point, a fountain was constructed in the middle of the park, along with a small bandshell. That bandshell burned down, and a new one was donated by Skip Killoran. In 2020, when the Morris Kiwanis disbanded, they planted a series of trees that the Morris community will enjoy for decades to come.

11

## 12 East 6th Street Morris Theatre

The Morris Theatre was constructed in the late 1930s, in the Streamline Moderne style, common of the time. It was completed in 1940 and had its first premier in October of that year. Television was not common for several decades so the theatre was frequented by those seeking updates on the war, or to be entertained by the products of the budding film industry. In 2008, a group of community members, many from the University of Minnesota, Morris, started the Morris Theatre Cooperative to purchase the theatre after it went on the market. The cooperative relied on membership payments from the community, securing over a hundred in its first year. A great deal of fundraising covered most of the mortgage and the theatre was saved. The Morris Theatre Cooperative still operates the theatre today and has since renovated and expanded to two screens. (See our West Side Morris Walking Tour for story on B.J. Benfield, related to the theatre)



Attendants of a Glenn Miller show, 1940

10

## 105 East 6th Street Post Office

The Morris Post Office began operations in 1938 and was constructed for \$50,000. Frank Hancock was the general contractor on the project, and you can see the architectural design reflected in other buildings around town. Boasting an elegant design, the newest federal building in the county at that time, was a very pleasant building architecturally and in its attention to details of the interior woodwork. In 1941, artist Alfred Sessler added the Gager's Station mural. Following the construction of the post office, a boom of construction and development occurred on 6th Street with several houses and businesses constructed in the 1940s. Prior to the construction of this post office, mail had been handled in a variety of locations around the town and even several miles out of town at Gager's Station, in the late 1860s. The first post-box from Gager's Station is on display in the permanent exhibition at the Stevens County History Museum.



A large gathering at the dedication in 1938.

3

## 303 East 5th Street

This home was built in 1902 by Frank and Ida Hancock. Frank was originally from Vermont but relocated to Minnesota along with many other Hancocks who trace their lineage back to the first Puritan settlers in the East. Frank was a prolific contractor in Morris, with his company building the Carnegie Library, many of the older buildings on the UMM campus, and First Lutheran Church (just to name a few). Ida was an influential civic leader as a part of the War Records Commission, which would eventually merge into the Stevens County Historical Society. She was appointed by Governor Burnquist to preserve all records pertaining to the war efforts and its affects in Morris. Her documentation of the late 1910s has given us a lot of insight on the farm depression, the Spanish Flu, as well as bountiful records for genealogical purposes. Frank was a charter member of the Morris Kiwanis, as well as a member of the Knights of Pythias and the Golden Sheaf Masonic Lodge. Both clearly had significant amounts of influence in the community at the time and Frank's enterprise made him a very wealthy man.



Frank A. and Ida Hancock and their home, 1910s.

# 4

## 310 Montana Avenue

William Wunsch built this home for his wife, Mary, and their eleven children in 1914. The youngest, Charlotte, remained in this home until her death in 1978. William Wunsch was born in Germany in 1840 and came to the U.S. in 1853, by himself. He enlisted in the Marine Corp. and fought in the Civil War, was present at Abraham Lincoln's Inaugural Address, and witnessed some of the most famous battles in our U.S. history. After his army discharge, he farmed in Dakota County for a year, but was most curious about the lands north. He took a train to Willmar, met up with J.D.Good, who already owned land in Stevens County, and the two gentleman rode the train to Benson's end-of-the-line railroad. Together the two men walked the railroad grade (which was getting ready for tracks) from Benson to Morris on July 4th, 1870. (Railroad came to Morris in 1871)



**William Wunsch**

J.D.Good convinced William to purchase land here and so William Wunsch purchased the Perkin's place on Pomme De Terre Lake, trying his hand at farming there. Six years later he opened "Wunsch Saloon" on Atlantic Avenue, purchased the Stanton House (aka "Chimneys") and lived there a short time, before building this house. Mr. Wunsch was the first pioneer member of the Assumption Catholic Church, and it was through his generosity that the first catholic church was built in Morris. He was well-known for his kindness and generosity to all and joy of conversation.



**Wunsch Home, 1914**



**Wunsch Saloon, 1910s**

# 9

## 102 East 6th Street Morris Public Library

When the Stevens County Memorial Armory burned down in 1967, the city of Morris built the Morris Public Library, that we see today, on the same lot. From 1922



until 1967, the collections of the Stevens County Historical Society were housed in the armory. State of the art building design (with fire wall technology) spared the collections from the fire that destroyed most of the building. The Morris library had previously been housed in the 1905 Carnegie building on West 6th Street, where the Stevens County Historical Society now resides. Today, the library is within the greater Viking Library system and offers a variety of services to the community including standard library service, room rental, and educational programming.



**Memorial Armory following 1967 fire**

8

## 311 Colorado Avenue St. Mary's School

St. Mary's was constructed for a cost of \$40,000 in 1914. Prior to its construction, the school was operating out of the basement of Assumption Church. The first floor was utilized for grade school pupils and the second floor served as the classrooms for high school students. Originally, the teachers were laymen of the parish until they were replaced by Sisters of Mercy. Many will remember that in 2014, heavy rains caused major damage to the roof. Frequently, young people would climb on top of the building for romantic rendezvous. A left behind wine bottle plugged a drainage hole on the roof, causing a large pool of water to compromise the integrity of the structure, causing significant damage to the building. The school utilized the tragedy to update its facilities in regards to energy efficiency, security, and fire protection adding to the \$800,000 repairs from the roof.

St. Mary's School teaches pre-K through Grade 6.



Saint Mary's School, 1940

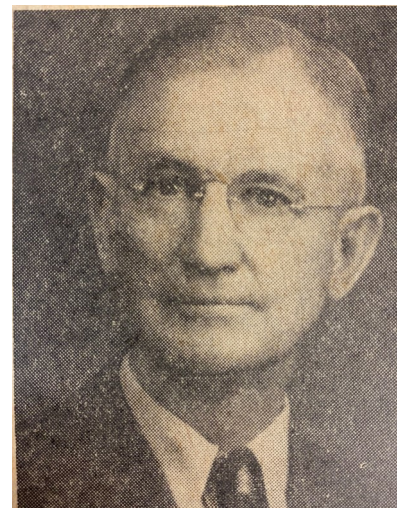
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## 307 East 3rd Street

This was the home of Dr. Charles G. Jennings. Dr. Jennings moved to Morris in 1903 from Illinois, following his education in Chicago. He practiced in Morris for over 50 years. He was a beloved member of the veterinary community and was honored with a lifetime membership to the Minnesota Veterinarian Association. He only missed the convening of the MVA one time in his life, due to an illness of his wife. Jennings involved himself in several groups in Morris including the Federated Methodist Church, the Knights of Pythias, the Red Cross, and the Morris Board of Education. In 1934, he was selected to participate in a federally funded program where he inspected



livestock herds in Texas. This was one of many policies adopted by the federal government to protect farmers as their margins disappeared in the depression. In 1945, Jennings moved out of the home, but he didn't go far. He spent the rest of his days in Morris at 301 East 3rd Street.



Dr. Charles G. Jennings, 1950

6

310 East 3rd Street

In 1878, Dr. H.L. Hulburd became the third doctor in the history of Stevens County, and, unlike many other doctors, lived here until his death. He was educated in New York, came to Wisconsin, Minneapolis, and then made his way to Morris. He served as the county coroner in his practice that was characterized as general, much like most other frontier doctors. Medicine in this time was rudimentary and largely based on an emerging scientific approach due to the organization of the medical profession. Rural people have historically had very little access to healthcare. Dr. Hulburd was involved in the Masonic Lodge and United Workmen's Association. Dr. Hulburd was highly revered, as evidenced by his widely attended funeral where H.H. Wells, F.A. Hancock, and O.C. Hanson served as pall bearers. His obituary includes personal quotes of condolences from nearly all the prominent businessmen of the time. He was described as an enormously kind individual who loved his practice. He truly internalized the belief that his medical practice was a way to make the world a better place. In 1895, he made it his mission to cure consumption (tuberculosis), a common ailment of the time. Obviously, this did not happen, but it is evidence of his approach to medicine and how he served Morris. His wife, Margaret, was also dearly loved and revered in this community as one that opened their home to anyone and made them feel comfortable.



Dr. H.L. Hulburd and the home he shared with his wife, Margaret, and daughter, Cora.

7

309 East 2nd Street

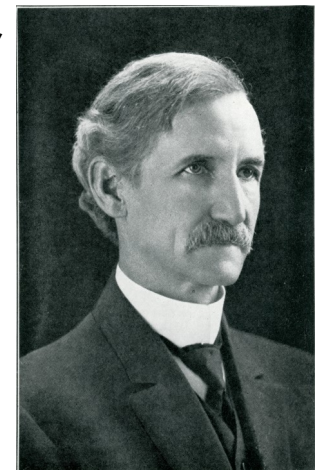
This home was constructed in 1899 for Stephen Flaherty and his wife, Nellie. Built in the Queen Anne Style, this home is one of the east side's more elegant homes. Note the profusion of windows, palate of color, and asymmetrical roof that was common in the Queen Anne Style. The Flaherty's were Irish Catholic and Stephan wanted the home constructed near Assumption Catholic Church. Stephen Flaherty was a lawyer who practiced in Morris, including a stint as Stevens County Attorney in 1887, until he was elected to the 16th Judicial District Bench in 1900. In his county wide elections, he ran unopposed. S.A. Flaherty was a member of many civic organizations and had the company of such Morris folks as O.C. Hanson and Frank Hancock. Stephen and Nellie's son, Sheridan, would find success in Morris as a musician.



More recently in 1984, the home was slated for demolition. Thankfully, it was sold and much restoration was done to save this historical home.



Flaherty House, 1905



Hon. S.A. Flaherty