

BRANDON TOWNSHIP CELEBRATES 150 YEARS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

By Mike Cleary, Brandon Township Clerk

Brandon Township was established as a township by the Douglas County Commissioners on September 3, 1867, and was then called Chippewa for its lakes and river of that name used as a “road of war” by the Ojibway into their forays to the Sioux country. Previously it had a station named Chippewa on the Burbank stage route from St. Cloud to the Red River at the home and hotel of Ole Brandon on a low hill about two miles north of the present railway village which received his name, whence also the township was renamed on March 11, 1881. The Village of Brandon was later incorporated at its present site on November 22, 1881.

That makes Brandon Township 150 years old this year. So you ask “What is a Township”?

Township government, carried over from Europe and established in Providence, Rhode Island in 1636, is the oldest existing unit of government continuing to serve on the North American continent and was in existence for 140 years prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The wording of the Declaration of Independence reflects the fact that 38 of its 56 signers had experienced the benefits of township government.

Townships are the original form of local government in Minnesota, established as part of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which created the State of Minnesota. The township form of government served as a familiar building block to develop the state by dividing land areas into 36 square mile units known as congressional townships. Today, the term township generally refers to organized but unincorporated communities governed by a local board of supervisors and created to provide services to their residents. There are currently 1,790 townships across the state of Minnesota. And, in Minnesota, Townships are also called “Towns”, not to be confused with Villages and Cities that are often also called “Towns”.

Brandon Township is governed by an elected board of three Supervisors each of who serve four year terms. The current Township Supervisors are Gene Fynboh, Kerby Lund and Dennis Lund. They are assisted by two appointed officers consisting of a Clerk and a Treasurer. Mike Cleary is the current Township Clerk and Kathy Zimmermann serves as Township Treasurer.

The number of township officials varied during the early years of the township. Early positions included the 5 officers mentioned above plus an Assessor, 2 Justices of the Peace, 2 Constables and 1 Overseer of Highways for each Road District (up to 12) in the Township, all of whom were elected.

During the period from 1872 to 2017 (township records prior to 1872 could not be located), the township has had 58 different supervisors (always 3 at a time), 13 clerks and 11 treasurers. Prior to the year 2000, township government was exclusively male. However, since then, three women (Sandi Olson, Diane Smith and Jennifer Lanners) have been elected to serve in Brandon Township. Notable officials with lengthy terms in office include the following:

<u>Officer</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Period</u>	<u>Years</u>
Carl O. Augdahl	Supervisor/Clerk	1905-1947	43
Kenneth Johnson	Supervisor	1966-2001	36
Haagen Holing	Treasurer	1875-1905	34
Vernon Lehn	Treasurer	1963-1992	29
Anton H. Strom	Supervisor/Clerk	1881-1909	28
David Klukken	Clerk	1974-1999	26
Hilding Peterson	Supervisor	1946-1970	25
Gaylin Croonquist	Supervisor	1986-2016 (W/Gaps)	25
Emil Linnard	Treasurer	1922-1945	24
H. O. Olson	Supervisor	1924-1944	21
Dianne Smith	Treasurer	1993-2012	20
Leonard Schulte	Supervisor	1972-1991	20
Clinton Olson	Supervisor	1966-1985	20

It has often been said that it is difficult to retire from township government once elected. The thirteen individuals listed above found that to be the case having served a total of 351 years between them.

The activities of the township during the early years consisted primarily of laying out and building a local system of roads needed for the settler farmers to purchase needed supplies and equipment and to get their products to market. During the period from 1867 to 1871, a total of 16 miles of township roads were constructed using horse drawn equipment. Today, the township maintains 38 miles of gravel surfaced roads and 6 miles of paved roads using modern equipment.

Road construction and maintenance were financed by assessing a "Poll Tax" of a number of days work (varied from one to two days per year) per abled body male between the ages of 21 and 50 and a "Road Tax" of a nominal amount (varied from 10 to 75 cents) per \$100 of assessed personal property (including farm buildings and equipment, crops and livestock). Road Districts were established in the township and Overseers assigned to each. Thousands of feet of oak planking were purchased during the early road building years for building a base over soft ground and for building bridges over streams.

Other activities of early township government included assessing property, ensuring public health and safety and providing general assistance for the sick and indigent. While crime has never been a major problem, there were many cases of illness in the early 1900's to include consumption and smallpox. The township provided assistance in caring for quarantined families and providing burial services where warranted. Most of these services are now provided by Douglas County.

While the township does not own any cemeteries, it is responsible for the maintenance of abandoned cemeteries such as Edgefield Cemetery located approximately three miles north of the City of Brandon on County Road 16.

Much of the early history of the people of Brandon Township and the Village of Brandon was reported by the Brandon Echo newspaper during its existence from 1898 to 1908. One hundred years later, portions of the history were reprinted by the West Douglas County Record during the years 1998 through 2006 in a weekly column titled "A History of The Edgefield Pioneer Cemetery Area" by Myron (Bud) Greenquist (1930-2009). Copies of Bud's columns make for informative and entertaining reading and can be found at the Brandon, Evansville and Douglas County Historical Societies.

Brandon Township currently has a population of 744 residents located in 309 households. Township Meetings are held on the 3rd Monday of each month except January and February. Due to holidays, the Board meets on the 3rd Tuesday of these two months. Meetings are held at 7:00 PM at the Brandon Community Center located behind the Brandon Fire Hall. The public is welcome to attend.

The Annual Township Meeting is held on the second Tuesday of March. The agenda for this meeting includes approval of the annual township budget and tax levy for the following year. Township government plays an important role in maintaining our quality of life. If you are unfamiliar with what your township does for you, please attend the Annual Township Meeting and see grass roots government in action.

More information on Township meetings can be found on the Brandon Township website at www.brandontownship.org.