



TOWER-SOUDAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ISSUE NO. 1, DECEMBER 2025

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

Be Part of Tower's History – Join the Founding Supporters Circle

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our supporters, the **Tower Fire Hall Restoration Project** is nearing completion!

Now, as we enter the final phase, we invite both **new and returning donors** to be part of the **Founding Supporters Circle** – a lasting tribute to those whose gifts made this dream possible.

Members will be permanently recognized on a plaque inside the restored Fire Hall, honoring early donors who helped preserve this historic landmark for generations to come.

Together, we have not only saved a historic building but also created a vibrant space where our community can gather, learn, and celebrate its past and future.

Contributions made between 2018 and 2025 will be recognized at the following levels:

- Legacy Circle – \$500,000 and above
- Cornerstone Circle – \$50,000 to \$499,999
- Visionary Circle – \$5,000 to \$49,999
- Community Circle – \$250 to \$4,999

Your gift – whether it's your first or a renewed show of support – will help complete the restoration and strengthen the foundation for the **Tower-Soudan-Lake Vermilion History Education Center**. We also accept multi-year pledges, and are set up to accept gifts of appreciated stock and securities now! Contact us for details.

Please make your gift by **December 31, 2025**, to be included in this special recognition. Donations may be made online at <https://towersoudanhistory.com/get-involved/donate> or mailed to Tower-Soudan Historical Society, PO Box 465, Tower, MN 55790.

Together, we've come this far – let's finish strong!

Nancy Larson

TSHS President



The Tower Fire Hall Restoration Project is nearing completion.

TOWERSOUDANHISTORY.COM • TOWERSOUDANHSGMAIL.COM

TOWER • SOUDAN • TRAIN DEPOT • FIRE HALL • LAKE VERMILION • MINING

HISTORICAL NUGGETS

How Cold Was It?

Residents of the Tower and Embarrass area know that their winters will be cold and have come to expect the frigid winter weather. Located in a low basin of the Embarrass River Valley, the Vermilion Range borders the northern end and the Laurentian Divide borders the southern end and moraines are found at right angles to this valley. Gravity and these natural barriers cause denser, heavier cold air to drain into the river valley basin creating a cold pool of air making it a natural cold spot.

Tower and Embarrass frequently record some of the lowest temperatures in the state. These frigid temperatures are recorded daily by local volunteer cooperative weather observers and relayed to the National Weather Service and across the country.

In 1996, for two days – January 31 and February 1, the temperatures were exceptionally cold, hovering at -55 and -58 Fahrenheit. However, day three at -60 caused the local schools to close for a couple of days and some folks reported that their water lines froze and burst.

Weather watchers knew a record was probably going to be broken or very close to it. The media frenzy was there, and everybody was talking about it.

It was a near-party atmosphere in the area with newspaper, TV and radio reporters all gathering on the forecast of potential state-record cold. There were those who relished the opportunity to earn bragging rights. A group of friends doubled up sleeping bags and dug into hardened snow drifts for a long night of myth-making at Timber Hall in Embarrass.

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The Way We Were

Do you ever look at old artifacts and wonder about the story of their origin? Who created this and what is its heritage? One such treasure is the Settler's Cabin located by the Depot in Tower. And this is its story.....

Mike Smulter, the man who built it, was born in Finland and arrived in Minnesota in the early part of the 20th century. He and his parents settled in the Embarrass area.

On an early spring day in 1912, Mike bought a railway ticket to Tower. After boarding the train, Smulter refused to sit in the smoking section while smoking his pipe. This caused quite a kerfuffle and the conductor stopped the train and ejected him. A short time later an ore train came along and Mike, trying to catch a ride, slipped under the car wheels and one of his legs was amputated below the knee.

After recovering, Smulter, a skilled craftsman, carved himself a wooden leg. Deciding to find some land to "squat" on, he soon found a 40-acre section of land on Smarts Bay where he built his cabin. Using only a double bit axe and a "buck saw", Mike cut down trees that were about 14 inches in diameter and made the round logs into 10-inch square ones with a broad axe. He then fit these logs using dovetail joints so tight no chinking or plastering was needed.

Mike lived on this property for many years by trapping, hunting, fishing and making fine furniture which he sold in Tower to tourists. Being a loner, he eventually left the area and the 13 by 17 foot cabin sat vacant for many years.

In 1965 the Tower-Soudan Historical Society started a search for a Finnish homesteader's cabin that could be moved to the Tower park near the train depot. Bob Olson, Frank Franson and "Chub" Shoberg knew where Mike's cabin was and in 1968 the Historical Society took ownership. It was moved over the winter ice to Moccasin Point and then by road to Tower.

The original tin roof was replaced with wood shingles, windows were replaced and some of Mike's tools were put on display. The Historical Society is planning to remodel the inside to reflect what it was like to live there in that time period.

Come see it next summer!

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Radio personality and historian Mike Hillman memorably entertained all by narrating a live feed to local radio station WELY from his tent at the Tower weather station. His claim to fame was successfully pounding a nail with a frozen banana on air.

The media folks were heading to Embarrass—as all signs pointed to Embarrass taking the record cold title—until their thermometer broke. On that day of February 2nd, Embarrass Station national weather observer Roland Fowler thought he might have had the record... until Fowler's National Weather Service official thermometer went on the blink at 3 a.m. Unfortunately, Fowler's back-up thermometer wasn't in the official box. The temperatures of the other thermometers were not considered official.

Tower's official thermometer was working perfectly and because of that, Tower was the winner that very cold day. Tower's 60 below zero was also the coldest temperature ever recorded east of the Mississippi River.

People living in Tower enjoyed their record setting day. "We've missed out on some state basketball tournaments and football tournaments, but now we're state champs," Gary Burgess, Tower's former mayor, said on that coldest of Minnesota days. "We've got our state championship."

Mayor Herbert Lamppa, was besieged with media calls and live CNN and WCCO phone interviews. He received calls from Texas, Washington D.C., Honolulu, Los Angeles, New York City and Boston. The City of Tower was put on the map. Lamppa told callers that people in Tower were going about their business pretty much as usual and invited everyone to visit Tower in June and July. Breitung police chief Jim Hill was interviewed live via telephone by Garrison Keillor on Minnesota Public Radio's "A Prairie Home Companion Show."

People from elsewhere wanted to have the experience of being in such cold weather. A family of five from Bloomington, Minnesota announced that they drove that night to northern Minnesota so they could experience the record-breaking cold. A souvenir coffee cup, featuring the frigid temperatures, was manufactured and sold in the local stores that summer. Photos exist of the Tower State Bank's digital sign flashing a temperature of -62 that morning. In



fact, the bank used that image for its coffee cup promotion that year.

The following day, on February 3rd, the cold snap broke and Tower was back to "warmer" weather...-32. However, Mother Nature was teasing Tower. The next day Kathy Hoppa recorded -46. After that, temperatures resumed their normal routine at -20 and up.



Shirley's Banana Bread

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup Imperial margarine
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 2 tsp soda
- 2 cups flour
- 4-5 ripe bananas
- Chopped walnuts

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cream margarine and sugar and add eggs one at a time.
- Add mashed bananas with flour.
- Beat several minutes until well blended.
- Bake at 350 degrees in 13 x 9 pan.
- Bake until well browned about 45-50 minutes.
- Cut into three loaves.

Delicious!

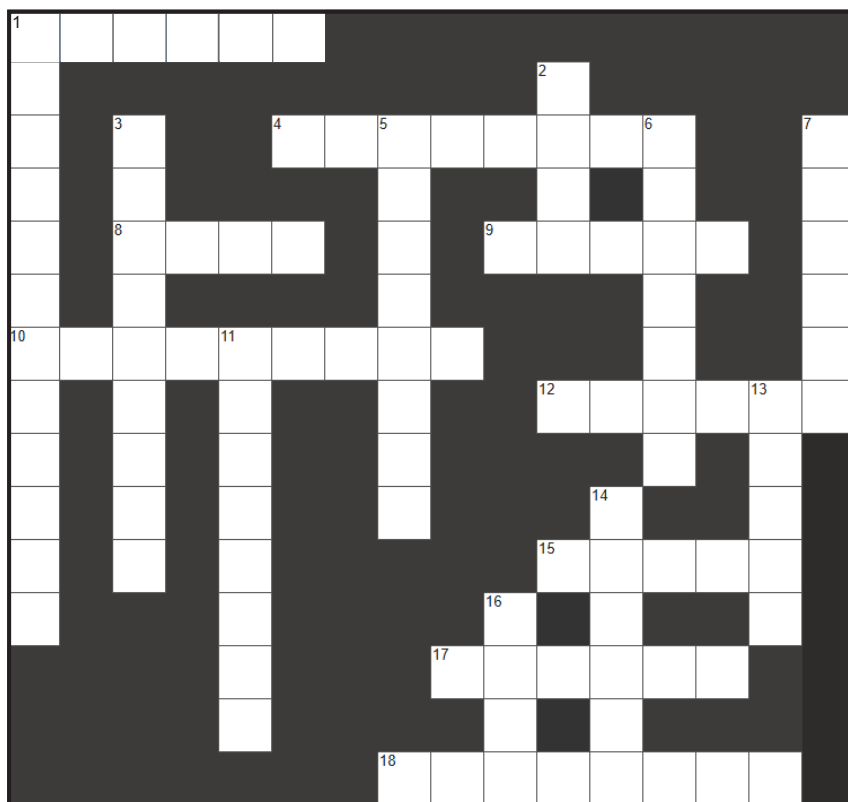
CROSSWORD CHALLENGE

ACROSS

- 1 Turn of the century horse drawn fire engine named after Tower mayor
- 4 Displays at the historical society
- 8 The short-lived Lake Vermilion Gold _____ of 1865 that led to the discovery of Iron Ore in the region
- 9 Train station housing a museum
- 10 Local tribe name meaning "hardy people of the woods"
- 12 Programs and _____ offered by the society
- 15 Second-oldest city in Arrowhead Region behind only Duluth
- 17 Point where logging camp and sawmill were located near Tower in the 1800s
- 18 Tower erected the first monument to what President two months after he was assassinated

DOWN

- 1 Newspaper serving Tower-Soudan, Ely, Cook, Embarrass, Crane Lake, Babbitt and Lake Vermilion.
- 2 How many towns were named after Charlemagne Tower
- 3 Lake associated with the historical society
- 5 The history and traditions of the area
- 6 Narratives shared by the society
- 7 Workers in the Soudan Underground Mine
- 11 1895 building restored and transformed as a History, Education and Event Center opening in 2026
- 13 Underground mine _____ offered
- 14 Mining town connected to the historical society
- 16 Ashawa, a lumber producing town, renamed after a local railroad official



Tower-Soudan Historical Society Membership Application

TODAY'S DATE _____

PRIMARY NAME _____

SECONDARY NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP CODE _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

This membership is: ☐ New ☐ Renewed

Membership Level: ☐ Individual - \$15 ☐ Couple - \$30

Are you interested in becoming a volunteer? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please mail this form with your check to:

Tower-Soudan Historical Society

P.O. Box 465 • Tower, MN 55790

*Memberships support the mission of the Tower-Soudan Historical Society and allow us to preserve, share and celebrate our history with the community to inspire future generations. **Thank you!***

ANSWERS
ACROSS
1 THE TIMBERJAY
2 FIVE
3 VERMILION
4 EXHIBITS
5 RUSH
6 DEPOT
7 MINERS
8 HERITAGE
9 STORIES
10 BOISFORTE
11 EVENTS
12 TOWER
13 TOURS
14 SOUDAN
15 COOK
DOWN
1 THE TIMBERJAY
2 FIVE
3 VERMILION
4 EXHIBITS
5 RUSH
6 DEPOT
7 MINERS
8 HERITAGE
9 STORIES
10 BOISFORTE
11 EVENTS
12 TOWER
13 TOURS
14 SOUDAN
15 COOK
16 COOK
17 HOODOO
18 MCKINLEY