

Bringing back the Boy in Blue

By Sara Gilbert Frederick
Special to The Free Press

MANKATO — Bryce Stenzel first saw Mankato's Boy in Blue monument in a photograph in a book at his grandmother's house when he was a child.

The actual monument, a bronze statue of a Union infantry soldier on a cast-iron basin anchored in an octagonal pool, was long gone by then. It had been vandalized, damaged by wind, rain and other natural forces, and poorly maintained. It was removed by the city in 1927, just 42 years after being installed in Lincoln Park — the triangular green space at the intersections of Broad, Grove and Lincoln streets in Mankato — to honor veterans of the Civil War.

But even as a boy, Stenzel was intrigued by that picture of the statue and what it represented. He was engrossed in its history and eager to figure out where it

had stood in Lincoln Park.

"I've always had a fascination with the Civil War and with that time period in general," Stenzel says. "And for me, the detective hunt was part of the fascination. I

If You Go

WHAT
The Civil War Symposium: "... We Cannot Escape History ..."

WHEN
9 a.m.-4 p.m. on
March 24

WHERE
Blue Earth County
Historical Society
Heritage Center

TICKETS
Advance registration
before March 15: \$25
(includes lunch)

Day-of registration:
\$20 (does not include
lunch)

FOR MORE
Visit
www.boyinblue.org

was always trying to figure out what used to be there."

Now Stenzel is part of group trying to figure out how to bring the Boy in Blue monument back to Mankato.

The Boy in Blue Memorial Project Committee, of which Stenzel is the director, has already found the original molds for the monument. They have found an artist in Missouri, Alan Gibson, who has worked on similar statues throughout the county and who is willing to work on this project. And they have received permission from the Mankato City Council to build the new Boy in Blue memorial on city property.

All that remains is to raise the funds necessary to do all of that, which total \$100,000.

Although \$10,000 of that has already been secured through a grant from the Rochester-based Carl & Verna Schmidt Foundation,

Looking for the Boy in Blue

The Boy in Blue Memorial Project Committee is looking for any existing photographs of the original memorial. Currently, only three have been found.

Anyone who has family photos from the early 1900s is encouraged to look for the statue and fountain among them and contact the Committee through its website, www.boyinblue.org.

most of the rest will come from private donations and from fundraising events — including the Civil War Symposium that the committee is hosting on March 24.

The day-long symposium, "... We Cannot Escape

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Courtesy of Blue Earth County Historical Society

Mankato's Boy in Blue monument was removed by the city in 1927, just 42 years after being installed in Lincoln Park. Now, a group of residents is trying to bring it back.

BLUE: Symposium on Civil War era set for this month

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History ...", will include presentations by Civil War experts and historians, costumed interpreters, interactive exhibits, a panel discussion and more.

Stenzel will appear as Abraham Lincoln to talk about the 16th president's "Trials by Fire" 150 years ago, in the year 1862. Local teacher and longtime Civil War re-enactor Arn Kind will bring uniforms and other living history artifacts to share with participants. Historian Roger Norland will introduce attendees to some of the actual boys in blue from Blue Earth and Nicollet counties.

"Roger will bring it down to the most personal level," Stenzel explains. "He'll talk about the individual soldiers from this area, the people who this monument was dedicated to. He will flesh them out and make them into real people."

There will also be a hands-on telegraph demonstration, a discussion about how the Civil War was portrayed in Maud Hart Lovelace's Betsy-Tacy books and authentic Civil War-era songs performed by "Lonesome Ron" Affolter.

"Our hope is that we'll have something that will appeal to everyone, even if you're not a Civil War buff," says Julie Schrader, a member of the committee. "It's really more about the history of the time, about what it was like here then. We're trying to be broad."

They're also trying to focus the public's attention on a part of the community's history that seems to be forgotten, especially during the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, between 2011 and 2015.

"Our local veterans do deserve to be recognized," Stenzel says. "They paid the ultimate sacrifice, and we need to recognize that."

Stenzel hopes that as people learn about the original monument's demise, and about the committee's commitment to restore and rebuilt it, they will be willing to contribute to cause.

"There is interest within this community," he says. "Once we are able to get the word out and let people them know what we're doing, the momentum will grow. ... If you tap into the spirit of people, which is what Abraham Lincoln believed in, we will reach our goal in the long run. I have faith that it will happen."