

'The Boy in Blue'

Historians publish commemorative book

Part of proceeds to pay for memorial's maintenance

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Bryce Stenzel considers statues honoring veterans teaching tools to help people understand their past.

"They are tangible pieces of history," said Stenzel, who recently co-authored a new book that focuses on the Boy in Blue Civil War memorial.

Not only will the book's readers find information about the statue standing in Lincoln Park, they also will find more information about Mankato's past.

"This book is not just about the history of the memorial itself. It includes the history of Lincoln Park, the Grand Army of the Republic Alexander Wilkin Post 19 and the Women's Relief Corps, the Columbiad Howitzer cannon, the Lincoln elm tree and more," said Julie Schrader, Stenzel's co-author.

The duo met Tuesday at a North Mankato business to observe the printing of their book "The Boy in Blue: Blue Earth County Minnesota's Civil War Memorial."

"It's been a labor of love — three years of writing and research. The book was a compilation of a lot of work. It was exciting to see it coming off the press," Stenzel said.

A release party is planned Nov. 3 for the limited edition of the hardcover filled with photographs in full color.

The book details the history of two statues installed in an older Mankato neighborhood's green space. Copies may be ordered online or purchased during the event at the Blue Earth County History Center in Mankato.



Photo by Pat Christman

Bryce Stenzel and Julie Schrader are co-authors of a soon-to-be-released commemorative book. Part of the proceeds from "The Boy in Blue: Blue Earth County Minnesota's Civil War Memorial" will go to a maintenance fund for a statue and foundation at Mankato's Lincoln Park.

If you go

What: "The Boy in Blue: Blue Earth County Minnesota's Civil War Memorial" book-release party 2 p.m. Nov. 3 at the Blue Earth County History Center, 424 Warren St., Mankato, with overview of the Boy in Blue memorial's history.

Cost: Pre-publication price is \$25 through Nov. 3, when the retail price will be \$35.

More information: Books may be purchased online at: www.mnheritage.com.

Schrader is hopeful her efforts will be well-received.

"It's for all ages and for anyone who is interested in the history of Mankato, Lincoln Park and the Civil War era," she said.

"How many people know that Lincoln Park was created before Mankato's best-known park, Sibley Park, and that it was created for the express purpose of erecting a soldier's monument? How many know that there was

once a Columbiad Howitzer cannon in Lincoln Park and that it was one of three cannons in Mankato city parks donated to a scrap drive during World War II in 1943?

Even Mankato-born author, Maud Hart Lovelace is connected to the "Boy in Blue."

"Lincoln Park was created for the original Boy in Blue statue," Stenzel said.

That monument — which was made either of bronze or white zinc and

honored Civil War veterans — was dedicated in 1893. By the time 35 years passed since its installation, the memorial — a victim of neglect, vandalism and the ravages of Minnesota weather — was no longer standing.

Stenzel was disappointed when, years ago, he discovered Lincoln Park's focal point once had been a Civil War memorial. "I hadn't been able to see it."

He and Schrader were among the organizers of a project that began four years before the idea for their book was sparked. They were among local history buffs who had their interest in the Civil War era renewed when the nation began observing the national conflict's sesquicentennial.

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The small but determined group began working together toward a goal, restoring the Boy in Blue to its former glory. Their project involved reconstructing not only the statue, but the pedestal and fountain pool as well.

Schrader, along with Stenzel and his sister, Laurie Stenzel, did the project's early research. By the time a committee was formed and the project was underway, a system was in place to document every step of the memorial's rebuilding process.

In May 2015, the new statue — formed from a durable bronze-colored resin — was installed in Lincoln Park.

According to an agree-

ment with the city of Mankato, the Boy in Blue Memorial Project committee is responsible for payments to a capital maintenance/repair endowment fund for cleaning and winterizing expenses, including the cost of care for fountain's water.

A portion of the proceeds from book sales will benefit the Boy in Blue Memorial Project maintenance fund.

Committee members are determined the new memorial does not meet the fate of the original, Schrader said.

“The book is a tribute to all of those who contributed their time, talents and financial resources to make the dream of re-creating Mankato's oldest war memorial a reality.”