

VALLEY GROVE NEWSLETTER

Winter 2005

By the Valley Grove

Preservation Society



Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

God Jul Og Godt Nyttar! Valley Grove's traditions live on in our popular Christmas Eve service planned for 10:00 p.m. with music beginning at 9:45 p.m. Rev. Dr. Cynthia Vold Forde will conduct this year's service. She is from Hempstead, Texas and a cousin of Preservation Society board member John Hellerud. Her great grandparents were Ole Halgrimson Vold and Brynhild Gandrud who immigrated to Rice County in 1861. Ole's sister Margit was married to John Hellerud, ancestor of the current John. Please bring your singing voices as well as treats to share with our hot cider after the service!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

An Historic Opportunity

We of the Preservation Society are excited to have the opportunity to restore the 1862 stone church. Because it was built by the immigrants themselves, using the skills they had brought with them while employing mainly the materials they could find near their new homes, this building is an object-lesson in the adaptive creativity, dedication, and sheer cleverness of those pioneers.

The stone structure was erected using methods that have existed in Norway since at least the 13th century. Limestone was widely available in the area but while suitable for rough construction, it could not be smoothed for exposed use. Besides, the settlers did not have the time for such an effort. So they used the time-honored method of coating the stone with a decorative plaster/stucco-type layer called *pussewalk*. The reason it has a buff color is that buff was the color of the sand on the Don Hope farm.

Don also tells us that making *pussewalk* involved heating limestone for several days with the hottest fire possible. This means *pussewalk* was also a manifestation of community organizing—someone had to tend the fire 24/7 while others had to provide the fuel.

We want to expose the details the pioneers built to decorate their church on the hill. The time has come to redo the *pussewalk*—this is done about once every 100-150 years in Norway. But first, we simply MUST replace the roof and steeple. We need money, of course. We also need any pictures that show how the steeple was originally built. Help with either will be much appreciated.

We note with gratitude a Howard Hope Estate gift of \$5,000.00 that will be used for the 1862 project.

Groves Named, Trees Ready to Adopt

On the protected land around the churches you see our oak savanna restoration. At seven locations there are the beginnings of peaceful and scenic groves where you may designate a tree in honor of someone or as a memorial. A map of their general locations is available on our web site (below).

You or your family may designate a planting of a 1-2 inch diameter oak in a grove of your choice: Tyske, Whitetail, Settlers, Gold Finch, Ken's, Prairie Rose, or Bluestem. The initial cost of a tree, including mulching and watering

until established is \$500. We gladly accept larger donations and put them to good use. Remember that any donation is tax-deductible. Contact us for assistance in planning your purchase: Gary Wagenbach 507-645-8549.

Opportunity to Donate to Valley Grove

Our Spring 2005 newsletter announced formation of the Elthon-Nelson Endowment Fund, created with donations from Ken and Sylvia Nelson of Arlington, VA. We were gratified by a recent donation to the Fund and wanted to remind you of this way to contribute to Valley Grove.

Thank you!

The Preservation board would like to give a great many thanks to Valdine Engeseth of Ringwood, IL, aunt of Preservation Society board member Michelle (Haugen) Roethler, for her generous donation of an original wall sconce from the Guild Hall. Valdine, who recently celebrated her 90th birthday, and her late husband Elmer Engeseth have a long tradition and connection at Valley Grove and the local area. Both of Elmer's grandfathers helped build the original church. Valdine said she remembers her father-in-law talking about the bell arriving at the train station in Nerstrand. Valdine's mother and father, Thomas and Tilda Haugen, are buried at Valley Grove.

Hardanger Music, Bluebirds, Bison and Big Horses

Under the great oak tree in the corner of the cemetery, fiddlers played as children tumbled and twirled in the grass and parents and grandparents lolled on blankets and chairs in the shade. Nearby on the gentle swell of the restored prairie, two teams of black percherons pulled farm wagons full of happy passengers through the deep grasses and young oaks. From the white church could be heard the strains of hardanger music as Andrea Een tuned up for a concert.

The annual Valley Grove Country Social was held at Valley Grove Church on Sunday, September 18th, as always, a refreshing and sweet day in the beauty of the prairie and the past.

Michael Barone, host of Minnesota Public Radio's "Pipe Dreams," played the historic organ and led a hymn sing.

In Passing

We note with sadness the passing of Clayton Sorenson of Asheville, NC, a supporter of our Society (9/9), and Helen Ingram, 93, of Northfield, a long-time member of the former Valley Grove congregation (11/16).

Changes in the Neighborhood

Valley Grove will soon be losing good and faithful friends. Vi Segerstrom and daughter Tanya are moving from their farm after residing on it for over 30 years. Vi and her husband Howard, who passed away in 2004, were both charter members of the Preservation Society and leaders in the effort to save the "new" church. We applaud Vi's decision to sell her farm to a local family who practices sustainable agriculture and will implement a rotational grazing system on land that is currently row cropped. The knoll across the road from the churchyard will be restored as oak savanna and importantly, be protected from housing development through an easement. Vi and Tanya will move to a smaller home in a nearby town next spring.

Valdine and Elmer were members at Valley Grove until it no longer held regular services, and Elmer served on the cemetery board until his death in 1978. Valdine moved to Ringwood, IL to be with her daughter Janet Flicek and her 3 grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great-grandchild!

This is our second lamp, our first having been donated by the late Norman Rosenqvist. We are slowly receiving these great pieces and are very grateful. Thank you.

If your family has a connection to Valley Grove or are aware of any lamps, pictures, or furniture from either church, we would love to hear from you! Check out our web site for information on how to contact us.

Andrea Een gave a hardanger concert and talk and Nordic Jam, a Northfield group founded by Ruth Sylte, provided music outdoors.

Keith Radel, bluebird coordinator for Rice County, presented a bluebird display and started installing birdhouses to create the first Valley Grove bluebird trail.

Dean and Judy Schwak of Nerstrand's Big Woods Bison Farm provided a display of bison artifacts, samples, and information on this native prairie animal. Bob and Cheryl Mathies of Faribault brought their teams of handsome Percherons. And Chip DeMann of Dundas provided a saddlehorse for children to enjoy a ride as well.

Al Lathrop, author of "Minnesota Churches" (University of Minnesota Press), sold books, and a power point show of the planned 1862 stone church restoration project was presented.

Stay tuned for details and dates for next year's social!

We thank them for their services to Valley Grove and wish them the best of luck with their future plans.

Tree Doctor Called In

Steve from H & H Tree Service (Dundas, MN) was called in on short notice this fall to help with our big oak. He installed three cables between key branches high in the crown of the approximately 200 year old bur oak on the southwest corner of the Valley Grove Cemetery grounds. Sometime during the summer worrisome additional cracking appeared in the trunk of this venerable matron. Gussied up in chains to defend against prior difficulties with her trunk she has occupied this spot for a very long time. Some of her offspring are growing nearby so her legacy is being perpetuated but it is not yet time to go. The Valley Grove Cemetery Association (which cares for the grounds) and the Valley Grove Preservation Society (which cares for the 1894 wooden church and now the 1862 stone church) supported the doctor call. We all want to buy this lady as much time as possible.

And, as always, please stay in touch!