



Fall 2013

Valley Grove Preservation Society News

From the President

Spring and Summer 2013 brought much-needed rain to our prairie and oak savannah surrounding the Valley Grove churches. During the last two summers drought conditions stressed some of our young oaks, and in an effort to alleviate that stress we arranged to water the most sensitive trees.

The Valley Grove Preservation Society welcomes new board member and Northfield resident Gary Stromley, retired food scientist at Malt O Meal in product development production and quality assurance. When he and his wife Janette moved to Northfield in 1983, they named their sons Anders and Karl for names in the Valley Grove historic cemetery. Gary has a volunteer background on the Northfield Library board and in Rice County issues.

"I'm a bird watcher and hiker and like to be outside," he says. "That Valley Grove's two churches are still up and functional is great! Historic preservation is not just the land and conservation but preserving what those who came before us built and what these buildings illustrate in terms of the lives they lived. To walk the trails, the fields, the edge of the woods and watch birds here is such fun, and this is a good and restful place. If I can help preserve it for the future I want to contribute."

The board continues to pursue maintenance and refurbishment projects on the 1862 stone church. The lovely maple wood floor installed during winter 2013 is now sanded and finished and ready for use. Some new tables have also been added enhancing the building's utility for meetings, receptions, and special events such as the upcoming country social in September. The 1894 wood church needs some exterior trim painting, something we hope to get done this fall.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the country social on Sunday afternoon, September 15th.

-----Gary Wagenbach



Inside this issue

Valley Grove Events	2
Our Annual Country Social	2
Prairie keeping, Groundskeeping..	2
Wildflowers in Bloom	3
Valley Grove's Native Flowers	3
Grant Application, History	3
Valley Grove News.....	4
Winter is Coming.....	4
Valley Grove in the News.....	4
Modern Media for Valley Grove.	4
Weddings, Baptisms, Birthdays..	4
Trees and Bequests.....	4

Valley Grove Events

Our Annual Country Social

Traditional music, prairie beauty and old time pleasures are the heart of our annual Valley Grove Country Social which will be held this year on Sunday, Sept. 15 from 1 to 4 p.m.

Internationally celebrated Norwegian music specialist Andrea Een of Northfield will be presenting a program of hardanger fiddle music at 2:30 p.m. In 2002, Andrea, a professor of violin, viola and hardanger fiddle at St. Olaf College, received a medal from King Harald of Norway for her contributions to Norwegian music heritage and culture. Her 2004 CD "From the Valley" was recorded in the 1894 Valley Grove white church and will be for sale at the social along with some of her more recent recordings. Hutennanny, a Northfield-based traditional Nordic music group comprised of fiddles, mandolins, bass, guitar, recorders, etc. will perform outside (weather permitting) on the historic grounds.

Bob Mathies and his teams of percherons will give wagon rides throughout the day, and there will be bluebird and butterfly educators and walks on the restored prairie. Children will get a chance to handle chickens or milk a goat from Zeman's Simple Harvest Farm and try traditional rope making. There will be a raffle of charming and/or historic objects.

On the scenic land surrounding the church, board members Julie Klassen, Myles Bakke, Gary Wagenbach, and Gary Stromley will lead walks and introduce the renewed prairie and its ecology.

Coffee and refreshments will be served. Admission is free, and tax-deductible donations to the Valley Grove Preservation Society are encouraged.



Prairiekeeping, Groundskeeping

Work continued this year to maintain the oak trees transplanted in 2012 and to remove invasive plant species from the prairie. In addition to the ongoing efforts of Gary Wagenbach and Myles Bakke, two general work sessions were held this summer prior to the monthly board meeting. Progress has been made in reducing sweet clover, birds foot trefoil, thistles, young Siberian elm, cottonwood, and box elder that spread easily and eventually crowd out native grasses and forbs. It's a treat to see in their place the increasing numbers of such prairie plants as baptisia, lead plant, and compass plant, as well as the thriving varieties of golden rod. Thankfully, this year's frequent rains have cut down the need to water the oak tree transplants as often as last year.

If the grounds around the churches look a bit different, it's because last winter a combined crew from the Cemetery Board and the VGPS Board applied their chainsaws to removing trees along the perimeter of both churches. This will protect the foundations from encroachment and damage by the tree roots. The work was made more difficult by metal embedded in the trees—a lot of saw chains didn't survive the process! Members of the two boards agreed that this necessary removal also restores the original landscaped plan and creates a more favorable view of church architecture. A crew from Steele Waseca Electric Coop trimmed trees along the electric line and more trimming and clean-up are needed in the grove. VGPS will coordinate this with the Cemetery Board.

All in all, the combined efforts of dedicated board members continue to support the health of the natural surroundings so intrinsic to the site's appeal.

Wildflowers in Bloom

August and September are the best months to view Valley Grove's blooming prairie. Shown is a spectacular "gay feather" a member of the sunflower family. There are many more flowers and grasses to discover. Bring a friend and visit Valley Grove and see for yourself. We estimate this type of native flower may well have been blooming on this very ridge prior to European settlement when, perhaps, the Whapekute Dakota people utilized the area we now call Valley Grove and Rice County.



This is a young prairie that will take many years to mature. Each season will bring transformation and adaptations to the plants, mammals, birds, and insects that are its inhabitants. We welcome your visit to observe these changes. Volunteers are invited to participate on our prairie workdays. To learn more about the Valley Grove Preservation Society and our restoration project, see our website at www.valleygrovemn.com.

For further information on prairie plants these reference books are recommended:
"Field Guide to North American Wild Flowers," (National Audubon Society)
"Grasses: An Identification Guide," Lauren Brown (Houghton Mifflin)
"Tall Grass Prairie Wild Flowers," D. Ladd / F. Oberle (Falcon / Nature Conservancy)
"Northland Wild Flowers," J. B. Moyle and E.W. Moyle (U. of M. Press)

Grant Application and Historical Research

MacDonald & Mack Architects, Ltd. are completing the Historic Structure Report (HSR) this summer for a Minnesota Legacy Grant we were awarded last fall from the Minnesota Historical Society for the Valley Grove Historical Site. The finished HSR is the first step in applying for additional grants to help us complete reconstruction, renovation and restoration of the two buildings. This Minnesota Legacy Grant will be submitted June of 2014.

The whole structures report will be in hand by September and must be finished by October 2013.

This HSR allows Valley Grove to apply for a larger grant in June 2014 when large grant requests are accepted by the application committee of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Valley Grove's Native Flowers

Rattlesnake master
Tall blazing star
Leadplant
White prairie clover
Purple prairie clover
Yellow clover
Grey goldenrod
Heart-leaved alexander
Black-eyed Susan
Upland goldenrod
Stiff goldenrod
Showy goldenrod
Hoary vervain
Culver's root
Prairie rose
Ox-eye daisy
Yarrow
Giant hyssop
Wild bergamot
Butterfly weed
Heath aster and smooth aster
Golden alexander
White wild indigo
Arrow-leaved aster
Rough blazing star
Milk vetch
Stiff tickseed
Canada tick trefoil
Prairie sunflower
Stiff sunflower
Blue vervain
Azure aster
Compass plant
Meadow blazing star

Several additional flower species were planted exclusively in wet areas:

Water plantain
Sneezeweed
Panicked aster
Giant sunflower
New England aster
Wild iris
Red-stalked aster
Mountain mint
Flat-topped aster
Tall meadow rue
Joe-Pye weed
Iron weed
Boneset
Grass-leaved goldenrod
Swamp milkweed

Winter is Coming

Where's the heat? In 1916 when the white church was heated by a woodstove, church members began discussing installing a furnace. This required digging a cellar under the white church. There's no record of when it was finished, but our current elderly oil furnace in the cellar dates from 1996; it is inefficient and expensive to run, and we could do with a new furnace that burns LP gas. A new furnace will not only be more cost effective but will keep the white church available for events year round including winter weddings and our Christmas Eve service. Contributions toward the new, efficient furnace are heartily welcome.

Valley Grove in the News

Russ Tokheim, feature writer for Metro Lutheran Newspaper, is producing an article about Valley Grove Preservation Society. It is scheduled for the September 2013 issue and will be available in Lutheran churches the last weekend of August.

Modern Media for Valley Grove

See our newsletter in color on our website or let us put you on our email list for a pdf version to be emailed to your mailbox. Just send us your request to be added to our electronic mail list to this address: ken@rcbmi.com.

Weddings, baptisms, birthdays

Valley Grove remains a unique, historic and bargain site for weddings and wedding receptions as well as baptisms, birthday parties, anniversaries and family reunions. Several weddings are scheduled for this fall, and reservations are coming for 2014. Contact Ken Sahlin at (507) 649-1227 ken@rcbmi.com to reserve a wedding or other event date.

Trees and Bequests

Many thanks to those who have donated for purchase of a tree in honor of a loved one. You make it possible for Valley Grove to continue to be a living Minnesota historical treasure. Including Valley Grove in your will is another excellent way to help preserve this charming and special historical site.

No donation is too small; no donation is too large.

Valley Grove Preservation Society

P.O. Box 75

Nerstrand, MN 55053

PLEASE
PLACE
STAMP
HERE

