



Spring 2013

Valley Grove Preservation Society News

Letter from the President

Like many people, I associate spring with renewal. As we watch our land go from brown to green and the return of nesting birds to the grasslands and forest surrounding Valley Grove, nature inspires us to continue to press forward to maintain and improve this cherished site. With this sense of renewal we begin to plan another year of work and activities on the Valley Grove church buildings and surrounding oak savanna and prairie.

We continue work on our application for grant funds through the Minnesota Legacy Fund. The church records we currently have are lacking in the type of detail that make funding of restoration projects successful. We are looking for such information as names of people involved in the construction, dates and times of changes and details about the active role played by the Ladies Aid Society. We also seek family and personal memories and letters that describe the activities and people of the church, as well as recollections of how things looked or how items (such as the original chandeliers or the wooden arch) were dismantled and passed out among the membership. These are the stories and the information that make our project real and personal.

So to everyone I ask: please contribute not just money but memories-- share your information, photos, family letters or personal recollections and stories about Valley Grove. This is what will help us create a narrative about the people, the buildings, the fixtures and the changes that help us preserve and restore, to reconstruct and revive our shared history.

We hope that each of you will retrieve memories and take the time to share telling the story of our Valley Grove.

*Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never Is, but always To be blest:
The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.*

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*

Todd Lein, President, Valley Grove Preservation Society

Note: Todd is retiring from the position of service to Valley Grove this April. The VGPS members and all supporters who have enjoyed his contributions of time, energy, effort and know-how are very grateful that he has been part of our board. We will miss him.



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Grant Application and Historical Research

Last fall we were awarded a Minnesota Legacy Grant from the Minnesota Historical Society. This grant was for development of a Historic Structure Report (HSR) for the Valley Grove Historical Site. MacDonald & Mack Architects, Ltd. will complete the HSR this summer.

To expedite this study and save money we are doing the historical research of the site for the Architects. Board member Jennifer Cox Johnson started the research by making contacts with the Norwegian American Historical Association (NAHS) at St. Olaf College. Julie Klassen, VGPS board member, sorted through boxes of information about Valley Grove stored at (NAHS) and shaped information about the happenings and improvements made to the churches into a chronological list. VGPS member Ken Sahlin then photographed all the materials, printed them in color and scanned them. Everything before 1927 is in Norwegian, he notes. VG neighbor Mary Jones, a former board member, assisted the effort by scanning through Northfield and Faribault newspapers and The Nerstrand Herald (which operated from 1911 to 1927). Mary found that on July 5, 1911 one of the churches was hit by lightning and its steeple had to undergo major repairs. Gary Wagenbach along with Julie are going over microfiche records at The Minnesota Historical Society. The minister at Dennison & Vang Lutheran Churches, Terji Hausken, is translating some of the meeting records from Norwegian. 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.

Valley Grove Events



Country Social

This year the autumn social had additional significance: we gathered to enjoy a sparkling autumn day on the prairie and mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of Valley Grove. On Sunday, Sept. 16, before a record crowd, former Governor Al Quie told the story of his immigrant Norwegian farm family and their involvement with Valley Grove. Joseph Shaw of St. Olaf College shared the history of Valley Grove's first pastor, Rev. Bernt Julius Muus, and Valley Grove's relation to St. Olaf. Thanks to everyone who helped make it so enjoyable: Bob Mathies and his handsome percheron teams, Marilyn Lewis Johnson for lovely harp music and organ music, Allysa Leonard and her band "Sister," and the members of Hutennanny, a Northfield-based Scandinavian music group that has been a VG country social mainstay for years. A raffle for many valuable items included a wooden bench made from the original flooring of the stone church and an oil painting by Northfield artist Fred Somers. Thanks to the Sons of Norway members who joined us for the occasion as did members of the Norwegian-American Historical Association.

It Was a God Jul at Valley Grove

Our annual Christmas Eve service was observed with carols, a reading of the Gospel of Matthew, and candlelight rendition of "Silent Night". Pastor Duane Everson conducted the service with the assistance of John Gorder as reader and bell ringer, organist Theo Wee, violinist Andrea Een, cellist Jonathan Een Newton, clarinetist Jo Ann Polley, flutist Kay Sahlin and singers Rachel Braaten, Matthew Braaten, Elizabeth Braaten Palmieri and Christian Braaten Thompson. Thanks to Donald Nelson for donating the Christmas tree that reached the ceiling of the chancel and to those who supplied goodies for the late night social that followed the service.

Weddings

In 2012 five couples were married at Valley Grove, and the 2013 wedding season started early when the Bonde family held a wedding in January. We are already receiving inquiries for dates in 2014. Contact Ken Sahlin at (507)649-1227 ken@sahlin.us to reserve a wedding or other event date.



New oak planted by Valley Grove Preservation Society board members at the 150th Anniversary and Country Social



New flooring in the old stone church

Site Maintenance

The last burn was done in 2012. The prairie will be burned every four years in rotating sections to keep from losing too much habitat at a time and destroying insect egg cases. Also nesting grassland birds require prairie with previous year thatch.



Veteran arborist Myles Bakke says “exotic control is crucial on our prairie: that means removing or suppressing problematic plants such as Queen Anne’s lace, cow parsnips, and woody things, particularly Siberian elm seedlings, on the treeline near the cemetery. Sometimes just cutting works, but it must be done repeatedly. We have a sizeable prairie that is nice to manage for wildlife: if you burn too much at one time you denude the habitat for small mammals and they are vulnerable to predations. Having some adjoining area they can move into and then expand back as it grows out is important. Burning in the spring is generally easiest but sometimes an area in the fall is good to burn because it gets rid of woody things, but that may be tough on desirable small mammals—meadow voles, deer mice, jumping mice, weasels both long and short tail, pocket gophers, and thirteen line ground squirrels. The snowcover we’ve had this year has been very good for them, and it should have been a good year for the pheasants thanks to severe weather and good standing grass.”

Gary Wagenbach will coordinate with other interested people to conduct a bird census on the land this season. Contact Gary to join the group.

Ken Vesledahl and Travis Roethler have removed troublesome cedars growing too close to both churches and stumps still need to be removed. This has revealed areas where repairs are needed to both exteriors. Steele Waseca trimmed trees along the electric line and more trimming and cleanup are needed in the grove. VGPS will coordinate this with the Cemetery Board.

Outstanding work orders include attaching the downspout on the southwest corner of the wood church and painting the corners of the wood church.

As always, your help with these tasks and their costs is useful and greatly appreciated.

Other Valley Grove News

Fresh Footing

Earlier this winter the board voted to install a new wood floor in the stone church, which had been serviceable exterior raw plywood since the extensive restoration project a few years ago. Installation was completed in February by River City Builders. Stainless steel staples were needed to attach the #2 hard maple flooring to the plywood. Closer than average — one foot — joists will make it extra stable. Thanks to Ken Sahlin and Todd Lein for coordinating purchase and installation, and removal of tables, chairs, and church pews. Sanding and oil finishing will be completed later this spring by Jay Hasse and, finally, River City Builders will install new base shoe, making it ready for the wedding season.

Trees on Our Prairie

An oak tree was dedicated in Ken’s Grove in honor of Catherine (Catie) Webb, age 13, by her family and friends. Many thanks to those who have donated. You make it possible for Valley Grove to continue to be a living Minnesota historical treasure.

In Memory Of/ In Honor Of

Additional memorial gifts have been made to honor artist John Maakstad, a neighbor and key early protector of Valley Grove. Gifts have also been gratefully received in honor of Melvin, Lulla and Ardis Groff, George Soule, Gladys Hope Wallin, Emma and Carl Iverson, Matthew Nelson, John and Hannah Tloren, Joseph Sahlin, and Frederick “Fritz” Boevers, Jr.

Memorabilia

We welcome your donations of VG memorabilia and continue to receive items from the VG past; recently a box of printed cards with an older picture of Valley Grove made by Steven Olson has been donated to VGPS by his family. Photos, letters, paintings, artifacts from the interior of either church—we still hope to find the original chandeliers from the stone church—are of great significance to our restoration effort.

Other Valley Grove News (cont.)

New Furnace Needed

The elderly oil furnace in the white church is inefficient and expensive to run, and we could do with a new furnace that burns LP gas. The current oil furnace is from 1996, and 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.

Annual Meeting

Everyone is welcome to join us on Thursday, April 18 at 7 p.m. at Valley Grove churches for the annual meeting. There are two seats open on the VGPS board, so if you have an interest in history, restoration, Norwegian immigrant culture or prairies, consider serving as a board member. We meet monthly throughout the year. New members will be nominated and confirmed at this meeting.

Note: In addition to Todd Lein, Lynne Pederson also is retiring from the VGPS board as of this meeting: her service as secretary has been essential, her contribution to the country social and other projects are most appreciated. Thank you, Todd and Lynne!

Mystery in the Stone Church

Notes in Norwegian and a sketch of the rooster finial on a board found in the older church may have been left by a worker who helped construct it in 1862. Research has revealed who he is and that he died in 1878 and is buried in the Vang Church cemetery. Stay tuned for his name and more details.

Bequests

Including Valley Grove in your will is an excellent way to help preserve this charming and special historical site. We greatly appreciate the \$5,000 gift from the estate of the late Carla May Glattly.

Valley Grove Preservation Society

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