



Annual Meeting

The annual meeting will be held Friday, April 17, 2009 7 p.m. at Valley Grove Church. Everyone is welcome. Two Board of Directors seats are open. If you enjoy historic preservation, immigrant history, nature or Norwegian heritage and would like to help Valley Grove continue to thrive, please join us.

With Gratitude to Jonathan Larson

Jonathan Larson will be rotating off the board this spring; we will miss his unique skills, contributions and the depth of his interest in and service to Valley Grove. Jon found the Valley Grove Church in 1992 while researching the childhood of the author, Thorstein Bunde Veblen. Letters written by Veblen's siblings mentioned a small stone church near the family woodlot. The site's authenticity was confirmed by a large gravestone marking the final resting place of Veblen's parents.

His interest in Thorstein Veblen was far from casual. He had written two books that relied heavily on Veblen's most significant gift to human understanding—Institutional Analysis.¹ He had read virtually all of Veblen's writings. And now he was following with intense interest the restoration of the Veblen family farmstead near Valley Grove because of how it better explained the origins of the thinking of perhaps America's greatest genius. Thorstein Veblen was Confirmed at Valley Grove—this alone made it an interesting place. Jon had an intense interest in historical preservation. He was responsible for saving the Louis Lockwood Rowhouse and the Cass Gilbert Lytchgate in St. Paul.² So when asked to join the Valley Grove Preservation Society, he readily agreed even though he was in no way related to the members of the historical congregation.

These were interesting times for the Preservation Society. From a humble beginning with a tiny budget, the Society has been able to extensively repair both church buildings on site while returning the surrounding land to something approaching the biological conditions of the native Prairie. It has been an astonishing accomplishment.

His role in all this preservation was essentially peripheral. Others organized the fundraising, directed the rehab construction, and replanted the prairie grasses. Nevertheless he takes considerable pride in:

Making sure that everyone understood that a dollar for roof repair was ALWAYS more important than a dollar in the

bank. Because VGPS spent every dollar it raised with considerable dispatch, improvements were quickly visible which made further fundraising that much easier.

Being the first to outline the way for VGPS to take on the repairs of the stone church—which was property of the cemetery board. This happy outcome especially pleased Jon because as he put it, "I never thought I would ever see an end to a church fight."

Getting a historically and theologically authentic vaerhane (rooster) placed atop the rebuilt stone church steeple.

Writing the newsletters that explained the historic preservation reasons for the decisions made in repairing the stone church. It is important that records be kept of the thinking that informed those decisions. Jon was happy to write those records.

And yes, Jon is the guy who suggested the Jell-O contests. He thought the idea sweet and funny. Still does.

Jon's greatest disappointment, by far, was his utterly unsuccessful attempt to interest people in the story of why this tiny rural Minnesota immigrant church was important to the very architecture of human thought. How was it that a son of this congregation would go on to influence the thinking of millions?

"Thorstein Veblen's greatest popularity came during the Great Depression," says Jon. "Many of the most significant economists of the New Deal could quote Veblen extensively. He was Albert Einstein's favorite author on social issues. He was the economist's political economist as the country pulled itself out of that economic catastrophe. Perhaps as economic conditions repeat themselves in 2009, the ideas of that great son of Valley Grove will become respected again."

1. <http://elegant-technology.com/ETauthBASE.html>
2. <http://elegant-technology.com/JALhistpresBASE.html>

Country Social

The annual Valley Grove Country Social is scheduled for Sunday, September 20 from 1 to 4 p.m. There will be refreshments, prairie walks, and live music, pony rides for children and as always the handsome Percheron teams pulling wagons over the prairie trail to view the wildlife, autumn grasses and flowers. Both churches will be open to enjoy the ongoing restoration progress.

Memorials

Gifts were made in honor of David Strickland, Jonathan Stenseth, Gerald Mundt, Hazel Dammer and Wayne Rorhrick

Weddings Abound

Seven weddings are scheduled at Valley Grove between June 20th and Oct 3rd. Few wedding locations are as charming, memorable and photogenic as Valley Grove, and even in a tough economy, our rental fees are a bargain. Contact Ken Sahlin at (507) 645-8720 for information and to reserve a date.

More Oaks on Our Prairie

Doug Erickson of Minneapolis has dedicated two trees in our Prairie Rose Grove. One celebrates the life of Tom Klug (Doug's partner for 30 years) who passed away in January. The second tree is in honor Tom's family (see the Valley Grove web site). Doug found Valley Grove thanks to board member Karin Winegar's Star Tribune editorial of July 2000 and drove his parents there to see the site. He also dedicated a tree to them several years ago. Thank you, Doug!

Dance in the Stone Church

Hütenänny, a Northfield-based music group that often plays for the country social, will hold a benefit dance for Valley Grove this summer. This will be the first event in the restored stone church and probably the first dance ever held in the 1862 building. Watch our Valley Grove website and the Northfield News for the date and time to be announced.

Almost Buried Treasure

We have received the Valley Grove Ladies' Aid Society ledger kept from 1890-1950. Ramona Rudningen of Faribault found it while cleaning; her mother in law was an active member of the Society. Excerpts from the ledger will be published here as space allows in future newsletters and it will be stored on a CD as well. Some will remember that the late Arnold Rudningen served on the board of the Valley Grove Preservation Society.

Support Valley Grove

There are many ways to keep Valley Grove blooming. For example contributions are welcome to the Tree Fund, which offers native trees for adoption to aid our developing oak savanna. Then there is the Endowment Fund, and the 1862 Fund. The former is intended to provide support over the long term and the latter pays for the continuing restoration of the stone church. (We need to pay down a loan of \$73,000 used for those restoration efforts.) Online donation will be available soon.

And Please Stay in Touch!

Write us with your Valley Grove Church reminiscences, share your fundraising suggestions, e-mail us with your recollections of people and events at Valley Grove and your ideas for its future. Letters, photographs, original furnishings and other memorabilia of Valley Grove are always welcome for inclusion in our archives. See past newsletters at www.valleygrovemn.com.

Valley Grove Preservation Society
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