

Valley Grove *News*

FALL 2011



*Save the date for the
Valley Grove Country Social!*

S E P T E M B E R 1 8 , 2 0 1 1

Dear Friends of Valley Grove Preservation Society,

Each spring the at the VGPS annual meeting we elect officers of a board of directors. The principal role of the board is to help guide our organization in the work of preserving and enhancing the buildings and surrounding prairie/savanna landscape. This year I agreed to serve as president.

Why did I agree to take on this role, and why have I chosen to be a volunteer for this not-for-profit organization? I surprised myself with the answers as I realize how important the Valley Grove cemetery, buildings and surrounding landscape are to me and my family.

I trace my lineage to Norway, and although I have no relatives buried at Valley Grove, I have lived in proximity to the site for more than 20 years. This alone doesn't give me reason to take an active role in saving historic buildings.

For me it comes down to the value I place on the cultural heritage and on the natural landscape of a place my family and I call home. And I think that the two church buildings, the well-manicured cemetery and the beautiful prairie and savanna that flow into the Big Woods State Park are an expression of those values. I believe these are worth my contributions of time and money. And we all benefit when we join our efforts in honoring these shared values.

As a board, we have identified several projects. Some of these will help us move forward in our restoration efforts and others for maintenance of the church buildings, the prairie and the oak savanna. The board's immediate priority is to pay down the remaining debt incurred from stabilizing the 1862 stone church.

Since beginning work on the stone church in 2007, we have invested roughly \$191,000. Of that, our outstanding debt is just \$19,000. We're excited about the prospect of completing debt repayment and ask you to consider a contribution toward that goal.

We look forward to seeing you at the country social this September. And thank you for your contribution and support toward preserving and enhancing this cherished site.

For the Valley Grove Preservation Society,

Todd Lein, President



The Country Social

The annual Valley Grove Country Social will be held at Valley Grove Church on Sunday, Sept. 18 from 1 to 4 p.m. Northfield-based Hütenännny will provide old-time music from the Nordic countries. There will be prairie walks on the scenic land surrounding the church where a memorial tree project is underway. Bluebird advocates will also display bluebird houses and answer questions about bluebird care. Musicians will perform on the historic organ in the 1894 church. Throughout the afternoon, wagon rides will be offered over the prairie by the picturesque percheron draft teams driven by Bob Mathies of Faribault. Children will get a chance to ride a horse or a pony provided by a board member. They can also learn to make hemp rope the old fashioned way. A milk goat and chickens will be on hand from Zeman's Simple Harvest Farm, a Valley Grove neighbor.

Hold Valley Grove in Your Heart...

Fans of Valley Grove have enjoyed the first group of charming magnets featuring Shawn Olson's portraits of Valley Grove in the four seasons. Last year a new series was issued with photographs by Gary Wagenbach, showing our restored churches from a different perspective. Both designs will be for sale at this year's Country Social.

Just in time for Christmas we will have a selection of notecards featuring Valley Grove. Derived from photographs by board members Gary Wagenbach Marlene Halverson as well as Marlene's sister Diane, the notes depict the prairie and churches in winter snow and summer splendor. Sets of cards will be available at the Social for \$5 and can beautifully solve your holiday, thank you, and stay-in-touch note needs.

Weddings

Six couples have been married or are scheduled to be married at Valley Grove in 2011. Reservations are coming in for 2012, as well. Our little secret is gradually getting out: this is a charming, unique and affordable site – not to mention photogenic. With the restoration of the stone church, Valley Grove can offer even more convenience and options to couples starting their married lives together in this historic place. For details and fees, please visit www.valleygrovemn.com.

Arch by the Inch

One of the crowning jewels of the 1862 stone church was the hand carved wooden arch spanning from balcony to balcony. The arch is visible in photos from 1800s, but somewhere over the years it vanished.

We have a bid from Norsk Woodworks in Barronette, Wisconsin, a nationally-known Norwegian woodcarving team. Else Bigton and her husband Phillip Odden have created stave churches, doorways, and other features of the Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa. They estimate the cost of replicating our 18 1/2 foot arch is \$12,000. If you'd like to see our lovely arch back in place, you now have the opportunity of helping purchase it, bit by bit. Want to sponsor a foot of the arch, for example? That will be just \$648. How about six inches? That's \$324. And an inch is just \$54.

Artist rendering of the stone church with the arch and chandelier.



The Mystery of the Stone Church Chandelier

The 1862 stone church is missing its two original oil chandeliers. While we'd prefer to have the originals back in place, we are scouting for suitable replacements. By studying the 19th-century photographs of the church interior, and then leafing through catalogs of fixtures of the time, we have found several very similar models. One chandelier almost identical to ours was recently sold by a Stillwater, Minnesota, antique light specialist, who has offered to help us either purchase it back or search for another one. Stay tuned for the thrilling conclusion of the hunt for the old chandelier.

Oak Savanna Restoration Report

About half of the restoration land surrounding Valley Grove underwent a management burn to suppress weedy trees and invasive plants during spring 2010, and the remainder was burned in 2011. Managed burns emulate prehistoric fires and enhance native grasses and wildflowers. Come see results for yourself! Thank you to the Minnesota DNR for financial assistance.



Prairie Restorations, Inc., burn crew in action protecting a desirable tree prior to the main burn.

Thank you to a team of volunteers – Ken Sahlin, Peter McKinnon, Karl Sames, and Jeffrey Coultas – who assist Gary Wagenbach in controlling invasive plants appearing in the oak savannah that surrounds the Valley Grove churches. About 25 hours of labor were contributed, as of July 15, to stamp out thistles, sweet clover, Queen Anne's lace and birdsfoot trefoil.

Support for the tree trunk.



Our oldest (perhaps 200 years) Valley Grove bur oak is weakened by a split in the trunk and recently received some additional support courtesy of the Valley Grove Cemetery Association. In 1859 Pastor Bernt Julius Muus from Norway baptized 52 children beneath its branches. Muus went on to help found St. Olaf College.

Photo Reminder

Do you have old photos of Valley Grove or events at Valley Grove? We welcome additions to our archives.

In Honor Of /In Memory Of

Valley Grove's churches, trees and prairie live on thanks to those who make memorial donations. In the past months, gifts have been given by the following: Carol Knutson, in honor of her parents, Rev. and Alma Rosenqvist, and brothers, Mark and Norman; the Phelps family, on behalf of Senora and Gary Nystuen; Audrey Hansen, for parents John and Hannah Floren; Karen Engeseth, on behalf of her uncles, Ingebrit H. Engeseth, Russel L. Engeseth and Adolph H. Engeseth; June Gerzevske, for Len Twiet; Karen Engeseth, with multiple gifts in memory of aunt Denora Engeseth, brother Joseph David Engeseth, and parents Henry and Rose Engeseth; Rene and Pam Koester, in memory of Benjamin Halverson; Gary and Linda Wagenbach, June Gerzevske, Kathy Braaten, Helen Peterson and the Bonde families, in honor of Earl Bonde; Ken and Kay Sahlin, in honor of Melba Sahlin; The Shannon family, and Elaine Hope and her children, in honor of Bevis Hope; Brad and Beverly Pederson, Lois Elstad, Marion Baily, Annetta Gardner, Donald and Patricia Robertson, Phyllis Kromer, Jolyn Fontaine, Earl and Charlotte Bonde, Rebecca Wagner, Lois Crough and Hougen-Eitzman families, in honor of Bob Hougen; DeWayne and Gert Halvorson, in honor of Irving Okkelberg; and Lillian M. Stenbakken donated a gift posthumously.

We Appeal to You

If family ties, natural beauty, or personal or cultural history draw you to Valley Grove, please share in its preservation and restoration.

Tax-deductible gifts may be made easily online at valleygrovemn.com or givemn.razoo.com/story/Valley-Grove-Preservation-Society. GiveMN.org is a partner with Charities Review Council and MAP for Nonprofits. It is part of the Razoo.com network and also a 501(c)(3) supporting organization of the Minnesota Community Foundation. The entire donation will go to VGPS as credit card fees are paid by Give.MN funding partners.

You may mail checks to **Valley Grove Preservation Society, P.O. Box 75, Nerstrand, MN 55053.**

Visit valleygrovemn.com to enjoy photos, old newsletters, timelines and stories. Please send us your own stories and memorabilia from Valley Grove so we can continue to enrich and preserve its history.

THANK YOU!