

# Valley Grove Preservation Society Newsletter

## Fall 2017

### A Note from our President, Gary Wagenbach

In addition to care for the two Valley Grove churches, land management challenges at the Valley Grove historic site occupy my thoughts each spring and summer. Board members administered a managed burn April 22 on ten of 40 acres Valley Grove Preservation Society owns just west of the 1894 wood church.

Periodic fire enhances growth of native grasses/wildflowers and sets back or kills undesirable trees. Walk there this summer, and you will see the vigorous prairie plants thriving now.

In the absence of fire, Minnesota's climate is conducive to trees becoming dominant on Valley Grove lands. The Forest Legacy Conservation Easement that guides our land management requires a minimum number of trees on our site--oaks in this case--to meet the definition of oak savanna. This is the reason for a combination of oak trees, native grasses and wildflowers on Valley Grove land beyond the cemetery borders.

In collaboration with the Cemetery Board, we arranged for removal of the grove of trees west of the parking area. To create our goal of an oak savanna, we must get rid of weedy tree species that are difficult to manage and the wind-borne seeds they deliver into surrounding grassland. Visitors remark that they like the enhanced view to the west and also notice the churches can be seen from a mile or two from the northwest. We are currently planning compatible new plantings on the site.

As part of this collaborative effort, we worked with the Cemetery Board in May to clean up and prepare the grounds. Earlier this spring, River City Builders built a new fence around the portable toilet and LP tank. To finish that project, Lee Skaar added a gate to the LP tank enclosure and, with the help of Gary Stromley, installed a stone walkway to the toilet. The parking area is now enhanced by these amenities and by the new stretch of fence along the east side of the driveway added last fall by the cemetery board.

Come see what we have been up to and remember to attend our **Country Social September 17th!**

### Our Annual Country Social

Families, friends and fans of history and Norwegian immigrant culture and crafts have flocked to our annual Valley Grove Country Social for 13 years. If you have never attended a country social, **we hope you'll join us**. Live traditional music, prairie beauty and old time pleasures such as wagon rides with handsome draft horse teams are the heart of our annual Social to be held **Sunday, September 17th from 1 to 4 p.m.** Entertainment includes the Northfield-based musical group Hütenänni performing Scandinavian music on the historic grounds at 1:00 pm.

**Exciting new features this year:** Al Quie, who served 11 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives and is a former Minnesota governor, local farmer, author and horseman, now in his nineties, hosts "An Hour with Al" at 1:30 pm in the clapboard church. Quie will share stories about Valley Grove when it was an active congregation and some of his memories of growing up around the area. "Cemetery stories": Amy Pagel, Associate Director of Annual Giving at St. Olaf College and an avid cemetery researcher, will follow at 3:00 pm, taking visitors through the cemetery to share tales about families that have made an impact around the Nerstrand and Northfield area, bringing some of the dead to life with their stories.

You will find more detailed information on our website and our Facebook page closer to the actual date.

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

As our Social has grown so has the number of vehicles.  
Please follow volunteers' directions and park in designated parking areas.

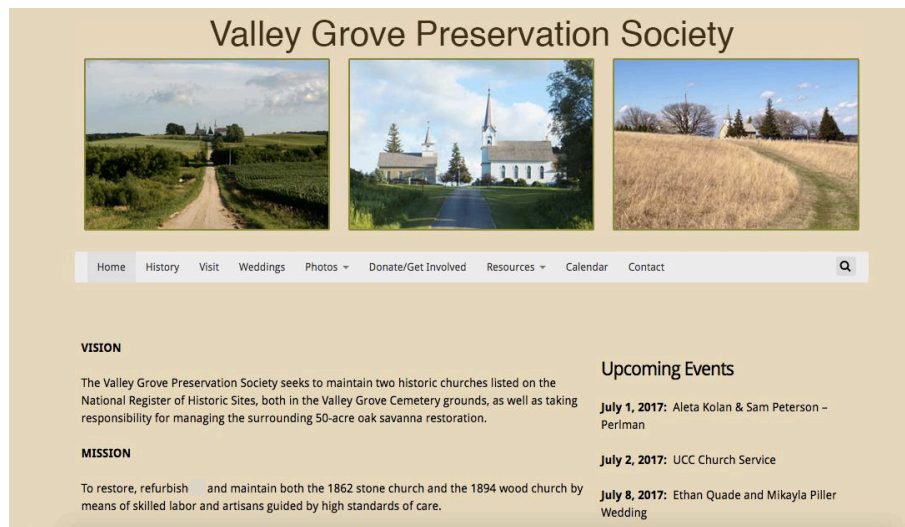


*Photo by Diane Halverson*

## Valley Grove and Social Media

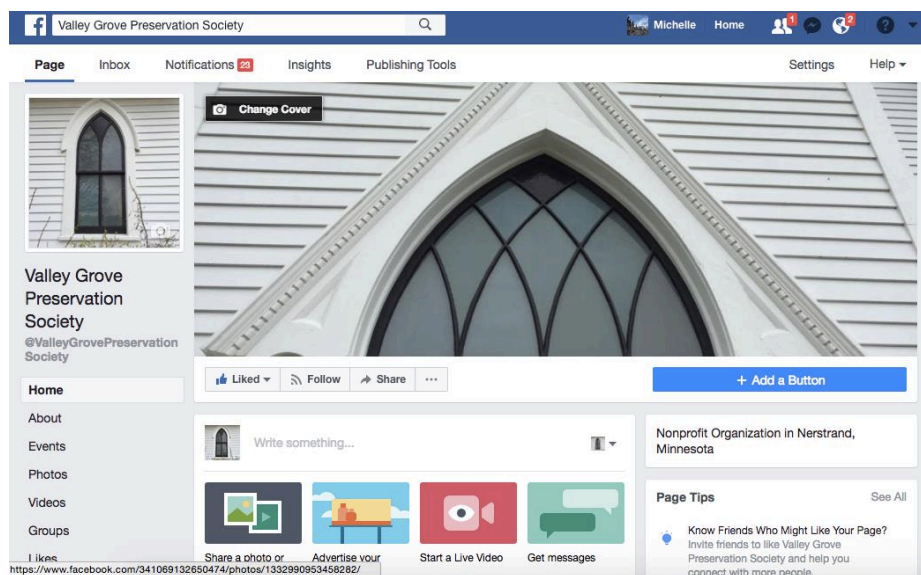
In 1894, when Norwegian pioneers were building Valley Grove's second church and tethering their horses to the hitching rails, they did not dream that people would use "Internet" to learn about the historic Valley Grove Churches. Here we are, 123 years later, and the Valley Grove Preservation Society (VGPS) has created two social media sites/pages to keep everyone connected: the Valley Grove website and a Facebook page.

Our website [www.valleygrovemn.org](http://www.valleygrovemn.org) has a lot of information about our prairie, the church buildings, a calendar of events, past newsletters, archival photos of weddings and services and contact information for the Valley Grove Cemetery Association. What's the difference between the two boards? The Cemetery Association manages the plots, burials, and grounds around the monuments. Their contact information is under the Contact tab on the webpage. The Valley Grove Preservation Society manages the surrounding prairie, the interior/exterior of the churches and hosts the country social every September and a Christmas Eve service. Board members are listed under the Contact tab. To email the Valley Grove Preservation Society use [valleygrovemn@gmail.com](mailto:valleygrovemn@gmail.com)



Our Facebook page can be found at:

[https://www.facebook.com/ValleyGrovePreservationSociety/?ref=aymt\\_homepage\\_panel#](https://www.facebook.com/ValleyGrovePreservationSociety/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel#)



On Facebook we post recently completed or ongoing Valley Grove Preservation Society projects. We also post Valley Grove photos, videos from past events such as the Country Socials and Christmas Eve services. It is the best way to keep up to date about Valley Grove happenings.

## Chandelier Returns at Last

Our chandelier is once again in place in the stone church after a decades-long absence thanks to Restorer, Steve Gnan, owner of *Let There Be Light* in Stillwater, Minnesota, working with board member Karin Winegar. Gnan will also recreate two matching wall sconces using existing brackets and supplying reproductions of other needed pieces. We plan to consult with Gnan to select appropriate light shades for the eight ceiling fixtures currently under the balcony.

The chandelier and wall sconces were originally oil-fueled, and a system of springs allowed the chandelier to be lowered from the ceiling so that the oil could be replenished. Cedar Lake Electric provided wiring for the chandelier that involved fishing wires around in the ceiling and installing a dimmer switch. Fortunately, the electrician who had done the earlier stone church rewiring had left wires available. River City Builders installed the chandelier and supplied the cable chain that suspends it and a support at the top.



## New Arch in the Works

Phil Odden and Else Bigton of Norsk Woodworks, LTD in Barronett, Wisconsin have been chosen to re-create the wooden arch in the stone church.



The arch spans the space between the ends of the balcony. Working from the historic interior photograph, Valley Grove board member Ken Sahlin was able to enlarge the image to actual size with the use of a computer and a large format printer. With this printed image, the couple gave us a bid and a description of their approach to this project.

Valley Grove board member Karin Winegar visited the Oddens at their workshop and farm, where they raise and train Norwegian Fjord horses for competitive driving events. They are known in North America and in Norway for their fine skills in traditional carving and their books on carving. The couple work in the loft of their horse barn and create everything from kubbestols and ale vessels to doorways, fireplace mantels and stave churches. One of their recent projects is the set for Disney's animated film "Frozen" at Disneyworld. To see inspiring examples of their fine work, visit [www.norskwoodworks.com](http://www.norskwoodworks.com)

## Building Remembered

Former Governor Al Quie visited Valley Grove recently to share his memories of the stable shed that once sheltered driving horses while families attended services. Quie rode to church as a child in wagons and sleighs and is possibly the last person living to have seen the historic structure. Sketching the shed out for Valley Grove Preservation Society members, Quie recalled the dimensions and the way a door allowed passage to provide hay to the tethered horses. The shed stood where the west side of the parking lot is now and provided warmth and dry space for horses against the prevailing westerlies. It was open to the east so drivers could steer their horses head first into the shed. Valley Grove Preservation Society board member Gary Wagenbach recorded the conversation, of which excerpts may appear in future newsletters.



## Memorials received by Valley Grove Preservation Society

We gratefully acknowledge memorial gifts received since those recounted in our last newsletter. Many family and friends honored the lives of **Edna H. Carlson, Allen L. Hanson, Erma Hope, Dorie Grant, Jim Lervik, Bruce Nelson, Patricia B. Volkert** and these Valley Grove friends from long ago: **Melvin and Lulla Groff and Ardis Janet Groff and John and Hannah Floren.**

Thanks to each of you from Valley Grove Preservation Society.

For your viewing pleasure, board members Gary Stromley and John Gorder share Midsommer 2017 at Valley Grove



And we all wish a very Happy Birthday to these special friends of Valley Grove



Brynhild Rowberg celebrates 100 years in 2017

and



Al Quie celebrates 94 years on September 18

## Valley Grove Preservation Society Board, 2017

President Gary Wagenbach; Treasurer Ken Sahlin; Secretary Julie Klassen; Myles Bakke; John Gorder; Marlene Halverson; Jennifer Cox Johnson; Michelle Roethler; Lee Skaar; Gary Stromley; Karin Winegar. Contributions to Valley Grove Preservation Society may be sent to P.O. Box 75, Nerstrand MN 55053.

## Valley Grove and Grace Cemetery Board, 2017

President Ken Vesledahl: 507-649-1321; Secretary/Treasurer Gary Bonde: 507-210-2937; Sexton Blair Baalson: 507-330-3593; John Hellerud: 507-581-2682; John Radtke: 507-838-8874; Travis Roethler: 507-664-0489; Mark Severson: 507-381-2102. Donations to the Valley Grove Cemetery Association should be directed to Gary Bonde, 16745 Kane Avenue, Nerstrand, MN 55053.