

# Valley Grove Preservation Society Newsletter

Fall 2016



## A Note from our President, Gary Wagenbach

Your Valley Grove Preservation Society board of twelve dedicated folks do their very best to care for the 1862 stone and the 1894 wood churches. They also care for a 50-acre portion of the surrounding beautiful oak savanna restoration replete with native grasses and prairie wild flowers complemented by young oak trees. The skilled care we apply to Valley Grove fully utilizes every dollar you donate. Thank you for your support!

The seven-member Cemetery Association maintains the cemetery itself and the headstones and does the mowing. It has a budget separate from that of the Preservation Society.

I often hear from visitors how well the grounds, churches and surrounding prairies look. It is a great place to watch a sunset or a moonrise or greet the dawn. Bring your thermos of coffee for an early morning moment. Folks I know often come out for a picnic or a stroll on the prairie. Others have a family story to tell about their connections to Valley Grove. We want to preserve those stories. Please contact a board member or me so we can record it.

I am excited to call your attention to a new development: our chandelier restoration is finally proceeding. We now have sufficient parts, resources, and a skilled helper to move forward. Herein you will find a report by board member Karin Winegar describing the path we are on. You will be able to view the results during the 2017 Country Social.

Do visit this summer and enjoy the grounds and the magnificent summer prairie setting and remember to attend our annual **Country Social, Sunday, September 18, 2016.**

See you then!

## Valley Grove Social: Save the Date! September 18, 1-4 pm.

Two woodcarving artists from the **Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum** in Decorah, Iowa, will be on hand to demonstrate their craft. Kim Glock, one of Vesterheim's gold medalists in woodcarving, will demonstrate acanthus carving, and Darlene Fossum-Martin, Vesterheim's education specialist, will demonstrate the art of kolrosing. View some of their work below and visit [vesterheim.org](http://vesterheim.org) (photo credits: Vesterheim).



Valley Grove Preservation Society  
P.O. Box 75  
Nerstrand, MN 55053  
[Valleygrovemn.org](http://Valleygrovemn.org)

## Also at the Valley Grove Social, September 18

Music by **Willow Brae**, the duo of harpist Andrea Stern and wind player Laura MacKenzie, conveys the warm resonance of traditional Irish and Scottish music in a performance of airs, songs, jigs and hornpipes on Celtic harp, wooden flutes, whistles, pipes, concertina and voice at 2:30 p.m. in the wooden 1894 church.



**Hütenanny**, a Northfield-based traditional Nordic music group comprised of fiddles, mandolins, bass guitar, and recorders, will perform at 1 p.m. under the Valley Grove historic oak, weather permitting.



## Stewardship by Ken Sahlin

### 2015-16 accomplishments at the site

Here are some examples of how we are using the funds you donate to upgrade both churches and the grounds.



In May 2016, we replaced the old wooden wheel that rang the bell in the steeple of the 1894 church. It had rotted over 141 years, but that's not bad longevity, given that the wheel had a one year warranty! Thanks to skilled efforts by Himec Mechanical in Northfield, a replica of the original is now in place. They fabricated the white painted aluminum replacement wheel, and installed it with help from River City Builders.

## Other Projects Completed

### *Grant Progress*

The Project Manual for the Exterior Masonry Restoration of the 1862 Valley Grove Church was completed by MacDonald & Mack Architects, LTD last fall. It included an analysis of plaster samples of the Stone Church by the Brun Intertec Corporation. This information will be used in the pursuit of grants to fund the masonry restoration.

### *Prairie Burn, May 2016*

We initiated a managed burn on about 5 acres of Valley Grove savanna/prairie. We utilize spring burns to suppress invading small trees such as Siberian elm, ash, cottonwood, and box elder and to rejuvenate native grasses and wildflowers.



## Looking ahead

### *Here Comes the Light* by Karin Winegar

Valley Grove's stone church has been without its original chandelier for decades, perhaps even a century. At some point, it was disassembled, and bits of it given to congregation members. Board members have put the call out for many years for these to be returned. After close scrutiny of both the ceiling of the stone church and the historic photo of the interior, the board determined that there was a single chandelier.

Now we have amassed sufficient original pieces as well as acquired the funds to restore the entire chandelier.

Proprietor and restoration expert Steve Gnan of Let There Be Light in Stillwater, Minnesota will supply, locate or create matching parts for those that are missing.

Working with his national sources, as well as local artists and metal casters, Steve will integrate the existing main stem and springs, the crown top etched glass globes as well as arms, shades, fonts, burners, shade holders, chimneys, oil pots and decorative frills.

He estimates we should have our chandelier by Christmas, along with two matching wall sconces. Some parts of the sconces, originally oil, as was the chandelier, were converted to electricity. The chandelier will be raised to the center of the wooden circle on the ceiling, and the sconces will be installed on either side of the kitchen's east door.

## Prairie Notes by Myles Bakke

### *Red Tail Nanny*

Earlier this summer I watched a red tailed hawk soaring over the Valley Grove prairie and wondered if it was taking advantage of the lack of thatch cover removed in a prescribed spring burn.

A burn completely denudes the land and denies cover for the small mammals living in that patch of prairie for a time. This forces those animals to expand into surrounding areas with already occupied territories.

The burn site was lush with summer growth and must have been tempting for the small mammal herbivores such as thirteen lined ground squirrels and meadow voles living in compressed and stressful territories. Any change in the structure and complexity of habitat creates vulnerabilities for some and new opportunities for others. Soaring raptors quickly exploit the diminished cover and concealment the missing thatch once provided.

Recently I have been astounded by a kind of pragmatism and trust shown by a family of red tailed hawks that has accepted me into their daily rhythms. A female red tail has been using my activity and my Bobcat skidloader to train her young to hunt. For the past three seasons, I have cleared stumps and debris off a field in preparation for a prairie planting. The project in the Carleton College Arboretum involved grubbing out and piling up tree stumps and branches for removal to a pile at another location. In the process, I changed the structure and complexity of this field, and by making prey vulnerable, developed a remarkable relationship with a family of red tailed hawks.

Please visit our website for the full account of how I became a part time nanny and full time fan of this family of amazing birds. The story is titled "Frick and Frack."

## Events 2015-16 at Valley Grove

Valley Grove was the site of four weddings from September 2015 through August 2016, in addition to our annual Country Social and Christmas Eve Service. Next year weddings are scheduled on May 14 and 20.

### Christmas Eve at Valley Grove

Rev. John Gorder conducted the 2015 Christmas Eve Service with music by Theo Wee (organ), Kay Sahlin (flute) and Andrea Een on violin. The church was filled to capacity. Two days before the service, the bell rope was found to be tattered. Quick repairs by Todd Lein and Lee Skaar saved the evening. Now the bell rings with a new wheel (see above *stewardship*).

## Altar Painting By Kristin Anderson, Art Department, Augsburg College

The Valley Grove altar painting displayed in the 1894 church, like most other altar paintings, is a copy of a famous original. In this case, the resurrection scene was a reproduction of the altar painting at Marienwerder Cathedral at Kwidzyn, Poland. The artist, Bernhard Plockhorst (1825-1907) was trained in Munich and Paris and later became a professor in Leipzig and Berlin. He specialized in religious subjects, creating the originals of a number of well-known altar paintings such as *The Good Shepherd*, *Jesus with Peter on the Sea of Galilee*, and *Jesus with the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus*.

These popular images were widely copied by artists in Scandinavia, Germany, and America for local church congregations that wanted an image or statue above the altar. Most of these artists had never seen the originals. They relied instead on small black-and-white reproductions from which to create their enlarged and full color oil paintings for the local church altars. In the upper Midwest, such artists as Herbjørn Gausta, Sarah Kirkeberg Raugland, Arne Berger, Andreas Pede, and August Klagstad produced large numbers of these altar paintings for Norwegian-American Lutheran churches.



The Valley Grove altar painting was not painted by one of the Minneapolis-based professionals listed above. The painting looks like the work of a self-trained “people’s artist” — someone working in the fine arts without the benefit of fine arts training. There is no visible signature, but the church records identify the artist as Trond Eltun. His name appears in a little note indicating that the congregation accepted the painting on the condition that Eltun make some changes recommended by Pastor Quammen. It is not clear what those alterations were.

One of two men — grandfather and grandson -- may have been the Valley Grove artist. First (and most likely), a famous hardanger fiddler named Trond Eltun (1823-1899) emigrated to Minnesota from Vang in Valdres, Norway in 1876. In the 1880 census, he and his son John were living in Dennison. Eltun traveled around the upper Midwest, performing for audiences in Norwegian-American communities, and the Rice-Goodhue Norwegian-American settlement seems to have been his home base. He had relatives in Dennison and in the Valley Grove church. Eltun died in Hanley Falls and is buried near relatives at Wang church cemetery near Maynard in Renville County.

His grandson, also named Trond Eltun (1871-1913), emigrated about the time the painting was created. He was quite young at the time, and there is no indication in his later life that he was an artist. He worked as a physician and died in Velva, North Dakota.

## Recent Memorials

We thank everyone for their contributions to our efforts, and we strive to be good stewards of your gifts. Recent memorials include: Brendon Thibodeau; Judy Kasa; Beverly Bond; Jonathan Stenseth; Melvin, Lulla and Ardis Groff; Lois Radke Elstad; Lenora Christie Hauer and Clarence and Emma Christie; John and Hannah Floren; Brad Easterson; Mylo Hagberg; Ginny Shaw; Elizabeth “Betty Wall” Strohfus; Laurie Dutton; Robert Wallin; and Jeff Heggedahl.

Find donation information at:

<http://valleygrovemn.org/donate-get-involved/>

You can also like Valley Grove on Facebook.

### Valley Grove Preservation Society Board, Sept. 2016

Myles Bakke; Jennifer Cox Johnson; Andy Franklin; John Gorder; Marlene Halverson; Julie Klassen, Secretary; Michelle Roethler; Ken Sahlin, Treasurer; Lee Skaar; Gary Stromley; Gary Wagenbach, President; Karin Winegar

### Valley Grove and Grace Cemetery Board, Sept. 2016

Blair Baalson, Sexton: 507-789-6747; Gary Bonde, Secretary/ Treasurer: 507-210-2937; Ken Vesledahl, President: 507-645-8610

Donations for the Cemetery Association should be directed to Gary Bonde.