

Valley Grove Preservation Society Newsletter

Fall 2018

A Note from our President, Gary Wagenbach

I am privileged with a view of the Valley Grove churches on the horizon south of our home. In winter, I see from my home office the steeples of the stone and wood churches silhouetted by the forests of Big Woods State Park. I am also lucky to serve with a team of volunteers who care for the Valley Grove churches including the surrounding oak savanna.



Monarchs at Valley Grove

The volunteers hosted the well-attended September 17, 2017 Country Social, and the Christmas Eve service, joined the Valley Grove and Grace Cemetery Board for a work day on May 8, trimming, setting grave stones aright, and checking buildings.

Visitors often remark how nice the grounds, cemetery, and buildings look. It works because we collaborate. We have no paid staff and rely on volunteers. The oak savanna, now 18 years old, is tended by volunteers, too. We've planted new native wildflowers around the perimeter of the cemetery, dehumidified stored hymnals, monitored health of bur oak trees, removed invasive plants and mowed the cemetery grounds (thanks to the Cemetery Association) and trails in the savanna.

Valley Grove is an open-air learning site for students of local schools and served as an art space for Carleton College artist Linda Rossi. High school students from Arcadia Charter School estimate the age of the biggest oak in the cemetery to be about 210 years old. Prairie Creek Community School also used the site for a study of history and the land and plants.

We recently applied to Partners for Sacred Places, a Chicago-based philanthropic organization, for an award of training, consultation, and modest funds for building restoration and refurbishment.

I look forward to continued community use and continuing restoration of our historic 1862 stone church and 1894 clapboard church. We invite you to bring a picnic, watch the sunset, or greet the dawn here. Walk the blooming prairie and experience the land as early settlers might have.

In your GPS our address is 9999 155th St. E., Nerstrand, MN. Donations and mail go to PO Box 75, Nerstrand, MN 55053

<http://valleygrovemn.org/>



We preserve the Norwegian historic churches and oak savanna for the use, education, and enjoyment of everyone today

Land Care at Valley Grove

Oak savanna conservation

An every-10-year-update to the management plan for the 113-acre restoration surrounding the churches is in process. We inventory oak trees, review placement and density and have installed plantings that will last a century or more. Through collaboration with the Carleton College's GIS* laboratory, environmental studies students, and Minnesota DNR Forestry, desirable trees were inventoried in May/June.

*A geographic information system (GIS) captures, stores, manipulates, analyzes, manages and presents geographical data.

For further information see the link on our web version of this newsletter.

Care of Oaks: by Ken Vesledahl, Cemetery Board

We have been treating four old bur oaks for Bur Oak Blight (BOB), a fungus that withers leaves, worsening until the tree dies, usually from insect infestation. The treatment involves drilling holes and injecting fungicide. This is not a cure and can stress the tree but it tends to keep BOB in remission. It needs to be done annually. Two of the trees were storm damaged and needed to be cut down.

Instead of fungicide injections on remaining oaks, we did a root feeding of high strength fertilizer and a chemical that helps the tree absorb it, building the tree's immunity to disease. This was recommended by John Feldman from Cannon River Tree Care and Iowa State University. We will not know until the end of July or August if it is successful and decide on future treatments as needed.

October 2017 Planting

Volunteers planted thousands of native prairie wildflower seeds in prepared soil surrounding the cemetery perimeter - the space previously occupied by a fence and weedy garden plants (both removed). In May 2018, 360 pollinator-friendly seedlings were planted, including Butterfly Weed, Pale Purple Coneflower, Black-Eyed Susan, Purple Prairie Clover, Smooth Aster, Sky Blue Aster, Ironweed, Early Sunflower, Bergamot, Hoary Vervain, New England Aster, and Meadow Blazing Star.

All were from the Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District. <http://www.riceswcd.org/sample-page/prairie/>

The planting of native wildflower seedlings was covered by Faribault Daily News, February 13, 2018. To read, see the link on our web version of this newsletter.

Cemetery Perimeter

Volunteer Brian Koester mowing the cemetery perimeter wildflower planting. Brian is the brother of new VGPS board member Rene Koester.



Our Facebook page can be found at:

<https://www.facebook.com/ValleyGrovePreservationSociety>

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.

Badger Work: by Myles Bakke, VGPS Board

I'm standing on a westerly slope of Valley Grove Prairie, looking at a patch of weedy plants roughly thirty feet in diameter, a discontinuity in the surrounding prairie. When I decided to write about the American badger for the newsletter, it seemed like a good idea to walk the prairie to find fresh badger sign. Thirty minutes of perambulation through tall grass yielded nothing, so I headed toward this location hoping for a change of luck.... (full article on web)

Learn more about Bakke's discoveries

<http://valleygrovemn.org>

Valley Grove Becomes Sponsored Site: Lee Skaar, board member

As of mid-June 2018, Valley Grove is now listed as a “Sponsored Site” for recording Master Naturalist volunteer hours. After completing training, Naturalists are expected to complete volunteer work each year to be considered an active Master Naturalist including:

Stewardship Projects -- such as invasive species removal or Prairie/Woodland restoration.

Education/Interpretive Projects -- Public presentations of natural resource information, education materials development, or general nature -related hikes.

Citizen Science Projects – supporting research projects, e.g. Monarch larvae monitoring, plant or animal counts, water quality monitoring.

Program Support – assist MN Master Naturalist program or serve as a local sponsor.

When a Master Naturalist completes volunteer work at the Valley Grove site, he or she logs hours under our name on the MN Master Naturalist WEB site. We hope to gain precious volunteer hours helping with our prairie maintenance. Each calendar year, VGPS receives a report of total number of hours donated and their financial value.

A Note From Nancy Braker, Arboretum Director, Carleton College

We will host a Master Naturalists Course this fall at the College Arboretum - the Big Woods, Big Rivers biome. Dates are September 12 through October 22. If you are not familiar with the Minnesota Master Naturalists program, visit at

[https:// www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org/](https://www.minnesotamasternaturalist.org/)

Partners for Sacred Places:

Our site is one of 16 nationwide selected to receive a site visit by consultants who provide training and some funding for restoration projects such as we hope to do on the 1862 stone church.

VGPS applied for a matching grant from Partners for Sacred Places to be used for preservation work at the site. Board members Karin Winegar and Gary Wagenbach attended a two-day training session in Mt. Horeb, WI, June 22-23, 2018. Wagenbach says, “We learned much about marketing, site utilization, community use and expanding our network. The experts will visit our site this autumn, and we intend to meet with the board of Trondhjem church near Lonsdale about information exchange, mutual promotion, and potential collaboration. Three board members from Trondhjem were part of the event.”

<http://www.sacredplaces.org/>

Representatives from historic churches in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota met with trainers from Partners for Sacred Places at Springdale Lutheran Church in Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin <https://www.twosteeple.org/>



Memorials and Honoraria received

We gratefully acknowledge gifts in memory of Russell & Evelyn Anseth, Raymond Cox, Marjorie Herrmann Cox, John & Hannah Floren, Julie Klassen, Marlys (Groff) Knutson, Bruce Nelson, and in honor of Carol Rosenqvist. You help the beauty continue—thank you!

New VGPS Board Members

Todd Nichol

I first encountered Valley Grove as a student at St. Olaf and later became acquainted with its history, in part through John Maakestad, one of my professors. I became an ELCA parish pastor and taught at both Luther Seminary and St. Olaf College. When my wife Kristin and I moved to Northfield, Valley Grove became a favorite place to visit and enjoy. John Gorder told me of his work on the board, and I am delighted by the opportunity to serve as a board member and look after these fine old churches.

Rene Koester

I grew up just a little over a mile from Valley Grove. We did not belong to Valley Grove but have been at events and activities. I especially enjoy hearing the bell ring across the valley. The churches have always been a beautiful spot, and the board has done a great job of maintaining the historic buildings and prairie. I hope to help maintain the churches and prairie.

Country Social, Sunday September 16, 1-4pm

Join us Sunday, September 16, 1-4 pm for our annual party on the prairie featuring live traditional Nordic music and old-time pleasures. This year, for the first time, photographer Doug Ohman will speak on historic churches of Minnesota. Ohman, of New Hope, is author of Minnesota Byways, a six book series featuring photos of some 3,000 churches. Northfield- based music group Hütenänny performs Scandinavian music on the historic grounds, where families enjoy wagon rides with a handsome draft horse team. Volunteers will conduct tours of the cemetery sharing tales of families from around the area. Educators will be on hand to highlight some of the wildlife of the prairie such as monarchs and bluebirds. Coffee and refreshments will be served. Admission is free, tax-deductible donations to Valley Grove Preservation Society are encouraged.



Julie Klassen
Gary Wagenbach 2017



Horseman Bob Matthies and his team of Percherons
Gary Wagenbach 2017

Remembering Julie

Julie Klassen, Professor of German, Emerita, Carleton College, passed away January 13, 2018. Julie was a VGPS board member since 2012 and secretary in 2016–17. Here she was digging an invasive Queen Anne's lace in the Valley Grove Prairie. A celebration of Julie's life was held at the Carleton College Chapel on Saturday, April 14th, 2018.

Valley Grove Preservation Society Board, 2018

President Gary Wagenbach; Treasurer Ken Sahlin; Myles Bakke; Jennifer Cox Johnson; John Gorder; Marlene Halverson; Rene Koester; Todd Nichol; Michelle Roethler; Lee Skaar; Gary Stromley; Karin Winegar.

Contributions to: Valley Grove Preservation Society, P.O. Box 75, Nerstrand MN 55053.

Valley Grove and Grace Cemetery Board, 2018

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: Valley Grove Cemetery Association, Gary Bonde, 16745 Kane Avenue, Nerstrand, MN 55053.**