

# VALLEY GROVE PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 2020



## From the President of the Board by *Gary Wagenbach*

Your Valley Grove Preservation Society (VGPS) Board is doing its best in the face of the challenges created by COVID-19. Our annual meeting in April occurred online, as announced on the website. We had a socially-distanced outdoor board meeting in July (photo right). We continue to manage the land and care for the buildings with volunteers and hired help where needed.

Many anticipated uses and events at Valley Grove have been rescheduled, postponed, or cancelled (see page 4). Burials and interment services continue and visitors continue to enjoy the grounds: trail walking, bird watching, and having small group meetings outdoors in the shade of the great oaks. Casual visitors often stop in for a look, a rest, and sometimes a sunset.



Projects completed in the last year include the restoration/recreation of 19th century wall sconces. They are now installed in the stone church, complementing the lovely restored chandelier completed a few years ago. We thank **Let There Be Light Antiques** in Stillwater, Minnesota, Todd Kamis, Dundas, Minnesota, the Nordic Churches Project within Partners for Sacred Places (PSP), and skilled volunteers who support Valley Grove Preservation Society. Two new projects are underway, both involving historical documentation, and a potential third -- a Nordic-American textile art project -- is being considered (see page 3).

Recent heavy rain highlighted the need to improve rainwater management around the foundations of both the wood and stone churches. The adjacent landscaping also needs review and replacement or modification.

The "Valley Grove Historic Place" registered with the National Park Service is one of our high-value, experiential and economic community assets. Research on urban historic churches shows a halo effect that benefits the community in both social and monetary terms. Partners for Sacred Places is researching similar impacts in rural places such as Valley Grove. We look forward to learning and sharing more from that work.

Please continue your financial support of the Valley Grove Preservation Society. Every dollar is applied to the care and improvement of this special and sacred place. For more information: <https://valleygrovemn.org/donate/> or send to PO Box 75, Nerstrand, Minnesota 55053

**The Valley Grove Board joins family and friends in sending our best wishes to Gary and Linda Wagenbach as they celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. Both have been staunch supporters of Valley Grove Preservation Society for years. Their children dedicated a tree in Tyske grove to commemorate the happy occasion.**

## BOARD NOTES

### Thank You, Lee!

Lee Skaar has served VGPS for six years, and we are very appreciative of his initiative, help, and guidance. He joined the board in 2014 and has helped with many on-site projects such as the restoration of six sconces recently installed in the stone church, a rain barrel installation that makes water available on the south side of the stone church, and trying to SOLVE the bat and bee problems we face from time to time. Although he now has retired from the board, we are holding him to his promise that he will continue to help out when his considerable skills are needed.

### The Board Welcomes a New Member

Margit Johnson of Northfield joined the board as of May 2020 for a new three-year term. She is an enthusiast of the history, culture, and preservation of Valley Grove. Her Scandinavian background began with her paternal grandfather emigrating from Sweden in the early 1900's. He married a farm girl from Kensington, Minnesota, whose mother was Norwegian and father was Swedish. The family story goes that Margit's great grandfather helped create the Kensington runestone (apologies to those who believe the stone to be authentic). Margit spent a year at a folk high school in Sweden where she was able to forge life-long ties with her Swedish relatives, several of whom have visited Valley Grove.

### Board Members 2020-2021

Gary Wagenbach (President), Ken Sahlin (Treasurer), Jennifer Cox Johnson (Secretary), Myles Bakke, Maren Brogger, John Gorder, Marlene Halverson, Margit Johnson, Rene Koester, Michelle Roethler, Gary Stromley, and Karin Winegar. Ken Vesledahl, President of the Cemetery Board (Ex-Officio), serves as liaison between the Cemetery Board and VGPS.

**The 2021 Annual Meeting** will be held April 15, 2021 at 7:30 p.m. at Valley Grove. We will update the events section on our Valley Grove home page if a change in meeting format or location is required.

## IN MEMORIUM

Memorial donations were received from August 1, 2019 - July 31, 2020 in remembrance of Russell Anseth, Marjorie Herrmann Cox, Raymond Cox, Andrew Engeseth family, Valdine Engeseth, and Kathleen (Kay) Hope.

### Remembering Russell Anseth *by Ken Sahlin*

We received several donations from the family of Russell Anseth (1920-2012) to honor what would have been his 100th birthday. I first talked with Russell a few days after the death of his wife Evelyn in August 2001. He called my home and was very heartbroken over his loss. In remembrance of Evelyn, Russell made a large donation to Valley Grove Preservation Society. Thanks to Russell's generosity, we were able to start major renovations to the Valley Grove 1894 building. The next four summers I visited with Russell as he was on his yearly trips from California (via Minnesota!) to Idaho where he had a summer home. I never quite knew what he would be driving each year, a new pickup, van or camper, but I know he enjoyed his freedom on the road. We had common interests in that I worked for a general contractor, and he was also a high-end contractor. Another connection: he found out that I live on the farm that was homesteaded by Hans Rinde, who had direct ties to Evelyn. Many stories were exchanged of his life experiences. The one I best remember is that while a student at Northfield High School he was a ringer for the St Olaf College ski team. I think his stopping was an excuse to see what we were doing at Valley Grove in addition to being a way to talk about his remembrances. I thoroughly enjoyed his company.



## EVENT AND PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2019-2020

- **2019 Country Social** - We were blessed with clear skies, fantastic music, and a grand turnout at our Annual Country Social last fall. Thanks to all who volunteered, donated, and enjoyed the various activities. Each year we are amazed by the outpouring of love and support we receive. We cannot say often enough how great it is to be able to share these spaces and the land with those who have a fond place for it in their hearts, just as we do. We will see you in 2021 (notice below)!



- **2019 Christmas Eve Service** - It is a magical evening of song and prayer, year after year. We never know what the weather will bring nor the song selections that will be requested. But we always manage to fill our hearts with hope and peace among family and friends. This tradition has been taking place since 1974, underlining the importance of being together in community on Christmas Eve long after the congregation disbanded during the early 1970s.
- **2020 Northeast Prairie Burn** (see page 1) - This spring we conducted a managed burn on the northwest section of the oak savannah. Crews arrived at 8 a.m. on Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup>. Although they were exhausted from the previous day's burns, they got it done just before noon.
- **Completed Refurbishment/Copies of Six Sconces in the Stone Church** - Shortly after the completion of the chandelier a few years ago, the board started to develop a plan to incorporate copies of the 19th century sconces, shown here in a period photo of the stone church interior, into the backdrop of the stone church's main space. Now installed, and with controllable LED lighting, they add a lovely ambiance.



- **Written Publication<sup>1</sup> - 50 Year History of the Valley Grove Preservation Society**  
We hired historian Jeff Sauvé to research and document the past 50 years of preservation and refurbishment efforts undertaken by the nonprofit group now known as the Valley Grove Preservation Society.
- **Film Documentary<sup>2</sup> - Valley Grove and Regional Historical Documentary Project**  
We hired filmmakers Paul Krause Associates to create a one-hour documentary film about Valley Grove, including the remarkable and successful efforts of community members to save the churches from demolition in the 1970s, the growing importance of Valley Grove to the community, and the continuing preservation efforts of today.
- **Potential Nordic Arts project** - Valley Grove is one of 17 church sites in the Upper Midwest chosen by Partners for Sacred Places (PSP) for its Nordic Churches Project. PSP wishes to help Nordic churches sustain their presence in their communities by leveraging folk art and traditions, including inviting proposals to fund new artwork, specifically textile art, from Nordic-American folk artists. Although COVID-19 prompted PSP to postpone its request for proposals until next year, we are in conversation with an interested and accomplished Minnesota Nordic-American tapestry artist and expect to prepare a proposal as soon as PSP's normal operations resume.

<sup>1</sup> This publication is made possible in part by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Any views, findings, opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the State of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society, or the Minnesota Historic Resources Advisory Committee.

<sup>2</sup> Funding support is provided by the Valley Grove Preservation Society and Northfield Shares Engeseth-Rinde Fund.



## Event Cancellations:

- **2020 Country Social - CANCELLED** - It was a difficult decision, but...it is not the type of social gathering that is deemed safe in these days of a pandemic. We will see you in 2021!
- **2020 Christmas Eve Service - CANCELLED** - We are also saddened to announce that we have decided to cancel the Annual Christmas Eve service. There is no reasonable way to create a safe environment without risking others in such a space.

## PRAIRIE NOTES: The Butcher Bird by Myles Bakke, Board member



The shrew was so tiny that the spike on which it was impaled passed through its entire body, pushing a bulge of hide out the opposite side (seen at left). It was either a pigmy shrew or a masked shrew, the only two shrews that small occurring in this area. These are among the smallest mammals on the planet, seldom weighing more than seven grams (depending on when they last had dinner), with a head and body length of less than two and a half inches. As a weight comparison, a nickel weighs five grams. This was the cache of a shrike, hung here for later consumption if needed. Known as “shrike larders,” they may be used habitually if they are near a nest site, or occasionally, near hunting perches over large territory.

Shrikes belong to a large order of birds called Passeriformes, often referred to as perching birds, or songbirds. The shrike family, *Laniidae*, consists of 33 species and four genres, most of which are found in Eurasia and Africa. Two, the Loggerhead Shrike and the Northern Shrike, are native to North America, the only ones to occur in the western hemisphere, and both are found in Minnesota. The Northern Shrike, *Lanius excubitor*, does not nest here, but visits to enjoy the more balmy Minnesota winter from its breeding range in the Arctic and sub-arctic.



Northern Shrike © Duncan Usher/Solent News

Its genus name, *Lanius*, is the Latin word for “butcher”. Roughly the size of a robin, these predatory birds have been observed attacking prey as large as themselves; no small feat for a predator with the feet of a perching bird and not the murderous talons of a raptor. Their primary weapon is a hooked beak, or tomial tooth, formed from the hardened cutting edges (tomia) of the upper beak. Repeated strikes to the head are often used to stun the prey. Grasping the neck and vigorously shaking the victim, it creates g-forces strong enough to dislocate the cervical vertebrae. The shrike then flies the carcass to a suitable location and impales it on a sharp thorn or twig for caching or disassembly.

~ For Myles Bakke’s complete essay and more photographs, visit the VGPS website <https://valleygrovemn.org/resources/prairie-notes/>

**Please keep in touch via our website, email or Facebook, or US mail**

More up-to-date information on events and changes are on our website and our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ValleyGrovePreservationSociety/>

We love hearing from you and sharing your photos and memories too, so please contact us, and if you are willing to receive your newsletter through email, please send us your email address. Send to:

info@valleygrovemn.org  
or by US mail at  
PO Box 75, Nerstrand, MN 55053

Many thanks!