

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 2, Issue 8: August, 2008

“Minnesota City: A Past that we honor; a Present that we give meaning; a Future that we build together”

Mark your calendars!

August 21: Minnesota City Historical Association (MCHA) Monthly Meeting; Historic First Baptist Church, 140 Mill Street, Minn. City; 6:30 p.m.
Note: Third rather than second Thursday

August 23: Pamela McNeill GBDRF Fundraiser: Elks Club; 7:30 p.m.

August 24: GBDRF One Year Post Flood Anniversary Celebration at LaCanne Memorial Park, Goodview; 11:00 – 4:00 p.m.

September 18: Community Readers Meeting; 6:30 p.m. at Riverway Learning Community; the selection is *Winter Roads, Summer Fields* by Marge Dorner. Open to the Public.

Note - there will be no “Readers” meeting in August.

Spring Open House Planned for Minnesota City Historical Association (MCHA) Archives

At the July 24 meeting, MCHA attendees decided to hold a public open house for the archives in the Spring when the Association anticipates being able to announce scheduling for “open to the public afternoons” for the summer months. These afternoons will provide opportunities for archival research, for public contribution of resources, for conversation, and for volunteer work. The Association intends to have a lending library of tapes and books. A fireproof file has been purchased for significant historical items.

The archives location in the historic First Baptist Church at 140 Mill Street has been renovated with volunteer labor and donated materials, as well as with labor and materials purchased with monies from members and donors, and with grants from Experiment in Rural Cooperation, from the Winona Foundation, and from the Minnesota State Sesquicentennial Meeting.

Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund (GBDRF) Sponsors August 24 Flood Anniversary Community/Family Day

Supported by a grant from Winona Community Foundation and with help from a Pamela McNeill Fundraiser on August 23, GBDRF is sponsoring a Family Day at LaCanne Park in Goodview on Sunday, August 24, 2008 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The celebration is planned for flood families and the whole community to rejoice with others in the progress made in flood recovery. The event will include an opening ceremony, music, and food from 11:30 until 2:00 p.m. (free), and children’s games. Humanitarian awards will be presented to persons who performed extraordinarily during and after the flood. Application forms for nominating individuals can be secured from Goodview City Hall, Hwy 61 N Kwik Trip, L & S Grab n Go in Stockton and LaBoutique in Winona. They can also be downloaded from the Minnesota City Historical Association website,

www.minnesotacity.org.

“An Evening with Pamela,” a fundraiser to support the Flood Family Day will be held on Saturday, August 23 at the Elks Club at 7:30 p.m. McNeill is a former Minnesota City resident; she has previously performed a benefit concert in St. Paul for the flood recovery. Tickets are \$12.00 pre-sales and \$15.00 at the door. First Place Trophy, HyVee, Hardt’s, Midtown Foods and The Elks have tickets. This event will also include a silent auction, and the Elks will provide a “for purchase” burger basket.

GBDRF was formed in December of 2007 in response to the August flooding. Its purpose is to serve August 2007 flood victims from SE Minnesota, namely Minnesota City, Rollingstone Township and Stockton.

Minnesota Post Reminds Readers of Unpleasant Sesquicentennial Events to Remember—or Forget

Minnesota Post, www.minnesotapost.com, which describes itself as a compilation of news items and analysis from the most comprehensive global news network on the internet, in keeping with the sesquicentennial, recently ran an article entitled “150 Minnesota moments we’d just as soon forget.”

They range in tone and information from unspeakably horrific to wittily amusing. A sampling:

1863: Little Crow, the Indian leader during the Dakota Conflict, is shot while picking berries. His body is horrifically mutilated and the flesh is boiled off his skull, which is presented to the Minnesota Historical Society, which keeps it and few other body parts until the remains are surrendered to Little Crow’s descendants in 1971.

1879: The start of a five year grasshopper plague in southwestern Minnesota. Hundreds starve. Three day January blizzard kills 70 Minnesotans.

1892: The Republican Convention comes to Minneapolis. “Hotels and restaurants were widely panned, setting back the convention and tourism business for decades.”

1918: The Minnesota Commission, created by war hysteria, unleashes a broad campaign against labor groups and German-Americans—in one case arresting the entire city government of New Ulm and replacing it.

1920: The Alexandria, Minnesota public library bans Sinclair Lewis’ Main Street in the mistaken belief that his fictional Gopher Prairie was based on Alexandria.



Putnam Gray (1832-1921) burial marker at Hillside Cemetery, Minneiska. (See July newsletter; the archives now hold numerous articles on Putnam and his Minneiska adventures).

Thank You :

-to Janet Hill Seabern for materials on Fleming family members and Minnesota City related newspaper materials.

-to the Roger Church family for biographical profiles of family members.

-to Gene Sobeck, Minnesota City, who donated a four drawer file to the MCHA.

-to Marianne Mastenbrook for a sheaf of materials on Putnam Gray, the castle builder, reputed ferris wheel originator, and Minneiska neighbor, and for materials on Samuel Loudon, Civil War participant, interred in Oakland Cemetery.

County Recorder Bambenek organizes Sesquicentennial recognition for 150 Year History Entities

Robert Bambenek, Winona County Recorder, assisted by office personnel, researched and organized a Winona County Fair celebration of over 100 individuals and groups who have a County history and presence dating back to 1858, the date commemorated by the State Sesquicentennial. At the fair on July 10, keepsake certificates acknowledging these histories were distributed to honorees. Minnesota City and area connections included these: the city of Minnesota City, Minnesota City First Baptist Church, Rollingsstone Township, Minnesota City Post Office, Oakland Cemetery, Roger Church Family, LaVerne Fritz Family, Whetstone -Denzer Family, Russell Church Farm and the Mastenbrook farm (Please notify MCHA of omissions). Because of severe weather, the county fairground attendees were evacuated to the St. Charles High School at the 1:30 p.m. time of the presentation.

Long Time Minnesota City Resident, Mildred Jessie, 105, Buried in Oakland Cemetery

For a number of Minnesota City residents, it seemed as if bells should have tolled to announce the departure from our midst of Mildred Jessie. She was a longtime stillpoint for some from which to consider the events of their lives, as she shared the history of her own. Some of this sharing was done with Riverway Learning Community students who interviewed her for their sesquicentennial publication, *Old Wise Tales*, in 2002.

Mildred Jessie, 105, was born in 1902 in Hillsboro, Wisconsin, and attended school up to eighth grade in a sod school house. In 1909 she went from Oklahoma to Colorado in a covered wagon. In 1919 her family moved to Sparta where her parents farmed. She had three sisters and three brothers. In 1921, Mildred married Harry Jessie who was born in Sparta, Wisconsin. Both of their family backgrounds included farming. Harry worked as a laborer in Sparta, and moved to Minnesota City in 1938. He lived with the Allemans, and Mildred moved here in 1939. They bought their house near the Minnesota City railroad depot in 1950. There were two or three trains that passed on the Minnesota City railroad each day, one the Milwaukee and the other the Chicago Northwestern. According to Mildred, "Some were passenger trains, and many were freight trains. Harry worked on the railroad for thirty nine years, getting paid 56 cents an hour when he first started, and usually putting in ten hour days. If there was a bad storm, Harry had to patrol the tracks." Mildred also remembered flooding, with water covering the tracks. "Everything on the railroad was done by hand then with picks and shovels. Now it's all machines."

If Mildred needed to go to Winona, it was always free, because Harry had a free pass for working on the railroad. Otherwise it cost twenty five cents to go to Winona. During war times when gas was rationed, "this man worked for my husband, and one week we'd take the car and go grocery shopping, and the next week, he'd take it. Just to save gas. You could only get so much."

While living in Minnesota City, the Jessies lived in three different houses. Mildred and Harry had a big garden, especially red raspberries. The Volunteer Fire Department in Minnesota City sponsored buses to the baseball games in the Cities. "We went several times." The Jessie's always had one cow for dairy and a calf. They butchered one and the other would grow up. They furnished all their own meat. They also had three goats, cats, and dogs, and chickens.

Asked about some of first memories, she recalled going to Winona "to do our own shopping. I thought that was the longest street, you know, Broadway, that I had ever seen. I was always in Sparta, and that's a small town. And when we first came to Minnesota City, when anybody had a birthday, the whole city would come."

Mildred and Harry had three children, Berniece, Harriet, and Allen. Two of these went to the Minnesota City schools. Mildred Jessie had three grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. Harry helped build the Minnesota City Church (Lutheran) which was dedicated on October 11, 1964. They belonged to this church. Mildred also worked as a Sunday school teacher for about sixteen years, and as a school secretary. She was a survivor of cancer (Lymphoma) for over twenty years. Harry died in 1991.

Mildred recently lived at the Lamberton Home in Winona and later at the Winona Manor. She continued at least one of her hobbies, playing cards, until the week before her death, according to her daughter, Harriet. Mildred was buried in Oakland Cemetery. The appropriate text for Rev. David Eckert's funeral homily for Mildred was Job, 5:26: "You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season." MCHA extends sympathy to the family and friends of Mildred Mae Betts Jessie. (Material from Riverway Learning Community's *Old Wise Tales*).

Minnesota City Youth Baseball Receives Twins Grant

According to a story in The Winona Post on July 2, the Minnesota City Youth Baseball Association has been awarded a "2008: Field for Kids" grant from the Minnesota Twins Community Fund and the Toro Corporation. Both fields of the group were affected by the August 2007 flood. Playing surfaces were destroyed as were electrical service, storage sheds and field maintenance equipment. Reclamation is estimated to cost between sixty and seventy thousand dollars. The Field for Kids grant is \$5000.00. According to program president, Jack Karnick, some 100 youth between ages 8 to 14 are served by this program. Readers who wish to donate to this project are asked to contact Karnick at 429-9404 or Scott Fritz at 452-1299. Readers of local papers are aware of the many successes of the teams.

Residents Remember Sports in Minnesota City



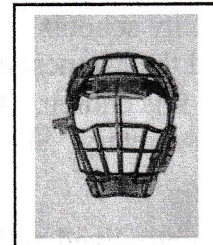
Minnesota City Team (1939)? Archival photograph

In interviews conducted by Riverway Learning Community students in 2002, several longtime residents commented on their recreational activities including baseball. Roger Church remembered that his brother, Curtis, was the business manager for the teams. "We had ball teams in the summer... that was the main activity." Gerald Cisewski was ten or twelve when he was playing football and softball. He played baseball in high school, "although I was never very good." One girl, "sort of a tomboy," according to Gerald, beat him out of a position for softball. "After school," Gerald said, "me and my brothers would go out and play ball until dark."

Delwin Tschumper recalled a number of sports. "You have to be creative to create recreation. There was no recreation department. At night we would play *Moonlight Starlight*. My mother always said that our backyard had no grass 'because grass and kids don't grow up together.' We played a lot of baseball and football." Delwin had a long list of names of friends he remembered: Jack Sandstede, Harold Dickman, Gerry Cisewski, Richard Newman, Phillip Streng ("he was an excellent marbles player"), Clayton Maxham, Arnold Cisewski, Jay Alleman, Beryl Tschumper, Allen Whetstone. "One of our main areas to play football was right behind the school. This was our football field. There was more land out that way. We had a softball diamond on one end and a football field on the other. Girls also played with us. We played marbles. We used to dig a little pot in the ground with our heel. We threw marbles in the pot and put a line down and then would shoot the marbles into the pot. The first person that shot the marbles in got all the marbles. We didn't have lights at that time, so we would play under the streetlights at night. It was a good time."

In a Minnesota City road tour in 2006, Allen Whetstone pointed out the location of one baseball field in Minnesota City, below the Hundorf home (formerly the Ed and Judy Maus home, formerly the Emil Norbye family residence).

This catcher's mask belonged to Elmer C. Evanson. He played on the Minnesota City School baseball team, graduating from the 8th grade in the class of 1922. The catcher's mask had been in his family before he was born in 1907 and remained in the family until it was given to the MCHA at the 2002 sesquicentennial celebration. Elmer died in 1998.



Anyone who wishes to be a member of the Association is invited to send \$15.00 to MCHA, P.O. Box 41, Minnesota City, MN, 55959.

All monies will be used to support Association goals. Separate or additional donations may also be sent to the above address.