

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 3, Issue 1: January, 2009

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

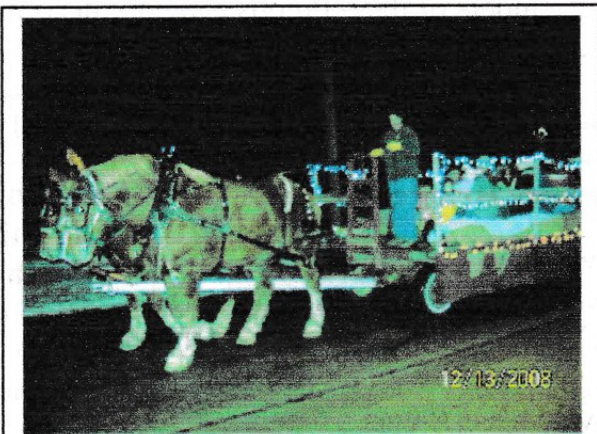
Mark your calendars!

January 5-31: “The Homes They Left Behind”; photo exhibit; Winona Public Library

January 8: MCHA Meeting; 6:30-8:00; Riverway Learning Community

January 15: Minnesota City Community Readers will discuss *The Road*. 6:30-8:00; Riverway Learning Community

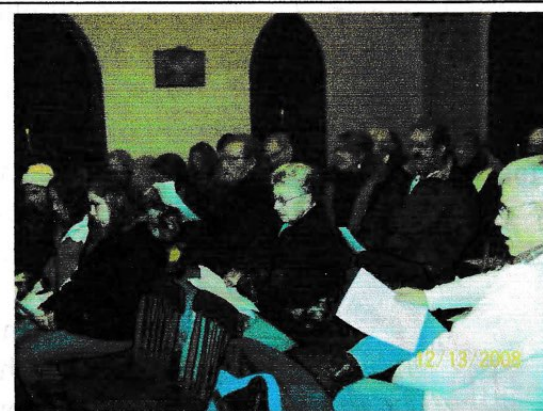
Caroling with Horse and Wagon Draws Large December 13 Crowd to Minnesota City



Bryce Maus drives Angie and Bill as they pull the wagon of carolers through the streets of Minnesota City on December 13. (Brzezinski photo)

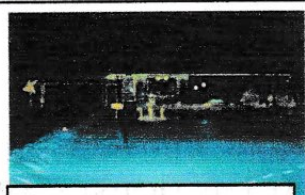
“THE HORSES ARE COMING, GRANDPA! THE HORSES ARE COMING!” shouted one of the waiting children running into the church after catching a first glimpse of the team pulling the lighted wagon down Mill Street. Although some fifty people had arrived at the historic First Baptist Church on Mill Street and were enjoying refreshments and the warmth of the stove, it was the arrival of the Maus family horse drawn wagon that provided the

very special feeling of excitement about the holiday season for the attending adults as well as the children. This third annual community caroling celebration included music, history, food, and conversation. A brightly lighted wagon, with carolers sitting on hay bales and followed by a large crowd of additional carolers made its way down Mill Street, to Minnesota Street, Dakota Street, a short distance on Old Highway 61 and back to the church. Bryce Maus and Ed Maus managed the two horses, Angie and Bill. The Caroling event this year was combined with announcement of the winners of the lighting contest organized by Susan Althoff and Hollis Donehower. Minnesota City Historical Association (MCHA), Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund (GBDRF), and Minnesota City First Baptist Ladies Aid coordinated efforts to make this a very memorable evening for adults and children. The last selections sung in the church were “This Little Light of Mine,” and “Light One Candle.” Musicians providing accompaniment were Kate and James O’Grady. Linda Brzezinski and Rebecca Weiss prepared gift packages for the children, and Donna and Betsy Friesen assisted with building decoration. The unusual lamps of the church, rediscovered in the attic and rescued by Dr. Younger when the Winona County Historical Society owned the building in the 1980s, were lighted to the accompaniment of “oohs” and “aahs” orchestrated by Linda Brzezinski. A Yule Log, decorated by Rebecca Weiss with ribbons and greens, was burned in the church stove marking its first lighting since the nineteen fifties. This was possible because of the relining and rebuilding of the chimney by Kevin Kearney, funded by the First Baptist Ladies Aid. Information was narrated to attendees about the history of lighting associated with the Winter Solstice in pre-Christian times, and its incorporation into Christian customs as well as into contemporary commercial celebration of the holiday.



Carolers rehearse at historic First Baptist Church before the December 13 street caroling. (Brzezinski photo)

Lighting Contest Winners Announced at December 13 Community Event



Minnesota City Holiday
Lights (Althoff photos)

Hollis Donehower and Susan Althoff, organizers of Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund (GBDRF) participation in the Community Lighting Event, announced the winners of the three categories at the Historic First Baptist Church on December 13, as part of the Community Caroling Event. Gayle McRae, Marvel Drive was the winner of the Residential decoration, Judy and David Russell, Stewart Valley Drive were the winners of the religious category decoration, and Russell Sobotta, Sunny Acres, was awarded the honorable mention category award. \$25.00 and a certificate were awarded each winner. Organizers commented on the many attractive lighting displays in Minnesota City.

Highway 14 Reopens; Minnesota City Bridge Doesn't

According to stories in the *Winona Daily News*, Highway 14 reopened on December 15 behind a November scheduled reopening. The closing had permitted excavation work necessary to prevent future rock slides near the Arches between Lewiston and Stockton. The section of closed highway necessitated a detour onto County Roads 23 and 25. Additional cleanup work will be completed in the spring, but will not require road closing.

The Minnesota City \$2.4 million road project had been scheduled for a September opening, but the replacement of the bridge washed out during the August 2007 flood has not been completed. A late project start as well as design changes were listed as reasons for delay according to Kristine Hernandez, MNDOT as reported in the *Winona Daily News*. A May completion is hoped for; crews will continue to work in the winter, adding riprap along the brook. Truckloads of rock from the Highway 14 project are being hauled into the Minnesota City project.

Minnesota City Historical Association expresses sympathy

to the family of Buelah Denzer Diekman, the daughter of John and Esther Denzer and sister of eight brothers, including Ray and Neil who survive her. One son, Brian (Julie) and family, lives in Altura, and a second son, Raymond, lives in Scotia, New York. Buelah died on Dec. 13 at Glendale Nursing Home, Schenectady, N. Y. A memorial service was held at First Baptist Church in Winona on Dec. 27, burial will be in Oakland Cemetery.

Winona Public Library Exhibit Opens: "The Homes They Left Behind"

The photo exhibit "The Homes They Left Behind" opens at the Winona Public Library with a reception and program on Saturday, January 10th from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. The exhibit runs from January 5 through January 31. The display of photos features original homes of ancestors of Winona County residents. Photos of ancestral homes in Czechoslovakia and Norway include those of Butenhoff, Jilk, Todd, O'Grady, and Evanson family members. According to a local newspaper release, the exhibition "Represents a wide diversity of immigration to Winona County, from the arrival of the Dakotas to families from Somalia." Sidonie Moravcova (Moravec), the great grandmother of Stockton Valley Jilk



The Moravcova house in Dolni
Dobrouc, Czechoslovakia

descendants, was born October 12 in this house in Dolni Dobrouc, a village in the Pardubice Region of the Czech Republic east of Prague. August Jilk, a Sudetan German born in Bohemia, had emigrated to the United States about 1870. He made arrangements through his sister, who lived in Dolni Dobrouc, to import a bride, which was then the custom. Sidonie (Moravec) came to Chicago in 1873 and married August. One of their sons, August Jr., born in Chicago in 1875, married Sophia Kilian; they were the parents of fourteen children born on the Stockton Valley farm.

Significant Books Contributed to the Archives

Howard Volkart has presented three historically significant books to the MCHA archives: *The History of Winona County, 1913, Vol. 1 and 11* and *1882 History of Houston County*. These books were given to Volkart by Margaret Kowalewski. Historians will find these to be treasures of information about the earliest years of Minnesota City, but readers will find descriptions about settlement experiences contradicted by accounts from the Winona County 1857 history as well as other historical tracts. The first winter of Western Farm and Village Association settlers is described in the 1913 Volume I: "The settlers who remained in the colony and made their homes in Minnesota City during the winter of 1852-1853 had comfortable cabins, in which they passed the winter. Some of these cabins were of logs, others were of boards. No cases of suffering from insufficient food or clothing were known in the settlement. Their principle employment was providing firewood for present use and laying in a supply for the ensuing year. After the sloughs were frozen over they engaged in chopping on the islands, cutting and banking steamboat-wood, getting out logs, timber, posts and rails for use in claim improvements. Their social enjoyments were quiet visits exchanged with each other and occasional meetings of the Association". (p 173).

The *Wabasha's Prairie to Winona Manuscript: The Territorial Era 1849-1858* presents this information: "By this time the member's hopes, plans, and even some of their lives had been destroyed. What had seemed to be an ideal setting for a new town site soon turned into a disaster. Travel to the frontier was difficult, especially for those with families, furnishings, and supplies. The conditions in the new town site, of course, were crude and the weather in early spring in Minnesota can be harsh. Few of these new settlers had any experience in frontier living. They were not used to camping out. They hastily constructed "Gopher huts" which were nothing more than dugouts covered by a roof of logs covered by branches and dirt fashioned in such a way to drain off the rain to protect themselves and their families. Many people fell ill because they were exposed to the elements and were unable to ward off diseases like cholera and typhus. The materials for a town hall for Minnesota City were purchased and delivered to Minnesota City but due to sickness the hall was never built. Minnesota's bitter winters claimed their share of victims. One poor young boy lost his way tending his father's cattle and froze to death." Accounting for the differences in the narrations will continue to challenge efforts of historical accuracy related to location and individual experiences.

Bishop Bernard Harrington Commemorates St. Paul's Birth at Minnesota City Service



Bishop Harrington Greets Gerald Butenhoff at St. Paul's Church on December 7, 2008.

On December 7, Winona Diocese Bishop Harrington said a "Pilgrimage Mass" at Minnesota City's St. Paul's Parish, as part of the Pauline Year established by Pope Benedict XVI to commemorate the 2000th year of St. Paul's Birth. The stained glass window above the front door through which the bishop entered depicts St. Paul. Following the Mass, a potluck meal in the church hall was shared by attendees. The Minnesota City church is one of four churches in the Diocese named in honor of the Saint; the others are at Mankato, Blue Earth, and Mazeppa; St. Paul's at Minnesota City is the only church named after Paul alone. The diocese has focused various activities during the year on the writings and witness of Paul.

Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund (GBDRF) completes successful, active Year

Board members of GBDRF and spouses met at Godfather's Pizza on December 15 for the Annual (fourth quarter) meeting. Susan Althoff, Board Leader distributed a list of activities of the group in 2007 and 2008. These included:

- December: Winter Apparel Drive for those losing coats, boots, hats, and mittens in the flood.
- January-February: Book Vouchers distributed for children who lost books in the flood.
- March: First Community meal for flood families and community members. A themed meal was served each month.
- April: "Flood Shower" for those losing kitchen, dining and bath items.
- May: Memories Day during Minnesota City Day, people brought in photos, children drew pictures of their experiences.
- June: Landscape Fair with Master Gardeners and 4-H Club. Gave away gravel, black dirt, flowers, seeds, planters, garden tools to families that were ready to redo lawns and yards.
- July: Delivered green plants to all families that had moved back into their homes over the summer months.
- August: Benefit concert and Silent Auction featuring Pamela McNeil. Over \$10,000.00 raised. One year anniversary of flood, Celebration of Recovery, with 500 people attending.
- October: Fifth Community Meal
- December: Community Holiday events in Stockton and Minnesota City.

GBDRF is the recipient of grants from Winona Community Foundation (\$2,500.00) and Winona Foundation (\$2,500.00). The group partnered with River City 4-H Club, Master Gardeners, Minnesota City Historical Association, Riverway Learning community, St. Paul's Catholic Church, Stockton Community center, Elks Lodge, City of Goodview-LaCanne Park, Holtan's Jewelry, Central United Methodist Church, and Thrivent Lutheran.

Residents Express Views on Election vs. Appointment of County Officials

Minnesota City and Rollingstone Township residents have been vocal participants at recent meetings of the Winona County Commissioners proposal to ask state lawmakers to author a bill that would permit the County Administrator to appoint the recorder, the treasurer and the auditor, rather than continuing the current process of voter selection. At a December 16 meeting, commissioners agreed to seek more input before making a decision. Citizen input, according to media reports, has focused on desire for independent decision making of this county rather than following practices of other counties, and on the significance of basic democratic process.

Minnesota City Historical Association expresses its appreciation

- to the Maus Family for providing the horses and wagon for the caroling event on December 13.
- to Donna Friesen, Betsy Friesen, Marianne Mastenbrook, Kate O'Grady, and Lynda Brzezinski for preparation for the caroling/lighting celebration.
- to Hollis Donehower and Susan Althoff for their work for the lighting contest event
- to all persons who participated in the holiday lighting event

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.