

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 3, Issue 8: August, 2009

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

Mark your calendars!

August 13: MCHA meeting; 6:30 p.m.; 140 Mill Street

August 19: Bridge Dedication Day 6:00-8:00 p.m. Bridge Street and Park – see newsletter for more details

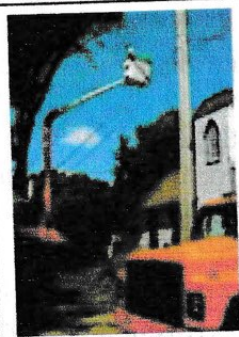
May 15, 2010: Minnesota City Day 2010

No Summer Reading Group Meetings: Next meeting - September 17. Selection - F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Go “Green”!

If you receive this newsletter in paper form and would prefer to receive it electronically, please call 689-2440.

Old Trees Removed at First Baptist Property

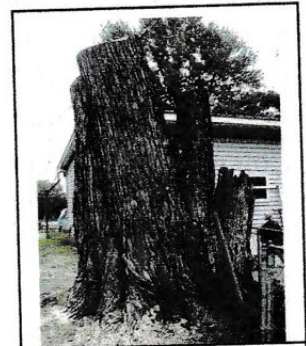


Blong's Tree Company begins taking down First Baptist Church trees (Blong photo)

Two huge trees on the grounds of the First Baptist Church, a maple and an elm, have been removed by Blong's Tree Service which contracted for the work with the First Baptist Ladies Aid. The removal was deemed necessary after examination of the trees following the falling of limbs from the elm tree on the early morning of June 20. Removing familiar trees is seldom easy, but as is often the case, the choices were safe, planned removal or possible catastrophic results to the historic church and to neighbors' properties. The felling of old trees has been the subject of poetic lament through the ages.

R.C. Bastasa, a contemporary Philippine poet writes, “...and today this big tree falls, hit by lightning and by thunder... the universe claps upon the fall of arrogance and pride and a tree's belief about its hugeness and strength... now this tree falls and I am here watching it.”

Repair of damage to the church lawn and Minnesota City Historical Association's storage shed will now commence, and the chemical toilet will be moved. The immediate neighborhood looks different without shade and shadows from the trees.



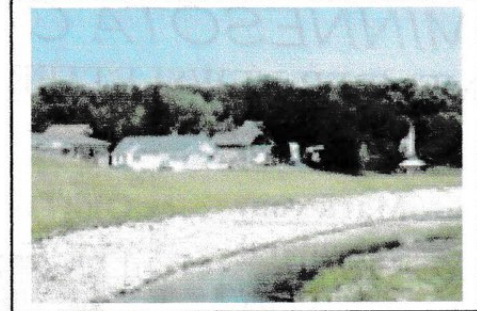
The base of the maple tree

Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund (GBDRF) Plans Bridge Dedication on August 19

GBDRF is organizing an August 19, 6:00-8:00 p.m. celebration of the opening of the Minnesota City Bridge (Old Highway 61). After the rerouting of traffic for 21 months following the 2007 flood, the bridge was opened in May. The Sheriff's Department of Winona County will close Bridge Street for the ribbon cutting on the nineteenth. A mini-parade will highlight the ability of drivers to now cross the bridge. The Winona County Dairy Association Little Red Barn and Winona County Dairy Princess will be present with milk and ice cream treats. A brief presentation of bridge/flood history in Minnesota City will be presented by MCHA. (See following Historical Newspaper accounts). Live music with John Will Bernadot and Carla Burton, and children's games with tattoo artist, Deb Rackow will provide entertainment in the adjoining park. The Minnesota City Baseball League and St. Paul's Catholic Church will also be serving food. Representative Steve Drazkowski, who participated in bridge rebuilding efforts, will attend. Readers are encouraged to watch local media outlets for further details, and to invite neighbors to this celebratory event.

Bridges of Minnesota City: Second (Third, Fourth, etc.) Verse Same as the First

Persons who study the history of floods and bridges in Minnesota City will likely agree with the opinion of the author John Barry who writes in the book *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* "Assuming that the Mississippi River can be controlled is hubris. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, an irrational faith in the ability of engineering leads many to believe that nature itself can be fully understood and controlled... These individuals while manifestly brilliant, are irrationally confident that they can fully understand processes as complex as hydraulics and turbulence. They further believe that a sufficient understanding would subsequently lead to the ability to completely subjugate natural forces." Garvin Brook has presented the same challenges to engineers and politicians. As early as 1903, the Winona Republican Herald recorded a trip of county and railway officials to Minnesota City "for the purpose of viewing the damage done by the recent floods at that place and seeing if some plan cannot be devised to prevent a repetition of losses in case of future highwater... It is understood that one plan suggested as likely to prevent a good deal of washing in the future is to straighten the course of the new outlet of the Rollingsstone Creek, so that from the stone arch bridge this side of the Minnesota City hotel, it shall take a straight shoot to the river... another way to prevent washing would be to rip-rap the sides of the ditch, but this would be pretty expensive." *Winona Republican Herald: May 28, 1903*



Rip-rap at Garvin Brook after 2007 flood

In September of 1903, the Republican Herald Reported: "The new iron bridge for which the Biesanz Stone Company had the contract is completed and Wm. R. Stewart, Jr.* was the first man to cross it with a team. He had been working on the fill and as soon as the last plank was laid he drove over. County Surveyor Burns followed him over with his horse and buggy." *Winona Republican Herald, September 2, 1903.*

A 1914 entry reads "The pile bridge which was built last summer after a general washout is again out, although a portion still remains hanging from one bank. The temporary bridge which extended over the street just above the dam near the brewery is completely gone. The present condition leaves Minnesota City residents completely stranded and confined to their homes until it will be possible to ford the stream or construct a temporary bridge."

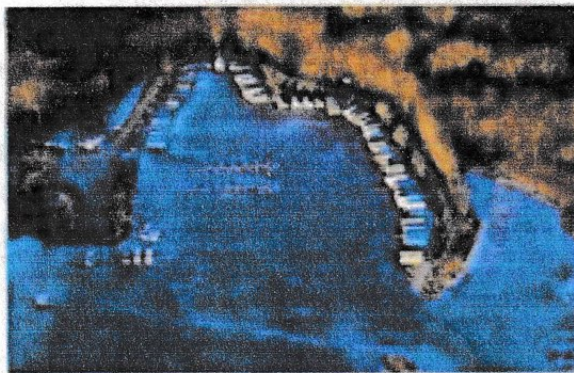
The damaged bridge across the Rollingsstone Creek at Minnesota City was described again in 1917 as being in a very dangerous condition. The District Engineer, H.B. Childs gave warning "that persons crossing it before new piles are driven are taking considerable risk. Mr. Childs is of the opinion that this pile bridge ought to be replaced by something of a more permanent character. His plan would be to construct a pier in the center of the stream with abutments on either shore, providing for two spans or trusses resting on these three supports." *Winona Republican Herald, March 27, 1917.*

Accounts through the years record the reality of John Barry's sentiment—the power of the water continues to thwart the best efforts of government to repair bridges in lasting ways. The hope for longevity accompanies each new construction up to and including the Bridge of 2009.

* **William Riley Stewart** was born in 1817 in Connecticut and was the oldest resident of Winona County when he died at his home in Minnesota City in February, 1915, at age ninety-eight. Stewart came to Winona County from New York State in 1854 and resided here more than sixty years. His father and male ancestors for generations were sailors; he was a farmer. Stewart drove two oxen teams west in search of land and opportunity, arriving at a time when Winona was only a collection of claim shacks and the Western Farm and Village Experiment had just failed. Stewart was active in local politics; he served several terms as County Commissioner. Twenty years before his death he retired to a home in Minnesota City. He is the ancestor of Frank and Jim Stewart families and of Beverly Stewart Mastenbrook. Photos often picture him driving oxen or a team of one ox and one horse through Minnesota City.

Minnesota City Boat Club Description Included in Recent Book Release

Marti Green Phillips has authored a book called "The Floating Boathouses on the Upper Mississippi: Their history, Their Stories." In it she details descriptions and histories of the boathouses along the Mississippi from Red Wing to Prairie du Chein. The Minnesota City Boat Club and its houses are among those described. The Club is a private club and is licensed as a marina. Some members own small fishing boats, houseboats, or pontoons which are removed from the location over winter. Many of the hunters and fishers are local persons, while others visit usually in the summer.



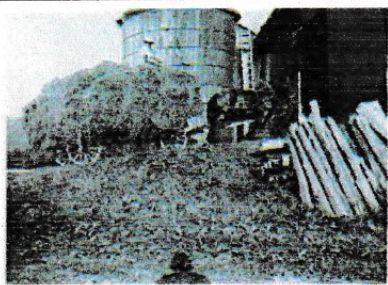
Dawn Over The Minnesota City Boat Club
February 2002

Photo by Peter Minneman
Present by Marti Phillips

According to Phillips, "the club officers talk directly with the regulatory agencies on behalf of the membership, heading off or handling any problems that occur." Boathouses are regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. According to Phillips, "member's boathouse improvements or alterations are strictly watched over, and anyone breaking the club's or other agency's rules is quickly and efficiently censured. By taking this strong leadership position the Minnesota City Boat Club has managed to have an easy and cordial relationship with the river's authorities." One club rule is that a boathouse can be occupied for only six consecutive nights at a time. According to Phillips, although the club is private, it holds an annual major public event, Harbor Days, attended by one to two thousand people."

Minnesota City Boat Club was organized to build the present 2000 feet of improved shoreline on the Mississippi River. An October 21, 1962 Winona Sunday News story authored by Mrs. Ralph Benicke details its beginning. The Club was started by Walter C. Kelly, owner of the Oaks, and Edward Maxham. They leased the area from the US Army Corps of Engineers. The harbor had originally been the Louis Stanz boat landing. Kelly and Maxham started improving it by building an approach from the dike. Kelly had the first boathouse in the harbor. Monthly meetings for interested persons were held at the Oaks, with Kelly providing free lunch for the forty or fifty people present. A corporation was formed in June of 1951. Before the improvements, fishermen carried motors or fishing tackle on their backs or pushed them to the shore in wheelbarrows over a half-mile of trail through the woods. Bad washouts of 1957 and 1960 were followed by a change in the course of Garvin Brook. Leon Bronk Sr. was one of the harbors most active fishermen; he owned a boat and boathouse and fished every day. A boathouse auxiliary was started in 1960 with fifteen charter members, and with Mrs. James Buswell as the president. Any club member's wife could join. (*Winona Daily News Oct. 21, 1962*).

July 16 Rochester Post Bulletin Features LaVern Fritz



Hauling hay 'the old fashioned way' on the Ray Church Farm circa 1925 (photo contributed by Darlene Decker).

A photo by Elisabeth Nida in the July 16 Rochester Post Bulletin pictures LaVern Fritz, Minnesota City farmer, drying hay in "the old fashioned way." forking it over before baling it. "Nobody even does this anymore," Fritz is quoted as saying, "The old time farmers would know what I was doing but the new farmers wouldn't understand it," he said with a smile. MCHA archives include a number of photos of "old time" area agricultural practices related to grain and hay harvesting.

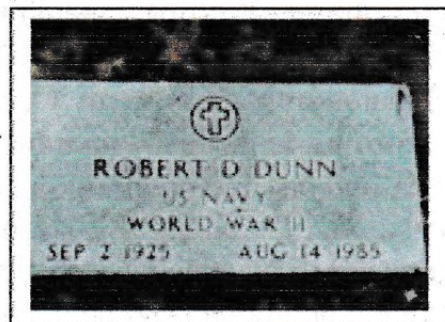
MCHA extends sympathy to

-the family and friends of Steven Paul Friese and Fay Lynn Friese. The Frieses died as the result of an accident on July 2 on Highway 14 near Eyota, Minnesota. Fay attended school in Minnesota City. Raymond Friese, brother of Fay and Steven, resides at Minnesota City.

-the family and friends of MCHA member, Francis Cisewski, who died on July 28.

Buried in Oakland---

Robert D. Dunn was born on Sept. 2, 1925 in Spooner, Minnesota to James C. and Irene M. Kavanaugh Dunn. He died on August 14, 1985 at Wabasha, Minnesota. He married Phyllis Barron on August 30, 1948 in Baudette, Minnesota. The couple lived in the area since 1956.



Robert served as a motor machinist mate in the Navy during World War II and was a member of the 1st Congregational Church in Winona, the Winona Masonic Lodge 18 of the A. F. & A.M., the Leon J. Wetzel Post 9 of the American Legion, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. He was a former scoutmaster with the Boy Scouts in Minnesota City, and a former member of the Minnesota City Volunteer Fire Department, the Minnesota City Council, and the Minnesota City School Board.

At the time of his death, Robert was survived by his wife, his mother of Baudette, two sons, Robert and James, both of Winona; two daughters, Mrs. Jerry (Jan) Baertsch and Sue Dunn, both of Winona. Roberts' funeral was at the First Congregational Church, the Rev. John A. Kerry presiding. Burial was in Oakland Cemetery.

Check Out The Website: www.minnesotacity.org

Continue to check the website periodically. New information is constantly being added.

Remind family and friends and former Minnesota City residents to check it out!

Thank you to Susan Althoff, Marv O'Grady and David Eckert for keeping the website updated.

Anyone who wishes to be a member of the Association is invited to send \$15.00 to:

MCHA, P.O. Box 21, 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.