

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 4, Issue 2: February, 2010

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

Mark your calendars!

February 13: MCHA regular meeting; 9:30 a.m.; Riverway Learning Community; 115 Iowa Street

February 18: Minnesota City Community Readers; 6:30 p.m.; Riverway Learning Community; 115 Iowa Street; February Selection: *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri

May 15, 2010
Minnesota City Day

Go “Green”!

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

School Reunion Possibilities Discussed at January MCHA Meeting

Previous newsletters have included mention of a possible reunion of all Minnesota City School Alumni. At the MCHA meeting on January 9, members took an initial planning step for this process with the decision to ask any persons interested in planning such a reunion to call 507-689-4103 (David and Brenda Eckert) or 507-689-2440 (Marv and Gen O’Grady).

Communicating with former students, teachers, and community members will be an important part of this process. Marianne Mastenbrook informed the meeting attendees that Winona County Historical Society has alumni addresses from Winona Senior High School. This will be a valuable resource because of the attendance of many Minnesota City students at this high school. When District 29 ended and Minnesota City was consolidated with Independent District 861 (Winona), the school records were turned over to the State Historical Association. This will be another resource for reunion planners.

Describing the Maybury School, Caroline Smith, one of the early teachers in the Maybury building wrote, “The school came into existence under rather favorable influences, because a remarkably fine type of men and women had left comfortable eastern homes to establish a new home in a Minnesota wilderness. The heritage of the Minnesota City School is therefore of high order, since the founders of the school knew full well the value of an education which had its beginnings under difficulties some 85 years ago in an unknown territory.”

All readers are encouraged to begin to solicit names, addresses, and photos of school buildings and classes.



Minnesota City School
Designed by C.G. Maybury

Riverway Students Exhibit River Related Photography

Riverway Learning Community Secondary III students recently displayed for public viewing forty of their photographs taken for the Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge Photography contest. The opening venue for the photographs was Mugby Junction Coffeehouse on Huff Street in Winona. Photos were in four categories: scenic, wildlife and plants, birds, and people on the refuge. Winning entries (Riverway had two) from the entire area were on display at the Frozen Film Festival in Winona at Winona State University from January 27 to January 31.

The Riverway Learning Community website (www.rwlc.org) offers information on all aspects of the Community’s activities, including profiles of staff and photos of student experiences, its cafeteria and garden programs. Like the immersion approach to photography, the gardening program of the community, related to its philosophy on food and development is unique in this area. Riverway Learning Community has five different gardening areas. These include 2000 square feet of potatoes, two gardens of about 1000 square feet each that contain tomatoes, peppers, garlic, onion, blueberries, rhubarb, watermelon, corn, and mixed greens, about 20 square feet of herbs and variety of fruits. They also garden a 900 square foot plot off of their property that contains pumpkins. Riverway students are included in all aspects of the growth cycle, including composting, planting, maintenance, harvesting, preserving and saving seeds. (Continued on page 3)

Whitewater Park Reenacts Ice Harvesting Activity



Visitors, including Kate O'Grady and sons James and Samuel, observe Dave Palmquist, Park Naturalist, supervise an old craft of Ice Harvesting at Whitewater State Park beach pond on January 23. (Scott Jensen photo).

For the past several years, Whitewater State Park has annually presented a demonstration of a century old activity—the harvesting of ice. Before electricity and refrigeration, each winter, ice was cut from the Mississippi River, lakes, and the beach pond at Whitewater. After it was cut it was distributed to sawdust insulated icehouses for winter storage. This year's demonstration was held on January 23. Tongs, saws, and hands-on know how of organizers are part of the demonstration.

In 2002, when interviewed by Riverway Learning Community students, Howard Volkart talked about harvesting ice. "Before having electricity (Volkarts got electricity in 1939), one of the things we had to do was harvest ice that was used for the ice box and milk tanks. They would cut the ice into big squares called cakes. They would haul them to the farms. Sometimes they harvested ice in the sloughs

and the gravel pits. A lot was harvested from Lake Winona and the river. This was very heavy work. There was a special building called the icehouse. There was sawdust on the outside and between the cakes of ice to keep it through the summer. Gladys' dad, (Raymond Church), hauled ice for us and for quite a few farmers." Roger Church, whose father and uncle (George and Elmer Church) operated the general store, told students, "The store had groceries and a meat market with a walk-in cooler. They had an ice house out back and used a horse to bring it up and used sawdust to insulate it."

February in Minnesota City in 1964

The MCHA archives include the minutes of the PTA in District 29 from 1960 to 1964. Although funding plans for and committees for other holidays (Christmas, Halloween) are included, no February entries mention Valentine's Day. The account of the PTA meeting on February 11, 1964 included these items:

- Community Singing
- Manley Elton, president, presides
- **No flag to pledge to; Stars Spangled Banner song replaces**
- Minutes read and approved
- Treasurer reports \$89.69 balance
- Card parties' profits in thirty dollar range
- Scholarship fund for Minnesota City prospective teachers recommended by Mrs. Pierce; \$5.00 contribution recommended by Mrs. Church
- \$5.00 donation for Founders' Day
- **Purchase of or donation for flag will be requested by Roger Church from the School Board**
- Fire Dept. will sponsor Boy Scouts
- Card parties need more card tables; action delayed pending determination of cost of sixth grade field trip and annual picnic
- Two films shown: "Honolulu," showing nice climate and scenery and second film "The Angry Boy", showing inner conflicts of a small boy affected by home and school environment
- "Hello Mudda, Hello Fadda", pantomime performed by Bobby Dunn
- Refreshments served by Mrs. Verne Pierce, Mrs. Robert Rolbiecki, Mrs. Ervin Mrozek
- Minutes submitted by Adeline Wobig

*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.*

Archival Additions Feature Biographical Information

- Lori Donehower contributed to the MCHA archives a Minnesota City City Council volume entitled *Register of Births and Deaths*, information of births beginning in 1908 through 1940, and of deaths for the years from 1908 until 1953. Birth entries contain the time of birth, and place in family, full name of the child, gender, legitimacy, full name of father and mother and occupation both, signature of physician (midwife, parent or informant) and name of registrar. Death entries state causes of death, occupations, burial sites, and coroner names. The album provides a quick look at interesting aspects of Minnesota City history for these years, where all women except two are listed as housewives, while men's occupations are varied and include telegraphy, railroad work, farming, laboring, stone cutting and others. Countries of origin are many, including Germany, Austria, Ireland, and others.
- Marianne Mastenbrook has contributed information on the Valentine and Drussell families, early Minnesota City residents with living relatives in the area. Additionally, she has organized internet site lists for persons interested in family history research. Some of these include death lists, surname searches, state searches.

These informative resources will be available at the Mill Street Archives, and when the archives hold open hours in the summer months, sessions will be held to acquaint searchers with their use.

Buried in Oakland - Louis Stephan

Louis Stephan died at age 81 on February 1, 1950, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Edward Engler, Minnesota City, after an illness of several years. He was born in the town of Wilson on December 1, 1869, and had lived in this vicinity all his life. He served as janitor for the Minnesota City Lutheran Church for 32 years. Survivors were nine children, Mrs. Arthur (Lilah) Pearson, William, Henry, Louis Jr.*, and Mrs. Engler (Minnie), Minnesota City; Mrs. Arthur (Clara) Nuthack, Rollingsstone; Charles, Winona; Richard, Lewiston; and Norman, Newport, Mn., 17 grandchildren, five great grandchildren, four brothers, and three sisters. Mrs. Stephan died ten years earlier. Funeral services were at the Minnesota City Lutheran Church, the Rev. Arthur Hanke officiating. The body lay in state at the church and then it was taken to the Engler home before burial in Oakland cemetery.



* Louis Jr. who lived in Minnesota City is remembered by current residents

MCHA Extends Sympathy

- to the family of Irvin E. Kerkenbush who died in Winona on January 14 at the age of 88. Irvin and Loma and children, James, Janaan, and Jane lived at Lock & Dam #5 at Minnesota City where Irvin was the lockmaster from 1962 until 1976. Irvin was a trustee at St. Paul's Parish in Minnesota City; he and Loma were married for sixty-one years.
- to the family, Ursula and children, of Robert Hogenson who died Tuesday, January 26, in Winona. Hogenson was an Ind. Dist 861 principal at Minnesota City.

Riverway (continued from page 1)

The program is run primarily by a horticulturist, who works with instructional and kitchen staff to provide instruction for the students. Each classroom in the school has committed 1-2 hours per week to gardening and helping with food preservation. Families from the school also become involved in the gardens during their Saturday School Days or by volunteer involvement. The University of Minnesota Extension program provides nutritional information and lessons directly related to the food produced at the school (information from RWLC website).

“History” of Valentine’s Day Presents Uncertain Information Record (from history.com)

An article in the Winona Daily News from February 14, 1887, states that “few missives of a cupidical nature” had been seen in the post office that day. Nearly all families have members who remember Valentine’s Day parties at their schools, with children usually instructed to bring “missives” for all their classmates.

Valentine’s Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. The Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentines, all of whom were martyred. One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured. According to one legend, Valentine actually sent the first ‘valentine’ greeting himself. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter, which he signed ‘From your Valentine,’ an expression that is still in use today. Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, stories emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic, and, most importantly, romantic figure.

While some believe that Valentine’s Day is celebrated in the middle of February to commemorate the anniversary of Valentine’s death or burial — which probably occurred around 270 A.D — others claim that the Christian church may have decided to celebrate Valentine’s feast day in the middle of February in an effort to ‘Christianize’ celebrations of the pagan Lupercalia festival. In ancient Rome, February was the official beginning of spring and was considered a time for purification. Houses were ritually cleansed by sweeping them out and then sprinkling salt and a type of wheat called spelt throughout their interiors. Lupercalia, which began at the ides of February, February 15, was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

To begin the festival, members of the Luperci, an order of Roman priests, would gather at the sacred cave where the infants Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were believed to have been cared for by a she-wolf or lupa. The priests would then sacrifice a goat, for fertility, and a dog, for purification.

The boys then sliced the goat’s hide into strips, dipped them in the sacrificial blood and took to the streets, gently slapping both women and fields of crops with the goat hide strips. Later in the day, according to legend, all the young women in the city would place their names in a big urn. The city’s bachelors would then each choose a name out of the urn and become paired for the year with his chosen woman. These matches often ended in marriage. Pope Gelasius declared February 14 St. Valentine’s Day around 498 A.D. The Roman ‘lottery’ system for romantic pairing was deemed un-Christian and outlawed. The oldest known valentine still in existence today was a poem written by Charles, Duke of Orleans to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London following his capture at the Battle of Agincourt. The greeting, which was written in 1415, is part of the manuscript collection of the British Library in London, England. In Great Britain, Valentine’s Day began to be popularly celebrated around the seventeenth century. By the middle of the eighteenth century, it was common for friends and lovers in all social classes to exchange small tokens of affection or handwritten notes. By the end of the century, printed cards began to replace written letters due to improvements in printing technology. Ready-made cards were an easy way for people to express their emotions in a time when direct expression of one’s feelings was discouraged. Americans probably began exchanging hand-made valentines in the early 1700s.

According to the Greeting Card Association, an estimated one billion valentine cards are sent each year, making Valentine’s Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year. (An estimated 2.6 billion cards are sent for Christmas.)

Approximately 85 percent of all valentines are purchased by women. Esther A. Howland created the first commercial Valentine’s Day greeting cards produced in the U.S. in the 1840s. Howland, known as the Mother of the Valentine, made elaborate creations with real lace, ribbons and colorful pictures known as scrap.