

# MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 5, Issue 1: January, 2011

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

## Mark your calendars!

**January 8: All School Reunion Planning Mtg.:** 9:00 a.m., Steve’s Anchor Inn, Mn City (across from Kwik Trip)

**January 8: Monthly MCHA Mtg.:** 9:30 a.m. Riverway Learning Community, 115 Iowa Street, Mn City

**January 12: Public Information Meeting for Wastewater Treatment:** 6:00 p.m., Riverway Learning Community, 115 Iowa Street, Mn City

**January 20: Minnesota City Community Readers:** 6:30 p.m. Riverway Learning Community. Selection: *Water for Elephants*, Sara Gruen

**Minnesota City Day:** May 21, 2011

**Go “Green”!**  
If you receive this newsletter in paper form and would prefer to receive it electronically, please call 689-2440.

## **Holiday Caroling Event Attendees Enjoy Good Food, Musical Participation, and Learn Some History**

An important prop at the Fifth Annual Minnesota City Historical Association Community Caroling event was a table whose coverings were changed to match the times of several historical letter writers. After the entry of readers, energized by a martial like rendition of *tradition* from *Fiddler on the Roof*, Don Evanson, enacting Minnesota writer Bill Holm, gaveled the audience’s attention to the readers’ script and the opinions of Bill Holm. Holm wrote on the language of poet William Carlos Williams in speaking of Christmas “gauds.” Five table cloths were removed, one by one, by readers who impersonated writers Martha Stewart, Anna Jenks Ramsey, Catherine Goddard, and a Minnesota settler. The readers also contributed historical newspaper accounts of Minnesota City Christmases, including memories contributed by Jean Gardner. An “authentic moment” occurred when some audience members spotted the still remaining “hook” used to hold up a burlap curtain for early Christmas productions described in Gardner recollections. A decorated Yule log was again burned in the woodstove.



Writers/Readers Utilized Covered Table for Writing through the Ages



Historic First Baptist Church on December 18, 2010

Program attendees caroled in the church and then proceeded to ride the pickup drawn wagon, decorated and furnished by Ed and Judy Maus. Carolers made several stops in the city, and were themselves surprised by a visit from Santa Claus who appeared to be RECORDING behaviors and counting people. He acted like this was his job. Returning to the historic church, children opened gift bags from around the Christmas tree, while carolers enjoyed refreshments, visited and generally appreciated the ambience created by the ticking eight day pendulum clock and the kerosene lanterns of the building. Holm and Williams would have been pleased; there were no gauds here.

### **Thank you to:**

- First Baptist Ladies Aid for continued cooperation with MCHA for presence in their historic church
- all persons who attended the Community Caroling event and continually encourage and support MCHA efforts
- the readers: Don Evanson, James O'Grady, Lynda Brzezinski, Brain Campbell, Marvin O'Grady Becky
- O'Grady Weiss, Kate O'Grady
- all persons who shared holiday baking with attendees
- Sarah O'Grady for bulletin board construction, decoration
- the several persons who had events that interfered with their offered plans to participate in the caroling event. (Next year, we hope!)
- all persons who assisted with the Dec. 18 Holiday program
- Betsy and Donna Friesen for church decorations

### **Sterner Family Member Provides Additional Information on John Sterner**

Dawn Church Webster, daughter of Russell Church, has communicated interesting additional information to our December Newsletter *Buried in Oakland* column on her father's uncle, John Sterner. According to Dawn, John Sterner was never married. Mary (Peterson) Sterner, John's mother, was born in Norway. His father was also called John Sterner. He died in 1917 and was born in Sweden. Russell's Uncle John worked their small farm at Minnesota City and lived there with his mother Mary. There was also a brother named Gustav who had epilepsy and drowned at the age of 17 in 1899. "Dad (Russell Church) says he remembers his mom taking food to her mother Mary and her brother John. The sale of household goods referred to in the December article must have happened after his mother Mary died." Dawn wrote, "We have a letter upstairs in one of the old trunks from John Sterner's landlady in California informing my Grandma of her brother's death and wanting to know what she wanted done with the body." Russell said the pine tree growing next to his garage was planted by his Uncle John. "Unfortunately, it is not a very nice looking tree," according to Dawn, "but it has sentimental value for Dad." \* Newsletter writers are invited to submit additional information or corrections to any articles in the newsletter.

### **Winona Genealogical Association Discusses Green Burial/ Private Cemeteries**

Some readers might be surprised to have an attendee at a local meeting ask who in the group might want the use of the community coffin. The question was asked at a recent meeting of the Minnesota Threshold Group, <http://mnthresholdnetwork.wordpress.com/>, a Minnesota organization formed to make available information about recent changes in Minnesota Statutes which affect home burials and green burials. Several Minnesota City Historical Association (MCHA) members were present at the November Winona Genealogical Association discussion of genealogical issues related to private cemeteries in Winona County moderated by Bob Bambenek. Gen O'Grady provided some information on the 2004 establishment of the O'Grady Family Cemetery on their property in Section 34 of Winona County. For a variety of reasons, including both philosophical (related to changing attitudes toward death and individual responsibility and preference) and practical (related to cost, space, and ecological concerns), individuals and groups are pursuing choices other than the historical practices of funeral home burial. Green burials are of great interest to cemetery historians. Without markers, recent technology, including GPS, will become important for persons interested in location of physical remains of interred. The format of preserving memorial information about the deceased will change. Recent increases in cremations support information about changed views. Dixie Brown, MCHA member from Stockton, has worked to document all interment connections related to Oakland Cemetery in Stockton. **Green burial** is a way of body preparation, funeral, and burial practices that increasing numbers of people are finding attractive.