

# MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 7, Issue 7: July, 2013

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

## Mark your Calendars!

August 10: MCHA monthly meeting; First Baptist Church, 140 Mill Street; 9:30 a.m.

September 26: Minnesota City Community Readers; Former Minnesota City School, 115 Iowa Street; 6:30 p.m.; Selection: Miquel de Cervantes - *Don Quixote*. All are welcome!

## **Accident Causes June Newsletter Omission**

On May 15, an accident on our four wheeler resulted in my hospitalization and continuing therapy. I have been told that I will make a full recovery. Many newsletter readers know that we have land atop bluffs that overlook the Mississippi River. Since an earlier vehicle accident in 1993, I have not been able to walk the distance to enjoy the hilltop views, and a utility 4-wheeler became my transportation for that purpose and others. **I am very grateful to all the individuals and groups who have conveyed good wishes to me since that time. Thank you!** I was most upset by the news that after ten years of writing this monthly newsletter to promote the identity and significant history of Minnesota City, a newspaper account of the accident identified me as a Minneiska resident. Gen O’Grady

## **May 18 Minnesota City Day Events Attract Visitors**

All events organized for Minnesota City Day were attended by mixed groups of Minnesota City friends and former and current residents. **Thank you to all presenters for these events and to all those who attended.** Response to these occasions encourages future presenters and researchers.



Kelvin Penrod explains wastewater treatment operation to tourists (Brenda Eckert photo)

Bryceson Maus, GBDRF Chair, reports that the waffle breakfast was a great success, and donation of some profits will be given to the Minnesota City Youth Baseball Program. All persons reporting from the tours conducted by Kelvin Penrod, Minnesota City City Council member, of the



Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund Belgian Waffle breakfast at St. Paul’s Catholic Church Hall. (Susan Althoff photo).

Wastewater Treatment Plant were impressed with the physical plant and with Kelvin’s information about it. The slide show of Penrod photos which recorded the project from beginning to end was also informative. Sandy Erdmann provided information about a



Audrey Denzer Hunger visits at First Baptist Church with hosts Janet Seabern and Jean Gardner. (Brenda Eckert photo)

number of artifacts brought to her presentation. Hopefully, Sandy will return for another history related presentation for MCHA. Jean Gardner, Janet Seabern, Donna and Betsy Friesen hosted visitors at the Historic First Baptist Church, 140 Mill Street, also the location of MCHA archives.

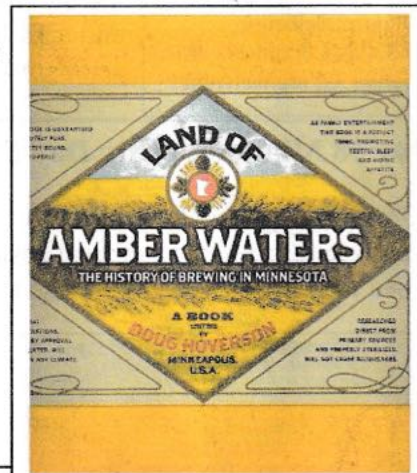


Minnesota City Day visitors examine materials related to glass and Minnesota City (Brenda Eckert photo)

## Additions to the Archives on Fifield and Vill: Brewing History Book Added to MCHA Archives

Locally and statewide, much attention is being given in recent months to brewing products. In preparation for Minnesota City Day, MCHA purchased *Land of Amber Waters: The History of Brewing in Minnesota*. Authored by Doug Hoverson and published by the University of Minnesota, the book was purchased because of its inclusion of the Vill Brewery in Minnesota City. Hoverson writes: "Studying the history of beer and the brewing industry in Minnesota also provides a window into the past to show how Minnesotans lived and what they valued. The stories of how Anthony Yuerg, John Orth, August Schell and Jacob Schmahl struggled to succeed in business on the frontier are every bit as instructive as those of other settlers. The conflict between brewers and temperance advocates that resulted first in dry municipalities and ultimately in Prohibition shows how groups on all sides of an issue attempt to used government for their own ends." (p.357) Hoverson details the history of the Vill Brewery in Minnesota City beginning with Otto Vill's arrival in New Ulm in 1857. Following the Dakota War of 1862, during which two of Vill's children died, Vill came to Minnesota City. Here he operated a brickyard. The Winona Daily Republican reported that the cellar for Vill's Brewery, along Rollingsstone Creek was completed in July 1868, and he began to brew in 1869. In 1914 when Otto Vill died, his son Oswald took over the brewery and operated it until Prohibition. (p.358)

All books in the MCHA archives are available for loan. Although dates are not definite, open hours at the archives are planned for the month of August. Please watch local media and/or the August newsletter for announcement. The detailed research of this book on the history of brewing is, as the author promises, much more than a history of beer.



## County Recorder Provides Fifield Information

In the recent discussion of the Minnesota City Fifield artesian well, MCHA drew on its consistently helpful resource, County Recorder Bob Bambenek, to trace the ownership of the Fifield property. This information which was available at Minnesota City Day is now in the MCHA Archives. Interested persons will find the documentation Bob provided informative related to many aspects of property transfer, details of contracting, legal language, and contingencies of land covenants. Ownership of the Fifield property was originally a land grant to Jacob Denman in 1855. The land transfers through deeds and leases include names of Miller, Dabelstein, Halverson, Winona Sand and Gravel, and Winona Aggregate. Readers are invited to review this material when visiting the archives; it is included in the notebook labeled FIFIELD.

## Standing Invitations:

- to attend regular meetings of MCHA. These meetings are held at 140 Mill Street. In cold weather months, generally October to May, these are held at the former school building. There is some correspondence between interesting meetings and the number of persons attending.
- to respond to newsletter content. Please send additions, corrections, suggestions, etc. to [mgogrady@embarqmail.com](mailto:mgogrady@embarqmail.com). **Writers of regular columns would be welcomed.** These might include monthly columns on area businesses, churches, schools, organizations.

### **1884 History of Wabasha County Recalls Fourth of July in Minnesota City, First Celebration of Holiday in Southern Minnesota**

The fourth of July, 1853, was celebrated with a great deal of patriotic enthusiasm at Minnesota City. The settlers of Rolling Stone Colony invited the citizens of Wabasha prairie to join them in the customary honors and hospitalities of "independence day." The invitation was accepted and many from the prairie were in attendance. The occasion was said to have been one of unusual interest and gratification to the settlers assembled.

The celebration was held in "the public square," under the oaks. The introductory was a song, written by Robert Pike, Jr., the poet of the colony. (This was the song publicly performed at Minnesota City Day, 2009).

The first toast was by Robert Pike, Jr. "The ladies. May they ever be pure, as our own bright fountains; beautiful as our wild flower; as even of temper as our own delightful climate (except the thunderstorms), and as fruitful as the soil to which they have been transplanted."

### **MCHA extends sympathy to friends and family:**

Of Ralph Herber, 90, Rollingsstone, who died on May 26 at the Lewiston Villa.

Of Nicholas Meisch, 83, Altura, who died on May 23 at his home.

Of Richard Kuhlman, 73, who died on May 21 in Minnesota City.

Of Vern Larson, 51, who died on June 5 in Minnesota City.

Of Patricia Ellefson, 64, who died on June 8, in Winona. Pat owned and operated KWIK Trip, Goodview from 1981-1989.

Of Mary C. Dorava, 85, who died in Onalaska on June 11. Mary was married to Ray Reps, son of Bill & Gert Reps, from Mn. City. Connections with McLaughlins, Whittens, Rolbieckis. (Information from Donna Friesen: Thank you.)

### **MCHA Congratulates:**

Agnes Jilk Evanson on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, June 19, 2013. Agnes is the daughter of Sophia Kilian and August Jilk, former Stockton Valley residents. A celebration of her life, hosted by her family, was held on June 16 at St. Anne's, Winona, where she currently resides.

Pamela Althoff McNeill, native Minnesota Citian, featured as the cover story of Central Minnesota Women June/July issue 2013 (CMWomen.com). In the interview, McNeill relates her musical beginnings in Winona and in her home, recalling piano lessons, her grandmother's Hammond pump organ, her parents' musical preferences and her own musical activities.

*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.*

### **Summer Reunions Remind of Gardner, Denzer and Jilk Family Heritages**

Summer family reunions of area families include those of the Denzer, Gardner and Jilk families. Numbers attending and from where, and particular events of the past year as well as event activities are often recorded. Local newspaper accounts of past history of these families relate interesting factoids that have assured them remembrance in the area archives as well as in their own families.

The June 22 reunion of family of Jean Gardner was of the Elsie Fagerness family, Jean's mother. Persons attended from five states. Jean said that out of state visitors found the area here particularly beautiful. The Winona Republican Herald records a land transfer from Edward Monk to Richard Gardner in 1902. Richard was Jean Gardner's paternal grandfather. When Jean's brother-in-law Leo Brom spoke to the Old Settlers in 1969, (Winona Daily News: March 23, 1969), he reported that the Elsie Gardner farm had been in the family for 100 years, (now nearly 150 years). "Fagerness," according to Brom means "beautiful point" and referred to a location on Lake Mjosen in Norway where the Fagerness and Langseths (Jean's maternal grandparents) lived. As memorable, or perhaps more memorable from that speech was Brom's relating the information about a Langseth family member's seventeen foot beard being donated to the Smithsonian institute. The Smithsonian website carries photos of the beard under *Collections, Hans Langseth Beard*. Jean has seen the beard at the Smithsonian.

Sons of Christian Denzer, progenitor of local Denzer families, also preserved some history for Winona County when Valentine Denzer presented a grain cradle to the Winona County Old Settlers in February of 1918 (Winona Daily News, February 20, 1918). "The grain cradle, formerly used with an old fashioned scythe when grain was cut by hand was used by Christian Denzer when he came to Winona county and settled in the town of Norton in 1858. While common at that time, such a cradle is a great curiosity now...the cradle has four fingers. Along with it goes a wooden fork of the variety that was used with the cradle to toss aside the cut grain." The Denzer family met this year at The Arches, with Lola Woodward Denzer (wife of Ray, son of John) being the oldest family member attending.

Attendees of the reunion of the August Jilk and Sophie Kilian family of Stockton Valley on July 27 will still regale each other with the stories of shared childhood "cousin experiences." In the telling of these tales they encounter some of the dramatic changes in the economics of livelihood and entertainment of many of their families. In the Jan. 25, 1926 *Winona Daily Republican* publication of bounties paid by Winona County, Anthony Jilk (son of August Jilk) and Edwin Butenhoff (son-in-law of August Jilk), were each paid \$17.50 for wolf bounties. The Jilk family of fourteen children "required" some aspects of the hunter gatherer cultures to supplement farm income. Hunting and fishing beyond the immediate area, trapping, berry picking all helped provide necessities of dollars and food. This year daughter Sister Marielouise (Margaret) Techny, Illinois, commemorates 65 years of religious life vows, and Sister Therese Jilk, Rochester, (granddaughter of August and Sophia), celebrates fifty years of religious life vows, reminding of August Jilk's role in requesting from the Winona diocese the location of a Catholic Church in Minnesota City.

### **!Calendar Keeper Needed for the Website!**

Since the initiation of the MCHA Newsletter, Marvin O'Grady, David Eckert, Andrea Church, and Susan Althoff have been the caretakers of the website. We all value their work.

Someone is needed to take over the calendar. This will be a valuable contribution to Association efforts. Many dates are "fixed", some are received from the newsletter, and some are contributed to the calendar keeper as they occur (birthdays, meetings, reunions, etc.). The calendar can be viewed on the website, [www.minnesotacity.org](http://www.minnesotacity.org), linked from Calendar. Please notify [mgogrady@embarqmail.com](mailto:mgogrady@embarqmail.com) or call 507-689-2440 if you can help with this work. Previous calendar keepers will help initiate a volunteer.