

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 9, Issue 7: August, 2015

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

Mark your Calendars!

August 8:
Saturday;
Monthly MCHA Meeting;
Archives, 140 Mill Street; 9:30 a.m.

August 27:
Thursday;
Minnesota City Community Readers;
Selection: Leon Uris, *The Haj*;
Former Minnesota City School, 115 Iowa Street; 6:30 p.m. and the
Bookshelf Giveaway; Open 6:30-8:00 p.m.

August 30:
Sunday; **Annual Church Service;**
First Baptist Church, 140 Mill Street; 2:00 p.m.

“Go Green!”
If you receive this letter in paper “hardcopy” and would like to receive it electronically, please call 689-2440.

First Baptist Ladies Annual Summer Service at Historic First Baptist Church

On Sunday, August 30, at 2:00 p.m., area residents will again have an opportunity to experience history of people and place in a unique combination. Every summer, the First Baptist Ladies Aid conducts a service in the First Baptist Church, the oldest church in Winona County. The church building itself is an historical gem, housing as it does, original (1875) church furnishings—eight day clock, 100 wooden chairs, pump organ, bible, wall hangings, baptismal submersion tank, and others. The service is a continuing tribute to the efforts of the Ladies Aid members, who have maintained the church following its return from Winona county Historical Society ownership in 1981.

In the past year, the efforts to maintain the edifice were realized with the restoration of the foundation for the north wall of building. Contributions for this effort will be welcomed in the day’s collection basket or at Historic Minnesota City Baptist Church, P.O. Box 106, Minnesota City, Minnesota, 55959. This summer’s service will be conducted by Dennis Hudson, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Winona. Special recognition will be given to Gladys Volkart who is retiring as Ladies Aid Treasurer after 37 years of service.

Minnesota City City Council Visits MCHA Archives

On June 2, following their regular council meeting, the members crossed the street to visit the MCHA archives, and following a brief powerpoint presentation on the history of the placement of the archives in the First Baptist Church, visited the rooms housing the archives. The abundance of materials now available related to Minnesota City and the area is impressive to most visitors, and council members voiced their appreciation for the visit. Contributions have included photos, printed material, and some items with Minnesota City historical value. Gen O’Grady thanked the council for their continuing financial support of MCHA, which annually funds the website.



City Council Members examine artifacts in the MCHA archives on June 2.

Mayor Don O’Neil, members Brian Ebbinger, Joe Pellowski, Jim Whalen and Clerk Tina Full participated in the visit.

Interest in Local Horticulturists draws U of M Researcher to Archives and Wenonah Drive site

On July 11, Jonathan Damery, an MFA student from the University of Minnesota, visited the archives to acquire information on O.M. Lord, an early Minnesota City Settler. Damery's interest in Lord was as an orchardist, having learned that a special plum, the Rollingstone plum, was developed by orchardists of the area. The Minnesota City archives has a cache of material on Lord. Better known to some area researchers was the apple harvesting of Hiram and Mary Campbell. In 1889, Lord is listed as a contributor to a Winona Street Fair which was a county fair sort of exhibition of all area fruits, vegetables, animals, handwork, etc. Lord is named on that site connected with apples, plums, potatoes and strawberries. Interestingly, the Lord's land is familiar to longtime residents as the Gallagher property where strawberries were grown for many years. The Campbell land became the Whetstone-Althoff land. Susan remembers the plum trees.

(See Page 4 – Althoff Remembers Plums)

Rural Stockton Woman's Home Severely Damaged by Tree Crash

Jane Brommerich, Stockton Hill, was trapped in her home on June 29 by a falling cottonwood tree. She was unharmed physically but needed assistance to free herself from the tree damage. The house is the lifetime home of Jane and eight siblings. The 100 year old cottonwood tree had been trimmed earlier this year and "trimmers" believed it had at least twenty five more years of good life, according to Jane. Much storm damage occurred in the area on the night of the tree's crash. Jane hopes to repair the house.



Mullein near the Minnesota City Post Office

Mullein

Second year mullein; here today; gone next year.

Mullein is a weed found in unshaded waste places; it lives for two years. In the second year the flower stalk grows. Seeds can survive up to 100 years.

One mullein plant can make 100,000 seeds in one year. The "crop" is abundant this year.

Hill Family Rest a While Cabins

CAMP REST-A-WHILE

Robert A. Hill Minnesota City, Minn.

On Shaded Bluff Side, near Whitman Dam
10 miles North of Winona, Minn.
5 miles So. of Minneiska On U. S. Highway 61

FURNISHED HEATED CABINS

GROCERIES EXCELLENT FISHING

PIKE - PICKEREL - CRAPPIES - BASS

PHONE ROLLINGSTONE, MINN 5504

In biographical material given to MCHA archives, Janet Hill Seabern recalled her family's ownership of the cabins and cottages five miles north of Minnesota City, just east of the current Bass Camp area, on the bluff side of the highway. "It was a lot of hard work, but all us kids helped with it. Mom (Zrada) would say 'We can all do it with God's help' and we did," according to Janet. The Hills had lived and farmed near Lewiston, but with their Dad going to the VA Hospital in Minneapolis, they rented the farm and got into the cabin renting. "The folks kept it full all summer

and had places for tents. There was a large lawn, so people could park anywhere. In the winter time the folks had people from Whitman Dam stay there and also a lot from Winona would come and stay—a get away they say. Mom would cook meals for everyone. Some asked Dad why they picked the name. Dad said it was a get away from city life—so much to see and do there. The folks stayed there until 1946 when they had to sell as the highway 61 was going to be four lane so the folks moved to Lewiston." Janet really enjoys going back where she was young and has driven up where she had lived, but it has changed since then. Janet's brother, Gale Hill, is also an MCHA member.

MCHA Extends Sympathy to:

- Family and friends of Alfred George Berndt, 95, Minnesota City, who died on June 18 at Winona Health. Berndt was the City of Winona recorder and court reporter, city treasurer for twenty years. Berndt lived with his wife Olga in Minnesota City since 1969.
- Family and friends of Marian Hutton, Northfield, MN. Marian, 92, died on June 18 in Northfield. She was the mother of Duane (Linda) Hutton.
- Family and friends of Bernard J. Mullen, 83, Winona, who died on July 7.
- Family and friends of Lucille Blumentritt, 96, Winona, who died on July 7. Blumentritt was a teacher in ISD 861, part of her experience being at Minnesota City. She also served as 4H leader for non-farm youth. Some Minnesota City students attended these meetings. A memory recalled by one of these was the Blumentritt "circle drive," a wonder of the Gilmore Avenue Blumentritt home.
- Family and friends of Joan Marie Schlinck Swain, 53, Lewiston, who died there on June 21.

MCHA thanks:

- Kathy Kohner, Minnesota City, Sarah O'Grady and Kate O'Grady for contribution of many children's books for the Giveaway Bookshelf. Children's literature had been minimal on the shelves; persons who visit the next giveaway will appreciate the contribution.
- George and Ruth Gabel, Mill Street, for a complete set of Britannica encyclopedias.
- Jason Frickson, Minnesota City Post Office, for posting commemorative plaque marking the office as First Post Office in Winona County.
- Andrea Church for contributing several hours of time to work with Marv O'Grady on MCHA's laptop computer and for the donation of two new speakers for the computer.

Readers Communicate Interest in Minnesota City History

Since the last newsletter, correspondence has been received related to the Cotton properties from Bill Yake, great grandson of Amos Ellsworth, Minnesota City Mill owner. Yake commented on the 1894 Minnesota City map (May newsletter).

"Yes, the dark building footprint is certainly the main mill with a storage building (hatched, rectangular footprint) to the east. The road between them leads over the mill dam and the RR spur fronts both of the buildings to the north. I've attached a photo from about 1867 showing the mill looking south."



Ellsworth Mill, Minnesota City, 1867, coincidentally, the location of the present Canton Mill Building.

Delwin Schneider, Winona responded to questions about a mill located near Sandstede's Bar. This building was moved to Minnesota Street.

Jilk Family Reunion at Farmer's Community Park in Stockton

Following an elaborate potluck dinner that included traditional family recipes as well as gourmet selections (their moms would have been proud!), the descendants of August and Sophia Kilian Jilk continued the afternoon of July 18 in the park with visiting, games, and playing in the creek. The creek remains a happy annual adventure for young members of the group. Mary Jilk, a daughter of August and Sophia, who died in April, and Carl Evanson, a grandson who died in September, 2014, were remembered by the group as was Goldi Bear, the mother of Nancy (Raymond) Evanson, who died the morning of the gathering. Goldi was 101 and had lived with Nancy for the last seven years. Kilian-Jilk daughter Agnes Jilk Evanson, who lives at St. Anne's in Winona, was present at the gathering. Agnes is 102. Sister Marielouise, (Margaret) Techny, Illinois was not present. She is 94.

Lester Spaag Recalls End of World War II

Included in the autobiographical material of Maxine Church Spaag (available in the Minnesota City Historical Archives) are her husband Lester Spaag's memories of his participation in World War II. Spaag was a member of the 351st Searchlight Battalion, trained in Florida, and was shipped across the Atlantic along with searchlights, power plants and trucks to Oran, Africa.

Lester writes: "The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945. I was sent to a staging area someplace in Italy to await shipment home. Even though the war went on with Japan, I had enough service points that I could be sent home instead of to the Pacific Theater of War. I didn't get home until September of 1945. I came home on the Queen Mary which had been converted to a troop ship during the war. I was mustered out at Camp McCoy, Wi. Mom and Dad came to get me. I was more than ready to be just a citizen again, thanking God that He brought me through some tough times in the 31 months that I was in Italy and Africa. Now it was time to get back to the farm and help my dad and mom again." Lester is a Stockton Valley native.

Spaag's experiences in the war were both dramatic and ordinary. About one engagement he writes, "Around this time we were dug in on a hill guarding our advance position. The Germans were shelling the heck out of us. Me in my foxhole, I heard the sound of a mortar coming straight overhead. A mortar is a big shell that explodes on contact and sprays out shrapnel. Something told me to move to the other end of the seven foot foxhole, and it was a good thing I did, as the mortar came in where I had been standing, dug into the dirt so that the shrapnel was contained in the dirt. My partner who was sleeping at the time was buried. I dug him out, and we spit blood for a few days and couldn't hear for a while, other than that, we were unharmed. Again, someone was looking out for me."

A highlight Spaag recalls related to the famous Leaning Tower of Pisa: "As we went north in Italy, the Germans were shelling the Leaning Tower of Pisa because they thought we were using it for an observation post. The Captain brought me a large key and told me to lock the padlock to the gate of the tower which I did."

On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers, and Japanese officials signed the surrender documents on September 2, 1945, ending the second world war. This year marks the seventieth anniversary of that event.

Susan Althoff Remembers the Plums

(continued from page 2)

After hearing of the visit and interest of Jonathan Damery, Susan Whetstone Althoff wrote: "One of my memories of Grandpa and Grandma Whetstone is of the plum trees on the homestead. I knew where the apple trees were and also the plum trees. The description of them is the way I remember the trees looking like.

The plum trees grew along the path to the bottom land on the opposite side of the apple orchard. There were also a few of them that lived back of the barn until around the 1980's and then I couldn't find them any more. I think the ATVs and snowmobiles drove over them and destroyed them. We used to have a lot of those machines running around in the bottom land.

Grandma had two plum trees in her garden along side of the "dinner plate" dahlias and asparagus. As you see, I remember the garden very well. I am not sure why, I know that I love gardening due to my grandparents and must have paid much more attention than I every realized.

Now I wonder if these were the plum trees being talked about by Jonathan Damer. I used to gather plum blossoms in the spring along with apple blossoms.

The sad thing that happened was the selling of the land in the 1960's to the Biesanz family for removal of sand and rock. That action destroyed so much, and at the time we didn't know just how much was lost. Grandpa did what he thought they needed to do to live out their years."