

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 10, Issue 7: September, 2015

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

Mark your Calendars!

September 12:

Saturday; **Monthly MCHA meeting;** 9:30 a.m.; 140 Mill Street

September 13: Sunday;

First Evangelical Lutheran Church 50th Anniversary; Open House: 1:00 p.m. and following 2:00 p.m. service; 141 Mill Street

September 24:

Thursday; **Minnesota City Community Readers:** Selection: *The Kitchen House*, Kathleen Grissom; 6:30 p.m.;

Open Giveaway

Bookshelf: 6:30-8:00 p.m.; 115 Anderson Street.

October 4: Sunday;

MCHA Fall presentation “Indigenous Foods; O.M. Lord; the Rollingstone plum.” U of Mn MFA student, Jonathan Damery; 2:00 p.m.; 115 Anderson Street

“Go Green!”

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

Lutheran Church Marks Anniversary on September 13

First Evangelical Lutheran Church, 141 Mill Street, will hold a special service at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 13, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their church building. Rev. Larry Zessin, pastor of the congregation from 1965-1972, will be the speaker for that service. An open house will be held beginning at 1:00 p.m. and will continue after the service.



First Evangelical Lutheran Church, 141 Mill Street, Minnesota

Sometime in the 1870s or 1880s, the First Evangelical Lutheran Church was established by German speaking Lutherans who lived in and around Minnesota City. The official organization date is in the fall of 1890. The church at this time acquired the deed for a saloon that would be the church building for seventy five years. When the new building was built, the old building was moved to Highway 248 where it still stands. The present church construction began in July, 1964. Church members constructed the church with work after Sunday services as well as during the week. Family names of those participating in the groundbreaking of the new church are familiar: Gensmer, Denzer, Volkart, Pasche, and Stewart. Windows in the church were contributed by familiar families of Minnesota City History: Stender, Schneider, Hanke, Richter, Kelly and Jessie and others. Pastor David Eckert has served the congregation since 1991. A characteristic of his tenure valued by many is the attention given to area “shut-ins.”

One of the most challenging events in the physical life of the church was the flood of 2007. As with the original construction of the building, members and outside contributors funded and executed repair of the building to its current state which is a beautifying aspect of a drive on Mill Street. Minnesota City Historical Association thanks Pastor David Eckert and Brenda Eckert for their participation in the life of the Minnesota City and area community.

Standing Invitations:

- To attend meetings of MCHA. These meetings are held at 140 Mill Street.
- To join Minnesota City Community Readers monthly meetings. See newsletter MARK YOUR CALENDAR.
- **Writers of regular newsletter columns would be welcomed.** These might include monthly columns on area businesses, churches, schools, organizations or any other relevant topics on the area and/or our history.

University of Minnesota Intern Presents on O.M. Lord, Plums and other Indigenous Foods

Jonathan Damery, University of Mn MFA intern, has agreed to give the fall presentation for the MCHA audience on October 4. On August 27, Damery, accompanied by Susan Althoff, Clare Denzer, Marv and Gen O'Grady, walked the ground cultivated by horticulturists Lord and Hiram and Mary Campbell in the early days of Minnesota City history.

The search for plums was not successful, but the trek was an outdoor experience enriched by the historical recall provided by Susan Althoff and Clare Denzer. The October 4 presentation will provide detail on Jonathan's interest in the O.M. Lord Minnesota City site.

Jonathan explained: "I am interested in regional identity in the Midwest, particularly the tallgrass prairie region, and exploring instances when culture has latched onto something unique to the ecological region. It seems that, in general, much of our existing cultural identity was imported, largely from Europe. This is especially evident with food—we eat very few native species, compared to what Native Americans consumed—but it is also true with other aspects of culture. The American plum is one illustration of something indigenous that, however momentary, was brought into the cultural sphere. A fall presentation could be an excellent opportunity to acquire information from those in the community who are interested in related topics and also anyone that knows something of the plums."



Susan Althoff, Jonathan Damery, Marvin O'Grady and Clare Denzer prepare to stalk the wild plums in the area.

First Baptist Church Annual Service Honors Gladys Volkart



A special focus of the August 30 service at the First Baptist Church was the honoring of Gladys Volkart for her 37 years of service as treasurer of the First Baptist Ladies Aid. Jean Gardner presented a certificate designed by Susan Althoff to Gladys. It featured a photo of the First Baptist Church. Jean spoke of Gladys' unfaltering commitment to her task. Jean also spoke of the repair of the Church Building by the Jerowski Firm and the fund drive that accompanied it. An annual feature of the service, the hymn singing from original hymnals and accompanied on the historic 1875 organ, was this year enhanced by the skill of Daniel Lewis, a WSU music major. The first hymn, selected by Jean Gardner, was How Firm a Foundation, appropriate for this year's restoration work. Pastor Dennis Hudson, Winona First Baptist Church,

conducted the service.

Genevieve O'Grady contributed remarks related to the use of building space to maintain the Minnesota City Historical Association Archives, with archival readings from biographical material of Janet Hill Seabern and a newspaper clipping about a county spelling contest won by Gladys Church in 1937. A DVD of the church produced by a cousin of Jean Gardner was played following the service while attendees consumed refreshments provided by the Ladies Aid, using recipes of area ancestors accompanied by commentary from Donna Friesen.

MCHA Extends Sympathy:

- To the family and friends of Arnold "Arnie" Schell, 67, who died at his home in Stockton on July 30. Schell was a Stockton Council member and an active community member.
- To the family and friends of Donald Beeman, 78, Minnesota City resident, who died on August 19 in Winona.
- To the family and friends of Audrey Grams Morgan, age 101 who died on Monday, August 17 in Winona.
- To the family and friends of Jean Schoen-Braden, 95, Elk Grove Village, IL. who died on August 26.

Oaks Performer Dies in Winona

Audrey Williams Grams Morgan died in Winona on August 17; she was 101. Her obituary included information of her performance at the Oaks Night Club. A check of newspaper archives included description of a Kiwanis meeting at The Oaks, which included discussion of facilities for youth vocational training for the foundry training courses being held. The entertainment for the meeting included the Leonard Gonyea orchestra, a dance and novelty team, another dancer and a vocalist, Audrey Williams. Williams, who later married Allyn Morgan was known as "the bluebird of the North." (information from *Winona Republican*, July 22, 1937).

Buried in Oakland: Paul Benck

August newsletter correspondence from Connie Greethurst included a May 29, 1934 *Winona Republican Herald* newspaper clipping which related the death of Paul Benck who is buried in Oakland Cemetery. Connie is related to family members of Paul. Benck died while at work in a Winona Sand and Gravel Company pit near the Minnesota City Road Dr. P. A. Mattison, Winona County coroner was called. Benck died from an attack of heart trouble, he said.

The pit where Benck died is known as Pit No. 4. It is the farthest west on the south side of the highway between Winona and Minnesota City. Benck and his son, August, also of Minnesota City, had stopped a conveyor belt to make some repairs on it. August left his father sitting near the belt and went into a nearby shed after something needed for the repair. When he returned, he found his father dead. Benck had worked at the pit only about a month. He formerly owned and operated a farm near Stockton and had lived in Minnesota City since 1920. He was born in Germany in 1869 and had lived in Winona County for 14 years. The funeral was at the Lutheran church in Minnesota City, the Rev. Alfred W. Sauer officiating.



Newsletter readers are invited to send information they have about Oakland burials and/or their connections with them. (mgogradey@embarqmail.com)

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.

Whitman Deering Valley Writers in the News.

Chad Oness has received a \$5000.00 Established Artist grant for *Odes for the New Rebellion* and Beth Oness gave a reading at Winona's Bookshelf on September 1 from her latest novel, *Leaving Milan*.

Interesting History in Minnesota Historical Society Quarterly Magazine

Minnesota City Historical Association subscribes to the State Historical Quarterly Magazine; it is shelved at the archives on 140 Mill Street, and is always available for loan. Previous issues are on file. Many issues have carried articles of local interest --local efforts to preserve the Winona Post Office (unsuccessful) and the Winona County Courthouse (successful). This month has an extensive examination of the efforts of Engla Schey, "a catalyst for Mental Hospital Reform in Minnesota." Growing up in northwestern Minnesota, she attended a Lutheran Ladies Seminary in Fargo and then Moorhead Normal School.

The daughter of a freethinker father and a "pietistic stern Lutheran mother," her childhood experiences shaped her values. She rejected the version of Christianity that condemned her loved ones to eternal fire...her father taught her tolerance and outrage against injustice. He encouraged her to question received wisdom, defy convention, and speak her mind. All of these traits help explain her path in life. When her father died in a Fergus Falls State Hospital, she became a social worker and committed her life to improvement of treatment and facilities for persons with mental health issues. Given the increasing media coverage of the continuing difficulties in this area of health care, including in Winona, this article has ample detail to convince readers to support improvements. July 14 *Winona Daily News* informed readers that Winona plans to build a 20 unit facility, Hiawatha Bluffs, for adults with mental health issues. This will be the sixth facility of Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center. There is a projected 80 person waiting list for this facility. The dynamic work of Engla Schey can be thanked for some beginnings for these important contributions. (*Winona Daily News*, July 14; *The Quarterly of the Minnesota Historical Society*, Summer 2015)

Passing on History—Hand On A Legacy

Since the opening of the Minnesota City Historical Association Archives in 2008, many local and area residents have been passing on their history to anyone who will be able to research it or view it at the Archives at 140 Mill Street. These histories are being passed on in a variety of ways that include:

- Written life stories of self and family. Currently these include material from Burley, Fleming, Hill, Church, Whetstone, Denzer, Cisewski, and others
- Contributing objects of family or area interest. These include memorabilia from The Oaks, books, the lamp from Rollingstone Township Hall, some clothing articles of residents
- Participation in sponsored events where photos record relevant historical material as well as presence of participants—the winter caroling event, the Garvin Brook sponsored All Star Wedding II in October of 2013
- Photos, historical and current
- Financial contributions that further goals of the Association
- The Association newsletter supported by membership donations

When an area resident dies, it is often inappropriate to ask family for contribution of historical materials the individual may have; that is why we issue this request now. **If you know of materials that would contribute to a more comprehensive history of the village of Minnesota City—and area around it—please contribute these items to the archives when the time is right.**

This Is Just To Say

William Carlos Williams,
1883 – 1963

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

