

# MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 10, Issue 11: December, 2015

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

## **Mark your Calendars!**

December 12:  
Community Caroling; 6:00 p.m.; Historic First Baptist Church, 140 Mill Street, Minnesota City.

December 17:  
Community Readers and Open Bookshelf; 6:30 p.m.; Former Minnesota City School Building, 115 Iowa Street, Minnesota City; Selection: *the Good Times* by Russell Baker.

January 9, 2016:  
Monthly MCHA Mtg. and Open Bookshelf; 9:30 a.m.; Former Minnesota City School Building, 115 Iowa Street, Minnesota City.

### **“Go Green!”**

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

## **Community Caroling** **December 12, 2015 6:00 P.M.**

Something old and something new—not wedding attire, but caroling program presentations. The annual Community Caroling program on the 12<sup>th</sup> will have the familiar elements—the Yule Log, carol singing, musical performance, horse drawn wagon rides, refreshments, lovely décor. But some new pieces, old to owners but new to audience, will be accordion and violin music performed by Ed Maus and Steve Schuh, an organ solo rendered by Daniel Lewis, WSU student, and description of ornaments special to families in attendance which will be shown to audience. Becky O’Grady Weiss and Lynda Brzezinski will again prepare gift and toy bags for children attending. This annual event first held in 2006 has become a meaningful opportunity to reflect on the area community.

### **A Minnesota City School Christmas Program in 1953**

Susan Althoff sent an article from the Winona Republican Herald (December 14, 1953) describing the Christmas program at the school. Another newspaper account noted that Mrs. Holland had Christmas programs that were over four hours long. Looking at the list of Susan’s article, this program would have been that long. Teachers of the groups were Mrs. Leslie Nelson (she attended the school reunion in 2011), Mrs. David Christenson, Mrs. Merrill Holland. Names still familiar (and alive) of area persons include Loretta Susan Althoff, (Susan was happy that Mrs. Nelson used her full (real) name), Steve Keller, Donna Spaag, Richard Witt, Hollis Donehower, Susan Martin, David Stewart, Laurel Denzer, Robert Keller, Doreen Riedemann, Kay Denzer, Charlene Kowalewski, David Reed, Carol Hohensee, Arlene Kaslo, Mark Schmidt—and others. Anyone wishing to see the full list can locate it in the Winona Republican Herald, December 14, 1953, Page. 11. Program pieces included songs, skits, recitations.

### **A Maxine Church Spaag Depression Era Christmas Memory**

In many countries including the United States, new clothing for Christmas is part of the tradition —being acquired for church services, family, or school gatherings. In her family history written in 2001, Maxine Church Spaag includes this vignette: “I remember a Christmas during the Depression when I was ten years old. The highlight of the season was the annual Sunday School Program. New dresses were few and far between, but for that program that year, my mother sewed for me a dress of blue velvet with a blue plaid skirt and a matching hat. I can still remember how proud I was in my new outfit that special Christmas Eve.”

## The Keeping of Christmas with a Yule Log (clog) in Bracebridge Hall

As many readers know, the history of Christmas observance in America is relatively short-lived, not a legal holiday until the 1800s. An impetus for observance of a number of the customs now observed is the result of author Washington Irving's series of sketches called *The Keeping of Christmas in Bracebridge Hall*, observations of an English Christmas written while he visited there (published in 1820). One such custom was the Yule Log, which our Minnesota City Community Caroling has included in the annual celebration. Irving wrote about Christmas in the Bracebridge family mansion: "The grate had been removed from the wide overwhelming fireplace, to make way for a fire of wood in the midst of which was an enormous log glowing and blazing and sending forth a vast volume of light and heat; this I understood was the Yule clog, which the squire was particular in having brought in and illumined on Christmas Eve, according to ancient custom." Many of the elements we incorporate in American holiday observances were described by Irving—candles, food, dance, caroling. The sketches called Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Christmas Dinner provide interesting familiar and novel details. Irving quotes the earlier English poet Thomas Tusser who observed "At Christmas be merry, and thankful withal, And feast thy poor neighbours, the great with the small." **And so we shall, on December 12!**

## Newsletter Readers Respond

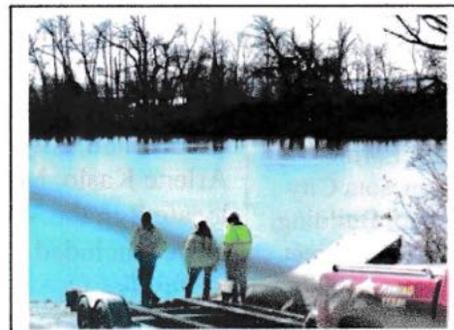
**Mary Jacob** (Deering Valley childhood, now in Dallas), "I do remember the delicious plums, making jam from them. Did not know they were so special."

**Jean Gardner** enjoyed the article on Hedge apples. She is using them around the Gardner farmhouse (Stockton Valley).

**Janet Seabern:** "We had red plums on the hillside. Mom would can them for pie, add green apples. Made great pies for winter." Janet also found older Minnesota City/area names in papers: Wilcox, Stockton, Guentz. A 1901 December Winona Republican notes that "Mr. Byron Wilcox and his mother have gone to Storm Lake to spend the holidays." Readers are invited to contribute information on these families.

## Train Derails at Alma

Local media have given coverage to the BNSF (Burlington Northern Sante Fe) train derailment at Alma on Saturday, Nov 7. Persons familiar with the area will have recognized that there is some distance between the tracks and the village of Alma which was voluntarily evacuated until information about the spill was secured. The spill, identified as ethanol, did not ignite, a significant danger of such events. Some twenty railway cars derailed. This was the first of two Wisconsin derailments of the weekend, the second occurring at Watertown on Sunday afternoon. Environmentalist concern about railway oversight has been heightened as well as residents' awareness of potential dangers. The Winona Republican Herald in 1938 recorded a train wreck in its *Years in History Column of Fifty Years Ago* (December 13, 1888). "The Wabasha accommodation bound north and a freight train collided a mile above Read's landing about seven o'clock this a.m. The wreck is reported to be a bad one and one man, presumably the head brakeman, is missing." Anyone with additional information on this wreck—was the brakeman found? Please communicate.



Observing the derailment  
from Highway 35.

**Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund (GBDRF) concludes Service**

On December 6, the Board of Directors of GBDRF will hold a final "farewell" meeting to disburse remaining funds and acknowledge the work accomplished since the organization's beginning as a Disaster Relief Fund following the flash flood in August 2007. The mission of the group having been accomplished, the meeting at St. Paul's Catholic Church Hall in Minnesota City will review the large number of successful efforts of the group to assist area residents recover emotionally and financially from the flood.

**Minnesota City 14U Wins in County**

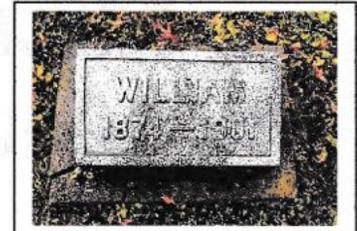
Minnesota City 14U baseball team won the Winona County League regular season and league tournament. Coaches are Steve Heftman, Scott Fritz, and Bob Herczeg. Congratulations, team!

**MCHA Extends sympathy to:**

- Family and friends of Argene Tschumper, 94, Bloomington, who died on November 5. The Tschumper family is a long time Minnesota City family; Argene's wife is Beverly Riedemann. The couple was present for the All Star Wedding in 2014.
- Family and friends of Robert (Bob) Evanson, 53, Winona, who died on November 11. Bob was raised in Middle Valley, the son of Carl (dec.) and Doris Breyer Evanson.

**Buried in Oakland: William Ehrke (1874-1901)**

Dateline: Minnesota City, December 26, 1901, *Winona Republican Herald*. "The funeral of Wm. Ehrke on Sunday was, we believe, the largest every held in Minnesota City. The day being fine and Sunday, and the popularity of the young man all contributed to make it such." An earlier article from December 19 is headlined "Distressing Accident: Young Man is Crushed Beneath Falling Tree." "A distressing accident occurred yesterday afternoon on the old Valentine Farm. The farm is operated by Mr. Ehrke. About 2 p.m., the two sons, William and Charles, were chopping trees on the side of the bluff. As one of the trees fell William miscalculated the direction it was going to fall and was caught by the falling tree and pinned between it and a large limb of another tree. His brother extricated him as soon as possible, covered him up with his coat and ran to the house and got the cutter and got him to the house as soon as possible. In the meantime a physician had been summoned from Rollingstone and another from Winona, but the large gaping wound was too severe and he died about 5 o'clock the same afternoon. Wm. Ehrke was 27 years of age, a large, strong, active fellow, well liked by a large circle of friends; an active member of the Lutheran church and his loss will be deeply felt and mourned by all who knew him. The funeral will be held probably from the Lutheran Church at Minnesota City, Friday Afternoon, Rev. O. Sonnemann of Winona officiating."



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.

**Check Out The Website:**

[www.minnesotacity.org](http://www.minnesotacity.org)

Continue to check the website periodically. New information is constantly being added. Remind family and friends and former Minnesota City residents to check it out! Thank you to Marv O'Grady and David Eckert for keeping the website updated.

# **Community Caroling**

**December 12, 2015, 6:00 P. M.**

**Historic First Baptist Church  
140 Mill Street  
Minnesota City**

**Horse Drawn Wagon Rides  
Music, Food, Conversation  
Adult, Child Performers**

**Sponsored by MCHA  
Hosted by First Baptist Ladies  
(689-4103; 450-0201)**

**Bring your Friends!**