

# MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 9, Issue 4: April, 2015

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

## **Mark your Calendars!**

**April 11:** Saturday, 9:30 a.m., MCHA Regular Meeting, Former Minnesota City School, 115 Iowa Street.

**April 11:** Saturday, 9:30 a.m., Open Book Shelf, Former Minnesota City School, 115 Iowa Street.

**April 23:** Thursday, 6:30 p.m., Minnesota City Community Readers, Selection: Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye*.  
Former Minnesota City School, 115 Iowa Street.

**April 23:** Thursday, 6:30 p.m., Open Book Shelf, Former Minnesota City School, 115 Iowa Street.

**May 5:** Tuesday. City Council Visits Archives, 140 Mill Street.

**May 16:** Saturday;  
**Minnesota City Day**  
Various Sites

### **“Go Green!”**

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

## **Rollingstone Township Annual Election and Meeting Routine**

Numbering about a dozen people in attendance, the annual Rollingstone township meeting on March 10 conducted business as usual. Bruce Speltz was elected to the supervisor position and Susan Althoff was elected Treasurer, each garnering about 20 votes. Tom Tibor was elected to moderate the meeting. Bob Bambenek, County Recorder, presented information on land values in the county. With no objections, persons present approved monetary donations for several groups: Minnesota City Park, Rollingstone Park, and Minnesota City Historical Association (MCHA). This year the groups requesting money from the township were asked to submit their requests in writing, naming the intended use for the funds. MCHA earmarked their \$300.00 donation for their recently acquired laptop. Township officers were applauded for prompt reply to data requests which had been described in *Winona Daily News* in a review of the 2014 County “test run” of Township responses. *Winona Daily News* had reported this information in March of 2014. The 2014 Road Tour Report was a listing of the repairs and upgrades of township roads that included fixing ditches, adding gravel, removing trees, and many other improvements. Carl Evanson, a former supervisor who died in 2014, was remembered to the group by Genevieve O’Grady.

## **Quiet Democracy in 1852 in Minnesota City and Area**

The orderly exercise of democratic process in the March Rollingstone township meeting and the discussion of land values and property improvements invited recall of the esteem for the democratic claims process in the establishment of the Minnesota City, Rollingstone, and Stockton area written about by Elder Ely and admired by J.P. Owens, editor of the *Minnesotian* in 1852. Ely described of what he considered “almost the only serious difficulty that arose among the colony about claims.... A young lady, Miss Amidon, made a claim on the South Rollingstone, about halfway between Minnesota City and Stockton. Later, she left and went east, placing her claim in the care of the association. (Western Farm and Village). In her absence a settler living nearby decided that he preferred her claim. He moved over, cut logs, and prepared to build a cabin. The committee on claims visited him and pointed out that his action was in violation of the laws of the association. The claim-jumper would not yield, even though the committee offered to help him build the cabin on his original claim. One night an informal committee paid his log pile a visit, and in the morning he discovered that he had twice as many logs, but they were only one-half the original length. On the occasion of the next visit the regular committee had little difficulty in persuading him to move and in fulfillment of the original offer it helped him build on his own claim a six-sided cabin made out of the short logs. This was standing fifteen years later, a rebuke to the cupidity of the trespasser and a monument to the diplomacy of the committee.”

<http://collections.mnhs.org/MNHHistoryMagazine/articles/9/v09i02p085-095.pdf>  
*Winona Republican*, May 20, 1867. *Minnesotian*, June 12, 1852.

### MCHA Extends Sympathy to:

- Friends and family of Phil Cochran, 59, who died in Winona on March 4, 2015. Cochran, the head of the Biology Department at St. Mary's University in Winona, collected a rattlesnake from the O'Grady yard for relocation in July 2011 (August Newsletter, 2011).
- Friends and family of Eleanor Pavlik Judy, 89, Winona, who died on March 8. In Minnesota City, Eleanor lived in the former Roger Church family home adjacent to Oakland Cemetery.
- Friends and family of Leonard Mastenbrook, 89, who died in Winona on March 15. In Minnesota City, the Mastenbrook family lived on Denzer Road; Len was a former resident of Deering Valley.
- Friends and family of Donald Marg, 89, who died in Winona on March 12. From age 3 until 1986, Marg farmed in Mount Vernon Township.
- Friends and family of Sandra HaaseVoelker, 63, Minnesota City who died on March 17.
- Friends and family of Joan TeskeWehlage, 82, Minnesota City, who died Tuesday, March 17, 2015.
- Friends and family of Mary Catherine Jilk, 91, Winona, who died on Thursday, April 2. Mary was born in Stockton Valley. She was a nurse in Africa for many years as a member of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit in Illinois, and later worked and lived in Winona County.

### MCHA Congratulates:

- Rebecca O'Grady Weiss, Bloomington, MN., who has been nominated and chosen as "Provider of the Year 2015 from Hennepin County." Becky's Licensed Childcare has served families for 24 years. Becky comes to Minnesota City for many MCHA events and enriches them with her many talents.
- McKennah Spiten, Minnesota City for inclusion of a poem in a poetry anthology sponsored by Southeastern Libraries Cooperating (SELCO).

### Calliope Presentation Draws Large Crowd

A draw for large New Orleans and other city crowds, the Ed and Judy Maus presentation about the Winona Steam Calliope in Minnesota City on March 15 also attracted one of the largest event audiences MCHA has experienced. The presentation with photos, stories of both Ed and Judy, displayed materials,



The Entertained—St. Paul's Church Hall

and refreshments contributed to the usual long lasting conversations of attendees. A popcorn

machine and Chicory coffee from Café Du Monde in New Orleans added to the atmosphere created by Maus mementos—beads, masks, and newspaper stories. MCHA especially thanks St. Paul's Parish for the use of their hall and the parish individuals who assisted; these included Clare Denzer, Jackie and Albert Butenhoff, and Don Evanson.



The entertainers: Edwin and Judy Maus

**New in the Archives:** *Sear, Roebuck and Co. Consumers Guide, Fall 1909* (Ventura Books c. 1979). *Holy Trinity Church, Rollingstone; Immaculate Conception, Oak Ridge Cookbook. Summerfest 1987.*

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.

## Readers Respond to Newsletter

**Erik Brom wrote:** "I just noticed the item in the newsletter regarding the WCHS calendar photo of the Minnesota City Depot. Unfortunately, the caption in the calendar is wrong. This was a joint depot used by the Chicago & Northwestern RR (originally named Winona & St. Peter RR), and the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul RR. The train at the station is a Milwaukee train, and the track on the left is the Northwestern. I did some research and determined that the photo was taken between 1910 and 1912."

**Gerry Okland**, Thief River Falls, MCHA member, sent this communiqué: "Greetings. (From the Winona Newspaper Project *Winona Republican* April 16, 1861 page 3:1(Column 1) *Town and vicinity. The River*). 'The Denmark on leaving the levee today resurrected that horrid screech called a Calliope which formerly awoke the echoes among the everlasting hills up in this country. Never exceedingly musical, it is now detestable and can only be compared to the battle-cry of the infernal regions or of South Carolina.' Please share. Thank You. Gerry" Readers here, noting the 1861 date, believe the great distaste for the sound was related to the "Rebel Yell" heard in South Carolina.

**Gayle Goetzman** wrote that she is working on sending out Century Farm DVDs, having returned from two weeks' vacation to travel, see the National Finals Rodeo and ride mules in Arizona.

MCHA member **Gale Hill** in an earlier newsletter requested information about a wall painting/mural he remembered from Sandstede's Bar in Minnesota City. The mural commemorated the Armistice Day Blizzard of 1940 and had the inscription "The Day the Ducks Came and the Hunters Died." Gale wrote, "Last Sunday Carol and John Denzer stopped in to see me. John said he remembers seeing the room at Sandstede's and the painting on the walls." Gale would still enthusiastically welcome any photo of this mural. If anyone has connections with the tavern/house/Sandstede's, please tell them Gale and other readers would welcome discussion of this mural—its painter, its removal, and other details. The archives has a copy of the book *All Hell Broke Loose: Experiences of Young People During the Armistice Day 1940 Blizzard*. The book's accounts of deaths and rescues on the river are dramatic, including the section on the Mississippi River and Southeastern Minnesota. Archival materials are available for loan.

**Sally Yaum**, daughter of Leonard Cisewski, wrote to thank MCHA for publication of her uncle Arnold Cisewski's World War II memories. "I am so happy that you enjoyed my Uncle Arne Cisewski's WWII story. I too found it very interesting and emotional...it means so much to me that you have held on to it and included it in your newsletters. Every year I "google" Minnesota City to see when you have your spring fling, because I would love to go to it. It always seems to fall on a weekend where we are busy as it does this year. ...I haven't been back to Minnesota City for almost three years. Now that Jerry and Janette Cisewski are gone, I have nobody left to visit there. Every so often I make the trip just to look at that sweet little town. I go and visit my dad who is buried there and drive by Grandma's house for a quick peek. I've always loved Minnesota City. It holds so many special memories for me. My Grandma Celia Cisewski was such a sweet lady. I sure miss her. Grandma---always wearing an apron. We'd pull up and she'd be sitting in her chair looking out the kitchen window. And her fat little dog Snoopy always faithfully by her side. We used to play outside for hours. We'd run down to the old swinging bridge and stand in the middle and make it swing. My brothers would scare the heck out of me swinging that bridge. We loved to take a wagon to the top of the hill by the old school and ride it all the way down the sidewalk and into the ditch at the bottom....I guess things were different back then. And then there was my Grandpa (Leo Cisewski.) He died when I was eight years old, but I do remember a little about him. I remember he used to roll his own cigarettes. Us kids thought that was cool. He spent his days across the street at his garage. We'd run over to visit him and get an ice cream treat. And we got to play with his cat named "puppy." Anyway, like I said, Minnesota City holds lots of fond memories for me" ..... Sally Yaum



Arnold, Leonard, Celia, Gerry and Leo  
Cisewski (MCHA archives photo)

## Community Identity –Roots - Changed by Relocation and Closing of Institutions Genevieve O’Grady

The newsletter of the St. Michael Historical Society in St Michael, Minnesota, in its February 2015 edition, featured an article by Bob Zahler entitled “Why Preservation Matters.” Zahler cited reasons to preserve the historic St. Michael’s Church building -“continuity of culture, traditions and values. Preserving the Historic Church should not be the sole responsibility of the parish. The church is part of the landscape that belongs to all of us. We all lose if it is severely altered, or worse, destroyed.” Two issues emerged in local media recently which invite reflection on community identity—on **our** cultures, **our** traditions and **our** values—and their relationship to the buildings and the functions of institutions in our communities—the churches, the schools, the post offices and others.

On February 6, a meeting at Bonnie Rae’s Café in Rollingstone with Winona School Superintendent West provided opportunity for area residents to voice opinions and have questions answered about the Winona School System. West spoke to the issue of school closure, stating emphatically that he has never discussed Rollingstone School closure. With the history of Rollingstone School, it can be assumed that the issue was nevertheless present in many minds. Readers of Kevin Fenton’s memoir *Leaving Rollingstone* learned of the vitriol which accompanied for some the closing of the Catholic school in Rollingstone and its attendant community repercussions for his own family. Persons at the February 6 discussion expressed solid resolve to maintain the Rollingstone School.

A second significant event given attention in area media and parishes of the Winona Diocese is the plan to reduce services to a number of parishes. Both St. Paul’s in Minnesota City and St. Mary’s in Minneiska are scheduled to become oratories where there will be no regular Masses, thereby requiring “faithful Catholics” to attend other churches. These churches are currently “clustered” with Holy Trinity in Rollingstone. Numbers are the focus of much of the available published data (<http://www.dow.org>) which has been prepared with time and careful counting: number of miles to go to church, number of rites performed, and projections of memberships. Harder to find—it may be there—is analysis of community disjuncture effect of cohesiveness on these locations when the first clusterings happened. The current vision of oratories resulting from reorganization seems to portend dramatic impact on community identity/ transformation. How will these communities change as a result of changed parish status? The health of individual and community identity often lamented by churches as being lost through failed family structures is unlikely to be maintained or enhanced when the assists of small community structures disappear.

In a 2012 article for the MCHA newsletter entitled “Roots—What Are They?” Leo Jilk wrote, “Might it be then, that “roots” is a state of mind, a blending of the concrete things like birthplace, family name, religion, national origin, but with the additional sense of belonging to a tribe, a way of life, a set of values, but most importantly to a community of people, not just family, but also neighbors and friends...That home, that set of roots is for most of us, I believe, a collection of our most precious memories, a special piece of land, a warm kitchen with our family around us, a Christmas service in the church where we were confirmed, a reunion of family and friends in a special place, traditions of food and music and stories; yes, all those stories which connect us back to community history and ancestors and a way of life.” (Minnesota City Historical Association Newsletter, February 2012)

I am no longer a Catholic and not a resident of these affected communities, but I support efforts to maintain their institutions in their local buildings because I believe that experiences of community build community identification which builds healthy human development. The First Baptist Church in Minnesota City, in my opinion, is an example of an effective modification of an historical treasure, not unlike the one described in the St. Michael Newsletter. It remains a church for requested “church uses” and it also now houses the Minnesota City Historical Association Archives. It is a gathering space for a number of community events—book signings, Community caroling, Minnesota City Day workshops and displays, and other MCHA events. When my grandfather August Jilk, along with Leon Bronk and Isidore Draskowski petitioned the Catholic bishop in Winona in 1925 to establish a church in Minnesota City, they were also counting miles; previously they attended Mass in Winona, but they were also clearly aligning with neighbors—their community-- to begin what would remain a place to celebrate their culture, their values, and their traditions in their own gathering space. Some of these cultures and traditions have changed, but their contribution to identification of institution with places of value has remained. Schools and churches are not like branches of K Mart. They are part of the generation of blood lines of the area. The consolidation plans of schools, the merging of parishes should address more than statistics. The plans should project the effect on community identity.