

# MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 12, Issue 10: November, 2017

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

## **Mark your Calendars!**

**November 11:**  
Saturday; MCHA  
monthly meeting;  
City Hall,  
Minnesota City,  
149 Mill Street;  
9:30 a.m.

**November 17:**  
Thursday;  
Minnesota City  
Community  
Readers; City  
Hall, Minnesota  
City, 149 Mill  
Street; Reading:  
*Falling Leaves* by  
Adeline Yen  
Mah; 6:30 p.m.

**December 9:**  
Saturday;  
Community  
caroling &  
Wagon rides;  
Historic First  
Baptist Church,  
140 Mill Street.;  
6:00 p.m.

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

## **Burley Relative Visits Archives**

Pam Stansfield Aune, the great great granddaughter of Daniel Q. Burley, visited the MCHA archives in October. In March 2007, Aune had presented the history of the Burley family in America for an Association gathering. Her visit to the archives now was an opportunity to see additions to the materials, including the three paintings of the Burley land buildings executed by Neil Denzer and the gathered Burley materials, one of the larger collections of the archives. She also assisted on potential wording for the Tour Sign that is planned for Denzer Road and includes the Burley family name. Aune’s daughter Colleen who has previously visited has authored a novel entitled, *III Kept Oath*, an historical fantasy set in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. The historical interests of this family are extensive.

## **Probably Not “our Pikes.”**

Many Minnesota City settlers’ names are now very familiar to newsletter readers. Recently the Pike name on Stewart Valley Drive caught our attention, Robert Pike and his brother William and families being some of the first famous as well as infamous persons of Minnesota City. When we visited with the Stewart Valley Pikes they lent us their published family history. A precursory examination did not establish connections. Predominantly eastern residents, some family did settle in Wisconsin. Anyone with relatives, same name or otherwise of Minnesota City area settlers, are invited to alert Archives personnel (507-450-0201).

## **The More Things Change....Winona Republican Herald, Friday, November 13, 1936**

“Minnesota City School District to Vote on Bonds, Minnesota City, Minn. Special to the Republican Herald. Voters of school District 29 will hold a special meeting at the schoolhouse the evening of November 20 for the purpose of voting on the issuance of bonds to finance a new school building. An application for a government grant has already been sent to the PWA office at St. Paul. The estimated minimum cost of the completed building has been given as \$22,000. A grant from the government would mean approximately \$9000 or 45 percent of the cost. This grant is given as a gift and does not have to be repaid. This would leave a balance of approximately \$13,000--- to be raised through bonds. The district can have as long as 15 or 20 years in which to pay these bonds, just as the board thinks best.”



## Minnesota City Hometown Harvest

Contributed by Susan Whestone Althoff

On Sunday, October 15, residents of Minnesota City and friends gathered for a special program in conjunction with the 165<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the city. Serving as Mistress of Ceremonies was Susan Althoff.



Eleven different presentations were given during the program, all centered around the 165<sup>th</sup> theme and harvest time. Some read the 165<sup>th</sup> page from a favorite novel, or 165 words from an article in the newspaper or publication, or the 165<sup>th</sup> verse of a poem or saying. There was also singing of favorite songs about fall and harvest. Presenters were: Jean Gardner, Maxine Spaag, Becky Weiss, Kate O'Grady, Kathy Schoen, Leo Jilk, Nancy O'Malley and Susan Althoff. Sharing her musical talent with two songs was Debbie Berhow. Accompanying her on the keyboard was Cathy Kreisel.



In the shadows, as she often is, Donna Friesen serves pie for her friends and neighbors.

A special award, was given to the "Minnesota City Laureate." This was achieved by putting all the names of the presenters in a basket and drawing out a name. Don Evanson was given that honor.

After the program was over, everyone was treated to homemade apple pie. Those making pies were Becky Weiss, Donna Friesen and Susan Althoff. What a variety we had. Donna and Betsy Friesen along with Kathy Schoen and Nancy O'Malley helped cut and serve the pies. Janet Seabern poured the beverages.

The committee for this event were: Kate O'Grady, Becky Weiss and Susan Althoff.

## Hometown Harvest Program Connections



Susan Whetstone Althoff

Susan Whetstone Althoff, with the help of a number of others, has been the successful organizer of Minnesota City Day, 2017 and of the Hometown Harvest Program. A value of these events, not always the overt one, is the connectedness that is fostered by people on these days. Janet Hill Seabern is one of the longest MCHA members. Mary Stremcha Jacob, a native of Minnesota City now living in Dallas, TX was able to attend the Hometown Harvest. When Mary lived in Whitman Deering Valley, Janet Hill Seabern was asked by Mary's family, the Mastenbrooks, to have Janet "help." Several years ago, Janet wrote about this. "When I was ten years old, Mr. Carl Mastenbrook came over and asked mom—Kate broke her leg and asked if I could come and help her. When Mom told me that, I didn't want to go and be with all the boys. You help Kate, she said, so I got ready as what Mom and Dad said we did. I was there two months of July and August. I came home on Saturday and back Monday a.m., fed the chickens, eggs to pick up, set the table and help put food on the table." How great that the Hometown Harvest harvested memories of this long ago connection between Mary and Janet. Kathy Streng Twite, East Grand Forks, who attended the event visited with Janet Seabern, a classmate of her mother, Cecilia Jilk Streng, and with a classmate of her aunt Elaine, Jean Gardner. The renditions of participants connected attendees and performers with a number of aspects of area history that promoted discussion.

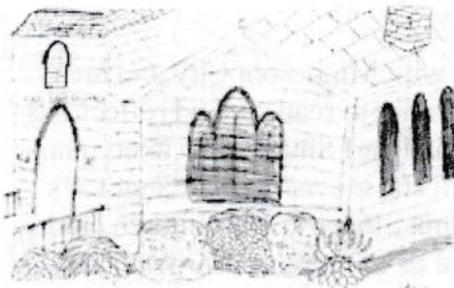


Debbie Berhow, Becky Weiss, and Kate O'Grady

## Minnesota City First Baptist Church Note Cards Promotion

Contributed by Nancy Volkart O'Malley

Note cards featuring the First Baptist Church are now available. They represent an opportunity to help preserve an important part of Minnesota City history. The First Baptist Church which still stands on Mill Street today, was the first church in Winona County, established in 1852. The congregation initially met in members' homes until funds were raised to build the church building in 1875. In 1878, the women of the congregation founded The Women's Home and Foreign Circle. In 1905, this group was renamed Ladies Aid. Today, the Ladies Aid has 11 members who all have familial, geographical or sentimental ties to the old church. The group aims to maintain and support the building with its original contents.



Drawing by Leah Zierfus



Leah Zierfus and Great Grandmother Gloria Denzer

The Minnesota City Historical Association uses the church to house their archives and hold public events. The Association gives annual donations; the two groups are stronger with each other's support. Members of the community also support the church by helping with projects and upkeep. The Ladies Aid's sources of funds are members'

freewill monthly offerings, outside donations and bequests. Completed recent projects include exterior painting, a new roof, and repairs to the foundation, windows and organ. A small church shaped free library was also placed out front.

Now, the group is focusing on their next project: new front steps. To help raise the funds needed for this goal, the Ladies Aid is offering note cards illustrated with original drawings of the church. There are two styles of cards available by two local artists with ties to past and current members of the Ladies Aid. Jody Church Berhow is the granddaughter of Mrs. George (Emma) Church and the niece of Maxine Church Spaag. Leah Zierfus, age 14, is the granddaughter of Corrine Denzer Zierfus and great granddaughter of Mrs. George (Gloria) Denzer. Special thanks to these two talented artists in the Ladies Aid family who generously donated their time and talent.

Pictured are the two styles of notecards. For a donation of \$10.00, you will receive 8 notecards with envelopes. If interested in acquiring notecards to support the church, please email Nancy Volkart O'Malley at [tjomalley55@comcast.net](mailto:tjomalley55@comcast.net) or drop a note to Nancy at First Baptist Church, PO Box 106, Minnesota City, MN 55959. Proceeds will be used for the upkeep and preservation of the historic church.



Drawing by Jody Church Berhow



Jody Church Berhow and grandmother, Emma Church

- **Special Thanks** to those of you who have submitted article material to the newsletters.
- **Writers of articles or columns are welcomed.** These might include monthly columns on area businesses, churches, schools, organizations or other relevant topics on the area and/or our history.

## MCHA Expresses Sympathy to the family and friends of

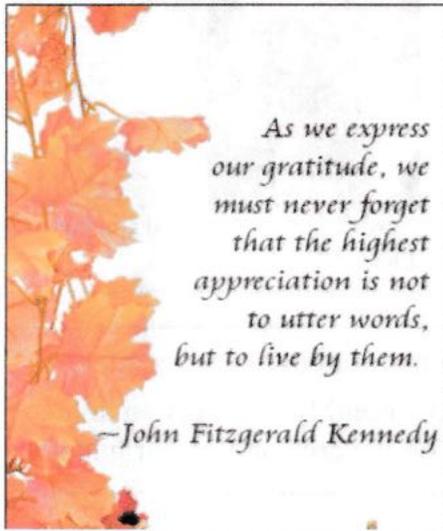
- Gary Oevering, 54, Stockton, who died on October 1 at his home.
- Chase Merchlewitz, 28, Stockton, who died on October 11. The Merchlewitz family are longtime residents of Stockton Valley.
- Lester Spaag, Winona, 97, who died on October 9. Lester was born in 1920 in Stockton Valley and married Maxine Church Morris of Stockton Valley in 1961.
- Lydia Pearl Leerkamp Singer, 103, who died in Minnesota City on October 12 at the home of her daughter, Kathy Meyers.
- Richard Witt, 70, who died in Nora Springs, Iowa on October 11. Richard will be interred in Oakland Cemetery as are his parents, Herbert and Helen Saehler Witt.

Each newsletter contains the death announcement of a person or persons with Minnesota City and area connections. Which newsletter readers have these connections is known only to readers, and reflections would doubtless differ greatly among us. This month, the death of Lydia Pearl Singer, provoked many memories for the O'Grady family who lived next to Pearl since 1964 until she moved to her daughter's house in Minnesota City. Pearl was a Minnesota City Leerkamp, Grandma Singer to our children, and even though we were already country people, it was Pearl who introduced us to morel mushrooms and showed us how to prepare them.

Lester Spaag was a less familiar person in our lives but his *joie de vivre*, his cheerful enjoyment of life, seemed ever present. He always greeted me with his reminder that he knew my father, and I loved the excitement still that he conveyed when telling "horse stories." When his wife, Maxine Church Spaag gave the Archives a copy of her biography, I read the story of Lester's WWII experiences and will not forget his involvement with the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Lester was in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. He recalled, "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."

And finally, Gary Oevering who died in Stockton had been a student at one of our Winona schools in 1975. When we had two weeks of school in the country studying outdoor topics, Gary made a sand sculpture that has been retained at the cabin; we presented it to his mother Judy at the time of the funeral.

Several people have commented on the death of Richard Witt, son of the Witt Store owners, and classmate of some at Minnesota City. This month we have connected with people because of hometown harvest, and we have connected again as vividly in some cases with the memories of those that have passed. We share these losses with those with closer ties.



Anyone who wishes to donate to or 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.

### MCHA invites readers to submit:

dates for the newsletter of family reunions, milestone birthdays, and other events about which readers wish to share information.

Check [www.minnesotacity.org](http://www.minnesotacity.org) or use the QR code.  
Submit information to ([mgogrady@embarqmail.com](mailto:mgogrady@embarqmail.com))

