

VALLEY GROVE NEWSLETTER

Winter 2004

By the Valley Grove

Preservation Society



The Annual Valley Grove Christmas Eve Service

Friday, December 24, 2004, 10 p.m. **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

Our legendary candlelight service will take place on Christmas Eve, Friday, December 24th at 10 p.m. Music will begin at 9:45 pm and following the service we will have our special hot cider. This year Reverend Owen Gaasedelen of Northfield will officiate.

Pastor Gaasdelen was born in Faribault and raised in Nerstrand where his father managed the elevator. Owen was a member of the last class to be confirmed at Valley Grove in 1947. He attended St. Olaf graduating with a degree in history and religion, then studied at Luther Seminary in St. Paul and was ordained an ELCA minister. He worked in North Dakota and southeast Minnesota and currently in a rural parish near Garner, Iowa.

Pastor Gaasdelen and his wife Kay (who have 3 children)

bought a home in Northfield a year ago. His grandparents Knut and Mary (Neset) Gaasdelen from Vang, Norway homesteaded near the Vang church and are buried there. Owen's son Owen researched the family tree and traced it back to the 900s and there is Viking runestone on Gaasdelen land.

"I took five languages at college but never took Norwegian," says Owen. "My father spoke it and he was confirmed in Norwegian at Vang's, but he never spoke a word of Norwegian in front of us. It was popular to get to the English, and about that time Norwegian churches were changing over."

Please feel free to bring Christmas treats to the service to share. Seats are filled right up through balcony these days, so please arrive early and be prepared to sing in Norwegian (sheet music provided) as well as English!

Country Social Does It Again!

In the cool beauty of the old white church, St. Olaf College music professor Andrea Een performed songs on the hardanger fiddle, her voice rising with the ancient Norwegian melodies as everyone listened in rapt silence. Andrea honored Valley Grove by choosing us for the launch of her new CD "From the Valley." The white church provides the cover art for this lovely and distinguished CD.

Andrea has generously offered to donate 20 percent of the CD sales to Valley Grove. You may order it by contacting her at www.andreaeen.com or through St. Olaf College.

On the green and gold prairie bright with asters, black eyed Susans, and wild grasses, Bob and Cheryl Mathies and their team of well-trained, big, black Percheron geldings hauled families to the jingle of harness trace chains and the thump of enormous hooves.

And along the shady row of oaks at the edge of the cemetery, Chip DeMann, his daughter Molly, and Molly's white pony Pepper gave dozens of rides to horse crazy kids.

Earlier in the day, Minnesota Public Radios Michael Barone led a sing-along on our historic organ (my, you all harmonize well!).

And at the end of the day, in the stone church, Jerry Erickson of Northfield and John Louis Anderson of Carver did a fabulous job of judging the imaginative and diverse entries in the Jell-O competition, some of which were edible, some of which were better off left on the plate. It was a perfect day.

Collectible Valley Grove Coffee Cups

Simplify your Christmas shopping! Stuff those stockings with a useful treasure! Support your local Norwegian-American historical site!

The first official Valley Grove cups featuring the Valley Grove image by Gretchen Quie are for sale now. We plan to produce a limited number of a special design each year, so start now to collect them. The 2004 red, white and green cups are \$10 each. They will be available at Red Letter Day, 17 Bridge Square in Northfield (507) 645-9141 along with our....

Charming New Valley Grove Refrigerator Magnets!

Just the thing for small, memorable gifts, thank yous, souvenirs, etc. Think of them as miniature artwork: a fall photo of Valley Grove by photographer Bob Firth of Carver, Minnesota and a four panel image of Valley Grove in four seasons by artist Shawn Olson of Minneapolis each in a tiny black picture frame. Magnets are \$5 plus postage and shipping at Red Letter Day in Northfield. Call (507) 645-9141 to order yours.

Big Bad Badgers Wanted

No, not the Wisconsin sports fans. We need an actual pair of healthy, vicious, gopher-munching badgers to make a home on our prairie and get to work chomping the oak-eating vermin. If you know where we can get a pair, please let us know. A badger-naming contest will take place in a subsequent newsletter. So what would suit a badger couple? Ole and Lena, Lars and Karla, Haakon and Siri...

About Valley Grove

Valley Grove consists of two historic Norwegian-immigrant churches set on a hilltop in the rolling fields near Nerstrand, Minnesota.

The stone church building dating to 1862, the wooden church building from 1894, and the surrounding pioneer cemetery are on the National Register of Historic Sites.

Norwegian settlers built both churches amid the prairie and bur oaks; Rev. Berndt Julius Muus of Norway, one of the first pastors, went on to help found St. Olaf College, and the cemetery is the resting place of members of the family of internationally known economist Thorstein Veblen who wrote *Theory of the Leisure Class* and coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption." The cemetery is also the burial place of members of the Kvi family, ancestors of former Minnesota state governor Al Quie.

The bell in the white church is said to be the second oldest church bell still ringing west of the Mississippi. And the pipe organ dates from 1911 and was hauled in on a sleigh.

The dwindling church congregation moved away as the farm economy changed and, in the early 1970's, the Valley Grove Churches were decommissioned. Many of the congregation went from Valley Grove to the Lutheran church at Vang.

In 2001, the 111½ acres of farmland that surrounds Valley Grove were put up for sale. After a close call with development, they were rescued and the church and fields revitalized by the Valley Grove Preservation Society. Today the refurbished church is the site for concerts, art shows, weddings, and carriage club meets and is cherished by photographers and artists. A scientific and natural area portion of the Valley Grove land is enjoyed by local college students and used in field studies by Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges.

Events and Notices

Deaths

Elmer "Fernie" Vesledahl, who served many years on the Valley Grove Cemetery Association, passed away on November 18, at the age of 78 years. His funeral was held at Vang Church and the interment was at Valley Grove Cemetery.

Project Wish List

We can use more volunteers. Come out for church clean ups, holiday decorating, country social set ups - we get a lot done in a little time amid great beauty and the food isn't bad, either. To help with work such as prairie burns, weed spraying, re-planting our prairie oaks and watering them, please contact Gary Wagenbach (507) 645-8549.

Money Needed, No Kidding

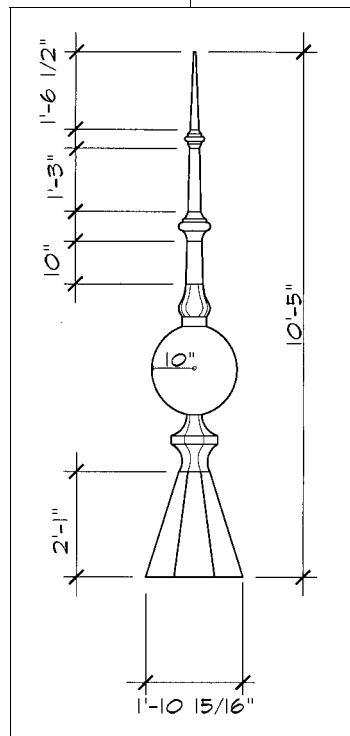
Your contribution keeps a good thing going; it is tax deductible; and it shows you care about this rare and lovely spot - this precious bit of Minnesota history.

Since last October, 97 families have given \$14,109.00 as donations and for 'tree purchases.' That's about 17% of our mailing list of 580 families. While we are very grateful to those who have helped, we must be frank with you: more is needed.

Right now, we need to raise \$13,000 to complete the steeple with the reconstructed finial. If you were at the September Country Social, you may have seen the remains of the finial that originally graced the steeple of the white church. It was on display out-

side the white church. A copper replica is being created and will be installed in time for the spring wedding season. Your help in purchasing the new finial made in the old style will be greatly appreciated.

Future projects will include restoring the water-stained ceiling of the white church. We also have sizeable insurance premiums to meet and there is continued oak savanna maintenance, such as replacing damaged trees.



If you come to the Country Social, the Solstice Art Show, the carriage club drives or Christmas Eve service, please contribute. If you have a place in your heart and/or your family history for Valley Grove, even if you rarely visit, please contribute. It's a darn good value for the money: Our annual Country Social and Jell-O Contest offers a day of wholesome fun and entertainment, with nationally known musical artists. It has all been free. The problem is, for example, this year's country social grossed \$549, but our costs were close to \$700. For Christmas Eve, we use about 120 gallons of fuel oil to get the church warm. Today's going price for #1 oil is \$1.86 per gallon. The newsletters alone cost us \$325 not counting any of our volunteers' time.

The envelope enclosed with this newsletter will make it easy to help. If you no longer want to receive the newsletter or be a contributor, please check the box and we will remove your name from the mailing list. If you want to be an ongoing supporter of Valley Grove, please return it with your check. Any amount helps and will be

very welcome. Thank you!

Call for Artifacts and Please Stay in Touch!

As always, we need your help to keep the past alive. Valley Grove history is perishable without memories and records. If you have any photos, furnishings, documents or mementoes of Valley Grove that you would like to contribute to the archives, please let us know and contact us anytime at the addresses below with any ideas you have for the future.