



V A L L E Y G R O V E N E W S L E T T E R

AUGUST 2001

BY THE VALLEY GROVE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

LET US BRAG JUST A BIT

Thanks to the work of volunteers, fundraising costs for the recent Valley Grove land purchase were a truly record low: ½ cent per dollar raised. We think our 467 supporters should know that almost every bit of it went to the project itself. Thank you again.

NEWS ON THE PRAIRIE

Carleton biology professor Gary Wagenbach has guided the restoration efforts on the newly acquired prairie at Valley Grove. In early summer, Wagenbach took members of the Science Teaching Institute at Carleton—junior high and high school teachers from the region and as far as California—to Valley Grove to help them understand the landscape and history and options for teaching and learning about landscape emphasizing restoration. He also took Keck Geology Consortium members (college students studying field research, housed at Carleton and hosted by Mary Savina of the geology department) to Valley Grove to study field, soil and erosion issues and how the prairie will change over time. Wagenbach has been working on Prairie Creek watershed in neighboring Nerstrand Park, a designated high priority area for conservation through the Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District. “The Valley Grove site is a wonderful place to talk about plants, to see a restoration site and it’s an unbeatable combination to walk right into the park,” he said. “The fact that a preservation society, a NGO, initiated the project is important; it’s very successful and unusual for this scale of endeavor. This attempt to restore savanna trees, prairie grasses and forbes is very challenging. The more common restoration just works with grasses. Valley Grove’s mix is the unusual part of the project compared to other restoration efforts. From a public and education point of view, field trips to the site for K-12 and college are welcome to learn from the site how to create a savanna restoration. It’s a great exploratory education endeavor and people are excited about it.”

WHAT WE’RE WORKING ON NOW...

After the last year of dedication to saving the land around Valley Grove, we are now investing our time and efforts to restoring and repairing the building itself. Upon inspection, our building committee has made strong suggestions for some much needed repairs to the white clapboard church. We are currently working on grant applications to assist financing these repairs.

Steeple project: Carpenter ants and moisture are threatening our steeple. We are hoping to restore the steeple including the replacements of its seven foot copper finial. (John Maakestad has stored what’s left of the original so we have a model to go on.)

Raise the (real) Roof: Asphalt roofs only last 10 to 15 years, and ours needs to be replaced. In the interests of beauty and historical accuracy, we hope to replace the asphalt shingles (circa 1990) with accurate, aesthetically appropriate and hardy cedar shakes. Won’t that look tremendous?

Paint Project : paint doesn’t last too long on old wood. The blistering and peeling paint on the white church needs help, and this winter we will be applying for donated paint from the Picture It Painted program , a community service sponsored by Valspar Corporation and The Initiative Fund that offers paint to historic buildings and landmarks in south eastern and south central Minnesota. We will still have to pay for labor, but this will save the cost of 35 gallons of paint and primer.

Wish us luck!

Any donations for restoration can be sent to:
Valley Grove Preservation Society
P.O. Box 75
Nerstrand, MN 55053

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RESTORE LOST PARTS

Things have drifted away from the historic Valley Grove churches over the years. Do you have any mysterious pieces - fixtures, photos, moldings, furniture - that could be ours? If you'd like to restore them to their original place, please contact Mary Jones at 507-663-7191.

PHOTOS WANTED

We need to know our past in order to accurately re-create it. Do you have photos of Valley Grove-interior, exterior, the whole hill, details— from past decades? Please consider donating them to our archives. Please contact Mary Jones at 507-663-6191.

YOU CAN USE VALLEY GROVE

Of course many couples reserve Valley Grove for weddings—we think the fee is modest for so much space and beauty, and they and their wedding guests inevitably agree—but there are many other appropriate reasons to reserve Valley Grove. How about anniversaries? Quilt shows? Genealogy or historic preservation workshops? Family reunions? Bicycle club? Art shows? Concerts? Contact Ken Sahlin at (507) 645-8720.

LETTERS TO THE GROVE

"Dear Friends,

"...My own Norwegian ancestors settled the prairie southeast of Montevideo, MN. Years ago my grandmother drove me out to see her birthplace, a sod dugout in a side hill. We found the old Lutheran church on an overgrown gravel road, and wandered amid the gravestones until we saw the headstone broken in two belonging to her grandfather, the Norwegian. His wife died in childbirth alone on the homestead, and we don't even know her name. A few weeks ago I traveled to Montevideo to re-visit these sites. Up and down and back and forth on lanes and over fields I went—but I never found the farm or the church. Now, at 49, I'm the oldest of my family and should know the faces and places of our path. Time and change make it so hard. Perhaps impossible.

" How wonderful that you have your church, your fields, your trees—your sense of place! Maybe Valley Grove church can come to be that sense of home that many others, including me, have lost. Best wishes to you all and to your families as you work on this project. With all the Norwegians in heaven behind you, surely you'll have resounding success!"

Sincerely, Ellen Hadley

FIRST ANNUAL VALLEY GROVE CHURCH SOCIAL JELL-O CONTEST

Here's the prize-winning recipe for one of the many splendid entries in our contest. This one was prepared by Deanne Winegar of Albert Lea. It looks gorgeous and tastes great, but even though Jell-O is a convenience food, this takes two days to put together.

RAINBOW JELL-O SALAD

Ingredients: 8 packages of Jell-O in the following flavors

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|---------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1. Blackberry | 4. Lemon | 7. Apricot |
| 2. Cherry | 5. Grape | 8. Raspberry |
| 3. Lime | 6. Orange | |

Use a 10-12 cup mold oiled well with canola oil. Mix layers 1,3,5,7 with 3/4 cup hot water and 3/4 cup cold water. Mix layers 2,4,6,8 with 1/2 cup hot water and 1/2 cup evaporated milk. Mix each layer, pour into mold, refrigerate and allow to set for 1 1/2 hours before adding the next layer. Set mold in warm water for a few seconds then cover with large decorative platter and carefully invert ring mold onto the platter. If you leave it in water too long it starts to melt the Jell-O. If too short a time, it won't release from the mold. Serve with your favorite dressing, anything from whipped cream to a favorite mayonnaise dressing with lots of lime

KEN'S GROVE

Three bur oaks are the first trees on our prairie in progress. The grove is named in honor of hardworking Valley Grove board member Ken Sahlin of Nerstrand, who will be mortified that we announced this.

CARRIAGE DRIVING

Two carriage driving societies, The Minnesota Whips and Wheels and the St. Croix Horse and Carriage Society, have been invited to meet at Valley Grove for a fall drive on a date to be announced. If you drive, be it hay wagon, vis a vis, doctor's buggy or road cart, please consider yourself invited.

STILL IN THE RUMOR STAGE

St. Olaf's writer in residence Jim Heynen plans to take a field trip to Valley Grove this fall with his class "Writing to Change the World" using as a base for the trip the real world effects of media, especially editorial writing such as Karin Winegar's Star Tribune article "A Plain and Moving Beauty Worth Saving" (Thursday, July 13, 2000 Commentary Page)