



Old stone 1862 church finial in front;  
white clapboard 1894 church finial in back

## *Finial tops off major phase of old stone church restoration*

### Getting the history right guided restoration

The primary reason we have been so aggressive in repairing the 1862 church was the critical nature of the decay. In the case of the rotten floor joists, it was either fix the floor or stop using the building. But this project was more than patching some leaks in the roof, because we are saving an historically important site. In our case, knowing the history helped define the repair problem.

Valley Grove has a historical significance for those who have family that were confirmed, married, or buried there. But it also has historic significance for total outsiders because of its importance to the scholarship surrounding the writings of the most famous guy to ever be confirmed in the stone church—Thorstein Veblen.

Veblen is one of the few historically significant intellectuals who look smarter as time passes. Of his ten books, his personal favorite was *The Instinct of Workmanship*—published in 1914. In it he argues that the primary economic motivation is the desire to do a good job.

The Valley Grove stone church was built by the people who taught young Thorstein that the *Instinct of Workmanship* was a real phenomenon. The charm of the 1862 church is that it was built by these skillful amateurs. These folks were barely off the boat, the USA Civil War was raging, the new land had a harsh climate with a short growing season and farming required new methods, and few of the settlers spoke English. With typical Nordic understatement, Ole Rolvaag wrote a book about settlers like these called *Giants in the Earth*.

Our creation of the finial was typical of the problems faced when attempting to be historically authentic. We had a picture but no old parts. The height and spatial proportions of the finial were pretty easy to get right,

### **Join Us At the Annual Meeting!**

Thursday, April 17th, 7:30 p.m.  
at Valley Grove

We need your input regarding future projects, budget, and events; and, we'll be electing two new board members.

but the rooster (*vaerhane* in Norwegian) was a problem because of perspective problems in the picture. We used high-definition scans. We actually found a sketch of the finial during the reconstruction of the steeple but it wasn't very detailed. We asked a scholar from Norway named Jens C. Eldal, a church historian that has used Valley Grove's 1894 church in his studies, to weigh in with his opinions. In the end, we had John Maakestad, one of the founders of the Preservation Society and a retired art professor from St. Olaf, draw a rooster for us. His drawing was converted into a vector file using the computer program, Illustrator, and after one more debate, we scaled it up to what we think was full size and gave it to the metal fabricators.

The *vaerhane* has theological implications. A pope in the middle ages dictated that a rooster should sit atop a steeple. In the reaction following the Protestant Reformation, the Catholics decided that in a burst of devotion, they would top their steeples with a cross. This left the rooster as a symbol of the Protestants (especially the Lutherans). Our Norwegian scholar sent us several pictures of magnificent roosters atop their churches—and taught us the special term they had for them.

The practice did not survive the trip to USA very well. Perhaps it was because by the mid 19th century, there were already thousands of weather vanes on barns, etc., that used roosters. This would explain why the folks off the boat put a rooster on their church but a generation later, their children did not. By now the practice is virtually unheard of.

When we went to purchase a rooster, we found a southern weather vane maker and not much else. So the one we had made was produced locally by Lockerby Sheet Metal and Roofing. They were *very* pleased that their rooster was the crowning touch of the restoration project.

Our finial requirements were that it would be made of copper, had to have a lightning rod through it, and the rooster needed to turn. On March 6th, we got a call from Lockerby saying they wanted to install the finial that day. It turned out better than we hoped. In the process of making the rooster into a weather vane, they added a three dimensional look to the rooster. As in earlier days,

the Lockerby craftsmen added their own touch, which was a small copper ball at the very top. The pride in their workmanship really shows, Maakestad's rooster design is magnificent, and the amazing genius of Veblen is validated one more time.

The finial is copper. It will remain shiny for only part of this summer. Photo lovers enjoy!

### For more about the restoration

Color pictures of the Valley Grove restoration complete with an historically informed comment thread can be found at the Paris-based Euro Tribune:

<http://www.eurotrib.com/story/2008/3/10/13226/9537>

A recent article about roosters atop Lutheran churches in Sweden can be read at:

<http://www.thelocal.se/10590/20080319/1/>



*The completed 1862 stone church steeple and finial (1894 church finial in background)*

### **Here's your chance to learn wood graining!**

All the new, raw wood inside the old stone church needs to be primed and hopefully painted before summer. In addition to applying a base coat of paint, we will be graining all the columns, rails and spindles. This part of the project can only be done economically by volunteers. Therefore, we are asking for your help in doing this project. We propose a weekend in June where you can come and get trained in graining. We would then do as much graining as possible that weekend, but would open the building for anyone who really wants to put their mark on the church. This is just in the planning stage, so contact us if you are interested.

### **Other restoration projects are stressing the budget**

To remove two stove pipes that were hanging down from the blue ceiling in the old stone church first required about ten hours of labor to remove bat guano. Now that this is cleaned up, we are trying to plug as many holes as we can before the bats return. This is just another one of those unknowns that has to be completed so we don't fall backwards in the project.

We have come so far but now we have to come to a stop because we cannot justify going more in debt.

The steeple came in under budget but we were forced to address the floor problem, which led to the modification of the kitchen area, which led to removing the false ceiling, which meant new electrical service and now a bunch of painting. In addition, we have upkeep to the 1894 white church and the care of our 50 acre forest savanna. By the time we get this phase of the stone church project completed, we will be a little under one hundred thousand dollars in debt.

### **We really need your support!**

In the next month or so the government will be writing checks to all the families in the U.S. If you are in a position to make a donation from this stimulus money, we welcome any tax deductible gifts you can offer. Every little donation is put to great use. Come and check out the progress so far. It is wonderful! Our web site is another great place to check out information and updates on Valley Grove: [www.valleygrovemn.com](http://www.valleygrovemn.com)

### **Special friends of Valley Grove: Kenneth & Sylvia Nelson of Arlington, VA**

*by Ken Sahlin, VGPS Board Member*

I first talked with Kenneth Nelson in 2000 to thank him for his large donation to Valley Grove's land preservation fund. He said he saw the Karin Winegar story, "A plain and moving beauty worth saving" in the July 13, 2000 Minneapolis Star Tribune — and that it brought up memories as a boy visiting the farm near Nerstrand of his aunt and uncle Albert & Inga Elthon. A few months later we received another large donation. I called him again, and that's when I discovered his good sense of humor. We would always joke with each other about what name we should call each other: Ken, Kenny, or Kenneth. We decided that we would trade around the names each time we talked with each other. In 2002 Ken started to make tree dedications and of course they had to be in Ken's Grove. He made eleven dedications from 2002 to early 2005.

Sometime in 2004 Ken decided that Valley Grove needed an endowment fund. I got a call from Ken in late November asking me to open an account at T.D. Waterhouse so he could transfer some stocks to us. Early that December, I received a follow up letter with a check to pay for expenses to set up an endowment fund, a sample of the Statement of Principles of the fund and then a statement hoping that he was not overburdening us. He was also hoping his actions would encourage others to contribute to this fund and his wishes were granted. By the end of December, Valley Grove Preservation Society had stocks. Ken took pride in giving us stocks that would produce a good rate of dividends. On the letter of his second set of stocks he gave us he wrote "Happy collecting of the dividends!"

Our Society could not have gone ahead with the 1862 Steeple Project if it weren't for the Elthon-Nelson Endowment. Those happy dividends will be used to offset any interest that may occur and help pay for the project. Sylvia called last fall saying Ken passed. Our Society is privileged to know Ken and his wife Sylvia.

**Send your tax-deductible contributions to:**  
Valley Grove Preservation Society  
P.O. Box 75  
Nerstrand, MN 55053

### More gifts and memorials

Since our last newsletter we have received gifts and memorials to honor LaVaun Phelps, Doris Severson, Ann Lockrem, Norman Hope, Elmer Vesledahl, Madin Stenbakken, Dick Hougan, Erick Halverson, Ole Evenson and Mary Veblen. A tree was dedicated to Art & Ruby Erickson in Prairie Rose Grove.

Last fall, we received a \$5,000 grant from the Frederick & Margaret L. Weyerhaeuser Foundation. This was our third grant over the past seven years. The first grant paid for our well at Valley Grove and the second was used toward the 1894 church roof.

### Call for wedding photos

Did you know the chapel area walls of the white church were once wall papered? In 1955 they were. Check the wedding photos for the Hellerud/Johnson wedding April 11, 1955. More photos are welcomed.

<http://www.valleygrovemn.com/weddings.cfm>

### Events

**Our Country Social** is scheduled for September 21, 2008; mark your calendars!

**Churches open Memorial Day weekend.** For those of you who would like to take a peek at the 1862 Stone church, we are planning to have both church buildings open over Memorial Day weekend.

### Paint on the way!

We are very pleased to announce that we have received a grant for approximately 90 gallons of paint and primer from the Valspar Corporation. Thank you to the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation for their application help and approving our grant application.

### Gopher madness

Prairie maintenance is an ongoing concern, as the gophers are gaining in numbers by leaps and bounds. If someone knows of any successful gopher eradication techniques please share them with us!

### Join the board

Come one, come all, we are looking for active board members. There are two positions to fill for two-year terms. It truly is painless! We meet once a month for about an hour. What a great way to give back to the community. Come to the annual meeting on Thursday, April 17th to volunteer.

*The 1862 stone church moments after final installation. Note the crane and workmen in the lower left corner.*

