

Valley Grove Preservation Society Newsletter, Fall 2019



A note from President Gary Wagenbach

What a year it has been for Valley Grove, our “National Historic Place” registered with the National Park Service. Those living nearby, attending the country social and walking the grounds and trails have vivid memories of this special place.

Then the evening of September 20, 2018 brought tornadoes and windstorms severe enough to down everyone’s favorite old bur oak. Its age was estimated above 200 years, perhaps 230, or germinating from an acorn in 1789, the year George Washington was inaugurated US President.

Volunteers saved branches, removed debris, leveled and reseeded the spot. We will select a teenage offspring to grace the corner of the cemetery and edge of the oak savanna. Perhaps we will celebrate memories of the oak at our upcoming Country Social on September 15.

Board members of VGPS rebuilt a stone church window damaged by the storm, improved drainage, and added a rain barrel for plant watering. The white 1894 wood church received replacement exterior entry doors.

The Preservation Society cares for the land immediately outside the cemetery and planted prairie wildflower seeds around the perimeter in October 2017. This year volunteers added 460 butterfly-loving native flower seedlings. A managed burn in the surrounding oak savanna southwest of the churches suppressed tree seedlings and enhanced native grasses and wildflowers. During the summer, volunteers scour the savanna to remove invasive species such as wild parsnip, sweet clover, and Queen Anne’s Lace. They also help with trail mowing and guided field trips. Prairie Restorations Inc. planted native grasses and wildflowers in the 2+ acres just west of the parking area in October 2018, a location cleared 3 years ago of weedy trees.

VGPS is completing six replica lights that restore oil lamp sconces that hung in the historic stone church. Color, assembly, and mounting are underway for the iron castings. Partial funding for this project comes from a Nordic Churches Project through Partners for Sacred Places <https://sacredplaces.org/> and your donations – thank you.

Valley Grove is a well-used and visited site: Six weddings this year, the Country Social in September, and Christmas Eve Service, interment and burials, occasional worship services by visiting congregations, board meetings, visitors from Big Woods State Park, school visits, a car club visit, a catered dinner for visiting members of a national board, a dedication ceremony at Valley Grove for the new Engeseth-Rinde Wildlife Management Area north of Nerstrand, Memorial Day celebration, family visits, hiking, birdwatching, and naturalists’ visits.

The Valley Grove Preservation Society and Valley Grove and Grace Cemetery boards meet year to year needs for care of the Valley Grove site, and also accept responsibility for envisioning the best long-term care for the site, its historic churches, cemetery, oak savanna, and most importantly the history of the people connected with Valley Grove.

Please be sure to give us your email address to save us mailing expenses. You can do this by emailing your address and any changes in your information to info@valleygrovemn.org

Valley Grove Social September 15



Photo credit: Laurie Schneider

Families, friends and fans of history, nature and Norwegian immigrant culture and crafts flock to our annual Valley Grove Country Social. **Join us Sunday, September 15 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.** for live traditional Nordic music, horse-drawn wagon rides, old-time children's activities, antique horse-drawn vehicles, and guided walks on our restored prairie.

St. Olaf College musician Chris Brunelle will lead a sing-along from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. and Northfield-based Hütenänny performs Scandinavian music starting at 2:30 p.m. Local rosemåling artists and butterfly and blue bird experts will be on hand and refreshments will be served.

Admission is free, although tax-deductible donations to the Valley Grove Preservation Society are encouraged. As our Social has grown so has the number of vehicles. Please follow volunteers' directions and park only in designated parking areas. Find more information on our website and Facebook page closer to the date.

Memorials and Honoraria received by Ken Sahlin

We gratefully acknowledge memorial gifts from August 1, 2018 to July 31, 2019 in memory of Raymond Cox, Marjorie Herrmann Cox, Ardis Groff, Daniel Hanson, Dorothy Severson Jarvey, Ruth Dylvig Johnson, Hugh Kaste, Marlys (Groff) Knutson, John Lygre, Bethany Lorence, Linda Storlie, and Elmer Vesledahl, A special acknowledgment goes to two active members, DeWayne Halverson and Brynhild (Brynnie) Rowberg, both recently departed from our midst. Our records, going back to 1992, show both as very consistent and dedicated supporters of our organization. All are missed.

Goodbye to former Valley Grove Preservation Society board member, Hugh Kaste, who died July 4. We truly appreciated his gentle ways.

Buildings by Lee Skaar

New Rain Barrel for the 1862 Stone Church

A new rain barrel on the south side of the stone church is part of a bigger project started in fall 2018 and completed in spring 2019 to improve drainage and divert roof runoff away from the foundation. With the addition of black dirt, seeding the area, and the installation of an underground tile system, the runoff is now successfully redirected. The new composite barrel and a downspout diversion adaptor mounted on the downspout guide water into the barrel. It is now ready for use in watering memorial plants and flowers.



Work day with Cemetery Board in May by Ken Vesledahl

As of mid-July, there were six burials at Valley Grove Cemetery. Cremation burials are now about 60% of burials. Sales of grave sites have been good. We hear often how peaceful and beautiful the Valley Grove Churches, cemetery and surrounding area are. People visit the graves of friends and relatives, and it is common to see a couple on a blanket on a gravesite having a picnic while overlooking the prairie and Big Woods State Park or watching the sun rise or sunset.

Trees are a crucial part of Valley Grove's beauty, and although we lost the biggest oak, treatment of two oaks for Bur Oak Blight continues to keep them alive. These and other critical tasks are done by Cemetery Board members, who are all volunteers. Please thank them when you see them.

[Link to Valley Grove and Grace Cemetery](https://valleygrovecemetery.com) <https://valleygrovecemetery.com>

Contact Ken Vesledahl, President - 507-645-8610 (for questions)

Gary Bonde, Secretary/Treasurer - 507-210-2937 (to purchase gravesite)



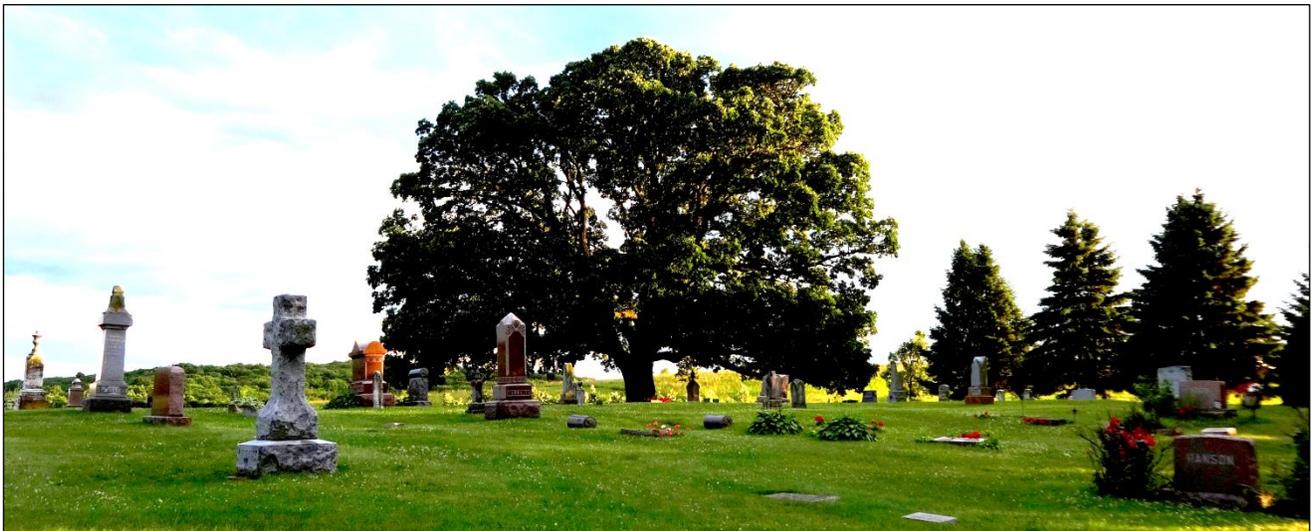
New VGPS Board Member – Maren Brogger

Inducted at the Annual meeting in April 2019 for a 3-year term

"I am so grateful for this opportunity to share my affection for the property, the history of the site, and my desire to help and learn. My grandmother, Lillian Wasner, was on the board in the 1990's and she and grandfather, Archie, are buried near where the old oak used to stand. I have visited on many occasions over the years to attend family weddings, visit ancestors, and take in the breathtaking views of the prairie. This is my very first board experience and I'm humbled to be a part of this community.

I grew up and currently reside in Northfield with my husband, Karl, who grew up in Sogn Valley and owns a small business in Dennison. My great-great grandfather's homestead was just down the road from the historic site and I look forward to sustaining the memories, traditions, and spaces at Valley Grove and the surrounding areas for all to enjoy for many years to come."

Parting Thoughts on the Loss of an Old Friend



The Great Oak of Valley Grove Church By Myles Bakke

"How much longer do you think it might live?" a visitor at our annual Country Social asked me last fall, as our little group stood admiring the stately bur oak. I was leading a natural history walk on the tall grass prairie restoration that surrounds the churches.

"Who knows?" I said. "Bur oaks don't often live much longer than this one. My plan is to outlive it if doctors can keep me in spare parts, bracing bolts, and chains," referring to the stabilizing cables, chains, bolts and other arboreal bling, added through the years, to extend the old tree's life. Now a large crack had split the middle of the trunk, and daylight shone through its nearly five foot diameter.

Less than a week later the old oak became a casualty of last fall's storm, and the base of the trunk looked as though it had exploded, shattered into vertical spikes and shards. Vast limbs slipped between the headstones, caught the tree and eased it into repose with surprisingly minimal damage on its way down.

During its long life, the great oak had seen drought, storms, prairie fires, and European settlement. The loss of that particular tree hit me hard, as if it were an old friend. As a biologist, I know better than to invest a tree with human qualities. This tree, however, was so old, and had stood like a guardian on the edge of the cemetery, and been there for decades prior to consecration. It must be my Viking heritage, but I think all great oaks should die in great battles with great storms.

To SEE PHOTOS AND read the rest of the essay **The Great Oak of Valley Grove Church: Bur Oaks and Oak Savannas** visit our website and look for "Prairie Notes."



Burr Oak Eulogy by Patrick Lundy

We watch the mighty topple in the wind; weeping at such majesty and breadth of reign now fallen. Graves are left without a sentinel to guard them; while we are called to bury acorns and move beyond.

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Valley Grove Preservation Society Officers and Board Members, 2019-2020

Gary Wagenbach, President
Secretary designated at each board meeting
Ken Sahlin, Treasurer

Members at large:

Myles Bakke, Maren Brogger, Jennifer Cox Johnson, Marlene Halverson, Rene Koester, Michelle Roethler, Lee Skaar, Gary Stromley, Karin Winegar.

Donations and US mail can be sent to PO Box 75, Nerstrand, MN 55053
GPS address is 9999 155th St. E., Nerstrand, MN.
Website: <https://valleygrovemn.org/>