

# MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 8, Issue 4: April, 2014

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

## **Mark your Calendars!**

**April 12:  
Saturday, MCHA  
Meeting , 9:30  
a.m. 115 Iowa  
Street, Minnesota  
City School  
Building.**

**April 12:** Minnesota  
City Book Shelf,  
9:30 – 11:00 a.m.,  
115 Iowa Street,  
Minnesota City  
School Building.

**April 24:** Thursday,  
Minnesota City  
Community  
Readers, 6:30 p.m.,  
Selection: Fenton,  
*Leaving  
Rollingstone.*  
115 Iowa Street,  
Minnesota City  
School Building.

**April 24:** Minnesota  
City Book Shelf,  
6:30-8:00 p.m.  
115 Iowa Street,  
Minnesota City  
School Building.

**May 17**  
Minnesota City  
162nd Anniversary  
of Founding

### **“Go Green!”**

If you receive this letter  
in paper “hardcopy” and  
would like to receive it  
electronically, please  
call 689-2440.

## **MCHA PRESENTATION A BLOOMING SUCCESS** Rebecca O’Grady Weiss

Some three hours after it began, attendees were still posing questions to resident bee keepers Howard Volkart and Hollis Donehower and master gardener Lynda Brzezinski following their presentations on Sunday, March 23. The afternoon began with Lynda Brzezinski explaining the types of habitats needed to attract and maintain birds and butterflies. With the Minnesota City area being on the upper Mississippi flyway for many bird species, local residents who provide food, water, nesting areas and cover for the birds will be rewarded with some great birdwatching.



Lynda Brzezinski points out winter feeding stations for birds on her backyard.

Lynda pointed out that considerations can be made year round with heated bird baths and perennial flowers that provide seeds and shelter for the birds throughout the winter months such as black-eyed susans, sedum and ornamental grasses. Each time a plant is added to a garden or backyard one should consider the value it adds to the wildlife. Beautiful slides accompanied her presentation. Butterflies and bees can be attracted to your yard by choosing plants that bloom at different times throughout the year to provide nectar and pollen. Purposeful deterring of visitors like squirrels and ants and only targeted use of pesticides can be important. After a break for refreshments, Howard Volkart, an experienced local bee keeper, shared historical information about bee keeping in the United States. While there are 20,000 species of bees in the world, approximately 4,000 non-native species inhabit the United States, coming here with the earliest settlers and spreading to the west coast. By the 1950's the U.S. held an estimated 5.9 million colonies of bees. Today about half as many remain while 3/4 of the crops grown in the states need bee pollination for annual crops and seed production. Crops such as corn, wheat and barley can be pollinated by the wind, and potato crops sprout on their own. Howard's information was



Howard Volkart presents bottle of honey door prize to winner.



Hollis Donehower explains the parts of a bee frame.

supported in the film "Why Bees are Disappearing." U of M researcher Marla Spivak listed monocultures, (the farming of a single crop in any given area), detectible pesticides, disease, a flowerless landscape and a dysfunctional food crop as reasons for the decline in bee population and described the problem as serious.

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## **Bees & Blooms** – continued from page 1

Hollis Donehower showed the parts of a hive, demonstrating how each was used. Along with descriptions of queen bees, workers and drones, terms like 'queen excluders', 'entrance regulators' and 'colony collapse' were explained. It was interesting to learn that bees do not hibernate and the drones, who have no stingers, actually do die after mating with the queens. It may have surprised some listeners to learn that the time commitment in raising bees might not be as much as expected as one becomes an experienced observer and handler of bees.

The afternoon ended with door prize winners receiving honey produced by Howard's and Hollis' bees and the hopeful note that Spring will once again bring us a season of new blooms, birds, bees and the buzzing of conversation of friends and neighbors in Minnesota City.

## **More on Mary: Old Settlers Meet at Minnesota City**

With interest generated by newspaper accounts of Mary Campbell's significant role in the Minnesota City apple history in the State of Minnesota (and its orchards being one of **Minnesota City Firsts in Winona County**), readers will find this additional information significant. The *Winona Daily Republican*, Jan. 3, 1880 issue located by Marianne Mastenbrook, had this story. "On the first day of the new year, 1880, the old settlers of 1851 had their annual gathering at the house of Mrs. Mary E. Campbell at Minnesota City. Nearly forty men and women answered the invitation of Mrs. C., made at the house of Mrs. Dellworth one year ago. It must be remembered that these old settlers, with two or three exceptions, are what are left of the old Farm and Village Association that came to the mouth of the Rollingstone twenty eight years ago the coming Spring. Brief sketches of the early settlement of this colony have appeared in the Winona papers many times...Mrs. Campbell made ample provisions to entertain the company for both dinner and supper, and the time was most pleasantly spent in going over the early experience of these old settlers. Everyone had a story to tell, which brought back the history of years gone by and the years of happy pioneer life." Names included in the article were Gilbert, Allen, Thorpe, Bannon, E.B. Drew, Waterman, Pike and Mrs. George Clark. Minnesota Citians Howard and Gladys Church Volkart recently received the longest married couple (67 years) award at the Feb. 2014 Old Settlers meeting, and Howard was the oldest man present (95).

## **MCHA expresses sympathy**

- To the family and friends of Loma Billmeyer Kerkenbush, 88, Winona, who died on February 27. Loma and her family lived at Lock and Dam 5 in Minnesota City while her husband Irvin was employed there by the US Army Corp of Engineers. The family attended St. Paul's Parish during their Minnesota City residence
- To the family and friends of Mabel D. Spaag Nagle, Winona, born in Stockton and attended Stockton Valley School. Mable was married to James Nagle at the Minnesota City First Baptist Church and was a member of the First Baptist Ladies Aid of the Church. She died on March 15 at the age of 92.

## **Jerry Apps Tells More Stories: The Focus is Winter**

Persons who enjoyed the MCHA November presentation of the Jerry Apps film may want to view his new film "A Farm Winter," which is now frequently being aired on Wisconsin Public Television (<http://wptschedule.org/bemoretunedin/exclusive-online-advance-preview-a-farm-winter-with-jerry-apps/>). In the film, Apps states "Winter is a season that demands respect. Insists on it. It is a season that refuses to be ignored. Winter is a season that never leaves us." Many of us will agree that this winter has been that kind of season.

## Stanley George Whetstone Details Childhood and Adult Life in Minnesota City

(This information of "the life and times of Stan Whetstone" was given to his sister, Susan Whetstone Althoff, on the occasion of Stan's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, March 5, 2014).

Stanley Charles Whetstone was born at the old Winona Hospital located on Lincoln St. on March 5, 1939. He and his mother went home from the hospital and did not get out to see anyone until late April due to the heavy snow in Deering Valley where they lived. The house he remembers was at the bottom of the hill to the ridge where the Mastenbrooks live now. His dad had four or five milk cows at that time, plus pigs and chickens. They had a bobsled and team of horses to get to Highway 61, approximately one mile. They moved up to Whitman farm on the ridge when Stan was around four or five. Stan had a cocker spaniel dog named Jigs that was his shadow. They went everywhere together, even on long walks that found cows that Dad was missing and coming home after dark to very worried upset parents. "I had Jigs so I wasn't worried."

While living on the Whitman farm Stan started school. "The first day around noon, Mom got a call from the teacher saying I had all the school I wanted and asked to come home. They did come and get me." Asked how they got him to go back, Stan said, "I don't know but I did. That darn desk didn't operate like a team of horses and a plow. Some of my classmates, younger and older were Wayne and Gary Buswell, Celia and Genevieve Jilk, Bonnie Burt (lived on 248), Donny Singer and his sister, and Haze Kranz, who lived on the bend across the railroad tracks, now known as Minnesota Street."

"We had a phone (battery operated), but we did not have electricity on that farm. During winter months I would sled down the hill to Deering Valley to get on the bus for school. I walked back up pulling that sled in the afternoon, not as much fun. It was about 2 1/2 miles."

In 1945, the Whetstones moved to a farm in Stockton Valley where Stan's sister and brother, Susan and Pete were born. In 1952, the family moved to Triumph in western Minnesota. Two major things happened to Stan while living there. The first was a farm accident on August 5, 1957, when Stan was 18 years old. "I was operating an Allis Chalmers combine getting in a pea crop when the canvas got stuck. I hopped on the equipment without turning it off and lost my balance and my foot slipped in to the auger. Over the years I have had 23 surgeries done on that leg. The majority were done in Mankato and some in Rochester." The second was a happy event. "We had a hired hand on the farm by the name of Engel Engelson," Stan said. "Mr. Engelson was Norwegian and had a small farm down the road from us. His son, Engel, Jr. and I became friends and would go scout the girls. We found two from East Chain, Mn. that were good friends, Anna Mae Charnicki and Betty Ann Patrovic. Engel and I married our girls, raised our families and remain friends to this day."

The Whetstone family moved back to Minnesota City in 1960 and Stan and his family moved to Middle Valley in 1963. He worked at Goodall in the tool and die department. When they closed, Stan found a tool and die job in Rockford Ill, working from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., coming home on weekends. When the Whetstones moved to the homestead to care for the parents, Stan moved his family into the house on the edge of Minnesota City on Co. Rd. 23. "My grandmother, Martha Stettbacher, bought that place and rented it out until I became owner of it. Grandmother Stettbacher was a teacher at Minnesota City."



Stan with his parents, Glen and Eleanor Whetstone



Whetstone Family: Front; Patricia, Ann, Darlene; Middle: Michael, Dawn; Back: Stan

Stan drove truck for Emil Kujak, worked for Winona Excavating, drove milk truck, and in 1985, he and Ann opened the River Run Truck Stop in Minnesota City. "My mother, Eleanor, baked the pies, daughter Dawn helped as a waitress." Stan and Ann had four children, Michael, Patricia, Darlene and Dawn. Michael died in 1988 from cancer, and Ann died from bone and liver cancer in 1990. Stan then sold the house on Co. Rd 23. His last job was delivering the Winona Daily news. \*

\* The complete text of the interview of Stan Whetstone by his sister Susan Althoff, with additional photos, will be available in the MCHA archives. 140 Mill Street.

## Area Orphan Train Stories Arrive at MCHA Archives Gen O'Grady

The circuitous quality of history reveals itself every now and then in the way story information originates and develops. MCHA has experienced this quality of history in tracing stories like the Fifield Mineral Water, the shooting by Robert Pike's brother William (also a Minnesota City resident and co-author of the famed book on mnemonics) of a religious journal editor in Chicago, and others. Not King Tut discoveries, but "aha moments."

In mid February, a Minnesota Jilk family cousin in Arizona attended a lecture on the orphan trains at which a "rider," Vittoria Gennaro, spoke. She had come on one of the trains to Easton, Minnesota, was raised in Rollingsstone at the priest's (Fr. Hennekes) home. Vittoria, born in 1912, "came to" Miss Lucy Norton. I then did some follow up, contacting the president of the Orphan Train Riders of New York (Midwest)). President Renee Wendinger, subsequently sent me a copy of her book, *The Orphan Trains and Newsboys of New York* which includes the photo of Vittoria, lists Miss Lucy Norton as her foster/adoptive parent, and her point of origin as the New York Foundling Hospital, NYC. She arrived in Minnesota in 1918. Winona newspaper stories list her with familiar Rollingsstone family names—Rader, Hengel, Rivers, and others. Gennaro, now 101, is identified as Victoria Moe and lives in Arizona. She regularly attends the reunions of the Orphan Train Riders.

A family relative photo in my possession includes an individual, Gaston Aubry, that I had been told "lived with," was not adopted, by the relative's family. At a recent family funeral, with the Gennaro story in mind, I asked who Gaston was, where he came from, and learned that he had come to Winona on an orphan train! Jean Gardner reminded me that Billy Streng, Minnesota City resident, came on an orphan train also. Checking with his granddaughter, my niece, Kathy Streng Twite, I learned that he had come to America via Ellis Island, was named William Bing. William "Billy" is also the grandfather of Sharon Anderson Nako. In telling these stories, I have learned that many people have connections with the orphan train riders.

About one in twenty-five Americans has an orphan train rider connection according to some sources, and many organizations, especially in New York City placed children on the trains. The children ranged in age from about six to 18 and shared a common grim existence. Homeless or neglected, they lived in New York City's streets and slums with little or no hope of a successful future. Their numbers were large - an estimated 30,000 children were homeless in New York City in the 1850s. Charles Loring Brace, the founder of The Children's Aid Society, believed that by placing them in morally upright farm families, he thought they would have a chance of escaping a lifetime of suffering. He proposed that these children be sent by train to live and work on farms out west. They would be placed in homes for free but they would serve as an extra pair of hands to help with chores around the farm. They wouldn't be indentured. In fact, older children placed by The Children's Aid Society were to be paid for their labors.

The Orphan Train Movement lasted from 1853 to the early 1900s and more than 120,000 children were placed. This ambitious, unusual and controversial social experiment is now recognized as the beginning of the foster care concept in the United States. There were numerous agencies nationwide that placed children on trains to go to foster homes. In New York, besides Children's Aid, other agencies that placed children included Children's Village (then known as the New York Juvenile Asylum), what is now New York Foundling Hospital, and the former Orphan Asylum Society of the City of New York. Some of the children struggled in their newfound surroundings, while many others went on to lead simple, very normal lives, raising their families and working towards the American dream. The Orphan Train Movement and the success of other Children's Aid initiatives led to child welfare reforms, including child labor laws, adoption and the establishment of foster care services, public education, the provision of health care and nutrition and vocational training.

<http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/about/history/orphan-trains> Wendinger's book has been placed in the archives and is available for reading. Wendinger is accepting any information readers have on other orphans—birth names, places. Most of the orphans are now deceased. Both Aubry and Streng were born in 1897. Aubry died in 1972 and Streng died in 1989. Did they arrive here on the same train?

**Please attend MCHA meeting Sat., Apr. 12 at 9:30am at 115 Iowa St.  
to plan for Minnesota City Day.**