

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 15, Issue 2: May 2020

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

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

There will be No May Readers Group

There will be No May MCHA monthly meeting

Minnesota City Day
CANCELLED

“Go Green!”

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

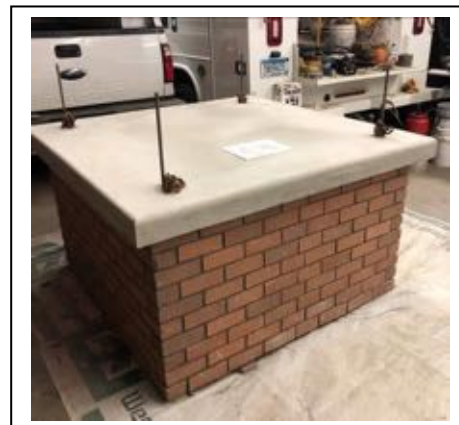
Minnesota City Day

It is with deep regret that we need to announce the cancellation of Minnesota City Day 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions. We hope that social gatherings will be possible in the future and we can once again get together to share our history, our stories, and our friendship. In this time of social isolation, the need for strong community ties becomes more evident every day.

Bell Fundraising Update

MCHA wishes to ring out a loud, heartfelt **Thank You** to all who have contributed so far to the fundraising efforts to secure the restoration and permanent housing of the 1872 Minnesota City School Bell. This effort will leave a lasting legacy for all and a reminder of the importance and the “firsts” of education in Minnesota City.

It would not be possible without your support and contributions. We also cannot thank Wallie Burley enough for his initiative in the bell restoration and his tremendous contributions to the planning, design and blueprints for the bell housing.



The base slab has been laid and work on the tower is progressing by Greystone. Due to “Shelter in Place” orders at this time, restoration work on the bell was not able to be completed in Winona as planned and the bell has been shipped to St. Paul for restoration work by a Minnesota Historical Society recommended bell restorer. Additionally, the restorer has indicated there is paint on the bell that should be removed prior to restoration. These circumstances will slightly delay completion, but be assured that the progress will continue.

We understand the current times may dictate added financial concern for many. Because of this, we are additionally grateful if you did or can find it in your budget to contribute to this monumental effort. If you have not yet contributed to this Minnesota City legacy and wish to do so, donations (earmarked School bell Project) can be submitted to:

Minnesota City Historical Assoc.
P.O. Box 21
Minnesota City MN 55959



Historical Flu & Other Notes

The Casual Observer: Winona Republican Herald, May 22, 1950 Gretchen Lamberton

“The other afternoon, I was sitting in the sunny kitchen of Oswald Vill’s house next door to the Oaks and he was telling me how it was that his father and mother had moved from New Ulm to Winona in 1862.

In 1862, the Sioux Indians made an attack on the peaceful little German Settlement of New Ulm. They killed an awful lot of settlers. Among them were my brother and my sister—they’re still buried there. After that my mother couldn’t bear New Ulm any longer, so my father brought her down here to Winona and they started all over again. It was pretty hard as they had only come over from Germany in 1855. But he worked for a while and eventually started a brickyard right over there by the grove of trees.

Mr. Vill who had been coughing and breathing hard lit up an asthma cigarette. “This always fixes me up,” he said. **“I got the flu in 1918 and it left me with a good case of asthma.** Well, anyway my father built this house for my mother—I was born here. The back end of it is still made of the original bricks of 1864, but I’ve built on a new front end. In 1864 he went in on a brewery with another brewery and he, and later I, made beer there until Nick Meyers bought it for the Oaks Night Club.”

Mr. Vill showed me with pride a certificate of merit awarded the Vill brewery by the St. Louis World’s Fair. It cited Vill’s Brewery as one of several in America whose product reaches a high degree of perfection in care of preparation, freedom from adulteration and purity of water used. He went on to tell me about how they only made beer during the winter months because it would have spoiled in hot weather. “We had two big caves dug in the hill, each one of them three stories deep. That’s where we used to store the beer and it really kept good and cold. I guess the Oaks still uses some of those deep cellars.” Living right in the shadow of the Oaks, Mr. Vill had a box seat for all three of the Oaks fires. I said that I supposed living so close he had lots of meals at the Oaks. He said with a rueful smile, “After my wife’s death several years ago I thought I’d step over and have a meal. The waiters brought wonderful food and served so nice. One of them said, “How’s your supper, Mr. Vill?” I said ‘it’s the most wonderful food I ever saw, but I just can’t swallow it because there’s nobody sitting across the table from me.’ Then I went back home.”

Mr. Vill, who is called the Mayor of Minnesota City, will be 81 in October. He has twinkling gray blue eyes and an enormous bubbling laugh and looks rather as though he had been hewn out of a block of brown granite. Maybe he’s that outdoors color because he spends so much time fishing. One of the trout fishermen of this region, he is adept at both fly casting and bait and he is apt to use both types of fishing in one day, depending on how the trout are acting.

He said with this a rumbling laugh “I thought I knew pretty much all there was to know about trout fishing, but you’re never too old to learn. Just yesterday I learned a different trick from Black Bill, the fella in Whitewater who catches rattlesnakes and is a wonderful fisherman. He watched me try to lure a big trout to the surface in a little pool. I wasn’t having any luck, and he said “You’re laying that lure right under his jaw. That’s too close. Let him chase it.” So I did and got the big fish. I guess it’s smart not to make things too easy for fish and people.” **CONTINUED** on page 3

Historical Flu notes

CONTINUED from page 2

Note: In Winona County cemetery registration for Oakland Cemetery, two individuals were interred in 1918: Catherine Stanz and Augusta Weiss. Their names occur in other newspaper articles at the time related to real estate and neighborhood visits.

Note: February 12, 1929 Toronto (AP): With twelve Indians already dead and 50 more in a very serious condition, the epidemic around Pickle Lake has reached the state where the department of Indian affairs at Ottawa and the Ontario government are in daily communication as to means of combating the disease. More than half of the six hundred Indians around Pickle and Shonia Lakes are said to be ill. This outbreak is as virulent as the epidemic of 1918.”

Correspondence:

(Jean Gardner)

“The first movie I ever saw was at the Woodman's Hall. Now I wonder how they did it if there was no electricity as Howard relates. It was a Jack London movie. Anyhow, I was impressed.”

Jake Pellowski Wins Youth Poetry Contest

Minnesota Citian Jake Pellowski recently won the Youth Poetry Contest sponsored by Great River Review and the Winona County Historical Society. His winning Haiku (a Japanese 3-line poem with 17 syllables, 5/7/5) was inspired by Winona County’s first television set seen in the Winona County Timeline exhibit at the History Center. The Haiku was printed in the Winona County Historical Society’s *Argus* newsletter and follows. Congratulations Jake!

First TV (a Haiku)

1949

*Was the first in Winona
Small and beautiful*

MCHA Archival Signage Noted in On-Line Blog

A recent search for information on Otto Vill revealed a blog entry, *Forgotten Brewery Caves – Under The Oaks*, written in 2017 by Tim Wolter and including a photo of the MCHA “The Oaks” plaque. To quote Wolter, who visited Minnesota City in search of the Vill Brewery but was a bit tentative as to being in the right place, “This unobtrusive marker on a back wall sums things up nicely.”



Nice to see our efforts being utilized. Thanks to David Eckert for leading the wording to “sum things up nicely.”



Dandelion Day Celebrated May 19th

“Dandelion Day”, founded in 1974 by Jilk descendants, celebrates the plant, oft considered a weed. Although not native to Minnesota the dandelion is easily identified and has many touted health benefits including antioxidants.

Minnesota City Historical Association extends sympathy to the family and friends of:

- Richard Alois Wessel, 79, of Rollingstone, who died Friday, March 13, 2020 at Mayo Clinic Hospital, Methodist Campus.
- Joseph George Jacobi, 93, of Rollingstone, who died March 15, 2020 at Lake Winona Manor.
- Reid Arthur Johnson, 82, who died Friday, March 13, 2020 at Saint Anne's Extended Healthcare.
- William T. Schoenack, 69, of Rollingstone, who died Sunday, March 15, 2020, at Winona Health Hospital.
- Elizabeth "Betty" Neyers, 88, of Goodview who died Sunday, April 5, 2020 at Sauer Healthcare, Winona.
- Beatriz Margarita (Kadala) O'Hara, 87, of Winona, who died Wednesday, April 8th, 2020.
- Francis "Fritz" William Hoffman, 93, of Rollingstone, who died Thursday, April 2, 2020 at Sauer Healthcare.
- Judith "Judy" Jilk, 76, of Winona, who died March 30, 2020 at Sauer Healthcare. Judy was the granddaughter of Sophia and August Jilk, longtime residents of Stockton Valley.

Standing Invitations:

- to attend regular meetings of MCHA. These meetings are usually held at 140 Mill Street.*
- to respond to newsletter content. Please send additions, corrections, suggestions, calendar information (meetings, reunions, birthdays, other significant dates) etc. to mgograpy@embarqmail.com.
- **Writers of regular columns or one time submissions would be welcomed.** These might include one-time research articles, monthly columns on area businesses, churches, schools, organizations or other relevant topics on the area and/or our history.

**Meetings temporarily cancelled due to Shelter In Place guidelines*

MCHA invites readers to submit:

dates for the newsletter of family reunions, milestone birthdays, and other events about which readers wish to share information.



Check www.minnesotacity.org or use the QR code. Submit information to mgograpy@embarqmail.com

Anyone who wishes to donate to or be a member of the Association is invited to send \$15.00 to:

MCHA
P.O. Box 21
Minnesota City, MN 55959

All monies will be used to support Association goals.