

MINNESOTA CITY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MEMBER NEWSLETTER – Volume 15, Issue 3: September 2020

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

The past months have brought tragedy, challenge, sadness and loss to many of the families in the Minnesota City community and their extended families and MCHA offers its heartfelt concern, thoughts and condolences. We dedicate this issue of the Minnesota City Historical Association member newsletter to honoring three of its long-time and very involved members who died this summer.



Genevieve Jilk O’Grady was born in 1938, to Florence (Monahan) and Leo Jilk. She grew up in Minnesota City on the Jilk Brothers Farm. She attended elementary school in Minnesota City, along with her siblings and many of her cousins. Gen completed her high school degree at The Sisters of the Holy Spirit Convent in Techny, Illinois and her bachelor’s degree from The College of Saint Teresa in Winona. She married her husband Marvin at St. Paul’s Catholic Church and for nearly 60 years they lived on their Minnesota City farm where they raised their six children. Gen went on to earn a Master’s Degree and her PhD and, over the course of her lifetime, had taught in Minnesota City, Altura, Lewiston, Winona and LaCrosse. She and Marv were also founding families of Delahanty Montessori School (now Bluffview) and Riverhaven School, both in Winona; and Riverway Learning Community in Minnesota City where she was the curriculum director.

Gen was also one of the founders of the Minnesota City Historical Association and she and Marv began the MCHA Archives where she helped plan and organize many memorable community events over the past 15 years, including Minnesota City Day and the annual holiday caroling event. Gen believed strongly in creating opportunities for connections in the community and for people to find ways to share their stories. Often the events curated for



MCHA included sharing the rich history of farming and the skills and interests passed down through generations. She also authored the MCHA newsletter. During her time with Riverway, she spearheaded the efforts for students to learn more about the area through the stories and memories of life-long Minnesota City residents they interviewed, resulting in a book and video, ‘Old Wise Tales.’ [copies can be found in the MCHA archives] She served on the board of the Garvin Brook Disaster Relief Fund and she and Marv were founding members of the Minnesota City Readers and very much enjoyed the lively discussions.

Though she had survived many health challenges in the past decade, including cancer, her death was due to heart failure. Gen, 82, died at home on August 22 and is buried in the family cemetery at the O’Grady farm.

Pictured above (left) Gen singing with three of her children at the annual caroling event and (right) Gen and Marv at an event honoring Robert Pike, Minnesota City Founder.

Howard Volkart, age 101, died peacefully, of natural causes, at his Minnesota City home on July 12th. Howard graduated from Winona High School in 1937. He was a pilot in the Army Air Corps from 1942-1945, serving as an instructor. After the war he came home and became a dairy farmer.



Howard married Gladys Church in 1946. The photo at left was taken for the "Old Wise Tales" book. They raised three children on their family farm in Minnesota City.

Gladys died in 2016, just months short of their 70th wedding anniversary.

Howard was active in his community, serving on the Rollingsstone Township Board, Midland Cooperative Board and committees at his longtime church, McKinley Methodist. He was a member of MCHA and often attended events as both a participant and presenter. He gave presentations on his beekeeping and also on woodcarving. He shared his enjoyment of events and newsletter content in thoughtful handwritten cards.



Howard enjoyed fishing and hunting. He would also tell of the time he had survived the Armistice Day Blizzard in the Mississippi River bottoms. He liked playing 500 and Scrabble, reading, and loved his beekeeping, watching the wildlife and the

birds, gardening, woodcarving, along with all the cats and loyal dogs on the farm. Howard so appreciated the beauty of his farm and woods, and enjoyed watching the seasons change.

Gale Hill was born in Wyattville in 1925. He attended school in Deering Valley, one of the areas first schools. He grew up in Lewiston. In 1943 while still in high school, he was drafted into the US Army and deployed to France. He served in the United States Army from 1943 - 1945 in France and Germany during World War II. He spent his 19th birthday in a fox hole. He served in the Battle of the Bulge and received a bronze medal from the United States Army.

He married Yvonne "Bonnie" Hinkley on September 25, 1948 at Central Methodist Church in Winona, MN. They had two children. From 1956-1984 Gale worked as letter carrier in Rochester for the U.S. Postal Service. The couple moved to Wabasha in 1986. Bonnie preceded him in death in 2008.

He was honored to participate in Honor Flight in 2008, following his honor flight he talked to many grade schools' classes about WWII. He was an active member of the Wabasha County Historical Society Museum and MCHA. He often attended events with his sister Janet Seabern, who remains a member of MCHA. Gale was a presenter in sharing his military background and memories from the war and contributed mementos to the archives. Gale died at Lake City Care Center on August 24. Gale was 92 years old.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: To carry on the legacy of creating connections, honoring the past through meaningful events and storytelling, MCHA is seeking volunteers to more actively support the association through your time and sharing of skills. We need help to: gather content and author the newsletter going forward [*Please note: until such time the newsletters will be suspended*]; to plan and implement community events; to archive the historical materials donated; to maintain the MCHA archives, located in the First Baptist Church in Minnesota City. Please contact David or Brenda Eckert at 507-689-4103.



Pictured above: Gen O'Grady and MCHA member Jean Gardner, promoting MCHA.