



City of Minnetonka Historical Society

Newsletter

Spring 2025

City of Minnetonka Historical Society

CMHS

www.minnetonka-history.org

minnetonkahistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Our Mission

To discover, preserve and disseminate knowledge and information about the history of Minnetonka to its citizens

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President's Message

Greetings, CMHS members and friends! Spring is finally upon us, and so too are projects and plans in bloom at CMHS!

As you can see, our newsletter has a new look! Thank you to Barbara Lindgren and Jan Cook for the lovely refresh. Stay tuned for lots of fun new content, including fascinating stories from Minnetonka's past, and opportunities for you to share YOUR stories.

We are excited about the upcoming launch of our new and improved CMHS website! This is a project that has been years in the making. A special thank you to Ian Baxter and Mariah Wise for leading this initiative; getting a new website off the ground is a BIG job, and it wouldn't have been possible without their tireless work, dedication, and expertise. This project was also made possible thanks to a generous grant from an anonymous Minnetonka donor who, too, believes that history matters. We will share more information about the new website launch very soon!

CMHS is delighted to welcome a new intern to the team this summer, Catherine Hicks. Catherine is currently a college student majoring in art history and education studies, and has served as a Burwell House guide for the last three years. She will be working on collections projects as well as helping us refresh our museum exhibits.

We want to share a special Dakota plant walk program that will be offered this summer. The Hennepin History Museum and several community partners are excited to offer these upcoming opportunities to learn about how Dakota people steward local lands and waters. These events are made possible in part by support from the City of Minnetonka Historical Society. The events sold out last year, so if you wish to attend, please sign up quickly—information can be found on the Hennepin History Museum's website (hennepinhistory.org).

Last but not least, CMHS will have a booth at the Minnetonka Farmers Market on June 17 and August 19 from 2-6pm. Stop by, say hi, and talk history with us! We look forward to seeing you there!

Burwell House Tour Season

The historic Charles H. Burwell House will be open for tours June through September and during annual special events.

June 1-Aug. 31, 2025: Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, 1-4 p.m.

Sept. 6-28, 2025: Saturdays and Sundays, 1-4 p.m.



Tour information:

No reservations required.

Tours are free of charge, but donations to the preservation of the Burwell House are always appreciated!

The house is air conditioned.

Group tours of ten or more people are available upon request on non-tour days. Contact Kathy Kline at City of Minnetonka 952-939-8350.

CMHS at the Minnetonka Farmers Market

CMHS will have a booth at the Minnetonka Farmers Market on June 17 and August 19 from 2-6pm. Stop by, say hi, and talk history with us! We look forward to seeing you there!

Volunteers Needed!

Serving as a volunteer is a meaningful and wonderful way to contribute to your community, learn about local history and work with others.

Opportunities are flexible, rewarding, educational and yes, fun!

We are looking for volunteers in the following areas:

Research Volunteer - Time commitment is 2-10 hours/month. Tasks include the following:

- Conduct research and respond to questions received from the public.

- Conduct research for use in CMHS programs (such as public presentations) and for posts on our Facebook page.

- Help compile subject files that can be used on an ongoing basis by the public.

Social Media - Time commitment is between 2-10 hours per month. Tasks include the following:

- Create and public Facebook and Instagram posts.

- Author promotional email blasts to members and stakeholders.

- Teach other volunteers how to use social media.

We'd love for you to help us expand our outreach!

If you are interested, contact Stephanie Herrick at 612-790-7227 or minnetonkahistoricalso-ciety@gmail.com

Dakota Plant Walks with Tanaġidaŋ To Win

The history of the Twin Cities is deeply rooted in its lands and waters. Join us for a walk with Tanaġidaŋ To Win (Blue Hummingbird Woman or Tara Perron) to learn about her family's relationship with Dakota plant medicines. She will demonstrate how to identify and care for native plants, including those that improve water quality. Together we will share and honor the sacred plant nation.

The tour begins at the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary (the Garden) at 1 Theodore Wirth Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55405. Parking at the Garden is free.

The Dakota plant walk is approximately one mile on uneven ground. Please wear comfortable shoes, bring sunscreen/protective clothing, dress for the weather, and bring your own water to stay hydrated. Free and family friendly.

Tour is limited to 20 people. Advance registration is required. Go to Hennepinhistory.org or Click on the link below to register:

Sunday May 4 at 1:00 pm at Eloise Butler

1 Theodore Wirth Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55405. Parking at the Garden is free.

Sunday May 4 at 2:15 pm at Eloise Butler

1 Theodore Wirth Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55405. Parking at the Garden is free.

Saturday June 7 at 10:00am at Carl W. Kroening Nature Center

4900 North Mississippi Drive, Minneapolis, MN 55430. There is a no-charge parking lot.

Saturday July 19 at 10:00am at Stormwater Park and Learning Center

2522 Marshall Street NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418. There is a no-charge parking lot and free street parking.

Thank you to the funders and partners including the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, City of Golden Valley Environmental Commission, City of Minnetonka Historical Society, Mississippi Park Connection, and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.



Martha's Mystery Mural

Update



In our last newsletter issue I wrote a story about the evolving mystery of a 50" x 11' mural, painted by Martha Van de Vere Larkin, that had been donated to the CMHS by the current owners of the Dana Frear house. Frear was the prominent local historian who unsuccessfully tried to get his history of Minnetonka published. The current owners didn't care for the mural and so rolled it up, and after a few decades donated it to the CMHS.

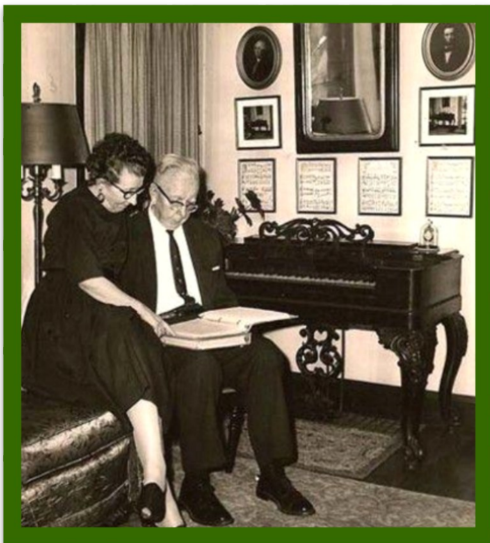
The board had the mural assessed by the Midwest Art Conservation Center, who reported that the mural could be restored and repaired, but doing so would require the CMHS to apply for grant money, which we hope to do. So, it continues to sit, professionally rolled up, in a closet of the Burwell House. The photos here are the only ones

we have of the mural when it was unrolled at the MACC facility in south Minneapolis.

The most exciting thing to discover was an article in the July 2, 1975, issue of The Deephaven Argus. The article is about the struggle Dana Frear had to get his manuscript published and finally gave a copy to the Minnesota History Center. But the crucial sentence is, in describing the Frear home, "One entire wall in the dining room is a mural of Pike's Peak, a favorite spot of the Frears, painted by Mrs. John (Martha) Larkin of Minnetonka, mother of artist Eugen Larkin." This gives provenance—proof and source—to the mural.

Next time, more about the Larkin family. And if you have any knowledge or memory of either the Larkin or Van de Vere families contact me at barbara.lindgren@yahoo.com

--B. Lindgren



Dana and Ann Frear at their home in
Minnetonka Mills

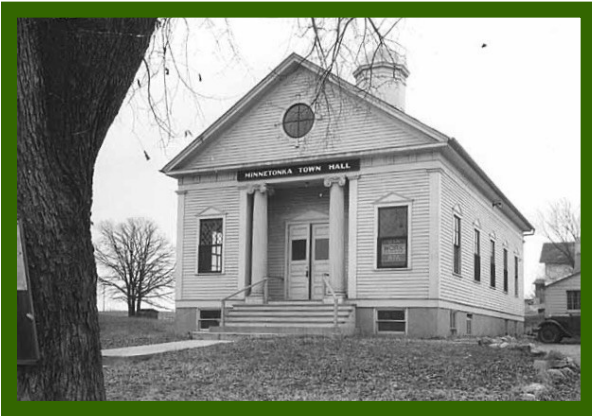


Close up of the mural painted by
Martha Larkin

Did you know...

...that the old Minnetonka Town Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places? *And* that the building is owned by Mills Church? *And*, that the Mills Church congregation is committed to preserving the historic building?

The historic Minnetonka Town Hall, at the corner of Minnetonka Dr. and Baker Rd., was completed in 1907 as a Classical Revival-style building. In 1934, a basement was constructed adjacent to its east side and the building moved atop it, with a rear addition being added in 1938. Further changes came in 1955 with an office addition, and the removal of the cupola. The columns were removed in circa 2005, and along with the cupola, are being stored by the city of Minnetonka.



The village of Minnetonka reincorporated as a city in 1968, and just as it had outgrown its township status, so too it outgrew the old town hall. In 1970, a new city hall was completed, and in December of that year, the Minnetonka Community Church (later becoming Mills Church) bought the building, with the intention of preserving, and using it.

Recognizing the important place the Town Hall building has in the history of Minnetonka the church has been awarded two grants from the Minnesota Historical Society—one to gather history and documentation and to pursue getting the building on the National Register of Historic Places, which it was in 2021. The second recently received grant will be used to have a Conditions Assessment done by an outside consultant and construction team. Later, another grant will be pursued for the actual renovations and improvements that the Conditions Assessment will outline.

The building has not sat empty since the church acquired it. Besides being used by the church, St. David's Center for Child and Family Development rented space for many years, but after a move to another location the church now shares space with a new renter, Resource West, a non-profit community agency that serves families and individuals living in the West Metro community.

Kudos to Mills Church for working so hard to preserve the Minnetonka Town Hall and using it for the good of our community.



Share Your Stories

In this new column, we invite you to share you stories, your memories of growing up or living in Minnetonka. Think schools, Shady Oak Beach, Snuffy's Drive-In, Ice Cream Social, etc., etc. Send your stories/memories to barbara.lindgren@yahoo.com

The following story comes from John Fetzek, now of Maple Grove.

Growing up just south of Minnetonka Mills, we referred to it as "the Mills." What a joyful time, memories and even the opportunity to revisit and recount some old stories. The 60's were my main time of hangin' down at the Mills: the DQ, Hlavac's Family Fruit Market, and the Variety and Gift Shop that was run by an older couple selling penny candy, and nickel baseball and football cards with a hard almost "inedible" flat stick of stale bubble gum! My most vivid and fondest recollection of going to school there was in kindergarten, in what later became the library, was the old "sunken" gym, down the stairs in the NW corner of the school. And on the opposite corner, my kindergarten classroom with all the windows so that I could stare out at Minnehaha Creek and daydream.

In 1976-77 I coached the football and girls' basketball teams for Burwell Elementary. For football we practiced mostly on the grass portion of the playground in the NW corner of the school grounds. Beyond my greatest fondness of working with the kids, was the very relaxed and comfortable atmosphere and culture of the school, staff and parents, all very supportive and embrative. After our football team going 6 - 0, we lost a very tough game by one point. The kids planned a post-game celebration and carried it out undaunted and without disappointment in great jubilation... ah, the spirt of youth! At season's end I put on a basketball banquet in the school's cafeteria for both the boys' and girls' basketball teams.



The City of
MINNETONKA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Membership Application

We are dependent on member support and appreciate your continued help!

Name _____

Address _____

Membership Level \$15 Youth ____ \$25 Individual ____ \$40 Family ____ \$75 Small Business Sponsor ____

Yes, I would like to make an additional donation of \$_____

Pay the easy way, with credit card or PayPal!

Simply type this link into your browser: <https://www.minnetonka-history.org/shop>

Select the type of membership you desire - Click on Add to Cart - Click on View Cart

Select your way to pay. Note: you do not need to be a member of PayPal to use your credit card.

You can also provide additional assistance by clicking the DONATE button on the same link.

OR Detach and Mail to: City of Minnetonka Historical Society c/o City of Minnetonka
14600 Minnetonka Blvd. Minnetonka, MN 55345