



THE MILLWHEEL NEWSLETTER OF THE CITY OF MINNETONKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CMHS President's Message

Hello CMHS Members and Friends!

The CMHS has a lot of exciting projects and events on the horizon, starting with our annual Burwell House holiday tours. The Burwell House is once again beautifully decorated for a Victorian Christmas, and will be open for self-guided tours on the following dates:

Sunday, November 24, 1-4 pm

Sunday, December 1, 1-4 pm

Sunday, December 15, 1-4pm



Please join us on Dec. 8th for our holiday open house at the Burwell House!

Thank you to Eric Johnson of Edina for his donation of items from the Glen Lake Sanitarium. The items, including numerous pieces of medical equipment, were used by Leonard Larson, a longtime doctor at the Sanitarium. Stay tuned to our social media where we will be posting photos and information about this donation, and thank you again to Eric Johnson for helping us preserve this amazing piece of history!

Speaking of social media, we are delighted to announce that we are now on Instagram!

Please visit us there at <https://www.instagram.com/cityofminnetonkahistory/>.

The CMHS is currently looking for a new treasurer to join our board. If you have experience in accounting or bookkeeping and an interest in local history, this might just be the volunteer position for you! Please reach out to us if you are interested in learning more.

Your participation will help our organization thrive into the future! If interested, please contact Stephanie Herrick at steph.herrick@gmail.com.

For more information about CMHS, please click on the following link. <https://www.minnetonka-history.org/volunteering> or send us an email at: minnetonkahistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Warmest regards,
Stephanie Herrick



CMHS Collections Update Fall 2024



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(From Stephanie's President Message)

Wanted: CMHS Board Treasurer

The CMHS is currently seeking a new board treasurer to help us manage our budget and books. We are a volunteer-run non-profit with a tiny budget, so the workload would be minimal, and training would be provided. If you have experience with accounting or bookkeeping, we really hope you will consider joining us. Your participation will help our organization thrive into the future! If interested, please contact Stephanie Herrick at steph.herrick@gmail.com.

Illustrated Stories from Frear's Manuscript - By Bill Jepson

Dana Frear's next door neighbor was Louise Burwell, whose family donated the land for the Burwell School which was built in 1922. For many years it was the main Minnetonka School and later became St Davids as it is today. A presentation was given there in 1947, shown in this photograph below. It was the earliest presentation of Frear's manuscript. At our annual CMHS meeting on Oct 1st, we watched the new presentation of stories from Frear's unpublished manuscript. They were accompanied by many of our archival photos and maps portraying Minnetonka in the 1800s. You can watch it at: (I'm working on uploading the video.)



MISS LOUISE BURWELL AND D. W. FREAR



Burwell Celebrates 25th Birthday



Frear Home Minnetonka Mills 1879-1943

City of Minnetonka Historical Society Board

Jan Cook - President - jbcook220@gmail.com

Lisa Fowler - Vice President - lisaannfowler01@gmail.com

Jim Whisler - Treasurer - jimwhisler63@gmail.com

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Sarah Schwabel - Curator ? - sschwabel@gmail.com

Martha's Mystery Mural

By Barb Lindgren

As tour guides at the historic Burwell House in Minnetonka we sometimes get asked questions that leave us stumped. During the 2022 season tour guide and CMHS board member Lisa Fowler was twice asked about the Dana and Anne Frear house across the street from Burwell's. Lisa's inquisitive mind propelled her to do a little investigation.

It should first be noted that Dana Frear (1885-1975) was a state agronomist, a university instructor, and past president and director of the Hennepin County Historical Society (now the Hennepin History Museum). He was also a prominent local historian who wrote a history of Minnetonka Town and spent years trying, unsuccessfully, to get it published. The CMHS board has been grappling with how best to get that accomplished.

One day while driving by the former Frear house Lisa happened to see a neighbor outside, so she stopped and asked if he knew the people in the house. He said sure, nice people, and proceeded to give Lisa their phone number. A cold call resulted in an invitation to visit, and two visits later, Lisa and two other board members received a donation of a large unframed mural that had hung in the dining room, signed by *Martha Van de Vere Larkin*.

The current owners had bought the house from the Frear estate shortly after Dana and Anne passed away on the same day in 1975. They didn't much care for the painting, so they took it down, rolled it up, stored it, and decades later, donated it to the CMHS. The board, recognizing the value of the gift, applied for and received a Legacy grant from the Minnesota Historical Society to have the painting assessed by the Midwest Art Conservation Center in Minneapolis. Their report came back stating that it could be restored and repaired, but the cost would entail applying for another grant. The project was tabled until more could be found about Martha Van de Vere Larkin.

As a new board member in the winter of 2023, I was tasked with doing the research to find answers to the questions, who was Martha Van de Vere Larkin? And how did her very large mural come to be hanging in the Frear dining room? Did the Frears and Larkins know each other? My first stunning discovery was that Martha and husband John P. Larkin farmed the land where Ridgedale Center now sits. And Martha's family, the Van de Vere's, farmed the land on the other side of what is now I-394. The Larkins were a Minnetonka family!

Watch for updates in future issues of The Millwheel, and if you have any memories or knowledge of the Frear, Van de Vere, or Larkin families. Please contact me at barbara.lindgren@yahoo.com.



**New Oral History interview transcription with
Charles and Charla Bennis. (Part 2 continued from last issue)**

Betty: According to the county records, your building was built in 1934, and Roy Hagen's building was built in 1947. And Dunn Brothers (People's Organic today), was built in 1901. It's the oldest building in the mills. Charla: When you wanted to go self-service, I said ... Self what? Self-service. Nobody will buy gas from us if we go self-service. Oh, that was before every body was self-service, huh? Chuck: We were the second one. Once it became legal. In Minnetonka, or the lake area. Yeah, in fact, I bought three pumps and had them standing inside of the station, and she just absolutely didn't want to do this. And my dad said, you're crazy, it's not going to work. And I said, it's going to work. Charla: That was 1979, when we went self-service. Yeah. So we put one island in self-service and kept one island service. So, you know, so... That's a good way to find out whether people like it, right? Speaker 1 It made her happy and made my dad happy. And it got down to a point where there was only one cent a gallon difference between the front and the back, and everybody was going to the self-service island. So I says, well, that's it. Now we're going to switch the front one over, too. And that was absolutely a thing to do. People loved it. Of course, there was people that were disappointed, too, you know, that they wanted help and stuff. They wanted their windshield washed. Yeah. Charla: Yeah, but a lot of them soon learned, though. They got pretty good at the squeegees, and they got pretty good about checking their oil. And it's amazing when you think about it, how people adapt. Betty: Well, when did Bennis Station start selling feed? Was that always part of it? No, that's our deal. That was, uh, what's now, 1979? No, no, early 80s, I think. Chuck: So my dad and I would go pheasant hunting in the fall. And where was that town? Silver Lake. It had a feed store, an old-time feed store, and a couple gas pumps out in the front. And we'd go through there, and I'd tell my dad, I says, you know, that might work at our place. He says, the horses are all gone, the farming is over with, you know. There's no animals to mount anything around anymore, you know. So he put me off, and put me off. And then finally, we bought him out. And we went independent. He always wanted to be Texaco. The day we paid our last payment, the Texaco sign came down. And then we were full self service. So we had all this room and the whole place was empty. So I said you know, maybe we should start that feed deal. And I said, well, let's jump in the car. We had to drive 20 miles to get a sack of corn. So we start making the loops, loops around the area and say, pretending that we were going to go buy a sack of corn or birdseed. And there wasn't any place. There was no place. I said, well, where would we get a sack of rabbit food in case somebody wanted to, or buy some corn. Well, you could buy birdseed because some of the hardware stores and stuff. Little sacks of birdseed. Yeah, so, and then they, we talked to Robbinsdale Feed and Feed. Yeah, they were the only one for a long time. Yeah. And so, oh man, they were really enthusiastic about it, you know. So they sent us a loan out, and we started putting a little of this in, and we found that we could buy a whole truckload of feed for, I'm sure it didn't seem like... Just a few hundred dollars. Before you know it, we had the whole place filled up with feed. That's how we built our inventory, actually, on request. And it was the greatest thing that we ever did. Charla: We had more fun with that feed and pet food business than we had had with automotive repair. You know, you've got people that are unhappy, it costs too much, or whatever. When we're feeding pets and animals, everybody's happy. Betty: Well, you got out of the car repair business about the time that the computers and the more complicated systems were coming in. Chuck: That's exactly right. That's exactly when we did. Because I thought, you know, we can only put in two cars in our place, and the computers and stuff are so expensive. Charla: And the required training. The knowledge you'd have to have to do that. Betty: It just wasn't like when my brothers were taking apart Buicks and stuff in our backyard. They still do it, but they do it with the 50s and 60s. Yeah. Chuck: Well, yeah, we used to think they were complicated back then. You lift the hood on a car now, and wow, it's just mind-boggling. Charla: About that time most everybody else that was closing their shops were going into convenience stores. And we had determined that we didn't care to be a copycat operation.



We'd like to have something different, which is what we did. And it was such fun. We wound up, in the end, we were selling \$500,000 worth of feed a year. And that was birds and pets and small animals, not big animals. Charla: We even had some horse feed customers. We had been advised by the Hubbard Feed Company not to get involved with people with chickens. For whatever reason, I don't know. We had some rabbit, but we did have some horse customers. Oh, yeah, we had some. We'd sell, you know, like a half a ton or a ton, and they'd come and pick it up with their truck or whatever.

Bennis Feed and Fuel around 2000

THE MILLWHEEL

Greetings from the **City of Minnetonka Historical Society**

The City of Minnetonka Historical Society is an independent, non-profit organization founded in 1970 as the successor to the Minnetonka History Commission. We are a non-profit dedicated to preserving Minnetonka's past. Our mission is to protect, preserve and promote our unique history for generations to come. In order to fulfil our mission, we are dependent on member support and appreciate your continued help.

Benefits of membership

- **Voting privileges.** You'll have a "voice" in preserving Minnetonka's past.
- **Subscription to *The Millwheel*,** our semi-annual newsletter.
- **Discounts on Society events.**
- **Invitations to our community education programs.**
- **Support the maintenance and operation of the CMHS Museum**
- **Support the preservation of CMHS's ever-growing archival collection.**

Levels of membership

- **\$15.00 Youth (ages 25 and under)**
- **\$25.00 Individual**
- **\$40.00 Family**
- **\$75.00 Small Business Sponsor**
- **I would like to provide additional assistance in the amount of \$_____**

*The City of Minnetonka Historical Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit; your donation is tax deductible as allowed by law.

Name* _____

Address* _____

Phone * _____

Email* _____ *Required

Membership Level (check below)

Individual ____

Youth ____

Family ____

Small Business Sponsor ____

City of Minnetonka Historical Society

c/o City of Minnetonka

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Minnetonka, MN 55345

Website: minnetonka-history.org

Thank you for your continued interest and support!