HERITAGE PARK REOPENED

Nordland Heritage Foundation members and all friends of Heritage Park celebrated the reopening of the park to visitors on June 10, 2012, the day of the NHF annual meeting. This marked the kick-off of the season during which all four historic buildings were open for public tours each Sunday until the Sunday before Labor Day from 2:00-4:00 in the afternoon. Due to major construction and reconfiguration the park had been closed for tours since August of 2009.

The new placement of the buildings in Heritage Park on the south end of the campus.

REASONS FOR CLOSING

At a Nordland Heritage Foundation Board meeting three years ago Augustana President Rob Oliver and Vice President Tom Meyer shared the college plans to build a new outdoor track on the area south of Heritage Park. Thus began a long and complex project that involved monumental amounts of earth moving as well as the moving of two buildings in the park, the Berdahl/Rolvaag House and the Rolvaag Writing Cabin. Step one was to lower the hill by five feet on which the track would be constructed. One thousand truckloads of dirt were removed and a destination determined where the dirt could be deposited. Designing the track was a long arduous task to ascertain that the track was of the proper length and at the proper angle. How to best separate the track area from the park area was another challenge.

Proper drainage of the park area became a central issue. During the heavy rains of recent years the Beaver Creek Church basement has been vulnerable to flooding. After careful planning the small drainage ditch has been replaced with a larger pond and water accumulating there has been directed to Grange Avenue. In addition changes were made to the rear entrance of the church including a wall to the west of the entrance and a drain just south of the door.

LANDSCAPING WORK IN PROGRESS

Many trees and shrubs were removed in the process of all the construction so landscaping is a major concern. Grass was sown and further planting will be continued in the future. Attempts will be made to create a unique, appropriate setting for each of the buildings while sustaining a pleasing atmosphere for the park as a whole. Crucial to the completion of the project was to lay new paths connecting the buildings. This was done in the spring when it was determined that the ground had settled. When the paths were finished the buildings were available even though the landscaping was not complete.

Throughout this construction period the college representatives have listened closely to all the needs and wishes expressed by the Board members. It is clear that the college is committed to the care of the park. Hopefully the reconfigured and refurbished park will become an even more central aspect of the college campus and will be recognized as the treasure to the community that it is.
electricity or plumbing. “It was largely through our experiences in the cabin,” Paul observed, “that we would learn about our past. That is where we could be together and my Dad (Karl Rolvaag, former governor of Minnesota) was not off on a political campaign. Or when Ole was living, he was at the cabin, not off to raise money to replace the chapel at St. Olaf or for the Norwegian American Historical Association or promoting his books. So it was time at the lake and the cabin that became an important part of who we are and what we have become.”

Paul Rolvaag continued

The Beaver Creek Church was brought to Heritage Park with the intention that it would represent the many rural churches on the prairie. Each one had a significant history and had made far-reaching contributions to the area it served and beyond. The Foundation authorized Rev. Leroy Iseminger to work on compiling the story of this church and organizing the information in a way in which it could be shared. He envisioned a series of eight panels to be hung on the walls of the church basement. These would show the church in its original setting, explain how this church was inspired by the home church of the Elster family in Norway, picture the ministers who served this congregation, the special ministry of Beaver Creek members, their tradition of music, their broad interest in missions, the many members who served in the military, and the story of the moving of the building to its current location. Leroy gathered the information and photos and Rev. Ray Engh designed and created the panels. The proofs now hang in the basement and tell the dramatic story of the Beaver Creek Church and reflect the story of many other similar congregations. Leroy also created a scrapbook of confirmation photos and names and was working on a multiplex to show in more detail the life of this congregation. Unfortunately, the latter was not completed at the time of his death.

Paul Rolvaag Addresses Annual Meeting

Paul Rolvaag, grandson of Ole Rolvaag, spoke on the theme, “Growing Up in the Legacy of Ole Rolvaag.” He traced this legacy through the story of the cabin which his grandfather built in 1922 as a family retreat and a place to write. Ole used it in this way until his death in 1931. After his death it was used by Paul’s grandmother, his aunt, Valborg and his father, Karl in the 1930’s. In the third phase Paul remembers going there with his father and their family in the 1950’s. In the fourth phase, Paul and his family would go to the cabin on a regular basis in the summers when his children were growing up. When the cabin had to be moved, the family chose to give it to Augustana College. Now, finally, it stands in Augustana Heritage Park next to the Berdahl/Rolvaag House where his grandfather heard the immigration stories that inspired the writing of Giants in the Earth. Rolvaag wrote the first draft of this South Dakota story in the cabin when it stood in northern Minnesota.

Though some changes have been made over the years, such as putting in panels on the split-log walls to eliminate the need to caulk between the logs every year to keep the mosquitoes out, it retained the essential “simplicity of the cabin that Ole built and handed on to his heirs in 1931.” It was a place in the woods without

Obituaries

The Nordland Heritage Foundation mourns the death of four friends of Heritage Park who made significant contributions to the park and the historic buildings.

• Rev. Leroy Iseminger
  (June 1, 1931-March 10, 2012) was a member of the Nordland Heritage Foundation Board and had a very passionate interest in the Beaver Creek Church. As an ordained pastor he had a varied career but his first love was the rural church. Over the years he served several rural congregations and saw the Beaver Creek Church in Heritage Park, the congregation in which he had grown
35th Anniversary of the Nordland Heritage Foundation

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the Nordland Heritage Foundation. In the spring of 1977 the Nordland Fest Board appointed a committee to plan for a foundation to raise funds to move and restore the recently acquired Berdahl/Rolvaag House. Art Huseboe, Art Olsen, Ole Sandvig and Bob Johnson formed that committee. On June 23, 1977 the first meeting was held of the Nordland Heritage Foundation and Art Huseboe was elected president.

One of the seminal ideas to emerge from the first (1975) Nordland Fest planning discussions was to offer a tour of the house built by the Andrew Berdahl family where author Ole Rolvaag met his bride-to-be, Jennie Berdahl, and heard many of the stories around which the themes of his novel, Giants in the Earth, were constructed. The house, near Garretson, had stood empty for some years and was in a state of disrepair, but James Berdahl, son of Andrew, had fond memories of growing up in that house and in the fall of 1976 he offered to give it to Augustana. President Balcer, recognizing the importance of this piece of local and literary history, accepted the offer and appointed a site committee. Two locations were seriously considered, one near Old Main and the favored one near the Bicentennial Prairie Garden which has grown to become Augustana Heritage Park. This is on the south side of 33rd Street across from Bergsaker Hall.

The Nordland Heritage Foundation was assigned the challenge of raising money to cover the cost of moving and refurbishing the house. In a few short months they were close enough to their initial goal of $10,000 to schedule the move. Groundbreaking was held on July 17, 1977, the last day of that year's Fest. Members of the Berdahl and Rolvaag families were present, including Rolvaag's son Karl, former governor of Minnesota, and daughter Ella Valborg Twedt, as well as James and Clarence Berdahl, brothers of Rolvaag's wife Jennie. Today the Foundation is still responsible for the house as well as the church, school and cabin, which are also in Heritage Park.

BERDAHL/ROLVAAG HOUSE

The Little Berdahl/Rolvaag House on the Prairie was ready to welcome visitors in June 2012 after being inaccessible for almost three years. The walkways were finished and the grass was sprouting. The house had new steps and railings which were freshly painted along with the front and side porches. The roof was repaired and the kitchen was newly painted. A day was scheduled for volunteers to meet at the house and to unpack the last of the boxes left from the house move, to re-hang the articles removed from the walls and complete the annual general cleaning. Those who were acquainted with the house in its original setting are relieved to see it facing the same direction it faced on the farm near Garretson.

Visitors this season found in the living room a mannequin modeling the wedding dress Jennie Berdahl wore when she exchanged vows with Ole Rolvaag as well as the vest worn by Rolvaag. The dress and the vest are highly valued gifts presented to the Nordland Heritage Foundation by Torhild Homstad of Northfield, Minnesota, granddaughter of Ole and Jennie. The Berdahl/Rolvaag House Guild appreciates this gift and also the generous help from the Sioux Falls museum staff in displaying the dress. The wedding reception for the newly married couple was held at the Berdahl/Rolvaag house and they spent their honeymoon here as well.

Dress and vest worn for the wedding of Jennie Berdahl and Ole Rolvaag.

Obituaries continued

• Dr. V. Ronald Nelson (January 20, 1921-April 28, 2012) had a long and distinguished career as Professor of Physics and Aeronautics at Augustana College. He was active in numerous honorary and community organizations including the Nordland Heritage Foundation Board. He took special interest in the Rolvaag Writing Cabin and worked side-by-side with Herb Mikkelson, experienced construction engineer, to stabilize the cabin when it was moved onto the campus and make necessary repairs. He also accepted responsibility for finding docents for the cabin whenever tours were scheduled. The Board is grateful for his careful analysis of the needs of the cabin and the many hours he spent fulfilling those needs.

• Doris Nesthus (October 10, 1920-January 3, 2012) was active for many years in the Berdahl/Rolvaag House Guild. She was very proud of her Norwegian heritage, and during her long career as a public school teacher enjoyed sharing her heritage with the children in her classes. She worked tirelessly organizing and implementing activities in Heritage Park each year for the Nordland Fest. After retiring as an elementary school teacher she was instrumental in helping to establish school tours of the historic buildings in Heritage Park. She was a valued member of the Nordland Heritage Foundation Board and her energy and many contributions to the park are missed.

• Elwood Carlson (May 25, 1921-May 19, 2012) was a very early member of the Berdahl/Rolvaag House Guild. He was particularly helpful because of his experience with antiques as the guild worked to recreate the interior of the house, appropriate to the time when the Berdahl family lived there. Ed made a very significant gift when he gave the stove in the living room to the Berdahl/Rolvaag House. Visitors to the house are struck with the authenticity of the interior and for that Ed deserves much credit.

up, symbolic of many churches on the prairie. Leroy dedicated countless hours gathering material to tell the history of the church. The Board is grateful for his interest in the Beaver Creek Church and his many efforts to make its significance known as it represents the many churches that have dotted the prairie.
An Invitation to Join

Please enroll me as a member of the Nordland Heritage Foundation. I understand that all dues and gifts will contribute directly to the support of the Berdahl-Rolvaag House, the Beaver Creek Lutheran Church, the Eggers Schoolhouse, the Rolvaag Writing Cabin, and similar projects to preserve Norwegian, Scandinavian and frontier heritage.

NAME ___________________________________________________________________________
ADDRESS ___________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________ ZIP ______________________ TELEPHONE ______________________

Regular annual dues are $17 (per person)
Contributors’ annual dues are $35 (including 2 persons)
Donors’ annual dues are $50 (including 2 or more persons)
Sponsors’ annual dues are $100 (including 2 or more persons)

Send to Nordland Heritage Foundation, 
c/o Center for Western Studies, 
Augustana College, 
2001 S. Summit Ave., Sioux Falls, SD 57197