140 Year Wagon Train Reunion Guests Visit Heritage Park Summer 2013

Linking Past, Present and Future

A highlight of the summer in Heritage Park was the visit by many participants from across the country of the reunion of the Eleven Covered Wagon Train families that originated in Fillmore County, Minnesota and settled in the Slipup Creek area of Dakota Territory in 1873.

The wagon train started with five families: Johannes and Kristi Berdahl with 9 children, Kristi’s aunt, Synева Henjum and her son, Mrs. Margaret Power, a widow with 6 children and Margaret’s brother-in-law and his son; John and Britha Loftesness and their 6 children; Mr. and Mrs. Olaus Jenson and 3 children; Mrs. Ingeborg Brandvold, a widow; and her son. They were joined a few days later by Thor and Ingeri Hermanson and 5 daughters and Ingeri’s parents, Herman and Kristi Wangness and their son. Mr. William Tobin, traveling alone, joined the group later in the journey, becoming the 11th wagon in the caravan.

From August 9-11, 2013, 398 descendants of these eleven wagon train families convened in Sioux Falls at Augustana College to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the original, incredible, four-week journey. Although each family in the wagon train of 1873 had its own homestead and its own set of stories, in a particular way Heritage Park represents them all. The Berdahl/Rolvaag House stands as an example of how each of those families lived and the Rolvaag Writer’s Cabin is where many of their experiences and emotions were recorded in Ole Rolvaag’s classic novel of pioneer life, Giants in the Earth. Rolvaag married Jennie Berdahl, granddaughter of Johannes and two of Johannes’ sons, Andrew and Erick, each wrote journals describing the journey and homesteading in Dakota Territory. These were sources that Rolvaag drew upon as he wrote his novel. According to writer Kristoffer F Paulson it was at the Eleven Covered Wagon Centennial in 1973 that Paulson interviewed James Berdahl, brother of Jennie Rolvaag and began to understand the correlation between the diaries written by the Berdahls and the incidents in Giants.

Now these descendants came together again to tell family stories and honor their pioneer forebears who gave them life. They remembered how their beginnings in

News Briefs

- At the NHF Annual Meeting on June 9, 2013 the following were elected to the Board of Directors; Julie Ashworth, Alan Berdahl, Gary Earl and Milt Hanson for their second three-year term; Ruthie Parker, John Sturdevant, Kenneth Iseminger, and Kim Srstka for their first three-year term. Eleanor Emmel and Linda Hart were thanked for having served two consecutive terms on the Board.

- Current officers for the Board of Directors are: James Wehde, president; Gary Olson, vice president; Gary Earl, secretary; and Bill Westerdahl, treasurer. Art Olsen continues as executive director.

- Prior to the Annual Meeting the yearly worship service was held in the Beaver Creek Church. Former chief of chaplains the Rev. Norm Einertson was the liturgist and preacher. Beverly Hallstrom was the pianist.

- 2014 Annual Meeting will be held on June 8 at 12:00 noon in the 3-in-1 room of the Augustana Commons. Charles Berdahl, chief organizer of the Wagon Train Reunion last summer, will be the speaker. The meeting will be preceded by a 10:30 am. worship service in the Beaver Creek Church. The meeting and the service are open to the public.
Wagon Train Reunion continued
this country were simple, humble
and fraught with hardship and
privation. Now
that these hardships are partially
forgotten, the past could become
somewhat more romantic. So it was
important for these pioneer
descendants to see that the ordeal
and life were real and material for
more than anecdotes. They toured
Heritage Park, where there was
physical evidence of the lives their
ancestors had lived, and the rest of
Augustana College Campus. Time
was spent on the pioneer farms of
Herman, Erick, Ole and Christopher
Berdahl and the pioneer-centennial
farms of Thor Hermanson and
Johannes Loftesness. It was followed
by a moving ceremony at Norway
Cemetery, five miles west of
Garretson, where most of their
pioneer ancestors are buried. Even
though Norway Lutheran Church
burned down years ago, the church
bell remains in the church cemetery
monument and this rang out across
the country side as each pioneer
family name was read. There were
times of learning, reconnecting and finally celebrating
with a worship service at the
Augustana chapel on Sunday
morning with a choir of 70 relatives.
Someone was heard to say, “It was
a marvelous event and probably a
once in a lifetime experience for us.”
This is exactly why Heritage Park
is here: to help people connect to
their past, to understand the lives
their ancestors lived and the values
they espoused and to pass the
heritage that is theirs to the
generations to come.

Anna Berdahl, Nursing Pioneer, Subject of Oyos' Address at 2013 Annual Meeting

Dr. Lynwood Oyos, Emeritus Professor of History at Augustana was the featured speaker at the Nordland Heritage Foundation Annual Meeting on June 9, 2013 and he presented Anna J. Berdahl, R.N., DSC., A Life Devoted to the Ward and the Classroom. Anna Josephine Haugen was born in 1887, the oldest child of Jon and Ingeborg
Haugen of Slayton, MN. She graduated from Lutheran Normal School in Madison, MN, as class valedictorian in
1909. She taught school for a few years before entering St.
Olaf College nursing program, graduating in 1914. She then
took a position at the Swedish Hospital in Minneapolis. In
1918 she joined the Army Nurse Corps and was assigned to
Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. She was assigned two
wards, each having 51 pneumonia patients. Next she was assigned the isolation
ward where she worked 12-hour shifts. She was offered the Robb Scholarship to Columbia University, but her supervisor denied her permission to accept. She was then assigned to a Kentucky hospital where her new supervisor (who happened to
graduate from Columbia) approved her accepting the Robb.

She was discharged from the army and enjoyed Columbia, especially the good
teachers and the international students. Her new field of interest was Nursing
Administration and Education. She returned to Swedish Hospital and designed the
nursing curriculum there. In 1922, she came to Sioux Falls at Sioux Falls Lutheran
Hospital. When it suffered financial problems, a new corporation was formed and
the name was changed to Sioux Valley Hospital. James O. Berdahl was a member of
the Sioux Valley Hospital Board. On September 21, 1926, Anna, now age 40, was
married to James, age 45, by Pastor Glenn at First Lutheran Church.

In 1927 she enrolled at Augustana College. She stayed on campus, her husband at
the local YMCA. She received her BS in 1928 and by October 1929 was Chair of
Nursing at Moe Hospital in Sioux Falls. That hospital, located at the corner of 14th
and Main, was closed in 1934. So by 1935, Anna was back at Sioux Valley Hospital in
charge of the curriculum. She stayed until 1952. In 1962, the Sioux Valley Nursing
home was named the Anna Berdahl Hall. James died in 1978 at the age of 96. Anna
lived until November 12, 1991, age 104.

(James O. was the son of Andrew Berdahl, one of the immigrants who came in
the wagon train to the Garretson area in 1873 and built the Berdahl/Rolvaag House.
As owner of the house in 1976, James gave the house to Augustana College. Anna
and James were very fond of the house and lived in it for a time after they were
married. The commute to James’ law office proved too inconvenient and they moved
into town. Anna helped form the guild to restore and furnish the house and was an
active participant in the process. When she made a gift of money the sidewalk
between the church and the house was named the Anna Berdahl Sidewalk. She
found it very amusing to have a sidewalk named in her honor.)

REV. LEROY ISEMINGER’S LEGACY

Leroy had a vision. He saw the Beaver Creek Church as the prototype of rural
Midwest churches and felt a tremendous urgency to tell its history—how it was
born, how it developed and contributed broadly to life on the prairie and beyond,
and how it was closed and moved to the Augustana campus. Fortunately, Rev. Ray
Engh stepped up to the challenge of helping Leroy achieve much of his goal. Before
his death Leroy knew that the history panels telling the story of the church had
been developed and the temporary panels were hung in the church basement. Now
the finished panels are in place and tell the remarkable story of the church.
However, there was one more aspect of this project that had not been completed.
Leroy had amassed hundreds of photos of the congregation members and had
sorted and labeled many of them, hoping to install them on a multi-plex. Now Ray
Engh, with some help from Leroy’s brother Ken, has volunteered to work on this
part of the project as well. We are grateful for the legacy of Leroy’s vision as well as
Ray’s willingness to carry it out.
Heritage Park could not operate without a crew of volunteers. Volunteers keep the buildings clean, do many minor (and some major!) repairs, work on the landscape and act as docents for tours. The following were docents in the Berdahl/Rolvaag House last summer: Dorothy Grevlos, Iona Powers, Ruth Olsen, Linda Hart, Lorna Kilian, Phyl Krueger, Liz Stadem. Those who acted as tour guides in the Beaver Creek Church were Ray Engh, Ray Johnson, Judy Johnson, Rita Elmen, Kenneth Iseminger, Don Sneen, Jim Olson, Lee Stadem. Docents in the Eggers School were Eleanor Emmel, James Wehde, Arlene Lefler. In the Rolvaag Writing Cabin the volunteers were Milt Hanson, Linda and Dale Hart, Gary Olson, Joyce Olson, Gary Earl. These people made it possible to have the buildings open each Sunday afternoon from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. from June 2 to August 25. The Foundation is very grateful for their help.

Last spring, cleaning day at the House coincided with Iona Powers’ birthday, so the morning ended with a birthday celebration. There for the cleaning and the coffee afterwards were Dorothy Grevlos, Lorna Kilian, Marj Hanson, Arlene Lefler, Ruth Olsen, Rosaeen Olson, Iona. Gary Olson was there to return a repaired piece of furniture.

Ray and Marty Johnson volunteer in the church all year long, scheduling weddings and preparing the church for each of these events. They meet with the bridal party and make sure the church is clean and in good order.

The Writing Cabin was in need of a new screen door and Milt Hanson agreed to build one. This proved to be a special challenge. Milt commented that it was his first experience building a door where the corners were NOT to be square. Such are the vagaries of working with old buildings. Over the years, V.R. Nelson (now deceased) and Herb Mikkelson also spent untold hours sharing their carpentry expertise on the cabin.

Heritage Park Vignettes

A BOOK GROUP

A telephone call came last June from Sharon Haman of Kansas City. She and her book group had just read Giants in the Earth and had enjoyed the book very much. They were interested in enriching their reading experience and had learned that the Berdahl/Rolvaag House and the Rolvaag Writing Cabin were on the Augustana campus. They were planning a trip to a cabin in the Black Hills; could they stop in Sioux Falls at Augustana College and tour those two buildings? Arrangements were made to meet them at the park on June 7 and open the buildings for them. It was a pleasure to take them through the house and the cabin because of their deep interest in Rolvaag and his work. They had many questions and were eager to visit about the book and the author.

A GRIEVING FAMILY

Amy Nelson, Office Coordinator for the Center for Western Studies, happened to be at the Center on Saturday, August 31 when a family group came through. They had arrived from distant parts of the country—South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wyoming, Ohio, Utah, Minnesota— with the purpose of burying the ashes of Joyce Kerns, a deceased mother along with her 36-year-old son, in the Beaver Creek Cemetery as she had requested. As they toured the Center they noticed the brochure for Heritage Park and became excited to see the picture of the Beaver Creek Church, the church the deceased Joyce Kerns had attended as a young person. Amy graciously agreed to open the church for them and allow them to tour the building. She mentioned the history panels in the basement and viewing them became the high point of their visit. Joyce’s maiden name was Elster, a name prominent in the history of the Beaver Creek Church. These visitors recognized names and faces long forgotten and put the burial of their family members’ ashes in a meaningful context.

CALIFORNIA ROLVAAG FAN

Now we are awaiting a visit from a California woman who has recently been delving into her Scandinavian roots. Her sister discovered Giants in the Earth and recommended it to her. In her enthusiasm for the story she has encouraged book groups and friends to read it and join her in appreciation of the book many of us know as a classic pioneer novel. She was on the St. Olaf campus and was pleased to discover that the library has been named the Rolvaag Library. She went home and checked the internet to see what other sites might be of interest in the area. In February she plans to visit her daughter in Minneapolis and would like to rent a car and drive to Sioux Falls to see the Berdahl/Rolvaag House and the Rolvaag Writing Cabin. We look forward to meeting her and showing her these buildings, baring sub-zero temperatures and unreasonable snow drifts.

It is very gratifying to know that the word of our existence is spreading and that we are therefore able to make these meaningful connections. This is why we are here!

Obituary

The Nordland Heritage Foundation mourns the death of Esther Bowden, one of its earliest members. Esther was an active member of the Foundation, serving on the Board for several terms. She had a particular interest in the Beaver Creek Church and volunteered as a docent there on numerous occasions. Blessed be her memory.
Yes!

I want to join Nordland Heritage Foundation and support its work of preserving heritage.

NAME ______________________________________________________________________________________________________
ADDRESS ___________________________________________________________________________________________________
ZIP ______________________________ TELEPHONE ________________________________________________________________

Enclosed is a check for: _____$25 Basic _____$50 Contributor _____$100 Donor _____$250 Sponsor

Annual membership dues include an individual or a couple.

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

• The Nordlander is the news publication for the Nordland Heritage Foundation. This organization was founded in 1977 and maintains the historic buildings in Heritage Park and makes them available to the public.

• Mark your calendar for the Annual Meeting of Nordland Heritage Foundation on June 8, 2014 at noon in the 3-in-1 room of the Augustana Commons.

• The four historic buildings will be open for touring on Sunday afternoons from 2:00 to 4:00, June 1 to August 24. Special tours can be arranged for school groups or other organizations. Call (605) 274-4700 or (605) 338-6372. The park is open all year.