



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 28, January 2005

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Friends of Minneopa State Park • 20499 555 Lane • Mankato, Minnesota 56001

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE FRIENDS OF MINNEOPA STATE PARK

The annual general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, January 20, 2005, at 7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. After the election of officers and any other organizational business, we will have an opportunity to **meet Craig Beckman**, the new assistant manager at the park, who will introduce himself, answer questions, and share some of his ideas about the park. In addition, the winning photographs of the 2004 Minneopa Photo Contest will be displayed. There will be refreshments too. The Friends organization is healthy and strong, but it is only strong because members come out and contribute to the discussion and solution of problems. We hope to see you there!

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NEW FACES SWEEP PHOTO CONTEST

There was a good turnout this year in the Minneopa Photo Contest, and when the dust settled all three winners were first-time participants. As always, the entries brought out the beauty of the park as well as the talent of the contestants. **[Cont., p. 2]**

PRESIDENT'S CENTENNIAL MESSAGE

The New Year has arrived. However you ushered in the New Year, it is time to celebrate, count the blessings, reflect on the past and look to the future.

Celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Minneopa State Park. In recognition of the centennial, a winter photograph of Minneopa Falls is featured on the new state park annual permit. The permit is good for one year from the month of purchase.

Count the blessings of having this state park. The Friends of Minneopa State Park invite you to learn about the natural wonders of Minneopa, the geology, spring wildflowers, and birds. In June the Friends will host the annual Open House. Park entry is free, with informative programs and historical pictures.

Reflect on the past at the park birthday party, Sunday, July 3. This will be an old-fashioned picnic with music, cake, and historical presentations.

Look to the future by resolving to support the park, especially in this time of continuing tight budgets and escalating needs. Volunteers are always welcome. If you can volunteer, please let us know. The Friends have several projects that could use help, and we are always looking for new ideas and projects.

My term as president comes to an end on January 20 when the new board is elected. It has been a privilege to serve as well as a very educational experience. The Friends of Minneopa is a great group who work to support a wonderful natural resource: Minneopa State Park. I hope each of you continue to support both.

Harriet Mason, President of the Friends

MANAGER'S CORNER

Every new year presents change and new challenges in one's life and this is certainly true within the Division of Parks and Recreation. In addition to the fiscal challenges we will be facing in 2005 the division is implementing major changes in its camping reservation system. In an effort to enhance customer satisfaction we will be converting to a system of site-specific reservations wherein customers can select the site they desire at the time of making their reservations. To facilitate that it was necessary to collect extensive data on each of the reservable sites to assure that the selected site would fit the customer's needs. Data collected for each site included length of spur, distance from sanitation building, distance from major water body, percent of sun or shade, width of site at narrowest point, obstructions that would inhibit slide out units (right or left), and more. While this change will pose some management challenges too complex to attempt to explain here, it is hoped that it will be well received by our customers.

In response to an administrative mandate to be less dependent on general fund dollars, campers will likely see fee increases in the near future. Electric hook-ups are now at \$3.00 and it is proposed that they will go to \$4.00. Camper cabins are now at \$30.00 without electricity and \$33.00 with electricity. The reservation fee has been built into the rate. The proposal is to charge \$35.00 without electricity and \$39.00 with electricity (the electrical charge is just added to the base rate). The reservation fee would be added on top and no longer built in. For group camps (Class 3 such as the one at Minneopa), the current charge is the larger of \$2.00 per person or \$30.00 per group. The proposal is to charge whichever is the larger amount, \$3.00 per person or \$45.00 per night. There are other proposals, many not applicable to Minneopa. All of these changes will require legislative approval prior to implementation.

Minneopa recently received a donation from the family of a park supporter in memory of a deceased loved one. It is the family's desire that the donation be used for the development of an interpretive sign emphasizing the importance of
[Cont., p. 4]

New Faces [from p. 1]

The winning photograph was by Margaret Smith of St. James, showing a line of autumn trees, a lawn of golden leaves, and a park bench in the distance. Second place went to Vycki Frentz, who submitted a classical view of the falls in autumn, sweetly framed by trees and colored by leaves and grass. Friends treasurer Tom Weigt took third for an evocative view of the creek in the gorge with mist rising from the water on a cool morning. Each of the pictures has good composition and excellent definition. The winners receive \$30, \$20, and \$10 respectively.

Three pictures received Honorable Mention: a light effects shot of the pavilion by Friends board member Tim Pulis, a monarch butterfly on a liatris flower by Friends VP Merrill Frydendall, and a winter woods scene by Linda Minich.

Finally, each of the three judges was allowed to name one more picture that was especially deserving of recognition. The judges' choices were by Linda Minich (maple tree with red leaves in the snow), Tom Weigt (treetops in the creek gorge), and Tom and Bonnie Frisk (stark image of a bare oak tree against deep blue sky and deep green grass).

All of the top 20 photographs, as well as others among the more than 40 shots submitted, were interesting and attractive. For example, Friends member Norma Carstensen had several good pictures, as usual.

This was the Sixth Annual Minneopa Photo Contest, but the winter woods picture by Linda Minich was the first winning photograph in all that time that included a human figure (very subtly shown in the distance through the trees). And another of the top 20 showed two kids jumping for joy. It was a breath of fresh air.

The top 20 selections went on display at the Blue Earth County Library before Christmas. The judges made their decisions, and the winners were designated after Christmas by adding labels to the library exhibit. The top 20 pictures will be on exhibit at the General Meeting on January 20 in North Mankato. Don't miss this display of the artistry of our local photographers!

MINNEINNEOPA PARK HOTEL

In the historical archives we find the Mankato Record, July 26, 1859, wrote: *"We understand (it is reported) that Mr. Porter, who lives a short distance from Minneopa east of the falls and beyond South Bend, is enlarging his already large house to be able to offer accommodations to the numerous visitors to Minneinneopa. He has had much experience in this business and will likely provide a popular resort for pleasure seekers. Its nearness to the Falls will make it headquarters of the visitors to the Falls."*

This announcement for the Minneinneopa Park Hotel referred to a house (see photo below) built by South Bend pioneer Miner Porter in 1858, the first of three homes built on this property. The site today is the first homestead on the south (left when west-bound) side of Highway 68 after you pass the Williams tank farm.

Business was presumably good for Mr. Porter in the summer of 1859. In the fall his hotel hosted the first meeting of the Blue Earth County Agricultural Association (main speaker was attorney Daniel Buck) on October 11, beginning a tradition of county fairs that celebrated its 145th year this past summer.

The Mankato Record for June 27, 1868 reported: *"Mr. Porter...designed his house as a place of pleasant and fashionable resort for*

persons visiting the Falls....He has pleasant groves surrounding his premises, he has put up swings, arches, and in fact made every preparation ... [for] the pleasure of visitors..."

Original park historian Thomas Hughes notes that the "great Civil War and the Sioux outbreak, however, hindered greatly the success of the enterprise, and about 1870 it was abandoned." Contemporary historian Gordon Herbst observes that the grasshopper plagues of the 1870s were not good for business either. Mr. Porter later made an agreement with the County to care for County charges and used his home this way for several years.

The second chapter in the history of the building came in the late 1890s when it was purchased by W. W. P. McConnell and Mrs. D. A. Swann, a teacher at the Normal School. They operated it as a very successful, modern dairy farm. Their herd of Jersey cows provided the milk for the first bottled milk dairy in the Mankato area.

The hotel building had a close call in 1866 when it was struck by lightning. Heavy rain put out that fire. In February 1906, however, fire did destroy the building. A new structure was built, for the use of the dairy manager, but it too burned in the 1920s. In 1929 the present house was built on the property, and it became the childhood home of our park historian, Gordon Herbst. But that is another story...

[Manager's Corner, from p. 2]

wetlands to water quality and wildlife habitat. We are currently working with Regional Naturalist Bob Beck on development of that sign. The intent is that it will be placed along the hiking trail adjacent to the wetland near the trailhead parking lot.

I hope you had a happy and safe holiday and look forward to your continued support in 2005.

Howard Ward, Minneopa Park Manager

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MINNEOPA CENTENNIAL: 1905-2005!

When the Minnesota Legislature assembled in January 1905. Ezra W. Gates, representing the South Bend-Minneopa area, presented a bill to form a new state park based on the double waterfalls at Minneopa. Mr. Gates was supported in this by the Mankato business community and the *Free Press*. Despite some opposition from legislators who claimed that it would be, in effect, a Mankato city park paid for by the state, the bill passed and became law on April 19, 1905. Of the state parks existing today, Minneopa was the third to be established (after Itasca in 1891 and Interstate in 1895).

So this is Minneopa's Centennial Year! And it will not go unmarked. The first thing that people should notice is that Minneopa Falls has been chosen for the image on the 2005 State Park sticker. The photograph catches a full stream of water running over the falls framed by bare trees and snow on the ground – a handsome late

winter shot taken by Minnesota photographer G. Alan Nelson. The best way to see and appreciate it is, of course, to buy a sticker: \$25 for one, \$18 for two, and you not only get into Minneopa free all year long, but also into the other 66 Minnesota State Parks.

DNR planners are working together with representatives of the Friends to mark the centennial. The celebration plans include three events, a spring fling with focus on wildflowers on May 14, the Open House on June 5, and an old fashioned picnic on July 3. This "picnic and birthday party" will be in the pavilion by the falls, the heart of the park, even though it is just a few acres near the edge of the park's 1,300+ acres.

By summer another Minneopa milestone should occur: the publication of Gordon Herbst's collection of over 200 photographs from Minneopa history with explanatory captions. This is the result of years of hard work by Gordon, collecting, understanding, and organizing a huge volume of material (over 800 historical pictures). It is eagerly awaited by friends of Minneopa.

Friends members will be involved in organizing and putting on these events, and we would welcome more help. This opportunity only comes once every 100 years!

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The Minneopa Messenger, 20499 555 Lane, Mankato MN 56001, is edited by Brand Frentz, who is responsible for any unattributed material. If you have comments or questions or want to submit material, call Brand at 947-3268.

winter picture by Minnesota photographer