



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 29, April 2005

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Tim Pulis, President Elect 388-7622
Tom Weigt, Treasurer 387-3617

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

PARK HISTORIAN GORDON HERBST TO SPEAK ON THE HISTORY OF THE PARK

The annual general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, April 21, 2005, at 7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. The program will deal with the early history of the park, presented by **Gordon Herbst**, retired medical scientist and South Bend native who has not only studied this subject intensively for the last four years, but has lived close to a good share of the history personally, from his childhood next to the old Minneopa Hotel.

As usual, refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there!

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MANAGER'S CORNER

*Park manager Howard Ward asked assistant manager **Craig Beckman** to write the column for this issue of the Messenger.*

After a winter of cold temperatures and very little snow, it appears spring is right around the corner. Early migrants to the area had to deal with the late, heavy snow on March 18-19, but seemed to pull through just fine.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Merrill Frydendall, Friends President

Greetings to all! As I sit here looking out my window on this beautiful spring day I marvel at the greatness of the out of doors. We are so fortunate to have public spaces where we can go to enjoy the flora and fauna that are so interesting and exciting. We have many such locations in our area, but one of the finest is Minneopa State Park. We are truly fortunate to have such a natural treasure so near for our enjoyment.

In January 1905, forward-looking Ezra Gates of Garden City, a State Representative from Blue Earth County, introduced a bill designating the area around Minneopa Falls as a state park and appropriating \$5,000 for its purchase. The bill became law on April 19, 1905 and officially created Minneopa State Park.

There is a question whether Minneopa was the second or third state park. The first was definitely Itasca State Park at the source of the Mississippi River. The other park that has already celebrated its centennial year is Interstate Park at the Dells of the St. Croix. The problem with this park is that it is jointly

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owned by Minnesota and Wisconsin. So is it truly a Minnesota State Park? However, since the Minnesota DNR has already celebrated Interstate Park as Minnesota's second state park, Minneopa will have to be satisfied with being third. Maybe this means that we will just have to try harder.

From this I think that you have been able to determine that this year we are celebrating the 100th birthday of Minneopa. Three parties have been planned to help celebrate the birthday. On Saturday May 14, the "Spring Fling" will concentrate on the natural resources of the area. Five different activities will take place at this time: bird banding, birding walks (bring your binoculars and bird books), wildflower walks enjoying the spring ephemerals (bring your camera and wildflower guides), Minneopa memories with a photo journey back to the turn of the century at Minneopa State Park, and "what's up" with Minneopa Creek's waters, a discussion of the water quality of Minneopa Creek.

During the State Park Open House on June 5 the Friends of Minneopa will offer a display of the 2004 Minneopa Photo Contest pictures and three programs: an afternoon nature hike with emphasis on the bluebird trail, "Louis Seppman" (aka Win Grundemeier) telling tales about the building of the mill, and a talk about the geology of the area and the development of Minneopa Falls.

The final party will be on Sunday July 3, when we will have an Old-Fashioned Picnic (bring your own) with a birthday cake and root beer floats provided. This will be a grand party with Lowell Schreyer's Dixieland Band for your listening pleasure and old-time games such as three-legged races, sack races, and more.

I hope that all of you will be able to attend these functions that the Friends of Minneopa board members have been developing. It will take quite a bit of "person power" to make everything happen smoothly. If you would like to help in any way, from the picnic races to just giving directions to visitors, please get in touch with me and get your name on the volunteer sheet. Also, if we need more bodies than the names that I receive, please be ready to say, "OK, I'll help!" when a member of the Friends gives you a call. If we all get behind this we can have a great and memorable birthday party.

Your President,

Merrill Frydendall

SPECIAL NOTICE. As this issue of the Friends of Minneopa newsletter was being prepared (April 11-13), we received news that our president **Merrill Frydendall** had suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized in Mankato. We wish Merrill the best; all our love and affection and prayers and wishes for recovery are with him.

And with **Gordon Herbst** too, who has put more time into the Friends and Minneopa than anyone. He had heart problems in late March and needed a triple bypass operation in Rochester. Although still weak, Gordon has made a remarkable recovery and with his characteristic determination plans to give the scheduled program for the Friends on April 21.

[Craig Beckman, from page one]

Robins are back in full force throughout the woods and probably your own lawns. Typically the first flights of migrants arriving in the area are flocks of male robins in search of territory. Once the females arrive, courtship and territorial defense begin almost immediately. We've all been outside this time of year only to be surprised by two robins recklessly whizzing by us, only inches from each other and only inches from our heads. Typically these are two males, fighting for territory and hoping to impress onlooking females. Toward the middle of April females will begin to choose their mates and nest building will soon follow.

One of the earliest migrants into the area is the male Red-winged Blackbird. The males arrive first to search and fight for the most productive nesting habitats. Once established, the males will sit in their territory and sing their dominance. A few weeks later, the females arrive to look over the territories the males have claimed and choose the one that offers them the best chance at rearing a successful brood. In late March a male had claimed the trailhead marsh, but no female had arrived yet.

Spring is also the mating season for the wild turkey. The heads of male turkeys are turning from winter drab to brilliant blues and reds and their feathers are becoming increasingly iridescent and shiny. Look for them in the next few weeks on field edges, tails fanned out and strutting their stuff. The falls areas has started to produce some early morning gobbling.

Over the next four to six weeks, a wave of migrant birds will enter the area. Some will stay, and others will continue on, looking for the perfect nesting habitat. Toward the end of the month, fawns and coyote pups will be born, and whitetail deer will begin antler

development. It's an excellent time of year to be out and about.

Craig Beckman, Assistant Manager
Minneopa State Park

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MINNEOPA AT WAR – HISTORY PUZZLE

If you put the word "Minneopa" in Google, you'll find 992 entries! Most of them are predictable, but there are a few surprises.

One odd connection is to Navsource Naval History and their records of "ships of the US Navy." The ship that caught my eye was the SP-1701 "Minneopa." SP is section patrol craft, and the description given indicates that this ship was 36' long, 8' wide, with a draft of 2.7' and a speed of 7 knots. The Navy acquired it on Oct. 9, 1917. The official Navy history source describes it as a "motor boat" that was laid down in 1902. Those are the "hard facts."

The accompanying material explains that SP ships were civilian vessels that were "pressed" into Naval service (loaned by the owners or bought by the Navy) to patrol U.S. waters during World War I.

The puzzle is whether this "Minneopa" has a local connection, and if so, what. Does anyone know any old sailors to ask?

SPECIAL APPEAL

The Centennial events are coming and the Friends have an important part to play in celebrating this anniversary. The first date is Saturday, May 14. Now is the time to help the park – volunteer to assist at the Spring Fling. It will be enjoyable and helpful too. Call an officer and pitch in!

THE RAMBLING EDITOR: MONEY AND THE ENVIRONMENT – WHAT WORKS

John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and many others said that wilderness was good for the soul and needed no further justification. In our country today it does; the dollars and cents approach is in command. Economics appears to dominate environmental decision making and largely disregards non-economic concerns. The “intangible benefits” of wilderness do not count.

People who are working to protect our natural environment often feel frustrated when they are run over by money arguments. In a nutshell, we hear that there isn’t enough money to go around, and because of that we have to put our priorities on people, jobs, education, and so forth. This isn’t the whole picture, and we may even try to argue about the intangibles that protecting nature gives us. But hard numbers with dollar signs in front of them usually win out, and the environment has to wait, and suffer.

But there is a new line of argument that meets this challenge head-on by showing that good environmental policy can pay off in dollars and cents! It is called “environmental economics,” and aims to prove that in many cases preserving wilderness areas may be the most profitable use of the land.

The economic value of recreational businesses, rafting for example, is the most obvious example. More subtle, and much more significant, are what are called “ecosystem services.” An example occurred in 1989 when the City of New York was ordered to build a water filtration plant for clean water at a cost of \$8 billion plus \$300 million a year operating expense. Instead, with court approval, the city spent \$2 billion restoring and protecting its watershed in the Catskill Mountains, and let a 2,000-square-mile forest do the work of the filtration plant.

The value of that forest is \$6 billion in capital, plus \$300 million a year.*

There is much more to this, and many aspects still need to be studied and figured out. But it is good to know that wise environmental policy can pay off economically.

At the same time, I still think that John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and many others were right too: wilderness has intangible values that may be worth preserving regardless of cost.

* Bruce Barcott, “As a Matter of Fact, Money Does Grow on Trees,” Outside Magazine, March 2005, pp 105ff.

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COMING EVENTS

April 21. Program on early Minneopa history by Gordon Herbst, 7 p.m., North Mankato.

May 14. Spring Fling, **Centennial** events, wildflower walk, bird walk, historical photo display, discussion of water quality in creek.

June 4. 7th Annual Minneopa Bird Count. 7 a.m. at the Picnic Area parking lot on the prairie side. More info – Brand, 947-3268.

June 5. Open House Day, **Centennial** events sponsored by the Friends: nature walk, Lewis Seppman re-enactment, geology of the falls walk.

July 3. Old-Fashioned Picnic, **Centennial** event with all the trimmings.

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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.