



# MINNEOPA

# MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

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## Gordon Herbst, Author of the New Book on Minneopa, To Speak at Friends Annual Meeting

The annual election meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, January 17, 2008, at 7 p.m.** in the Police Annex of the North Mankato City Hall at 1004 Belgrade Avenue in North Mankato, our usual meeting room.

Gordon Herbst, long-time officer of the Friends, tireless worker for the benefit of the park, and now historian too, will talk about the early days at Minneopa, including the big Methodist-Episcopal camp meeting in the 1860s.

Refreshments will be served as usual. We hope to see you there!

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Outgoing President Harriet Mason, run ragged with Gustavus Arboretum and other concerns, was unable to write a final note to the Friends. But in a phone call she expressed her gratitude to everyone who has helped out in the Friends' important work for Minneopa. It should be pointed out how much Harriet herself has done. She has been an active, reliable officer and board member since 2003. This was her second term as president, and she will remain on the governing board in 2008 in the past president slot. Harriet Mason has set an example of public service for us to follow.

## Manager's Corner

By Howard Ward, manager of Minneopa State Park

December 26th found me and thousands of others in Southern Minnesota behind the wheel pushing the snow dumped on us over the holidays. The following morning, after a couple of packing laps, the trail groomer was connected to the trusty Yamaha snowmobile and our ski trail was groomed and tracked. Some may not be aware that hiking on groomed [See Manager, p. 2]

**[Manager, from p. 1]** cross-country ski trails is prohibited. Please help me get the word out. I assume some re-education will be necessary after a number of seasons with little snow.

After returning the equipment to its proper storage I proceeded to the park office to find a line of three vehicles awaiting my arrival. These were the first cross-country ski trail passes sold in over two years. Our snowfall, while barely adequate yet for good skiing conditions, sets the stage for what could potentially be a banner year for outdoor recreational activity at Minneopa. Only time will tell.

The 2008 vehicle permits will go on sale January 1 around the state and it appears that the mugs will arrive at some later date. Gordon's book has been selling well with 14 sold as of today. As you may know, the Division of Parks has been moving towards differential pricing of camping based on campsite occupancy rates. Camping rates at Minneopa will increase in 2008 from \$16.00 to \$18.00 for a non-electric site. This bodes well for the park as priorities are often established based on visitation and revenue generation.

With the New Year come the dreaded year-end procedures you've heard me speak of so many times before: the inventories, accounting procedures, and year-end reports. It's difficult not to think about the fact that this will be the last time I will be doing this. For those of you who haven't heard, my intention is to retire in April of 2008. I will save my farewells for the next issue. Meanwhile, dust off those skis and pay us a visit.

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**Alleven of Delevan Wins Photo Contest**

A classic picture of Lower Minneopa Falls in early winter won first place in the 2007

Minneopa Photo Contest for Warren Alleven of rural Delevan. In fact, 2007 was the year of falls portraits. No fewer than five of the 10 honored photographs showed the park's premier feature.

Polly Brown won second place, however, with a shot of the frozen creek, titled "Winter Wonderland," and third place went to Kay Helms for another classic shot: "Autumn at the Mill."

The top three pictures receive money awards of \$50, \$30, and \$20. In addition the three judges named four Honorable Mentions and three Judge's Choices.

First place winner Warren Alleven had another picture of the falls that got Honorable Mention. Julie Warner had two fine pictures of the falls, one Honorable Mention and one Judge's choice. Several others of the top 20 were of the falls. It should be noted that after all these years (the park is 100 years old, and visitors have been coming to the falls much longer than that) it isn't that easy to produce an impressive picture of it. But nature is always different, always changing and we had some good photographers this year who make us remember how beautiful the park and the falls are.

The other winners were Ashley Pagel's interesting perspective of railroad tracks running off into the distance titled "Shining Rails" (Honorable Mention), Edwyn Frydendall's Honorable Mention for "Flutes," a shapely mushroom, and Merrill Frydendall's amazing Judge's Choice for "Nighthawk Protecting Her Young," a very close shot of the bird on her nest.

The top 20 photographs have been on display at the Blue Earth County Library since December and will be shown at the annual meeting as well. They are worth coming for by themselves, not even mentioning annual elections and Gordon Herbst's talk.

## **Minneopa State Park and the DM&E Railroad**

By Tim Pulis, past president of the Friends

In the last issue of the Minneopa Messenger, I wrote about the Union Pacific (UP) Railroad and its history in the Minneopa area. The UP tracks are the ones that run by the falls. This time I will discuss the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern (DM&E) Railroad that runs along the Minnesota River right below the campground and cuts that part of the park in half.

This rail line's history is not nearly as dramatic as the Union Pacific's. There was no depot or town site or really any connection to the park except for passing through (and this land was not joined to the park until 1970). Its development is interesting though. In 1869 the Winona-St. Peter Railroad was in Janesville heading west toward Mankato. Hundreds of workers were grading, filling, laying track, and building bridges. The railroad was under pressure to be at certain points by certain dates as dictated by state law concerning land grants. On December 31, 1870 the line reached Main Street in Mankato. The Winona to Mankato line was complete.

At this point a huge debate unfolded on how to proceed to New Ulm. Either follow the Minnesota River directly from Mankato or leave Mankato a branch line, cross the river to St. Peter near Kasota, and then cross the river again to reach New Ulm. After much lobbying by both towns, the St. Peter option won out. The building of two immense bridges began. As the years went by Mankato got much more of the rail business. That, along with the expense of maintaining the St. Peter to New Ulm line, led to the decision to build a new line from Mankato to New Ulm. This was completed in May of 1900 and was called the Mankato and New Ulm Railway

Co. The W&StP and the M&NU merged into the C&NW almost immediately. When one delves into railroad history get ready for a bowl of alphabet soup. It remained the Chicago and Northwestern until 1986 when it became the Dakota Minnesota and Eastern.

As far as I know Minneopa State Park and this railroad have had a compatible relationship. To get past the tracks to the river has been possible by going under the trestles. There are only 5-6 trains a day coming through the park. The times that I've stayed in the camper cabin mid-winter, it's been fun to run to the edge of the cliff as the headlights of the engine, shining through the falling snow, lead the boxcars clicking and clacking just 50 feet below. There's a certain romance to the occasional train rolling through. What concerns me is the effect on the park if the DM&E, soon to be part of the Canadian Pacific, develops its goal of hauling coal from Wyoming. I've read where there could be 34 mile-long trains a day or one every 43 minutes.

My wife and I camped at a state park near Hood River, Oregon. We went to bed at 10 pm and fell asleep. At 11:30 the first train came through at high speed with air horn blasting. I honestly thought it was coming right through the tent. We both woke up with chest pains from panic attacks every two hours when a new train came through.

If the Canadian Pacific brings coal trains, the good things are there will hopefully be new quieter engines, smoother ribbon rail, and a whistle-free zone in the park. Another fortunate thing is that the planned switching yard for the Minneopa Park area was moved to New Ulm. There are a lot of questions of just how it will all play out and when. Let's hope our park is not adversely affected.

## **“Minneinneopa - 150 Year History - Minneopa State Park”**

Book review by Tim Pulis

It's Christmas morning and I've just gotten back from a hike down into the Minneopa Creek gorge to view the frozen falls at close range. Each year the falls freezes into a different shape depending upon the variables of temperature and water flow. Today's display was spectacular.

It seems like a good time to express my thoughts on Gordon Herbst's recently published book titled "Minneinneopa -150 Year History - Minneopa State Park". This book is a must for local history buffs and those who have a love for the Minneopa Park area. It is really two books in one. First, it's a perfect coffee table book for casual browsing, with 150 photos and 10 historical maps in its 112 pages. But alas, it's also an in-depth excursion into topics ranging from the demise of the passenger pigeon to the creation of the park, the hunt for the James-Younger gang, the role of fire in the ecosystem, and much more.

Most books of this type are by authors who know little of their subject, but research it diligently trying to come up with enough material to fill its pages. In Gordon Herbst's case, however, it was having a mountain of information collected during a lifetime of exploring and observing the park and trying to narrow it down to a concise book. Gordon was actually raised in an old farmhouse built near the foundation of the original Minneinneopa Park Hotel a half mile from Minneopa Falls.

What's great is that Gordon knew many of the people mentioned in the book and has actually seen the decades of change himself. He describes the park from many vantage points: the historian, the botanist, the birdwatcher, the geologist,

the photographer, and the teacher. One photograph taken by Gordon in 1948 from Pigeon Hill (Benco) shows two rows of rocks out on the prairie. This photo couldn't be replicated today because trees have gotten too big. The photo shows an airport runway on the Seppman farm which is now part of Minneopa Park. Without the photo now described in the book, this fact would likely have been lost in the fog of undocumented history. The book contains many fascinating facts such as this.

"Minneinneopa" is the first picture book on a state park in Minnesota. Gordon's book is a treasure about one of our local area's treasures – Minneopa State Park. The book can be purchased at Barnett Photography, the Blue Earth County Historical Society, and the Minneopa Park office.

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### **Two Ways To Help Minneopa**

**Pay Your Dues** (for 2008, if you haven't already). \$10 single, \$15 family, larger amounts are welcome. Contributions to the Friends are tax-deductible and help us with the various projects such as putting up hikers' benches, outfitting the camper cabin, and sponsoring Open House programs.

**Volunteer Your Time:** Become an officer or governing board member, bring in your own ideas and dreams for the park and see what can be done. 2008 will be a year of transition at Minneopa with Howard's retirement and a new manager. We should be ready to help.

*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.*

