

Upcoming Open Houses

April 13, 2024
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

April 27, 2024
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

May 4, 2024
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

May 11, 2024
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

~Closed~
Memorial Day Weekend

The Record

Museum Opens!

Saturday, April 13th ~ 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Special Tornado Anniversary Open House Event

May 4th, 2024 ~ 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

May 6th, 2024, is the 59th Anniversary of the Fridley tornado disaster! Please join us for a special open house on May 4th, 2024. Fridley Historical Society Board Member, author, and tornado expert Al Taylor will be on hand sharing stories about the 1965 tornado outbreak that devastated Fridley, Spring Lake, Mounds View, and Golden Valley. Check out our tornado display and photo collection. See firsthand the devastation that these tornados caused. Three out of four Fridley homes were damaged and one in four homes were completely destroyed during this fateful night. It was truly a night to remember and one that will never be forgotten!

The tornado approaching Moore Lake



Fridley Terrace



Fridley Historical Society Board Meeting ~ February 8, 2024

Attendance: Mark Bonesteel, Pat Barrett, Dorothy Gargaro, Mary Ann Hoffman, Mary Sue Meyers, Noreen Rickenbach, Mary Ann Hoffman, Kathy Smith, Al Taylor, Rob Zelenak.

Treasurer’s Report: The financial summary report was given for the month of January. The motion was approved by Rob Zelenak and seconded by Al Taylor. Motion carried.

Secretary’s Report: None submitted

Membership Report: Two new members joined and 19 renewed. At the end of 2023, there were 139 members.

Events: Valentine Bingo, Fridley 49er Day, and the Hall of Fame Lasagna dinner were discussed.

Maintenance Report: Discussions on completing the roof and a breaker causing heat loss were discussed. Board members were given the date for cleaning up the museum.

Other Business: The museum now has more control of the website. Mark Bonesteel is working with the Fridley School Superintendent to set up a meeting to discuss the museum’s operations.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 PM.

~Kathy Smith

Fridley Historical Society Board Meeting ~ March 6, 2024

Attendance: Mark Bonesteel, Dorothy Gargaro, Mary Ann Hoffman, Mary Sue Meyers, Noreen Rickenbach, Kathy Smith, Al Taylor, Rachel Westhoff, Rob Zelenak.

Treasurer’s Report: The financial summary report was given for the month of February. The motion was approved by Al Taylor and seconded by Rob Zelenak. Motion carried.

Secretary’s Report: Motion to approve February 8, 2024, report was made by Mary Sue Meyers and seconded by Dorothy Gargaro. Motion carried.

Membership Report: Noreen Rickenbach discussed ideas on how to reengage members that have not renewed their membership. She will be implementing novel approaches to bring in former and new members.

Events: Tornado Remembrance, Fridley 49er Day, and the Hall of Fame lasagna dinner details were discussed.

Maintenance Report: Al Taylor discussed all the maintenance items that were taken care of last month. The flag pole problem of not being able to lower it was discussed. There is no easy fix for this problem.

Other Business: Mark Bonesteel met with the Fridley School District’s Superintendent who stated that the school district is in the process of rewriting the lease.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 PM.

~Kathy Smith

Officers

- President:** Mark Bonesteel 763-331-1885
- Vice President:** Mary Ann Hoffman 763-780-5911
- Past President:** Dorothy Gargaro 712-709-2840
- Secretary:** Kathy Smith 763-432-5633
- Treasurer:** Judy Anderson 612-499-0113

Other Board Members

- Archives Chair:** Rob Zelenak robzelenak1993@gmail.com
- Programs and Events Chair:** Mary Sue Meyers 763-717-7987
- Grants Chair:** Mary Ann Hoffman 763-780-5911
- Maintenance Chair:** Al Taylor 763-422-3878
- Membership Chair:** Noreen Rickenbach 763-443-1269
- Newsletter Chair:** Rachel Westhoff rachel.westhoff@gmail.com
- Social Media Chair:** Pat Barrett
- Member at Large:** Lori Greiner

FridleyHistoricalSociety.org

✉ FHS1949@outlook.com

President's Corner *by Mark Bonesteel, President*

Hello everyone and Happy Spring! The winter season flew by this year like none other and certainly was one for the record books! Your Fridley Historical Society Board has been busy planning events for 2024 and looking forward to our future here in the community.

Our building was built in 1931. A few times over the years, it has had to be re-shingled. Late last year we found several missing shingles on various sides of the roof. We contacted our insurance agent with the League of Minnesota Cities. We found out that our insurance only covers the interior of the building, and nothing externally. This insurance has been in place since we moved into the building in 1989.

The Fridley School District had the roof repaired and shingled in January. A new layer of plywood was added over the original woodwork to add strength and longevity to the roof. The Fridley School District paid for the roof repair and shingling, and we are very grateful for the District's attention in resolving this problem.

The Fridley Historical Society sign quit working late last fall. It had not been lighting up and was difficult to read at night. The Fridley School District had an electrician check our sign out and found that the internal bulbs had burned out and needed replacement. The electrician was also working on the Hayes School sign at the same time and addressing some issues that the school was having. Our sign was updated to LED lighting and repaired. The School District paid for that repair as well.

In February, I met with Fridley School Superintendent Brenda Lewis and District Facilities Manager Jonathan Spitzer regarding our lease agreement. We have a five year lease and our current lease is due for renewal in July, 2024. Superintendent Lewis asked if our society wished to renew our lease and I informed her that we did. Superintendent Lewis advised me that the school district had some concerns about our current lease and some of the language in the lease. Specifically what repairs and upkeep that the Society was responsible to maintain, and what the School District would be required to maintain. I was advised that a new lease proposal would be forwarded to our society for review.



We also added two new Board Members in February. Kathy Smith agreed to become our Secretary. Kathy grew up in Fridley as a member of the Johanson family. Kathy's grandfather Hans Johanson moved to Fridley in the 1800s. Her father Charles was one of the original members of our society. Pat Barrett volunteered to become our new Social Media Board Member. Pat is a long time golf coach in Fridley and has served as Athletic Director. Pat graduated from Fridley High School in 1975. Both Kathy and Pat are huge additions to our society and bring our Board of Directors to ten members.

Nominations are being taken for the next class of the Fridley Hall of Fame. Application packets can be picked up at the museum. The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies take place during our fall lasagna dinner fundraiser in October.

Finally, the Historical Society has teamed up with the 49er Day Committee to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Fridley's incorporation. Look for further information in our next newsletter which will be out the first week in June! Enjoy the weather and stay safe friends ~ *Mark Bonesteel*

Gordon Christenson, September 2012

by Mary Ann Hoffman, VP and Grants Chair

The following is a summary of another of the interviews collected in 2012 as part of our grant project regarding the midcentury suburban development of Fridley.

Born in 1937, Gordon grew up in Fridley on Mississippi Street. His family had lived in Fridley for three generations, unlike the many people who moved to Fridley in the '30s and '40s.

In his interview, he described the rural nature of Fridley during his childhood by stating, "It seems we spent a lot of time down at Rice Creek. That was all cow pasture....In my backyard was a fence and that was all cow pasture from there to Osborne Road."

He added that there were perhaps only three houses on either side of Mississippi Street between his house and Central Avenue. (Highway 65 as we know it today didn't exist at that time.)

At one time, his father, Elder Christenson, managed one of the farms in the area – the C. N. Nelson farm, called Clover Leaf Farm. According to Gordon, "C. A. Nelson owned a large, beautiful home on East River Road that has been torn down. He owned three farms in Fridley: one on Mississippi Street between University Avenue and the railroad tracks on the south side of the street, called Tipperary Farm; one sat on the south side of Rice Creek in the area where Jackson Street is." He didn't recall the third one.

Gordon attended the two-room Fridley School for grades one through four and reminisced about paying a nickel to watch movies that were shown in the basement on Saturdays. After completing fourth grade, Gordon attended Braemer School in North Minneapolis, the Twin City Arsenal where classrooms were leased following World War II, Marshall High School in southeast Minneapolis, a grade school in Columbia Heights called Oakwood, and finally Columbia Heights High School for grades 9 - 12, graduating in 1955. The experience of attending multiple schools that Gordon described was repeated in other interviews. Being bused to school became necessary, leading Gordon's dad, Elder, and his uncle Art Christenson to start a bus company. Gordon's first job was cleaning and gassing up buses, for which he received no pay. Later he worked at Theisen's Market which was located in the Christenson strip mall.

The leisure activities described by Gordon included eating at the Gingham Café on Central Avenue, especially after football and basketball games; ice skating; riding his bike and later a motor scooter; roller skating at Ordman's in Northeast Minneapolis; and watching movies at the Heights, Hollywood, and Ritz theaters.

An important part of Gordon's teen years was joining an auto club, the Drag-n-Wheels, which was based in Columbia Heights. Eventually Gordon and other local boys formed their own club, the Toppers, which was sponsored by the Fridley police and advised by officer Bob Cook. Gordon raced at Twin City Speedway and attended a lot of dances sponsored by the Toppers.

Gordon married a local girl, Carol Sherer, who lived just up Mississippi Street. The small-town flavor of Fridley shows when Gordon said, "I just met her, I don't really remember meeting her. I don't remember starting to date her, we just kind of got together when...I was a sophomore and she was in the 8th grade." They married when they were 19 and 21 on December 7, 1958 at Redeemer Lutheran Church.

Carol's father, a home builder, built their first house, a 3-bedroom rambler on Jackson Street. Including the lot, it cost \$32,500; it didn't include a garage because his father-in-law said he couldn't afford it. Gordon added one later. Gordon and Carol raised five children. Gordon shared many additional memories in his interview.



Gordon Christenson
(photo taken in September 2012)

Suburban Development of Fridley Grant Committee

by Mary Ann Hoffman, VP and Grants Chair



Pictured is the committee that is assisting Steve Boyd-Smith of Amplifier Experience Design in creating an exhibit concept in accordance with the Arts and Cultural Heritage Grant we received. The committee has met twice and will meet again in May to help finalize the project.

Left to right:
Steve Boyd-Smith, Cathy Ballot, Brad Gudim, Mark Bonesteel, Rachel Westhoff, Sharon Hall, Kathy Smith, Rob Zelenak, Frank Plant.
Photo taken by Mary Ann Hoffman.

2023-24 Weather Records Shattered!

by Allen Taylor, Maintenance Chair

After last year's horrendous winter of record snowfall and low temperatures, we hardy Minnesotans needed a break! None of us could have imagined a winter like this one! Here is a brief breakdown of the weather records we broke this winter.

- > The lowest snowfall since the winter of 1930-31 (14.2"), so far 11.1".
- > The highest all-time average daily temperature (2023-24) broke the pioneer record (1877-78). 28.9 vs 29.9 degrees—**146 years!**
- > Earliest ice-out of Lake Minnetonka (3/11/1878) vs this year's ice-out (3/13/2024).

The Fort Snelling weather records began in October 1819 until 1892. Observations were then taken in Minneapolis from 1891 until 1938 moving to Bloomington with the advent of the new St.Paul/Minneapolis Airport. The Weather Bureau (NWS) lasted at the airport until its move to Chanhassen in 2000. The Weather Bureau was formed in 1870 and changed to the National Weather Service in 1970.



Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

Recommended website: Historic Fort Snelling weather observations (1819-1892):

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/climate/twin_cities/snelling.html

Former President George W. Bush Office Response

by Rob Zelenak, Archives and Exhibit Chair

In our most recent newsletter, we included my letter to former President George W. Bush inviting him and Mrs. Bush to our society's June 2023 meeting. To be honest, I was not expecting a response, let alone an acceptance to our meeting. Much to my surprise, about two weeks after I sent off my letter, his office sent me a nice typed up note thanking me for reaching out and explaining that former President Bush sends his personal regrets, and that he could not be in attendance. I'm still hoping that someday a U.S. President will be able to stop by and visit the Fridley History Center!

(Zelenak is a freelance presidential historian and the author of the 2017 book titled Presidential Inaugurations - A Pictorial History)



In Memoriam

by Mark Bonesteel, President

Gordon Christenson passed away on October 17, 2023. Gordy was a longtime Fridley resident and member of the Historical Society along with his wife Carol. Gordy graduated from Columbia Heights High School and attended Dunwoody Institute where he became a registered Land Surveyor. Gordy owned Minnesota Valley Land Surveyors and Engineers. Gordy was a long time member of Redeemer Lutheran Church and a proud member of the Patriot Guard honoring our military heroes.

Special Update!

If you would like to receive your newsletter via email, please send an email request to:

FHS1949@outlook.com

Your newsletter will be sent by email, rather than a hard copy sent to you. Please remember to check your junk/spam folder if you haven't received your newsletter in a while.

Membership Update

by Noreen Rickenbach, Membership Chair


Have you renewed your 2024 Historical Society membership? If you have, thank you! If you haven't, please renew your membership this month. If you know people who would like to join the Historical Society, please give them a form or ask them to stop by the Historical Society during a Saturday when the museum is open. Or call me, Noreen Rickenbach, at 763-571-2896, and I will send a membership form to those requesting one.

During the months of December-March, several of you have sent in your membership dues and some have included a donation - thank you for doing this! A major part of the programing and day-to-day money for the operation of the society come from membership fees and donations.


Below are listed the people who have sent in their membership renewal during February and March. Renewals from Dec-Jan were listed in the previous newsletter.

During February and March, the following have renewed their membership:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <i>Judy Anderson</i> | <i>Julie McCain *</i> |
| <i>Gordon and Linda Backlund *</i> | <i>Mary Sue and Donald Meyers *</i> |
| <i>Catherine Ballot *</i> | <i>William Plum *</i> |
| <i>Mark and Laura Bonesteel *</i> | <i>Arlo and Betty Revier *</i> |
| <i>Mary Ann Hoffman</i> | <i>Joseph and Noreen Rickenbach *</i> |
| <i>Sarah and Tom Joslin *</i> | <i>Roy Scherer *</i> |
| <i>Nancy Lambert *</i> | <i>David Schulze *</i> |
| <i>Connie & Skip Standal/Levang *</i> | <i>Gaylene and Lee Switzer *</i> |
| <i>Scott and Cindy Lund *</i> | <i>Jacob Taylor *</i> |
| <i>Bernadine Matushak *</i> | <i>Emma Thomley *</i> |
| <i>Margaret and Gerald Maeckelbergh *</i> | <i>Rachel & Brandon Westhoff/Newberg</i> |



 A name followed by
 an * indicates
 that the renewal was
 accompanied by
 an extra donation.



As always, we thank you for your generosity, and we invite you to include us in your will or estate planning.

**Membership Renewal Form
on other side**


Help Preserve Our history

Fridley has changed over the last 70 plus years. In 1951, you could see all the way to the creek from 66th Avenue (the street directly behind Mississippi Street). Fast forward to 1973 and the picture of Unity Hospital.



Preserving this history is important. We need your support. If you haven't joined or renewed your membership, consider doing so now. Donations are also welcomed.

