

Upcoming Events

Valentine's BINGO and potluck

February 15
11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Valentine's BINGO!

Please join us at the History Center on Saturday, February 15 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. for our annual Valentine's bingo. Potluck food will be served starting at 11 a.m. and bingo games will run from 11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m. Please bring a potluck item to share.

The Record

Happy New Year!

by Mark Bonesteel, President

I wish each and every one of you a very happy and prosperous New Year. Wow! 2024 was an amazing year and expect huge things in 2025. The first great news I wish to share is that we are now at 155 members! At a time when many organizations are having trouble obtaining members, we are seeing an increase in memberships as well as visitors to our museum. The Board members have gone above and beyond in making our museum a great place to visit.

On January 6, 2025, a contract was signed with Access Lifts to replace our nearly 34 year old lift/elevator. The new lift will be fully ADA Compliant and ensures our museum of many more years of operation. A new building lease with the school district was signed in July which allows our society to operate our museum until at least 2029.

The 40th Anniversary of the Fridley Historical Society occurs this April. May marks the 60th anniversary of the May 6 Fridley tornado. To commemorate both of these events as well as a ribbon cutting for our new lift, a special open house will be held Saturday, May 3. More details to come!

Finally, last year we purchased a digital video camera from funds donated several years ago to upgrade our technology. We hope to start conducting digital video interviews shortly. These will then be uploaded to our YouTube channel. Please check out our YouTube channel for some fascinating videos. We are also looking into the possibility of adding a podcast in the future as well. Thank you for all your support over these many years. Our society continues to move forward and each and every one of you helps us with our mission to collect, preserve, document and share our great history!

FridleyHistoricalSociety.org

✉ FHS1949@outlook.com

Officers

President: Mark Bonesteel 763-331-1885
Vice President: Mary Ann Hoffman 763-780-5911
Past President: Dorothy Gargaro 612-709-2840
Secretary: Kathy Smith 763-571-0120
Treasurer: Dave Linton 763-843-3415

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: Open
Newsletter Chair: Rachel Westhoff rachel.westhoff@gmail.com
Social Media Chair: Pat Barrett pat.barrett@fridley.k12.mn.us
Member at Large: Lori Greiner lorifridley2@outlook.com



Fridley Historical Society Board Minutes Summary December 5, 2024 – January 4, 2025

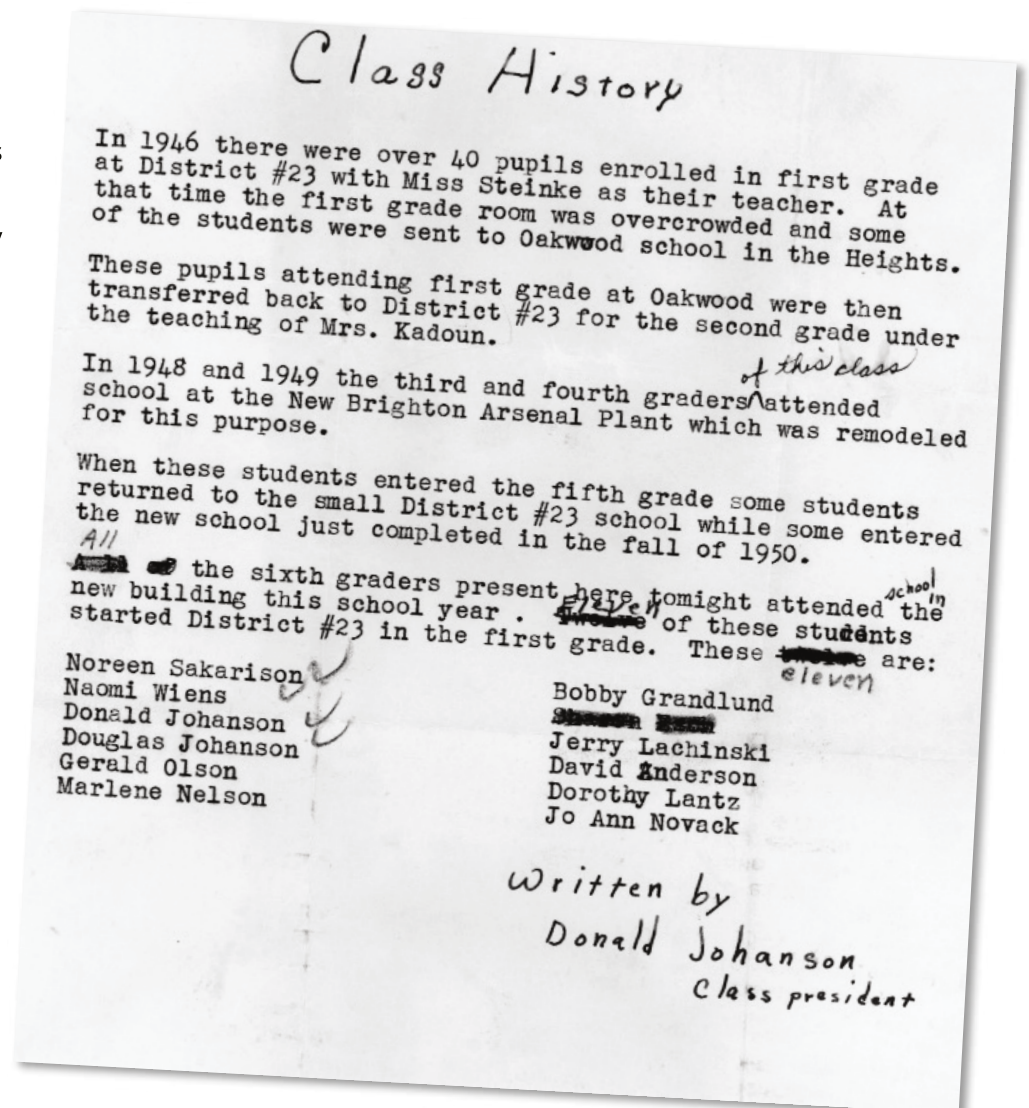
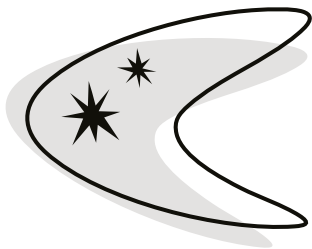
The Treasurer and Secretary reports were approved. Membership continues to grow and is now at 155 members. Bad news happened in December – the elevator stopped working and cannot be repaired. The board approved having a new lift installed. We are still seeking donations to help with the costs. Work continues on the Fridley Early Grant process. We will be submitting our proposal in May. If approved, work could start in late September.



Please visit our website for detailed board meeting minutes.

Hayes School – 6th Grade Graduating Class – 1952

The image shown on the right is a speech written in the Spring of 1952 by 11-year old Donald Johanson for his 6th Grade graduation. The speech tells us about the history of the Fridley School district which was #23 and later changed to District #14. There were 40 pupils in that class, which if Fridley had a High School would have been the graduating class of 1958. Instead, this class graduated from Columbia Heights.



2024 Kindergarten Art Fair ~ Recap by Mark Bonesteel, President

The 2025 Kindergarten Art Fair was held Saturday, December 14th. More than 150 people attended this year's Art Fair. Unfortunately, rain and sleet arrived around 1:30 p.m. and the event quickly tapered off. Santa made his appearance and passed out candy canes. A couple of well-stocked tables of snacks awaited all of our guests. These included cookies, peanut and gluten-free cookies and suckers, apple juice, coffee and water.

An art table was set up in the basement where children could construct reindeer ornaments. Decorated Christmas trees and a holiday market kept everyone busy in the basement. The regular museum was open as well and many visitors enjoyed seeing photos of their homes from the early 1960s. The tornado exhibit was also enjoyed with some newly added damage photos donated recently by several residents.

The school room was decorated wall-to-wall with art work. Teacher Laura Charles from Hayes School and Lindsie Faber from Stevenson School attended the event and met with students. Parents seemed amazed by all the great art work on display.

The Art Fair is the museum's single largest-attended event each year. It has been growing from year to year. A special shout out to long time Fridley Historical Society member and former President Dorothy Gargaro for putting this great event together! Thank you to Dorothy, society members, and volunteers who helped make this another successful event.



Thank you for 18 years, Judy Anderson!

by Rob Zelenak, Archives Chair

The Fridley Historical Society would like to recognize and thank Judy Anderson, who in November 2024 retired from the society's board of directors after 18 years of service. Judy was raised in Fridley and grew up on Mississippi Street, near the corner of Jackson Street. As the youngest of five children to Drue and Fay Scherer, she attended the Hayes Annex school with her siblings. Judy was a member of the second graduating class at Fridley High School. She married a local Fridley resident, raised her family and later moved to Coon Rapids and then outside of the Twin Cities. In her retirement years, Judy and her sister Bernadine became active volunteers with the Fridley Historical Society. Judy joined the board in October 2006 and took the title of Treasurer in January 2007. Some of Judy's highlights as a member of the Board of Directors include the FHS hosting its annual Hall of Fame and Lasagna Dinner, Christmas exhibits, August Fest, 1965 Tornado 50th Anniversary program in 2015, '49er Day celebrations and Fridley's 75th anniversary in 2024.

As Treasurer, Judy oversaw the Society go through challenges and face complex decisions. Thanks to her smart thinking and wise counsel, the society grew substantially during her tenure. In his announcement of Judy's retirement, FHS President Mark Bonesteel said, "Judy did a fantastic job as Treasurer and her knowledge of early Fridley has been very beneficial to our Society. She has always been available to answer questions and made sure bills and paperwork were filed and paid in a timely matter!" Reflecting on her legacy, Judy remarked, "Retiring from the board and my position as treasurer after 18 years will be quite a change for me. However, I think it's time. We need to recruit new members to the board who will bring new ideas to keep the history of Fridley interesting and educational. I will miss everyone and hope to attend some functions, and of course will remain a member."



In November 2024, long-time Fridley resident and FHS member David Linton succeeded Judy as Treasurer. The board welcomes David to the team. Please join the FHS board in saying a big thank you to Judy for all her years of service and arduous work to not only FHS but her community as well!

Lasagna Dinner Volunteer Opportunity



Our only fundraiser of the year is fast approaching and we need volunteers to make this happen! Please consider being a volunteer to help us prepare for this event. You can devote to a few hours to as many as you wish. Anything you can do help would be much appreciated!

Please call or email Al Taylor if you can help in this endeavor (763) 742-4558 or email 1965tornadobook@gmail.com.

Grant Update

by Mary Ann Hoffman, VP and Grants Chair

We are proceeding on our project of installing a permanent exhibit that will showcase the post-World War II suburban development of Fridley. This project has been broken down into three phases. Phase One has been completed and we are ready to begin work on the second phase, which is designing the exhibit. Work on writing a grant proposal will begin in early 2025. Following is another selection of memories from a rich interview collected in 2012.

Gwen Nawrocki - 2012

by Mary Ann Hoffman, VP and Grants Chair

Gwen's family, including her parents, two older brothers, and twin sister Grace moved to Fridley from south Minneapolis in 1941. The Clarks were drawn to Fridley's 'country living' because friends from their church had already moved here.

They bought land from Drue Scherer and contracted with a builder to construct their house. When the contractor scammed them, the family moved into a small house on Old Central.

Eventually, this house was moved to their property on what is today Able Street. Over time the house was improved, including a bathroom in 1947. Gwen stated that many homes in Fridley lacked indoor plumbing.

Both Gwen and Grace attended the two-room Fridley School and rode Christenson's bus. Due to overcrowding, Gwen was transferred to Oakwood School in Columbia Heights for second grade. When she transferred back to the Fridley School the following year, indoor plumbing had replaced both the outhouse and outdoor water pump. As was mentioned in previous articles, even though the family didn't move from their home on Able Street, Gwen attended many schools, eventually graduating from Columbia Heights High School.

Gwen recalled a neighbor who lived across Mississippi Street from their house by stating, "There was a local farmer; his name was Herder Nelson...We lived on the edge of the woods [and] east of us was a woodsy area where he sent his cows to pasture. And then the neighbor kids would herd the cows back to the farm at about 5:00. And I remember my brother one time had good shoes on and my mother was so upset because he walked through puddles herding the cows." Gwen laughingly added, "Sometimes she'd have us come in the house because she didn't want us to be out there herding the cows. And she said, 'That farmer...can herd his own cows'." The Nelson farmhouse still stands just north of Mississippi Street.

Gwen's recollections of the sand in Fridley included, "Whenever there'd be a windstorm, there'd be sand and it would blow right into our house. My mother would complain about the sand in the house, and we had to be careful – Moore Lake was just on the other side of the sand dunes and our parents were very careful that we didn't ever go to Moore Lake because we always heard there was quicksand in the bottom." Later in the interview, she



Gwen Nawrocki continued...

added, "When we were little kids, sand burrs were a problem out here. You couldn't walk around without getting sand burrs on your pants."

Gwen addressed the rural nature of Fridley in the 1940s by recalling that, "Right after the war a riding stable moved out to Fridley...and it was right about where the high school is now. And we could rent a horse for a dollar and ride it for an hour."

In those years, substandard housing could be found in Fridley and Gwen spoke about this. "Now over on University, just this side of 100 [694 today], that was kind of a poor area [known as Peaceful Valley] and so those kids were kind of rough and some of those people didn't have decent houses. I remember when we were in 7th grade we took a girl home – we took her to some activity at school – and then when we took her home my mother couldn't figure out where she lived. Well, she lived in a boxcar."

In response to the interviewer's final question, "What's your strongest memory of growing up in Fridley", Gwen responded, "I think we had a lot of freedom. We could walk all over. And we had to be friends with our neighbors because they were the only ones....My parents talked about how we had good air. And I don't think I have any bad memories."

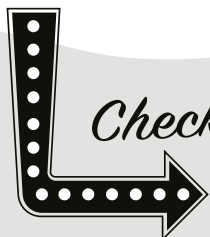
Help Wanted

The Fridley Historical Society is always looking for volunteers – it is what keeps the organization running. Think about joining this fun team. We currently have the membership chair position open.

Membership Chair – board member position

- ☞ Attend a monthly board meeting and provide a report on the year-to-date membership activities.
- ☞ Be a docent at least four times a year.
- ☞ Track new and renewed membership via an Excel spreadsheet.
- ☞ Make membership deposits at the Fridley located credit union and report amount to treasurer.
- ☞ Mail out reminder notices to members to renew.
- ☞ Work with the President to create mailing list for newsletter.
- ☞ In January, send out receipt of donations to those requesting a receipt.
- ☞ Become a member of FHS if you are not already one.

To apply or to find out more about any of the above opportunity, email FHS1949@outlook.com or call Kathy at 763-571-0120.



Check us out on our socials!



Fridley Historical Society



YouTube

Fridley Historical Society Videos

Keeping History Local!

Joining or renewing is key to keeping history local.

**Basement Parties were
the norm in the '50s...**

L to R: Glenn & Pat Johanson, Charlie & Marge Johanson, Lennie & Bonnie Gertzen, Rachel & Don Heinz, Buddy & Fran Gertzen

Rachel Heinz & Glenn Johanson and Bonnie Gertzen and Don Heinz

Rachel (Newsletter Chair) hosted her own costume party in her Fridley home's basement

**...and some even keep
the tradition alive in 2025!**

Membership Update

by Kathy Smith, Secretary

Listed below are the names of the people who have sent in their membership since the last newsletter. We welcome new and renewed members. We are 155 members strong. If you have not renewed please consider doing so now.

Pat Barrett

Julie & Kevin Bebensee*

Laura & Mark Bonesteel**

Mary Bonesteel*

Toni Ferdelman*

Ella Friendt*

Dorothy Gargaro*

Lynne Grigor**

Ed & Arlene Hamernik*

Mary Ann Hoffman

Carol Hoiby

Katy Johnson*

Sonja Granlund Johnson**

Audrey Mahr*

Dee Meissner*

Susan Murzyn

John & Darla Samuelson**

Roy Scherer*

David Schulze*

Ronald W. Skon**

Connie & Skip Standal**

Mike & Kim Schroer**

Laurence F. Stahl*

Ema Thomley*

Carol & Barry Westhoff

Rachel Westhoff & Brandon Newberg

Agnes Wolf*

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Many members included a donation;
a name followed by an * denotes
a donation up to \$50, and
** denotes \$50 or more.
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