

# URBANDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

4010 70<sup>TH</sup> STREET

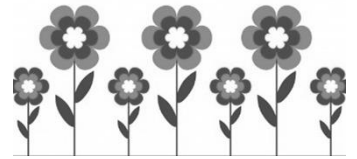
URBANDALE, IA 50322

(515) 270-2917

[www.urbandalehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.urbandalehistoricalsociety.org)



Olmsted-Urban House



## Spring 2019

### Plant Sale

Time to plan for the annual plant sale to be held by the Urbandale Garden Club, Saturday, May 11 in cooperation with the Urbandale Historical Society at the Olmsted-Urban House. Not only will a variety of plants be available, but a Bake Sale will be featured and a sale table of garden-related items will be offered. The sale opens at 9 a.m. and it is expected most of the items will be gone by noon.

How can you help? Sale items are donated by Garden Club members and friends in the community. Your donation will be appreciated. Please bring items to the south porch of the Olmsted-Urban House by Friday afternoon. Be sure the pots or bags are labeled as to variety and possible color and future height.

Then come to the sale May 11 to find items to add to your own garden, or perhaps share with a neighbor. Though the sale primarily features perennials, there may be a few bulbs, small shrubs or house plants available.

Proceeds from the sale go to support a variety of service projects and the establishment of the Pollinator Garden at the Olmsted-Urban House site.



### Spring Bus Trip

This past winter has not been friendly for us to scout out places for a Spring Bus Trip for this year. Please keep in touch as we do hope to have a spectacular Fall Bus trip. While we have some ideas, if you have any particular places you would like to visit, let us know.

### Olmsted School

The public is invited to participate in an Olmsted Legacy Celebration Thursday, May 23 to honor the proud history of Olmsted Elementary School. The Open House and celebration begins at 4:15 p.m. with a brief ceremony at 5:30 p.m. Activities will conclude at 7:00 p.m.



The first (east) section of the school was built on a tract of land owned by Millard Olmsted between 71<sup>st</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> on Prairie. A second (south) wing was added in 1953 with a Federal grant of \$64,000 and a third (west) wing was added in 1954.

The building was officially dedicated on April 21, 1954 named in honor of Millard A. Olmsted in recognition of his work in developing the Urbandale schools and all his efforts on behalf of the community over the many years.



There were expansions through the years with a kitchen addition in 1965 and an additional west wing in 1969. In the late 1980's a change in the district grade structure was instituted. The original (east) wing of the building was remodeled to serve as the Kindergarten center. More instructional space was also needed to provide programs mandated by the State and Federal governments. A media center and remodeling in 1991 added 47,000 square footage.

In 2016 with the continued growth of the community, kindergarten classes were moved back to each elementary school.

Now, with the passage of the Bond issue in 2018 the School District is moving ahead with new plans. The Olmsted building will be closed at the end of this school year. The building will be demolished and a new two-story structure will be constructed on the site. The goal is to open the new building in the Fall of 2021. Current students will be divided and this fall will attend Jensen or Karen Acres Schools.

The Urbandale Historical Society is very interested in seeing Millard Olmsted's name being retained for the new school building. He was a significant part of our heritage and his contributions need to be recognized as a part of our schools. If you feel as we do, please contact the school administration and School Board to express your desires in retaining his name of the school

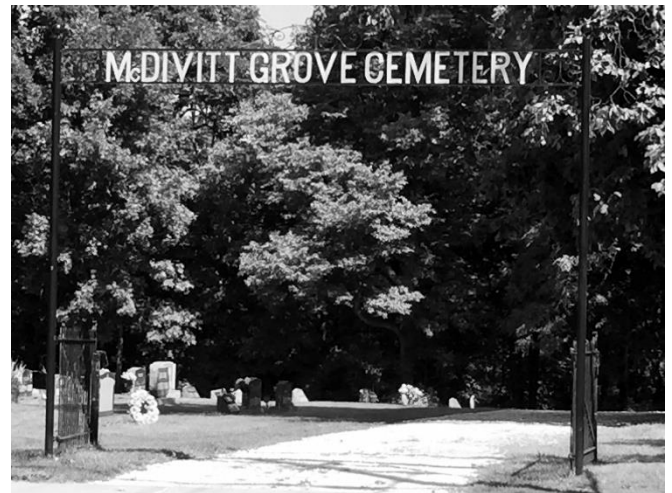
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### McDivitt Cemetery

As Memorial Day approaches there is more interest in Urbandale's only cemetery, McDivitt at 70<sup>th</sup> Street and Meredith.

Mary Polson, long-time Urbandale resident, former councilwoman and UCAN Director, has developed an informative program on the Cemetery. Mary has previously presented this program at a DUNA meeting, the Urbandale Library and most recently at the Historical Society last March.

Highlighting pictures of some of the unique tombstones she gives interesting information about some of the families that are buried there. The earliest being John McDivitt, the young son of William McDivitt who set aside some of his farm land for his son's burial in 1865 and later his wife Sarah who died in 1868.



Mary's presentation not only mentions some of the heritage families but also some recent residents including a number of former Urbandale High School teachers.

Several of the Urbandale Alumni Association are sponsoring a **walking tour of the Cemetery on Saturday, May 25 beginning at 1 p.m.** Come to the entrance of the cemetery to be assigned to a group for the guided walking tour of the Cemetery.

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### ANNUAL ICE CREAM SOCIAL

**- SUNDAY JUNE 30, 2-4 p.m. -**

Planning has already begun for the annual Ice Cream Social to be held June 30 on the lawn of the Olmsted-Urban House 4010 70<sup>th</sup> St.

Serving of the ice cream begins at 2 p.m. Come any time before 4 p.m. Select your choice of pie or cake and a beverage. Sit and enjoy the fun and fellowship



of visiting with friends and family. Listen to the music. Take time to visit the Olmsted-Urban House and Barn to see new acquisitions and special displays.

Some members of the Central Iowa Model A Club are planning to be here and welcome your coming over to view their vintage automobiles parked on the north lawn. As well, the Cadillac and LaSalle club will be in attendance again this year. We hope you can share in this event.

We need your support! The Ice Cream Social is our yearly fund-raising event. Like all "homeowners", the Historical Society has major expenses related to the upkeep of the Olmsted-Urban House and grounds - utilities, lawn care, snow removal, painting, insurance, etc. If you are unable attend Ice Cream Social. we would appreciate any donation you might make to help meet these expenses. Send your check to Olmsted-Urban House, Urbandale Historical Society, 4010 70<sup>th</sup> St., Urbandale, Iowa 50322. We thank you.



### **Millard Olmsted**

It is most fitting that Millard A. Olmsted, for who Olmsted Elementary is named, is considered the founding father of the Urbandale Community School District.

The son of Leander and Charlotte Olmsted who came from the state of New York to farm in Webster Township in the 1860's. Millard was born in 1868 in the farm home. He grew up playing in the open prairie grass helping his father on the farm and with his brother Clarence, attended the McDivitt Grove country school on Meredith.

An avid learner, after completing the eighth grade at

the rural McDivitt school, he went on to participate in a new two-year high school equivalency program offered at Drake University. He continued at Drake and earned a Bachelor's of Physics degree with Drake's first graduating class in 1889. He spent a short time in business with his brother but came back to work full-time with his father on the family farms. He married a local farm girl, Olive Stuart, in 1902. Plans were to build a new farm home on the southeast corner of the property (now 70th and Airline).



Millard and Olive raised six children in what is now known as the Olmsted-Urban House. Like their father, the children first went up the road north to attend McDivitt Grove School.

As a member of the newly organized Greater Urbandale Booster Club, Millard and some of the other farmers expressed a desire to build a better school in a more central location for the families in the area. Millard was one of the driving forces in this endeavor. The group obtained a \$2,000 grant from Webster Township and together they raised the remaining funds to build a two-room wooden school house located at the corner of 70<sup>th</sup> and Douglas. Millard himself donated the foundation for the school. Recognized for his leadership he was elected president of the first School Board, and served on the Board for 17 years.

His work for the new school was hardly complete. In 1916, a move was being considered by the Johnston (Station) Consolidated school district to expand south and take control of the Urbandale Community School. Several area men, again led by Millard Olmsted, met with Judge Howe to determine how to preserve their

community's school and keep their children in Urbandale. Judge Howe told them that if they were to incorporate the town then they could establish an Independent Community School District. Millard and his father-in-law J. D. Stuart posted the \$2,000 bond themselves to file the necessary papers and begin the process to incorporate the town.

After the election, in April 1917 the town of Urbandale was officially incorporated. Notification was made to the Auditor of Polk County and the Johnston Consolidated School District of the official incorporation and legal boundaries of the town of Urbandale and as such the establishment of the new Independent Urbandale Community School District.

During Millard's tenure as School Board President the community worked together to build a new school that would offer classes for all grades. A two-story brick building was constructed at the 70<sup>th</sup> and Douglas location in 1925 with the first students graduating as the class of 1937.

In the early 1950<sup>1</sup>s with a growing population, there was a need for a new school for Urbandale's elementary students. Millard Olmsted again stepped forward. He sold a tract of his land for a very nominal sum to the school district just south of the land he had sold to the Urbandale Lions Club to be developed as a park.

This tract between 71<sup>st</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> on Prairie became the site for the elementary school in 1952. Several wings were added and on April 21, 1954 the entire building was officially dedicated and named in honor of Millard A. Olmsted to recognize his work in developing the Urbandale Schools.

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### **History of McDivitt Grove Methodist Church**

This history of the McDivitt Methodist Church, written by Eunice Heard nearly 50 years ago first appeared in the *Northern Polk County News*, August 20, 1970 and was later reprinted in the *Johnston (Station) Historical Society newsletter*, Dec. 2004. What makes this account so unique is that the author obtained some information from the grandson of William McDivitt for whom McDivitt Grove is named. Reprinted in abridged form with permission



### **History of the McDivitt Methodist Church**

By Eunice Heard

Early in 1875, the families (in the area) got together and decided it was time to get busy with the building of the church. The area was cleared and leveled, the plans were studied and discussed, and they all went about getting the farm work out of the way as early as possible.

I asked the "Old Timers", where did you get the money? Didn't you have budget, or a drive or a long-time pledge, as churches do now? A grandson of Mr. McDivitt answered me thoughtfully, "We all knew how to work at building, for most of us have helped each other build our own homes; the flat glaciated rocks from along the ravines were used for the foundation. The lumber was sawed, but mostly the farmers would go to a mill not too far away, bring home what they needed in their lumber wagons and pay for it each trip. There wasn't much money, but we all knew how to use what we had, and we wanted this church."

The church foundation was laid quickly and by late summer the roof was on. Nobody remembers exactly the size of the church, but they were sure it was 50 feet wide and possibly 100 feet long from front to back (it faced south). The walls were 18 feet high and the ceiling resting on these walls seemed very elegant to some of the women. Most of the early homes had low ceilings for warmth.

A raised and railed platform made a place for the pulpit and the little pump organ on one side, and a pot-bellied stove on the other.

### **Coal Mines**

The church was heated by coal from one of the nearby mines. Few people now realize that after the early glacial drift down into our area, there were a million or so years of growth of vegetation, later resulting in veins of coal, which covered much of central Iowa. Most of the coal still lies there buried under a few hundred feet of sod cover. Mines were opened after 1875 all over the county. Several were located in the McDivitt church area. The closest was "Riders" mine just a couple of miles west of the church.

The "Old Timers" built a good coalhouse at the back of the church, and kept it supplied, hauling it in at \$3.25 per ton, as needed, and taking turns. Privies were added at the sides of the coal-house, and before winter, left-over lumber was made into a shed where horses and buggies could be driven under for protection. There was only room for three buggies. If you came late, or on horseback there was a good fence on the west side to tie up.

Again, the question came up - How much debt did the church have? Who helped pay for it? Was it a missionary church? All the answers were emphatically "No". When the building was finished there were only a few little bills and some more things we needed or wanted. The men from the new Polk City church had come and helped us out several times - just as we had gone to help them with their building earlier".

### **Church Bell**

There was one more thing - proudest of all was a fine bell to be placed in the belfry. Mr. Ray Stewart says it was a "hefty" bell but they got it up and in place on heavy walnut wedges. No one remembers who paid for the bell or how much it cost, but many think it was the Conference. They remember as young children watching it hoisted into place, and hearing it rung for the first time.

It was to be rung for some 75 years to help with the life of the church, sending out its sweet tones over the quiet countryside to call everyone to church or other special times, and tolling for funerals.

Other than horseback, the bell was the only way to communicate quickly with the people of the countryside for it was many years before the advent of the telephone or radio in the area.

When the church was dismantled in 1950 an auction was held to dispose of things inside the church. The Church of the Open Bible had leased McDivitt's church for some time and was building a new church on 68<sup>th</sup> and Douglas (in Urbandale). They purchased all but one of the pews.

These pews had been made from fine native lumber,

slabs of walnut selected by the men for quality and size. They would be 16 to 18 feet long, and no piecing was done. They were sturdy pews and served well for long years, but no one had gotten around to sand and polish them. No one minded that they were "in the rough"; they did not dress up for church - just cleaned up.

The men from the Open Bible church took them apart and made them into beautiful and durable tables to use in their church all finely finished and polished.

Along about this time a new Urbandale Congregational church was built, and the "hefty" bell was placed in their belfry.

Water was a problem for the church and also for the new school [McDivitt Grove School] nearby. There were numerous springs over the area, but not close by. An artesian well had been opened in the Lovington area, but the water was tainted and stained by minerals, so it was closed up. Water for both the church and the school was always carried by the older boys from a farm house some distance west or a spring in a ravine to the east.

### **Preachers**

Circuit riders came early to McDivitt's Grove, irregularly at first, but followed by more regular help from the Des Moines Conference Seminary at Indianola, later called Simpson College, with student preachers. Still later, an ordained preacher came to live at Polk City serving their church and McDivitt's Grove on Sunday afternoons. It is said that a Dr. Holmes, who served for some time, later became president of Simpson College.

How were these preachers paid, we asked? Our "Old Timer" said, "They did not have a stated amount, but never went away from our church without a collection being taken and all given to him. He was given feed for his horses, fruit and vegetables from bountiful farm gardens, and whatever else that could be shared. Some of the preachers had regular jobs during the week".

There are few things remaining to remind us of this early church. The little cemetery lies quietly among the trees. There is a well-worn pew, a "hefty" bell, a Bible used on the pulpit for years with records of births and deaths in it, some old song books and a post card stamped "McDivitt's Grove".

The "Old Timers" remember it as the center of their worship, their place to meet each other in good times and bad, and a very good place to bring up fine children.

## Address Change and New Members

We are happy to welcome the following new members to the Urbandale Historical Society and note address changes.

### New Members

Charity & Bob Andeweg  
3928 Greenview Dr.  
Urbandale, IA 50322

Jan Hall  
915 Ashworth Rd. #107  
West Des Moines, IA 50265  
515-360-5949

Dan & Julie Kaercher  
4300 75th St.  
Urbandale, IA 50322  
515-205-7134

Julie & Lee Kessler  
4430 104th St. Unit 11  
Urbandale, IA 50322  
712-301-1153

Cynthia Fisher  
2457 Patricia Dr.  
Urbandale, IA 50322  
515-681-8089

Carol Bohl  
6654 Sutton Dr.  
Urbandale, IA 50322  
816-797-0489

### Address Changes

Please note the following address changes

Miles & Marilyn Browne  
8308 Colby Pkwy #228  
Urbandale, IA 50322  
515-276-2393

Doris Hintz  
1701 Campus Drive. Unit 2114  
Clive, IA 50325

Bob & Verda Simon  
4210 Hickman Rd. Apt. #3320  
Des Moines, IA 50310  
515-276-2478

Speaking of changes, we are working towards developing a new membership Directory so if you have not renewed for this year, please do so to be certain of being in the new Directory.

### Acknowledgement of Supporters

We would like to acknowledge the following groups for their generous contributions and support for the programs and operations of the Urbandale Historical Society.



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**Urbandale Historical Society**  
**4010 70<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**Urbandale, IA 50322**