

# VERMONT'S VOICE

AGRICULTURE

GOVERNMENT

NATURAL BEAUTY

## Grandpa's Memories of Christmas: An interview with Jorgen Skalet

By Joan Skalet

*When and where were you born?*

"I was born August, 1912, the 30<sup>th</sup>, at the homestead.

*What was it like when you were a kid-how is it different from now?*

"We lived like the Amish do now. We had no car until 1917, a Studebaker.

*What do you remember about Santa Claus?*

"Marcellus Paulson was a neighbor and he dressed like Santa Claus and came to the neighbors on Christmas Eve. He had candy and wore a full Santa suit. He walked. He was a WWI soldier.

*What about music at Christmas?*

"We'd sing Christmas songs. Thora would play the piano. There were church and school programs. The Luther League would come through the township on a horse drawn hay wagon singing Christmas carols.

*What do you remember about special food at Christmas? Did your family bake cookies or make candy?*

(Laughing) "We'd have Lutefisk and lefse, rommegrot and pream on Christmas Eve. Ya, there was a variety of cookies decorated. The cream for rommegrot came from the factory.



*Jorgen Skalet*

*Did you put up a lot of Christmas decorations? Who was in charge of decorating at your house?*

"We most generally got a tree up in the valley across from the barn, a cedar. It was sort of a pine. Before electricity, we used candles. We had to watch out! It smelled good. Not very big ones.

*How was the Christmas story shared in your family?*

"The folks talked about the story, especially Ma. Thora read the Bible on Christmas Eve.

*What was it like for you on Christmas Eve? What did your family do Christmas morning?*

"We'd get the chores done. Then we'd eat (laughing) lutefisk, lefse, rommegrot and pream. The folks had been in town shopping. A lot of presents. A special dinner on Christmas Day. Chicken and turkey. We always had a big rooster.

*How did your family share Christmas with others? Did you go visit relatives or did they come to your house?*

"It was just the family Christmas Eve. Relatives would celebrate Christmas Day-we would go to our cousins or they would come to our house. We would go to church on Christmas Day. A special church program with Reverend Severin Gunderson.

There was always a tree in church.

## DON'T FORGET TO VOTE

Tue., April 5, 7:00 AM – 8 PM

Town Hall, 4017 Cty, JJ

Let's maintain our proud tradition of high voter turn-out.

If you are not already a registered voter, you can register when you come to vote by showing a personal ID (such as a driver's license) and proof of residence,(such as a utility bill).

## BURNING PERMITS REQUIRED

Submitted by DNR Forester Scott Lancaster

With the melting snow comes the need for burning permits in Wisconsin's Extensive Fire Protection Area where the ground is no longer completely covered with snow. All unincorporated areas of Vermont Township in Dane County are part of this protection area.

State law requires permits for outdoor burning in the Extensive Fire Protection Area from January 1 through May 31 unless the ground is snow-covered. Only fires used exclusively for the purposes of cooking food or warming the body do not require a burning permit. Vermont's fire warden is Shirley Brandt (4670 Cedar Hill Lane, Black Earth, WI.

53515, phone on back cover.)

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## Burn Permits

*(continued from page 1)*

As in the last two years, burners need to obtain only one annual burning permit to cover all their *regular* burning. This includes burning done in a covered container (such as a burn barrel), and small areas of uncontained burning (i.e. ditch banks and brush piles), both done between 6 p.m. and midnight. The Annual permit is not tied to a location.

After obtaining an annual permit, burners must check for and follow specific burning restrictions based on weather conditions in the county where the burn takes place. They must check after 11 a.m. *each day* they want to burn. Check either the toll free hot-line (1-888-WIS-BURN) or the DNR website ([dnr.wi.gov/forestry/fire](http://dnr.wi.gov/forestry/fire)). People using the toll-free hotline will need to enter a county code to hear the restrictions for the county where the burning will be done. County codes for this area are as follows: Sauk – 57; Iowa – 25; and Dane – 13.

Special Permits are required for all outdoor burning done prior to 6 p.m. daily, and all burns over ten acres in size. These are only issued after a site review by DNR Fire Control personnel. People seeking a special permit should contact DNR Forest Rangers in advance at Spring Green (608.588.7725).

People burning without a permit or burning contrary to the restrictions written on their permit, are subject to civil forfeiture and related court costs of about \$182. People whose fires escape are responsible for all suppression costs and may be held liable for double the damages to adjacent properties.

Burn barrels located near tall, dry grass and burn barrels without lids to prevent embers from blowing out of the barrel, are common causes of spring forest fires. Improper disposal of hot ashes from wood stoves and sparks coming out of outdoor wood burners while they're being stoked can also cause wildfires.

Notify your local Fire Department before burning, either Black Earth or Mount Horeb respectively, if the fire is likely to produce a lot of smoke.

## Wally Keller, Local Treasure

By Jon Urness

Everyone seems to have their own great memories of Wally Keller, the creative genius behind the metal sculptures seen along Highway 78 and in various parades and events. Back when I was a kid and a piece of machinery broke down, I can remember my Grandpa Nels saying that if you want something welded right, you take it to Wally. Later, I'll always remember the time during the evening milking when Wally came to the barn and asked if he could search through our old machinery graveyard for interesting metal parts. I must have looked at him rather quizzically because he assured me he wasn't reselling the stuff, he just wanted parts to make some crazy metal sculptures. Be my guest I told him.

Recently, on one of the coldest days of the winter, I visited with Wally's wife Shirley and was welcomed into her home bursting at the seams with the late artist's creations. Besides the many metal pieces, there are a few surprises, including an elevator that lifts firewood from the basement to a little cubby hole just beneath the fireplace hearth. Shirley recalls coming home from work one day and finding the living room and fireplace torn apart. She wasn't too happy about it at the time, but today the invention makes life a little easier for her and is a fond reminder of Wally.

Another Wally Keller masterpiece is "PARTSMAN", a self-propelled metal sculpture that, well...is almost impossible to describe, but once you've seen it, you'll never forget it. Shirley has to use arithmetic to figure out when PARTSMAN was built. By taking her oldest



*There's a lot of Wally Keller in the home that he and his wife Shirley built in 1970 along Vermont Creek including a one-of-a-kind firewood elevator that conveniently boists chunks of wood up from the basement to the hearth (visible in the lower right of this photo).*

granddaughter Jessica's age, (28), and subtracting five, she knows that PARTSMAN is 23 years old. The reason she subtracts five is that Jessica was five years old when she and some other Keller grandchildren rode with Grandpa around the State Capitol in a parade. PARTSMAN has been seen in numerous parades in the area over the years including Mazomanie, Cross Plains, Black Earth and many times in Mount Horeb. There was seating for five and it was propelled by a small gasoline engine.

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## Wally Keller

*(continued from p.2)*

Today, PARTSMAN looks a little forlorn along Shirley's driveway in the shadow of a pine tree in a snow bank. Perhaps one day PARTSMAN will be restored to his former glory.

Speaking of glory, when I visited Shirley she was still basking in the afterglow from attending the Super Bowl....yes, the Super Bowl in Dallas that saw her beloved Green Bay Packers beat the Pittsburgh Steelers!

"I still can hardly believe I was actually there," Shirley beamed. Though Wally wasn't much of a football fan, going to a Super Bowl has always been one of Shirley's dreams. About a week before the big game, her daughter and son-in-law surprised her with the tickets.

"It was just wonderful to be there, but those Steelers fans are so noisy. They tried to rattle (quarterback Aaron) Rodgers with all the noise and those Terrible Towels," Shirley said.

Apparently he wasn't rattled!

## WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL WILL INCLUDE STANFIELD FILM

**LEGEND LAKE: A TALKING CIRCLE** is a documentary film produced by David Stanfield of Vermont Township and funded by Terra Institute of Mount Horeb. It chronicles the history of Legend Lake, located on the Menominee Indian Reservation in northern Wisconsin, and the subsequent controversy surrounding its present status of land ownership.

The lake was formed by joining 7 smaller lakes to create a beautiful setting for a development of summer homes. What went wrong is the subject of the film, and yet another chapter is the long and contentious relationship between reservation Indians and non-Indians. The film doesn't take sides and offers no solutions but does offer a means for local residents to resolve the controversy.

Terra Institute exists to deal with land issues and has helped resolve land conflicts worldwide. So when Stanfield and his team heard about the Legend Lake conflict they decided to explore ways to resolve the conflict. Using an adopted version of a Native American means of resolving problems, he formed a Talking Circle comprised of 7 participants representing various factions involved in the controversy. The film includes visits with each of the participants, in their north-woods setting, and culminates in the Talking Circle where they join together, talk to each other and hear each other.

UW professor and TV personality Patty Loew serves as moderator of the talking circle. Stanfield is the narrator. The film was directed and written by Mark Anthony Rolo. Bobby Breitenbach was the photographer and editor. The film is meant to be used, with written reference materials, as a teaching tool in schools and universities, and in discussions by community groups statewide and beyond.

The 2011 Wisconsin film festival takes place in downtown Madison, Wed, March 30 – Sun, April 3 at 9 different venues within walking distance of each other. It will feature roughly 200 films from around the world, and is presented by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arts Institute.

*Check the festival web site to see when you could view Legend Lake film: <http://www.wifilmfest.org>*

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## Town of Vermont Goes to the Birds (in a good way!)

By Warren Gaskill

Birds. There are a lot of people in Vermont Township who pay a good deal of attention to our feathered visitors and residents.

Consider the couple of dozen who will rise well before dawn April 16 to be at their assigned spots in the township to listen for, see and count the Sandhill Cranes that have come once again to bugle their arrival at their nesting sites in the valleys.

Or those who nurture their fields and woodlands to attract Pheasants or Grouse or increasingly rare Bobolinks and other high, open field nesting birds.



*Belted Kingfisher*

Or those who tend a trail of bluebird boxes along the roadsides, keep humming-bird feeders filled in summer or suet feeders in the winter.

Perhaps the biggest collection of local bird fans comes together once a year in late December or early January for the Mt. Horeb area Christmas Bird Count. It is one of eight in south-central Wisconsin and one of hundreds conducted across the country about the same time of the year, all for the same simple purpose – to see who is around.

The count census “snap shots” – when compared year after year, decade after decade – provide valuable insight for another simple

purpose – to see what’s changing in the environment.

The local count that covers a 7.5-mile radius centered in Mt. Horeb and encompasses virtually all of the Town of Vermont offers such a glimpse. Ken Wood, Forshaug Road resident, long-time bird enthusiast (and dahlia grower in the summer months) has been keeping track of the data now stretching back more than 20 years. These are some of the highlights he points out:

- The 12 bald eagles spotted on the count this past Dec. 26 were a record for our count.
- The two northern saw-whet owls, 246 white-breasted nuthatches, 331 snow buntings, and eight swamp sparrows seen on this past count were also record highs.
- The 11 red-headed woodpeckers were the highest number found in any of the eight area counts this year.

And there were several unique or only “few in number” species observed, including 4 bohemian waxwings, 2 pine siskins, 1 rusty blackbird, 1 common grackle, 4 brown headed cowbirds, 1 northern shrike, 1 pheasant, 1 turkey vulture, 1 Wilson’s snipe, 2 belted kingfishers, 4 American robins and 21 eastern bluebirds.

In all, there were over 9,000 birds representing 54 species seen in our count on Dec. 26, certainly lower than the high of 60 species in 2002, but higher than the 39 species spotted in 1988.

But perhaps the number that Ken takes the most pride in are the number of observers – both those who drive and walk the roads on



*Pine siskin*

count day, and those who count the birds at their feeders. In our area count, there have been as many as 93 observers (in 2003) out looking about and this past count there were over 50. Of the eight area winter counts, only the Madison one, which has a much larger population to draw from, involves more observers.

One of the big draws of the Mt. Horeb Area Christmas Bird Count is the end of day potluck where folks get together, share a meal, talk about what they have seen and more. Not many of the other counts have such a community get together.

This season’s potluck was held at the home of Brian Evans and Agnes Kanikula on County JJ. The next Mt. Horeb Christmas Bird Count will be Sunday, Jan. 1, 2012, and the potluck will be at The Gathering



*Snow Bunting*

*(continued, over)*

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Place, next to Vermont Lutheran Church.

The coordinator baton has been passed along over the years. Joyce Powers, Bert and Betty Johnson, Warren and Sharon Gaskill have all filled the capacity. Ken held forth for more than 10 years, and then

passed the honor on to Kerry Beheler of Mt. Horeb starting last year. If interested in participating on the next count, let Kerry know via an email to [kerry.beheler@gmail.com](mailto:kerry.beheler@gmail.com)

Among the participants on the 2010 is last count: Brian and Marie Martinell, Andy Anderson, Ken Wade, Pat Trochlell, Earl and

Shirley Brandt, Ken Wood, Kevin Kuntz and family, Harriet Irwin, Ken and Mary Maxwell, Wanda Marling, Pat Mommarts and Lisa Lutz, Peter Gorman, Steve Richter, Glenn Chambliss, Allen Holzhueter, Susan Slapnick and Marci Hess. Those counting birds at their feeders in the Township included: Barbara Borns, Brian Evans, Agnes Kanikula, and Ben Evans, and Wanda Marling.

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## MEET THE SMITHS

by Earl Brandt

John and Kathy Smith are the owners of Secure Buildings, LLC. Kathy is the Risk Management Director for the Wisconsin Youth Company in Madison.

John has been serving as interim Supervisor since he was appointed at the January Town Board meeting to replace Steve Cowan, who resigned. Steve had served as Town Chairman, Supervisor, as well as Representative to the Black Earth Fire and EMS services over the years. John is running unopposed for the position at the spring election in April.

Kathy will be on the ballot for the Treasurer's position, replacing Sarah Danz, who is not seeking reelection. Kathy is also unopposed.



John served on the Town Council in Gibsonburg, Ohio for 15 years before moving to Wisconsin in 2005. He was also active in the Boy Scouts of America and served as Scoutmaster and various other positions on the District and Council level. John has two sons who are Eagle Scouts. They describe themselves as "outdoor people" who are interested in camping, canoeing, kayaking and bird watching.

Kathy has also served as the Wander Wisconsin program director for the Wisconsin Youth Company as well as program support coordinator for the After School Division. Kathy has 25 years of experience with the Girl Scouts, YMCA and American Camping Association in camp directing, property management and licensing and accreditation standards. The Wisconsin Youth Company is a non-profit organization providing after school care, recreation and enrichment program for children and youth.

# VERMONT'S VOICE

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**Mission Statement:** It is the mission of Vermont's Voice to provide information about our town and articles of interest to the residents of our town in order to promote a sense of community, encourage participation in and understanding of town government, and improve communication among residents. Vermont's Voice is a volunteer, citizen-run publication that encourages and depends on citizen participation in providing information, articles, or suggestions for articles, photos, criticism, and help with mailings. The cost of printing and postage is included in the town budget. Vermont's Voice is not the official voice or viewpoint of the town government.



**Lisa, Chris and Johanna**

Look for this issue of the Vermont Voice on the Vermont Web Page! Check it out at <http://www.vermonttown.com>.

## Town Officials

*Chair*, Mark Sherven 437-3732  
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*Supervisor #3* John Smith, 767-0809  
*Supervisor #4* Barb Grenlie 437-5856  
*Town Clerk* Marc Robertson 767-2457  
Or email: [clerk@townofvermont.com](mailto:clerk@townofvermont.com)

*Town Treasurer* Sarah Danz 444-5462  
*Town Patrolman* Jack Schulenberg 437-5490  
*Building Inspector* MEI 608-643-5329

Bruce Ellarson 767-4974  
Eric Haugen 767-3327  
Todd Culliton 767-4145  
Larry Ziemer 437-4292

## Plan Commission Members

*Chair* Jim Elleson 767-3553  
*Vice Chair* Barb Grenlie 437-5856  
*Secretary* Johanna Solms 767-2467

## Fire Warden

Shirley Brandt 767-3030

## Winter 2011

### VERMONT'S VOICE

AGRICULTURE      GOVERNMENT      NATURAL BEAUTY

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