

## HISTORIC HOMES OF YANKTON

## A Look At The Old Parish House — Congregational

Yankton's Territorial Homes, Revisited — A Sesquicentennial Series

*"The sesquicentennial series titled "Historic Homes of Yankton" prepared by members of Yankton Questers Dakota Territory Chapter No. 794 continues this week with its ninth selection."*

Old Parish House  
601 Maple Street

Dakota Territory Chapter No. 794

The historic residence which nestles in a hilltop neighborhood at 601 Maple Street once served a purpose far different from its present function. On June 30, 1991, Robert and Suzette LeFebvre realized their dream of owning a historical home by purchasing and moving the two-story "Old Parish House" adjacent to Yankton's First Congregational Church at 5th and Walnut to Outlot 30 Auditors Lot, City of Yankton. Moving the hundred-plus-year-old building with its unique mushroom-shaped cupola over one half mile through city streets and backing it onto its new location required coordinated efforts by both city and private businesses.

The Parish House retains much of its original character, thanks to concentrated efforts by the LeFebvres. To lessen the weight of the old building before moving, the couple removed plaster walls, dropped ceilings which had been built below the originals, panels, radiators, and much woodwork, carefully noting locations of each piece in order to replace it correctly after refinishing.

The parsonage remained raised on blocks at the new Maple Street location long enough for construction of a full basement. The LeFebvres have finished but not yet completely furnished that level except for a furnace room which contains two furnaces, one for each floor. Only the second story has central air; however keeping cool in summer and warm in winter is not a problem, they say.

The house has totally new plumbing and wiring, as well as new period light fixtures. Beautiful original solid vividly-colored glass panels remain in most windows, including an unusually shaped window on the north. A unique mushroom-shaped cupola dominates the exterior, which is currently undergoing upgrading and painting.

Original exterior double doors open off a covered porch to a small foyer whose double doors lead into a central hall. To the left is situated the large former pastor's study and an adjacent parlor. A beautiful tile fireplace in the study likely heated the room with coal as the basement in the original location contained a coal bin.

To the right of the hallway an exquisite ornate banister and equally ornate stairway lead to the second story. The main hallway then opens to a large dining room, which leads to kitchen quarters, back stairway, and bath. The kitchen has been updated with ceiling-high solid oak cabinetry done in period style. A large full bathroom, laundry room, and closets now occupy what may have been butler's pantry and maid's quarters. Ten-foot ceilings have been restored throughout the main level.

Ceilings in the front four bedrooms of the second story, including the large master bedroom which had formerly been the intern's study, have been restored to original nine-foot height while ceilings in the two back bedrooms and full bath area were returned to their original eight-



foot height.

History of the old parsonage is sketchy. Church records state that it was built in 1889 at a cost of \$4000. A photocopy of an early photo shows the structure standing alongside the first frame church apparently before wings had been added, while another photo showing wings along both sides of the church contains the caption "sometime after 1878." Records in the Equalization Office located in the Yankton County Building state the year of building as 1880.

Church records say little of parsonage activities in the intervening years before 1968, at which time "the old Parish House" was said to be housing church offices. In the 1970s, Intern Minister James Harwood and Student Assistant Steve Patterson and his wife Deb occupied living quarters there. In 1981 Intern Don Degnitz lived on second floor, and in 1982, then-pastor, Rev. Dwight Snesrud, and his wife sorted and stored early church records on that floor which had been found in the garage of an elder member. On August 11, 1985, Intern Doris Ruben hosted an open house in her apartment.

One hundred seventeen years before, Rev. Joseph Ward was playing a major role in establishing the Congregational Church in Yankton, D.T. Prior to his and his wife Sarah's arrival on November 6, 1868, missionary Rev. E.W. Cook had gathered a small flock of 11 which, on April 6, 1868, in the home of A.G. Fuller, adopted a confession of faith and covenant. It was at a Sabbath School Festival on Christmas Eve that year in Fuller's Hall on Cedar Street between 1st and 2nd Streets that J.B.S. Todd presented his gift of three lots on which to build a church. Before first services were held on January 9, 1870, in the barely completed frame church at 5th and Walnut, newly-arrived Rev. Ward was conducting services in the lower level of the Capitol Building at 4th and Capitol Street.

In 1904, the present brick church building replaced the rapidly deteriorating original church. Church members approved plans in 1987 for a handicap accessible building expansion adjacent to the west side of its Walnut Street location. Plans called for an elevator, restrooms and stairway. That same year, 1987, Schenk property across the alley west

was purchased, and in 1990, according to Don Allan's brief history of the church written in 1993, remodeling of the Chapel Annex created office space. However, it would not be until 1991 that the Old Parish House was sold and removed, allowing the new annex to be built in its place.

A serious complication occurred after Suzette and Robert LeFebvre's bid of \$5000 had been accepted. Asbestos had to be removed, and the church was committed to spend \$6000 before the contract could be completed. Suzette remembers the lingering unpleasant odor resulting from the removal, especially offensive in the second story.

The LeFebvres have spent 20 very busy years in restoring their home. They had originally budgeted \$42,000 for primary costs including purchase, moving, and other expected basic expenses. They had bought the lot from Myrtle Richardson for \$5000; spent \$31.51 to survey the property; and paid City of Yankton \$1428 to remove and trim trees, \$225 for police escort during the moving, and \$383 for removal and replacement of street signs. Other charges included house mover Clellan Becker, \$6630; Northwestern Public, moving power lines, \$1285; Wayne Anderson, basement walls, etc., \$5175; phone company, \$500; cable company, \$923; and furnaces, \$4284. And that was only the beginning! Now that the couple's three older children are grown, only 10-year-old little sister Rose remains to share the many rooms in which so many hours have been spent in labors of love. That labor has provided the family with an attractive, comfortable home with true historical ambience.

Rev. Joseph Ward and his family had lived in another of Yankton's remaining distinctive territorial homes. The historic 18-room home built in 1873 at 512 Mulberry served as social center for both church, political, and Yankton College activities. It was said that stagecoach horses stopped so regularly there that at times they made the routine stop even when no passengers were on board. Both the well-maintained Ward House and the restored "Old Parish House" stand as impressive reminders of territorial days in Yankton.

## Wildflowers: The Jewels Of Nature

BY BRENDA K JOHNSON  
P&D Correspondent

Before summer wanes, a chance to experience native plants and animals in their native habitat in our region can be worthwhile. One such outing occurred in northern Antelope County along Highway 20 in Nebraska occurred earlier this summer. Northeast Nebraska Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council and Program Support Assistant Carol Peters arranged this fourth annual public tour with Biologist Rebekah Jessen, Nebraska Games & Parks Commission Biologist Scott Wessel, RC&D Council President Dennis Wacker and others. A few of the sightings follow.

Shell-Leaf Penstemon is a native perennial forb that is found throughout the Great Plains. Lavender to pink bell-shaped flowers are held on stiff stems up to 20 in. tall. A member of the Snapdragon family and also called Wild Foxglove, this plant is also cultivated and is included in some roadside wildflower mixtures. Native Americans are said to have prepared a toothache remedy and a chills and fever remedy from this plant. Sources: Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers, Uses of Plants by the Indians of the Missouri River Region, Plants of South Dakota Grasslands.

Rush Skeletonplant or prairie pink is a native perennial forb that grows up to 18 in. tall, is a member of the Sunflower family, and has tiny pink flowers. Most notable is its skeleton-like, almost leafless stems that exude milky latex when broken. Roots of this plant exceed 20 ft in depth and include underground rhizomes, so that this plant is very drought hardy. Skeletonplant is found on the Great Plains in dry soils and especially on hilltops. During dry periods the plant can be toxic due to accumulated nitrates. This plant rarely produces viable seed. Some Native Americans brewed a tea to stimulate milk production, stop diarrhea in children, and as eyewash. Dried latex was chewed as gum. Sources: Weeds of the Great Plains, Plants of South Dakota Grasslands.

Upland Sandpiper's favorite habitat is native grassland, singing on fence posts but more often on the wing. The bird leaves North America in fall and returns in spring. During migration it is not



Shell-Leaf Penstemon is one of the many native forbs of the Great Plains seen on the tour arranged by Northeast Nebraska Resource, Conservation & Development Council.

found in mudflats or with other shorebirds. Its diet includes insects and seeds. It disappears into tall grass prairie where it walks among the grasses foraging and also nests. Often four buff colored eggs are found in the well-hidden nest on the ground with grasses arching over it. Both the male and female build the nest, and both parents feed the young. If young are threatened, the adults distract predators away. While Upland Sandpipers are found on the Great Plains, their numbers have diminished with loss of habitat. Sources: Lives of North American Birds, The North American Prairie, Birds of South Dakota.

Wild Sweet pea, prairie turnip, compass plant and many other native forbs were found on native prairie owned by sisters Allison and Kristin Krohn of Shoestring Acres Seed. Her wildflower and grass seed operation on another mixed and tall grass acreage offers seed adapted to the upland environment. There she uses tillage to control smooth brome grass.

## "Shoestring Acres Seed"

Dennis Wacker is RC&D President and tour participant. He represents six Nebraska county cooperatives including Pierce, Knox, Cedar, Antelope, Dixon, and Wayne counties. RC&D Council website: www.nenercd.org and phone: 402. 582.4866

A wildflower enthusiast, Wacker grows them at home. "If you want low maintenance plants, grow wildflowers. You have to have patience and put up with weeds."

Carolyn Hall of Basset Nebraska contributed information about edible prairie plants and Carol Peters made the dessert called Purple Passion Pie to end the tour. The recipe using aronia berry juice and topped with an edible viola flower is from Kay Young's Wild Seasons cookbook.

Biologist Scott Wessel described the soils of the tour area along Highway 20 as often sandy, variable, and some with silt from the Elkhorn River. "Sandy soil doesn't recover from tilling in hundreds of years. For as many kinds of birds, plants, and other life above ground, the diversity below ground is much more. Science doesn't know all the relationships," Wessel concluded.

Moments to refresh in the beauty of Nature that brought us to this region of the Great Plains are far between. Yet we don't have to travel far to find them. Public spaces such as native wildflowers of Spirit Mound along Highway 19 north of Vermillion, vistas of Missouri River breaks along the nature trail at Lewis & Clark Recreation Area west of Yankton, woodland trails at Ponca State Park at Ponca Nebraska, and Niobrara State Park in Nebraska are but a few stops to enjoy Nature before this season ends.



## PURPLE PASSION PIE

Crumb crust for 9" pie  
1 envelope unflavored gelatin  
1 cup elderberry or aronia berry juice  
2 eight oz. packages of cream cheese, softened to room temperature  
1/2 cup sugar or honey  
2 tablespoons lemon juice

Press the crust into a 9" pie pan and refrigerate or freeze until ready to fill

Sprinkle the gelatin over 1/4 cup of elderberry juice in a medium bowl and stir thoroughly moistened. Heat the remaining juice to the boiling point. Pour the juice into the gelatin mixture, stirring until dissolved. Set aside to cool. (To hasten cooling, place the bowl into a shallow pan of cold water, stir frequently.) Allow to cool only slightly.

In a large bowl, combine the cream cheese, sugar or honey and the lemon juice. Beat with an electric mixer until smooth. With the mixer running at medium speed, gradually add the juice mixture and continue mixing until smooth. Pour this mixture into the cold crust and refrigerate until firmly set (at least 2 hours or more). Makes 6-8 servings.

*Excerpt courtesy of Kay Young in Wild Seasons Gathering and Cooking with Wild Plants of the Great Plains, University of Nebraska Press*

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