

# August 5, 2004

## Daneville Heritage Association



by Lester R. Lauritzen  
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### Calendar

DHA board meetings first and third Wednesdays, at the museum at 6:30 p.m.: August 4 and 18th. Members and other interested people welcome.

Lester Lauritzen has volunteered to host the museum Sundays 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Note: Aug. 8, he may close 11:30 to 1:30 to attend the Hooker reunion at the DBS Hall. Or, some other volunteer may cover that period.)

Hooker reunion, DBS Hall, August 8, 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Anyone with a Hooker interest is welcome. Pot luck. Bring a dish. Coffee, Kool Aid, and tableware furnished.

### DHA News

Barbara Miller has volunteered to fulfill day-to-day functions of DHA treasurer as a "Financial Officer" of DHA. Contributions, bills, etc. may continue to go to Box 177, Viborg, SD 57070 (Parsons Insurance office).

### Mange Tak

To all who attended the DHA museum's open house July 25th. There was a most gratifying response.

For all the compliments received by DHA members, Danish Days and since. Reportedly, even some skeptics have been complimentary.

To Ruth Weier, voting membership; to M. Berchart, memorial for Kathryn Nelsen.

### History

The Viborg Centennial History book, page 45, reported: "Howard Reisner had a W.N.A.X. Service Station." This would be ca. 1933-plus. Earlier recollections in DHA News have placed

this one block west and about a half-block south of the 4-way stop in Viborg. About where the present DBS Hall is located. The following has been held two months for space, until the Danish Days information subsided.

"Filler up with WNAX gas"

by "Writer at Large"

Bob Karolevitz

"Now that the prices at the pump are soaring, I guess it's appropriate to discuss WNAX Fair Price Gasoline of the 1930s, which — it's sad to say — only a few old timers remember.

"That's when Deloss Butler Gurney of the pioneer radio station in Yankton got riled up by the high costs of petroleum products — and he resolved to do something about it.

"The result was 578 gas stations scattered throughout the five-state area, selling gas for as little as 17 cents a gallon.

"How did he do it?

"He used the air waves and magazine called *Common Sense* to take on "big oil." And he organized producers — and unhappy customers — to rally around his attempt to undo what he considered a national travesty.

"Before long the familiar green-and-white pumps showed up through the Dakotas and adjoining states. Hard-put farmers brought cans and barrels to the stations to fill them with fuel for their idle equipment.

"Private automobiles — including gas-guzzling Durands, Auburns, Pierce-Arrows and Chandlers — lined up at the pumps to fill up with WNAX gas. He even gave five gallons of the stuff to men who bought a suit for

\$15 — with a vest, and extra pair of pants, a shirt and tie, socks, a handkerchief and a fine pair of shoes thrown in. all this for making the trip to Gurney's.

"D.B. — as the entrepreneur was known — was also ahead of his time with the introduction of "alky gas," the forerunner of today's ethanol. The upshot was the purchase of a closed-down brewery in Atchinson, KS, and not long afterwards D.B.'s company began marketing a blend in his WNAX gas.

"To prove his point, he used an alcohol mixture in his own car. Air pollution wasn't a factor to be considered then, but he would have been one of the first environmentalists if it had been.

"Chan Gurney, D.B.'s son, who later became a U.S. Senator, got in on the act, too, when he moved to Sioux Falls to operate a station and bulk plant — selling WNAX gas, of course.

"In time the Fair Pride outlets added tires, batteries and oil to their gasoline line. With the radio station promoting them extensively, they enjoyed great but short-lived success. And then the bubble burst!

"Pressure from the major oil companies, the depletion of surplus crops to make alcohol, the sale of Radio Station WNAX, and the eventual advent of World War II, were among the factors which brought an end to the Gurney Enterprises. D.B.'s anti-New Deal stance, which brought him out of favor with President Franklin Roosevelt's administration, also helped.

"Although it covered most of the Depression Era and then faded into history, WNAX Fair Price Gasoline was an important part of South Dakota's heritage, and its story deserved retelling some seven decades later.

"D.B., who parlayed peonies, pancakes and seed potatoes into a

commercial dynasty, was one of the state's remarkable individuals, and his "alky gas" gave notice of things to come."

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Readers of the *Yankton Press & Dakotan*, *Vermillion Plain Talk*, *Centerville Journal*, *Beresford Republic*, *The Wakonda Times*, and five additional newspapers in Iowa and South Dakota, have already seen this information. Mr. Karolevitz is a lifetime writer on historical subjects, and has 37 books titles published, including *Yankton: A Pioneer Past*, *Challenge: The South Dakota Story*, *Tears In My Horseradish*, *Yankton College: A Continuing Story*, etc.

Mr. Karolevitz, a Polander, said his wife, Phylis (Gunderson) Karolevitz, is half Dane, so she was especially pleased to know that Viborg is doing well with its museum project. He also commented that "We Polanders do not have a similar organization in South Dakota." (There's still time to start one.—LRL)

Mr. Karolevitz also informed that he started writing for Waldemar Weverstad at the *Yankton Public Opinion*. Weverstad later purchased the *Centerville Journal*. (To which, I (LRL) submitted Centerville Saddle Club news for many years. I used to drop the week's news on Walt's desk, then continue to the back room to watch Herman Williamson(?), the lino-type operator, and the shop foreman Lyle Miller(?) work.)