**The History of the History Committee
of the Seward Neighborhood Group**

The Seward Neighborhood Group (SNG) formed in 1960. Their history committee was formed in 1977 and immediately began archiving information on the neighborhood. They obtained funding from the Charles S. Mott Foundation and hired University of Minnesota Ph.D. candidate Norene Roberts to do research on the history of the neighborhood. She unearthed the story of the Minneapolis Fairgrounds that was located in the center of Seward from 1865 to 1884. This led SNG to create the first King’s Fair in 1979. This bi-annual celebration continues to this date and usually has a history theme.

In 1978 the committee began collecting oral histories from older Seward residents. They received training and information for this project from the Minnesota Historical Society and continued to collect these histories for the next 30 years, ending in 2008. These oral histories were the backbone of the Seward history book. They have been transcribed and are now available from the Hennepin County Library.

Starting in the 1990’s the committee began to hold Reminiscence Evenings to collect historical remembrances from Seward citizens on topics such as: Seward School, Birchwood Diary, Sports, WWII, Greyhound Bus, Streetcars, Stories from Franklin Avenue, etc. These evening presentations and discussions were recorded and later transcribed. They are also available at the Hennepin County Library. These evening events were held periodically for 20 years, ending in 2010.

In 1996 the committee branched out and looked for ways to share stories from their research. They hired playwright Ben Kreilkamp to write three long plays—*Under the Hill, Along the River,* and *By Moonlight*—and several short plays based on stories from Seward history for the Seward Theater Project, using funds from the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP).

In 2000 the committee hired Jeff Zeither to write a manual on doing neighborhood oral histories that was published in 2001. Titled “How to Record the Oral History of your Neighborhood” the manual is available online. The Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) and the Center of Urban and Regional Planning (CURA) provided the funding.

In 2009 the SNG Board adopted a mission statement supporting the collecting of Seward history. That year the committee donated a small portion—seven boxes—of the large archive of historical materials it had amassed to Special Collections at the then Minneapolis Public Library in downtown Minneapolis. These materials consisted of photographs, slides, videotapes, taped interviews with transcriptions, newspaper articles, posters, and other items. This collection was cataloged by Librarian Wendy Adamson and is available at the downtown Hennepin County Library and online. (Look for Seward Neighborhood Group Collection.pdf)

In 2011 under Dick Westby’s leadership, the history committee determined to publish a book on the history of the Seward neighborhood and formed a book production committee. They obtained a $6,850 grant from the Minnesota Legacy Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society and developed a topic-based outline for the book. They chose a collaborative approach for the writing rather than hire a single writer. They hired nineteen Seward writers, each with distinct voices and viewpoints, to research and write specific chapters. Wendy Epstein led the committee in researching relevant historical photographs.

At the end of this grant period the committee sent their written material to two neighborhood historians Jean Johnstad and Jean Gorman for review and comment. These local historians suggested improvements and indicated that several chapters needed additional work. The committee concluded that they needed professional help to complete the project.

In 2014 they obtained a second grant from the Minnesota Legacy Fund for $10,000 and hired retired Journalism Professor Richard Musser as developmental editor for the project. With his help the committee reorganized the manuscript with a more chronological flow and revised some chapters. In fall of 2015 the new manuscript was sent to three professional published historians who were asked to evaluate manuscript’s suitability for publishing—all were positive and complimentary in their comments but one suggested we needed an even more chronological organization.

The next task was to identify a publisher and determine how to publish the book. The University of Minnesota Press indicated a willingness to consider the book. The manuscript was sent to them but after nine months of no response the book was pulled and the publisher search resumed. In summer of 2017, at the suggestion of Bruce Johansen, the committee approached Norton Stillman of Nodin Press. Stillman readily agreed to publish the book, if we worked with his production editor and designer John Toren to produce the book and we limited the size of the book to 280 pages. SNG and the committee agreed to these terms and the committee applied for a third grant from the Minnesota Legacy Fund to prepare the pages for publication.

The production phase of the book began at the end of 2017. This work included the selection, purchase, and permissions for the photographs, caption writing, fact-checking, footnote source checking, copyediting, editing to trim the length of some chapters, writing missing chapters, and working with John Toren on page design and layout. These duties fell mostly heavily on Wendy Epstein and Marilyn Matheny, with help from Dick Westby and Rick Musser. The book was printed in December 2018 and the book release was celebrated on December 10th, 2018 at the Seward Co-op Creamery Café. As of January 2021, 1290 b00oks have been sold.

The plans for the future include setting up an online presence to collect more stories of the neighborhood and to tell the stories that didn’t make it into the book. The committee will conduct their annual summer history walks to share the stories from the book. They will work to promote the book through talks at local venues. In 2020, seven additional boxes of the committee’s extensive archives were donated to the Hennepin County Library.

Past and present members of the history committee: Dick Westby, Nancy Meyer Sansone, Jean Johnstad, Betty Edlund, Clem Engen, Mary Cooper, Gail Seifert, Ben Kreilkamp, Mike Trdan, Wendy Epstein, Linda Coffin, Bruce Johansen, Burt Berlowe, Marilyn Matheny, and Lisa Boehlke. SNG board liaison is Tony Korum.

 