Red Wing Woman Champions the Arts

By Sharon Schroeder

Sixty-eight years ago, in September of 1933, a young woman by the name of Marjorie Gray arrived in Red Wing on Labor Day from Edina, Minnesota to move into her room at the home of Mrs. C. J. Sargent on East Avenue. Miss Gray was the new art teacher at Red Wing High School. Little did she realize at age 21 that she would become one of the most influential members of the community in the arts. Today, her name, Marjorie Gray Vogel, better known as Marge, is synonymous with art in Red Wing. Among her many accomplishments, Vogel established the art department at Central High School and was a founder of Red Wing Arts Association.



Hand puppets created by AAUW women . Seated (l-r) are B. Duffy, M. Vogel, G. Holst, & H. Musty. Standing are Mrs. Reichert and H. Kappel, 1938, GCHS photo

Born in Duluth, Vogel lived in Peoria, Illinois and Minneapolis before settling in Red Wing. She became involved in the arts while attending Washburn High School in Minneapolis. Although she studied music and dance, she discovered her real interest was in the graphic arts. She entered the University of Minnesota in 1929 and upon graduation in 1933, Vogel looked to the Red Wing School District for a job. The district was without a regular art department so she was hired to establish one. She was paid $120 a month for 9 months for teaching art and English.

During her three years as a high school teacher, she became involved with local organizations. The classes she taught for the College Women's Club were the beginning of the Arts Association. In 1936, she married local attorney Arnold Vogel, which meant the end of her high school teaching career. The public school teaching policy pertaining to married women may actually have been a blessing in disguise as it opened the door to her city-wide activities.

In the winter of 1936, she began holding creative arts classes. Activities expanded to include crafts and puppetry. She shared the creations of students through displays in downtown windows and wrote a column for the newpaper telling people what was going on in the arts in Red Wing. In the late 1940s, Red Wing included all community art classes in its City Recreation Program, which was held in the large lower level of the YMCA.

When honored for 66 years of service in the arts by the Red Wing Arts Association, she said "There has never been a moment of regret in my life, that I chose Red Wing." Monday, March 7, 1999 was declared Marjorie Evelyn Gray Vogel Day in Red Wing by proclamation of Mayor Romeo Cyr.

Vogel recalled the day in April 1933 when she made her decision to come here and teach. Her father asked her if this is what she wanted - to be a big frog in a little pond. Her answer, "Yes, I'm sure. I will just have to learn to croak differently." (RWRE, Tuesday, March 6, 1999)

Turning 50: The Red Wing Arts Association

By Joel Thompson

For the last half century, the Red Wing Arts Association (RWAA) has been an integral part of the community in exposing people to the arts. It was started by individuals such as Marge Vogel, who was responsible for establishing the art program in the Red Wing Schools in 1933. A few years later, she began teaching courses in the arts, which were sponsored by the College Women's Club for local residents.

In 1945, the local arts program was housed in the YMCA and a youth center established. In January of 1951, the Red Wing Arts Association was incorporated with Marge Vogel as its first president. The RWAA began many worthwhile projects that have had a lasting impact on the community. Starting in 1959, Art Week became an annual event offering demonstrations, performances and a major show and art sale held at Levee Park and the Pottery Annex. The Fall Festival of The Arts has become the most important annual event and fundraiser for the Association.



Marge Vogel, first president of RWAA, speaking at founding in 1952, GCHS photo

A brief look through the decades:

1950s RWAA brought many arts events to the community. One was the loaning of artwork by local artists to local businesses. The annual Art Week originated during this time.

1960s RWAA began a weekly arts column in the Republican Eagle. The Fall Arts Festival was held for the first time at Levee Park.

1970s RWAA undertook a massive effort to raise funds to commission a work by internationally renowned local artist Charles Biederman. Through grants and donations, $27,500 was raised. Biederman's work was completed and put on display in Red Wing.

1980s The Summer Concert in the Park made its debut. Music lovers have been treated to an eclectic selection of musical styles. In 1987, the Association started the Affiliated Artist Residencies program in conjunction with Ordway Music Center, providing artists in the schools.

As the RWAA celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this fall, Red Wing as well as the rest of Goodhue County owes a debt to thanks to the Association's decades of service and their investment in a valuable resource - the arts.