

# PRAIRIE FIRE

Newsletter of the Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society

Sunday Services in the Portal-Foster Center

1806 West Lawn Ave., Madison, WI

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"Year of the  
ongoing Revolution"

EDITOR: Vivian Meyer

251-7526 or 266-7051

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## PRAIRIE CALENDAR

- SAT  
FEB 7 9 AM-9:30 PM FOLK MUSIC WORKSHOP Richard Perry, Denominational Affairs  
Chairperson, announces that a folk music workshop will be  
held at St. Paul's University Catholic Center. Admission  
is \$5.00; if more than 3 persons from a church go together  
the admission is \$2.50 per person. The focus will be on  
liturgical music. For additional information contact  
Richard Perry. 255-6157
- SUN  
FEB 8 10 AM "REMBRANDT: FROM RAGS TO RICHES TO RAGS" Program led by  
layminister Joe Hoffman. 257-9595
- SUN  
FEB 8 1 PM CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING at the Carson's. The Carsons will  
provide liquid refreshment, those who come should bring  
nibblies (e.g. cheese, crackers, etc.) The Carson farm  
is located at 4341 Vilas Road, in Cottage Grove. 221-1244
- TUES  
FEB 10 8 PM PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING at Theron Caldwell's home  
1228 Sherman Ave. Newcomers welcome to help plan Sunday  
services with layministers Joe Hoffman and Annis Pratt.  
Annis begins her ministry in March. 255-9974
- THUR  
FEB 12 7:30 PM BOARD MEETING at the home of Melinda Roznoy, 2205 West Lawn  
Ave. Members and friends are welcome. 221-1244
- SAT  
FEB 14 TRIP TO CHICAGO ART INSTITUTE organized by Joe Hoffman.  
Plans are tentative now but there is hope that those going  
to Chicago will go by bus. The day will be spent browsing  
with some assistance from Joe. For more information please  
contact Joe Hoffman. 257-9595
- SAT  
FEB 28 7:30 PM PLAYREADING GROUP will meet at the home of Lilo Koehl,  
3907 Fern Court. For more information about the play  
to be read, call Lilo at 233-7383.

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### Prairie Society Involved in Court Case to Protect Privacy and Religious Freedom

This week Judge James Doyle of the Federal District Court granted a hearing, set for February 11th, on a petition for a preliminary injunction to prevent Iowa County officials from disturbing the gravesite of Jana Osteraas. The hearing will take place at 9:30 AM and will confront the issues presented in the petition filed by Jack and Dorothy Osteraas in response to threats by Iowa

County authorities to prosecute alleged zoning violations.

The court action stems from the private burial of Jana Osteraas on the farmland owned by her brother, John Osteraas, on January 23rd. Apparently the individual hired to assist in preparing the gravesite consciously or unconsciously let it be known that the burial had taken place. Though the neighboring landowners had no objection and the Osteraases had checked for state laws affecting the burial, the zoning administrator claims there are zoning ordinances forbidding such a burial. According to Kenneth Paltzkill, the Zoning Administrator and defendant in the case, a conditional permit must be issued for a cemetery in order to legally bury someone on land zoned agricultural. The District Attorney, Dennis Scallon, and co-defendant in the case threatened to prosecute the Osteraases and to serve them with a subpoena to appear in Iowa County Court.

Barbara Willard and Chuck Dykman, the attorneys of record representing the Osteraases, acted on February 2nd to head off the possible exhumation of Jana's grave. They filed for a preliminary hearing and temporary and permanent injunctions to enjoin the Iowa County officials from disturbing the grave until the court could hear the issues raised in the petition.

The petition was filed in Federal District Court because one of the issues on which the case turns is the First Amendment right to freedom of religion, guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution Bill of Rights.

(1) The complainants claim that the act of disturbing the gravesite of Jana Osteraas is an infringement on the constitutional right to practice the beliefs of one's religion;

(2) The state's action to exhume Jana's body would be an invasion of privacy; and

(3) A statute which provides a penalty (e.g. zoning violation) must be clearly defined (e.g. the definition of "cemetery") and must have a warning as to what the results will be of a specific action.

The line of argument is that the state's interest in enforcing this zoning ordinance is small in comparison to the right to practice religious beliefs freely; that the lack of demonstrable hazard (e.g. health considerations, etc.) and the lack of a state law prohibiting individual burials causes the state's interest in exhuming the grave to be less important than the Osteraas family's interest in their privacy; and that historical precedent has been established by innumerable private, individual burials on private land throughout Wisconsin.

Barbara Willard indicates that this will be a case of "first impression." This means that, if the complainants defend the issues raised, that they will be asserting a new constitutional right--the right to bury persons in accordance with their religious beliefs subject to certain statutes established to protect the community from health hazards, etc. The result of this case, if successfully completed, would be new law and a new civil right never before asserted.

Barbara pointed out also that this case, involving Unitarian tenets, is similar to the Brookfield Unitarian Church's court case fought to establish the right to teach sex education as an important element of Unitarian ethical teachings. In the case involving Prairie Society, as the Osteraas' church, the Ceremonies Committee helped to plan the burial of Jana and the Counseling and Ministering Committee helped plan the memorial service held in the First Unitarian Society. This thoroughly establishes, along with the membership of Jana and her family in Prairie Society, that the burial was a religious activity. As such, this activity should be conducted under the protection of the First Amendment in order to allow individuals to be buried according to their beliefs.

Prairie members can be of assistance in this case by: (1) writing to the Iowa County Zoning Board (especially if they have land or other vested interests in that county) and sending a copy to Barbara Willard; and (2) relating to Barb and personal knowledge you may have of individual or private burials not in a "cemetery." Barb resides at 2217 West Lawn Ave. Madison, WI 53711, (256-2801)

### Prairie Member Alerts Society to Folk Art Opportunities

Those of you in Prairie who enjoy (and I know that many of you do) old-fashioned, authentic American mountain folk music will not want to miss the concert given by the Madison Folk Music Society at the Memorial Union on February 11 which will feature Vanguard, Folkways, and Phillips recording artist Hedy West. Miss West is primarily a singer of traditional songs which have been handed down through several generations of her family in the hills of western Georgia, as well as those she has collected elsewhere. She accompanies herself on guitar and banjo, and is one of the finest banjo players in the country. Tickets are \$3.00 and are on sale at the Union boxoffice. While in Madison, Miss West will be a house guest of Prairie member, Pat Watkins.

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Is there anyone among our readers who has been hungering for an authentic, hand-sewn applique or patchwork quilt, but can't envision paying the \$3-400 that is being asked for them in retail stores? Pat Watkins has a connection with an elderly woman in Tennessee who makes them and who is willing to sell them for between \$100 and \$150 depending upon size and type. If you are interested, call Pat at 233-5795 and she will arrange for you to see a sample. These are new quilts of heirloom quality, and a real bargain.

-- Pat Watkins

### Little Girl Needs Assistance

Julia Bonser would like to ask if anyone would be able to drive her daughter Joella home from Randall School. Joella was recently injured when she was struck by a car. She will be ready to reenter school February 15th if all goes well, though she will still be in a leg cast. Joella needs to be picked up on Monday at 2 PM and on Thursday at 3 PM. Anyone who can offer assistance should call 233-6481. Your help will be greatly appreciated!

### Celebration of Life

In describing the memorial service held to remember Jan Osteraas David Carson said, "The service provided insight into the kind of young woman Jan was." The following is a brief account of that service and a remembrance of Jan's life.

On Friday, January 23rd, family, friends and Prairie members said farewell to Jana Osteraas at a memorial service celebrating her life. Jan, daughter of Dorothy and Jack, sister of John and Mark, was killed the preceding Tuesday in a train-car collision on Nolen Drive. Jan had become a member of Prairie Society on Sunday, January 11th of this year.

Her family, who had always liked doing things together, felt they wanted to say goodbye to Jan in their own way and, if possible, to bury her themselves, on family land. And so they built her a coffin of pine and made a quilt to line it. Then they buried Jan beneath a tree on her brother's farm in Iowa County.

Following the burial, the Osteraases shared a tribute to Jan's life with friends and family at First Unitarian Church. Jan, though only 20, had traveled widely, lived a full and varied life, made many, many friends. Slides taken of and by Jan in her travels--Scandinavia, Afghanistan, backpacking in the U.S.--were shown, bringing her vividly to us and also demonstrating her considerable skill as a photographer. There was much music--fiddlers from Folklore Village, the Prairie Pluckers, guitarists, recorded favorites like "Joe Hill." Jan's dance group came and improvised to music a movement interpretation of the Jan they remembered.

There were readings and poems, some composed to Jan by friends. Her parents and brothers spoke individually of the different person Jan had been to each of them--yet still recognizably the same lively, busy, involved young woman. Jack described how the family had gathered after Jan's death and decided to handle her burial and last rites as personally as possible, in a way they felt appropriately expressed their relationship with her. They thought that while to do as

much themselves as possible might be less usual, it would certainly be more meaningful to all of them and more pleasing to Jan.

After Dorothy told of Jan's last 24 hours and of how satisfying they had been both for Jan and to Dorothy in her relationship with her daughter, she ended by saying, "Jan had a good life."

Indeed, this seemed a very apt description of Jan Osteraas and summed up very well what we had come together to commemorate.

Those present closed the celebration by sharing a potluck supper with the family.

--Rosemary Dorney

Rosemary has compiled material which the Osteraases wish to share with us. These experiences and recollections may be viewed at Portal-Foster on Sunday.

#### Bicentennial Corner

In 1976 a great furor is being raised over the role of women in society. Clearly women have an important role in all aspects of life--from child-rearing to politics. In 1776 women played a crucial role in the development of revolutionary America and the war effort as well.

Historians have theorized that in 17th and early 18th century American women had more freedom, relatively, than they have in the 20th century--out of necessity. This is in the framework of a frontier society where women often performed the roles of providing food, protection, and shelter for their families as well as those roles usually associated with females. But less well known is the role of women in the professions (e.g. law, medicine, journalism, and business. Despite certain laws controlling ownership and control of property, freedom to engage in contracts, etc., in fact women played significant roles in all these areas, often as widows and sometimes while married or single. Julia Cherry Spruill, in her work, Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938) describes in detail the significant activities of a number of women.

Needless to say it has always provoked my curiosity, and does so even more now, to know why we read only of George Washington and Lightfoot Harry Lee in the Revolutionary War. But, Betsy Ross sewed and Martha Washington entertained if we are to accept the history books. Little is made of Abigail Adams' political activities and strong impact on the development of the Declaration of Independence and the opinions of many male political leaders. Even less well known is the role of women like Mary Ludwig, Margaret Cochran, and Deborah Sampson who fought in military engagements which helped launch the United States' rebellion against Britain. Though I do not intend to dwell only on the war, since Bunker Hill and Fort Ticonderoga et al have already been profusely commemorated, I would like to uncover the little known activities of some of these American women.

I do not believe history is made up of a few people who "made headlines" but of many people who accomplished similar feats and went unnoticed. I hope to continue with some short essays on the lives of some Revolutionary women and to reflect on how, if we are to continue our revolution today, we must learn to consider and respect all people and the value of their contributions to society.

Finally, I shall provide a short bibliography for those who wish to pursue the issue on their own and a long bibliography to anyone who expresses the desire to have it.

--Vivian Meyer