



Aewsletter

Volunteer Award Recognition for Joanne Hall



The annual convention of the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums (MALHM) was held in White Bear Lake April 23-24, 2025. The Convention provided networking opportunities with others from around the state. It was a valuable two days of presentations, breakout sessions and resources for five people from Fillmore County museums. Joanne Hall attended from PHS, sponsored by the Collection Committee. During the Annual Meeting, Volunteer Excellence Awards were given to 18 people who were nominated by their local organization. Joanne was one who received a pin and certificate for Volunteer Excellence in her work with PHS. She was honored to be nominated by Sheila Craig.

Preston Historical Society's Grand Lady

During the Trout Days parade on May 17, 2025, PHS's Ila Mae Olstad was featured as our Grand Lady in our PHS parade entry, driven by member Kerry Soiney.

Preston Historical Society
Ila Mae Olstad,
PHS GRAND LADY
Kerry Soiney,
PHS Member



DMRC Soft Opening on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025

By Soft Opening Committee of Barb Mielke, Alison Leathers, & Sheila Craig

Save the date for Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025, from 2-5pm, for the Preston Depot Museum and Riverfront Center's Soft Opening!

There will be free soft-serve ice cream, cookies, water and coffee and tours of the event center and museum with construction photos, some artifacts, brochures, membership information, brick and merchandise sales, and more! We need 10 members to donate two dozen cookies for this event, so contact Barb Mielke to sign up.

This event will be cross-promoted with the Root River Trail Towns "Autumn Trail" event, which highlights local events happening in the Trail towns on Oct. 4. Spread the word about this special soft opening event!



President's Notes

By: Sheila Craig

Just saying 'Thank You', is not nearly enough to all the members of the Preston Historical Society who have helped the organization in the past three months. So many people have stepped up and offered their time and talents. It is truly incredible. I don't dare begin to list each of you as I'm afraid I would miss someone in the long list.

We have come such a long way on the Depot Museum project, the Masterplan, and the Trail to Forestville. A year ago — who would have thought that we would be planning a soft opening on October 4 for our new PHS home. From all the planning, fundraising, more planning, more fundraising — it has been quite the journey together.

THANK YOU!!! Sheila Craig, President



Photo courtesy of Gabby Kinneberg.

A Visit to the Preston Veterans Home

Joanne Hall, photo above on left, and Sheila Craig, on right, gave a presentation about Preston at the Preston Veterans Nursing Home on May 12, 2025. Joanne is holding Lazy Daisy Fishing Lures and Sheila has a tool from the railroad repair that was invented and used to pick up rail ties so the men didn't have to bend over to pick up each one -- it has a magnet on the bottom!

Tractor Ride Update

By: Sheila Craig



Our biggest fundraiser of the year will be on Saturday and Sunday, September 13 and 14th. We currently have 62 tractors signed up plus many more riders! We need many volunteer hands to make this event successful. The more who can help will make the work easier for all.

A summary of the tasks follows. If you can fill any of these spots, please contact Sheila at smeercraig@gmail.com.

- Thursday, September 11, 1 p.m. at United Methodist Church PHS Office: Stuff bags for participants
- Friday, September 12, 1 p.m.: Set up food area in Commercial Building on the Fairgrounds
- Friday, September 12, noon-8 p.m.: meet tractors
 Greeter
- Saturday, September 13: Afternoon break in Harmony
- Sunday, September 14: Afternoon break in Highland
- Saturday, September 13: 5pm help serve dinner
- Saturday, September 13: Clean up after meal
- Sunday, September 14: Help cook & serve breakfast
- Sunday, September 14: Clean up kitchen after Meal

We are also looking for donations of cookies and bars for the breaks. Let Sheila know if you can provide either of the following donations: 2-dozen cookies or pans of bars -- bars cut in 12 in a 9x13 pan and brought in a box or container that can be thrown away.

On Saturday the Ride will go from Preston to Henrytown to Mabel for lunch. Afternoon will travel on to Harmony and back to Preston. Sunday will see the group going to North Prairie on to Peterson. Afternoon will travel to Highland and back to Preston. Contact Sheila if you want full ride details.

Membership Update

By: Sheila Craig

We welcome Diane Kinneberg as a new life member! She joins the 119 other members and 27 business members of the Preston Historical Society.

Know someone interested in membership? Share this newsletter with them and head to our website for membership rates and form.

prestonmnhistory.com



Raffle Update

By: Alison Leathers

The PHS raffle closed on August 7, 2025. Winners for the cash prizes will be posted in the November 2025 newsletter. Thank you to everyone who organized the raffle, sold tickets, and purchased tickets!

\$1,000 - Grand Prize

2 - \$500 Prizes

2 - \$250 Prizes

2 - \$100 Prizes

6 - \$50 Prizes



Collections Committee Highlights

By: Joanne Hall

The Committee developed a photo display that featured the accomplishments of the Society over the past 25 years and shared it at the Spaghetti Fundraiser dinner in May. Photos and text highlighted the Elevator restoration, bringing the Boxcar and Caboose to Preston to restore, adding the Motor and Trailing car, maintaining the O'Hara school and developing the Library sign featuring the Browning Club involvement in establishing a Preston Public Library.

We presented a "Preston" program at the State Veteran's Home during Cities Week in May. We showed the 2005 Coming Home video developed by Ila Olstad and Jill Erdmann; presented our collection of River, Railroad and Agriculture themes through photos; and highlighted the former Dairy & Farm site building being transformed into our Depot Museum and Riverfront Center (DMRC). It was especially interesting for those who had worked or done business there when it was a business site.

We received items for our collection that feature the Railroad. An unusual one is a wooden railroad track gauge used for laying track around corners. Dave Wilson was a RR agent and his daughter, Barb Wilson Dornink, has donated several original depot items. Among the items are a Preston Depot sign, RR agent's stool and a telegraph machine. A Milwaukee Road lantern was donated by Eleanor Junge. A RR Express Wagon that was used in Preston was donated by the family of Dave and Art Wilson, former depot employees.

We visited the Winona County Museum to tour the displays and the collection storage archives. We look for ideas to spark our displays as well as store our collection. To get ready for Fair Week, we were part of a group that helped clean the O'Hara School, inside and out, and set up displays. John Carlin mopped the original wooden floor and repainted the front steps. He fixed stubborn cupboard doors, but just couldn't get the A/C to work in the building! (It's a running joke now since there is no A/C!) The windows do open!

The Collection committee has also interacted with the Building Committee and the DMRC Committee of the whole with suggestions and decisions. We will be planning a small number of exhibits for the Center soft opening. Exhibit development will take time after the move to our Depot area, so there will be exhibits evolving over the months ahead. There is never a "nothing to do" moment for the Collection Committee!

Forestville State Trail Effort Moves Ahead

By: Jon DeVries

The PHS State Trail Committee met on July 14th at the F&M Community Bank for updates on the DNR engineering/acquisition work on the Preston to Carimona Township segment and for planning the Carimona Township and Forestville State Park segment.

Progress reports on the Harmony Trail Extension to Niagara Cave/Iowa State line were presented — now nearing completion. Updates on the Preston Historic Campus & Riverfront Center Master Plan and DMRC construction were made. The committee's work is supported by the ESMC (Empowering Small Minnesota Communities) program of the University of Minnesota Extension Service which selected PHS as a recipient community organization. Minnesota DNR and ESMC staff attended along with committee members from Preston, Harmony, and Lanesboro, State Representative Greg Davids, and MN State Park and Historic Forestville MNHS staff. The DNR affirmed that the use of eminent domain no longer exists for acquiring land for recreational trails, including the Forestville Trail.

The Preston Depot Museum & Riverfront Center (DMRC) Master Plan and DNR Forestville Trail benefits were reviewed: increased town visitor spending, new biking/walking opportunities for residents and park guests and expanded public river fishing access.



On July 11, 2025, U of MN SE MN RSDP ESMC staff met with PHS members and other community members (including Preston Tourism/Chamber Director Mandy Huston and Preston EDA Executive Director Michelle Marotzke) during their ESMC tour.



PHS members Sheila Craig, Jon DeVries, and Kerry Soiney are joined by John Torgrimson (Root River Current), Lanesboro Mayor Alicia Pearson and U of MN SE MN RSDP staff.

Trail completion benefits for Historic Forestville were highlighted given the current plans of the State of Minnesota to discontinue onsite MNHS staffing and to close public access to the Meighen Store given low visitor attendance and state budget concerns.

Following the meeting, committee members and guests toured the construction at the DMRC (See pictures). Next steps include final DNR engineering for ADA, University review of trail options, Historic Forestville and State Park updates, and further community input.



Step Back in Time at the Fillmore County Fair

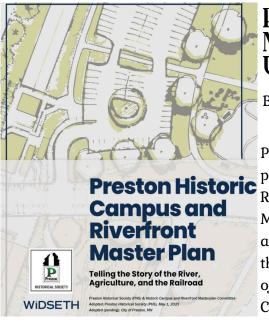
By: Mary Glaser

Here is a summary report of the O'Hara School event at the Fillmore County Fair for 2025. The school was open Tuesday, July 22 from 4pm-8pm, and Wednesday thru Saturday 11am-8pm, which totals 40 hours. We had nine volunteers who worked the shifts, five worked one shifts and four worked 2 shifts.

We had a total of 411 visitors compared to 510 last year. Most were local, but out of state visitors were from Wisconsin, New York, North Dakota, New Zealand, and Iowa. We collected \$38 from bell ringing (\$40 last year), and \$59 from donations (\$38 last year). PHS merchandise totaled \$2, and \$190 was collected from raffle ticket sales.

Thanks to all the volunteers that helped clean, set up and take down the display, and those who worked at the school during the fair. They are Rick and Sue Grooters, Barb Mielke, Sheila Craig, Charlie Sparks, Diane Johnson, Joanne Hall, Kerry Soiney, John Carlin, Mary Glaser, Carol Soland, Dorrie Besse, Eileen Linden, Aaron Fox, Ila Mae Olstad, and Jon DeVries.





Riverfront Masterplan Updates

By: Alison Leathers

PHS began the process to get the Riverfront Masterplan included as an addendum to the forthcoming City of Preston's Comprehensive Plan.

This process first began with the City of Preston EDA Board unanimously adopting a resolution to include the plan as an addendum to the City's Comprehensive Plan with a resolution at the May 28, 2025, EDA meeting. At the June 25, 2025, Preston EDA meeting, a one-word change was made to the resolution and passed with a 4-2 vote.

The next step was to take this amended resolution to the City of Preston Planning and Zoning Board to have them vote on recommending to Preston City Council that the Riverfront Masterplan be an addendum to the City's forthcoming Comprehensive Plan. This unanimous vote occurred on July 21, 2025, during their regular meeting. City Council then voted on this unanimously on July 21, 2025, during their regular meeting. The Riverfront Masterplan has now been officially supported by the Preston EDA, Preston Planning and Zoning Commission, and Preston City Council, with recommendations to include the plan as an addendum to the City's forthcoming Comprehensive Plan.

Take the Preston
Comprehensive Plan Survey!
Vour voice matters!

www.arcg.is/1GGm4T0

History Moment - Preston Municipal Power Plant

Taken from a July 1, 1936, article in the Preston Republican (adapted by Alison Leathers - newspaper article provided by John Carlin)

On March 4, 1871, the first Village of Preston council met and adopted the town charter. During this time, Preston did not own any property and there were not amenities we see today, such as sidewalks, sewer, water, power, and telephones. The first money the Village had came from criminal fines, and the first improvement the Village paid for was building its first wooden sidewalk in 1872.

For the following six years, the Village added more wooden sidewalks, and then in 1875 they purchased 25 acres that comprised the fair grounds. And with the fairgrounds and sidewalks, Preston first celebrated July 4 in 1877.

The first lamp lights were built and installed in 1878, and they required a lot of work to maintain. Each day the lamps had to be cleaned, refilled, and lit by hand each night. In 1881, the first graded streets were created. And not long after that, wagon bridges were built over the river at all roads leading into Preston.

A large meeting was held in 1895 to investigate Preston getting a water works and light plant, urged on by a petition of 184 voters. A special election was held on 10/22/1985, asking voting citizens if they were in favor or not of a water works and light plant. The votes tallied 151 in favor, 58 opposed, and 10 ballots were thrown out. Another special election occurred in November 1895 to ask voters if they wanted to take out \$18,000 in bonds for the construction - 168 were in favor and 43 were opposed. Work on the plant began immediately, and in January 1896, someone began canvassing the town to see who wanted to rent lights and water.

The plant site was purchased for \$367 from Mary O'Brien, who had donated the spring and property that had the previous reservoir.

The plant was completed in the Fall of 1896, and a C.M. Morgan was paid \$75/month to operate it. It ran only from dusk until midnight, unless there was an event like a dance, and it ran until 1:00am.

Preston grew in the next few years as the railroad came in along with a telephone exchange and a town hall in 1912. The plant operated until 1914 when a group of local citizens formed the Root River Power and Light Company and built a new water power plant at Brightdale, and that plant opened in the Spring of 1915.

This company continued operation until 1928 when it sold out to the Federal Public Service Corporation of Chicago, and maintained the contract until 1935. On Dec. 5, 1933 during a council meeting, a group of citizens protested to make sure the plant stayed with the Village of Preston, which means that without this group of citizens, there may never have been a municipal plant.

In 1934, with a new council and alderman in place, many citizen meetings and one failed special election were held to figure out the future of a municipal plant. Finally in 1935, a special election was held and 385 people voted in favor of and 294 voted against a new municipal plant. Work started in September and it was completed in December.

In the 1936 Republican Leader article, credit was given to the mayor and councilmen who, "braved the wrath of a number of their fellow citizens in order that the town might have an improvement which they were convinced would be an asset of great value; as well as Plant Superintendent F.H. Stebbins, whose able administration has caused the plant to function as intended."

Preston's growth and changes have often been met with resistance, but time marches on.

History Moment - Preston Municipal Band

By: Linda Wolfe

The band known as the Preston Cornet Band was formed on April 18, 1878 (I believe this was the official date, however the Cornet Band was mentioned in newspapers in 1876, 1877 and won a Second Premium in the Fillmore County Fair in July of 1877).

The cornet band played at the Murrel wedding reception on Nov. 7, 1878. Local papers reported on the band playing at different venues over the early years. In 1880 the band played for the Railroad Supper held at the Stanwix Hotel where over 100 men were in attendance.

In 1883 the band was directed by Mr. Tom Evans, at that time the members were John Kramer, Leader; Sidney Fife, Wilson Galbraith, Al Murrel, Henry Kappe, Frank O'Brien, George Mann, Orrin Loomis, and Henry Paulsen. In 1883 the band played at the Grand Mask Carnival at the roller rink, where general admission was 10 cents.

In 1886 the Cornet Band went to St. Paul for a week and were guests of The Globe Toboggan Club. In 1893 the Chatfield Democrat stated, "It is an excellent band with a wide reputation".

In October of 1904 the band re-organized, with 22 members. Prof. Thaler was engaged for a year and received a salary. Members listed as, L.P. Weller, G.F. Mann, P. Nelson, Verge Vickerman, Walden Vought, Geo W. O'Brien, Thos. F. Curchill, Will Bakey, Edw. Bassett, George Flynn, Leonard Ott, Hal A. Mann, H. Holdhuson, Oscar Krause, J.O. Backman, Clarence Anderson, C.F. Groth, George Holdhusen, John Holdhusen, Frank Holdhusen, Earl Bassett and Jack Johnson. The first sixteen members agreed to pay expenses of the teacher, Prof. Thaler.

In April of 1917 the band was renamed the Preston Municipal Band. In 1917 the Preston Times stated, "Thursday evening was an eyeopener". Saying the band was a "metropolitan aggregation of artists more than 40 in number".

On January 31, 1918, the band participated in the Service Flag Vesper Service at the Methodist Church. The church was packed and the band played patriotic music.

December of 1920 a concert put on by the band was hampered by knee deep mud and equally deep snowdrifts kept many away. However, a goodly number were rewarded by "one of the finest musical concerts ever given in Preston" In December of 1925 all proceeds of the band's concert went to paint the buildings at the fairgrounds.

In 1926 the Post Bulletin reported the Preston Municipal Band, under the direction of Mr. Herbert P. Jones, was a high-class musical organization selected to play at the Minnesota State Fair the year before. They were headliners in the Legion parade this year. Mr. Jones left in 1927, and a Mr. Solberg became the director.

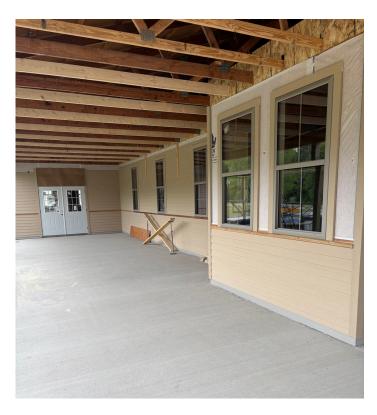
In June of 1930 a 200-foot-long stage required for presentation of the Fillmore County Historical Pageant at the fairgrounds with girls competing for "Miss Fillmore County" in colorful costumes. The pageant had 200 to 300 members in the cast. The Municipal Band played throughout the performance.

Preston Depot Museum & Riverfront Center Updates

Photos submitted by Steve Hall

May 2025 Construction Photos









Preston Depot Museum & Riverfront Center Updates

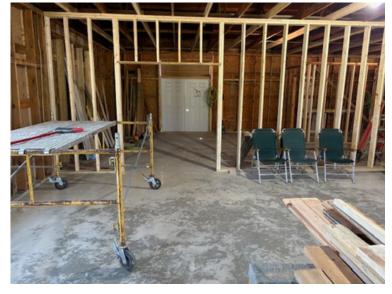
Photos submitted by Steve Hall

June 2025 Construction Photos











Preston Depot Museum & Riverfront Center Updates

Photos submitted by Steve Hall

July 2025 Construction Photos









Preston Historical Society Officers & Contact Information

- President: Sheila Craig (507.273.1481) smeercraig@gmail.com
- Vice President: Kerry Soiney, ksoiney@hotmail.com
- Secretary: Diane Johnson, johnson.dianekeith@yahoo.com
- Treasurer: Debbie Thompson, debbie@dthompson26.com
- Newsletter Editor: Alison Leathers, alisonbleathers@gmail.com
- Web Master/Social Media: Lexi Pierce, aglenzinski@yahoo.com and Ilene Edwards, ilene6006@gmail.com

Mailing: Box 138, Preston, MN 55965 www.prestonmnhistory.com

Follow Us on
Facebook!
Preston Historical
Society - MN