



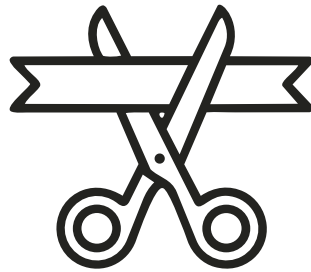
Preston
Historical
Society

Newsletter

Depot Museum & Riverfront Center Grand Opening

By: Alison Leathers

The Preston Historical Society invites you to the grand opening of the new Preston Depot Museum and Riverfront Center (DMRC) on Friday, May



15, 2026, from 9am-5pm and Saturday, May 16, 2026, from 9am to 3pm. The DMRC is located at the former Preston Dairy and Farm site, at 304 Fillmore Street East in Preston, MN. The grand opening will feature a ribbon cutting at 9am on Friday May 15, 2026. There will be free treats, giveaways, merchandise for sale, and an opportunity to view the space.

What began as a dream almost a decade ago is now a reality. The new museum includes exhibit space that features Preston's railroad, agriculture, and river history while also showcasing Preston business, organization, and school history. There is a replica ticket counter for children to get their 'train ticket' stamped, just as it was done from 1880-1976.

The DMRC also offers its Riverfront Center, a 1000 square foot space, as a rental for meetings, parties, showers, and other events. Inquiries to rent the space can be sent to phs-president@prestonmnhistory.com.

In collaboration with the City of Preston, a lease for the building was secured and plans were created by Widseth. The former Depot building, used by the Milwaukee Railroad, was used as inspiration. Fundraising began in July 2024, and \$400,000 was raised by December 2024. Thanks to volunteer grant writers and the generous community to help reach this fundraising goal, construction began by Phil Eickhoff Construction on April 1, 2025, and was completed in time for a soft opening on October 4, 2025.

Preston Historical Society is excited to welcome you to the new Depot Museum and Riverfront Center! Regular DMRC hours will be available soon at prestonmnhistory.com.

Proud to Announce our New Logo

By: Alison Leathers

The Marketing Committee is proud to announce the new logo for the Preston Historical Society and the Depot Museum and Riverfront Center. Kelly Printing helped us bring our ideas and feedback to life to create this new logo which features our historic campus and the new DMRC. If you look closely, you see the logo highlights our river and bluffs as well. Look for the new logo on our internal office supplies such as letterhead, address labels, and greeting cards and also on items for sale in the DMRC such as t-shirts, postcards, and stickers!



President's Notes: Volunteers are the Key!

By: Sheila Craig

The success of the Depot Museum and Riverfront Center IS centered on volunteers! It is only because of a multitude of volunteers that the Preston Historical Society has been able to achieve a milestone in the history of Preston with the development of this magnificent Project. It took volunteers to write grants, meet with potential donors, and be the donors to acquire the necessary funds to actually find the funding to get the building. But before that it was a volunteer 'idea' from people with the vision to have a depot replica and use the former Dairy & Farm building to be the basis for the materials. Volunteers found and met with architects and engineers, and then identified and recruited Phil Eickhoff to be the general contractor.

Volunteers serve on 14 different committees to develop all aspects of the project from the building to interpretation. When you take a moment to actually think about this, it is awesome, incredible, and magnificent. There are a host of other words that the various volunteers could use to describe this endeavor for not only the Preston Historical Society, or the City of Preston, but the wider community.

This effort is moving forward and will continue to move forward on the backs of Volunteers. Since we have just celebrated April as 'Volunteer Recognition Month', I dedicate this article to the Volunteers serving the Preston Historical Society!

2026 Events Calendar

- Grand Opening - Fri., May 15, 9am-5pm with ribbon cutting at 9am. Sat., May 16, 9am-3pm.
- Raffle - opened in March with drawing on August 6 at the PHS Monthly meeting
- Tractor Ride - September 19 & 20
- Monthly meetings - the first Thursday of each month

"New" Old Signs

By: Alison Leathers

In collaboration with Kelly Printing, various signage has been made to be ready for the Grand Opening.



Photo: Jon DeVries with Andrew Kelly from Kelly Printing and original depot building with Preston sign.



Be on the lookout for this signage inside and outside of the DMRC.



We recognized our top donors by giving them naming rights

and signs (made to look like the historic Preston Depot Sign) to the various spaces:

- Agent Room: DeVries Depot Agent Office
- Waiting Room: David Wilson Waiting Room
- Riverfront Center: Christianson Riverfront Center
 - In recognition of the Christianson family - Al, Evelyn, Dan & Jan
- Portico: F & M Community Bank Portico
- Historic Campus: Ila Mae Historic Campus

The new DMRC sign in Milwaukee Road Font. Thanks to Kerry Soiney and Rick Grooters for installing the sign.



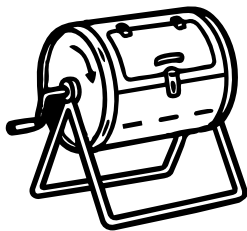
Marketing Committee Updates

By: Alison Leathers

The Marketing Committee, consisting of Ann Sparks, Gabby Kinneberg, Debbie Thompson, Alison Leathers, Ilene Edwards, Ashley Wood, and Sheila Craig, has met for the last few months to get ready for the Grand Opening and update other marketing materials. The creative committee has accomplished the following:

- New logo creation with assistance from Kelly Printing.
- New branding guide with fonts, colors, and other standards to guide us with all future marketing material.
- The creation and ordering of merchandise for sale at the DMRC (t-shirts, stickers, and postcards). Postcard art courtesy of Ashley Wood and Joseph Chase.
- The creation and ordering of new address labels and notecards for PHS business.
- The creation of a train ticket for visitors to “stamp” at the ticket window.
- A new DMRC rack card with Riverfront Center rental information.
- Soon claiming our Google listing.

Thank you to this dedicated group for the hard work to freshen up PHS’s marketing!



Raffle Update

By: Barb Mielke

Have you bought your PHS cash raffle tickets yet? The cash raffle is PHS’s second biggest fundraiser. Proceeds benefit the Preston Historical Society & Depot Museum and Riverfront Center. \$3000 in CA\$H prizes will be awarded to thirteen lucky winners. The drawing takes place at the PHS monthly meeting non August 6 at 7 pm at the DMRC.

Tractor Ride Update

By: Sheila Craig

Plans are coming together for our 13th annual 2-day round about Tractor Ride in beautiful Bluff Country. The ride scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, September 19 and 20 has been renamed the Robert Maust Memorial Tractor Ride in honor of the founder of the ride.

Day 1 on Saturday will start at 9 a.m. in Preston with travel to Root Prairie Lutheran Church for the morning break. From there it is on to Chatfield for a lunch stop at the Chatfield Lutheran Church. The afternoon will be at the Fillmore Free Methodist Church and from there back to enjoy a smoked pork chop dinner and a silent auction.

Sunday finds the group enjoying the traditional sausage, egg, and pancake breakfast before heading the tractors to the Forestville State Park for the morning break. Then it will be back on the road to go to Faith United Methodist Church in Spring Valley for lunch. From Spring Valley the group will return directly to Preston for the afternoon break before loading their tractors to head home.

This year the registration deadline will be on August 31. There will be the usual cap of 100 tractors. If you don’t have a tractor, but you would like to tour Bluff County at a slow leisurely pace, we have a wagon available for those interested in riding for one day or both days – but you must also be pre-registered. There is a registration form on our website. As a Preston Historical Society member, we will be looking for some volunteer help from each of you. This is our largest fundraiser of the year!

Tickets are only \$5 each and over half the tickets are committed already, so don’t miss out. And to make things even more fun, F&M Community Bank donates \$1 for each ticket sold! Show your support for PHS and buy your tickets today.

Membership Update

By: Linda Wolfe

Membership

4 Individual yearly members

14 Family yearly members

105 Lifetime members

28 Lifetime business members

≡Welcome≡

We welcome four new members:

Chuck and Deb Jeffers

Bruce and Theresa Hoff



There is always time to buy a brick and customize it to honor your business, yourself, or someone special in your life! Order forms at the DMRC, F&M Bank, and at prestonmnhistory.com.

Collections Committee Highlights

By: Joanne Hall

Displays and stories are being developed for our Depot Museum Grand Opening on May 15. Actually having a space to reflect Preston history is new territory for us. We appreciate the offers of items like tables, bookcases and cabinets that have helped us in creating displays. We hope they will be enjoyed!

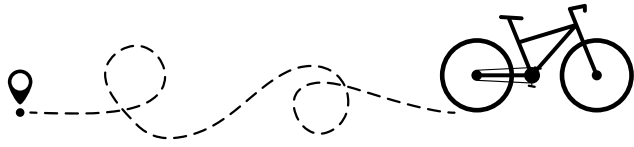
Donations received in the last three months have come from: Kerry Soiney, Bonnie Hill, K. John Hall, Sheila Craig, Eileen Linden, Diane Johnson, Elaine Schmidt, Carol Soland, Amanda Specht, Janet Erdman, John Carlin, Joyce Hellickson, Eileen Linden, Dean Aug, Jeff Knies, Denny Brusse, Andy and Gail Bunge family. The Fillmore Central School District donated several boxes of Preston High School memorabilia and yearbooks. Cataloging new donations, storing or adding them to a developing display has taken several hours over the past four months. The dedicated volunteers of the Collection Committee are Sheila Craig, Sue Grooters, Joyce Hellickson, Diane Johnson, Carol Soland and Linda Wolfe. We also appreciate our "Friends of Collection" who have helped with our "to do" list: John Carlin, Leslea Hodgson, Keith Miller and Jon Wood.



A sneak peak of one of the exhibits!

Carimona & Forestville State Trail Effort Update

By: Jon DeVries



Things are happening in the legislature and another proposal has been submitted to continue the project through the U of MN ESMC Program. Stay tuned for the August newsletter to hear more updates on the bike trail and Preston riverfront effort!

Readers write for readers
Saturday / January 21 / 1978 / 5B

The tracks that went to my town are gone!

John N. Hanson

It was a cool day in late spring and there was still snow on the north side of the hills, in shaded woods, and in the ditches along the side of the road. I could remember driving over the road between LaCrosse and Harmony with my father since I was a youngster. Now, years later, I was driving over it with my family. We were going back to my home town for a visit, and it was a good feeling.

As we climbed a familiar hill east of Spring Grove, I noticed that railroad crews were out working on the track that paralleled the highway. It was unusual to see so many people working on the tracks; there must have been two dozen men and a half dozen tracks out there. Then, to my utter horror, I saw that they were not repairing the tracks but removing them! As we drove to Harmony, the strewn steel track and wooden ties followed us all the way.

When we got to Harmony, there were no railroad tracks to cross over to get into the main street. Instead, we crossed over some dirt and gravel where the track used to be. What kind of Midwestern town doesn't have railroad tracks going through the middle? Well, at least no one has to be raised on the wrong side of them.

I share with many the tender memories of growing up in a small town with "two-train-a-day" service. Balancing on a railroad track or putting pennies on it and waiting for the train to come along and form them into a flattened mess. I remember jumping off the cattle cars into piles of sand.

For 25 cents we could ride the caboose to Canton and for 40 cents

we could go, round-trip, to the County Fair at Preston. The best seat in the caboose was the very top one in that penthouse.

On rare occasions, Jay, the engineer, would let us ride in the cab. I remember the huge ladder and how the first rung touched my chin. Inside the cab was the smell of burning coal and lots of steam and heat. When the engine started moving you would grab onto anything and hold tight. Looking behind, you could see the coal tender move back and forth and the walkway move up and down. A foot pedal was pushed down and the boiler doors would swing wide, revealing an intense fire of large hunks of coal. And, oh, all the large white dials with mysterious numbers. I won't forget that ride!

That railroad was a beautiful part of my growing up, and now part of that memory is gone. I grieved for those long endless miles of steel on black-pitched oak. They stacked the ties for burning and sent the rails far away to be melted down, as if to burn the railroad from my mind forever.

I don't wish to debate the deed. After all, the railroad was old, and did little business. Like many old things, its time was up and, therefore, it had to go in the name of progress. My only wish is to give a kind of eulogy to an old railroad. It, and many others like it, were extremely important in the development of towns like my home town. They served us well.

R.I.P., old railroad.

John N. Hanson was born in Harmony, Milan, and is now a pharmacist in Decorah, Iowa. He bought an electric train last Christmas for his son and himself.

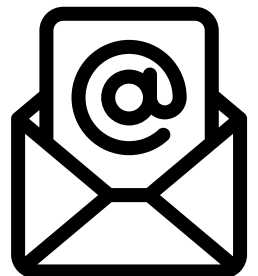
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History Moment

This newspaper clipping is shared from a Harmony Area Historical Society Facebook Post: John Hanson young son of Leonard Hanson Harmony's Pharmacist 1938 and well into the 1960's writes his memories of removing the railroad tracks we always had to drive over before entering main street.

Do you have memories or a specific story of the Milwaukee Rail coming through the area? If so, send them to [phs-marketing@prestonmnhistory.com!](mailto:phs-marketing@prestonmnhistory.com)

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



History Moment - Preston Arts Council

By: Eileen Tienter-Linden

Thanks Mariella, for the Arts Council introduction. I've got the pleasure of giving you the events we did, running though 2006-2024. In 2006 we partnered with the Harmony Arts Council for their Big Band Bash. Bruce Henry, jazz musician in residence, returned to Fillmore Central to work with students and held a Jazz concert for the community, held at Wheelers in Harmony. 2007 The Fintaical Fish sculpture, a 30 foot fish sculpture to be placed along highway 52, was a city of Preston project that merged with the Arts Council. Monies were raised, committees were formed. But sadly it never was completed. We hosted five musical concerts 2008-2014: Maritza band, Scott and Greg Hoag, Fillmore Central Tapestry choir, Irish Minstrels, and Lori Ecker.

In 2011 we hosted In the Shadow of Ishi: A Talefish and Glaciers. A program of story telling and music by Area residents Greoge Spangler and Janine Sherry. We partnered with the following organizations: Preston Lions club for Picnic at the Pines 2011, served refreshments for the Preston Library programs 2012-2018, ECFE for their Halloween Fest 2017-2018, the Preston Chamber Holiday Expo, we had a membership table 2017- 2018.

We donated to the following organizations, 2011-2023: the Preston Area Community Foundation, Student Scholarship program, Arts in Residence, the Bluff Country Studio Arts Tour and to Fillmore Central middle school art projects, one being "The Pour". The students made patriot tiles that are on display at the Preston Veterans Nursing home.

We hosted Four Movies night 2008-2011 Movies Nites Under The Stars, Harvey, It Happened One Night, Grease and Blind Side. We also hosted a local writers program featuring: Rachel Hanson, Neil Haugerud, Rita Joerg, and Jon Laging.

Our fundraisers consisted of Two Ugly Sweater events, held at the Preston Servicemen Club 2015 & 2016, Three, Family Fun Nites where we sponsored two chalk walks and sold root beer floats. For our mural project we sold painting rites for painting certain parts of our Hooked on Preston mural.

Another fundraiser was our Gyotaku printing of t-shirts, aprons and bags, which were sold at the Preston Visitors Center. We had great times printing them on Trout Days weekend and many member gatherings to print inventory. 2007-2018 Now onto our bigger projects: 2015-2017 our mural project, "Hooked on Preston" artist Alison Love Ulsman. We had many events to promote and paint on this mural. It was a wonderful community project. The Fillmore middle school had a paper copy of the mural to color. "Morning Raise" our stained glass project, 2019-2020, artist Vicky Kirk. On display at the Veterans Cemetery. (See video of Gerie Daley) "Lady on the Lake" 2022-2023 our multimedia art work, artist Kelly Puent, and 5 16 x 20 Civil War pictures of MN Civil War troops. On display at the Preston Veterans Nursing Home. Inspiration for the project came from a postcard from the Preston Historical Society. The Civil War pictures were inspired by the address of the home, 1864 First Minnesota Street.

I'd like to think that we accomplished our goals and objectives, to support arts and programs that provided quality art experiences for people of all ages. Sadly in 2023 we disbanded.

History Moment - Gyotaku

By: Eileen Tienter - Linden

Gyotaku is the traditional Japanese method of printing fish, a practice which dates back to the mid 1800s. This form of nature printing, where ink is applied to a fish or replica, roll it with ink or paint and then pressed onto paper, it was used by fishermen to record their catches, but also has become an art form.

The Gyotaku method of printing uses fish, sea creatures or similar subjects as its “printing plates”. It is rumored that samurai would settle competitions using Gyotaku prints. This original form of Gyotaku, as a recording method for fishermen, is still utilized today, and can be seen hanging in tackle shops in Japan.

Kay Spangler brought the Gyotaku idea to the Arts Council Community in 2006. All the members thought it would be a unique activity for Trout Day weekend, it could also be a fund raising tool. George Spangler got permission from the DNR to be able to catch and keep various sizes of trout to use for printing each year. So they ordered t-shirts, fabric paint, brushes, and rubber fish (for people too squeamish to handle real life dead fish) On Trout Days weekend of 2007 they set up their first of many Gyotaku t-shirt printing.

Gyotaku aprons were introduced in 2012, Eileen Linden was garage sailing on Trout Days City wide garage sales when she happened upon 2 white aprons at Gary Fines garage sale. They were purchased, printed and worn that weekend. The next year we had aprons to print too!

Cotton bags were added to our line up of Gyotaku items in 2015.

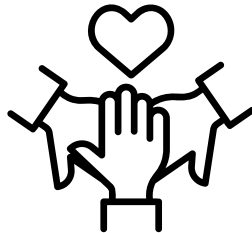
In 2015 when we started to work on our “ Hooked on Preston” mural project, we changed from Preston Trout days to printing “Hooked on Preston” on all of our Gyotaku items.

We sold many of these items at the Preston Visitors center, over the years we had many printing days, with our members to print t-shirts, aprons and bags. It was great fun!

Volunteers Needed

There are five different volunteer positions that PHS needs help from! Please reach out if you are interested and help us spread the word! We're looking for volunteers who can give 2 - 4 hours once a month (or more, if you have the time). Fri.-Sat. 10:00am – 4:00pm, Sun. 10:00am – 12:00pm.

- Greeters
- Writers
- Graphic Designers
- Video Editors
- Audio Editors



History isn't just about the past. It's about the people who keep it alive. Share the stories. Be part of something meaningful. Help yesterday inspire tomorrow. Contact us:

prestonhistoricalsociety@prestonmnhistory.com

History Moment - United Methodist Church Christmas Day Fire - 1985

By: Mark Woodward

Christmas Day 1985, started out like many winter mornings. The temperature was -8 degrees with winds out of the Northwest 20-30 MPH. As many families sat down to enjoy their Christmas dinner, the fire siren rang, piercing the cold wind throughout the city. Would there be enough firemen around to answer the call?

Equipped with backpacks, the Preston firemen were met with heavy smoke billowing out of the church sanctuary. They crawled on hands and knees towards the orange glow signaling a devastating blaze behind the altar. Trying to distinguish the flame, was to no avail as the fire was on the floor behind the altar. The firefighters then shot water up at the ceiling allowing the water to trickle down and extinguish the flames. Large exhaust fans were used to clear the smoke from the sanctuary. Burned beyond repair, the altar, baptismal font, nativity scene, circuitry boards of the organ and ceiling lights, and the large wooden cross were a total loss.

In the wake of the fire, the church's governing body decided to use local craftsmen to repair the church. Amid the destruction, John Leeseberg, a devoted member of the church and a skilled local craftsman, stepped forward to lead the recovery effort. A dedicated team including Steve Knoepke, Lynn Tienter, Ron and Roger Schroeder, Bobby Volkart and Jerry Miller spearheaded the reconstruction efforts. The community, already grappling with a farming crisis, resolved to purchase replacement materials locally to support the struggling economy.

The congregation gathered in the basement Fellowship Hall for services during the long winter months, and finally on Easter morning in 1986, they celebrated their resilience with a triumphant return to their reconstructed sanctuary. In rebuilding their church, they not only restored a vital part of their community, but also reaffirmed their faith and commitment to one another in the face of hardship.

Preston Historical Society Officers & Contact Information

- President: Sheila Craig (507.273.1481), phs-president@prestonmnhistory.com
- Vice President: Barb Mielke, phs-vicepresident@prestonmnhistory.com
- Secretary: Diane Johnson, phs-secretary@prestonmnhistory.com
- Treasurer: Matt Quanrud, phs-treasurer@prestonmnhistory.com
- Newsletter Editor: Alison Leathers, phs-marketing@prestonmnhistory.com
- Social Media: Ilene Edwards, ilene6006@gmail.com

Mailing: Box 138, Preston, MN 55965

www.prestonmnhistory.com

prestonhistoricalsociety@prestonmnhistory.com

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