



Preston
Historical
Society

Newsletter

We are Open!

By: Joanne Hall, Sheila Craig & Alison Leathers

The Preston Depot Museum and Riverfront Center hosted its grand opening during Trout Days weekend on May 15-16, 2026. The celebrations started with a ribbon cutting at 9am on May 15, 2026. PHS President Sheila Craig gave a wonderful speech while Ila Mae Olstad, Dan Christianson, Jan Christianson Dawson, Kerry Soiney, and Jon DeVries all helped with the ribbon cutting. A large crowd was there to help PHS celebrate this milestone grand opening and enjoy the exhibits, conversation, and treats.

The month of May saw over 390 visitors come through the door of the Depot Museum!

We have had a great variety of rental uses in the Riverfront Center from baby and wedding showers, to family Christmas and reunions to a presentation on a paranormal visit to the Wood's home. We have lots of room for more rentals.



The DMRC is open!

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Fridays and
Saturdays 10am-4pm

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Sundays
10am-12pm
Admission is free!

All Signs Point to...Teamwork

By: Alison Leathers

Many new signs were installed on the outside and inside of the DMRC building prior to the grand opening. Multiple PHS members and the Fundraising and Building Committees were involved in making decisions on sign verbiage, design, size, location, and more.

Jonathan Wood and John Carlin made the frames for many of the signs. Multiple people worked with Kelly Printing to design and order signage. It took a lot of teamwork to complete this big task.



Exterior and interior signage. Photos by Jon DeVries

Grand Opening Giveaway Winners

Winners of the grand opening give-aways were:

- PHS Crock Set: Hunter Goellner - Preston, MN
- Grain Elevator Birdhouse: Lori Thompson - Starbuck, MN
- PHS T-shirt: Judy Hein - Farmington, MN

A huge thank you to Phil Durst for donating the set of Preston crocks for the grand opening give-away!

President's Notes

By: Sheila Craig

WE DID IT! Together the Preston Historical Society Membership has accomplished a monumental step for Preston – the opening of the Depot Museum and Riverfront Center at 304 Fillmore Street in Preston.

The Grand Opening was held on Friday, May 15 at 9:00 a.m. with Ila Mae Olstad providing the ribbon cutting assisted by Kerry Soiney and Jon DeVries. Well over 50 people attended the actual ribbon cutting with approximately 300 visiting the Museum during the weekend! We didn't quite do a "Walk on Moon", but we were close! The significance for the City of Preston is immeasurable.

The Collection Committee, led by Chair Joanne Hall, has done a fantastic job in preparing an interesting array of displays to showcase some of the many artifacts that have been donated to the Museum (these will be rotating displays, so not everything that has been given is out on display at any one time). Current displays have featured drama and summer sports accomplishments by Preston High School, Trout Days, America 250, Ila Mae's railroad article, business highlights and many more.

Since the opening weekend the facility has been open to the public, free of charge, on Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Sunday's from 10 a.m. until noon. Every two hour shift has been staffed by a volunteer. Come join the fun and sign up for your turn to host visitors to the Museum (training is provided). Many people who have stopped by are former Preston residents who love to reminisce while others just come to see our new attraction.



Thanks to the Building Committee for securing a new bike rack for visitors! Thanks to the Preston Area Community Foundation for funding the new gutters for the buliding to help negate ice build up in the winter (sidewalk safety) and move water away from the building.



Photo by Jon DeVries

Additional Improvements to DMRC Site

By: Rick Grooters & Chuck Aug

Cement was poured for parking spaces on the west side of the DMRC building in early May. There are two ADA parking spots and eight additional parking spots on this new concrete.

Rain gutter downspouts were installed in June 2026 with funding from a grant through the Preston Area Community Foundation. These downspouts are hooked up to the underground tile to eliminate surface runoff.

A new bike rack was placed by the two-headed car to accommodate the bikers.

Black dirt will soon be put around the sidewalks and the portico to level up the ground.

The Building Committee had the first Site Meeting with Jim Roe (MNHS consultant) and our landscape designer.

2026 Raffle Conclusion and Winners

By: Barb Mielke

The second annual Cash Raffle wrapped up at the PHS monthly meeting on August 6 at 7 pm. We are happy to report it was a very successful fundraiser for PHS.

Cash prizes totaling \$3000 were awarded. The \$1000 grand prize winner was Greg Davids of Preston. Two \$500 prizes were awarded to Mandy Shmoker of Rushford and Bettie Gulbranson of Preston and the two \$250 winners were Tim Little of Harmony and Jill Covert of Davis, CA. Two \$100 prizes were awarded to Jay Harstad of Preston and Zach Imoehl of Cresco IA. Six final cash prizes of \$50 were awarded to Connor Dols of Preston, Cory Smith of Spring Valley, Debbie Thompson of Preston, Amber Meyer of Rochester, Tona Keene of Preston, and Charles Aug of Preston. Congratulations to these thirteen lucky winners!

A total of 1500 tickets were sold. A special thank you to Karen Quanrud and Carol Soland for their efforts, as they sold more than half of the Cash Raffle tickets which made my job very easy. Thanks also to Dan Christianson for matching the 1500 cash raffle tickets sold with \$1 per ticket for a total of \$1500. We have certainly been blessed in the Preston community!

We are grateful to all who supported this activity by buying tickets or selling tickets.

Thank you PHS
members and
community!

Marketing Committee Updates

By: Alison Leathers

Since the grand opening, the Marketing Committee has not needed to meet but continues to support PHS as needed.

A thank you ad was placed in the Fillmore County Journal in June to thank everyone for a successful grand opening, announce the winners of the drawing, and thank Phil Durst for donating the crocks for the drawing. The ad also highlighted that the DMRC is open, its location, and entry is free.

Ilene Edwards and Ashley Wood continue to keep our Facebook page updated with engaging posts.



A special thank you to artist Joseph Chase of Chatfield, MN, for creating this artwork for one of our postcards for sale at the DMRC.

Membership Update

By: Linda Wolfe

There have been no new memberships in June and July.

Is there someone in your life that may be interested in becoming a member? Reminder that membership information can be found at:

<https://www.prestonmnchamber.com/preston-historical-society-membership/>

Collections Committee Highlights

By: Joanne Hall

The DMRC is open and ready for you to enjoy our many displays! Our Collections Committee carefully considers each item offered to the Society and we have had a back log of donations to consider! We evaluate the story behind the artifact, its relevance to Preston, its condition, and our ability to store, maintain and display the artifact. Some items we accept simply contribute to a Preston story.

- Our Trout Days display is due to donations from the Preston Arts Council for fish painting photos and shirts, Mel Hayner for Mel Haugstad's fishing pole; and the many, like Gabby Kinneberg, who donated Trout Days memorabilia as well as Lazy Dazy history and lures. The fishing fly display is on loan from the Arrowhead Fly Fishing Association. We hope the Trout Trot and parade photos brought back good memories!
- The current F&M Bank display and history reflects their longevity in Preston and the many "give-aways" over the years. People have donated F&M Bank memorabilia ranging from pens to mugs, decks of cards, pizza cutters, calendars and much more.
- The current Ebert Hardware display is a result of donations from Phil Durst, Jeff Bennett and other individuals. Open on the desk top, the record of gun sales is a fun look!
- Many of our donations tell the story of Preston schools over the years-class and all-school reunions, sport jackets and uniforms, band uniforms, trophies, graduation, and awards. Recent donations were from Andy Walsh, Bev Hagedorn, Eileen Linden, Bonnie Davids, Mary Eich, Debbie Thompson, Barb Mielke, Carol & LuVerne Soland, the family of Verlyn Dornink, Rosalie Bjorkman, and Deb Peterson.
- Charles and Ann Sparks provided a donation of items that reflect their years as members of the Preston-Fountain School faculty. In addition to yearbooks from the Elementary and Middle School, there are Bluejay Bugle newsletters and other memorabilia.
- The family of Frank Jaszewski contributed a collection of baseball and football record books that could verify (or debate) the stories of some of his athletes! Other Preston School and Preston swimming pool memorabilia were part of the large donation from Frank's family.
- Artifacts show how items like graduation diplomas evolve over the years. The diploma of Lester Ott donated by Marilyn Schreier is poster sized, Gerald Kalstabakken's 1950 diploma donated by Barb Mielke is in a small paper folder and Debbie Thompson's 1980 diploma is in a leather folder. One unchanged artifact is the Preston "P"!
- Many people donate a single item or photos that reflect a current or former Preston business or organization-like a yard stick from Sethre Implement or Dahly's TV; a wooden hanger from the Gilbertson & Kuethe store; a Simonson Oil Co. letter opener or photo postcard. Roger Marzolf, Kevin Ostern, Andy Bisek, Lori Finseth, Sue Grooters, Diane Johnson, and Pat Soland have contributed such items.
- Wayne Haugerud donated photos and artifacts from the Preston Republican office, printing plates for our railroad display came from Linda O'Connor, and a clock from the old elementary school that now hangs in the Agent's Office was donated by Chuck Aug.
- Jon Haugan donated items reflecting the history of the pharmacy from the days of Porter Remington and Gordon Green. Our pharmacy display will include a poison purchase record!
- The brass spittoon (now "out of order") donated by Mark Woodward recalls the days they were located for a specific purpose in saloons and train waiting rooms.

Collections Committee Highlights contd.

- Our Reference shelf collection of school yearbooks will always be available, as well as Preston history books, such as the All School Reunion; "Coming Home" Preston's 125th Anniversary 1980, and 1984 Fillmore County History book. Donations from Kevin Ostern and Sue Hovey make these possible.
- K. John Hall donated four large wooden easels to PHS for our use in creating displays.
- Bonnie and Greg Davids contributed many items reflecting Preston businesses, Trout Days and All School reunions.

Each donation helps tell our story of Preston and its river, railroad or agriculture. We are unable to display all of the donations at one time, so we plan to update displays to tell new stories as time goes by.

Photo: Andy Bunge stands next to a cabinet from the Preston High School that was gifted to him by his former teacher and track coach, the late Paul Zimmerman. Andy fixed it up decades ago and donated it to the museum in May.



Tractor Ride Update



By: Sheila Craig

As of this newsletter we have 77 tractors signed up plus all of the extra riders and people wagon participants. We will soon be requesting donations of bars and cookies for the morning and afternoon breaks that we provide for the participants. We will also be looking for workers to assist with serving the dinner on Saturday evening, September 19, 2026 and the breakfast on Sunday morning, September 20.

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**

The Tractor Ride is the largest fundraiser for the Preston Historical Society. Your assistance with this endeavor is appreciated.

Riverfront Center Updates

By: Sheila Craig

We have had the Riverfront Center available for rental for approximately eight months. We've had an interesting array of renters from child birthdays, family Christmas events and reunions, baby and bridal showers, to garden clubs, business events, and political open houses. Consider using this venue for your next group meeting. Less than four hours is \$75 while four hours or more is \$125. If you are interested in renting, use the rental form found on our website at prestonmnhistory.com.



**DYK? We have
a train ticket
counter!
Come get
your ticket
stamped!**



Forestville State Trail Effort Moves Forward

May 2026 Float Trip

Our thanks to Mel Hayner for his generous hosting of our Forestville team kayaking tour of the Root River Valley. The tour highlighted the unique beauty of this valley and also provided numerous examples of conservation tasks and areas that need attention. My special thanks to Andi Sutton from ESMC and Dan Handeen from the U of M Design Center for their assistance and river skills and expertise. This tour will guide our next stage of ecology opportunities as identified by Joel Mielke who also informed our visit. Please find some pictures in this article of our shared "adventure." All Aboard and thanks to all.

-Jon DeVries

June Meeting with Key Players

By Alison Leathers

On June 24, 2026, a meeting at the Preston Depot Museum and Riverfront Center was held to share updates and a most preferred route conceptual map for a trail from Preston to Carimona.

Key players were there including the local planning group, spearheaded by Jon DeVries, of people from Preston, Lanesboro, and Harmony, including the Mayors of Preston, Lanesboro, and Harmony; U of MN SE MN RSDP Executive Director Andi Sutton and U of MN Design Center research fellow Dan Handeen; MN DNR Staff; Rep. Greg Davids; Fillmore County Soil & Water staff; Fillmore County Commissioner Duane Bakke; Preston Chamber & Tourism Director Mandy Huston; interim Preston City Administrator Michelle Marotzke; and many community members.

Kent Starr, Project Manager for the MN DNR Division of Parks and Trails, stressed that new trails in MN only get built because of local involvement and local direction. The Preston Historical Society will continue driving this project, especially as new funds were appropriated from the MN legislature, with Rep. Greg Davids being able to get the project an additional four million dollars.



Jon DeVries takes a selfie with Andi Sutton, U of MN SE MN RSDP Executive Director.



Andi Sutton (left) with Michelle Marotzke (right), former Preston EDA Director and current interim city administrator.

The group is ready to tackle the next steps in this quest to expand the current 60 miles of trails in this area, with this stretch to Forestville being touted by the MN DNR Engineer as having the potential to be the most beautiful section of trail in Minnesota.

A full article was written for the Root River Current by John Torgrimson and can be found at this link:

<https://rootrivercurrent.org/preston-to-forestville-trail-moves-one-step-closer-to-reality/>

Check out the Fillmore County Journal article:

<https://fillmorecountyjournal.com/the-goal-preston-to-forestville-bike-trail/>

History Moment - Preston Arts Council Part II

By: Kay Spangler - provided by Mariella TerBeest-Schladweiler

In 2004, Preston's resident sculptor, Ben Love, had a dream. He envisioned a beautiful sculpture park, winding along the Root River, and bicycle trail in Preston, Minnesota. Ben talked with friends, community leaders, local, and county officials, and artists to garner support for his idea. One of Preston's prominent promoters, former Mayor Richard Nelson, saw great possibilities in Ben's sculpture park idea. He thought the sculpture park's success depended upon establishing a mechanism that could develop the idea into a concrete plan, and project proposal. Richard decided to promote the idea by forming Preston City Arts Council as that mechanism. Richard held two public meetings that addressed the art need in the Preston area. A local steering committee was formed to organize the council. Members of the committee included Preston residents Father Francis Galles, Ben Love, Richard Nelson, and Kay Spangler. Sadly, in the fall of 2005, Richard Nelson passed away suddenly, and in early 2006, Ben Love suffered a debilitating stroke that left him in need of institutional care.

In the spring of 2006, Father Francis Galles, and Kay Spangler invited other interested Preston residents to attend an arts council organizational meeting. At the meeting, a volunteer board of directors was appointed, and in September of 2007, the Preston Area Arts Council celebrates its first year as a Minnesota non-profit organization. The charter Preston Area Arts Council board members include Eric Corson, Tara Corson, Father Francis Galles, Sally Gibson, Amy Luhmann, Jessica (formally Erik) Paulson, La Verne Paulson, Doctor Robert Sauer, Joe Schladweiler, Mariella TerBeest-Schladweiler, and Kay Spangler. At a Preston town meeting held in August of 2006, a community project proposal to create, and build a 30-foot-tall trout sculpture along Highway 52 in Preston became one of two winning proposals to receive funding from Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation. The dreams of both Ben Love and Richard Nelson remain alive and well.

Mission Statement: The Preston Area Arts Council supports artists, and programs that provide quality arts experiences for people of all ages, interests, and abilities.

Goals and Objectives: The Preston Area Arts Council works to broaden the base of public, and private support for the arts; to assist art organizations, and artists through funding, and consulting; to serve as a local resource for arts information, and education; to encourage communication, and cooperation among area arts groups, the schools, other non-profit organizations, local community government units; works to promote the arts as a vehicle for community, and area economic development, and tourism.

Our First Year at a Glance

- Worked with the Harmony Arts Board to support the Fillmore Central's "Big Band Bash" by conducting a fundraising campaign for the event.
- Lobbied for arts projects in the Preston town meeting supported by the Preston Citizens in Action Committee, and the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation.
- Supported the winning town meeting project proposal the "Fintastical Trout Sculpture Project".
- Sponsored a Halloween pumpkin decorating contest in Preston.
- Sponsored a Fillmore Central Photo Club exhibit at the Preston Library.
- Conducted a Trout Day workshop: "The Art of Gyotaku Japanese Fish Printing".
- Awarded a high school student a \$150.00 scholarship to attend the Commonweal Theatre Conservatory.

History Moment - 412 St. Anthony Street North

By: Charlie Sparks

Charlie & Ann Sparks Home

This home was built around the turn of the century on 2 1/2 lots for R. E. and Anna Thompson. Richard Enos was born in the township of Preble, March 7, 1857, to Iver and Cecilia (Walder) Thompson in Fillmore County. His parents were from Norway and were married in Chicago. R. E. was educated in the common schools of the Newburg township, Breckenridge Institute at Decorah, and the State Normal School in Winona.

From 1874 to 1879 he taught school. He studied law in the office of Judge H. R. Wells in Preston and was admitted to the bar in 1881. Gray & Thompson Law Firm was formed in a partnership with A. D. Gray. R. E. served as a deputy clerk of The District court, Representative of district 1883 to 1885 and was re-elected. In 1894, he was elected to the State Senate and served until 1905. Mr. Thompson along with his brother A. W. Thompson were also in the abstract business for Fillmore County. Thompson Brothers had the original and only set of abstract books and tract index of Fillmore County. He was also a Master Mason. R. E. married Anna (Ann) in 1884 and they had 2 children. Victor was born Sept. 26, 1885, and Inez was born May 13, 1891. R. E. died in 1925 and Anna lived in the home until her death in 1951. Alton and Doris Olson owned the house from 1952 to 1959.

Orilee & Vernon Kleimenhagen bought the house in 1959. Orilee rented boarding rooms until she sold the home in 1979 to Donald & Retha Grewe. Vernon built the large garage by the alley using materials from the gas station at the the corner of St. Anthony St. and Fillmore St. Many single people including several teachers lived in the house when it was a boarding house. The interior of the house was not changed while it was a boarding house. Charlie & Ann Sparks bought the house in 1987 raising their 3 children, Carrie, Will, and Peter there. Charlie and Ann are still in the home at this time. As a side note, his brother, A. W. Thompson built the former home of David and Cynthia Hokenson at 309 St. Paul St. NW.



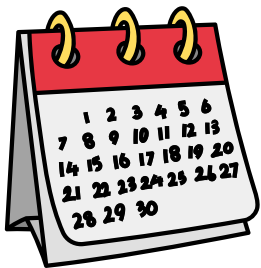
History Moment - 412 St. Anthony Street North contd.

By: Charlie Sparks

A few quotes from the newspaper obituary:

“HON. R. E. THOMPSON PASSES - Hon. R. E. Thompson Dies at Rochester Hospital After a Lingerin Illness from Heart Trouble. Funeral Services Tomorrow Afternoon at the Home.” “About two years ago he was taken with the flu and it is thought the attack was responsible for heart trouble which became serious a year ago, so much that he spent the winter in Rochester. He returned in the spring much improved in health and was feeling quite well until about two months ago when he again returned there for treatment but grew steadily weaker and it has been apparent for several weeks that he could not recover.” “To him as much as to any one are we indebted for the widening of the Branch and the connection between here and Isinours.” (railroad) “With the passing of Mr. Thompson, Fillmore County loses one of its most noted citizens and Preston one her best residents, a man of exemplary habits, honored by all.” “The remains will arrive here today and funeral services will be conducted at the home at 2:30 tomorrow afternoon. Interment will be made at Crown Hill cemetery.”

Information was gathered from various history books of Fillmore County and Preston. Submitted by Charlie Sparks - June 2026



2026 Events

- Tractor Ride - September 19 & 20
- Autumn Trail - October 3, Preston's weekend for the Root River Trail Towns Fall event
- Monthly meetings - the first Thursday of each month

Thank You!

Thank you to Barb and Joel Mielke for hosting an ice cream social on July 14 to thank all the PHS volunteers!

Live Generously: Thrivent Action Teams & Choice Dollars

By: Diane Johnson

Thrivent Action Team Grants - In the past, our community has been enriched in many ways by the generosity of the Thrivent organization with the resources they share in their offering of Thrivent Action Teams. Examples of past projects in our community include purchasing items for Christmas in Fillmore County, Fillmore County Women's Shelter, Bundles of Love, Vacation Bible School, the Food Shelf, winter clothing/boots given to local school, PHS signs and soft opening materials, the Child Care Center (supplies, toys, books).

Thrivent members are eligible to apply for up to two "Action Team" Visa gift cards worth up to \$250 each year. A Thrivent member submits an application to lead a project. Upon approval, Thrivent then goes on to support the project by providing the seed money, T-shirts, and other helpful items. Once the project is completed, the team leader completes a brief report and submits it to Thrivent to share the positive impact outcomes and celebrate the success of the project.

Even if you are not a Thrivent member, you can still easily get involved. For just \$19.95 per year, you can become an "Associate Member". Each Associate member is eligible to apply for one action team grant of \$250 per year. There are many worthwhile projects in our community that would benefit from these grants. Please consider applying for one (or more) of these grants. It only takes a few minutes of your time to complete the application process.

Thrivent Choice Dollars - Thrivent members who have financial products also get "Choice Dollars" each year to designate to a charity of their choice. Preston Historical Society is an approved non-profit for members to designate their dollars to. Last year, PHS received \$727 from this program.

If you have questions about how to apply for a grant (or have a suggestion on where funds are needed), or need help finding your choice dollars, contact Diane Johnson (507-251- 6922). Additional information and application forms can also be found on their website at <https://www.thrivent.com>.



Preston Historical Society Officers & Contact Information

- President: Sheila Craig (507.273.1481), phs-president@prestonmnhistory.com
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