



## Preston Historical Society

PO Box 138  
Preston, Minnesota 55965

A 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Corporation

## NEWSLETTER July 2019

Volume 13 Issue 2

### NEW RAIL COMMEMORATION DISPLAY AT PRESTON TRAILHEAD – RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY SUNDAY, JUNE 30<sup>TH</sup> – 3:00 P.M. AND CABOOSE OPEN HOUSE 2:00-4:00

By: Jon DeVries

*The Milwaukee Road in Preston* and *A Day on the Railroad* are two of the headlines of a new interpretive display sign being unveiled and dedicated on Sunday, June 30<sup>th</sup> in Preston. The sign is a project of the Preston Historical Society (PHS) and is located adjacent to the historic rail campus being developed by PHS at the Preston-Harmony trailhead. The sign has been jointly funded by the Preston Historical Society and the Preston Area Community Foundation (PACF).

The *Milwaukee Road in Preston* story tells the role of the railroad in the development of Preston and Fillmore County. It also profiles the historic rail campus which began with the designation of the Milwaukee Elevator to the National Register of Historic Places in 2006.



Since then PHS has restored the elevator and added rail displays including a 1939 box car, a 1951 caboose, and a Fairmont “speeder” motorcar. An elevator bagging shed/scale house and office as well as motorcar trailer are in planning.

The *A Day on the Railroad* story is a commemoration to the Milwaukee Road employees that served Preston whose names have been gathered from family members and historic records. To date thirty-three employee names have been identified and listed on the sign. These names are accompanied by a picture of train operations in Preston on a typical spring day in 1963 – including turning the engine, assembling the train, and traveling to Isinours – the historic rail junction five miles north of Preston.



Two speakers who donated pictures and maps to the sign will share their recollections: Cecil Cook and Walter J. Dunlap. Cecil Cook, rail author, grew up in Waukon and with his brother photographed the Milwaukee Road – he will be autographing his book “Final Steam Years” at the dedication for \$25 a copy.

Walter J. Dunlap of St. Paul, MN, railroad photographer, provided his wonderful color photographs of a typical day on the railroad in Preston in 1963. He is also a colleague of John C. Luecke, author of *More Milwaukee Road in Minnesota*, who provided maps for the sign including the Preston Yard showing all the businesses located there and another showing the rail route to Isinours.

The dedication event will take place at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 30<sup>th</sup> at the restored Milwaukee Road caboos adjacent to the Milwaukee Elevator and state trailhead. The public is invited to tour the caboos which will be open from 2:00-4:00 and attend the ceremony at 3:00.

The event will also include “throwing the switch” for the lighting of the caboos – both the display sign and the historic caboos will be lit in the evening going forward – providing a friendly and historic welcome to Preston. Light refreshments will be served.

Many individuals, firms, and organizations made this historic display possible including: Preston Historical Society and Preston Area Community Foundation – Funding; Mayor Kurt Reicks & City Administrator Joe Hoffman, City of Preston – Site/Utilities; Cecil Cook, Walter J. Dunlap, John C. Luecke and Fillmore County News Leader – Pictures and Maps; Milwaukee Road Historical Assn. (MRHA) – Heralds; Ron Schroeder, Quality Construction – Contractor; Kevin Ostern, Morem Electric – Sign and Caboose Lighting; Abbey Norby, Kelly Printing – Graphic Design; John Carlin – Historic Depot Gable and Sign; Jon B. DeVries & Flossie Schultz – Rail Research, and Sheila Craig, PHS President.

## President's Corner

By: Sheila Craig

How can 2019 be ½ over already!!! In February the membership reviewed our goals and set the following 10 items to try to achieve during the year. We are well on our way to achieving most of them.

### Preston Historical Society Goals for 2019

1. Increase revenue through raffle, city contribution, & tractor ride
2. Work on historical documentation: starting a museum, updating the inventory, putting pictures on flash drive, and continuing historical moment
3. Public Relations: having caboos open more and other presence in the community
4. Monitor maintenance on assets
5. Continue tractor ride with limit of 100 tractors
6. Membership: increase number and participation
7. Improvements to the elevator: getting windows installed and a lightning system inside on the displays
8. Complete historical marker sign at the Trailhead.
9. Add motor car trailer to historical campus
10. Continue efforts to reconstruct bagging shed

## Tractor Ride 2019

By Elaine Maust

We are busy making all the arrangements for our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual ride on Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>. Thus far we have drivers from New Jersey, Mississippi, Iowa, Wisconsin & Minnesota registered.

Saturday we will be going from Preston to Spring Valley and continuing in the afternoon to Fillmore and then back to Preston. That evening they will enjoy a smoked pork chop dinner at the fairgrounds.

On Sunday the ride will go to Lenora, Canton, Harmony and back to Preston with a lunch break at the State Line event center.

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*At each monthly meeting we have a 'history moment'. Some of the presentations follow!*

### **Fillmore County Fair Grounds in Preston 1930's & 1940's**

**Written by Ila Mae (Noel Larson) Olstad**

The fair was usually the last of August. 4-H could take livestock directly to the State Fair. It was a BIG County event. Most towns didn't have celebrations like now. No TV! I remember sitting on the porch swing and hearing the sounds of the Fair-especially the Merry Go Round. Made me want to go!

My dad, Art Noel, was on City Council-Herb Spies was Mayor-and he received some Free passes for rides! One of the first buildings we visited after going through the Turnstile was the County School which was on the west side about the end of the big building there now. Teachers would choose the **best** papers to be sent to the fair and it was fun to search for your exhibits-especially penmanship.

The rides were the Ferris Wheel. Wow! What you could see from the top. The Merry Go Round and that wonderful music. Tilt A Whirl-Bullet Ride -Swings-Pony Rides. Small kids train or cars.

There were "games of chance" to try down the midway center. Along the sides were tents for "freak animals" and Barkers would come out on stage to work the crowd into the show. The biggest attractions were the

"girly show dancers" and we would watch to see who would go inside!

I remember a fence around the Race Track and sometimes standing there to watch the Harness races. These drew big crowds! Another big attraction was the night Grand Stand show. Lots of lights, bright costumes, dancing girls, magicians, and clowns. (Show) Girls stayed at our neighbor's house during the fair. They always looked much more beautiful on stage! I remember wearing my snowsuit to the fair because the nights in late August got cold along the river.

Ball tournaments were popular during the Fair and a lot of people brought picnic baskets with them.

4H was always an important part of the fair. The upstairs of the 4H Building was used as a dormitory for those who had to stay overnight. It was a long way home for many.

Food demonstrations were given-especially bread! Clothing sewing was big-had a style show before the Grand Stand show and awards were won. I remember a contest for the Healthiest Baby in Fillmore County!

The Fair Grounds had other uses during the year-storage of our trailer & horses in the barns and ball games. I remember about 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade getting out of school and the class walking down to the Fair Grounds to watch football games before the field was built by the school. In the '50s the Horse Clubs built the Horse Arena for the 4H Horse Shows and other shows in the area.

It was always fun to look at the Fair Grounds from the Highway Point up by Apple Berry Farm at Fair time or any time. I remember the "Wolf" Farm on the north side, the river-you could see so far! What good memories!"

## **“Children of the ‘50s”**

**Shared by Steve and Joanne (Simonson) Hall**

*Starting Kindergarten in 1955 was a milestone event for us. Not only were we starting school, but it is where we met each other!*

*Our kindergarten class met in the Preston Library for six weeks in the spring of 1955. Our parents received this (included) letter from our teacher, Margaret Murray. It was all we needed to know to launch our educations!*

*We would eventually move on to First grade. Grades 1-12 were all located in the building now known as the Trailhead Suites. Elementary classes were on the first floor and 7-12 were on the second floor. Hot lunch was served in the basement of the Presbyterian Church that stood across the street. The End of the Year event our 2<sup>nd</sup> grade year was a Milwaukee Road train ride to Mabel and a picnic in the Mabel park.*

*Preston was a great place to be a child in the 1950's. The old courthouse still stood on the town square, along with the Band shell. The Popcorn Stand was a summer stop. Trains rumbled along the tracks, the depot and roundhouse were still in use. There were July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations, the County Fair, a Halloween parade around the Town Square and Santa visited Preston in December. Those were wonderful days for us!*

Following is a letter our parents received from the teacher in 1955.

Preston, Minnesota  
March 28, 1955

Dear Parents

Kindergarten is the first of your child's school life. When your child enters kindergarten, he comes not to learn the three R's, but to build habits and share experiences which will help him learn the skills when he is ready to do so.

In kindergarten your child learns to get along with other children and with his teacher.

He will improve in physical co-ordination.

He will learn to work and play in a group and to wait his turn.

He will learn to follow simple and reasonable directions, to share common property, and to tell his experiences before a group.

Your child will learn how to look at books, to love them, and to learn that printed words convey meanings.

He will begin to appreciate fine music, and will be introduced to self-expression through singing, speaking, drawing, and painting.

“Play”, as adults term it, is really “work” to the child. Kindergarten is an adventure for your child. It is the beginning of an exciting new phase of life – the school years.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Margaret S. Murry

1. Please send 35 cents for your child's crayolas.
2. Milk is 25 cents per week.
3. Label your child's rubbers and clothing.
4. School hours are from 8:30 A.M. – 11:00 A.M. They may enter the room after 8:15 A.M.
5. A washable rug or blanket is needed for rest period.

## **DeVries Barber Shop**

**By Dick Wildgrube**

*Originally prepared for the “I Can Still Remember!” series printed in the Republican Leader 5.20.2005 for the Preston Sesquicentennial; excerpts included below.*

It was quite a trek for Elmer De Vries as he arrived in Preston. Born in Holland in 1911, he immigrated to the United States with his family. Outside of Pease, Minn, his father took up farming. Growing up Elmer found that farming was not the life for him, and against his father's wishes, he enrolled in barber school in the Twin Cities.

When finished, he took the bus to Preston in 1936 to take a job with Sam Moe Sam had

to do some convincing to get Elmer to stay as the town already had six barbers. Sam did a good job and Elmer stated a barber career in Preston that would last for 41 years and occupy five different locations.

His fifth and final location came in 1941, when Elmer leased the space at 129 West Fillmore Street, currently Family Hair Center, from Kenneth Ibach and during his time there he updated the shop on a regular basis. The installation of the awning out front was a big project that replaced the canvas one, reducing the sun angle and summer heat. Elmer's shop was the first air-conditioned one in town. He took great pride in the appearance of his shop and the quality of his work. He would often demonstrate hair cutting and styling at the state barber conventions.

Elmer's years of barbering saw the popularity of the crew cut; the medium-length, slicked-back, ducktailed, styled look; to the combed-down-in-front bowl Beatles appearance; the long unkempt look of the 1960s; and into the more washed and styled features that have evolved into the look of today.

Unlike many barbershops of the time, Elmer also cut women's hair. He especially enjoyed giving children their first haircut and providing the free gum or candy that each came to expect. There are still hundreds of Fillmore County residents who recall having their first haircut at the De Vries Barbershop.

Elmer was a leader in the business community including chairing the effort giving Preston its first hanging Christmas decorations around the square and numerous activities through the Booster Club and the Lions to improve downtown Preston.

Elmer would talk at length about lawn care at his home and the plans he had for retirement and his woodworking hobby. They were dreams that never materialized. Elmer died in 1977 – within two months of his retirement. The location continues today as the Family Hair Center under that name with Theresa Keyes as operator.

Jon De Vries recalls: We lived in the back of the barbershop when it was next to Thauwald's Funeral Home. Dad, as the barber, always liked to wear the traditional white barber coat. In 1950 he went to cutting hair by appointment. At first it was slow to catch on, but as time passed, the customers liked it. So much so, that during the busy call-in times, my mother, Arvilla, would man the phone and appointment book.

This would allow Elmer to try to maintain his rate of four haircuts an hour. In the 1940s and 1950s, the shop was open six days a week as well as Wednesday and Saturday nights to accommodate rural shoppers. In the evenings, customers would attend the band concerts at the courthouse gazebo finishing up with a soda or malt.

On other evenings, I would accompany Elmer to cut hair for local shut-ins in area hospitals and nursing homes, too. In the 1960s Elmer organized the Fillmore County barbers to do to a Monday closing.

Every haircut followed this scenario: being covered up with the apron, next wrapped with a home-laundered towel, hair cut, shaving lather on the neck, shaved with a freshly stropped straight razor, and rubbed with Lucky Tiger or Bay Rum. Then it was time to pay your bill and off you'd go.

## Village of Preston, Fillmore County Minnesota 1874

by: Norma Vogt

We received as a gift a beautifully framed 14 X 9.5 detailed hand colored original plan of the Village of Preston done by American Architect and Building News 1874. This picture is hard to find as the Andreus Atlas only had a small circulation at that time and few were preserved. You can see a small version in the book "Images of America Preston" page 25. The original Fillmore Co. Court House stands in the middle with one other building still standing -- the Fillmore County Jail to the left. This building was completed in 1870.

A framed colored copy was donated by PHS for the silent auction at the 2019 Preston Foundation Dinner.

## Visiting the Caboose



Photo By: Bob Smock

One of our 2019 goals was to have the caboose open more often for tours. So far we have been open on Trout Days and the first evening of Rhythm on the River. These events will be three times during the summer with music and food sponsored by the Preston Chamber of Commerce. The caboose will also be open for the sign dedication event on June 30 from 2 – 4 p.m.

## New Web Page

By Gabby Kinneberg

Check out the new web page being managed through the help of Tourism and Chamber Director, Gabby Kinneberg. You can access our web page at [www.prestonmnhistory.com](http://www.prestonmnhistory.com). It can also be accessed through the Preston website at [www.gethookedonpreston.com](http://www.gethookedonpreston.com).  
Web Master: Gabby Gatzke  
gkinneberg@prestonmn.org



## 2019 Raffle

Sales are currently underway for the 2019 raffle. One of the main fund raisers for the PHS, 1000 tickets have been printed with Dan Christianson, F & M Community Bank again matching each with a dollar for a total donation of \$1000. If you live out of town, but would like to purchase or help sell tickets, please contact Sheila Craig, 507.273.1481. Sales end when all tickets are sold or it is the date of the drawing - the August 1 meeting of the Society.

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## Preston Historical Society Officers

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