



Preston Historical Society

Post Office Box 138
Preston, Minnesota 55965

A 501C/3 Non-Profit Corporation

NEWSLETTER
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President's Corner

Sheila Craig

This is a special newsletter to share with you some of the "History Moments" that we have been enjoying at each of the monthly meetings. We have asked the presenters to provide copy for this newsletter.

Other notes to share with you:

- The Caboose will be open on Trout Days from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. If you can help host, please let Norma Vogt know – 507.765.2276.
- We will be having our 'mini' elevator in the Trout Days parade. If you are interested in riding and tossing out candy let Elaine Maust know – 507.765.2453.
- We will soon be ready for our next annual raffle fund raiser. Tickets will be available for sale after May 3. Call Sheila Craig – 507.273.1481 to buy or sell some.
- Representative Greg Davids is working to have the bagging shed project included in the Legacy Funding bill during this legislative session.
- Work is slowly progressing to have a home for the Preston Historical Society at the Riverside Center.
- Annual Tractor Ride is set for Saturday and Sunday, September 15 & 16, 2018.

Waukokee Village

Gabby Gatzke Kinneberg

This is a locality on section 25 in the Willow Creek Valley in Fillmore County. (Between Preston and Harmony) The land was at first pre-empted by Daniell Hulburt and others. The name was derived from an Indian chief, who used to have a fishing and hunting camp at his place. The Indian tribe is thought to be of the Ojibwe-Chippewa Tribe. Several arrowheads were found on the now Gatzke and Broadwater farms. Milton West built the first house in 1853. There was once a post office there, dry



goods store, a schoolhouse and a Methodist Church. The St. Paul-Dubuque Stage Coach trail went

through Waukokee and people still believe Jesse James traveled through the valley on his way to Northfield. The original schoolhouse burnt and a new one was rebuilt. Jon Gatzke's Great-Grandpa Jon purchased the farm that sits on the edge of the woods before you enter Buffalo Grove in the early 1900's from a teacher who taught at the original Waukokee school house. Her husband had passed away and the house was in foreclosure.



The farm is now a 100 year farm and still owned by the Gatzke family. In 1948, Doris and Vern Gatzke moved into the schoolhouse after their house burnt down. Once all the country schools combined into the Preston school, the schoolhouse was purchase by Doris and Vern and it was used as a corncrib. It was later torn down. You can still see the lone tree that sits at the entrance of the old driveway of the school. If you travel through the valley you will also find the Waukoee Cemetery that is maintained by Carimona Township. Although the village itself no longer exists, its history lives on!

Preston Creamery

Robert Maust

The Preston Creamery Association was formed in 1880. The first creamery was built on the east side of the river on the south side of which is now Fillmore Street. At that point in history there was a dam on the north side of Fillmore Street across the river causing a 4 -5 ft pool of water on the west side of the creamery and this pool was used to make ice in the winter and supplying water to the Wolf Wool Mill. The plant remained in operation until 1924 at which time it caught fire and burned. In 1924, after the fire, the creamery was moved and rebuilt on its present site and the walls of the old creamery were converted into an ice house.

As the creamery expanded at its new site, in addition to accepting cream and milk, it added a produce department called Preston Creamery Produce. The produce bought eggs and chickens and sold sack feeds for all kinds of livestock and poultry. The creamery made butter from the start and packaged it in 1 pound blocks sold for eating butter. They also packaged it in 60 pound wax boxes for shipment to commercial customers.

After selling just butter and skim milk, the skim milk being for livestock, they added bottle milk and homogenized milk, chocolate milk bottled in ½ gallon, quarts, pints and ½ pints. A lot of milk was sold to schools in ½ pint glass bottles and were returned, washed, sanitized and used again. In later years cottage cheese was added to the many products being pedaled and sold about the town. Many creameries consolidated with Preston Creamery in the next few years.

In 1945 a casein roll dried plant was added where the first produce had been and the produce plant moved to the corner of St. Paul and River Street. The roll dried plant dried the casein which was used to make paint. In 1950 a new building was built and spray drying was installed and new boilers to operate it. Both skim milk and whole milk were then spray dried into a milk powder and put into 300 pound cardboard barrels. These were shipped out by rail to many users around the US including Mars candy in Chicago, Ill. In later years Preston consolidated with Wisconsin Dairies which later became Foremost Dairies. During the 1960's a dried milk packaging plant was consolidated down by the Milwaukee railroad tracks. The dried milk was taken to the packaging plant in 300 pound barrels or sacks and packaged into smaller sacks for worldwide customers.

History of the Preston Brewery Mike and Flossie Schultz

The Preston Brewery was built and began business in 1859. According to recorded history, it changed hands several times before closing in 1874 upon the death of the current brewer. At that time it was considered to be worth \$12,000. New owners reopened in 1887.



During this time “Preston Lager” was brewed, as is evidenced by a label touting “A healthful and invigorating beverage, brewed from the choicest materials”.

In 1911 the brewery was purchased by August Knapp.



The story is picked up by Rupert Knapp of Everly, IA, son of the last brewer, as recounted in “Coming Home”, a publication which marked the 125th anniversary of the town of Preston in 1980. “My father, A.F. Knapp, came down from St Cloud, MN, a year before the family arrived, and stayed during that time at the old Workman House,

which was just west of the old Presbyterian Church, and east of the present location of the FM Bank. I was born in 1914, two years after my mother came to Preston. I believe the purchase price of the brewery in 1911 was \$40,000, which was a tidy sum in those days.

Soon after buying the brewery, my father began manufacturing and selling beer under the name and trademark of Peerless Beer. He soon found himself in difficulty with another brewer who was already selling beer registered as Peerless.

My oldest brother, Fred, was delegated to design a new label of the product. After some experimenting, he decided on a label bearing intertwined leaves and flowers of the Forget-Me-Not flower.”



The original building included a brewing room, aging cellars, a warehouse, boiler room, storage vats (about 10 large kegs, each lying down and holding 2000 gallons, in order to age all the beer at least a year.) There was a resin shed where wooden kegs were repaired and caulked, an icehouse with a capacity of 800 tons, and directly under the ice house space to act as a top icing refrigerator.

Horses and wagons were housed in a stable and carriage house. Besides this, hogs were kept to eat the by-products of brewing. Partitions separated a malting room and a room for storage of hops and barley.

Rupert Knapp writes, “My father was once accused of making illegal “on sales”. Even though there was no basis for the accusation, he had a board fence about 300 feet long and 10 feet high constructed

along the south side of the brewery so if anyone chose to inspect his operation, they could do so on the premises, but not with 'spy glasses'.

I could not have been more than three or four years old the one and only time that I went along on a delivery. My father hooked the light driving team of horses, Cap and Dan, to a buckboard load of beer and we made a route which took us to Hutton, Greenleaf, Wykoff or Forestville, and Carimona, though probably not in that order. The only part that leaves a vivid impression on me is coming back through Buffalo Grove in pitch dark, depending on the horses to see us safely home. Other routes included such places as Isinours, Fountain, Spring Valley, Peterson, Whalan, Mabel, Lenora, Blackhammer, Harmony, Henrytown, Highland, and others which are probably long gone and which I can't recall. Some shipping was also done by rail. My father operated the brewery from 1911 to 1919. I think it was on April 19th that the beer left in inventory was dumped by Sheriff Blexrud and his deputies. I'm told the men waded in beer to the tops of their hip boots! It seems incredible now that there would have been a whole year's supply to dump after they had been given a year's grace to dispose of the surplus, but, if today the government outlawed grocery stores and gave them one year to dispose of their stock, do you think many people would believe they really meant it?"

After the implementation of the 18th Amendment, the Preston Brewery continued in business for a short time producing soda pop. During this time the malting room was turned into an extracting department. This business was short lived as Mr. Knapp could see no future in soft drinks and refused to make what he considered to be an inferior beer containing only 1/2% alcohol. 1921

marked the end of active brewing.

The building was then modified to contain living quarters. In the 50's all the Knapp descendants left Preston, and the building was purchased by the Clarence Hansons, who were occupants until 2003. At this writing, much of the original structure is gone, and the railway which ran directly south of the building until 1977 is now converted to a recreational trail. Pictures from the 70's reveal a declining limestone structure, which fortunately was tuck-pointed and preserved. The Preston Brewery is on the National Historic Register, and is claimed to be the oldest surviving commercial building in Fillmore County.

Few artifacts of this once thriving business survive. A few bottles and labels, some galvanized crates, and the huge iron door of the original boiler remain. It is inscribed, "LaCrosse Boiler Company." Of note is a memory recounted by current residents that the basement vaults may have been used in the 50's as storage & distribution for Potosi Beer brought to Preston from Wisconsin.

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