



Preston Historical Society

PO Box 138
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A 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Corporation

NEWSLETTER
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President's Notes

By: Sheila Craig

I write this message to you as it seems our world, as we know it, is shut downand we don't know for how long. Such unprecedented and uncertain times! As a member of our history committee says, "this certainly is historic!"

The April meeting of the Society had to be cancelled and the May meeting will be a virtual meeting.

Trailing Car

The newest edition to the Preston Historical Society historic campus is a mid-20th century motor trailing car. The trailing car has now been placed on the rails behind the earlier restored rail motor "speeder" to help complete the Milwaukee Road Railroad story in Preston. Together the speeder and its trailing car transported railroad workers and the supplies needed to maintain the railroad track and right of way.

Both were built by the Fairmont Gas Engine & Railway Motor Car Co. started in Fairmont, Minnesota in 1909. In 1928 the company purchased the motor car business of a Chicago company enabling it to become the largest manufacturer of railway motor cars and related equipment. After World War II the company introduced "hi-rail" road vehicles with retractable rail wheels – soon replacing the motor cars.

The trailing car now on display in Preston was owned by the Milwaukee Road and was located by Preston Historical Society member Mike Schultz at a cousin's home near Protivin, Iowa. The car was transported to Preston by Mike and Bob Maust. After being sandblasted and painted at EZ Fabricating, Inc. in Chatfield, it was returned to Preston. David Rye was hired to rebuild a new floor for the car.



Photo's Courtesy of Bob Smock

Tractor Ride – 2020

By: Elaine Maust

The tractor ride committee is busy making all the arrangements for the 8th annual tractor ride on September 19 & 20. Due to the coronavirus we hope to be able to hold the event. We, of course, hope for beautiful fall weather for our tractor drivers to enjoy.

Society Officers

By: Sheila Craig

At the December meeting, an election of officers was held. Each officer serves a two year term with the terms alternating. In December the Vice President and Treasurer positions were up for election. Both Darwin Smith and Charles Sparks were re-elected to their respective positions as Vice President and Treasurer. We thank them for their continued service!

Goals for 2020

1. Increase revenue through raffle, city contribution, & tractor ride
2. Work on historical documentation by; updating the inventory and posting pictures on website and flash drive
3. Preserve recorded tapes and other history stories, and continue history moment
4. Public Relations: more caboose open houses and other events in the community
5. Monitor maintenance on assets and continue exploration of long-term facility options
6. Continue tractor ride with limit of 100 tractors
7. Membership: increase number and participation
8. Improvements to the elevator: extend wiring and install lighting system
9. Complete interior and exterior repairs on O'Hara School

10. Reapply for State funding to reconstruct bagging shed

Facility Committee

An Ad Hoc Facility Committee has been named by President Sheila to work on Goals 5 and 9. They include: Jon DeVries, John Carlin, and Mike Schultz. They will monitor the existing needs of the buildings that are under the care of the Society. The first project is to proceed with work that needs to be done for the maintenance of the O'Hara School.

MN Alliance of Local History Museums

by: Norma Vogt

MN Alliance of Local History Museums in 2020 (of which Preston Historical Society is a member) has created regional groups that include local and county museums. Preston is part of the Southeast Minnesota History Group and has had two meetings. The first was at the Winona County Museum located in downtown Winona and attended by JoAnne Hall, Aaron Fox and Norma Vogt. At the first meeting we met MN History Museum representative and PBS representatives who are going to be working on a Minnesota immigration series. Local and county museums addressed the areas they need information and help: technology, fund raising, grant writing, and supplies, etc.

Our second meeting was held at the Houston County History museum, located on the fairgrounds in Caledonia. This meeting was attended by Sheila Craig and Norma Vogt. We toured the museum, had table topics to sit in at, speaker on exhibits. Meetings are going to be held quarterly and are going to be of great help including meeting others that are working on preserving our HISTORY.

We continue to have a 'history moment' at each of the monthly meetings. Following are two recent presentations.

A House, A Home

By: Wayne Marzolf

A house is just a building to shelter people. A home is a house that is inhabited by people who are caring, thoughtful, even tempered and loving.

Back in 1903, my maternal grandparents married and in 1905 purchased a small farm located two miles south of Preston. To this union came three daughters, my mother being the youngest. My grandfather died in 1938. In March of 1939 my parents married and took over operating the farm. One year later I was born in the same house my mother was born. Grandma stayed with my folks for seven years before moving into Preston.

Our home was a simple two story structure with two bedrooms upstairs, a small living room, dining room, and kitchen on the main floor. This structure sat on a stone foundation and an unfinished basement with a dirt floor. There was water piped from a well to the house, but no bathroom. We did have a telephone on a party line with about seven other families, but no electricity. Heat came from a wood stove in the kitchen and a small furnace in the living room. Three more children were eventually added to the home.

Various improvements to the home were made over the years including electricity becoming available, putting in a full bath room (around 1948), replacing the kitchen wood stove with a propane fueled one, and the installation of a fuel oil furnace in the basement that had piping to all the rooms for heat.

A significant change came to the family activities when I became an original member of the Preston Hilltoppers 4-H Club in 1949. My dad's patience was often tested. An

uncle gave me two lambs to raise for my first project. Then I decided to establish my own flock, even though Dad strongly disliked sheep! Over the years, pigs, dairy calves and other projects were added. One of those projects was forestry, which involved planting 500 evergreen trees over a couple of areas on the farm that had to be fenced in.

The 4-H Club met monthly, rotating between the members' homes. When they met at our home, the ladies were in the kitchen, visiting and getting lunch ready; the men played cards in the living room; the club meeting and any demonstrations were held in the dining room.

In 1959, the folks decided to do a major renovation to the home which included adding a good sized bedroom on the first floor, doubling the size of the living room and under the addition, constructing a partially finished basement with an outside entry. The club meetings were moved to the basement. Over the years, a few "town kids" joined the 4-H club, but some of the parents did not wish to host a monthly meeting. Eventually, my parents agreed to host all the monthly meetings in our home, even for some twelve years after my youngest sibling graduated from 4-H.

My father passed away in 1981 and three years later my mother moved to town. Like many old farm structures, the house is not there anymore. It has been replaced by a modern house/home for another family that is taking good care of the farm.

This story was written by Wayne Marzolf, Lifetime PHS member. It was presented at the meeting by Sheila Craig, who currently owns the farm with her husband Norm. It is farmed by their son, Andrew Craig as a beef and grain farm.

Early Preston Rail History

By: Robert Maust

Early attempts to establish a railroad across Fillmore County were undertaken in the 1870's. The project to build a railroad from Lanesboro to Chatfield was abandoned after it proved too expensive.

The Reno-Preston Branch of the railroad began in November of 1873 when the Chicago, Clinton, Dubuque & Minnesota Railroad Company wanted feeders for its river road. They worked to build a line westward, through Caledonia. They reorganized as the Caledonia, Mississippi & Western. No mention of Preston was included in the company plans. However, they attempted to work with the townships of Canton and Harmony who would not agree to taking a vote to provide funds for the railroad.

So the company turned their attention to Preston, agreeing to make Preston the terminus of the road on condition that the citizens of Preston vote a bonus of \$25,000 and persuade the citizens of Harmony and Canton to change their opinions. After a bitter fight, the conditions were fulfilled, Preston voting \$25,000, Harmony, \$12,000 and Canton \$12,000.

The first shovel of dirt to build the narrow gauge road was thrown in June, 1879 and on September 7, 1879 the first rail was laid in Reno. The first train reached Caledonia, September 25, 1879. On Christmas day, 1879 the gang was within sight of Preston, but the cold was so intense that work was suspended and it was not until toward evening on December 26, 1879, that the first train reached Preston.

The first train was a work train. The first passenger train started running regularly January 29, 1880.

“From that date until 1901, the line retained its narrow gauge tracks, with poor connections at Reno, and with all the freight disadvantages attendant upon the necessity of a transfer at Reno.”

In 1890 the Minnesota legislature, authorized the railroad and warehouse commission to order the gauge broadened. “Work was commenced in the summer of 1901, and the first standard gauge train reached Preston, Monday morning, November, 11, 1901 at 5:30 o'clock. The train consisted of engine 1343, a combination mail, baggage and smoking car, a day coach and the superintendent's private car, occupied by several officials.”

The switch from narrow gauge actually occurred in a very short time when “a train brought the mail as usual on Saturday, November 9 and immediately returned to Reno. Monday morning the mail left Preston on time, as usual, on the wide gauge train!”

This information is from the “History of Fillmore County Minnesota, Compiled by Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, Volume I, 1912.

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