



# Preston Historical Society

PO Box 138  
Preston, Minnesota 55965

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

## NEWSLETTER October 2020

Volume 14 Issue 2

### President's Notes

By: Sheila Craig

The Year 2020 will certainly go down in the history books as a year that is remembered. When the last newsletter was mailed, we had no idea that the world could change so much in such a short time, be so drastic, and have many of the changes be permanent.

Because of the pandemic, all of our fund raising events were cancelled including the raffle and the Tractor Ride. However, the local active group has made much progress for the overall good of the Society. Very active committees, especially the History and Facility Committees have been very busy as you will read later in this newsletter.

### 2020 Raffle

By: Sheila Craig

Although the raffle was cancelled, we want to thank Dan Christianson, F & M Community Bank for still giving us the \$1,000! In the past he has matched our ticket sales, but he graciously still offered the funds. THANK YOU Dan!!

### A Busy Year Maintaining our Historic Assets

By: Jon DeVries

*(A report from the Chair of the Facilities Committee)*

The PHS Board has utilized 2020 to catch up on maintenance of some of our key assets – including the O'Hara School and

Milwaukee Road Caboose. This effort has been led by the newly formed Facility Committee composed of Jon DeVries, Mike Schultz, John Carlin, Kerry Soiney and Dick Petsch.

The O'Hara school is having the interior ceiling repaired, primed, and painted. The interior windows have also been repaired and painted by Bob Mayrand. The exterior has been scraped with the help of volunteers



and will also be primed and painted. John Carlin has stained the front porch, added an exterior grill over a foundation opening, and assisted with interior repairs.

*(See more pictures for this article - Page 6.)*

The Milwaukee Road caboose is having its roof scraped, patched, and painted with rust resistant materials. Five of the caboose wood window frames are also being rebuilt.

The primer/paint for the school and the caboose was provided by a "Paint the Town" grant from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) in partnership with Ace Hardware – a total of 35 gallons! The painting for the school and caboose is being done by Schroeder Drywall and the caboose window replacement by Gingerich Construction.

Earlier in the year the committee added marking numbers to the Fairmont speeder trailer – **MILW-N1658 MW**. The letters include an abbreviation for the Milwaukee Road – **MILW**, the number of the Preston depot – **N1658**, and the designation for maintenance of way – **MW**. Kelly Printing created the number decals.

And finally, work on the trailhead sign was completed over the summer with Quality Construction/Ron Schroeder painting the major support beams in historic Milwaukee Road blue gray.

In the coming months, the committee will be investigating the updating of the PHS information panel and graphics on the trailhead “swallow” kiosk and adding an electric hookup and lighting to the elevator.

### **History Committee**

**By: Norma Vogt**

The 1978 cassette tape interviews of Preston citizens are now being digitized by Armer Computer of Preston the tapes are old and our goal is to get this oral history preserved. We do have a transcript of each tape but want to preserve the voices.

Thanks to a grant from the Preston Area Community Foundation and a grant pending from the Preston Public Utilities Round-Up Dollars we are able to get this treasure preserved.

We have gotten a larger area to house all the artifacts donated to the Society and pictures we have received. The History committee is working two days a month to inventory and properly identify all items.

A new Collection Policy is being drafted.

### **Membership Updates**

**By: Sheila Craig**

We welcome **new lifetime members**: Kerry & Nancy Soiney and Alison & Bradley Leathers and **lifetime business member**; the Sweet Stop & Sandwich Shoppe. We have also added a **student member** category and welcomed our first student, Paxton Smith.

### **Plaque Project Update**

**By: Sheila Craig**

Thanks to recent additions to the plaque project and donations: **\$100 contributions**: Gerald Hook, Jon & Christine DeVries, First State Bank of Fountain, Vernon E. Wiegand, and Charlie & Ann Sparks. **\$200 contribution**: Ken Stager.

### **History Moments**

*(At each monthly meeting, members share information for a special agenda item called “History Moment”.)*

#### **The 1918 Pandemic**

**By: Aaron Fox**

Although a search of *Chronicling America* did not identify any specific details related to Preston and the 1918 pandemic, it did offer information of interest. On December 13, 1918, an article in the *Morris Tribune* noted the death of two students of the local division of the State Ag School at Morris from the “Spanish” Influenza.

The article noted that the local Ag school had been closed against the direction of the State Board of Health; the State Board of Health forced the Morris location to reopen. The article closed noting that the principal preventive measure is the compulsory wearing of masks. A search for the terms compulsory and mask, returned two

citations. The first was from the Princeton Union, January 9, 1919. This article was an update on Influenza based on a meeting of the American Public Health Organization. The article stated the proper wearing of masks was compulsory in all hospitals and should be general practice. The article went on to say that “closing of schools and prohibitions of gatherings are still matters of dispute.”

Search again with the term “prohibition” and “gatherings” identified multiple references. An article from the Warren Sheaf, a Marshall County publication, dated November 13, 1918, noting the indefinite delay of a meeting due to the Public Health prohibition on gatherings. Approximately 15 months later, New Ulm banned gatherings by local proclamation in specific locations including dances, card parties and meetings – both public and private – as well as moving picture and theatre performances.

According to the CDC, “the 1918 influenza spread worldwide during 1918-1919. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918. It is estimated that about 500 million people or one-third of the world’s population became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States. “As of July 2, 2020, recorded deaths attributed to COVID 19 total 130,000 with approximately 1,500 in Minnesota. Worldwide, COVID is estimated to have claimed 516,000 deaths. We are living a once in a lifetime experience. A full one hundred years since the 1918 pandemic, we are using the same actions to combat the spread of a new virus.

*References for this article are available upon request.*

## **William W. Foote**

**By: Joanne Hall**

William W. Foote died in Preston on 13 Feb 1902 (aged 56). Of historical note to us, in the words from his Preston Times obituary, “He was in charge of the first work train that ran into Preston the 26th day of December, 1879. The following January he commenced this run as conductor on the regular passenger and has filled that position acceptably to the company and the patrons ever since.” Of human interest to us is the fact his death was related to that work and was described eloquently in his obituary.

### ***Preston Times Feb. 19, 1902***

*“Death is the heritage of all. To some the grim reaper comes as a welcome relief from years of suffering it closes gently the tired lids of the aged and infirm, or lulls to sleep the infant in its mothers arm, while to a few, and happily but a few, it comes swift and terrible. Every heart in Preston stood still for a moment, Thursday evening, and then beat with unwonted violence as the awful news spread from house to house and was whispered with hated breath from neighbor to neighbor that our beloved townsman, Conductor W.W. Foote, had been crushed to death under the wheels of the 8:10 passenger train, just in. As if borne on the wings of the lightning the news spread and with one impulse the people rushed to the depot, refusing to believe and hoping against hope that some mistake had been made. But it was too true. Death had left its imprint on the well know features, no responsive light shown in the kindly eyes. "Billy" Foote was dead. Just how it happened no one will ever know. Mr. Foote had been somewhat indisposed for a few days and was not on his regular run. A few minutes before train time, he left his home and went to the depot to await the arrival of the train which he boarded to speak to mail agent Rollins. The train had in the meantime*

*pulled up to run in on the siding for the night. Mr. Foote left the car and it is presumed slipped in some way while attempting to get off, falling directly under the wheels which passed over his chest. He was found shortly afterwards, but death must have been instantaneous.”*

Mr. Foote was born in Geneva, NY. July 20, 1845. When but a young boy the family moved to Michigan and from there to Independence, Iowa. On August 14, 1862, at the age of 17, he enlisted in Company L. 1st Iowa' Cavalry. Re-enlisted as a veteran volunteer Jan. 1, 1864, and was appointed bugler of the regiment July 1, 1864, receiving his final discharge Feb. 15, 1866. August 29, 1866, he married Miss Martha M. Kessler, who died August 15, 1871. They immediately moved to Colorado where two sons were born, namely George and Charley both living.

After the death of his first wife he returned to Independence, Iowa, and engaged in railroad work as brakeman on the river division, from which position by hard work and close attention to business he worked himself up to conductor. July 12, 1882, he was married to Miss Anna E. Dick and moved to Preston. The issue of this union is three girls and two boys, who with the widow survive him.”

Mr. Foote was a prominent and active member of the Masonic institutions of this place. The remains were consigned to their last resting place in the south cemetery, (*Crown Hill Cemetery*) with Masonic honors. A special train came up from La Crosse and Masons and friends from various portions of the state were sorrowing witnesses to the largest funeral ever held in Preston. The church services were held at the house. Deceased leaves a wife and seven children to mourn their terrible loss.

*“Human condolences are but empty words before a grief such as theirs. Mr. Foote's tastes were essentially home. He was the ideal husband, father and companion and his domestic relations were those of happiness and contentment. In his associations with the outside world he was always the courteous gentleman and the kind and sympathetic friend. We shall all miss him, miss the familiar figure, the kindly smile, the pleasant, cheery words. Our heartfelt sympathy will go out to the devoted wife, the sorrowing children”.*

Of interest, I noticed in Dianne Ruuds's recent column entitled the “Canton Mystery” she shared a poem written by Aaron Sleyster, a Preston resident of the late 1880-1900. (The Mystery, which was the vision in the Catholic Church, is the reason Canton celebrates August 15 as Canton Day Off). But relating to Mr. Foote, the poem, written in 1895, begins:

*“The Canton Mystery” by Aaron L. Sleyster, 1895*

*“The August sun with sultry ray,  
Was heating fast the morning, air,  
As I to Canton sought my way  
To photograph a vision there.  
I started down the Narrow Gauge  
In charge conductor Foot, and found  
The little coach was fairly packed with  
passengers, for Canton bound....”*

### **Rosalie Gertrude Stork Dayton**

**By: Joanne Hall**

Rosalie Gertrude Stork, daughter of William and Angeline Stork, was born October 17, 1853, near Lake Geneva, Wis. When she was an infant of nine months, she came to Fillmore County with her parents. They homesteaded a few miles north of Harmony. She lived there until her marriage on July 4, 1873, to Aaron H.H. Dayton of Harmony Township. He was a brother to Zara Dayton, both sons of Daniel Dayton, who

built the Ravine House in Big Springs. Aaron's first wife was Rosalie's sister, Ann Stork, who he married November 1, 1865. She died in 1866. Rosalie and Aaron farmed what was known as The Farm, located five miles south of Preston, near the Ravine House, until Mr. Dayton's death in August of 1900. Mrs. Dayton then built the Dayton house in Preston, and she and her two children moved there on April 1, 1902. This house still stands at 114 Spring St. NE. in Preston. She resided there with her daughter Emily, until her death on April 9, 1945 at the age of 91.

The farm was owned by Mrs. Dayton until her death. An ad in the *Preston Times* of November 11, 1920 lists a "Good Stock Farm of 180 acres for sale" by her but apparently she did not sell it, as the 1928 Fillmore County plat book lists Emily Dayton as the owner of the 180 acre farm. Letters and receipts received by the PHS from the Don Ward estate show she was a farm manager-ordering twine from the Stillwater Prison, arranging for other farm supplies and labor.

Besides her daughter, she was survived by one son, Atty. John S. Dayton who lived in Plymouth, Michigan at the time of her death.

Our PHS 'railroad campus connection' is a local news item in the Feb. 1907 *Preston Times*. Rosalie spent the week-end with friends & family in Harmony, expecting to return home Saturday evening on the train. However, high water at Freeberg prevented the passenger train from running, so she took the Sunday freight train home.

*The information for this article was taken from her obituary in the Preston Republican of April 12, 1945.*

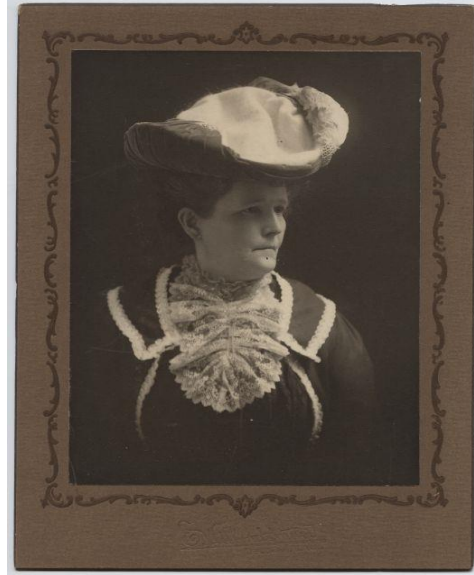


Photo contributed by Brian Huggenvick to the "Find A Grave" website.

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