



Preston Historical Society

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

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2022

Volume 16 Issue

President's Notes

By: Sheila Craig

Winter is almost over and Spring is in the air – some days as I write this. Although meetings have been a challenge this winter with cold weather, still a lot has been accomplished. Take note in this newsletter of all the work being done by the Collections Committee and on the SMIF Grant Masterplan project. The Tractor Ride and Raffle are in planning stages for our fund raisers.

Collections Committee Update

By: Joanne Hall

Several donations have been accepted by the Membership to include in our inventory.

Items received from the Preston Carnegie Public Library included the original accession ledger of books #1-1000 and two tin types of the original library.

Jon Haugen donated several items from previous pharmacy businesses in Preston, namely – Kyseth Drug Store, Remington's Pharmacy, and Green's Pharmacy. Also included were **Show Globes** that will remain on display at the Hy-Vee Healthmark Pharmacy in Preston. Older Preston natives will remember these in the Remington Pharmacy.



A **show globe** is a glass vessel of various shapes and sizes containing a colorful liquid. It has been a symbol of a chemist from the 17th century England to the early 20th century in the United States. It marked the drugstore or apothecary in much the same way as the barber's pole marked tonsorial establishments in some countries. People who were illiterate needed such symbols to locate these medical practitioners. George Griffenhagen, pharmacist and acting curator of the Smithsonian Institution, did extensive research into the evolution of the show globe. Most historians today feel the show globe began as a symbol of the chemist's shop. Chemists prepared and sold chemical preparations used for medicinal purposes. To attract attention to themselves and to symbolize the mystery and art of their profession these chemists displayed show globes with solutions of colored chemicals.

Also included in Jon's donation were vintage postcards of Preston street scenes and area scenery and a "Hard and Kuethe

General Merchandise” glass sign. Hard and Kuethe built the building where the pharmacy has been located. A ribbon making machine and instructions are reminders of the gift wrapping years at the “Drug Store”!

Other recent donors include John Carlin (ice tongs used by Olson's Ice Delivery); Ann Ott (Rail Road and Ott paper memorabilia); Gary Feine (Ebert Hardware pail, First National Bank ruler, paper artifacts from Zion EUB church); Rick and Sue Grooters (multi communion wine glass filler).

Diane Johnson donated several historical Preston artifacts (Empire Bottle Works bottle, Weiser Pharmacy bottle, Mrs. E.B. Read key ring, 1895 copy of the Preston *Courier*, tape measure from Floral Treasures and More, a “Night Before Christmas” Hallmark booklet from Green’s Drug Store). Other donations included current Preston business items (F&M Bank jar bank, Ristau Haulers magnet, Get Hooked on Preston lanyard, Preston-Fountain School blue coffee mug, Sweet Stop and Sandwich Shoppe business card holder, F&M Bank double zippered coin purse.

Remember-today’s items are tomorrow’s history.



Tractor Ride 2022

By: Elaine Maust

The 2022 Tractor Ride is set for Saturday, September 17 and Sunday, September 18. A longer ride is being planned than last year. The route is a very scenic one going through Pilot Mound, Peterson, and Henrytown on the first day and through Cherry Grove, by Good Earth Village to Fillmore and Fountain on the second day. Many riders are already registered!

Many helpers are needed for various tasks to make the Ride successful. Please save that weekend and let us know how you can help with food or logistics.



Raffle 2022

By: Sheila Craig

Many items have been donated for our 2022 raffle. Tickets will be on sale starting during Trout Days, May 21. If you would like to purchase a book of 10 tickets for \$20, please contact Sheila Craig at smeercraig@gmail.com. The drawing for the raffle prizes will be held during the August 4 membership meeting.

Our continued thanks to Dan Christianson, F & M Community Bank for matching each raffle ticket sold with \$1 for a total donation of \$1,000!

Membership Update

By: Sheila Craig

We welcome Dick and Linda Wolfe as Lifetime members after several years as Family Members!!

Goals for 2022

By: Sheila Craig

Goals are reviewed annually by the members of the Preston Historical Society. Goals for 2022 include:

1. Increase revenue through raffle, city contribution, & tractor ride.
2. Work on historical documentation by continuing work on documentation of photographs and posting pictures on website.
3. Find ways to preserve history stories and continue with history moment.

4. Public Relations: more caboose open houses and other events in the community.
5. Monitor maintenance on assets, especially the boxcar and continue exploration of long-term facility options.
6. Continue tractor ride with limit of 100 tractors.
7. Membership: increase number and participation.
8. Work with Advisory Committee to complete SMIF grant.
9. Partner with Fillmore County Historical Society for displays, news articles, etc.

Walden (Wally) P. Vought was born in Amherst Township, Fillmore County on June 6, 1894. He spent his entire life in and around Preston. He retired as conductor for the Milwaukee Road Railroad in 1946 after 41 years of service.



Wally Vought
(Picture from Preston Historical Society Archives)

“Community Masterplan Update” for Preston Historic Campus

By: Jon B. DeVries

The Community Steering Committee formed for the planning work funded by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation has now held four monthly meetings starting in December. The committee, chaired by PHS President Sheila Craig, has nine members including Dean Schumacher, Dan Christianson, Kerry Soiney, Charlie Sparks, Barb Mielke, Ilene Edwards, Steve Hall, Gabby Kinneberg, and myself.

The kick-off December meeting included a guided discussion of “Why do we like living in Preston” and “Where are we now as a community” and “What assets can we bring to create a plan that serves the future needs of the community.”

At the January meeting we were asked “Imagine the impact a restored elevator area could have as a river/agriculture/railroad (“RAR”) history center.” Impacts identified included a home for seasonal events, a welcome center for visitors, an education resource for schools, a meeting/display area for PHS and an anchor for riverfront attractions.

The February meeting featured Robert Vogel and Christian Hendrie (Pathfinder CRM) who prepared the original 2011 plan for the elevator presenting an updated “concept budget” of \$597,600 for the reconstruction of three attached structures: drive shed, scale house, and sack/bagging house (1,200 sq. ft.), renovation of the historic boxcar (300 sq. ft.), and addition of exterior public access areas (1,400 sq. ft.)

The committee and the PHS have presented a request for State of Minnesota “Legacy

Fund” support through Representative Greg Davids.

The March meeting included a guided discussion of “What do we want the riverfront area of Preston to look like?” Highly ranked items included seating, gazebos, and native plants, areas for picnics and recreation, upgrades to Pooler Park and Fillmore/River Road area, Trout Unlimited funds to extend river improvement, historic markers along DNR trail, brighter bridges, cleaning up properties for public use (old mill, POP, NAPA, etc.), a “public market” and riverfront handicapped access.

The meeting also heard a proposal from the Wiseth engineering and planning firm from Ryan Hermes for an “Inventory Analysis” of the water front (\$6,100) and a “Conceptual Master Plan” (\$8,300). PHS has approved the 1st phase and will seek funds from PACF to compliment the SMIF grant.

The upcoming April 4th meeting will continue the discussion of “What do we want the riverfront to be” as well as hear progress reports from the consultants and member organizations. We welcome ideas and input from all PHS members, community organizations, and stakeholders.

Magdlin-Gilbertson Veterans of Foreign Wars Post & Auxiliary (#6893)

The local VFW post was established in 1946. Amos Anderson was the first commander. Other early members included Darrell Crawley, Calton Meck, Howard Gartner, Bob Rathke, Clarence Leutink, Fowler Stevens, Homer Eggen, Moppy Anderson, Lee Engstrom, Alan Raymond, Ralph Hanson, Francis Shanahan, Roland Thacher, and Allen Burge. Eligibility to

join required that the member had served in combat during a foreign war.

By early 1947, a meeting was held to discuss the creation of an auxiliary. The VFW Auxiliary charter was issued on April 30, 1947. The first president was Florence Foss. There were 17 charter members, including Lily Hopp, Doris Olson, Helen Anderson, Lillian Benson, Mae Burge, Delores Crawley Broten, Cora Halsey, Josie Kinneberg, Mary Magdlin, Margaret Milne, Betty Raymond, Shirley Roche, Joyce Simonson, Sophie Stevens, Arlene Thacher, and Della Viall. An additional 36 women joined in 1947. Note that today men are also able to join the auxiliary; they can join on the eligibility of a spouse, sibling, parent, child, grandparent, or grandchild.

In the beginning, two meetings were held each month: one to conduct business and the other was a social event. They were first held in the Town Hall but were later moved to the basement of the Victory Café.

To raise money for their projects in the early days, one of the things was that the post and auxiliary had a food stand at the Fillmore County Fair. The auxiliary also catered dinners for the Firemen, Booster Club, and Lion’s Club as well as class reunions, retirements, etc. I remember that when I was a junior in high school, our Junior-Senior Prom Banquet was held at the Servicemen’s Club.

In June of 1947, the VFW sponsored the Bill Blomberg rodeo held at the Fillmore County Fairgrounds. There were 3 performances over 2 days. The concessions at the rodeo were operated by the Preston Fire Department. Even so, the VFW netted over \$900: \$600 went to the post and \$300 to the auxiliary.

The auxiliary currently has about 85 members. Meetings are held 8 times per year. Members continue to distribute Buddy Poppies in May just as they did back in 1947. The money collected can only be used for veterans and/or their families.

“The Preston Iron Works-From Wagon Wheels to Custom Fabrication”

Norma and DeWayne Vogt donated many original items from the Preston Iron Works to the Preston Historical Society in 2021. A selection of these tools and artifacts are now



on display at the Fillmore County Historical Society Museum located at 202 County Road 8 in Fountain, MN. The Museum is open Tuesday-Saturday 10am-3pm and admission is free.



(A close-up look at the display at the Fillmore County Historical Society.)

Wagon Works to Iron Works

The following information is included with the display

In 1853 John Vail from Pennsylvania was the first man to locate a claim in what became the village of Preston. That same year William Douglass started the first blacksmith shop in Preston.

In July of 1855, a blacksmith shop was operated by Charles Rappe, who bought out the forge and business of William Douglas. The site of the forge was in the general vicinity of where the Preston Ironworks of 1980 was located on Mills Street.

In the 1800's a man by the name of Cramer was the owner of the business known as the Wagon Works. At that time Mr. Homer S. Popple from New York, who was a carriage maker, worked for Cramer. In 1890, Homer Popple and George Renner purchased the Fred Dawson foundry and machine shop "on the flat" in Preston. In 1898 Elmer H. Cummings, Popple's son-in-law, became an apprentice to Homer Popple.

George Renner retired in 1901 and the business name became Popple and Cummings. Later the business was known as The Preston Iron Works. They had two assistants and were equipped with lathes, saws, drills, planners. They were well known in this part of the state to be equipped to do difficult repairs. They were the builder of the water-cooled Preston Gasoline Engine (1910). Their name was cast on this engine which was built in its entirety in Preston along with the Preston Jack. The jack fit any pump and it had 3 strokes.

Tony Olsen, of Brookings, SD purchased the business in 1937 and upon Olsen retiring, Vern Runnigen purchased the business. To keep the Preston Iron Works going, he kept the same employees who ran the business – Don Trende, Gerald Wubbles, and Roger Hovey.

DeWayne and Norma Vogt purchased the Preston Iron Works in December 1972. DeWayne added on to the building in the late '70s and eventually sold the building to the surrounding elevator company in 1984. Vogt then moved the business to a location on Hwy 52. Under DeWayne's ownership they specialized in custom fabrication, ran a complete machine shop, welding service and a full line of parts. Vogt semi-retired in 2003 and sold the business to Sheldon Kinneberg. The business closed in 2017.

A DECADE ON THE EXTRA CREW TRAINS – IOWA, DAKOTAS, AND MONTANA

By: Ila Mae Olstad

The Ila Mae Olstad Story of "Growing Up on a Work Train" will be featured in the 1st Quarter 2022 of The Milwaukee Railroader. Excerpts by Jon B. DeVries to be continued in upcoming PHS newsletter issues.

Part 3: Section 2 Consist of the Work Trains

The work train functioned as a self-sufficient "camp" for the large work crews. The primary purpose of sending out large crews was to get track ready for the faster Hiawatha trains – including elevating the curves. Everything the camp needed to support the work and the daily lives of over 200 men was included in the train – a complete town on wheels.



(Russ Vischer and three forman)

A water car had a generator for electricity which was limited to a few hours per day. A refrigerator car was next to the cook kitchen car and was packed with ice and food.

The cook kitchen car had big stoves and usually had two cooks and two or three helpers – peeling potatoes and cleaning up. It was a hot place to work. Each cook had a special skill – one was a baker for each meal. The cook car prepared and served three meals a day and rang a loud bell for each meal.

There was a tool car where lots of the hand tools were kept as well as a blacksmith car – which traveled out from Milwaukee every year with Emil the blacksmith – where tools and items needed for the track work could

be maintained and repaired. All the track work was done by hand – with none of the big machines used today.

There were several dining cars, and each had one long table with benches for the workers. There was a separate foreman’s dining car for the General Foreman – my Dad – and the foremen of the various work crews. We would eat evening meals with my Dad and he would visit with all the other foremen about the work assignments for the next day. There was a small Commissary on one end of the Foreman’s dining car with miscellaneous items workers could buy.

There were multiple sleeping cars – old passenger cars cleared out with bunk beds. I don’t know how many men to a car but I’m sure they didn’t smell too good. The Assistant Foreman, the timekeeper, and others with them had a separate sleeping car and shower.



(Crew posing on Motor Car Trailers)

There were multiple motor cars that traveled with the train. These were used to move the men and materials to the work sites but also for short trips into town – these were the same type of cars used by the section crews in Preston and other towns.

There was a separate General Foreman’s car – a former passenger car divided into three sections. One end had an office for the

General Foreman and a desk for the Timekeeper – to keep time records and pay the work crew. There were two sleeping sections – one for my Dad and Mom and one for children – me and my sister Vi – with single level beds – not like the bunks in the crew sleeping cars.



(5 work car trains behind crew posing on trailers)

Sometime my Mom and I would have a “sleep-in” morning. But usually Mike, the Russian, would “check-in” early and bring us warm buns from the kitchen and fresh ice-water for the day – and also run any errands for us. If we were near a town on Sunday we would go to church – I always noticed the town people were a little “suspicious” of the workmen.

Everyone had to do their own laundry – probably not the best system! On weekends, clothes were hanging on the fences along the tracks.

Whenever we moved from town to town, the first thing done was digging holes and setting up outdoor toilets. When we stopped near towns, we usually also had keys to the depot facilities.

NEXT INSTALLMENT: CREWS OF THE WORK TRAINS (Part 3: Section 3)

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT –

By: Jon B. Devries

UPCOMING EVENT – Ila Mae Olstad – OPEN HOUSE AND MAGAZINE SIGNING

The Milwaukee Road Railroader (TMR) 1st Quarter 2022 magazine is off the presses and features a lead story by our beloved PHS member and lifelong Preston resident Ila Mae Olstad - A DECADE ON THE EXTRA CREW TRAINS – IOWA, DAKOTAS, AND MONTANA.

Ila Mae has written about her years of growing up on the Milwaukee Road in Preston and her dad’s work as section foreman. She recently donated a restored “Fairmont” motor car and trailer at the historic campus in Preston like the one her father used with his crew.

Each summer Ila Mae, her older sister Vi, and her mother traveled with her father on an “extra crew” train to various states. Last year she began writing down her recollections of living on the work train for 10 summers (1936-1946) with a crew of over 250 men supervised by her dad. The train was a “city on wheels” with bunk, dining, water, blacksmith, and equipment cars traveling from town to town. The article features 30 pictures and 12 pages of her recollections. The editor describes this as the “most heartfelt” article they have ever published.



(Motor car and trailer donated by Ila Mae Olstad in memory of her father, Arthur Noel.)

Visit with Ila Mae and have her “sign” a copy of the magazine for you which PHS will have available at the Preston Public Library on a Saturday in April or May – TBD. This is your chance to experience the history of our town in a new way as well as honoring Ila Mae.
ALL ABOARD!

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