



Preston Historical Society

PO Box 138
Preston, Minnesota 55965

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

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2022

Volume 16 Issue 2

President's Notes

By: Sheila Craig

WOW, what a busy 2022 so far! Your Preston Historical Society Collection Committee has been very busy organizing and archiving the many, many items that have been donated to PHS (see Collections article!). The other major work has been on the Campus-Riverfront Masterplan project using the \$10,000 grant from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Fund (SMIF) "Small Community Grant". The recent meetings have been held with the WIDSETH Engineering firm leading the group in studying what is currently available in Preston and along the riverfront.

SMIF has granted an extension for the project so that the money needs to be spent by October 31, 2022, and the final report completed by December 31, 2022.

A community meeting is tentatively set for Wednesday, October 26 from 6:30-8:00 pm. Stay tuned for further announcements.

O'Hara Country School Open during the Fillmore County Fair.

By: Mary Jane Glaser and Joanne Hall

Over 400 fairgoers visited the O'Hara Country School during the Fillmore County Fair. Out of state visitors were from Texas, Iowa, and North Dakota! Thanks to all the volunteers who helped clean, set up and take down the display, and those who worked at the school during the fair: Ila Mae Olstad,

Sue Grooters, Joanne Hall, Jon DeVries, Joyce Hellickson, Nancy Dahly, Lexi Pierce, Diane Johnson, Dick Petsch, Barb Mielke, Charlie Sparks, Linda O'Connor, Aaron Fox.

"Senior citizens" reminisced, and youngsters learned about "outhouses"! The school bell was rung multiple times! New displays this year included a donation by the Richard Schmidt family of a painting by Carol Hahn Schmidt of the Dutch Hollow School, which was located near the Schmidt family farm outside of Preston.



Photo by: Susan Nash

A recognition of the Fillmore Country Schools 8th grade graduations was also on display. Four framed photos of 8th grade graduations and donations from Arlene Staue provided a glimpse of this milestone in the life of a country school pupil.

Tractor Ride

By: Elaine Maust

The time is fast approaching for our 2022 tractor ride -Saturday, September 17th and Sunday, September 18th. We have over 50 tractors registered from Iowa, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, South Dakota, Texas, and Minnesota.

Our meal planners are busy getting places organized for lunches, breaks and people to work for Saturday evening supper and Sunday's breakfast. Let us know how we can count on you for your help.

Newsletter Collections Report

By: Joanne Hall

Thank you, to the following Donors

Buzz and Betty Riehl, Fillmore County Historical Society, Arlene Staupe, Sharon Woellert, City of Preston-Public Utilities Office, Sue Grooters, Geraldine Williams, Diane Johnson, Kathryn Knittel, Fillmore County Fair Board.

for these artifacts:

PHS Graduation photos -1944 & 1948; Fillmore County School Map and Final

Report of Fillmore County Schools; 1938 and 1939 8th grade graduation certificates and photos; 1938 graduation exercise program; Preston 150th Celebration cook book; F&M State Bank cloth drawstring deposit bag; zippered coin purse stamped Reimann Crop Insurance; Christmas "give aways" from Simonson Oil Company (measuring cup, pen, turtle clip); Pencil from Preston High School printed with the 1937-1938 basketball schedule; Preston Farm Service magnet clip; Preston Service Men's Club thermometer; "Preston The

Heart of Fillmore County" ink stamp; PHS basketball photos by Bue Studio; coin purse from Victory Cafe; Christ Lutheran Church white mug; 50th anniversary program for merger of St. Paul's and Grace Lutheran Church; 125th anniversary program from Christ Lutheran Church; 1965 Christ Lutheran Christmas program; St. Paul's Lutheran Church photo notecard; F&M Bank CD folder; F&M Bank "We make banking easy" blue tile; January 1951 photo of Preston Co-op Creamery truck; "I Hear America Singing" community songs-stamped "Property of Preston Schools"; Supersweet Feeds notepad; White Gate Gift Shop bag; VFW Auxiliary 40th anniversary program; VFW 40th Anniversary Banquet program; VFW Auxiliary 50th Anniversary Celebration program; F&M Community Bank Centennial calendar 1911-2011; F&M Community Bank *Santa's Candyland Fun* book; Fillmore County Journal 2010 National Trout Learning Center booklet; Sewing needle packet from Gilbertson & Nelson, Preston; postcards of *White Gate Cafe; Unloading, Preston, July 4, 1923 (railroad photo)*; 1974 Methodist Church photo directory; Preston City Plat map, dated 1961, revised 1978; Fillmore County Fair Premium ribbons dated 1918-1925; Fillmore County Plat Books-two 1950's and one 1966;

A collection of eighty nine *The Milwaukee Railroader* (TMR) magazines spanning 23 years was donated by Thomas Mauszycki of Winona. His donation letter indicated "due to the significant influence of the former Milwaukee Railroad in the development of Preston," the Journals belong in Preston to be enjoyed and shared..."

The Richard Schmidt family donated a painting of the Dutch Hollow School by Carol Hahn Schmidt. The frame for the painting was made by Chris Schmidt. Carol was the mother of both men.

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**Preston Historical Society
Announces 2022 Raffle Winners**

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The Preston Historical Society (PHS) conducted the drawing for the winners of the 2022 raffle fundraiser at the August 4th Society meeting. Proceeds from the raffle will be used for PHS projects.

The Society would like to thank F & M Community Bank for again providing matching funds of \$1000 (a dollar for each ticket sold). The Preston area businesses and individuals, listed below were also gracious in providing the many prizes.

Taylor Made Golf Bag by Greg & Bonnie Davids (\$230 value) Eileen Linden, Preston.
Toolbox plus by *Featherlite* (\$200 value) Luanne Wussow, Rochester.

Gift Certificate to 4 Daughters by Dick & Linda Wolfe (\$100 value) Karrie Stai, Preston.

MN Quilt by Ann Sparks (\$75 value) Burt Hungerholt, Lanesboro

Wilson Putter by Greg & Bonnie Davids (\$70 value) Norma Vogt, Bloomington, IL
Gopher Tied Fleece Blanket by Sheila Craig (\$65 value) Joyce Hellickson, Preston

Oil Change Gift Certificate from Preston Service Plus (\$60 value) Kurt Reicks, Preston

Wilson Golf Balls by Greg & Bonnie Davids (\$50 value) Tom Maust, Wayzata
Visa Gift Card by Fountain State Bank (\$50 value) Donna Novotny, Chatfield

Two Gift Certificates to Preston Motor Mart from Rich Irish (\$50 value) Heidi Torses, and Karen Winter, Preston

Two Pork Gift Certificates from Harmony, Preston or Rushford Foods from Gulbranson Farms (\$50 value each) Richard Kregel, Preston and Greg Davids, Preston

Gift Certificate to NAPA, Preston (\$50 value) Steve Wingert, Preston

Cross Pen Set, by Greg & Bonnie Davids (\$50 value) Mark Maust, Prior Lake
Branding Iron Gift Certificate from Gary & Joyce Hellingson, (\$50 value) Julie Maust, Wayzata

Gift Certificate to Juniper by Aaron Fox & Bob Mayrand (\$50 value) Mike Schultz, Preston

Gift Certificate to Harmony Spirits by Aaron Fox & Bob Mayrand (\$50 value) Linda Wolfe, Preston

Purse from Helen's Daughters by Steve & Joanne Hall (\$48 value) Christine DeVries, Preston

Purse from Helen's Daughters (\$40 value) Alissa Grundman, Preston

Garden Hod from John Carlin (\$30 value)

Gabby Kinneberg, Preston

Gift Certificate to Preston Foods (\$25 value) Jim Henley, Harmony

Gift Certificate to Urban Artifacts by Keith & Diane Johnson (\$20 value) John Hill, Cherry Grove.

Gift Certificate to Preston Floral by Keith & Diane Johnson, (\$20 value) Sheila Marzolf, Preston

Gift Certificate Trout City (\$20 value) Eric Ruen, Lanesboro

5 Gift Certificates to Sweet Stop & Sandwich Shoppe (\$10 value each) Ramon Hernandez, Preston; Dave Gardner, Preston; Robert Gulbranson, Harmony; Dallas Finseth, Fountain; and Gary Feine, Preston.

Additional merchandise from *Featherlite* won by: Will Sparks, Minneapolis; Alissa Grundman, Preston; Jay Masters, Harmony; Jim Henley, Harmony; and Bonnie Davids, Preston.

Membership Update

By: Sheila Craig

New members joining the Preston Historical Society since our last newsletter include:

Life members: Rick & Sue Grooters, Preston, Diane & Keith Johnson, moved from family membership and Elmer Hansen, Phoenix, AR; Business Life Member: Julie Sogla, Wykoff; Family Members: Linda & Scott Snyder, Harmony and Dean & Cheryl Schumacher, Preston, and Individual Members: Lexi Pierce, Preston and Ilene Edwards, Preston.

Poet Grant

By: Sheila Craig

Jon DeVries and Sheila Craig submitted a grant application to POET for their “*Never Satisfied Grant*” on behalf of PHS for the Historical Campus Masterplan project. We were excited to learn we were awarded the \$3,000 grant from the Preston POET facility.

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

By: Ila Mae Olstad

Final excerpts by Jon B. DeVries from article in *The Milwaukee Railroader* (TMR) 1st Qtr. 2022.

Part 4: Life on the Work Trains and Postlude

When a worker was hired, they would receive a number. It was the timekeeper’s job to check who worked, when they would get on the motor car to go out and keep track

of the work they did. On payday, the timekeeper received their checks and would hang them out by number.

I remember when we had the Mexican gang workers for two years, someone from the head office would come. The Mexicans always sent most of their earnings back to Mexico. They were able to cash their check in exchange for drafts which could be sent to Mexico. I also think the timekeeper could cash some checks.

Often payday meant some workers would take off catching a train back to Milwaukee or Chicago. They probably either used their money for liquor or would lose it or get “rolled” and then return back to camp a few days later. Most of these men had no family or were always on the move.

The workers seldom bothered to go into the small towns. Once in a while, Dad would be called because of a problem. When they put in a hard day’s work and a few chores at night, the bedtime was all they wanted. Sometimes they, especially the Mexicans, would play guitars and sing. They tried to teach me some of their language.

There was always a flagman on both ends of the crew wherever they were working. The jobs were carefully planned because trains were always going through the work area. All the foremen carried a pocket watch and a whistle to alert workers for trains coming.

Watches were a necessity when you worked on the track to always know what trains to expect – the work required a lot of planning to allow the regular trains to come through.

The work train or camp was always parked on a switch track or passing track, sometimes even between towns. The location always depended on what the work

was. Some years when they would replace ties, the camp would move every few days. But if they were doing major changes to curves or something similar they would stay in place for several days.

Since there was no theater in these locations, the towns would set up a big tent and a screen for movies. The same movie often moved from town to town and one year when we moved often I saw the same movie in several towns.

For “our” car, the General Foreman’s car, my Mom made curtains. We also did embroidery on dishtowels and other items. One year we had a small square loom and yarn and made an afghan by sewing squares together. This is where I learned how to stitch and sew. Mom would crochet but I learned how to knit about age 9 or 10 – so that was what I did.

Mom and I spent a lot of time together those years either in the trailer or on the track in our special train car. Mom wrote a lot of



Ila Mae as a child with her dog Peggy posing with the family car and coal tender

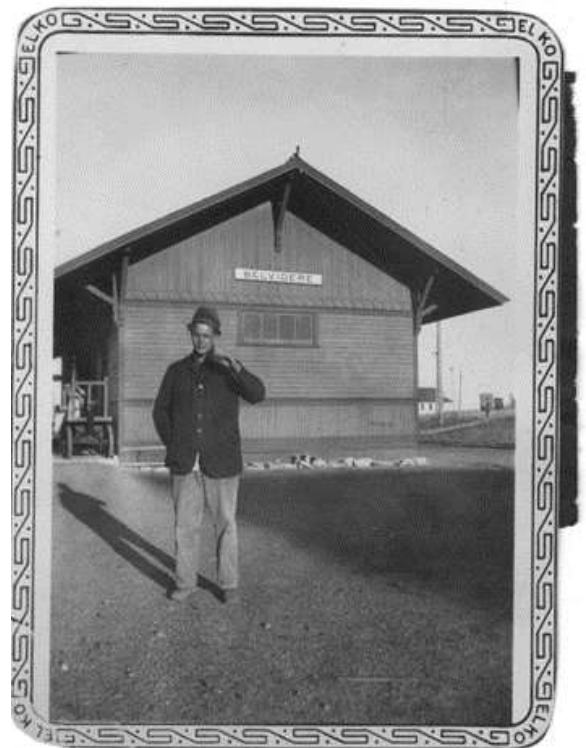
letters and postcards, and I spent time reading. When we lived in the trailer we had a car and sometimes we would go for a drive or have a picnic. We toured the Badlands several years.



Ila Mae on railcar steps - 1936

Once I remember we were in an old station that had signs on the highway for free ice water. The last time we stopped for ice water, a small city – Wall, South Dakota – had grown up around it on the route to Mt. Rushmore!

Dad at Depot, Belvidere, South Dakota



We were in several towns in South Dakota – Sioux Falls, Reliance, Alexandria, Oacoma, Mitchell, Pukwana, Kennebec, Presho, Vivian, Belvidere, and others. In 1939 I was put in the hospital in Pierre and was sick with the flu. Another year we were higher up in South Dakota in Aberdeen and then to the corner of North Dakota in Bowman and Garner.

Russ Vischer, Ila Mae's sister Vi, and two foremen – Oacoma, South Dakota



One year the crew was asked to assist in restoring the track from a passenger train wreck – although this was a rare occurrence.

Another year we were in western Minnesota and one year in Mildred, Montana – and some short times in Iowa – Garner and Spencer.

Restoration Work of Preston Historical Society – Motor Car and Trailer

I was fifteen in 1946 and that was my last year with Dad at camp. Preston had a flood of “biblical” proportions in 1946 which covered all the railroad tracks as well as reaching our home and the streets nearby. The flood also wiped out the railroad connection to Reno resulting in the line ending at Caledonia and leaving only the line to Isinours as our connection to the rest of the railroad.

This resulted in the Preston branch being switched from Dubuque to Austin for crew assignments – so my Dad and Mom moved to La Crescent to preserve my dad's seniority. They later moved back to Preston for retirement. I stayed in Preston so I could attend my senior high school year and graduate – I lived with the Russ Vischer family. Russ was working in the Preston depot, so I still heard all the news about the railroad.

I have always fondly remembered my ten years of summer traveling on the “extra gang” trains – and growing up along the tracks in Preston. I hope this narrative has successfully evoked the excitement and the massive human effort involved in working on the railroad of a previous era.

The Preston Historical Society (PHS) has been engaged in creating a rail interpretive exhibit now for several years along the historic Milwaukee Road right of way – now occupied by a state trail. To date a steel bay window caboose and a “rib-side” box car have been restored as well as the adjacent “Milwaukee Elevator.”

On June 30, 2019, I cut the ribbon for a new interpretive sign entitled “The Milwaukee Road in Preston” with over 60 town people

and former Milwaukee Road employees in attendance and our special guest Cecil Cook in the caboose signing copies of his latest rail history book.

The sign includes a timeline of the railroad in Preston, photos from various eras, illustrative maps (John C. Luecke) and pictures of a typical “day on the railroad” (Walt Dunlap). It also has a list of nearly 40 Milwaukee Road employees who worked in and around Preston – including my Dad and his men.

In honor of my Dad and those men, I have donated and assisted the restoration of a “Fairmont” motor car and trailer which the Society has installed in the exhibit. These were the same type of motor cars used on the Preston “section gang” as well as the crews of the “extra gang” trains. They now shine in magnificent Milwaukee Road yellow with their red rail heralds and shiny black numbers. We invite all of you to visit Preston sometime soon and view the historic train exhibit – and to think about those big “extra gang” trains of my youth.

Postlude

In October 2021 when I decided to begin writing this story about my ten years of being with my Father during the summer when he was the General Foreman of an Extra Gang, I knew few people know about this part of railroad history.

I contacted another member of the Preston Historical Society, Jon B. DeVries, who I knew also shared an interest in the history of the Milwaukee Road. I asked him to help me, and he encouraged me to continue writing. I thank him for his patience and help to organize this piece of writing and my picture collection. We are both excited to have the opportunity to share this history and story with you.

History Moment- “Preston’s High School Building Completely Guttled by Fire”

By: Joanne Hall

The January 26, 1922, edition of The Preston Times read, “School House Burns”. The Preston Republican headline read, “Preston’s High School building completely Guttled by Fire”. The article notes the building had been on fire twice in the past few months. The fire broke out around 10:00 am on a Monday morning but both the Grade and High School buildings were emptied quickly and without any injuries. The temperature was several degrees below zero. The loss was estimated at \$25,000 with \$10,000 in insurance. The High School records were saved but everything else burned.

After the fire, the Grade School classes were able to continue to meet in the Grade School. That building did not burn due to the focus on it by the firefighters when they realized the High School could not be saved. The High School classes were held in the Methodist, Presbyterian, and German Lutheran churches for the remainder of the school year. The eighth grade class met in the Town Hall.

A local paper of May 11, 1922, states bids for building and furnishing a new building were solicited by May 25. The June 2, 1922, Preston Republican carried the news that the Board of Education had opened the 22 bids submitted for the new school. The J.B.Nelson Construction Company of Mankato was awarded the contract for the building with a bid of \$104,483.00. The heating and plumbing contract was awarded to P.J. Gallagher of Faribault at \$39, 669. The contract for the electrical work was given to Nimis & Nimis of St. Paul with a bid of \$3,998. Construction had already

begun as of the June 2 paper date and the building “is to be completed by November 1, 1922”.

There are some things that do not change as the March 1, 1923, Preston Times carried a local news item stating, “we are waiting to move in” and the March 15, 1923, paper reported “they started moving into the new school on Thursday, March 8, 1923, and completed the move by March 12.” The first HS basketball game was played in the new gym on March 22, 1923.

OPEN HOUSE AND MAGAZINE SIGNING – Ila Mae Olstad

By: Jon B DeVries



Ila Mae Signing Her Article At Caboose Open House

On May 21st, the Preston Historical Society hosted a “caboose open house” featuring its oldest member, Ila Mae Olstad, signing her article in *The Milwaukee Road Railroader* (TMR) 1st Quarter 2022 magazine.

Ila Mae signed nearly 40 copies of the magazine for visitors who were requested to make a \$5.00 donation to PHS. Copies of the magazine was made available by the Milwaukee Road Historical Association (MRHA).

The article featured 30 pictures, 12 text pages and color rear cover photos. Editor Mike Shafer opined this was the “most heartfelt” article they had ever published.

Dozens of members, friends, family, and railfans attended. Jeff Goutcher, President, MRHA, welcomed visitors – thank you Jeff.

Afterward Ila Mae led the *Trout Days* parade in downtown Preston as GRAND MARSHALL with Paxton Smith – our youngest member.



Grand Marshall Ila Mae Olstad & Paxton Smith.

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