



Preston Historical Society

PO Box 138
Preston, Minnesota 55965

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

NEWSLETTER

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President's Notes

By: Sheila Craig

Success! The Preston Historical Society and the City of Preston have signed a lease agreement for converting the former Dairy & Farm building across from the Historic Campus into a Depot Museum & Riverfront Center. (See details below in Steve Hall's article). Two other major happenings have occurred since your last newsletter. See Jon DeVries' article on the repainting of our Milwaukee Road Boxcar. It looks fabulous. Also, PHS hosted a stop of the six-city tour in Fillmore County for the Milwaukee Road Historical Association (MRHA) annual meeting. (See more details in a later article in this newsletter.) We can't accomplish all of these activities without your help. Your time and monetary gifts are greatly appreciated!

City of Preston Approves Use Agreement for Preston Historical Society

By: Steve Hall

At the June 3, 2024 city council meeting the Preston City Council approved a lease and management agreement with the Preston Historical Society (PHS) for the former Dairy & Farm building at 304 Fillmore St. E in Preston. The agreement is between the city and PHS.

PHS has undertaken a masterplan for the riverfront in Preston including the former Dairy and Farm property (building and grounds) owned by the City. PHS plans to convert the building and grounds into a Depot Museum & Riverfront Center (DMRC) as a home for PHS and as a public facility for residents and visitors. The improvements to the buildings and grounds will include building systems,

interpretive displays, collection storage areas, activity center amenities as well as initial exterior and site improvements to include pedestrian access, parking, signage, lighting, landscaping and ADA accommodations.

The lease commenced on June 17, 2024. PHS will have 12 months from that date to raise project funds in the amount of \$200,000 to pursue the exterior enclosure and improvement of the former Dairy and Farm building. Once the initial \$200,000 has been secured, and upon PHS's submission of a complete application, the City will issue all necessary building permits for renovation and reconstruction of the Dairy and Farm building and grounds.

The terms include two phases where PHS will be launching a capital campaign to raise money for the Project. Before construction commences, PHS will need to raise \$200,000 (Phase 1) of the approximate \$400,000 goal for the project (Phase 2).

Preston Historical Society members and friends will be receiving information in the near future as to how they can contribute to the success of this new facility through a fund raising campaign. *The Preston Historical Society has a 501(c)(3) status and is a non-profit organization. All donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.*

Collections Committee Highlights

By: Joanne Hall, Committee Chair

- Received a Preston Area Community Foundation (PACF) grant of \$1,000 toward the purchase of a new laptop. Tyler from

Armour Computers assisted in purchasing a laptop that will meet our future needs.

- 2023 Oral Histories are available for check out at the Public Library and also through a link located on the Library website, under the heading of Beyond Books.
- Jill Eerdmans & Ila Olstad created a video for the 2005 Preston Sesquicentennial. It was shown at a membership meeting as our History Moment and the link placed on our PHS Facebook page. The video closes with a song “A Place Called Home” and to date the artist singing is unknown. If it was you, let us know!
- We assembled a Fillmore County Fair historical display for the O’Hara School during the Fair.
- Table runners and squares have been made from the “new” (1960) Preston High School stage curtain. They will be available through our website store.

Donations continue to be inventoried and stored. We appreciate those who share local objects and artifacts:

Philip Gartner-assorted local photos, paper artifacts and local newspapers with a variety of dates

Sheila Craig-Milwaukee Road magazines from 2021, 2022, 2023

Diane Johnson-photos of 25th reunion of the Preston-Fountain Class of 1974, yellow flyswatter from Farmers and Merchants Community Bank, photos taken during the demolition of the Preston Oil Products bldg; photo of “Seeing Santa Off”- Santa on the Caboose steps

Eileen Linden-“125 Years of Faith” -St. Columban’s Catholic Church booklet;1997 booklet featuring St. Columban’s Catholic parish; Preston High School Class of 1946 Class Reunion booklet of 1971; 1977 Gehling Implement Calendar; 1961 Fillmore County Fair Premium book; Preston Bluejays head scarf (sold at Barlow’s Dept. Store in Preston); Ebert Hardware black coin purse;1992 All School Reunion Bluejay sweatshirt, white; Preston Fountain Bluejays basketball sweatshirt, gray;

Preston Fountain Bluejays band uniform, jacket and pants

Sue Grooters- First Quarter 2022 issue of the Milwaukee Railroader magazine

Ron Scheevel- a box of assorted receipts dated in the 1940’s found in the Preston Oil Products building before demolition.

Lexi Pierce-photo of Preston High School girls basketball team-1907; two postcards of Preston street scenes

Carol Soland-Preston Creamery Assoc. notepad holder; photos of the 1930 and 1931 PHS girls basketball teams, 1931 PHS boys basketball team, 1933 banquet in the school gym, composite photo of the PHS class of 1933; a certificate for one share Common Stock of Meadowland Dairy Assn. dated September 1, 1970, Preston Service Men’s Club thermometer-yellow in color

Fillmore County Ag Society (Fair Board) 12 County Fair buttons-various years

Norm Olson Preston Creamery medallion recognizing the Minnesota Centennial in 1958

David Gartner (given in honor of Mayor Keith and Donna Gartner) small souvenir vase with old County Courthouse photo; Preston Fire Dept Centennial button; Bluejay Fever (homecoming) button; metal jar opener from McNiff Corner Store; small screwdriver from D&S POP Service Station
Donna Drier two 150th Coming Home tree ornaments

Membership Update

By: Lexi Pierce

We welcome Katherine Knittel from Individual Membership to Lifetime Membership and Charles Aug as a Lifetime member. We also welcome John Hall as a new Individual Member.

Tractor Ride for 2024

By: Sheila Craig

The number of tractors registered to date is just over 50 tractors. Much volunteer help is needed to make this a successful fundraising event. Please text Sheila at 507.273.1481 if you can help. A new addition this year will be a silent auction.

2024 Raffle

By: Sheila Craig

All of the 1500 tickets have been sold to be matched with \$1500 by Dan Christianson at F & M Community Bank. The match will be \$1 for each ticket sold! Drawing winners will be announced in our next newsletter.

O'Hara School Report

By: Mary Glaser

Here is a summary report of the O'Hara School event at the Fillmore County Fair for 2024. The school was open Tuesday 4pm-8pm, and Wednesday through Saturday 10am-8pm, which totals 44 hours. We had 10 volunteers who worked the shifts, 5 worked one shift and 5 worked 2, 3, and 4 shifts. We had a total of 511 visitors compared to 523 last year. Most were local, but out of state visitors were from Arizona, Maryland, Nebraska, Alaska, Ohio, and Iowa. We collected \$40 from bell ringing (\$55 last year), and \$38 from donations (\$40 last year). PHS merchandise sold totaled \$248, and \$140 from raffle tickets.



Thanks to all the volunteers that helped clean, set up and take down the display, and those who worked at the school during the fair. They are Sue Grooters, Joyce Hellickson, Linda Snyder, Sheila Craig, Charlie and Ann Sparks, Diane Johnson, Linda Wolfe, Debbie Thompson, Joanne Hall, Kerry Soiney, John Carlin, and Jon DeVries.

Note of Thanks

The collection committee and Preston Historical Society would like to thank Julie Sogla of the Preston Storehouse for her donation of a storage unit to PHS for keeping specific items in a climate controlled location. Thanks, Julie!

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History Moments

These remain a monthly feature of the Preston Historical Society meetings. Following are some of the recent featured topics.

Frank T. Ashton

By: Diane Johnson

Frank's roots in Fillmore County go back several generations. His great-grandparents moved to Fillmore County from New York in 1854. His grandfather, Frank E. Ashton was born in 1858. He married Echo Batemen and they had several children including Archie, who was Frank's father. Frank was born on September 9, 1909 in Missoula, Montana. He attended grade school in Ravalli, Montana until 1918 when, due to crop failure, the family moved back to Fillmore County. They traveled by immigrant railroad cars to Fillmore County (along with the cattle, horses, sheep, wagons, and household furnishings). They lived on several farms in the Fountain/Preston. They later moved to a farm near Granger, where they retired.

Frank graduated from Preston High School in 1928. He attended Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis, worked in highway construction, and hauled cream in Fillmore County.

On January 27, 1932, he married Mildred Hutton in Lanesboro. They had 3 daughters: Jean, Ora Mae, and Karen. Millie passed away in 1994.

Frank volunteered to serve in the Army during WWII. He served in France and Germany in General Patton's Third Army.

Frank was well known for being a rural mail carrier, which he did for 32 years. It turns out that he was the third generation in his family to do so. His grandfather, Frank E. Ashton, was appointed carrier in the first rural mail route established in Preston. In 1902, three more routes were established, with his son Archie as one of the carriers. (Archie was Frank's father.) Archie held that job until they moved to Montana. In 1941, Frank was appointed rural mail carrier on the route in the same general area of the route carried by his grandfather, Frank E. Ashton. He served as Postmaster in Preston until his retirement in 1972. He also held several state and national offices in the Rural Carriers Association.

Frank served as Mayor of Preston for 10 years (1952-1961). He was also a past VFW Commander as well as President of the Senior Citizens.

Frank passed away at the Ostrander Care Center on November 22, 2006 at the age of 97. At the time of his death, he had 7 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren.

Malvin Russell “Moppy” Anderson

By: Diane Johnson

Malvin “Moppy” Anderson was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin on May 22, 1893 to Math and Syverine “Sarah” Anderson. His parents were both Norwegian immigrants. He had two brothers and three sisters: Amor, Mabel, Helen, Stanley, and Irene.

He attended La Crosse Public Schools. After high school, he attended the La Crosse School of Business. He started his career at First National Bank in Rushford in 1914. While living there, he organized and led an athletic club there for men and women.

“Moppy” served in World War I from 1918-1919. He was a sergeant in the U.S. Army. He was stationed in Belgium and France and fought in the Argonne Forest Battle in France.

He moved to Preston In 1922, when he was elected as treasurer for Fillmore County. He held that position for 28 years (from 1923-1950). He also serviced as president of the State Association of Treasurers for four years.

He married Allene Michener on November 19, 1924 in Preston. Her father was Daniel Michener, who was a probate judge. They had three children – Kinsey, Alice Patricia Campbell, and Phillip. His wife died in 1979.

“Moppy” was very active both in the local community and at the state level:

- Chairman of the Fillmore County Historical Society for 12 years
- Commander of the Preston VFW Post and also First District Commander
- Commander of the American Legion Post
- Member of the Preston Methodist Church
- Member of the Masonic Lodge and Order of the Eastern Star
- Secretary of the Fillmore County Fair Board for 4-5 years
- Member of the Preston School Board for 13 years and secretary for 5 years
- Chairman of the Fillmore County War Bond and Savings Committee (after WWI)
- Chairman of the Minnesota Board of Public Health from 1929 to 1931.
- President of the Fillmore County Red Cross (from 1920's to 1950's).
- State Representative for Fillmore and Houston Counties (served for 12 years (1951-1963)
- Representative for the Minnesota Governor's Conference on Aging in 1969
- Named the Minnesota Outstanding Senior Citizen at the Minnesota State Fair in 1971

“Moppy” loved sports, especially baseball. When he was 14, he played in La Crosse and was pitcher for the La Crosse Athletes team. He pitched semi-professional baseball at age 15 and didn't quit playing until age 62 (due to a broken arm). He managed indoor baseball, starting in high school. After moving to Preston, he managed the indoor baseball team called the Preston Tigers. Their games were played upstairs in the building where Urban Artifacts is currently located. They later

played inside at the schoolhouse. They played teams from Spring Valley, Chatfield, and even as far away as Chicago.

For 34 years, he was the umpire for all of the home baseball games at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He also received the Minnesota State High School League Baseball Enthusiast Award from the Minnesota Twins.

Moppy was also very involved with the Boy Scouts. He was a scout master for nine years while living in Rushford and another 28 years after moving to Preston. He was instrumental in starting the Boy Scout organization in Preston. He received the Boy Scouts Silver Beaver Award for 33 years of service. For many years, he took the scouts on camping trips to northern Minnesota or Canada. He owned a wooded retreat near Preston, known as “Cedar Springs”. I assume the local boy scouts spent time there as well.

He started the “Community Christmas Tree” after he moved to Preston. The tree was located by the town hall. A program was held that included singing and a visit from Santa, who handed out candy to the children. This continued for about 25 years.

Moppy also organized the Memorial Day Program for 34 years. It was a joint effort with the VFW, Legion and local school. The program was held at the courthouse parking lot. Planks and cement blocks were hauled in from the lumber yard for seating and the piano was moved across the street from the town hall.

Moppy died at the age of 93 on December 5, 1986 at the Bethesda Nursing Home in Willmar, Minnesota. He is buried at Crown Hill Cemetery.

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Seeking a Great Grandfather and Finding a Great-Grandmother’s Family As Well!

By: Joanne Hall



Todd Wheeler first contacted the Preston Historical Society via email in February, 2020. He had recently learned his great-grandfather, Rev. F.C. Bailey, had lived in Preston as the pastor of the Presbyterian Church, was the owner of F.C. Bailey Furniture and Undertaking and was buried in the Greenwood Cemetery in Preston. He was planning a trip to Preston in July, 2020 to learn more. COVID delayed his trip by four years but he arrived in July, 2024. He requested a visit to the site of the home he knew the Baileys had built, the site of his business and Greenwood Cemetery. Our PHS research was able to provide those requested site visits as well as photos, property deeds and connect him with the family of his great-grandmother, Rosella Slater Bailey.

Franklin C. Bailey married Rosella Slater in Preston in 1889. He was called as the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Preston in the early 1890's. Her parents, Richard and Angeline Slater, had arrived in Preston in 1856 and were founding members of the Presbyterian Church. They eventually built a house on Slater Hill, the address today being 105 Preston St. NW. In 1895, Franklin and Rosella built the house located at 201 St. Anthony St. N. in Preston.

Rev. Bailey opened a furniture and undertaking business in 1899 on Preston's Main St. and owned this business until December, 1905. In June, 1906 Rev. Bailey accepted a pastoral call to Houston, MN and in 1912 he accepted a call to the Presbyterian Church in Kasota, MN. It was there that Rosella Slater Bailey died in June, 1915. She was buried in the family plot at Greenwood Cemetery in Preston beside her parents, sister and brothers. When Rev. Bailey died in 1931, he was also buried in Greenwood.

Todd Wheeler was appreciative of all he learned of his family history during his visit to Preston and expressed his appreciation with a donation to PHS.

Milwaukee Rd. Historical Assn. (MRHA) Visits PHS & Area Depot Museums

By Jon B. DeVries

MRHA held its 2024 convention in Winona and PHS assisted a six town tour of restored depots and hosted the 160 person group in Preston. Thanks to the Goutcher family, The Sweet Shop and United Methodist Church for lunch arrangements.

The group reviewed plans for the Preston Depot-Museum & Event Center and donated \$1,000. The convention group picture was at the PHS rail display for the MRHA magazine. PHS volunteers SOLD OUT their PHS T-shirts and birdhouses.

Open G Link for article by Reporter Wanda Hanson in the July 8th Fillmore County Journal:

Milwaukee Road Enthusiasts Tour Local Depots
fillmorecountyjournal.com



1939 Rib-Side Boxcar Restored to "New"
By Jon B. DeVries

The two years of planning by Kerry Soiney and the PHS Facilities committee has paid off. The boxcar at the trailhead looks as "new" as when it rolled out of the Milwaukee Road shop in 1939 – with maroon body, black wheels and bright white lettering.

The unique "rib-side" construction once again shows off – the full length welded sides pioneered by the Milwaukee Road.

Our thanks to Nate Julseth of Worth Solutions for sandblasting/painting and to his stencil makers. Nate made a special trip to Albert Lea to get the maroon color to match the original and "hand touched" wheels, frame, and "order board" on door.

Please see the pictures on following page for the various restoration stages and note that this project brings the total invested by PHS in the historic campus to over \$200,000. All Aboard!!



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