



## Preston Historical Society

Post Office Box 138  
136 Saint Anthony Street  
Preston, Minnesota 55965

A 501C/3 Non-Profit Corporation

## NEWSLETTER February 2016

Volume 10 Issue 1

### President's Corner

**Sheila Craig**

Look at the Volume number on the heading for this letter — **10**. It is very hard to believe that this is the 10th year for the writing of the Preston Historical Society Newsletter. Where does the time go?

The exciting news since our last letter is the ongoing efforts to secure a display location and storage space for the Society. In searching for a permanent location for storage, the former Dairy & Farm Building was found to be available and could also serve as a museum. The location is ideal — across the street to the south from the Elevator, Boxcar, and Caboose!

The project under development is for the space to house not only PHS, but also the National Trout Center (NTC) and Preston Tourism (PT). The three groups are working with the City of Preston to purchase the 2.9 acres and the three buildings. Only the main west building is proposed for renovation at this time. Highlights for PHS include display space, office and storage space, and shared meeting area with kitchenette and a retail space. The location will be made handicapped accessible with a ramp and bathrooms. Stay tuned for more developments and donation opportunities!

Other PHS changes since the last newsletter is the resignation of our 20-year Treasurer of the organization, Marc Sather. We would like to extend a huge THANK YOU to Marc for all his years of dedicated serve. Charles (Charlie) Sparks accepted the Treasurer's responsibility and was then elected to his first term at the December elections.

Also newly elected is Sam Halverson as Vice President. Our thanks to Bob Maust for his service as the previous Vice President. Continuing officers for the second year of their terms are President, Sheila Craig and Secretary, Elaine Maust.

### Updates of Interest

**Sheila Craig**

- Birdhouse sales have now passed 150. More are still available.
- The new 'red' t-shirts are available featuring the elevator, boxcar and caboose on the back and the PHS logo on the front. All sizes are still available.
- The 2015 Tractor Ride was a huge success with 72 tractors participating and a profit of over \$4500.

### History at Isinours

**Sheila Craig**

PHS member, Jon DeVries, has a great interest in the history of the railroad in Preston. While hiking out in the Isinours area, he found remnants of the Isinours Junction and turntable site. It was being used as a brush storage area and Trail staff did not know that any part of the railroad junction still existed in the area. The area will need to be cleaned up.

With subsequent contacts, it has been learned that the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Trails has been interested in making the Isinours area an Interpretive Site. Jon will be working with the DNR to do research of the area: the depot and turntable at the site, and the Milwaukee Road trains that served the area. The DNR proposal is for a kiosk in the area that will inform trail users of the history of the Isinours Junction area and the Milwaukee railroad.

## 2016 Tractor Ride

Elaine Maust

The 2016 tractor ride is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, September 17 & 18. Again we will be touring paved roads in S.E. Minnesota and N.E. Iowa. The committee will be meeting again to decide what and where meals and refreshments will be served. Participants enjoy meeting with a lot of friends and much conversation.

### Preston History

Did you know you can read about the history of Preston at your local library? The library houses a group of books that will help you learn about the ancestors and settlers of the Preston area. Also did you know that all of the Preston High School senior pictures are on display in the library?

### Volunteers Needed

There are two opportunities for volunteers coming up in spring and summer.

1) Last summer John Carlin made a replica of the Milwaukee Elevator for the Trout Days Celebration for our float for the parade. It is available to be taken to other community celebrations throughout the summer. If you would be available to take the 'float' to another community for their celebration, please contact us through our e-mail [prestonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:prestonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com) or call 507.273.1481.

2) We also would like to train a corps of workers who would volunteer as hosts at the caboose this summer. They could be 2 or 3 hour sessions on weekends as you are available. Tourists see it open and stop in. Please let us know of your interest and when you would consider volunteering to have it open by sending an e-mail to [prestonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:prestonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com).

## Days I Remember

Bob Maust

*The first two installments of this history trip around Preston were offered in our March and June 2015 newsletter issues. The story continues:*

Heading down St. Paul Street past McKnight Hardware Store was Gilbertson & Majors Clothing which handled all kinds of men's clothing. Next to it was the Green Lantern Bar & Pool Hall. Later it became the Lovness Gamble Store and Electric shop, and U.S. Post Office, and is now the Servicemen's Club. Across the alley was Caroline's Dress Shop and then June Utley Maust's Beauty Shop. Next to it was the Preston Republican Newspaper Office owned by Lud Gartner where today is Preston Floral & Gifts.

Behind those 3 buildings to the west were the Witte Freight docks. Back on St. Paul street, the next building was the Confare Chick Hatchery & Feed Store which later became the Kelly Veterinarian Office and Feed Store. Mrs. Jerry Bartsch operated the office for Kelly. Across the street to the south was the Preston Livery Stable. This property was sold to Martin Sethre and Jorgenson Construction built the building that you see there today owned by Root River Hardwoods. Today it is a Fitness Center. Martin Sethre was the dealer for Chevrolet cars and trucks, Massey Harris and Moline farm machinery. Next building was the Holland - Tessum IH farm machinery dealership. Mr. Pfremer was the mechanic and Mrs. Pfremer the secretary.

Across the alley was the Drury Benson garage where they did auto and truck repair. Jimmy Drury became the first TV dealership in Preston selling Spartan black & white TV's in the early 1950's. If you had an antenna on your roof you could pick

up one Rochester TV station. Today the building has been torn down and rebuilt for Ristau's milk truck garage. Next was the Farmers Home where single men would rent a room and be cooked for. Later was bought and used as Grant's Dentist office and today is used as a residence. Behind this was the Hinzelman Welding Shop and across the street towards the river was the Carrier Blacksmith Shop.

If we go across the south bridge you'll find the Preston Municipal Power Plant. It started with one small Fairbanks Morris engine and over time has expanded up to four Fairbanks Morris engines. The first city well was drilled just south of the power plant. Before this time Preston city water all came from a spring located just east of the power plant. It supplied water power for the flour mill and saw mill. It washed out in a flood. At one time to the west of the power plant, Fillmore County was going to build a new truck shed on the corner in that area that is all dug out. This is where they were going to build but never did. By today's standards it wouldn't have been very big. For 70 years there was a dam across the Root River on the west side of the bridge.

As we walk back north across the south bridge on the east side we'll come to the site of what was the bulk fuel storage area for what was called the P.O.P. or Preston Oil Products. The railroad siding came up behind these bulk storage tanks and the Spies Grain Mill. This mill was built by a millright whose last name was Preston and for which the City of Preston was named. In its early days this was a flour mill where farmers would bring in their wheat to have it ground into flour to sell. It was powered by the Root River by water diverted by the dam to the west. It was later converted to coal and steam power. In the early 50's the

mill was sold to Frank Bros. from Mapleton, MN who converted it into a soybean processing plant. When the railroad came to Preston, the end of the line was next to the flour mill on the east and the P.O.P. on the west and both identities were serviced by the railroad. Later years after Frank Bros., this was purchased by Vernon & Dorothy Runnigen who sold it to the Soma Family from Harmony/Harmony Feed & Grain. Years before, this location was the Ford garage that later became the Minnesota Highway Department garage before being torn down. The only thing left on the mill site today is grain storage owned by Harmony Feed and Grain which is no longer used.

On the corner was the Minnesota Highway Department garage. Next to it was the Preston Iron Works owned by Tony Olson where as a young man I would spend many hours learning about the many things that were built there by Tony, Tuffy Thompson and Frank Broadwater. They built a lot of log & lumber handling equipment, power winch systems for unloading grain cars, can milk truck boxes and some of the first loaders for farm tractors. Tuffy helped build the Alaskan Highway during the Second World War. He was a very talented man. In later years Don Trende worked many years at the Iron Works. On the east side of the Iron Works was the Sorenson Blacksmith Shop where farmers would bring in their plow shares to be sharpened by heating them red hot and pounding the edges flat with heavy hammers and a lot of hard work. This later became part of the Iron Works and later torn down for the grain storage area.

Around the corner was Sethre Implement before they moved to their new location. After they moved to their new location the site was sold to National Bushing & Parts

who later moved up to their location talked about before.. The building is now home to Larson Plumbing and Heating. Next time we will continue with the block on the north side.

## Memberships

### Membership Committee

We welcome the following lifetime members who have joined us since the last newsletter:

Business Lifetime Members:

S & S Sanitation          Major & Co  
Preston Service Plus      POET

Individual & Family Lifetime Members:

Michael Bjorkman          Will Mensink  
Greg & Cheryl Dornink  
Donald & Wenonah Berkland

## A Look Back

### Dick Petsch

Happy New Year to all. A sad start to the new year with the fire that consumed the B & B Bowling Alley. A devastating loss to Preston of a strong viable business which goes back many years. This is an historical event which has become, with all its sadness, a true part of Preston history. Thank the Lord, no one was seriously injured.

Throughout history fire has played a cruel role in many places. One of the worst fires occurred in New York City, Manhattan, to be exact. On March 25, 1911, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. At the time, shirtwaists were a type of women's blouses. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory was located on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the 10-story Asch Building. The factory employed about 500 workers. Most of them were women between the ages of 16 to 23 and immigrants. Their weeks were 9 hours a day, Monday thru Friday, 7 hours on Saturdays. Pay was \$7.00 to \$12.00 per week. The fire started at about 4:40 pm in a waste bin under a cutter's table on the 8th floor. A passerby on the street called in the first alarm when they saw smoke coming from the 8th floor window.

A bookkeeper on the 8th floor called the 10th floor, but the fire reached the 9th floor same time as the alarm. There was no audible alarm system in the factory. Although there were several exits and two freight elevators the fire had spread

rapidly due to the huge amount of scrap material on the floors. Also some exits were kept locked to prevent theft and to keep employees from sneaking out for breaks. With exits blocked by fire, many employees crowded into the two freight elevators to escape the fire. The two elevator operators were credited with saving many employees. Some employees climbed stairs to the roof to be rescued. Tragically, 146 garment workers, 123-women, 23-men died in the fire, 71 injured, some from jumping out windows and about 20 died when an external, poorly anchored metal fire escape twisted and collapsed. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was one of the deadliest in New York history and one of the deadliest in US history. The fire caused many laws to require higher safety standards in factories and businesses.

Until we meet again.

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