



Preston Historical Society

Post Office Box 138
Preston, Minnesota 55965

A 501C/3 Non-Profit Corporation

NEWSLETTER March 2015

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Sheila Craig, President

Greetings to all Preston Historical Society members! First of all I want to thank Dick Petsch for his 10 years of excellent leadership to PHS! 2015 brings a change to the President's position for the Society. I'm Sheila Craig, and I think I know many of you, but not all. I've lived in the Preston area since 1987 and am a retired Extension Educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Since 2003 I have been working as a Community Sewage Treatment Facilitator with the Southeast MN Wastewater Initiator working in the 6- SE corner counties of MN. I'm excited to take on the challenge of leading this great group of members.

As we look to the coming year, I suggested some goals for myself and for the PHS. At the first meeting in January I announced them as "New Year's Resolutions" or the "State of the Society". Call them what you will. I'm sure they won't all be kept or met, but that is something to analyze next December. At least we have a bit of a map to follow.

2015 Goals:

- Involve more members in Ad Hoc Committees
- Set a newsletter schedule
- Include more publicity for PHS and events in local newspapers
- Consider getting new t-shirts
- Work on Inventory of Artifacts
- Continue to pursue a Legacy Grant for the bagging shed
- Setting a meeting time of 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

MICHAEL & VICKI OTT STORY

Bonnie Davids

Greg & I went to St. Peter's Catholic Church in Hokah, MN in October, 2014, for their annual church dinner. While waiting in line, we began talking with a man named Michael Ott. Greg asked him if he was related to Ann Ott of Preston and he said he was.

Michael said he had worked for the Milwaukee Railroad in Preston. I told him we just had a dedication for the restored Milwaukee Road Caboose in Preston in Aug, 2014. I mentioned that my dad, Robert Maust, a member of the Preston Historical Society, had worked on restoring the Caboose. Michael said he had the Preston depot sign at his place in rural Houston. He invited us to come look at it.

On Friday, Nov. 28th, Robert and Elaine Maust and Greg and I visited with Michael and Vicki Ott at their home. I gave him a copy of the book from the dedication ceremony and a picture of the Caboose. He offered to give us the Preston depot sign. We visited for three hours about the four generations of the Ott family that worked as Agents for the Milwaukee Railroad. My dad also shared stories of his father and grandfather who worked for the railroad. Michael remembered Sam Maust and shared some stories. When we were about to leave, Michael Ott also wanted us to take additional items from his Preston Railroad collection.

A few weeks later in mid-December Greg & I went to pick up the Preston sign. Along with the sign, Michael and Vicki Ott gave us additional items including the 1918 Milwaukee Railroad Blue Prints.

CONTINUING THE \$100 PLAQUE

Sheila Craig

We have extended the \$100 donation category to a second plaque and already have the two donors: Greg & Bonnie Davids and David Joerg. We welcome anyone to contribute \$100 for the work of the PHS. It can be engraved with your name or in honor/memory of someone.

2015 TRACTOR RIDE

Elaine Maust

The 2015 tractor ride committee has decided on the route for this year. On Saturday, September 19th we will leave the fair grounds and go south west to Lime Springs for lunch, then go east and north through Granger, Harmony and back to Preston.

On Sunday, September 20th we will leave Preston traveling to Lanesboro and then north to have lunch in Pilot Mound; then traveling west and south back to Preston.

We have sent out over 100 registration forms and have received several back to join us already. Our next meeting will be the first part of May to decide on meals and members who can help with duties.

O'HARA REMEMBERED

History At A Glance

Dick Petsch

Provenance—from the French provenir, “to come from”, is the chronology of the ownership, custody, or location of a historical object.—**Wikipedia.**

Recently, The Preston Historical Society (PHS) received from Jerry Johnson, husband of the late Elaine Thompson Johnson, a large 3-ring binder containing

memorabilia of O'Hara Country School, District #29.

It is a very in-depth volume containing lots of memories of when Elaine Thompson and her classmates attended O'Hara School. In the front cover pocket is the Republican Leader, dated Thursday August 26, 2010, when a reunion of about 80 classmates and family members held a reunion at the O'Hara school, located on the Fillmore County Fairgrounds. Also in the front cover pocket are other bits of information and a few pictures.

The first part of the volume contains pictures and stories of the reunion. A little farther there is a unique section of about 8 pages called “School Ideals” which contains poems about school days and one poem about George Washington with a drawing and the Gettysburg Address with a drawing of Abraham Lincoln. The next section is pictures of the students in class and what became of many of the students. After that, there are pictures of the O'Hara school being moved from Amherst Township to the Fillmore County Fairgrounds in 1963. The last section is the school census listing all the students who attended O'Hara School.

Elaine Thompson Johnson went to great length to put this volume together. This volume is truly the provenance for the O'Hara School. This volume will be on display at the O'Hara School whenever the school will be open for viewing. I would encourage everyone to take some time to go back in time to see how our Grandparents and even some Parents attended school.

WEBSITE - prestonmnhistory.com

BIRD HOUSES

Sheila Craig

What a popular fundraiser for the Preston Historical Society thanks to Jon Haugan! Also thanks to Bretta Grabau for the front page story in a recent issue of the *River Valley Reader*. Prior to the story we had sold over 60 of the Milwaukee Elevator replicas. As of press time for this newsletter, the article has generated additional orders for 20 more bird houses. If you want to order a bird house, contact Sheila at 507.273.1481.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Sheila Craig

Several new Ad Hoc committees have been created in addition to the Standing Committees of Membership, Finance, and History. The new committees are: Newsletter, Activities, Marketing/Promotion. Volunteers are welcome to join any of these committees. Just contact Sheila!

DAYS AS I REMEMBER

Robert Maust

Starting at corner where Preston Foods is and going west on Fillmore Street was the Snyder Motor Company who were the Pontiac, Cadillac and GMC truck dealership. They bought this property which contained the Tibbetts House which was really a big hotel. This building was sold to Gartner Bros. who tore it down and made it into a grocery store they sold it to Vern & Shirley Dahl who sold it to Preston Foods.

Next door was Dr. Grinell's office and it was taken apart in two pieces and moved two blocks west and two blocks south where today there are two homes which was once his Doctor's office.

Continuing west on which was known as the upper street was Gartner's grocery store operated by Gus, Leo and Howard Gartner. There was an 8 foot wide stairway which took you upstairs to the Grand Opera House. There used to be many dances in the big auditorium which later became the Lazy Ike fish plug business run by Mr. Ellingson and Mr. Nelson. When the Gartner Bros. moved into their new super market the old Victory Café was operated by Mickey Meyers and was sold to Harlowe and Donna Ibach who moved from where part of Root River Appliance is now into the old Gartner Bros. store.

Next door was the Preston Lockers & Meat Processing Co. and also an ice cream confectionary owned by the Lyle Austin's and Mr. Becker. They made homemade ice cream and newlywed sundaes. Mr. Becker later sold his share to Vincent Shanahan. Today parts of this building are made into a beauty shop and Preston Mercantile.

In the next building was DeVries Barber Shop. Jerry Roche and Elmer DeVries were the two barbers. I remember going there to get my hair cut. Next to that was George's Tavern with a gas pump out in front where you could drive up and pump gas up into a glass measuring container and then put that gas in your car and beer in your stomach.

On the west side of George's was the Gamble Store, which later became Dunwell's Optometrist in the 50's, and next to it was National Bushing Auto Parts.

On the west side of National Bushing which burned down and is now a vacant lot was Heitner Furniture and Funeral Home run by Bill & Maynard "Buster" Heitner. It was purchased by Dale & Muriel Thauwald and is now operated by Jeff Thauwald as a funeral home.

If you go across St. Paul Street, the Methodist Church was on the corner with a Methodist parsonage on the north side of the church. In 1968 the natural gas company purchased the church lot and tore the church down. They later sold that lot to Don & Rae Rustad and now houses Greg Davids office, Kurt Reicks motor vehicle license bureau, Sandy Marzolf beauty shop, Kiel Anderson insurance office and Brevig Gun Shop.

Going down street on west was Fran Eischen home and another home Chandler's and then Joe Hahn, Sr. grandpa to the Hahn who now has Harmony Lumber Company. This location is now the Preston Fire Department and Ambulance service.

Going south across Fillmore St. on the corner was the Ray Barnes home; he had retired from farming west of Preston. Next to it going east was Virg Vickerman house, a local cement contractor who did a lot of cement work in Preston. This location was bought by the telephone company and they built a new office there in 1950. Hans Jorgenson was the building contractor. I think that at one point in time 30 plus people worked either in or out of the telephone company.

Next was the Preston Fire Department downstairs under the library and the City Clerk's office with Mr. Grebin being city clerking 75 years ago. This space is now the council chambers and City Clerk's office. The cost of the library building was given to the city by the Carnegie Foundation which is now the offshoot of the US Steel Corporation. Originally the south side of the building upstairs was a town hall and downstairs the city jail.

Next door going south on St. Paul St. was Phil Gartner Sr.'s attorney office. Outside his office was a public drinking fountain where there now sits a wooden fish statue. He sold his business to Clem Snyder & David Joerg, who are both

retired now and is now the Corson Law Office.

On the south side of the alley was Charles Keehn meat market. Charlie and his son, Bob operated Keehn's Meat Market and were famous for their baloney, wieners and other processed meats. Willie Cambern, who later had a grocery store in Fountain, learned the meat trade from Charlie Keehn. The property was sold to Farm Bureau Insurance which is there today.

On the south side of Keehn's was Kerr's Confectionary where they had wonderful ice cream and ice cream drinks including a drink called the "Buffalo". Bay Kerr and his wife operated it 75 years ago. In later years it was operated by Clyde and Faith Shaw and later to Alton and Doris Olson after which it was purchased by Tom & Nancy Byrne for tax preparation and where a tax accounting business is today.

Next time in "Days As I Remember", we'll finish this section of St. Paul Street to the corner with Main Street and continue our trip around 'courthouse square'.

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