



DECEMBER 2024

WHEELS ACROSS THE PRAIRIE HERITAGE CENTER

P.O. Box 1091 • 3297 Hwy. 14 • Tracy, MN 56175 • (507) 626-1949
www.wheelsacrosstheprairie.org • wheelsacrosstheprairie@gmail.com



Wheels Across the Prairie visitors walk along a flag-lined pathway this summer. Thirty flags were raised this summer along the Wheels most easterly “street” in August. Another 15 are expected to go up in 2025 along the Wheels’ more southerly street.

New era unfurls at Wheels

Transformative change continues to take shape for the Wheels Across the Prairie Heritage Center, with a multitude of projects begun or completed in 2024.

Some improvements are highly visible, others not.

Thirty American flags were raised on new 20-foot poles this August in undoubtedly the most eye-catching change. Another 15 poles and flags are slated to join the Wheels array in 2025. Each is a star-spangled salute to a Tracy-area military veteran. Nameplates will be affixed to each pole, listing the individual service man or woman being memorialized. Gifts of \$1,500 or more from families and friends financed each flags’ installation, with some money set aside for future maintenance.

Other major improvements that came to fruition for Wheels Across the Prairie this past year include:

- The completion and opening of a new military building. New exhibits in the building tell the stories of local military veterans. The insulated, 24x36-foot structure became the Wheels’ second facility with a HVAC system. During the winter-off season, the new building is being used to store artifacts sensitive to temperature and humidity swings.

- A new barbershop exhibit was dedicated in July, with longtime

Tracy hair-clipper Jack Miller the guest of honor. Scores of visitors turned out for a program and hot-dog lunch to fete Miller, who kept his Tracy customers looking neat and trim from 1962-2012.

- Multiple utility projects were completed, including the extension of a City of Tracy water main to the Main Barn, installation of a larger capacity septic tank, the extension of natural gas services to the Main Barn and Military Building, running electricity to additional buildings and upgrading electrical services to 600 amps on the Main Barn. A hydrant and garden spigot were installed to make watering outdoor gardens and plants easier. Progress was made in grading the grounds, to prepare for seeding and landscaping projects in 2025.

- Two, 15-year-old computers were replaced in 2024 with new computers and software. A new scanner and printer were also purchased. The upgrades will provide increased security for Wheels’ valuable digital archives and records, and expand capabilities.

- New siding and windows were installed in the railroad Section Foreman’s House, that had been moved to the Wheels in the fall of 2020 from DeGraf. Interior wiring and finish work are planned

New Era: Continued on page 5

Indian boarding school legacy hits close to home

By Seth Schmidt

A compelling, but little-known story was shared at the Wheels Across the Prairie Heritage Center this fall.

How and why did a Catholic Indian mission school open in the tiny, wind-swept prairie village of Avoca 14 decades ago?

Program presenters Janet Timmerman and Anita Gaul began the Sept 15 program with a caveat.

“We do not speak for them,” Timmerman said, referring to the mostly forgotten Indigenous girls who attended the school. “We have only half the story. We have not heard the voices of those who were at the school.”

The speakers explained that Indian girls attended the Avoca Catholic boarding school from 1884-1894, as part of federal government policy to educate and assimilate native children into America’s main stream white culture. The goal was to “kill the Indian, but save the man,” in the words of a prominent federal advocate, by teaching children of marginalized native tribes to adopt white cultural practices and trades, learn to speak English, and abandon traditional ways. Conversion to Christianity was encouraged. Traditional native languages, ways of thinking, spiritual practices and manners of dress were to be stamped out. Removing children from their parental homes was part of the process.

“Parents often had no choice but to agree to this forced removal,” Gaul said.

The Avoca school was one of about 16 Indian boarding schools established in Minnesota, and one of about 367 nationwide, in the late 19th and early 20th century. Set into motion by the Grant Administration’s “Peace Policy,” in the 1870s, the schools were meant to assist Indigenous tribes who had been forcibly removed from their traditional lands by the relentless encroachments of white settlement and government policy.

The harm of wrenching children from their families, and unmooring young people from their cultural traditions, Timmerman and Gaul said, was unacknowledged and poorly understood.

“We need to understand the trauma of the boarding schools,” Gaul said. “We’ve



An 1886 photo shows 50 girls and young women on the porch steps outside the Avoca boarding school. The nuns in the photo are likely members of the Holy Child of Jesus order that ran the school. A man in the center back is likely a priest (Murray County Historical Society photos).

had generations of (Indian) children grow up without parents and siblings.”

Timmerman said that citizens today should recognize that they are living on land that once belong to Indigenous people.

In October, President Joe Biden issued a formal apology for the government’s role in removing at least 18,000 indigenous children from their homes, and forcing them to attend boarding schools.

Ambitious vision

Catholic Bishop John Ireland laid the foundation for the Avoca school, Timmerman explained. through his advocacy of rural Catholic colonies.

“He wanted to get Irish Catholics out of the Cities,” said Timmerman. “He was



The Lincoln House Hotel was built to accommodate sportsmen and other visitors coming to Southwest Minnesota. When actual usage fell far short of goals, the hotel was converted first into a Catholic boarding and day school, and then into a boarding school that also accommodate indigenous girls and young women.

concerned that poor Catholics who had settled in the biggest cities would lose their faith. He felt that they would be better off settling in rural areas, on railroad land where new churches and towns could be started.”

The Catholic Colonization Bureau, established in 1876, was instrumental in the founding of Minnesota towns such as Graceville, DeGraf, Clontarf, Adrian, Fulda, Currie, Iona and Avoca, Timmerman noted.

Bishop Ireland personally selected and named the Avoca townsite in 1877, after visiting Lime Lake in southern Murray County. A priest was soon assigned to establish a mission church: The Church of St. Rose of Lima.

In addition to spiritual dreams, Bishop Ireland also had an entrepreneurial vision for the new prairie town: The Lincoln House. The imposing three-story gabled structure with a double-porch near Lime Lake, was designed as a first-class hotel. It cost \$6,400, an enormous sum for the time. (About \$2.4 million in today’s dollars).

“Bishop Ireland envisioned that Avoca would become the hub of Catholic life in Southwest Minnesota,” Timmerman said. “He also thought that Avoca would become a tourist destination for hunters.”

The hoped-for influx of visitors in Avoca never happened. What could be done with the impressively expensive, but mostly empty, Lincoln House?

In 1882, Ireland invited the Sisters of

Avoca: Continued on page 3

Boarding School:

Continued from page two

the Holy Child Jesus in Philadelphia to convert Lincoln House into a Catholic convent and school. Three Sisters took the railroad west to Avoca to take a look, and ultimately agreed to give it a try. A \$2,500 downpayment was made, and in 1883, five Sisters opened the St. Rose Academy to serve the area Catholic families across the area.

The Catholic boarding school attracted 20-30 day students, and 9-12 resident boarders, Timmerman and Gaul reported. However, tuition fees were “insufficient to support the school.” Just feeding everyone at the school proved a challenge, despite donations of potatoes, eggs, butter and milk from local families.

“When Bishop Ireland came by the school for a quick visit in Nov. 14, 1883,



Anita Gaul and Janet Timmerman

the Sisters could not offer him any food,” Timmerman reported.

Financial salvation for the school arrived the following year with a contract from Bureau of Indian Affairs, to educate, house, and feed up to 50 Indian girls for \$85 a year.

“This decision was motivated by the desire to get money to keep the school open,” Gaul said.

So began the St. Francis Industrial School for Indian girls in September of 1884. Under the same roof, the St. Rose Academy continued to serve the daughters of white, Catholic parishioners.

The first 14 Indian students were Lakota’s from the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota. Several months later, 22 girls of Ojibwa and French-Canadian descent arrived from Northern Minnesota. The new arrivals spoke a different language from the Lakota girls from Rosebud, and had a very different culture, adding to what must have been a bewildering cultural shock for the new



A horse-drawn wagon and ladies in hoop-skirts exploring the shores of Lime Lake are frozen in time in this 1880s-era photograph. The Catholic boarding school and convent can be seen on the opposite shore.

boarding students.

Journals kept by the Sisters describe everyday life routines at the school.

The Indigenous girls learned domestic skills such as cleaning, cooking, and gardening. A notation in 1888 describes the students harvesting 700 bushels of potatoes. Children learned to sing in a choir, sometimes performing for visitors. Annual awards honored “Best Cook and Housekeeper,” “Excellence in Class,” “Gold Medal for Elocution,” “The One Who Spoke English the Best,” and “Most Improved in All Subjects,” as well as an award for diligence in learning about Christianity and Catholicism.

Apparently, the Indian students were something of a curiosity for the surrounding emigrants of European descent, as a convent journal noted that “people come to look at them everyday.”

The school was described as well-lit and spacious, with a parlor, large meeting hall, and chapel. The school had both a piano and organ. Each child slept in their own bed.

Journals also noted the hardships of winters on the prairie. “More snow! Will it ever stop?”

An entry on Jan. 7, 1886, read: “Not fit for anyone to go out. Everything is freezing to the stove.”

Another writer described bringing chickens into the house’s kitchen, after temperatures plunged to minus 46 degrees.

Despite eight stoves scattered about the school, warding off winter chill was a constant challenge, as was cleaning up coal dust.

Illness, especially the dreaded tuberculosis, was an on-going threat to the

children. Journals describe the deaths of five girls to TB during the winter of 1888-89.

“The 1880s was an awful time to be out on the prairie,” Timmerman said.

The Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus operated the Avoca school for seven years. The Sisters of St. Joseph, based in Minneapolis, took over in 1890, and ran the school for three more years before losing the government contract in 1894.

The era of the Catholic Indian boarding school was over in Avoca.

Final resting places

Six Indigenous girls and young women who died at the Avoca school are known to be buried at the St. Rose of Lima church cemetery in Avoca. Their names are: Mary Catherine Xavier Tasunka, 17; Bertha Tapantinwin, 24; Lucy Walters, age unknown; Mary Josephine Bordeaux, 21; Alma Pauskaduta Parient; Inez Burger, age unknown.

In 2018, the Catholic Daughters of St. Anne’s Parish in Slayton, raised money for a memorial stone with the names of the six students. A dedication ceremony included a traditional Native American rite, combined with a Catholic prayer service.

The cemetery memorial, as well as their presentation, represent “only the first steps of reconciliation” efforts needed to address past injustices toward Indigenous peoples, Gaul concluded.

Timmerman, retired Murray County Museums coordinator, is the author of several books and articles about area history.

Gaul is a history instructor at Minnesota West Community & Technical College.

Views from our Museum President

by Jon Wendorff

Visitors ranged from Alaska to Georgia

Visitors to Wheels Across the Prairie this past year came from all over the United States.

Some came from as close to home as Walnut Grove. Others came from as far away as California, Georgia, and Alaska.

How did these visitors know about our little gem in the prairie here in Tracy? They heard about us from brochures, our newsletter, word of mouth, trip advisor, facebook and more.

Each visitor we hope walks away feeling, "Wow what a neat place!" We definitely need to tell our family and friends to check out this heritage center and all it has to offer."

We are sure that after people leave the Wheels they visit other businesses in town, as we always share tips about places to eat and visit. It is always fun to visit with families as they walk our campus. Some may be home for a class reunion. Others may be curious about where their grandparents once lived. Sometimes we can share the exact location of where they lived or had a business.

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We are always adding new pieces to our collections.

Sometimes, people bring in dishes that belonged to great-grandmothers, On any given day we might receive old store receipts from a Tracy business that closed long ago, a 1928 wedding dress, a photo of a proud World War II veteran, or vintage handmade toys. What is certain is that this spring when Wheels Across the Prairie opens for a new season, there will be lots of new exhibits for visitors to see.

Do you have special, unique items that you would like to give Wheels Across the Prairie? Remember, before you toss, give us a call 507-626-1949.



Gleaming chrome and paint were near universal features of the classic cars displayed at the Wheels Across the Prairie this summer.

Classic cars have extra sparkle amidst Wheels village backdrop

Blazingly hot, sultry weather cut down on entries for Wheels Across the Prairie's second-annual classic car and cycle show on August 25. But car fanciers were still treated to the sight of 40 gleaming entries.

Vintage Studebakers, Bel Aires, Mustangs, Road Runners, Chargers, and more, seemed right at home with Wheels' vintage village and freight train backdrop.

Ellis Vosberg, Dean Vosberg, and Robert Ankrum were the class winners in the show. Dean Beierman topped the motorcycle vision.

Wheels Across the Prairie donated \$600 to both Tracy Public and St. Mary's schools from show proceeds.

Car-show visitors were treated to free admission to Wheels Across the Prairie buildings. Many responded by leaving donations anyway.

The classic car show will return to Wheels on Sunday, August 24.



What's under the hood? Bob Bruder, Don Hansen and Bill Heern discuss the finer points of the internal combustion engine.



Exhibitors in Wheels Across the Prairie's Box Car Days tractor show were invited to take their machines for a leisurely drive through Tracy. Terry Filter, waving at spectators from his John Deere, was among those who joined the tractor caravan. The Wheels board has decreed that the event will henceforth be known as the John D. Meyer Memorial Tractor Drive, as a lasting legacy for an original organizer of the drive. Meyer, a long-time Wheels board member, died in January of 2024 at age 78.

New Era: Continued from page one



Arika Sanders, Tracy Chamber manager, addresses the crowd.

Barbershop dedication honors Jack Miller

The adage “there’s no such thing as a free lunch” was put to the test during a July dedication of a new barbershop exhibit.

Free hot dogs, chips, cookies, and beverages were served following a program that saluted longtime Tracy barber Jack Miller. Chamber Director Arika Sanders thanked Miller for his service to Tracy, and complimented the Wheels for another addition to their campus.

About 100 people came out to greet Miller, and see the re-created small-town barbershop. The centerpiece of the new exhibit—a barber chair from Miller’s last shop—became the spot where the veteran hair clipper hung out while meeting with well-wishers. Visitors also checked how the aura of an old barbershop had been recreated with tools of the barbering trade and related-memorabilia and photos.

Miller, who grew up on a farm near Tyler, set up his first Tracy barbershop on South St. in 1962. He cut and trimmed the hair of local men and boys for parts of six decades, before retiring in 2012. His last location was on Morgan St. across from Tracy Lanes.



Jack Miller, sitting in his old barber chair, chats with visitors.

Joe Beierman furnished the craftsmanship for the recreated barbershop.

in 2025.

- New cedar shingles were installed on the vintage log cabin that once stood near Bear Lake in Murray County’s “Great Oasis” area. Steps were also undertaken to reinforce the 150-year-old building’s roof.

- New cedar siding was installed on a refurbished the Blacksmith Shop. Wood shingles and a front overhang are planned in 2025.

- A vintage windmill is again spinning in the wind, thanks to restorative repairs. The \$6,500 project, funded with private donations, rebuilt the windmill head and platform and put on new metal blades.

- Working with consultant Molly Peterson, Wheels launched a new, and more visually appealing web site.

- Plans were put in place for the installation of nine classic light posts along Wheels walkways during the coming year.

A host of smaller projects—ranging from the sandblasting and painting of a century-old school bell to fixing a vintage outhouse’s exterior—were also completed.

As always, on-going efforts continued this past year to maintain collections, create new displays, and add to old ones. The board continued to study options for insulating and installing a HVAC system in the Helmberger-Johnston building.

Activities were wide-ranging. This past year, the Wheels hosted four on-site historical programs, a classic car show, a tractor show, several class reunion tours, children’s activities, and a Box Car Days pork-burger benefit.



Heath Thompson, Emma Bigoni, Hunter Thompson, and Dulce Thompson were among those who checked out Wheels Across the Prairie’s new military building this summer. The Walnut Grove visitors checked out the exhibits while taking a break from the classic car show, held at the Wheels in August. The 24x36-foot structure is the second building on the Wheels campus to be insulated and equipped with heating and air conditioning capabilities. The military building opened for the first time over the Memorial Day weekend.



Rows of American flags at the Wheels Across the Prairie are memorials to the sacrifices of American military veterans.

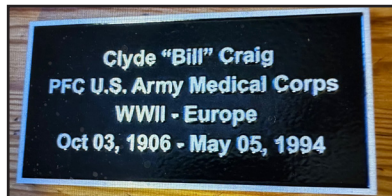
Many contributed to success of Wheels flag memorials

The generosity of many donors keyed the success of Wheels Across the Prairie’s flag project.

The Stars & Stripes was raised on 30 new flag poles this August. Another 15 poles will be erected in the coming year.

Each flag is a memorial to a Tracy area military veteran. A nameplate on each flag pole identifies the individual the flag honors. Solar lights on each pole will make it possible to leave the flag up at night. Plans are to have the flags flying from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Numerous families and friends gave \$1,500 to pay for the expense of each flag pole installation, and honor the veteran of their choice. A portion of flag donations have been reserved for future maintenance needs.



Flag pole name plates identify each veteran being honored, and when they served.

The flag sponsors are:

- Brad & Brenda Stoneberg
- Suzanne Sandbo
- Ken & Colleen Schiller
- Nancy Hippe & David Abernethy
- Bosacker family
- Noreen Hanson & Rita Forbregd
- LeRoy Johnson
- Laura DuCharme
- Joe Cooreman
- Thad Lessman, Jeri Schons & Jeff Lessman
- Donald Buzzell
- Wayne & Joyce Greely family
- Erbes family
- Steve & Doris Haugen
- Eric & Lisa Timmerman, Lynn & Rose Goltz, Patricia Timmerman
- Bonnie Withrow, Dave & Garry Hippe
- Allen Hubbard (2)
- Children of Harold Halfmann
- Jeff & Lori Alf
- Mavis Garrett (2)
- Brent Nelson
- Cal and Deb Ludeman
- Nyquist family
- Vicki Unger
- James Rademacher, Dorothea Rademacher
- Mike Marben, Kurt Marben
- Ward Wixon
- Sott Thein
- Jean Krueger
- Donaldson family
- Hayes family
- Carol Cooreman
- Harold Deal (2)
- Minnwest Bank
- Liz and Jay Waltermann
- Anonymous (7)

‘Dollars for Doers’ gives extra volunteer incentive

The day-to-day work of keeping Wheels Across the Prairie running is done almost entirely by unpaid volunteers.

The only “pay” volunteers receive or want is the satisfaction of helping carry out the Wheels’ mission of telling the story of Tracy’s priceless historical heritage, and preserving this legacy for future generations.

But volunteers could not carry on this work alone. The financial generosity of Wheels supporters helps ensure that bills can be paid and needed tasks get done.

One example is the “Dollars for Doers” program established by Alan and Judy Johnston. This generous donation provides Wheels Across the Prairie with a Dollars for Doers stipend for each hour of work contributed by volunteers. The Wheels benefits greatly from this extra source of revenue. Volunteers, in turn, are provided with an extra incentive to help at the museum, knowing that Wheels Across the Prairie is getting a double benefit from their involvement.



Extensive grading was done on the Wheels grounds this past year.



G&R Electric installed a new 600-amp electrical service to the Main Barn.



Aaron & Sons was the general contractor for the installation of siding on the railroad Section Foreman's House. Wheels volunteers assisted.

Utility upgrades made

Wheels Across the Prairie is better positioned for the future, after completing several major utility upgrades in 2024.

The Main Barn is now hooked up to City of Tracy municipal water services. The extension from a main at the corner of the Highline Road and Hwy. 14, was made possible by a \$20,000 Lyon County appropriation of federal American Recovery Act funds. The project extended 1.5" PVC pipe about 800 feet to the Main Barn, as well as a hydrant near the depot.

Natural gas extensions have been made to both the Main Barn and the military building. Previously, a propane tank had been used for heating the Main Barn. The line was trenched-in so that natural gas services could be extended to the Helmberger-Johnston, Monroe Town Hall, St. Mark's Church, and depot if needed in the future.

TE Underground of Tyler installed the gas and water lines.

A new septic system, with two-tanks

of 1,600 and 900 gallon capacity, will greatly improve the serviceability of the bathroom in the Main Barn. An older, smaller septic tank, was removed.

The new system has a large enough capacity to avoid the need to frequently pump out the tank. It was decided not to have septic drainage field, because the Wheels doesn't have enough year-around usage to make that system operate well. ET Heating & Cooling of Milroy installed the septic system.

The Wheels board has discussed the future possibility of adding a second bathroom to the Main Barn, which the new septic tank would have the capability of handling.

G&R Electric upgraded the electrical services in the Main Barn from 200 amp to 600 amps. Wheels leaders felt it was worthwhile to install the 600 amp service, rather than just 400 amp., to account for future needs.

Additional electrical work last summer included the extension of power to additional exhibit buildings.



A large capacity septic tank was put in place this summer by ET Heating & Cooling.

Foundation supports RR house & log cabin

The Community Foundation of Northern Colorado continued to be a major Wheels Across the Prairie supporter in 2024.

The foundation gave just under \$20,000 to support two large improvement projects. A grant of \$9,800 was given to help fund new siding installed on the Wheels' railroad section foreman's house. Another \$9,807 was given toward restoration efforts on the Wheels' log cabin.

The Northern Colorado foundation was established by 1949 Tracy High School graduate Evelyn Helmberger-Holmboe and her husband, John Holmboe. Over the past decade, the Foundation of Northern Colorado has given Wheels Across the Prairie over a \$250,000 for major projects.

This fall, Evelyn Helmberger-Holmboe was inducted into the Tracy High School Wall of Fame.

**Become a member!
Or renew for 2025.**

Your financial support helps the Wheels Across the Prairie continue our mission of preserving and sharing Tracy's heritage!

**RETURN TO:
WHEELS ACROSS THE PRAIRIE
HERITAGE CENTER
PO BOX 1091 - TRACY MN 56175**

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

email: _____

LEVELS OF MEMBERSHIP
(Dues annually on Jan. 1)

_____ Individual - \$30

_____ Business \$100

_____ Family - \$50

_____ Other \$ _____

Donations fund windmill repairs

Donations this spring covered the expense of a badly-needed windmill restoration at Wheels Across the Prairie.

A crew from Great Plains Windmill Service, Fairfield, Iowa, rebuilt the windmill's head and platform and put on new blades in a \$6,500 project. The cost was covered by financial gifts from Wheels friends Joyce Greeley, Ron Wixon, Karen Larson, Dennis & Marilyn Christianson, Vesna Grujin, Dennis Fultz, John Nelson, Ronald Bendixen and Warren Emmons.

Sponsorship still open for new light poles

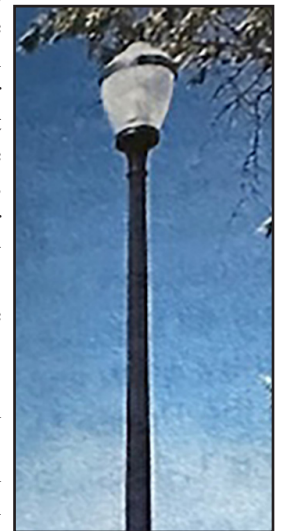
The Wheels Across the Prairie campus will be seen in a new light this coming year, thanks to the installation of nine new lampposts.

The vintage lights will be installed along the heritage center's two main walkways, Main Barn, and front parking lot. Besides providing needed illumination around the Wheels village, the new lights will help finish off the look of walkways that are already lined with American flags.

Financial gifts of \$4,500 have already been received for eight of the light poles. Those eight benefactors are: Jack Miller and Wendy Selman, Dr. Wilfredo Apostle and family, Allen Johnston, Chauncey and Jane Muedeking, Dennis and Marilyn Christensen,

Donald Buzzell, Jeff and Jeanne Knott, Tom & Shannon Hook. The Wheels board thanks those givers for their generosity.

A \$4,500 sponsorship opportunity remains open for the ninth lamp post. Call Wheels board member Garry Hippe for more information at 507-626-0180.



Log cabin roof gets new cedar shakes

Thanks to restorative work this fall, the roof on the Wheels Across the Prairie's 19th-century log cabin is no longer in danger of caving in.

First, workers from the Barn Doctors installed new roof supports inside the cabin.

In September, volunteer workers with Northern Bedrock of Duluth installed new cedar shingles.

The \$19,000 project was funded with major donations from the Northern Colorado Foundation and a matching \$7,000 grant from Ron McDaniel.

A second phase of restorations is planned in 2025 to replace the crumbling chinking between the cabin's logs.

For the coming year, McDaniel is offering a matching grant of up to \$6,000 to help fund this year's estimated \$19,000 project.

The log cabin is the oldest manmade structure in Tracy, having been originally built in 1866 by Bart Low, on the shores of Bear Lake in Murray County's Lowville Township. It was moved to the Wheels grounds in the 1990s.

Two shifts of volunteers worked on the log cabin, camping out on Wheels grounds and sometimes sleeping overnight in the Main Barn.



Northern Bedrock volunteers who work on Wheels Across the Prairie's log cabin in September include: (from left) Cora Terletzky, Kenosha, WI; Butterfly Oldham, Minneapolis, MN., Thomas Horgan, St. Paul, MN.

Helicopter monument added to future improvement list

A military-helicopter memorial may be on the horizon for Wheels Across the Prairie.

The helicopter was placed on the Wheels' six-year capital improvements plan this summer, after a Tracy graduate volunteered to coordinate a fund-raising appeal for the project.

Dorothy (Hamilton) Radermacher (THS '68) feels that the chopper would remind people of the importance of the U.S. Armed Forces, and the sacrifices of those who served in uniform. The project has a special meaning for her, because her late husband, Ronald, was a helicopter door gunner during the Vietnam War.

"He flew on 450 missions when he was in Vietnam (1965-67). Every time he went up, they were told there was a 50-50 chance they wouldn't be returning. Being involved in this is my way of helping repay our servicemen for their sacrifices."

An OH-6 Cayuse "Loach," which was used on scout missions in Vietnam, is the type of chopper that is being sought for the Wheel project. The craft would be mounted on a cement slab on the east side of the Wheels campus.

Cost of acquiring helicopter and placing it on a pad is estimated at \$150,000. The project is targeted for 2029 in the Wheels' long-range capital improvements list.

Radermacher explains that she is currently gathering background information and meeting people, to better understand and assess the project. Details of the helicopter fund-raising appeal will be announced at a later date.

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Other items in Wheels Across the Prairie's long-range capital



The OH-6 Cayuse helicopter

improvement plan include:

2025

- Landscaping & plantings around buildings, \$50,000.
- Repair & restore 1868 vintage log cabin, depending on recommendations from Northern Bedrock Historic Corps, \$25,000
- Trade-in mower, upgrade with bagger, \$20,000.

2026

- Chicago & Northwestern Depot, new siding, \$25,000.
- Blacksmith shop, build overhang on North side, \$10,000.
- Picnic shelter on former general store slab, \$7,000.
- Security cameras, \$5,000.

2027

- Addition to Main Barn for second bathroom, \$65,000.
- RR Section Foreman's House interior restoration, \$40,000.

2028

- Restoration of 1915 switch engine, coal car, boxcar, and caboose, \$300,000.
- Extend concrete on East driveway, \$20,000.

2029

- Fencing around perimeter of Wheels grounds. \$75,000

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The long-range plan, according to President Jon Wendorff, is intended as a planning tool, not a guarantee of when and if each project is done. Cost figures are best-guess estimates, and dependent on funding.



Wheels Across the Prairie offered special activities for young people during Box Car Days. Ellie and Ava Vogel, Eagan, were among the kids who enjoyed making their own birdhouse.

2024 Wheels Across the Prairie Heritage Center Members

Curt & Bev Wixon	Robert and Bonnie Boerboom	Dr. Richard Brown
Ronald Bendixon	Billie Jo Lau	Steven Lee
Warren Emmons	Mavis Garrett	Lois Schmidt
Joyce Greeley	Carol and Ronnie Dahl	Karen Larson
Loren Rykhus	Garry Hippe	Virgil Laleman
Cal & Deb Ludeman	Seth & Betsy Schmidt	Rosemary & Warren Hemmingsen
Lois Henkel	Carol Strand	Mary and Dan Snobl
Alan & Cleone Richardson	Jeff & Shari Blegen	Mike & Jon Roeder
Renata Sutton	Marlene Meyer	Linda & David Rykhus
David & Jean Hicks	Don & Carolyn Engelkes	Jean Krueger
Kerry & Becky Knakmuhs	Becky Averill	Dave & Charlene Lenertz
Vicki Unger	Dawn Brown	John & Muriel Coulter
Louann Engel	Linda Tikkala	Bob & Annie Syverson
Bill & Toni Whitman	Laura DuCharme	Betty Jo Troseth
Jesse James	Norine & Kami Hanson	Dr. & Mrs. Wilfred Apostol
Joan DesLauriers	Doug Edwards	Sander & Peggy Ludeman
Mike & Margie Fraser	Jack Miller	Chris & Kim Bowman
Gary & Patty Peterson	Jane & Chauncey Muedeking	
Ron Boje	Ruth Sanders	Business Memberships:
Jon Wendorff	Larry & Marge Fischer	LaVoy's Repair
Mev & Bob Jackson	Donald Buzzell	Tracy Chamber of Commerce
LuAnn Kern	Judy Klatt	Salmon Motors
Doris Drackley	Jim & Sue Keul	The Caboose
Dennis & Marilyn Christensen	Tom & Pam Keul	Southwest Sanitaiton
Joan Ziemke	Ken & Colleen Schiller	Tracy Kiwanis
Ken & Linda Witt	Mike & Darcy Carlson	
Wayne & Dorine Brock	Eleanor Sellman	
Darrell & Linda Wendorff	Gayle Whiting	

Forgotten pioneer revisited

Author uncovers story of Julia Wright, Shetek captive

By Seth Schmidt

The mystery shrouding a little-known Shetek pioneer has been peeled away with new research from Walnut Grove historian Daniel D. Peterson.

“For years, no one knew much about what happened to Julia Wright after 1862,” Peterson told a Wheels Across the Prairie audience this summer.

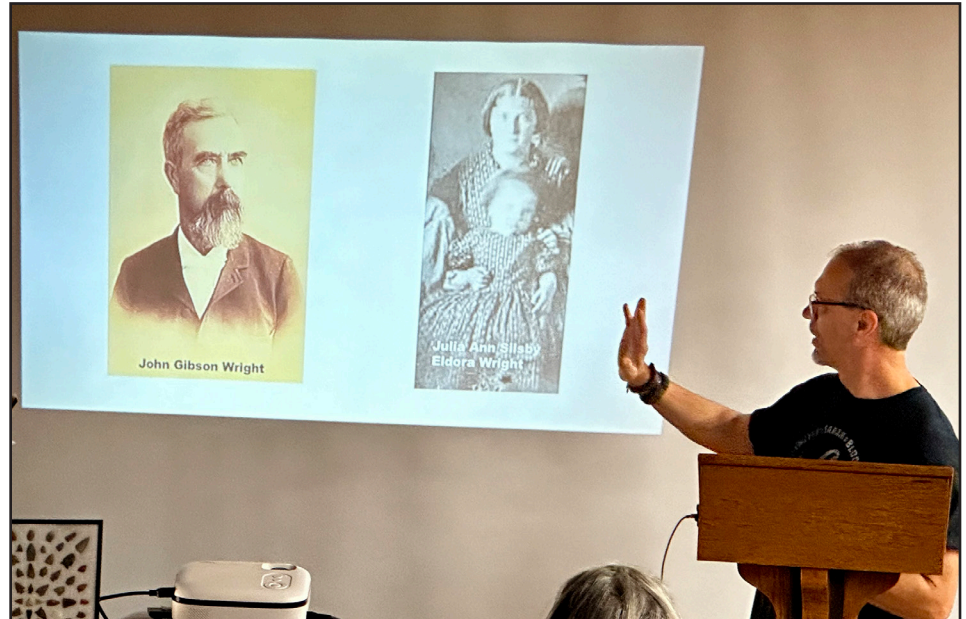
The young wife and mother was taken into captivity with her two young children, after surviving horrific violence near Lake Shetek on August 20, 1862. Fourteen people from Shetek fledgling white settlement were killed on that fateful day by Dakota Indians intent on reclaiming ancestral lands. Julia and her children were taken captive near a marsh known today as Slaughter Slough, then survived an arduous three-month trek hundreds of miles into Dakota Territory. Later escorted to safety by a band of friendly Lakota men who bartered for their freedom, Julia and her little ones safely arrived at a U.S Army fort with five other rescued captives. But after reaching freedom, the resilient Mrs. Wright disappeared, leaving historians puzzling over her fate.

That has changed, thanks to evidence chronicled in Peterson’s new book, “Takini: The Story of Julia Silsby (Wright/Lloyd/Cole). Peterson’s book reveals how Julia was divorced from the father of her two children, John Wright, with whom she had settled with at Shetek. After her break from John, and the death of her daughter, Julia remarried twice. Her post-1862 life included sojourns to Iowa, southeast Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, and Missouri, and lived into her thirties.

Clues to Julia’s life emerged through months and years of persistent sleuthing by Peterson. Old newspaper articles, government archives, legal documents, Census records, journals and decades-old-interviews helped patch together missing links.

Hard scrabble roots

The daughter of poor Michigan farmers,



Daniel Peterson shares insights about 1862 Shetek survivor Julia Wright.

Julia Silsby was 19-years-old when she and her husband staked a claim near Lake Shetek in 1859. In doing so, the Wrights were among the first white emigrants to establish claims on land that for generations had been home to indigenous tribes.

By the summer of 1862, the Wrights were part of a settlement of 40-50 people around Shetek. Their recently-constructed, 14x20-foot, story-and-a-half, log cabin, was one of the largest on the lake. The chatter of young children echoed through the rustic dwelling. But on August 18, 1862—with promised federal annuity payments overdue for hungry Dakota Indians confined to a reservation along the Minnesota River—violence erupted at Lower Sioux Agency. Two days later the bloodletting spread to the fledgling settlement at Shetek, shattering the new life that the Wrights and other Shetek families had established.

In the grand sweep of the U.S.-Dakota War, the tragedy that unfolded at Lake Shetek became a mere footnote. Dakota onslaughts at Fort Ridgely and New Ulm, and their ultimate defeat in the Battle of Wood Lake, dwarfed the events at Shetek.

And yet, generations of local historians

have remained fascinated by the Shetek pioneers and their hardships.

Dr. Harper Workman, a Tracy railroad physician, and Currie founder Neil Currie, attempted to gather accounts from all Shetek survivors in the 1880s. But despite repeated attempts, neither was unable to locate and interview Julia Wright.

Workman’s research, known as the Minnesota Historical Society’s “Workman Papers,” concluded that John Wright divorced Julia, because “he did not care to have a woman occupy his bed who would not die rather than submit to the treatment (she received) from the Indians.” (Multiple sources reported Julia was raped during her captivity). Workman concluded that Julia “went to Nebraska and remarried and all trace of her has been lost.”

Not so fast, Peterson’s book concludes.

Peterson writes that “many rumors” circulated about Julia in the aftermath of the 1862 catastrophe, sometimes perpetuated by later, undocumented historical accounts. Some narratives, Peterson notes, wondered if Julia had gone back to live with the Dakota people. Others speculated whether Julia had become pregnant by a Dakota man by the time of her rescue, and that she

Julia Wright: Continued on page 11

Julia Wright:

Continued from page ten

gave birth to a mixed race baby in 1863, prompting John to divorce her.

“The simple fact is that we really don’t know what happened,” Peterson states.

Peterson’s book cites court divorce records stating that John and Julia lived together until June 6, 1864, and suggest that Julia was the one who left John. Peterson did not find documentation to support the story that Julia gave birth in 1863. Peterson also writes that nothing supports Workman’s claim that Julia went to Nebraska following the divorce.

New beginnings

Although details are sketchy, Peterson believes Julia returned to Michigan to be close to family following her divorce from John, before moving to Ohio. Why didn’t Julia take her children with her. Peterson declines to speculate, beyond the fact that Eldora, a four-year-old in 1862, is not mentioned in the Wrights’ 1865 divorce papers, and likely had died at a young age. George, a year younger than “Dora,” is known to have lived with his father, who remarried in 1866. The family lived in Mower County, where two sons were born. (John Wright would migrate west, when George was 11, and establish homes in Seattle, San Francisco, and Arizona. George grew to adulthood in Seattle, and would work in bakery, restaurant, and real estate businesses).

In 1866, Julia married a Civil War veteran 17-years her senior, Thomas Lloyd, in Williams, Ohio.

(The colorful Williams had been found



Julia Wright was photographed with her daughter, Eldora, and six other Shetek captives, in late 1862, after their arrival in Fort Randall, Dakota Territory. Julia, left, is holding Eldora. Others in the picture are, from left, Roseasse Ireland, Emma Daley (back), Lily Everette (front), Laura Daley, holding son Jefferson, and Ellen Ireland. Julia’s son, George, also survived after being taken hostage in a separate group. This is the only known photo known to exist of Julia Wright.

guilty in 1863 of shooting dead a man who been having an affair with his wife. A pardon by the governor subsequently allowed Lloyd to enlist in the federal army during the Civil War).

Following their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd traveled over 600 miles west, likely by horse-drawn wagon, to Bates County, Mo. But the marriage was an unhappy one, with Julia moving out in the fall of 1869, with divorce papers filed in 1870. Julia returned to Ohio. In 1872, at age 34, Julia married a third time. Julia had met the groom, William Henry Cole, four years her junior, in Missouri, where the couple made their home.

Little more is known about Julia and her new husband, except that she died prior to 1880, and that William, another Civil War veteran, filed for a military pension as an “invalid” in 1891 and died three years later.

Much remains unknown

Unlike many other Shetek survivors, Julia never left a direct account of her Shetek experiences. although she did share some recollections with a nephew, Frank Lamb.

Multiple Shetek survivors spoke highly of Julia’s courage and intelligence, noting that she had good relations with the Dakota prior to the conflict, and could communicate with them in their native language. John Wright, was described by fellow survivors as a dishonest schemer, who filled a false land claim and sold whisky to the Indians.

The Dakota, he was said, called him “big liar.”

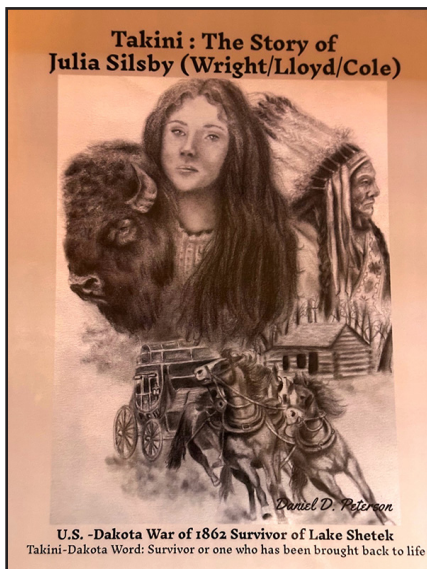
Julia has left historians with one other unsolved mystery. It is unknown when or where Julia died or where she is buried. No record of her death has been found, Peterson notes, and her place of burial is unknown.

But Peterson is gratified that he was able to uncover part of her untold story.

“Somehow I feel that I was meant to tell Julia story,” he writes in the book’s forward. “Initially, one dead end led to another, then a small clue, then more research, and finally: Julia! I found you and what a story you had to tell!”



Pork burgers, with grilling provided by the Murray County Pork Producers Association, was again a crowd-pleaser for a Wheels Across the Prairie Box lunch benefit during Tracy Box Car Days weekend. Jim Babcock (left), and Jeff Meyer, were among those who lined up for burgers.



U.S. -Dakota War of 1862 Survivor of Lake Shetek
Takini-Dakota Word: Survivor or one who has been brought back to life



**Wheels Across the Prairie
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PO Box 1091 • 3297 Hwy 14
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www.wheelsacrosstheprairie.org

\$20,000 gift launches Wheels Legacy Fund

Interested in making a gift to the Wheels Across the Prairie that will continue to make a difference decades from now?

An anonymous supporter has established a legacy fund for the Wheels through the Southwest Initiative Foundation. Launched with a \$20,000 anonymous gift, the new Wheels Legacy Fund is set up so that the fund's principal can never be spent. Instead, the Wheels Across the Prairie will benefit perpetually from the earnings generated by the legacy fund's principal.

As future donations are received into the Wheels Legacy Fund, it is envisioned that principal and earnings will grow substantially to provide increasing long-term support for Wheels Across the Prairie's mission.

The Southwest Initiative Foundation is administering the Legacy Fund for the Wheels. For this reason, checks to the Wheels Legacy Fund should be made out to the Southwest Initiative Foundation, with instructions that the money is to go into the Wheels fund. Gifts can be mailed to Wheels Across the Prairie, Box 1091, Tracy, MN. 56175, or the Southwest Initiative Foundation, 15 Third Ave., NW, Hutchinson, MN, 55350.



The Amiret Post Office brought back memories Jan Jansen, whose husband, Darrell, worked for U.S. Postal Service for 38 years. Daughters Dana Helle and Jill Scharafanov shared in the experience.

Little train to return

Wheels Across the Prairie's popular miniature train was unable to run in 2024, due to disruptions caused by underground utility projects.

Plans are to get the train running again in 2025, with tracks relocated further west on museum grounds.