



DECEMBER 2025

WHEELS ACROSS THE PRAIRIE HERITAGE CENTER

P.O. Box 1091 • 3297 Hwy. 14 • Tracy, MN 56175 • (507) 626-1949
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Old-school treasures *still playing out at* *Wheels Across the Prairie*

What was it like learning the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) in a one-room country-school a hundred or more years ago? A visit to Wheels Across the Prairie's District 91 school provides a glimpse of those long-ago times. Top, a group of children visiting Wheels during Box Car Days used their imaginations to "play school" in the museum's 14-decade-old country school. Top, Charlotte Larson, 13, tested her teaching abilities on grade schoolers Penelope Larson, Logan Hay, and Stuart Hay. Right, flags fly as other museum goers walk up to the school house.



Railroad job? Absolutely!

\$29,000 matching grant offer is chance to double your gift

The Foundation of Northern Colorado is offering a matching grant of up to \$29,000 to help fund Wheels Heritage Center's Speeder shed project.

The 20x36-foot structure will protect one of the Wheels' most prized pieces—a restored Fairmont speeder car.

The two-seat rail car was once a mainstay of rail maintenance, with cars used to transport crews and materials short distances along a line. Typically, Speeder crews were responsible for 52-mile sections of track, often pulling a similar-sized flatbed car with tools and materials.

The name "Speeder" car was coined because the engine-powered units ran much faster than the two-man hand-cars they replaced early in the 20th century. Today, Speeder cars have virtually disappeared from active rail service, having been supplanted by specially-adapted pickup trucks and SUVs for monitoring the rails.

Jim Wichmann, longtime Balaton railroad man, donated the Speeder car to the museum. Art Peterson and Johnny Johnson did the restorations, which included a paint job in Chicago & Northwestern green and gold.

However, the Speeder car's prolonged outdoor display has taken a toll. Being able to store the Speeder car indoors over the winter will protect the rare unit from the elements. Specially configured rails laid alongside the shed will allow the Speeder car, and three auxiliary flatbed units, to be moved indoors easily.

Besides indoor space for the Speeder cars, a portion of the shed will be made into a railroad shop area, featuring vintage railroad tools. Some of those old tools will be moved from The Wheels' depot.

Wheels volunteers Garry Hippe and Ken Witt did the groundwork for the project, with B.T. Construction putting up the building. Siding matches the brick red of the 1870s Section Foreman House, that is across the "Avenue of Flags" walkway east of the Speeder shed.



The construction of a 20x36-shed will provide shelter for Wheels Across the Prairie's Speeder car units. Tracks, seen in foreground, will make it easy to slide the cars indoors. Crews from BT Construction took advantage of mild fall weather as they put up the building shell.

To help the Wheels reach its \$29,000 matching grant goal, checks can be sent to: Wheels Across the Prairie, PO Box 1091, Tracy, MN. 56175.

The Wheels Across the Prairie board thanks the Foundation of Northern Colorado for its matching grant offer.

The Foundation was established by the late Evelyn Helmberger, and her late husband, John Holmboe. Helmberger was a 1949 Tracy High School graduate who taught at several colleges and earned a doctorate degree in education at the University of Minnesota. Holmboe was a civil engineer who developed apartment buildings, shopping malls and community centers from Minnesota to California. Helmberger died in 2008 at age 76 in Fort Collins, CO. Holmboe who was a St. Paul native, died in 2009 at age 83.

Since 2015, the Foundation of Northern Colorado has contributed more than \$300,000 to Wheels Across the Prairie.



Volunteers planted native prairie plants and installed edging this August around the new septic tank that was installed the previous year. Another section of native plants was planted southwest of the Wheels' Main Barn.

Research fee is established

A \$25-an-hour research fee has been approved by the Wheels board.

Wheels volunteers are often called upon to look up information about people and events in Tracy's past. Often that service has been offered at no charge, with recipients sometimes making a donation to the Wheels.

The board decided to establish an hourly fee, to reflect the significant amounts of time that research can take. Copies are available at 25 cents each.

Let there be light! 9 lampposts installed

Wheels Across the Prairie is a brighter place, thanks to the installation of nine light poles this fall on the Wheels campus. A 10th light still needs to be installed.

The Wheels board thanks the benefactors who each contributed \$4,500 to sponsor the cost of installing a light. They are: Alan Johnston, Jeff & Jeanne Knott, Dennis & Marilyn Christensen (in memory of Denise TeKrony), Chauncey & Jane Muedeking, Dr. Wilfredo Apostol, Don Buzzell, Jack Miller & Wendy Sellman, Tom & Shannon Hook.

Name plates on each lightpost

recognize each of the donors. Two \$4,500 sponsorships are still available.

The new 10-foot lights have both practical and cosmetic functions.

Better lighting will enhance security, and also make it possible to host after-dark events. The vintage lampposts were selected to blend in with the period architecture of buildings in the Wheels "village."

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For more information about sponsoring a light, contact Jon Wendorff, Wheels executive director, at 507-626-1949, or email jawendo62@gmail.com.



Crews from G&R Electric did trenching work prior to the installation of new outdoor light fixtures.



Enhance blacksmith shop

A 17x30-foot lean-to to Wheels Across the Prairie's blacksmith shop was added this summer. The addition provides increased flexibility and safety for blacksmithing demonstrations. The space, which also has electrical hook-ups, could also be used for outdoor programs. Wheels board members inspect the completed addition prior to their October meeting. The space is being used for storage over the winter.

Become a member! Or renew for 2026.

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 \$ _____

KKK enjoyed 1920s renaissance in region

By Seth Schmidt

A mystery preceded a Wheels program this summer featuring Minnesota West professor Anita Gaul.

Posters advertising “The KKK in Southwest Minnesota in the 1920s,” kept disappearing from the community bulletin board at Tracy Food Pride. Organizers would dutifully put up new posters, only to have them disappear again. Weeks passed before it was discovered a conscientious Food Pride employee had been removing the posters, thinking the poster was advertising an *actual* Klu Klux Klan meeting, not a history lecture.

Such is the sinister reputation of the KKK, whose white-supremacist, terror-filled legacy in the post-Civil War South is well known.

However, Gaul’s program noted, the Klan’s resurgent popularity in the 1920s has become an almost-forgotten footnote of American history.

Across the U.S., including Minnesota, a new generation of Klan devotees recruited members and sponsored events in towns such as Pipestone, Dawson, Jackson, Luverne and Montevideo. Often the KKK events ended with cross-burnings, a practice that the old Klan generally didn’t use.

“The new Klan was no longer a secret organization,” Gaul said of the Klan’s 1920s resurgence. “They portrayed themselves as a very patriotic, main-line Christian organization who were defenders of law and order.”

Whereas the KKK after the Civil War became infamous for its violent suppression freed blacks and their supporters, the KKK of the 1920s tried to present an aura of respectability, Gaul said. Yet the repackaged Klan’s vision for America remained darkly exclusionary.

“It wasn’t just blacks who were threatening America,” in the minds of the new Klan proponents, Gaul said, but also “Catholics, immigrants, Jews” and a long list of “degenerates, such as gamblers, drinkers, bootleggers and flappers.”

Who could save America?

In the KKK’s view, Gaul said, “Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Christians” were America’s best hope for salvation.



Anita Gaul, a history teacher at Minnesota West, discusses the Klu Klux Klan’s revival in the 1920s.

The new Klan’s vision for America had no place for immigrants or foreigners.

It’s official membership creed stated, “I am a native-born American. I believe that



Klu Klux Klan rallies, such as this one recorded in a Minnesota Historical Society photo, often featured cross-burnings. However, few photos of 1920s Klan activities exist.

my rights are greater than any foreign-born person.”

Gaul’s research showed that for a time, the KKK’s message found receptive audiences in Minnesota.

Sharing headlines from small-town newspapers across the region, Gaul reported that in 1924, 2,000 people attended a Klan gathering in Worthington, with a crowd of 4,000 turning out to hear a Klan speaker in Windom. A theater in Walnut Grove that same year was “packed to overflowing” for another Klan speaker. Likewise, the *Lake Wilson Pilot* reported that 75 automobiles

had parked at a 1925 KKK event, which concluded with the immolation of a large cross.

The Klan’s growing popularity did not escape the notice of *Tracy Headlight-Herald* publisher J.D. Gilpin, who in a MID-1920S editorial, expressed skepticism about the Klan’s goals.

...

Why did so many embrace the new Klan, which had been re-established in 1915 by Colonel William Simmons, an Atlanta, Ga. preacher and admirer of fraternal orders?

Several factors contributed, Gaul said.

Rapid change was convulsing post-World War I America, she noted, which had many Americans yearning for the supposed tranquility of “the way things used to be.” Gone were the staid and stable ways of the Victorian Era. New fashions, fads, music, dances, women’s suffrage, movies, automobiles, radio, Victrola players, and urban industrialization were changing everyday life in America. The wide-spread flouting of new Prohibition laws contributed to worries about a breakdown in social order. The “great migration” of southern blacks to northern cities was underway. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, labor unrest, and increased unionism seemed to threatened American capitalism. The cataclysms of World War I and the 1918 influenza pandemics had further disrupted many Americans’ sense of normalcy.

Under this backdrop, nostalgia for “returning to the way things used to be” had great appeal for many Americans, Gaul explained, and newly-arrived immigrants and blacks became convenient scapegoats for the unsettling changes.

America’s first blockbuster movie, “Birth of a Nation,” Gaul explained, became a catalyst for fanning ethnic and racial hatred, and rehabilitating the image of the Klu Klux Klan.

“It glorified the the Antebellum South as a simple agrarian civilization where enslaved people were well treated and glorified the KKK as the organization who tried to restore this civilization,” Gaul said.

After America emerged on the winning side of World War I, Gaul said that “extreme nationalism” in the U.S.

Klan reborn: Continued on page 5

History Matters

by Jon Wendorff



A great deal was accomplished during past year

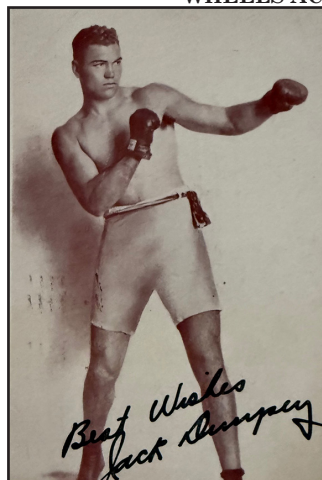
This year has been one of incredible progress at Wheels Across the Prairie. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, board members, and supporters, we've checked off a remarkable list of improvements from our five-year plan.

Projects completed or underway include:

- Construction of the Speeder shed
- Chinking on the log cabin
- A new lawn mower (finally!)
- Updated computers and security cameras
- A lean-to addition onto the blacksmith shop
- A reorganization of the board
- And—drumroll—creation of the Executive Director position

The goal of that last one? To lighten my workload. Has it worked? Well, let's just say I'm still waiting for the "less work" part to kick in.

But truly, every step forward this year has been a team effort. These changes reflect our shared commitment to preserving Tracy's heritage and building a museum that serves, educates, and inspires. I'm proud of what we've accomplished—and even more excited for what's ahead. Thank you for being part of this journey.



Treasures

Expect the unexpected at Wheels Across the Prairie. Top, is an autographed photo of Jack Dempsey, the iconic American boxer who was world heavyweight champion from 1919 to 1926. Bottom, Shirley Temple scrapbook cover reflects Hollywood's popular child star of the 1930s. Both items belonged to Genevieve Gilpin Schenzel, who grew up in Tracy in the 1920s and '30s, and were recently given to the museum.



Tractor show tribute

The annual Wheels Across the Prairie tractor show over Box Car Days weekend has officially been named after John D. Meyer, who died in 2024 at age 78. The long-time Tracy farmer and Wheels board member helped found the tractor show about 20 years ago with his son, Jeff, who has continued organizing the show. The younger Meyer, shown in front of a John Deere tractor that his father helped restore, says he is grateful to the Wheels board for naming the show after his father.

Klan reborn:

Continued from page four

heightened suspicions of recent immigrants, who were primarily from Eastern & Southern Europe. This anti-immigrant fervor was manifested in 1924 with the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act, which established quotas severely restricted immigration from anywhere than Western Europe. These restrictions remained in place until the 1960s.

...

The KKK's popularity in Minnesota peaked in about 1924, Gaul said. Nationally, the Klan's membership declined from several million in the early 1920s to about 350,000 in 1927.

Why did the Klan fade away?

Gaul said that historians remain uncertain.

Perhaps profiteering, immorality and criminal behavior among Klan leadership undermined the group's credibility.

Perhaps the hard times of the Great Depression meant

that members could no longer afford to pay dues.

Could the rise of Nazi Germany's ugly racism have reflected poorly on the Klan?

"We just don't know," Gaul said, in part because of the paucity of primary records from the KKK during that period. Very few families, she added, appear to have preserved great-grandpa's involvement in the KKK.

Historians can only hope that a journal, scrapbook, or membership log is discovered someday in an attic trunk to shed further light on the 20th-century Klan.

What is certain, Gaul said, is that the Klan's complicated legacy is not without its effects.

Gaul said that it can be argued that the KKK's 1920's popularity "increased the acceptability of bigoted actions" in 20th Century America, and laid the foundation for the Klan's violent opposition to Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.



Blind date alters history for South

Jane Muedeking honored for years as museum volunteer

By Seth Schmidt

If it hadn't been for a blind date six decades ago, a young teacher from Anniston, Alabama would never have become a Minnesota farm wife and not ridden in the 2025 Tracy Box Car Days parade.

"If Chauncey had been a dud, I had car keys to leave the house party early," remembers Jane Muedeking of her arranged date, when she was a first-year teacher in Columbus, Georgia 60 years ago.

As things turned out, an emergency exit wasn't needed. The Southern belle hit it off with her date, a handsome and quick-witted Tracy farmer and Minnesota National Guard officer named Chauncey Muedeking, who happened to be training at nearby Fort Benning.

Within weeks, Chauncey had proposed and Jane accepted. A wedding followed that summer. Almost quicker than one could whistle "Dixie," the Auburn University graduate had begun a new life on a Monroe Township farm.

"It was a shock, I didn't know a thing about farming. I was a city girl," recalled the former Jane Harlin, whose father was a soil scientist and her mother a grade-school teacher.

Tracy, then a bustling retail hub just shy of 3,000 souls, was far smaller than Mankato-sized Anniston. The howling winds and brutal blizzards of Minnesota winters were another shock.

Moving onto the Muedeking farmstead west of Tracy, where Chauncey's mother, Etna still lived, Jane adjusted to her new life.

"I learned to drive a tractor, scoop shit and chase pigs," she quips.

While immersing herself in rural life, she also began a career as a school librarian in Balaton, where teenagers could mercilessly tease Mrs. Muedeking about her pronounced Southern accent.

"How are you'all this morning?" students would call down the hallway.



Jane Muedeking today.

"I learned to talk right back at them," Jane smiles.

Becoming a mother to three daughters in the 1970s (Christina-TAHS 1989, Georgia-'93, and Julia-96), Jane continued with her school job, unlike many new mothers in that era.

"Esther Morgan, a neighbor and good friend, asked me if I planned to quit my job when she heard that I was pregnant. She said 'I've got a proposition for you. How about you keeping your job, and I'll take care of your kids? So that's what we did.'"

As she raised a family, Jane's community involvements expanded to include 4-H leader, Legion Auxiliary, Sunday School teacher, Sorosis Club, Daughters of the American Revolution, and finally, Wheels Across the Prairie.

Key volunteer

Muedeking served on the Wheels Across



Jane Harlin and Chauncey Muedeking became engaged soon after meeting near Fort Bragg, GA., six decades ago.

the Prairie board for over two decades. She stepped down as the board's vice president this spring, while recovering from heart surgery.

"I didn't pay much attention to the Wheels when it was first started, because I was busy with other things." Her job in Balaton, she noted, meant her attention was focused in that direction.

She became a Wheels volunteer in the early 2000s because of an appeal from Mary Lou Ludeman, one of the museum's founders.

"Mary Lou knew that her time was limited and she was looking to pass on the reins of leadership," Jane said of the longtime Wheels president, who died in 2007 "Volunteers at the Wheels then were few and far between."

No longer working as a librarian due to Balaton High's closure and consolidation with



Chauncey and Jane Muedeking have been inseparable for decades. They walked across the Wheels grounds in this historic setting.

Tracy, Muedeking found the Wheels to be a perfect fit for her interests. A history major in college, she liked learning more about Tracy's heritage and especially enjoyed leading museum tours.

"Jane has been someone we could always count on," explained Jon Wendorff, Wheels executive director. Muedeking did many behind the scenes tasks such as filing obituaries and maintaining historical local news clippings. Innumerable visitors were charmed by her



Jane & Chauncey Muedeking were honored by riding in the Box Car Days parade.

engaging, southern hospitality.

"I've enjoyed being out at the Wheels. You

Jane: Continued on page 10

thern Belle, museum

Hardscrabble upbringing music & military set tone for farmer



able forces in Tracy and at Wheels Across the Prairie s during Box Car Days this fall as flags waved over the

By Seth Schmidt

They are like Lucy and Desi, Ginger and Fred, Sandy and Danny.

You can't think of one without the other. Last names aren't needed..

Whether it's their Sunday morning spot in a front pew at Tracy Lutheran, or attendance at a Wheels Across the Prairie event, Jane and Chauncey Muedeking go together like the Stars & Stripes.



A talented musician, Chauncey still plays the baby grand piano that his mother, Etna, was able to buy, with money earned by making lefse.

The Wheels' Box Car Days pork burger benefit this fall was no exception. While Jane helped sell buttons, Chauncey roamed the grounds offering yesteryear insights.

"A team of

horses pulled that grader," explained Chauncey, gazing toward a ponderous hulk of metal and wood. "They used it to grade the township roads. The horses were changed out at noon, but the guy sitting on it had to crank that heavy blade up and down all day. Everything was a lot of work back then. A lot of guys literally worked themselves to death in those days."

And what of the rusted contraption next to the grader?

"That's a potato digger that was pulled by horses. People used to have big gardens. They didn't have money to buy everything from a store."

Child of Depression

Born in 1936 at the height of the Great Depression, Chauncey is the third-generation of Muedekings to farm in Monroe Township. Yet the 1954 Tracy High School graduate was a gifted pianist growing up, performing once at the University of Minnesota's Northrup Auditorium. Talented also on the trumpet, a young Muedeking played in dance halls across the area, with groups like the Sammy Jensen Band, Tiny Little, and the Fat Dutchmen.

"People knew how to dance then," he remembered. The late-night schedule could be exhausting, but the pay wasn't bad for the times. "I could play a night in Slayton and get paid \$20, plus \$2 for mileage. That was pretty good money when a lot of guys would have to work all week to earn that much."

Until the birth of their daughters in the 1970s, Jane often accompanied her husband to the dances, and drove him home.

The trumpeter never put down his horn. Through the years, Muedeking played "Taps" for hundreds of military funerals, and hit the high notes at countless Memorial Day programs. He was a first-trumpet with the Tracy Community Band for 30 years.

While still in high school, Muedeking joined the Minnesota National Guard, where he served 27 years—10 as an enlisted man and 17 as an officer. When a catastrophic F-5 tornado struck Tracy on

June 13, 1968, Lt. Muedeking assumed command of the Guard unit that patrolled the disaster-stricken town. He retired with the rank of Major. A family joke considers whether Dad needs to salute his youngest daughter, Julia (TAHS '96), who attained the rank of Colonel while working in the Pentagon, or vice-versa.

A self-taught mechanic, Chauncey rebuilt a 1947 Stinson airplane and flew it out of the Tracy Airport as a hobby.

But it might be the iconic sight of Muedeking planting corn with a 26 HP John Deere-A each spring, for which the frugal farmer is best-known. Shunning the expensive capital improvements and technology of modern agriculture, Muedeking has defied trends by sticking with a tractor built the same year he was born, 1936.

Health issues sidelined Chauncey from



Chauncey Muedeking remembers how this horse-drawn grader was used to maintain township roads.

his tractor two springs ago. Bill Bornitz farms the land for him now. But the Muedeking farm endures.

"I still have the same 247-acres I started with. You don't have to farm half the county to make it," he asserts.

Indeed, the nest-egg generated by their farm enterprise allowed the Muedekings to become world travelers during their Golden Years. Their dozens of trips ranged from the pyramids of Egypt to Incan ruins

Chauncey: Continued on page 10

'Halcyon Days' chronicles good times at Shetek

By Seth Schmidt

The histories of Tracy and Lake Shetek have been intertwined since 1874, when Currie founders Neil



Historian Janet Timmerman discusses the research that went into her new book, *Halcyon Days*.

and Archibald Currie built a warehouse along newly-laid railroad tracks in Monroe Township.

Horse-drawn wagons brought supplies from the new depot 13 miles across the prairie to the fledgling village on Shetek's outlet. The Currie warehouse soon became a depot for the Winona & St. Peter Railroad's whistle stop of Shetek Station, which a year later became the village of Tracy.

The historical serendipity made an August 10 Wheels Across the Prairie program especially fitting. Janet Timmerman, former Murray County museum director and author of several regional histories, shared insights from her new book: *Halcyon Days—Leisure on Lake Shetek*.

"This was a major project for me," Timmerman told the packed Wheels gathering. *Halcyon Days* was her first

effort working with an editor, Nathaniel Lee Hansen, and a book designer, Murray County native Diane Foster. Three grants from the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and the Marshall-based Society for the Study of Local and Regional History supported the book's research.

The author expressed gratitude for the "collaborative" efforts of those who had contributed to the book.

"It was delightful working on this book," Timmerman said.

A boatload of interviews from local people, plus snapshots from family scrapbooks, supplemented documentation that included period newspaper articles, journals, conservation reports, weather data and real estate records.

Snippets of history often emerged from unexpected places, the author said. For instance, important information about Keeley Island "came from boxes in someone's garage."

Hundreds of clippings from newspapers in Currie, Slayton and Tracy, Timmerman said, were especially helpful in reconstructing bygone decades of Shetek happenings.



A circa 1915 photo shows that the fishing for northern pike at Shetek was almost too good for these two men. (Wheels Across the Prairie Heritage Center archives).



The Harold and Dorothy Elwood family, who motored out to Tepeeotah for a picnic in 1948, are among the legions of people who have enjoyed spending time at Lake Shetek. (Janet Timmerman photo collection).

"Newspapers are great sources. They have information and follow-ups. Someone asked me, 'what happens if someday we don't have any newspapers?' That is a question we have not been able to answer."

The allure of water

Halcyon Days spotlights the spell Shetek's shimmering shores have cast on generations of people, starting with the indigenous tribes that once inhabited the region, and the 19th-century settlers who established farms and towns.

Epic events and politics are mentioned only fleetingly. The 99-page book instead dives into

Shetek's recreational allure, and the personal legacies of its boaters, picnickers, dance hall frolickers, campers, town baseball rivalries, swimmers, anglers, beer-tasters, roller-skaters, and beach-combers. Bible camps, Boy Scouts, entrepreneurs, snowmobilers, equestrians, naturalists, and developers are part of the story too, alongside bootleggers, flamboyant women, excursion boats, WPA craftsmen and rickety pontoon bridges.

Humanity's quintessential quest for good times leaps from Timmerman's narrative.

"Each generation has stories to tell and pictures to share of this lake," Timmerman writes. "In the end, that is what the history of leisure at Lake Shetek is all about, stories. The stories and photographs presented in this book are meant to connect you with your own stories and experiences in the special places you love."

Halcyon Days traces Shetek's recreational evolution from the modest row-boats and homespun picnics of early settlers.

Today, Timmerman writes, the cluster of Shetek's lakes is "the largest municipality

'Halcyon Days':
Continued on page 9

'Halcyon Days': Generations drawn by Shetek's charm

Continued from page 8

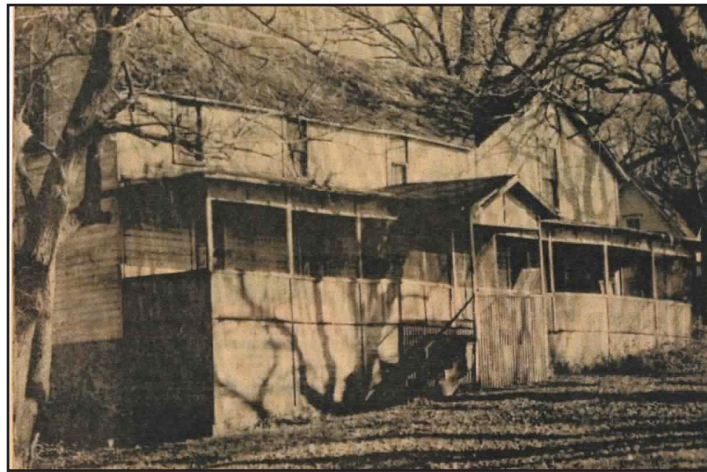
in (Murray County) without being incorporated. Around its shores are four campgrounds, a state park, three marinas, four restaurants, two Bible camps, and 18 individual housing developments" with a summer shoreline crammed with docks and boat lifts." Lake levels, she notes, are managed with a dam on Shetek's outlet and a municipal sewage system handling human waste.

"This is now a man-made paradise with man-made issues."

Timmerman notes that Shetek's charms are no longer enjoyed mostly by locals, as its visitors and year-around residents come from a multi-state area.

Havens on two sides

Tracy-area people were



The Tepeeotah Hotel was a popular spot, before being razed in 1965. (Tracy Headlight-Herald).

instrumental in the 1888 establishment of cabins in the Teepeeotah, and later, Owanka developments on Shetek's northeast side. The Teepeeotah resort and dance pavilion became mega-attractions in the

first half of the 20th Century.

Meanwhile, Slayton-area people were more oriented to the attractions of Valhalla Island. *Halcyon Days* traces Valhalla's rise as a major leisure destination from the humble beginnings by Swedish emigrants John and Emma Hobert, who owned farmland on the southwest side of Shetek, to the present day.

By 1903, a hotel, dining hall, and cabins had emerged on Valhalla Island. The 1906 purchase of Valhalla by Rudolph Beal, a millionaire businessman from Omaha, opened the path for ever grander developments, including the Valhalla Resort Inn, a dance pavilion, restaurant, and roller dome.

Human impacts

The book discusses environmental issues that development has brought to Shetek, ranging from lake level and algae blooms, to siltation, sewage and fish management.

Efforts to mitigate the impact of human development on the lake, the book points out, have frequently stirred controversy because of competing interests.

"Most controversies revolved around three main issues: water quality, water quantity, and the sustainability of the fish population, which heavily relied on the first two issues."

As it has for decades, Shetek remains a beloved place for many, Timmerman acknowledges. An unanswered question in the book is whether the lake is "being loved to death."

Timmerman writes:

"The challenges brought on by development are part of the story, however, and take place in unison with vacation photos, the smiles of lucky anglers holding their catch aloft, and children playing in the sand. Nature does not play a passive part in the story. For every change made by humans, nature reacts. These interactions make up the story of Lake Shetek."

Copies of *Halcyon Days* are available at Wheels Across the Prairie for \$20 plus shipping.



Passing over a pontoon bridge was part of a trip to Valhalla Island in the 1920s. (Murray County Historical Society)

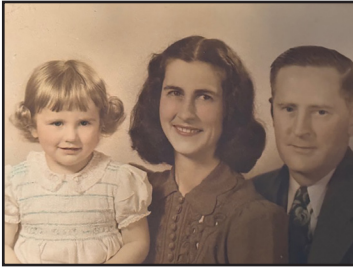
Log cabin restoration

The 1860s log cabin at Wheels benefited from two-rounds of restorations in 2025. Crews from Northern Bedrock of Duluth spent a week chinking logs on the cabin's exterior in June, and then returned in November to put new mortar material between logs inside the cabin. Lauren Gros of Duluth (left) was part of the summer crew. Other workers, with their four-legged mascot, included: (back, from left) Marcus Popovich, Crystal Lake; Jack Haggerty, Mankato; supervisor Mark Johnson, Kasota; Liam Henn, Dogiestown, PA; Sam Reynolds, Sioux Falls, SD; Lauren Gross, Duluth. Front: Hieu, Hanoi, Viet Nam; Elijah, Grand Rapids, MI; Sophie LaBric, Minneapolis; Izzy Witten, Albuquerque, NM; Sadie Young Cloquet, MN. The cabin was built by pioneer Bart Low on the shores of Bear Lake, in what was once called the "Great Oasis" chain of lakes in Murray County. The cabin was moved from Lowville Township to Wheels Across the Prairie in the 1990s.



Jane

Continued from page 6



Young Jane Harlin with her parents, Frances Emma and William.

meet a lot of interesting people," she reflects.

She continues to be an avid Wheels supporter, but acknowledges that health issues

have limited her activity. "I'm not as spiffy as I was. I am getting by, but not taking on anything extra."

Riding in the Wheels Across the Prairie trailer with Chauncey on Labor Day, was fun, she said.

"It was interesting to see all the people I knew."

Being part of the parade was a novel experience for Jane; not so much for Chauncey, who played with the Tracy Community Band in the parade for three decades.

"I watched the parade alone all those years. My job was to watch the parade and collect Tootsie Rolls for Chauncey."

Chauncey

Continued from page 7

in South America. Greenland and Antarctica are among their off-the-beaten track travel destinations.

A grand legacy

The grand piano that Chauncey's mother bought for him decades ago still occupies a place of honor in the Muedeking home. The instrument is a legacy of Chauncey's hardscrabble upbringing. "No one had any money. The county was broke. The banks wouldn't even lend money to the county."

But Etna Muedeking, who Chauncey said suffered from lifelong physical impairments because of being dropped as a baby, wanted the best for her musically-inclined son.

Night after night, Etna would stay up late peeling potatoes and making lefse. In the morning, Chauncey would take packages of fresh lefse to be picked up by a Greyhound bus that stopped in front of Tracy City Hall. The lefse was delivered to a bakery in Sioux Falls where it was sold. The extra dollars from the lefse



Chauncey was the only son of Etna and Alfred Muedeking.

sales eventually went to buy the grand piano.

"My mother was kind of a cripple. She had it hard and got tired. But she never gave up. She kept going. She didn't know how to give up."

Carrying on the family tradition of perseverance, Chauncey plans to celebrate his 90th birthday in January.

The couple celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary this summer.



Wheels hosts historians

Wheels Across the Prairie hosted an October gathering of the West Central Minnesota Historical Association, which includes museums and historical societies from a 10-county area. Members shared ideas for sharing expenses on traveling exhibits and gave updates of activities at each museum. Lac qui Parle, Big Stone, Yellow Medicine, Lincoln, Swift, Chippewa, Lyon, Kandiyohi, Renville, Redwood counties are represented in the group. Liz Koele of the Minnesota Historical Society, was among the speakers. Naturally, lunch was served, with guests enjoying a tater-tot hotdish catered from Tracy Food Pride.



Steve LaVoy and Ronnie Dahl talk over the virtues of vintage Farmall tractors.

The Box Car Days pork burger benefit continues to be a big draw. Steve Schreier of the Murray County Pork Producers again did the grilling.

Carson, Brooklyn and Dawson Herfurth were among the many who enjoyed the pork burgers.



Flag memorials grow to 48

Wheels Across the Prairie's array of American flags grew to 48 in 2025.

After the first poles and flags were installed on the Wheels campus in 2024, additional

requests were received from families wishing to sponsor a flag as a memorial to a military veteran.

Space for the Wheels flag array is now filled up, meaning

no further flag memorials can be accepted.

Wheels Across the Prairie thanks all those who contributed \$1,500 to sponsor a flag. The 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
Alan Hubbard (2)
Children of Harold Halfmann
Jeff & Lori Alf
Mavis Garrett (2)
Brent Nelson
Cal and Deb Ludeman
Nyquist family
Vicki Unger
James Radermacher, Dorothy Radermacher
Mike Marben, Kurt Marben

Ward and Maureen Wixon, Vince and Patty Wixon
Scott Thein
Jean Krueger
Donaldson family
Hayes family
Carol Cooreman (2)
Harold Deal (2)
Minnwest Bank
Liz and Jay Waltermann
Anonymous (7)
Jim and Sue Keul
Ron and Carol Dahl



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



Ron Boje demonstrates the craft of creating parts from metal in the Wheels blacksmith shop. The demonstrations are always popular with Box Car Days visitors.

New officer slate ready for 2026

Amy Foster will assume the duties as Wheels Across the Prairie's board president in 2026.

Now the Wheels vice president, Foster will succeed Dorothy Radermacher, who will remain on the board as past-president.

Carol Strand, the board's treasurer, will become vice president next year.

The 2026 secretary and treasurer positions have yet to be determined.

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Other current board members include: Jeff Meyer, Garry Hippe, Muriel Coulter, Ron Boje, Ken Witt, and Seth Schmidt. Jon Wendorff, the Wheels heritage center's executive director, is a non-voting board member.

Plat dedication marks Tracy's 150th

In 1976, Tracy people went all-out to celebrate the town's centennial.

Tracy's birthday bash included a boxcar of historical displays, a parade, commemorative souvenirs, store window displays, and fun-events like beard-growing and costume contests. The town centennial coincided with America's bicentennial celebration, which used the July 4, 1776 signing of the Declaration of Independence as its historic milepost.

So why did Tracy mark its 150th year in 2025, instead of waiting for 2026?

Actually, several different dates can be used to calculate the beginning of Tracy.

Several years ago, the Tracy City Council, in developing a new city logo, adopted the 1875 date for Tracy's establishment. The choice was based on an April 27, 1875 dedication ceremony of a 10-block plat on the new town. Albert Keep, president of the St. Peter & Winona Railroad, presided over the dedication. A post office for the new town was established that same year.

However, the 1875 date comes with an asterisk.

Surveying for the town's first plat was actually done in the fall of 1874, the same year that a warehouse for Shetek and Currie area shipments became the future village's first building.

Also, the town plat that was dedicated in 1875 was called "Shetek Station" or "Shetek Bend." It wasn't until 1876, that the village's name was changed to "Tracy," in honor of one of the railroad's officers.

So take your pick. Sesquicentennial arguments could be made for 2024, 2025, or 2026.

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Wheels Across the Prairie this summer marked the 40th anniversary of the museum's opening. Mayor Dale Johnson Sr. cut the ribbon at the June 1, 1985 grand opening.



**Wheels Across the Prairie
Heritage Center**
PO Box 1091 • 3297 Hwy 14
Tracy, Minnesota 56175
www.wheelsacrosstheprairie.org

Legacy Givers can greatly help Wheels Museum

Do you want to help ensure that Wheels Across the Prairie continues its mission of preserving and sharing Tracy's heritage for decades to come?

You can, by becoming a Legacy Giver for Wheels Across the Prairie.

Including the Wheels heritage center in your estate planning is one way to support the museum's mission. Another is to give to the Wheels through a Required Minimum Distribution, which allows supporters to benefit from significant tax advantages.

By authorizing a Required Minimum Distribution from a retirement account, donors age 70 1/2 can give up to \$100,000 per year as a Qualified Charitable Distribution directly from their IRA, to a qualified non-profit charity like Wheels Across the Prairie.

By using a Required Minimum Distribution to give a Qualified Charitable Distribution, the gift is not taxed as income, like a regular retirement account withdrawal would be.

Wheels Across the Prairie board members urge benefactors to contact their retirement account administrator or accountant for further details.

Legacy gifts to the Wheels heritage center can help:

- Preserve historical artifacts and records.
- Educate future generations about their heritage.
- Enhance and improve programs and exhibits.
- Improve community engagement.

Benefactors can designate the area that they would like their gift to be used.

For more information contact Jon Wendorff, Wheels

Across the Prairie executive director, at 507-626-1949, or wheelsacrosstheprairie@gmail.com.

Wheels Across the Prairie is a qualified 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.



It's been 35 years since a 1915 switch engine and coal-tender car was moved to Wheels Across the Prairie, and it's still the attraction that no one wants to miss.