

1950

2025

MIDWEST OLD THRESHERS

THRESHERS CHAFF

Volume 51, Issue 1

MOUNT PLEASANT, IOWA

Spring 2025

Midwest Electric Railway welcomes Car 1811

One of the last pieces of the Transportation and Campground Improvement Project arrived in Mount Pleasant in January. Thanks to funding from a Destination Iowa Grant, a CAT Grant, Enhance Henry County Foundation Grant and financial support from the OT Foundation, the Midwest Electric Railway welcomed a new trolley to their fleet. Streetcar 1811 arrived at Old Threshers via lowboy on January 14.

The 1927 Milan trolley, which was fully restored by the Gomaco Trolley Company in Ida Grove, IA, is a key addition to the Midwest Electric Railway collection. The trolley originally served Milan, Italy, and represents a significant piece of both European and American transit history.

According to Midwest Old Threshers Vice President Phil McMeins, the trolley was built in the 1930s based on a design from Peter Witt, a Cleveland Street Railway Commissioner.

The streetcar remains essentially unchanged from its original design," McMeins said. "Unlike other electric streetcars operating at the time, Mr. Witt understood the efficiency of designing a streetcar with a third door in the center of the car, allowing for quicker loading and unloading, increasing the efficiency and time between passenger stops.

His design was used in the manufacturing of many streetcars in several cities including Toronto, Philadelphia, and of course Milan, which operated over 500 of this style of streetcar."

The trolley measures 46 feet long, weighs approximately 33,000 pounds, and travels with an average speed of 30 mph. The car is designed to seat 30 passengers with room for nearly 70 standing.

"The design fits well into the passenger service offered around the campground and to the Log Village, a staple of the Old Threshers Reunion," McMeins said. If Car 1811 looks familiar, that is because it is of the same origin as



Milan Italy Car No. 1945 (pictured below.) The car was built in 1927 and was brought to the Midwest Electric Railway in 2002.

The Gomaco Co. continues to work on Car 1779 and plans to have it ready for the 2025 Midwest Old Threshers Reunion.

The public is invited to ride Car 1811 for free May 24th from 7am to 3 pm.

Midwest Electric Railway is always looking for a reason to take a ride on the rails. If you or a group that you know would like to take a ride on the rails. The trolleys are available for special events or group rentals. For more information please contact the Old Threshers office at 319-385-8935.



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Celebrating 75 Years! All Original Parts and Most Still in Good Working Order! The Midwest Old Threshers Reunion | Mount Pleasant, Iowa August 28th to September 1, 2025!

Dear Old Threshers Friends,

Days turn into years in the blink of an eye – time flies, so make every moment count! It feels, like just yesterday that I was wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in the last *Chaff!*

In just a blink of an eye:

- Spring has sprung and the grass is being mowed
- The new trolley, 1811, arrived in the cold weather of January
- School Tour kids are on grounds
- Two Steam Schools are in the books
- We announced the great entertainment for the Reunion,
Malpass Brothers, Cooper Alan, Priscilla Block and Jeff Foxworthy
- Plans are under way for Celebrating 75 Years!
- And at home, my daughter started driving, oh boy!



**Terry McWilliams, CEO
Midwest Old Threshers**

Under the topic of Communication: Communication means the exchange of information, preferably correct information. Remember it is a two-way street. Reach out to me if you have questions about what is happening at Midwest Old Threshers.

This spring has kicked off a long list of projects for the Association.

- | | |
|---|--|
| √ Grandpa's Barn in the campground | √ Truck Barn Door Replacement |
| √ Steam Area Restrooms | □ Bunkers on the Reeves Steam Engine |
| √ Drainage in south campgrounds | □ Two New Ground Trains |
| √ New lights in Car Building | □ New Lights on Grounds West Side |
| √ New lights on outside of Museum A | √ Carousel Engine Repaired and Painted |
| □ Log Village Barn Roof | □ Finish Trolley 1779 |
| □ New Road in Campgrounds | √ New Equipment, in office and in the shop |
| □ Water line replacement in campgrounds, new hydrants | Check mark = Already Completed |

Reach out to me for more information or if you wish to help support these projects.

I have spent some time in the winter months doing some **Research and Development** on a couple of needed projects for the near future for the Association. R&D always means lots of money. What do these projects entail? A "RESTROOM" facility and a "RESTROOM/SHOWER" facility. The costs for developing restrooms today are off the charts. It will come down to fundraising, maybe a capital campaign, maybe major donors, naming rights, or even a lucky lottery winner. These facilities would be located in two different spots on grounds and would benefit all events that happen on our grounds. These facilities would remove everyone's favorite item from our grounds during these events, the famous port-a-potties.

I would like to also let you know that the calendar of events for this year is still being added to on a weekly basis. I have already mentioned school tours and two steam schools, but there are more. A Trolley School, Great Iowa Swap Meet and Flea Market with the Gun Show and Rock Show, host site for many graduation gatherings, Farmers Market is back on grounds, a couple of weddings, training site for the fire department, KXEL Great Eastern Iowa Tractorcade, Trolley Club ride day, host site for Rotary BBQ, working with our friends at the Henry County Fair, and our booth at the Iowa State Fair. That gets us to that little thing called the Midwest Old Threshers Reunion, August 28 to September 1, 2025, Celebrating 75 Years and then of course Printers Fair, Midwest Haunted Rails, Thrashers House of Terror and the Mount Pleasant Festival of Lights. Which means I will be wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year all over again, where did the year go? How can time go so fast?

Thank you all for supporting Midwest Old Threshers, our museums, our events, and the Old Threshers Reunion.

I look forward to seeing you at the Reunion, if not before!

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Terry".

Celebrating 75 years of Midwest Old Threshers

The original idea to form the Midwest Old Settlers and Threshers Association came from a discussion among W.E. (Ted) Detrick, Herman E. Elgar, Ray H. Ernst and Clark Everts in September 1949. These four were returning from the Zehr Threshing Reunion in Pontiac, Illinois.

Considering the many steam engines and separators in Henry County, Iowa, the men decided there was great potential to host a threshing reunion in Mt. Pleasant. Their hope was to be able to record and preserve much of the early history of the Midwest territory, especially southeast Iowa, and leave an authentic record that would be of interest to future generations.

After several winter meetings, the election of a Board of Directors and lengthy discussions about a Mt. Pleasant event, the Association was chartered on August 21, 1950, and the first Reunion was held September 20-21, 1950. Records show that 15 steam engines and 8 separators were exhibited with an estimated 10,000 people from 14 states attending the first Reunion.

Family descendants of these co-founders will be recognized during opening ceremonies of the 2025 Reunion in front of the grandstand on Thursday. One family – the Elgar Family – will receive the Foundation’s Golden Wheat Award as part of the volunteer recognition program at the Family Tent on Friday.

Three generations later, Herman Elgar’s family has remained involved as major financial donors, Foundation board members, area coordinators and volunteers at the carousel during the Reunion.

As the original secretary of the board, Herman wrote an interesting article published November 1, 1951, about the second Reunion which is reprinted in its entirety on page 4.



New banners were installed recently along Washington Street in Mount Pleasant celebrating 75 years of Midwest Old Threshers.

School Tour Program sees more than 1,000 students

Tailored to students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, the Old Threshers School Tour Program hosted more than 1,000 students this spring.

Participants get to see a cross-section of what Midwest Old Threshers is all about while also learning about the agricultural history of the United States and Southeast Iowa.

This free program wouldn’t be possible without the help of volunteers. The School Tour Program is the first major event of the year.



Second Reunion of the Midwest Old Settlers and Threshers Association in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa

By Herman E. Elgar

Editor's Note: This story originally appeared in the November/December 1951 issue of Steam Traction Magazine. Herman E. Elgar was co-founder and original secretary of the Midwest Old Settlers and Threshers Association, Inc.

The second reunion of the Midwest Old Settlers and Threshers Association, Inc., of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, has passed into history and certainly made history.

We literally turned the clock back about 75 to 100 years. If Rip Van Winkle could have walked into McMillan Park on Tuesday morning, September 25, 1951 he would have thought he had just taken a short morning nap instead of his fabled long sleep, as he would have surely been amid familiar surroundings and surrounded by things familiar to his time, even to the axe on the wood pile, which no doubt would have caused him to rub his eyes, yawn and lie down under the beautiful and stately elms that grace McMillan Park to finish his morning nap.

It rained some Tuesday morning and our spirits were about as low as the overhead clouds but by midafternoon it cleared and it was estimated that there were 9,000 to 10,000 people in Mt. Pleasant viewing the wonderful display of steam engines, separators, antique farm machinery, and the old settlers relics in the shelter house.

Wednesday morning dawned clear and pleasant except a high wind from the south, but it was a beautiful fall day such as only Iowa can have, and the kind of a day that makes one feel glad to be alive. It was estimated that fully 12,000 to 14,000 visitors came in that day.

Thursday came in with a cold north wind that was very disagreeable and kept many persons away. It was a day such as only Iowa can have when the weatherman is in a bad mood, but in spite of the cold wind fully as many persons came as were present on the first day. It was estimated there were at least 25,000 to 27,000 people in attendance during the three days.

An actual count at the East Gate showed that in a little over an hour, cars



A view of Mr. J.H. Whitbey's M. Rumely 20 hp No. 6785 built in 1913. Mr. Whitbey is from Fort Wayne, Ind. This engine is equipped with a locomotive bell and whistle of a scrapped locomotive PRR engine No. 5407. Mr. Ted Griner of Fort Wayne, adapted the whistle to the engine. This engine pulled 75 hp on the Prony brake at Alvardton.

from 52 of the 99 Iowa counties passed into the park, and cars from 12 different states and one each from Ontario and Saskatchewan, Canada, came to our reunion. This was on Thursday afternoon.

I will give you a brief description of the many exhibits and the events each day, play by play.

Ray H. Ernest of Wayland, Iowa, had four of his eight engines on display: a 10 hp Frick, which is very rare here; a 12 hp Russell; a Case 12 hp of 1886, which is the only one known in perfect running condition; and a 6 hp Nichols & Shepard which is also the only one we know of in perfect running condition.

Milo Mathews and Son of Mt. Union, Ia., had four engines on display: a mighty 75 hp Case, a 20 hp Aultman-Taylor; a New Giant return flue, 18 hp; and a 20 hp Rumely.

The writer, of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, had his 6 hp Case portable all dolled up and on display.

Clark Everts of Wayland, Iowa, had his 20 hp Advance Rumely polished up to perfection with its giant steam boat whistle, that led the whistle parade with

its mighty blast that literally shook the ground and could be heard for miles. Peter Bucher of Fairfield, Iowa, had his 19 hp Port Huron compound dressed up in her best and a very fine engine.

Robert Willits and Son of Mt. Pleasant, had the 18 hp Undermounted Avery showing off beautifully. Eight other big engines did not get in due to transportation difficulties beyond our control.

In the miniature models, John J. Van Baren of Newton, Iowa, had his Case model engine in operation with the Case separator and water tank.

A. J. Goodban of York, Neb., had his small model on display designed by himself, and it worked perfectly.

There was Milford Bees of Franklin, Ill., who had four of his small models, a Gaar Scott, and an Advance, and the other two, of which I did not learn, but all worked beautifully.

C. B. Killing of Coal Valley, Ill., had his little cut out engine on display. It was a skid engine.

Harry Hinson of Jerseyville, Ill. had his upright engine steamed up and was busy giving the kids a ride in the two small

Second Reunion, continued from page 4



This is the grandson of Mr. C. M. Bush. He is a fine looking fellow and seems to know his place in life. We know he is happy that he has a grandfather that furnishes real playthings.

coaches built and owned by Ray H. Ernest. I think Henry was the busiest man on the grounds.

I also counted seven other models of popcorn and peanut steam engines all under steam and adding to the noise, fun and smoke.

Ray H. Ernest had his groundhog thresher in operation, powered by two 'cranks', one on each end of the shaft; his chaff piler and the C. Aultman separator made at Canton, Ohio in 1861, geared for a horse power, which is the only one known in perfect condition, and his old Keystone thresher made in 1873, and his Westinghouse separator in good condition. Also, his old wood frame Aultman Taylor thresher with Sattley stacker and self-feeder, all threshing.

Milo Mathews and Son had a modern Case thresher stacker feeder and all; they also had the only horse power shown. It was a five-team hitch and in good shape. We also had several others on display but space prohibits further mention although they deserve mention. All in all, it was the finest exhibit ever shown as every engine was given a cold-water test before it was allowed on the grounds, and everyone was cleaned and polished up in splendid shape.

On Wednesday, Martin A. Tollefson of Drake University Law College, Des Moines, Iowa, gave an excellent address,

and on Thursday our fighting Attorney General of Iowa, Robert Larson, gave a fine talk. Also on Thursday, the Reynolds Fun Makers of Rutledge, Mo., dressed up in true hill Billy style and stole the show as they came down the midway in an ancient Model T Ford touring car.

The Old Settlers exhibits were housed in the two large wings of the shelter house each 60 x 30 feet, both full to the roof with spinning wheels, etc., and under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Johnson of Lock ridge, Iowa, the old spinning wheel was spent in operation and yarn made from the virgin wool while the visitors looked on in wonder and amusement.

I think the Old Settlers exhibit was the finest and most complete ever shown in the Midwest. It would be impossible to try to describe them in any detail and do them justice. Mrs. Milo Mathews captured the show here with her display of fine old

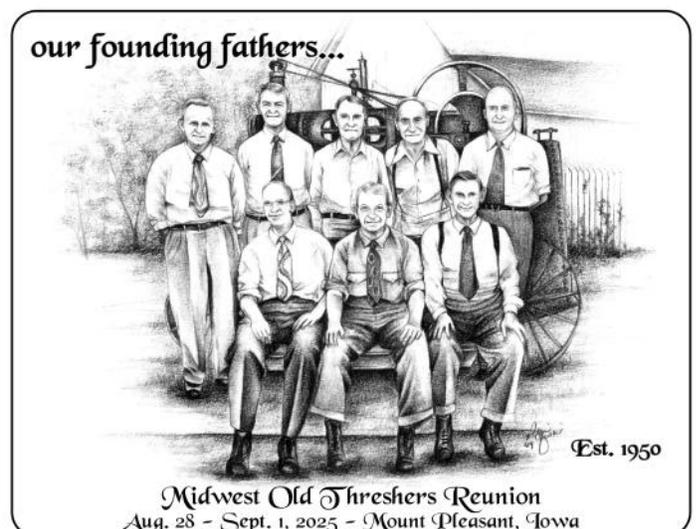
dishes and ancient cut glass ware. Mr. and Mrs. Mauley G. Frazer of Mt. Pleasant, helped with the display.

Space forbids a further description of the fine display of engines, separators, antique farm machinery, tread power, self-rake, binders and old settlers exhibits, but we expect to have the reunion next year and I would suggest to all our good friends who came this year to be sure and come back next year. And those of our friends who did not get to come this year that you come out to Iowa next year and see for yourself this great educational show and enjoy our Western hospitality and good fellowship that the association is trying to maintain in all dealing with our friends who visit us.

I think it would be decidedly unfair to close without mentioning that Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Ritzman, editors of the IRON-MEN ALBUM came out and spent the week with us.

Thank you one and all for 1951, and we urge you to come again in 1952 and we will try to see that you have a pleasant and profitable time.

Herman E. Elgar was co-founder and original secretary of the Midwest Old Settlers and Threshers Association, Inc.



This year's 30-hour volunteer award features the OT Founding Fathers.

A Book Review from the shelves of the Midwest Old Threshers' Library

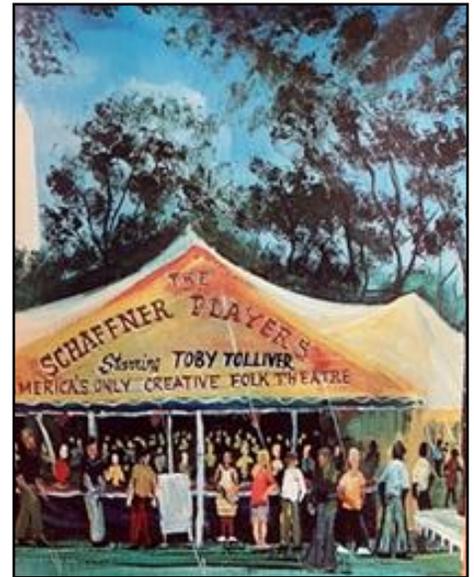
Editor's Note: This is one of many book reviews by Threshers volunteer Joan Alt Belknap. Joan has made a detailed list of all the books in the Old Threshers' Library in the conference room. "Many of them are amazing for different reasons. It seems a shame for them to just sit there with many people not even realizing they are there," says Joan.

The Schaffner Players Starring Toby Tolliver: America's Only Creative Folk Theater by James Davis, summer show booklet, copyright likely 1970.

I confess, this is not a book. It is technically a piece of ephemera or a paper item often discarded after use. Grace Davis said it was an example of a summer program handed out at tent shows. It is only 15 pages long, but it led me toward a personal discovery of treasure on the Old Thresher's grounds.

I've been at meetings in the "Opera House" basement, but never wandered upstairs or joined a tour of the Theatre Museum of Repertoire Americana. I wasn't really aware how important it was. What I thought was "opera stuff" turns out to be a rich, internationally renowned collection of all things theatre and specifically "tent show." A tour of the museum is now on my "must do" list, and if you haven't been there, put it on your list too. Website of the Theatre Museum of Repertoire Americana <http://thetheatremuseum.com>

Back to the booklet. In 1969, the Smithsonian hosted the local Schaffner Players during their ***Festival of American Folklife*** in Washington, D.C. This booklet features photos of that experience, and introduces Jimmy Davis, then owner of the Schaffner Players, his wife at the time, and their children. It also includes previous owner Neil Schaffner and wife Caroline in their roles of Tobias Tolliver and Susie B. Sharp. Other pages have captioned photos of the tent show life, actors, friends, and celebrities. One page mentions the Museum and the Society for the Preservation of Tent, Repertoire and Folk Theatre in Mt. Pleasant. It concludes with a bit of history and family photos. This small booklet captured my interest and launched my research into the Schaffners, the Davis' and the Theatre Museum of Repertoire Americana.



Neil Schaffner turned out more than 100 plays in addition to leading the Schaffner Players through many seasons on the road. You might think that the tent shows were just local sideshows but in 1927, it was estimated that tent shows had played to 78,000,000 customers. (*Kramme*) They reached folks where they lived, with humor that sprang out of their audiences own trials and troubles.

I am really sad now, knowing that I have missed out on the tent show era. This quote from the booklet is part of the reason why. "The Schaffner Players did not offer off-color or sensational entertainment but, instead, offered what has been the basis for successful theatre....good clean family-type fun."

The booklet can be found on shelf 3.

Selected resources which mention the Schaffner Players or the Theatre Museum, most in the Thresher's Library

Glenn, George & Richard Poole. ***The Opera Houses of Iowa***. Iowa State Press, 1993 (shelf 4)

Kramme, Michael. ***The Schaffner Players***. Historic Preservation Publication Inc.. Kindle Ed.

Kramme, Michael. ***Opera House Illusions: Jesse Cox and Theatrical Scenery*** and Sullivan, J. Leo, ***A Small-Town Opera House***.

Palimpsest State Historical Society of Iowa, Winter 1990 (shelf 4)

Martin, Jerry L. ***Henry L. Brunk and Brunk's Comedians***. Popular Press, 1984 (shelf 4)

Matlaw, Myron ed. ***American Popular Entertainment***. Praeger, c1979. (shelf 4)

Slout, W. L. ***Theatre in a Tent***. University of Wisconsin Press, c1972 (shelf 4)

Featured at the 2025 Old Threshers Reunion



2025 Featured Car
1923 Hudson Essex
Owned by: Dennis & Suzy Veenstra of New Sharon, IA



2025 Featured Antique Truck
1931 Ford Model A
Owned by: Tim & Lisa Ockenfels of Mt Pleasant, IA



2025 Featured Garden Tractor
1963 Montgomery Wards Squire 6
Owned by: Eddie Ward Family of Belton, MO



2025 Featured Antique Tractor
1936 Silver King R66
Owned by: Roger & Janice Richers of Mt Union, IA

2025 Featured Traction Steam Engine
1922 Russell 30 HP
Owned by: Pub & Sarah Melsha of Springville, IA



2025 Featured Horse
Percheron



2025 Featured Antique Gas Engine
The Field-Brundage Co Field Type W 1 1/2 HP
Owned by: Brian & Brent Bambrook of Eddyville, IA

From the MCRR Shop

By Lauren and Kendall Osier



While winter may have kept some people inside, the Midwest Central Shop has had a plethora of volunteers in and out trying to get everything ready for the Reunion. While the Reunion may be five months away, rolling stock projects will keep the crews busy every weekend until then. The main rolling stock project is finishing Coach No. 303. This coach will have undergone almost an entire rebuild by the time it is finished. From the trucks up, the only piece that will be original is the coach body framing. Volunteers have been working hard to install the new window frames and siding for the coach. Another set of volunteers has been tasked with working on the platforms and the brake rigging.



The interior of the coach will be similar to the interior refresh that occurred in the Mignon Coach before the 2024 Reunion. This coach will have upgraded bus seats from the 2000s versus the 1970s seats it had prior. Walkover seats would be ideal, but it is expensive to cast new frames. The paint scheme will reflect what is believed to be that of pre-1900 Chicago, Burlington & Quincy coaches. Mount Pleasant was heavy CB&Q territory, and being that these coaches are not an exact historical replica of any specific narrow gauge coach, it best represents local railroading history. This coach will also feature new end platforms which include new steps, and a new style of railing.



We know that many are anxious regarding the current status of West Side Lumber Co. No. 9, and the possibility of her running for the Reunion. At this time we cannot provide an official completion date for the project. The team has been working on going over the plumbing on the Shay in preparation for her eventual return, however, we are currently waiting on Durango & Silverton to return to complete the additional R stamp repairs needed. Thank you for your patience & understanding with this very large project.



A few volunteers have continued to work on No. 2 as well. We are currently working on frame repairs and spring rigging. The pilot truck rebuild is next on the list, as the new replica pilot wheels are to be delivered this month. Volunteers have finished the design for the new driving boxes and waste cellars, and we will be producing patterns to have them cast as soon as we hear back from the foundry. As we head into spring and quickly get closer to summer, now is the time to begin reaching out if you are interested in volunteering and joining our train crews. If you are interested in becoming a conductor, please reach out to Head Conductor Ryan Johnson for more information. He can be reached at ryan.johnsonmcr@gmail.com. If you are more interested in helping out on one of the shop projects, please reach out to Project Manager Kendall Osier for more information. He can be reached at kosteamsix@gmail.com. As always, thank you for your continued help and support for Midwest Central Railroad.

2025 Steam School Season comes to a close



Midwest Old Threshers hosted two steam schools in 2025. In the two-day class, students from across the country learned how to safely operate a traction steam engine.

Thank you to the volunteers from the Traction Steam Area for getting their engines out and helping with the hands-on experience. Thank you to Jay Sigafoose and Frank Tharp for sharing their expertise in the classroom.

If you are interested in attending Steam School in 2026, call the office and talk to Julie—319-385-8937.





**Aug. 28
to
Sept. 1
2025**



"Heritage Ambassadors of Volunteerism and Hospitality"

Midwest Old Threshers **SWEET SIXTEEN**

***Act As Official
Reunion Hostess***

***Great Experience for
College Resumes***

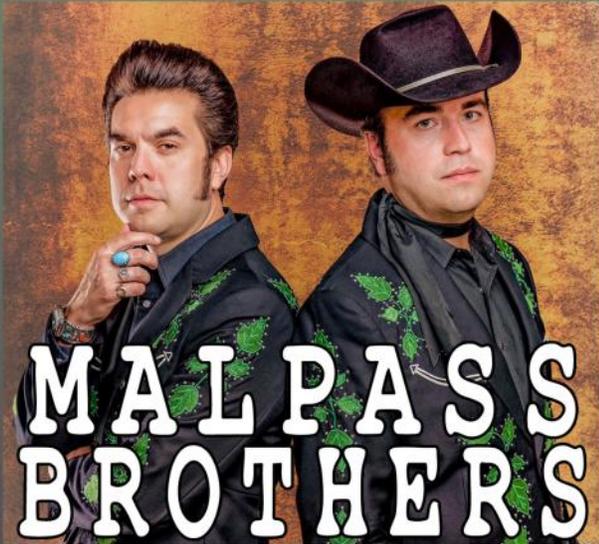
***Meet Interesting
People & Much More***

**Sweet Sixteen and her court
will be eligible for a
scholarship opportunity.**

There will be an informational meeting
for Sweet Sixteen on Sunday, June 1st, 2025
at 3:00 pm at the Midwest Old Threshers Office
Participants must be 16 years old during the Reunion. 8/28/25 thru 9/1/25

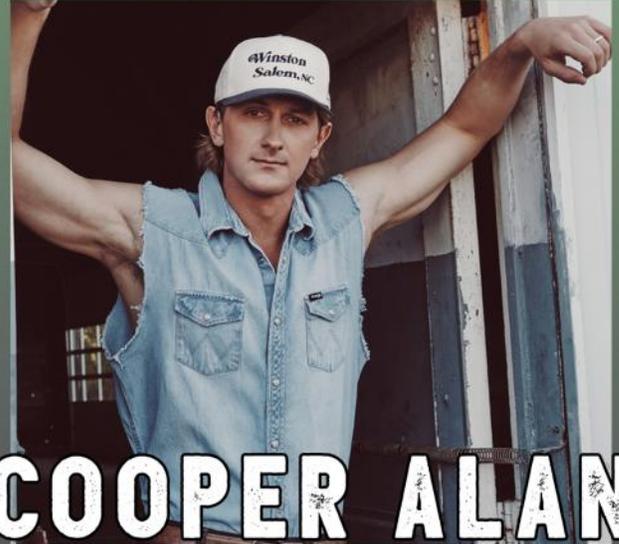
**FOR MORE INFORMATION & TO REGISTER VISIT
WWW.OLDTHRESHERS.ORG/SWEET16**

Celebrating 75 Years **Midwest
Old Threshers Reunion**



**MALPASS
BROTHERS**

THURS., AUG. 28



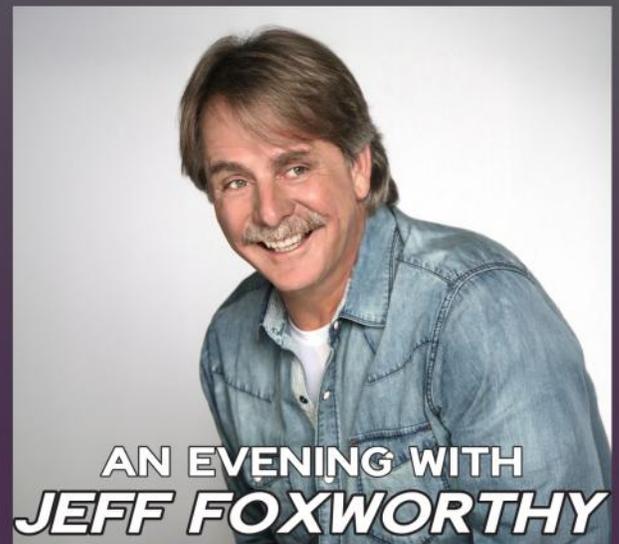
COOPER ALAN

FRI., AUG. 29



priscilla block

SAT., AUG. 30



**AN EVENING WITH
JEFF FOXWORTHY**

SUN., AUG. 31

**GRANDSTAND OPENS AT 6:30 PM
SHOW STARTS AT 8:00 PM
INCLUDED WITH YOUR ADMISSION.**

Young Guns in Preservation: Lauren Osier

The journey of a lifetime for the 25-year-old volunteer at the MCRR

By Lucas Iverson | May 2, 2025 | Reprinted with permission

Editor's Note: The "Young Guns in Preservation" series is a recurring feature in Trains Magazine that profiles young individuals who are actively involved in rail preservation efforts. These articles highlight the work, dedication, and challenges faced by younger generations in keeping the history of railroading alive. The series also aims to showcase the diversity of skills and experiences within the preservation community. Two of our very own volunteers have been featured. Even though the stories highlight their roles in railroad preservation, their dedication flows over into their volunteer efforts during the Old Threshers Reunion and sharing their passion with visitors.

When the opportunity arose for Lauren Osier to begin her rail preservation journey at the 3-foot gauged Midwest Central Railroad in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, it became the journey of a lifetime for the now 25-year-old. She has taken on multiple volunteer opportunities at the railroad, ranging from social media marketer to engine crew; met her husband, Kendall, who together started the Midwest Narrow Gauge Preservation Society; and participated in a summer 2024 internship at the Nevada Northern Railway Museum. All while documenting the journey through YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok as the "Female Foamer."

How did you get involved in rail preservation?

I've always liked trains ever since I was a kid. I didn't do anything about it because growing up, I was a girl, I didn't think I should like trains, and people around me didn't like them. So, I just hid that part of me.

Then my brother started volunteering with Midwest Central when I was in high school. I was seeing him as a conductor and got a little envious. So, in 2018 when I went to college in advertising, I was like, "Maybe I could wiggle my way in by taking pictures for them and helping with social media." They had a Facebook page,



but they didn't have Instagram and weren't posting often. I reached out to someone I knew in the organization and asked, "Could I take pictures and post content for the social media pages?"

Continued on page 13

Young Guns in Preservation: Russell Heerd

For the Durango & Silverton's special events coordinator, not every museum and tourist railroad are the same in how each fulfills the preservation movement

By Lucas Iverson | May 22, 2024 | Reprinted with permission

Railway preservation is important for museums and tourist railroads. But each non- and for-profit approaches this differently. For Special Events Coordinator Russell Heerd of the for-profit Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, keeping the doors open, lights on, and wheels turning is a juxtaposition between individual organizations.

How did you get involved in rail preservation?

My grandpa introduced me to trains at a really young age. He was part of preservation, beginning at age 17, while traveling around with Robert Richardson, Richard Kindig, and all the other big names at the time. He eventually did photo charters with the Durango &

Silverton for about 15 years – mostly just for him and his friends – and had a video series called Machines of Iron, where he traveled the world and documented the last of steam railroading into the modern era.

Our family also had a 1905 steamroller, so that was a huge play in all this. My grandpa bought it from the city of Boulder, Colo., when he was 17. After retiring in 2008, he trucked it out to Iowa, where I'm originally from, and we restored it at a local shop. That was my first, actual step into preservation.

As far as the Durango & Silverton goes, all I originally thought of doing was graduate high school, spend the summer working at the local radio station, go to Iowa State, get my civil engineering



degree, and see where that goes. Grandpa instead pushed me to hire out with the D&S, which I never thought was even possible. I applied, got the job, and the day after I graduated high school, got on a plane to Durango. I spent 3 months over

Continued on page 14

Young Guns: Osier continued from page 12

After about a month of that, I met my now-husband and he brought me into the work weekends saying, "I think you would enjoy more than just taking pictures." So, I started working in the shop and then slowly worked my way to where I'm at now.

As for the "Female Foamer," I think because I was an advertising major, I've always liked social media. I grew up in the core of when YouTube influencers were the big thing and began thinking, "What if it would be fun to post what we're doing?" I wanted to share to the world all these cool things we're seeing with all these amazing trains and different museums. My husband jokingly suggested, "You could be the 'Female Foamer.'"

COVID-19 happened, I then downloaded the TikTok app, and just started posting as the "Female Foamer." It's been an outlet for me to hopefully be like, "Here, look at these awesome women in railroading out there! We can do this and we're not alone." I didn't have a role model, so if I can be a role model for someone else, then that makes me happy. And I've made a lot of awesome connections out of it.

As a young preservationist, what have you found to be the most challenging aspects in the industry?

First, I want to say time and money. This both references us young preservationists, but also organizations. My husband and I drive three hours each way to go to Mount Pleasant, at least multiple weekends a month. Not everyone is privileged enough to have a railroad museum nearby. It's a major factor that's a challenge a lot of people have to contend with.

On a more personal level, I would say being a female has its inherent challenges in the industry. When you interviewed Kristen [Fredriksen], she touched on how we have to prove ourselves a little more, and I definitely agree with that. But even to build upon that, there are still people in the industry who don't want us there. Some of the things I have been told are

mindblowing, and it's just contending with stuff like that.

Segueing into a story, but last year I was on fire-up at 6:00 a.m., getting the locomotive ready. I was walking back from breakfast and had this gentleman approach me. I'll admit I did have a red bandana in my hair because during midwest summers, it's hot as heck. The gentleman was like, "Look, a Rosie cosplayer!" I responded, "I'm actually going to go fire the steam engine. He then asked, "Can you even fire that?" And I answered, "Yes, you can come watch if you want." That's a tamer story.

But I will say there has been some improvement within the community, just from when I started in 2018 to now. We're making progress.

What's been the most rewarding for you so far?

There are so many things. Something that really sticks out during last year's old threshers was I was firing. We were coming into the station with lots of people waiting, including this mom and her daughter. We got close enough to the platform that I could see and hear the little girl point and say, "Mom, look! It's a girl!" That just made me so happy because that's what I want. I want other little girls to see and be like, "Look, I can do this, too. It's not just a boys club." That's what I'm trying for with the "Female Foamer."

Then more towards the preservation side, something that makes me so happy is I love trains, I love history, and I love sharing all that. When I would do tours at Nevada Northern last summer, I would get super into it. I loved seeing when I was excited, the guests were excited. They were actually interactive and asked me questions. I would have all those people at the end of the tour say, "You actually made that super interesting and I learned something. Thank you."

Where do you see rail preservation as it is today and what do you hope it'll become for the future?

Honestly, I think we're in a bit of a renaissance. So many projects have been announced in the last year. It's absolutely nuts. The hard part is going to be making sure we retain volunteers. I think if we can keep people motivated and inspired, and I think relying on social media is going to help, that'll keep the hobby, the practices, and the jobs growing.

What advice would you give for any young person looking to get involved in the industry?

Though a lot of places have volunteering age limits because of safety and insurance reasons, I would say start when you can, even if it's just watching at first. I was not mechanically inclined before I started, but I've learned so much just through the osmosis of information. When you reach the age to start volunteering, it might suck at first because you may have to sweep or clean parts. But that's you working up towards being able to help on the locomotive, and it just takes time. Be enthusiastic and try your best.

We're looking for Volunteers

Scan Me

or Call 319-385-8937 to start volunteering

Young Guns: Heerdt continued from page 12

the summer there working as a brakeman and decided to go back for my second as a fireman. That was when it clicked that college was not my thing. I stayed on while having worked through the many challenges we have faced in the last 9 years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and just the ups and downs of the whole industry. At that point, I was pretty-well established as I got promoted to engineer and was working in the shop.

Our special events manager stepped down right before THE POLAR EXPRESS™, which is a huge part of our operating season. Because of my grandpa's history with photo charters and growing up around that stuff, I thought to myself, that's something I think I could do really well at. I talked to our general manager, who agreed to me managing THE POLAR EXPRESS™ to get us through the winter. Over the past two years in addition to THE POLAR EXPRESS™, my main priority has been photo charters – both private and company sponsored – as well as film and photography shoots. This is where I feel I have a real strong suit being able to manage the logistics of those events.

As a young preservationist at age 26, what have you found to be the most challenging aspects in the industry?

The biggest challenge is how we go about doing business versus others in either non- or for-profit, while still maintaining a historical operation in the 21st Century. The D&S can be juxtaposed against many other prestigious heritage railroads across the country. Most organizations are a non-profit (501-c3) organization where preservation to the nut and bolt is the mission and funding comes from grants, donations, and special events. Most do an incredible job of being a living history museum and maintaining their core values while not venturing into the for-profit side. We in Durango do pride ourselves with preservation that takes place here with the sized fleet we run and maintain, and how could you not be? But that is only possible by attracting

sizable ridership year over year. Without generations of large ridership and growth, we would not see a company like we have today.

Ridership ultimately keeps the railroad open, but now we also maintain history in the most genuine way possible without sacrificing business opportunities. Al Harper, our CEO and owner, has a motto that's in our timetable, rule books, and training information: "We are the guardians of history, and the best way to preserve history is to make its presentation so interesting and exciting that people are willing to pay a fair price for the great experience."

That's how we go to business, whether it's THE POLAR EXPRESS™ and the other events, or just the regular ride to Silverton. At the end of the day, we do have to make money, but we also have an obligation, morally, to preserve the history of Durango, Silverton, and the railroad itself.

The other challenge is recruiting and training for an operation this large. Because of the contract work and notoriety, we've gotten with the Rio Grande Southern No. 41 restoration, our shop services exploded and we now maintain one of the largest staff specifically dedicated to maintaining both steam locomotives and turn-of-the-century coaches. We were a 6-month business, now we're a 9-month business and soon to be 12 where we're running trains consistently. One of the most pivotal parts of that growth will always be maintaining a staff with skills you rarely can just hire off the street.

What's been the most rewarding for you so far?

There's quite a few things. The biggest is sharing history with guests because that is why we're here as preservationists. One of my favorite jobs is working as a conductor to go through collecting tickets, talking to the kids and families, and explaining to them why we're here, what we do, and that this is more than just a

train ride. I often run into people that have booked the ride but have little knowledge of the railroad's history and mission. To be able to explain to them how and why the railroad was started, the different ownerships, the commitment to maintaining what we are as a business and historical landmark while continuing to operate in the 21st Century, it brings a lot of joy to me.

Being here long enough, we've also got young people who rode the train as kids and teenagers that are now hiring out because they talked to one of us. And then there's being able to train them as new brakemen in a way to maintain the historical operating practices.

Then there's kind of going back to what we've already talked about... Seeing the business develop into what we are today. We didn't give up in the fire, we didn't give up during COVID, and having the leadership that we have now brought us into a new age.

Where do you see rail preservation as it is today and what do you hope it'll become for the future?

The industry has the same ambition and passion as it did the 70s, but with more safety, better accountability, and quality of work. We have more engines getting rebuilt and running again than we've ever seen but are also being rebuilt in a way that they're going to continue to run.

In the future, I think because we've got this young generation that is open to new ideas and technology, but also willing to train the next generation already, we're going to have a good 50-60 solid years going at it and not have to worry about where the next generation is going to come from. The willingness to put in the effort, train the new people, and open the inclusivity of the current preservation world is unlike anything I've ever seen, which I think is very important.

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WHAT IS IT? WHERE IS IT?

Can you tell what these things are? And if so, where can one find them during the Old Threshers Reunion?
Answers are at the bottom of page 19.

A



B



C



D



E



F



Obituaries

Melvan Higgins

Melvan L. Higgins, Sr., 83, of Knoxville, Illinois died December 14, 2024, at OSF St. Mary Medical Center, Galesburg, Illinois.

He was born on September 20, 1941, in Galesburg to Marvan L. and Faye L. (Cunningham) Higgins. He married Charlene E. Blacklidge on June 10, 1962, in Galesburg and they raised their four children, Diana, Doreen, Melvan, and Darlene.

Surviving are his children, Doreen Benson of Galesburg, Melvan (and Kay) Higgins, Jr. of Bedford, Texas and Darlene (and Chris) Plue of Knoxville, a son-in-law, Clint Dowdy of Springfield, Illinois a brother, Myron L. (and Kelly) Higgins of Aledo, Illinois, a sister, Marilee (and Lawrence) Johnson of Knoxville, ten grandchildren and thirteen great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents, his wife of 58 years, Charlene Higgins, on July 11, 2020, and his daughter, Diana Dowdy on July 13, 2021.

Melvan graduated from Knoxville High School in 1959. He was born and raised on a farm and worked the farmland with

his father until his father's health failed. The family was forced to sell the farmland, but Melvan continued to farm for the Goff family, the Hennenfent family, and any other farmer that needed help. He also worked at Gates Rubber Company for over 37 years and retired in 2007. He worked in just about every department for Gates, including management for a short time. He was a member of the First Christian Church in Knoxville. Melvan's true passion was volunteering for the Midwest Old Threshers in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. He began attending the Old Threshers in 1972. He loved running the old steam engine, the carousel, and answering questions for the visitors. Most of all, he loved spending time with his family, including several camping trips.

Memorials may be made to the Midwest Old Threshers Carousel House.

Tom Sharratt

Tom Sharratt, age 82, of Westby, WI, passed away on December 16, 2024. Tom was born in Milwaukee on August 1, 1942, to Kathleen (Hering) and Bill Sharratt and lived as a child in Madison,

Appleton, and Milwaukee before completing a bachelor's degree in agriculture at UW - Madison in 1964. At the same time, he received a commission in the US Regular Army and served on active duty for 21 years as a Field Artillery officer. He retired as a Major, having served in a variety of assignments in the US; over seven years in Europe with US, Belgian, and British armies where he specialized in the readiness and security of nuclear weapons; and in Viet Nam in 1967-68. While in the Army, he completed a master's degree in Agricultural Economics at Purdue University. He shortly thereafter purchased a farm in Timber Coulee near the Snowflake Ski Club, in Westby, WI in 1972.

In 1985, he became a high school teacher in Des Moines, Iowa, where he taught High School Junior ROTC at Hoover High School. He enjoyed working with his students and their parents, teaching leadership and citizenship skills. One of his most fondly remembered achievements was teaching a blind student to rappel from a 40-foot-high

Continued on page 16

Heerdt from page 14

What advice would you give for any young person looking to get involved in the industry?

Do it. If you have a passion for it, a true passion, you're never going to work a day in your life. It is not easy and you're never going to work as hard as you will in rail preservation. The biggest thing that I've learned and what I try to instill in new brakemen and hires, companywide, is never say: "I know."

Because that old guy in the corner with a cup of coffee is going to shut up and let you make your mistakes. If you show up every day, ask the questions, have the patience and take the time to learn from those that came before us, you'll find that old guy and open up an encyclopedia of knowledge you never



**Midwest Old Threshers
Office Hours**

May 19 - 23 • 8am to 4:30pm

May 24 • 9am to 1:00pm

May 25 & 26 • CLOSED

Starting May 27 • Summer Hours Begin
Mon - Fri: 8am to 4:30pm
Sat: 9am to 4:30pm & Sun: Noon to 3pm

Obituaries

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tower. In 1996, Tom and his beloved wife Sharon (Burkhalter) moved to their farm in Timber Coulee, and enjoyed the rest of his life raising trees and organic crops. He and Sharon shared a deep love for the land, and worked hard at being good stewards. They chose to protect their land with a land conservation easement with the Mississippi Valley Conservancy in 2016. He had four loves in his life - Sharon, his wife of 41 years; his two children and four grandchildren; agriculture; and railroads. Many people knew Tom only as "the guy with a railroad in his front yard."

He and Sharon traveled extensively, riding and photographing railroads in the US, Canada, Latin America, China, Cuba, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. They also invested in railroads and worked together for several months each year for over seven years on a privately owned rail car. He enjoyed both writing and photography, and had several articles published in TRAINS magazine and Army publications. For several years, he also wrote a monthly column for the local paper entitled "Where in the World are We?" under the pseudonym of "The Lost Wanderer." Tom was active in the Westby United Methodist Church, Coon Valley American Legion Post 116, Westby VFW Post 8021, the Lexington Group, and a number of railroad museums around the country. He was also active in the Westby Area Schools as a volunteer representing veterans. Tom volunteered at OT for the Midwest Electric Railway.

Tom is survived by his older brother, Richard (Dianne) of Reedsburg WI; his wife, Sharon; his first wife, Mary Smart of Des Moines; his daughter, Stephanie (David) Horak of Urbandale, IA; his son, retired Army Colonel Lee (Lyndsay) Sharratt of Winterset, IA; and grandchildren: Garrett Horak, Eleanor Horak, Jennessa Sharratt, and Lainey Sharratt.

Memorials may be given to Westby United Church, Westby Area School District, or one of the veteran's

organizations he belonged to.

Edward Hiller

Edward Dean Hiller, 96, passed away December 29, 2024 in Indianola.

With the passing of his mother due to childbirth complications, Ed was raised by his widowed father. A Minnesota childhood secured his life-long loyalty to the Minnesota Vikings.

Upon enlistment in the United States Military, Ed was placed on assignment in Berlin, Germany. He assisted in the Berlin Airlift, for which he received a Letter of Appreciation and Quilt of Valor.

Ed was a life-long heavy equipment operator and Caterpillar operator. You would always find him wearing a hat or coat with the Caterpillar or Minnesota Vikings logo.

Ed and Lucy met when Lucy was at college and Ed had recently returned from his military service. They married and traveled to various locations due to Ed's work, settling in Indianola to raise their four children.

Ed and Lucy enjoyed bowling together in league and mixed doubles, camping and were part of the Carlisle Camping Club. Both spent countless hours volunteering annually at the Old Threshers Reunion in Mt. Pleasant. Ed worked in the steam engine room on the engines and providing leadership.

The everyday rhythm of life included vegetable gardening and canning, and the everyday cribbage games. His biggest smiles happened during a good game of cribbage, time shared with family, working side-by-side with his friends at the Old Threshers Reunion, and helping with the chili suppers at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church.

Ed is survived by his children, Danny (Linda) Hiller, Alan (Laura) Hiller, Julia (Dave) Fish and Cindy Hiller; grandchildren, Katherine (Christopher) Miller, John Hiller, Luke (Kristin) Hiller, Jacob (Aisha) Hiller and Anna Fish; great-grandchildren, Killian Miller, August Hiller, Ryder Hiller and Atlas Hiller. He was

preceded in death by his wife, Lucille Hiller, parents, Edward and Julia Hiller.

Helen Nicholson

Helen Jean Nicholson, passed away peacefully on February 14, 2025, at the age of 89 at Arbor Court Care Center in Mount Pleasant. Born on August 19, 1935, in Richland, Iowa, Helen was the beloved daughter of Clarence and Doris Greiner. Her life was a rich tapestry of love, dedication, and service, woven into the fabric of southeast Iowa, where she resided for her entire life.

On December 9, 1955, Helen married the love of her life, Richard Nicholson, and together they embarked on a journey of companionship and mutual support that would last until Richard's passing in 2006. Helen embraced her role as a homemaker with grace and enthusiasm, raising two daughters and creating a home filled with love and the aroma of her famous homemade bread and cheesecake.

Before dedicating herself to her family, Helen worked at Universal Manufacturing in her early 20s. After her daughters began school, she returned to the workforce, this time at the Fairfield Glove Factory, where she would retire after 25 years of loyal service. Helen's talents extended far beyond her professional life; she was a self-taught crocheter, an excellent seamstress, and an excellent cook whose recipes were cherished by all who had the pleasure of tasting them.

Helen and Richard shared a passion for camping, an activity that brought them closer to nature and to a community of friends and family. Their adventures under the open skies were among their most treasured memories. Helen's commitment to her community was evident through her active membership in the East Pleasant Plain Pioneer Association, where she contributed to the growth and vitality of the small community, she held dear.

For over 40 years, Helen was a proud member of the Midwest Old Threshers

Obituaries

Continued from page 17

Association, dedicating 30 years as a volunteer at their annual reunion. She loved being an attendant on the trolley, sharing stories and laughter with passengers from near and far. Helen's volunteerism extended to special events, where she could be found guiding school tours, contributing to the Halloween Haunted House, and assisting with maintenance and repairs on the grounds.

Helen's legacy is carried on by her loving family, including her two daughters, Gloria Wasson (Donald) of Libertyville, IA, and Goldie Davis of Westminster, CO. She was a guiding star to her sister, Karlene Holt of Rome, IA, and a doting grandmother to her grandchildren, Hilary Lanman (Mathew) of Hedrick, IA; Dalton Davis of Log Lane Village, CO; Issac Wasson of Salem, IA; Michael Wasson of Salem, IA; Wyatt Davis of Firestone, CO; Hayley Davis of Denver, CO; and Hanna Davis of San Deigo, CA. Helen's great-grandchildren, Joseph Lanman and Ilya Davis, will also hold her memory in their hearts.

Preceding Helen in death were her husband, Richard Nicholson, and her siblings, William, Jerry, and Lloyd Greiner, as well as her sisters, Irene Simmons, Ruth Smith, Betty Roush, and Martha Roberts.

Memorials in Helens honor to Old Threshers or the American Cancer Society may be mailed to the family at P.O. Box 189, Fairfield, IA 52556. Friends may leave online condolences at www.cranstonfamilyfuneralhome.com

Robert Alt

Robert E. Alt, 77, of Clinton, passed away March 7, 2025, at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics surrounded by his loving family.

Robert Eugene Alt was born on October 9, 1947 in Iowa City, Iowa, the son of Joseph and Agda (Eldeen) Alt. He was a 1966 graduate of University High School in Iowa City. He married Jane Rohret on September 11, 1971 in Tiffin, Iowa.

Bob worked as a meat department

manager at Eagles Foods for several years and retired from Sullivan's Grocery.

Bob was a lifelong volunteer and exhibitor at The Old Threshers Reunion where he showed gas engines, loved his family and made lifelong friendships. He was active with the Sawmill Museum in Clinton. In his free time, you could find Bob spending time with his family and grandchildren or chatting up the neighborhood on his front porch. He was an avid Iowa Hawkeye and Chicago Cubs fan.

Bob is survived by his wife: Jane of Clinton; his sons: Jason (Caid Rinker) Alt of Iowa City, Iowa, Brian (Jessie) Alt of Madrid, Iowa, Addie (Travis) Rupp of Clinton, and Rae (Damen) Feddersen of Clinton; five grandchildren: Jacob, Tanner, Kiera, Kelsey, and Everett; and his two sisters: Elizabeth Utzig of Cadiz, Kentucky and Joan (Randy) Belknap of North Liberty, Iowa. He was preceded in death by his parents and his two brothers: George and Arthur.

Memorials can be made to The Old Threshers Foundation.

Larry Price

Larry Lee Price, 81, of Mt. Pleasant, IA, died March 12, 2025 at Halcyon House in Washington, IA.

Larry was born January 4, 1944 in Mt. Pleasant, the son of Jack Emerson and Lena Mae (Thomas) Price. He graduated from Mt. Pleasant High School in 1963. On October 17, 1964 at the former Methodist Church in Crawfordsville, Larry was united in marriage to Doris Jane Griffith.

Larry began his working career as a Psychiatric Aide at the former Mt. Pleasant Mental Health Institute. He then worked at his uncle Bob Thomas's Conoco Gas Station in Mt. Pleasant. From there, Larry worked at the I.A.A.P. in Middletown, and later at the former Blue Bird Manufacturing Plant in Mt. Pleasant. From there, Larry began a career as a Lineman for REC. His time with REC spanned 36 years until he retired as a General Foreman in 2007.

Larry was a member of Calvary Baptist Church and I.B.E.W. Union. While at REC, he taught CPR and First Aid to the workers. For over 40 years, Larry volunteered his labor in the Maintenance Department of Midwest Old Threshers. Larry enjoyed hunting of many kinds. He held a deep and genuine fondness for fishing, gardening and mowing his lawn. Larry also liked to play cards and pool, make homemade ice cream and watch Western shows and movies.

Those thankful for sharing in Larry's life include his wife of 60 years, Doris of Mt. Pleasant; 3 children – Lorna (Jeff) Hood and Lisa Price, all of Mt. Pleasant, and David (Janet Orr) Price of Fairfield; 3 siblings – brother Donald (Jan) Price of Adel, IA, Patricia (Larry) Marlow of Myrtle Beach, SC and Sue Postol of Ames, IA; 4 grandchildren – Jakob (Kristi) Hood, Linzie Mitchell, Liam Hood and Zachary Price, and 4 great grandchildren – Oliver, Remington, Walker and Freya.

Those considering an expression of sympathy may direct memorials to Save the Bridge (the restoration project of the Oakland Mills Footbridge). Online condolences may be directed to www.kimzeyfh.com.

Bruce Walter

Bruce (Gator) E. Walter, 71 of Muscatine, IA passed away March 24, 2025. Cremation was completed and a Celebration of Life will be held at a later date yet to be determined. Memorials may be made to the Walter Family to help with funeral expenses.

Bruce Eugene Walter was born January 26, 1954 to Gene and Barbara Walter, Davenport, IA. Bruce lived a full life filled with many adventures. He never met a stranger and was always willing to step in and help family and friends when needed. He was an avid supporter of the Old Threshers Reunion, working on the steam engines. He also enjoyed working on the old grist mill in Wild Cat Den.

He worked for many years for Gardner Engineering Co. in Davenport.

FOL receives Community Impact Award

The Mount Pleasant Festival of Lights, a Midwest Old Threshers community event, received the Community Impact Award given by the Mount Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce at its annual banquet in March 2025. This Award is given to a Chamber member that is a business, non-profit group or event that made Mount Pleasant and Henry County a better place to live, work and play.

Described as one of the largest drive-thru Christmas light displays in Iowa with its 174 displays and 229 sponsors, this beloved event attracted 7,000 cars from 36 states and 66 counties last year.

Nearly 2,000 visitors attended the two walk-through nights the weekend prior to Thanksgiving, enjoying trolley rides, a stroll through the Log Village and free refreshments.

In 2025, Festival of Lights will be celebrating its 13th year of operation by expanding its 1.6 mile route through the newly renovated portion of the campground making the drive



a total of two miles long. This year over 30 new displays, including Peace on Earth pictured at left, will add to the holiday experience. As always, the route will end at Santa's House, which is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings for families to visit Santa and his Elves.

Obituaries Continued from page 18

Bruce is survived by his mother Barbara Walter, sister April (Larry) Peterson, brothers David (Toni) Walter, Edward (Julie) Walter and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his father Gene and sister Linda Craven.

Rodney Zirkle

Rodney "Rod" Wade Zirkle, 54, of Richland, IA, passed away peacefully on May 11, at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City, surrounded by loved ones.

Born on January 1, 1971, in Virginia, Rod was the beloved son of Roger Lee and Linda (Hall) Zirkle. He graduated from high school in Virginia in 1989 and went on to earn his Associate's Degree. Rod's life journey brought him to Iowa in 1999, where he began a distinguished career in public service as a firefighter at the Veterans Hospital in Knoxville. He later joined the Ottumwa Fire Department as a firefighter and paramedic, proudly serving the community and standing strong with his brothers and sisters in the Firefighter's Union.

It was during his time in Ottumwa that Rod met the love of his life, Sarah Ann Keeley. They were united in marriage on February 22, 2008, and together built a beautiful life filled with laughter, love, and devotion. Rod and Sarah were

blessed with two wonderful children, Bekah (13) and Brody (10), who were the light of his life.

After retiring from his fire service, Rod continued to serve his community in another way—by becoming a school bus driver. He faithfully drove routes for the Fairfield, Winfield-Mt. Union, and Pekin school districts, always looking out for the children in his care with the same dedication he had shown his entire career.

Rod was a man of many passions. He loved the outdoors and could often be found hunting, fishing, golfing, or practicing archery. He had a natural talent for working with his hands and took pride in tackling yard projects and handiwork around his home. His quick wit, warm hugs, and perfectly timed jokes made him unforgettable to all who knew him. Rod had a wicked sense of humor and a deep love of comedy that brought joy to many. Above all, he was a devoted husband, a loving father, and a loyal friend.

Rod's gentle spirit extended to all creatures—especially his cherished

service dog, Maisie, a constant and beloved companion who was truly a member of the family.

One of Rod's favorite traditions was volunteering at Old Threshers, where he could be found doing what he loved—driving the ground train and enjoying the music echoing from the grandstand.

Rod is deeply missed and lovingly remembered by his wife, Sarah, and their children, Bekah and Brody; his brother, Kevin Zirkle and wife Anne; his in-laws, Jerry and Becky Keeley; sisters-in-law Tressa Keeley-Pickett and husband John; Cynthia Keeley Ridinger and husband Thom; his brother-in-law, John Keeley; his (Aunt)Sue Rapheld of Mt. Pleasant and his cousins Jill and Kenny Stutsman.

He is preceded in death by his parents and his brother-in-law, Dan Keeley.

In lieu of flowers, consider a donation for the future education of Rod and Sarah's children, Bekah and Brody. Checks may be made payable to Sarah Zirkle.

Answers to What is it? Where is it? From page 15

A) Santa's chair located in the Santa House in the campground. B) Wood Lot in the Log Village. C) The white tires of Maria #6 Midwest Central Railroad. D) One of two big chairs around the Reunion for a great photo op. E) The front of trolley 1811 Midwest Electric Railway. F) Bird's eye view of Tractor Headquarters.



RESTORATION STORIES WANTED

Are you currently restoring a tractor, gas engine, steam engine or other piece of equipment? We'd love to hear your story and publish your progress in *The Chaff*.

Restoration projects aren't just limited to machinery. Cars, buildings, quilts, tools, the list goes on. Send a photo and a description of your project to otchaff@oldthreshers.org or mail to The Chaff, 405 E. Thresher Rd, Mt. Pleasant, IA 52641

2025 Calendar of Events

- May 23-24—Swap Meet
- May 23-25—Gun Show
- May 27—Heritage Museums and OT Gift Shop open 7 days a week
- June 21—Trolley School
- July 15-21—Henry County Fair
- August 1-3—Western Illinois Threshers
- August 7-17—Iowa State Fair
- August 13—OT Briefing Meeting
- August 16—OT Campground Opens
- August 27—Harvest Day Parade & Horse Pull
- August 28-September 1—2025 Midwest Old Threshers Reunion
- September 11-13—Printers' Fair
- October 2-4, 9-11, 16-18, 23-25, 30-31—Thrashers House of Terror
- October 10-11, 17-18, 24-25—Haunted Rails
- November 8—Old Threshers Annual Meeting | Foundation Annual Meeting
- November 22-23—Walk-thru Nights Festival of Lights
- November 26-December 31—Festival of Lights
- December 6-7, 13-14, 20-21—North Pole Express



Old Threshers Reunion

EST. 1950

Aug. 28 - Sept. 1, 2025 * Mount Pleasant, Iowa