



The Todd House Museum

TABOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

June 2019 Newsletter
Chuck Douglass President

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Society News

Chuck Douglass

Like all historical societies, Tabor maintains a wide range of artifacts such as letters, documents and photographs, all linked to our shared history. But what might be surprising to you is our collection of farm machinery made possible by the generous donation of Orvan and Rita Grudle.

Orvan came from a farming family and was a graduate of Tabor High School's class of 1934. He enlisted in the army during World War II and served as a sergeant with the 8th Air Force in England maintaining the electrical systems of B-24 bombers. After the war he married Rita Ann Jessen of Omaha and settled down to a life of farming about a mile north of Tabor. But if you were to ask Orvan what he did for a living, he more than likely would have told you he was an inventor, and invent he did. Around the farm he was always tinkering with machinery trying to make equipment more efficient and effective. For example, he took a double-disk grain drill used for planting seeds and modified it with a hydraulic lift and seed feeder so it could be used more easily on hills.

In 1994 the Grudles approached the historical society and offered to donate Orvan's equipment to the organization as well as funding construction of a building to house the collection—ground breaking on the 40-by-50-foot structure occurred in the fall of that year, completed in September 1995. The museum has since become a home to donations from other families and includes farm implements old and new, everything from a one-horse sickle mower for cutting hay, donated by Richard Johnson, to Orvan's Super C Farmall tractor.

The Grudle collection continues to be an integral part of the society's holdings and is an important record of Iowa's agricultural ingenuity and achievements. The museum is open by appointment.



Grudle Museum Display Floor



Orvan and Rita Grudle

The Horseless Carriage in Southwest Iowa Harry Wilkins

With cars being such an integral part of modern life, it's hard to imagine when automobiles were a rare and newsworthy curiosity such as they were in the early 1900s. On September 1st, 1901, the Thurman Mirror reported Charlie Paul accepting delivery in McPaul of what was thought to be the first “horseless vehicle” in Fremont County. A large crowd was on hand to witness the event, described as a “beautiful rig, built to carry four persons . . . [and] with its pneumatic tires it looks as though it would ride as easy as a rocking chair with a big feather cushion.” Paul's new car, never identified as to make or model, would herald the beginning of a new era, with many more to follow. With so many cars flooding into the state, Iowa began in 1904 mandating one-time registration, followed by a yearly registration in 1911. The fee was eight dollars or more, depending on horsepower, and the owner was given license plates.

Early automobiles were not complicated machines and were usually delivered with a tool kit and instructions so owners could perform virtually all required maintenance. Operating the vehicle safely was another matter. In 1916, Charles Gipe was teaching his friend John Aistrope, from Tabor, how to drive near Strahan (Mills County) when the “steering apparatus suddenly became loose.” Control of the car was lost—it careened into a ditch and overturned, pinning both men underneath. Freeing themselves before help arrived, both suffered bruises, cuts, and, presumably, embarrassment.

One of the more challenging aspects of motoring in the early years was the necessity of sharing the road with horses, often with calamitous results, but not always. Sometimes the noisy machines actually came in handy. In March of 1916, Lula Johnson's son was in McPaul with a hitched wagon and team of horses; a train pulling into the McPaul station spooked the horses and they bolted down the road for home. At the same time, Mr. Leeka was driving up in his Dort automobile, a \$650 four-passenger sedan manufactured in Flint, Michigan. Seeing what had happened, he yelled at Lula's son to jump on and they chased the runaway team. According to the Thurman Times, Leeka “turning his machine loose,” edged the car parallel with the horses while young Johnson crept out on the fender, grasped the reins and swung himself up on the wagon bringing the team under control.

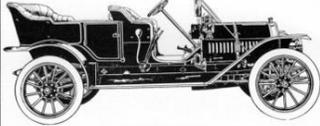
In spite of growing pains, Iowans embraced their cars and numbers grew quickly: in 1904 there were only 931 motor vehicles registered in the state but by 1915, Iowa ranked first in the nation as to number of automobiles per capita with over 147,000 rolling down the state’s byways.



Cars parked in Tabor, around 1915

Pioneer Implement Co.

Jackson
AUTOMOBILES



MODEL 50, \$2,350

THE HILL CLIMBER

Other models at \$850, \$950
\$1,250, \$1,600, \$1,700
and \$2,400.

P. B. LAIRD, Agent
TABOR, IOWA

Burning Memory

Glenn Irwin

One of Tabor's great historians was my mother's cousin, Leland Ruse Smith. She lived most of her life in Tabor, graduated from Tabor High School in 1932 and in later years became a tireless chronicler and collector of town lore. Beginning in 1985 she began writing "*Memories by Leland*," a weekly column in the Tabor Beacon that was a touchstone for those who loved great stories about the people and events that made our corner of Iowa fascinating and unique. One story she reported on was a short blurb originally printed in the Beacon on October 24, 1912:

"A four-year old boy and a match were responsible for the \$3,000 fire last Saturday at the Frank Bell farm about seven miles southeast of Tabor. A large horse and hay barn, including one span of horses, several wagons, some harness, one new buggy, with all the hay and small grain of this year's raising, also 4,000 feet of native lumber, was totally destroyed. There was no insurance. The four-year old son of Mr. Bell says he did it with one match. He and his three-year old sister narrowly escaped being burned alive. The little girl's clothes were singed when rescued by the mother. Mr. Bell had gone to town and neighbors kept other buildings from being ignited."

The boy who started the fire was my uncle, Floyd Everett Bell and his little sister Irmel. As a boy I lived one-half mile south of this farm, which was originally owned by my great-grandparents John Thomas and Zora Henderson Bell. It eventually passed down to my grandfather Frank and his wife Nettie. Their oldest daughter, Eunice Esther Bell Irwin was my mother. This tragedy was most certainly a substantial loss for the Bell family. The Iowa census for 1915 listed Frank Bell's yearly income for 1914 as \$1,500. Imagine a financial loss today taking two years' income with nothing covered by insurance!

Thank you, Leland, for keeping our history alive.



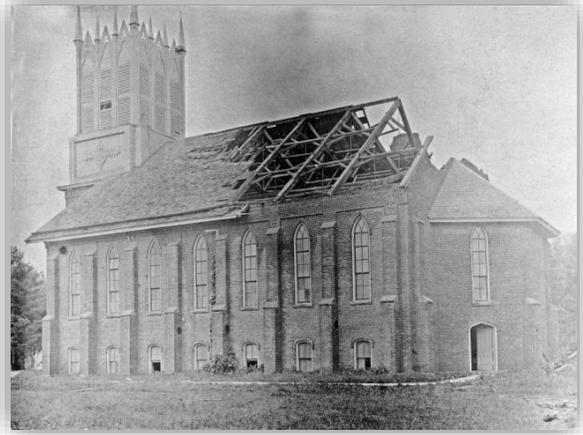
The Bell Siblings in 1913: Eunice and Everett in back, sister Irmel in the front



Never Happier: Leland sorting historical documents

Did you know?

Southwest Iowa was struck by a severe thunderstorm in the summer of 1907. It was a Saturday, July 6th, and the day had looked stormy but no one was concerned since it had been a dry summer and locals were beginning to fear a drought. The Congregational Church choir met for practice in the evening to be ready for the following day's service. Around 10:00 p.m., shortly after choir members left for home, the storm hit with a fury that was described in a local newspaper as the most damaging in living memory. A six-mile wide torrent of rain and high wind, accompanied by a deluge of hail raced over portions of Mills and Fremont Counties beginning about a mile east of the Hillsdale-Tabor Road (Highway 275 today) moving southwest toward the Missouri River. Tabor was in the path and sustained heavy damage, particularly to the church which lost half of its roof—its pipe organ and a grand piano were destroyed with losses estimated at \$6000, and no insurance. Farmers north of Tabor reported corn stalks beaten down to the point that rows could not be seen and in some cases fields were “left bare as when plowed.” Orchards were stripped of their fruit and many lost livestock. Practically everyone living in the path of the storm lost part or all of their roofs, windows were blown out and many farm buildings destroyed. Tabor was described as a “forest of fallen trees” and the park a “tangled mass of broken trees and limbs.” Charles Ellis, the owner of Tabor's Standard Grocery,



(Above) Destruction inside the Congregational Church: \$2500 was spent replacing the pipe organ. Right: tree branches blocking a residential street.

Ellis saw a large tree driven through a wall of his home narrowly missing one of his children. The Loess Hills were inundated with rain and water which swept down hills becoming “raging floods.” Crossing into Nebraska, Plattsmouth likewise reeled from with wind damage and flooding. But in spite of the widespread destruction, residents counted their blessing since no one was injured.



Old School

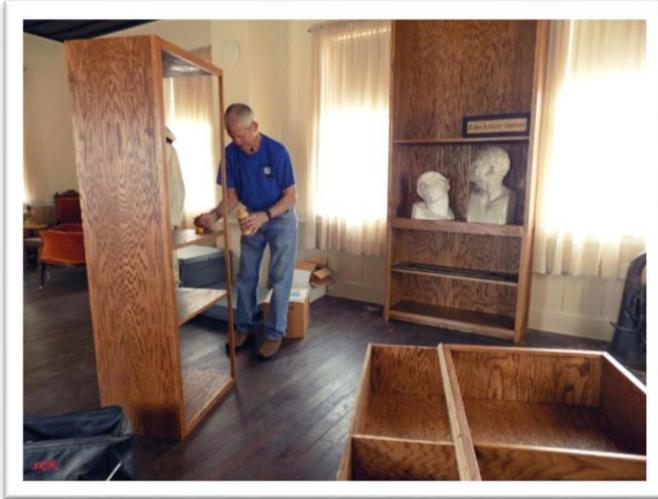


Tabor teachers at the start of the school year, September 1915. From left to right: Mr. James Evans, Superintendent, Miss Ruby Ireland, Miss Lois Yerger, Miss Jeanette Pardee (principal), Miss Ruth Bates, Miss Frances Mintier, Miss Pearl C. Gottsch, and Miss Louise Knox. It appears that Bloedel Hardware donated some tools to the school. The photograph was taken in front of the old Center Street School, looking north.



Miss Louise Knox with her home economics class. Superintendent James Evans is standing in the rear.

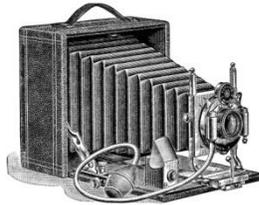
Keep it Brief!



Gary Moles puts the finishing touches on cabinets he constructed to display historical artifacts in the Tabor Historical Society's Music Hall. Funding for the work was provided through a grant from the Fremont County Community Foundation.



Jann Tackett, vice president of the Fremont County Historical Society, assists Harry Wilkins in mounting a new Tabor photo display in the Sidney Historical Museum. The framed display contains historical photographs from Tabor's past, joining similar displays for Sidney and Percival.



The 2019 Memorial Day fund raiser luncheon was a rousing success, held this year in the Tabor Community Center. The two-day event raised money for the historical society while providing an opportunity to remember our fallen heroes.

