

# TABOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

February 2020 Newsletter

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## Society News by Chuck Douglass

With the beginning of a new year, the Tabor Historical Society is planning the next phase of the John Todd Museum restoration project. Constructed in the summer of 1853, the home of Reverend John and Martha Todd was the third structure to be built in the village of Tabor and is one of only four remaining stations in Iowa's Underground Railroad. Due to its extreme age, the structure requires careful maintenance and all restoration projects are carried out in accordance with the Historic Structure Report compiled by the Franks Design Group in 2013. The report is a comprehensive study of the house and includes architectural drawings, a detailed analysis of its condition, and a list of recommended projects categorized under five priorities, all aimed at preserving the structure for future generations. The project in its entirety was estimated at over \$900,000, of which our society committed, through grants and fundraising, over \$200,000 in 2016 for the restoration of the north foundation, northwest bedroom and front porch.

The restoration continues this spring with work on the home's south porch and associated foundation, at a cost of over \$88,000. Preserving historic structures is very expensive, due in large part to the special attention that must be paid to ensure original aspects of the building are not lost, if at all possible. In areas where damage or deterioration requires replacement parts, care is taken to maintain the original appearance or function. For example, using early photographs of the Todd House's south porch, the society determined the correct original style among the current support posts, which are mismatched. Watching over John and Martha Todd's home is a labor of love and one you may want to join in with we're looking forward to continuing the work this spring and could use all the help we can get.



**Left: Original oak beams used as floor joists, along with the adobe brick wall in background, require constant attention**

**Right: Society member Bob Benton inspects the exposed north side foundation during the 2016 project**



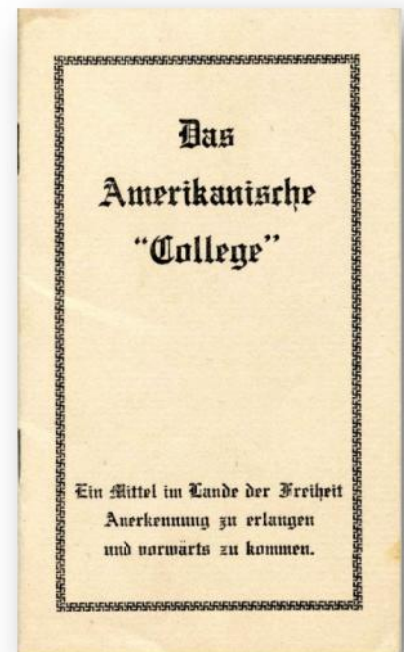
## *Did You Know?*

Ethnic Germans comprised the largest non-English speaking group to come to Iowa from the 1840s through the 1960s. The numbers were impressive: In 1900 there were 123,162 German immigrants living in the state, according to the U.S. Census. German influence reached even into Fremont County when German-born Philip Nies opened the Hamburg Brewing and Bottling Works in 1867, which included a beer garden and dance hall (something that deeply disturbed temperance advocates in Tabor).

Always looking for ways to increase the enrollment at Tabor College, administrators decided in 1910 to write a publicity pamphlet entirely in the German language, encouraging non- or limited-English-speaking parents to send their sons and daughters to the best school in “the land of the free.” Written in what is now an old style German script by Prussian-born Fritz W. Martini, working at the time as a school counselor, the eleven-page catalog appealed directly to parents of prospective students, explaining in detail the advantages that would be realized by sending their children to Tabor College. Then, as now, small class size was seen as a plus: “It must be said that in this institution the classrooms are arranged to make it possible for a professor to pay attention to each student, so when needed, each individual can get ahead. It must also be said that special attention is given to those who, for whatever reason, failed in other schools.” In his concluding lines, Mr. Martini implored his “dear countrymen, to carefully think about the most important thing: the education of your children. Think how grateful the dear young people will be to you, if you help them achieve the best there is in this world: a good, thorough, Christian education.”



**Tabor College German Club in 1909**



**Cover page translated: The American College A Way to be Recognized in the Land of the Free and to Move Ahead**

## Dreams of an Electric Railroad

Harry Wilkins

The early 20th century witnessed an explosion of technological marvels, particularly in transportation. Steam locomotives had been in use for decades, but electrically powered conveyances, including cars and trains, were making inroads in many areas of the United States. Responding to what they saw as a golden opportunity, Tabor businessmen, among them William Wadhams and Charles Ellis, began promoting the construction of an interurban trolley line connecting towns in Southwest Iowa. On July 1, 1903, the Council Bluffs, Tabor and Southern Electric Railway corporation was born, with William J. Dobbs (from Creston) elected president and general manager.

The trolley line would begin in Tarkio, Missouri, and move north through Riverton, Sidney, Tabor, Hillsdale, Glenwood, and Council Bluffs, where connections could be made to the Omaha trolley system. A spur would be built connecting Hamburg to the line. The company, using rented offices above the Barbour store in Tabor, began surveying the route, acquiring land rights and most importantly, raising money. Planners envisioned a 75-mile line requiring a main power station in Tabor generating 32,000 volts, and several substations. The system would provide six trains daily each way, the last leaving Council Bluffs after theaters closed at 11:00 p.m. Planners also knew that freight would be a major source of revenue. It was estimated that moving bulk items could be accomplished in one-third the time taken by traditional rail service. Towns would be connected as never before with rapid speed and low cost—traveling from Tabor to Sidney was estimated at 20 minutes for a 30-cent fare. Another benefit of the electric railway was selling excess power to communities for residential use.



Typical Interurban Trolley (Bellevue, Ohio, 1908)

The cost of the enterprise was significant. The company would need to raise two million dollars, the equivalent of over \$51 million today. But steady progress was seen, and within the first year the route was surveyed and access granted by landowners and municipalities, although Council Bluffs insisted on a spur to the Iowa School for the Deaf before granting approval. Initially, funds were raised through the sale of stock—at least \$10,000 by 1904—but construction could not commence without the support of a large bond sale. President Dobbs and others tirelessly promoted the project, regularly meeting with community leaders and financial backers. Area newspapers were enthusiastic in their reporting: on December 29, 1905, the *Hamburg Reporter* said the railroad was "nearer a sure thing than it has ever been before." Unfortunately, the critical bond issuance never materialized. Some interest was shown by East Coast bankers but their insistence on ten percent of the cost being raised through stock sales before committing to the deal could not be satisfied. The enterprise slowly faded as popular enthusiasm waned, all but dead by 1908. Although several local investors lost a great deal of money, the long-term survivability of the electric railroad, had it been built, was certainly bleak: few people in 1903 could have foreseen the advent and effect of the mass-produced automobile.

## *The Girls Knew How to Walk!*

Getting around wasn't always as easy as today and we sometimes forget that in the old days just moving from one town to another could be considered a trek, particularly if you were on foot.

A short news piece in the Tabor Beacon of March 16, 1911, illustrated the challenge: "Miss Ethel Baggs and Miss Rilla Hanley, students at Tabor College, started one recent Saturday afternoon to walk to Shenandoah where they were going to spend the Sabbath at the home of Miss Hanley. However, as it was getting late in the day (about 3 o'clock p.m.) they modified their plans on the way and decided to cut across from Randolph to Imogene and if possible, catch the evening southbound train for Shenandoah.

While on the road to Randolph they were overtaken by a team and buggy and given a lift of a few miles which enabled them to arrive at a quarter of 5 o'clock. Then they struck out at a rapid gate for Imogene, covering the distance between seven and eight miles in one hour and three quarters, just in time by a dash at the finish, to board the southbound train at 6:30 and soon arrived safely at their destination.

After resting and visiting over Sunday they returned by railroad, but upon arriving at Malvern via the Wabash route, they found the Tabor and Northern train out of commission for the day on account of a disabled locomotive, so the young ladies, nothing daunted, started upon another nine-mile tramp to Tabor. Others were going the same way so they did not need to walk the entire distance.

They are feeling in the best of health and spirits, none the worse for the hiking experience and are quite independent of transportation companies."



Miss Ethel Baggs

A few years later, on August 20, 1914, the Malvern Leader reported that Ethel "had her right arm broken and quite a gash cut in her head. She had been visiting at the Gray home and with Mrs. Gray and her baby was riding to Thurman in a buggy. A passing auto frightened the horses and in the mix-up Miss Baggs was thrown out of the buggy. She was taken to Thurman where her injuries were attended to and on Monday came to her home in Tabor. Mrs. Gray and baby were not injured."

By this point Ethel may have thought that her long-distance walking stints back in college weren't such a bad idea.



## Yesterday and Today



Tabor's Main Street, looking northwest. The area where the bank is now located was occupied by stores and the Tabor Opera House, seen in the photo from around 1900 with its curved roof. A common feature for businesses during the era before air conditioning was the use of awnings, seen extended on several businesses in the old picture. Like most small American towns, Tabor's main street measured 80 feet across to allow for the movement of horse-drawn wagons.

## City Government Paying the Bills in 1939

The following bills were read and allowed:

Joe Lybarger	Street & Water Comm.	80.00
L.M. Perkins	Clerk	17.50
Dale Chantry	Marshall and Nightwatch	65.00
Geo. Irwin	Snow Removal	3.38
Ed Patton Music Co.	Band Music	6.34
L.E. Decker	Snow Removal	3.38
O.A. Nickerson	" "	2.50
Delbert Lybarger	Labor	7.00
McKesson & Robbins	Chlorine and Alum	41.60
A.S. McDonald	Snow Removal	2.50
A.M. McMahill	Mayor	15.00
Harry Hall	Snow Removal	3.50
Iowa-Nebr. L & P Co.	Lights and Power	150.94
Iowa-Nebr. L & P Co.	Int on Registered Warrants	200.00
L.H. Benedict	Blacksmithing	7.50
Tabor Fire Dept.	Expense	5.00
Frank Benedict	Labor	15.00
Mid States Utilities	Telephones	7.96
A.S. Bloedel Co.	Supplies	4.44
Harry Hall	Labor	4.25
Orville Watters	Labor	2.00
John Shier	Labor	5.25
The Merchants Nat Bank	Int on Fund Bonds	12.50
White Phillips Corp.	Int on Fund Bonds	12.50
First State Bank	Int on Fire Bonds	25.00

The record of expenditures as approved by the Tabor City Council, March 6, 1939. The mayor was Arthur M. McMahill (1871-1953). The council also decided to buy six speed signs from the Iowa Highway Commission for use around Tabor's two schools.

## *Keep it Brief!*



1903 was the first year for Tabor College's boys' basketball team, pictured here. The school reported that the sport was "fast becoming a national game . . . and when played properly, is very attractive and exciting." The coach (center front) was Hiram Everett Farnham, professor of Greek language and literature. Noteworthy was the fact that the college had been sponsoring a girls' team for several years which was very popular. The boys were playing catch-up! The young man sitting in the front row, far left is Ralph Ellis Todd, Reverend John Todd's grandson. Ralph graduated from Tabor College in 1905 and would later earn a civil engineering degree from the University of Nebraska.

Eight students from Shenandoah High School braved the cold and snow on January 23<sup>rd</sup> to visit the Todd House Museum, along with their teacher Mr. Brain Daoust. The group is enrolled in the American History advanced placement class which prepares them to receive college credit for work done in high school. The focus of the visit was learning about Tabor's role in the Underground Railroad.



**Please Notice This**



February is dues month and you should have received an invoice with a membership card along with the newsletter. Your financial support is critical to our continuing success but just as important is finding members who are willing to donate their time to the many projects that are ongoing and planned. Do you like working with historical documents? Think you could conduct a tour? Write an article for the newsletter? Stop by for a visit and we'll show you what we're working on.