

# *Preserving the Past*

## THE HIBBING HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

*2017- 4th Quarter*

### **Rain, Rain—Go Away!**

Some early evening clouds and showers did not dampen the spirits of those hardy souls who attended Hibbing's 124th Birthday Party Celebration on Tuesday, August 8th, on the lawn of City Hall. As host Mary Keyes told the audience, "We endure 30 to 40 degrees below zero, we can handle a little rain!" Young and old, armed with umbrellas, came to honor the latest inductees into the Hibbing Historical Society's Hall of Fame: John Alex Chisholm and Irma Mattioli McCarthy. Their biographies are available at the Hibbing Historical Society.

The Hibbing Historical Society wishes to thank friends and families of Alex Chisholm and Irma Mattioli McCarthy for sharing their stories. Special thanks to the faithful members of the Hibbing City Band and its director, Julie Sandstede, for braving the inclement weather! The music was fantastic and, as always, much appreciated.



### **Calendar**

It has been a busy year for our historical society. Our Annual Spring Dinner and Fundraiser was our most successful ever. The Burger Bash in June was so well received, we are making plans to hold one again next summer.

The Fall Membership meeting is fast approaching on **Saturday, October 21st**. Please see insert for details.

The last event of the year will be our Christmas Open House to be held Friday, December 8th, from 10:00am to 2:00pm. This festive event offers time to tour the museum, sample some tasty holiday treats and perhaps win a door prize!

## The Great Alice Train Wreck

A group visited the museum last month with quite an interesting story to tell.

Tom Beissel and his father Joseph shared the memoirs of Walter F. Beissel with museum staff.

Along with dozens of wonderful personal anecdotes about life on the Iron Range, Beissel documented the tale of an unusual train ride he took.

Walter wrote:

“In July 1916, I took a trip to Coleraine on the Iron Range to visit my brother John. Then on July 4 I was on my way to Chisholm where my father and sister, Mrs. William Bellmore, lived.”

That morning he got on board the Duluth, Missabe and Northern railroad passenger train for the short ride to Chisholm to visit his father.

“The July 4 celebration in North Hibbing had races that ran down 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue to Alice and back. When our train pulled out of old North Hibbing we were headed through Alice Location south of Hibbing, which is now the new Hibbing. There was a big dip in the road where the Duluth, Missabe and Northern track went through. The track is the same one that runs through Hibbing now to the north of Howard St.”

An automobile race was to be held that afternoon, so the auto committee had obtained permission from the railroad company to cover the rails at the crossing with sand and gravel for the cars to cross.

“The race committee was told not to fill in the dip until just before the race,” Beissel said. “Well, something got mixed up, because as the train I was riding approached Alice there was three or four feet of dirt and gravel in the dip for the race, and it was all packed down. “



When the locomotive hit the road, the engine rolled over and two cars left the track (one also turned over).

“I was in the third coach car when the train hit the crossing. The engine went over on its left side, and the water tank car behind it ended up on top of it. The rest of the cars all went off the track and the whole train cleared the crossing before it stopped.”

Engineer A.T. Stewart was badly injured and Fireman John McGillivray (also spelled MacGilvray) was seriously burned by steam.

“I jumped out of the window of the coach and ran up towards where the engine was on its side. There was steam and smoke and dust everywhere. The fireman and engineer were just getting out of the engine. I don’t know how they did it, but they did. They were so scalded that the skin hung like ribbons from their faces and skin was off their hands.”

Newspapers reported that both men later recovered.

“(I) finally got to Chisholm by street car and met my dad whom I hadn’t seen for 10 years.”

Below: The Beissel family – in the center John (Walter’s brother) and Claire Beissel with their three children. Walter is kneeling on the right. The family suspects this photograph was taken during Walter’s visit that July 1916.



Walter was only 17 when he visited the area, on vacation from his job as a motorman in Michigan. After this incident, Walter went back to Michigan where he worked for one more year before moving to Chisholm to live with his sister, until he was married in 1921. The Beissels moved to Myers location for a short time, eventually landing in Fraser location, where they lived for almost 40 years. Beissel worked as a foreman and general foreman for U.S. Steel at the Fraser Mine and retired in 1961 after 40 years on the job. After he retired, they moved to Chisholm, where they resided for another 20 years.

Curator Erica Larson thanks the Beissel family, David Aho, and an article by Al Zdon (Hibbing Daily Tribune – May 14, 1976) for filling in all the pieces of this story.

## **Board Member Spotlight**

David Perell was drawn to the Hibbing Historical Society because of Hibbing's very rich and exciting history. He wanted to share the story of our town with those who were unaware of it.

Dave was born and raised in Hibbing. His father was a Hibbing native while his mother hailed from Buhl. Dave is a 1972 graduate of Hibbing High School. His college years were spent at St. Thomas where he furthered his education and met his future wife, Pam. Then it was on to the University of Minnesota where he earned his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree. Dave and Pam returned to Hibbing to practice dentistry together at the Dental Health Service. Hibbing provided a certain comfort level to the young couple and was a great place to raise their two daughters.

During his 32 years as a dentist, Dave also found time to become involved in our community and volunteered many hours of his time. He was instrumental in the development and growth of the local Mines and Pines Art Festival. He was also named Titan of Taconite in 1995.

Currently, Dave is very active in the restoration project of Hibbing High School's historic auditorium. He is pleased to say that the job is being done correctly because the community expects it! Under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society, the project's motto is "Do it once, do it right!"

Dave also likes to garden and has been bitten by the travel-bug. He and his wife like to "wander" and explore this great country. Dave also drives a tour bus as it gives him the opportunity to go to places he would not otherwise go.

## **Aubin Collection**

After receiving a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society, the work has begun! The Society has received over 2000 photos from the Aubin Collection, with more to come in the next few years. Volunteers are busy organizing these photos with the ultimate goal of having them scanned, stored and catalogued. This process will lead to the development of an online database for viewing by the public. Thank you to Roberta Schloesser, Peter Becchetti, Jack Lynch and Carol Larson for their enthusiastic help.

An additional grant from the Minnesota Digital Library will allow over 200 panoramic negatives and prints from the Aubin collection to be sent to Minneapolis for scanning. Before the negatives can be sent to Minneapolis, they must be cleaned and documented. Thanks to Linda Suihkonen for taking on this project. She has been very impressed by some of these panoramic negatives and is sure you will be, too. We hope to have these images available on the Minnesota Reflections website early next year.

Because of the enormity of the collection and all of the careful, detailed work that must take place during this project, we ask that you be patient. Those of us who have had the privilege of working with the collection guarantee that the wait will be worth it!



Harkening back to his Dental Service days, Dave donned gloves while serving burgers this past summer at a society fundraiser at Palmer's.