



THE BURLINGTON DEPOT at Herndon was a busy place, not only for shipping cream and eggs, but for bringing supplies to the many downtown businesses. Passengers, dressed in their finest, waited to board the train. — Julie Hafner photos

Herndon stories told, tour of town planned

By MARY LOU OLSON
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People will have a chance to tell their memories of Herndon and Traer when they join a historical tour sponsored by the Oberlin Arts and Humanities Commission on Sunday, April 29.

The group will meet at 2 p.m. at The Gateway in Oberlin to form a car pool. A van will be available for seniors. The group will go first to Traer, in northwest Decatur County, where Jim Wesch will talk, then on to Herndon, where the group will see a slide show on the town to be given by Julie (Huffles) Hafner at the Senior Center.

Memories of Herndon might include the OK Lunch, Beaver Valley Roller Mill, the magnificent Commercial Hotel, Pooch's Pizza, J.G. Huffles & Son Plumbing, the Escher, Leitner and Cox groceries, drug store, school spirit, summer ball games, the every-five-years ox roast, four grain elevators, Doc Fleckenstein, the Nonpareil newspaper or the Dull murder trial — and the list could go on and on.

Those who visit Herndon may find it hard to believe what a thriving community it was during the first half of the 20th century, when the town boasted more than 40 businesses and a population over 300.

Known in its early days as "The Biggest Little Town in Western Kansas," Herndon is in the northeast corner of Rawlins County in the heart of what's been called the Beaver Valley Wheat Belt.

The first known settlers in Herndon Township were Lorenz and Sophia Demmer and their three children, who came in May 1876 from Austria-Hungary. As the first postmaster, he named the area "Pesth" in honor of his homeland's former capital.

I.N. George moved to Herndon in 1879 and built the first small sod-and-frame building. He stocked it with a few groceries. After he became postmaster, he renamed the town Herndon after Abraham Lincoln's law partner. Herndon later grew to include a lumber yard, bank, two hotels, a water-powered flour mill and a weekly newspaper.

In 1884, Fred Drath built a small waterpower mill on the bank of the Beaver Creek, but because of the dry season and low water, Drath Brothers built a steam powered mill which was later sold to Peter Wenzel and James Malone. Mr. Wenzel began building a light plant in 1906 and had it operating by 1911, making Herndon the first town in northwest Kansas known to have city lights on the St. Francis Burlington Railroad Branch.



THE COMMERCIAL HOTEL was a magnificent structure and served the area well for many years. A part of the original Page Hotel still stands on the west side of Main Street and is used as a pool hall, operated by Chris and Kent Wood.

The city was incorporated in 1906 with R.C. Drath elected mayor. Councilmen were J.R. Kirschner, Jim Malone, W.P. Slocum, G.H. Cox and George Hudiburgh.

In 1905, a fire destroyed eight frame business buildings with a loss estimated at \$75,000, but most were rebuilt. A smaller fire in 1909 produced losses amounting to \$7,500.

The business section of Herndon grew from one inhabitant and one business in 1879 to 40 businesses by 1915. However, the depression and the "Dust Bowl" days of the 1930s forced many stores to close and many people left the farm to find work. During that time, Herndon shrank to half its size.

The first school was built in 1887. It was razed in 1917 after a brick two-story building was constructed. Bert Pinneo, the first superintendent, organized the Herndon Rural High School District, with the first class graduating in 1919. Professor D.J. Chittenden served as superintendent from 1928 to 1958. Pete and Anna Lorentz were the first janitors on the school record, starting in 1930, and Mr. Chittenden nicknamed them, "Mr. Pete and Mrs. Pete."

A football team was started in 1920, coached by Mr. Pinneo. George Grafel coached in the 1930s and he suggested the name "Beaver" as the mascot, which continued until the school consolidated with Atwood in the fall of 2003.

Karl Wendelin, 93, still remembers when the town was a major trade center. He and Wayne Herzog, a lifetime friend and former neighbor, have corresponded for many years about memories of the town, which include bootleggers, Spud Bones' filling station, the newspa-

per, the old mill, badger fights, farming with horses and much more.

Mr. Wendelin said his grandparents, George and Susana (Herzog) Wendelin, came to America from Gols, Austria, and later home-steaded on the eastern edge of Herndon Township, which later became the Karl Wendelin family farm home.

Jan (Huffles) Sattler grew up in Herndon and said she enjoyed roller skating, riding bikes and playing ball with the Blankenburg, Grafel and Lippold girls. She started high school in the old school, and said she remembers how the kids loved sliding down the pipe holding the stairs to the fire escape.

Maxine (Nolan) Tongish, a 1939 graduate, said that she recently found her old skate key, which brought back memories of skating on the sidewalks of Herndon.

Ann Fleckenstein said Herndon will always be "home" to their children, adding that the town has a notorious history. Her husband Loren, son of Dr. A.P. Fleckenstein, operated Fleck's Gas Service for many years.

Don Grafel, former Herndon mayor and Herndon booster, said his memories include the old railroad roundhouse, where they also held poultry contests, as well as the outhouses, which students and faculty used at the old school.

Edie Pettera, 95, the oldest living resident in Herndon, added, "When I was 8 years old, Herndon was so big. We used to have the 'Big Circus' and the tents would be lined up on main street and hundreds of people would come. There were so many businesses, including a big meat market owned by Andy Unger, who made the best bologna. You

could break off a chunk and eat it.

"The train went through every day and the dray delivered things. It was so nice to see the wagons lined up in front of the stores with the horses tied to the posts. We also had a baker who made delicious bread and rolls. Those were the best years of my life!"

"Herndon will always have a special meaning to me, since it was at Herndon that I was born and raised," said Elaine Bryan of Oberlin. "I attended school from first grade through high school in the two-story school. I also enjoyed teaching there and especially the students.

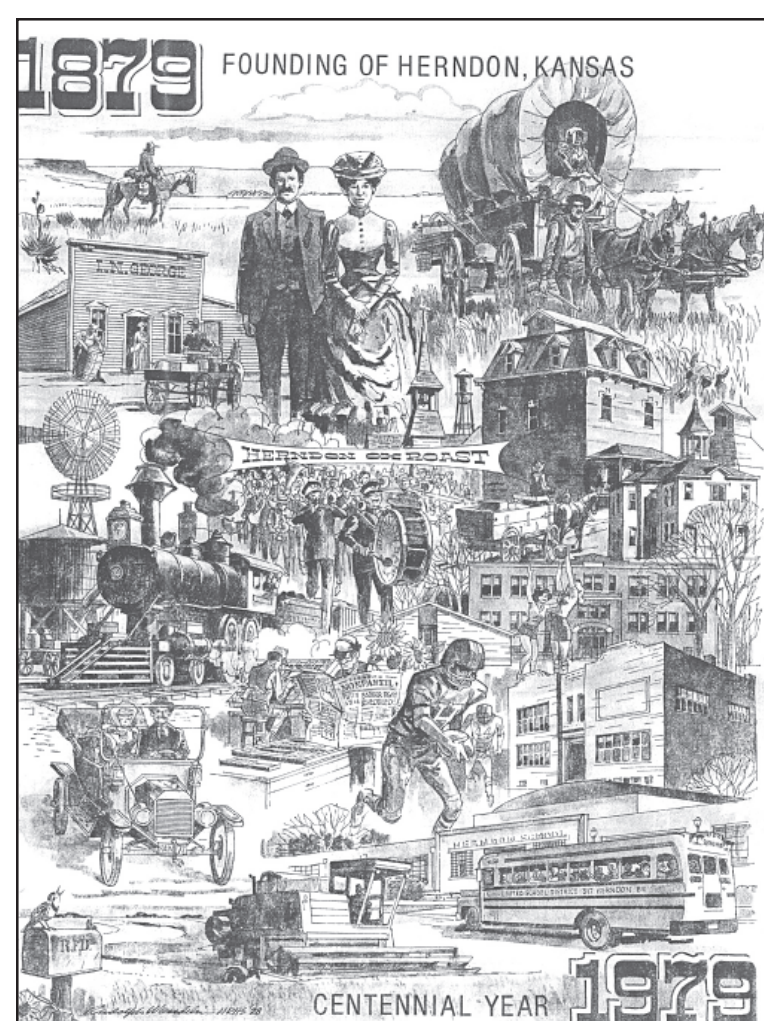
Lucille (Riepl) Barenberg said, "I remember best the Friday night dances with a real live orchestra. During intermission, we girls always hoped that our favorite boy friend had a little change in his pocket so we could enjoy a bottle of pop.

"We had two restaurants to choose from, Herman and Nellie's O.K. Lunch, or Jack Clyde's Restaurant and Pool Hall. During the last dance, the band always scrambled to dance with the girl they hoped to escort home. For the last dance, the band always played 'Good Night, Sweetheart'."

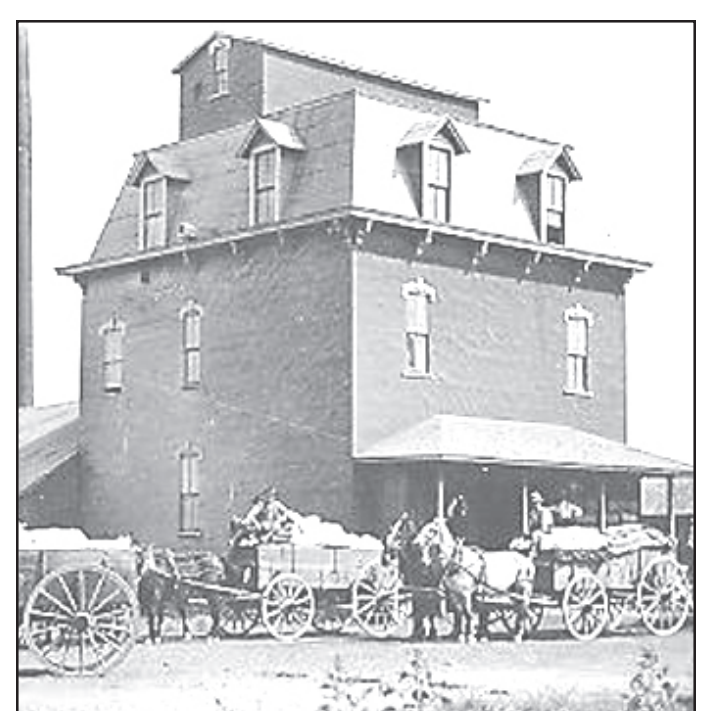
Even though the town is much smaller today, with help from area businesses, it was able to sponsor an ox roast, parade and dance to celebrate its 125th anniversary in 2004.

Every person who ever lived in the Herndon area could add more stories about the town, and some of those will be heard during the tour, which everyone is invited to join.

For details, call Ella Betts at 475-3557 or Mary Henzel at 475-3329. A story on Traer will be carried in *The Oberlin Herald* next week.



THIS MURAL OF HERNDON was done by the late Rudolph Wendelin, a graduate of Herndon High School. A longtime employee of the U.S. Forest Service, he also created Smokey Bear.



THE BEAVER VALLEY ROLLER MILL in Herndon was a popular place for many years as farmers brought their wheat to town to be ground into flour. The mill burned to the ground on April 4, 1987.