

The Iola Historical Society's Window

Quarterly Member and Activities Newsletter

Volume Four

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Summer 2011



Lee Nelson was a World War II pilot. He flew the B-17 "Flying Fortress" bomber on 31 combat missions over Germany and German

occupied France to strike enemy targets. On many of those missions, in my mind, Lee demonstrated real heroism by making the difficult decisions

and performing this dangerous duty with a determination to time after time bring his plane and crew safely back to their home airfield at Ridgewell Station 167 in England.

As is common with veterans of other wars, many World War II combatants for many years would not talk about their experiences and memories of the war, usually with good reason. However, as the decades passed and time provides perspective, many veterans have begun to tell their stories, preserving their role in history.

This allowed me to sit down and interview Lee and write the book "Iola's Humble Hero, Lee Nelson

The colorful B-17 represented on this cover is of a model that Lee carved in 1945 and is on display at our museum.

WWII B-17 Pilot." It all started when it was discovered that Lee had carved a wooden model of a B-17 Flying Fortress like the ones he flew during World War II. He carved it in 1945 after returning to the United States, while stationed at Kirkland Field at Albuquerque, N. M., where he was serving as a B-17 flight instructor.

When Lee was asked if he would loan the model of the B-17 to the Iola Historical Society so it could be put on display. He agreed. When he and his niece Martha Nelson-DeYoung brought the model of the B-17 and a few photographs to the Historical Society, I explained we would put the model and photos on display in a four-

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President's Corner

Summer is here and we are now open on Saturdays through September. We need docents to show the visitors around. There is always something to be done during the slow times, such as dusting and picking up in the buildings. There are always things that need to be done outside, such as weeding and cleaning windows.

On Monday, June 20, the Iola Old Car Show scrubbed the floor in our 222 building for the Strawberry Fest and Appraisal Fair.

On Wednesday, July 20, we will need help to set up tables and chairs for the Wisconsin Historical Society Central Regional meeting which will be hosted in that building as well.

On Saturday, July 23, the Iola Historical Society will be hosting the Central Regional Meeting of the Wisconsin Historical Society in our 222 building. The day's agenda begins at 9:00 am and features a workshop on creating quality exhibits on a small budget and a roundtable discussion of current projects and issues in the Central Region. Updates from the Wisconsin Council for Local History and a presentation on IHS projects will also be presented.

We will also need help at the registration table during the morning on that Saturday, along with help setting up and serving coffee and sweet rolls. We are expecting an attendance of between 40 to 60 persons.

HUMBLE HERO *Continued from page 1*

foot display cabinet where they could be safely viewed by the public.

Almost as an afterthought, Lee replied; "I'll bring my medals down." I was very surprised to hear about them, as he had never mentioned them to me before. In fact his niece had also not known that he had medals received from World War II. Since that day the Iola Historical Society has received many other items from Lee, including his leather bomber jacket, many photographs and other military memorabilia from his service time.

Shortly after the display had been set up, Chet Krause stopped in at the Historical Society to look at the B-17 model that Lee had carved. When Chet saw the medals, he was also surprised and stated; "We need to do something for Lee, we should write a book about him." And, as they say, the rest is history. That's how this book became a reality. Thank you, Chet.

In the ensuing months Lee shared with me many of his experiences as a B-17 co-pilot, lead pilot and formation pilot during World War II. This

story is written to preserve Lee's history and to honor him and all military veterans who have stepped into Harm's way.

The following is an excerpt from the book: Sunday, May 28, 1944, was one of Lee's toughest missions to date. While locked in the two-minute Initial Point during a bombing raid on the oil refinery at Frankfurt, Germany, intense flak was encountered and the plane was hit by flak. After returning from the mission, the plane "looked like it had been attacked by a can opener," according to Lee. There were more than 270 flak holes in the plane. Shrapnel makes a small hole going in but when it comes out it shreds and bends back the metal causing the can-opener like effect. One large piece of shrapnel hit on the top of the wing, putting a large hole in the wing and into the gas tank. The hole was large enough to put your head into it. With the



On July 23, 1944, 1st Lieutenant Lee Nelson was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. It was presented to him on July 31. The original medal is on display at the Iola Historical Society.

shrapnel also being hot from the explosive, it was lucky that the gas didn't explode and take down the B-17 and crew.

On May 4, 2011 a book presentation was held at the Iola Historical Society in honor of Lee. Invited guests included a dozen local WWII Veterans, family members and friends, with 31 individuals in attendance. Saturday, June 4, 2011 a book signing took place at the Iola Historical Society with over 300 people in attendance purchasing books and visiting with Lee.

Lee's book can be purchased at the Iola Historical Society for a donation of \$20.00. There is a \$5.00 shipping and handling fee if mailed.

The Iola Historical Society 210 Depot Street • P.O. Box 412 • Iola, WI 54945

Officers:

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Area Civil War Veterans

This "Area Civil War Veterans" is part two of a presentation recognizing and honoring Civil War Veterans buried in the Iola and surrounding cemeteries. In this issue we are looking at information taken from the Hitterdahl Cemetery, Northland Cemetery, South New Hope Cemetery and the North New Hope Cemetery. In next issue we will highlight the Scandinavia Lutheran Cemetery.

At the Hitterdahl Cemetery there are eleven veterans that served in the Civil War. They are Peder Gregersen – born February 22, 1821 and died on November 20, 1896. An enlistment list that shows a Peter Gregorson who entered the service on October 29, 1864 with the 44th Regiment Infantry, Company C and was discharged on August 16, 1865. It is not known if this is the same person or not.

Jacob C. Thoe (Toe) entered the army and served with 44th Wisconsin Infantry, Company C and died on June 22, 1913, with no other information available.

Ole K. Toebaas was born in 1831 and joined the 44th Wisconsin Volunteer and died on April 1, 1865. Others that served were:

Knud Knudson – born November 21, 1929, died October 3, 1905; Ole Larson – born September 26, 1826, died January 20, 1901; Jens Paulson – born August 31, 1835, died March 24, 1911; Aslak Sorenson – born December 2, 1835, died May 14, 1901; Christian Thompson – born in 1826, died April 18, 1908; Svennung Thompson – born July 6, 1824, died September 30, 1910, and Halvor K. Tubaas – born April 11, 1840, died on January 30, 1917.

North of Iola is the Northland Cemetery with two Civil War Veterans, Hans Myhre who was born on March 17, 1840, and passed away on October 29, 1922. The other person is Elsie Wogsland, born on June 29, 1844

and died in 1924, who was married to Christian W. Wogsland. It is not known for sure if she was in the military or if it may have been her husband Christian.

West of Iola is the South New Hope Cemetery where two Civil War Veterans are buried; Ole Paulson – born November 10, 1825, died December 10, 1893; Torger P. Wesley – born in 1835 and died in 1905. No other information is known about either individual at this time.

A short distance from the South New Hope Cemetery is the

Halvor H. (Hansen) Brua – born in 1837, died April 24, 1903; Peder H. Budsberg – no birth date available, died May 4, 1921; Per P. (Peter Peterson) Daaka – born in 1828, died August 31, 1901; Mathias Ellingson – born June 28, 1838, died June 9, 1900; Lars Halverson Engum – born 1834, died June 8, 1902; Johanes Gunderson – born November 1, 1825, died February 8, 1880; Simon Iverson – born 1824, died July 28, 1908; Ole Fjelbo Jacobson, Peter Jenson and Even Johnson are also listed but no dates are indicated.



\$20.00 Confederate banknote dated February 17th, 1864, on display at the Iola Historical Society. (Donated by Dick Olson of Iola.)

North New Hope Cemetery where 26 Civil War Veterans are laid to rest.

Jesse Fox was born on March 10, 1838, enlisted on November 1, 1864, with the 44th Regiment Infantry, Company C, and was mustered out on August 28, 1865. He lived to the age of 97 years, 9 months and 16 days, passing away on December 26, 1943.

No information is known regarding the following individuals except for their dates of birth and death. Knut Gunderson Bergan – born in 1829, died November 22, 1912; Simon Torgerson Blihovde – no date of birth noted, died in 1898; Nels O. Brathovde – born February 24, 1833, died August 16, 1881;

Torben Larson – born in 1824, died February 2, 1908; Ole Martinuson – born 1835, died November 26, 1923; Lars Nelson Nysoen – no date born, died November 9, 1886; Peder T. Pederson – born July 22, 1821, died July 15, 1887; Jens Peterson – born 1826, died 1876; Ole Reierson – born 1821, died January 13, 1899; Peder E. Reistad – born 1822, died December 3, 1903; Martin Rustad – born October 26, 1839, died December 30, 1933, died December 30, 1933; John O. Wrolstad – born 1840, died December 13, 1907; Jorgen O. Wrolstad – born 1812 and died in 1899.

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The 28th Annual Strawberry Fest and Appraisal Fair drew large attendance.

An estimated 300 to 400 people were in attendance at the event that was held on Sunday, June 26 at the Iola Historical Society Complex. Some of the people attending came from as far away as Milwaukee, Chicago, and from elsewhere throughout Wisconsin.

Events Schedule

Saturday, July 9, 16, 23, 30

Open house at IHS Museum and Historical Village
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Wednesday, July 13, 20, 27

8:30 am Work Day
Working on depot restoration
General Clean Up of Building and Grounds

Monday, July 25

6:00 pm IHS Board Meeting
6:30 pm IHS General Meeting

Wednesday, Aug. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

8:30 am Work Day
Working on depot restoration
General Clean Up of Building and Grounds

Saturday, August 6, 13, 20, 27

Open house at IHS Museum and Historical Village
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Monday, August 29

6:00 pm IHS Board Meeting
6:30 pm IHS General Meeting

Saturday, September 3, 10, 17, 24

Open house at IHS Museum and Historical Village
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

CIVIL WAR VETERANS

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The Iola Historical Society is seeking more detailed backgrounds on these men and women and other information about the Civil War participation of area residents.

Wednesday, Sept. 7, 14, 21, 28

8:30 am Work Day
Working on depot restoration
General Clean Up of Building and Grounds

Friday, September 23 & 24

2011 Annual Local History and Historic Preservation Conference
Holiday Inn Convention Center
Stevens Point, WI

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April • May • June

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