

TONGANOXIE COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2nd QUARTER NEWSLETTER, June 2019



THE COLLAPSE OF THE LOWER POOL HALL JULY 3, 1957

Recently I began to use my Facebook Account. I really don't fully understand how it works. I was able to place on my Facebook account several youtube movies that were all part of the documentary, *The Traditional Tales of Tonganoxie*. One of those movie clips was about the collapse of the Lower Pool Hall in July of 1957. This movie clip generated quite number of responses. Below are four of those responses.

from: Jeanne Doege Mills

Yes, I do remember the day the buildings in Tonganoxie, Kansas, fell in 1957. I was about fourteen years old and had a babysitting job about a block from the Ratliff Drug Store. So, on this day the children I were outside in their yard, and we heard all the unusual sounds and traffic. I do believe someone stopped by on the street and told me some of the buildings on 4th street had fallen down. The children's mother called and my mother called, both to check on us. I had an uncle, Bob Pulley, who was a barber in one of the shops (Albert Conley's barbershop) that fell in. My mother assured me that he was okay and had gotten out as the floor went down behind him. The children and I, actually, watched the activity of people and cars going by to downtown from their porch. I remember when I got off work, I went to the site and was so surprised to see the destruction. This was a big event in Tonganoxie, Kansas.

from: Pattie Druley West

Hi Perry Lee, this is my recollection of the buildings collapsing. I was at the pool when my friends and I heard the commotion and sirens. Judy Baker and I got out of the pool and went downtown. We saw lots of debris and smoke or dust still in the air. We stood across the street to watch the recovery efforts. We stood where Skeet Real Estate is presently. I think it might have been Buds Bakery then.

I remember seeing WDAF newsman Randal Jessee there reporting it. I thought he was quite a celebrity.

Judy and I were twelve that summer. (ED. Note: I believe this Judy Baker was George Baker's daughter)

from: Jeannie Henson

Thanks for sharing. I remember this well. My mother was working for Opal at that time but was not at work when it fell in.

from Cleta Henak

The 1957 cave in at Al Hicks pool hall really scared me. I came out of J.C. Laming's Ford Dealership and across the street I saw either an explosion or a cave-in. My first thought was to call the Kansas City Star. It really scared me and I remember it today. Three people were killed in this accident. I will never forget it.

I have discussed this pool hall's demise several years ago and it accounts for about 12 minutes of the documentary, *The Traditional Tales of Tonganoxie*.

Although the official cause of this disaster was a collapse of a failed foundation, there are still a few people who believe it was an explosion. An explosion was initially stated because of the cleaning building being involved. However, it soon was shown that the west wall of the pool hall fell into the barbershop and the cleaning building. This resulted in the second floor falling. This is where Mrs. Hicks lived. The weight of the second floor caused the first floor to fall into the basement. This brought the west wall of Opal's Cafe to fall into the mess.

It was said that the building had been weakened previously by the collapse of the foundation wall. Virtually there were no underpinnings left for the entire north-south wall

Help came from all over the region. Okie Parmer, a Leavenworth County Sheriff, who was from Tonganoxie, was the first officer on the scene. Also involved were the Kansas Hwy Patrol. People from the Douglas County, the Leavenworth County and the Bonner Springs police departments were on the scene. Thirteen Tonganoxie Volunteer Firemen were also at the scene. Plus there were many local people helping remove debris and recover bodies.

Bob Pulley heard the walls of the barbershop began to crumble. The people in the barbershop began to quickly move to get out of the building. They were lucky because the walls provided a wedge where they could get out through the front door of the building.

Three people died in this accident. Claude Reynolds age 76 from McLouth, Charles Farrell age 25 from McLouth and George Stephenson, a cattle trader from Tonganoxie were all killed. The victims were still alive when they were discovered, but by the time rescuers could uncover them, they were dead. They were located in the middle of the basement and covered by twelve feet of debris. One of the individual's family received



\$10,000 dollars. Dr. Parker went into the basement of the collapsed building and gave first aid, including injections of local anesthetics to relieve pain.

Tom McNulty, a farmer living southwest of Tonganoxie was standing in the door of a real estate office which was 40 feet from the pool hall. He describes an awful roar with large rocks falling into the street.

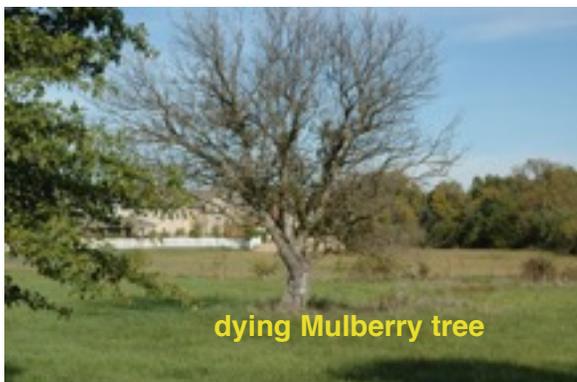
Among our recent visitors was Sharon Phenicie with her daughter and friend. She brought us more information about the First State Bank. Sharon 's grandfather is one of the Phenicie brothers who held the contract for making ties for the railroad and are responsible for the early growth of the Reno area.

Marie Brockhoff has joined the ranks of Wednesday volunteers and is a welcome addition.

The Fairchild Spring Project

— — Joy Lominska

In April, the historical society received a Humanities Kansas grant to begin developing an exhibit, both indoor and outdoor, about the historic spring to the south of the museum. Newspapers document the use of the spring by stage coaches for watering their teams of horses and by passing wagons carrying early settlers. The spring was instrumental in the success of the Fairchild dairy farm, providing water for cattle and cooling for milk in the time before refrigeration.



We have begun work on this project. In May, we had the dying Mulberry tree that grew out of the stones around the spring cut down. Little did we know that continuous rains after that would make it almost impossible to remove brush and logs left from the tree. We have removed poison ivy, which will need to be repeated, sprinkled rock salt on the tree stump and covered it with plastic (to keep the stump from resprouting), and dragged brush and logs away from the pool below the old spring. Now we just need a dry week so we can drive a truck in to haul off the

brush and logs.

To our surprise and delight, we found that the spring is still flowing! There may be water coming up through the layers of debris in the old pool, but it is difficult to tell. However, just to the east of the original site, the water is definitely flowing, making a small slough with different grasses than the rest of the field. In the coming months, we hope to determine the location of the spring

house that was used for cooling milk, and perhaps confirm its building material (which was probably stone).

If you know of anyone who has heard stories of the spring or the spring house, please let us know! We are eager to learn **more**.

ED. Note: Joy Lominska was responsible for TCHS writing this grant.



Marie Brockhoff

The title of my project is:

“Reno: The Rise and Fall of a Tiny Kansas Town”.

Here is a synopsis:

In April of 2019, Marie Brockhoff won the senior individual performance category in the Kansas History Day competition. She will advance to the national contest in June. This will be held in College Park, Maryland

Her performance tells the surprisingly compelling story of Reno through the lives of two women, Georgina Phenicie and her daughter, Ruth. In the late 1880s, 400 freed slaves came to the community. Reno was fully integrated. Back then, Reno was bigger than Tonganoxie, with all kinds of businesses. But the black population dwindled to just 47 by the 1920s, a decline coinciding with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Her performance reveals all that history and explores why it matters now.

She also received two special prizes: The Native Sons and Daughters of the Greater Kansas City Area award and the Kansas Council for History Education senior award.

She will be advancing to the National History Day competition this June!

TCHS has recently learned that Marie placed second in her division at the national contest in College Park, Md.. There were many people taking part in this competition so the contestants were divided into groups. Each group contained 8 people. Marie won second in her division, but the winner over the entire program was the first place winner in Marie’s group. Congratulations to Marie on a very successful National History Day competition.

Marie will present her program to TCHS in July. On July 23rd, she will be first on the program that is to be a “Show and Tell” program.

First some good news!

Joy Lominska has met twice with Carol Dee Knox Smith in the past few weeks – Carol brought her son and grandson to the museum last weekend. Carol brought some new photographs for



our collection...one is a charming photo of Frank and Mattie Fairchild in their Victorian living room. And she donated two lovely portraits of Mattie and Frank. She has donated some additional pictures and a series of letters that Bessie Knox wrote during the 1930s and 1940s.

She also gave us a \$100 donation. Carol has recently moved.

We received a \$20 memorial gift in honor of Ernie Walker, Jr., whose family had his celebration of life at the barn few weeks ago.

The Downtown Drugstore gave TCHS a check for \$217 for sales of DVDs. That was just for January and February sales. Sarah has sold more than \$500 worth of DVDs since last October.

For those who are interested, The Downtown Drugstore has two different DVD's for sale. ***The Traditional Tales of Tonganoxie*** and ***Ghost Towns around Tonganoxie***.

Colton Timms, who works at the library and has been a good friend to TCHS, and Bethany Daye got married at the historical site on a Friday evening in late May. Congratulations and best wishes to both of them.

New Members ——— Kris Roberts

Members are so important to us. Your presence at Fourth Tuesdays or as a volunteer or just on our membership rolls makes us a stronger organization. We want to welcome members who have joined in the past six months: Cecil Burnett, Jerry Elkins, Carol Bloom, Bob Bender, Evonne Cooper, Jim & Mary Jane Grinter, Becky & Ed Mullins, Cindy Fortney, and Anne Brockhoff.

Thank you and welcome! (If we left you off the list, please contact us to correct our error.)

Barn Block Workshop

On March 30, ten participants created 10 barn blocks to take home with them. From 9-2, the hay barn was full of paint and concentration



Brenda Shaw & Mackenzie Calovich



Amber and Michael Smith

and laughter and creativity. The next workshop will be in the fall - exact date to be determined.

Labeling



Denise Rodgers

Members met on April 11 in the barn to put mailing address labels on union newsletters. This fund raising event is organized by Denise Rodgers and always involves treats and coffee.

Over the many years that Denise has organized this event, she has quietly provided TCHS a VERY significant amount of operating money.

Volunteers in Action

It takes a crew of many to keep the museum and historical site open and in good repair. Every Wednesday morning from 9 am to noon, a group of volunteers converge on the museum.

Lawn care is a high priority during the summer - our grounds are mowed and kept clean by volunteers. Much of the building maintenance is done by our volunteers and preparation of exhibits is also done by volunteers.

We want to extend a special thanks to Vic McEachron, who built a custom ramp for the museum entry door. The ramp works beautifully and we have been using it.

Stop by the museum on a Tuesday (9-4) or Wednesday (9-noon) and check things out. Coffee on Wednesdays is at 10:00 am - we would love to see you.

Sunday Docents

The museum has been open on Sunday afternoons from 1-4 since it opened in 2003. It has been traditional for members to docent the museum on Sunday afternoons. If you are interested, **let Kris Roberts know**. And, if you are not sure about what a docent does, watch for an upcoming class this fall, "Docenting 101."

And many thanks to those members who do volunteer on Sundays - Tony Johnson, Jean & Lloyd Pearson, Theresa & Mike Megee, Kathy & Ray Stockman, Kris Roberts and others.



Memorial Day Breakfast



Loren Feldkamp



For the third year,

TCHS has commemorated Memorial Day with a salute and a breakfast. This year, the raising of the flag and reveille by the Boy Scout Troop #357 was followed by a cannon salute by the 3rd Kansas Light Artillery Battery B and a flag ceremony by the VFW Post #9271 and American Legion Post #41. The ceremonies were very fine.

Loren Feldkamp and eleven Civil War re-enactors stayed for breakfast and then gave demonstrations on how the cannon was fired, and the role that each man in the unit played.

Many thanks to Dennis Bixby for his third year of getting up in the wee small hours of the morning to make biscuits and gravy. Many thanks to 25 TCHS volunteers who prepared and served food and

set up and cleaned up. The breakfast was lots of fun.

2019 Leavenworth County Grant

Seven museums in Leavenworth County received funding from Leavenworth County in early June. These funds will be used for a variety of projects. TCHS is very pleased to have received funding for a two-part project. The first part will complete the addition of rock to our driveway (initial grading and two loads of rock were added in March) and add gravel to our parking area.

The second part of our project will add a drive and parking area for the “Spring at the Fairchild Farm.” In addition, we will be adding some trees to lend more shade and a park-like atmosphere. (*see the Fairchild Spring Project above.*)

Many thanks to the Leavenworth County Commissioners for supporting organizations such as ours that believe in the importance of preserving history and sharing it with the public.

2018 Pete & Margaret Leighty Grant

TCHS was awarded funds from the Pete & Margaret Leighty grant last fall. These funds are being used to update light fixtures in firehouse, hay barn, and museum from fluorescent to LED. The firehouse is complete; the museum is 90% complete; and we will be working the hay barn next.

TCHS is very grateful for the assistance and support that is afforded to our society and the other very deserving organizations in the Tonganoxie area by the trust left by Pete and Margaret Leighty.

Upcoming TCHS Events

July 23 - Fourth Tuesday in July! 7:00 pm at the Historical Site. Since there is no conflict this week with the County Fair, we are having the **Show’n’Tell program**, which was postponed due to weather in May.

Marie Brockhoff will present her program. “**Reno: The Rise and Fall of a Tiny Kansas Town**”, to TCHS on July 23rd. She will be first on the program that is to be a “Show and Tell” program.

July 25 - BookTALK at 6:00 pm at the Public Library. “**Book TALK**” - a book discussion series made possible by Humanities Kansas and co-sponsored locally by the Tonganoxie Public Library and the Tonganoxie Historical Society.

“**A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains**” by Isabella L. Bird is the third and final book in the series that started in March. In 1873 Isabella Bird made an unlikely journey alone on horseback through the Rockies of Colorado, climbing Long's Peak, staying in mountain cabins, and observing the tumultuous world of the mining camps. Check the book out at the public library and join us in the Tonganoxie Public Library for a discussion led by Sandra Wiechert.

Aug 27 - Fourth Tuesday program TBD.

Labor Day weekend - Sunflower Stroll. The Tonganoxie Business Association sponsors this annual event. We will open the museum all three days and be active in the Sunflower Growing competition, open to youth up to age 14

Sept 24 - Fourth Tuesday program TBD.

Upcoming events in the area -

July 20 & July 21 - **Second Annual Living River Festival** in Lawrence at the Lawrence Marriott Springhill Suites on July 20, 11am-4pm & July 21, 1pm-4pm. The festival will include river art & stories, net weaving, native American history, wildlife & fish life, canoeing & paddling. Recommended by Barbara Higgins-Dover, who shared the history of the River Kings with us in April.

Aug 24 - **Suffrage Tea**, 12:00-3:00 pm at June's Northland, 614 Pottawatomie, Leavenworth. A Centennial celebration of the passage of the 19th Amendment. Guest speaker Sarah Bell, PhD. Benefits the Leavenworth County Historical Society. (www.leavenworthhistory.org)

Nerd Night -

Once a month, the Tonganoxie Public Library sponsors Nerd Night. Nerd Night is an opportunity to come out to the Myers Hotel and listen to three local citizens talk about a passion they have. We went to Nerd Night on April 20. Kris Roberts talked about Frances Perkins, FDR and Social Security.

We also watched Marie Brockhoff give the presentation that won her the opportunity to go to Washington DC this month to compete in National History Day. Marie's presentation on the history of Reno is well worth watching - **so be sure to attend the Show'n'Tell Fourth Tuesday program on July 23 - Marie will start off the program for us.**

"When Kings Reigned"

Presented by Barbara Higgins-Dover.

The documentary "When Kings Reigned" produced in Lawrence, Kansas, was shown.

Barbara Higgins-Dover, the producer, spoke about the making of the movie and gave us more insight into the history of the Kaw River and some of the men who made their living and their homes on the river. These men had more resources for income than just fish. Many sold Booze.

"Orphan Trains"

Leanne Chapman is active in the Jefferson County Historical Society. She spoke about orphan trains and poor houses and shared some of her experiences with Jefferson Town in Oskaloosa. This was a good opportunity to learn more about the history just next door in Jefferson County.

The "Orphan Trains" and "When Kings Reigned" were 4th Tuesday programs which were given at the site during the second quarter.

These two programs were given early in the second quarter of this year

JOHN CASS LENAHAN & WWII



John Lenahan was born on Jan. 13, 1923. He graduated from Tonganoxie Rural High School and the next day he went to Ft. Leavenworth. He had been drafted into the United States Army Air Force. He was at Ft. Leavenworth a very short time. He was then sent to Lincoln, Neb. He had his basic training at Lincoln. He disliked basic training because he felt they just wanted to break a person down. He felt, "They just didn't give a damn!!" Here he took an IQ test which resulted in some technical training down the line. He wanted this training. Sgt. Flynn was an Irishman too and seemed to like him. He put John on "Right Guard" during this basic training. While marching John said they sang songs. Some started out pretty good, but soon became a little rank.

His next duty was at Laurie Field in Denver, Colo. Here he learned armament. How to load bombs and make them so they would explode. He also learned how to be a gunner on the plane. These guns were 20 caliber and 50 caliber.

Salt Lake City was his next training base. It was mountain training and similar to basic training. From here he went to

the east coast to Patrick Henry base in Virginia. Soon they were loaded on an old Liberty Ship and sent to Europe. Many of the boys were sea sick, but he wasn't. The trip took about 2 weeks due to the ship zig zagging (zig zagging was something done to avoid enemy ships especially submarines.). They passed by Gibraltar, on to Morocco, and wound up in Algeria. John believed they were going to support the troops in the boot of Italy.

Some German POWs were involved in this trip. They were picked up at Lion Mtn. in Algeria. The guarding of these prisoners was very slack because the POW's weren't leaving the ship. They liked being out of the war. The American troops interacted with the German POWs. The Germans made jewelry out of coin silver and bartered this for candy and cigarettes.

At one point the troops were loaded on to box cars referred to as 40 by 8 (each car would hold 40 soldiers or 8 mules/horses). John said that the smell in these cars was one of horses and their waste. The troops had to clean the cars. The train was ca. 1/2 mile long and it stopped 2x per day so the soldiers could eat. They generally ate "Sea Rations" which came in 10 pound cans. He was upset and could see no reason to issue mattress covers when there were no mattresses to cover. He thought they were issued because they were GI issue.. The Arabs bought them if they could find one for sale. They were worth \$20-\$50 to the Arabs who just poked a hole in the center of the cover and poked their heads through it.

John ultimately ended up on the island of Corsica and became a member of the 57th bomb group. On his first mission as a gunner on the airplane he was injured by flak. Evidently, this was a serious injury because he was in the hospital for a week. His flying missions were over. John liked flying. The crew on the planes were 6-7, but many times they flew without a complete crew.

During his free time cards were played. Poker was the standard game and John said he did make some money playing poker.*

Because he “could read and write”, he was sent to the Headquarters Section where he became the chief clerk in the ordinance section. His job was to make sure the bombs and ammunitions were effectively managed. He saw that these critical items were properly ordered and replaced. He had to deal with various supply outfits in many different locations.

John became an aide to a Col. Robertson, who was an old pilot. John travelled with him. John was charged with taking good notes so the Colonel could refer to these notes. The Colonel needed some accurate reminders and John gave this to him. John said he was a real nice guy.

Generally the air bases were on flat areas near the coast so the planes could take off over the Mediterranean Sea. This allowed the planes with their heavy bomb load more time to reach the altitude required to “make it over” the mountains.

When the war was over there was lots of celebrating on the base. Quite a bit of alcohol was consumed by some of the men. The trip home started at Naples when they loaded on another old Liberty Ship which had been an old hospital ship. The trip home was almost the reverse of the trip over, except he was discharged from Lincoln, Neb. and paid at Ft. Leavenworth. John said that the Italians liked the Americans, probably because of cigarettes and chocolates, but he also believed they didn’t trust the Americans.

Letter from Helen Schilling to classmate Edwin Willert

Another recent addition for our military section was found in a donation of memorabilia from Helen Schilling who many remember as a reporter for the Tonganoxie Mirror and a member of our historical society. **There was an unopened letter from Edwin Willert , a classmate of Helen’s. The letter was unopened and returned with black censor marks stating that the addressee was a prisoner of war.** Edwin was captured by the Germans during the Battle of Tunisia in Africa. Turns out towards the end of the war, he was actually killed by a U. S. Army Air Corp bombing raid as he served in a prison hospital in Germany.

Edwin Willert was also a classmate of Fred Leimkuhler in Tonganoxie High School.

The letter told about some of the people who worked at Ratliff’s drug store. Helen was always good in her letters in telling about the people of Tonganoxie. She also told about the weather. Edwin had worked at Ratliff’s before entering the army. It was believed that Edwin wanted to be a pharmacist or a physician. He was in the medical corp as an enlisted person.

BACK HOME IN TONGANOXIE

This bugle belonged to Stephen G. Kramer who was Harry S. Truman’s bugler during WWI. It had temporarily been on loan to the Truman Museum in Independence, Mo, but when the loan time expired the family decided it and other material should be in our



museum. The bugle with the extra mouthpiece which Stephen describes as having purchased in Paris, France was donated by Ron Babcock on behalf of the Babcock and Kramer families. Also with this donation is an oversized photo of Camp Doniphan where the 129th Division took basic training. This camp covered 2,000 acres and had 1267 buildings which were mainly tents. Included in the group is a photo of an appreciation banquet in Washington, D.C. hosted by Truman with both Truman and Stephen included.

This donation along with the generous donation of WWI and WWII uniforms belonging to Bill Stephenson, Sr. and Bill Stephenson, Jr. along with their medals, silver stars, etc. have prompted the museum staff to reorganize our military display. We plan to have the exhibit flow chronologically from the civil war to recent battles. Our staff plans to stage a celebration when this is completed.

2019 Distinguished Service Awards

Dan Carr

When Dan and Caryle moved to Leavenworth County in 2001, they immersed themselves in their new community. This included volunteering at museums in both

Leavenworth and Tonganoxie. TCHS has been a beneficiary of their generosity and good works, which included being the docents every year on Mother's Day, so that the other volunteers could spend that day with their children.

Dan was a part of the team that restored the 1936 fire pumper truck. He continues to be a regular Wednesday morning volunteer - he is still mowing. **Dan has been part of the team here for many years and we can count on him for his knowledge of how to approach and tackle the maintenance issues that come up in our buildings. Our**



gift shop with antique apple boxes and milk cans is a testament to Dan's creativity.

Dan is a source of wisdom and he willingly shares his experiences. We miss Caryle and were lucky to have known her. And we count ourselves lucky to still have Dan in our midst.

Jean Pearson

Jean brought her love of quilting to the historical society as early as 2005, when she organized Vintage Quilt Shows in the church as part of Tonganoxie Days. Since then, she has continued to organize quilt shows, but she also reached out to start something new and different – barn quilts. Jean's contacts in the quilt world has benefitted our



historical society by bringing in people who are interested in quilts and barns. Jean's efforts broaden the base of people we are able to reach out to.

In 2013, Jean started holding Barn Block workshops at TCHS. It was her idea to create a Quilt Trail and make TCHS its home. Jean's contacts in central Kansas have stitched TCHS and the Glacial Hills Quilt Trail into the Kansas and even the national network. The classes give participants a glimpse into our museum and chance to share part of our heritage.

Jean is always willing to share her talents and she volunteers regularly to help out with special events. **She is now serving her second three-year term as a board member. Her practical and down-to-earth perspective is well suited to this position and we appreciate her presence and her quiet, dependable counsel.**

Denise Rodgers

Denise served for ten years as Secretary for TCHS between 2000 and 2009. And during that time, she created a fundraising activity for TCHS.

For over fifteen years, members have gathered up to six times a year to label union newsletters. We meet at the barn of a morning and label newsletters, while we visit and drink coffee. **This has been one of the highest dollar and least impact fundraisers we do, yielding over \$2,000 per year.** The task has gotten progressively easier for our members over the years, due to additional mechanization of the task and the untiring work of Denise Rodgers, for whom the task has not gotten easier. Denise picks up the newsletters, prints the address labels, and delivers the boxes of newsletters to us and then to the post office.

Denise has found ways to contribute to the historical society and she has done so, generously and untiringly, for many years. We are indebted to her.

2019 Certificate of Appreciation

Joy Lominska

Joy came to the museum as a volunteer in late 2017. We quickly realized that her background as a teacher and her enthusiasm for history was a great match to our needs. She presented a program in early 2018 on the book she researched and wrote about her home in Jefferson County and she was happy to tackle any project that the museum director asked her to work on.

Joy dove into researching and renovating the Dairy exhibit in the museum. That project piqued her curiosity and she turned her focus to the abandoned spring just south of the barn. Convinced that the spring held the potential to be an educational and intriguing exhibit, she pursued a grant from Humanities Kansas to research the spring with the help of a professional historian and geologist. Humanities Kansas thought enough of Joy's submittal that they funded the work to create an outdoor exhibit at the spring. We are very lucky to have Joy as a dedicated volunteer.

A Distinguished Service Award is given once to those people who have been members for at least 6 or more years in a position of significant responsibility and has filled that role in an exemplary manner. This certificate is generated by the Board of Directors and the Chairman of the Board signs the award. This award is given one time.

A certificate of Appreciation is given for a special performance, task, presentation or gift. They are given to program presenters at the monthly meetings. It may be given for commendable service as an officer, director or other individual with significant responsibility of less than six years. This certificate is signed by the President. It can be given more than once.

Tornado results in the Linwood area. Linwood missed this tornado by a block. The only good thing about this tornado was the Union Pacific RR tracks are so you might see the train when you are approaching the tracks. All the brush was removed. The tornado was almost one mile wide here.

