

# Rolfe Parade and Opening of RHS Time Capsules

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**I**t was a rainy, gray morning when I arrived on Garfield Avenue (aka Main Street) at 9:45 am on July 8, 2006. I was there to watch the Greater Rolfe Days parade and prepare to videotape the opening of two time capsules from the Rolfe school property following the parade.

Because of the inclement weather, there was some doubt whether the two parades—a kid's parade and the main parade—would be held. However, after a short delay, both were carried off as though there had been no problem, whatsoever.

The main parade was a long, festive event with the usual suspects, who seem to take pleasure in the parade, year after year. My favorite part of the parade is the line up of Farmall and John Deere tractors. I also love seeing horses in a parade, whether ones with riders or the team of Percherons that pulled the wagon that escorted parade marshal, Florence MacVey Faux MacVey (RHS 1943). It was also neat to see my father Deane Gunderson (RHS 1935) riding on one of the two Lion's Club floats. Prior to leaving home that morning, Deane pointed out that his gold trousers and red sweater were the traditional Rolfe school colors and that his red and white striped shirt was the Pocahontas colors.

What I like least in any parade—and the Rolfe parade was no exception—is children who dash about, in what appears to be a greedy manner, chasing after candy thrown into the street by the various parade participants. A person would think that in this day and age of programs such as Lighten Up Iowa, school districts that are removing soft drinks from vending machines, public awareness of the problems of too much sugar intake, and the near epidemic nature of obesity—that there would be a moratorium on the airborne distribution of candy at parades. Perhaps some clever parade coordinator could think up an "I spy" kind of game that would capture the attention of youth during a parade. But then again, the attention of children could be on the wonderful appearance of various floats, vehicles, and characters and on the enthusiasm, playfulness, and community spirit exhibited by the participants. Perhaps at the end of a parade, there could be give-away booths where youth could get non-caloric, non-sugar items such as a pencil, decal, balloon, or other treasures. But then again, what do I know about modern day youth and the dynamics of running a parade to suit a wide range of ages?

When I was on the committee to plan the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration for Gilbert, there was a bit of discussion about the problem of candy in parades. But the overwhelming sense of the planners was that there was no way to control that kind of behavior. It would be a real downer, I suppose, to have candy police at a parade. However, in my humble opinion, some creative thought should be given to the whole matter of children dashing after candy. Their activity ruins

the aesthetics of a parade, especially for a photographer. It's also maddening to see children appear to be so greedy. Besides, candy scraped up off a street, especially after the horse have marched by, cannot be all that healthy. And the consumption of all that cheap candy cannot be good for anyone. And besides, there was plenty of other good food available on the Greater Rolfe Days weekend.

In spite of the light rain showers during the parade, the weather was generally good—neither too hot nor too cold—for the Saturday events.

After the parade, people started milling into the community center for the opening of the two time capsules that had been retrieved from the Rolfe school property. At one point, there were close to 100 visitors in attendance. There were many generations of people, including several children, sitting at tables with their bags of candy from the parade, sorting out or eating the treasures that they had gotten.

Jeff Kerns (RHS 1978) was the emcee. Board members John Behrendsen (RHS 1980), Dan Duitscher (RHS 1984), and Darwin Eaton along with board president Ray Seeheusen and Superintendent Joe Kramer also presided over the opening of the boxes. As Jeff said when I talked to him in a phone call this week, "Rolfe was well represented."

The board had arranged for Peter Seeheusen, a 2006 graduate of the PAC high school and son on the board president, to videotape the materials on the lectern as Jeff handled them and to project the images onto a large screen. As Jeff said, "It helped a lot for people to be able to see the materials on the screen—that way, they could see what I saw at the same time." Ray Seeheusen was the recorder, writing down a list of the items removed from each box.

The first box to be opened was the smaller of the two. It had been stashed in the cornerstone of the three-story Rolfe school building when it was constructed in 1917. The lid of that box was easily removed. Inside were some newspapers and a set of school board minutes. Jeff took a long time, turning the pages of the newspapers and reading aloud some of the items in it. An observer could say that he took too long and read too much detail, and that doing so got the event off to a slow pace. However, there seemed to be a lot of interest in those details. And the slow pace may have calmed some of the people—perhaps even lowered their blood pressure—who had a contrary attitude about how the school district had handled the razing of the school or custody of the time capsules.

The second box was one that had been buried by the class of 1928 in the east pillar at the south entrance of the school. It was a larger and much heavier box made of tin or zinc and had been soldered closed. The board members had to use tin snips and a screwdriver to open the box. Inside was a whole cache of items. Apparently, the class had opened, added items, and resealed the box at its reunions in 1948, 1968, and 1978. The class also asked the class of 1978 to contribute items to the box.

Gradually, the pace of reviewing the items sped up. After each batch was reviewed at the lectern by Jeff, projected on the screen, and duly recorded, the materials were placed on long tables for public viewing after the ceremony was concluded.

Asked about the event to open the capsules, Delores Hendrickson Pederson (RHS 1952) said, "It was nostalgic and disheartening." She thought there would be more in the box stashed away in 1917 than just the *Rolfe Arrow* newspapers. However, she was particularly impressed with the edition of the paper that included the floor plans for the new school. Those drawings prompted her to try to visualize what the Rolfe people went through to get the school building ready for use. She was also impressed with how active the community was in those early years, but reminisced that Rolfe had continued to be an "active little town" even when she moved there in 1948.

In a related matter, Dee talked to school board member, Jeff Kerns, after the opening of the boxes. She told him her concerns about the victory bell that had been removed from the Rolfe school property and placed on the grounds of the high school building in Pocahontas. Dee said she and a number of other Rolfe people would like to have the bell back in Rolfe and made part of a memorial to the Rolfe schools. Apparently, Jeff told her that the bell had gone along with the merger of schools and that Pocahontas had never had a victory bell. Dee replied that Pocahontas could get its own bell.

Nancy Shelgren Martin (RHS 1951) said, "The program got really long, but I enjoyed it." She took a bit of time after the ceremonies to view the time capsule materials that the school board members had been spread out on long tables. She said, "A person needed a lot of time just to look at the papers—there was a lot of material there. I personally knew several people from the class of 1928 and was particularly interested in looking at the materials they had placed in their box."

Nancy noted that the number of people in the audience kept shrinking because there were so many other Greater Rolfe Days activities that people wanted to attend. She left the community room, and when she returned later in the afternoon, all the materials had been put in boxes and taken to the library for temporary safe-keeping. She talked to Superintendent Joe Kramer, who assured her that the items would be scanned and the images made available to the public.

Phil Brinkman (RHS 1945) said, "The event was real interesting, but it took so much time, that unless a person was real involved with the history of the area, they could easily have lost interest. It was hard for me to identify with the 1917 box, but when the 1928 box was opened, I started listening. I was two years old then but have no memories of that year." Phil added, "What I found very interesting—maybe because of my age—were things like the newspaper ads and what things cost back then. It's unbelievable how much things have changed. But then, of course, I am an old dog."

Tammy Pederson Shimon (RHS 1983 and the daughter of Dee Pederson) is the secretary for Rolfe Betterment, Inc. When asked about the significance of the annual Greater Rolfe Days event, she said, "It is a weekend of pulling together as a community, great camaraderie, enjoying ourselves, and celebrating our home town."

When asked about the event to open the time capsules, Tammy's first response was, "For me, it was an awful lot of newspapers." She chuckled, then added, "You have a personal stake in it because of growing up in the community and the fact that you went to the school—and it's no longer up and running. The materials in the capsules provide a legacy to our heritage and are a part of the history of that school. It was important to be part of the event to open those capsules and to see what people of another era felt was important to preserve for the future. The box from the class of 1928 was supposed to be opened again in 2028, but we didn't have that option." Later, Tammy said, "Even though there were a lot of newspapers, knowing the history in them was important—especially the plans for the school built in 1917—that was a real surprise. And it was interesting to learn the original cost of the building."

Tammy said that the materials that the class of 1978 deposited in the box established by the class of 1928 were of special interest to her. She also said that the swing choir had been very successful during that era and that both her husband Jim Shimon (RHS 1979) and brother Troy Pederson (RHS 1980) had been part of the choir.

When asked about what she experienced during the opening of the capsules, Tammy said that it was hard to put her feelings into words. "It was very interesting, and you were glad you were there to reflect on things and events."

Jeff Kerns had been part of that swing choir and said it was fun to go through the copies of the Rolfe Arrow from 1978 that had been placed in the box and see pictures such as the one of the swing choir director, Paul Tapper, holding two large trophies. Jeff added that the choir had gone to four different contests, including one in Fremont, Nebraska, and won four, first-place trophies. According to Jeff, "That had never been done before or since."

Chris Simonson (RHS 1979) was also a member of that swing choir and attended the opening of the time capsules. He chuckled and said, "It was unusual in the 1928 time capsule to find contemporary people—namely myself," referring to the photo and report in the Arrow of the swing choir's success. Chris said, "I wasn't in sports past my freshman year, and winning four out of four major contests was like being in basketball and winning the state tournament. Paul Tapper directed the choir and pushed personalities to the limit—in a good way—and taught us a lot about the need to be focused and have fun. He did not tolerate a lack of focus."

In describing the 1928 time capsule, Chris said, "It was not just a snapshot of one year. It was both their high school and post high school memories, and I am looking forward to seeing the scans and being able to study the material more."

Donna Smith Behrendsen (RHS 1950 and mother of school board member, John Behrendsen) said, "I was kind of disappointed in the event. I thought there would have been more than just the Rolfe Arrows." Unfortunately, she had to leave shortly after the second box was opened so that her husband Virgil could get home and rake hay. Donna admits, "I really don't know what I was expecting to be in the boxes—perhaps I thought there would have been an item from the school. The information from the early newspapers was interesting, but I think we all knew a lot about the difference between prices then and now. Of course, the younger kids wouldn't have realized that a crate of peaches cost \$1.59 then and costs \$16 today." Donna added, "I'm going back to the library to read the materials, and maybe I will feel differently after reading them for myself."

Donna commended Superintendent Kramer, "I thought the event was a very good gesture on his part and at this time. People felt better about the boxes, knowing they were opened as part of the Greater Rolfe Days activities."

(It should be noted that the PAC school board has not made a final decision about the fate of the time capsules and their contents. Currently, the materials are housed at the Rolfe library, but are not available for public viewing. They are fragile and need to be handled with extreme care. Superintendent Kramer has asked me to scan the items. I hope to spend time in Rolfe during July and will scan the smaller items and, hopefully, transfer the audio tape made by the class of 1928 to digital format as well. I am looking forward to posting some of the material on this web site, and making them available on CDs to the Pocahontas and Rolfe libraries as well as the PAC school district. It may not be necessary to scan the newspapers, considering that the Rolfe Arrow has already been put on microfilm with copies available at the Pocahontas library and the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines.)

When asked what he expected would be in the time capsules, Virgil Shelgren (RHS 1943) said, "I figured we would have a newspaper or mementoes from graduation or baccalaureate. Of course, you think that someone might have left a ring or string of beads." He knew that at its various reunions, the class of 1928 had already opened its box but said, "I didn't realize it was such a tight container to keep out mildew and things such as that—everyone was thinking when they planned that box." He added, "What intrigued me the most about the event was the reading of items from the newspapers. Also, the opening of the boxes was handled in a very nice way." When asked what went through his mind during the ceremony, Virgil said, "I thought about the school and how much it has done for the whole community and for the kids who graduated from it. Rolfe had one of the premier schools around here."

Jenealea (Cheryl) Hansen Hilton (RHS 1954) said, "The event was wonderful, but it was a very sad day for our family." When asked to explain, she talked about how her family's heritage is interwoven with the life of the Rolfe schools. Her great grandmother, Rebecca MacVey, had taught at Old Rolfe, which was the original county seat and site of the town. It was located about three miles northeast of where Rolfe now stands, and there continues to be a cemetery and a marker for the court house at the Old Rolfe location.

Genealea's grandmother, Lottie Fisher, graduated from the Rolfe schools in 1898 and was an elementary school teacher for the Rolfe schools. Both of Genealea's parents, Chet Hansen and Mildred MacVey Hansen graduated from Rolfe, he in 1926 and she in 1928. Also, all of Chet's siblings graduated from Rolfe: Elwyn Hansen, Lolita Hansen Leonard, and Velma Mason Hansen. Jenealea and all of her siblings began school at Rolfe. Her brother, Jim, graduated from the Des Moines Township school, but the rest all graduated from Rolfe: Jenealea in 1954, Janice in 1960, and Julie Hansen Friedhof in 1967. Genealea and her husband Denny had four children—all graduates from Rolfe: Brent in 1972, Jim in 1975, Kevin in 1980, and Sharri Hilton Mason in 1988. All but one of them was at the event to open the time capsules.

Jenealea and her family anticipated that the opening of the boxes would be an important occasion. As Jenealea said, "We knew that there would be all the stuff in the box from the class of 1928—because my mom had talked about it. The class had lots of big reunions and took lots of pictures, and I had been there several times when the box was opened and resealed — I had seen what my mom and some of her classmates had put in it." Jenealea did regret that some of the photographs had stuck together or otherwise had deteriorated.

She continued, "We were very pleased with the way the superintendent from Pocahontas organized the event and pleased to see three former Rolfe students on the school board, even though they don't remember the town the way we do." Asked what she meant, Jenealea talked about the days when the town was packed on Wednesday and Saturday nights. "People parked up and down Main Street. Some even came early and parked their cars so they could watch other people walking up and down the street. There were lots of stores, a movie theater, and a popcorn stand. There is little of that anymore."

When asked what feelings she experienced during the opening of the boxes, Genealea said, "It was sad. For some of us — it's like the ending of an era. The Rolfe school and education were always important to my parents. People talk about the athletics at Rolfe, but Rolfe also had some great music and speech programs."

Genealea said that Mary McEwen Nelson and Ivadelle Cleal Porter are the only living graduates of the class of 1928. Mary is in the care center at Rolfe. Apparently, Ivadelle lives in Webster City. Genealea said, "It is kind of sad that no one got in touch with Ivadelle to tell her about the opening of the time capsule so that she could have been here."

Genealea concluded, "It was a great day, and I appreciate all of the work and attention to detail that went into the event, but it represented the end of the Rolfe school. When they opened those boxes, it was a closure for me."

Asked if he was nervous in anticipation of his role as emcee of the opening of the time capsules, Jeff Kerns replied, "The only thing I was nervous about is that we didn't know what was in the boxes—whether there would be a lot of material or dust. Because of that, there was no way to plan ahead." He added that it was particularly exciting to open the box from 1917 because of the fear that all of those materials could have deteriorated. It turned out that the school board

minutes from the meeting, when the new building was approved, were included in the box. Those papers were extremely fragile, and yet, Jeff was able to read that the amount of the bond for the building was \$65,000 at 4 1/2 percent interest. Jeff says that following the event, Bill Winkleblack of the Rolfe State Bank said that if the bond were issued today, the interest rate would be the same.

Jeff noted that, when the ceremonies began, he could tell that some of the people were particularly anxious to see the opening of the box from 1928 because their parents had been in that class. Jeff said, "The class of 1928 had been very close knit and invited their children to their reunions, and it was easy to see that among the people gathered for the opening." He said the crowd was also interested in entries in the newspapers—such things as the corn and bean prices and ads for a new plow or car.

In preparing for the event, Jeff had called Jayne Brinkman Hadley, who had been the president of the class of 1978. He said, "I got a heads up and wasn't surprised a lot." He reported that Jayne said that the contents of the box had been prepared on short notice. The class of 1928 had gathered for its reunion in 1978, and someone found her uptown and asked if she could find items to contribute to the box.

Jeff commented "What impressed me most was looking back and seeing how much pride people took in the Rolfe school. In 1917, there was community pride in the new building. In 1928, there was pride in the school and the graduating class. It is good to get together to reflect on the past—to see where we were and where we have come to. As a board, we are looking at the possibility of a regional high school due to declining enrollment in our district. As leaders of the PAC District, we want to be on the front edge instead of being reactionary. We like to study and research ahead of potential problems so that we know where we are headed."

Regarding the fate of the victory bell that had been taken from Rolfe and placed on the high school grounds, Jeff said, "Dan, John, and I feel good about the bell being there. It is part of the collective property of the school district. I like to see kids ring the bell every time there is a victory. I don't view students as being from Poky, Rolfe, Havelock, or Plover—all those communities and their students are now joined in one school. Unfortunately, when the Rolfe building came down, people seemed separated again. It became Poky versus Rolfe. I hated to see that. There were kids from other towns who attended school in Rolfe and had an attachment to the Rolfe building. It is important not to view the current school as the Pocahontas school but as the PAC District. Two of us on the board wanted to repair the Rolfe building, but there were seven members on the board, and it was a 5–2 decision to raze the building. Now we are focused on how to move forward and give our kids the best education possible and have them take pride in their school. It is important to look at what's best for the kids. The building is not there, but we need to move forward."

I, too, am extremely interested in the diagrams of the floor plan of the school that was built in 1917. And I have heard that the newspaper from 1914 includes an article about an architectural consultant from Minnesota, who talked with a group—mainly of women—from the Rolfe community about modern trends in the construction of school facilities. It is impressive that the three-story building contained both a gymnasium and auditorium in addition to classrooms for 12 grades.

Newspaper headlines and articles tell only the surface level of history. Because of that, I am also extremely interested in materials left by the class of 1928—especially term papers, round-robin letters, an audio tape made at its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion, and envelopes containing written items. Perhaps via those materials, those of us who are interested can learn more about the heart and soul of the classmates of 1928. I knew many of them quite well.

Mary McEwen Nelson is a resident of the Rolfe Care Center. She and her husband LeRoy of the class of 1927 farmed southeast of the cemetery and were members of the Presbyterian church that my family attended. Mary seemed like the most gracious person I knew. And she was beautiful, too. I believe that at one time, she was a beauty queen for the Iowa State College yearbook, *The Bomb*. LeRoy was one of my favorite people. He was gracious, too, but also had a great sense of humor, and I fondly remember his chortle. He helped my father find two horses for \$50 apiece to give my siblings and me for Christmas when I was nine in 1954.

Arlo Ives was the father of my classmate, Dallas Ives (RHS 1963), and farmed across the section from our family. Lois Brinkman Hodaway also farmed across the section and taught physical education in the Rolfe schools.

When we were young, my siblings and I would sometimes stay with Jenealea Hansen's mother, Mildred Hansen, in town. She was a strict baby-sitter, but one I respected. I recall the time that she would not let me go to the summer band concert unless I put on a dress. I hated dresses, but I wanted to go to the concert, especially so I could get popcorn at a stand on Main Street owned by my great uncle Art Lighter, a single man and linotype operator for the Rolfe Arrow. I thought I could get out of wearing a dress simply because I had not brought one to town with me for our overnight stay. But Mildred didn't buy into my rationale. She found one of her daughter's dresses for me to wear, and I gave in and wore a dress.

Jim Wilson was an insurance agent in Rolfe, and a dominating business leader and Republican figure in the town. Russel Ives was a genteel man, who retired in Rolfe after a job with the USDA in Washington. I believe that Russel and Jim were part of the original group that formed Rolfe Betterment, Inc.



It is too early to tell the full significance of the materials in the time capsules. It was wonderful to have a public event, and it was done well. Yes, the pacing could have been improved. But how often does a school board or other group plan such an event? It is an unpredictable kind of happening. For some people, the event may have seemed long and like watching paint dry. But for those of us with a long-time connection to Rolfe, who recognized many of the names in the 1914 and 1917 newspapers and who knew many of the people in the class of 1928, the event held our interest.

I also believe it was important for the Rolfe community to have a ritual of coming together, reflecting on the life of its school, reminiscing, laughing, and perhaps letting go—a form of grief work regarding the loss of the school and all that it represented. That kind of process can indeed be a step toward healing and moving forward.

Holding a grudge or other bitterness over such things as school mergers, the razing of a building, or the custody of time capsules hurts the person who carries the grudge or bitterness more than it hurts anyone else. And for that reason, forgiveness is also an important element of healing and moving forward. That is not a principle that is easy to practice, but it is sure worth trying, even if we have valid reasons to think our own perspectives on an issue are the right ones. It is also wise to remember the opening lines of the "Serenity Prayer" by Christian theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference." Or as the Zen traditions emphasize, there is a time to detach and that too much attachment cripples a person's health. Enough said.

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