

FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Summer has flown by and fall is taking shape. Personally, it is a major shift as it will be the first year of not having a calendar filled with high school sporting events. Our youngest is starting his freshmen year of college! Time flies!

The museum is experiencing changes this fall as well. MHS is happy to announce and share a temporary exhibit of the Bucknell marionettes! The Bucknell family has loaned the museum 10 marionettes, a case full of extra marionette heads, and instruction demonstration kit of how Bruce Bucknell created his life-like puppets. Nola, Bruce's wife, handmade all the costumes creating the playful characters for their variety show.

Bruce and Nola lived in Cedar Rapids but had a holiday home and studio here in McGregor. You may remember the sign "Mr. Punch's Studio" that hung outside their place on A Street. It continues to impress me how many creative spirits have graced our town over the years. MHS is honored to have this opportunity to share this with all of you. We hope you have the chance to see it in person. The Bucknell display will be up through the end of the season.

In October the museum will be featuring local historian and author Mary Antoine. She will be holding a book signing event and an end depth discussion on local history and how it shaped this area in the 1800's. The museum has not had any inhouse events this year. Having Mary speak twice during leaf season will be a bonus for visitors.

Thanks to Brandi Crozier, our liaison with the city of McGregor, I am proud to announce MHS has been awarded an Art Project Grant in the amount of \$2,555 from the Iowa Arts Council, a division of the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), with support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The grant will support the 2026 Scottish Fest, our vibrant cultural celebration that brings history to life through food, music, games, and traditions honoring McGregor's Scottish roots. Scottish Fest has quickly become a meaningful tradition and this funding allows us to expand our programming while preserving and celebrating our cultural history. Mark April 11th on your calendars and bring your kilts for next year's celebration!

As always, the McGregor Historical Society thanks you for all your continued support throughout the year, and please plan to stop in and see what's new in the museum!

– Patti Ruff



Bruce Bucknell carved over 300 marionettes, each requiring about 300 hours of work. He invented a method for crafting elbow and knee joints that mimicked natural human motion, a technique later adopted by other puppeteers.

Bringing Wonder to Life: The Art and Legacy of Bruce and Nola Bucknell

In October 1975, area residents experienced a unique performance when Bruce and Nola Bucknell brought their marionette variety show to the Mar-Mac High School stage.

The Bucknells, longtime residents of Cedar Rapids who summered in McGregor, were already known nationally for their artistry. Bruce carved and strung the puppets, and Nola sewed elaborate costumes. Their nearly two-foot-tall figures came to life in 45-minute shows. A reviewer noted the couple "performed with precision and imagination, in a miniature variety show" that delighted both children and adults.

By the mid-20th century, the couple gained an international reputation. Bruce, considered one of the most experienced puppeteers in the United States, began carving puppets at age ten. He studied briefly under master Rufus Roise, but largely developed his own technique. Always seeking greater realism, he invented a method of constructing elbow and knee joints that mimicked natural human motion, an innovation later adopted by other puppeteers. Over his career, Bruce created more than 300 marionettes, each requiring about 300 hours of work.

Nola spent as many as 125 hours designing and sewing each costume. Their creations included memorable figures like Billy Boulder, the Pinhead Brothers (who debuted the Hy-Vee jingle "A Helpful Smile in Every Aisle"), and Mr. Bones the skeleton. The Bucknells' puppets appeared on

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, Sep 27 | 9 am–5 pm

Sunday, Sep 28 | 8 am–3:30 pm

FALL-DER-ALL, Froelich Foundation & Museum, McGregor

Saturday, Oct 4

8:30 am G.R.R.R.R. (Great River Road-Road Race), Pikes Peak

9 am–4 pm Flea Market Under the Bridge, Marquette

11 am–1 pm 300 Block Celebration, Artesian Park, McGregor

10 am–3 pm McGregor Library Book Sale

1 pm–4 pm Life on the Porch

Sunday, Oct 5

9 am–4 pm Flea Market Under the Bridge, Marquette

11 am–2 pm Mary Antoine Book Signing, McGregor Museum

Saturday, Oct 11

9 am–4 pm Flea Market Under the Bridge, Marquette

10 am–3 pm McGregor Library Book Sale

10 am–5 pm McGregor Fall Arts & Crafts Festival, Turner Park, McGregor

1 pm Mary Antoine Story-telling/ Interpretation, McGregor Museum

Sunday, Oct 12

9 am–4 pm Flea Market Under the Bridge, Marquette

10 am–5 pm McGregor Fall Arts & Crafts Festival, Turner Park, McGregor

Saturday, Oct 25 | 10 am–12 pm

Halloween Parade and Festival, McGregor

ONGOING EVENTS

Mondays | 8 am–noon

Pocket City Fellowship Coffee and Conversation, McGregor's Convention, Conference and Community Center

Second Monday of each month | 6 pm

McGregor Music Jam Session, McGregor's Convention, Conference and Community Center

Tuesdays | 3 pm

Adult Writer's Group, McGregor Public Library

Thursdays | 3 pm

Game Group, McGregor Public Library

For more events, go to: portsofdiscovery.com/upcoming-events

Clayton County Museum Crawl Draws Visitors from Near and Far

This year's Clayton County Museum Crawl proved once again that our region's history is alive, well, and worth exploring. Throughout the month of June, museums and historical sites across Clayton County opened their doors for a coordinated month of discovery, inviting guests to step back in time and experience the stories that have shaped our communities.

McGregor was proud to participate alongside other Clayton County communities, showcasing our unique heritage and welcoming history enthusiasts from across the county and beyond. Visitors enjoyed trying their hand at sand bottle art and exploring an array of other activities and exhibits.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the event was the enthusiasm of attendees. Three participants—including one of our own board members, Bonnie James—visited every site on the crawl, earning well-deserved recognition for their dedication. The Passport Program encouraged exploration, with each location stamping visitors' cards and offering the chance to win prizes for completing the circuit.

The Museum Crawl not only brought new faces into our buildings but also fostered collaboration among museums and historical sites countywide. This spirit of partnership strengthens our shared ability to preserve and share Clayton County's history.

The McGregor Historical Society extends a heartfelt thank you to our volunteers, fellow participating sites, the Clayton County Historic Preservation Group and Upper Mississippi Gaming for their funding contributions, our local radio station and newspapers for event coverage, and the Clayton County Development Group for coordinating this countywide celebration of heritage. We are already looking forward to next year's event—and to welcoming even more guests eager to discover the stories that make our community special.



2025 Clayton County Museum Crawl Grand Prize Winner, Jaxson Chapman of Monona, pictured with his prize basket of gift certificates, Chamber Bucks, and merchandise from each participating museum gift shop.

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WMT-TV in Cedar Rapids, at county fairs, on convention stages, and at Puppeteers of America festivals, often alongside Jim Henson. For 26 consecutive years, their marionettes won national prizes for lifelike design.

Their artistry was a family endeavor. All three Bucknell children: Del, Curt, and Elaine, were required to build and perform with their own marionettes before graduating high school. Elaine toured her own shows to help pay for college. "To help ensure that the art would be preserved and passed on," Nola once explained, the children were immersed in every aspect of the craft.

Beyond the stage, the Bucknells left a lasting mark on McGregor through historic preservation. In 1968, they purchased an 1848 building that had once served as the town's first City Hall. With its roof and floors gone, demolition seemed certain. Over six years, the Bucknells rebuilt it brick by brick and board by board, transforming the first floor into a workshop and the upper story into their summer home. They added whimsical carved fronts to the sandstone storage caves beside the building, making them look like tiny houses built into the rock. (When Richard and Charlene Palucci bought the property in 1992, this enchanting spot became known as "The Cave of the Elves.") The Bucknells' restoration, along with magical touches they added to the



Bruce and Nola Bucknell in their workshop. Bruce carved lifelike marionettes and Nola crafted elaborate costumes. Together, they brought these creations to life in imaginative variety shows that delighted audiences of all ages.

cliffside, became a local point of pride and an early example of historic preservation in McGregor.

In both their marionette shows and their preservation work, the Bucknells proved that with creativity and craftsmanship, wonder can be brought back to life.

A new temporary exhibit at the McGregor Historical Museum honors the artistry and legacy of puppeteers Bruce and Nola Bucknell, who, for decades, entertained audiences through school performances, events, conventions and even television commercials.

A set of 10 marionettes handcrafted by the couple are on loan from son Curt Bucknell of Monona. Multiple marionette heads, as well as pieces that detail the step-by-step process of creating a marionette, are also on display. Video clips of some of their performances play nearby.

Outside an exhibition at The History Center in Cedar Rapids two years ago, this is the first time the marionettes have been viewed by the public in around 30 years.

McGregor Historical Society President Patti Ruff is excited about the opportunity.

"When you take a dive into our local history, like we do at the museum, you come to realize how



many vibrant artists have called McGregor home over the years. The Bucknells fit into that category. It is truly an honor to get to share their creations," she said.

Curt Bucknell also looks forward to sharing the exhibit with those who remember the Bucknell performances, as well as new generations.

"I hope they enjoy the characters. I hope they enjoy the videos of mom

and dad doing the shows. When they were doing the shows, video cameras were not readily available like they are now, so there's very limited [footage]," he reflected. "I hope they learn a little bit of the history and understand the art of it."

The exhibit will be on display at the McGregor Historical Museum through the end of October. Museum hours are 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Thursday to Sunday.

Legends of McGregor's Past brings historical figures to life

Downtown McGregor was alive with history Aug. 30 and 31, for the annual Legends of McGregor's Past Guided Historical Walking Tour. Community members acted out short skits at five locations, depicting visionary photographer Margery Goergen and revered Ho-Chunk figure Emma Big Bear, doll manufacturer Ruth Hoseley, beloved swimming instructor Gordon Lord, notable bowyers Lloyd Eddings and George Birnie and puppeteers Bruce and Nola Bucknell.

The event was sponsored by the McGregor Historical Society, McGregor Historic Preservation Commission and McGregor Public Library, and drew over 110 attendees across the two days.

Now in its fifth year, this was the first Legends event to solely include more recent historical figures from the 20th century. Many attendees remembered them personally and shared their own memories during the tours.

Also unique was that Legends of McGregor began at the McGregor Historical Museum, which has artifacts associated with each one of the Legends among its exhibits.

This included Bucknell marionettes on loan for a special exhibit, as well as photographs by Margery Goergen and Gordon Lord, Emma Big Bear baskets, Ruth Hoseley dolls and Eddings bows.

Laurie Klosterboer directed the Legends of McGregor's Past Guided Historical Walking Tour, while Michelle Pettit was the scriptwriter. Joel Lustre and Audrey Posten helped with marketing and design, Elise Martins with special exhibit curation and Dale and Brandi Crozier with setup/tear down and registration.

Acting talent included Duane Boelman and Rowan Janes as Lloyd Eddings and George Birnie, Kathy Koether and Kyra Simon as Ruth Hoseley and young Sharon Lynch (Lynch donated Hoseley dolls to the museum in 2012), Aiyana Janes as Margery Goergen, Joe VanRooy and Elliott Waltz as Gordon Lord and one of his swimming students, and Charlotte Koether and John Kite as Nola and Bruce Bucknell. Roberta Hass, Sheila Oberuetter, Michelle Pettit, Audrey Posten, and Brandi Crozier served as guides.



1 Rowan Janes (left) and Duane Boelman depicted master bowyers George Birnie and Lloyd Eddings during one stop on the Legends tour. 2 Kathy Koether took on the role of doll manufacturer Ruth Hoseley. Kyra Simon portrayed one of the 10-year-old girls who helped name the dolls. 3 Aiyana Janes as photographer Margery Goergen spoke about her time with Emma Big Bear. 4 Joe VanRooy portrayed Gordon Lord, who taught hundreds of McGregor and Marquette children how to swim. He is pictured with Elliott Waltz, who played one of the students. 5 John Kite and Charlotte Koether played Bruce and Nola Bucknell outside the historic building and caves on A Street which the couple renovated.



River Towns Remember: McGregor Historical Society launching oral history project

The McGregor Historical Museum's collection will soon extend from physical artifacts, photographs and documents to oral histories as well. "River Towns Remember" will launch this fall, sharing the memories of McGregor and Marquette area residents through audio and video recordings.

McGregor Historical Society board members Audrey Posten, Joel Lustre and Brian Hedeman are spearheading the oral history project, which was inspired by a community member's suggestion. They've already interviewed multiple subjects, including McGregor resident Gerrie Hendrickson, who turned 100 years old this summer.

Hendrickson will feature in the inaugural video. View photos from throughout her life as she discusses her childhood—from school and holiday traditions to life on the family farm during the Great Depression. She also speaks about McGregor businesses, natural disasters, technological

advancements, raising her own family and why she's been glad to call McGregor home all these years.

"River Towns Remember" episodes will be shared on the McGregor Historical Society YouTube account, as well as through the McGregor Historical Museum Facebook page. Episodes will focus on one individual's memories or explore themes, with multiple interviewees chiming in on the same topic.

Members of the oral history project committee are excited about this engaging way to collect and share area history.

"On the McGregor Historical Society board, we recognize that history doesn't just reside within our museum walls, but also outside it: in those who have lived in and shaped our communities for decades. Their personal experiences



Gerrie Hendrickson and her friend Donn Mae on Gerrie's horse, Prince, in summer 1934. Her grandmother, Lena Davies, is on the right.

can add depth to the people, places and events of Marquette and McGregor. It's important to preserve this primary source material while we still can," said Posten.

If you are open to being interviewed for "River Towns Remember," or would like to suggest an interview subject, please email Posten at ajposten@gmail.com.

Then & Now



In 1968, Bruce and Nola Bucknell purchased McGregor's first City Hall, an 1848 building slated for demolition. They transformed the ground floor into their workshop and the upper floor into their summer home. The Bucknells' restoration is an early example of historic preservation in McGregor, complete with whimsical carved fronts on the sandstone caves in the courtyard. This magical spot has become a beloved local landmark. The Bucknells proved that with creativity, care, and craftsmanship, wonder can be brought back to life.

McGregor Historical Society
P.O. Box 426
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*History is who we are
and why we are
the way we are.*

David McCullough, American Historian

The McGregor Historical Society's Museum offers a glimpse of McGregor's history through its collections and exhibits. Over the years exhibits have changed, students have visited, community groups have used the space for conversations and lectures, and visitors have enjoyed our collections to view McGregor's unique history through an experience toward understanding where we've been.

We hope you will join us through your membership support.

Member Information (Please Print)

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