

## With the seed of an Astrakhan apple tree: Andrew Peterson Farm dedication held

Published July 1, 2016 at 10:31 am

By Melissa Priebe  
watertown.editor@ecm-inc.com



*The Andrew Peterson Farm.*

With the planting of a single apple tree, the roots for a historical legacy were set into the soil.

On Saturday, June 25, a dedication ceremony was held for the Historic Andrew Peterson Farm in Laketown Township. Historical society staff and volunteers gathered with elected officials and other supporters to get a glimpse of the grounds and to celebrate a momentous year for the farm.

In the last year, restoration of the buildings on the Peterson Farm has begun, grants have been made and, above all, the Carver County Historical Society has gained ownership of the historic buildings – bringing the dream of a public historic site on Highway 5 closer to a reality.

“The historic buildings are now the property of the Carver County Historical Society,” said Wendy Petersen Biorn, executive director. “We closed on the property in 2015.”

The land where the Andrew Peterson Farm resides carries a long and storied history, not to mention the history of the Swedish emigrant himself, who began his journey from Sweden to Minnesota in 1850. He emigrated to the U.S. from Kommen of Ydre, and he kept a journal from the time he left Sweden until the day before he died in Minnesota. Peterson’s journals were found at the Minnesota Historical Society by Swedish author Vilhelm Moberg, who used them as a basis for a book series called *Emigrants*.

In addition to his writings, Peterson is famous for his work to develop apple trees in Minnesota, and for his efforts to establish the Scandia Church, which began in his rural home. His farm was one of the first research stations for the Minnesota Horticultural Society, which would eventually evolve into the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.

The land was formerly owned by Ward Holasek, who helped to preserve many artifacts and contributed to the site's listing on the National Registry of Historic Places. When Holasek died in 2013, he left 51 acres of the land to the Carver County Historical Society.

Now that the land Peterson farmed is under the ownership of the Historical Society, preparations can be made to prepare the buildings for public tours and other events.

"We do want to make this a public place, as Ward would want it to be," said Biorn. "This is a property that clearly everyone is excited about."

Restoration has begun on the North Barn, which partially collapsed in 2010, and other restoration work is taking place on the property.

"The work is being done exactly in the way Peterson would have done it, right down to the way the wood is cut with the saw," said Biorn.

In partnership with students from the University of Minnesota, work on the historic site has also included a structural analysis of the buildings, an archeological dig, cultural landscaping and the development of an augmented reality project, where visitors can see what the farm was like back in time through a digital app.

Already, students have unearthed many historic artifacts from the land. At the dedication on Saturday, items such as machine-cut nails, a key to a sardine can and pottery fragments were on display.

Joe Pnewski, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, said the research teams have discovered items from a few different time periods. Two large canisters found at the historic site don't quite date back as far as the mid-1800s, while other specimens likely do. One unusual item the team has found includes a pair of matching cuff links, that were found in the dirt outside.

"It's rare that you find a matching pair," said Pnewski, who plans to write his thesis on the archeological research conducted at the Peterson Farm. He is interested to find out what researchers can learn from archeology that they may not be able to learn from history. "It's a lot of fun to come out here and see what's beneath the surface."

Dozens of people came out to the dedication on Saturday, including county commissioners James Ische and Randy Maluchnik, U.S. Rep. Tom Emmer, Minnesota Rep. Jim Nash, and Minnesota Rep. Dean Urdahl, who gave a keynote speech.

“It has been said, ‘If we don’t remember our past, we have no future,’” said Urdahl. “The past is all around us here at the Andrew Peterson Farm.”

After a presentation on the history of the Peterson Farm, Historical Society staff and volunteers planted an antique apple tree to remember Andrew Peterson and the legacy he left to Carver County. The variety, Astrakhan, is a variety that was favored by Andrew Peterson, who experimented with many varieties of apple trees.

“The Astrakhan apple tree is a symbol of Andrew Peterson and his Swedish immigration,” said Lin Deardorff, who donated the tree from his orchard, after it was brought over from California.

The tree will also be incorporated into the new logo for the Historic Andrew Peterson Farm. The apple tree can be seen from the road, standing on the lawn in front of the age-old farmstead.

Now, the Carver County Historical Society is ready to welcome small tours. Those interested in seeing the historic site can call in advance and make arrangements for a self-guided tour or other small events.

“Through this site, the history of our immigrant and agricultural past lives on,” said Urdahl. “May this site inspire, educate and enliven history for future generations.”