

Ox Cart Trails Historical Society (OCTHS) was incorporated May 30, 2000 with 60 charter members after several people gathered to discuss forming a historical society for the Drayton area. Today the membership has doubled.

MUSEUM: Our museum building, the former Eagle Point Baptist Church, was



moved into Blessing Village in 2002 and has undergone a complete transformation from its former role as a religious building to a public museum.

SOD HOUSE: After inviting author Lauraine Snelling to Drayton to present a writing workshop, members of OCTHS began thinking of recreating a sod house as depicted in her *Red River of the North* historical novels. These books chronicle a Norwegian family's coming to North America and their joys and problems in homesteading in what is now North Dakota. Although the books are historical fiction, many readers discover that the experiences of the family in the books could well have mirrored those of their own real-life ancestors. OCTHS has since brought *Bound For Blessing*, a play based on Snelling's books, to the stage in 2009 and 2010.

In early October 2006 several volunteers from Drayton journeyed to Edinburg, ND to help construct a sod house in

that community and learn from the experience. Edinburg organizers had offered to cut any sod Drayton would need and, after seven trips hauling sod back to Drayton, we were almost ready to start building our own sod house. Freezing weather required the sod to be kept in a quonset until time to use it. Local volunteers worked slowly and meticulously, erecting the walls over a period of 6 weeks. Some mornings snow had to be removed from the layers of sod by what looked like volunteer snow-bunnies in heavy gloves and stocking hats.

Many of the roof beams were provided by some industrious beavers along the Red River and others had been cut by local saw mills some 60 years ago. One-inch rough oak boards were fastened to the beams. By then the ground was frozen and the roof sod had to wait for warmer weather. Spring 2007 set the project in motion again and additional sod was cut locally and put in place on the roof.

A total of 25 pallets (25 ton) of sod were used in the construction of the 12' x 14' soddy with 2-foot thick walls. The sod pieces were 1' x 2' x 4" thick and were layered in a staggered fashion as



one would lay bricks, locking the rows together. The window and door frames were constructed and placed as the walls went up. Sod was stuffed around the frames for added insulation. The sleeping loft was added to stabilize the walls as well as to add more living space to the small structure. The door was constructed of 1-inch rough oak boards with Z-bracing and 4-pane barn windows finishing the room. The soddy was erected under huge pine trees to keep minimize wind and water erosion.

A Sears Box Stove was purchased at a rummage sale and is quite adequate for such a

small area. The floor is the original ground with wood chips added for cleanliness and insulation. Many pioneers used a mixture of manure and dust for their soddy floor, which would eventually harden like concrete. Imagine what would have happened when the roof leaked!

LOG HOUSE: Many early homes in this area were built of wood from the abundant large trees that were available. Almost all of those log homes were destroyed over the years by floods or prairie fires; over-enthusiastic farmers also exacted a toll as many homesteads were ruined in a quest for land to increase crop acreage.

In August 2007 OCTHS was asked if the Society would like to have a log house that was about to be demolished. The cabin was built in the late 1800s and had been occupied until 1980s. It



was in overall good condition, mainly because it was constructed of tamarack logs. However, the bottom three rows of logs were in poor condition due to the addition of a poured concrete retaining wall that was meant to keep out rodents. Moisture and leaves became trapped in the wall causing severe deterioration of the logs. Windows, curtains, and some furniture from the previous owner remained in the cabin.

The cement walls and 2 feet of dirt were removed from all sides of the house. Bridge planks were obtained to help stabilize the walls during the move. Planks were placed on the outside and inside walls next to each of the door and window openings. Holes were drilled through both planks and through the wall so 16-inch bolts could pass through sandwiching the wall between the planks. Thirteen 2-inch ratchet straps were used to tie the logs together. The house took on the appearance of a ginger bread house wrapped like a birthday gift

with orange bows. The roof was removed to allow passage through the bridge at Drayton. Eight blocks and a half dozen jacks were used to raise the house so a trailer could fit underneath. A 4230 John Deere farm tractor was hooked to the trailer and the journey home to Drayton began with two pilot vehicles as escorts. Workers found it amazing how much country side can be seen while traveling 15 mph for 5 ½ hours!

A foundation was constructed by hauling in dirt (dirt from a potato field complete with 2-inch potatoes). New bottom logs were crafted and fitted and then the home was lowered onto its foundation and later a new roof installed. Stairs, floors, windows, and a new door were finally completed in 2010.

OX CART: The ox cart replica was built for the Society in 2003. Ox carts were used in the Red River Valley from approximately 1820 to 1870, replaced mainly by the railroads. The carts were made of tough, well-seasoned oak and designed for a wide variety of travel conditions. They were easy to draw through bogs, buoyant at river fords, strong on rock-strewn hills, and hard to upset in stumpy forests. Most builders started with two squared 12-foot poles, 6 feet of which served as shafts for harnessing the ox while the other 6 feet supported the frame. Crosspieces were firmly mortised onto the shafts to underlay the oak floor, and upright rails were fitted into holes.

OUTHOUSE: The log outhouse has floated several times in the mighty Red River during floods. It was moved here from the farmyard where it landed and was refurbished to add to the Blessing Village.

MILL STONE: The mill stone is one half of the stone used to grind flour at the Drayton

Flour Mill on the south side of Drayton c. 1918. The stone was found on the banks of the Red River in 1980; the whereabouts of the matching stone is unknown. Stone grinders are the oldest type of grinder with two circular grinding stones. One stone turns against a stationary stone. Grooves are cut into the stone radiating out from the center of the stone to the ends. Grain falls through a channel into the center of the two stones and, as the stone rotates, it pulls the grain out through the channels to be ground. The flour falls out the outer edges of the two stones. Mill stones weighed hundreds of pounds and were turned by windmills, water wheels or animals.

WALKWAY: Blessing Village has a brick walkway that runs from the street to the museum steps. The vintage bricks are assumed to be Drayton bricks made in the brickyard that once operated south of town. Some were salvaged from a Drayton property that went to a flood buyout and some were excavated from this very site after the fire that destroyed Drayton's hotel in 2000.



by appointment. A sign at the museum door lists contacts who can provide access.

The Society maintains a genealogy database of past and present area residents and their descendants. We need your volunteerism and your membership to keep "the ox cart rolling." Dues are \$10.00 single, \$15.00 family, or \$300.00 for lifetime membership. For more information, visit us online at >www.oxcarttrails.net<

DRAYTON NORTH DAKOTA

Blessing Village

Compiled by:

Ox Cart Trails Historical Society

