



# Reflections

*Dedicated to preserving the history of a great airline.*

## Remembering David L. Behncke

by Bob Johnson

Pioneer Pilot with Dickinson and Northwest Airways  
Earned a Major Legacy as Founder of the ALPA

In June, 1926, the Twin Cities were agog about new airmail service to Chicago provided by a government contract awarded to 68-year-old Charles "Pop" Dickinson, a Windy City aviation entrepreneur.

Local papers flooded their readers with daily stories about the new service including a page one yarn in the Minneapolis Tribune of June 25. Headlined "Airplane Shopper Flies 800 Miles for Bargains Here." It was followed by the subhead "Chicago Woman Hops to Minneapolis and Back -- Gets New Clothes."

It continued, "An 800-mile shopping tour by airplane enabled Mrs. David Behncke of Chicago to buy a coat and dress in Minneapolis Thursday. She planned her venture in long-distance purchasing Wednesday night when her husband, a pilot on the airmail line between Minneapolis and Chicago, returned home with a copy of the Tribune in his pocket. Reading the advertisements, Mrs. Behncke decided it would be an economy to come to Minneapolis and shop."

The story relates how she "squeezed in beside the mail pouches" to make the trip. "At 3 p.m. she went aloft again with her husband and they had a belated dinner in their Chicago home."

Behncke soon joined Northwest Airways and was destined to become perhaps the most important man ever in the American labor movement as it pertained to commercial aviation. A quick look at his early years is revealing.

Behncke was born in 1897 to a German immigrant farm couple near the small central-Wisconsin town of Cambria. His education was scant, through the eighth grade. Tiring of the drudgery of farm work, he had a spat with his father and ran off to Milwaukee to join the army. He was 16. The army said "no." He then took a menial job with a local dairy where he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Reluctantly, he returned home.

He recovered, and the army said "okay." He served in a rear-echelon job with Gen. John J. Pershing's 10,000-man force that crossed into Mexico in futile pursuit of Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa, who earlier had raided Columbus, New Mexico. He attended army flight school in San Diego, where his proficiency earned him an instructor's rating.



DAVID L. BEHNCKE, first pilot hired by Charlie Holman, later became co-founder of the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA.)

*Photo courtesy of "Flight To The Top"  
by Kenneth D. Ruble*

*Continued on page 3*

## ***President's Message***

by Bruce Kitt

Peer recognition for aviation accomplishments is worth celebrating, and many states have established Aviation Halls of Fame that host annual inductions for selected individuals. On April 28, the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame ([www.mnaviationhalloffame.org](http://www.mnaviationhalloffame.org)) inducted six individuals, two with ties to the NWA History Centre, **Joe Kimm** and **Bryan Moon**. The induction ceremony was well attended with 10 to 15 members of the NWA History Centre among the crowd. Afterwards, I wondered how many employees of the 13 airlines that the NWA History Centre works to preserve the history of have previously been inducted – and then what about other states' Aviation Hall of Fame recognition?



By no means an exhaustive internet search (in some cases I couldn't quickly find a biography of the inductee), I can report - with some fear of contradiction and error - results for four state and two national Aviation Halls of Fame: **Arizona** (2 – Southwest Airways); **Minnesota** (31 – Northwest, Wisconsin/North Central, Republic); **North Dakota** (1 – Northwest); **Wisconsin** (5 – Wisconsin/North Central, Republic, Northwest); the **OX-5 Club** (4 – Minnesotans) and the **National Aviation Hall of Fame** (0). It would be interesting to know how many people who worked for, say a minimum of two years, for any of the 13-named airlines the NWA History Centre is focused on, have been inducted into a state's hall of fame. (Citations and sources required and we will keep the information in a binder for future reference.)

Looking ahead, the NWA History Centre will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Saturday, October 20. It will be part of the Airliner Collectible Show & Sale at the Best Western Plus in Bloomington, Minn. and will begin at 5 p.m. that evening. Plans are still being formalized so watch our website ([www.nwahistory.org](http://www.nwahistory.org)) for details. We hope to see you there. CAVU.

### **Save These Dates!**

**September 8**

**Coffee & Conversation: *Highjacked!***

*NWA History Centre*

*R.S.V.P. to Mary Fryer at 651-699-8833 or Email [mcfrayer@q.com](mailto:mcfrayer@q.com)*

**September 15**

**Dave Watters' 16th Annual NWA Reunion Party**

[nwareunion@yahoo.com](mailto:nwareunion@yahoo.com)

**October 20**

***NWAHC Airline Collectible Show, 9 until 4***

**Gala NWAHC 10th Anniversary Party, 5 until ?**

Best Western Plus Motel, Bloomington MN

[bill@airlineposters.com](mailto:bill@airlineposters.com) or [www.nwahistory.org](http://www.nwahistory.org)

**Remembering David L. Behncke** *Continued from page 1*

World War I over, he barnstormed across the midwest with other restless young aviators. He chose Chicago as his base and in 1921 won the prestigious Chicago Air Derby, winning acclaim as an outstanding pilot. He managed Checkerboard Field, the Windy City's first bonafide airport, for about four years.

In the midwest, everybody who was anybody in aviation knew **Charles "Pop" Dickinson**. Dickinson made his money in the agricultural seed business, but flying was his passion. Behncke and Dickinson were good friends, and when "Pop" started flying the mail to the Twin Cities on June 7, 1926, Behncke joined him.

Misfortune dogged Dickinson's brief effort, however, and on Sept. 30 he quit. Enter Northwest Airways, destined to become one of the world's great airlines during its 82-year existence. Behncke and **Charles W. "Speed" Holman** were Northwest's first two pilots. Holman, who had already earned a reputation as one of the nation's premiere stunt and racing pilots, doubled as Operations Manager.

Holman and Behncke were opposites. Behncke was serious, introverted. Later, even people who had worked with him for years said they never really knew him, didn't know what made him "tick." Retired Northwest Captain **Joe Kimm**, now 101, knew Holman well. "Everybody loved 'Speed' Holman," Kimm said recently. "He had a great personality and he could do things with an airplane that no other pilot would, or could, do." (Another Northwest legend, Captain **Walter Bullock**, once called Holman "the greatest pilot who ever lived" and Bullock knew them all.)

Holman often took Northwest's little Stinson "Detroit" planes up for some aerobatics to "prepare them" for passenger service. Behncke objected to this practice on airworthiness grounds. One day in 1927 he refused a Chicago flight in a plane Holman had been handling. Holman prevailed, however, and Behncke promptly left the airline. He hooked up with United for awhile but was terminated for unexplained absenteeism. (Throughout his life Behncke was known as a moral man who abhorred alcohol.)

Behncke's experiences had made him particularly unhappy with airline management's attitude towards its pilots, particularly in the realm of work rules and pay. He decided to do something about it. He gathered a few like-minded pilots together in the Morrison Hotel in Chicago (among them Walter Bullock) and on July 27, 1931, the Air Line Pilot's Association, ALPA, the pilots' union, was born. Behncke was its first president and held that post for more than 20 years.

There followed a period of head-butting with many of the nation's airlines. American was the first to sign a contract with the ALPA. Other domestic carriers soon followed, finally even Eastern. Eastern chief **Eddie Rickenbacker** was a particularly strong early foe of the ALPA.

Behncke's leadership was brilliant. He was politically astute. He knew the importance of our nation's capital. He knew Washington was the place to get things done. New York City Mayor **Fiorello LaGuardia**, a former Congressman and a Behncke admirer, was an important mentor. (Indeed, LaGuardia and Behncke marched together shoulder-to-shoulder near the front of New York's 1939 Labor Day parade.) LaGuardia advised him on strategy and opened doors to powerful liberals in the Roosevelt administration and to important Congressmen.

Behncke marched through these doors with command. He testified at innumerable Congressional committee and subcommittee hearings on labor matters, often extolling ALPA pilots as a national treasure. His appearances were eagerly awaited and afterwards applauded. **President Roosevelt** knew Behncke personally as well as by reputation, as he often attended FDR's Oval Office ceremonial signings of important labor legislation.

Behncke's Washington victories were many, too many to be detailed here. One, however, should be mentioned -- the passage of the 1938 Civil Aeronautics Act which provided Federal guarantee of airline pilot wages and working conditions.

In the late 1940s, however, clouds formed on Behncke's horizon. He began to slip physically and emotionally due to his single-minded purpose and years of brutal overwork, his lieutenants felt.

★ Steve Marks - Gold Star Volunteer! ★



Spend an hour talking with Steve Marks and you'll find out how much he values connections with people. Which appears to make him a perfect candidate for volunteer work at the NWAHC. You'll find Steve at the Centre every Tuesday, from 11 until 2, greeting visitors, giving tours, selling merchandise, helping out with mailings and cheerfully taking on just about any task he is asked to do. As you read on, you'll find people connections everywhere.

After four years in the U. S. Air Force, from 1964 to 1968, Steve hired on with Golden West, a commuter airline in southern California. A year later he moved back to Minnesota and started with North Central in the engine shop in August, 1969. "My first day on the job I worked with a guy named **Walt Foemmel**. Turns out he was from a town 35 miles south of where I grew up in Wisconsin."

North Central became Republic. Steve survived the NWA buyout and ultimately retired from Northwest in January, 2005, after 35-1/2 years.

"When I worked for Republic, I bowled in the Airport League at Airport Bowl, with several original red tails and got to know them. After the buyout, I met up with many of them again in Building B, which made it a lot nicer for me. I was welcomed. I was happy to see them. It was old home week.

"Early in January, 1987, soon after the Northwest buyout, I was on the second shift working on a JT8 (DC-9 and B-727 engine) and this guy from plant maintenance came by in an electric cart. Every time I saw him over the next few weeks I felt like I knew him from somewhere. One night I talked to him and discovered he was stationed at Moses Lake AFB in Washington at the same time I was, in the same shop. His name was **Phil Tenney**, a native of Fairmont, Minn., 50 miles south of New Ulm, where I went to high school. When Defense Secretary Robert McNamara went on a base-closing spree in 1966, Moses Lake was closed. I was sent to March AFB in Riverside, Calif. Phil went the other direction, to Goose Bay, Labrador. I served at March AFB in Riverside the remainder of my time in the service in a B-52 wing. The B-52 was the second-largest bomber in the Air Force. Each aircraft carried two A-bombs - a cold war deterrent.

"Around New Year's, 1987, I found myself working in NWA Building B. That is where I first met members of the NWAHC "Thursday Gang,"\* before they retired. Steve said "Northwest had one of the two best, if not *the* best, airplane engine shops in the industry.

"I grew up in a little town in central Wisconsin where they make Tombstone pizzas. One day in 1988 I was over in Building C and ran into a guy I recognized right away. My boyhood friend **Chuck "Charlie Tuna" Warner** was working for NWA. His dad gave me my first airplane ride when I was in grade school. He was in maintenance for NWA for many years.

Steve said, "I've always been interested in history, and my friend **Don Swanson**,\*\* whom I've known for 40 years, was active at the NWAHC. He asked me to cover his shift at the Centre when he was working air shows, and that's how it started."

Steve is also active in the 8th Air Force Society. "**Joe Olson**, of the NWAHC "Thursday Gang" got me into this group. Their goals are similar to the NWAHC, focused on preserving oral history. Many members are WWII vets. One, 94 years old, was a B-17 pilot and makes it to lunch every week," Steve says.

Steve has a son, Steve Jr., daughter Rebecca, and five grandkids. He and Faith have been married since 1993. Steve Jr., is very interested in aviation and visits the NWAHC for special programs. "I hope we can keep the NWA museum going a long, long time. Too much history here to lose." ✈

\*Ed note: Link to **Reflections** story about the "Thursday Gang" in 2010 [http://www.nwahistory.org/newsletter/10\\_sep\\_newsletter.pdf](http://www.nwahistory.org/newsletter/10_sep_newsletter.pdf)

\*\*Ed note: Link to **Reflections** story about Don Swanson in 2009. [http://www.nwahistory.org/newsletter/09\\_sep\\_newsletter.pdf](http://www.nwahistory.org/newsletter/09_sep_newsletter.pdf)

**Remembering David L. Behncke** *Continued from page 3*

For years, Behncke had ruled the ALPA with an iron hand. Everything was done the Behncke way. He became even more rigid in his views, even more adverse to counsel. His correspondence became verbose and ill-defined. He squandered hours on detail on matters of secondary importance. Finally and inevitably, there was a move to replace him. Behncke's dissatisfaction resulted in a tangle of internal lawsuits which all but paralyzed ALPA's normal activities. Behncke lost and was cited for contempt of court. Knowing he would be ousted from the union he created, at an upcoming ALPA meeting in October, 1952, he did the unthinkable. He resigned.

He was due a \$7,500 yearly pension, details for which had been worked out several years earlier. Bitterly, he refused a thoughtful and generous offer from his ALPA colleagues: a life salary of \$15,000 a year (salary, not pension, in 1952 dollars). He did ask, however, that his wife, Gladys, be taken care of. He died six months later at age 55.

ALPA members today stand on a firm foundation conceived and in large part constructed by David L. Behncke. He built an incredible career, perhaps seldom rivaled for intensity and drama, for the old "Pop" Dickinson and Northwest Airways pilot - - the Wisconsin farm boy with an eighth grade education who left home when he was 16. ✈

*Editor's note: Many facts in this story were gleaned from the book "Flying the Line" by George E. Hopkins, published by the Air Line Pilots Association in 1982. Thanks to NWA History Centre volunteer Ray Dolny for lending us the book. Ray is a success story, too. He joined Northwest as a mechanic in 1947, became a flight engineer in 1953, a pilot in 1962, and retired in 1985 as a B-747 Captain. Now in his eighth decade, he still plays slow-pitch softball "when my knees say it's okay."*

**Prominent U.S. Airline Historian** *Continued from page 9*

He retired from The Saint Paul Companies in 1988 after 25 years of service and pursued his aviation interests full time. Five years later, in 1993, he sold his home in Bloomington, Minn. and moved to Eugene, Ore. By then his model airplane collection had grown to 400. Two days before he was to leave Minnesota, he saw an article in the Eugene newspaper with the headline "Four Eugene Businessmen Start Air & Space Museum at Eugene Airport."

"I thought I'd died and gone to heaven," Dave says. "I packed up my models and brought them to the museum." Ever since, Dave has been curator and one of the directors of the Oregon Air & Space Museum. [www.oasm.org](http://www.oasm.org)

We're all blessed that Dave still has a soft spot for NWA, and we look forward to his next visit. ✈

**Publisher**

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[www.nwahistory.org](http://www.nwahistory.org)

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**NWA History Center Hours**

**Monday through Friday**

**11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

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**9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

**VOLUNTEER  
OPPORTUNITIES**

**Put your talent to work for the  
NWA History Centre!**

**Hosts/Hostesses needed  
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**Call Wayne Snyder 952-698-4478**

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**Help with many H.C. projects  
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*Northwest Airlines well represented at 2012 Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame Awards: Joe Kimm and Bryan Moon Inducted April 28*



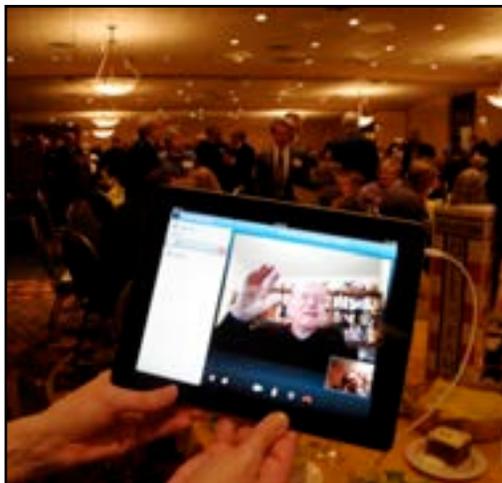
**Bryan Moon**, retired NWA V.P., Advertising, founded the successful MIA Hunters organization.



Joe Kimm's daughter **Kerry Cotton**, son **Joe Kimm, Jr.**, and granddaughter **Kimm Viebrock**, accepted for **Joe Kimm**.



**Shirley Huskins** and **Marianne Blomquist**, Donald Nyrop's secretary,



Joe Kimm, in Seattle, joins the proceedings via Skype, thanks to his granddaughter Kimm Viebrock.



Kimm with iPad, helps Grandpa Joe participate at the awards.



Two NWA alumni who are proud supporters of the NWAHC museum were honored by the MN Aviation Hall of Fame at the organization's annual banquet. Congratulations Bryan and Joe!

Pictured: Bruce Kitt, NWAHC president, Mary Fryer, secretary, and Susan Rostkoski, director.



## Wisconsin Central and North Central Airlines Coffee & Conversation at the NWA History Centre, April 21



**"Tails from the Past,"** presented by NWAHC honored guests from Wisconsin Central and North Central Airlines. **Vicki Pritchett**, Event Coordinator, tells us her team of 27 volunteers—including mechanics, flight attendants, pilots, reservationists and other retirees, worked like a well oiled machine.

"Attendance was at an all time high, with guests numbering around 125. We heard many comments from former employees of these two airlines ~ how impressed they were that the NWAHC would honor them and all their years of service. And oh, there were lots of "tales" to tell. It just goes to show you that an airline employee will always be part of one big family, forever." ~ Vicki Pritchett



President **Bruce Kitt**, welcomes the group.



**Steve Marks** and "Herman"

### ***Greetings from Wayne (Rudy) and Botella "Bo" Rudolph***

"My husband and I attended the Coffee & Conversation at the NWA History Centre that honored Wisconsin Central and North Central employees on April 21. Rudy and I had a marvelous time reminiscing and remembering times gone by. We enjoyed the camaraderie with past friends and fellow employees of North Central. We even saw an old neighbor (**Janice and Smoky Meyers**). I personally enjoyed seeing **Lucy Pellet** (she replaced me at NWA when I quit in 1959). Of course we always enjoy **Steve Marks**. I teased Rudy about paying Steve to say something nice about him as Rudy was his lead mechanic. *Ed note: See story on Steve Marks, page 4.*



**Rudy and "Bo" Rudolph**

I want to thank everyone involved with making it such a nice, enjoyable afternoon, especially **Mary Fryer**. A special thank you to **Flora Dryer**, who picked us up at the Airport Embassy Suites and drove us to the "Tails From the Past," then transported us to the airport in time to catch our 5:30 p.m. flight back to Great Falls, Mont. We live 50 miles northwest in a little town called Choteau. It is a sleepy town of around 1,700 people. If any of you are out our way please stop by or at least call us. We live in Skyline Lodge, which has many retirement apartments. Our land-line is 406-466-5458 and my cell is 406-590-2558."

*Continued on page 10*



***RNPA Cruise  
Aboard the 'Avalon' on the  
St Croix River  
June 2012***



**Gary Pisel**, RNPA president, and **Bill Marchessault** admire NWAHC merchandise.



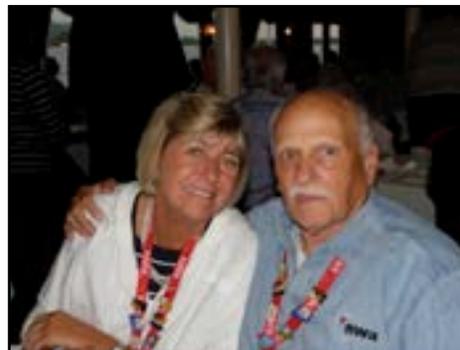
The stormy weather outside had no effect on happy diners inside the bright, floating dining room.



**Mary Fryer** and **Kay Ferrell** worked the NWAHC table.



**Jerry Wortman** and **Bill Rataczak**



**Bob and Sue Horning**



**Bill** (pack/unpack) **Marchessault**



Lots of steady activity at the **NWAHC** table.  
Thank you, **RNPA** members and guests!



**Judy and Tom Schellinger** and  
**Karen Kreutzman**, enjoy the cruise.



Holman Field, St. Paul, MN

## Hangar Talk . . . Stories from and about *Reflections* Readers



**Dave Galbraith** sharing information with NWAHC volunteer **Bob DuBert**

### **Prominent U. S. Airline Historian Visits NWA History Centre**

Need to know what happened to an aircraft - *any aircraft* - owned by a U. S. airline - *any U. S. Airline*? **Dave Galbraith** is your man.

Over the years Dave has amassed accurate, detailed records, including photographs, when available, of all aircraft owned and operated by U. S. airlines. Organized in three-ring binders, each identified by an airline name, Dave's work makes fascinating reading.



Galbraith and President Bruce Kitt remember the early days

The following anecdote illustrates how highly regarded Dave Galbraith is by the airline industry, and has been for many years.

“Back in 1975 I got a call from Martin Cole, then editor of the American Aviation Historical Society (AAHS) Journal. He had contacted Northwest about doing an article commemorating their 50th Anniversary. NWA V.P. Public Relations **Roy Erickson** said to call me, as I knew more about Northwest's history than anyone he knew at the airline. Marty called me and the rest is history.”

You can find a copy of the article Dave subsequently wrote, “**The Aircraft History of Northwest Airlines**,” originally published in 1976, at the NWAHC. Resplendent with photos, this detailed history of NWA's first 50 years (before any mergers or acquisitions) has become a prized resource for volunteers and visitors at the center.

In June, Dave visited the NWAHC, bringing three-ring binders that relate to all of the airlines Northwest acquired over the years, in addition to Northwest Airways and Northwest Airlines prior to mergers and acquisitions.

A native of Minneapolis, Dave hung around the NWA hangars at the airport as a kid. “The mechanics were so nice to me. They would show me what they were working on.” Dave says. “That started my interest in commercial aviation and, most particularly, Northwest Airlines,” he added.

Dave has constructed 1,085 models, the largest number of models by one person to a single scale currently in a museum.

*Continued on page 5*

**Wisconsin Central and North Central Coffee & Conversation** *Continued from page 7*



**Steve Marks** and **Don Swanson** lead the storytelling.



**Smilin' Jack Schillinger** and **Don Swanson**

June 18

**NWAHC Staff go to College**

H.C. President and Curator **Bruce Kitt** and volunteer **Robert DuBert** attended an all-day conference of the Minnesota Digital Library at the University of Minnesota Continuing Education and Conference Center. They learned about the digitalization of museum collections and how a dynamic online presence can increase the visibility and reach of a museum like our H.C.



True to form, Jack's stories kept coming!



Lots of tempting memorabilia was available.

**Door Prize Winners**

- Judy Jurgensen** and **Jim Jauch** both won Smilin' Jack's books
- Judith Jauch:** an Applebee's gift certificate donated by Vicky and Ben Pritchett
- Mike Haugen:** a North Central mug
- Jerry Ferrell:** a North Central cap



# The DVDs are Here!



*Remembering the days of*  
**Wisconsin Central & North Central Airlines**  
**Coffee & Conversation**  
at the  
**NWA History Centre**  
**April 21, 2012**

Watch and listen with the biggest C & C crowd ever, as Wisconsin Central and North Central survivors share their stories about working for these historic carriers. If you were unable to attend the event, we've preserved the experience so you'll be able to enjoy it as if you had been there, front and center. And if you *were* part of this wonderful day, now you can watch it again and share these timeless memories with family and friends.



Wisconsin Central President Francis Higgins hired designer Karl Brocken (r) to design the new logo. How long did Brocken have to wait for his pay? And what was unique about that first paint job?



Did Don Swanson and/or Steve Marks have anything to do with painting a smile on Herman back in the day? And again later?

**Other DVDs still available:**  
**“Remembering Donald Nyrop”**  
**“Meet NWA Orient Route Pioneers”**  
**“No Rules,” Al Johnson’s story**  
To order, call Mary Fryer at 651-699-8833 or Email [mcfryer@q.com](mailto:mcfryer@q.com)  
**\$20 each or three for \$49**

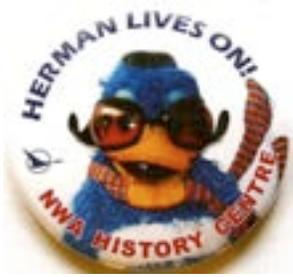
Pick them up at the NWAHC Gift Shop Monday through Friday, 11-5 or Saturday 9-1 or send your check for \$20\* today, plus \$4 S&H, to Mary Fryer, NWA History Centre, 8101 34th Avenue South, Bloomington, MN 55425

\*Income received from memberships, donations, events and the sale of merchandise supports the goals of the NWA History Centre. Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of state and federal levels.

NWA History Centre



8101 34th Avenue South  
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See pages 7, 10 and 11 for  
Wisconsin Central and North  
Central Coffee & Conversation  
event at the NWAHC

*NWA History Centre Reflections*

*Summer 2012*

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## **NWA History Centre Appreciates its Volunteers**

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**Thank you all!**

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