



Reflections

Dedicated to preserving the history of a great airline.

Remember our 'Mod Squad?' It was 1942 . . .



The last B-24 came off the Mod Center line in 1945. Photo courtesy of Harry Chin, shown with other members of his shift. He is standing 7th from the right in white shirt with arms crossed.

In addition to operating an airline, Northwest Airlines was involved in 10 World War II projects. In early 1942, officers of the U.S. Army and the British War Mission came calling asking NWA to take on one more big one.

By now America had shifted into high gear, producing desperately needed bombers on an assembly line - much faster than her enemies. It was not practical to slow down these fast moving lines to add modifications to ships bound for special missions or for service in different climates.

Special Assignment

The Army wanted to know if NWA could create a huge bomber modification plant in St. Paul

to update these planes for combat so the assembly lines could keep going at optimum speed. Northwest agreed, and the "Mod" was born.

Wait - we're not quite ready!

Only two days later, a squadron of B-25s, needing to be outfitted for desert warfare in north Africa, arrived at Holman Field. Up to the challenge, the airline ultimately built a force of 6,000 Mod employees, but when the B-25s arrived, there were only borrowed personnel and no designated facilities. Many worked outdoors that first winter until more hangar space was constructed.

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President's Message

by Bruce Kitt

Something old, something new. Since opening in October 2002, the NWA History Centre had a monthly coffee gathering. Highly popular and well attended in the beginning, attendance had declined to the point that it was discontinued two years ago. Earlier this year Anne Kerr, editor and driving force behind the improvements you see in *Reflections*, approached the History Centre Board of Directors with a fresh take on the old coffee gathering. Motivated by the interesting stories she was hearing and collecting from you, our readers and supporters, as feedback from articles and requests for stories in *Reflections*, Anne proposed fewer, topic specific gatherings. In the desire to encourage the sharing of stories, somehow 'Coffee & Conversation' seemed a catchy name that built on its older roots and hinted at its newer purpose.



The launch of 'Coffee & Conversation' was the tribute to Donald W. Nyrop - successful beyond our expectations. From that gathering Anne met and heard from enough Northwest alumni that she proposed a follow up: Northwest's pioneering trans-Pacific service to Asia. Another hit. Playing off that story line, the History Centre invited Rick Seireeni, who had earlier enlisted the NWAHC to help him find information about his father, NWA Capt. Al Johnson, to speak about his quest for stories about his dad, some of which took place in early years of Northwest's Pacific service. Three for three - a very successful new endeavor. What has been especially rewarding for the NWAHC has been the use of the museum as a center for learning and sharing and the potential to use its collection to illustrate or highlight topics of interest with artifacts that were 'there' when these events took place. In and of themselves, artifacts are mute. In the hands of story tellers they speak of events that are part of Northwest's history - and part of our history. With your support, as members and donors, we will keep these stories from fading away. CAVU



Coffee & Conversation at the NWA History Centre

*Do you have topic ideas for
C & C events in 2012
or wish to sponsor an event?*

Norm Midthun, who hosted both "**Remembering Donald Nyrop**" and the "**Meet Orient Route Pioneers**" events, has suggested two topics for 2012.

One involves the **D.B. Cooper** incident, and Norm suggests inviting **Bill Rataczak**, who was co-pilot on that flight, to be present at the event.

His other idea is an event about **NWA hijackings**. He recalls a couple of them where some members of hijacked crews, like **Red Sutter**, are still around and could be asked to share their recollections.

Would you like us to pursue these ideas? Do you have more ideas for us? We plan to host three C & C events in 2012 and will consider hosting four if demand warrants.

We wish to announce sponsorship opportunities for individuals and businesses to join us in hosting Coffee & Conversation events in 2012. An investment of \$250 will add your name(s) to the event you select. Call Mary Fryer at 651-699-8833 or E-mail mcfryer@q.com with event ideas or sponsorship questions.

Your NWA History Centre Board of Directors

***Just in time for the holidays -
NWAHC Gift Shop offers Perfectly
Unique Ideas for Aviation Buffs***

Fay Kulenkamp, our gift shop guru, is happy to announce the arrival of her new shipment of NWA logo watches and 747 watches. "Priced at \$24.95 and sporting red or black leather bands, these make great gifts for men or women.

"We also have lots of new retro NWA and NC baseball caps - one even comes in pink for ladies!

"Our nicely made denim shirts, with various logos and sizes from small to 3X, start at \$29.95.

"The very popular and functional NWA-engraved airplane seatbelt keychains are just \$9.95.

"Select from a variety of colorful, original little serving dishes used on NWA international flights. Starting at \$6.95, these conversation pieces are just the right size for candy or nuts. Plus, they bear the NWA stamp!

"Our books make great gifts for readers - or non-readers who love our airline: *Voices From The Sky* by Bob Johnson, *Fujiyama Trays & Oshibori Towels*, by Anne Billingsley Kerr, *Northwest Airlines, The First Eighty Years*, by Geoff Jones and the *NWAHC Cookbook* for everyone who appreciates good food.

"Our NWA pins, jewelry and coffee mugs stuff stockings with memories.

"For someone special, purchase the gift that keeps on giving all year long: A NWA History Centre membership. The lucky recipient will receive a copy of each newsletter, discounts on all gift shop purchases and an invitation to our special events. At \$20 and up, it's the biggest bargain of all!"



Call us for more information and assistance! 952-698-4478



NWA History Centre Gift Shop open Mon. - Fri. 11-5 and Sat 9-1

**VOLUNTEER
OPPORTUNITIES**

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

**Hosts/Hostesses needed
during museum hours.
Call Wayne Snyder 952-698-4478**

**Story and photograph
submissions for the newsletter.
Call Anne Kerr 612-865-5377**

**Help with many H.C. projects
Call Bruce Kitt 952-698-4478**

Publisher

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Members: *We'd like to hear from you! Have ideas of stories you'd like to see in your newsletter? Photos to share? Send to editor@nwahistory.org or call Anne @ 612-865-5377.*

The Mod Center *continued from page 1*

Superintendent Ralph Geror, Speed Holman's mechanic in Northwest's early days, oversaw creation of what became a huge technical school, where new hires from all walks of life learned to become qualified specialists in many areas, from machine guns to the super-secret radar, that led to the superiority of Allied air power.

In the beginning, the "Mod," short for Bomber Modification Center, used a small space in Northwest's own Holman Field building and also leased the 109th National Guard hangar, which wasn't large enough for the 4-engine B-24 Liberators NWA prepared for battle. Undaunted, Northwest set up an ingenious open air production line, protected from the elements by canvas tarps.

Construction of a 600-foot-long hangar was completed and in use December 7, 1942 - and another one begun - exactly one year after Pearl Harbor.

A Small City

In addition to a variety of workshops and offices connecting the two hangars, a modern cafeteria was built. At its peak, it accommodated 6,000 employees, serving meals for 50 cents or less.

This self-contained area included a fire department, which was needed because NWA crews had to test-fly the bombers before they were turned over to the Air Force; bus service to transport workers from one facility to another; a post office and a newspaper, "Field and Hangar."

Gussie the Gun Moll

Many women worked at the Mod - but instead of the more common "Rosie the Riveter" moniker, they were distinctly dubbed "Gussie the Gun Moll" because so many of them were gunsmiths.

Honeywell's Automatic Pilots

Autopilots produced in the Twin Cities by Honeywell were among the dozens of technological improvements installed by Mod workers.

H2-X

Radar at the time was so top secret that it was referred to by a code name - H2-X. Northwest was the only civilian organization in the United States chosen to install this equipment, that allowed Allied airmen to bomb with accuracy day or

night, unhampered by overcast or clouds. Radar-equipped bombers destroyed enemy war plants, rail centers, fuel tanks and even scattered Nazi sub fleets, opening up sea lanes for Allied transport of men and equipment.

Bendix manufactured the radar equipment and was able to produce only 82 units per month, so the Mod *installed* 82 units per month. The newly equipped bombers were in such demand they were in Britain two days later.

Top Secret

So secret was the radar that armed guards accompanied the units on the railroad en route to St. Paul, and so many guards hovered over the assembly line workers, it was difficult for them to meet quotas.

All Over the World

Mod bombers were used in the famous "hump" operation, carrying material over the Himalayas from India to China. Some were camouflaged a dirty-pink for the African desert campaign. Others were specially winterized for Alaska operations.

The 'Super Eye'

Newly invented "super eye" triple-lensed cameras gave Allied fliers the most advanced photo reconnaissance equipment of the war.

In one example, cameras installed by the Mod allowed two U.S. Marine photo planes to discover and record on film one of Japan's most tightly guarded secrets, the enemy's principal South Pacific sea and air fortress at Truk Island.

Mod Personnel

People of all shapes and sizes worked at the Mod, from a four-foot one-inch mechanic to a guard who weighed in at 240 pounds and was a six-foot-four ex-Chicago White Sox pitcher. Nine blind employees sorted nuts, bolts, washers, rivets, screws and tiny machine parts and saved the company costs beyond the salaries they earned.

Harry Chin, an early Mod Center employee, came to visit the NWA History Centre in June. His story follows on Page 5. ➔

Ed note: Photos of the Mod Center and copies of "Field and Hangar" are available for study at the NWAHC. Also available is Kenneth D. Ruble's book "Flight to the Top" with fascinating Mod Center stories.

Harry Chin visits the NWAHC to see the museum's 'Mod' collection and talk with John Peterson

Harry Chin still has the pin he wore while he worked at the "Mod," short for Bomber Modification Center, installing Radome and Nordic bombsights on B-24s. He also installed gas tanks on B-25s for the British.

The pin says "I am Chinese." It was important that people knew he was Chinese, not Japanese, especially while working on U.S. bombers during WWII at NWA's St. Paul facility.

Chin's daughter Sheila Morris called the NWAHC this summer to say her father was talking about his experiences at the Mod in the 1940s, and she wondered if we had any information, or knew of other Mod workers her dad could share experiences with.

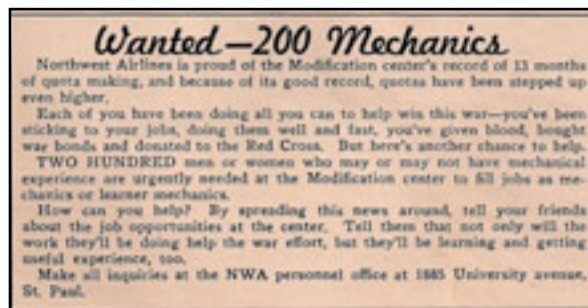
With their usual zeal, NWAHC volunteers sprang into action and on June 27, introduced Harry, his daughter Sheila and her husband Rick to the museum, its Mod collection and another Mod worker, John Peterson. At the request of the U.S. Army and British War Mission, NWA opened the center at Holman Field in February, 1942, and brought Peterson in from Seattle as crew chief, to help get it started. So although they never worked together (Peterson worked on the first B-24 and Chin worked on the last one) they enjoyed reminiscing about this proud chapter in NWA history.

Harry Chin came to the U.S. in 1939 at 17. He worked in restaurants until he heard about better paying jobs at the Mod. "I called the (U.S.) Army, but they didn't want me because I didn't know English very well. I was hired by NWA, and went to a NWA mechanic's school in Minneapolis on Hennepin Avenue before starting work at Holman Field in St Paul.

"The Mod was open 24 hours with three shifts. After my shift I would go to another job cooking in the Canton Cafe. I also worked in laundries." When asked what he did on his time off Harry responded, "I didn't know time off. When I wasn't working at the Mod, I worked other jobs. We had a lot of fun working at the Mod. Sometimes if there was no work, we'd play cards in one of the airplanes." ➔



Harry Chin and John Peterson at NWAHC in June, 2011. Both worked at the Mod Center in the 1940s, but at different times.



This notice appeared in Field and Hangar newsletter in May, 1945. Visit the NWAHC to see newsletter copies, photos of the Mod, and a model of the B-24 bomber.



"No Rules" Becomes Family Reunion For Pilot's Son Sept 29



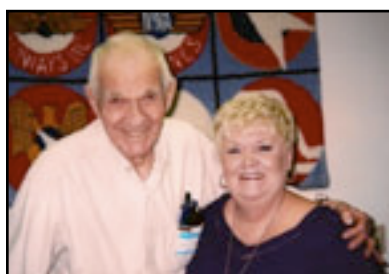
Al Johnson.



Rick Seireeni's search for information about his dad, Al Johnson, started with NWAHC's founder Pete Patzke.



Terry & Al Johnson in Shanghai



John Peterson and daughter Carol Peterson, had 82 years of combined service with NWA



Elaine Meilke, widow of NWA Capt. Bob Meilke with RNPA's Dino Oliva



Rick Seireeni and retired NWA F/A Bob DuBert, who Emceed the event.



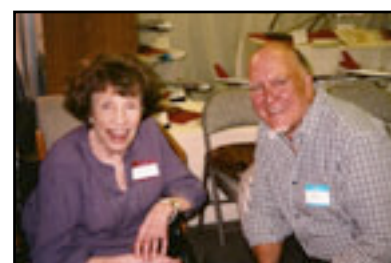
Rick's family came to meet Rick and hear the stories they helped him discover.



Mary and Delta/NWA Capt. Charles Curry Jr., chat with ret. NWA Capt John Campbell and Rick Seireeni.



Some of Rick's newfound family members l-r, cousins Stephen Johnson, Dorothy Hanson, Jim Johnson (son), Rose Johnson, Theresa Doherty, and Al's brother Jim Johnson, Rick Seireeni



Phyllis Curry (widow of NWA Capt. Chuck Curry) tells Rick about how she and her husband were close friends of Al Johnson, Rick's dad.

History Centre hosts retired sales group

by Bob Johnson

They came from near and far - a happy and enthusiastic group of retired Northwest Airlines sales, ticketing and related personnel - who talked up "the good old days" during an afternoon visit to the History Centre in September.

The group's two-day social whirl in the Twin Cities, its first official gathering in about 10 years, was coordinated by Roger Hauge of Excelsior Minn. Roger joined Northwest as a Spokane sales rep in 1959. He retired as vice president of Northwest's Atlantic Region, London, in 1992.



Sophia Howard, 1973-2003 and Maureen Pickell, 1985-2006



Old friends Jim Queenan, 1964-1972 and Carol Peterson, 1964-2006



Bud Smith 1952-1985; Maiako Smith; Skip White 1969-1992; and Ted Hemmert 1975-2002



Above:

*Mike O'Connell, 1970-1978;
Alan Robbins 1972-1992;
Charles Boos, 1959-1982.*

Right:

Bill O'Brien, 1968-1992, and History Centre chief Bruce Kitt at the old Philippine hardwood Manila reservations table constructed in 1950 and used for 30 years until automation. in 1980. It is not certain where it was, from 1980 until 2005, when it mysteriously appeared at the NWAHC. Can any reader educate us on this?



Joe Kimm writes about this photo from the NWAHC archives

The June, 2011 issue of *Reflections* carried a question with photo and 'hint' and asked readers to respond with the information. Within hours of receiving his newsletter, Joe Kimm, retired NWA Captain, responded with the following great story and photos:

Back to Fargo!

by Joe Kimm

As the summer waned, typically the passenger loads began to fall off. And, as the schedules were reduced to accommodate fewer loads, it was inevitable that I would now return to Fargo for the winter months. However, this time there was a major change. I would be flying all the way to Winnipeg with an overnight stay, then return to Fargo the following morning. This time I would be flying only, not asked to fill in as station manager at Fargo.

Another change - because of the heavy snow problems on the route, the company had developed a special ski to install on the aircraft during these snowy periods. This ski was built with a dural base, buckets to hold the wheels and bungee cords to keep the skis level in flight. When needed, the skis were placed on the ground in front of the wheels, the aircraft then taxied forward into the buckets - then special metal straps wrapped over the tires and secured to hold the aircraft to the skis. Bungee cords were then attached from the underwing to the front and rear of the skis.

This sounded like a pretty good solution to operating in deep snow, but in actual practice proved to have some problems. It made the aircraft very difficult to steer on the snow, particularly when the wind was strong. However as the snow began to fall we strapped on the skis and used them, sometimes with great difficulty.

And so it was, on a particular flight from Winnipeg south, I discovered after landing at Pembina that it was impossible to turn my aircraft around to taxi back to the ramp. I radioed the station manager of my difficulties. His answer to the problem was to obtain a team of horses from a neighboring farmer, hook them up to the landing gear of the Hamilton, and standing on the cowling behind the engine he drove the airplane back to the ramp. After that we reverted back to discing the runways and landing on wheels.

I was fortunate to have a Brownie Kodak camera with me and so was able to photograph the incident. The station manager referred to above was Charles 'Snakes' Bouvette. He is shown driving the team of horses bringing the aircraft back to the ramp at Pembina, North Dakota in January, 1936.➤

Where did this earlier NWA employee work?



His nickname was "Snakes"



Ed. note: [Joe Kimm celebrated his 100th birthday on August 18, 2011](#), and will be inducted into the [Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame](#) in May, 2012. His contributions to Northwest Airlines and the NWAHC are enormous. Thank you, Joe!

Patzke voices passing of vintage NWA planes from MSP

It was with deep regret that we saw the removal of Chuck Doyle's replica 1910 Curtiss Pusher and Dan Neuman's 1928 Waco biplane that hung from the ceiling of the Gold Concourse at MSP. The Pusher has been moved to the Dakota Territory Air Museum in Minot, ND.

The Waco, painted in the colors and carrying the vintage logos of Northwest Airways, Inc., went to the Delta Air Transport Heritage Museum in Atlanta. Neuman had donated his plane to Northwest Airlines back in 1968 and apparently it was claimed by Delta as part of the merger spoils. The departure of the Waco was particularly hard to take as it was the last vestige of the Northwest name and the long time "Red Tail" identifier at MSP.

We hope that at some future time no one takes a paint brush to the Waco's logo and numerical identity, destroying the aircraft's unique history.

Pete Patzke is founder and treasurer of the NWA History Centre

'All About Bob' marks Reardon's 60 year flight pattern

Bob Reardon's 60th anniversary with Northwest/Delta was commemorated at the MSP Officer's Club, Oct. 3, with more than 300 well-wishers attending. Bob appeared to enjoy the festivities in his honor, and he modestly summed up his longevity by saying, "I just keep breathing."



l-r Mitch (Radisson Narita), Bob, and event planners extraordinaire Richard Moody and Lori Rothmund



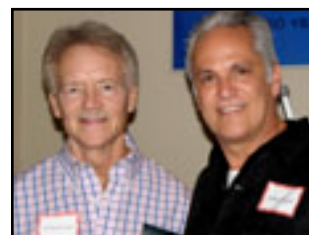
l-r Bob's sister Berniece Reardon, Rev. Martin Shallbetter, Bob, sister Mary Klingelhoets



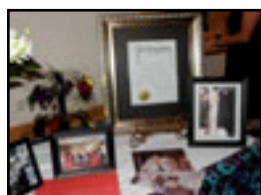
Old timers Mary Pat Laffey Inman, Carol Holmquist, Jean Carlson Schreiber and Anne Billingsley Kerr



NWAHC president Bruce Kitt and secretary Mary Fryer



F/A's Bill Marchessault and John Joseph



Bob Reardon and Carol Holmquist



Jackie Dammel's DC-3 cake

*Ed. note: The following story and photographs are reprinted with permission from the July/August 2010 issue of **Aloft**, magazine of [The Museum of Flight](#), in Seattle. It all started when Bob DuBert, retired NWA flight attendant and volunteer at the NWA History Centre, visited The Museum of Flight earlier this year and saw the Style In The Aisle exhibit. He was enthusiastic enough about it to want to share his experience with those of us not able to visit the museum during the time this exhibit was featured. He contacted Mike Bush, editor in chief of **Aloft** and Director of Marketing and PR for the museum, who graciously gave **Reflections** permission to reprint this article.*

Style In the Aisle: Out of Sight, But Not Out Of Mind

By Dan Hagedorn

When the Museum curatorial and exhibits staff decided to mount "Style In the Aisle" several years ago, making use of flight attendant and stewardess uniforms and accoutrements actually in the collection, the response from our visitors was, to say the least, very gratifying indeed.

As is often the case, the popular exhibit gave rise to a great number of donations as former flight attendants, stewardesses and stewards were so pleased to see that, at long last, their highly visible (but generally overlooked) role in the evolution of air transport had been memorialized in an exceptionally clever and, dare I say "tasteful" way. The staff has been considering a touring exhibition of the same general theme and, funding permitting, would then take portable portions of the collection on the road to sister aviation and aerospace museums and other institutions who might be willing to fund such an excursion.

In the meantime, the majority of the contents of the collection that were exhibited have been returned to the gentle ministrations of Collections Assistant Kathrine Browne, who is often dubbed with the sobriquet "Adjunct Curator for Flight Clothing" by myriad former and current flight attendants who have come to know and treasure the respect and care that she gives to their much-loved uniforms.

The so-called "Garment Room," where most of the collection is carefully stored in expensive, high-quality containers, labeled and location-coded for quick retrieval, is one of the best-kept secrets in the Museum. Even long-time staff members, who were gifted with a quick tour recently, had no idea what lurked beyond the

otherwise anonymous door in the collections storage area. While the garments and accoutrements themselves are often beautiful and compelling, as with all of our objects, it is the very human stories that accompanied them during their day-to-day service lives that we strive to communicate to our visitors.

Take the donation of Patrick North, for example, who donated Mary Finley North's uniform (his mother) from her Northwest Airlines career. Mary had worked with her twin sister, Margaret - often on the same airplane - and they occasionally had fun with the passengers in the process. Mary was Member Number 252 in the Stewardess Association and she and Margaret often did publicity photos for Northwest. They were the only twin-sister stewardesses in national service at the time.



Mary Finley North, right, with her sister Margaret, adorned with perhaps the most elegant stewardess attire of all time - including a mink stole - being admired by a NWA official. (Patrick North Collection)

The flight attendant collection now numbers more than 2,000 items, and continues to grow. It includes a very nice selection of TWA uniforms - one of the nation's legacy airlines - that were donated to our collections by Silver Wings International. It includes 22 TWA uniforms ranging from 1944 through 2001.

Continued next page

Style in the Aisle *continued*

Then there are the current flight attendant corps members, such as Sue de Monchaux, who walks the aisle for the Australian flag carrier Qantas, and who, besides donating some of her own personal attire, has been an enthusiastic collector for other aviation museums in her native Australia. She also flew to Seattle recently to deliver items in Kathrine's care on a purposefully extended trip.

Another great benefactor to the collection is in the person of Jean Marie Lyons, who flew out of Boston for Northeast Airlines. When her flights took off from Groton Airport, the aircraft would inevitably fly directly over Jean's home, and her mother would stand outside and wave to her from the family's backyard. On one of her flights, after the aircraft had taken off, the passenger entry door suddenly came ajar, and in the finest tradition of the profession, Jean not only calmed the passengers, but firmly instructed a male passenger sitting next to the door to "sit still" although he had started to make movements suggesting he was going to try to secure the door, which he could not, due to the slipstream. She finally had to engage another passenger to help her secure the door. She performed her tasks, for the most part, as a crew member on classic Douglas DC-3 airliners between 1951 and 1953.

Besides the hundreds of stories that the flight attendants' uniforms afford us, the Garment Room also contains military uniforms from various services, including the Army Air Force, U.S. Air Force, Army and Navy. One interesting set is an arctic uniform - one of the very first - developed

during World War II. The collection includes other flight apparel as well, such as flying helmets, boots, gloves and work clothes worn by aviation mechanics and production line workers. You can almost hear them whispering war stories to each other, if you use a bit of imagination and listen closely!

*Dan Hagedorn is the Senior Curator
for The Museum of Flight.*

<http://www.museumofflight.org>



(upper left) The complete Northwest Airline uniform of Mary Finley North now in the collection of The Museum of Flight, and as shown in the service photo on the preceding page. The full stole, including the collar muff, was only worn in the coldest weather, with just the drape and an open collar worn in more temperate weather. Hardly practical, the accoutrement did not last long in service. (Patrick North Collection)

(head and shoulders portrait) The lovely Miss Mary Finley North as she appeared in full uniform while flying with Northwest Airlines in the 1950s. (Patrick North Collection)

It's easy to donate online!

WWW.GIVEMN.ORG

Wednesday, Nov. 16

When you arrive at the **GIVE MN** home page, just start typing NWA History Centre where it says "search for a cause," and our page will pop up. Easy as pie. We know you are being contacted by many other non-profit organizations. The NWA History Centre really needs your support in order to keep the museum, its collections and events alive and thriving. Thank you.

P.S. If you work for a company that makes "matching funds" available to employees whenever they donate to 501(c)3 non-profits, please be sure to let us know. It doubles your contribution to your NWA History Centre.

NWA History Centre



8101 34th Avenue South
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***Happy Holidays to all!
Look for unique gift
ideas on Pages 3***

NWA History Centre Reflections

Fall 2011



‘Coffee & Conversation’ at the NWA History Centre



DVDs of these popular events are now available!

Remembering Donald Nyrop, June 11, 2011 \$20 plus \$3 S&H

Meet NWA Orient Route Pioneers, Aug. 6, 2011 \$20 plus \$3 S&H

No Rules, Rick Seireeni, Sept. 29, 2011 \$20 plus \$3 S&H

**** Purchase all three DVDs for just \$49 plus \$3 S&H ****

***Stop at the NWA History Centre Gift Shop to purchase your copies or mail your check
to Mary Fryer, NWAHC, 8101 34th Avenue South, Bloomington MN 55425***

Have ideas for future C & C events? Wish to sponsor an event? See page 2