

# Dunlap Focuses on Railroad Heritage

Beginning in 2022, Individuals and members of several organizations in Dunlap sparked a fresh interest in the community's oldest entity – the railroad.

“It all started with a neglected set of stairs,” shared Jill Schaben, Executive Director of the Dunlap Community Development Corporation. Boyer Valley FFA students in Dunlap sought a community service project.

“I’d driven by these concrete steps on many occasions and the state of the railing and stairways bothered me. I asked Becky Berens, the substitute FFA Instructor at the time, if she felt this was a worthwhile project and she said, ‘Let’s do it!’”

Boyer Valley FFA students worked with shovels to pull accumulated dirt and debris away from the steps. Several community members donated split perennials – day lilies and sedums, and the FFA students partnered with the Dunlap Flower Club to plant and water them.

“It was important for the students to get involved because it taught them a lot about being part of a community,” shared Berens. “We had great conversations about the history of our town and how the railroad was a big part of it. This project made the kids feel a sense of pride in their community and that they were doing something to improve it.”

Additionally, Dunlap City Foreman, Tony Warnock, removed the wobbly railing and commissioned the removal of an obsolete electric pole that partially-obscured the view of the railroad and rolling hills.

As time went on, the project began to garner public attention. Many Dunlap residents were surprised to see the concrete benches on the sides of the stairway as these benches had been overgrown for many years.

“We came across a photo of the historic Dunlap Hotel and you can clearly see both flights of stairs in the photo. By this time, community members were stopping me on the street to ask about the project. They had lots of questions about the stairs, the hotel and the depot that has since been demolished,” said Schaben. “Someone told me, ‘If you want to dig into Dunlap’s railroad history, you need to talk to Fonley Allen.’”

Allen was a former Mayor of Dunlap. He serves on the Dunlap Historical Society and is very involved with the operations of the Watson Station in Missouri Valley, Iowa. Allen brought a lot of interesting history to light.

“The history of Iowa is the history of the railroad,” stated Allen. “We need to remember our past. You’ve got to know where you’ve been to know where you want to go.”

The Dunlap Public Library was also a huge asset. “Our local library has digitized Dunlap Reporter articles and advertisements dating back to 1860,” Schaben explained. “We soon began finding little nuggets of historical information pertaining to the stairs, the depot, the hotel, etc.”

A more immediate need for this special exhibit was to replace the railing. Thanks to grant funding from the Harrison County Foundation and donations made via the sales of “spike grasshoppers” welded by Nick Braun, new stair railing was purchased. Greg Stinn, Larry Heller, and Jason Knickman volunteered their time installing the railing and the historic displays.

Meanwhile, members of the Dunlap Flower Club, namely Linda Lehan, Sue Nemitz and Barb Corey have maintained and improved the perennials that were originally planted by the Boyer Valley FFA.

“Dunlap would not exist had it not been for the development of the railroad. We want this area of town to serve as a tourism stop -- a place where residents and visitors can get exercise while learning about the fascinating history behind the railroad as it pertains to the establishment of Dunlap, and the incredible history about this specific area within our community.”