



Spotlight: Nebraska City	1
April Welcome	2
Brownville Merchants	3
A Woman, A Farm, and the Dry Years	5
Peru State College -- Action Photography	6
Peru News and Mayor Novak's Letter	6-9
Valentino's Coupon! ❤️❤️❤️	10
Arbor City News	14-17
<i>New Feature!</i>	
<b>A Prairie Journal</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Columns</i>	
<b>Merri's Diary</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Window on Fifth Street</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>History, Memory &amp; Reflection</i>	
<b>Haunted</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Slim's Stories</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Marion Marsh Brown</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Prairie Love</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Letters From The Prairie</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Westward With Lewis &amp; Clark</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Arbor Day Festival</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Poetry &amp; Creative Works</i>	
<b>DiAnna's Book Review</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Sheila Tinkham's Poetry</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Bruce Madsen's Poetry</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Devon Adams' Poetry &amp; Portraits</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>Calendar</i>	
Morton-James Public Library Calendar	14



Peru State College's Home Opener for Baseball was February 27. More action photos on page 6.



***Your Country Neighbor***  
**Your "2-cups-of-coffee" break**  
**with local photos and articles**  
**and the flavor of rural America.**

**April 2026 "Your Country Neighbor,"**  
**Recognizes Nebraska City with this Historic Reminder.**  
*(Historical summary compiled from public records.)*

Noted by Lewis and Clark as an ideal town site, Nebraska City began taking shape in the 1850s near Fort Kearney and a busy Missouri River ferry crossing used by west-bound settlers, including California gold seekers. Incorporated in 1855, the city's distinctive street grids still reflect its early development along the river.

A shortage of timber inspired pioneer J. Sterling Morton to champion tree planting, founding Arbor Day and establishing Arbor Lodge. Railroads fueled rapid industrial growth in the late 1800s, positioning the city as a manufacturing hub serving America's agricultural expansion. Though river and rail traffic later declined, Nebraska City preserved its historic character and embraced tourism, entrepreneurship, and the arts. Home to Arbor Day celebrations and the AppleJack Festival, the community continues to grow where history, agriculture, and innovation meet along the Missouri River.

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Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

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### **This Month’s Writers & Contributors**

Devon Adams 18

John Chatelain 8

Stephen Hassler 19

Merri Johnson 19

DiAnna Loy 7

Bruce Madsen 17

Morton-James Public Library Calendar 14

Mayor Novak 9

Cheri & Nick Petrillo 7

Sheila Tinkham 16

Thank You!

*“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead  
where there is no path and leave a trail.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

*“People will forget what you said, people will forget  
what you did, but people will never forget how you  
made them feel.”*

Maya Angelou

## April

*by a country neighbor*

If March negotiates, April commits. It doesn’t arrive all at once, but when it comes, it comes with intent. The ground firms up, the air softens, and the calendar finally aligns with what the land has been preparing for. Winter still has a word or two to offer, but it no longer controls the conversation.

Outdoors, April is a working month. The soil darkens and opens, ready to be shaped again. Along the higher ground around Nebraska City, orchards and shelter belts begin their quiet return—rows still bare at a glance, but charged now with purpose. The land doesn’t look finished, but it looks willing. That’s enough to begin.

Light changes faster now. Days lengthen noticeably, and mornings lose their edge. The sun climbs with confidence, warming south-facing slopes first, then moving on. You can feel the difference not just in temperature, but in momentum. April doesn’t linger. It moves.

In Brownville, April brings visible motion. Shops stir and extend their hours. Galleries and museums settle back into their working rhythm. The winery prepares to welcome longer days and pour a new vintage. The café remains the steady center—unchanged, dependable—and the River Inn continues its role as a floating welcome, tied to the bank but open to whoever arrives.

And in Peru, April has a simpler signal. The fields may still be deciding, but the ballfields are not. It’s time to play ball!

This is the month of attention. After the restraint of March, April invites action—but only the kind that’s grounded. Seeds are chosen carefully. Repairs are made where winter exposed weaknesses. Decisions made now carry forward. April doesn’t forgive guesswork, but it rewards preparation.

Wildlife responds in kind. Birds return in earnest, no longer testing but committing. Fields show the first true signs of renewal, not yet green, but awake. In orchards, backyards, and along the river road, there’s motion that wasn’t there a month ago—purposeful, rhythmic, and shared between people and place.

By month’s end, that shared work becomes visible. In Nebraska City, Arbor Day arrives not as an interruption, but as a recognition—of trees planted long ago, of care repeated year after year, and of a community that understands growth as something tended, not assumed. The parade doesn’t signal the start of Spring so much as it acknowledges that Spring is already underway.

From my place between the river and the prairie, planting has always carried meaning beyond the season. April feels like agreement—between effort and outcome, between patience and reward. What we choose to tend now will stand, quite literally, for years to come.

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There is a new, young Cardinal couple in my yard.  
This is the female, The male was nearby and appeared to be young as well.



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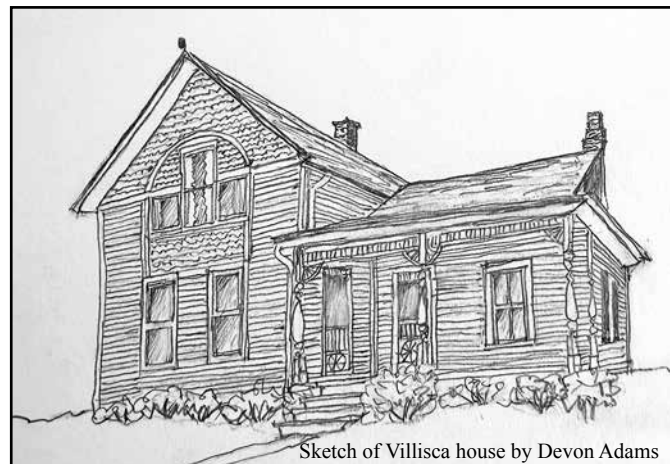
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## Haunted?

by a quiet observer



In the early morning hours of June 10, 1912, a quiet neighborhood in Villisca, Iowa became the scene of one of the Midwest's most disturbing unsolved crimes. Inside this modest white frame house, eight people — Josiah and Sarah Moore, their four children, and two young overnight guests — were killed with an axe as they slept. The crime shocked the nation. More than a century later, it remains officially unsolved.

The house still stands at 508 East Second Street, restored to resemble its 1912 appearance. Period furnishings fill the small bedrooms upstairs. A narrow staircase creaks underfoot. Sunlight filters through simple curtains much as it would have that summer morning. There is nothing grand about the home. That may be what unsettles visitors most.

Today, the property operates as a historic site and museum. Guests can tour by day or stay overnight. Many come for the history. Some come for something else.

Reports from visitors over the years include unexplained footsteps on the stairs, doors that close on their own, children's voices, and sudden cold drafts in otherwise still rooms. Skeptics point to settling wood, suggestion, and the power of expectation inside a house so steeped in tragedy. Believers are less certain. A few investigators have even claimed to record unexplained sounds during late-night stays.

Whatever one believes, the weight of the story is undeniable. The house is small. The rooms are close. The air feels heavy with memory.

Haunted? That depends on whom you ask. But history alone is enough to make this Iowa home one of the most chilling stops in the region.

# A Woman, a Farm, and the Dry Years

The Face Of Drought (circa 2005), by Karen Ott, a former contributor to “YCN”

No moisture this week... but we had a close call: a twenty percent chance on Saturday materialized into a hit-and-run snow, the flakes coming in hard and fast at the beginning but tapering off to nothingness fifteen minutes later.

On Thursday a west wind roared into the panhandle bringing along Wyoming’s dirt, corn-husks and tumbleweeds; if every farmer and rancher in the Cowboy State had turned on their pivots, Nebraska would have gotten three inches of rain. The pivots would have been our only hope. A look at the March fifteenth drought monitor map shows drought pouring over the states in the disorderly manner of spilled paint; the panhandle never stays the same color for long, vacillating between the extreme and exceptional categories, it’s like an indecisive woman who can’t decide what color she wants to paint her kitchen.

A calf was born dead this week. The mother took one look at the lifeless little body and walked off as if nothing had happened. Some cows are like that while others under similar circumstances are grief stricken for days. Dale hauled her home and put her in the back corral with a surrogate baby, a situation she obviously didn’t plan on... she’s letting the baby eat, but only if Dale stands in front of her with a big stick and a threatening look. The transplanted baby comes from a set of twins we christened ‘the odd couple’; one calf is a very large gangly-looking red-white face while the second is a tiny Black Angus. They’re like a pair of test-tube twins gone wrong.

The new pivot is up. The men, of course, see this aluminum and steel monster as a God-send: less work, less water, better crops. But when I look out the upstairs window I can’t help but sigh with disappointment. Until this week the view was somewhere I could go without ever taking a step outside the house, a place where childhood play and adulthood responsibilities merged with the sweeping vista of fields and bottomland. Now the view is violated by the harsh design of progress. I’ll never become accustomed to the ugly thing.

As far back as I can remember our upstairs north window has been the prairie counterpart of an eastern seaboard ‘widow’s walk,’ a place a woman could stand watch, waiting for her man to come home. Sea captain’s wives looked towards the ocean; here on the plains women look to the fields. “See if your father’s lights are moving.” my mother would command. And I would climb the stairs as quickly as my eight-year-old legs could carry me and search through the darkened pane for the yellow glow of tractor lights crawling through the night.

As a young married woman I stood at the window following the tractor up and down the fields, checking Dale’s progress, timing supper with each pass. Years later, with a mother’s worried eyes, I watched my sons; always from the same window, always looking north.

The view has changed but little in the hundred years which separate me from that first farm wife who made this house a home. She would have seen a wider and shallower Platte, and watched the Kiowa, as well as Horse Creek, braiding itself through the cattails and shimmering slough grasses; but the fields are the same, and the worry she felt when her husband didn’t come home from them on time would have prompted the same questions. Where is he? Did he have a heart attack or is pinned under a piece of equipment? Did a cow take him down? Is he bleeding to death and calling my name?



*As far back as I can remember our upstairs north window has been... a place a woman could stand watch, waiting for her man to come home. Sea captain’s wives looked towards the ocean; here on the plains women look to the fields.*

Any woman who has ever married a farmer or rancher knows the feeling. We stare out windows and down roads and try cellphones which have been turned off or left at home, and we pray, please God... let him be all right. Then... miracle of miracles he’ll be home; dismissing our fears with a trite and aggravating, “Don’t worry about me. I can take care of myself.”

And so we’ll breathe a sigh of relief, put supper on the table and sit down to talk about the day... and somewhere in the warm jumble of conversation he’ll make it clear he’s sorry we were so worried and the toll his absence exacted on our hearts will be paid in full... until the next time.

Working the land is an inherently dangerous profession; the men know it... and so do we.

Karen

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Action Photos from the Men's first Homegame of the season, February 27, 2026



Action Photos from the Women's first Homegame of the season, March 21, 2026

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## Tuesday Literary Club Reads

DiAnna Loy, Tuesday Literary Club

## Slim's Stories

Submitted by Cheri & Nick Petrillo

As the Tuesday Literary Club continues to look at the history of the United States in celebration of our 250th birthday, Peggy Groff discussed with us the book *Leaving Gee's Bend* by Irene Latham. Gee's Bend, Alabama is also known as Boykin, Alabama and is located in a large bend of the Alabama River; it is a land mass consisting of 2.8 square miles. It is a block of land enclosed on three sides by the river. Although Gee's Bend is a real place, this book is a work of fiction. Our main character is Ludephia "Lu" Bennett who lives with her father, mother, and brother. Lu is 10 years old and blind in 1 eye. She wears an eye patch.

Where the Bennett's live there is a ferry that can take people across the river to the main bank where the town of Camden is located. There are no stores or services located in Gee's Bend and the residents rely heavily on the ferry any time they need anything from town. The only other choice is to walk approximately six miles to the land bridge to the main shore and six miles back down to Camden. The homes are humble with open slats in the floors and walls that let in the cold wind. Old newspapers are used for insulation in the walls and quilts for warmth and floor coverings.

As the book opens, Lu's mother is sick with a bad cough and is nearly ready to have a baby. She is worried as she has had several miscarriages before and doesn't want this child to be born too soon. Mother's heavy coughing does bring on early labor and, with the help of a neighbor, Lu is able to deliver the baby. The baby is small but healthy, her mother isn't so lucky. Her coughing get worse and she is unable to care for the child. Even though her father tells her there isn't any use to go to Camden for the doctor, Lu decides to go anyway.

When Lu gets to the ferry, no one is there to take her across on the raft. She decides she will use the ferry herself; she doesn't think she has any other choice. A storm is coming and as she gets part way across, the storm worsens and blows the ferry cables loose. The ferry is blown down the river with Lu on it. Lu is finally able to get to the other shore but then has to walk many miles back up to the road to Camden. She really isn't even sure where she is as she walks through the blowing storm. She finally finds a barn, lets herself in, and sleeps through the night.

In the morning, Lu wakes to find that she has spent the night in the barn of Mrs. Cobb, the one person her brother has told her to avoid. Mrs. Cobb feeds her breakfast and treats her nicely so Lu doesn't understand why her brother said what he did and he didn't explain. After breakfast Mrs. Cobb puts Lu in her car and drives her in to Camden. That's where Lu figures out what Mrs. Cobb is all about. Mr. Cobb was the owner of the mercantile where the folks of Gee's Bend have bought their goods for years, mostly on credit. Mrs. Cobb did not agree with this practice and now Mr. Cobb is dead. Mrs. Cobb tell Lu she is going to get her wagons and drive to Gee's Bend and take back everything the folks there haven't paid for yet. Lu has many adventures getting back to Gee's Bend to warn everyone and receives help from unlikely places.

The reading was exciting but sometimes a little difficult as it was written as a 10-year old in the South would have talked. This book is available at the Auburn Memorial Library.

"Happy reading!"

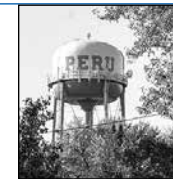
In the early years of the 1900's, the streets in Auburn were all dirt. Gradually they started laying bricks to have a more convenient way to travel.

His uncles would come to town for supplies for their farms, and they would come to his folks house for dinner (we call it lunch now). After a satisfying meal they would sit around the table discussing issues of the time. Young Lawrence took it all in. Two things he remembered: First - They argued over the roads being eventually all paved. One uncle said he thought someday there would be a paved road from Omaha to Kansas city. The others sputtered in disbelief at this audacity. They thought the roads would be paved within the towns, but thinking it would be paved all that distance was beyond their imagination. How far we've progressed.

The second thing the uncles couldn't believe was electricity, particularly how a three way switch worked. One would stand on one side of the room and flip the switch and the light would come on. Another stood at the switch by the front door, and flipped it off. This was in the 1920's and it was a while before the farms would have this modern invention.

On the west side of the cemetery is Longs Creek with a little waterfall and swimming hole at the bottom of it. After a long refreshing afternoon of swimming, dad and his pals were walking home in the evening twilight. They had to walk through the cemetery to get to the road (hwy 136) leading back to Auburn. As they walked through the tall

*Continued on page 8*



Continued from page 7



Their "Ghost"

Photo submitted by Tom Combs

On the west side of the cemetery is Longs Creek with a little waterfall and swimming hole at the bottom of it. After a long refreshing afternoon of swimming, dad and his pals were walking home in the evening twilight. They had to walk through the cemetery to get to the road (hwy 136) leading back to Auburn. As they walked through the tall dark trees they saw a white form looming up ahead. Someone yelled, "Ghost"! In a panic they all took off running, staying as far away as possible from the "Ghost". Later that week they decided to be brave and go to their swimming hole again. Walking back through the cemetery, they suddenly saw their "ghost" in the bright sunlight. Someone had erected a new tombstone at the west edge of the cemetery. The "ghost" was a white angel on the tombstone. It still is there today but I'm pretty sure it won't scare any young boy returning from an afternoon swim.

## Marion Marsh Brown

John C. Chatelain, Omaha

Peru and its environs have produced many notable sons and daughters. Among them is the prolific author, Marion Marsh Brown. Marion was born on July 22, 1908, in the large farmhouse, belonging to her uncle George Kennedy. The handsome structure still stands today between Peru and Brownville. George's father, Stephen W. Kennedy, a/k/a "Squire", a noted southeast Nebraska settler, came to Nemaha County in 1856. George had married Marion's Aunt Annie in 1883, bringing the Marsh and Kennedy family lines together. 1

Marion Elizabeth was the only daughter of Cassius and Jenevie (Hairgrove) Marsh. Cassius, a Brownville newspaperman, began his career in the late 1870s working for The Nebraska Advertiser, owned by Robert W. Furnas, Nebraska's third governor. Cassius later worked for the Nebraska Farmer in Lincoln. His early death from tuberculosis in 1924 brought Jenevie to Peru where she eventually served as acting Dean of Women at the college. 2

Marion's love of writing was evident at age ten when her first published story appeared in the Omaha Bee newspaper. She was then attending country school, District 17, near the family farm between Peru and Brownville. Marion left District 17 at age ten, after passing the countrywide eighth-grade examinations. She graduated from Auburn High School at age 14 and enrolled at Peru State College. She excelled at Peru, earning her bachelor's degree at age 19, with honors in 1927. 3

Marion taught English and Latin at Steele City, Curtis and Franklin, Nebraska before returning to her alma mater, Auburn High School, where she taught two-and-a-half years. By July, 1931 she had completed a master's degree in English from the University of Nebraska. All the while she had been submitting stories to newspapers, including the Omaha World Herald. Marion returned to Peru State in 1934 as assistant professor of English and advisor to the college newspaper, the Pedagogian. 4

When Marion left Peru in December 1937, her Pedagogian staff wrote, "We admire the fact that husband and home mean more to her than does teaching school, but we will miss her." She married Omaha attorney, Gilbert S. Brown on June 11, 1937, well on her way toward fulfilling her objectives in life. "When I was ready to go to college, I knew there were three things I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to be a wife and mother, I wanted to write, and I wanted to teach." Brown became a mother when her only child, Paul, was born in 1940. 5 Mrs. Brown returned to her profession, serving as Professor of English at Municipal University of Omaha from 1954 to 1968. 6

The famous author of 20 books won many awards, writing mostly biographies for junior and senior high students, including "Young Nathan" (1949) about the martyred hero of the Revolutionary War, Nathan Hale; and "Swamp Fox" (1950), about American patriot, Francis Marion. "The Swamp Fox," garnered national attention on May 4, 1959, when Brown signed a contract with Walt Disney Productions for a television series. It ran from October 1959 to January 1961, starring Leslie Nielsen. "Marnie" (1971) was autobiographical. Of interest to southeast Nebraskans, her work also included, "The Brownville Story: Portrait of a Phoenix, 1854-1974". 7 In a 1992 interview, Mrs. Brown stated, "The composing--I love the words and the way they come together as of their own volition. It's fun." She died in February of 2001 at the age of 92. 8

1 Marion Marsh Brown: A Continuing Legacy in Nebraska Writing, by Dan Houtz, Nebraska History, Spring 2020: 26-29; 2 Ibid; 3 Ibid; 4 Ibid; 5 Ibid; 6 Nebraska's First College: Shaping the Future Since 1867: 90. 7 Nebraska History:29; 8 Ibid: 35

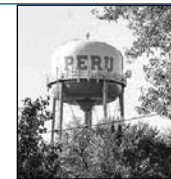
# PERU CITY NEWS

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## A Letter From The Mayor Of Peru

More than once this past year, I have questioned whether moving back to Peru, and specifically running for office, was the right decision. I want to be honest with you about that.

I don't regret rural Nebraska, the life my family has built here, the friends we've found, or the work we are doing. What I am struggling with is harder to admit: I worry the Peru I grew up loving, the Peru I moved my family back to, is not sure it wants what I came here to do.

I moved my family here because I believed in this town. I still do. But I want you to know what the past 18 months have looked like, and what is standing in the way of the progress we are trying to build.

I came in with a simple promise: I would lead with respect and hold myself and everyone around me accountable to that. Over time, through accountability and the natural turnover that comes when expectations change, we built something I am proud of: a committed, hard-working staff that genuinely cares about this community and the people it serves. It was not easy or quick. But we did it.

In the meantime, we are in the process of building Peru's first formal budget process in recent history from scratch. We launched a community newsletter. We are working to strengthen relationships with area leaders including the City of Auburn and Peru State College. We are identifying and correcting water billing errors that have cost this city money for more than seven years. We did all of this while I underwent major surgery and nearly died from a complication that put me back in the hospital by helicopter. While I also navigated manufactured conflicts and a recall petition built on false allegations. The work got done anyway.

And yet here we are, facing the same staff instability and turnover that brought me back to Peru in the first place. From where I stand there are at least two forces driving that, and they could not be more different. The first is doubt. The genuine belief that Peru cannot grow, that businesses have struggled here for decades, that our geography limits us. I want to be honest: that argument is not entirely wrong – we have all seen struggling businesses in town. But I do not believe it is the whole truth either. There are communities like ours that have chosen to invest in themselves rather than accept decline and build something worth staying for. Every grant we don't pursue is

revenue we will never recover. I would rather try and fail than accept defeat without trying.

The second obstacle is something different. Not despair, but interference. Personal grievances dressed up as governance. Over the past fifteen months there has been a consistent pattern: interference with personnel matters, a recall petition signed and publicly supported by two sitting council members based on allegations that cannot be substantiated, and now ordinances introduced without coherent rationale that would destabilize the most stable staff Peru has had since I moved back. Every council meeting brings a new public challenge to my administration. Occasionally a minor error is found and treated as cause for alarm. To be clear, I welcome the review. We do have a newer staff learning the ropes and a second set of eyes on financial documents is genuinely appreciated. But there is a difference between accountability and theater. Minor errors can be raised and corrected at any point prior to a public meeting, preventing additional agenda items and unnecessary length added to meetings. Nothing more has been uncovered because there is nothing to find. Individually, each of these actions might look like governance. Together, they don't.

Both mindsets will produce the same result: a city that is cutting the capacity it needs to move forward at the exact moment we have finally found our footing. But Peru cannot afford either one.

This is an election year, and there are important decisions to be made by Peru voters. I am not telling you how to vote. I am asking you to understand what beliefs and motivations are shaping the decisions being made in your name before you do.

I moved back to Peru because I grew up here and I believed in what this place could be. My family bet on that belief. We chose this community not from the outside, but from inside it, as people who live here and have skin in the game.

Peru is at a crossroads. The question is not whether this town can grow. I believe it can. The question is whether it wants to. Whether new people who move in and try to help are welcomed or worn down. Is there still pride in Peru? Hope for a better future?

For me, the answer is still yes.

— Katy Novak, Mayor of Peru, Nebraska



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## A Prairie Love

Chapter Thirteen: Threads and Thunder – August 1924

Cora waited until the supper dishes were done, the kitchen cool and quiet again. Her mother sat by the window, peeling apples for drying, while her father polished his boots in the corner. The moment felt simple, but it held weight.

"Mama, Papa..." she began, smoothing the front of her apron though it didn't need smoothing. "Lyle asked me to marry him. I said yes." Her father paused, boot brush in hand, and looked up. Her mother's hands stilled over the bowl. "You're sure, then?" her father asked, his voice even. Cora nodded. "I am. We're thinking October. After harvest."

There was a silence—a breath between seasons. Then her mother smiled softly, and a tear slipped down her cheek. "Your papa proposed to me in October," she said. "We married just before the first snow. It was cold, but it was good."

Her father gave a small nod. "He's a good man, that Lyle. And you—you're ready."

Cora's chest swelled with something tender and strong. It wasn't just permission—it was a blessing. Two days later, she rode out to the cabin with a satchel of sandwiches and early apples. The day was warm and cloudless when she set out, but by the time she reached the edge of the pasture, clouds had piled high and dark.

She spotted Lyle at the cabin, hammer in hand, working on the window shutters. He waved her in, just as the first drops began to fall.

Inside, the air held the scent of pine shavings and sawdust. The roof over their heads—new and solid—thudded quietly with rain. They sat on the floor near the stove, laughing at the sudden downpour.

"You brought the weather with you," Lyle teased. "I brought lunch," she countered, handing him a sandwich.

Thunder rolled low and far off. They listened in comfortable silence, the storm wrapping around the little house like a lullaby. Cora leaned her head against the wall, eyes on the raindrops tracing patterns on the windowpane.

"It's going to be home," she said softly. "I can feel it." After the rain passed, they stepped out onto the porch. The air was clean and cool, and puddles mirrored the sky. Cora kicked off her shoes and let her toes sink into the damp earth, laughing as Lyle spun her once in the mud.

They stood in the quiet after the storm, her dress clinging, his shirt damp, both of them glowing with something more than rain—something like certainty. The windmill turned slowly behind them, steady as ever.

That night, back in her room, Cora lit the oil lamp and took out a small notepad she kept tucked in the drawer. She began to jot down ideas: wildflowers for her bouquet, apple cake like Mama used to make, songs her sister could play on the fiddle.

Her handwriting was loose and flowing, the way it always was when her heart was full. October felt close now—not just a season on the calendar, but a gathering of hopes taking shape. A month when the land would turn golden, the air crisp, and something sacred would begin.

She tucked the list away and blew out the lamp, her fingers lingering on the cool metal base. In the dark, she smiled.

She was ready.

*Continued in May*

12 April 2026 Your Country Neighbor

## Letters from the Prairie

August 10, 1888

Nemaha County, Nebraska

*Thirteenth Letter from Anna Wilhelmine*

*Bauer to her sister Klara in Germany*

My dearest Klara,

It is the kind of August day that makes everything shimmer, even the silence. The air is thick with the scent of warm hay and wild chicory, and each footstep in the grass disturbs a flutter of grasshoppers. I find myself moving slower, not from weariness, but as if the prairie itself demands reverence this time of year.

The corn is shoulder-high now—tall and tasseled—and the beans climb in tidy rows. Johann tends like soldiers. We rise early to do what work we can before the heat settles in like a heavy quilt. By midday, the children lie in the shade with their books or help me peel apples for drying. Our cellar smells of earth and dill, where the first pickles are resting in crocks.

Johann has been speaking more often of the coming harvest, not with anxiety but with a kind of wary hope. Wheat prices have risen slightly in the eastern markets, according to the small newspaper that arrives once a week, folded and dusty in the postman's bag. There's talk of better rail connections soon—perhaps even a new depot at Auburn. Imagine! If such a thing comes to pass, we might send our grain more easily, maybe even sell flour milled nearby.

Do you remember the stories Father told about Emperor Wilhelm's interest in American industry? Sometimes I wonder if our small Nebraska county is part of that great wheel, even in the smallest way.

Lena has made a habit of standing by the windmill at dusk, watching the blades turn slowly in the prairie wind. She says it's "thinking." I've told her the windmill thinks about drawing up water and about the clouds on the horizon. She considers this, solemn as an old soul, and says, "Then it knows more than most people." Perhaps she is right.

We had a thunderstorm last week, one that came so quickly I barely had time to gather the linens. The lightning danced like silver ropes over the fields, and thunder shook the windowpanes. I found myself standing in the kitchen, watching the sky, thinking of home—our home in Germany—and how the summer storms used to roll over the hills near our village. It is strange how memory and weather are so often entwined.

This letter, like the month, feels quieter. But there is beauty in the quiet too. These days are not without struggle, but there is a sense of belonging here that grows stronger with each season. I think the prairie has begun to accept us, to fold us into its wide and wordless story.

Please write soon and tell me how your garden grows, and whether the river path is still lined with forget-me-nots.

With love always,

Your Anna

*Continued in May*

## Westward With Lewis & Clark

Chapter 11, Part 1--Where the Prairie Watches

Morning carried a brightness that felt provisional, as though the day had not yet decided its disposition. The mist burned away slowly, revealing banks that lay flatter and wider than before. Grasslands stretched outward in all directions, the river now a moving thread through open country.

Without trees to mark distance, the land appeared larger than it was. What lay a mile away seemed near enough to touch, yet remained stubbornly remote.

We moved carefully through a braid of channels that divided and reunited without warning. Twice before midday the pirogues grounded in sand so pale it shone beneath the surface like bone. The men stepped out again, boots filling, shoulders to the hulls.

No one complained. The river required work now, and work had become its own kind of agreement. Captain Clark stood often in the bow, pole planted deep, studying the current with an attention that bordered on conversation. He seemed less to command the boat than to negotiate with it.

Lewis remained drawn to the shore. At every opportunity he stepped onto the bank, examining stems, seeds, and leaves as though each carried a message worth deciphering. Once he called out to us from the grass with the quiet triumph of a man who had discovered something both ordinary and entirely new. He held up a flowering plant no taller than his hand, its yellow disk bright against the wind-bent green. "Observe the arrangement," he said to no one in particular.

Clark glanced from the boat, nodded once, and returned his eyes to the water.

By afternoon the wind rose from the west, steady and unhurried. It moved across the prairie like a thought passing over a face. The grass responded in waves that traveled farther than the eye could follow.

It was Drouillard who first noticed them.

He had gone ahead along the bank, rifle carried loosely at his side. When he returned he spoke quietly to Clark, pointing across the open ground.

We followed his gesture.

At first the shapes were difficult to distinguish from the land itself. Then one lifted its head.

Buffalo.

Not a few, but many—spread wide across the prairie, grazing with a patience that suggested the land belonged to them entirely.

They stood dark against the grass, immense and deliberate, their movement slow but purposeful. Calves moved close beside the cows. Now and then a bull turned broadside, the heavy arc of his shoulders catching the sun.

The herd did not startle at our presence. The river lay between us, and perhaps that boundary suited them.

The men watched in silence. *Continued in May*

# A Prairie Journal

## A Fire Report from the Western Plains

The wind doesn't look like much from a distance. It just moves the grass a little faster, pushes dust along the road, rattles a loose piece of tin somewhere out of sight. But when it comes hard and steady for days, and the ground has nothing left to give, it turns the prairie into something else entirely.

This past week, it turned it into fire. Out west, the land has burned in a way most of us have never seen. Not a pasture here or there, not a bad day with a grass fire that gets ahead of itself—but hundreds of thousands of acres, rolling and running until it became the largest wildfire this state has ever known.

They say more than 800,000 acres have burned. That number is too big to picture. You can say it out loud, but it doesn't settle in. What does settle in is smaller: a line of blackened fence posts, a windmill standing in ash, a stretch of ground where cattle used to graze and now there's nothing left but smoke and dirt.

The fire moved fast—too fast in places. Driven by wind and dry grass, it covered ground in hours that would normally take days. There were evacuations, sirens, trucks moving in and out, and people making the kind of decisions no one ever wants to make: what to take, what to leave, and when it's time to stop trying and just go. One woman didn't make it out.

That's the part that changes everything. You can rebuild fences. You can replace equipment. Grass will come back, eventually. But there's always a line somewhere, and when it's crossed, the story is no longer just about land.



An artist's conception

*"How many years it took to build it into something that worked."*

Out here, most people understand risk in a quiet way. Machinery breaks. Weather turns. A good year can slip into a bad one without much warning. Fire has always been part of that understanding—but not like this. Not this fast, not this wide, not in a season that hasn't even fully decided whether it's winter or spring.

There's a kind of arithmetic that doesn't get written down anywhere.

How many cows were on that ground.

How many miles of fence.

How many years it took to build it into something that worked.

And then there's the other side of it—the part you don't total up because you can't.

The neighbor who shows up without being asked.

The volunteer firefighters who leave their own places to save someone else's.

The quiet check-ins.

The simple question: You okay?

You hear a lot of talk about resilience. It's become one of those words people use too easily. But out here, it doesn't look like a slogan. It looks like a man standing at the edge of a burned pasture, already thinking about what has to be done next. It looks like someone opening a gate for a neighbor's cattle because there's nowhere else to put them.

No speeches. No announcements. Just work that keeps going.

The prairie has always kept its own record.

This month, it's written in ash.

# ARBOR CITY NEWS

## *Morton-James Public Library Calendar of Events April 2026*

All activities held at Morton-James Public Library (unless otherwise noted), 923 1st Corso, Nebraska City, NE 68410  
For questions call 402-873-5609 or visit [morton-jamespubliclibrary.com](http://morton-jamespubliclibrary.com)

### All Programming is Free and Open to the Public

#### Story Time – April Showers

**Wednesday, April 1st 10:00AM - 10:30AM**

We will sing a song, learn signs in American Sign Language, and read stories. We will then make a paper umbrella craft. Story Times are geared toward children ages 2-6. Free! Families are welcome! There is no registration. Repeats Thursday 4/2 at 4 pm.

#### Yarn Crafters Club

**Wednesday, April 1st 1:30PM - 3:00PM**

This is for all levels of crafters. Bring your own hooks, yarn, needles, whatever you need to make your yarn craft. Club members will be here to help those beginning, and MJPL will have some patterns available. Free to attend. Everyone is welcome who is 15 and older!

#### Story Time – April Showers

**Thursday, April 2nd 4:00PM - 4:30PM**

We will sing a song, learn signs in American Sign Language, and read stories. We will then make a paper umbrella craft. Story Times are geared toward children ages 2-6. Free! Families are welcome! There is no registration.

#### HN David Seay: Train Songs and Tales

**Thursday, April 2nd 7:00PM - 8:00PM**

What is it about trains that so easily engages one's imagination? Climb aboard with David as he shares a variety of railroad inspired songs and stories that offer peeks into the past from a wide variety of points of view. This upbeat excursion is accompanied by guitar, banjo, harmonica, whistles, and a sing-along or two.

#### Paint Together

**Saturday, April 4th 10:00AM - 12:00PM**

We will be painting patriotic flowers for the America 250 celebration. Call or visit the Library to sign up! Everyone who signs up must have a partner, and you must be ages 8+. Registration Required 402-873-5609

#### Lego Club

**Monday, April 6th 3:30PM - 5:00PM**

Join us at the Library in the Kimmel Gallery every first and third Monday of the month. Free build with Legos at the club or bring your own sets to work on. Ages 8 and older. No reservations, free to attend.

#### Library Board Meeting

**Wednesday, April 8th 4:00PM - 6:00PM**

#### Story Time - America's 250 Story Time

**Wednesday, April 15th 10:00AM - 10:30AM**

Join us for a Story Time to celebrate America 250 Nebraska City! We will read stories with characters from American history, learn some signs in American Sign Language and have patriotic coloring pages as an activity. Story Times are geared toward children ages 2-6. Families welcome!

#### Evening Book Club

**Wednesday, April 15th 5:30PM - 6:30PM**

*Falling* by TJ Newman

#### Story Time – America's 250 Story Time

**Thursday, April 16th 4:00PM - 4:30PM**

Join us for a Story Time to celebrate America 250 Nebraska City! We will read stories with characters from American history, learn some signs in American Sign Language and have patriotic coloring pages as an activity. Story Times are geared toward children ages 2-6. Families welcome!

#### HN Janie York: Remember the Ladies

**Thursday, April 16th 7:00PM - 8:00PM**

This presentation explores the role our founding mothers played in the American Revolution. The words of Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams resonate in the title. She beseeched her husband to "Remember the Ladies" as he and the Continental Congress created the document that would shape this new democracy. Women of the time used their cunning, creativity, and skills with the needle to craft a story of how they supported the efforts of the military. You'll meet activists, impersonators, and seamstresses who supported the war effort and in some cases changed its trajectory.

#### Matt Mason Poetry Workshop

**Saturday, April 18th 10:00AM - 11:00AM**

Poetry workshop with former Nebraska State Poet Matt Mason. Adults and teens age 15 and up, free, no registration. Open to beginning and seasoned poets and writers!

#### National Library Week April 19th - 25th

Come celebrate all week long at MJPL. A different special treat each day! Call for more information – 402-873-5609.

#### Lego Club

**Monday, April 20th 3:30PM - 5:00PM**

Held every first and third Monday of the month from 3:30 - 5:00 pm for Lego Club! Free build with Lego's at the club or bring your own sets to work on. Ages 8 and older.

#### Afternoon Book Club

**Tuesday, April 21st 2:00PM - 3:00PM**

*The Women* by Kristin Hannah

#### Library Closed for Arbor Day

**Friday, April 24th**

#### Arbor Day Craft and Color

**Saturday, April 25th 10:00AM - 12:00PM**

All ages are welcome to the Kimmel Gallery at the Morton-James Public Library from 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM to color a wood ornament for Arbor Day. We will also have coloring pages. Free!

#### Chess Club

**Every Thursday 4:00PM - 6:00PM**

All ages and experience levels are welcome to join Chess Club that meets at the Morton-James Public Library on Thursdays between 4:00 and 6:00 pm. If you have never played, members will teach you! Chess boards provided.

#### Kimmel Gallery April 1-30

America's 250 Photography Exhibit  
Open during regular Library hours.

# ARBOR CITY NEWS

*News from Nebraska City*

## ARBOR DAY FESTIVAL

April in Nebraska City means one thing: Arbor Day Festival. Since 1872, when J. Sterling Morton first proposed a day dedicated to planting trees, Nebraska City has proudly celebrated its roots as the birthplace of Arbor Day. In 2026, that tradition continues April 24–26 with a full weekend of festivities, community pride, and can't-miss experiences, all tied together with this year's theme, Stars, Stripes & Saplings.

This year's theme also reflects a broader milestone—the upcoming America 250 celebration. Just as trees stand as living witnesses to history, Arbor Day offers a meaningful way to honor the past while planting for the future. From the earliest roots of the nation to the trees planted today, the festival highlights how small acts can grow into lasting legacies. Throughout the weekend, Nebraska City will be buzzing with activity from end to end. Downtown streets will come alive with the annual Arbor Day parade down Central Avenue on Saturday afternoon, a long-standing favorite that brings together community groups, performers, and festive floats in a celebration of local pride. Visitors can also explore the Home, Craft, and

Garden Market, featuring regional vendors, handmade goods, and seasonal inspiration, or take part in unique events like the Best of the Midwest Bloody Mary Championship.



New and returning experiences continue to add to the excitement. Saturday evening will feature Plant Bingo—a fresh twist on a classic favorite where every prize is, fittingly, a plant—offering a fun and relaxed way to wind down the day while keeping with the festival's tree-loving spirit. The festival offers something for everyone. Runners and walkers can kick off the weekend with the Arbor Day Run, while families can enjoy interactive kids' activities, educational exhibits, and hands-on experiences that celebrate trees, nature, and community. Local businesses, organizations, and venues across Nebraska City will host special events, open houses, and activities, making the entire community part of the celebration.

Of course, no festival is complete without great food. From food trucks and pop-up vendors to local restaurants showcasing their best, visitors will find everything from classic festival fare to creative, locally inspired dishes. Whether grabbing a quick bite between events or settling in to enjoy the atmosphere, there's no shortage of options to satisfy every craving. Longstanding traditions remain at the heart of the Arbor Day Festival. From tree-focused educational opportunities to community gatherings that have been enjoyed for generations, the weekend continues to honor its original purpose—bringing people together to celebrate and care for the natural world. "This weekend is what Nebraska City does best—welcoming people in, showing off our community, and having a lot of fun along the way," said Amy. "Whether you're here for the parade, Plant Bingo, the food, or just to soak it all in, there's something around every corner. You might come for Arbor Day, but you'll leave already planning your next trip back." With a legacy spanning more than 150 years and a full lineup of events happening throughout the city, the Arbor Day Festival continues to draw visitors from across the region and beyond. As always, the celebration is about more than just trees—it's about community, tradition, and creating memories that continue to grow year after year.

**Complete Schedule of Events at:  
[www.NebraskaCity.com](http://www.NebraskaCity.com)**

**STARS,  
STRIPES  
& SAPLINGS**

**April 24-26**



# ARBOR CITY NEWS

News from Nebraska City

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## Two Origins

Sheila Tinkham, Lincoln

### Origin One

Easter Eggs

Eggs were dyed red to signify blood of Jesus

In Greek and Orthodox faiths

Second the goddess in the North

Eggs symbols of fertility and Spring

Also during Lent eggs were not allowed to be eaten.

Boiled and decorated eggs were saved to eat for Easter!

### Origin Two

Winnebago Pow Wow

Driving through Winnebago Indian reservation to see

South Sioux City Freedom Park

Two events

Both make me proud to be American

To hear stories of sacrifice and love of country

At Freedom Park

During Pow Wow the Native Americans honored all the branches of the military

Made my heart tremble

Reminded me of Code Talkers

Native Americans willing to help beat Germans and Japanese

using their language....

Freedom is not free. Thank you all, veterans.

And God bless America!



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# ARBOR CITY NEWS

*News from Nebraska City*

## Springtime

Bruce Madsen, Nebraska City

Springtime, The snow is gone

Edges of winter have left us with anticipation of a new season, a new song

I look around and see shades of green

And of flowers blooming with that early morning sheen.

But then, this old feeling returns when the new season creeps in

So, I drive through the country under a clear blue sky

And sit behind the steering wheel, watching all the dust fly

In every field from here to the Horizon

People are working hard in the fields to finish

With no rest to foresee till their work is done

This is when the ache comes back to that empty space within me

And leaves me in a state of melancholy

Because it no longer can be

I've always known my purpose for being here was clear

Because my life as a farmer, to me, was very dear

I always knew what I was going to be

I've known that since the tender age of three

Funny how your mind just knows

The path of reality your life is going to follow

So, in my pick-up I reminisce and remember

About the work I used to do from January to December

It was pride I felt, and the satisfaction that my work rendered

I was pleased with myself, my feelings pleasantly tendered

Now I'm watching others do what I used to do,

Taking over, paying their dues

And I'm just moving on to yet another phase

As the cycle continues, unbroken, unphased

And to that fact, I'm always amazed

The next generation has it under control

No need to worry, besides it's non-negotiable

The best I could do is over and done

I can't feel bad, 'cause there's always someone

To pick it up and carry on

Till their time is over and their work is done

So the dust is still flying, but I'm going back to town

Maybe with a tear, but certainly not a frown

I know how it works, not going to let it get me down

Back in the driveway I return, it's quiet, don't hear a sound

Some might say I'm bored, and maybe I have a vacant look

I don't know, whatever, my easy chair is waiting

And beside it, there's a good book.

# P o e t r y

by Devon Adams, Nebraska City

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## GHOST ROAD

They are there, just beyond your headlights. Sometimes they jump into the road and scare drivers wild. Mostly this curve in the hills is a peaceful bend. Daylight feels safe, without the dark, but ask anyone who saw the two young boys waving at them as they stood by the old mailbox by the farmer's driveway. They will tell you that the boys looked very sad, as if they hoped a driver would take them home.

## STEP AWAY

Stop doing what you are doing and step away from it. Find a rain drop and look inside. Magic lives there in the upside-down mirror image of the scene that you will see. Tiny trees and houses and cars exist in all the drops dripping from roofs and branches. You are in a special kind of dimension that only people who are free can see. No rules to limit what you think or how you feel, and life is yours to live.

## APRIL FOOLS

Don't get giddy before it gets muddy and stormy. An early Easter might mean disaster for outside services up there on the hill, meaning cold rain at dawn, with snow and icy wind knives cutting into our coats. April showers can continue to be cold, with early blooms wearing frosty edges. Never fear, though, because temps will soar before June, and the roar of thunder booms will knock us out of bed about the time that power goes out. If we're lucky the ground will quake and shake at the same time. Have a nice day when you can find one!

## SUMMER HILL

When the June moon is full and gold as it sits on the edge of the hills, and the meadow is lush with brome, the old oak tree sighs to herself and relaxes. She's been living here for a very long time, and loves the long view across the valley from the top of this hill. Her life is a gamble, though, with weather throwing tantrums in all seasons. She is content to live with danger, recognizing grace when she feels it touch her with gentle hands. It is enough to feel the sacred power of life itself, no matter how long it lasts.

## THE OLD ORCHARD

They are getting lonesome, those old apple trees up on the hill. The family farm is long gone, except for these survivors with gnarled branches and twisted trunks. All of their friends faded away over the years, losing a branch at a time, but they won't let go yet. Birds and deer love them for their fruit and the quiet corner for shade and nests and cover. And the family ghosts love them too, gathering together in a peaceful silence that feels like forever.

By Artist, Devon Adams

PENCIL AND WATERCOLOR

PORTRAITS OF

PEOPLE, ANIMALS, WILDLIFE & BUILDINGS

*Done from your photographs.*



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Send to:

Devon Adams

1220 Oak Street, Apt. A, Box 9 Nebraska City, NE 68410

Phone: 402-209-9377

adamsdevon07@gmail.com

## Window On Fifth Street

Stephen Hassler, Peru

Through my window on Fifth Street there is a hint of Spring; daffodils and tulips pushing up through last year's leaves, warm afternoons (mostly), and Goldfinches, still in their winter garb, busy at the feeder of black-oil sunflower seeds. After a time, families take a break from activities in the fields, the garden, and from Spring cleaning in order to get together more often for Sunday dinner after church. Spring like this always reminds me of the Sunday dinners of my childhood.

I recall when I was a boy, our four-mile drive to Aunt Marie's house. Her farm was along a branch of the Elkhorn River. Everyone called her Mary except close family. My grandparents who were immigrants from Germany with English as their second language, named her Maria, as the first girl born was often named. The American version was Mary, but Marie was the name her nieces and nephews knew her by.

Sunday dinners were frequent, especially on holidays and after picking from the early garden—peas, radishes, and string beans. There were still plenty of last Fall's potatoes in the cellar, along with canned peaches and pears. And Marie's lemon meringue pie was topped with a high roof of egg whites, its peaks singed brown from the oven. And there was always chicken.

The kitchen was kept as clean and new-looking as when the house was new. The chrome handle on the refrigerator was always protected with a white towel, and the blue linoleum floor never seemed to age. Adjacent to the kitchen, through an archway, was a small dining room with a table that filled most of the space, and that could seat eight, and we were only seven: my brother and sister, my mom and dad, Aunt Marie, Uncle Henry (Heinie), and me.

Heinie was Marie's and my dad's brother. He was deaf from the 1918 flu pandemic and carried a hearing aid in a pocket on the front of his bib overalls. The device was about the size of a cell phone—but heavier. It was always turned down unless someone got his attention. I never knew him to initiate a conversation. He was always “there,” but we just moved around him. So when Heinie moved, it was noticed.

At one Sunday dinner we were all around the table, my dad at the head and Heinie at the other end. All the wonderful food was being passed around and our plates were filling. We noticed, without comment, that Heinie was mixing his mashed potatoes with his peas—not a surprising act—and we didn't give it much thought.

Marie's dog, Spot (a strange name for a somewhat striped mongrel), was sitting near Heinie, as any family dog eager for a morsel to fall would do. But being impatient, or perhaps just hungry, Spot reached up with his head turned sideways so he could reach Heinie's plate. Spot began slurping Heinie's potato-pea mixture.

We all noticed, but before anyone could react, Heinie calmly picked up his spoon and rapped Spot on the head—not hard, just enough to discourage him. Spot withdrew to his place on the floor. Heinie replaced his spoon and calmly continued eating.

Each of us kids started to giggle. Marie smiled. My mom smiled. My dad might have chuckled a bit. But when we tried not to laugh at Heinie, our giggles became uncontrollable to the extent that our faces felt crunched and our cheeks burned as we tried not to make a sound. Then Marie caught the giggles too, having time to consider that yes, it really was funny—but mostly because the giggling was contagious. Uncle Heinie didn't notice. His head was lowered as he continued eating his dinner, and somehow that made it even funnier. And to this day, I'm not sure whether the funniest part was Spot—or the effort we made trying not to laugh.

## Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson, Auburn

Dear Readers, I find that I don't have the mental energy to compose an original column this month, so I hope you enjoy this throw-back to 2018, which itself was a throwback to 1997 when Hubby and I took a cruise to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. Here we are in 2026, getting close to our 55th anniversary!! This time, we will be celebrating with our kids, their spouses, and our grandkids on a stateside trip to Sedona, AZ. I'm pretty sure there will be no Arctic jet stream or threat of hurricanes to interfere with this trip. Fingers crossed that it will be memorable...in a good way. Maybe even memorable enough to inspire a column.

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Dateline, St. Joseph, MO, 2018. I'm writing from St. Joseph, Missouri, this month, where hubby and I are enjoying our grandkids – and getting REALLY tired! – while our son and daughter-in-law are vacationing in Jamaica.

The closest hubby and I have ever gotten to Jamaica was a cruise to the Bahamas back in 1997. It was our 25th wedding anniversary celebration. I have to say, the weather was crummy. The cruise was in January and the whole country was in the grip of a very deep jet stream. Arctic air brought rain and high seas to the Caribbean for the majority of our trip. According to the cruise propaganda, the Caribbean gets sunshine 360 days out of the year. Wouldn't you know we'd manage to pick the other five days to set sail. We should have gone in September, when our anniversary actually falls, but that's peak hurricane season. So, we thought what better time to go south than in January, when escaping cold and snow would be so lovely? Unless there's a deep jet stream in play.

Hubby got seasick, despite taking Dramamine, and we were both a little underwhelmed with the shipside entertainments. I recall Janet Jackson performing. Definitely not our style. All we really wanted was to sit beside the top-deck pool and soak up the sun and make the scheduled stop on a private island. Both of those activities got canceled. We did get to snorkel off Key West on our last day. But hubby was so worried about getting left behind while our catamaran returned to shore, that he had a hard time enjoying it. All-in-all, the experience pretty much soured us on ever taking another ocean cruise.

On the other hand, a European river cruise looks pretty appealing. We've looked into those a little bit – anniversary #50 is bearing down on us. The historic and cultural sites, the food, the scenery (with a tour guide taking care of all arrangements!) sound fantastic. On the other hand, the cost is several times that of an oceanliner cruise. Then, of course, there's the threat of attacks by crazies. Although that likelihood is probably less than the chances of being left behind in the open ocean by your catamaran. Or, we could opt for “Europe light” and just go to Montreal. Oui oui!!

We could challenge ourselves to backpacking 50 miles of the Appalachian Trail just to see if we can do it. I could maybe get into that if it weren't for the possibility of black bears wanting to share out tent. Or maybe we could rent our own houseboat on the Mississippi. The downside to that could be mosquitoes pretty much all the way from Minneapolis to New Orleans. We could visit a state we've never been to: North Dakota comes to mind. I hear the Bakken Oil Fields are nice in September.

Maybe I'm getting the cart in front of the horse. Who knows if we'll make it to our 50th anniversary? And by “make it” I mean “still be alive.” At this point, our marriage likely has a statistically higher chance of survival to “death do us part” than our actual lives have. If that makes sense.

Anyway, I'm thrilled that right now our son and daughter-in-law are having a great time in Jamaica, and hubby and I are having a great time here in St. Joe. Our future is not guaranteed, but our present is pretty darn good.



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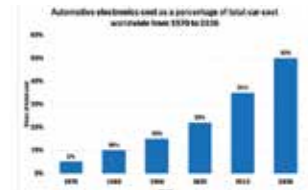
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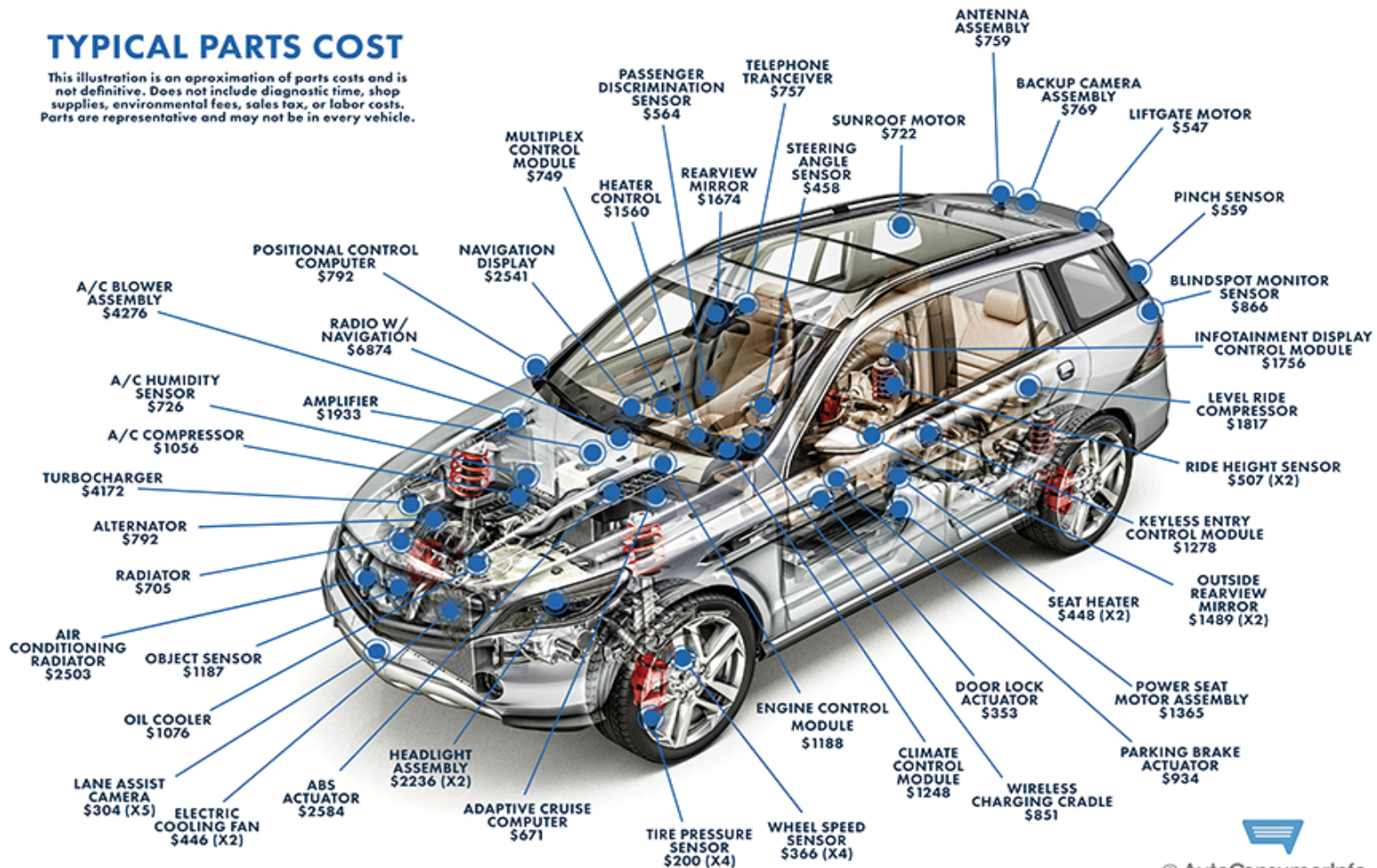
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## TYPICAL PARTS COST

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Call Scott McEwen at 402-873-5507 or Email [scottm@larsonmotorgroup.com](mailto:scottm@larsonmotorgroup.com)

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