

The Jerry Fackler Story

Californian, Jerry Fackler's chance encounter with a group of former railroaders in Eldon, Iowa would change the future of the Eldon Depot Museum.

The small town of Eldon was an important stop on the Rock Island line prior to the Rock Island's demise in 1980. Once the Rock Island ceased operations, the railroad bridge was dismantled and all rail was removed. The one reminder of the railroad was the Eldon depot which had been sold privately and was used for storage. It had gradually deteriorated over time and in 2001, four former railroaders took the brave step to purchase the depot. Those four were: Jim Bedford, Richard Hemm, Steve Roe and Don Eakins. They became the first board of directors of the Eldon Depot Committee.

Restoration of the depot was an arduous task. A committee was formed from members in the community who were willing to help. On July 26, 2001, the committee voted to hold a watermelon feed to help raise funds for the depot restoration. The motion included purchasing 30 watermelon and 2 dozen cantaloupe.

On August 1, 2001, the Eldon depot was in the midst of their watermelon feed. Business was slow and at one point Patty Hancock commented, "We need a miracle". During this slow time, Richard Hemm and Bill Scott were approached by a gentleman in a car. He rolled down his window and identified himself as Jerry Fackler. He said he was looking for Richard Hemm who would be able to help him. He pulled over to the side of the road to talk.

Jerry Fackler was from California and had come to Eldon to bury his mother in her family plot. He was unable to reach anyone at the local funeral home and was needing to get back to California. Richard tried to phone other funeral homes in the area, but was unable to get any response. He reassured Mr. Fackler that once her body arrived, he would help in any way he could. Jerry Fackler replied that his mother was in the trunk of his car. He quickly noticed, by Richard and Bill's reactions, there was a misunderstanding and corrected himself by saying it was a cremation. They agreed to help him, going with him to the Eldon cemetery to identify the family plot where his mother, Phoebe Beck, wished to be buried beside her parents. Needing to return to California, Jerry left \$800 in cash and a check for \$1000 to cover the expenses to the cemetery and for a headstone. Richard suggested that the funds go through the depot since it was a non-profit organization and there would be a paper trail of the finances. Any extra money would be returned to him. Jerry refused to have any money returned.

They then discussed the depot and what they were planning for its future. Mr. Fackler liked the idea, saying he always liked railroads. Jerry Fackler left to return to California, and Richard took the urn with the cremains of Phoebe Beck to his home until arrangements could be made for her burial. Once everything was completed, a photo of the site with the monument in place was sent to Mr. Fackler.

Richard Hemm received a thank you from Jerry Fackler on Oct.23, 2001.

Dear Mr. Hemm,

Thank you for the pictures of my mother's resting place. I do appreciate it.

As a token of my appreciation to you and the committee, I have sent some Rock Island memorabilia and a note along with it. In as much as I had no Eldon address, I had to send it in care of the Libertyville Savings Bank. So you can notify them.

Please keep me advised of your progress. I am interested.

*Thank you again,
Jerry Fackler*

PS. The bank should have it in 2-4 weeks.

At the November 28, 2001, depot meeting, the second thank you from Jerry Fackler was read.

San Diego

To the President and members of the Eldon Depot Committee:

I appreciate the courtesy shown me in August and your efforts on my behalf.

I hope that this Rock Island memorabilia will bring back fond memories. Please keep me advised of your work in restoring the depot, and I will help you. Also, please give me a local name (s) and/or addresses. Keep in contact with me: I will try to come back next year.

Thank you very much.

*Jerry Fackler
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Jerry did return to Eldon for the Gothic Days Celebration where he met many of the committee members. He continued to stay in touch with the depot through Steve Roe,

always wanting to know what progress was being made. He would often send items which could be used for door prizes or displays at the depot. He began sending a \$1000 at Christmas which was greatly needed and appreciated by the depot committee. He invited Steve and Sandy Roe to come to California in February of 2004. Jerry was awarded a lifetime membership award for his contributions to the depot at that time. While there, Jerry took them to the San Diego Railroad Museum at Camp, California.

In 2013, the depot committee was notified of Jerry Fackler's death and the Eldon Depot had been named in his trust. On November 24, 2014, the trustees of the Jerry Fackler trust fund presented the board of directors of the Eldon Depot Committee with a check for \$500,000 to be used to secure the future of the Eldon Depot.

One never knows what events can change the future of a community. Phoebe Beck's desire to be buried with her family started a chain of events that put Jerry Fackler in Eldon, Iowa, at a watermelon feed, hosted by community members trying to save their depot.

Thank you Jerry.

