



*Distinguished Alumni - 2025*

**Beverly JoAnne Peal Jackson Cotter**

**Class 1957**

During her growing up years, there was a plaque on her bedroom wall that stated, "All things are possible for those who believeth." John 9:23.

Following high school, Bev married Richard Jackson, raised four children, taught Sunday School, Bible School and chaired Girl Scouts, 4-H and PTA meetings. When she was 30 years old, she began taking piano lessons and at 37 opened the Jackson Piano Studio, giving lessons to cover tuition and books for classes at Austin Community College and later Mankato State University. She did her student teaching at the Munich International School near Starnberg, West Germany through Moorhead State University and in 1985 received a Master's Degree in Continuing Studies with an emphasis on museum administration from Mankato State University.

In 1987 Bev was hired as the first Executive Director of the Freeborn County Historical Museum and Village. During her 18 years there the museum's hours expanded from three hours a day in the summer to full time year round. Displays were revised, education programs expanded, committees organized, and temporary and traveling exhibits hosted. A highlight of her years there was the initiation of the Discover History program taught by ALHS 11th grade humanities students to area 5th grade classes. She also served on the Board of Directors of the Albert Lea Convention and Visitors Bureau, Senior Resources, the SE MN Arts Council and the Albert Lea Historic Preservation Commission.

Bev served on the Minnesota Historical Society Board of Review for the National Register of Historic Places and the State Historical Records Advisory Board. In 2006 she was the recipient of the National Merit Award presented by the American Association of State & Local History at the annual conference in Phoenix, AZ.

In 1990 Bev attended her first storytelling meeting and realized how perfectly the concept fit into her history programs. For 16 years she coordinated the Minnesota Storytelling Festival, organizing the annual event that brought nationally known storytellers to Austin and Albert Lea for programs in schools, dinner theaters, workshops, concerts and church services.

In 2006 Bev married Michael Cotter, Austin area farmer and nationally known storyteller, and together they traveled, sharing stories in classrooms, and at fairs, programs and festivals. She served on the Board of Directors of the Albert Lea Art Center and was active in her church. For almost 30 years she has written a column for the Albert Lea Tribune, first called "History is . . .," then "Art is . . .," and now "Memories." Her writing includes books on local history, life stories, and editing Michael's books on rural Minnesota life.

Bev is a life long resident of Albert Lea. She enjoyed travel in both the U.S. and Europe, taking a summer class at the University of Warwick in Coventry, England and traveling for fun and learning to several European countries and Egypt.

**Her "all things are possible" credo has allowed a life of adventure and service.**