



July - August 2004, Vol. XXXII, No. 4

# MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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for county and local historical societies and heritage preservation commissions

Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest



The family of the late Ben Berger donated this and other photographs documenting his family history to the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. The group's new genealogy research center will serve the region's Jewish community.

Barry Family Campus in St. Louis Park, the society shares quarters with the Minneapolis Jewish Community Center, the Minneapolis Jewish Day School and the Talmud Torah.

To take full advantage of those proximities, the JHSUM envisions becoming a research center that will provide genealogical and family history services to the region's entire Jewish community. Among the first steps taken by the group toward that goal was the acquisition of a microfilm reader/printer, purchased with an MHS state grant-in-aid. The grant also enabled the society to add to its small library of microfilms and microfiches with the purchase of microfilmed city directories.

"We plan to publicize our new resources in three ways," reports JHSUM president Katherine Tane. First, the society's Genealogy Committee will hold a summer event for genealogists in the Jewish community. Then, to observe the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America during 2004-5, society staff will meet with educators to plan how the resources can be used by schoolchildren. Finally, at a historical fair this fall, the society will showcase all of its resources for preserving Jewish history, from caring for family photos to researching family genealogy to recording personal histories.

Says Linda Schloff, JHSUM executive director, "These events and our new research facilities will help us carry out our mission to promote

## Laying the groundwork

### Microfilm libraries meet research needs of patrons and staff

It was the growing number of requests from patrons that sent three of Minnesota's historical organizations on a similar mission: Find the best way to serve the research needs of constituents.

That shared challenge led each group to the same solution - a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society to purchase microfilm and microfilm readers that will equip fledgling research libraries. With those building blocks, the three organizations - the

Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum and Tourist Center, the Wilkin County Historical Society and the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest - all expect to boost their capacity for fielding research requests.

#### On becoming a full-service historical society

After several moves in recent years, the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSUM) was ready to put down roots. Now at home on the

Groundwork continued on page 2

## Groundwork *continued from page 1*

the continuity of Jewish culture in the Upper Midwest through preservation, interpretation and education.”

### Improving access, saving space

The inconvenience of retrieving research materials stored in another building led the staff of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum to set up a research station in their tourist center. Rearranging the main office to accommodate new equipment and a growing collection of microfilm, they created a space both accessible and secure.

After investigating equipment options, board president Stanley Gordon, who consulted on the project, decided against buying and maintaining a traditional (and bulky) microfilm reader. He recommended instead a relatively low-cost system – the Infographix Scanpro, a digital reader/scanner that transfers the image to a computer for modification and printing. “There are some drawbacks to this system,” says Gordon, “but it’s fairly easy to use and we can archive scans for future reference using our PastPerfect software.” An MHS state grant-in-aid funded the project, which also included the purchase of more than 70 rolls of microfilm – Redwood County census and naturalization records and nearly 100 years of Walnut Grove newspapers.

Museum staff are now able to answer the growing volume of research requests from patrons. They’re also scanning obituaries and other articles to create files on local families and adding scanned newspaper ads of local businesses to museum exhibits. In addition, the research station is



Wilkin County Historical Society



Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum and Tourist Center

Left: A researcher at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum reads microfilm on a space-saving, computer-linked digital reader/scanner. Above: Sylvia Peterson of the Wilkin County Historical Society searches local newspapers on a conventional microfilm reader.

was the original newspapers, which were beginning to tear from continual handling. A state grant-in-aid helped bring them up to date, providing funds for microfilming 23 years of the Wahpeton (N.D.) Daily News.

Now patrons’ requests can be filled without jeopardizing the fragile source materials. That’s important to Duane Swanson, a reference specialist at the Minnesota Historical Society and a dedicated genealogist. Access to such resources, he says, “is absolutely essential in order for a historical society to serve its constituency well.”

For more information: Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, 952-381-3360 or e-mail [history@jhsum.org](mailto:history@jhsum.org); Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum and Tourist Center, 1-888-528-7298; Wilkin County Historical Society, 218-643-1303.

available for use by the public. A small user fee for nonmembers helps meet costs and contributes to the purchase of additional microfilm.

### An up-to-date collection

The Wilkin County Historical Society had a microfilm reader and drawers full of microfilmed newspapers and census records. They also had a steady stream of requests from people researching their family histories. There was just one problem. For the years since 1980, all they had

# Taking your measure

## Visitor surveys hold the key to effective programming

*Editor's note: This is the second of two articles on using surveys to gauge your organization's effectiveness. See the May-June 2004 Interpreter for "Know Your Audience," on conducting market surveys.*

When it comes to visitor evaluation, Jennifer Lanning knows her stuff. An audience research specialist at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, she helps the program and exhibits staff figure out what works with audiences and why. "We want to make the museum experience meaningful for visitors," she says, "so we try to learn as much about them as we can."

### A dual purpose

Visitor surveys play several roles, Lanning points out. "A survey can be a planning tool when you use it for front-end research," she explains. "If you find out what your visitors already know about the subject of a future exhibit, for example, you can avoid being too simplistic or too advanced. It's easier - and less costly - to do

### Time well spent

Have you returned your Minnesota Historical Society annual survey of historical organizations? If not, take a few minutes to complete it now. The survey is the best way to keep us up to date on your organization - and to provide us with benchmarks for comparative analysis. You never know when that data may come in handy for stating your case to your funders.

things right in the first place than to correct mistakes later."

Surveys can also be used as a measurement tool. "Have visitors fill out a questionnaire or interview them as they leave to find out if your event or exhibit met their expectations and achieved your goals and objectives," suggests Lanning. "That kind of evaluation often helps funders look more favorably on your request for support."

### Shaping a survey project

Lanning outlines the steps necessary to shaping a successful survey project:

- Define your purpose.
- Determine your budget, resources and timeline.
- Identify the audience that can provide answers to your questions.
- Determine the best method to use for your survey.

"It pays to educate yourself about survey methodologies," says Lanning, by doing research, consulting with specialists and quizzing colleagues about their experience with evaluation. "If you plan your survey well," she explains, "you'll get meaningful data that can translate into action. The result: You'll serve your audiences more effectively. And you'll turn those audiences into repeat visitors."

### Resources

One source Lanning recommends is the Visitor Studies Association ([www.visitorstudies.org](http://www.visitorstudies.org)), dedicated to helping museums and other recreational educational facilities meet the expectations, needs and interests of their visitors. Among the organization's



At one of its "Lost Towns" programs, Martin County Historical Society volunteer Carol Tvedten (left) polls a visitor, State Senator Julie Rosen, about her impressions.

areas of study are visitor surveys, audience development, and evaluation of programs, exhibits and visitor services. An e-newsletter sent to all members includes a list of consultants.

Another helpful resource is a book by Judy Diamond titled *Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Education Settings* (AltaMira Press, 1999, paper, \$26.95). The guide, from the American Association for State and Local History, covers such basic techniques as how to conduct interviews, design questionnaires, sample audiences and analyze data. For ordering information go to [www.altamirapress.com](http://www.altamirapress.com).

For more information call Lanning in the Minnesota Historical Society's audience research office, 651-297-3341, or e-mail [jennifer.lanning@mnhs.org](mailto:jennifer.lanning@mnhs.org).

## Keeping it fresh

### Scott County video kicks off new exhibit

What's a county historical society to do with exhibit space to fill and only modest collections? That was the dilemma faced by the Scott County Historical Society in creating

an exhibit to celebrate the county's 150th anniversary. Their solution: Keep it small. Keep it simple. Keep it changing.

Focusing on the six largest cities in the county, the staff selected a few items to tell just a portion of each town's history. Over time the displays will change, keeping exhibits fresh for repeat visitors. At the

to interpret because we lack the resources to tell the story," says Megan Schaack, SCHS curator and interim executive director. "The video allows us to do that effectively for the first time."

The first 10 minutes of the video can be accessed from an interactive monitor in the museum (it runs on a flash card to minimize equipment breakdowns). The full-length program, a 90-minute collection of stories, is offered for sale to the public in VHS and DVD formats. Reports Schaack, "The VHS version has sold out twice. Because the county covered production expenses, this has turned into a nice fundraiser for us."

*For more information about the Stans Museum, operated by SCHS to interpret the histories of Scott County and Shakopee native Maurice Stans, call 952-445-0378 or go to [www.scottcountyhistory.org](http://www.scottcountyhistory.org).*

Scott County Historical Society



The centerpiece of the Scott County Historical Society's Prior Lake display is this 1940s postcard of a painting commissioned by the Maves family to promote their fishing resort.

exhibit entrance is a video, "Scott County: The New Frontier," produced in partnership with the county. "Early settlement has always been difficult

## Hometown History Nights

### Blue Earth County program celebrates community

Looking for ways to serve the whole county, staff of the Blue Earth County Historical Society took to the road. Under the banner "Hometown History Photo Nights," they've headed out every month since January to a different community, taking along a small case packed with artifacts from the society's collection.

"We invite residents of each town to bring their photo albums and join us for an evening of sharing stories about their families and their communities," says BECHS collections manager Jessica Potter. "Our goal is to

get people thinking about preserving their histories." Staff and volunteers also provide tips on caring for photographs.

For more information on this outreach effort, call the county society at 507-345-5566 or e-mail [bechs@juno.com](mailto:bechs@juno.com).



Blue Earth County Historical Society

At a Hometown History Photo Night in June, Amboy residents reminisced over photos like this 1940s view of the town's main street.

# 'Minnesota Treasures'

## New book tells stories of National Register Properties

Do you know Minnesota's second-most famous aviator?

He was the father of the homebuilt aircraft movement. His popular kit planes ran on automobile engines. And his Cherry Grove workshop/garage is on the National Register of Historic Places.

You'll find the full story of aviation pioneer Bernard H. Pietenpol in an enticing new book from the Minnesota Historical Press. Titled *Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places*, this illustrated volume by Denis P. Gardner showcases 75 of the state's most intriguing National Register properties.

### Praise for local efforts

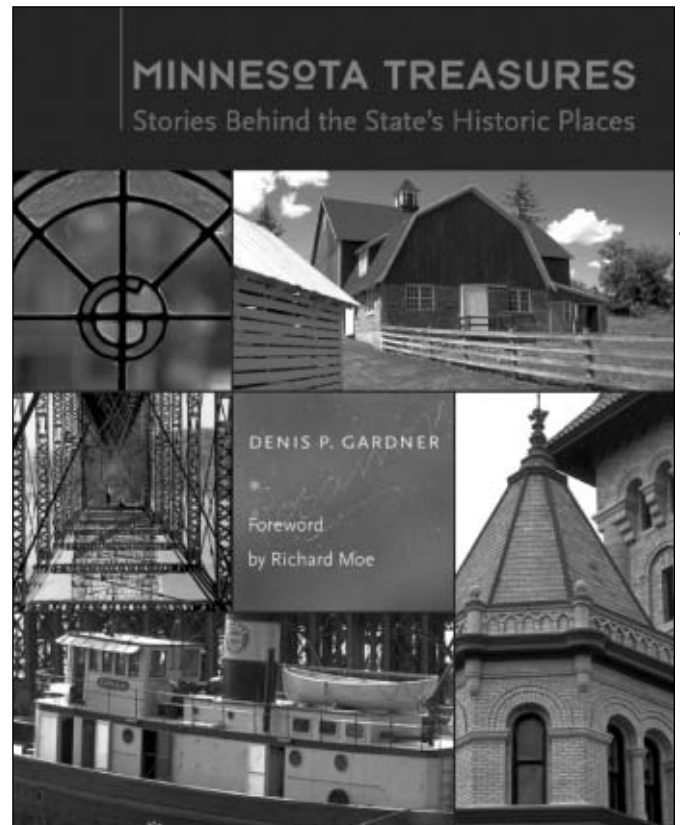
Gardner spent two years combing the files of the State Historic Preservation Office and visiting county and local historical societies to find his stories. "I had two criteria for selecting properties," he explains. "First, I wanted to show the diversity of National Register properties - the humble as well as the grand. Second, I

wanted to cover all corners of the state. Everywhere I went, I met people doing great work - often on shoestring budgets - to preserve important properties. Without their efforts, so much of our architectural heritage would be lost."

Gardner is scheduled to make more than a dozen appearances around the state to talk about his work. To book an event in your community, e-mail Alison Vandenberg, MHS Press publicity manager, at [alison.vandenberg@mnhs.org](mailto:alison.vandenberg@mnhs.org).

### How to order

You can help spread the word about the importance of saving Minnesota's historic resources by



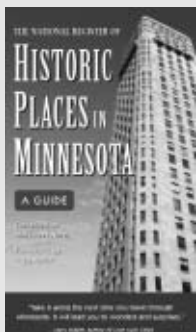
Minnesota Historical Society Press

adding *Minnesota Treasures*, along with *The National Register of Historic Places in Minnesota: A Guide* (see sidebar), to your museum gift shop. You'll find both titles in the latest MHS Press Catalog.

If you haven't received the Spring/Summer 2004 catalog or need more information about these books, call Leslie Rask at 651-297-3243 or e-mail [leslie.rask@mnhs.org](mailto:leslie.rask@mnhs.org). For sales information go to [www.mnhs.org/market/mhspress](http://www.mnhs.org/market/mhspress). To place an order call the Chicago Distribution Center, 1-800-621-2736.

*Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places* by Denis P. Gardner, \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 0-87351-471-8, 320 pages, 156 color photos, 37 b&w photos, index.

## Pocket guide serves up Minnesota's historic properties county by county



Want the full picture? *The National Register of Historic Places in Minnesota: A Guide* is a county-by-county inventory of more than 1,500 Minnesota listings on the National Register. Compiled by Mary Ann Nord, the guide includes a brief description of each property's significance.

*The National Register of Historic Places in Minnesota: A Guide*, \$13.95, paper, ISBN 8-87351-448-3, 280 pages, 180 b&w photos, appendixes, index. Produced by Minnesota's State Historic Preservation Office.



## Of books and balers

### Preservation workshops tackle issues large and small

Two August workshops sponsored by the Upper Midwest Conservation Association offer advice and hands-on practice with the care of a variety of artifacts.

*Aug. 19 - 20*

#### Care and Preservation of Books and Archive Materials: Storage Enclosures

*James J. Hill Library, St. Paul*

This workshop tackles the challenging area of book and paper conservation, emphasizing proper storage techniques and materials. Designed for people who work with archives, library and fine-art collections, the workshop includes instruction in how to make various acid-free enclosures. Among the topics to be covered: agents of deterioration, mold and mildew prevention, pests, environmental controls and disaster recovery.

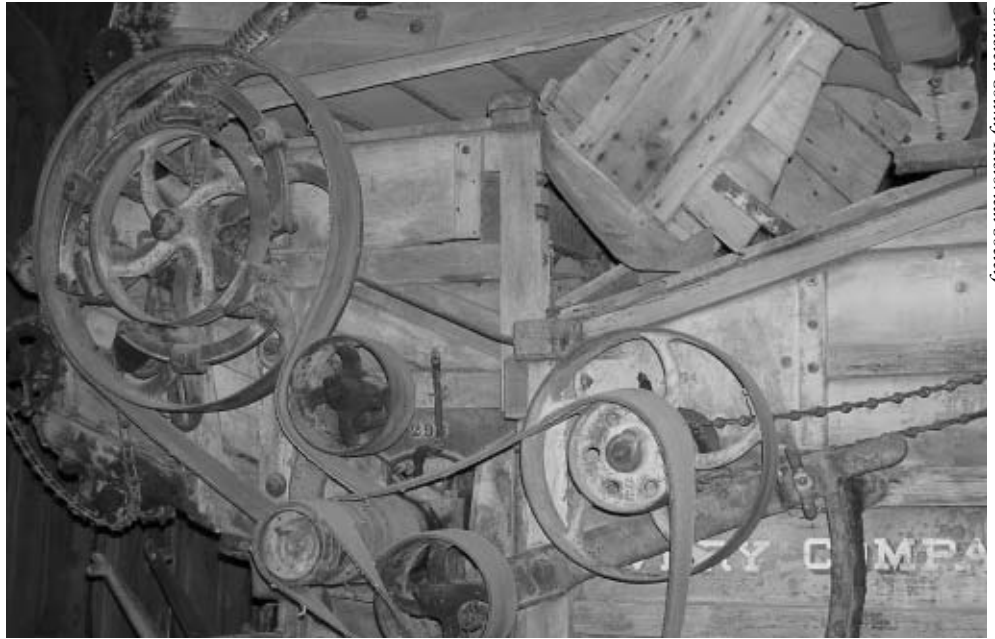
Participants are invited to bring an object that presents storage problems to discuss during the clinic. (Arrangements must be made in advance; items with mold, mildew or pest damage will not be allowed.)

*Aug. 27-28*

#### Care and Preservation of Agricultural and Industrial Machinery and Equipment

*Olmsted County Historical Society, Rochester*

Instructor Malcolm Collum, a conservator at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Michigan, is nationally recognized in the care of large agricultural and industrial machinery. He will address a multitude of issues for the care,



Olmsted County Historical Society

Large artifacts like this Avery Company thresher in the Olmsted County Historical Society's collection pose preservation challenges.

storage and exhibition of these complex artifacts. Using the Olmsted County Historical Society's collection of agricultural and industrial implements, he will discuss the differences between preservation, conservation and restoration.

Part of the day will be spent outdoors. Bring a lawn chair,

sunglasses, a hat and sunscreen.

#### Fees and registration

For each workshop, the fee is \$245 or \$195 for UMCA members. To register or for more information, call Melinda Markell, UMCA field services coordinator, 612-870-3128, or e-mail [umca@aol.com](mailto:umca@aol.com).

## Deadlines for state grants-in-aid

Application deadlines for the fall 2004 round of state grants-in-aid are:

- July 30** Pre-application due.
- Sept. 3** Grant application due.
- Oct. 7** Grants Review Committee meets.

If the Minnesota Legislature

appropriates the necessary funds, deadlines for state grants-in-aid for capital projects will be announced. Updated information will be posted in MNLOCALHISTORY, the Society's list service, and on the Society's web site at [www.mnhs.org/about/grants](http://www.mnhs.org/about/grants).

# Housekeeping basics

## Online resources for historic properties

Looking for tips on how to clean your historic building? These two online resources cover the basics of appropriate cleaning techniques:

- Wood, glass, marble, metal, textiles and carpet, books and paintings – you'll find useful guidelines for cleaning every surface in the Minnesota Historical Society's 39-page *Historic Housekeeping*

Handbook, available online at [www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/reports/manual-0102.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/reports/manual-0102.pdf).

- The National Park Service includes a chapter on housekeeping in its *Museum Handbook*, online at [www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHI/mushbkl.html](http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHI/mushbkl.html).



*James J Hill House, Minnesota Historical Society*

**Historic houses grand and modest shine with proper care.**

# Sign up now for 25th Annual Statewide Preservation Conference

## See Planner for details

St. Cloud will host this year's Statewide Historic Preservation Conference, set for Sept. 23 -24 in the city's historic Paramount Theatre. Focusing on the theme "Improving Community Life with Historic Preservation," the conference includes sessions on such topics as

downtown revitalization and smart-growth initiatives.

This year the ever-popular tours to local sites visit a granite quarry, Marcel Breuer's church at St. John's Abbey and the St. Cloud Commercial District. See page 3 of the enclosed Preservation Planner for details.

## AASLH offers new listserv for small museums

The American Association for State and Local History has opened a new listserv for small museums. Called the Small Museum Network, the listserv provides a forum for staff, board and volunteers of small museums to share information, find creative solutions to issues and concerns, and learn from each other about ways to make your organizations successful.

AASLH has also encouraged the participation in the listserv of organizations providing services to small museums.

To join, send an e-mail message to [SmallMuseums-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SmallMuseums-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) and put "subscribe" in the subject box. For more information, e-mail Karla Nicholson at [nicholson@aaslh.org](mailto:nicholson@aaslh.org).

*Minnesota Historical Society*



**The St. Cloud Commercial Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, includes the 1889 First National Bank, built of locally quarried granite.**

## Put us on your mailing list

What's the best way to share your successes with your colleagues in Minnesota's county and local historical organizations? Get the Minnesota Historical Society's Field Services office on your newsletter mailing list.

While you're at it, make sure that your newsletter also gets mailed to **Serials** at the Society. That copy becomes part of the periodical collection in the MHS library, where it will be accessible to researchers.

The **Field Services** copy gets circulated among the field programs staff, who can serve you best when they know what you're involved in, and the **Interpreter** editor, who counts

on your news to fill our newsletter.

Note: The two copies are necessary; their paths do not cross! For both copies, use the Minnesota Historical Society address: 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

If you can afford it, why not exchange complimentary copies of your newsletter with other historical organizations in your region? Sharing newsletters is a great way to get new ideas.



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