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History in Lost Properties

Reflection on the demolition of buildings can be not only poignant and sometimes downright sad, it can lead us to useful connections between the present and the past. This section may remind us of the value of photographs in helping us reflect on what the lost buildings in our communities can tell us about our past, and, as Larry Millett says, set us thinking about “how to create better cities in the decades ahead.” In the late fall 1996 issue of *In the Midst Of*, the newsletter of the Cokato Historical Society, Mike Worcester, interim museum director and newsletter editor, wrote about two demolished Cokato buildings. With his permission, the two articles are reprinted here, along with a short notice about Larry Millett’s new book, *Twin Cities Then and Now*.

Two Cokato Landmarks Are No More

by Mike Worcester

I. The Coast To Coast Store

The demolition of the Coast To Coast building in downtown Cokato last fall provided a valuable glimpse into a once-thriving Third Street business. Built by the Stevenson family, a pioneer family in Cokato, this building was one of the town’s oldest, and in its early years was the location of the State Bank of Cokato.

For much of its life, this building was home to The Big Store, run by the Mabusth family. It was one of the most popular stores in town, where men, women and children could be outfitted with an entire line of clothes. A later tenant was Norm Biaha’s grocery store. Del and Norma Raasch opened the Coast To Coast store in the late 1950s. It remained open until 1988, then sat empty, its age and condition impediments to use.



Left is the J. J. Mabusth Store, on the south side of Third Street in Cokato, as it looked around 1928.



Right: the Coast to Coast Store, built on the site of The Big Store, as it looked in 1995.

Both photos courtesy Cokato Historical Society

Just before the scheduled demolition, a group of volunteers and staff from the museum were able to salvage a number of artifacts from the building. These included several items—such as kneeling stools and ceremonial candle holders—used by the Masonic and

Order of the Eastern Star lodges; store display cases; the ticket window for the meeting hall on the second floor where gatherings, dances and Cokato High School basketball games were played; and product display signs.

With the loss of the Stevenson building, only a handful of structures built before the turn of the century remain in Cokato.

ISTEA & Historic Preservation

Since its beginning in 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) has authorized \$155 billion for highways, highway safety and mass transportation. A mandatory 10 percent of ISTEA funding is set aside for the transportation enhancements program, which has provided nearly half a billion dollars for historic preservation projects since 1992. The ISTEA is up for reauthorization by Congress in 1997. For those interested in the legislative process, the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Department of Law and Public Policy has prepared a *Preservationist’s Guide*. For a copy, contact *Preservation Advocate News* at 1785 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C., 20036. Telephone: (202) 588-6254; fax: (202) 588-6038; e-mail: Lawpol@nthp.org

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History in Lost Properties

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II. The Cecile Theatre

Motion pictures first appeared in Cokato in 1907, when a group of men petitioned the council for permission to use the second floor of the village hall to show movies.

Shown once or twice a week, these silent movies—which usually ran about 20 minutes—thrilled local audiences.

The first theater building was opened in April 1914 on Broadway Avenue (later the site of Moberg Motor Co.). Its owner, A. G.

Hansen, named it the Cecile Theatre, after his wife.

The next year, Esle Larson built a new theater on north Millard Avenue, now the site of Mike Ackerman’s barber shop. The theater had its grand opening on Aug. 3, 1915, showing “The Quest,” a Mutual Film Production starring Margarite Fischer and Harry Pollard. Music for this silent feature was provided by a local orchestra. Later, Mae Harkman played the organ for many of the silent films.



Millard Avenue in Cokato in 1945, looking south, past the Cokato Theatre on the left. The note on the photograph says that business at the theatre was brisk.

Movies with sound, “talkies” as they were called, made their debut in February 1930. Audiences were treated to the MGM production, “On With the Show,” and “It’s a Great Life.”

Photo courtesy Cokato Historical Society

“The actors live and talk with startling reality,” reported the Cokato *Enterprise*. Shortly before World War II, a new owner changed the name to the Cokato Theatre.

It was a popular social gathering point for people of all ages. Children viewed Saturday matinee serials and adults enjoyed the latest full-length features from

Universal, MGM, and Twentieth Century Fox

studios. Admission charges ranging from 5¢ to 25¢ were not a problem for people who wished for an evening of entertainment.

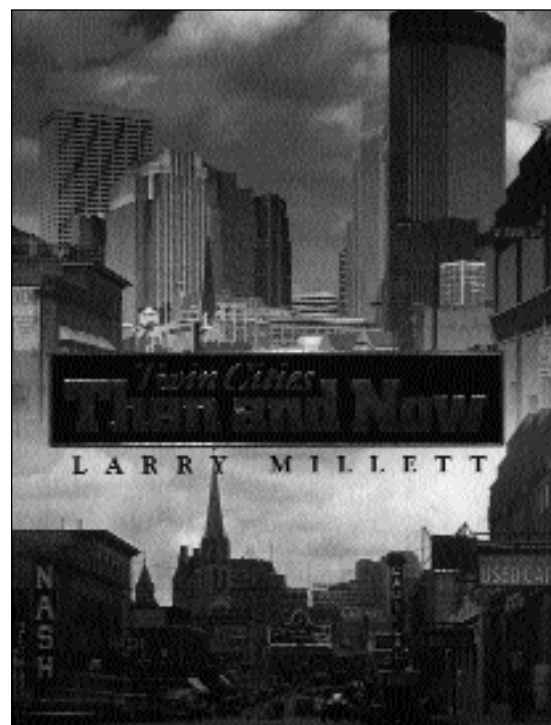
But time took its toll on the Cokato Theatre, with “The Swinger,” starring Ann-Margret and Tony Franciosa as its final film in late August 1967. Eighteen months later, the building was demolished.

For further information, call Mike Worcester, Cokato Historical Society, (320) 286-2427.

Visualizing the Consequences of Demolitions

Larry Millett, architecture critic for the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, has long been interested in the history of and around buildings. His new book, *Twin Cities Then and Now* (MHS Press, 1996), includes 72 historic photographs paired with contemporary photographs of the same or close-by places by architectural photographer Jerry Mathiason. The comparisons provide what Millett calls “images of change.” He is not arguing for a return to the past, but he does hold that “there are valuable lessons to be learned from the old way of making cities.”

For information about MHS Press books, contact Nordis Heyerdahl-Fowler, marketing manager, (612) 296-7539; to order, contact the MHS Press Order Dept., (612) 297-3243, or 1-800-647-7827.



Minnesota Historical Society Press; top photograph by Jerry Mathiason



News from the American Association of State & Local History

AASLH Awards Program

The American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) has announced its 52nd annual awards program. The awards recognize groups and individuals who attain standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state, provincial, and local history throughout North America. (Last year the Renville County Genealogical Society and the Taylors Falls Historical Society received Certificates of Commendation.)



Awards are made in four categories, listed below. Nominations are to be sent to the state or regional chair of the awards program by **March 1, 1997**. The awards will be announced on July 15, 1997.

AWARD OF MERIT, for a performance deemed excellent compared with similar activities in North America.

CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION, for excellence within the context of available means and regional standards.

NOTE: The two awards listed below are made only through regional chairs of the awards program; do not gather documentation before contacting the regional chair.

ALBERT B. COREY AWARD, for primarily volunteer-operated historical organizations that best display the qualities of vigor, scholarship and imagination in their work. Named in honor of a founder and former president of AASLH.

AWARD OF DISTINCTION, for long and very distinguished service. Given infrequently, this award is for individuals who are recognized nationally as leaders in the profession, and who have demonstrated the highest standards of performance and professional ethics.

For further information, contact the state or regional chair of the awards program. The Minnesota chair is Tim Glines, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102; (612) 296-6120. The regional chair is Lynn Wolf Gentzler, State Historical Society of Missouri, 1020 Lowry St., Columbia, MO 65201; (314) 882-7083.

Plans

In a special issue of its newsletter, *Dispatch* (October 1996), the AASLH presented a complete report of its mission, structure, activities, donors and "Two-Year Vision Plan." The two-year planning effort is being guided by the following goals:

- Provide improved service to existing AASLH members;
- Address the needs of under-served audiences;
- Enhance AASLH's status as national leader and active advocate for its membership;
- Increase membership;
- Identify and address strategic challenges;
- Maintain a competitive advantage for AASLH;
- Continue long-term planning and program development.

These goals are discussed in some detail in the text of the special issue of *Dispatch*. Terry L. Davis, the new executive director and CEO, stressed teamwork in implementing the plan. In her letter, she wrote,

In the year ahead, we will not only ask what you need from us, but we will ask for your help, too. We will ask you to join us as partners in the delivery of workshops in your region. We will also ask you to write articles about your own successes and challenges. And we will ask you to participate in Annual Meeting sessions and to represent this Association in the places we need to be, but cannot go. It is this type of teamwork that makes AASLH special.

The new president of AASLH is Dr. George L. Vogt, director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.



Three Field Workshops in 1997

Friday, March 21

Friday, April 18

Friday, May 2

AUSTIN, Holiday Inn; cohost: Mower County Historical Society

FAIRMONT, Holiday Inn; cohost: Martin County Historical Society

BRAINERD, Holiday Inn; cohost: Crow Wing County Historical Society

• FOUR SESSIONS EACH DAY •

Collecting Today's History for Tomorrow
Museum Security: Keeping Your Artifacts Safe

Developing a Board Training Manual
Selling the Museum—Public Relations One-Two-Three

On the evening prior to each meeting, a program relating to preservation will be held at the Holiday Inn meeting site, and on the day of each workshop there will be a local tour of historic sites in the area.

For further information, call (612) 296-5460.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

MHS Field Workshops:

March 21,
April 18,
May 2,

and

Historic Preservation Week:

May 11–17,
1997.

Fake Trees and Funny Towers Communications Technology and Historic Preservation

Remember powerline controversies? Roadside billboards and neon signs? Now we have a contemporary issue—locating transmission towers for the wireless communications industry—that recalls some of those controversies from the past. Just consider, for instance, the numbers: There are now about 22,000 cellular transmitters in the U.S., but another 100,000 are expected by the year 2000. (Pratt Cassity, "When Historic Meets High Tech," *Historic Preservation forum news*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Nov/Dec 1996.)

The number—and height—of the towers are the chief causes of problems for communities, planning commissions and review boards. The problems become more complicated because, as Cassity says, "the choice of a specific tower location depends on numerous factors, most of them fully comprehensible only to the industry itself." Communities are concerned with issues such as "electromagnetic fields, aesthetic drawbacks, property devaluation, encouragement of sprawl, effects on other communities, obtrusive lighting, and potential damage from falling towers, ice, and debris."

Not all the news is bad, however; there are some success stories.

For instance, a communications company desired to mount an antenna for its cellular network at Mount Vernon, George Washington's Virginia estate. It was granted permission to do so by the Fairfax County government, on condition that the tower had to be camouflaged. When plastic and rubber foliage is added to it, the tower will resemble a tall white fir tree.

In another case, Bell Atlantic paid to reconstruct the 1859 United Methodist Church steeple in Ipswich, Mass., and in exchange received permission to hide a transmitter inside the steeple. ("Aesthetic alternatives" such as these are more expensive than conventional towers, but Cassity reports that "many providers think that the business opportunity is well worth the extra expense.")

Cassity notes that studies of how zoning and planning policies can accommodate the demands of the new technology are underway. The studies are generating recommendations that are being used in developing model language for policies and regulations. Some of these recommendations are listed in the box below.

Siting and Design of Cellular Towers: Some Recommendations

- Encourage co-location of devices on towers and clustering of towers on selected sites.
- Negotiate with providers to "trade" improvements for towers.
- Pass regulations concerning: tower height; lot size; landscaping of towers and accessory structures; safety concerns (e.g., falling ice, debris, climbing); and removal of structures that have been abandoned.



Bells to Ring Out with the History of Special Places

*Musical instrument; work of art; historical marker; historical event—
All are true of new commemorative bell towers in two Minnesota locations.*

Brooklyn Park Community Carillon

In June 1997, a commemorative bell tower is to be erected on the campus of North Hennepin Community College in Brooklyn Park. It is more accurately called a *carillon*, since it has more than 23 bells (25). Carillons are the largest musical instruments in the world, and are capable of performing compositions over a two-octave tonal range.

Many people in the area also call the tower a *glockenspiel*. This includes Eldon A. Tessman, a founder of the community, who long dreamed and worked for it as a way to celebrate the rich agrarian history of the north Hennepin-Anoka-Wright county area. (In the 1930s and '40s, for instance, more potatoes were shipped from the Osseo railhead than anywhere else in the world.)

Tessman's cousins Alice

P. and Raymond G. Tessman generously provided the funding for the design and construction. (See photo.)

The Brooklyn Historical Society has joined the college in the project not only because the carillon has historical value, but because erecting the tower is a historical event in its own right. The college and the society are of one mind in holding that history is in the making all the time, and in seeing this as a significant contribution to the history of the community and the area. The two organizations co-hosted a reception for the designers, Stanton Sears and Andrea Myklebust, in December, and will co-host the installation program and inaugural concert, scheduled for Saturday, June 21, as a part of the Community's Tater Daze festival held on the college campus.

For more information, contact John Reilly, North Hennepin Community College, (612) 424-0916, or Madeleine Roch, Brooklyn Historical Society, (612) 561-4462.



Above: The carillon is being fabricated by Moorhead Steel in North Minneapolis and the bells are being made in Cincinnati.

Designer Andrea Myklebust took this photo of the model. Photo courtesy North Hennepin Community College.

CCC Bell at Cook County Historical Society

The bell now on the grounds of the Cook County Historical Society (see photo) had rung at the Gunflint CCC Camp #712 until the camp closed in 1942. The bell was accepted into the historical society collections, where it remained until placed in the tower last summer. Designed by Russell Zenk, the tower is intended to honor the importance of the CCC Camps in the history of the area.

Persons making memorial contributions to defray costs of design and construction may have the names of their loved ones inscribed on a plaque inside the museum. The first donation was in honor of M. J. Humphrey, photographer at the camp from 1933 to 1942 and former president of the society, who had donated to the society his collection of the photographs that he had taken over 30 years.

At the installation ceremony in August, 1996, the first ringing was performed by society past president Peggy Heston, and former presidents Herb Hedstrom and Willis Raff spoke.

For information, call Pat Zankman at the Cook County Historical Society, (218) 387-9131, or write, Box 1293, Grand Marais, MN 55604.



Courtesy of Cook County Historical Society; photograph by Pat Zankman

David Peterson, president of the Cook County Historical Society, stands beside the new bell tower in August, 1996.



Part of Roof Collapses at Kandiyohi Historical Society

Around noon on Monday, Dec. 30, the roof over the public meeting room of the Kandiyohi County Historical Society in Willmar collapsed under the weight of ice and snow. No one was injured; meeting room furniture, Christmas decorations, and a computer and printer were damaged, but no irreplaceable items or objects were destroyed.

began to creak. The construction workers went to lunch, and no one but Bonde and Nelson-Balcer were in the building. Then, in her words, "As the creaking and noises were sounding louder and were more frequent, I went back into the museum and turned off the breaker switches for the meeting room....The noises became more like 'rumbles' and the room

collapsed. The creaking, rumbles and crashes went on for a couple of minutes (like a 'domino' effect)."

Among the numerous calls Mona made after the collapse were requests for a sheet-metal expert to check the furnace, a plumber to disconnect the water, two radio stations to announce that the society would be closed for the rest of the week, the fire department to inspect the property, and the police department to request an extra

patrol of the area through the night. The next day construction companies began the cleanup, and architect Richard Engen took dated photographs of the damage. On Friday a section of an outside wall was removed to allow front-end loaders to enter the room.

The society's office and a makeshift public research area opened January 13, and the museum will reopen in late winter or early spring. The society's board has decided to consider several options for replacement of the room and improvement of the structure.

For further information, call (320) 235-1881, or read the next issue of the society's newsletter, *The Kandi Express*, which will be published in March. Write the society at 610 N.E. Highway 71, Willmar, MN 56201.



Courtesy Kandiyohi County Historical Society. Photo by Mona Nelson-Balcer.

On Sunday the 29th, volunteers had written a note that said "the ceiling is falling down," but later that day an observer did not think it looked bad. Society director Mona Nelson-Balcer read the note on Monday morning and noticed that part of the ceiling had lowered about a foot, but she heard no noises from the ceiling. She and a volunteer made several calls, to board president Tom Bonde and to carpenters and the society's insurance agent. The carpenters visited the building, made plans to return to work to strengthen the ceiling, and left. While they were gone, in Mona Nelson-Balcer's words, "We carried out a clock, a bust of Gladstone, the microfilm/microfiche reader, some of the folding tables, and some of the chairs," so they would not be in the way of the workers.

The carpenters arrived later in the morning and carried some equipment into the room. The ceiling

A worker from Pulsifer Construction Co. sits on a slab of insulation from the ceiling of the meeting room, during cleanup at the Kandiyohi Historical Society, Jan. 3.



Preservation Resources on the Internet

Local and county historical organizations might find this list of web sites useful. It was originally compiled by Robert A. Young in "Building Preservation and Rehabilitation Technology," an article in the Nov./Dec. 1995 issue of *Heritage*, the newsletter of the Utah Heritage Foundation. The list was reprinted in the fall 1996 issue of *Alliance Review*, newsletter of the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions.

General information

Located at Cornell University, this site provides access to other preservation-related organization web sites for information on conferences, education, legislation, links, opportunities, and organizations.

<http://www.preservenet.cornell.edu/>

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) publishes *NCSHPO Weekly On-Line News* that covers such topics as ISTEA, tax credits, takings legislation, and Native American issues. Contact CEHP Incorporated, fax: (202) 293-1782, or by e-mail at cehp@hpa.cais.com

For information about free publications from the Preservation Assistance Division of the National Park Service, contact:

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/pad/padpub.html>

Technical information

The address below is for the *Publications Briefs* series, publications from the National Park Service containing in-depth technical information on preservation-related topics ranging from vinyl siding to stucco repair. The series is published by the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (text only).

gopher://gopher.ncptt.nps.gov:70/11/npsresources/briefs/

National Park Service sites

For the text of various National Register Bulletins that describe the process of nominating a resource to the National Register of Historic Places, contact:

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/bulletins/bulletins.html>

For information about federal tax incentives and how to obtain them, contact:

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/pad/taxact.html>

Postal Rate News

Postage costs are frequently significant items in the budgets of historical organizations, so there appears to be some good news from the U.S. Postal Service. The U.S.P.S. does not plan to increase postal rates in the immediate future, even though the Service is convinced it must increase its revenues.

According to the December 1996 issue of *Quik & Important*, the newsletter of Twin Cities-based Quik Print, the "Postal Service plans to provide new services and products, including electronic bill paying, ordering and transfer of money abroad, etc." Among the other revenue-producing efforts under consideration are: pushing overseas sales by U.S. catalog companies; converting post offices to "postal stores," which would provide packing and shipping

services; implementing electronic postmarks via the Internet; and renting rooftops to wireless companies for antennas.

These ventures may run into legal complications, for, according to *Quik & Important*, the legal mandate of the U.S. Postal Services "stipulates that the agency's revenues must come from delivery or mail (or, one could loosely interpret that as delivery of information, in this electronic age)." In the meantime, no increases in postal rates are foreseen in 1997 or 1998.

Quik Print's report is based on information from Dick Gorelick & Association of West Chester, PA.



Revisiting Volatile Issues in Museum Exhibits

Edward Linenthal, the keynote speaker at the 1996 annual MHO meeting, showed that controversies about the presentation of history in museums will not soon go away. (See Barbara Averill's article in the January 1997 *Interpreter*.) This is particularly true for exhibits that seek to be both celebratory and analytical, and for exhibits about recent history. A new book will be particularly useful for readers interested in this problem area.

Martin Harwit, former director of the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution has published *An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of the Enola Gay* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1996; 466 pp., cloth, \$27.50). (After the controversy around the exhibit, which was named *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and World War II*, Harwit resigned.) In this book Harwit chronicles the demise of the planned exhibit and includes the full text and many excerpts from letters, memos, articles, etc., of the time. His book is reviewed in the Nov./Dec. 1996 issue of *Museum News* by Robert R. Archibald, CEO and president of the Missouri Historical Society.

Harwit said that the Smithsonian could do an exhibit "that both dealt squarely with the mission of the Enola Gay and properly honored the veterans," an exhibit, in other words, that would be both

analytical and commemorative. Archibald disagrees. He maintains that the kind of analytical approach Harwit thought he could have requires academic freedom, but "Curators in museums do not exercise the same freedoms as their academic colleagues because exhibitions are institutional, not individual, undertakings."

Another point: Because museums receive public support, they must share ownership and authority with the public. This means, Archibald says,

We are authorities, but we are not the authorities. We will not be permitted to dictate the meaning that humans assign to objects, events, and ideas. Museums are places for the appreciation, contestation, and discussion of meanings. We can no longer be the purveyors of canons. However, as authorities, we can facilitate and guide the discussion, supplying the evidence and insisting on aesthetic and moral values that must inform critical judgment.

Despite the disagreements, Archibald says that Harwit's account is "compelling and comprehensive," and that the many primary source materials in the book, which enable readers to make their own judgments about key issues, make it an especially valuable resource.

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Britta Bloomberg, Head,
Historic Preservation, Field Services and
Grants Department
David Nystuen, Field Coordinator
James Smith, Editor

<http://www.mnhs.org>



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

345 KELLOGG BOULEVARD WEST
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