



Published
by the Minnesota
Historical Society
for local and county
historical societies
and heritage
preservation
commissions

THE MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

January 1997 Vol. XXV, No. 1

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History Takes to the Air

by **Bev Jackson**

This story may inspire some ideas that readers could put to use in reaching their various kinds of constituencies: regular, irregular and potential. Bev Jackson, executive director of the Freeborn County Historical Society was reluctant at first to write this story in the first person, but she finally agreed that is the best way to tell it.

If you are in south-central Minnesota or northern Iowa on a Friday afternoon and tune your radio dial to AM 1450 (KATE) at 1:05, you'll hear me introducing the special guest for that week's "History is..." program. Since last May, this weekly half-hour show has brought local history and current trends to a listening audience throughout Freeborn and neighboring counties and north-central Iowa. Linda Brekke, KATE announcer, provides the technical know-how and now and then joins the conversation.

The program offers memories, interviews, historical insight, and information on special events. Through the generosity of KATE, there is no charge to the Freeborn County Historical Society (FCHS) for this show, though the society does pay a small amount for a Sunday morning segment.

Recently, I had some evidence that the show is successfully reaching at least some listeners. Following a program for a senior citizens group, a woman told me, "Last Friday I laughed and laughed. When you talked about the odors in a country school, I could just smell the wet wool mittens and leggings hanging up to dry by the stove, and the wood



Photo by Jim Pilgrim

Bev Jackson is shown here in the studio during one of her interviews for "History is..." on KATE, Albert Lea.

burning, and the aromas of kids who only took baths on Saturday nights and wore the same clothes to school every day."

Another time, I was in a local shop picking up nametags for museum volunteers when the clerk mentioned a program on which I had interviewed the daughter of longtime DFL leader Ray Hemenway. The clerk said, "I had to stop working and just listen. I remember admiring Ray and his dedication, and pretty soon I found myself crying."

How it began

The Friday show evolved from a number of different radio experiences. For several years, I have been doing a 10-minute telephone interview with

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MHS Research Grants: A Clarification

Grants made by the MHS research grant program are for individuals only. It may not have been sufficiently clear in the recent article (*Interpreter*, December, 1996) that nonprofit organizations are not eligible, nor is research on dissertations or theses. Academicians, independent scholars, and writers—nonprofessional as well as professional— may apply. Deadlines are staggered:

- Jan. 2, 1997, for projects beginning March–June 1997;
- April 1, 1997, for July–October 1997 projects;
- Sept. 1, 1997, for November 1997–February 1998 projects.





National Preservation Award for Minnesota Restoration Team



The Restoration Team for the Joyce Estate was recently awarded the 1996 National Award for Excellence by the National Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The team was organized and managed by the State Historic Preservation Office and staff of the U.S. Forest Service Marcell Ranger Station. The award was given for “outstanding contributions” to the USDA’s preservation program, “Windows on the Past,” and on Dec. 5, at a ceremony in Milwaukee, was presented to Charles Nelson, MHS historical architect, and David Nystuen, SHPO field services coordinator.

Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the estate was constructed in 1917-20 by David and Beatrice Joyce. It is located north of Grand Rapids at Larson’s Point on Big Trout Lake in the Chippewa National Forest. Though it is an

example of Rustic Style architecture, which was popular among resorts in the Upper Midwest during the first half of the 20th century, the Joyce Estate stands apart from its counterparts in Minnesota.

Unlike the others, it closely resembles the opulent “Great Camps” of the Adirondack region of New York. The “Great Camps” are characterized by elaborate site plans, careful use of natural materials to provide contrasts with natural surroundings, and a main lodge that is surrounded by smaller structures with various purposes. In effect, these camps function as self-contained villages.

Working from 1993 to 1996, the restoration team stabilized a number of buildings and structures in the complex; it now reflects the character of the estate as it was during its period of historic significance. For information, contact the State Historic Preservation Office, (612) 296-5434.

History on the Air

Continued from page 1

KATE radio on Sunday mornings. Usually, I give a summary of recent events and upcoming programs. Then, during the quieter times of the museum year, I read excerpts from the 1882 Freeborn County History book or early county newspapers, or anecdotes from one of the newspaper columns I write regularly for the Albert Lea *Tribune*.

Occasionally, a topic from the *Tribune* column triggered a visit to the “Party Line,” a morning call-in household hints program, or led to an invitation to an appearance on Linda Brekke’s afternoon show. In another field, as coordinator of “Stories from the Heartland,” Minnesota’s only annual storytelling festival, I work with the local elementary schools; last year, with KATE’s full support, I brought some students to the station to share their stories over the air.

This combination of experiences led to the opportunity to try a regular Friday history program on 1450 AM. Since its beginning, listener response has been enthusiastic and very supportive.

The variety of guests on “History is...” includes museum professionals, museum volunteers, representatives of area ethnic groups, and people whose families reflect the county’s history. Topics

cover a variety of issues, ranging from historic and current issues, for example, 1860 vs 1990 solutions to youth anger management, or making dandelion wine.

Our purpose in doing this show is to expand people’s awareness that history happens everyday, everywhere, to all of us. We have found that radio interviews with people who have historical expertise, or who can share unique experiences, can bring history to an audience that might not be reached in any other way.

For additional information, call the Freeborn County Historical Society, (507) 373-8003.

Bev was recently selected to participate in the Peer Advisor Network (PAN), a new program for providing advice to museums in greater Minnesota. Topics include organization, exhibits, fund raising, and other subjects of interest to museums. PAN is sponsored by Community Programs in the Arts, through Minnesota’s Resources and Counseling for the Arts.



Taking Care of Wet Archaeological Artifacts

Although few readers actually do wet archaeology, this article, adapted from the paper that Paul Storch delivered at the shipwrecks conference in Duluth in October, will help even us general readers appreciate the value and methods of this still-developing field of historical inquiry. And note the central role that ethical principles play in this field of work. Paul Storch, Objects Conservator of the John and Martha Daniels Conservation Laboratory at the Minnesota Historical Society, has been on the staff at MHS since January 1991.

Archaeology at Freshwater Sites

by Paul Storch

Introduction

In this article I can only give a brief introduction to the conservation of artifact materials from freshwater archaeological sites. I say “freshwater” rather than “underwater,” because there are significant differences between conservation of objects from a marine, or salt water, environment, and conservation of objects from a freshwater environment, such as Lake Superior and most Minnesota rivers. Treatments developed for marine sites may be unnecessary and uneconomical at best, and do irreversible damage at worst.

The field of archaeological conservation is evolving rapidly from its roots in classical restoration and chemistry into a specialized applied science; we need further development of methods specifically suited to freshwater sites and information exchange at conferences such as the shipwrecks conference.

organic materials. Most organic objects are made of wood, but often other organics, such as leather, and textile fibers, such as wool and cotton, are preserved.

The key concept to remember with archaeological materials, whether they are buried in the ground, submerged in the water, or buried in submerged sediments, is that these objects have equilibrated with their burial conditions. That is, deterioration has progressed to a certain point and then stopped, or the rate has drastically slowed down.

If the equilibrium conditions are maintained in the burial environment, then the materials will remain in a state of preservation. If something happens to disturb the equilibrium—such as archaeological excavation or a natural change, like a drastic drop in waterlevel—the materials will begin to reach equilibrium with the new conditions. This results in renewed deterioration, which in the case of metals can mean the formation of additional oxides, and for wood the loss of water and resultant shrinkage and cracking.

The logical extension of this concept in practical terms is that one must be prepared—with the proper methods and supplies—to re-create as closely as possible the equilibrium after excavation and removal from the burial environment. Failure to do this is the antithesis of ethical conservation practice, and inevitably leads to the loss of information at the least, and total loss of the object at the most.

Chemical considerations

Although freshwater does contain dissolved minerals, we do not have to contend with the large amount of chloride ions that are in sea water. Chlorine is particularly troublesome with metals such as iron and copper because of its strong negative charge, which gives it a strong attraction to positively

Well pulley from Fort Snelling, ca 1820-30s; wrought iron is in direct contact with wood. The iron is heavily corroded and the wood is swelled. It is not possible to dismantle objects such as this to attempt to treat the components differently without destroying the object and its integrity.



Under the Water

The major types of materials found on most Great Lakes shipwrecks from the 19th through the late 20th centuries include inorganic (e.g. iron and brass) and



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charged metals. When combined with an electrolyte solution such as sea water, this strong attraction sets up galvanic electrical currents that lead to corrosion and metal loss.

The iron handle of this copper kettle has completely corroded, but has left the iron minerals from the corrosion products behind on the copper surfaces.



In freshwater, metals combine with oxygen and other dissolved anions (electrically charged particles) such as sulphates and phosphates. The biological activity in freshwater is different from that in seawater and there is no precipitation of the calcium carbonate that leads to the massive concretions that occur on marine objects. One corrosion problem that does occur with metals in freshwater is increased galvanic corrosion, which happens when two dissimilar metals are in indirect contact. (See the picture of the copper kettle.) When copper and iron are in direct contact, the iron corrodes preferentially, becoming what is termed a sacrificial anode. This kettle is from an inland submerged riverine site, at Horsetail Falls of the Granite River, in the Gunflint Trail region of Minnesota.

Water-logged organic materials such as wood, leather, and other fibrous materials can be very fragile, while appearing to be in good condition. Do not be fooled by appearances! If allowed to dry out completely without special treatment, these objects will be destroyed with little hope for restoration. Valuable historical and archaeological information will be lost forever.

The conservation of water-logged organic materials requires extensive knowledge of chemistry and currently available practices, and often requires

specialized equipment and supplies. Treatment is often slow, and can be expensive. It is for these reasons, and others, that it is best to leave these objects where they are. If that is not possible, then contact a qualified conservator to help with detailed recovery and conservation plans and specifications.

“Put it back”

An option that is somewhat akin to the conservation philosophy is the current “put it back” movement among well-meaning avocational and professional underwater archaeologists. Although it sounds simple and effective enough at first look, this is not necessarily the correct option in all cases.

Some Definitions

CONSERVATION is the profession that is devoted to the preservation of cultural property for the future. It includes examination, documentation, treatment, and preventive care, supported by research and education.

TREATMENT is defined as the deliberate alteration of the chemical and/or physical aspects of cultural property, aimed primarily at prolonging its existence and preserving as much inherent information as possible.

STABILIZATION denotes treatment procedures that are intended to maintain the integrity of cultural property and to minimize deterioration.

RESTORATION denotes treatment procedures that are intended to return cultural property to a known or assumed state, often through the addition of non-original material(s).

A CONSERVATOR is a professional whose primary occupation is the practice of conservation and who, through specialized education, knowledge, training, and experience, formulates and implements all the activities of conservation in accordance with an ethical code such as, but not limited to, the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice.



Continued from page 4

Particularly with organic objects, re-submerging them after they have dried or been treated can spell disaster. Water-logging them again will cause stresses in and between fibers and structures that have already been weakened first by the previous water-logging, then by the equilibration to the air. Treatments may have introduced chemicals into the materials that make them water-resistant and have changed their density. Metal objects will be less affected by putting them back into water, but there are still risks and



Trade axe head found in 1960 at Horsetail Falls with the nested kettles. The steel blade edge has annealed to a wrought iron body. Wrought iron and steel is stable in fresh water.

questions to be answered. These include: Is the object structurally stable? Will the increased pressure affect it adversely? Is the environment to which it will be returning the same over all as when the object came out, or have certain parameters changed?

It would help answer the questions we have about putting objects back on sites if we had a body of data on objects that have been put back so far. Written and photographic documentation of the objects, with as much recovery and treatment history as is possible, will help conservators assess and analyze the effects of resubmergence on objects.

This article may have raised more questions than it has answered. Wet and water-logged objects pose complicated problems, but the stories that they can tell us are invaluable historical resources. Cooperation among all interested and involved parties can go a long way in solving some of these problems.

General Guidelines for Conserving Objects Excavated from Freshwater Sites

- **Do not hesitate to ask for professional advice.** Contact the John and Martha Daniels Laboratory (JMD) at the Minnesota Historical Society or a professional conservator in your area; telephone, (612) 297-5774. The American Institute of Conservation (AIC) in Washington, D.C. has a computerized referral service that lists AIC members who consider themselves qualified in specialized fields; call (202) 452-9545.
- **Have a plan.** Anticipate what types of objects and materials will be brought up. Plan to have the funds, equipment and supplies necessary to properly store and stabilize the objects.
- **Know where the objects will end up** for long term storage and/or exhibit. Contact the repository, if known, for their guidelines for storage. Make adequate provisions for proper storage supports and materials.
- **Good archaeology is proactive.** Contact a conservator before proper object care becomes a major problem.
- **Provide adequate security for the objects,** especially if they are in outdoor holding tanks.
- **Take water samples and object materials to a conservator for testing,** if at all possible. This will help establish the condition parameters and help to design proper treatments. It is usually easier to send samples than the objects to an out-of-town conservator.
- **Keep wet materials wet.** Try to maintain the objects' environmental equilibria.
- **Monitor the water quality** in the holding tanks regularly for mold growth.

Note: Electrolysis is usually not necessary for metal stabilization. "Traditional" methods for treating marine objects are not always directly applicable to objects from other environments.



Minnesota Impressionist Painting— Duluth Exhibit and Afton Historical Society Book

Paintings and drawings by 24 artists linked by their adherence to the style of French Impressionism and who lived and/or worked in Minnesota in the late 19th or early 20th centuries will be on display until Feb. 9, 1997, at the Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota Duluth. The exhibit includes works by well-known Duluth painters David Ericson and Knute Heldner, as well as such artists as Alexis Jean Fournier and Carl Rawson. Several women artists, whose work is often overlooked in the larger context of American art, are also represented. They include Clara Mairs, Gertrude Barnes, and Alice Hugy.

The guest curator for the exhibit was **Rena Neumann Coen**, author of *Painting and Sculpture in Minnesota 1820-1914* and *In the Mainstream: The Art of Alexis Jean Fournier*. Her book about the subjects and context of the exhibit, titled *Minnesota Impressionists*, is now available from the Afton Historical Society Press (96 pp., 43 color plates plus b/w photos of the artists, a reading list, casebound in linen; \$35).



Courtesy Afton Historical Society Press

The Afton Historical Society is, as far as we know, the only historical organization besides MHS to have a book-publishing press. It was begun in 1995 and specializes in fine books on a wide range of Minnesota subjects. Its first book, *The Shape of Things: The Art of Francis Lee Jaques*, by Patricia Condon Johnston, won both the Minnesota Book Award for Best Illustrated Book of 1995 and the 1995 Midwest Publishers Award for Best First Book (from a new press). In 1996, *Minnesota Gardens: An Illustrated History*, by Susan Davis Price, also won several awards.

The more recent books from the AHS Press include *Afton Remembered* by Edwin G. Robb, which combines memoir with narrative history of the community, and *Minnesota Architect: The Life and Work of Clarence H. Johnston*, by Paul Clifford Larson, which tells the story of this not-well-enough-recognized architect of astonishing productivity.

For a copy of the catalog or to place an order, write Afton Historical Society Press, PO Box 100, Afton, MN 55001; or call either (612) 436-8443 or 1-800-436-8443.

Cover of Minnesota Impressionists by Rena Neumann Coen, Afton Historical Society Press, for promotional postcard.

Stearns County Puts Exhibit on Internet

Myron Hall, a celebrated news photographer, took many pictures of community life in central Minnesota in the years following World War II. An exhibition of his photographs has been mounted in the Stearns

County Heritage Center and will remain on display until Aug. 31, 1997. The photographs show scenes from daily life, such as milk being delivered and lunch at a corner drug store, that illustrate the life styles and values of a period being

romanticized by politicians and cultural critics.

Selected photographs from the exhibition can be viewed on the Internet. Developed by Virtual Strategies and sponsored by the Stearns County National Bank, the exhibit is called *Myron Hall Online*, and is located in the Virtual Directory. The address is: www.virtualstrategies.com

The exhibit is sponsored in part by the Central Minnesota Arts Board through funding by the Minnesota State Legislature, and by the United Arts of Central Minnesota, the Gannett Foundation, the Central Minnesota Community Foundation, and Dain Bosworth, Inc.

In conjunction with the exhibit, SCHS will provide a free educational booklet using the Hall photographs for social studies and language arts teachers and students. You can obtain booklets by writing the Stearns County Historical Society, PO Box 702, St. Cloud, MN 56302-0702, or by calling (320) 253-8424.



Courtesy Stearns County Historical Society

Soap box races on 5th Avenue, St. Cloud, ca. 1950. The neighborhood really came together to see who had the best cart. From the Myron Hall exhibit.



“Tell history with frankness, not secrecy”: 1996 MHO Annual Meeting Keynote Speaker

by **Barbara Averill**



Local historical societies should tell stories “warts and all,” advised historian Edward T. Linenthal, whose address “What is the Place of History?” was the keynote for the Nov. 15 annual meeting of Minnesota Historical Organizations. Linenthal, professor of religion and American culture at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, discussed the controversies involved in historic interpretation and the courage it takes for historians to overcome myths, misinformation and traditions.

Linenthal said, “Historians revise about everything, unless they are intellectually senile,” and offered examples of “revisionist triumphs.” Ken

Burns, for instance, practiced revisionism in his Civil War and baseball documentaries, giving the American public new stories to consider.

Another triumph in revisionism came at the Smithsonian Institution with modification of the V2 rocket exhibit. The V2 was previously exhibited as a “gem of technological boosterism,” without text to explain that it killed or terrorized thousands during

World War II. The exhibit was altered to show a V2 victim’s body and information about the Jews who were forced to build them and died doing so.

Invented Traditions

Linenthal pointed out the dilemma for historians who seek to change long-standing interpretations now regarded as fact. Some stories are “invented traditions” so dear that historians who attempt to alter them often pay a price in their professional and personal lives.

One such story is that of William Travis, who, according to the legend, drew a line at the Alamo where heroic but overwhelmingly outnumbered defenders fought the Mexican army in 1836. Travis’s “line,” so deep in Texas lore that it has become part of the language, only became part of the Alamo story in the late 19th century.

Likewise, the battle of Lexington Green was portrayed in later art as a scene of courageous combat

by men consciously risking death for a cause. In actuality, it was a massacre of colonists by British troops. That version reduces the status of the casualties and is therefore unpopular with the people of Lexington. But both stories have enduring favor: the Alamo has a marker denoting the line; and textbooks record Lexington as the site of the “first battle” of the Revolution.

First Interpretations

Another dilemma Linenthal noted is the “enduring truth of first interpretation....It is difficult to make people aware that, in fact, first interpretations are just that—they are interpretations.” One success story concerns the National Park Service, which reshaped a memorial for Gen. George Custer at “Custer Battlefield” into an interpretation of the Little Bighorn Battlefield. Visitors are now exposed to the perspectives of both the 7th Cavalry and the Dakota and Cheyenne Indians. “They’ve been able to transform a shrine into a site of public history where various groups of people can converge, from ‘Custerphiles’—people who revere him—to ‘Custerphobes’—people who hate him.”

Sacred Narratives

Some communities preserve “sacred narratives,” and altering such stories is perceived as an act of heresy. Linenthal referred to the Smithsonian Institution’s controversial Enola Gay exhibit, about which he testified before the U.S. Senate. The sacred story developed in 1940s was that bombing Hiroshima ended the war and saved millions of American lives. That idea has persevered so strongly into the 1990s that the museum was prevented from presenting viewpoints that questioned the decision to drop the bomb.

Another sacred narrative, bolstered by motion pictures, has Davy Crockett fighting to the last as the Alamo fell. A researcher of Mexican diaries about the Alamo revealed that in their accounts, Crockett and others were captured, tortured and burned at the orders of Santa Anna. Although the Mexicans’ diaries said that Crockett had been so brave and heroic that Mexican soldiers attempted to release him, the author’s interpretation of the frontiersman’s death was met with ferocious hate mail and even death threats.



Professor Edward T. Linenthal is shown at the podium of the 3M Auditorium in the Minnesota History Center while delivering his keynote address to the 1996 annual MHO meeting on Nov. 15.

Photo by Michael Koop, SHPO



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Two Voices: Commemorative and Historical



Holocaust museum curators struggled with decisions concerning sensitive material. For instance, curators had planned to display hair shorn from the heads of Jewish women fated for death. Nazi Germany used the hair for submarine insulation and furniture stuffing. Some museum staff argued that displaying the hair would violate the decorum expected of a Capitol Mall museum. Others said it was a pedagogically important part of the story. And some survivors said the hair was too personal an item to be on public display. The concerns of the survivors, who viewed the museum as a commemorative place akin to a burial ground, overcame the "historical voice" of those who took a more analytical and removed view.

Similarly, the "commemorative voices" persevered over the historical voices in the Enola Gay controversy. Linenthal struck a note of moderation: "Each voice is essential to the story, but when either insists on being the only voice, problems arise."

Barbara Averill is Media Relations Manager for the Minnesota Historical Society

Oral History Association Schedules Meetings

The 1996-97 mini-series of brown-bag programs of the Oral History Association of Minnesota (OHAM) will conclude on Feb. 6. Larry Long, Minnesota folk singer and troubadour, will describe how he combines oral history and song-writing to create an intergenerational curriculum. The one-hour program begins at noon at the Walker Art Center conference room in Minneapolis. A beverage and dessert will be provided. Space is limited, so please call ahead of time if you plan to attend.

Watch the *Interpreter* for further information about the 1997 OHAM annual conference, scheduled for April 5 at the Minnesota History Center.

For information about oral history, or OHAM and its programs, contact any of the following: Marilyn McGriff, president, (320) 396-3957; JoAnn Hanson-Stone, vice president, (612) 641-1540; Kurt Kragness, secretary, (612) 261-4433; or Bev Hermes, treasurer, (612) 953-0730.

The Minnesota History **Interpreter** is published by the Historic Preservation, Field Services and Grants Department of the Minnesota Historical Society, and distributed to Minnesota's county and local historical societies and heritage preservation commissions.

Readers are invited to submit information for publication. To be considered, items must reach the editor by the 25th of the month, two months before publication (example: publication date, October 1; submission deadline, August 25). Send to: **Interpreter** Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906. For more information call (612) 296-5434 or (612) 296-8196.

Upon request, this publication can be made available in alternative formats: audiotape, large print or computer disk.

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