



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

THE MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

January 1999 Vol. XXVII, No. 1

INSIDE

Tech Talk: Architectural Styles, I 3
Postal rate hike 7
Rural landscape workshops 8

Caring for and Disposing of Government Records: An Introduction by Robert Horton

Head of State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society

Local and county historical organizations are becoming increasingly interested in collecting government records and are naturally concerned with storing and disposing these materials. We thought it would be timely and useful to provide Interpreter readers with some basic guidelines. We asked Robert Horton, head of State Archives for the Minnesota Historical Society, for a succinct introduction to the main issues. Considering the scope and complexity of these matters, his article is indeed brief, but it is longer than most Interpreter articles and so has to be continued on pages two and seven.

Local and county historical societies routinely contact the State Archives department at the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) about government records. Most often, they would like to add records created by their local government to their collections. Sometimes, they would like the State Archives to take away the local government records they have. In either case, certain state laws apply that any local historical society ought to understand. This article offers a brief review of those laws and their significance for local and county historical organizations. See the box on p. 2 for the titles and statutory citations of these laws.

Official Records Act

The Official Records Act (M.S. 15.17) mandates that “all officers and agencies,” at all levels of government, “shall make and preserve all records necessary to a full and accurate knowledge of their activities.” The motive for that mandate is a concern for accountability: government spends public money on public services, so it needs to be accountable for its actions to the citizens, to the administration, to the courts, to the Legislature, to the financial auditors and to history—that is, to future generations. This reflects a general concern: Minnesota needs to preserve its historical resources, be they buildings, landscapes, artifacts or documents. In the law, the



MHS file photo

A section of the Government Records section in the storage area of the Minnesota History Center.

chief administrative officer of an office or agency is named the responsible authority for creating and preserving government records.

Records Management Act

The second statute, the Records Management Act (M.S. 138.17), recognizes that it would be an impossible—and impossibly expensive—burden to create comprehensive records and then preserve all of them forever. No one does that; no one could afford to do that; no one wants to do that. So M.S. 138.17 creates a mechanism for the orderly and accountable disposition of records.

Continued on page 2



Government Records: Care & Disposing

Continued from page 1

Specifically, it creates the records disposition panel. For state government agencies, the panel includes the legislative auditor, the attorney general and the director of the Minnesota Historical Society. For local government, it includes the state auditor, the attorney general and the Society's director. These members represent three of the primary records constituencies and are knowledgeable about specific areas of expertise: the auditors' offices about the accounting value of records; the attorney general's about the legal value of records; and the Minnesota Historical Society about the historical value of records.

The panel's role is to review, evaluate and then approve or disapprove requests to destroy records, to transfer records, or to establish record retention schedules. Fundamentally, the panel has an oversight role, but it is important to note that the panel does not initiate any actions. If a government unit wants to keep its records forever, then it never has to deal with the panel. But if it wants to do anything else legally with those records, it has to submit its proposal to the panel. In short, the unit of government develops the plan, and the panel reviews it to be sure that the legal, accounting and historical concerns are addressed.

Since virtually every type of document that government uses or creates falls under the definition of a record, government records comprise an enormous volume and variety of material. This means that government units need to manage their records effectively. Retention schedules are the best tools available. Because of the similarity of their responsibilities and organizations, many local government associations have developed "general retention schedules" that apply to all the records commonly created by their members. For example, there are separate schedules for cities, townships, and for all school districts. A local government unit has

the option to adopt the schedules, either in whole or in part. It can also change individual components of the schedules, as long as it has the approval of the records disposition panel. Basically, then, there is quite a lot of leeway in the system.

The Records Management Act also makes the state's Department of Administration responsible for oversight of the records management process; the Information Policy Analysis office is specifically charged with this responsibility. The State Archives is officially just the clerical help; it acts as the secretary, documenting the decisions of the records disposition panel.

Data Practices Act

The last statute to consider is the Data Practices Act (M.S. 13). Its general presumption is that records should be accessible—citizens should know what government is doing, because the government should be accountable for its actions. Obviously, however, the government collects some information and creates some records that include sensitive or confidential data. These categories cover a lot of ground, everything from child protection information to adoption records. In fact, the Data Practices Act

covers about 80 pages in the Minnesota Statutes. So, while in theory everything is presumed to be publicly accessible, there are lots and lots of exceptions. These exceptions are defined solely by the Legislature. Any organization, public or private, which releases data covered by the Act could suffer significant penalties.

Archival Value

Only a very small percentage of the total number of government records created have *archival value*. Of the records being created today, less than 5 percent are retained permanently. That might not sound like much, but it still results in a very large quantity of material. There are thousands of governmental units



Three Basic Statutes Relating to Government Records

In the Minnesota Statutes, government records fall under the rubric of three laws:

- Official Records Act (Chapter 15.17)
- Records Management Act (Chapter 138.17)
- Data Practices Act (Chapter 13)

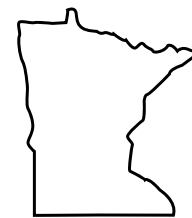
Together, these laws spell out the mandates and considerations that any organization holding government records must follow.



MINNESOTA
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

TECH TALK

Minnesota's Architecture • Part I



Early Architecture of Minnesota by Charles Nelson

With this issue we begin a series of five Tech Talk articles that will span the main architectural styles in Minnesota's history. The goal of this series is to create an awareness of our precious architectural heritage and provide counsel on its care. Two styles are discussed in this article: Greek Revival and Gothic Revival. In the next installment, the popular architectural styles of the post-Civil War era will be considered.



Over the last 150 years, Minnesota's built environment has undergone a number of changes. In many developing communities, several generations of buildings have come and gone. Early pioneer buildings have made way for more substantial structures, testifying to the commitment to stability and permanence of communities that grew from them. The historical development of communities is evident in architecture, and a timeline of popular styles is often the best testimony of their vitality. The timeline attests to progress, continuing growth, and prosperity as evidenced by popular styles over a long period in the community's history, for it offers evidence of continuing growth and prosperity over a long period in a community's history.

mid-20th century did there appear to be a blatant disregard for the work of previous generations. This disregard was brought on by several factors, not the least of which was the abundance of mass-produced building products and the pressure for developable land in desirable localities.

The old styles found they could not compete with the economic formulae of progress, and the image of older, growing communities changed, literally, overnight. Attitudes, however, also change, as evidenced by a new appreciation for old buildings. Preservation sensitivity, along with economic reality, has renewed the value of architecture in our history. Products for the restoration of older buildings are now commonplace in the building trade. In a typical rehabilitation project, scarcity of older-quality materials encourages retention of practically everything for which a use might be found. Today the owners of Greek Revival Style houses, for example, lovingly care for these venerable ancestors with hopes of passing them on to the next generation of stewards.

The Vernacular

Before we consider the early styles, it is important to realize that there are categories of buildings for which no academic designation of a style can be assigned. These buildings, often referred to as "vernacular," include subsistence dwellings as well as in industrial structures. Most of these buildings were modest and constructed of readily available local materials. Log buildings were common in forested areas. Stone buildings could be found along rivers with limestone and sandstone ledges. Sod houses were



The John H. Stevens House (1849) was built on a simple broadside plan; it is now located in Minnehaha Park in Minneapolis. Note the eave-returns on the gables, the simple pilasters at the corners, and the six-over-six windows, which are characteristic of this style.

It is common for a number of styles, representing different points on the timeline, to coexist side-by-side. Over time, earlier styles tended to blend with later styles to create the "harmonious individualism" that gives character to older communities. Only in the

Continued on p. 4

Editor's note:

TECH TALK is a bimonthly column offering technical assistance on management, preservation and conservation matters that affect historical societies and museums of all sizes and interests. Comments and suggestions for future topics are welcome.



constructed on the prairie. Brick structures were erected in areas near clay pits where brick yards flourished. With the advent of the railroad, materials could be more easily transported to remote areas, away from the local sources. The first construction to dot the landscape was of this nature. It signified the first phase of settlement. Many of these buildings exist today as the cores of older buildings or as utilitarian outbuildings.

Greek Revival

The first true architectural style to achieve popularity in Minnesota was Greek Revival. The earliest of these buildings date from ca. 1845, and the style remained popular through the Civil War. Its prominence was made possible by the production of lumber in standard sizes,



MHS file photo

The Dodge County Courthouse in Mantorville has a Classic Greek Style portico with complete pediments in the gables. The domed cupola designates this as a public building.

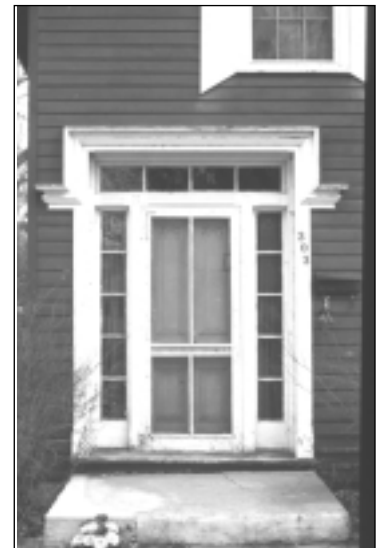
MHS file photo



The Harrington House, an example of a "L" plan Greek Revival Style house. Note the 1 1/2 story kitchen at left. Built ca. 1860, it was moved to Irvine Park in St. Paul from Lake Elmo in Washington County.

e.g., two-by-fours, two-by-sixes, etc. The lumber was produced in commercial sawmills that first sprang up along the Saint Croix River and at the Falls of Saint Anthony. Early sawmills were water-powered, but the invention of the steam-powered mill made it possible to erect mills closer to the timber resources. Although the style was popular for all types of buildings—public, commercial and residential—the majority of surviving Greek Revival buildings are residences. They are found mainly in the Saint Croix, Mississippi and Minnesota river areas, and throughout southeastern Minnesota.

Greek Revival buildings are found in three basic shapes: the broadside, the gable-end, and the "L." The broadside plan is distinguished by a prominent central entry flanked by windows in a symmetrical pattern. The gable-end plan is recognized by an entry at one side, an odd number of bays, and a prominent gable facing the principle approach to the building. The "L" plan is created simply by the addition of a wing at right angles to the main body of the house; the wing often has a lower profile than the main section. The roofs of Greek Revival buildings are low-pitched gables without dormers, and chimneys are slender, signifying that the primary heating sources were stoves rather than fireplaces. For the most part, Greek Revival residences are constructed of wood with clapboard siding, and, in Minnesota are painted white.



MHS file photo

Note the transom and side lights in this Greek Revival Style door, in the Sherman Hale House, ca. 1860. (Cannon Falls, Goodhue County)

General characteristics of Greek Revival Style include corners defined by pilaster strips, which are



corner boards in the shape of half-columns (often of the Greek Doric pattern); heavy friezeboards, trim boards under the eaves at the cornice level; full triangular pedimented gables similar to Greek temple triangles, principal entries with sidelights and transoms; and six-over-six pane double-hung windows with thin muntin divisions. Where a porch is present, the posts supporting the porch roofs are often in the form of classical columns. Clearly, Greek Revival houses are known for their simple refinement rather than for a profusion of ornament.

In a restoration project, the “stylistic refinement” or “simple elegance” of Greek Revival is of utmost importance in setting the quality control in the scope of work. The restorationist must consider the profile of the clapboard siding (siding with one board overlapping the other to shield the rain); the dimensions of the muntins in the windows; and the depth of the frieze or extension of the corner pilasters. Inappropriate siding, new windows without true-divided panes, or metal combination storm/screen units can be disastrous to the aesthetic of the Greek Revival house. Removal of or “colonializing” the signature entrance entablature (the door surround or portal), is definitely to be avoided. Addition of details that have no relevance to the style, or ornamentation from a

phase, often referred to as Carpenter Gothic, coincided with the last decade of the period dominated by Greek Revival, roughly 1850-65. Like Greek Revival, Carpenter Gothic was promoted



MHS file photo

This Winona farmhouse (ca. 1860, recently demolished) was built in the Carpenter Gothic style, with elaborate bargeboards and pointed arch windows in the gables.

The Good Shepherd Church (ca. 1872), in Blue Earth, Faribault County, is an Early Gothic, or Carpenter Gothic, style, with board and batten siding, a steeply pitched gable roof and pointed arch windows.



MHS file photo

later architectural period should also be avoided. (For guidance, consult the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*; copies are available from the State Historic Preservation Office.)

Gothic Revival

Where Greek Revival was known for its relative simplicity, the Gothic Revival Style was profusely ornamented and complex. In Minnesota, Gothic Revival experienced three distinct phases, its popularity lasting well into the 20th century. The first

through books. Among the noted proponents of Gothic Revival was Andrew Jackson Downing, a horticulturist from New York, who expounded on the merits of the style and its affinity with nature in his book *Country Houses*. Downing produced a number of designs in his book, which reached readers and builders throughout Minnesota. Although not overly popular for residences, the style became

synonymous with church architecture. It owed much of its popularity to the availability of dimension lumber produced in bulk, called “production lumber,” and the invention of the scroll saw for cutting decorative wood trim.

The stylistic characteristics of Early Gothic Revival, or Carpenter Gothic, include an irregular plan and one-to-three stories, sometimes with a tower. Facades emphasize verticality: Roofs are steeply pitched gables, often ornamented with “gingerbread” barge boards, finials and pendants. Both frame and masonry construction were prevalent; sides of the frame buildings were made with board and batten

Partial Glossary

Chamfered: When a corner is cut away at an angle (e.g. 45°) to the edges.

Finial: A formal ornament at the top of a gable or canopy.

Pilaster: A shallow column that projects slightly from a wall.



siding, and the masonry buildings used a combination of smooth and rusticated blocks. Ornamental treatments include bay windows, dominant multi-flue chimneys pointed or flat arches over door and window openings, squared or chamfered columns on porches, a monochromatic color scheme, and the ever-present gingerbread.

During the 1870s and early 1880s, Gothic Revival experienced a resurgence known as Victorian Gothic.

The Winona Hotel (ca. 1889) is a typical Victorian Gothic Style building, with its polychromatic facade, an elaborate carved stone ornament and pointed arch windows.



MHS file photo

The source of inspiration for this phase seems to have been John Ruskin, an English scholar who wrote extensively about the Gothic buildings of Venice. His books, like *Downing's*, were profusely illustrated.

The primary emphasis of Victorian Gothic was in commercial and public architecture rather than on residences. These buildings were substantial and often constructed of brick and stone rather than wood. An elaborate mix of materials and ornamentation contributed to its polychromatic, or many-colored, appearance.

Characteristics of Victorian Gothic include an irregular plan and massing, steep roofs, and construction of brick and cut stone in polychromatic patterns. Verticality was emphasized through a profusion of towers, high arches and gables. Ornamental treatment includes stained glass, arcades, flaring cornices and corbels, brackets, spires and finials, and multiple colors. The complexity of the style contributed to its rather short-lived popularity.

The third and last phase of the popularity of Gothic Revival, or Late Gothic, followed the Columbian Exposition of 1893. It was promoted by architect Ralph Adams Cram, who, with partner Bertram Goodhue, produced designs for prominent

clients across the country. Having its roots in the architecture of Medieval Europe and England, it was a formal style taught in the architectural schools of the period. Its popularity continued until the end of World War II. Advanced technology allowed these buildings to achieve immense scale; because of this, it was widely used for churches and college campus buildings (hence a reference to it as "Collegiate Gothic").

Like the two earlier phases, Late Gothic buildings are irregular in plan and often comprise multiple stories. It has steeply pitched gable roofs, often with vaulted interiors. Materials for construction included cut stone, but reinforced concrete also came into wide use in the early 20th century. Its ornamental features include towers or spires, intricate window tracery, pointed arches, and a monochromatic color scheme.

Restoration of Gothic Revival buildings presents a challenge for the craftsman, as many of its distinguishing qualities are inherent in complex detailing and ornamentation. Delicate exterior ornament or curvilinear window tracery has often been lost over the years due to deterioration or insensitive remodeling. Replacement materials are usually not available and often must be painstakingly reproduced by hand. Few intact examples remain to serve as patterns. Consequently, restoration is costly and laborious and will usually take more time than

Right: The House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Paul (ca. 1913), a Late Gothic Style building, shows signs of the academic revival of European design and forms. It was influenced by the English parish church, with elaborate stonework, stained glass windows and the towers.



MHS file photo

anticipated. The finished product, however, is a rare valuable testament to Minnesota's rich early architectural heritage.

Charles Nelson, Historical Architect at the Minnesota Historical Society, has been with the Society since 1971. He has traveled throughout the state to work on preservation projects, make presentations and give workshops.



Increase in Postal Rates

Across-the-board postal rate increases go into effect Jan. 10, 1999. The rate for nonprofit standard A rate (formerly third class) will increase by, on average, 9.6 percent and nonprofit periodicals (formerly second class) will increase by 8 percent on average. The cost of a first-class stamp will increase by one cent, from 32 to 33 cents. The rates will not increase as much for mailers who can afford to presort letters to mail carrier routes.

The United States Postal Service had originally sought a 15- to 18 percent increase for A mail, and a 3.6 percent increase for periodical mail. The increases had been opposed by the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers, of which the American Association of Museums (AAM) is a member. For more information, contact AAM Government Affairs, Barry Szczesny, at 202/289-9125 or e-mail: bszczesn@aam-us.org. (Source: *AVISO*, AAM newsletter, December 1998.)

Government Records: Care & Disposing

Continued from page 2



and many thousands more governmental employees. They create millions of records annually; no government can justify the cost of keeping all of them forever. Only those with archival value are retained.

What is archival value? How is it determined? Frankly, over time it has changed. The way society looks at history now is different from how it did 50 years ago and the way an archives looks at historical records has changed as well. In its appraisal of records, the State Archives looks at a variety of factors, but these are complicated issues, and the conclusions the State Archives draws may well be different from those of a local historical society.

As a result, some organizations may want to keep government records that the State Archives does not. While that is indeed possible, it would still have to be done in accordance with the laws described above. Those laws impose certain responsibilities and mandates, and in particular require the explicit approval of the records disposition panel for any kind of disposition other than permanent retention by the agency of origin.

Storing Government Records: Points to Remember

- **Storage:** records must be stored in an environment and under conditions that meet standards for permanent preservation;
- **Staff training:** the Data Practices Act creates a legal risk for organizations keeping records that contain private and sensitive data, so staff must understand how to protect citizens' privacy rights;
- **Public services:** the citizens' rights to gain access to records and to make copies have to be met and facilitated;
- **Legality of the transfer:** organizations should document the transfer of records to demonstrate they acted within the framework of law.

Consequences

Any local or county historical society that wishes to collect government records has to act within the framework of the law. This requirement entails certain responsibilities. Basically, the collecting society should presume that all the conditions that the laws settle on a government agency are transferred with their records. Thus, whoever takes the records assumes responsibility for the mandates, too. The sidebar lists some of the issues to consider:

For these reasons, not every historical society is willing to accept government records, and those that do need to understand what burdens they accept along with them. In that context, the State Archives is more than willing to help educate organizations about the laws and their mandates. It is important to note, though, that records management is the legal responsibility of the state's Department of Administration and of local government; the latter should follow the practices and retention schedules it establishes.

Conclusion

In sum, the state laws governing the disposition of government records are complex and explicit. In some cases, government records have been handled in an informal manner. That is not a wise precedent to follow, especially as entering into and staying in compliance with the statutory mandates is a relatively straightforward and feasible process. The State Archives would be happy to assist any organization in achieving those goals.



Two Workshops in March on Rural Historic District Planning

Two planning workshops on Rural Historic Districts will be held in early March, one in Goodhue County and the other in St. Paul. Exact dates and locations will be announced in the February *Interpreter*.

The Goodhue County workshop is tentatively titled "Community Planning Workshop for the Proposed Sogn Valley Historic District" The proposed Sogn Valley Historic District, a rural area along the Little Cannon River in western Goodhue County, has recently been documented as a potential agricultural historic district. In an effort to identify the factors that may threaten the historic character of the area and to begin to explore ways to address those threats, residents, local elected officials, planners, and others will be invited to participate. A written plan will be issued after the workshop.

The St. Paul workshop is tentatively titled "Statewide Planning Workshop for Rural Historic Districts." This workshop will use the example of the

Sogn Valley to look more broadly at statewide issues related to the preservation of historic character in rural areas. Participation is open to all interested persons, and special invitations will be sent to people involved in rural and agricultural planning efforts. The goal of the workshop is to produce guidelines on how to identify and evaluate rural historic landscape areas, and on how to work cooperatively to preserve these areas.

These workshops are part of a two-year project, for which funding has been approved by the Minnesota Legislature, 1997 Laws, Ch. 216, Sec. 15, Subd. 5 (b) as recommended by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources from the Minnesota Trust Fund.

Watch for more information in the February *Interpreter* or call Dennis Gimmestad, SHPO, at 651/296-5462.



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 18th of the month, two months before publication (example: the deadline for the October issue is August 18). Send to: **Interpreter** Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906; 651/296-8196 or jim.smith@mnhs.org.

Material from this issue may be reprinted with the following credit line: Reprinted with permission from the **Minnesota History Interpreter**, published by the Minnesota Historical Society, Vol. XXVI, No. 12, Decs. 1998. Do not reprint material that has been reprinted from another source.

On request, this publication is available in alternative formats: audiotape, large print or computer disk.

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

Send address changes to David Nystuen,
651/296-5460; e-mail: david.nystuen@mnhs.org.



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

345 KELLOGG BOULEVARD WEST
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55102-1906

NonProfit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit No. 854