



THE MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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MHS State Grants-in-Aid Program Revitalized

A Message from Minnesota Historical Society Director Nina Archabal about the 1997 Legislative Session


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 Historical Society
 for local and county
 historical societies
 and heritage
 preservation
 commissions

Greetings! I am delighted to report very good news for history in Minnesota. On May 30, Governor Arne Carlson signed into law a bill that includes an appropriation to reinvigorate the Society's Grants-in-Aid program.

This once-substantial program has had only minimal funding for the last six years. Fortunately, legislators and the governor recognized the need to help county and local organizations accomplish important historical projects and approved an increase of \$175,000 each year for the two fiscal years that begin on July 1, 1997. This edition of the *Interpreter* includes detailed information about the grants program and deadlines for submitting applications.

The Grants-in-Aid program has long been a catalyst for some of the best historical work done in Minnesota. Awarded through a competitive application process and requiring a dollar-for-dollar match, Grants-in-Aid have helped organizations win additional gifts and grants from other funders. Marlene de Boef, coordinator of the Washington County Historic Courthouse in Stillwater, recently wrote me about a grant her organization had received.



The Nicollet County Historical Society received a grant for restoration work at the Eugene St. Julien Cox House in St. Peter

She noted that: "Area foundations were willing to provide additional matching funds, because they knew that the grant process had appropriate guidelines and procedures."

Please express appreciation to your legislators and to Governor Carlson for putting life back into this successful program. Write to the Governor and Senators at the State Capitol, St. Paul, MN 55155.

Write to members of the House of Representatives at the State Office Building, 100 Constitution Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55155. If you need assistance in reaching your legislator, you are welcome to call David Kelliher in my office at (612) 297-8085.

The future for history in Minnesota looks bright with the Society's Grants-in-Aid program in a strong position to support the good work done by so many historical organizations across the state.

Have a great summer, and we look forward to receiving your grant applications!

Schedule for State Grants-in-Aid Cycles

	FALL 1997	WINTER 1998
Pre-Application Deadline	Aug. 15, 1997	Jan. 6, 1998
Final Application Deadline	Sept. 12, 1997	Feb. 6, 1998
Grants Review Committee Meets:	Oct. 16, 1997	March 26, 1998

Grants Informational Meetings

July 28, 1997 • 4 p.m.	New Ulm (Gág House)
July 30, 1997 • 5 p.m.	Grand Rapids (Forest History Center)
July 31, 1997 • 4 p.m.	Onamia (Mille Lacs Indian Museum)

See p. 2 of this issue of the *Interpreter* and the summer 1997 issue of the *Preservation Planner* (enclosed) for further details and for information about the State Bond-Funded Grants-in-Aid program.



State Grants-in-Aid Program Highlights

Here is a summary of key practical features of the MHS State Grants-in-Aid program for FY 98. A revised manual will be available in July.

- **Funds available:** State Grants-in-Aid for operating budget grants, target figures: fall 1997, @ \$100,000; winter 1998, @ \$90,000.
- **Maximum grant award:** \$7,500
- **Eligible applicants.** Regional, county, and local nonprofit organizations whose purpose is historical preservation and/or interpretation are the primary recipients of these awards. Applications from other nonprofit organizations and units of government will be considered if they fit in an eligible category.
- **Eligibility categories.** (Applications in all 10 categories will be accepted for FY 98 grants.)
 1. Historic properties
 2. Artifact collections
 3. Interpretive programs
 4. Microform copies
 5. Oral history
 6. Photographic collections
 7. Manuscripts
 8. Publications & Research
 9. Museum environments
 10. Technology
- **Scope of projects.** Usually, most projects should be completed within 12 or 18 months after starting. The size and complexity of the projects should be manageable by the organization that will conduct the project.
- **Matching grants.** Grant funds may cover no more than 50 percent of the total costs of the project. The remaining 50 percent must be matched, either by cash or by in-kind and/or donated materials, or both. State funds may not be used to match an MHS grant.
- **Application procedures.** Preliminary inquiries and/or draft proposals are extremely valuable; we urge everyone considering applying for a grant to take advantage of the assistance we will provide. (Two categories require pre-applications: Historical Properties and Museum Environment projects that involve construction.)
- **Review criteria.** The grants process is competitive because funds are limited. There are specific review criteria for each project category, which are described in the Project Guidelines, included in the Manual. The following criteria will be considered for all applications: potential benefit to the public; the ability of the applicant to complete the proposed project; the quality and completeness of the application.
- **Review process.** Applications are reviewed by MHS staff, which conveys its comments and recommendations to the Grants Review Committee. This Committee considers the applications at a public meeting; representatives of the applicant organizations may address the Committee (for no more than five minutes). The Committee sends its recommendations to the Society's Executive Council for final approval.



The St. Louis County Historical Society received a grant to do a condition assessment survey of its American Indian collections. Conservators from the Upper Midwest Conservation Association assisted with the project. This picture was taken in September, 1996.



Grants Office files

For information, contact the Grants Office of the Historic Preservation, Field Services & Grants Department at MHS, (612) 296-5478, or www.mnhs.org

NOTE: Grant applications will also be accepted this fall for the State Bond-Funded Grants-in-Aid program, which is solely for construction-related grants. A total of \$431,926 remains for awards this fall from the 1996 appropriation. For this program, there is only one grants cycle, in fall 1997. See the article in the summer 1997 issue of the *Preservation Planner* (enclosed in this issue of the *Interpreter*) for more details.



TECH TALK

This issue: Conserving Sports Equipment



Care of Sports Memorabilia by Paul Storch

Over the past few years, I have had a number of inquiries from collectors regarding the long-term preservation of sports memorabilia. Signed baseballs and signed footballs, for instance, are especially popular items, but in fact you may encounter many kinds of objects and materials. The goal of this article is to serve as a brief introduction to the main types of materials you might encounter in a sports memorabilia collection, the problems you might have with those materials, and some solutions to those problems. If you know the background of the materials and the problems, you'll be able to ask more informed questions when you seek assistance from a professional conservator.

Common Materials

Memorabilia collections can contain leather, textiles, metal, plastics, paper and various colorants such as dyes, inks and paints. This article will not cover paper-based collections items such as baseball and other kinds of collectors' cards, since those materials have been addressed in other Tech Talk articles.

Leather

Leather is used in various forms and preparations for sports equipment. For leather to be useful in sports, it must be durable and water resistant. To achieve those properties, the raw hide must be treated with various chemicals known as tanning agents. Baseball gloves, footballs and leather padding are generally manufactured from vegetable- or combination-tanned cattlehide leather that is embossed and printed with graining patterns. The better grades of baseballs are made from alum-tanned cattlehide or horsehide.

Vegetable tanning is also used where flexibility and water resistance are required. Mineral tanning agents such as alum impart durability but do not have great water resistance. The surface colors of those leathers tend to be lighter, such as the familiar white baseball.

Conditions of leather equipment can vary depending on several factors: the original quality of the material, the amount of use to which it was

subjected, the level of care it was given by the owner, and the subsequent storage or exhibit conditions to which it was exposed. Note that these considerations also apply to any other material, but some problematic conditions apply specifically to leather objects, such as surface abrasions, tears, distortion of the original shape, excessive dryness and, less commonly, excessive wetness, mold, insect infestation, and fading of dyes and colorants.

A condition that might be encountered in late 19th-century equipment is called "red-rot." This is caused by excessive acidity in the leather, and is evidenced by



Leather baseball mitt, excellent condition. The interior was supported with inert polyethylene foam strips.

Editor's note: TECH TALK is a bimonthly column for offering technical assistance on management, preservation, and conservation matters that affect historical societies and museums of all sizes and interests.

Paul Storch is Objects Conservator in the John and Martha Daniels Objects Conservation Laboratory at the Minnesota Historical Society. He has been on the staff at the Society since January 1991.

All photographs in this Tech Talk were taken by staff members of the John and Martha Daniels Objects Conservation Laboratory.



TECH TALK

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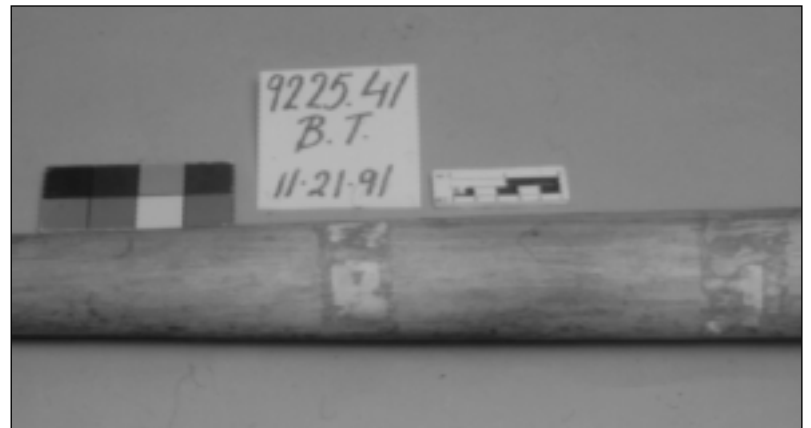


Wooden skis, showing thick vegetable-tanned leather straps.

loss of the grain layer (smooth surface), a reddish-orange color, powdering of the exposed surfaces, and darkening in contact with water. Leathers in this condition must be handled very carefully or irreversible damage will occur.

Wood

Wood occurs in many familiar forms in the sports equipment arsenal, such as baseball bats, hockey sticks and curling broom handles. For the most part, durable hardwoods are used, as these resist impact, water and other factors that can deteriorate

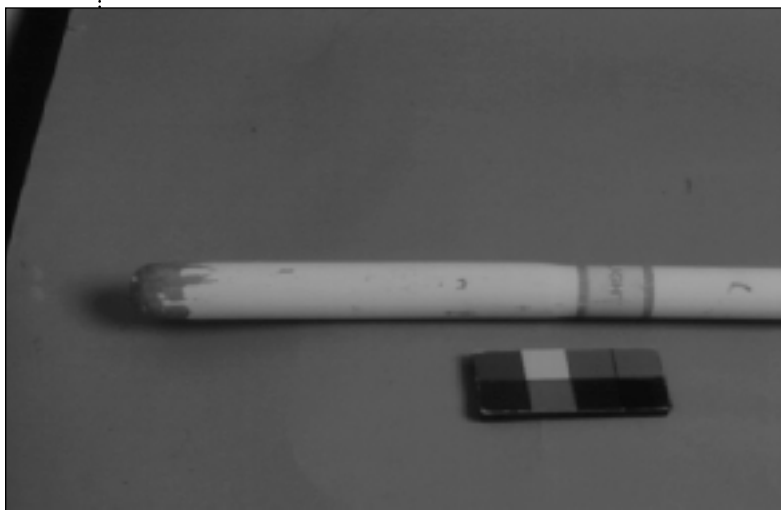


Baseball bat, showing adhesive tape residue from improper repair.

can show how the object was used; they can often be highly idiosyncratic to one individual, and therefore very informative. Interventive treatment could potentially erase that type of unique information.

Metals and Plastics

Metals and plastics are less vulnerable to breakage and the common deterioration factors to which natural organic materials are prone. These two materials have been used in more recent sports equipment, so collectable items composed of them will not be very old. Proper handling, display and storage will minimize damage in the future. Aluminum and its alloys, which are engineered for lightness, durability and corrosion resistance, are commonly used.



End of the handle of a curling broom, showing paint loss caused by use during play.



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After removal of tape residue on the bat (photo previous page), this crack was not repaired or filled.

Plastics include high-impact polystyrene and high-density polyethylene and polypropylene. Plastics are affected by long-term exposure to light and heat. They can be particularly affected if the quality of the plastic was poor when it was manufactured. There is not much that can be done for an item or material that is subject to “inherent vice,”—its natural tendency to deteriorate—other than proper handling and stable storage conditions.

Textiles

Textiles, objects composed of both natural and synthetic woven fibers, can be included in sports objects collections. Textile objects may include painted bed sheets that were used as make-shift banners, pennants,



Hockey helmet, donated by former Governor Wendell Anderson, who wore it while playing amateur hockey. The adhesive tape was left on the chin strap as evidence of use.

T-shirts, uniforms and caps. Textiles are particularly difficult objects to display and preserve because they are easily damaged by materials used for their display, handling and the environment. For instance, textiles are not usually self-supporting objects that can simply be placed on a shelf; they need some kind of special stand or case.

All light is harmful to textiles. Light, both visible and ultraviolet, not only fades dyes but also degrades fibers. The damage to textiles from light is cumulative. The choice of display materials and mounting methods also have significant effects on the preservation of textiles. Proper storage is the most important action that you can take to prevent damage and to preserve a textile object. For mounting, framing and storage methods, seek the advice of a professional textile conservator.

The choice of storage materials is crucial for long-term preservation of most objects, including sports memorabilia; unbuffered acid-free paper and board materials are preferred. Store textile artifacts so that they are protected from soil, crushing and creasing.

SUMMARY

In this article I have touched on the main materials and problems with common sports objects. It should serve as a starting point for further inquiry regarding the specific problems of unique objects. In the short term, it should answer immediate questions about how to handle, display and store such objects to minimize damage and deterioration, and I hope it can serve as a guide and introduction to their long-term safekeeping and preservation.

I cannot stress strongly enough that an experienced conservator should be consulted if you have questions concerning the conservation treatment of the objects in your collection. Taking advice from dealers, collectors and popular preservation “recipes” can oftentimes lead to irreversible and costly damage to a valuable object. A proactive approach is usually best.

Author’s note: I would like to thank Deborah Bede, MHS Textile and Costume Conservator, for providing information about caring for textile sports objects.





TECH TALK

This issue: Conserving Sports Equipment



Recommendations

The following recommendations are basic and simple to apply, but can go a long way toward giving your sports memorabilia collections a long life.

Material	Handling	Display	Storage
Leather	work with clean hands or latex gloves; avoid cleaners, dressings and “preservative”	internal supports; low light; 40-50% RH	same as for display; use unbuffered archival tissues and paper products; dark storage
Wood	work with clean hands; avoid damaged and flaking painted areas; avoid cleaners and “preservative” coatings	low light levels; RH 40-50%; avoid heat above 72 deg. F	same as for display; use buffered archival tissues and paper products; dark storage
Metals	use latex gloves; avoid cleaners and “preservative” coatings	avoid contact with acidic and corrosive materials	same as for display
Plastics	work with clean hands or latex gloves; avoid cleaners and “preservative” coatings	low light levels; 40-50% RH; temperature not to exceed 72° F	same as for display; dark storage
Textiles	work with clean hands; fully support objects when moving	low light levels; 40-50% RH; properly designed mounts and supports; protect from dust accumulation	same as for display; dark storage; unbuffered acid free paper and board materials; protect from dust, crushing and creasing
Paints, inks & dyes	work with clean hands if areas are stable; avoid handling if at all possible	minimize temperature and RH fluctuations; low light levels; no sunlight or fluorescent lights	same as for other materials of which the decoration is a component

For a list of members of the American Institute of Conservation (AIC) who consider themselves qualified in various specialized fields, call (202) 452-9545.

Glossary

RH: Relative humidity. The ratio of the quantity of water vapor in the atmosphere to the quantity of water vapor that would saturate the atmosphere at the existing temperature.

UV: Ultraviolet radiation. Roughly, that part of the electromagnetic spectrum from 200 to 400 nanometers (millionths of a meter). This is the most energetic part of the light spectrum; exposure of organic objects to it can lead to fading and other permanent physical/chemical changes.

Reference: *Environmental Guidelines for the Storage of Paper Records*, NISO Technical Report Series: TR01-1995. Bethesda, MD: NISO Press.



Stillwater Bridge Among Nation's Most Endangered Historic Places

The Stillwater Bridge, built in 1931, is one of two remaining vertical-lift bridges built in Minnesota before World War II, and has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1989. In June, the National Trust for Historic Preservation announced that it has placed the Stillwater Bridge on its list of "11 Most Endangered Historic Places."

The National Trust's "Most Endangered" list has been issued each year since 1988 to call attention to parts of our nation's heritage that are at risk. Richard Moe, a former Minnesotan who heads the Trust, said "The list is a wake-up call to all Americans."

Nina Archabal, MHS director and State Historic Preservation Officer, said that "the one thing that is clear is that there is no reason to destroy this intrinsic part of the Stillwater landscape and the St. Croix riverway. It should stand. To lose it is unthinkable."

For more information, call the National Trust at (202) 588-6141 or visit its web site, www.nationaltrust.org

A link from the MHS web site provides a list of Minnesota bridges complete with historical information and pictures: www.mnhs.org

AASLH Awards Given to Minnesota Lakes Photography Project & Mille Lacs Museum

Paper Stories: Photographs and Words from Minnesota Lake by the People of Minnesota Lake and David Morano received a Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

Paper Stories began with a faculty research grant from Mankato State University to David Morano, a photographer and associate professor in the art department at MSU. Morano and Mary Herbst, vice president of the Minnesota Lake Area Historical Society, were able to "weave the project into the activities of the townspeople," as Bonnie Wilson, Curator of Sound and Visual Collections at MHS, noted. Morano's photographs of residents are accompanied by stories that grew out of the shared experiences. Together

Internet home page (see below). Out of the project grew what David Nystuen, Field Services Coordinator at MHS, called a "palpable change in attitude" toward history in the area. The project, he said, "strengthened the community as they grew to understand it better."

For more information, call Mary Herbst at (507) 462-3424. The Web site address is www.co.faribault.mn.us/Minnesota-Lake



This picture of Jim and Jean Evans from the project is titled "A Certain Look."

they provide an artistic and narrative documentary of the town as it marked its 130th anniversary.

The photographs—now numbering more than 90—are on primary display at the Minnesota Lake Area Historical Society in the Kremer House, but are rotated from time to time on walls of local businesses and other places frequently visited by community members. Other projects emerged from *Paper Stories*: School programs on local history were developed, the commercial buildings of Minnesota Lake have been photographed and documented, and plans are being made to include the project on Minnesota Lake's

The Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) received an AASLH Award of Merit for the exhibit *Learn About Our Past: The Story of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe*, produced in close partnership with the Mille Lacs Indian Museum.

The partnership enabled a high degree of participation by community members in every aspect of the exhibit. W. Richard West, director of the National Museum of the American Indian, was particularly struck by the spirit of inclusiveness that permeates the exhibit. In his letter of support to AASLH, he wrote, "the presence of the Mille Lacs interpretive voice is explicit throughout—a convincing demonstration of the proposition that good history is not compromised by this kind of inclusiveness but, indeed, can be made sounder, more enriching, deeper."

Photographs from the exhibit were included in curator Kate Roberts's Tech Talk in the September 1996 issue of the *Interpreter*, "Writing Exhibit Labels." For further information about the exhibit, call Joycelyn Shingobe-Wedll, director of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, at (320) 532-3632, or Kate Roberts, curator for MHS, at (612) 297-8839.



Cokato Museum Mural Unveiled

The west wall of the Cokato Museum in Wright County has a new look. A 52' x 8' mural (pictured here), painted by Hutchinson artist Lance Albers, was unveiled on May 4. Albers has won several awards, including the Super Gold (Judges) award at the Artists of Minnesota show in 1994; this is his first exterior mural.

Planning for the mural began in February 1996 in discussions between museum staff and the Cokato

Historical Society (CHS). The mural was funded entirely by private donations, which were raised by the CHS. George Peterson donated space for painting the mural panels in his former furniture store in Cokato.

At the unveiling ceremony, Steve Lien, the Master of Ceremonies, was driven to the podium in a 1904 Oldsmobile. Susan Keskey, CHS president, recognized donors; Michel Nelson, former board president, told the history of the mural; and the artist described his work. The unveiling was performed by Cokato Queen Jessie Webb, Cokato Mayor Mel Swendra, and museum director Mike Worcester.

The images in the mural are based on photographs from the Gust Akerlund photograph collection, which is housed in the museum. They represent the social, cultural and economic life of Cokato from about 1880 to 1920.

For information, call Mike Worcester, museum director, at (320) 286-2427, or by e-mail at cokatomuseum@cmgate.com.



The paintings include the home of a pioneer family, street and railroad scenes, and two boys in a cornfield, representing at once the agricultural heritage of the Cokato area and welcoming visitors to the museum.

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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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