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COMMEMORATING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRES OF 1918 by Lois E. Johnson President, Moose Lake Area Historical Society

A Time of Troubles

It was a dark time in history. War was raging in Europe, a flu epidemic was taking lives throughout the world, and, on the afternoon of October 12, 1918, northeastern Minnesota suffered one of the worst disasters in the state's history. A massive fire raced through forests, farms and communities from Sturgeon Lake in northern Pine County, through Carlton County and St. Louis County, to the shores of Lake Superior north of Duluth.

Months of hot, dry weather set the stage for the tragedy. Although many practices of the day may have contributed to the fire, sparks from railroad engines were determined to have ignited dry brush along the



To escape the fires on shore, these cars were driven into Moose Lake.

Minnesota Historical Society

tracks. High winds fanned the flames, giving people very little time to take shelter. One-half of the victims perished in the Moose Lake-Kettle River area. A sharp turn on Highway 73 south of Kettle River became a death trap when vehicles fleeing the flames ran off the road in the dense smoke. The crashes resulted in 25 deaths at a turn now known as Dead Man's Curve.

The statistics tell part of the story:

- 453 lives lost,
- 52,000 homes lost,
- 38 communities destroyed,
- \$7.3 million in property damage.

Although the area suffered major devastation, some homes were spared by the flames. One home, west of Moose Lake, became a hospital for the injured. Another family in Moose Lake took refuge from the fire in the lake within sight of their home. A burning ember that had landed on the roof was extinguished by the father, and the home was

MARK YOUR CALENDARS! Schedule for State Grants-in-Aid Cycles

	Fall 1998	Winter 1999
Pre-applications due:	Aug. 7, 1998	Feb. 4, 1999
Final applications due:	Sept. 4, 1998	March 4, 1999
Grants Review Committee meeting:	Oct. 15, 1998	April 15, 1999

Grants Informational Meetings

Tuesday, July 21: 3 p.m. • *Alexandria* • (Knut Nelson House, 1219 S. Nokomis St.)

Wednesday, July 22: 3 p.m. • *Owatonna* • (West Hills, State School Orphanage Museum)

Applications will be accepted for two state-funded grants programs: the *State Grants-in-Aid* program, which encourages the development of local historical organizations and historical programming in Minnesota; and the *County and Local Preservation Projects Grants* program, which supports grants to public entities for historic preservation projects of a capital nature. The July issue of the *Interpreter* will include more information about the Fall Grants Cycle.

Continued on p. 2



Community History Project Seeks Information from Residents Past and Present

A Burnsville community history, filled with stories and never-before-seen photographs from Burnsville's past, was published in 1976. Now, many of the original researchers, history buffs and writers are joining with other community residents to publish Part II of the history. It will focus on the 22 years since 1976, but material not included in the first part will be considered. If you, or anyone you know, has Burnsville memories, stories, news clippings, or photographs, please contact Connie Morrison, project coordinator, at (612) 435-7647. Clippings and

photographs will be copied and returned to the sender. A completion date of December 1999 has been set.

Other communities undertaking similar projects would no doubt like to spread the word about their intentions to former residents around the state. The *Interpreter* will be happy to help such enterprises by publishing announcements like this one in future issues. Send information about your project to the *Interpreter* editor; see the back page for further information.

The Fires of 1918

Continued from p. 1

saved. The next morning, the mother prepared a pancake breakfast for the survivors who had lost their homes. At a home near Duluth, a mother had supper in the oven when the family had to flee from the flames. They returned to find the only thing left standing was the stove with the supper still in the oven. They had their evening meal as planned, but without a roof over their heads.

People took refuge from the fire in various ways. Some people and covered themselves with wet blankets in plowed fields and on rock piles. Others climbed into wells or root cellars. Ironically, those exposed to the flames on the fields survived. Many who sought safety from the flames in the wells and cellars perished; the fierce fire consumed the oxygen and suffocated them.

After the fire, the Red Cross and the Home Guard were quick to respond with food, clothing and lumber for shelters. The disaster area suffered another blow a month later when the worldwide influenza epidemic passed through the area and took a heavy toll.

But the hearty people persevered and rebuilt their homes, farms and communities. "The courage and fortitude of those who pulled themselves up from their disaster and rebuilt the community is to be admired," wrote David Anderson in the *Moose Lake Area History*.

A Way to Remember

To commemorate this disaster, Dan Reed of Kettle River has written a play, "The Meeting Place." It will be performed by members of the Kalevala Theater Society during the July 4th weekend in Moose Lake, and is co-sponsored by the Moose Lake Area Historical Society (MLAHS) and the Moose Lake Area Chamber of Commerce.

"This is the first time I have ever had a production where the boy and girl fall in love while butchering a deer," said Seamas Cain, the play's director. The play tells of two immigrants coming to the area, building a home and family, and surviving the 1918 fire. Even through the hardship of pioneer life and the losses caused by the great tragedy of the fire, these people see their lives positively and humorously, with great hope for the future. Whether visiting at the kitchen table, doctoring sick cows, or telling stories on the sauna bench, these characters step out to the audience of the 1990s.

Performances are scheduled for Friday, July 3, at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, July 4, 2 p.m.; and Sunday, July 5, 2 p.m. in the Moose Lake School Auditorium. Tickets are \$5 each. For further information, or to reserve tickets for the play, contact the MLAHS, P.O. Box 235, Moose Lake, MN 55767, or call Lois Johnson at (218) 485-4032, or the Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-635-3680.



Note: Sources for this article include newspapers published at the time of the fire, especially the Duluth News Tribune and Herald, the 1918 Fire Memorial Plaque in Kettle River, and "Kettle River, Automba, Kalavala and Surrounding Area, A History," by Edwin Manni, 1978.



New Ceiling Mural for Stevens County Historical Society

Borrowing from Michelangelo's legendary methods, artist Lisa Johannes has completed painting a mural on the domed ceiling of the entrance to the Stevens County Historical Society (SCHS) building in Morris. Johannes spent much of her painting time lying on her back on a scaffold that



Above: Lisa Johannes, a resident of Hancock and a member of the SCHS board, worked from January to mid-April of 1998 to paint this mural and both rows of stenciling on the ceiling of the SCHS entrance.

Right: The seven counties are outlined: Lake of the Woods, Roseau, Polk, Kittson, Marshall, Pennington & Red Lake.

enabled her to work 16 feet above the floor.

She worked in the Swedish 19th-century Gustavian style, so that the ceiling would embody the Scandinavian heritage of the Morris area. To this end, she painted wildlife such as barn swallows, and indigenous plants, such as wild grapes and bittersweet against a sky-blue background. Before the refinishing, the dome was completely white. She combined traditional with modern methods, using an air compressor to help paint the background and brushes and stencils for the delicate parts. Gold leaf highlights the cornice molding that frames the dome, which had been painted mustard yellow.

The building, a 1905 Carnegie Library, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. To retain its listing, the ceiling mural had to meet the register's standards and preserve the historical significance of the site. The project was supported in part by a \$3,000 grant to SCHS from the Lake Region Arts Council.

Northwest Corner Collaboration: A Work-in-Progress

Historical and cultural organizations in the seven-county northwest corner of Minnesota (see map) are working together to pool resources. Ethel Thorlacius, director of the Marshall County Historical Society, who had the idea and took the first organizing steps, said that "each separate group, always facing ever-present economic problems, is aware that only by joining forces with peer groups can it afford to accomplish what might look like the impossible."

A steering committee of representatives from each of the seven counties has been meeting and talking for several months. It enlisted the assistance of Mara Lunde and staff of the Northwest Regional Development Commission (NWRDC) in Warren (Marshall County); David Bergman and the staff of the Minnesota Dept. of Trade and Economic Development's Branch Office of Tourism in Thief River Falls (Pennington County); and David Nystuen, field services coordinator of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, who suggested the first four programs:

- The first edition of a newsletter was issued in May, with a second scheduled for this summer. Circulation is aimed at the nearly 1,200 people on the lists of the seven county historical societies.

- A brochure will describe the organizations' many programs, historic sites, and cultural events of interest to residents and travelers. An initial printing of 20,000 is planned, with creative assistance by the NWRDC and financial support of Otter Tail Power Co. and TKM Electric in Warren.
- To identify and locate the historic sites in the area, a grant application has been made to the

Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR).

- The group is seeking to participate in a web page being developed by three area tourist-and-travel organizations: Borderland Trail, Riverland Association, and Northwest Gateway. The University of Minnesota Extension Service and the University of Minnesota at Crookston also may participate.



The group is working without a formal structure; its working title is "Minnesota's Great Northwest Historical Initiative." The *Interpreter* will keep you informed as the group's plans and programs take shape. For further information in the meantime, contact Ethel Thorlacius, director, Marshall County Historical Society, Box 103, Warren, MN 56762; (218) 745-4803.



History Day 1998: Many People, Many Places

Around the state, work on History Day projects in schools usually begins each fall, as soon as teachers tell their students what the theme for that school year will be. For 1997-98, the theme was "Migration in History: People, Cultures, Ideas." Some teachers

prize, donated by Fred and Roxanne Ziccina, was awarded at the regional competition on March 23. Selected student projects are put on display at the Olmsted County History Center during the summer months. Executive director Ed Merrell said that in doing these things, OCHS is "trying to say to students, parents, teachers and sponsors that local history is important."

The State History Day competition was held at the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota on May 2. Finalists from regional competitions statewide met, shared ideas, made new acquaintances, learned from each other, had their projects evaluated, and had a generally good time. All entries were evaluated in the morning, resulting in first-round finalists, who were then evaluated a second time by a different group of judges after lunch. Results of the final judging were announced to an excited full house of students, teachers and parents at Willey Hall on the university's West Bank that afternoon.

Minnesota Historical Society, photograph by Tim Rummelhoff



Above: On State History Day at the U. of M., exhibits are displayed in Coffman Union in rows like this one.

require their students to do a History Day project, while others make it optional; in either case, students know that the idea and production of the project is up to them.

This year, more than 23,000 students in Minnesota were involved in some kind of History Day project. They find their project ideas and formats in their own ways, but they all talk, read, watch, talk, write, read, and talk some more: with each other, with other students, and with their teachers. As their basic ideas take shape and they plan their research, more and more frequently they are turning to their local historical organizations. Students and teachers have found their staff members to be welcoming and helpful and their resources very useful. It is a win-win situation for the schools and the historical organizations.

For example, a close relationship between the Olmsted County Historical Society (OCHS) and History Day has been in effect for four years. This year, OCHS sponsored prizes to the History Day groups or individual students who best utilized local historical resources in their projects. Donated merchandise and OCHS calendars were awarded at the district competition on Feb. 10, and a \$50 cash



Minnesota Historical Society, photograph by Tim Rummelhoff

Right: Judges confer as they evaluate junior individual exhibits; l-r: Mary Ann Hoffman from Anoka High School, and Eden Penn, MHS development associate.

The top two entries in each category go to the University of Maryland at College Park just outside Washington, D.C., for the national competition on June 13-18. (Support for the travel to Washington comes from many sources, including students and their families, donations, and school districts.) A list of finalists is given on page 5 so that readers of the *Interpreter* can learn more about the distribution of successful competition and the range of topics.

HISTORY DAY PROJECTS come in four kinds, 14 sizes in all, of every possible color. Students can choose to build an exhibit, do a performance, present a media production (video, computer animation, or slide/tape), or write a historical research paper. In each one of these categories, participants are further classed according to grade (junior: 6-8, and senior: 9-12) and according to number of participants: group (up to five) or individual. Only individual students can write research papers. In the list on page 5, these categories are abbreviated for the sake of space: grade level, group or individual, type of project.



Finalists: 1998 Minnesota State History Day

Anoka County

Fridley, Totino Grace • Dan Salzer and Jesse Atkins:
1st, Sr. Gp. Exhibit—"Irish Exodus."

Beltrami County

Bemidji, Home School • Emily Claypool: 1st, Jr. Individ.
Exhibit—"From Romance to Reality."
Bemidji, Oak Grove Academy • Abraham Godwin:
1st, Sr. Individ. Media—"Migration of the Blues."

Dakota County

Rosemount, Rosemount Middle School • Laura
Hammond: 2nd, Jr. Individ. Performance—
"Matanuska."

Hennepin County

Maple Grove, McGuire Junior High • Becca Stark,
Nicole Swanson, Matt Sutterfield and Hillary
Field: 2nd, Sr. Gp. Performance—"Escaping the
Famine."

Minneapolis, Anthony Middle School • Cam Clark:
2nd, Jr. Individ. Exhibit—"Rondo."

Minneapolis, Anthony Middle School • Molly
Schuetzler and Julianna Beattie: 1st, Jr.
Gp. Exhibit—"Migration from
Sweden."

Minneapolis, Breck School • Mark
Thomson: 2nd, Jr. Historical
Paper—"The Migration of
Smallpox."

Minneapolis, Breck School • Bria
Walling and Leigh Shadko: 2nd, Jr.
Gp. Media—"Medieval Holocaust."

Minneapolis, Henry HS • Tiffany
Grunewald: 2nd, Sr. Historical
Paper—"America's Revolution."

Minneapolis, South HS • Courtney Istre: 1st, Sr.
Individ. Exhibit—"Acadians."

Minneapolis, South HS • Nathan Keepers, Emily
Gunyou, Rachel Widen, Kathryn Parker: 1st, Sr.
Gp. Performance—"Northward Bound."

Minneapolis, South HS • Lindsay Kuehn: 1st, Sr.
Historical Paper—"The Migration of Jazz."

Minneapolis, South HS • Erica Phillips: 2nd, Sr. Individ.
Media—"Changing Chopsocky."

Minneapolis, South HS • Caitlin Reid, Claudia
Kabella and Hilary Lundquist: 2nd, Sr. Gp.
Exhibit—"Bound for Success."

Minneapolis, South HS • Emily Robinson and Brett
Wilcox: 1st, Sr. Gp. Media—"The Peace Corps:
Piecing the World Together."

Minneapolis, South HS • Joshua Tanz: 1st, Sr. Individ.
Performance—"A Red Guard's Migration."

Robbinsdale, Cooper High School • Courtney
Glenny: 2nd, Sr. Individ. Performance—"This, Then
is America."

Olmsted County

Rochester, Willow Creek Middle School • Molly
Bowen and Melanie Baker: 2nd, Jr. Gp. Exhibit—
"From China to America."

Olmsted/Fillmore Counties

Chatfield, Chosen Valley HS • Laura Zacardi: 1st, Jr.
Individ. Media—"The Mennonites."

Ramsey County

St. Paul, Christ Household of Faith School • Jonathan
Bluhm: 1st, Jr. Individ. Performance—"Dillon
O'Brien."

St. Paul, Christ Household of Faith School •
Nathan Otten: 2nd: Jr. Individ. Media—
"Gangster Migration."

*St. Paul, Christ Household of Faith
School* • Walter Warneke, Adella
Alsbury, Charissa Simonson,
Joshua Fiscus and Benita Alleman:
2nd, Sr. Gp. Media—"There and
Back.."

St. Paul, Ramsey Jr. High • Miriam
Hadj-Moussa and Anna Marschalk-
Burns: 1st, Jr. Gp. Media—"Swedish
Immigrants."

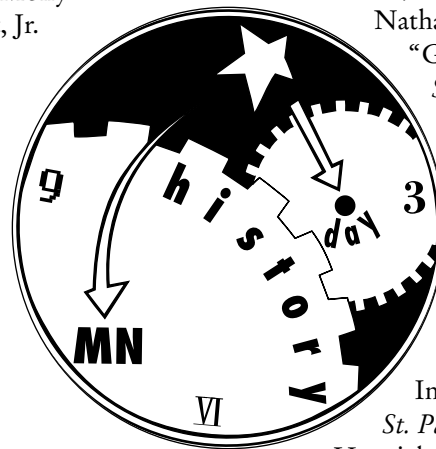
St. Paul, Ramsey Jr. High • Rachel
Hopsicker, Alison Brazel, Zaneta Clark and
Hannah Appelbaum: 1st, Jr. Gp. Performance—
"Anne Hutchinson."

St. Paul, Ramsey Jr. High • Maureen Olesen: 1st, Jr.
Historical Paper—"The Fur Trade."

St. Paul, Washington Tech. Magnet • Megan Moos,
Rachel Douglass, Katie Krosschell, Holly
Henrickson and Caitlin Cleary: 2nd, Jr. Gp.
Performance—"Mennonites to Minnesota."

St. Louis County

Duluth, Marshall School • Jesse Dalbacka: 2nd, Sr.
Individ. Exhibit—"The Trans-Art-Lantic Movement."





Display of Civil War Artifacts and Memorabilia to Commemorate the First Minnesota at Gettysburg

The battle of Gettysburg, the most famous engagement of the Civil War, was fought July 1-3, 1863–135 years ago. The First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment distinguished itself at Gettysburg, particularly with its heroic charge on July 2. The



Photograph of William Irvine, a member of Company "D" (Lincoln Guard of Minneapolis). After the 1st Minnesota Infantry was mustered out in 1864, he reenlisted with the First Battalion Minnesota Infantry Volunteers and was mortally wounded at Petersburg, Virginia, later that year.

regiment already had made history when Gov. Alexander Ramsey was the first to offer his state's volunteers to President Lincoln after Fort Sumter in April 1861. On July 2, the regiment, with only 262 men, was ordered to gain time for reinforcements by charging a Confederate force of more than 1,000 troops. The charge stalled the Confederates, and the reinforcements arrived, but the First Minnesota suffered nearly 82 percent casualties—the highest percentage of any Union regiment in a single engagement of the entire war.

Photograph courtesy of Wayne Jorgenson; loaned to the Minnesota Historical Society.

The next day was another memorable one for the regiment. The remaining Minnesotans engaged the 28th Virginia Infantry in Pickett's Charge. It is recorded that first one Minnesota flag bearer was wounded, then a second, and finally the third, Corporal William N. Irvine, took the flag and carried it for the rest of the battle. The flag of the Virginians was captured by Private Marshall Sherman of Company "C," for which he later was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

This summer a display will be presented by the Minnesota Historical Society to commemorate the First Minnesota's role at Gettysburg. The display, "Long Remember: The First Minnesota Regiment at Gettysburg," will appear at two locations: June 16-29 at Historic Fort Snelling and July 1-15 at the Minnesota State Capitol. June 20-21 at the fort is also "Civil War Weekend," which features more than 100 volunteers from reenactment groups, including the First Minnesota Regiment.

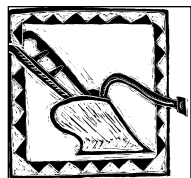
The display will include historic photographs, rare Civil War artifacts, and vivid accounts from eyewitnesses. Among the highlights of the display will be the sword that Col. William Colvill of Red Wing carried as he led the First Minnesota in its charge on July 2, a uniform coat worn by Gettysburg veteran Mathew Marvin of Winona, and a rare pre-Civil War cartridge box used by the Minnesota Pioneer Guard (MPG). The MPG was the first militia unit formed in the Minnesota Territory (1856), and it became Company "A" of the First Minnesota in 1861.

Both sites are open daily.

New Directory for Courses in Cultural Resource Management

The National Park Service's (NPS) "Cultural Resource Training Directory" for 1998 is now available in print and on the Internet. The directory lists workshops, courses, seminars and other short courses (up to six weeks) in practically every aspect of the field of management of cultural resources. It was compiled by Rebecca A. Shiffer and Deborah B. Maylie, of the office of Technical Preservation Services of the Heritage Preservation Services Division, NPS.

The directory is published in conjunction with *CRM*, the magazine for people and organizations engaged in cultural resources work. For more information, write Training Director, Heritage Preservation Services, Room NC200, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240, or call (202) 343-9583. The web site address is <http://165.83.219.60/crm>





New National Historical Organization

A new voice and forum for people interested in history—professors, students, history buffs—was recently formed. It was established particularly for those who are disenchanted with current emphases in history and/or the two major national historical organizations. This third national organization, called simply the Historical Society, was founded by Eugene D. Genovese, a well-known and highly respected historian and author. Genovese reportedly says that the group will focus “on the study of plain-spoken history, not jargon-laden, esoteric theory, and not only the matters of race, class, and gender.” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 8, 1998.)

In its publications and meetings, the Historical Society promises not to focus on contests with its critics. Marc Trachtenberg, executive director and historian at the University of Pennsylvania, introduces the society’s web site by stating, “We have no interest in endless controversies and ‘cultural wars’ with those who are satisfied with the status quo. We

seek neither a restoration of the Good Old Days, which never existed, nor the perpetuation of the irrationalities of recent years.” The society’s publications and meetings will aim for discussions and sharp and frank debate “in an atmosphere of civility, mutual respect and common courtesy. All we require is that participants lay down plausible premises, reason according to the canons of logic, appeal to evidence, and prepare to exchange criticism with those who hold different points of view.”

The Society has set \$20 as its charter membership fee (\$10 for students). Its addresses are: The Historical Society, P.O. Box 382602, Cambridge, MA 02238-2602; and home.nycap.rr.com/history/. For comments pro and con, from members of both the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians and from others, see the “Colloquy” section on the *Chronicle’s* web page, chronicle.com/colloquy.

Tall Tales Writing Contest Sponsored by Genealogical Society

The Minnesota Genealogical Society (MGS) is holding its third “*Semi-Sporadic (Not Quite Annual) Paul Bunyan Tall Tales Writing Contest*.” The theme this year is “Ancestral Tales: Strange, but True.”

The contest is open to all, including, for the first time, children 12 and younger; one does not have to be a member of MGS to enter. Submit an original paper, one-to-five pages in length, that tells a strange but true story about an ancestor. For example, the subject of the paper could be a relative who:

- got caught up in something bizarre,

- was the victim of unusual circumstances,
- was involved in a strange twist of fate, or
- was (by any definition) an extraordinary goof-ball. (*MGS Newsletter* of May 1998).

The story can relate a one-time-only event, or events over a period of time. Whatever the subject, the “story must be verified by research, carefully documented, and written in a style that is both informative and compelling.”

The prizes are:

First prize: \$75, for *Paul Bunyan Tall Tales Top Honors*

Second prize: \$35, for *Babe the Blue Ox Award of Merit*

12 & under prize: \$35 toy-store certificate, for *L’il Paul Children’s Prize*

For contest rules and to enter, write Minnesota Genealogical Society, Paul Bunyan Tall Tales Writing Contest, 5768 Olson Memorial Highway, Golden Valley, MN 55422. All entries must be postmarked no later than Sept. 1, 1998; winners will be announced in the November 1998 issue of the *MGS Newsletter*. Judges will be appointed by the MGS board of directors.



Becky Herman, 10-year old niece of MGS board member Dixie Hansen, drew this picture of Paul and Babe, his blue ox.



1998 AASLH Meeting Helps Mark California Sesquicentennial

The American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) will collaborate with the California Council for the Promotion of History to stage the organization's 1998 annual meeting in Sacramento, Calif. The theme of the conference will be "It's a Living: The Business of History."

Sessions and workshops have been developed to speak to the needs of small and mid-size as well as large history organizations; topics such as collaborations, historic houses, technology, and fund-raising will be addressed. William Ferris, new chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, will be the keynote speaker. Special events and tours will acquaint visitors with the Sacramento area and California history, of particular general interest during this, California's Sesquicentennial, year.

For more information, visit the AASLH home page on the World Wide Web, www.aaslh.org, call (615) 255-2971, or fax (615) 255-2979.

Living History Conference Set for November

The Midwest Open Air Museums Coordinating Council (MOMCC), the Midwest Regional Chapter of the Association of Living History Farms and Agricultural Museums, is an association of individuals who work in the field of living history.

MOMCC's fall conference and annual meeting will be held Nov. 19-20, 1998, at the Minnetrista Cultural Center in Muncie, Ind., with the theme "Museums: Learning Places for the 21st Century."

Presentations, sessions and workshops, and papers on topics related to the theme, especially educational activities, methods and materials, are being sought. The deadline for proposals is July 6.

For information or to submit a proposal, contact Thomas L. Sanders at (612) 726-1171, fax (612) 725-2429, or write to him at Fort Snelling History Center, St. Paul, MN 55111.

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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: the deadline for the October issue is 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.

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