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# MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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Morrison County Historical Society



Clifwood Motel, Little Falls, photographed in July 2003 by Pamela Wolters for "Uncommon Focus: Images of Morrison County."

## No stone left unturned

### Morrison County photo project documents uncommon places

It all started over missing motels. Mary Warner, museum manager for the Morrison County Historical Society (MCHS), needed photos of the county's motels and tourist camps for a newsletter article she was writing. But her search of the society's photo collection turned up nothing. And that wasn't the only hole in the collection, she discovered. There were plenty of photos of prominent buildings in the county - churches, schools, government buildings,

libraries. But the collection contained few views of more uncommon or out-of-the-way places.

"Our photo collection suffered from the 'wedding dress/military uniform syndrome' that characterizes many museum clothing collections," explains Warner. "People donate those items because they represent important events in their lives. They forget that blue jeans and t-shirts are

Photo project continued on page 2

### Funding shortage forces reduction of field services

Since January the Minnesota Historical Society's Department of Historic Preservation, Field Services and Grants has operated under reduced hours - a reduction necessitated by a shortage in the federal appropriation to the Historic Preservation Fund, which provides the Society's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with a majority of its funding.

Through Sept. 30, 2004, when the federal fiscal year ends, the department is closed every other Monday, including the following dates: March 8, 22; April 5, 19; May 3, 17; June 14, 28; July 12, 26; Aug. 9, 23; and Sept. 13, 27. These closings are in addition to Monday holidays on May 31, July 5 and Sept. 6.

This is the second time funding cuts have affected the department in the past year. State budget cuts in 2003 led to numerous program reductions at mid-year, including a 75-percent loss of funding for the State Grants-in-Aid program.

The federal funding shortage means that staff will be less available for onsite

Funding shortage continued on page 5

## Photo project *continued from page 1*

just as important to telling their stories as their special clothes. The same goes for buildings: the 'important' ones get photographed while everyday places are overlooked."

So the MCHS staff put their heads together and came up with a list of photo subjects missing from the collection. "We wanted to see the backs of buildings, the insides, architectural details as well as long shots," says Warner. "We needed to document businesses on the outskirts of towns. And we wanted to capture the character of the whole county - not just major buildings in the bigger cities but features like rural bridges and playgrounds and corn cribs."

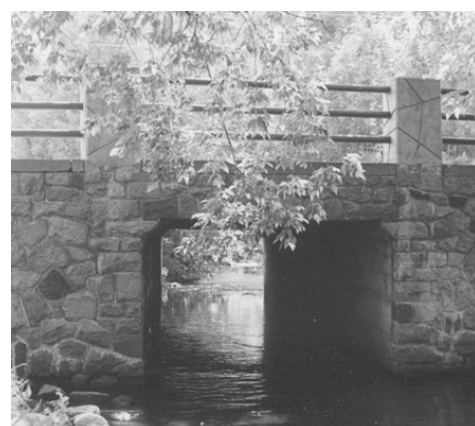
### **A project takes shape**

Soon a photo documentation project emerged from the swirl of ideas. Dubbed "Uncommon Focus," the undertaking was an ambitious one. "We set out to add 1,000 images to the society's photo archives," says Warner. The project's goals:

- broaden the photo collection,
- fill in missing subjects,
- document the county's built environment, and
- create a research resource for staff, visitors and future generations.

After securing a state grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society in the fall of 2002, the county society recruited volunteer photographers, relying on newspaper ads and word of mouth. "We hoped to attract five volunteers," notes Warner. "We got 14."

The volunteers were expected to use their own 35mm cameras. The



Morrison County Historical Society Photos

**Left: Blanchard Dam, Royalton, February 2003, photo by Gwen Berg. Right: WPA-era bridge over Two Rivers, Upsala, July 2003, photo by Dan Hovland. The bridge is slated for removal.**

society would supply the black-and-white and color film, pay for developing and reimburse the photographers for their mileage. Volunteers also had to commit to identifying and labeling their photos once their fieldwork was done.

### **The assignment**

To help them carry out their work, the volunteers received training in how to take good photographs and how to document their shots. Then, within the broad parameters of the project, they were allowed to choose their own subjects. Some photographers ranged widely, traveling the county to shoot a particular property type. Others stayed closer to home, concentrating on their own communities. MCHS staff also solicited ideas from the public on what to photograph. "That helped generate excitement for the project," Warner says, "and it uncovered some interesting structures and scenes."

To document all aspects of county life in every season, the project stretched through 2003. Even without assigned geographical areas or

property types, the group of volunteers managed to cover the county and get images from every township and municipality. "We told them to focus on recording historical information, not taking artistic photos," says Warner. "They returned with many pictures that were both documentary and artful."

At the suggestion of the MCHS Board of Directors, the society solicited donations from communities across the county. Eleven came through with funds. So did a number of individuals, enabling staff to purchase more film, developing services and archival photo envelopes for the project.

### **Unexpected benefits**

"This project opened people's eyes," reports Warner. "The photographers had an opportunity to explore the county, make discoveries and meet new people. And residents saw that their county historical society truly represented everyone, not just the Little Falls area. It was a great public relations tool for us."

The project also helped educate the public about the importance of

donating photographs to historical societies. It even generated new members for the society, including several of the photographers, who joined the organization after seeing firsthand the importance of its work in preserving the county's history.

What emerged from "Uncommon Focus" was a comprehensive snapshot of the year 2003 in Morrison County. "The majority of photos in our collections dated from before 1950," explains Warner. "Now we have a visual record of the present day that will be just as important to future generations as the older photos are to us."

In fact, before the year was over, project photos became evidence of disappearing local landmarks. Shortly after an old frame church in Freedhem was photographed, for example, it burned to the ground. In several cases, photographers were able to document change as it happened. Says Warner, "These photos will help us remember things as they used to be."

### Recognition for all

"Uncommon Focus" culminated in a year-end exhibit at The Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum, where county residents perused hundreds of the photos taken by their neighbors. At a reception for project volunteers and funders, each photographer received a print of a favorite photo in appreciation for their work on the project.

In attendance at the reception was David Grabitske, grants and field programs assistant for the Minnesota Historical Society. "The amount of volunteer time and financial resources donated to 'Uncommon Focus' shows the enthusiasm it generated throughout the county," he said. Bonnie Wilson, curator of sound and visual collections for the Minnesota Historical Society, also had high praise for the project, noting that *all* the photographs - together reflecting the varied interests and abilities of the volunteer photographers - were

accessioned for the MCHS collection. Both Grabitske and Wilson hope that the project will serve as a model for other historical societies.

Just how successful was "Uncommon Focus"? The photos tell the story. More than 1,900 new images are being readied for the Morrison County society archives - nearly double the project goal. Exclaims Warner, "Now, that's a tangible benefit!"

*For more information about "Uncommon Focus," call Mary Warner, MCHS museum manager, at 320-632-4007, or e-mail [mchs@littlefalls.net](mailto:mchs@littlefalls.net).*

## Tips for photo documentation projects

Project director Mary Warner of the Morrison County Historical Society has plenty of advice for groups wishing to undertake a photo documentation project. Among her tips:

- Use local fundraising to ensure project buy-in countywide.
- Revolve other programming around your photo project.
- Have photographers sign copyright release forms so that your organization owns the copyright. And be sure that people in the photos sign model release forms so their images can be used without seeking permission later.
- Purchase negative sleeves and a three-ring binder to keep all project negatives together.
- Don't expect the world from your volunteer photographers - and they will deliver much more.

Morrison County Historical Society photos



Left: Mary Warner's photo of the telephone booth at Gross's Corner Store, Richardson Township, November 2003. Right: Dairy Queen drive-through at dusk, Little Falls, August 2003, photo by Pamela Wolters.

## Making room

### School records collection puts squeeze on Otter Tail society

They couldn't turn it down. The unexpected donation of a collection of records from several rural school districts near Pelican Rapids sent the staff of the Otter Tail County Historical Society scrambling. "The records had been stored in cardboard boxes and plastic tubs in an old barn," said Chris Schuelke, OTCHS director. "When someone brought them in, we didn't have the space or the archival supplies to handle such a large infusion of material."

With the help of a state grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society, the staff ordered what they needed to house the records properly:



Research assistant Vicky Anderson files rural school records in Hollinger boxes and cabinets purchased to store the collection.

Hollinger boxes, acid-free folders, flat-storage cases and floor-to-ceiling steel shelving. "One of our volunteers gave us money for a safety ladder," said Schuelke. "That makes the collection easier to reach. We'll spend the winter sorting and inventorying the records

so they're accessible to researchers."

His advice for those acquiring similar large collections? "When you write a grant proposal for storage systems and archival supplies, be sure to include shipping costs. They can catch you by surprise."

## It may not be pretty but...

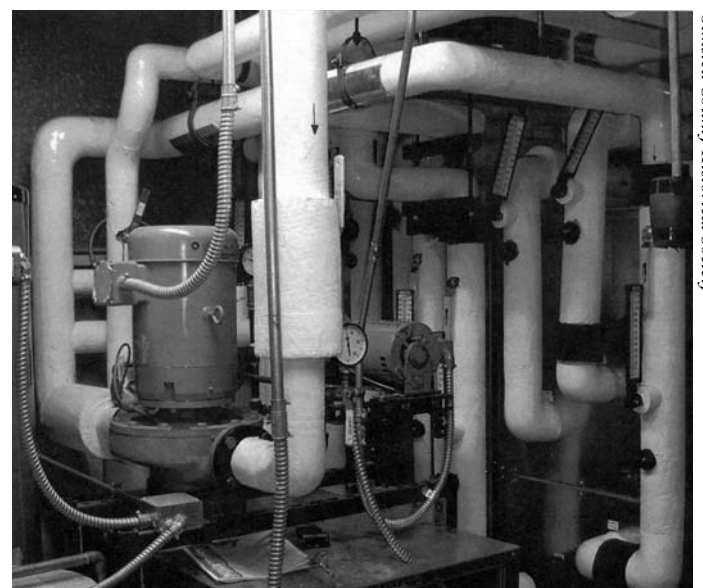
### HVAC project keeps Olmsted County museum warm and cool

When the heating, ventilating and air-conditioning system in the 1970s-era Olmsted History Center needed an upgrade, the county historical society secured a state grant-in-aid to get the job done. The goal: a more comfortable environment for history center staff and visitors and a stable environment for the collections. "Humidity control was especially important," said society director John Hunziker.

As with many a construction project, however, not all went smoothly. Even before work began, the contractor determined that the building's electrical system needed upgrading as well. And to keep pipes in the newly installed HVAC system from corroding, a water softener had

to be added. That meant big cost overruns. "Luckily, we got financial help from both Olmsted County and the City of Rochester," Hunziker said. "We couldn't have done it without them."

Since the project was completed, the new HVAC system has generated considerable savings; electrical usage alone has dropped about \$1,000 a month. For the inside story and lessons learned, call Hunziker at 507-282-9447.



New HVAC piping fills the mechanical room at the Olmsted History Center.

# Celebrating Latino life

## Smithsonian photo exhibit comes to Stearns History Museum

On view through April 25 at the Stearns History Museum in St. Cloud is “Americanos: Latino Life in the United States,” a portrait of Latino communities seen through the work of 30 award-winning photographers. Organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and the Smithsonian Center for Latino Initiatives, the exhibit features 120 photographs organized around themes such as work, family, spiritual life and the arts. Together they show the diversity of Latino people as well as their important contributions to U.S. history and culture.

A committee of 30 local volunteers planned a series of events in conjunction with the exhibit, including an Opening Fiesta and a Children’s Day. Committee members loaned pottery, textiles, musical instruments and sculpture from their own collections to augment the photo display. “This exhibit provided us with a unique opportunity for collaboration with the area’s Latino community,” says



Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service

**Ramona Sandoval with her granddaughter Jasmine Zubia, from the exhibit “Americanos: Latino Life in the United States.” Photo by Genaro Molina, Boyle Heights, Los Angeles.**

Joan Vincent, Stearns County Historical Society development director. “They’re very excited about the project.

“We also got tremendous support from local sponsors,” adds Vincent. “They helped underwrite both the exhibit and the events.” For more

information on this groundbreaking community collaboration, call the Stearns History Museum toll-free at 1-866-253-8424.

*“Americanos: Latino Life in the United States” is made possible through the generous support of AOL Time Warner and Qwest Communications.*

## Funding shortage

*continued from page 1*

consultations, training and meetings in the field. For other changes, which affect primarily constituents of the SHPO such as local heritage preservation commissions and preservation consultants, see page 4 of the enclosed Preservation Planner.

During this period of retrenchment, field services staff will look for ways to continue providing assistance to Minnesota’s 500 county and local history organizations. “We’ll

promote greater use of resources on the Society’s web site,” says Tim Glines, manager of outreach services, “And we encourage everyone to subscribe to our interactive listserv, MNLOCALHISTORY, which offers a weekly forum for sharing news and information.”

A revised plan for historic preservation functions at the Society will be developed as the federal funding picture becomes clearer. “Despite

diminished resources, the SHPO remains steadfast in our commitment to all our preservation partners,” says Britta Bloomberg, deputy state historic preservation officer.

If you have specific questions or concerns, call Glines at 651-296-5460 or Bloomberg at 651-296-5471 or e-mail [timothy.glines@mnhs.org](mailto:timothy.glines@mnhs.org) or [mnshpo@mnhs.org](mailto:mnshpo@mnhs.org). With the exceptions noted, regular office hours are weekdays 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

## Teacher workshops spotlight Minnesota legends and notable women

Share news of these all-day Saturday workshops with teachers in your area. Or augment your own teaching of local history with in-depth looks at notable Minnesota women and other legendary figures. To register, call teacher education specialist Nancy O'Brien Wagner at 651-284-3818 or e-mail curriculum@mnhs.org.

*April 13*

### **Fictional History/Historical Fiction** *Runestone Museum, Alexandria*

Myths merge with truths in the stories of Paul Bunyan, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and the Kensington runestone. Using these legendary Minnesota figures, both historical and mythical, explore how to encourage students to analyze perspective and bias. Cost: \$75 (lunch included) for six clock-hour credits.

*May 7*

### **Hard-Hearted Historical Heroines** *Minnesota History Center, St. Paul*

Examine the successes and complexities of Minnesota leaders Harriet Bishop, Jane Grey Swissholm,

Eva McDonald Valesh and other strong women who have played significant roles in reform

movements that challenged the status quo. Cost: \$75 (lunch included) for six clock-hour credits.



Minnesota Historical Society

The Kensington runestone, ca. 1920.

## Fundraising workshops geared to grassroots efforts

Don't be misled by the sponsor's name. These fundraising workshops from Springboard for the Arts fit the bill for smaller historical organizations, too.

*March 2:*

### **Benefit Events That Work**

Learn the basics of event-planning, from setting goals to recruiting volunteers to lining up sponsors.

*March 9*

### **Direct-Mail Campaigns**

How do you design an effective campaign? It takes the right timing, good lists and a persuasive pitch. Learn what makes a donor respond.

*April 20*

### **Asking for Money Face-to-Face**

Identifying potential donors is the

easy part; asking for money is another matter. Prepare your board and volunteers for this important and oft-dreaded task.

All workshops are held on Tuesday afternoons at Springboard for the Arts in St. Paul. Individual sessions are \$55; the series is \$150. For more information go to [www.springboardforthearts.org](http://www.springboardforthearts.org).

## AASLH seminar for museum administrators

After a hiatus, the Seminar for Historical Administration (SHA), long considered the “granddaddy” of the country’s museum professional development programs, is back in business.

Designed to strengthen leadership in the history museum community, the intensive three-week program covers all aspects of museum administration, from financial management and board relations to exhibitions and interpretive programs to human resources and marketing. Sponsored by the American

Association for State and Local History (AASLH), the seminar is geared to full-time, paid staff of history museums, historic sites and preservation organizations who have 3-10 years of experience and are now in or preparing to fill a position of administrative responsibility.

Only 18 participants are selected to participate each year. Char Henn, director of the Goodhue County Historical Society, was one of the lucky few chosen for the 2001 seminar (see *Interpreter*, May 2002). She calls the seminar “eye-opening,”

especially about approaches to funding. Henn welcomes inquiries from anyone considering applying; you can reach her at 651-388-6024 or by e-mail at [chargchs@qwest.net](mailto:chargchs@qwest.net).

The next seminar will take place Oct. 30-Nov. 20 at the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis. Applications are due May 21 and may be completed online. For more information about the program, go to the AASLH web site at [www.aaslh.org/histadmin.htm](http://www.aaslh.org/histadmin.htm).

## Wanted: A new home

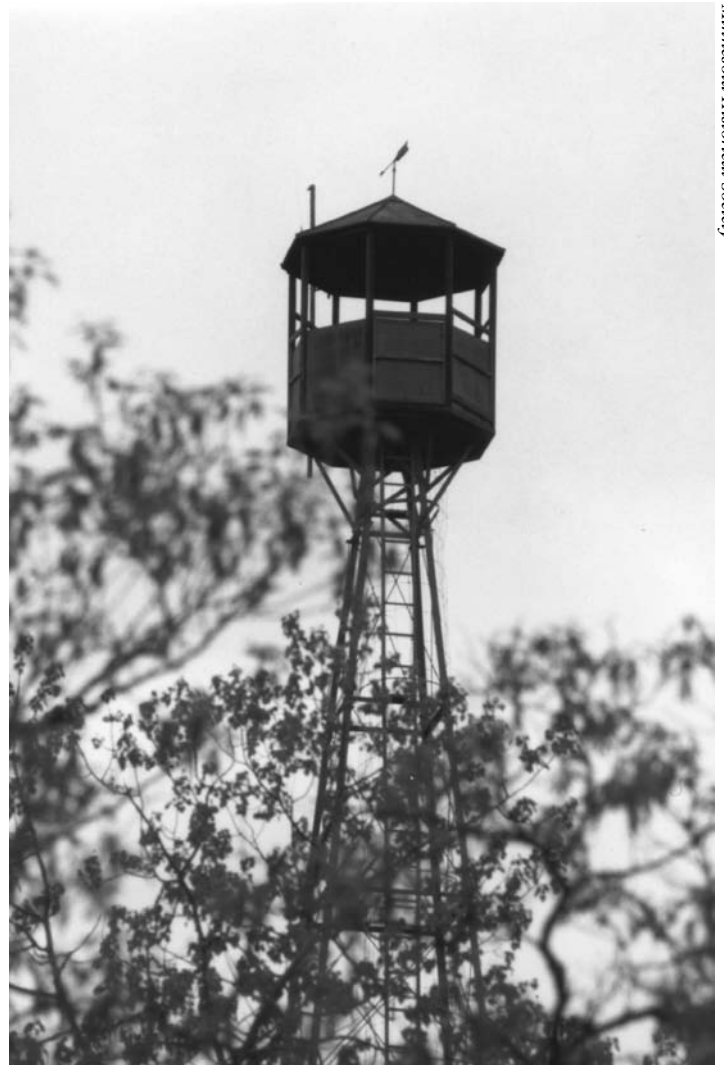
### Lookout tower available for acquisition

The National Park Service seeks a new home for the historic Shoepack Lookout Tower that once stood in what is now Voyageurs National Park. It was dismantled in 1999 and the pieces marked and bundled for transport. Complete with instructions for reassembly, the tower awaits a new owner interested in its preservation.

Built in the 1920s in the Cloquet Valley, the tower was a key element in the area’s fire protection system. By 1939 it was one of 122 fire towers erected by the Minnesota Forest Service on state land. But in the 1950s, when the use of aerial fire reconnaissance eliminated the need for most lookout towers, the Forest Service moved it to Shoepack Lake for protection of timberlands owned by the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company. Today, fewer than 40 fire towers remain in the state. Only a handful have this once-common style of crow’s nest, characteristic of early towers.

For more information call Mary Graves, NPS cultural resource specialist, at 218-283-9107, ext. 6126, or e-mail [Mary\\_Graves@nps.gov](mailto:Mary_Graves@nps.gov). The new owner must provide transport but NPS staff will be available to help load the bundled tower onto a truck.

**Shoepack Lookout Tower was fully documented and photographed before dismantling in 1999. The steel tower is 81 feet tall with a caged, inside ladder and an octagonal crow’s nest constructed of wood.**



Minnesota Historical Society

## Spring field workshops reminder Online registration makes it quick and easy

Four venues to pick from. One great program. And a price affordable to all. If you haven't signed up yet for the 2004 field workshops, take a minute to do so now.

This year for the first time, you can register for the workshops at the Minnesota Historical Society's Online Store, using your credit card and the Society's secure web site. Your registration will automatically be forwarded to field programs assistant David Grabitske, who will send you a confirmation. To register online, go to <http://shop.mnhs.org> and do a search for field workshops.

For the complete schedule of

workshop sessions, see the flyer posted on the MHO page of the Society's web site. Or fill out the form enclosed with the January-February Interpreter. If you've misplaced your flyer or don't have Internet access, call Grabitske at 651-297-4416 to request another copy.

We hope you'll join us this spring at one of these workshop locations:

March 26, Anoka; April 16, Windom; April 30, Bemidji; or May 14, Rochester. See you there!



Minnesota Historical Society

A tour of research botanist Alexander P. Anderson's estate, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, highlighted last year's workshop in Red Wing.

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For address corrections e-mail [michele.decker@mnhs.org](mailto:michele.decker@mnhs.org) or call 651-296-5434. For other matters call Tim Glines at 651-296-5460 or e-mail [timothy.glines@mnhs.org](mailto:timothy.glines@mnhs.org).

**Britta Bloomberg**, Head,  
Historic Preservation, Field Services  
and Grants Department  
**Tim Glines**, Manager, Outreach Services  
**David Grabitske**, Grants and Field Programs  
Assistant  
**Mary Ann Nord**, Editor  
**Kate Raver**, Layout

[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)

## Minnesota Historical Society

345 Kellogg Boulevard West  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102-1906

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