



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

# THE MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

October 1997 Vol. XXV, No. 10

## INSIDE

- Braham pie festival . . . . . 3
- School group logistics . . . . . 4
- Winona renovation completed . . . . . 7

*Material for the following article is from the account in the May/June 1997 issue of the Clay County Historical Society newsletter by Mark Peihl, CCHS archivist, and subsequent correspondence with him.*

## The Flood of 1997: A Close One in Clay County

The Clay County Historical Society (CCHS) and Heritage/Hjemkomst Interpretive Center (HHIC)—which houses the Clay County Museum—narrowly escaped serious damage in the flood of 1997. Their story is dramatic and instructive.

The back door of the HHIC is only 100 yards from the Red River, presumably high enough above the 100-year-flood plain, but at the flood's crest, 18 inches of water pressed against the front of a sandbag dike. The photograph on page 2 shows how close the water was to the top of the dike. Peihl says that if the dike had failed, two of the four floors of the Hjemkomst Center would have been filled with river water and a third would have been under a foot of water. The dike was built by Moorhead city employees, HHIC and CCHS staff and volunteers, Minnesota National Guardsmen, and passers-by.

"The dikes held beautifully. Some seepage occurred but the city, CCHS and HHIC exhibits curator Pete Conlin provided pumps that kept up

with it. Building staff, volunteers and board members kept watch over the pumps in shifts 24 hours a day...Inside was a different story." Mark says that snow-melt water has seeped into the permanent exhibit area every spring since 1988, but this year was particularly bad.

"The water runs down the wall behind the exhibit panels and wicks out across the floor through the carpet... Staff spent much time vacuuming up water from the carpet tiles."

The cold weather in the blizzard of April 5-6



Photo courtesy of Clay County Historical Society

*On April 18, 1997, the river was near its crest, and the Hjemkomst Center looked like a ship in a science fiction movie. In this photograph we are on the 1st Avenue North bridge between Fargo and Moorhead, looking northeast toward the rear of the center.*

### Western History Association Meets in Mid-October

The 37th Annual Meeting of the Western History Association (WHA) will be held in St. Paul, from Wednesday, Oct. 15, through Saturday, Oct. 18. A welcoming reception will be held at the Minnesota History Center on Wednesday evening, and the concurrent sessions will be held at the St. Paul Radisson Hotel. The conference theme is "Western Visions: Many Voices, Many Landscapes," and John Ford's 1956 film, *The Searchers*, starring John Wayne, will be shown. Tours are planned to historic places in the Twin Cities, Stillwater (including a ride on the *Empress Andiamo* riverboat), and the Alexis Bailly Winery in Hastings, thence to Red Wing and dinner at the St. James Hotel.

For information, call the WHA office, (505) 277-5234. The pre-registration deadline was Oct. 1, but on-site registrations will be accepted (\$60/conference, \$20/single day). For room reservations at the Radisson, call the hotel at (612) 292-1900 or 1-800-333-3333.

Continued on p. 2



## Two Timely Grants for Chippewa County Historical Society

With the close call during the disastrous floods of 1997 in mind, Lutheran Brotherhood awarded a grant of \$3,500 to the Chippewa County Historical Society (CCHS) in Montevideo that will enable CCHS to purchase acid-free boxes, encapsulation supplies and artifact storage containers. These materials will help protect the irreplaceable objects in the CCHS collections in case of some future catastrophe.

A grant of \$500 from the Aid Association for Lutherans, Branch 470, has enabled CCHS to purchase paint, painting supplies and shrubs for its

youth service project, whose purpose is to promote volunteerism among young people. In August, 13 young volunteers were joined by two adult volunteers and two CCHS staff members in painting the CCHS administration building and planting shrubs in front of the Village Hall in Historic Chippewa City.

For further information about the grants and the youth service project, contact CCHS, Montevideo, at (320) 269-7636.

## Narrow Escape from the Flood in Clay County

*Continued from p. 1*

stopped the leaking temporarily. Mark continues, "CCHS collections manager Pam Burkhardt, Pete and I used the dry time to install a simple drain system. We hot-glued J-shaped light pieces of steel siding to the wall, which channeled the water into

inverted milk cartons, also glued to the wall. Rubber hoses carry the seepage from the cartons into large garbage cans. So far the system has worked quite well."

The flood crested on April 18, but the worst scare was on April 20. The sump pump in the basement is built to "carry water up some 35 feet, then the length of the building, to be ejected out the south side...When the flood started, Pam began checking on our storage areas every 12 hours. She came in just before noon to find that one of the pipe connections had blown out along the north wall of oversize storage. Water stood nearly half an inch deep on the floor of the store room and had soaked the carpet in the weather exhibit and part of the permanent exhibit." [Editor's note: The "weather exhibit" is titled *How about that weather?* It is scheduled through January 1998.]

"Pam shut the water off and had an HHIC volunteer begin calling people on our disaster list. Within minutes, CCHS staff, board members and volunteers were on the scene moving artifacts and vacuuming up water. We had to shut down the exhibit area for three weeks during cleanup but **no artifacts were significantly impacted!** The sump has been rerouted, carpets have been shampooed with a disinfecting cleanser and we're back to normal operations."

For further information, call CCHS, Moorhead, at (218) 233-4604.



*Photo courtesy of Clay County Historical Society*

*HHIC program curator Pete Conlin leans over the sandbag dike at the Hjemkomst Center to measure the water depth on April 18, the day the river crested. He found it was 18 inches deep at that point. If this dike had not held, two floors of the center would have filled completely, and a foot of water would have covered the floor of the third floor.*



## The Braham Festival: Social History, Folklore & Pies

We asked Valorie Arrowsmith, executive director of the Isanti County Historical Society, to tell the story of the famed Braham Pie Festival. The following article is from her summary.

In 1990, Governor Perpich declared Braham to be the “Homemade Pie Capitol of Minnesota.” The title and reputation are well-deserved. In the 1930s and 1940s, the great cooks and bakers at the Park Cafe rolled out extraordinarily flaky crusts, and pie fame began to grow. The word spread as Twin Cities residents drove to the lake on weekends and took the much-advertised “short cut to Duluth through Braham.”

5th- and 6th-graders, wrote and performed “The Pie Opera.” In 1993, the first of the annual 3rd-grade Pie Bookmaking projects was held with book artist Mary Jo Pully. Each student learns the pie ballad, sees a slide presentation with an underlying pie theme, watches a pie crust demonstration, goes on a walking history tour, writes pie poems and stories, learns to make pie-shaped pop-up books, then reads them at Pie Day. Some of these books were included in a two-year international book tour sponsored by the Minnesota Center for Book Arts.

Students have also participated in these arts-and-history residencies with the following artists: “Dance the Story of Pie” (Rochelle Ratzloff); “The Pie Town Video” (Karen Kysar); “The Braham Pie Plays” (Mary Finnerty and Michael Anthony); and “The Pie Mural” (Ta-Coumba Aiken).

Artists performing at Pie Day are asked to put pie into their repertoire, which they do by changing the lyrics of songs or, as with Lou and Peter Berryman, writing their own song, “I think I know where I am, I must be in Braham.” Recent performers include Malcolm Dalglish with his original pie rap, Margot Galt with an Ode to Pie, and Ross Sutter and dancers from the Ethnic Dance Theater, who performed a “Cow Pie Dance.” Other activities include crafts, ethnic foods, games, a Small Quilt show, a Pie Day postal cancellation, the Braham Busy Dizzy Lizzies’ pie-baking contests for young people and adults, pie-eating contests for young people and adults, T-shirts, the Braham Pie Hall of Fame, pie folk costumes, and pie flags that fly along Main Street during July.

A Pie Day committee of 14 local residents works intensely up to the festival, planning, brainstorming and organizing crews to bake and serve over 300 fruit and berry pies. New ideas come up each year. In 1996, the Pie Race was implemented, and in 1997 the Exotic Pie Challenge and the Pi R Squared Math Contest were added. Projects under consideration for future festivals are pie pods and more pie public art.

At Pie Day 1997, it was estimated that more than 3,500 pieces of pie were eaten. The cost of Pie Day 1997 was just over \$6,100; revenues were almost \$6,800; the proceeds go to ICBS.

For further information, contact Valorie Arrowsmith, ICBS, Cambridge, (612) 689-4229.



Photo courtesy of Isanti County Historical Society

Above are volunteers and members of the 1996 Pie Day Committee in pie folk costumes and (left) the wedge-of-pie costume. The costumes were designed by Valorie Arrowsmith and Ellen Cunningham. (Left to right: Ellen Cunningham, Polly Grossbach, Kathryn Stavem, Valorie Arrowsmith, Marilyn McGriff and Andrea Downing.)

Pie Day began in 1990 with a grant from “Celebrate Minnesota.” A committee had been discussing what to do for its “Celebrate” program, when Phyllis Londgren, Braham’s unofficial pie lady, asked, “What do we do well? What are we known for?” The answer was obvious. Then, after two successful years of pie-related programs, Londgren approached the Isanti County Historical Society, (ICBS) which for several years had been producing the Braham Ice Cream Social the first Friday of each August. She suggested that the two events be combined. And so it came to pass: a “pie à la mode” festival on the first Friday of each August.

### Highlights

In 1991, troubador Larry Long helped the community write the Braham pie ballad, “The Rhubarb of My Eye.” In 1993, he returned with the theater artist Marie Olafsdotter, and with the help of



## The Logistics of Being Good Hosts for School Groups

The school tour season at a historical organization can be a very satisfying experience for students, teachers, volunteers and staff—or it can be a logistical nightmare. The Freeborn County Historical Society (FCHS), which is housed in a two-story, 13,000-square-foot museum building in Albert Lea, devised a system to enable volunteer tour guides to lead effective tours in difficult situations.

*A tour guide explains the workings of an old plow to school children. The old schoolhouse, with the outhouse behind it, is in the background. This photograph is from 1990, but is typical of present-day tour guides at work.*



*Photo courtesy of Freeborn County Historical Society*

FCHS offers two guide-led tours: a one-hour tour of its Pioneer Village, and a one-and-one-half-hour (or two-hour) visit to both the village and the museum. Each visiting class is divided by its teacher into groups of no more than 12 students, and each group must be accompanied by a teacher or room parent.

Bev Jackson, FCHS executive director, describes a situation that might be typical for other historical

organizations as well as for FCHS. “On a day when only one class visits the site, the tour guides have the flexibility of moving at the pace set by the teachers’ suggestions and the students’ interests. On the days when several school groups visit, the schedule becomes more rigid. It is not unusual for one school to schedule a one-hour tour of the village for 30 students (three groups), and another school group of 60 students (five groups) to schedule one-and-one-half-hour tours of the museum-plus-village—all at the same time.

“In order to prevent complete chaos, each guide is given a schedule that looks something like this:

- 10 00 a.m.. School
- 10:10 General Store
- 10:20 Church
- 10:30 Mill House
- 10:40 Barn (from west end to the east)
- 11:00 Museum lower level (south to north)
- 11:15 Museum upper level
- 11:30 Return to bus.

Each time slot includes the buildings in between.”

Eight of these schedules are made; each one places a guide in a different spot at a given time, and adjustments are made depending on the availability of time. As Bev says, the 20 volunteers “gave up most of their other activities during the month of May in order to share their enthusiasm for history with the youngsters.”

(Source: Freeborn County Historical Society newsletter, June, July, August 1997, and correspondence with Bev Jackson, executive director.)

For further information, contact Bev Jackson, FCHS, Albert Lea, (507) 373-8003.



## Paying Attention to Details

In making arrangements for meetings, details that seem minor or obvious are often neither. Here is a good example of attending to an easily overlooked but potentially very useful detail. In the May/June issue of the *Clearwater History News*, the newsletter of the Clearwater County Historical Society (CCHS), director and newsletter editor Tamara Anderson-Edevold first told readers about the time and place of the next CCHS meeting and about the plans for an evening tour of the old Mallard townsite, the largest ghost town in the county. Then she added, “Wear long pants and bring bug spray. The ticks are out!”



## Donated Objects: To Return or Not to Return

*The following article is excerpted with permission from the July-September 1997 issue of Heritage Herald, the newsletter of the Wright County Historical Society (WCHS). Maureen Galvin, curator/coordinator, discusses a potentially volatile issue that people in historical organizations should think about.*

Every once in a blue moon, museums get what we often refer to as “the call.” We often whisper about them, thinking that maybe if we speak softly then *we* won’t get them.

It is “the call” from a donor, or family member of the donor, who wants to take back an item or items previously given to the museum. The answer is and should be “no.” But that is not the answer the donor or family member wants to hear.

Kids can take “no” for an answer, but just try saying “no” to an adult!

First, did you know that donating an item to a museum is legally considered a gift? The donor is transferring ownership of the item over to the museum to care for it as an artifact or an educational piece. This means that when an item is donated it cannot be taken back years later. Just because the donor decides, for whatever reason, he or she wants it back—the answer is “no.” It is a gift.

(If it wasn’t a gift, museums would then be temporary storage facilities for your items until you wanted them back. That is, it would be a free storage facility, subsidized by the public—as most museums are non-profit institutions. Do you want to pay for that?) [Editor’s note: See the two articles at the top of page 6 for additional information about policy language.]

Second, just think of the tax implications with the IRS. Because the donation is usually itemized as a tax deduction for the donor, how then does the donor, museum or IRS take care of that deduction if the donation is returned? What would this do to the museum’s non-profit status?

Third, a frequent case, is the request to return a donation made by a deceased member of the requester’s family. Think about it. How could it be returned to a family member when he or she was *not* the person originally donating the item? Also, if this deceased donor has five living children, 20 grandchildren and 35 great-grandchildren—who gets it?

Now you know why we laugh when people visit the museum on a quiet day and say, “you must have an easy job—I’d love not to have to worry about things all day!”

Here are two key terms that museum staff and volunteers are quite familiar with: *accessioning* and *deaccessioning*.

*Accessioning* is the act of recording/processing an addition to the permanent collection. This process can take a bit of time if we have to go out and look at an object, discuss the item at a Collections Committee meeting, retrieve and clean the item and then document and mark the object. Ask our volunteers, Judy and Jan, who help us accession artifacts.

*Deaccessioning* is the process of removing an object permanently from the museum collection. A museum should not accept an object with the thought that it could someday deaccession it. This process should be done cautiously, prudently and slowly. Deaccessioning should be the exception, not the norm.

For further information, contact Maureen Galvin, WCHS, Buffalo, (612) 339-6881.

*On the right is the simple form used by the Museum Collections Department of the Minnesota Historical Society for receiving donated artifacts. (Forms in other collecting departments of the Society differ from this one.) The print at the bottom of the page reads: “All gifts are accepted with the understanding that they become the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and may be used for research, exhibited to the public, or otherwise disposed of according to the policies and procedures of the Society.”*

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MUSEUM COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT  
345 Kellogg Blvd. W.  
St. Paul, MN 55102  
612-296-8071

DONATION OF ARTIFACTS

I hereby donate the following items to the Minnesota Historical Society Museum Collections:

SAMPLE

Owner: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
DONOR

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGN

All gifts are accepted with the understanding that they become the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and may be used for research, exhibited to the public, or otherwise disposed of according to the policies and procedures of the Society.

White - MHS Copy    Yellow - Donor Copy    Pink - MHS Copy



## Collections Management: Two Further Items

### A Gift Is a Gift: Policy Language Sample

The collections policy of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City includes the following relevant language.

“Title to all objects acquired for the collections should be, where possible, obtained free and clear, discouraging restrictions as to use or future disposition. Where restrictions are attached to an acquisition, every effort shall be made to place a reasonable limit on the time for which the restrictions may apply and to define the conditions under which their force may terminate. Restrictions shall be adequately documented and retained as part of the permanent title records.

“A legal instrument of conveyance, setting forth an adequate description of the objects involved and the precise conditions of transfer, shall accompany all gifts, bequests, purchases, and exchanges and shall be signed by the seller or donor...”

(Source: Gerald R. Singer, “Case Study: One Institution’s Approach to a Comprehensive Collections Management Policy,” submitted to the American Legal Institute-American Bar Association (ALI-ABA) Course of Study, “Legal Problems of Museum Administration,” March 1997.)

Other materials and information about collections policy issues can be obtained from the American Association of Museums (AAM), (202) 289-1818; fax (202) 289-6578.



### Schedule for MAP Grant Proposals

Category II of the Museum Assessment Program (MAP II), “Collections Management Assessment,” is particularly relevant to the issues discussed in the article about returning donations on the previous page. The deadline for FY 98 MAP II grants is March 13, 1998.

Other grant application deadlines: “Institutional Assessment” (MAP I) projects—two deadlines: Oct. 31, 1997, and April 24, 1998; “Public Dimension Assessment” (MAP III) projects: Feb. 27, 1998.

The MAP program is managed by the American Association of Museums (AAM); for further information, contact the MAP staff at AAM, (202) 289-9118.

## Immigration History Center to Get a New Home

The new Minnesota Library Access Center at the University of Minnesota will house the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) and seven other university archival collections. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on May 9 for the building, which will be located on the West Bank Campus, overlooking the Mississippi River.

The collections and library books are to be stored in huge constant-temperature caverns carved out of the sandstone bluff, 80 feet beneath the surface. Construction has started and is expected to be completed in two years.

For more information about the IHRC’s activities and its new home, contact Joel Wurl, curator and assistant director, at (612) 627-4208, or visit the center’s web site: <http://www.umn.edu/ihrc>.



## Renovation Completed for Winona County Historical Society

Among the new things at the renovated Winona County Historical Society (WCHS) in Winona are an elevator, windows, kitchen, conference room, and a remodeled library and archives. The work began in



Photo courtesy of Winona County Historical Society

*This is the new WCHS conference room.*

1992, when director Mark Peterson received a call from Pete Woodworth, president of the Winona Knitting Mills, who had just led a drive to raise funds for a new YMCA swimming pool. Woodworth knew that the community had great respect for WCHS, believed that fund raising for renovation would be successful, and gave Peterson a check for \$5,000 to use to start a drive.

WCHS reviewed its finances and programs, did a feasibility study and made a “wish list.” The resulting capital campaign led to a \$650,000 renovation of the Winona Armory building—which houses the WCHS library, museum and offices—and the Arches Museum and the Bunnell House near Homer, two properties also managed by WCHS. The renovation has not only upgraded the WCHS facilities, but, as Peterson says, “it created a higher profile for us in the community and immeasurably strengthened our financial and volunteer support.”

Financial support included gifts from more than 700 businesses, foundations and individuals. One of the individual donors was 12-year-old Melinda Merchlewitz, who one day handed the receptionist an envelope containing six one-dollar bills. She left only her name, and the staff was unable to locate her. Peterson says that they were sorry they “never had the chance to thank her properly.” Then, by chance,

he met her one day, and gave her an invitation to the WCHS donor appreciation party. Melinda attended the party, and was pleased to hear her gift publicly acknowledged.

Staff and volunteers contributed essentially by helping with such work as moving, painting and cleaning up. Peterson says “For over a year and a half they worked through adverse conditions, did things that went way beyond their normal duties, and stayed excited and focused on the results.”

(Source: *Winona Post*, Sept. 17, 1997, “History Never Stops,” by Jerome Christenson, and conversations with Mark Peterson.)

For further information, contact WCHS, Winona, at (507) 454-2723.



Photo courtesy of Winona County Historical Society

*Now mounted beside a stairway in the renovated building, this was once the door of a freight elevator in the old Choate Department Store in Winona.*



## Some Basic Rules for Doing Documentation Work

The following rules were formulated with genealogical research in mind, but we hope you will agree that they apply to documentation work in general. The immediate source is the December 1996 issue of *Branching Out*, the newsletter of the Twin Ports Genealogy Society, which cited as its source the April 1996 issue of the Crow Wing County Genealogical Society newsletter, *Heir Mail*.

1. Document as you go.
2. Enter notes in a consistent format.
3. Use confidential information with discretion and sensitivity.
4. List all sources found.
5. Identify conflicting or missing information.
6. Avoid using abbreviations.
7. Indicate where additional research is needed.
8. Strive to obtain primary sources for each event.
9. Indicate the location of lengthy documents rather than restating them.
10. Welcome input and constructive review of your documentation.
11. Identify all researchers' contributions, including your own.
12. Recognize that good documentation requires a process of continuous refinement.

The list strikes us as a topic for discussion and as a teaching tool, and we welcome your thoughts on it: what to emphasize, prioritize, differ with, or augment.



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

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

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

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

<http://www.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