



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

THE MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

September 1997 Vol. XXV, No. 9

INSIDE

- Future History Day themes 2
- Tech Talk: Caring for quilts 3
- New MHS quilts exhibit 7

Continuing Interest in the Civil War

For people with some imagination and historical sense, the Civil War can be an opportunity to learn about a subject of central importance in the history of the United States and to enjoy the company of others in commemorative and celebratory activities. The first two articles below describe two approaches that can be used to sustain and cultivate interest in the Civil War.

Civil War Encampment Program at Moose Lake

by Lois Johnson

An authentic Civil War camp attracted approximately 1,000 people to the Moose Lake Depot and Fires of 1918 Museum on July 4th and 5th. Thirty-five men from the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry and Brackett's Battalion brought 130-year-old-history to life as young and old, many with ancestors who fought in the Civil War, visited the camp and talked to the soldiers.

Moose Lake is located in southern Carlton County, 40 miles south of Duluth. The Moose Lake Depot and Fires of 1918 Museum is one of two museums operated by the Moose Lake Area Historical Society.



Courtesy Moose Lake Area Historical Society

Part of the parade during the Civil War encampment program July 4 at Moose Lake.

The First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry began 20 years ago when men interested in the Civil War got

together and established the unit at Historic Fort Snelling. Brackett's Battalion, a cavalry re-enactment unit, was formed just a few years ago. The two groups visit one member's hometown each year and take part in several Civil War activities, such as Civil War Weekend at Historic Fort Snelling in June.

The Moose Lake Area Historical Society sponsored two programs preceding the Fourth of July Civil War Encampment. Glass slides dating back to the 1890s, made from actual photographs taken

Recovery Under Way at Humphrey Museum in Waverly

On August 18, a fire destroyed the building that had been serving as temporary home for the Hubert H. Humphrey Museum in Waverly. As this issue went to press, the cause has not been determined. Firemen were able to remove most of the objects in the exhibit and collections from the building and move them to the Village Hall around the corner. The collections, mostly papers and photographs, were laid out to dry on the floor of a large, open room, where fans had been set up to accelerate drying. Director Irene Bender noted that visitors from the public and press were noticeably moved by the sight of museum objects spread out on the floor. Out of the context of formal display in an exhibit, the objects seemed to them to be vulnerable.

The museum board and staff are following Humphrey's tradition of refusing to be defeated. They continue to collect objects that emphasize the sense of place and people characteristic of Humphrey's politics, and plan to open a new museum in the year 2001.

Conservation, library and archives staff members from the Minnesota Historical Society visited the museum on the day of the fire and assisted museum staff and volunteers in drying, cleaning and sorting. Helen Alten, independent conservator, spent two days at the museum assisting with recovery operations.

For information about the MHS recovery response, contact Paul Storch, objects conservator, (612) 297-5774. For information about the Humphrey Museum, call the recovery office (donated by the city of Waverly) at (612) 658-4505.

Lois Johnson is president of the Moose Lake Area Historical Society.

Continued on p. 2

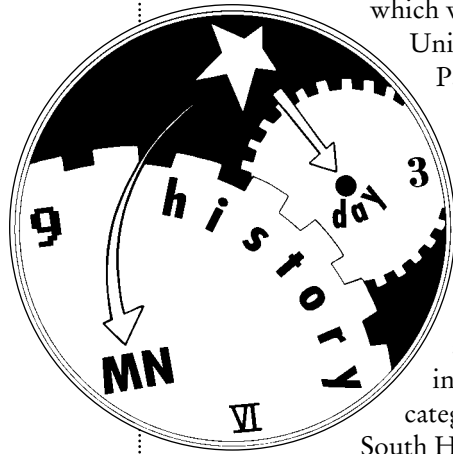


History Day 1997 and in the Future: Themes for 8 Years

More than 20,000 students, representing more than 200 Minnesota schools from all around the state, participated in History Day 1997, which had the theme "Triumph and Tragedy in History."

At the finals of National History Day, which were held in June at the University of Maryland, College Park, just outside Washington, D.C., Minnesota students once again received high awards. Blake Longacre, from the Academy of Holy Angels in Minneapolis, portrayed "Frank Higgins: The Lumberjack Sky Pilot," and placed third in the senior individual performance category. Mattie Weiss, from South High in Minneapolis,

presented a display project (table-top exhibit) titled "The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" and placed third in the senior individual project category. Three other individuals and four groups received awards ranging from 5th to 11th place.



It is not too early to start thinking of ways to encourage teachers and students to make use of your collections and libraries in their preparations for History Day next year and the years to come. To help historical organizations think of ways to take an even more active role in History Day, here is the list of themes—kept deliberately broad to encourage creativity—through 2005:

- 1998: Migrations in History:
People, Cultures, Ideas**
- 1999: Science, Technology, Invention in
History: Impact, Influence, Change**
- 2000: Turning Points in History:
People, Ideas, Events**
- 2001: Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas**
- 2002: Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History**
- 2003: The Individual in History**
- 2004: Rights and Responsibilities in History**
- 2005: Communication in History**

For more information, contact Tim Hoogland, State History Day Coordinator, (612) 297-2081.

History of Civil War Inspires Continuing Interest

Continued from p. 1

during the Civil War by government photographers, were shown by Gary Kovanen on May 25, along with a number of other artifacts. Kovanen, who is a Moose Lake resident, is part of the First Minnesota and an avid Civil War collector and historian.

In the second program on June 15, Jeff Daniels, another Moose Lake resident, who is also a member of the First Minnesota, took the audience on a visit to his unit in Virginia. Daniels talked about his uniform, his equipment, the food the soldiers were given, the camp, the climate, and the battles he had been in. Even though conditions weren't the best for the soldiers, Daniels said, "I'm here because I firmly believe that we should not be divided; we should be united as one nation."

To build on the interest created by the Civil War camp, the Moose Lake Area Historical Society board plans to repeat the slide show and re-enactment this fall.

Organization Formed for Sons of Civil War Veterans

In late 1996, five Minnesotans formed the William Colvill III Minnesota Camp 56 of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCA). Chartered by Congress in 1954, the SUVCA was begun by members of the Union Army in 1881 to keep alive the memories of those who fought and sacrificed to preserve the Union. The Minnesota camp is named for the Red Wing native who commanded the famed 1st Minnesota Volunteers Regiment, which fought at Gettysburg at a critical point in the battle.

Men who are not descendants may join as associate members, and women who are not descendants may join the SUVCA Auxiliary. (Women descendants may apply for membership in the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War.) For more information, contact Mike Wilkinson, Minnesota Camp 56 Commander, at (612) 935-8135.



TECH TALK

This issue: Caring for Quilts



Preserving Historic Quilts by Deborah Bede

All photographs in this Tech Talk are from the Minnesota Historical Society; the photographs were taken by Eric Mortenson, in the Society's Textile Conservation Laboratory.

Quilts present a preservation challenge because of their large size and the inherent fragility of textile fibers. Textiles are easily damaged by handling and by storage and display conditions, so preventive conservation techniques used in these situations have a great impact on the preservation of the quilt.

Particular Condition Problems to Look for in Quilts

Silk

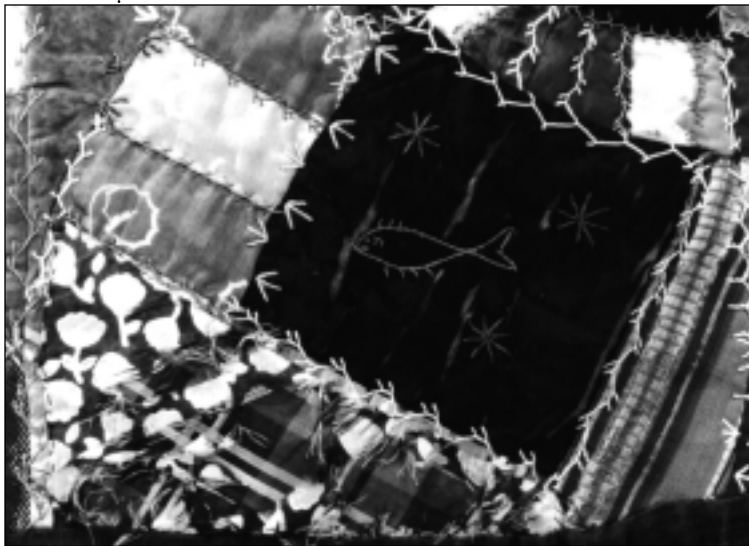
Silk quilts very often are in poor condition, as evidenced by splitting and worn fabrics. Silk is extremely vulnerable to damage from light and handling, so special

colors often catalyze the deterioration of the underlying fibers. This appears as weakness and even loss of the brown or black areas of a fabric. When this damage is widespread, the fabric is greatly weakened by the losses and the quilt is easily damaged by handling.

Handling: Plan Ahead

When handling quilts, it is essential that the workspace be large enough to handle these large textiles safely. Plan ahead so that you do not handle the quilt unnecessarily, and be sure that the quilt is supported at all times. Textiles easily pick up particulate and liquid soils, so be sure that the workspace and your hands are scrupulously clean. Gloves can be worn if it is not possible to wash your hands, but are not necessary if your hands are clean. Jewelry and watches should be removed.

Support the quilt when moving it with a piece of clean acid-free cardboard, a piece of muslin or cotton sheeting, or a piece of heavy acid-free paper. These will take the weight of the quilt and reduce the strain on fragile fabrics.



The flowered fabric at the lower left and the black fabric in the center are examples of deterioration in silk fabrics.

care should be taken in handling silk quilts, and to limit the amount of light they receive.

Dark Brown Dyes

Another commonly encountered problem is seen in printed cotton fabrics that have dark brown or black components in the design. The dyes used to produce these

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.

Deborah Bede is Textile Conservator in the Textile Conservation Laboratory at the Minnesota Historical Society. She has been on the staff of the Society since 1994.



TECH TALK

This issue: Caring for Quilts



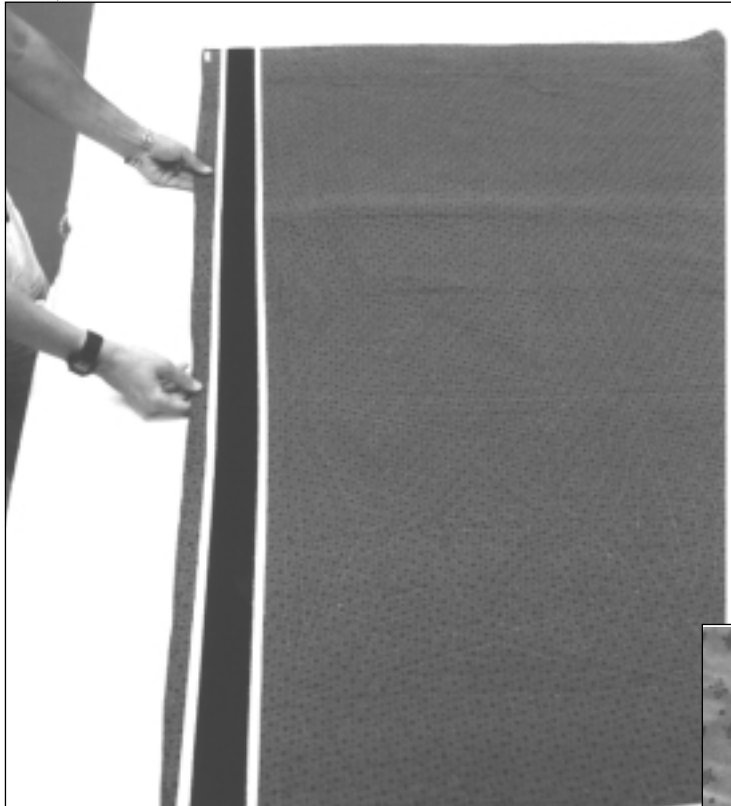
Displaying Quilts

Hanging quilts on the wall is a popular form of display. For quilts in good condition, hook-and-loop tape such as Velcro® can be stitched to the top edge of the quilt. With a sewing machine, stitch the loop side of 2-

should be well supported. Isolate the quilt from wood and other materials with acid-free paper or board.

Exposure to light fades textile dyes and deteriorates fibers. This damage is caused by any kind of light, although the ultraviolet portion of the spectrum is the most damaging. Daylight and fluorescent lights are the most significant sources of UV; use filters on the lights or windows to remove this radiation.

All light is harmful, and the damage it causes is irreversible and cumulative. Reduce the amount of light a quilt receives on display by keeping lighting dim and by restricting the length of the exhibit. Periodically replace quilts on display with others to help reduce display time, and close blinds or shades when the room is not in use. Silk quilts are particularly easily damaged by light, and displaying should be kept to a minimum

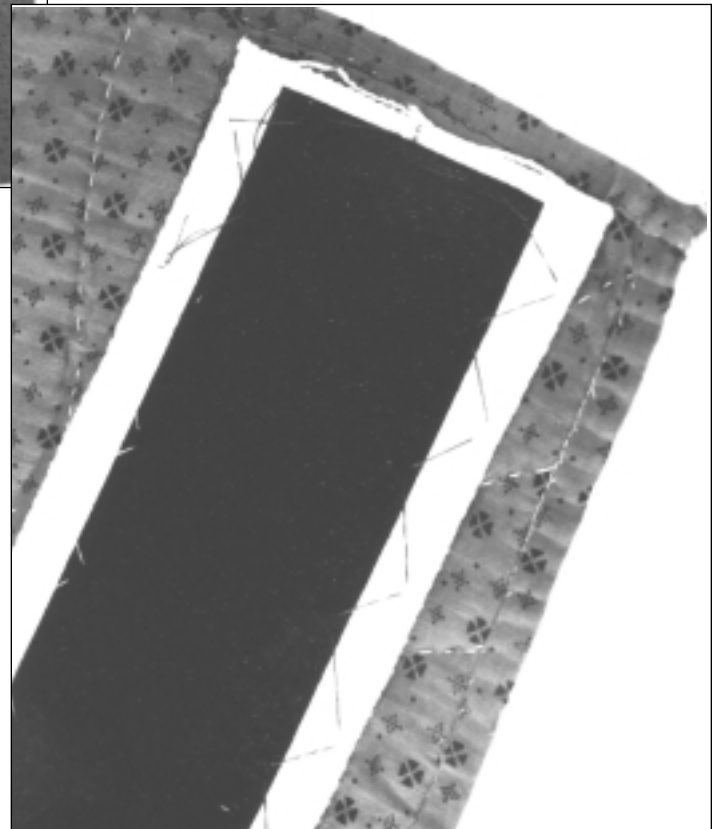


Above, a quilt has been prepared for hanging with Velcro®.

The detail to the right shows how the Velcro® is stitched to the quilt.

inch-wide Velcro® to a piece of cotton canvas or webbing. Then hand-stitch the canvas or webbing to the quilt, staple the hook side of the Velcro® to a wood slat and mount the slat on the wall with a cleat. The MHS Textile Conservation Lab has a handout that describes this method of display in more detail. Muslin sleeves are often used to hang quilts, but Velcro® has the advantage of being adjustable so that the quilt hangs smoothly and is well-supported.

Other display methods include folding or draping the quilt over a quilt rack, bed or other support. The weight of the quilt





TECH TALK

This issue: Caring for Quilts



Cleaning Quilts

Cleaning historic quilts is physically challenging, can be risky, and should be done by a professional textile conservator. Experience and training are essential for the successful cleaning of a historic quilt, and proper space and materials to do the job correctly are also required.

A conservator will normally use water to clean a quilt because most soils found on quilts tend to be water-soluble. Although many people ask about dry cleaning, it's usually not a good cleaning method for quilts. Dry-cleaning machines agitate and spin their contents, which could damage fragile quilts. Also, dry cleaning solvent is most effective on oily soils, so cleaning may not be as effective as when water is used.

Some quilts can't be wet- or dry-cleaned at all because they are in poor condition or because their dyes bleed in water or solvent. In these cases, it becomes necessary to accept the soil as part of the history of the object. In general, silk quilts cannot be cleaned.

Vacuuming through a fiberglass screen is an important technique for the removal of particulate soils. For the screen, stitch bias tape around the edges of ordinary fiberglass window screen. Place the screen over the quilt and draw the round brush attachment of the vacuum cleaner over the screen in slow, steady strokes. For particularly fragile quilts, use a machine with variable suction and reduce the suction of the vacuum cleaner. Quilts in excellent condition can be vacuumed without the screen.

Storing Quilts

For reasons of space and convenience, quilts are usually stored folded in a box. While quilts are in storage, it is very important to protect them from harmful materials that can harm the fibers. The wood of trunks, cedar chests or dresser drawers releases acids that damage fibers. We strongly recommend that you use only acid-



When folding a quilt for storage, place acid-free tissue inside all folds. Ms. Bede is to the left; to the right is Melissa Bilyeu, Intern in the Textile Conservation Laboratory.



TECH TALK

This issue: Caring for Quilts



free boxes and tissue to store quilts and other textiles.

To prepare the quilt for storage, fold it carefully. Plan where the folds will go so that previous fold lines are not used, and so that the quilt will fit into the box not too snugly or too loosely. Use crumpled acid-free tissue to pad the folds. Line the box with acid-free tissue, and place the quilt inside. If necessary, wrap plastic sheeting loosely around the box, but do not seal it tightly.

Read top to bottom: When folding a quilt for storage, fold it to fit its box. Use an acid-free cardboard box if possible.

Storage climate affects preservation. Temperature and relative humidity (RH) should be regulated to avoid extremes or large changes; the standard is 70° F and 50 percent RH. If the building does not have climate control, choose a storage location that will provide the most stable climate possible; attics and basements are usually not suitable. The paper and cardboard materials used to pack the quilts will help to buffer changes in temperature and humidity.



Insect pests are usually not a problem for quilts unless they contain wool. Good housekeeping practices are the best method of control.

Repair

In most cases, repair of damaged quilts should be performed by a professional textile conservator. Deteriorated fabrics should never be replaced, as this changes the historical and intrinsic value of the quilt and can also cause physical damage to the quilt.

For more information on these topics, consult a professional textile conservator. The American Institute for Conservation offers a free referral service; call (202) 452-9545.

To request a copy of the handout, "Hanging a Flat Textile with Velcro®", contact Deborah Bede at (612) 297-5490, or by e-mail at deborah.bede@mnhs.org.



Quilts & Their Stories: New Exhibit at MHS

"Q is for Quilts," a new mini-exhibit at the Minnesota History Center, will feature 14 quilts and their stories. Scheduled to open Oct. 18, the exhibit will be a stunning kaleidoscope of quilt patterns, colors, fabrics and stories from the late 1840s through the 1990s. It will provide a unique perspective on quilters' contributions to Minnesota and national history.



Minnesota Historical Society

This is a photograph of a quilting party, taken about 1895. (The original photograph was loaned by Jon Willard, 1977.)

Visitors can listen to contemporary women talk about the value of quilts and quilting, piece together quilt patterns, and, on the first and third Saturdays of each month during the first year of the exhibit, be part of an old-fashioned quilting bee. Visitors can also explore "Quilting Through Time," an illustrated time line stretching from log cabin quilts to the AIDS quilt, and learn about the Minnesota Quilt Project—part of a nationwide effort that has documented over 175,000 quilts since 1981.

In Minnesota, almost 700 volunteers have spent the past 10 years collecting quilters' biographies and oral histories and documenting 3,500 quilts in private and public collections. These Minnesota Quilt Project volunteers "discovered" the 14 featured quilts as part of Quilt Discovery Days, events held in 41 Minnesota communities between 1988 and 1997. This exhibit is a collaboration of MHS, the Minnesota Quilt Project, Minnesota Quilters, Inc., and the Minnesotans across the state who generously loaned their quilts.

"Q is for Quilts," which is part of the History Center exhibit *Minnesota A to Z*, will be in place from 1997 to 2005 and each year will highlight a new set of quilts. Watch for notice of additional programs and demonstrations related to quilting and family heirlooms. For more information, call Loris Connolly, MHS exhibit curator, (612) 297-7706.



Minnesota Historical Society

This photograph of a baby sitting on a quilt illustrates one of the many uses of quilts to be displayed in the exhibit. This

Mulligan to Keynote MHO Annual Meeting

The keynote speaker at the meeting of Minnesota Historical Organizations (MHO) on Oct. 17 is William Mulligan, Jr., associate professor of history and director of public history programs at the Forrest C. Pogue Public History Institute at Murray State University, Kentucky.

His talk, "Making Connections: Local History and Heritage Tourism," should be of interest to MHO representatives. Professor Mulligan has written six books, the most recent being *Historic Resources of the Iron Range in Marquette County, Michigan, 1844-1941*, published in 1991. He founded the *Michigan Historical Review* and was publisher and editor of *The Practical Historian* newsletter from 1989 to 1996. He has also developed workshops on such topics as exhibit planning for small museums, fund raising for historical organizations, disaster planning for museums and libraries and caring for family heirlooms. His talk promises to be useful and entertaining.

For program details, see the enclosed insert.



Internet News



The Le Sueur County Historical Society, the LCHS museum and the Le Sueur County Genealogical Society are now on the Internet, providing information about exhibits and staff, photographs, county history, the historical society and articles from a staff newsletter, *History on the Hill*. A "virtual tour" that will include further information and pictures and sound clips is planned for the near future. The address is <http://www.lchs.mus.mn.us>

The July/August issue of *Museum News* included a useful list of web sites of interest to museum professionals. A few are given below.

American Association of Museums (AAM)

<http://www.aam-us.org>

American Association of State and Local History (AASLH)

<http://www.nashville.net/~aaslh>

Institute of Museum and Library Services

<http://www.ims.fed.us/>

National Endowment for the Humanities

<http://www.neh.fed.us>

Conservation OnLine (CoOL)

<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/>

Internet Resources for Heritage Conservation,
Historic Preservation and Archaeology

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/ncptt/irg/irg-servers.html>
Minnesota Humanities Commission

www.thinkmhc.org

Remember that the *Directory of Minnesota Historical Organizations*, published by the Historic Preservation, Field Services & Grants Department of the Minnesota Historical Society, is now only available through the MHS web site, www.mnhs.org.

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