



April 2001, Vol. XXIX, No. 3

INSIDE

page 5

Resources for disaster preparedness

page 6

Collections care projects

page 8

Historic house workshopPublished by the Minnesota Historical Society
for county and local historical societies and heritage preservation commissions

Shakopee Valley News



Fire fighters from 10 communities fought the blaze at Murphy's Landing in January. The site, owned by the city of Shakopee and operated by the Minnesota Valley Restoration Project, plans to open on schedule this spring.

Trial by fire

Murphy's Landing disaster offers lessons in emergency preparedness

At 5 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 17, Dennis Kelly got a wake-up call he'll never forget.

Kelly, director of Murphy's Landing living history museum in Shakopee, heard an urgent voice on the other end of the line: "The restaurant's on fire!" The caller, a staff member who lived at the site, quickly filled him in on what was happening: a building housing the restaurant, a shop, a storage area and offices was burning; all occupants of the apartments above had been evacuated; and firefighters were on the way.

"By the time I got there 40 minutes later, I could see flames in the sky from the highway," Kelly recalled. "And the road to the site was filled with fire trucks and emergency vehicles." He immediately checked in at the fire chief's command post to confirm that all residents had been safely removed. He also determined that no historic properties at the site were threatened by fire.

Returning to his car at 8 a.m. to escape the cold while firefighters did their work, he retrieved from his trunk

Trial by fire continued on page 2

The making of a musical

by Mike Worcester*Museum Director, Cokato Historical Museum*

In October 2000 the curtain rose on the world premiere of Earl Tracy: The Musical, about a charismatic healer and the controversy he engendered in his small Minnesota community. Based on a real-life resident of Cokato in the 1930s, the musical was written by Howard Lake native Marianne Kreitlow, a composer and playwright now living in Texas. Mike Worcester, director of the Cokato Historical Museum, where Kreitlow did much of her research, traveled to Pasadena, Texas, for opening night.

As the theater lights dimmed on the campus of San Jacinto College, the crowd hushed. A feeling of anticipation crackled in the October air - something magical was about to happen. A lone spotlight illuminated the stage and a solitary figure strode into the light. He paused for a moment, then

Musical continued on page 7

Trial by fire *continued from page 1*

a tool that would guide him through the difficult days and weeks ahead. It was a disaster recovery kit, dubbed the A.R.K. (for A Recovery Kit), that staff had received at a workshop two years earlier. In the A.R.K. was a step-by-step plan for coordinating an organization's response to a natural disaster. Kelly set to work.

Using phone numbers recorded in the kit, he alerted key staff and board members at home, then called the insurance company. Consulting the kit's list of duties for disaster-control officers, he directed his board president, who by now had arrived at the site, to handle interviews with the media gathered nearby.

"We did a good job of keeping the public informed throughout the morning," Kelly said. "Though we suffered some losses, all the historic

buildings and most of the artifacts were saved. So we got the message out early: the fire would not prevent our programs from going forward. We would open to the public as usual on Memorial Day weekend."

Later that day Kelly identified a place where staff could set up operations. Their temporary office for the next few weeks would be the

"You have to make sure you can go forward as an organization if a disaster occurs."

Herrick House, a building at the site that held classroom space for school programs. The site's regular phone number was quickly hooked up and a voice-mail message recorded to keep callers up to date.

From those quarters the staff scrambled to keep their organization running. In late February they moved to offices in a trailer parked on-site. "This spring we'll begin comprehensive long-range planning with our staff, board, consultants, community members - all our stakeholders," explained Kelly. "We'll look at our programs, staffing, the site. Before the fire we had been in negotiations with the Suburban Hennepin Regional Parks District to take over administration of Murphy's Landing. We expect to continue those negotiations.

"Meanwhile," he continued, "I want to share with my colleagues throughout Minnesota what we learned from this disaster. Looking back, I see some things we did well. Other things were painful lessons to learn. Maybe our experience can help other organizations prepare for the unexpected."

1. Keep the A.R.K. in your car

Nothing helped Kelly more than knowing who to call and what to do in the first frantic hours after disaster struck. There, in his A.R.K. kit, were most of the important phone numbers he needed and a list of jobs critical to taking control in an emergency - duties of a commander, operations officer, logistics officer, finance officer, security officer and media officer.

"Two years earlier we had had staff training based on the kit," said Kelly. "At that workshop we assigned specific jobs to specific staff and board members. Those worksheets helped us get our recovery rolling. But I realized, as I scanned the lists that morning, how much can change in two years. Some staff had left and



Recovery of artifacts and salvageable records was slated to begin when insurance investigators finished their work at the fire scene. Meanwhile, cold weather kept the frozen items stable.

some of our officers were unavailable in the off-season. I advise others users of the A.R.K. to revisit your list of emergency personnel periodically and keep phone numbers updated.”

The kit suggests contacting not only key personnel but also vendors and services in the community. “Know who your banker is and who to contact at the local hardware store,” said Kelly. “What’s not in the A.R.K. is a place to record phone numbers of other stakeholders like donors, volunteers, city and county officials. You’ll want to call on them for help as soon as you can; they’ll be important sources of support. Our local officials have been very helpful as we work to put the pieces together again.”

At the time of this interview in February, the site was still being examined by insurance investigators. So Murphy’s Landing staff had not yet been able to put into practice the A.R.K.’s guidelines for assessing damage and recovering materials. “Conservators tell us that as long as things remain frozen, they’re stable,” said Kelly. “We’ll be ready to go as soon as the site is released to us.”

2. Know and understand your insurance

Work with your insurance agent to thoroughly review and analyze your coverage, advised Kelly. “It’s crucial that you *understand* your coverage. What sounds good on the surface may really mean something else.”

Among the questions to ask *before* disaster strikes: Do you have replacement-value insurance? Must you replace items before you can collect? Can you afford your deductible? What happens with a partial loss rather than a total loss? Do you have coverage for your

organization’s equipment and other property as well as its structures? How is that property valued? Does your insurance company require that property be depreciated? Historic artifacts are often not covered by insurance; how will you replace them if they’re lost?

One often-overlooked but crucial question: Do you need business insurance to replace income lost during rebuilding? “You have to make sure you can go forward as an organization if a disaster occurs,” said Kelly.

3. Maintain backup records off-site

Everyone knows the importance of regularly backing up computer files and keeping them at another location. But not everyone puts that knowledge into practice.

“For each set of records, ask yourself, ‘How hard would it be to live without this information?’” Kelly suggested. “That will help you prioritize their importance. Murphy’s

Murphy’s Landing



In the days following the fire, director Dennis Kelly (above, left) strategized with his staff at their temporary office in the Herrick House (left) at Murphy’s Landing. They used materials from the A.R.K. to help them prioritize.

Landing has an off-site electronic catalog of artifacts. And our auditor has our audits on computer. Beyond that, it won’t be easy to reconstruct our records. We can rebuild most of our financial records for the last three years or so, using paper copies saved by board members. We lost all record of financial transactions only from the first 17 days of January.

“Ask yourself, ‘How hard would it be to live without this information?’”

“What will affect us most is that we lost all records connected with our members, volunteers and donors. Parts of those records can be reconstructed from people’s personal papers but we’ll never recover all of them. The lesson we learned? Keep copies of *everything* off-site – not just member and donor lists but training materials, brochures, forms. That may

Trial by fire *continued from page 3*

mean keeping a lot of paper somewhere if you don't have everything on computer. But it's worth the trouble. And try to take advantage of the digital age. It's easier now than ever before to put photos and other visual materials on disk to store off-site."

Murphy's Landing will proceed this spring with its schedule of school tours. "The trouble is," Kelly said, "we lost our record of who's coming when. So we put out the word for schools that had reservations to call us. We want to be ready for them when they arrive."

4. Prepare to deal with grief and loss

Working without the tools you're used to will be difficult in ways you

Murphy's Landing



Until long-range planning is completed, this trailer parked on the grounds of Murphy's Landing will house staff offices. Buildings damaged by fire (background) will be razed.

can't anticipate, warned Kelly. "Not only may you have no phone or computer - you may not even have pencil and paper. That degree of disruption takes a toll on you and your staff, even on your families and friends.

"As with any kind of grief or loss, you'll find yourself going through cycles. One day you may feel overwhelmed by the enormity of it all; the next day you may feel a ray of hope. Just remember that everyone in your organization is going through it together."

Like all members of his staff, Kelly faced not only the usual pressures of his regular job but also a long list of disaster recovery tasks. "To help me organize and prioritize," he said, "I made a list of major areas in which we had to keep moving forward - contacting stakeholders, getting office space,

furthering programs, processing our insurance claim. I tried to do something each day in each of those areas. I also tried to stay focused on our organizational mission."

5. Make a list of people to thank

"As soon as you find that paper and pencil, start a list of all the people you'll want to thank."

That's the last piece of advice Kelly shared as he recounted events of the days and weeks following the fire at Murphy's Landing. "The outpouring of support was tremendous - from the local community, from colleagues at other organizations. So many people stepped forward to ask, 'Is there anything we can do?'"

"It buoyed our spirits to learn we had that kind of support. We want *everyone* to know how much we appreciate them."

For updates on Murphy's Landing's recovery, visit their web site at www.murphyslanding.org.

Northern States Conservation Center



The A.R.K. (A Recovery Kit) was developed by the Northern States Conservation Center at the request of several Wright County museums after a 1997 fire at the Hubert H. Humphrey Museum in Waverly. Designed to guide staff through the first 24 hours after a disaster, the laminated materials are packaged in a waterproof envelope, to be kept in the trunk of a car for immediate accessibility.

Northern States Conservation Center

Need practical solutions to your collections care problems? The Northern States Conservation Center (NSCC) offers consultation and training on collections care and disaster preparedness as well as skilled conservation treatment of damaged artifacts. Among its services:

The A.R.K.: A Recovery Kit

Created to assist small-museum disaster recovery efforts, the A.R.K. contains materials to lead museum staff through the first 24 hours of a disaster. Applicable to any disaster, the kit includes six laminated position description cards (with resource lists and phone numbers that each position needs to do the job), recovery priority cards and other materials - all packaged in a waterproof envelope, to be kept in the cars of up to three staff

or volunteers for immediate accessibility. Each kit costs \$30.

Site visits

NSCC staff will come to your museum for consultation in such areas as emergency preparedness, collections care planning or general conservation. In an emergency preparedness workshop, they will work with you to assess your collections risks, outline first-response steps, prepare an emergency plan and guide a practice drill.

To order materials, schedule a consultation or inquire about other services, write NSCC, P.O. Box 8081, St. Paul, MN 55108; phone 612-378-9379; or fax 612-378-2319. A full description of services can be found on the NSCC web site, www.collectioncare.org.



Northern States Conservation Center

With the threat of spring floods high this year, emergency preparedness workshops offered by the Northern States Conservation Center can help museums prepare for disaster. Here, staff from the Siouxland Heritage Museum in Sioux Falls, S.D., remove "collections material" from a tub of water in a simulated flood recovery operation.

Minnesota Historical Society online resources

There's a wealth of information about disaster recovery available on the Minnesota Historical Society's web site, www.mnhs.org. Click on Preserving Our Past and you'll find:

- "Thinking About the Unthinkable: A Disaster Plan for Historic Properties in Minnesota." Developed in 1999, this plan outlines steps to take before, during and after a disaster. It offers guidance in assessing damage caused by flood, fire, wind, snow and ice and includes such practical tools as damage prevention and assessment checklists, a list of state contacts and helpful web sites and publications. Go to www.mnhs.org/

[preserve/shpo/disaster/disaster.html](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/shpo/disaster/disaster.html).

- The Society's Conservation Department offers tips and resources for saving and restoring damaged items. At www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/ you'll find advice on restoring personal belongings, historic buildings and government records damaged in natural disasters. There's a list of emergency supplies to keep on hand and vendors who supply them. And you'll be directed to e-mail addresses of Society staff who can answer questions.

Emergency response regional workshops

This year across the country, five museums will host regional workshops on emergency response. Based on a curriculum developed by the National Task Force on Emergency Response, the workshops are designed to build a national network of individuals and organizations that can respond to a regional disaster within 48 hours.

Teams of trained responders will include conservators, registrars, collections care managers, archivists, archaeologists, state historic preservation officers and staff, curators, librarians and historic preservation architects, as well as professional emergency responders.

The workshops, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, are sponsored by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (FAIC). The Midwest Region workshop will be held Sept. 6-8 at the Truman Library in Independence, Mo.; the application deadline is July 1. Fifteen participants will be chosen. For more information, call 202-452-9545 or e-mail info@aic-faic.org.

State, federal grants fund collections care projects

Historical societies in Renville and Washington counties are taking spring cleaning to new lengths this year. Both societies have put to good use grant monies for large-scale collections care projects.

After decades of trying to manage stacks of uncatalogued photographs, the Renville County Historical Society can now access its photo collection with ease. A state grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society helped the county society purchase archival supplies to protect the photographs and new cabinets in which to store them. In the process of inventorying the collection, staff and volunteers catalogued the pictures, sorted them by size and filed

them by subject or family name. The result: photographs are easier to access for exhibits and more readily available for research by the public.

Last fall the Washington County Historical Society received a National Endowment for the Humanities award for preservation assistance. WCHS will use its first-ever federal grant to purchase archival supplies such as Mylar sleeves and archival boxes for its collections of clothing, quilts, photographs, books, maps, letters, diaries and other artifacts. Most collections have been stored in the society's Warden's House Museum in Stillwater. The collections will soon

Washington County Historical Society



Celebrating the Washington County Historical Society's first-ever NEH grant are (from left) volunteer Arlene Fults, U.S. Rep. Bill Luther, research and library manager Brent Peterson, and board members Jill Greenhalgh and Hank Sampson.

be moved to new climate-controlled storage in the upgraded Carriage House on the museum grounds.

For more information, call the Renville County Historical Society at 507-697-6147 or the Washington County Historical Society at 651-439-5956.

Group forms to preserve Arlington history

Fire hall is first project

Two years ago the city of Arlington in Sibley County undertook a self-study to spur community development. One of the study's recommendations: the preservation and restoration of historical buildings. There was no organization to assume such a responsibility, so the mayor appointed several interested citizens to a preservation committee. Out of that committee grew the fledgling Arlington Historical Society.

The group's first project will be restoration of the city's 1890 fire hall. A mixed-use building from the beginning, the structure originally housed not only the fire department

but city offices and community meeting rooms as well. Over the years the Romanesque brick building suffered unkind alterations, including removal of its bell tower and changes to its street-level façade. Plans call for restoration of the building's exterior to its 1890 appearance.

Fundraising is underway and work on the building will begin later this year; it is expected to take two or three years. For more information contact Dwight Grabitske, a local historian and member of the Arlington Historical Society, at 204 Shamrock Drive, Arlington, MN 55307.



The Arlington fire hall will be restored to its original appearance, as illustrated in the Sibley County Enterprise in the early 1890s.

A room of their own

Grove City society gains exhibit space

For the first time in its 12-year history, the Grove City Area Historical Society in Meeker County has an exhibit space to call its own. Last fall the group settled into its new room in the city's former public school building, now a community center and senior housing complex. There

the society plans to develop changing exhibits on such topics of local interest as country schools and the U.S./Dakota Conflict. Photographs from its growing collection are featured and there is a genealogy corner where residents can research their families' history in the area.

With a computer donated from the city, society volunteers hope eventually to computerize genealogical files and collections records. For more information call director Dorothy Lindstrom, 320-857-2461.

The making of a musical *continued from page 1*

spoke. "My name is Earl Tracy. Maybe you've heard of me."

I wondered how I would react to hearing the names of so many familiar people and places, spoken by actors who likely had never been to Minnesota. But as the play progressed, I saw how they had done what all good actors do - they became their characters, making it seem as if a small part of Minnesota had been transported to southeastern Texas.

The playbill featured Gust Akerlund's trademark photo of Tracy. [Akerlund ran a portraiture business in Cokato from 1902 to 1950; his photography studio, now a National Register site, is an integral part of the Cokato Historical Museum.] The stage sets were familiar, too - Akerlund's studio skylight, a detail of the Tracy house, the park gazebo. Above the stage hung a large screen projecting images from Cokato's past. To see a headline from the Minneapolis Star about Cokato's "Miracle Man," or to gaze into the eyes of the men and women whose names we read in the program made the audience understand the real stories behind the characters.

But the most enjoyable aspect of the play was the music - all original

songs written by Marianne Kreitlow. Many songs spoke of the feelings of townspeople about their notorious neighbor. "Take a Jump" shed light on Tracy's penchant for making passes at local ladies, as one character tells him to "take a jump in the lake, mister." "Take Our Pain Away" revealed how so many believed in Tracy's powers to heal. The most memorable song, simply titled "Earl Tracy," provided bookends for the production. Sung at the beginning, it introduced us to the man. Reprised for the finale, it brought the cast together to sing, "Everything you've heard is true. I see with an inner light. Spirit tells me what to do - I can help you."

Many of the cast members worked hard to achieve the proper accents for their characters, from a Swedish brogue to flat Midwestern vowels. They fared better than this guest from Minnesota, who was asked by the Texas car rental agent, "What country are you from?"

Knowing beforehand that this production was essentially a work of fiction, I had checked my museum director's credentials at the door. But after the play was over, after all the hugs were shared and photos taken, I was struck by how the cast and crew



Cokato Historical Museum

Cokato Historical Museum director Mike Worcester (left) meets "Earl Tracy" (actor Brian Hamlin) backstage on opening night.

had come to appreciate the people they were portraying. Several young actors quizzed me about what the men and women they played "were really like."

I came home with wonderful memories and a videotape of the play to show to local audiences. I have great hopes that this show will live on. It has been entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. If it advances past the regional competition, it will be performed as part of the national festival at the Kennedy Center for the Arts in Washington, D.C.

This column was adapted from a longer article in the December 2000 issue of IN THE MIDST OF, the newsletter of the Cokato Historical Society. For the full article, visit the museum's web site, www.cokato.mn.us/chms/ and click on "Special Features."

Ramsey House to host AASLH workshop on historic house museums

On June 21-23, 2001, the Alexander Ramsey House in St. Paul will host a workshop, "Historic House Museum Issues and Operations," sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). The workshop is designed for first-time directors, new and mid-career professionals and volunteers involved in historic house museums.

Participants will explore management issues, learn to translate research into interpretive themes and try their hands at designing a house tour. Other topics include marketing, earned income, membership

programs, volunteers, and care of buildings and landscapes.

Registration deadline: May 21. A \$250 fee includes two and one-half days of seminars, two lunches and a notebook of curriculum materials. For more information or to request a workshop brochure, call 615-320-3203 or e-mail history@aaslh.org. Workshop information, agendas and a registration form also appear on the AASLH web site at www.aaslh.org.

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And to make sure that we get all your news, take a moment to check your own newsletter mailing lists. Any mail addressed to retired MHS field services coordinator David Nystuen should now come to Interpreter Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

Thanks for helping us stay in touch!

Minnesota History Interpreter

is published nine times a year by the Historic Preservation, Field Services and Grants Department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Readers are invited to submit information for publication. To be considered, items must reach the editor by the first of the month, two months before publication (example: deadline for March issue is Jan. 1). Send to Interpreter Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906. Phone: 612-729-4729; e-mail nordreeves@earthlink.net.

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