



MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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Technical leaflets available online or by mail

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Cottonwood County Historical Society



An artist's perspective shows what the entrance to the Cottonwood County Historical Society's new exhibit gallery will look like.

Starting from scratch

Cottonwood County readies new exhibit hall

Imagine the thrill of having a whole new exhibit space to fill. Imagine the challenge.

It's both exhilarating and daunting, says Linda Fransen, director of the Cottonwood County Historical Society, who faces just that challenge. In 1998 the county approved construction of an addition to the society's 1970s facility in Windom that would double the building's size. The addition was to house a new exhibit hall as well as an art gallery funded by a private donor. When Fransen came aboard as director that fall, she found more than 3,000 square feet of open space waiting to be filled.

"The big question was where to begin," she recalled. Fransen canvassed her board, society members and museum visitors, whose input helped identify the major themes that would tell the county's story. Then she hired researchers to study the society's archives and photograph and artifact collections. From that research they developed story lines for the new exhibits, letting the final choice of themes be shaped by the strengths of the collections.

"After deciding what we wanted to cover came the question of how to

New exhibit hall continued on page 2

Update on state grants-in-aid program

The January-February issue of the *Interpreter* contained information about the state's anticipated revenue shortfall – then estimated at nearly \$2 billion – and the effect it might have on the Minnesota Historical Society's grants-in-aid program. Due to the uncertainty of the state budget situation, the Society decided in late January to cancel the winter grants cycle.

Since then, the Minnesota Legislature passed a revised budget. However, new revenue projections in late February indicated an even larger shortfall. As this issue went to press in early March, there had been some progress on balancing the state budget but final action had not been taken on the Society's budget.

"We are participating in legislative hearings and taking all opportunities to discuss our work with the governor and state agencies," said Tim Glines, manager of the Society's outreach services, "so that final decisions can be made with full understanding of the effect the proposed cuts would have

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New exhibit hall *continued from page 1*

divide the space,” said Fransen. “We hired an exhibits designer to help us fit the themes into the gallery. Our goal was flexibility – exhibits that had some permanency but that also could accommodate change as new artifacts come into the collections.”

During the planning process, Fransen found herself juggling divergent interests. “There are two kinds of museum visitors,” she observed. “The lookers just want to see your stuff. The readers want to know more about the artifacts and the community’s history. We’ll try to satisfy both.”

So the new exhibit hall will house historical vignettes from the old museum, reconfigured to fit the new spaces. But the addition of reading rails with flip books will put the artifacts and vignettes into a broader context. “The old exhibits were short on interpretive history,” said Fransen. “The new exhibits will reflect more recent scholarship and address current museum concerns such as conservation.”

All of this has taken time – more time than anyone imaged nearly four years ago. How has Fransen kept the public interested in the county society while the exhibits are closed? “The

Remick Gallery has been a life-saver,” she said. “We put on three shows a year that showcase local artists. It keeps people coming here. And to build anticipation, we try to involve people whenever we can in the development of the new exhibits, from proofreading to sewing curtains to wielding hammers. While we were working on the Norwegian dwelling display last spring, we issued invitations to watch the craftsman hew the logs. He was a big hit.”

Phase one – roughly a third of the exhibit space – will open this summer. Phase two, now in development with the help of a Minnesota Historical Society grant for



A craftsman hews logs for the museum’s Norwegian dwelling, one of several vignettes that will depict aspects of Cottonwood County history.



researching and writing more exhibit story lines, will be completed in stages over the next few years. “It’s hard to devote all my time to the exhibits and still run the society,” said Fransen. “It’s even more challenging to try to reconcile our budget limitations with our vision.

But it’s also a wonderful opportunity to have a hand in creating and realizing that vision.”

For updates on the museum’s timetable for completion, call Fransen at 507-831-1134.

Update *continued from page 1*

throughout the state. The Society remains hopeful about the fall grants cycle but it may be some time before we know how much money would be available to award.”

Depending on the final budget resolution, any remaining or restored grant funds would be available in the fall. The schedule for the fall grants

cycle is:

- Pre-application deadline: July 26.
- Application deadline: Aug. 30.
- Grants Review Committee meets Oct. 3.

Updated information will be posed on the Society’s web site at www.mnhs.org/about/grants/index.html. Please address questions

to Tim Glines (651/296-5460; timothy.glines@mnhs.org) or grants/field programs assistant David Grabitske (651-296-4416; david.grabitske@mnhs.org). General information about the Society’s overall budget situation can be found at www.mnhs.org/about/legis.

Ten lessons about museum renewal

Five years ago the Valentine Museum in Richmond, Va., weathered what director William J. Martin called “institutional trauma.” A period of rapid expansion had led to the museum’s near collapse in the face of unsettling change.

Gradually, the 258-year-old history museum fought its way back to organizational health. As the Valentine underwent a process of renewal, Martin said, dedicated trustees were critical to turning the museum around and setting a positive course for the future.

Crisis often yields valuable insights. And so Martin offers 10 lessons that the Valentine’s board and staff learned about boards, board-staff dynamics and museum-community relations in times of turmoil.

1. Articulate a clear mission for the museum.

The board, with the director, must express a clear sense of purpose. Otherwise, it is difficult for trustees to feel positive about their service.

2. Create a sustainable vision for the future.

In addition to a clear mission, the museum must have a vision that makes economic sense and that will help create an exciting venue for the public.

3. Structure the organization for growth.

Both board and staff should be capable of moving the organization forward.

4. Be sure that public relations meet reality.

If the museum’s public face is positive, the atmosphere inside the organization should match. New trustees joining the board don’t want to be surprised by what they find.

5. Broaden the board’s decision-making process.

Clearly define all committee roles and limit the executive committee’s power so that no trustee feels like an outsider.

6. Maintain frequent, honest, relevant and lively communication between the board and the director and staff.

The open discussion of problems signals a healthy organization. Be cautious about letting “dysfunctional politeness” overtake board meetings. The most valuable board member is often the one who asks the

difficult questions. Boards should demand believable financial information and real attendance numbers. They should also address conflict-of-interest issues regularly and directly.

7. Be sensitive to employee morale.

When the board-director relationship is “out of sync,” there is likely to be staff turnover.

8. Listen to voices from outside the museum.

Don’t hesitate to call on professional colleagues in the community. They can bring an objective voice to the table to discuss problems and explore solutions.

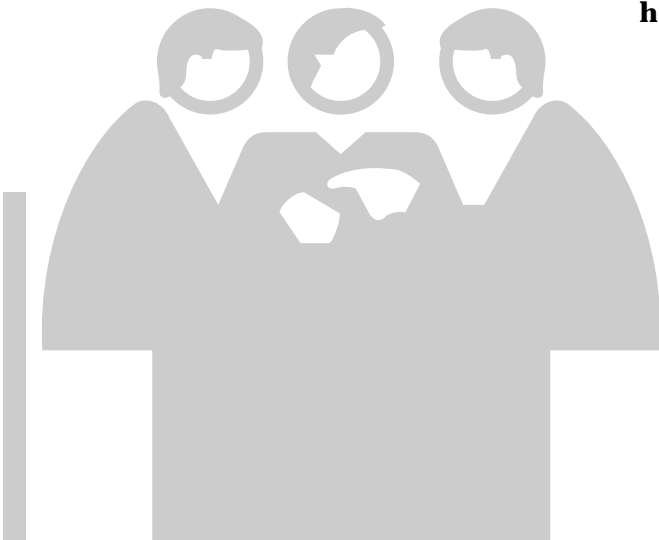
9. Acknowledge the emotional costs of change.

With each change in board membership, ease the transition by ensuring that departing members are treated as well as arriving ones.

10. Remember to laugh.

Board service is serious business. But strive to make it an enjoyable experience. If trustees don’t enjoy being with one another, it will be difficult to attract new people to the board.

Adapted with permission from Museum Trusteeship, a quarterly publication of the Museum Trustee Association, Winter 2001. For more information, write the MTA, 2025 M Street NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20036-3309; call 202-367-1180; or go to www.mta-hq.org.



'St. Peter Then and Now'

Student exhibits spotlight local buildings

It's a hands-on experience for students taking Mike Bidelman's 11th-grade history class at St. Peter High School. First, they learn about primary sources by doing research in the collections of the Nicollet County Historical Society. Their charge: to select a local historic building and dig up as much information about it as they can. Then they turn their research into a photo exhibit at the Treaty Site History Center, creating and installing the exhibit themselves. The opening finds the students stationed by their displays, sharing what they've learned with museum visitors.

The program, "St. Peter Then and

Now," benefits the county society as well as the students. Their research findings are added to the society's archives. And the exhibits, which change twice a year, have proven popular with the public.

Funded by a five-year grant from the St. Peter Education Foundation that covers exhibit materials and photo reproductions, the program is now in its third year. NCHS executive director Mark Morrison hopes it can be extended. "Their teacher has discovered that the students'



Nicollet County Historical Society

A St. Peter High School student shows the results of her research on the history and architecture of several downtown buildings.

newfound research skills translate into better-quality work on other projects, too" he said. For more information call Morrison at 507-934-2160.

Pope County society hosts world premiere

Local playwrights draw on family history

Last winter a new play by local family historians Llewellyn "Lew" Linde and his son Kenneth premiered at the Pope County Historical Society in Glenwood. The play, "Joanne Westfield" – a story of adoption reform in the 1970s – was drawn from the Lindes' family history book, *Linde Narrative*. Capacity crowds packed both performances.

With his degree in theater design, society administrator Merlin Peterson felt right at home as the play's producer. "It was a real community effort," he said. "Funding came from the Lake Region Arts Council, and we cast entirely from the local area. Lew generously donated copies of the book for the county society to sell, with proceeds going to our capital fund."

This wasn't the Pope County society's first foray into theater. Another local playwright, Kathy Ray, wrote a series of sketches under the collective title "Women through the Ages," which were preformed in the exhibit galleries. Her company, *Playing on Purpose*, specializes in original plays on social issues. For details about all of these theatrical ventures, call Peterson at 320-634-3293.



Pope County Historical Society

Cast and crew join playwrights Kenneth and Lew Linde (fourth and fifth from left) after the final performance of "Joanne Westfield" at the Pope County Historical Society.

Historic church finds new life after restoration

Concerts, lamplight services and weddings once again fill Ness Church in Litchfield after restoration of the building's interior to the 1920s period. But the church's history goes back much further, to its construction in 1874. Hand-hewn logs from the original foundation are still visible in the basement, an 1875 baptismal font holds a prominent place in the sanctuary, and an 1898 painting by Sarah Ragland graces the alter.

Restored with a state grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society augmented by matching funds raised locally, the church is considered the mother church to 30 other congregations in the region, though its own congregation disbanded in 1968. A volunteer group, the Ness Church Preservation Foundation, oversaw the restoration project – a three-year process that restored the

exterior as well. “Ness Church stands as a testimony to the dedication of this small group of preservationists,” said Charles Nelson, the Society's historical architect.

The church is now open every Wednesday afternoon from June through August and for its annual Pioneer Festival in

October. A rededication ceremony is scheduled for Aug. 25. For more information call foundation president Yvonne Hargens, 952-401-0928.



Ness Church Preservation Foundation

Restoration of the Ness Church interior included installation of pressed-tin walls and ceiling.

Partners in history

Kanabec County Timeline program reaches a generation of students

For 19 years the children of Kanabec County have trooped to the Kanabec History Center for their annual lesson in local history. And for



Timeline instructor Patty Johnson supervises as fourth-graders try their hand with a crosscut saw during a lesson on logging at the Kanabec History Center.

19 years they've been greeted by instructor Patty Johnson, coordinator of the center's Timeline program for students in grades K-6.

Each year Johnson schedules hundreds of students for a history program related to their social studies curriculum. In a lesson titled “Life on the Farm,” for example, second-graders examine wooden and iron tools to learn how farmers had to be jacks-of-all-trades. During “The World in Kanabec County,” fifth-graders study immigration and, in the process, learn about the museum's role as chronicler of changing customs and family histories. In “Making History Today,”

sixth-graders learn how to “read” photographs as a prelude to understanding photography as historical documentation.

Timeline is offered by the Kanabec History Center to school districts throughout the county. The program is funded in part through Mora Community Education and the Mora and Ogilvie school districts. For more information on the program, call Sharon Vogt or Janet Franz, co-directors of the history center, at 320-679-1665.

Technical leaflets available online or by mail

A useful source of technical assistance for those on a small budget is the Field Services Alliance's online listing of technical leaflets from FSA member organizations. You'll find it at www.aaslh.org/FSA/fsaleaflets.html.

Some organizations, such as the American Association of Museums, offer the full text of their leaflets online. Among the AAM's half-dozen titles are "Writing a Collections Management Policy," which outlines issues to address

and points to cover in such a policy, along with referral to other publications on the subject and organizations that may be able to offer assistance. Full-text leaflets also include Minnesota Historical Society Tech Talk articles.

Other FSA organizations list only titles online, with instructions on how to order. Some leaflets are free of charge, others modestly priced. All offer practical advice on a wide range of topics for history

organization operations.

The Alliance is a loosely organized group of individuals who provide training opportunities, guidance and technical services to local historical societies, archives, libraries and museums in their respective regions. They meet once a year at the AASLH annual meeting to share information and promote scholarship among those offering educational services to history organizations.

Directory of North American historical organizations updated

The Directory of Historical Organizations in the United States and Canada, a comprehensive listing of historical agencies, museums, programs and other historical organizations, has been revised and expanded for publication of its 15th

edition. It is the first new edition in 10 years. Published by AltaMira Press and sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and the History Channel, the directory is available for \$129.95 through the AASLH (www.aaslh.org)

or from AltaMira Press (15200 NBN Way, P.O. Box 191, Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17214; phone 1-800-462-6420; e-mail www.altamirapress.com).

Each of the more than 10,000 entries includes full contact information as well as general information on the organization's mission, collections and interpretive themes, staff, membership and more. Fully indexed and cross-referenced, the directory also contains sections for the National Archives and Records Administration, state history agencies and university public history programs. Long considered the standard resource for anyone interested in state and local history, the directory was first published by the AASLH in 1936.

Book uncovers roots of heritage tourism

Tapping regional pride to spur tourism – it's an idea as old as the hills. A new book from the Smithsonian Institution Press looks back to the 19th century to explore the impact of tourism on the formation of a 20th-century American identity. *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880–1940*, by Marguerite S. Shaffer, offers the first comprehensive chronicle of the birth of modern American tourism.

To order the book (\$55 cloth, \$18.95 paper), write the Smithsonian Institution Press, P.O. Box 960, Herndon, VA 20172-0960, or call 1-800-782-4612. There is a \$3.50 postage and handling fee.



Smithsonian Institution Press

Correction

Instructions in the March *Interpreter* for subscribing to the Minnesota Local History Listserv were formatted incorrectly. To subscribe, send an e-mail with "subscribe minnesota-local-history-listserv" as the sole text to Majordomo@state.mn.us.

Conservation workshops cover the basics

Minnesota Historical Society chief conservator Bob Herskovitz continues his popular workshop series, part of the Society's conservation outreach program. All workshops are free and open to the public.

Preserving Your Family Treasures

Using items that participants bring in, Herskovitz offers tips on how to preserve, store and display books, textiles, photographs, wood and metal objects and more.

May 7, LeSueur

LeSueur City Historical Society, 1:30 p.m. Co-sponsors: LCHS and Land O'Lakes Foundation. For details call 507-665-2087.

May 8, Morton

Renville County Historical Society, 2 p.m. Co-sponsors RCHS and Land O'Lakes Foundation. For details call 507-697-6147.

May 9, Red Wing

Goodhue County Historical Society, 7 p.m. Co-sponsors: GCHS and Land O'Lakes Foundation. For details call 612-388-6024.

May 20, Park Rapids

Hubbard County Historical Society, 7 p.m. Co-sponsors: HCHS and George W. Neilson Foundation. For details call 218-732-5237.

May 23, Hibbing

Hibbing Historical Society, 7 p.m. Co-sponsor: HHS. For details call 218-263-8522.

Make It Last! Tips for Artists

Herskovitz advises artists on how their selection of materials, techniques and processes will affect the longevity of their artwork.

May 22, New York Mills

New York Mills Regional Cultural Center, 7 p.m. Co-sponsors: NYMRCC

and George W. Neilson Foundation. For details call 218-385-3339.

First notice

Statewide preservation conference Sept. 12-13

Plans are underway for the 23rd Annual Statewide Historic Preservation Conference, scheduled for Sept. 12-13 on the campus of West Hills, the former State School for Neglected and Dependent Children, in Owatonna. This year's theme: finding new uses for Minnesota's historic state institutions. See page 4 of the enclosed *Minnesota Preservation Planner* for more information.

Teaching local history through 'time travel'

Celebrated Swedish team to give workshop

In May the American Swedish Institute will host a workshop presented by staff of the renowned Alla Tiders Historia (ATH) program from Sweden's Kalmar County Museum. Led by program founder Ebbe Westergren, a team of educators, historians and archaeologists will discuss their award-winning outreach program for students ages 5 to 25, which teaches local history through site-specific "time travels."

Back in Sweden, ATH staff collaborate with local historical societies to research the inhabitants and environs of a historic site near each participating school, then train

the school's teachers in preparatory workshops. On program day, students come to the site, don period clothing, receive new names, then begin their time-travel adventure. Accompanied by ATH staff and adults from the community who have assumed identities of real people from the past, students spend the day at work and play, adopting the ways of their new time and place.

When: Monday, May 6, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Where: American Swedish Institute, Minneapolis.

Who should attend: Museum program developers and interpreters, docents, guides and performing artists.

Cost: \$15 per person.

To register: Mail your name, phone number and check (payable to ASI) to ATH Conference, ASI, 2600 Park Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55407. To pay by VISA or Mastercard, call 612-871-4907.

For more information, call Nina Clark at 612-870-3374. For directions to the American Swedish Institute, go to www.americanswedishinst.org or call 612-871-4907.

Farmamerica to host barn workshop

The third annual Minnesota Barn Preservation Workshop will be held Saturday, April 20, at Farmamerica near Waseca. Intended for barn owners and enthusiasts, agricultural historians and preservationists, this one-day workshop focuses on technical issues encountered while adapting and rehabilitating old and historic barns.

Speakers include:

- **Dexter Johnson**, an agricultural engineer from North Dakota State University, who will provide practical information on adapting old farm buildings to modern farming practices.
- **Mike Woodford**, a barn restoration contractor based in New York, whose company repairs foundations, replaces rotted timbers,

straightens structural frames and restores roofing and siding on more than 300 barns each year.

In two case studies, historians, barn owners, contractors and architects will discuss the adaptive reuse of the Dammon Round Barn in Goodhue County and the restoration of the Olof Swensson barn in Chippewa County.

Following a box lunch, workshop participants will tour Farmamerica, Minnesota's Agricultural Interpretive Center, then travel by bus to historic barns in the area.

Registration is \$35 for Minnesota Historical Society members, \$40 for nonmembers. Registrations must be



The museum-quality restoration of the ca. 1890 Olof Swensson barn in Chippewa County will be featured in a workshop case study.

received by April 10. For more information and to register, call Michele Decker, 651-296-5434.

Sponsored by the State Historic Preservation Office and Farmamerica, with grateful acknowledgment of the generous support of the Horace F. and Esther J. Chamberlain Fund for Historic Preservation for helping to make this event possible.

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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. Send to Interpreter Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

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