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Scott County Historical Society



Home of the Scott County Historical Society, the Stans Historical Museum was built in 1995 with a gift from benefactor Maurice H. Stans.

## Back on track for growth

### Settlement ends dispute over control of Scott County's Stans Museum

Seven years ago the future looked bright at the new Stans Historical Museum in Shakopee. Built through the generosity of Scott County native Maurice H. Stans, the museum would not only tell his story but also serve as the first permanent home of the Scott County Historical Society.

Stans, U.S. Secretary of Commerce under President Richard Nixon, made

a \$1 million gift to the society that included his boyhood home, a garden park and the museum. Three exhibit halls focused on Stans' early years in Shakopee, his careers in business and government service and his extensive travels in Africa.

As the years passed and exhibits remained unchanged, audiences dwindled. Hoping to stimulate

attendance by updating the exhibits, the county society instead found itself at odds with the Stans Foundation over control of the museum. This spring the two parties reached an accord that ended the protracted legal dispute.

#### A win-win agreement

At issue was management of the museum's exhibit space and the Stans artifact collections. As originally designed, exhibits dedicated to Stans' professional and personal life took up two-thirds of the museum's display space. The dispute surfaced when the society announced plans to rotate some Stans artifacts into storage to prevent their deterioration. That change also would have reduced the size of the Stans display. The foundation, fearing it would lose prime display space, contended that its contract with the society gave it implied control of the artifacts and displays. In a civil lawsuit, the foundation sought permanent control and outright possession of the Stans artifacts and property donated to the society.

A preliminary ruling from a district court judge prompted representatives of the society and the foundation to reach a settlement. According to the agreement, the Scott County Historical Society will have control over the type of displays presented on Stans' life. In addition, display space for interpretation of Scott County history will increase

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## On track *continued from page 1*

from one-third to one-half of the exhibit galleries. The foundation retains its space near the front of the museum. And when more than 10 percent of the Stans exhibits change, the foundation has a 30-day period in which to comment (their opinions are nonbinding).

“Both sides won assurances,” said SCHS director John Gutteter. “The foundation can be confident that the Stans story will continue to be told and that artifacts will be cared for appropriately. And the society can now make changes we feel are necessary to encourage return visits by local residents.”

### Accommodating change

“With any donor gift, it’s important to clarify roles and responsibilities,” said Gutteter. “Donors have high expectations these days; they want to protect their investment. But they don’t necessarily have a background in museum operations. We in the museum community need to educate donors about the long-term implications of any restrictions they want to impose.



In the 1950s Leo Albrecht Sr. (back row, fifth from right) performed with three generations of family members under the Albright Circus banner, a stage name adopted by the family in the 1930s. An exhibit telling their story recently opened at the Scott County Historical Society’s museum for a two-year run.

In our case, the initial contract failed to address specifically how and when exhibits could change. When the exhibits remained static, declining attendance was inevitable.”

Any good long-term exhibit needs to be dynamic enough to draw people back, said Gutteter. “That means changing artifacts and coming up with new interpretations and interactive components. Later this fall we’ll begin making changes that focus on aspects of Stans’ life not explored in the original exhibits.”

### Sure-fire crowd pleaser

Meanwhile, the Scott County Historical Society will concentrate on continuing the growth it started back in 1995 when it moved to its new home. Sure to make attendance figures soar this year is “Laadies and Gentlemen:

The Albright Circus,” the largest exhibit ever mounted by society staff. Opened in June for a two-year run, the

exhibit tells the story of three generations of a Belle Plaine circus family that performed across the country from 1930 to 1968.

Patriarch of the family was Leo Albrecht Sr., an inveterate showman and master of the slack wire, who never forgot the first traveling circus he saw in Scott County when he was 8 years old. Inspired by that 1898 spectacle, Albrecht promptly recruited his brothers and a pet goat to mount their own show under a burlap tent. His last performance in the ring took place 70 years later, surrounded by his sons and their families, who had been raised with the circus in their blood.

Among the family treasures on display at the Stans Historical Museum are costumes made by Albrecht’s wife, photographs of his trained dogs and ponies, and an ornate “coronation” coach he carved in the 1950s to wow the crowds at circus parades. For museum hours call 952-445-0378.

*Articles from the Shakopee Valley News, Jan. 9, 2002, and June 19, 2002, were used in the preparation of this story.*



Displays of artifacts from the life and career of Maurice Stans, unchanged since their creation by an exhibits design firm in 1995, will soon be updated.

Scott County Historical Society photos

# What is historical interpretation?

## Minnesota's historical organizations tackle the question

Historical interpretation is not an easy concept to explain to the uninitiated. But one might argue that its definition is even more elusive for those familiar with the subject.

This spring more than 140 representatives of Minnesota's county and local historical organizations gathered at three field workshops sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society to explore aspects of interpretation. One session focused on the nature and purpose of historical interpretation – the means that history museums use to tell the story of their region.

### Working toward a definition

Guided by a facilitator, workshop participants first shared their personal definitions of historical interpretation. Key words from those responses provided a framework for group discussion.

Most participants agreed that the primary purpose of interpretation in a museum setting is to educate. But few saw that as the sole role of historical interpretation. Among its other purposes, participants identified these: to entertain, to enlighten, to help visitors make connections and to foster respect for others.

### Choosing the right medium

With definitions in hand, participants next created a list of vehicles for historical interpretation, from the printed word to the spoken word, from displays to demonstrations. Ideas included walking tours, exhibits, historical markers, living history, lectures, public programming, brochures, newspaper columns, newsletters, TV, radio and many others. No single medium was

deemed the best. "Choose the vehicle appropriate to your situation," everyone agreed.

### Learning the language

One of the biggest challenges facing historical museums is the language barrier. Not the one facing museum visitors born in other countries. Even for Minnesota natives, learning about the past can be like studying a foreign language, full of unfamiliar words and strange-sounding expressions.

Translating history into a language clearly understood by all visitors is the charge of every good museum interpreter or interpretive text.

### Pooling ideas

At the end of each workshop, participants collectively adopted a definition of historical interpretation based on their discussion.

- In Shakopee the group focused on education theory: *Interpretation is education that provides a sense of*

*connectedness and relevance, recognizing audiences' varied interests, education, experience and learning styles.*

- For the Waseca group, customer satisfaction was key: *Interpretation is customer service. Tapping staff talent and passion, the past can be made meaningful, relevant, enlightening and enjoyable.*
- In Fergus Falls participants favored letting the past speak for itself: *Interpretation is telling an accurate story in a compelling fashion, letting voices from the past be heard.*

Whatever the differences, these definitions reveal a common objective. Each aims to help the museum visitor answer the question, "What does this mean to me?"

For more information on the field workshops, call David Grabitske, field programs assistant, at 651-297-4416 or e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org.

## More definitions of interpretation

Interpretation is an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings and relationships through original objects, firsthand experience and illustrative media, rather than to simply communicate factual information.

*Freeman Tilden, Interpreting Our Heritage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957)*

Interpretation is done by those who translate, decode, explain and describe.

*Allison L. Grinder and E. Sue McCoy, The Good Guide: A Source Book for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides (Scottsdale, Ariz.: Ironwood Press, 1985)*

An interpreter translates material culture and human or natural phenomena to the public in a meaningful, provocative and interesting way.

*Stacy F. Roth, Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998)*

## Putting a legacy to work

### Donor gift creates Brown County history essay contest

After Hildegard "Kitty" Lieb left a gift to the Brown County Historical Society in her will, the board of trustees found several ways to honor her bequest. A portion of the gift was designated for upkeep of the society's museum, housed in the historic New Ulm Post Office building. And as a tribute to her lifelong interest in history, the board created the Kitty Lieb Historical Essay Contest.

Last fall the first call for entries went out. Anyone 16 years of age and over was eligible. Essays, from 1,000 to 5,000 words in length, could be on any aspect of Brown County history.

"We got 14 entries, mostly from working adults," said Bob Burgess, BCHS director. "They wrote memoirs, genealogies and research papers on historical personages. The winning entry was from a Brown County deputy sheriff who wrote about the World War II prisoner of war camp in New Ulm." Deputy Leah Willaert, also a



Brown County Historical Society

Leah Willaert, right, took top honors in the first-ever Brown County Historical Society essay contest. She joined other winners at the awards ceremony in April.

graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato, plans a thesis about territorial law enforcement in Brown County. She received a small cash award for her essay and will have her name inscribed on a plaque at the county museum.

Burgess reports that several people are already at work on entries

for next year's contest. "We want to draw more high school students," he said, "so we'll add a teacher to our committee of judges in hopes that will encourage students to enter."

For more information about the project, call Burgess at 507-233-2616 or e-mail [bchs@newulmtel.net](mailto:bchs@newulmtel.net).

## UMCA mentorship program aids collections care

### Olmsted, Wright counties among grant recipients

The Olmsted and Wright County Historical Societies are among five recipients of a 2002 mentorship grant from the Upper Midwest Conservation Association. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the two-year UMCA program helps nonprofit organizations improve their collections care practices.

Undertaking its first-ever, long-range preservation planning, the Olmsted society will work with UMCA field services staff to formulate

the plan and learn about grant opportunities from federal agencies. "Having a plan in place for long-term collections care will let potential funders and donors know we're ready to care for the things entrusted to us," said Beth Butterfield, OCHS development coordinator.

Improved collections storage is the goal of the Wright county society. "We'll consult with UMCA staff on redesigning our storage area and purchasing storage equipment," said

Maureen Galvin, WCHS curator. "This is a huge project so we welcome help with developing it in phases and learning where to seek funding."

Other 2002 mentorship grant recipients are the Ashland Historical Society in Wisconsin, the Hibbing Public Library and the Runestone Museum in Alexandria. For more information on the program call Neil Cockerline, UMCA's field services director, at 612-870-3120 or e-mail [UMCA@aol.com](mailto:UMCA@aol.com).

## A depot with a difference

### Lake Hubert group restores historic open-air station

From 1918 to the 1960s, tourists bound by train for resorts north of Brainerd debarked at a small, open-sided depot near present-day Lake Hubert. Then the trains stopped coming and the depot fell into disrepair. Today, thanks to the efforts of the Lake Hubert Conservation Association, the shelter stands, newly restored, as one of the few surviving open-air railway stations in the country.

Work to save the depot began in 1968 when it was moved 100 yards to its current site. A few years later the local conservation association took over responsibility for the building. In 2001, when deterioration threatened the shelter, the association launched a fundraising campaign to make repairs. Private donations and a state grant-in-

aid from the Minnesota Historical Society helped finance a new roof, structural repairs and a fresh coat of paint.

Rededicated in July, the depot remains popular with area tourists, particularly bikers on the nearby Paul Bunyan Trail. The Lake Hubert Conservation Association hopes eventually to open it as a museum.



Lake Hubert Conservation Association

The Minnesota and International Railroad Freight House and Shelter Shed, built in 1918, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## Painting the past



Cokato Historical Society

Thanks to the steady hand and considerable talent of Hutchinson artist Lance Albers, the Cokato Historical Society has a new mural in its exhibit gallery. Depicting scenes of the countryside along the railroad tracks leading to town, the mural provides a transition between the "farm life" and "town life" portions of the exhibit.

This is the second time Albers' art has graced the museum walls. In 1997 he spent six months creating a 52-foot mural that covers an exterior wall with images of the town taken from the society's photo collection. Albers' work was funded by grants from a private foundation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. For more information call 320-286-2427.

## Sharing quarters

When word went out earlier this year that the Mora Area Chamber of Commerce needed a new home, staff at the Kanabec History Center made room. Now the two organizations share office and meeting space in an arrangement that benefits both.

"Having the chamber of commerce at the history center brought in members of the business community who hadn't been here before," said co-director Sharon Vogt. "Now they use our meeting rooms and see our exhibits at the same time."

Sharing quarters also makes it easier to plan community events. In May the history center and the chamber of commerce cosponsored the first annual Kanabec Heritage Days.

## New from the Minnesota Historical Society

Three new tools offered by the Minnesota Historical Society, all accessible online, offer assistance with conservation, oral history and photo research projects.

### Conservation lending library

The Society operates a lending library of conservation-related books, articles and videotapes that are available for loan without charge to Minnesota's cultural institutions. For a list of items, see [www.mnhs.org/preserve/treasures/lending.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/treasures/lending.pdf). For more information call chief conservator Bob Herskovitz at 651-297-3896 or e-mail [bob.herskovitz@mnhs.org](mailto:bob.herskovitz@mnhs.org).

### Oral history guides

New from the Society's oral history office are two helpful guides that highlight some best practices to consider when undertaking an oral history project. They are available on the Society's web site as pdf files. To download "Oral History Project Guidelines," go to [www.mnhs.org/library/collections/oralhistory/ohguidelines.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/library/collections/oralhistory/ohguidelines.pdf). For "Transcribing, Editing and Processing Guidelines," see [www.mnhs.org/library/collections/oralhistory/ohtranscribing.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/library/collections/oralhistory/ohtranscribing.pdf).

### Visual resources database

The Society's visual resources database has recently been redesigned

and upgraded with improved search capabilities. Users can now click on "What's New" to find images added to the database in the previous month. There are also new links to photograph collections, information about preserving your own photographs and a rotating "Features Search" section. See <http://collections.mnhs.org/visualresources>.

## NEH offers public programs grants

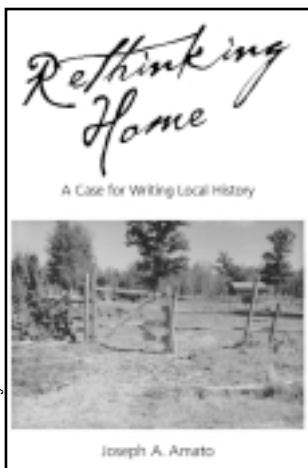
The National Endowment for the Humanities offers two grants for museums and historical organizations to develop public programs in the humanities. Those in the early stages of project development may apply for a consultation grant to work with humanities scholars who will help define key humanities themes and shape project goals.

Public program grants support activities such as exhibits, reading and film discussion series, lectures and symposia that provide opportunities to explore the humanities.

Application deadlines: Sept. 16, 2002, for consultation grants and the planning phase of public program grants; Feb. 3, 2003, for the implementation phase of public program grants. For information about eligibility, grant preparation and the review process, see [www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pubconsult.html](http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pubconsult.html).

## Local history as food for thought

### New book explores our sense of place



When European cultural historian Joseph A. Amato arrived at Southwest State University in Marshall, he didn't plan to stay long.

Slowly, through his work as professor of rural and regional studies, he became rooted in the place. Now his 25 years of study and reflection on local history have culminated in publication of a new book,

### *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History.*

Using southwestern Minnesota as a backdrop for his musings on the meaning of home, Amato demonstrates how exploring the uniqueness of one place helps us understand it as part of a larger, everchanging whole. Says Richard O. Davies in his foreword, Amato "offers fresh perspectives, themes and approaches for energizing local history." Plumbing topics from the environment to the clandestine, this is an engaging, unsentimental portrait of the place.

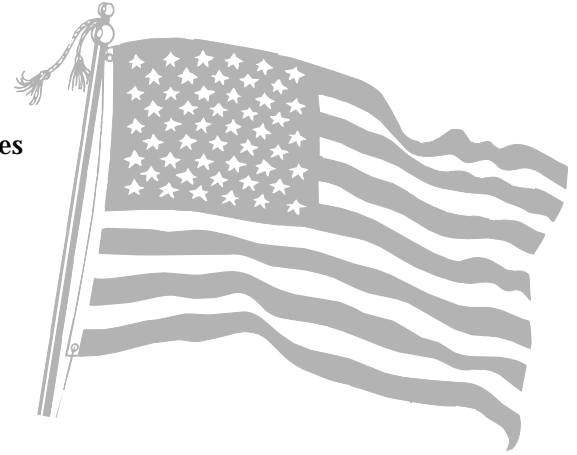
Published by the University of California Press, *Rethinking Home* (261 pages, 3 maps, \$48 cloth, \$18.95 paper) is available at local bookstores.

## Veterans History Project seeks local partners

The Veterans History Project, an activity of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, is working to preserve the stories of veterans of World War I, World War II, and the Korean, Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars. In addition to audio- and videotaped oral histories, the project will collect documents such as letters, diaries, maps, photographs and home movies of war veterans and those who served in support of them. At the

conclusion of the project, the Library of Congress will create a catalog of all materials collected.

Museums and historical societies are invited to start their own local projects. Groups also can become official partners of the Veterans History Project, which will furnish interviewing guidelines and instructional materials. For more information see [www.loc.gov/folklife/vets](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets).



## Governor's vetoes cut capital grants for historic preservation

### Limited funds remain for fall cycle

citing concerns about the size of the Minnesota Legislature's bonding bill, Gov. Jesse Ventura late in the 2002 session vetoed nearly \$400 million in capital projects. Among the cuts was \$300,000 for matching grants to support historic preservation projects, a capital grant program administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Despite this disappointing news, the Society plans to proceed with a fall grants cycle for both the capital projects and state grants-in-aid programs. A relatively small amount of money (approximately \$50,000) in unspent or returned capital project funds remains from the previous grant round. The state grants-in-aid program is unchanged since previously announced budget cuts; for a detailed description of the program, see the State Grant-in-Aid Manual, available from the grants office or online at [www.mnhs.org/about/grants/stgrants](http://www.mnhs.org/about/grants/stgrants).

#### Grant deadlines

Applications for both state grants-in-aid and capital project grants will be reviewed during the fall cycle (capital grant applicants must have submitted a pre-application in July). Dates to remember:

- Aug. 30:** Grant application due by 4:30 p.m.  
**Oct. 3:** Grants Review Committee meets.

For more information call David Grabitske at 651-297-4416.

## MAP grants switch to one deadline a year

Effective immediately, there will be only one deadline per year for Museum Assessment Program (MAP) grants. Applications for the grants, awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, are due Dec. 1, 2002.

Organizations may apply for an assessment in one of four areas: 1) institutional assessments take an overview of museum operations; 2) collections management assessments focus on policies, planning and collections care; 3) public dimension assessments address how a museum

communicates with its audience and community; 4) governance assessments study a museum's leadership and governing structure.

The program is managed by the American Association of Museums and funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Candidates must complete both AAM and IMLS applications to receive a MAP grant. For eligibility information and application forms, see <http://aam-us.org/map.htm>, call MAP at 202-289-9118, or e-mail [map@aam-us.org](mailto:map@aam-us.org).

## Last notice

### Statewide preservation conference Sept. 12-13

The former State School for Dependent and Neglected Children in Owatonna will serve as a case study for this year's statewide preservation conference, set for Sept. 12-13 on the school's campus. Charles Nelson, historical architect for the Minnesota Historical Society, will use the site for a field workshop on rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of Minnesota's historic state institutions. Other sessions address topics of interest to local preservation commissions.



Conference attendees will tour the National Farmers' Bank of Owatonna, designed by Louis Sullivan.

For program and registration information, call 651-296-5434.

## Calling all subscribers!

### Minnesota Local History Listserv shortens moniker

Due to software changes, the Minnesota Local History Listserv now has a shorter name — MNLOCALHISTORY. Since it debuted earlier this year (see *Interpreter*, March 2002), the free online weekly digest has become a popular tool for announcing events and sharing resources. But users have yet to tap its full potential as a forum for discussion, notes Tim Glines, the Minnesota Historical Society's manager of outreach services.

It's easy to subscribe. Just send an e-mail to [majordomo@state.mn.us](mailto:majordomo@state.mn.us) with the text SUBSCRIBE mnlocalhistory. To be removed from the list, send the text message UNSUBSCRIBE mnlocalhistory.

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