



# MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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Otter Tail County Historical Society



Some of Otter Tail County's newest residents, including students from Vietnam and Mexico, will soon be able to tour the county museum in their native languages.

## One county, many voices

### Tours on tape reach new audiences

For Melissa Hermes, it was a light-bulb moment.

As education coordinator at the Otter Tail County Historical Society, Hermes had been looking for ways to make museum visits more meaningful for the growing numbers of schoolchildren in her community with limited English. Now, as she sat in a seminar about diversity in the classroom, an idea took root.

A few months before, she had attended a Minnesota Historical Organizations workshop on how to make museums accessible to people with disabilities. One of the

suggestions: tape-record museum tours for visually impaired visitors. Why not use that strategy for people facing language barriers, Hermes thought. She shared the idea with a fellow participant in the diversity seminar - and a grant-winning project was born.

With the help of Yok-Sim Gunaratne of Cultural Diversity Resources in Moorhead, Hermes created "One County, Many Voices," a project to develop taped museum tours in a variety of languages. The primary goal was to serve speakers of languages other than English - both

## Recruiting business members

It's all in how you ask

by David Ebnet,  
Director, Stearns History Museum

Every fall, as part of our annual membership drive for the Stearns History Museum, we recruit new members from the central Minnesota business community. This year we reviewed our business member list with a local business leader, who expressed surprise at how many businesses were absent. Why, he wondered, didn't more businesses support the museum, which works to benefit the whole community? We set out to find the answer.

I put the question to a number of people in the business community. One response turned up over and over: "I've never been asked."

To correct this apparent oversight, we devised a three-pronged strategy for membership recruitment that would augment our direct-mail solicitation.

- First, we targeted certain businesses for a personal visit from me. I discussed with each business leader

Recruiting continued on page 2

One county continued on page 4

## Historians in the making

### Kids' programs spark interest

Last fall, from Cloquet to Mankato, schoolchildren were playing the name game. In a pair of history programs designed to pique curiosity, youngsters learned how people and places got their names.

#### Weekend workshops

The Blue Earth County Historical Society's Young Historians Program got off to a lively start in September with a program on place names. The workshop, titled "How Good Thunder Got Its Name," explored the origins of the area's many Indian place names.

Revived from years past, the Young Historians Program began with on-site activities at the museum, to be held quarterly during the school year. Once attendance builds, the staff hopes to incorporate field trips to local sites. Among topics under consideration for future workshops: stone quarrying, voyageurs and author Maude Hart Lovelace, whose Betsy-Tacy books are set in Mankato.

For information on the Young Historians Program, call museum assistant Mary McGrew at 507-345-5566.

#### After-school clubs

Kids enrolled in the Carlton County Historical Society's Times of Your Life Club got a visit in October from "Detective No Name," who helped them track down where family names come from. Under the sleuth's hat was Christine Skalko, the society's museum educator, who masterminded this year's history clubs devoted to genealogy.

For seven weeks of once-a-week, after-school sessions, children at a local elementary school gathered to work on a family tree. Using federal census and county marriage records, they learned the basics of genealogical research. Those without access to their family history made a "life map" of places where they've lived or visited.

The history clubs for grades three to five are part of a larger program of after-school learning activities funded

## Recruiting ...

*continued from page 1*

how financial support from our own community would help us leverage outside funding. Many granting agencies, I explained, require matching funds and evidence of community support.

- Second, we asked our current members to pitch museum membership to the people they do business with. It's common fundraising wisdom that such solicitations are more effective coming from acquaintances and colleagues.
- Third, I spoke to as many community groups as I could about the work of the museum and the benefits of membership. And everywhere I went, I invited community and civic organizations to hold their next meeting at the Stearns History Museum.

The results have been gratifying. We're confident that support from the business community will continue to grow now that we know the secret. Sometimes, all you have to do is ask.

*Questions? Call David Ebnet at 320-253-8424 or e-mail [davide@stearns-museum.org](mailto:davide@stearns-museum.org).*

by a three-year grant to the local school district. For more information on CCHS's involvement, call Skalko at 218-879-1938.

Marlene Wisuri



Museum educator Christine Skalko dons many guises in her work with the Carlton County Historical Society's after-school history club at Cloquet's Churchill School. Sometimes schoolmarm, sometimes sleuth, she introduces students to their community's past.



*East Otter Tail Historical Society*

Weak masonry caused the entrance tower on this historic church to collapse. To restore the building to its original appearance, the tower will be topped with a lighter-weight wooden belfry.

that time WPA stonemasons removed the church steeple and replaced it with a stepped turret built of matching local stone. As a testament to WPA workmanship, the turret survived the collapse intact. Museum officials expect insurance to cover the cost of restoring the tower.

State historical architect Charles Nelson was quick to turn the disaster into a valuable lesson for all owners of historic properties. "This is graphic proof of the need for a total structural evaluation before you begin restoring a building," he said. That's why he and Minnesota's State Historic Preservation Office recommend that property owners commission a historic structure report to assess their building's structural stability and evaluate present and future uses. Having such a report in hand, he added, is always good ammunition for a grant application.

## Repair job triggers collapse And the walls came tumbling down

Have you ever tackled a repair job that turned up bigger problems than you knew you had? Then you'll sympathize with folks at the East Otter Tail Historical Society in Perham.

Last fall they set out to have the masonry repointed on the historic stone church that houses the History Museum of East Otter Tail County. Then disaster struck. Workmen removing loose mortar at the base

discovered that beneath an outer crust, the mortar had turned to sand. Before they could finish the repairs, a corner of the entrance tower collapsed into rubble. As workers rushed to stabilize the structure, the rest of the tower crashed to the ground.

Built in 1887, the Episcopal church had been modified in the 1930s with the addition of a community room and legion hall. At

## Lightning strikes – again Historic post office damaged

For the third time in the last 20 years, the New Ulm Post Office was hit by lightning during an overnight thunderstorm last fall. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the distinctive 1910 German Renaissance building is one of the tallest buildings in town and, it seems, something of a natural lightning rod.

In this storm the historic post office sustained damage to its slate

roof and one of its stepped gables. Pieces of brick and native stone from the gable's peak were retrieved the next day from an adjacent parking lot. Fortunately for the building's current tenant, the Brown County Historical Society, the building had no interior damage. Nor was anyone injured.

As they did after a lightning strike three years ago, museum personnel will work with local artisans to repair



*Minnesota Historical Society*

The New Ulm Post Office in 1995.

the roof and restore the gable to its original appearance. But this time one thing will be different. BCHS officials plan to install a lightning deflection system to prevent future strikes.

## History where it happened

### Photo exhibits tell the story

From coffeehouse to courthouse, historic photos are popping up everywhere in Minneapolis, thanks to an inventive new exhibit program of the Hennepin History Museum.

To share its photo collections with a wider public, curator Jack Kabrud created “You Are Here,” a campaign to connect the city’s present with its past. He paired historic photos of community landmarks with the sites as they are today, then approached property owners about exhibiting the photos. “The response has been very enthusiastic,” says Kabrud.

At each site, passers-by find a “You Are Here” mini-exhibit – a



This 1946 photograph of Seventh and Hennepin in downtown Minneapolis is on display at a restaurant near the intersection.

stanchion containing a historic photo with a brief text about where the viewer is standing and how it has changed over time. On every display is the museum’s signature logo – a blue angel adapted from the weather vane of the 1853 Winslow House, a Minneapolis hotel that once overlooked the Falls of St. Anthony.

The blue angel will serve as a visual cue for the “You Are Here” exhibits. Wherever visitors encounter an angel, they’ll find a history nugget to chew on. So far exhibits have been planned for downtown theaters, office buildings, restaurants, a coffeehouse and the Minneapolis Public Library.

## One county, many voices *continued from page 1*

immigrants to the area and visitors from other countries. But the taped tours could also be used by museum visitors with learning disabilities, poor reading skills or limited vision. The project proposal won a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society.

### Connecting with the community

Hermes prepared a tour script and, guided by demographics of both the county’s population and the museum’s visitorship, selected seven languages for the translated tours: Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Bosnian, Norwegian, Finnish and English. Community liaison Gunaratne found most of the translators. The Norwegian version was supplied by Norwegian seminary students from the nearby Hillcrest Lutheran Academy. Staff from Minnesota State University-Moorhead did the recording and tape duplication.

When the taped tours are inaugurated this spring, visitors can

choose from two kinds of listening devices – headphones for individual use or a hand-held device that enables several people to listen. A wagon-wheel symbol (the county society’s logo) by selected exhibits will tell visitors when to turn on their listening device. Cassettes and scripts of the translations will be given to the Pelican Rapids Library and to ESL and Head Start programs in the Pelican Rapids schools, where teachers planning a trip to the museum can make pre-tour preparations.

### Sound advice

The project has all the makings of a success. That’s not to say, however, that all went smoothly. Hermes has some advice for those tackling similar projects. “Keep the script simple,” she said. “And allow more time than you think you’ll need. Coordinating the wide variety of native speakers was very challenging. Our community liaisons proved invaluable in taking

into account cultural differences and keeping lines of communication open over many months.”

The translations also proved more costly than expected. Project monies ran out before translations could be developed for Otter Tail County’s most recent immigrants from the Sudan and Somalia. And plans to produce a taped tour for Ojibwe speakers fell through when no one could be found to take on the translation. Said a teacher from the Pine Point School, “You need someone who can think in Ojibwe, not just speak it.”

But the benefits of the project promise to far outweigh the challenges. Says Chris Schuelke, director of the Otter Tail County Historical Society, “What better way to help people come to know and understand a community than through its history? We want all our visitors feel at home here.”

# Books, books, books

## Spotlight on Minnesota people and places

Five new books from Minnesota publishers take readers on a journey through times past.

From city to suburb to small town, Minnesota's landscape is ever-changing. Places once cherished have disappeared as neglect, natural disasters or displacement take their toll. Author Jack El-Hai tracks down 89 of Minnesota's now-gone historical properties in *Lost Minnesota: Stories of Vanished Places* (University of Minnesota Press, 203 pp., \$19.95 paper). What better way to help us appreciate - and protect - what remains than this collection of tales about what we've lost. Available at a bookstore near you.

It's the county where 3M began, where the first load of Minnesota iron ore left port, where commercial fishing once abounded. It's Lake County, celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2000 with the

publication of *By Water and Rail: A History of Lake County* by Hugh Bishop (Lake County Historical Society, 200 pp., \$24.95 hardcover, \$19.95 paper). Bishop draws from the Lake County Historical Society's extensive photo collections as well as interviews with longtime residents to tell the story of those who settled this corner of northeastern Minnesota. To order call 1-888-573-5701. For information about the project call Rachele Maloney, LCHS administrator, 218-834-4898.

First published in Finnish in 1935, *History of the Thomson Farming Area* by John A. Mattinen is now available in an English-language edition, thanks to the Carlton County Historical Society. Translated by Richard Impola, the book recounts the history of rural Thomson (Esko) Township, using firsthand accounts that Mattinen collected from early settlers and their descendants. Finnish

businesses and organizations in Cloquet are also discussed. 230 pp., \$15 paper. For ordering information call the CCHS, 218-879-1938.

In the works is the multi-volume *Cuyuna Country: A People's History*, a project of the Cuyuna Country Heritage Preservation

Society. The recently completed Volume I (328 pp., \$29.95 hardcover) is an account of the peoples who lived in the northeastern Crow Wing

County region from 10,000 B.C. to 1900 A.D. CCHPS staff and volunteers are hard at work on Volume II, covering the period 1900-1960, to be released in December 2001. One or two additional volumes are planned. For more information write CCHPS, P.O. Box 68, Ironton, MN 56455.

Back in print after more than a century is W. H. C. Folsom's *Fifty Years in the Northwest*, a guide to the region that would become east-central Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin. In his tome, first published in 1888, Folsom mixes his own experiences and observations with settler biographies and town histories. This new edition (Taylors Falls Historical Society, 764 pp., \$59.95 cloth, \$44.95 paper) includes a facsimile reproduction of the original with a new introduction by historian Helen M. White.

### 'Rural Minnesota Pulse'

#### Blandin report looks at concerns of rural communities

According to a new report from the Blandin Foundation, rural Minnesotans think their communities are not doing enough to address two issues critical to the future well-being of their regions: economic development and the involvement of adolescents in community life. The report, "Rural Minnesota Pulse," is based on a statewide survey of 1,000 rural residents from across the state.

For details visit Blandin's web site at [www.blandinfoundation.org/releases/ruralmnpulse.htm](http://www.blandinfoundation.org/releases/ruralmnpulse.htm).

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Faith Flour Mill, built in 1916, was the last remaining mill in Norman County when it burned down in 1989. It is one of the properties featured in *Lost Minnesota: Stories of Vanished Places*.

## Keeping an eye on Main Street, Minnesota

### Web sites address preservation issues

**M**ain streets often hold the key to understanding a community's history. Their architecture reveals the economic and social changes a place has experienced over time. They are reflections of a community's successes and failures. With the demolition of this history comes the destruction of a community's very foundation. So it is crucial to preserve main street commercial districts, not only in rural areas but in urban and suburban communities as well.

Listed here are web sites for some of the many players in the fields of historic preservation and community development who are concerned about issues affecting main streets in Minnesota and across the country. Think of them as possible partners in your work to preserve your own community's historic resources.

#### **www.mainst.org**

The National Main Street Center, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, seeks to revitalize traditional commercial districts through the partnership of historic preservation and economic development. Main Street Center staff provide educational publications and fee-for-service consultation.

#### **www.ruralheritage.org**

Also part of the National Trust, the Rural Heritage Program works with communities to recognize and protect rural historic and cultural resources. The program focuses on farmland preservation, scenic byways, historic roads, and heritage areas and parks.

#### **www.MNPreservation.org**

The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota is a statewide, member-



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Virginia's downtown is one of 40 commercial historic districts in Minnesota listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

supported organization dedicated to historic preservation education and advocacy.

#### **www.1000fom.org**

The 1000 Friends of Minnesota works to prevent the kind of urban sprawl that gobbles up farmland and threatens the viability of historic rural communities.

#### **www.sprawlwatch.org**

The Sprawl Watch Clearinghouse disseminates information about growth management tools.

#### **www.ilsr.org**

Contact the Institute for Local Self-Reliance for information and technical assistance on promoting sustainable communities using economically sound development strategies. Click on "ILSR Publications List" to order their new book, *The Home Town Advantage: How to Defend Your Main Street Against Chain Stores...and Why It Matters* by Stacy Mitchell.

*Source: The Minnesota Preservationist (July/August 2000), newsletter of the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota. Used with permission.*

## Stearns History Museum enters new era

### Library collections go online

The end of summer 2000 brought to a close a two-year project to finish cataloging the collections of the Stearns History Museum's research center and make most of them available online. A collaborative effort between the museum and the Great River Regional Library, the project will be a boon to all those interested in Stearns County history.

Researchers can access the full database - 9,000 books, 12,000 family files, 20,000 records - by direct link from computer workstations in the museum's research center or any library in the Great River system. The catalog can also be viewed on the SHM web site at [www.stearns-museum.org](http://www.stearns-museum.org).

Still to come: an online catalog of the museum's 500,000 photographs. Meanwhile, staff can add to and update the database from the research center. To save money and staff time, the database is maintained off-site by the museum's contract file server, which designed and hosts the web site.

For more information on the project, contact Rose Marie Puerta-Curnutt by e-mail at [info@stearns-museum.org](mailto:info@stearns-museum.org).

# State Grants-in-Aid awarded

## Projects funded in 18 counties

Twenty-four applicants received more than \$88,000 in state grants-in-aid during the Minnesota Historical Society's fiscal year 2001 fall grants cycle. Grants were awarded in the categories of historic properties, artifact collections, interpretive programs, museum environments, microfilm copies and technology.

- **Aitkin County:** *Aitkin County Historical Society, Aitkin.* \$2,000, temperature and humidity control, Northern Pacific Depot.
- **Brown County:** *Lind House Association, New Ulm.* \$7,500, exterior restoration, John Lind House.
- **Brown County:** *Wanda Gág House Association, New Ulm.* \$7,500, interior restoration, Wanda Gág Childhood Home.
- **Brown County:** *Sleepy Eye Area Historical Society, Sleepy Eye.* \$413, archival storage supplies.
- **Clearwater County:** *Clearwater County Historical Society, Shevlin.* \$1,000, artifact registration and storage.
- **Dodge County:** *City of Kasson.* \$5,250, exterior restoration, Kasson Water Tower.
- **Faribault County:** *Faribault County Historical Society, Blue Earth.* \$750, security system installation.
- **Hennepin County:** *The Goldstein Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.* \$2,500, costume storage renovation.
- **Hennepin County:** *Hennepin History Museum, Minneapolis.* \$4,000, conservation equipment.
- **Hennepin County:** *Hopkins Historical Society, Hopkins.* \$804, microfilm purchase.

- **Hennepin County:** *City of Minnetonka.* \$3,500, interior woodgraining, Charles H. Burwell House.
- **McLeod County:** *McLeod County Historical Society, Hutchinson.* \$3,897, climate control upgrade, Heritage Center.
- **Meeker County:** *Dassel Area Historical Society, Dassel.* \$5,000, planning and research for interpretation of ergot and Universal Laboratories Building.
- **Mille Lacs County:** *Milaca Area Historical Society, Milaca.* \$1,330, microfilm purchase.
- **Otter Tail County:** *Otter Tail County Historical Society, Fergus Falls.* \$1,080, microfilm purchase.
- **Pipestone County:** *Pipestone County Historical Society, Pipestone.* \$1,800, shelving.
- **Renville County:** *Sacred Heart Area Historical Society, Sacred Heart.* \$3,260, exhibit of photographic images from glass negatives.
- **St. Louis County:** *Hibbing Historical Society, Hibbing.* \$2,000, registration and preservation project.
- **Stearns County:** *Stearns History Museum, St. Cloud.* \$7,500, collections storage.
- **Wabasha County:** *Wabasha County Historical Society, Reads Landing.* \$7,500, heating and cooling system installation, Reads Landing School.
- **Washington County:** *Arcola Mills Historic Foundation, Stillwater.* \$7,500, window and door restoration, John and Martin Mower House.
- **Wright County:** *Cokato Historical Society, Cokato.* \$7,500, HVAC system upgrade.



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With a state grant-in-aid, Reads Landing School in Wabasha will get a new heating and cooling system.

- **Wright County:** *Wright County Historical Society, Buffalo.* \$2,500, library and archives storage.
- **Sawyer County, Wis.:** *Grassroots Educational Multimedia, Hayward, Wis.* \$2,500, development of CD-ROM about Ojibwe sovereignty and treaty rights in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

### Position open

The Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center near Waseca seeks an executive director. Responsibilities include fiscal management, long-range planning, personnel management, fund development, public relations and marketing.

Qualifications: experience in those areas as well as in agriculture, program management and volunteer recruitment. Background in business and/or nonprofit management and degree in related field are desired. Salary and starting date negotiable.

For a more complete job description, call 507-835-2052. To apply, send letter of application and resume/proposal to Executive Director Position, Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center, P.O. Box 111, Waseca, MN 56093. Fax: 507-835-2053. E-mail: farmamerica@mnnc.net.

## Taking stock of tribal museums

### AASLH to conduct first-ever study

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) has received a national leadership grant of more than \$200,000 from the Institute for Museum and Library Services for the first-ever comprehensive study of tribal museums and heritage centers. The two-year study will be conducted by AASLH's American Indian Museums Program (AIMP), established in 1996 at the request of tribal museum professionals.

The study will survey the mission, collections, services and funding of American Indian museums and cultural centers;

conduct a needs assessment; make recommendations for programming and services to address unmet needs; and suggest ways to link allied organizations with an interest in assuring the survival and growth of tribal museums.

"Nothing of this scale has been done before with tribal museums," said Lisa J. Watt (Allegany Seneca), chair of the AIMP national steering committee. "We're going to need all tribes' support and input."

For more information about this and other AASLH programs and services, visit its web site at [www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org).

### Mark your calendars

#### Spring field workshops

You'll have three chances this spring to catch a Minnesota Historical Society field workshop:

March 30 Hutchinson, McLeod County  
April 20 Albert Lea, Freeborn County  
May 4 Duluth, St. Louis County

Each daylong program begins at 9 a.m. with a welcome from the Society's new manager of outreach services.

Concurrent workshop sessions follow, with an emphasis on object handling and government record access. Other sessions include a hands-on look at producing publications, a snapshot of digital photographic access and a grants workshop. Each day includes a tour or local program courtesy of the host historical society.

Watch for registration information in February, or call grants assistant David Grabitske at 651-297-4416.

#### Minnesota History Interpreter

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