



MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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INSIDE

page 4

2002 survey results

insert

Spring field workshops schedule and registration form

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Clay County Historical Society



This elaborate dollhouse, modeled after the builder's home in Moorhead, found its way back to the original owner after being featured in a toy exhibit sponsored by the Clay County Historical Society.

Dollhouse takes center stage

It all began with a toy exhibit at the Clay County Museum in Moorhead. Welcoming visitors at the exhibit entrance was a large, handcrafted dollhouse donated years earlier by the daughter of a couple who had owned Lindy's Doll Hospital in Fargo. After the business closed in the mid-1980s, the dollhouse, which had once stood in the shop's front window, came to the Clay County Historical Society collection.

The exhibit proved to be a crowd-pleaser, attracting the attention of the Fargo Forum, which ran a photograph of the dollhouse in the newspaper. That's where Delores Sandbeck saw the childhood treasure she had thought was lost for good.

Sandbeck called the museum to say she was the original owner and explained how she had tried to track down the dollhouse after closure of the doll hospital, where it had been sent for restoration. Now that the dollhouse, built for her by her mother, had surfaced again, she was interested in getting it back. That set in motion a painstaking, months-long process to resolve the matter.

Laying the groundwork

Collections manager Burkhardt went immediately to the dollhouse donor file to make sure the proper forms were in place. When the artifact was given in memory of the doll-hospital business owner, his daughter had signed a form as donor of record stating, in part, that there were "no

A question of ownership

Clay County case resolved by following procedures

Dam Burkhardt knows the importance of keeping good records. As collections manager for the Clay County Historical Society, she's responsible for processing donated objects, maintaining artifact files, and overseeing incoming and outgoing loans. A stickler for details, she prides herself on keeping track of countless

donor forms, condition reports and loan files as well as the locations inventory for the society's collection of nearly 30,000 items.

But as Burkhardt learned early last year, being careful isn't enough. Sometimes it's the unanswered questions about long-ago donations that catch you up short.

Ownership *continued on page 2*

Ownership *continued from page 1*

other claims” against the item. It was her understanding that her parents had acquired it by purchase – time and place unknown.

Because the historical society’s records were in order, Burkhardt explained to Sandbeck, certain steps had to be followed before the dollhouse could be returned to her. “Museums are custodians of the collections in their care,” says Burkhardt. “We hold them in trust for the public to enjoy and learn from. We’re not free to return things without following procedures.”

But the Clay County Historical Society Museum had few formal, written procedures in place for deaccessioning objects. So Burkhardt conferred with an attorney on their board. She consulted Minnesota Historical Society staff members Marcia Anderson, head of museum collections, and Tim Glines, manager of outreach services. She read several publications on the subject. Together they helped her begin to formulate a process.

Next steps

According to standard procedures covering such questions of ownership, the first step is to submit a formal request for the item’s return. So Burkhardt asked Sandbeck to write a letter to the Clay County Historical Society Board of Directors. The next step is to prove ownership. Even though museum staff did not doubt Sandbeck’s claim, she would have to supply the board with documentation of her relationship to the dollhouse.

Supply it she did – in the form of a 1938 newspaper article that pictured her as a child posing with her dollhouse. But Sandbeck had no documentation of any attempts to recover the dollhouse once it had left her possession. Instead, over the

coming weeks, she solicited letters from neighbors and acquaintances verifying that she had spoken years earlier of trying to find the lost property.

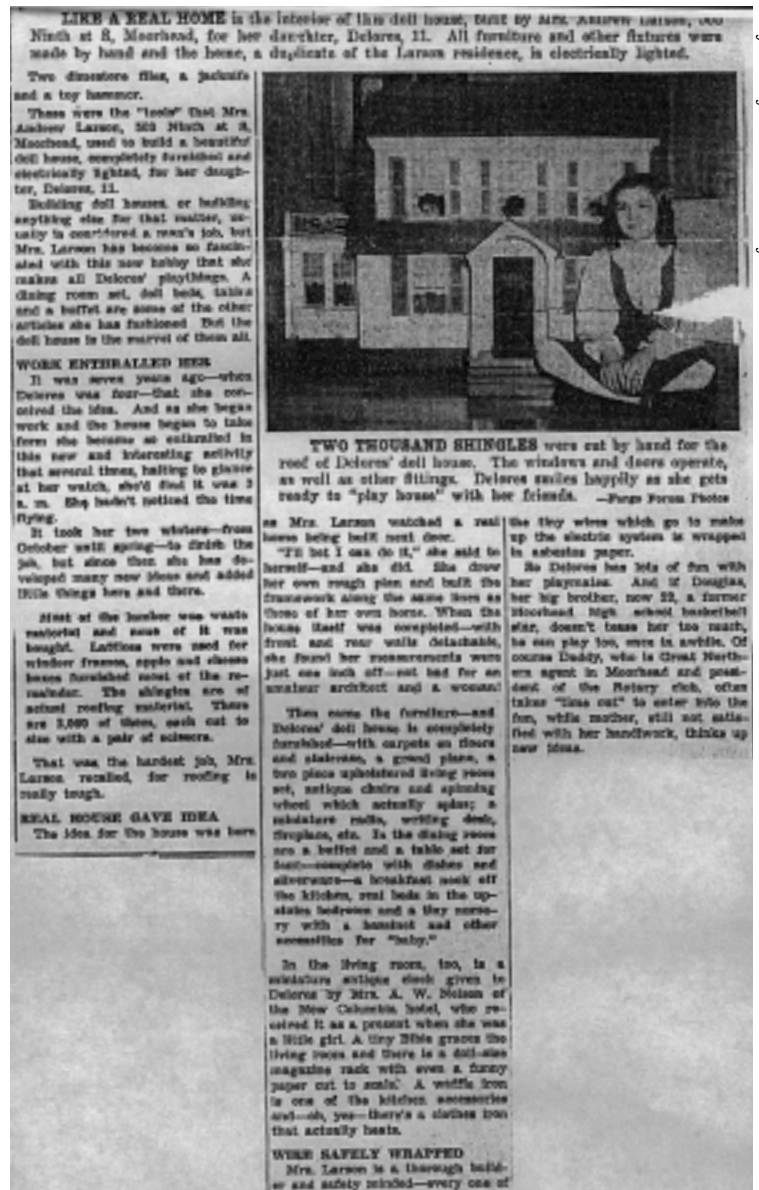
Once the board reviewed the matter at its monthly meeting, members agreed that the dollhouse should be returned to its original owner. Both Sandbeck and the donor of record, who also attended the meeting, were in agreement about the final disposition.

A happy ending

As soon as the board signed the form authorizing the deaccession, Sandbeck signed a loan form so that the dollhouse could remain in place until the exhibit closed. And the old newspaper photo was added to the display, documenting the history of the artifact. Today, the dollhouse is back in Sandbeck’s hands, undergoing restoration.

Moving on

“Thanks to a very strong board with a commitment to process, we



A 1938 Fargo Forum newspaper article proved Delores Sandbeck’s ownership of the dollhouse. She is pictured at age 11 with the house that her mother, Mrs. Andrew Larson, built from apple and cheese boxes using a jackknife, a dimestore file and a toy hammer. Larson cut the roof’s 2,000 shingles from real roofing material and even wired the house with electricity.

got the job done right,” says Burkhardt. Now she and the Clay County Historical Society’s new director, Lisa Hanson, are hard at work reviewing and formalizing all museum procedures. Then, bit by bit, they’ll begin to tackle the problem of other artifacts with unclear lineage.

“Perhaps 95 percent of the objects acquired by the museum between 1936 and 1955 are on indefinite-loan status,” Burkhardt explains. “It was customary in those days to accept things on loan to get collections started. Now, whenever we get a visit from an ‘artifact relative’ – as I call people whose families loaned such items in the past – they’re asked to sign a donor form. Most are glad to do so since it was the family’s original intention to make a gift to the museum.”

Resources

Collections manager Pam Burkhardt of the Clay County Historical Society recommends the following sources for guidance on resolving questions of artifact ownership.

A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections by Marie C. Malaro (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian University Press, 1985). This book reviews collections-related legal issues of relevance to the museum community, with hypothetical examples and sample forms – all aimed at prevention.

Museum Property Handbook 411 DM (U.S. Department of the Interior). Vol. 1: Preservation and Protection of Museum Property; Vol. 2: Documentation of Museum Property. This handbook, intended for use by the department’s Museum Services Branch, outlines general policies for collections management and the care of museum property. It can be found online at www.doi.gov/museum/museum/index.htm.

What has Burkhardt learned from the dollhouse experience? “Get help from museum professionals, seek legal advice and write *everything* down,”

she advises. “It would have saved so much time if we had had formal processes in place and every step clearly spelled out.”

Legislation sought to address museum property issues

New state law would guide disposition of unclaimed/undocumented objects

An ad hoc group of staff and volunteers from Minnesota museums is exploring the idea of proposing legislation, possibly during the 2003 legislative session, that would enable museums and historical societies to resolve issues related to unclaimed and undocumented objects. More than half of all states already have such statutes in place.

The problem

Museums accumulate unclaimed and undocumented objects in several ways. Sometimes donors neglect to retrieve items loaned to a museum for exhibition, identification or evaluation. Occasionally things are simply left on the doorstep. The past practice of “permanent loans” between lenders and repositories such as museums, libraries, archives and historical societies also has resulted in items being left in institutions for generations. As

time passes, museums have an increasingly difficult time tracking the rightful owners of the property.

Without legal title to unclaimed or undocumented objects, museums can make only limited use of these items even though they bear all the costs of providing storage space, record keeping, climate control, security, inventory, insurance and general overhead. As the costs of caring for collections increase, museums are looking for ways to reduce their inventories of items that they do not own or that may not meet their educational mission.

Working toward a solution

If you would like to learn more about the issue or help shape the proposed legislation, call David Kelliher at the Minnesota Historical Society, 651-297-8085, or e-mail david.kelliher@mnhs.org.

Taking the pulse of Minnesota's historical organizations

Survey results shape 2003 spring workshops

by David Grabitske, grants/field programs assistant

For 30 years the Minnesota Historical Society has collected survey data from county historical societies. At first done every four years, these surveys have become an annual affair.

Over time they've proven to be an effective means of measuring the organizational health and well-being of Minnesota's historical societies and museums. For you, the survey takers, they represent an opportunity to let your voices be heard, to assess your operations, to measure your successes. On our end, the surveys enable us to track growth and trends among our partner historical organizations across the state, to gauge the challenges you face and to celebrate your accomplishments. The results help the

field services staff develop programs and services to meet your needs.

What we asked

Early surveys, initiated by now-retired field services coordinator David Nystuen, focused on the level of financial support that county societies received from their county governments. More recently we've asked for other numbers – on budget, attendance, membership, and volunteer participation. This information is generally interpreted as a reflection of how successfully county societies serve their audiences countywide.

Beginning in 2001, we broadened the scope of the surveys, taking a look at different aspects of your operations.

That year we asked what kinds of planning tools your organization had in place. In 2002 we asked several questions geared specifically to professional development. Also for the first time last year, the survey was sent not only to Minnesota's 87 county historical societies but to an additional 194 local historical societies. This wider view gives us an even clearer picture of the state of affairs among historical organizations in Minnesota.

We also count on the surveys to keep the Minnesota Historical Society's web site up to date on contact information for the state's historical organizations. That helps us all stay in touch.

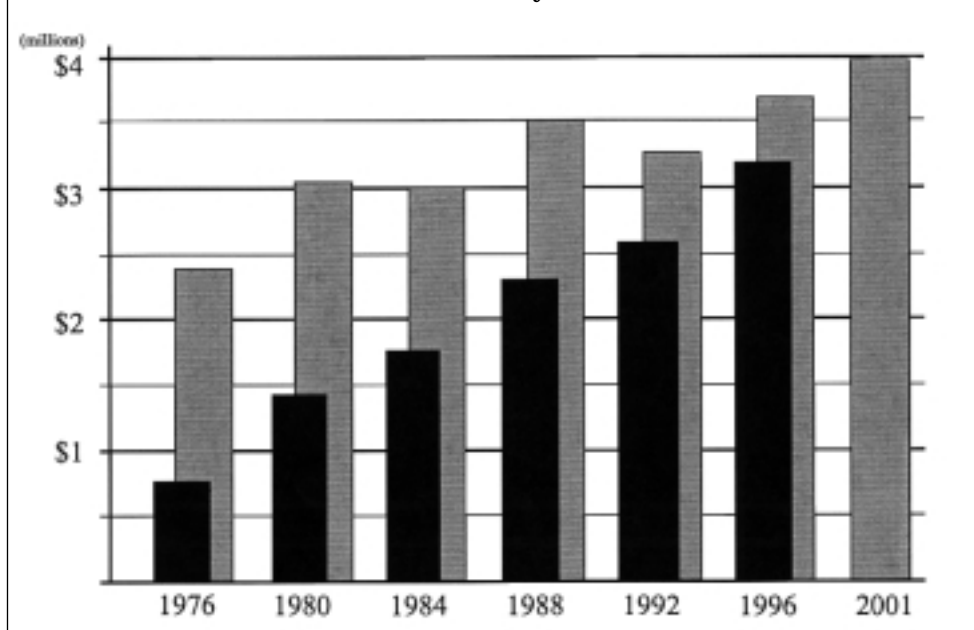
How you answered

Of the 281 surveys mailed out last spring, 187 were returned, including responses from 84 of the county societies – an impressive rate of return. Following is a summary of your responses about professional development activities.

- **Training:** Many of you expressed a strong desire not only to learn more about museum methods and practices but also to keep current with historical research. Nearly 70 percent of those who sought additional training went to some kind of museum workshop. And in the past year, 35 percent of you went to a history conference such as the Northern Great Plains History Conference. Professional development activities are clearly a priority for Minnesota's historical organizations: 70 percent of the time, your organization paid the registration fees.

Aggregate County Appropriations to County Historical Societies

Source: Minnesota Historical Society, Field Services Office, 2002



County appropriations to Minnesota's county historical societies, represented by the black bars, have grown steadily over the last 25 years. The shaded bars, adjusted for inflation, show the same amounts in 2001 dollars.

- **Field trips.** Neighbors are a great source for new ideas. That's what many of you have discovered during visits to neighboring historical organizations. Last year 86 percent of survey respondents made trips to at least two nearby historical museums. A few more made one visit. Those who ventured forth also were the most likely to attend a workshop and to work for an organization that paid the registration.

- **Professional/institutional memberships:** Almost all respondents are institutional members of the Minnesota Historical Society, a requirement for affiliation. Membership in at least one other larger historical or museum organizations was reported by 77 percent; 67 percent belong to two or more; and 19 percent belong to four or more.

The preferred organization is the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums, to which 45 percent of respondents belong. The American Association for State and Local History was next with 31 percent. Membership in general museum groups such as the American Association of Museums and the Minnesota Association of Museums trailed far behind.

Not surprisingly, most local organizations are affiliated with their county historical society. And many survey respondents listed membership in their local chamber of commerce, demonstrating a commitment to community participation. Other membership affiliations included the

Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, various ethnic societies, and specialty groups such as railroad historical societies.

What it all means

The challenge in interpreting the results of any survey is determining how respondents arrived at their data. Some numbers – county appropriations, for example – are straightforward. Other numbers are more subjective. A case in point: there is no universally applied formula for calculating annual attendance or “public contacts.” Some organizations count only those who visit their museum, while others include attendance figures from programs held elsewhere. Still others count web site hits, telephone calls fielded and e-mail answered.

Despite these inconsistencies, the survey data is useful in many ways. You can use your year-to-year growth to demonstrate to various stakeholders – county commissioners, city council members, donors – your value to the community. We look at the overall picture to spot programming trends, common problems or pressing needs. On the 2002 surveys, many of you identified volunteer recruitment and retention as a major challenge. That input translated directly to a session on the subject at the 2003 spring field workshops.

Looking ahead

All of us can be encouraged by the vibrant state of history organizations in Minnesota. Your collective strength



Last spring representatives of a dozen county and local historical societies gathered in Fairmont for a meeting of the South Central Minnesota Historical Societies, one of several such regional groups in the state. Here, engaging in a lively exchange of ideas, are society directors Bev Jackson (left) of Freeborn County, Bob Burgess (center) of Brown County and James Lundgren of Blue Earth County. After hosting the meeting, Lenny Tvedten, director of the Martin County Historical Society, paid return visits to two of the county societies.

comes in part from your quest for professional development opportunities, your openness to new ideas and your desire to improve on already-sound operational models.

Of course, there's always room for improvement. So watch for the next annual survey, to be mailed this spring. Then take a few minutes to let us know how you're doing. Your continued input will guide us in planning programs and services for the year ahead.

If you have questions about the annual survey of Minnesota historical organizations or if your organization did not receive one, call David Grabitske, grants/field programs assistant, at 651-297-4416 or e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org; or Tim Glines, manager of outreach services, at 651-296-5460 or e-mail timothy.glines@mnhs.org.

Warren Research genealogy classes at the Minnesota History Center

The following one-session classes on family history and genealogy are offered by Jim and Paula Stuart Warren, nationally recognized genealogical researchers, lecturers and writers. Advance registration is recommended. For fee and registration information, call Warren Research, 651-503-4802, or e-mail warren@spacestar.com.

Discover Your Family History Workshop

Jan. 25, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Designed for beginners, this workshop covers the basics of genealogical research – among family members and in libraries, archives, courthouses, churches and cemeteries. Handouts include useful Internet addresses.

Writing Your Family History in Small, Manageable Pieces

Jan. 25, 1:30 to 3 p.m.

This class offers practical, “write-as-you-go” methods for recording, preserving and sharing your research results.

Railroad Records and Railroad History: Methods for Tracking

Jan. 26, 1 to 2:30 p.m.

Discover the wealth of historical materials to be found in repositories of railroad company records.

Solve Genealogical Problems Like a Pro

Jan. 26, 3 to 4:30 p.m.

Learn about problem-solving tools and techniques used by professional researchers. Registrants are welcome to e-mail the instructors a brief description of a problem for class discussion.

Web site explores preservation funding options

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) recently expanded its web site to include information about financial assistance for historic preservation projects. This clearinghouse of funding options, found at www.achp.gov/funding.html, focuses on federal funding, with more limited discussion of state, tribal, local and nonprofit funding opportunities. The site provides links to specific program web sites and to the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, all of which contain detailed information on eligibility and

application requirements.

ACHP was established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

It is an independent federal agency that promotes the preservation and productive use of the nation’s historic resources and advises the president and Congress on national historic preservation policy.



Job opening

The Dakota County Historical Society is looking for someone to develop an interpretive program and operations plan for the Le Duc Historic Site. The two-year contract position, paying \$2,900–\$3,200 per month, will remain open until filled. Candidates must have a B.A. degree in history, museum studies or a related field and three years of experience in project management.

Built in 1862–65 by Civil War general and business leader William G. Le Duc, the Gothic Villa-style mansion was acquired by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1958. After a transfer of the property to the City of Hastings, the site will be operated by the Dakota County society.

For a detailed job description and background information about the site, call director Mark Reidell at 651-552-7548 or e-mail dchs@mtn.org.



Le Duc Historic Site

State grants-in-aid awarded

Twenty-nine applicants to the Minnesota Historical Society's State Grants-in-Aid program received a total of \$94,866 during the fiscal year 2003 fall cycle. This cycle saw a greater demand by applicants for funding of planning tools and interpretive programs.

Anoka County: Anoka County Historical Society, \$3,500, to purchase microfilm copies of Anoka County newspapers.

Brown County: Lind House Association, Inc., \$7,500, for front porch restoration on the John Lind House, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Carlton County: Carlton County Historical Society, \$690, for "Biography of Harry Newby Sr.," an oral history project.

Cook County: Schroeder Area Historical Society, \$2,055, for "Mining for History," research for an exhibit on Taconite Harbor.

Cottonwood County: Cottonwood County Historical Society, \$915, to purchase PastPerfect museum software.

Dakota County: Dakota County Historical Society, \$5,200, to synthesize research for future interpretation at the William G. Le Duc House, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dodge County: Dodge County Historical Society, \$6,000, to reroof the Wasioja Schoolhouse in the Wasioja Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Douglas County: Douglas County Historical Society, \$1,000, to purchase the 1930 Census of Minnesota.

Grant County: Grant County Historical Society, \$904, to purchase

microfilm records.

Hennepin County: Hennepin History Museum, \$1,050, to conserve its collection of Sanborn fire insurance maps of Minneapolis.

Kandiyohi County: Kandiyohi County Historical Society, \$982, to purchase microfilm copies of newspapers and death records.

Martin County: Martin County Historical Society, \$3,800, for "Lost Towns of Martin County, Part 2," an interpretive marker program.

Morrison County: Morrison County Historical Society, \$2,274, for "Uncommon Focus: Images of Morrison County," a photographic collections project.

Olmsted County: Olmsted County Historical Society, \$7,500, to restore house entrances and cave masonry at the George Stoppel Farmstead, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Otter Tail County: Friends of the History Museum of East Otter Tail County, \$4,600, for "Women and War," an oral history project.

Pine County: Audubon Center of the North Woods, \$4,000, for chimney restoration on the Arnold Schwyzer Summer House and Farmstead, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Pipestone County: Pipestone County Historical Society, \$5,952, to reroof the Old Pipestone City Hall in the Pipestone Commercial Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building now houses the Pipestone County Historical Society.

Ramsey County: Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, \$2,350, to purchase a microfilm reader/printer.

Ramsey County: Little Canada Historical Society, Inc., \$2,250, to purchase a microfilm reader/printer.

Ramsey County: Maplewood Area Historical Society, \$3,100, to purchase PastPerfect museum software and a computer.

Ramsey County: Ramsey County Historical Society, \$5,500, for design and implementation of the Dakotah Learning Lodge, an interpretive program.

Ramsey County: Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association, \$2,000, to research the Judiciary Triangle for future interpretive programs.

Ramsey County: White Bear Lake Area Historical Society, \$1,134, to purchase White Bear Lake newspapers, 1934-2000.

Sherburne County: Sherburne County Historical Society, \$4,114, to photograph objects for documentation in collections management software.

Stearns County: Stearns History Museum, \$7,500, to improve building environmental systems.

Steele County: Steele County Historical Society, \$132, to install a security system on the OZ Press building.

Watsonwan County: St. James Opera House Restoration Project, Inc., \$6,200, to restore the first-floor façade of the St. James Opera House.

Watsonwan County: Watsonwan County Historical Society, \$1,414, to purchase PastPerfect museum software and a computer.

Wright County: Wright County Historical Society, \$1,250, to purchase log cabin furnishings identified in a previous grant for the furnishing plan.

Register now for spring field workshops

Sessions to focus on seeing results

You'll have four opportunities this spring to catch a Minnesota Historical Society field workshop:

March 21 Red Wing,
Goodhue County

April 11 Fairmont,
Martin County

May 2 Alexandria,
Douglas County

May 9 Virginia,
St. Louis County

In a program to be repeated at each venue, presenters will focus on the theme "Seeing Results" – how historical organizations can effectively measure successes and communicate those successes to key audiences. The daylong workshop offers sessions on

audience surveys, communications strategies, volunteer recruitment and fundraising. Also on the agenda in each city: a tour of local historic sites planned by the host historical society.

You won't want to miss this year's keynote speaker. Charles Nelson, the Minnesota Historical Society's longtime historical architect, looks back at changes he has witnessed in the preservation movement, reflecting on his 32 years of work to save Minnesota's historic properties.

To register: Use the form enclosed. For more information call Tim Glines, manager of outreach services, at 651-296-5460, or David Grabitske, grants/field programs assistant, at 651-297-4416.



Historical architect Charles Nelson will deliver the keynote address at the 2003 field workshops.

David Nystuen

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

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