INSIDE
page 7
State grants-in-aid awarded
insert
**Spring field workshops schedule
and registration form**

Lydia Area Historical Society

Lydia youngsters posed with their teachers in front of their school in 1914.

Managing government records
Local group finds safe home for school documents

It was a long road traveled by school records from the small town of Lydia to their permanent home a few miles away at the Scott County Historical Society. And therein lies a tale of the challenges of archives management.

Four years ago Don Beuch, whose family settled in the county in the late 1800s, helped organize the Lydia Area Historical Society (LAHS). Their goal:

to preserve the history of the unincorporated town, which once boasted a thriving business center with its own bank and stores. The center of the community's social life was the Lydia school, where generations of children in grades K–8 attended classes until 1960, when the school district disbanded.

The Jordan Independent newspaper, dating from the 1880s,

proved a rich source of information for LAHS researchers because the first two editors, both from Lydia, made sure to include their hometown news. Beuch's research also took him to the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, where, to his great surprise, he found among school records housed there his own first-grade report cards. Wondering if other, earlier school records survived, he went in search.

Records lost and found

Back in Scott County, Beuch learned that most Lydia school records had been sent in 1960 to the Jordan school district, where they were stored in a district building along with records from Jordan schools. He also learned that at some time in the past some of the records, after being damaged by a roof leak, had been discarded. Allowed to search through surviving records, Beuch found what he was looking for. By the time he was done, he had assembled several boxes of Lydia school records – architectural plans and building specifications, information on school bonds passed by voters, and teacher ledgers dating to the 1800s containing lesson plans, attendance records and student grades. In the ledger from 1897 he came across another familiar name – that of his grandfather, then a 10-year-old boy.

Government records *continued from page 1*

Concerned about the records' safe-keeping and wanting to make them accessible to researchers, Beuch asked the district superintendent to consider donating the records to a repository. Upon advice from the school district's attorney about data privacy, the superintendent refused. Beuch persisted, enlisting help from the Scott County Historical Society, which in turn called on Charles Rodgers, government records analyst at the Minnesota Historical Society. It is Rodgers's job to advise local government officials, county historical societies and others on preserving and managing government records of historical significance.

Tackling the issues

"All government records are created at public expense," explains Rodgers, "so, by law, they must be preserved. They may be transferred to the State Archives at the Minnesota Historical Society. But because we don't have room for everything, we look to county and local organizations to help us preserve important local records and provide public access to them."

Of the four major jurisdictions of local government – city, county, township and school district – Rodgers gets the most questions about school and city records. "People mainly want to know how long records need to be kept," he says. "Perhaps the most common misconception is that every piece of paper is valuable and needs to be saved. In fact, only records of permanent historical value need to be kept; that's actually quite a small percentage of the total. What's important is to know the guidelines for records appraisal and to be selective in what you keep."

> ## "We look to county and local organizations to help us preserve important local records and provide public access to them."
>
> *Charles Rodgers,*
> *government records analyst,*
> *Minnesota State Archives*

Questions about data privacy also come up frequently, says Rodgers. "State laws restrict access to certain kinds of information – birth records, adoption papers, medical records, company personnel files. The primary concern with school records is information about student grades." If, after consulting the resources described below, people still have questions about privacy, Rodgers suggests they seek guidance from State Archives staff.

To aid the process of accessioning and preserving government records, the State Archives developed a publication titled "Managing Your Government Records: Guidelines for Archives and Agencies" (see page 3). It's an essential tool for those involved with historical records – an online tutorial in all activities required to maintain an archive: records acquisition, appraisal, description, preservation, storage and retrieval. An appendix to the guide deals specifically with issues of public access to local government records.

Addressing the disposition of school records, particularly those of

Scott County Historical Society
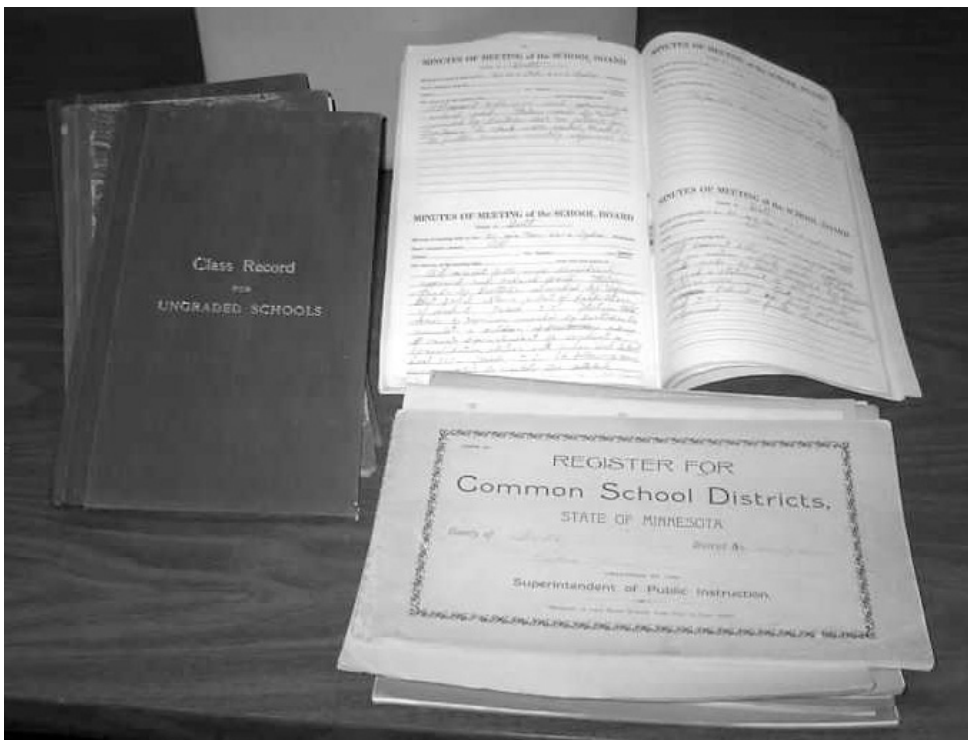
Among recovered records for the Lydia school district are teacher ledgers and minutes of school board meetings. The records are now being evaluated by Scott County Historical Society staff.

closed rural schools, is another State Archives offering, "Government Records Information Leaflet No. 2: School District Records" (available from the State Archives at the Minnesota Historical Society or online at www.mnhs.org/preserve/ records/infoleaf2.pdf). As the leaflet explains, school districts may, with permission from the State Archives, transfer such records to a local or regional historical agency, library or museum.

That's what happened with the Lydia school records. Thanks to Don Beuch's persistence, advice from Rodgers, designation of the Scott County Historical Society as repository and assurances that privacy laws would be followed, the Jordan school board finally agreed to turn over the records.

Order restored

Megan Schaack, curator of collections at the Scott County society, is now hard at work evaluating the records for accession. "When I complete the inventory, it will go to the Minnesota Historical Society for review," explains Schaack. "The records fall under the purview of the State Archives but we'll have responsibility for preserving and managing them. I've learned a lot through this process about data privacy laws, what records are worth keeping and how to store them properly. Now, when other schools, townships and police departments in the county come to us with questions, I can give them the answers."

News coverage about the Lydia school records generated considerable local interest. To facilitate local access to *all* the information about Lydia's school history, Beuch is exploring the

possibility of combining on microfilm the school records from both the Scott County and Minnesota Historical societies. Experience shows he won't quit until he makes it happen.

Managing Your Government Records: Guidelines for Archives and Agencies

The complete guide, outlined below, is available online at www.mnhs.org/preserve/records/recordsguidelines/guidelines.html. A limited number of printed copies are available from the State Archives at the Minnesota Historical Society.

Introduction
• Describes who will benefit from the guidelines, what they contain and how to use them.

What do you need to know about government records?
• Defines government records, summarizes the laws that govern them and lays out the responsibilities of repositories.

How do you appraise government records?
• Helps you understand the value of government records and get started appraising your own records.

How do you describe government records?
• Explains the practices of good documentation and record description and their role in managing your archives effectively.

What are the issues regarding information technology and electronic records?
• Discusses information technology and electronic records and how they affect archives-related work.

How do you preserve and store government records?
• Offers preservation and storage tips for paper and nonpaper records.

How do you provide reference service to government records?
• Outlines your responsibilities in complying with state statutes governing public access.

Appendices
• Guidelines for the Disposition of Government Records to Other Repositories
• Government Records Depository Agreement
• Access to Local Government Records: A Short List

Questions? Call Don Beuch of the Lydia Area Historical Society at 952-492-6173; Megan Schaack, curator of collections, Scott County Historical Society, 952-445-0378; or Charles Rodgers, government records analyst, Minnesota State Archives, 651-297-2344.

High-tech history

Technology helps historical organizations preserve the past

by David Grabitske, grants/field programs assistant

These days, much of the work done in Minnesota's historical organizations both large and small depends on information technology (IT). The last 10 years have witnessed a dramatic increase in our use of computers as software applications and Internet access mushroomed.

So for our annual survey in 2003, the Minnesota Historical Society field programs office decided to focus on the use of information technology by the state's historical organizations. To ensure that we covered all the bases on the questionnaire and to interpret the results, we enlisted the help of the Society's IT department. Our goal: to gauge how extensively and effectively your group uses information technologies in your work to interpret and preserve the past.

Out of a mailing of 335 questionnaires, 195 of you returned your surveys. That's a response rate of 58.2 percent – down from a return rate of 66.5 percent on the 2002 survey. The results confirm what most of us already know – that computer ownership is widespread, that we all struggle to keep up with changing technology, and that the Internet serves as an invaluable tool for disseminating information.

Keeping pace with IT

Nearly 60 percent of survey respondents reported owning computers, mostly desktop PCs. One-third of that group have only one computer. Of those with more than one machine, a majority report that their computers are networked.

More than half of respondents bought a new computer within the last two years and many others invested in technology upgrades, spending on average less than $1,000 to improve their technology capabilities. Lagging behind in the race to keep up with the dizzying speed of technological advancements are 11 percent who still use computers older than a 1995 model.

Levels of expertise

In our survey we asked how savvy you were about technology. That's the same question we asked you in 1997 at the direction of the Minnesota Legislature, which was then taking the measure of technological expertise among Minnesota's historical organizations. Six years ago 10 percent of you felt you had no expertise; today only four percent feel the same. Two-thirds of you who responded to the 1997 survey said you were technologically capable or advanced; that figure has now risen to 95 percent. And the number of you who count yourselves experts rose from one percent to nearly 12 percent.

> **"A good IT plan and up-to-date computers will save money and time."**
>
> *Rose Sherman, head of Information Technology, Minnesota Historical Society*

Software

Almost all of you who returned your surveys report that the main work you do by computer is word processing (primarily for correspondence and newsletters) and managing membership roles. Next on the list are accessing the Internet, corresponding via e-mail, designing promotional materials and accounting. So far, few of you tackle by computer the time-consuming tasks of staff/volunteer scheduling and payroll.

The use of software for cataloging and managing collections, which facilitates photo and document scanning, is growing by leaps and bounds. Forty percent of survey respondents have adopted some kind of cataloging software, most

Sacred Heart Area Historical Society
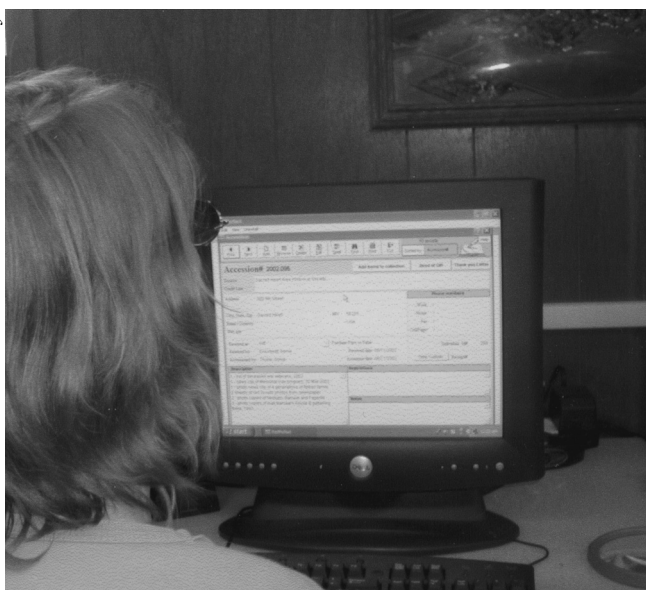
Sonja Thune of the Sacred Heart Area Historical Society catalogs artifacts with PastPerfect, the collections management software now used by dozens of Minnesota museums.

commonly PastPerfect (version 3.0 or higher dominates). A number of groups report using software customized by or for them, while a smattering of others use such programs as FileMaker, Accession, Cemetery, Microsoft Office Suite applications, PFS: First Choice, Q&A and Re:Discovery.

The Internet

Since its inception, the Internet has proven to be one of the most effective ways to exchange information. Experienced users among you turn to the Internet both as a means of acquiring information germane to your work and as a tool to broaden access for your constituents to local history resources. To date, roughly 42 percent of Minnesota's county and local historical organizations have web sites. The most sophisticated sites are interactive; others are used essentially as an online bulletin board to post information.

Nearly all of you who reported using the Internet access it through an Internet Service Provider (ISP). More than two-thirds currently connect through a regular telephone line; nearly one-third use either a digital subscriber line (DSL) or a cable modem. Only one organization uses a high-speed, high capacity T1 connection. (That so many are still using telephone lines may be for lack of access to faster connections.) Among historical organizations with web sites, those sites are hosted nearly evenly by the group's own server, their host government or their ISP.

WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 167, Stillwater, Minnesota 55082

About WCHS
Special Events
Visit the Museums
Research the Collections
Gift Shop
Join the Society
Volunteer & Intern
Vintage Base Ball
WCHS e-Photo Album
Schools of the Past
Links

Steamboats and the West grew up together! Here is their story...

A new publication of the Washington County Historical Society!

Paddlewheels on the Upper Mississippi tells how that uniquely American invention, the western river steamboat, made settlement of the Upper Midwest possible in the days when the river was America's western frontier.

Paddlewheels on the Upper Mississippi 1823–1854

How Steamboats Promoted Commerce and Settlement in the West

by Nancy and Robert Goodman

- individual boat histories
- filled with stories about the boats, the captains and pilots, the merchants, the travelers, the townsites AND the Grand Excursion of 1854
- enhanced with reminiscent accounts, travelers' letters and diaries, and newspaper stories
- illustrated with more than 60 photos, drawings, maps and other illustrations
- glossary of steamboating terms, resource section and full index
- traces the settlement history of western Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota
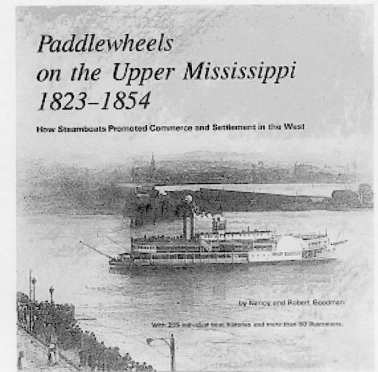
Published by the Washington County Historical Society, Stillwater, Minnesota, for the History Network of Washington County. Call 651-439-5956 for more information.

The Washington County Historical Society's web site (http://wchsmn.org) keeps the community informed about society programs and services. The site was developed by a volunteer with expertise in information technology.

Many of you report visiting the Minnesota Historical Society's web site for program information, collections research and technical guidance. But you would like to see even more technical leaflets and how-to materials posted. You asked that the Minnesota historical organizations (MHO) section become a searchable database. And some of you expressed interest in having the Society host an online discussion group. The Society's IT department is already at work on boosting online technical assistance and creating the searchable database.

Planning is essential

There's no question that information technology is expensive.

And it's not only the hardware that needs upgrading at regular intervals; the software needs to keep pace as well. That makes it all the more important to plan for ongoing technology costs.

Yet most of you still do not have a long-term technology plan in place. "In the long run," says Rose Sherman, head of Information Technology at the Minnesota Historical Society, "a good IT plan and up-to-date computers will save money and time." Those are two commodities we all find in short supply these days.

AASLH seeks award nominations

The American Association for State and Local History seeks nominations for its annual awards program, established to encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation and interpretation of state and local history.

For two of the awards, nominations may be made from the field. They are:

• Awards of Merit, recognizing performance deemed excellent compared with similar activities nationwide.

• Certificates of Commendation, presented for excellence within available means and regional standards.

Among types of eligible activities are exhibits, public programming, special projects, media/publications, preservation/restoration projects and individual achievement. Special consideration is given to new and promising ideas, approaches and innovations. (For examples of Minnesota's past award winners, see the Interpreter, September-October 2003.)

Deadline: If you wish to nominate your own or another historical organization, submit a nomination form by **March 1** to state awards chair David Grabitske at the Minnesota Historical Society. Nominations are then reviewed by a national committee; winners will be announced in the fall. For information on nomination criteria and for copies of the official nomination form, call Grabitske at 651-297-4416 or e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org.

Teacher workshops on Minnesota history

Teaching with Northern Lights

This full-day workshop introduces teachers to the new *Northern Lights* curriculum (see Interpreter, September-October 2003). Presenters demonstrate curriculum components and suggest ways to adapt them to individual classrooms. Cost: $100 (lunch

Minnesota Historical Society

Students study Minnesota geography at a Wright County rural school in 1946.

included) for six clock-hour credits.

January 12	St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth
February 12	Minnesota History Center, St. Paul
March 22	Mille Lacs Indian Museum, Onamia

History and Geography

Augment your teaching of local history with this in-depth workshop on Minnesota's natural and man-made environment. Learn how geography has affected the state's settlement and growth and explore current environmental issues. Developed in conjunction with the video "Minnesota: A History of the Land" and the Minnesota Environmental Atlas. Cost: $75 (lunch included) for six clock-hour credits.

March 2	Minnesota History Center, St. Paul

To register for these workshops, call teacher education specialist Nancy O'Brien Wagner at 651-284-3818 or e-mail curriculum@mnhs.org.

'American Journeys' web site features primary sources

"American Journeys," a new web site from the Wisconsin Historical Society, provides access to more than 150 rare books, original manuscripts and classic travel narratives from the society's library and archives. Created especially for students exploring National History Day's 2004 theme, "Exploration, Encounter, Exchange," the site was developed in collaboration with National History Day and partially funded by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

To read these eyewitness accounts of explorers, American Indians, missionaries, traders and settlers, go to www.americanjourneys.org. For more information on National History Day, call contest and program manager Bill Lickiss at 301-314-3139, or go to www.nationalhistoryday.org.

State grants-in-aid awarded

Seventeen applicants to the Minnesota Historical Society's State Grants-in-Aid program received a total of $48,000 in the fall cycle of fiscal year 2004. This was the first of only two cycles, instead of four, for the 2004-05 biennium, a reduction necessitated by state funding cuts (see Interpreter July-August 2003).

Grants were awarded in the categories of historic properties, artifact collections, microform copies, oral history, photographic collections, museum environments and technology. This cycle was characterized by innovative projects that addressed specialized problems.

Anoka County: Anoka County Historical Society, $2,300, for a light mitigation project.

Blue Earth County: Blue Earth County Historical Society, $2,600, for a three-dimensional storage box upgrade.

Brown County: Springfield Area Historical Society, $1,700, to purchase PastPerfect museum software.

Chippewa County: Chippewa County Historical Society, $366, to purchase storage shelving.

Cottonwood County: Cottonwood County Historical Society, $2,600, to purchase storage units.

Grant County: Grant County Historical Society, $2,500, to purchase a digital microfilm reader/printer.

Hennepin County: Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, $5,000, for "Making It Home," an oral history project.

Isanti County: Isanti County Historical Society, $2,634, to purchase

Anoka County Historical Society

The Anoka County Historical Society received a grant to filter UV light from the many windows of its history center, housed in a former public library.

PastPerfect museum software.

Kandiyohi County: Kandiyohi County Historical Society, $1,514, to purchase a hardwired fire-alarm system.

Lake County: Lake County Historical Society, $5,000, to restore the Three Spot locomotive engine.

Lake of the Woods County: Depot Preservation Alliance, $5,000, to restore windows on the Baudette Canadian National Depot. The depot is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Marshall County: Argyle Historical Society, $500, for a photo preservation project.

Renville County: Renville County Historical Society, $2,500, to purchase microfilmed county

newspapers up to 1930.

Stearns County: Stearns History Museum, $1,800, for collections storage.

Wabasha County: Wabasha County Historical Society, $5,000, for geothermal heating and cooling at Reads Landing School, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Watonwan County: St. James Opera House Restoration Project, Inc., $5,000, for window restoration on the St. James Opera House, which is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Wilkin County: Wilkin County Historical Society, $1,986, to purchase microfilm of the Breckenridge Daily News.

Register now for spring field workshops

The theme: The Cost of Doing Business.

The place (pick one):
Anoka, March 26
Windom, April 16
Bemidji, April 30
Rochester, May 14

The program: See inside for the complete workshop schedule.

Don't miss this opportunity to hear Minnesota Historical Society staff share advice on stretching budgets and maximizing resources in these trying economic times. To register use the form enclosed.

Minnesota Historical Society

Chris Schuelke, director of the Otter Tail County Historical Society, took part in a brainstorming session at the 2003 field workshop in Alexandria.

High-tech *continued from page 5*

Looking ahead

We'll check back with you on technology down the road. Meanwhile, your continued input on other topics will guide us in planning field programs and services. So watch for the next annual survey, with a focus on archival holdings, to be mailed this spring. Then, even though it's one more thing to add to your busy schedules, take a few minutes to let us know what you're doing. We want to hear from you!

If you have questions or observations about the 2003 survey results, call David Grabitske, grants/field programs assistant, 651-297-4416, or e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org; or Rose Sherman, head of Information Technology, 651-296-4735, or e-mail rose.sherman@mnhs.org.

Minnesota Historical Society

345 Kellogg Boulevard West
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102-1903

Address service requested