

INSIDE

page 5

**Minnesota groups awarded
IMLS grants**

page 8

State grants-in-aid deadlines

MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

Published by the Minnesota Historical Society for county and local historical organizations and heritage preservation commissions

A 13-step program for local history

by Carol Kammen

Carol Kammen writes the column "On Doing Local History" for History News magazine, published by the American Association for State and Local History. This article appeared, in a slightly longer form, in the Summer 2004 issue. Used with permission.

In this era of declining resources, increased expectations and aging memberships, many historical societies face questions about their survival. It is up to each organization's leaders and membership, working together, to arrive at decisions about what to do and how to meet the challenges.

Many groups have already started the hard work of reexamining their purpose, goals and means. Some organizations have even changed their names, choosing to drop the word *society*, with its connotations of something old-fashioned or elitist, in favor of *museum* or *history center*. The modernization of a name, however, is clearly not enough.

What I propose is a 13-step program for strengthening historical societies. I offer these suggestions to spur creative thinking.

1 Evaluate your institution

Concentrate not on what your organization once was but on what it currently is. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What is its role in the community? Your questions should focus on your goals as a historical organization and the financial resources, leadership,

membership and archival support needed to achieve them.

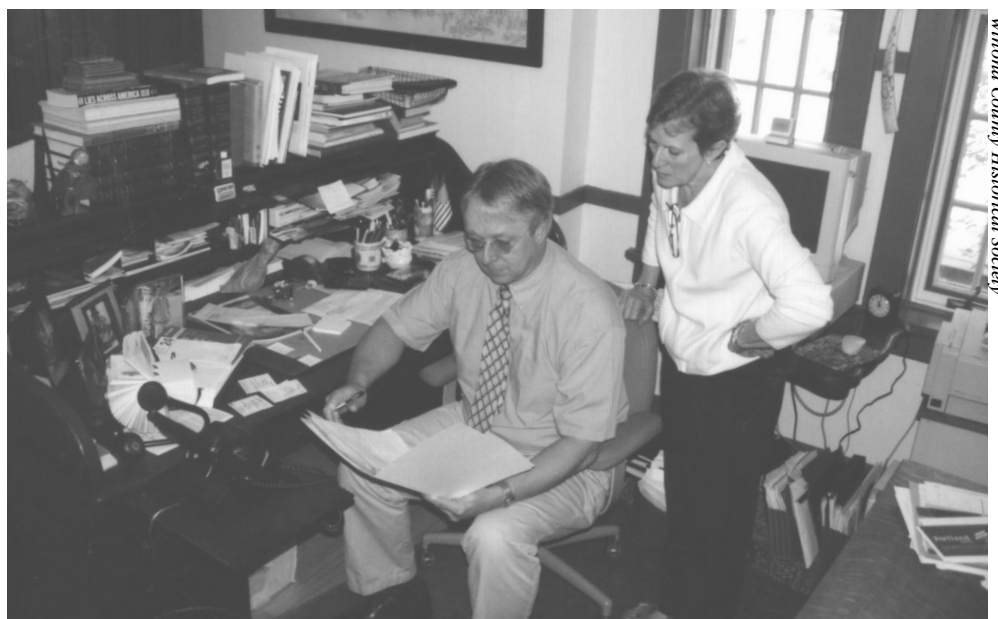
2 Collaborate with partners

One group does not have to do everything. Consider

cooperating with other history organizations. There are many ways in which two or more groups can join to create one stronger organization without the loss of individual identity.

This might mean a combined membership, cooperative programs at a variety of sites, and a joint archive where each group maintains ownership of its manuscript and library materials but shares a location with regular hours and adequate storage. Whether you decide on one facility or more than one, such a collaborative effort would concentrate and protect what has been collected by all the partners.

A 13-step program continued on page 2



Winona County Historical Society

Step 1: Evaluate your institution.

To prepare for a capital campaign in 2006, the Winona County Historical Society held a board-staff retreat and a series of facilitated planning sessions. Here, executive director Mark Peterson and board president Laurie Lucas review the resulting strategic plan, which identifies the society's most critical needs: more space for collections storage and expansion of its library and archives.

A 13-step program *continued from page 1*

Collaboration might also mean an online inventory of collections to which all patrons have access. It might mean one good newsletter rather than several weaker ones. This strategy necessitates supporting the efforts of others – jointly promoting programs, sites, exhibit openings and special events. Interest in history begets interest in history.

3 Make alliances with organizations of allied interests

Build a network of area history organizations, preservationists, genealogists, business groups and the chamber of commerce, all working to promote knowledge and use of the locality. Environmentalists, too, foster understanding and protection of place. Go to their meetings; invite them to yours.

You should also have strong working relationships with the public library and folks at the local community college. Make common cause with the arts as well. Give poets, playwrights and visual artists a venue for their work. Hold workshops that allow members to give expression to art in support of history.

4 Modernize

- Post regular hours and keep to them so that people have access to you and your collections.
- Consider the 20th century as a field of study.
- Use the Internet.

5 Sniff the air

Go outside your building with programs and exhibits. Be a presence at fairs, farmers' markets, in the mall and at the park.



Otter Tail County Historical Society

Minnesota Historical Society Collections



Step 3: Make alliances.

Otter Tail County Historical Society director Chris Schuelke (center) addresses a crowd in Fergus Falls at the opening of the Kaddatz Artist Lofts in the renovated Hotel Kaddatz. Schuelke and his staff lobbied the city council to save the historic hotel (left) from demolition. Forming the Hotel Kaddatz Preservation Association, they helped find a developer and recruited volunteers to work on the renovation. Kaddatz Artist Lofts, the first development in greater Minnesota by Artspace Projects, has proved successful: the apartments are rented, a gallery is open and street-level retail space will soon be filled.

Work with the local media, the chamber of commerce, community improvement groups and those involved in the business of tourism.

6 Read

Form a history book club. Link the group with a local bookstore to get discounts for members.

7 Educate

It is the responsibility of a history organization to educate the community. Many take this to mean providing lessons and programs for schoolchildren. But educational programming must go beyond an emphasis on schools.

Your audiences are of many ages. Provide community education for all people in a variety of venues. Find ways to help them discover a historical context for their lives.

8 Professionalize

Treat your volunteers, board and staff as professionals, even if you cannot compensate them adequately. Respect their competence.

9 Listen

Ask what interests the public and listen to their responses. They may have interesting and important things to say.

10

History first

Be wise about where you economize; be sure that you retain a historian on staff or as a consultant. Too often, grant money is allocated for the design team rather than for those who can create an exhibit, program or publication of better quality. Nothing substitutes for sound historical content.

11

Share responsibilities

Often in small, volunteer-run organizations, one person carries a disproportionate load—running the organization, writing the newsletter, planning the programs. It is preferable to share those responsibilities so that your organization is not dependent on any one individual. Ask your members to

step forward and take on some of the tasks.

Don't forget to invite the younger generation to participate. People under 50 might look like youngsters but they're energetic. And those who are parents will be particularly invested in the community. That group needs to be well represented on your board and on committees. Give them a say in determining the direction, emphasis and programs of your organization. After all, they are its future.

12

Involve the public, not just your membership

Invite newcomers in the community to meet with you. Convene at their place. Recent immigrants, more established ethnic groups, college students, summer people – all have a stake in local history. It is your job to show them this is true.

13

Know your public officials

Learn who your city, county, state and federal officials are. Be sure they know what you do, what the costs are and what role your organization plays in the community's cultural life. Appear before boards, testify when appropriate, invite civic leaders to your events and involve them in your programming.



Photo by John Cross, Mankato Free Press

Step 12: Involve the public.

In 2002 the Blue Earth County Historical Society joined forces with Minnesota State University in Mankato to create an oral history project and exhibit on women whose families had immigrated to the area from Somalia, Thailand and Mexico. The project gave voice to groups too seldom represented in local museums. And donation of the tapes and transcripts to the BECHS augmented its collection of more-recent historical materials.

These are not the only steps to take when seeking ways to strengthen your historical society. Rather, I offer them as some realistic ways to think about surviving and thriving in this new century.

Nor are these suggestions only for weaker organizations. They should also provoke conversation among healthy organizations. Times are changing; it is wise to think about what can be done, what should be done and what is possible to achieve.

Sacred Heart Area Historical Society



Step 11: Share responsibilities.

Iverne Enestvedt (left) and Sonja Thune play multiple roles at the all-volunteer Sacred Heart Area Historical Society, planning programs, putting up exhibits and writing the newsletter. In recognition of their many contributions, they recently received the "Over-All Award," one of several awards the society president creates for the group each year.

Meeting the challenge

Groups find creative ways to close the funding gap

Whether it's contests with prizes, gifts to match or countywide campaigns, Minnesota's historical organizations have tapped wellsprings of talent and good ideas to augment tight budgets. Here are just a few examples.

Singing the Cash Crunch Blues

Creativity is often born of desperation. Proving that point this spring was Marlene Wisuri, director of the Carlton County Historical Society. Facing a cash flow crisis when unexpected expenses threatened to deplete society accounts, Wisuri and her staff launched a fundraising campaign they dubbed the Cash Crunch Blues. Four \$1,000 challenge grants from supporters in the community – two for new memberships and two for cash donations – set the bar for

the campaign.

A competition kept up the momentum as teams of eight – made up of board members, business members and community organizations – vied to see who could raise the most money. Carlton County citizens also were invited to join the race by taking the "I'd Rather Do It Myself" challenge to solicit donations and new memberships.

The campaign's "Shoestring Sales" took its name from the plight of every county and local historical society that operates on a shoestring. A \$10 donation bought a pair of flashy new shoelaces. And all individuals donating \$100 or more received their choice of a CCHS publication or CD.

The creative fundraising event brought in nearly \$10,000, garnered 41 new members and welcomed

seven lapsed members back into the fold. Team and individual winners of the competition were treated to a gourmet dinner prepared by the CCHS staff as well as a performance of the campaign's title song, written by Wisuri and company. For tips on what worked best, call Wisuri at 218-879-1938.

Grassroots effort pays off

A solid plan, dedicated volunteers and

persistence. That's what it took to make a success of a four-year project in Goodhue County to mark the sites of villages that once dotted the

countryside. Today, dozens of road signs stand as reminders of the role those hamlets played in shaping the county.

A committee of the Goodhue County Historical Society board took on the challenging project. From the beginning, their goal was to raise funds privately. They got approval for the signs from county commissioners, township boards and the state highway department. With their state representative's help, they even got signage guidelines clarified so that communities could piggyback their signs on state highway markers.

To spread the word about the project, committee members gave talks to fraternal and service organizations, staffed a booth at the county fair and got stories into local newspapers. They posted samples of the signs in bank lobbies and distributed flyers soliciting donations. As the signs began going up, interest mounted and county residents organized their own fundraisers to have additional settlements marked.

"It took a little work and a very good committee," says project chair John L. Cole. "We ordered the signs from the company that supplies the county, then county workers installed them. We paid for all the materials and labor. We're very proud of the fact that we did it on our own without any grants or government funding." For more information about this well-executed grassroots effort, call Cole at 507-789-6344.

A special gift for special projects

As the Goodhue County road sign



Mary Lukkarila (right), director of the Cloquet Public Library, wore her shoelaces as a bolo tie during the Carlton County Historical Society's Cash Crunch Blues campaign. Collections assistant Harriette Niemi admired the inventive accessory.



Goodhue County Historical Society

Private fundraising paid for Goodhue County's town marker project. This sign marks a town where some structures remain.

committee did its work last year, another benefactor stepped forward with a challenge of a different sort: If the county historical society and its

supporters could raise \$15,000 in three months, the donor, who wished to remain anonymous, would match the amount.

Funds were to be used for upgrading exhibits in the Goodhue County History Center.

Exceeding everyone's expectations, the society raised double that amount, bringing in much-needed monies to supplement its budget. This year the donor

posed the same challenge, and again the society exceeded the goal.

"We've received donations from longtime friends as well as people new to us," says GCHS director Char Henn. "With last year's monies we were able to install new cases and labels in our Native American exhibit. These extra funds let us take on more ambitious projects than our budget normally allows." For information on working successfully with benefactors, call Henn at 651-388-6024.

Four IMLS grants awarded in Minnesota

Cokato Museum receives state's first-ever MAP grant for governance assessment

Four historical organizations in Minnesota got word recently that they have been awarded federal grants from the Institute for Museum and Library Services. Most notable is the state's first-ever Museum Assessment Program (MAP) grant in the category of governance - a \$2,325 grant to the Cokato Museum in Wright County.

The relationship between the City of Cokato and the Cokato Historical Society will be a central focus of the study. "Our museum is city-owned," explains museum director Mike Worcester. "The historical society is an independent advisory agency that helps run it. The main areas we plan to assess are the effectiveness of that arrangement and our public relations efforts - how well we engage the community. We hope the grant will help both agencies operate the museum more successfully."

Another MAP grant recipient is the Clay County Historical Society, which received \$4,820 for a public dimensions assessment. The organization will evaluate the ways it serves its community through exhibits, programs and other services and how well the historical society communicates with its audiences through public relations and evaluation tools.

Two Conservation Project Support grants round out this year's IMLS awards to Minnesota. The Kandiyohi County Historical Society received \$18,602 to install ultraviolet film, dimmers and motion-activated lights that will help protect its collections from damage. The Olmsted County Historical Society received the largest of the four grants



Cokato Historical Society

The City of Cokato owns the building that houses the Cokato Museum and the public library. A MAP grant will help the agencies assess their shared responsibilities.

- \$53,515 in conservation project support to purchase a compact storage unit in which the Society will rehouse its 7,500-piece textile and costume collection.

For more information about IMLS grants, go to www.imls.gov/grants.

Workshops aplenty

PastPerfect Museum Software Training

Sept. 27-30

Minnesota History Center, St. Paul

Pastime Software Company will hold regional training classes for users of its PastPerfect Museum Software products Sept. 27-30 at the Minnesota History Center. The first day will introduce Version 3 users to the new Version 4. The second day covers collections management. On the third day participants will learn to use Report Maker and Virtual Exhibit. The fourth day deals with membership and fundraising.

Cost: \$95.20 **per day** for AASLH members, or \$119 **per day** for non-AASLH members. For more information see www.museumsoftware.com/training.htm. To reserve a place call Pastime Software Company training coordinator Amy Dunn at 610-304-0973 or e-mail training@museumsoftware.com.

Exhibit Planning

Oct. 20

Blue Earth County Historical Society, Mankato

or

Oct. 21

Morrison County Historical Society, Little Falls

How does your museum create its exhibits? Could you use some fresh approaches, design ideas or fabrication tips? Then mark your calendars for this one-day workshop on exhibits planning, sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Offered at two convenient locations, the workshop covers all aspects of exhibits production, from content planning to design and label writing to exhibit fabrication. The instructor is Tom McKay, local history coordinator at the Wisconsin



MHS Local History Services photo

An addition to the Cottonwood County Historical Society created more than 3,000 square feet of exhibit space to fill. A mural depicting the county's agricultural roots welcomes visitors at the entrance.

Historical Society.

Watch for registration information in the September-October Interpreter. Meanwhile, address questions to Tim Glines, MHS manager of outreach services, 651-296-5460, or e-mail timothy.glines@mnhs.org.

Conservation Concerns for New Building Projects and Renovations

Oct. 20-21

Minnesota History Center, St. Paul

This two-day workshop is one of the first of its kind in the country to cover conservation issues that need addressing before, during and after construction or renovation of cultural institutions with

collections. The workshop is sponsored by the Upper Midwest Conservation Association (UMCA) and the Minnesota Historical Society.

Instructors Neil Cockerline, UMCA's director of field services, and Bob Herskovitz, MHS outreach conservator, will discuss aspects of the design/construction process that directly affect collections. Among topics to be covered: building placement, site drainage, vapor barriers, window coatings and coverings, landscaping materials, loading docks and freight elevators, storage vaults, traffic patterns and crowd control, and systems of checks and balances. Other experts will address specialty issues such as HVAC systems, security and insurance.

Cost: \$245, or \$195 for UMCA members. For more information call UMCA field services coordinator Melinda Markell at 612-870-3128 or go to www.preserveart.org.



Minnesota History Center planners called for vast underground storage spaces in a structural frame of reinforced concrete to house priceless collections.

Minnesota Historical Society photo

And the winner is...

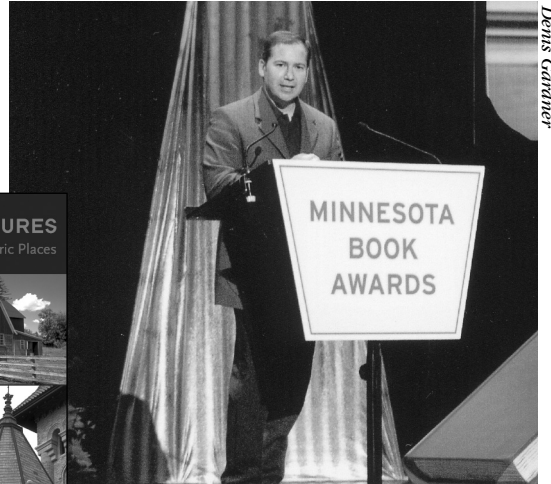
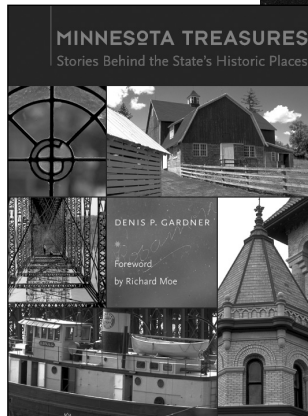
Author Denis Gardner garners Minnesota Book Award

Minnesota *Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places*, by Denis P. Gardner, took top honors in its category at the annual Minnesota Book Awards in April. Besting four other nominees in the category of Nature and Minnesota, Gardner's book showcases 75 of the state's most intriguing properties on the National Register of Historic Places. Included are historic resources from all corners of the state.

Published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press, *Minnesota Treasures* is available for resale in museum gift shops. For sales information go to www.mnhs.org/

market/mhspress. To place an order call the Chicago Distribution Center, 1-800-621-2736.

Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places by Denis P. Gardner, \$39.95 (dealer discounts apply), cloth, ISBN 0-87351-471-8, 320 pages, 156 color photos, 37 b&w photos, index.



Denis Gardner accepts his award for *Minnesota Treasures*, a collection of stories about the state's National Register properties.

26th Annual Statewide Historic Preservation Conference

Sept. 14-16 • Duluth

"Grassroots Preservation" is the theme of this year's conference sponsored by the State Historic Preservation Office. Sessions offer insights into the many ways local preservation efforts can strengthen communities. Tours of host city Duluth feature several downtown housing and tax credit projects.

For details and registration information see the enclosed Preservation Planner, page 4.



Duluth's Aerial Lift Bridge has long drawn visitors to the city's waterfront.

Minnesota Historical Society Collections

Cultural tourism is theme of MAM annual meeting

The Minnesota Association of Museums (MAM) will hold its annual meeting and conference on Monday, Oct. 10, at the Mill City Museum in Minneapolis. Sessions addressing the theme of cultural tourism are in the planning stages. Eric Jolly, president of the Science Museum of Minnesota, is slated to deliver the keynote address.

The day before the meeting, MAM will host a family event for conference attendees featuring tours of local attractions.

Registration begins in mid-August. Go to www.minnesotamuseums.org for more information as it develops. Details will appear in the September-October Interpreter.

Legislative delays bring uncertainty

Plans proceed for fall grants round

As this issue of the Interpreter went to press in early June, the Minnesota Legislature remained in special session to finish its work on the state budget. Still pending was action on funding for the Minnesota Historic Society's biennial appropriation and with it the State Grants-in-Aid program.

"There's no question that funds for the program will be approved," said Tim Glines, MHS manager of outreach services. "We just don't know yet exactly how much there will be."

In April the legislature did pass the 2005 bonding bill, which included \$1 million for county and local

historic preservation grants. Administered through the Society's State Capital Projects Grants-in-Aid program, these grants support historic preservation projects in publicly owned buildings. (See the calendar section of the enclosed Preservation Planner for details on capital grants.)

Grant deadlines set

Even with the uncertainty about state grants-in-aid funding, deadlines have been set for the fall grants round so that grant applicants can begin planning. Applications will be considered for both the State Grants-in-Aid and the State Capital Projects

Grants-in-Aid programs.

For more information on state grants-in-aid requirements, go to www.mnhs.org/about/grants/stgrants.html.

July 29	Pre-applications due for both grant programs.
Aug. 19	Final applications due by 4:30 p.m. for state grants-in-aid.
Aug. 26	Final applications due by 4:30 p.m. for capital projects.
Oct. 6	Grants Review Committee meets.

Minnesota History Interpreter

is published bimonthly by the Historic Preservation Department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Readers may submit news for publication. Send to Interpreter Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

Material from this issue may be reprinted with the following credit line: Reprinted with permission from *Minnesota History Interpreter*, July - August 2005, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4, published by the Minnesota Historical Society. Do not reprint material taken from another source without permission.

On request, this publication is available in alternative formats: audiotape, large print or computer disk. Back issues can be found online at www.mnhs.org/about/publications/interpreter.html.

For address corrections e-mail michele.decker@mnhs.org or call 651-296-5434. For other matters call Tim Glines at 651-296-5460 or e-mail timothy.glines@mnhs.org.

Britta Bloomberg, Head,
Historic Preservation Department
Tim Glines, Manager, Outreach Services
David Grabitske, Grants and Field Programs Associate
Mary Ann Nord, Editor
Kate Raver, Layout

mnhs.org

Minnesota Historical Society

345 Kellogg Boulevard West
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102-1906

Address service requested.

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit No. 854