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Last call for state grants-in-aid applications

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

From the frame up

Caring for large functional objects requires clear goals and planning

Fire engines. Farm equipment. Cars and railway cars. Machines for washing clothes and grinding wheat.

More than a few Minnesota museums hold such oversized artifacts in their collections. Known as large functional objects, these artifacts present special conservation challenges. For smaller organizations with limited space and modest budgets, the challenges loom even larger.

Help is close at hand. Outreach conservator Bob Herskovitz is one of the Minnesota Historical Society's resident experts on the care and conservation of collections. He can suggest strategies for tackling large projects. He can present options to consider as you ponder what needs doing and how to go about it. He can offer technical guidance and assistance.

But Herskovitz has no easy answers. Instead, his approach is to ask a few basic questions.

Know what questions to ask

"First," says Herskovitz, "you need to be clear about your purpose. What are your goals? Do you simply want to keep a vehicle or piece of machinery from deteriorating? Do you want to clean it up for display in your museum? Or do you want to be able to operate it? Your answer to those questions will help you decide which



Minnesota Historical Society

After Volkswagen-specialist mechanics mothballed Charles A. Lindgergh's 1959 Beetle for long-term display, conservator Paul Storch (left) repaired rust on the car in his lab at the Minnesota Historical Society.

direction to take - conservation or restoration."

Conservation is treatment to stabilize an artifact - to prevent or retard further deterioration. Conservation practices generally aim to maintain the integrity of an object, leaving its physical nature as unaltered as possible. Sometimes,

however, changing the appearance of an object during conservation is unavoidable, says Herskovitz, citing one of the treatments for rust removal that turns a metal surface black.

Restoration aims to reverse deterioration and improve the

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Frame up *continued from page 1*

appearance of an object, returning it to a known or assumed condition. Restoration can also involve steps to make the object functional again.

“You may decide on a hybrid approach, making something functional without cosmetic changes,” says Herskovitz. “Or you can restore it to like-new condition. There is no single correct approach. It’s a matter of your objectives and your philosophy about your collection.”

Weigh the pros and cons

There are persuasive arguments for a total overhaul, known as from-the-frame-up restoration. Restoration rescues a relic in derelict condition and makes it usable as an object for interpretation.

Restoration may even *improve* on the original. When period materials and parts are no longer available, modern materials – new paint, for example, or a newly created part – must be substituted. The resulting



Engine 2523 arrived at the Kandiyohi County Historical Society in 1965 when the Great Northern Railway presented the locomotive to the City of Willmar. Retired railroad engineers give tours of the stationary display. A canopy shelter saves on maintenance and conservation costs.

object may look better or be more durable than the original. Such improvements can be advantageous if you plan to operate a vehicle or machine. However, these improvements reduce the originality of the object and may diminish its value for research. “When an object is restored – that is, no longer in its original condition,” says Herskovitz, “be sure to include that information in your interpretation.”

Creating a like-new appearance is more appropriate for some kinds of artifacts than for others, he notes. “A fire engine would have been kept polished and in good repair throughout its period of use.”

But one can also argue that wear patterns on an object – like the worn spots on a car’s upholstery – are a natural part of its use. “To lose that evidence of wear,” he says, “is to change the

object’s physical nature permanently and irreversibly. You erase some of the history of the piece.”

A case in point is Charles Lindbergh’s 1959 Volkswagen Beetle,

now on exhibit at the Charles A. Lindbergh Historic Site in Little Falls. Paul Storch, the Minnesota Historical Society’s senior objects conservator, oversaw work on the car before it went on display. “The project was more conservation than restoration,” he says. “We wanted to retain as much of the original material as possible, imperfections and all. That included a dent in the fender made by daughter Reeve Lindbergh as she backed out of the garage. Some of the car’s history would have been lost if we had fixed that dent.”

Assess the risks

There are other factors to consider when an artifact is to be put into use. For a transportation museum, operating vehicles in its collection may be part of the mission. With that approach, however, come certain risks. “When you use something,” says Herskovitz, “you risk damaging it or wearing it out – using it up.”

At living history sites like the Oliver H. Kelley Farm in Elk River and the Forest History Center in Grand Rapids, that’s a necessary risk. “You need to be able to show the way of life on a farm or in a logging camp, with working vehicles and equipment,” says Storch. Adds Herskovitz, “Visitors get a whole



This 1914 Cretors popcorn wagon is partway through its restoration at the Brown County Historical Society using a combination of original and replacement parts. For safety reasons, it will be restored without gas burners. When completed, the wagon will be used at community events.

different appreciation for an object and its history when they can see and hear and smell the equipment in operation.”

Many museums have teaching collections – duplicate artifacts that can be put into use while other, similar artifacts are preserved in their original condition. “Tools, clothing, spinning wheels, mangles – those things exist in surplus,” says Herskovitz. “But how many museums have a spare automobile or tractor sitting around? Sometimes there’s no choice but to use the original if your mission goes beyond display of the artifact.”

Follow standard practices

When deciding how to treat an object, let standard conservation practices be your guide, advises Herskovitz. You might think of a machine as a document of continued use, to be preserved as it was when it ceased to be used. Few cars or tractors make it into museum collections without having had parts replaced, he points out; those changes add to the artifact’s story.

Attitudes toward conservation have changed over time, Herskovitz notes. “Our profession is more conservative now,” he says. “It was not an uncommon practice in the 1940s and 1950s to run machines. Today, conservators who specialize in the conservation of three-dimensional objects are more aware of the preservation needs of the object and the potential for damage to its condition.”

Keep complete records


“There are so many variables to consider with large functional objects,” says Herskovitz. If your museum doesn’t already have a policy on operating machinery in its



Wheeled vehicles aren’t the only large artifacts preserved in Minnesota museums. A display of wood boats and canoes at the new Minnesota Lakes Maritime Museum in Alexandria includes examples made by the Alexandria Boat Works and other Minnesota wood boat builders. The collection also contains outboard motors, hunting and fishing artifacts, and memorabilia from the state’s resorting past.

collection, consider formulating one, he suggests. Spell out the circumstances under which you would consider operating a vehicle, who will operate it, what measures will be employed to protect it from damage, and how it will be transported and insured.

“Whatever approach you decide to take,” he says, “there’s one thing you should always do – keep complete

records.” Before beginning any conservation work or restoration project, take time to thoroughly document the current condition of the item. Assess what is original and what may have been previously repaired or replaced. Then record, in words and pictures, all changes as you make them. That documentation goes into the artifact’s file and becomes part of its history. 

Resources

- For guidelines on caring for large objects such as wheeled vehicles, farm equipment and industrial machinery, see Paul Storch’s article, “Policy and Procedures for the Post-Acquisition/Pre-Storage Treatment of Large Functional Objects,” on the Minnesota Historical Society’s web site at www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/research.html.
- Two articles from the Illinois Heritage Association on antique cars have broad application to any kind of mechanical artifact. See Technical Inserts No. 136 (July-Aug. 2005) and No. 137 (Sept.-Oct. 2005), titled “Operation of Antique Cars in a Museum Collection,” Parts 1 and 2. They may be ordered at <http://illinoisheritage.prairienet.org>.
- For step-by-step examples of Minnesota Historical Society conservation projects, including work on the Lindbergh Beetle, a cabriolet sleigh from the Alexander Ramsey House and an 1879 wooden boxcar at Mill City Museum, go to www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/treatment.html.
- For consultation on your museum’s conservation or restoration projects, e-mail the Society’s outreach conservator, Bob Herskovitz, at bob.herskovitz@mnhs.org or call 651-297-3896.

Sherburne History Center opens

Communitywide effort bridges county's past and future

The Sherburne County Historical Society board began dreaming of a new home more than 15 years ago. In June that dream finally came true when the 15,500-square-foot Sherburne History Center opened with great fanfare – the crowning event in a year-long celebration of the county's sesquicentennial.

"It's been a tremendous communitywide effort," says SCHS executive director Kurt Kragness. He is particularly proud of the \$1.1 million raised during the society's capital campaign. Another \$1.9 million in bonding from the county helped build the new facility outside Becker, located on 50 acres of the 220-acre Oak Savanna Park being developed on land donated by a longtime Becker family. (The county owns the site; the historical society leases the building.)



The new Sherburne History Center in Becker houses a 2,000-square-foot exhibit gallery, an education wing, research library, and archival and artifact storage. An outdoor plaza will accommodate special events.

'Life on the Edge'

Filling the 2,000-square-foot exhibit gallery is "Life on the Edge," a semi-permanent exhibit planned with input from representatives throughout the county. Rather than an encyclopedic survey of the county's history, exhibit developers focused on themes illustrating the county's location at the edge of the Anoka Sand Plain – glacial history, outdoor life, conservation, agriculture – and themes tied to the county's position on the edge of two

urban areas – power generation and rural electrification. Anchoring the exhibit are large iconic objects such as a bison skeleton, nine-foot advertising characters Willie Wiredhand and Reddy Kilowatt, and a 1970s irrigation tower. Audio stations throughout the exhibit range from Ojibwe songs recorded by

ethnologist Frances Densmore to oral histories about the impact of electricity on rural ways of life.

A changing exhibit, under the banner "Communities," will highlight various parts of the county. The first to be featured: the era of Big Lake resorts.

Building a legacy

Outside the history center, county workers are seeding five acres near the building with native grasses and plants to recreate a feeling of the area's prairie heritage. The natural landscaping will also hold down maintenance costs. "Many organizations – federal, state and local – have contributed financial support to the project," says Kragness, "and volunteers donated time and supplies." As the prairie landscaping takes root, the county society plans to use it as an outdoor exhibit space.

A half-mile Legacy Trail will link other cultural and natural features on the site, including a nearby lake, a historic farmstead (to be developed) and two historic structures owned by the SCHS. Additional funds to complete several of those projects are being raised through the sale of bricks for a Legacy Plaza.

For more information on the planning of this major undertaking, call Kragness or programs manager Bobbie Scott at 763-262-4433 or e-mail schs@sherbtel.net.



Volunteers install an irrigation tower in a new exhibit about the transformation of agriculture in Sherburne County through the advent of widespread irrigation.

The taste of tradition

'Key Ingredients' exhibit comes to Scott County

When the latest Smithsonian traveling exhibition rolls into Minnesota this summer, Scott County will roll out the red carpet.

"Key Ingredients: America by Food" opens at the Scott County Historical Society July 1 for a six-week stay. The exhibit explores America's diverse food traditions – historical, regional, social – found in everyday meals and special celebrations alike. Among events planned at the Stans History Museum in Shakopee is an early Fourth of July celebration complete with races, contests and music. A juried art show will feature the work of local artists inspired by favorite family recipes. And folksinger and songwriter Charlie Maguire will perform the world premiere of his own "Key Ingredients" song.

And that's all on the exhibit's opening day. In weeks to follow, visitors can join a coffee klatch, attend an ice cream social, take cooking classes, watch a Victory Garden grow, contribute to a local food drive and take part in a county library cookbook swap. Perhaps the biggest event of all is the publication of *Kitchen Stories of Scott County*, a cookbook created from the oral histories of county residents. The stories also have been woven into an exhibit on local food traditions that will complement the Smithsonian exhibit.

For more information about these and other Scott County Historical Society events, call Kathleen Klehr at 952-445-0378 or e-mail kklehr@scottcountyhistory.org.

Next stops

"Key Ingredients" was developed by Museum on Main Street, a

partnership of the Smithsonian and state humanities councils. Other Minnesota stops scheduled so far are:

- Aug. 12 - Sept. 19, Murray County Historical Society
- Sept. 26 - Nov. 2, Clearwater County Historical Society
- Nov. 8 - Dec. 15, The Crossing Arts Alliance, Brainerd
- Dec. 22 - Feb. 1, Waseca County Historical Society
- Feb. 12 - March 26, Otter Tail County Historical Society.



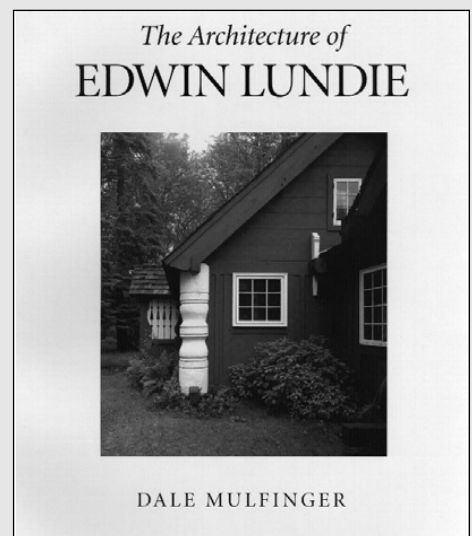
Scott County Historical Society

In 1915 this cook (center) and her crew fed visitors to Scott County's Mudbaden Sulphur Springs resort. Years later Catherine Beckius (left) swapped recipes with her card club, recording them in a little book where she tracked her winnings. Her recipe for Million Dollar Cookies appears in the cookbook *Kitchen Stories of Scott County*.

North Shore tour to feature Lundie cabins

On July 15 the Schroeder Area Historical Society will sponsor its third annual tour of selected North Shore residences designed by architect Edwin Lundie. This year's tour focuses on the Schroeder/Tofte area and includes the MacDonald, Daniels and Olson cabins as well as Lundie's own cabin. Architects accompanying the tour will be available for questions.

The cost for the day-long tour, including a picnic supper, is a donation of \$150 per person to the nonprofit Cross River Heritage Center. For more information and reservations, call 218-663-7706.



Minnesota Historical Society

A residence designed by Edwin Lundie on the cover of a book from the Minnesota Historical Society Press.

New electronic newsletter debuts

Minnesota Local History News replaces listserv

New and improved. That's the state of the former MNLOCALHISTORY listserv. Retitled Minnesota Local History News, the electronic newsletter still comes to you by e-mail every Wednesday. And each issue features the same content you've come to count on - coming events, news, conferences and workshops, grant deadlines, job announcements - time-sensitive items that the Interpreter's less frequent publication schedule can't accommodate.

So what's new? Pictures and graphics now enliven the electronic format. And each issue contains only postings submitted since the previous issue. That makes it easy to check out the latest information from your history colleagues and the Minnesota Historical Society. All past issues will be archived and can be searched for articles of interest.

There's more. Gone is the old Discussions and Questions section of MNLOCALHISTORY. Now you can communicate with your colleagues and MHS staff through a link to the new Minnesota Local History Blog - short for web log. Use it to get prompt answers to

pressing questions, submit comments and share ideas.

The Interpreter newsletter will continue to be published bimonthly, bringing you in-depth stories, technical articles and features spotlighting your special exhibits and programs.

Watch for a tie-in to this issue's

feature story in the July 12 Local History News, where you'll have an opportunity to let your history colleagues know about large functional objects in your collections. Share your conservation and restoration successes and challenges and exchange ideas on strategies and resources.



Don't miss a single issue of Local History News!

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DISCUSSIONS AND QUESTIONS
New Design for LOCAL HISTORY NEWS

This section of the newsletter has moved to our blog. See <http://discussions.mnhs.org/MNLOCALHISTORY/index.cfm>. This week also marks the first appearance of a new design and format for Local History News. We invite your comments and suggestions. Please respond directly on the blog.

JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS

There are no new announcements this week. See <http://www.mnhs.org/shpo/lhs/jobs.htm> for previous announcements and links to job listings for the [Minnesota Historical Society](#), [Wisconsin Historical Society](#) and other midwest organizations.

LOCAL EVENTS
Sherburne County History Center grand opening

The grand opening celebration for the new Sherburne County

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

Discussions and Questions

- New Design for LOCAL HISTORY NEWS

Job Announcements

- No new announcements

Local Events

- Sherburne County History Center grand opening
- *Key Ingredients: America by Food* exhibit opens at Scott County Historical Society

News

- Kids can learn Swedish this

Conservation workshops offer tips on preserving family history

As part of the Minnesota Historical Society's multiyear project to honor Minnesota's World War II generation, outreach conservator Bob Herskovitz continues his series of conservation workshops to help Minnesotans preserve their family history.

Titled "Minnesota's Greatest Generation: Preserving Family History," the programs offer a step-by-step approach to preserving various kinds of family memorabilia - letters, photographs and other materials - particularly from the World War II era. Using items brought by participants, Herskovitz demonstrates how to care for, store and display family treasures. He also offers guidelines for creating oral histories that are both informative and useful for future generations.

This summer Herskovitz will conduct conservation workshops in:

July 26: Ely

Ely-Winton Historical Society, 7 p.m.

Sponsor: Ely-Winton Historical Society
Call 218-365-3226.



Outreach conservator Bob Herskovitz answers questions from participants about the care of their family treasures in a "Preserving Family History" workshop in Fairmont.

July 29: Silver Bay/Beaver Bay

Re-union Hall, Silver Bay, 9 a.m.

Sponsor: Bay Area Historical Society
Call 218-226-4317.

Aug. 17: Arlington

Arlington Community Center, 6:30 p.m.

Sponsor: Arlington Historical Society
Call 507-964-5878.

Host a conservation workshop

Herskovitz is now scheduling workshops for the fall and winter. With continued funding, he expects to offer the workshops throughout the course of the Minnesota's Greatest Generation project, which will culminate in a major exhibition at the Minnesota History Center during the state's 2008 sesquicentennial.

If your organization is interested in hosting a workshop, call Herskovitz at 651-297-3896 or e-mail bob.herskovitz@mnhs.org. For more information on the Society's Minnesota's Greatest Generation project, go to www.mnhs.org/people/mngg/index.htm.

Exhibit planning workshop returns

When: Oct. 4

Where: Twin Cities venue to be announced

Tom McKay, retired local history coordinator at the Wisconsin Historical Society, returns to Minnesota this fall with his popular exhibit planning workshop, first offered here in 2005.

Sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society, the day-long workshop covers all aspects of exhibits production, from content planning to design to label writing and exhibit fabrication.

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.

Fall grants round fully funded

State grants-in-aid, capital grants to be awarded

Deadlines are fast approaching for the Minnesota Historical Society's State Grants-in-Aid program.

This is the second of two grant cycles funded by the 2005 Minnesota Legislature for state grants-in-aid. Approximately \$58,000 will be awarded to county and local historical organizations in the categories of historic properties, artifact collections, microform copies, oral history, manuscripts collections, museum environments and technology.

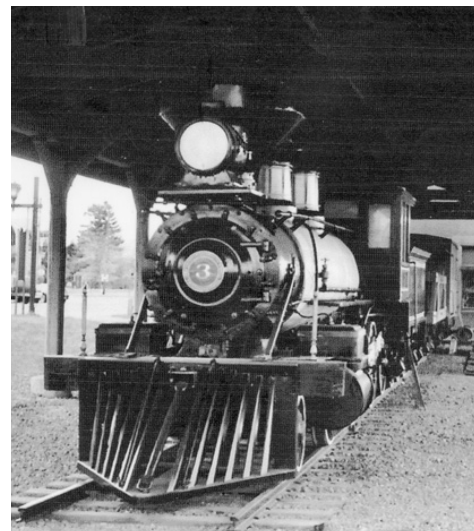
Also scheduled for this grant round is the State Capital Project Grants-in-Aid program, funded through the 2006 legislature's \$1 billion statewide bonding bill, passed in June.

Approximately \$900,000 in matching grants to county and local jurisdictions is available for the 2007-08 biennium to support historic preservation projects in publicly owned buildings. (See the calendar section of the enclosed Preservation Planner for details on capital grants.)

Grant deadlines

- July 28** Preapplications due for both grant programs.
- Sept. 1** Final applications due by 4:30 p.m.
- Oct. 3** Grants Review Committee meets.

For details about the two grant programs, including guidelines,



Lake County Historical Society

A state grant-in-aid helped the Lake County Historical Society repaint the Three Spot Locomotive, used to tell museum visitors about the growth of rail transport and the iron ore industry in northeastern Minnesota.

eligibility and application forms, go to www.mnhs.org/about/grants.

Minnesota History Interpreter

is published bimonthly by the Historic Preservation Department of the Minnesota Historical Society. Unless otherwise noted, photographs are from the Local History Services office.

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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.

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

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

www.mnhs.org

Minnesota Historical Society

345 Kellogg Boulevard West
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102-1906

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