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## Don't delay – document today!

Preserving your organization's history pays off in many ways

Five years ago the Interpreter featured an article on an often-overlooked aspect of community history – the history of the very organizations charged with preserving it. Too many of Minnesota's county, local and special-purpose historical organizations still put themselves last when it comes to documenting their communities.

So the topic bears a second look, especially as Minnesotans gear up to celebrate the sesquicentennial of their statehood. After all, by the time Minnesota was established in 1858, the Minnesota Historical Society had been collecting manuscript materials and objects for nine years. Intent on preserving the history they were creating, the Society's founders kept a record of their own doings, too.

Here are some things you can do to make sure your own organization's history becomes part of your community's historical record. Future generations will thank you.

### Add to your archives

The surest way to document your organization's activities is to archive

the records that should be preserved, including:

- annual reports
- board and committee meeting agendas and minutes
- financial records
- accession and donor files (useful for clarifying artifact ownership)
- membership roles
- bylaws and other papers pertaining to governance.

Together, these primary sources contain a vital record of your organization's growth and development.

Don't overlook other important sources of information:

- Exhibit files show how museum displays were researched and constructed.
- Grant applications and summary reports of completed projects serve to document major activities.
- AASLH award nominations may be gold mines of material about a key player in your organization.

**Don't delay – document today!**  
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## Tim Glines retires

Tim Glines, manager of outreach services in the Minnesota Historical Society's Historic Preservation Department since early 2001, retires from his post on July 5.

Those of you with long years of service in Minnesota's history community will remember Tim's first tour of duty with the department, when he served as grants manager from 1987 to 1991. Then, after nine years tending to administrative duties in Society director Nina Archabal's office, he rejoined the department to oversee its outreach services – consultation on local history museum management, historic preservation education, grant programs, preservation work with local governments, and conservation outreach.

**Tim Glines**  
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## Don't delay - document today! - continued

A case in point: When retired historical society executive directors Bev Jackson of Freeborn County and Margaret Sinn of Waseca County, both 18-year veteran administrators, were nominated for AASLH awards, their nominations were virtually capsule histories of their organizations.

Another easy way to document what you do is to save all your public relations and marketing materials, suggests Molly Tierney, MHS curator of manuscripts. "Newsletters, ads, flyers – they tell the what, where and when of your programming and exhibits.

"If you do a thorough job of documenting not just events but all aspects of your organization," Tierney says, "you won't have to reinvent the wheel each time you begin a new project. Good project files also mean you won't have to rely on someone's memory."

### **Include your organization in published histories**

If you're planning to publish a history of your community, don't forget to

count your own organization among institutions that are key to the community's vitality. When the St. Louis County Historical Society published "A County Built on Iron" to mark the county's sesquicentennial in 2006, the final chapter was devoted to the society's own history and its role in preserving the region's heritage.

Going a step further, Minnesota's Machinery Museum in Hanley Falls published a booklet devoted to its own 25-year history. Packed with photos of the museum's collections, activities, visitors and volunteers, the slim volume captures the organization's growth from a group of farm machinery enthusiasts to a full-fledged agricultural history museum.

### **Take plenty of photographs**

Photos are a great way to document your special events and public programs, of course. But what about recording your everyday activities, too? Set a goal of snapping pictures on a regular basis – of your volunteers indexing obituaries, the local garden club tending your grounds or the staff setting up your display at the county fair. And remember to take an annual group photo of your board of directors.

Digital photography makes taking and storing images easier than ever, once you master the technology. But be sure to add selected prints to your photo archive. And keep a log of what you're shooting. Unidentified photographs will be of little use to future historians. Well-documented photos, on the other hand, can be put to many uses – in your newsletter, in annual reports, on your web site.

Besides preserving your organization's history for posterity, these photographic records can serve other, very practical uses. They will:

- Enliven your own promotional materials. Showing people engaged in an annual event is much more effective than just writing about it.
- Increase your chances of garnering publicity in other media. Newspapers may give you more prominent coverage if you accompany your press release or media-kit story ideas with pictures of local interest. And, of course, this newsletter relies on your photographs to share your news with colleagues around the state.
- Create more vivid and compelling funding appeals and grant proposals and reports than mere pages of text can convey.

### **Conduct oral histories of your own group members**

Departing officers, board members and long-time employees are fonts of knowledge about your organization's growth and development. Interview them on tape – video or audio – so their experiences become part of your historical record.

That's what the St. Paul Police Department accomplished recently with its oral history project. Conducted by Hand in Hand Productions, the oral histories of current and retired officers serve to document the evolution of a major city police department. The interviews mine the subjects' memories not just of changes to the department over time but of stories passed down from senior officers to rookies – oral traditions that reveal the department's distinctive culture.



*Behind-the-scenes photos are a regular feature of the Chippewa County Historical Society's monthly newsletter. The pictures serve to document society operations and recognize staff and volunteers. Here, volunteers Julius Ost and Vernon Lund install shelving during a library renovation.*

## For the record

What have you preserved that captures the distinctive flavor of your own organization? Beyond annual reports – beyond accession files and financial records – it’s the words and pictures of the people who have helped shape your organization that will bring your history to life. Without them, it’s so much harder to tell your story – to potential members and donors, to the public and the media, and to future generations.

**Need more information on preserving your organization’s papers? Call Charlie Rodgers, government records specialist at the Minnesota Historical Society, 651-259-3266. ■**



Morrison County Historical Society

*The Morrison County Historical Society collects its own organizational history along with the rest of the county’s. Among its holdings are photos of the society’s founders in 1944 (left) and the longtime leadership team of Jan and Art Warner (right), recognized in 2005 for their 40 years of service to the organization. The Warners share their knowledge via articles in the society’s newsletter and web site but oral histories of the pair have yet to be done.*

## Tim Glines – continued

He viewed this work as an opportunity to get back to one of his passions – history at the grass-roots level.

A tireless champion of the value that smaller organizations bring to their communities, Tim is best known for his roles as a liaison to Society resources and as advisor to many a county, local and special-interest historical organization. That work meant driving thousands of miles over the years, as Tim imparted his wise counsel and encouragement to groups in every corner of the state.

Asked to reflect on the past six years, Tim offered this perspective on the county and local historical society movement: “The majority of Minnesota’s history organizations seem stronger than ever. Many have solid strategic plans to guide them in the

years to come. And although finding enough money continues to be everyone’s concern, many organizations have seen their budgets grow. A number of excellent new museums and building expansions have gone up in recent years. And most organizations are putting time and resources into the important work of cataloging and caring for their historical collections.

“The future is not predictable, of course, but there’s one thing we can count on: information technology will continue to change the way we do our work. Those changes will present historical organizations with tremendous opportunities to serve their publics better. The key is to prepare ourselves to take advantage of those opportunities.”

Tim’s retirement means that a season of transition lies ahead for both the Historic Preservation Department and Minnesota’s local history community. I want to assure you that the Minnesota Historical Society is committed to continuing a strong local history services program. We believe, as Tim does, that you are important partners in advancing the interests of history statewide. I know we can count on Tim’s continued advocacy, now from behind the scenes, for the work that we all care about.

Tim will be missed by his colleagues here at the Society and by the many of you he served in the field. As we say farewell, we also say a sincere thank you to someone who has been a colleague, an advisor and a friend. ■

**– Britta Bloomberg, head**  
Historic Preservation Department



## Welcome aboard!

New and not-so-new directors take the helm at Minnesota's county historical societies

It's been nearly two years since the Interpreter introduced readers to more than a half-dozen new directors at Minnesota's county historical societies (see the September-October 2005 issue). Since then, fourteen more county organizations have welcomed new staff members to their top position. Seven of them are profiled here. The rest, in alphabetical order by county, will appear in the next issue.



Anoka County Historical Society

Todd Mahon

### Anoka County

The dust has finally settled for executive director Todd Mahon at the Anoka County Historical Society. Hired in December 2005 when Bonnie McDonald left to head the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, he moved to his new post from a position at the Hennepin County society. Mahon brought his seven years of experience there to the task of planning Anoka County's sesquicentennial celebration in May 2007.

"For the first 18 months, I acted largely as an events planner," says Mahon. "Now that the sesquicentennial is behind us, I have a brand new job. We're using that communitywide

celebration as a launching pad to raise the visibility of the historical society and boost membership."



Carlton County Historical Society

Anne Dugan

### Carlton County

In September 2006 Anne Dugan took over from the Carlton County Historical Society's longtime executive director, Marlene Wisuri, who left to pursue her photography and book-publishing projects. Dugan, a Carleton College graduate with a master's degree in museum studies from Columbia University, finds her new role in her new home "a wonderful way to participate in the community."

Dugan's challenge: Bring more people in to the museum. "I want to enliven the space so that it becomes a community gathering spot," she says. So she hired a part-time exhibits coordinator to develop changing exhibits. She also plans some adventurous programming, like a history-based Amazing Race Around Town, to be held during the annual Big Day Cloquet event.

### Carver County

When Leanne Brown began searching for her successor at the Carver County



Carver County Historical Society

Wendy Biorn

Historical Society in late 2006, she called Wendy Biorn, who had made her mark as director of the Rockford Area Historical Society with a focus on marketing that had quadrupled attendance. Biorn will use that experience to lead the Carver County society, which has just undertaken the two-year Museum Assessment Program, a process of internal and external study to address areas of concern.

"The population of Carver County, one of the fastest growing counties in the state, is expected to triple by 2030," says Biorn. "We could see our museum attendance grow sixfold in that time. We're sure to experience growing pains but we'll also have tremendous opportunities as we introduce the county's new, more urban population to the area's rural history and culture."

### Crow Wing County

Taking over from the Crow Wing County Historical Society's longtime director, Mary Lou Moudry, in April 2006, Marilyn Anderson found that her recruiting experience as a human services administrator came in handy with the society's volunteer program. She'll use that experience to bring new energy to the organization for both staff and volunteers.



Crow Wing County Historical Society

Marilyn Anderson

“Another of my focus areas is internal efficiencies,” says Anderson, about her plans to improve collections storage and upgrade computers. She’ll also work to raise community awareness of the society’s museum and research library, generate interest by changing exhibits more frequently and boost membership.



Dakota County Historical Society

Chad Roberts

## Dakota County

Dakota County Historical Society executive director Chad Roberts has worked in museums for most of his professional life. One of the major accomplishments to date in his nearly two-and-one-half-year tenure at the Dakota County society is the opening in May 2005 of the LeDuc Historic Estate in Hastings. “Since then, I’ve been concentrating on growing the organization to support the operation of two sites in two different cities,” says Roberts, noting the society’s main museum in South St. Paul.

The organization is providing more services to more parts of the county through such programs as satellite exhibits, he reports. And the staff is filling more requests than ever from schools, churches and other community organizations working on history projects. “We already serve more than 20,000 people a year,” Roberts says, “and the need just keeps growing.”



Dodge County Historical Society

Earlene King

## Dodge County

Just four months on the job as director of the Dodge County Historical Society, Earlene King has her work cut out for her. On her list of goals for the coming years are giving the museum exhibits a facelift, making reference materials more accessible to researchers and developing a range of educational programs. King’s service on the local library board and her experience working in the high school media center will serve her well as she works to raise the visibility of the society and make it truly a community resource.

“Our board is ready to move forward,” she says. “In fact, the whole community of Mantorville is making changes, economically and culturally. So our audience is very receptive. I’m finding the best way to spread the word is through groups of kids that visit the museum. Their parents are discovering us at the same time.”



Freeborn County Historical Society

Pat Mulso

## Freeborn County

Though she’s been at the helm of the Freeborn County Historical Society for just two years, Pat Mulso’s involvement goes back to 1988, when she chaired the society’s county history book project. So she was in the right place at the right time when longtime executive director Bev Jackson retired in 2005.

Mulso quickly put her 40 years of experience as a genealogist to work, getting the society’s computer system upgraded and running internet access into the FCHS library to aid patrons’ genealogical research. She wants to expand the library further and hopes eventually to double the size of the museum.

## More to come

Watch for more profiles of new society directors in the September-October Interpreter. We’ll look in on Hennepin, Jackson, Lake, Mower, Wadena, Waseca and Yellow Medicine county historical societies. Did we miss you? If so, please let us know and we’ll include you next time. Just e-mail David Grabitske at [david.grabitske@mnhs.org](mailto:david.grabitske@mnhs.org). ■

## Mastering PastPerfect museum software

Minnesota History Center hosts training classes Sept. 11-13

Get the most from your PastPerfect museum software by training with the people who developed the best-selling program. From Sept. 11 to 13, the Minnesota Historical Society will again host classes on PastPerfect applications at the History Center in St. Paul.

Each day covers a different topic:

- **Day 1** is devoted to collections management. You'll learn how to catalog and research your collections (or learn a few new tricks if you already know the software), use multimedia and digital imaging options, and explore built-in security and backup features.
- **Day 2** introduces two flexible tools, Report Maker and Virtual Exhibit. Learn how to customize reports for your organization. Then try your hand at creating a collections-based web site from PastPerfect data and images (no web programming knowledge required).
- **Day 3** is all about managing membership and fundraising activities. Discover how PastPerfect can help you maintain effective contact with all your constituents by managing mass mailings, membership renewals, donations, volunteer hours and capital campaign activities.

### Take just one class or register for all three

You may register for any one day, a combination of days or all three days. Each session runs from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Cost: \$119 per day or \$95.20 per day for AASLH institution-level members. For online registration



*Participants get hands-on experience at a training session for PastPerfect museum software.*

(classes fill on a first-come, first-served basis), go to [www.museumsoftware.com/training.htm](http://www.museumsoftware.com/training.htm). For more information about the training, call 1-800-562-6080 or e-mail [training@museumsoftware.com](mailto:training@museumsoftware.com).

### Bring your own laptop computer

Training classes are taught using the PastPerfect 4.0 Evaluation software. For hands-on participation, you are strongly encouraged to bring your own laptop computer (Windows 2000 or higher, able to support a screen resolution of 1024x768, with a CD or

DVD drive). If you do not have this software on your laptop, please arrive at 8:30 a.m. to have it installed before class. ■





## Exhibit planning workshop becomes a fall staple

Popular program offered Oct. 18 and 19 in choice of venues

Returning to Minnesota for the third consecutive fall with his popular exhibit planning workshop is Tom McKay, retired local history coordinator at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

This year, the day-long workshop will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in two locations:

### Thursday, Oct. 18

Lac qui Parle County Historical Society  
250 S. Eighth Ave., Madison, MN

### Friday, Oct. 19

North West Company Fur Post  
Pine Co. Hwy. 7, 1.5 miles west of I-35  
at exit 169

Sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society, the workshop offers fresh approaches to managing an exhibits program.

McKay shares a wealth of ideas for creating engaging exhibits:

- Planning exhibit content: choosing topics, organizing by main concepts, selecting artifacts.
- Elements of exhibit design: uniting design and content; using color, space and texture.
- Writing exhibit labels: titles, key-word labels, detail labels.
- Exhibit fabrication: positioning walls and panels, reproducing images, creating labels, mounting artifacts.

**Cost:** \$25 per person (includes lunch).

**Registration deadline:** Oct. 8.

Space is limited so register early by photocopying and completing the form below. Or register online at [www.mnhs.org/mhowkshp](http://www.mnhs.org/mhowkshp).

If you have questions, call David Grabitske at the Minnesota Historical Society, 651-259-3460, or e-mail [david.grabitske@mnhs.org](mailto:david.grabitske@mnhs.org). ■



Using scale models, Tom McKay demonstrates flexible wall systems at an exhibit planning workshop.

### Registration Form: Exhibit Planning Workshop

Name		Title		E-mail	
Organization				Phone	
Address		City		State	Zip
Select date: <input type="checkbox"/> Oct. 18 - Madison <input type="checkbox"/> Oct. 19 - Pine City					
Number of persons registering: _____ at \$25 each. Total enclosed: _____					

Make check payable to **Minnesota Historical Society**. Mail payment and registration form to Minnesota Historical Society, Attn. David Grabitske, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

## Fall grants round gets funding

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

If you hurry, you can still beat the deadline for the fall round of state grants-in-aid and state capital project grants-in-aid. Application deadlines are:

**July 27:** Pre-application due by 4:30 p.m.

**Aug. 31:** Final application due by 4:30 p.m.

**Oct. 9:** Grants Review Committee meets.

State grants-in-aid are awarded in the following categories: historic properties, artifact collections, microform copies, oral history, manuscripts collections, museum environments and technology.

Matching grants for historic preservation projects of a capital nature are awarded only to county and local jurisdictions. At least \$300,000 remains for this second year of the state's bonding cycle.

For details about the two grant programs, including guidelines, eligibility and application forms, go to [www.mnhs.org/about/grants](http://www.mnhs.org/about/grants). ■



Martin County Historical Society

*A state grant-in-aid helped the Martin County Historical Society add a brick elevator tower to the back of its 1902 building, making all three floors accessible.*

## About this publication

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