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Preparing a successful
grant proposal

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Preservation Planner

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for county and local historical societies and heritage preservation commissions

Anoka County Historical Society



A former public library building now houses the Anoka County Historical Society.

Journey of promise and pitfalls

Anoka County Historical Society moves to new home

Four years ago the Anoka County Historical Society set out on the road to its new home. That's when negotiations with city and county officials began for a new history center in Anoka's former public library building – a move that promised more exhibit space, improved storage and full accessibility. The journey comes to an end this summer with the grand opening on July 13 of the Anoka County History Center and Library.

What a journey it's been. For co-directors Vickie Wendel and Jean Smith, there were architectural plans to review, a fundraising campaign to launch, construction work to oversee,

legions of volunteers to recruit and a move to supervise. Each phase brought new challenges. Says Wendel of the mammoth undertaking, "You'd better have a strong constitution going into a project like this or you'll never survive."

But survive they did. Now, as they look back on pitfalls encountered, challenges met and lessons learned, they offer advice to other organizations planning moves or expansions.

Essential ingredients

"A strong board is vital," Wendel says. "We wouldn't have made it without the countless hours they

spent working in many capacities, from leading our capital campaign to serving as contractors to painting bathrooms." (For more on the fundraising campaign, see *Interpreter*, October 2001).

There was also strong community support for reuse of the old library building. Anoka's mayor and city planners had long advocated downtown revitalization. In that spirit, Anoka County commissioners helped work out an agreement between the library board, the city and the county historical society under which the society would operate a branch of the public library in the new history center. With the agreement came additional public funding for staffing it.

Preparing the new home

"The main thing I would do differently next time is hire a construction manager," says Wendel. "We did it ourselves because we had several board members with contracting experience. But the learning curve was awfully steep for the staff. It was like trying to learn a lot of new languages all at once – about building codes, heating systems, electrical wiring. It was also very difficult coordinating contractor schedules so that things happened in the right order."

Wendel learned two lessons quickly: 1) everything will take longer than you think; 2) expect the unexpected. "It's the things we hadn't thought of that caught us by surprise," she said. "Only after the old lighting

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was removed did we realize that one contractor who needed to do his work at night wouldn't be able to see. And all the construction crews got parking tickets because we hadn't made arrangements with the city not to tag them."

She has special advice for anyone retrofitting a building: "Never throw anything away; you never know where it might fit. One day a volunteer came in with a piece of metal he had found in the street. We stuck it in a closet. Six months later a workman discovered there was a piece of copper trim missing from the roof."



Volunteer Jan Anderson paints the backdrop for a logging diorama in the new exhibit hall.

Moving in stages

When the library and storage areas were ready in November, the daunting task of moving the collections began. An army of 40 volunteers, including the Anoka National Guard, turned out to help transport the artifacts and archives. One volunteer who works for Allied Van Lines brought his moving



A crew from Hoffman Enclosures delivers one of the custom-designed storage units for the clothing collection.

van. Another volunteer made lunch for everyone. It took three trips between the society's old home in Colonial Hall and the new history center.

Over the winter months the collections were unpacked and the two libraries opened for business. A local cabinet manufacturer delivered custom-designed units, all donated, for storing the clothing collection. Then in April came phase two of the move. An Anoka cleaning establishment loaned its van so the garments could be moved on hangers. And another moving crew brought over large artifacts left behind in the first move.

"Meanwhile," adds Wendel, "we were switching telephone services, installing computer networks, changing our mail delivery and doing a thousand other things that come with moving."

Looking ahead

The exhibit hall will open in July with four major exhibits, including one called "Anoka County A to Z." Wendel credits that idea to an exhibit at the Minnesota History Center. "It's a great way to get more of our collections on view," she says. "I especially like our letter V display: a vermin-proof bed and a violet ray machine that promises to cure whatever ails you."

Other big changes lie ahead for the county society. The board has decided to move to a full-time director to manage the larger staff and longer hours. Wendel will step aside to devote more time to research and outreach projects. But she'll be on hand in July for the grand opening. "We're very proud of what the Anoka County community has helped us achieve," she says. "We want everyone to share in it. So come for a visit!"

The new Anoka County History Center and Library is located at 2135 Third Ave. N. in downtown Anoka. For summer hours call 763-421-0600.

Applying for a state grant-in-aid

Keys to preparing a successful grant proposal

With state budgets shrinking, the competition for grant monies in the Minnesota Historical Society's State Grants-in-Aid program will be tight this year. But there are plenty of ways to improve your chances of being awarded a grant in fiscal year 2003. Here are a few pointers from the staff of the Society's grants department, gleaned from years of experience in guiding applicants through the process.

1. Start with a plan.

Putting together a detailed plan is perhaps the single most important thing you can do when applying for a grant. In fact, you might think about making that the first grant you go after – funds for developing a project plan.

The process of planning will help you define your project and ensure that it fits your organization's needs



Minnesota Historical Society

The Rockford Area Historical Society started its long-term restoration of the Ames-Florida House more than 10 years ago with a historic structures report. That report assessed the condition of the ca. 1860 National Register property and identified 17 small-scale projects to be undertaken one at a time as funds allow. The society's most recent endeavor: project no. 9 on the list – repairing and repainting the shutters with funds from a state grant-in aid.

and priorities. The plan itself will serve as a project blueprint that can

take you step by step to your project's successful completion. Having such a plan in place when applying for subsequent grants demonstrates to the Society's Grants Review Committee your ability to carry out the project.

2. Get input from others.

Knowing what you want to do is one thing. Presenting your ideas clearly on paper is another. The Society's Grants Office staff can help you draft a solid grant proposal. Tap their expertise in several ways:

- Attend a field workshop, offered at selected locations around the state each spring. One session always covers Society grant programs and reviews the application process.
- Schedule an on-site visit from the grants staff for an individual

Planning tools

- *Historic structures report.* If your project involves the restoration and preservation of a building, you might want to start by applying for a historic structures report (see Project Guidelines in the State Grants-in-Aid Manual). The report will help you prioritize the work to be done and, in the long run, will save you money.
- *Interpretive plan.* Before you tackle a major overhaul of your museum exhibits, apply for a grant to develop an interpretive plan that will help you identify the stories your exhibits should tell.
- *Technology plan.* If you're planning to upgrade your organization's computer system, consider starting with a grant-funded technology plan to guide you in purchasing and maintaining the new system.
- *CAP grant.* The Conservation Assessment Program, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, funds general conservation surveys of a museum's collections, environmental conditions and sites. Use survey results to build your case for a project grant.
- *MAP grant.* Offered by the American Association of Museums, the Museum Assessment Program is a tool for strategic planning. Your assessment can serve as a springboard for seeking project support.

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State grant-in-aid

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consultation, or consult by phone and e-mail.

- Study successful proposals on file in the Grants Office at the Minnesota History Center. It's one of the best ways to make sure your proposal measures up.
- Confer with other historical societies that have undertaken similar projects.
- Remember – the Grants Review Committee may not know your organization. So have someone not familiar with your society read through your proposal for clarity.

3. Submit a pre-application – even when it's not required.

The pre-application process, required for some Society grant programs, enables you to get feedback from specialists who review a draft of your proposal. Their advice can help you strengthen your grant request.

John Gutteter, director of the Scott County Historical Society, knows firsthand the benefit of such advice. After submitting a pre-application for a grant to develop a web site, he received three pages of comments from a reviewer. Gutteter's first reaction: Responding to all the suggestions would be too much work. But respond he did, and the grant was awarded. Now his proposal stands as a model for successful web site grant requests.

4. Make your proposal easy to follow.

Attention to the nuts and bolts of your grant proposal will help your request move through the review process without interruption. Some tips:



Minnesota Historical Society

When the Lake County Historical Society installs an elevator in its museum, the 1907 Duluth & Iron Range Depot in Two Harbors, it will turn for advice to the Carlton County Historical Society, which went through a similar project in its home, Cloquet's Shaw Memorial Library. Both buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places.

- **Content.** Carefully read and follow the guidelines in the State Grants-in-Aid Manual.
- **Budget.** Get at least three bids and choose the one that is right for your organization. Itemize projected expenses. Make sure you have at least a 50-percent match of the funds requested; have the match in hand before applying. The match should be at least 20 percent cash and the rest in-kind (employee) or donated (volunteer) time and services. The more cash in the match, the stronger your application will be.
- **Format.** Use the application form provided in the manual. Do not put your proposal in a binder or place a cover letter over the first page.

For more information

- **On the State Grants-in-Aid program:** Go to mnhs.org/about/grants for a program overview, project guidelines, grant deadlines, the application form and a list of the most recent grant recipients.
- **On planning grants:** On the web site of the Upper Midwest Conservation Association – www.preserveart.org/funding/grant_programs.html – you'll find links for CAP and MAP grants.
- **Minnesota Historical Society grants staff:** Grants assistant David Grabitske, 651-297-4416, e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org. Grants specialist Mandy Skypala, 651-296-5478, e-mail mandy.skypala@mnhs.org.

Murphy's Landing under new management

Agreement with park district ends year of uncertainty

A disastrous fire last year at Murphy's Landing in Scott County threw the living history museum into limbo. Now, after months of negotiation, the site's former owner, the City of Shakopee, and its operator, the Minnesota Valley Restoration Project, are handing Murphy's Landing over to the Three Rivers Park District.

Under terms of the contract, the park district will take over daily operations of the site and will have control of the land as long as it

operates Murphy's Landing as a living-history museum interpreting 19th-century Minnesota River Valley life. The park district expects to continue running summer tours and conducting weekend events. Scott County will continue to make annual contributions for site operations.

Meanwhile, Three Rivers Park District is launching a master planning process to upgrade Murphy's Landing facilities and operations. "We'll look at comparable

sites around the country," said interim site manager Denis Hahn. "And we'll get input from all parties affected – park users, Minnesota Valley residents, historical societies, American Indian communities and the staff of a nearby wildlife refuge, among others." A permanent site manager will be on board by January 2003. For more information call Hahn at 763-476-4663.

Details in this story were taken from the Shakopee Valley News, March 13, 2002.

Long-range plan sought for Willmar landmark

Great Northern locomotive requires special care

It was a site to behold in 1965 when Engine 2523 arrived at the Kandiyohi County Historical Society in Willmar. Pushed and pulled onto the site along specially laid tracks, the massive steam locomotive quickly became a favorite attraction for tourists and townspeople of all ages.

A symbol of Willmar's history as division headquarters for the Great Northern Railroad, Engine 2523 is a source of community pride – and constant worry. "It's one of our most valuable artifacts," says KCHS executive director Mona Nelson-Balcer, "but something so big is very challenging and very expensive to take care of." So the society's board formed a locomotive preservation committee to come up with a long-range plan to preserve the engine.

Students are doing their part to generate local interest in the project.



Retired Great Northern engineers give tours of Engine 2523 to local school groups.

Last summer New London-Spicer High School art instructor Bill Gabbert signed on to restore the locomotive's painted logos. He then challenged his students to create an informational piece about the engine. Hours of

research, interviews with former engineers and time on the drawing board resulted in a brochure to be distributed to visitors this summer. For more information call Nelson-Balcer at 320-235-1881.

Playthings of the past

Toy exhibit lets Carlton County residents share their favorites

A toy exhibit at the Carlton County Historical Society in Cloquet features more than artifacts from the collection. Toys owned by community residents – and the stories that go with them – share the spotlight, thanks to a “Toy Stories” wall in the exhibit gallery. There, visitors young and old are invited to leave a photo of themselves with a favorite toy or record an anecdote about it in a memory book.

Also scheduled are two “Toy Stories” programs, one an afternoon tea for adults and one a Saturday

session for kids, where participants can have their pictures taken with their toys to add to the display.

“The first-person accounts will add new perspectives to toys that were popular through the years,” said Marlene Wisuri, CCHS director. “People tend to remember their first wagon, their toy cook stove, their set of tin soldiers. The memories triggered by those toys are often so poignant.” The exhibit, “Playthings of the Past: Toys Remembered,” will be on view until Sept. 1. For more information call 218-879-1938.



Dan Reed

The day after a fire destroyed much of Carlton County in 1918, young Edwin Reed hugged a doll that had escaped the flames. Brother John waited his turn.

Swift County history programs hit the road

Outreach effort serves distant communities

This year, staff members of the Swift County Historical Society in Benson are traveling to opposite corners of the county to present programs in communities distant from the county museum. Earmarked for the outreach activity are Kerkhoven, near the eastern county boundary, and Appleton to the west.

“We’ll do research in our newspaper and historic photo collections to present a history of each town’s main street,” explained SCHS director Marlys Gallagher. “So many people, especially young people, don’t know what their towns used to look like. In Appleton, for example, all streets were renamed after World War II to honor war casualties from the area.”

Gallagher recruited local sponsors for each program. A senior citizen



Swift County Historical Society

Like many towns in the 1940s, Appleton’s thriving main street boasted a movie theater.

club will host the Kerkhoven event June 21 and the Appleton Chamber of Commerce will incorporate the

history program into its Applefest in September. For more information call Gallagher at 320-843-4467.

State grant-in-aid program back on track

Deadlines approach for fiscal year 2003 fall cycle

Uncertainty has been the watchword this year for all matters legislative. Among the many programs affected by Minnesota's state budget turmoil was the Minnesota Historical Society's State Grant-in-Aid program. One thing is certain, however. There will be a fall grant round for fiscal year 2003.

Budget cuts in fiscal year 2002 brought suspension of the winter grant cycle. The few available dollars were carried over into the second year of the 2002-03 biennium. That means there should be approximately \$107,000 to award in each of the two grant cycles for fiscal year 2003. But stay tuned – that figure could still change.

Guidelines outline eligibility

What won't change are the guidelines for the State Grant-in-Aid program – and the many opportunities the program affords for Minnesota's county and local historical societies. Whatever your needs – educational, interpretive, archival – there's a grant category to match. Choose from 10 project categories:

- Historic properties
- Artifact collections
- Interpretive programs
- Microform copies
- Oral history
- Photograph collections
- Manuscripts
- Publications and research
- Museum environments
- Technology

Detailed descriptions of these grant categories, along with other criteria for eligibility, can be found in the State Grant-in-Aid Manual, available from the Grants Office or online at www.mnhs.org/about/grants/stgrants.

Grant deadlines

Applications for both state grants-in-aid and state capital project grants will be considered in the fall cycle (see the enclosed *Preservation Planner* for details on capital grants). To improve your chances of crafting a successful application, it's a good idea to submit a pre-application even when not required to do so (see Tech Talk, pages 3-4). There's still time before the first deadline.

July 26: Pre-application due by 4:30 p.m.

Aug. 30: Grant application due by 4:30 p.m.

Oct. 3: Grants Review Committee meets.

For more information call grants assistant David Grabitske at 651-297-4416 or e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org.

An interpretive program grant success story: St. Louis County project lays groundwork for exhibits

Among the St. Louis County Historical Society's most prized collections is a group of some three dozen sketches by artist Eastman Johnson. Made during a trip to Lake Superior's North Shore in 1857, they depict the faces and homes of the region's native people.

With a state grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society, the county society recently completed a project to research the collection and prepare individual exhibit labels for all the artworks. The new labels can be reproduced and mounted quickly and inexpensively, allowing items in the collection to be rotated easily. The labels also accompany the artworks when they are loaned to other organizations.

For more information on this project, call the St. Louis County Historical Society at 218-733-7580.



Eastman Johnson, *Ojibwe Women*, oil on canvas, ca. 1857. The label for this painting explains the seemingly random group of figures: they documented poses and clothing for future paintings.

St. Louis County Historical Society

Did you do your spring mail-list cleaning?

The best way to build support for your organization is to make sure your promotional materials get into the right hands. A few minutes spent cleaning up your newsletter mailing list will help you spread the word about your programs and activities.

Addressing the Minnesota Historical Society

The *Interpreter* is readymade for sharing your news with other historical organizations around the state. For story ideas, the editor relies on your newsletters, annual reports and press releases. So be sure this address is on your mailing list:

Interpreter Editor
Minnesota Historical Society
345 Kellogg Blvd. W.
St. Paul, MN 55102

Tim Glines, manager of outreach services (same address), is the other important destination for your mailings to the Minnesota Historical Society. He oversees the Society's grants programs and services to county and local historical societies. When adding his name to your mailing list, don't forget to remove names of those no longer at the Society (David Nystuen, former field services coordinator, and James Smith, former *Interpreter* editor).

The Society's Library-Serials Unit (same address as below), which acquires and catalogs selected Minnesota-related publications, also may be interested in your magazine or newsletter. To verify whether the Serials Unit receives your publication or to find out if the Society's

Acquisitions Committee will consider adding it, call Acquisitions Librarian Patrick Coleman at 651-296-9986. He is particularly interested in knowing about published local histories and church histories.

Two-way street

Now it's our turn to ask you if the *Interpreter* is reaching the right people at your organization. Is there a new person in position? Is the address correct? Are you receiving duplicates? Please let us know about any corrections we should make. You may fax your mailing labels, with corrections noted, to 651-282-2374. You may also mail your changes to the address below, phone them in to Michele Decker at 651-296-5434, or e-mail her at michele.decker@mnhs.org.

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