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# MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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for county and local historical societies and heritage preservation commissions

## Marking a milestone

### Anniversary publications take many approaches

When it comes to milestone anniversaries, many history organizations mark the occasion with a publishing project. Sometimes ambitious, sometimes modest in scope, these publications serve as a focal point for community celebrations.

With many Minnesota communities observing their centennial and sesquicentennial anniversaries around the turn of this century, commemorative publications abound. A look at several of them and a few words from some experts reveal the challenges of undertaking such projects.

#### Consider the audience

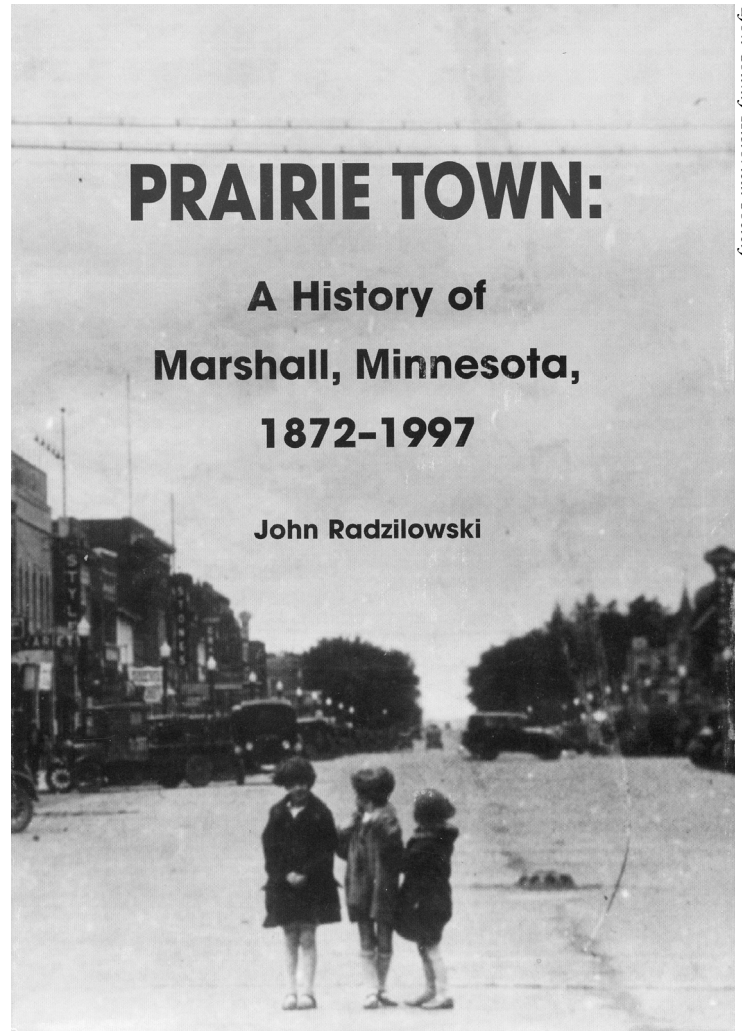
Too often, planning committees ask the wrong questions when considering a new town or county history book. So says Carol Kammen in her column "On Doing Local History" in *History News* magazine.<sup>1</sup> Committee members may start by discussing authorship ("Should we hire someone or use local contributors?"). They may debate the book's scope ("Should the book tell the whole story or take up where the last one left off?"). Or they may wrestle with how to finance it.

Instead, Kammen suggests, publishing projects should begin by considering the audience. Historical

societies might ask themselves how the public uses local history, what topics people are drawn to, what they want to know about the place in which they live. "So the starting point may be figuring out how best to disseminate the information that the public wants and that the local story and research warrant," she writes. "The conclusion might be that a new chronological history, well written and well illustrated, is needed. Or the conclusion may be to explore new ways of delivering local history in a format that the local population will actually read."

#### Keeping memories alive

Chris Schuelke, director of the Otter Tail County Historical Society, has chosen the latter route for his organization's many publications.



Lyon County Historical Society

John Radzilowski's *Prairie Town* has been called "a model of local and regional history."

"Rather than doing a large commemorative history book, we've concentrated on smaller stories," he says. "One of our most popular books is the one we did on rural schools. There was a real urgency to that

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## Marking a milestone continued from page 1

project – the remaining school buildings were disappearing fast. We wanted to cover the topic before they and the people who remembered them were gone.”

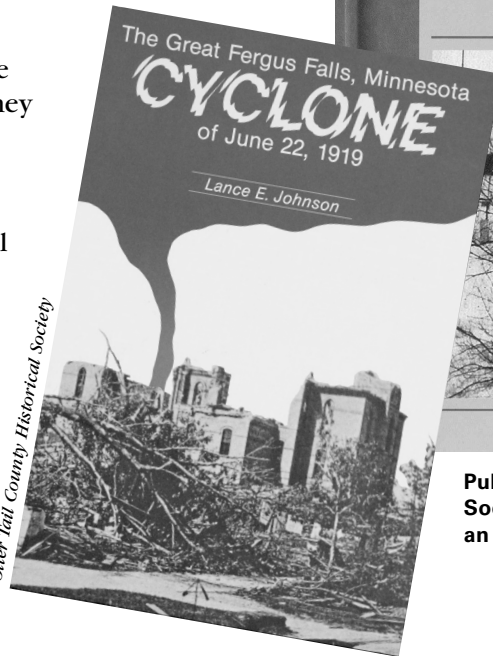
Despite the narrowly defined subject matter, assembling material for the book was a huge task. A volunteer committee that included several former teachers researched each of the county’s 238 rural school districts. They conducted oral histories with teachers and students, gathering anecdotes about games played, lunches brought from home, severe weather battled and Christmas programs celebrated. The book, published in 2000, was illustrated with both historic photographs from OTCHS collections and present-day photos of the surviving school buildings.

“We did the same sort of thing in the 1980s with the New Deal and the Great Fergus Falls Cyclone of 1919 – both definitive events in Otter Tail County history,” says Schuelke. “We’re now beginning our next big project – documenting the fast-disappearing family resort industry, which has been a vital part of the culture and heritage of our county.”

Such local history books are the kind of niche publishing that sells well, according to Kammen. “People are drawn to specific topics,” she says.

### Sharing stories

The Hanover Historical Society also took an anecdotal approach to its publication about that small German settlement. “We interviewed longtime residents about who and what we should cover,” explains Mary Coons, author of *Safe From the Outside World: A Social History of Hanover, Minnesota* (2004). The result is a collection of stories about individual and family



Otter Tail County Historical Society

## Safe From the Outside World *A Social History of Hanover, Minnesota*

Mary Coons



**Publications from the Otter Tail County Historical Society (left) and the Hanover Historical Society take an anecdotal approach to their subjects.**

experiences in the words of local residents, sprinkled with historical data and photos from the Wright County Historical Society collections.

**“The starting point [is] figuring out how best to disseminate the information the public wants.”**

*Carol Kammen*

“In the oral histories we chose for the book, we tried to cover a variety of topics, a range of ages and a mix of town and country,” says Coons, who donated her time to do the interviews and to write and lay out the book. “We got lots of publicity locally and I did book signings so Christmas sales were good. After we break even, all profits will go to the Hanover Historical Society, which we established in 2002 to document and preserve our local history.”

### Good references

There are many reasons that people buy local history books, Kammen says, “ – to support the writer, the organizations that

sponsored it or the community; to see what might be said about institutions or individuals they’re connected to; or to use for reference.”

It was that kind of history book as reference tool – fact-filled, comprehensive, indexed – that project planners had in mind when they published *Prairie Town: A History of Marshall, Minnesota, 1872-1997*. Marshall had never celebrated its centennial so when the city’s 125th anniversary approached, civic leaders welcomed a proposal from author and longtime Marshall resident John Radzilowski to write a history of the community.

Historian Joseph A. Amato, director of regional studies at Southwest State University in Marshall, calls Radzilowski’s book “a model of local and regional history.” In his preface to *Prairie Town*, Amato spells out what sets it apart from many commemorative histories:<sup>2</sup>

- Plenty of vivid detail and new information.
- Organization around important issues and subjects.

- A strong dose of social and ethnic history.
- Themes adopted from the new local history advocated by scholars.

Perhaps most important, says Amato, the book traces the history of Marshall as a regional center. With appendices, an extensive bibliography and an index to augment the text, *Prairie Town* provides an understanding of Marshall's past and serves as a basis for shaping its future.

### Doing it all

The Carlton County Historical Society has an especially long history of publishing, dating to 1949 when society founders identified it as a priority. One of their first major books was a centennial history published in 1962, with essays by local residents about the settlement of the county. Another reference tool - *Crossroads in Time: A History of Carlton County, Minnesota* by Francis M. Carroll, published in 1987 - grew out of a grant-supported, multiyear research

project. "We go to that book often," says CCHS director Marlene Wisuri.

**"Rather than doing a large commemorative history book, we've concentrated on smaller stories."**

*Chris Schuelke,  
Otter Tail County Historical Society*

Two complementary publications that marked Cloquet's centennial in 2004 appeal to a different audience. One book, *A Hometown Album: Cloquet's Centennial Story*, is an overview of the town's history. Produced by Wisuri and Larry Luukkonen, it is illustrated with more than 300 photos that serve to acquaint readers with the county historical society's collections. The other volume, *Stories of a Century: Cloquet Centennial Book of Reflections, 1904-2004*, contains stories submitted by Cloquet citizens - a mix of biographies, business histories, memoirs and accounts of notable events. "We borrowed the idea from an extremely popular newspaper series," Wisuri notes.

"All of our publishing projects help us fulfill our mission and reach new audiences," she says. "They raise money, too. Of course, it helps being up here in paper country - we usually get the paper donated. And *Stories of a Century* was funded entirely by private donations, with volunteers doing the editing. People who registered for a package of centennial events got a complimentary copy. The rest of the books were donated to the county historical society for sale."

### Essential ingredients

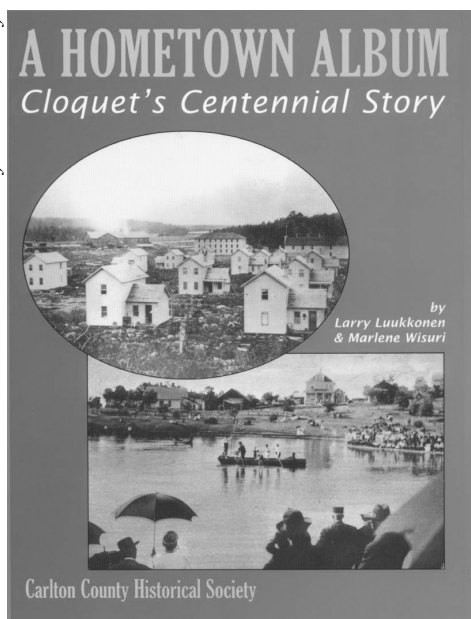
Whatever approach a local history book takes, says Greg Britton, director of the Minnesota Historical Society Press, they all play a valuable role in

recording a community's history at a particular moment in time. "The trend in commercial publishing these days is toward sure things and big markets. Local history books run counter to that. They will never be big moneymakers. But it's essential that they get done."

Britton has some final words of advice for organizations planning publications. "There are certain things a book should have to help ensure its success," he says. "A table of contents, citations and an index are high priorities. So are accuracy and good design. And don't forget Library of Congress cataloging information and an International Standard Book Number (ISBN). All of those ingredients will make your book more useful to researchers, ready for cataloging in libraries and easier to sell."

### Notes

1. Carol Kammen, "On Doing Local History: Writing Local History for Those Who Read It," in *History News*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 3-4.
2. Joseph A. Amato, *Preface to Prairie Town: A History of Marshall, Minnesota 1872-1997* by John Radzilowski (Lyon County Historical Society, 1997), pp. xiii-xv. Amato is also the author of *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (University of California Press, 2002).



Donations from the community and in-house production helped fund *A Hometown Album*, one of two books published for Cloquet's centennial.

## More on marking milestones

Looking for other ways to mark a community anniversary? Be sure to attend this year's field workshops, also themed "Milestones." See enclosed flyer for details. If you haven't already registered, make plans now to join us for this 25th annual round of workshops sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society.

# 'Farms and Families'

## Anoka County celebrates its agricultural roots

Farms are fast disappearing from Anoka County. Where dairy cows once dotted the countryside, there are now housing developments. To document the area's roots in agriculture, the Anoka County Historical Society has undertaken a three-year project that will preserve evidence of the county's rural past.

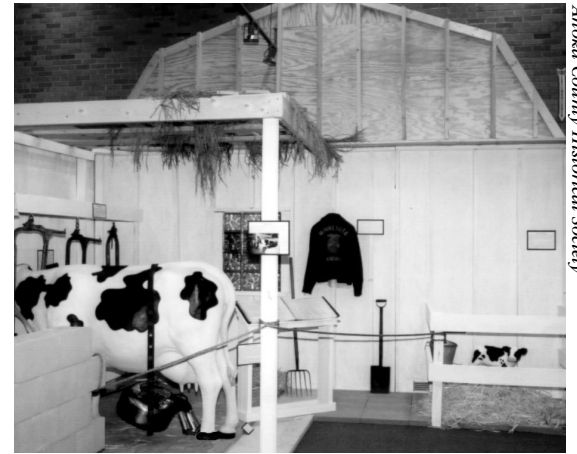
Funded in phases, the project was made possible by a succession of grants from the Anoka County Agricultural Preserves Fund through the Anoka County Extension Office. Each phase of the project has four components:

- a written history of farming in Anoka County,
- oral histories to capture the stories of the county's farm families,
- a windshield survey to document agricultural buildings, and
- an exhibit based on the research.

"Despite our agricultural past, we

had no comprehensive written history of the county's farms and farmers," says ACHS executive director Bonnie McDonald. "These new written and oral histories will go into our library for use by researchers. We have several of our county commissioners to thank for working with us to secure the project grants."

The first phase of the project, "Farms and Families: The Changing Face of Anoka County Agriculture, 1945 to the Present," has been completed, and the accompanying exhibit is now on view at the Anoka County History Center and Library. Displays tell of the inventive ways in which farmers have adapted to the changing needs and resources of the times. A barn complete with hayloft and life-size cows remind viewers of the county's recent past as a dairy



Anoka County Historical Society

A fiberglass cow and her calf bring this barn vignette to life in the Anoka County Historical Society's agriculture exhibit.

farming center. But there are also a farmers' market stall, a sod field and tree farm, and even a portion of a house under construction, representing the county's shift from a rural to an urban landscape. Highlighting the exhibit are panels featuring 10 families who share stories of their lives as farmers.

"The museum staff had to be fairly inventive, too," says ACHS program manager Vickie Wendel of the team that mounted the exhibit. "We simulated sod with carpet, quilt batting and lots of spray paint. And we had to find ways of planting corn and storing hay without bringing in pests."

Phase two, now underway, will culminate in September with an exhibit on farming in Anoka County from 1900 to 1945. Phase three, covering the years 1850-1900, is slated for 2006. At the conclusion of the project, the three written histories will comprise a book tracing the evolution of agriculture in the county from 1850 to the present.

For more information about this project, call Bonnie McDonald at the Anoka County Historical Society, 763-421-0600, or e-mail [www.ac-hs.org](http://www.ac-hs.org).



Anoka County Historical Society

A 1948 Massey Harris "Pony" tractor stands behind a fence in the exhibit. In the background is the cornfield of Anoka County Commissioner Dennis Berg, a farmer who shared his family's story of running a sweet corn stand.

## Genealogists, take note

### Minnesota birth certificates now available online

A new online index to Minnesota birth certificates brings this valuable source of information to the fingertips of family historians and local history researchers. So far, the online index, available through the Minnesota Historical Society's web site at <http://people.mnhs.org/bci>, contains birth records for the years 1900 to 1907. Subsequent years will be added every few months.

Researchers may purchase noncertified copies of the birth records via the Historical Society's secure e-commerce system with electronic delivery feature. Here's how it works. If you pay with a credit card, you'll be given a web site link to

immediately view and print a digital image of the birth certificate you want. That means no more waiting for copies to arrive in the mail.

These resources are also available for viewing in the Society library; you may make copies there.

A new baby gave occasion for this portrait by photographer G. G. Grove in 1900.



Minnesota Historical Society Collections

## Assessing your collections preservation needs

### Low-cost, self-help guide offers step-by-step approach

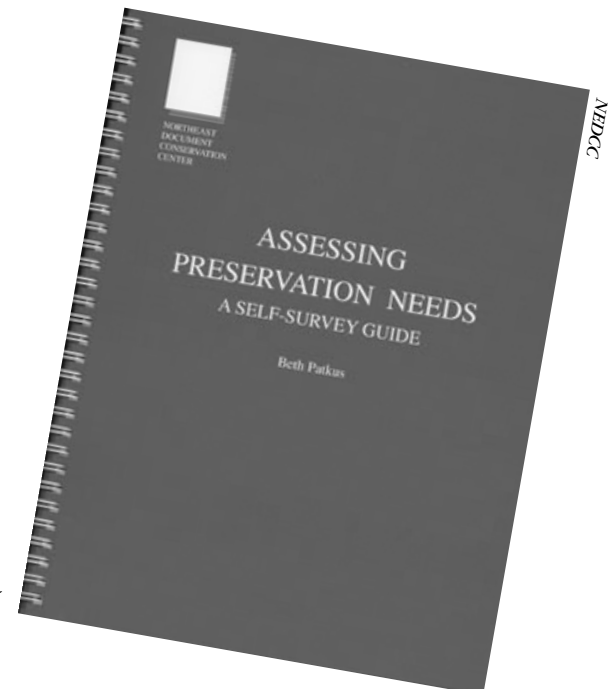
From the Northeast Document Conservation Center comes a publication designed to help small and mid-sized organizations develop a comprehensive program to preserve their collections. Titled "Assessing Preservation Needs: A Self-Survey Guide," the 96-page booklet by Beth Patkus (2003) is geared to groups with limited budgets and little previous preservation experience.

In a step-by-step approach to collections preservation, the guide offers directions for surveying the condition of your collections and setting preservation priorities. Because different kinds of collections have different preservation needs, there are

individualized worksheets tailored to the following materials:

- bound volumes and pamphlets
- documents and manuscripts
- photographs and negatives
- oversized and framed materials
- newsprint
- scrapbooks and ephemera
- audiovisual materials

The guide is available online at [www.nedcc.org/welcome/pubs.htm](http://www.nedcc.org/welcome/pubs.htm). To order a hard-cover copy, send a check for \$15, made out to NEDCC, to the Northeast Document Conservation Center, attn. Juanita Singh, 100 Brickstone Square, Andover, MA 01810-1494.



## Running the show

### A how-to guide for all-volunteer organizations

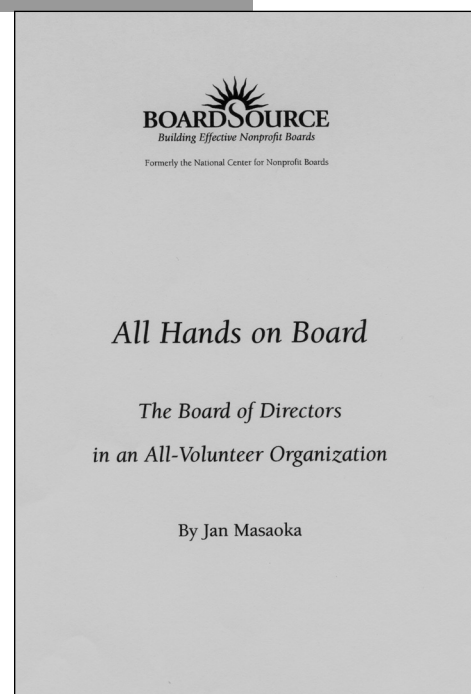
Do you know the Top 10 jobs for boards of all-volunteer organizations? You'll learn those and more in *All Hands on Board*, an online handbook from BoardSource, formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards.

The e-book is available at BoardSource's online bookstore, [www.boardsource.org/EbookList.asp](http://www.boardsource.org/EbookList.asp). It covers the basics of serving on the board of a grassroots organization, spelling out both the responsibilities of the board as a whole and the responsibilities of individual board members. Among the topics covered: legal and fiduciary

responsibilities, management, leadership and other duties essential to running the organization. The guide also provides a checklist to help you gauge your own board's effectiveness.

*All Hands on Board* is authored by Jan Masaoka of CompassPoint, a California-based nonprofit services organization that co-published the handbook.

For a comprehensive selection of materials on nonprofit governance, see BoardSource's online bookstore (web site listed above). It offers a variety of tools, best practices, workshops and



training, and leadership development for board members of nonprofit organizations.

## Picture perfect

### Advice on handling photographic collections

The Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress has on its web site information useful to organizations needing advice on handling and processing photographic collections.

A series of Tip Sheets answers questions most frequently asked of the LOC staff. Some of the topics:

- safe handling for pictorial collections,
- collections processing, complete with suggested arrangement schemes and sample accession forms,
- cataloging strategies, offering an overview of subject indexing, and
- digitizing standards.

The site features the division's own cataloging tools, resource lists and a bibliography of related articles. Go to [www.loc.gov/rr/print/cataloging.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/cataloging.html).

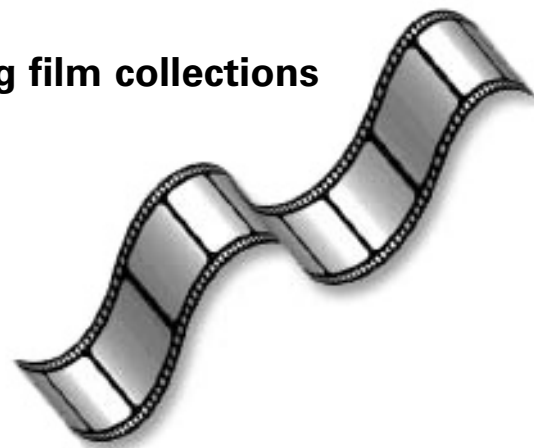
## It's in the can

### Guidelines for preserving film collections

Whether you have one reel of home movies in your collection or hundreds, the National Film Preservation Foundation wants to help you preserve those and other one-of-a-kind resources.

The NFPF was created by the U.S. Congress to help save the country's film heritage. Now, in a new publication, "The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries and Museums," the foundation introduces film preservation concepts and techniques for archivists and curators with no moving-picture experience.

The illustrated guide gives collections managers step-by-step instructions for identifying and handling moving images and offers advice on minimizing film deterioration through proper storage.



Also included are case studies of successful film preservation programs, a glossary and a resource list.

For a free copy of the 135-page guide, go to the foundation's web site at [www.filmpreservation.org/sm\\_index.html](http://www.filmpreservation.org/sm_index.html). The publication can be downloaded chapter by chapter. To purchase a booklet, send \$8 for postage and handling to National Film Preservation Foundation, 870 Market St., Suite 1113, San Francisco, CA 94102.

## 'Key Ingredients'

### Locations sought for Smithsonian traveling exhibit

Coming to Minnesota in 2006: "Key Ingredients: America by Food." This traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution explores the connections between Americans and the foods we prepare and present on our tables. Through artifacts, photographs and illustrations, "Key Ingredients" looks at the historical, regional and social traditions found in our everyday meals and at our celebrations - traditions that help us build a sense of community through food.

The exhibit was developed by Museum on Main Street, a partnership of the Smithsonian and state humanities councils. Currently accepting site requests for Minnesota is Jane Cunningham, director of grants and community programs for the Minnesota Humanities Commission.

"'Key Ingredients' will make up to 10 stops in Minnesota between June 2006 and May 2008," she said. "It's bigger than 'Barn Again!' - the Smithsonian exhibit currently touring the state. Locations interested in being considered for the 'Key Ingredients' tour need nine-foot ceilings and about 1,000 square



These young diners at the 1947 Minnesota State Fair are featured in the Smithsonian traveling exhibit "Key Ingredients."

feet of space to install the exhibit."

For more information or to book the show, call Cunningham at 651-772-4249 or e-mail [jane@minnesotahumanities.org](mailto:jane@minnesotahumanities.org).

For a preview, see the web site [www.keyingredients.org](http://www.keyingredients.org) - an online educational companion to the exhibit

complete with a summary of the display and classroom activities. As with all Museum on Main Street exhibits, local hosts are encouraged to plan events, programs and local exhibits that link their own collections and local food specialties to the national story told in the exhibition.

## May is Preservation Month

Remember Preservation Week? It's now Preservation Month.

Created in 1971 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Week was designed to spotlight grassroots preservation efforts around the country. Over the years more and more communities joined in, staging annual events from tours to black-tie fundraisers.

Now, in response to its overwhelming popularity, the

National Trust has decided to extend the observance, declaring May 2005 Preservation Month. The theme for this year corresponds to the theme for the NTHP's national conference, "Restore America: Communities at a Crossroads."

What is your organization planning? For tips on planning and promoting Preservation Month events, go to the National Trust web site at [www.nationaltrust.org/](http://www.nationaltrust.org/)

[preservationmonth.index](http://preservationmonth.index).

To publicize your events in a Minnesota Preservation Month calendar on the MNLOCALHISTORY listserv, e-mail details to Tim Glines, the Minnesota Historical Society's manager of outreach services, at [timothy.glines@mnhs.org](mailto:timothy.glines@mnhs.org). Include the event name, date, time, location, a brief description, sponsors and contact information.

## Spring field workshops begin

### 'Milestones' theme, five venues promise to draw crowds

Join us this spring as we celebrate our own milestone - the 25th anniversary of the Minnesota Historical Society's annual field workshops. This year there are five venues to choose from. All feature the same great program, titled "Milestones," which looks at a variety of ways to mark community anniversaries.

For a complete schedule of workshop sessions, see the enclosed flyer. You may register using the form provided or you can register online at [www.mnhs.org/mhowkshp](http://www.mnhs.org/mhowkshp). If you have questions, call David Grabitske at 651-297-4416.

We look forward to seeing you at

one of these workshop locations: March 18, South St. Paul; April 8, Winona; April 22, Willmar; May 6, Split Rock Lighthouse; or May 20, Thief River Falls. Tours of local sites at each venue are a workshop highlight. Make a date to join us!



Minnesota Historical Society, HPRS-G, photos

A rapt audience and eager tour-takers are always part of the mix at MHS field workshops.

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