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Boom or bust?

Demographic shifts pose challenges for small museums

Much has been written about the baby boom generation. Ever since they began arriving in unprecedented numbers in the 1940s, they have posed challenges for every aspect of American society – schools and churches, housing, health care, social security.

No less affected have been the country's cultural institutions, including history museums and historic sites. As this largest-ever generation moves toward retirement age, their numbers

promise to change much about the way museums do business, from programming to volunteer recruitment to fundraising. What challenges can your organization expect from boomers in the years ahead? And how will you meet those challenges? There are no easy answers. But one thing is certain: figuring out what will work next will require new ways of thinking about how you do your work. Your organization's well-being may depend on it.

Challenge: Declining tourism

At museums and historic sites across the country, visitation is down. Boomers are entering retirement with more money and better health than any previous generation. But there is stiff competition for their time and money, from sporting events to casinos to vacation-destination travel. There's even competition among history museums themselves – particularly historic house museums – as they've proliferated in recent decades.

Boom or bust? –
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Nicollet County Historical Society



The Nicollet County Historical Society's Cox House benefits from the work of two special-interest groups. The local chapter of Questers, a study club of history enthusiasts and antiques collectors, organized a St. Peter house tour to raise funds for Cox House preservation projects. And members of Mariah's Garden Club (right) tend the Victorian-period gardens, holding an annual plant sale to support the house's upkeep.

Boom or bust? – continued

Declining visitation means that the old way of doing business may no longer work. Relying on the familiar model of cultural tourism – providing a history experience for visitors who pay admission fees – doesn't make ends meet.

Solution: Establish small affinity groups

Consultants John and Anita Nowery Durel propose a new model for history museums in their article "A Golden Age for Historic Properties" (History News, Summer 2007). They suggest that museums position themselves as places where retiring boomers can gather to pursue common interests – gardening, quilting, birding, tinkering, collecting antiques, doing genealogy – the list goes on.

Historical organizations are ready-made to cater to these active retirees, say the Durels. Museums have collections, libraries, work spaces, equipment and expertise; some have land and gardens as well. Why not structure membership programs to serve such special-interest groups? Your organization could host a collector's club, a gardening guild, a quilting circle, a history study group, even an astronomy group or hiking club. These small affinity groups, whose dues would go to supporting your museum, could operate fairly independently, planning and carrying out their own programs for their members as well as the public. You, the host organization, would provide the venue, your staff could function as coordinators, and affinity group members would do the work.



Anoka County Historical Society

A love of history – and mystery – brought Anoka County Historical Society volunteers together to plan Ghosts of Anoka, a popular program of twilight walking tours. They're just some of the 150 volunteers that executive director Todd Mahon (standing, second from left) and volunteer coordinator Maria King (fourth from right) count on for help.

Adding new members like these in significant numbers, making them central to your operation and maintaining strong relationships with them may one day replace counting visitors as a measure of your organization's success.

Challenge: Volunteer recruitment

In the next few years, many local history museums will face a crisis as their current crop of volunteers ages and steps down. Who will replace them? Will boomers volunteer in numbers equal to the previous generation? Opinions are divided.

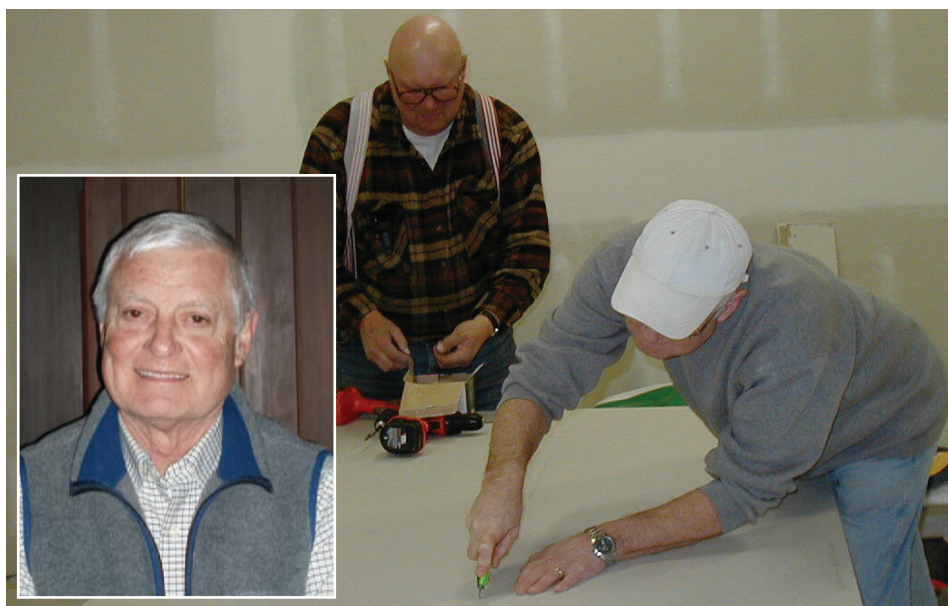
What's clear is that baby boomers are, by and large, well educated and highly skilled. They will be less willing to spend their time in low-level volunteer positions – doing office work, answering phones, stuffing envelopes. Instead, they'll be looking for opportunities to put their talents to good use.

Solution: Create meaningful volunteer experiences

To attract this new breed of volunteer, organizations will need new strategies for volunteer recruitment and retention. The key, says Christine Litch, a consultant in volunteer management, is to tap into their expertise. Use them in areas that match their skills – strategic planning, program development or information technology, for example – so that they can contribute at a level commensurate with their experience.

Another way to ensure a committed volunteer workforce is to offer a variety of volunteer tenures. Some volunteers may prefer the current model – long-term involvement with a regular schedule. But increasingly, volunteers from the boomer generation want greater flexibility to make time for other activities and commitments. One-time projects of shorter duration may be the answer for them.

Boom or bust? – continued



White Bear Lake Area Historical Society

Board president Peter Reis (inset and wearing cap) puts his decades of experience as a business executive to good use advising the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society on strategic planning and policy matters. He also finds outlets for his skills as a master gardener and builder doing other volunteer work for the organization.

Accommodating and retaining baby boomer volunteers may take rethinking and reorganizing your current volunteer management, says Litch. Because boomers will want to see that their time and skills are used well, they'll also want effective training, efficient organization and, perhaps, a degree of autonomy that you haven't given to your volunteers in the past.

Challenge: Fundraising

At most local history museums, fundraising relies largely on government support, grants and fundraising events. According to the Durels, too little attention has been paid to cultivating major individual donors. That's due in part to reliance on the cultural tourism model, built on attracting a large number of people who may visit a museum only once – visitors who therefore don't form a strong attachment to the organization.

But it is attachment to a place – like loyalty to a cause – that spawns donors. Think of how successfully churches, colleges and health-related causes cultivate legions of donors – many of them baby boomers looking to leave a legacy – who share a commitment to the organization and have meaningful relationships with one another.

Solution: Turn members into donors

Your members may hold the key to long-term financial support of your organization. You have multiple opportunities to strengthen relationships with them – through repeat museum visits, newsletters, annual meetings, special events. And if those members are also active in small affinity groups? Over time, they're even more likely to develop a strong bond with your organization – a sense of belonging, even ownership.

Out of such bonds come loyal donors. So, to build a strong financial base for the future of your museum, turn your attention to your members. Effort spent on cultivating them will serve you far better than money spent on attracting more one-time visitors. ■

Join the discussion

Does your organization have an affinity group? That's the question posed by the March 5 edition of the Minnesota Local History Blog. Join the online discussion at <http://discussions.mnhs.org/MNLocalHistory/index/>.

Last November the blog featured a lively debate about the challenges posed by the baby boom generation. To see what your colleagues had to say, go to <http://discussions.mnhs.org/MNLocalHistory/index.cfm.2007/11/5/Ready-for-the-Boom>.

Sources

John Durel and Anita Nowery Durel, "A Golden Age for Historic Properties," History News, Summer 2007 (vol. 62, no. 3), American Association for State and Local History.

John H. Falk and Beverly K. Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions* (AltaMira Press, 2006).

Christine Litch, "Is Your Organization Ready for 'The Boom'?" at www.guidestar.org/DisplayArticle.do?articleId=1171.

More than bone and stone

2007 survey assessed nature of local archaeology collections

by David Grabitske, manager of outreach services

Archaeological artifacts make up a significant portion of the collections at many of Minnesota's local historical organizations. To help organizations better understand the importance of their archaeological collections, Patricia Emerson of the Minnesota Historical Society's Archaeology Department addressed collections care and use at the Society's 2007 field workshops. Following up on Emerson's presentation, the MHS Local History Services Office chose the topic of archaeological collections as the focus for its annual survey of county and local historical organizations.

As of October 2007, a total of 149 surveys had been returned. That's a response rate of only 44 percent – a number markedly lower than in past years. It's not too late to make your voice heard. If you have not yet responded, please do so. We count on your input to help us bring you the programs and services you want.

Collections large and small

More than half of survey respondents – 57 percent – report that they have archaeological collections. While the collections vary in size from very small to very large, the majority consist of fewer than 25 objects. Most contain primarily artifacts from within the geographical purview of the collecting organization.

Nearly all of Minnesota's local archaeological collections – 92 percent – were received through donation. Less than 3 percent are on loan. Both that accession rate and the appropriateness of the collections to the repository's mission



Martin County Historical Society

These grinding stones are among a collection of more than 2,200 archaeological artifacts found over the years in Martin County and donated by a local resident to the county historical society. More information about the people who made them awaits further research.

reflect sound collecting practices at Minnesota's local history museums.

One survey, however, raised questions about how to handle certain kinds of donations – items recovered by amateur archaeologists, removed from their site and not fully documented. “There are doubtless ethical issues surrounding such archaeological artifacts,” wrote the respondent. “We need to review and implement policies for accepting or refusing those items.” Indeed, any thorough collections policy should provide guidance on the circumstances in which collections of various kinds are to be considered for accession.

Holdings vary

Ninety-three percent of organizations with archaeological collections report having stone artifacts – generally points (arrowheads) and stone tools. The next largest class of artifact was ceramics, represented in 60 percent of respondents' collections. But all types of materials are present in good numbers. Not surprisingly, most artifacts in local

archaeological collections come from the period of white contact and settlement. However, the survey also revealed that several organizations have collected 20th century archaeological artifacts as well.

Identifying what you have

Most organizations responding to the survey expressed the same need: assistance in identifying what they have. In the words of one respondent, “If we had more information about our holdings, we could invite researchers to study our collections and use the artifacts more often in exhibits.”

That's just what David Mather, national register archaeologist at the Minnesota Historical Society, hopes to see. “These collections have lots of interpretive and research potential,” he says. “They make ideal projects for archaeology students, who can help museums identify what they have and understand the context for their artifacts. That, in turn, helps tell the story of the people who made them.”

Survey – continued on page 5

Survey – continued

Where to find such assistance? Check with archaeologists at a nearby college or university – they and their students may be able to accommodate requests. Two additional sources for archaeological assistance:

- Professional archaeologists often are available during Minnesota Archaeology Week in May. To request their services, e-mail state archaeologist Scott Anfinson at scott.anfinson@state.mn.us or call 612-725-2411.
- The Council for Minnesota Archaeology sponsors the Riaz Malik Student Research Grant Program. Applications from students are usually due in late January. To inquire about matching your need to students' availability, e-mail Mather at david.mather@mnhs.org or call 651-259-3454.

The next survey

Watch for the 2008 survey, to be mailed in June. This year, we want to learn more about your museum's physical plant. Are you reusing a historic building? Planning an addition? Building new? Our goal is to provide the best advice possible on all aspects of your building program, from needs assessment to strategic planning to plant management.

For more information about the annual surveys conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society's Local History Services Office, please e-mail David Grabitske, manager of outreach services, at david.grabitske@mnhs.org, or call 651-259-3460. ■

Home-grown talent

Local residents provide programming for Osakis Area Heritage Center

When it comes to planning the Osakis Area Heritage Center's winter lecture series, the all-volunteer board doesn't have far to search for speakers. "We look for local people with areas of special interest," explains board president Stella Riley Bender. "Our goal is to involve the community as well as provide cultural entertainment."

The lecture series, funded by local grants, has been a popular staple for 20 years. "Last year we had two former country school teachers talk about a typical day at a country school," says

Bender. "They drew such a big crowd – 300 people! – that we had to move their lecture to the community center. People had a great time sharing stories of their own school experiences."

This winter's series includes "Lure Lore," on March 30 – a presentation by a local collector of fishing tackle, including Fisheretto lures made in Osakis by the Brown Brothers between 1917 and 1945. Audience members will have the opportunity to tell their own fishing stories. It promises to draw another record crowd. ■



Former country school teachers LaRayne Johnson (left) and Beth Fraune shared stories of teaching penmanship and the three R's at an Osakis Area Heritage Center program last winter.

Osakis Area Heritage Center

Be prepared

Online resources guide disaster planning and recovery

For many Minnesota communities, spring thaws bring the annual threat of flooding. And tornado season isn't far behind. Homeowners, businesses, historical organizations, government facilities – all may be at risk for losing important records and other irreplaceable possessions. But knowing what to do – and acting quickly – can minimize the loss.

You can prepare for natural disasters with these and other online resources for disaster planning and recovery:

- **Minnesota Historical Society.** Downloadable publications offer guidance for dealing with water-damaged historical materials of all kinds. For emergency response procedures and other disaster recovery resources, go to www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/emergency.html. There's also help for flood-damaged historic structures at www.mnhs.org/shpo/disaster/index.htm.

For more information, call the Society's Conservation Outreach Program at 651-259-3388 or 1-800-657-3773, or e-mail conservationhelp@mnhs.org.

- **Northeast Document Conservation Center.** The NEDCC operates an emergency assistance program for institutions and individuals with damaged paper-based collections. Services include 24/7 emergency phone assistance and a free template for writing disaster plans. The online tool and links to other disaster planning and recovery resources can be found at www.nedcc.org/services/disaster/php.
- **Heritage Emergency National Task Force.** This partnership of service organizations and federal agencies publishes the useful handbook "Field Guide to Emergency Response." To preview the publication and for online guidance to disaster-recovery funding



When floods inundated the city of Rushford last summer, owners of historic properties called on Minnesota Historical Society staff for advice.

from 15 federal grant and loan programs, go to www.heritageemergency.org.

For a longer list of online resources, featured in the Local History News e-newsletter of March 7, 2007, go to www.mnhs.org/newsletters/localhistory/index.htm. ■

Connecting to Collections Bookshelf

IMLS program offers collections-care resources for small museums

A multiyear initiative of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Connecting to Collections Bookshelf provides small museums and libraries with resources needed to improve the condition of their collections. The resources include books and DVDs on such topics as the ethics of collecting, collections planning and management, emergency preparedness, and culturally specific conservation issues.

In cooperation with the American Association for State and Local History, Bookshelf resources are being distributed free of charge to 2,000 institutions around the country. For a list of the publications, go to www.aaslh.org/Bookshelf.

How to apply

The next application period runs March 1 to April 30. You'll find

instructions and the application form, which requires completion of several essay questions, at www.aaslh.org/Bookshelf. Because the IMLS is a federal agency, you'll also need an institutional DUNS number to apply; instructions can be found at www.imls.gov/applicants/grantsgov/duns.shtm. ■

Systems for Success

Sign up now for a 2008 Local History Workshop

Join your colleagues this spring at one of five Local History Workshops around the state, all offering the same mix of practical advice and innovative ideas. Explore ways to get things done – from fundraising to collections management to customer service – that will strengthen your organization and grow your skills.

You'll find the full agenda in the January-February 2008 issue of the Interpreter at www.mnhs.org/about/publications/interpreter.html. Highlights include sessions on annual fund drives, board development, research library improvements, the new AASLH Self-Assessment Program and more.

March 28, Stillwater

Host: Washington County Historic Courthouse

Joint meeting with the Northern Wisconsin Local History Office

April 11, Harmony

Host: Harmony Area Historical Society

April 25, Montevideo

Host: Chippewa County Historical Society

May 9, Grand Marais

Host: Cook County Historical Society, at the Johnson Heritage Post

May 19, Warren

Host: Marshall County Historical Society, at the Marshall County Courthouse

Fee: \$30 per person. Includes materials, lunch, refreshments and tour of local historic sites.

To register: Complete and mail the registration form below. Or register online at <http://shop.mnhs.org>.

Please sign up at least one week in advance of the workshop – by March 21 for Stillwater, April 4 for Harmony, April 18 for Montevideo, May 2 for Grand Marais, or May 12 for Warren.

For more information: Call David Grabitske at 651-259-3460 or e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org.



Attendees of the Montevideo workshop in Chippewa County will tour the restored 1880s barn on the Olof Swensson Farmstead, a National Register property.

Registration Form: Systems for Success

Name:	Title:	E-mail:	
Organization:		Phone:	
Address:	City:	State:	Zip:
Select Date: <input type="checkbox"/> March 28 - Stillwater <input type="checkbox"/> April 11 - Harmony <input type="checkbox"/> April 25 - Montevideo <input type="checkbox"/> May 9 - Grand Marais <input type="checkbox"/> May 19 - Warren			
Number of persons registering:	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.

Bulletin Board

Welcome aboard!

In February Melinda Hutchinson joined the Minnesota Historical Society's Historic Preservation Department as grants and field programs assistant. In her new role, she will work with the state grants-in-aid program and local historical organizations.

Hutchinson brings a background in curatorial work to the job. With degrees in history from Ripon College and historical administration from Eastern Illinois University, she has worked at Heritage Hill State Park and the Neville Public Museum of Brown County, both in Green Bay, Wis.; Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum in Rockford, Ill.; the Sherburne County Historical Society in Becker, Minn.; and Historic Fort Snelling.



Melinda Hutchinson

You can reach her at 651-259-3459 or e-mail melinda.hutchinson@mnhs.org. ■

Promote your Sesquicentennial events

Minnesota's Sesquicentennial in May will give the state's historical organizations an opportunity to gain statewide exposure for local events and projects. To get your activities listed in an online events calendar, register them at www.mn150years.org/eventform.html and get free use of the official Sesquicentennial logo.

For an overview of other ways your organization can participate in the year-long commemoration, see the January-February issue of the *Interpreter* at www.mnhs.org/about/publications/interpreter.html or go to the Minnesota Sesquicentennial web site above. ■

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