



MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

March 2002, Vol. XXX, No. 2

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

Clay County Historical Society



Randolph and Catherine Probstfield posed with their 11 children in 1890. A granddaughter, June Dobervich, recently received an award from the Red River Valley Heritage Society for preserving a record of her family's contributions to the region's history.

Pioneering family leaves rich legacy in Red River Valley

Probstfield collections benefit numerous organizations

Pandolph M. Probstfield was more than an agricultural pioneer. He saw himself as a steward of the history he was making in the business and politics of the Red River Valley, where he settled in 1859. Probstfield's penchant for keeping a record of his affairs was passed on to subsequent generations of his family. The result: A wealth of information on Clay County's early history has been painstakingly preserved.

Several Clay County organizations are beneficiaries of the family's

foresight and planning. Minnesota State University Moorhead acquired Probstfield's diaries. And the Clay County Historical Society recently added to its collections hundreds of artifacts and documents detailing the family's contributions to the region.

CCHS collections manager Pam Burkhardt first became involved with the family several years ago when she was approached by Probstfield granddaughter June Dobervich for advice on creating an inventory of

Pioneering family continued on page 2

A curator's view: Looking for layers of meaning

Larry Hutchings joined the Carver County Historical Society staff in June. He talked about his work as museum curator in the Summer 2001 issue of Annals of the Carver County Historical Society. Adapted with permission.

I entered the museum field almost by accident. Casting about for a career after deciding I didn't want to be a high school band director after all, I took a job as curator at the Stevens County Historical Society. Only later did I realize I had been preparing for that work nearly all my life.

As a child, I spent hours creating table-top museums, with the Science Museum of Minnesota as inspiration. My exhibits included rocks and minerals, toy dinosaurs, a miniature cast of the Kensington Runestone and the most prized piece in my collection – a mouse skeleton I had found in the barn, cleaned and mounted. Thus began my path to a curatorial career.

So far, none of the

Curator's view continued on page 2

Pioneering family *continued from page 1*

their vast collections. Dobervich and her sister had spent years researching Randolph's affairs, assembling materials from various state and federal archives, and gathering family belongings. They kept the materials in a room of their house that they dubbed "the museum." Dobervich had also helped establish the Probstfield Living History Farm Foundation, charged with rehabilitating the Probstfield homestead, Oakport Farm, as an interpretive center.

Burkhardt advised the foundation on its options for the care and

preservation of the family collections. Foundation board member

Dobervich, grateful for the guidance, decided to donate to the county historical society a selection of the materials. When the time came for Dobervich to downsize to an apartment, Burkhardt had to move fast. "I had one day to select items," she recalled, "and two days to pack and move them. But because I was already familiar with the family history, I was able to make decisions quickly."

She selected family photographs, the children's toys, Randolph's pipes and Catherine Probstfield's gardening tools; papers detailing the family's innovative farming methods, crop varieties and marketing ventures; and records of their involvement in county and state government, national agricultural organizations and the suffrage movement. The

list goes on and on.

"We're very happy to be the recipient of such a rich collection of materials," said Burkhardt. "Some of



Probstfield Living History Farm

With a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society for a historic structure report, the Probstfield Living History Farm Foundation will explore restoration of the farmhouse at Oakport Farm.

them are on view now in 'open storage' at the Hjemkomst Center. We're almost finished cataloging everything. Then we'll begin doing research to uncover the stories behind the artifacts."

All the organizations involved – the county society, the state university, the foundation – plan to work in partnership, explained Burkhardt. "We've agreed to loan materials to one another for exhibits and other programs. And the Clay County Historical Society will carry on June's work of sharing our county's history with students from Probstfield Elementary School and other schools in the region."

For more information on the experiences of the CCHS in managing collections, building partnerships and cultivating donor relations, call Burkhardt at 218-299-5520 or e-mail pam.burkhardt@ci.moorhead.mn.us.

Clay County Historical Society



The Probstfield children and grandchildren carried on Randolph's dream of a self-sustaining, experimental farm, opening a local market in the 1930s to sell vegetables and flowers.

Curator's view *continued from page 1*

museums I've worked for have had dinosaurs or mouse skeletons in their collections. But they've held countless other wonderful objects that lend themselves to compelling exhibits.

One of the first things I'll do in my new job is to help complete the Carver County Historical Society's collections inventory. That will be a great opportunity to familiarize myself with the collections here so that I can begin shaping our exhibit program.

I like to use objects to tell a story. That's what museum exhibits should be all about – telling stories. You can create a strong story line by choosing strong objects, then presenting them in unexpected ways. I find that by layering objects of varying scales, using photographs in different ways and adding color for visual effect, you can enhance the drama inherent in the story without overwhelming the objects with text.

When planning an exhibit, I try to keep in mind the way children perceive the world – how they explore it visually. In my experience, exhibits aimed at children often create the richest museum experience for adults as well. The best exhibits offer layers of meaning for viewers of all ages to explore. Whether you're 7 or 70, it's that exploration that fires your imagination – and keeps you coming back for more.

Knowing your own needs

Douglas County society offers advice on buying equipment

When it came time to replace the outmoded microfilm reader in the Douglas County Historical Society's Public Research Center, the staff did its own research. They started with a comprehensive study of the center's needs. How would the new equipment be used? Who would run it? What kind of workspace did it require? How would it be maintained? What were the budget restrictions?

Answers to these and other questions guided the historical society in its acquisition of a Minolta MS6000 microform reader/printer/scanner, bought with a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society and matching funds. The new machine will enable users to read microfilm, then scan it and transform the information into a computer document that can be cut and pasted, magnified or reduced, and printed on regular paper.

"We worked with a vendor we knew and trusted," said Rachel Barduson, DCHS executive director. "They were experienced with the kind of equipment we sought so they could help us find the perfect machine for our needs – one that was



Douglas County Historical Society

Douglas County Historical Society volunteer Carol Radil uses the new microfilm reader/printer/scanner to do newspaper research.

user-friendly for our volunteers and researchers. They also assisted us with installation and training.

"We still use our old machine for browsing," Barduson noted. "But we can do so much more with the new one and, at the same time, save money on supplies and repairs. We've already expanded the hours of our research center, which we share with

the Douglas County Genealogical Society. Now we can respond more quickly and efficiently to the hundreds of research requests we get by e-mail and regular mail and from walk-in patrons."

For questions about the DCHS process of needs assessment and vendor/equipment selection, call Barduson at 320-762-0382.

Beltrami County schools welcome curriculum resource guide

In far-flung corners of rural Beltrami County, teachers and students do not have ready access to many Minnesota history resources. So the Beltrami County Historical Society brings state and local history to the classroom with its new curriculum resource guide. Published in conjunction with the inaugural exhibition at the society's home in Bemidji's Great Northern Depot (see

Interpreter, August 2001), the guide can be used for pre- or post-museum visits or with slides as a stand-alone interdisciplinary unit.

The guide is part of the society's new education outreach effort, designed to "educate Beltrami County's diverse populations about their own and each other's history, building connections and breaking down cultural and generational

barriers," says Holly Marie Bethune, BCHS administrative assistant. She developed the curriculum in collaboration with local educators, creating lesson plans to fit the state's graduation standards. Editing services were provided by a Bemidji State University professor, and funding came from the United Way of Bemidji. For more information call Bethune at 218-444-3376.

There's a lot to learn when starting an endowment

Wright County society shares its experience

When a generous donation provided seed money last year for establishing an endowment fund, the Wright County Historical Society found itself facing a steep learning curve.

“Our staff and board started what turned out to be a five-month process of educating ourselves,” said WCHS curator Maureen Galvin. “First, we learned the basic principles of endowment funds. They can be set up for a variety of purposes – collections care and preservation, exhibits, building maintenance, library and archives, education programs. Often the donor specifies the purpose. In our case, the donor requested that the fund support general operations. Of course, it’s only a portion of the interest from an endowment fund that can be spent. The principle can never be touched.

“Next, we called other historical societies to find out how their endowments were set up. Some manage their funds themselves with the help of a financial services firm. Others have their fund managed by an outside foundation.”

After interviewing several firms and foundations to learn the differences, the society’s Financial Committee recommended to the full board that they place their endowment with the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls. “Our committee decided it would be best for us to have our endowment fund managed by someone with more experience in nonprofit investment management laws, regulations and tax reporting,” explained Galvin.

Now, with a set of new policies in

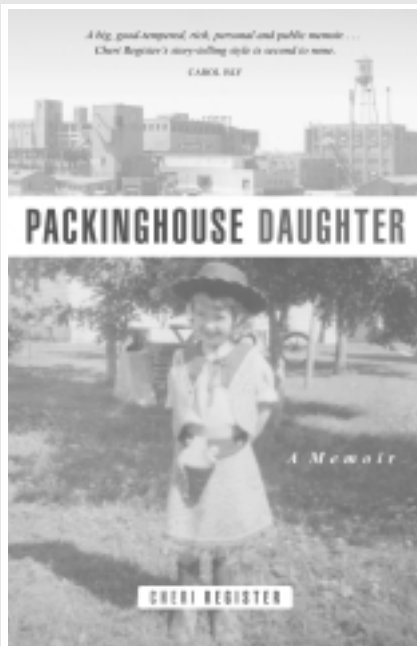
place (Corporate Resolution, Endowment Development Program Statement of Policy, and Endowment Development Resolution), the board will turn its attention to building the endowment. “We want the fund to reach a certain size before we draw any interest,” said Galvin. “We may use our 60th anniversary this year as a

springboard for more fund-raising. The first thing we’ll do is add this new giving opportunity to our membership form.”

For more information call Galvin at 763-682-7322. For a brief look of some other county historical societies with endowment funds, see the October 2001 issue of the *Interpreter*.

Book clubs with a history bent

Minnesota Historical Society



Catching the wave of the book club phenomenon, historical societies in Winona, Scott and Carver counties have organized clubs of their own.

Winona County’s Food for Thought Book Club meets monthly to discuss a range of works that, together, will get participants thinking about the diversity of life in Minnesota communities. February’s selection was Cheri Register’s memoir *Packinghouse Daughter*, a story of family loyalty, small-town life and working-class values during the violent 1959 meatpackers’ strike in Albert Lea, published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press.

Responding to member requests

for more adult programming, the Scott County society created its book club in partnership with Shakopee Community Education. Book club members guide the reading selections for the bimonthly meetings, with suggestions from staff geared to Minnesota Valley history. The Carver County book club sometimes selects a topic – say, the U.S.–Dakota Conflict – then members each read something of their own choosing related to the topic and share it with the group.

For details about the clubs, call WCHS museum educator Vicki English at 507-454-2723, SCHS educator Judy Hentges at 952-445-0378 and CCHS assistant director Tom Garcia at 952-442-4234.

Is it art? Or is it history?

Hennepin History Museum challenges viewers to see connections

Curator Jack Kabrud wants to open the eyes of visitors to the Hennepin History Museum. With two photographic exhibitions, he challenges museum-goers to view contemporary photography in a new way – not only as art but as historical documents.

Assembling the work of six local photographers – images one might not expect to find in a local historical society – Kabrud interviewed them about their work, documenting their responses for the museum’s archives.

“With many of the 17,000 historic photographs in our collections, there are questions we’ll never have answers for,” he says. “Who were those anonymous photographers? Why did they choose the people and places they recorded? I had the opportunity to ask those questions of the photographers in our shows.”

Bill Eilers calls his pictures “environmental portraits” – images of people in the places where they live, work and play. Portraits like these, he says, provide a historical and cultural context for the people in them. Portraits by five other photographers



Sally Sweet



Hennepin History Museum

In an exhibit at the Hennepin History Museum, viewers are invited to compare the frank portraits by photographer Sally Sweet (left), taken in 1999, with the work of 19th-century photographers such as Anna Oleson Heighstedt (right), who took over her late husband’s Minneapolis photographic studio in the 1880s.

in the exhibitions capture their subjects in settings ranging from the artist’s studio to city streets.

Kabrud sees connections between their work and that of earlier photographers. “It’s vital that we collect, preserve and exhibit the work of contemporary photographers,” he

says. “They will soon be as essential a part of our collections as their predecessors.”

For more information on the exhibits *Environmental Portraits* and *The Concept is Simple*, call Kabrud at 612-870-1329.

Pipestone County Museum awarded two IMLS grants

Two grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) will enable the Pipestone County Museum to better serve the public and fulfill its mission. Awarded a Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) grant last spring, the museum worked with a conservator and an architect to review its collections practices and the condition of its

building, storage facilities and exhibition spaces. The consultants’ reports will help museum staff develop comprehensive collections management plans.

An IMLS operating support grant – one of only four awarded in Minnesota last year – provides two years of support based on a percentage of the museum’s income.

Funds will be used to retain the part-time staff member who fills research requests from patrons, gives guided museum tours and manages the gift shop. For information about the application process for these grants, call museum director Chris Roelfsema-Hummel at 507-825-2563 or e-mail pipctymu@rconnect.com.

Minnesota Local History Listserv debuts

A new Internet tool, the Minnesota Local History Listserv, is now available to Minnesota's community of nonprofit history organizations. Developed by the Minnesota Historical Society, it will serve as an electronic meeting place to share information and exchange messages.

What is it?

A list service group is similar to a newsgroup, where people exchange

information about topics of shared interest. But a list service employs the Internet e-mail system to communicate with users.

"The Minnesota Local History Listserv will help all of us share information in a timely manner," explained Tim Glines, manager of outreach services for the Minnesota Historical Society. "The Society will use it to publicize programs and

services such as grant deadlines and field workshops. Subscribers can use it to announce job openings; promote exhibits, public programs and annual meetings; or simply update contact information."

The listserv also will provide a forum for issues, enabling Minnesota's history community to share ideas on a wide range of topics. "You'll be able to ask questions of your colleagues statewide and get prompt answers," said Glines.

How will it work?

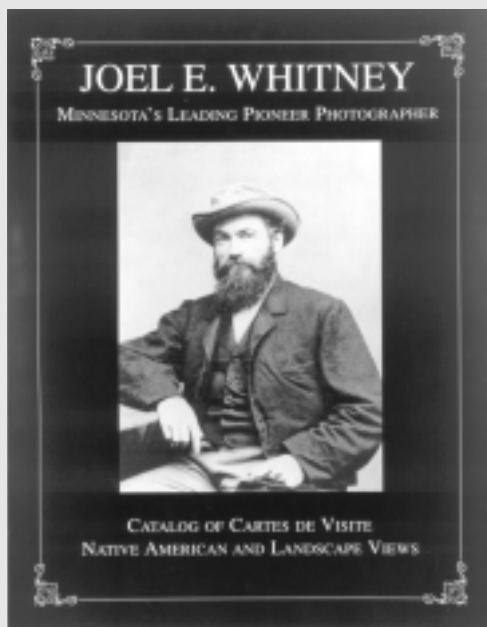
The Minnesota Local History Listserv will be an open list where members can subscribe and unsubscribe at will. It will be a moderated list, with submitted items sent to a moderator for approval. And it will be a list digest. To reduce in-box clutter, news and announcements will be grouped and distributed to subscribers every Wednesday.

How to subscribe

Just send an e-mail, with "Subscribe Minnesota Local History Listserv" as the sole text, to majordomo@state.mn.us. You may take yourself off the listserv at any time by sending an e-mail to majordomo@state.mn.us reading simply "Unsubscribe Minnesota Local History Listserv." Do not include any other copy in the body of the text.

Use of the listserv is free and open to all nonprofit organizations and units of local government that interpret and preserve Minnesota history; it is also open to interested citizens. If you have questions, call Glines (651-296-5460 or e-mail timothy.glines@mnhs.org) or David Grabitske, grants/field programs assistant (651-296-4416 or e-mail david.Grabitske@mnhs.org).

Photo collectors group announces first publication



In the 1860s, pioneering photographer Joel E. Whitney traveled from Red Wing to Duluth recording Minnesota people and places. Now 350 of his images have been compiled in a new book produced by the Minnesota Historical Photo Collectors Group. Five years in the making, *Joel E. Whitney, Minnesota's Leading Pioneer Photographer* presents the best of Whitney's cartes de visite depicting American Indians, cityscapes and river scenes, along with a catalog of the marks he used to identify his work.

The book (130 pages, \$25 plus tax and shipping) may be

ordered from the Kramer Gallery, 800 LaSalle Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55402. For details call 612-338-2911.

The collectors group was established nine years ago to create a network for people with a common interest in historical photography. Membership is open to all; a fee of \$10 covers group mailings. To join call Bonnie Wilson, the Society's curator of Sound and Visual Collections, at 651-296-1275, or e-mail bonnie.wilson@mnhs.org.

Conservation ABC's

Workshops cover basics of preserving treasured possessions

Minnesota Historical Society chief conservator Bob Herskovitz continues his popular workshop series, part of the Society's conservation outreach program. All workshops below begin at 7:30 p.m.; they are free and open to the public. Watch for May workshops in the April *Interpreter*.

April 3, Fairmont

Preserving Family Photos and Documents

Martin County Historical Society

Learn about options for the handling, storage, display, repair and restoration of treasured family photos and documents. Bring in letters, photos

and other papers about which you have questions. Co-sponsors: MCHS and Fairmont Community Education. For details call 507-235-5178.

April 4, Windom

Care of Antique Furniture

Cottonwood County Historical Society

Herskovitz discusses how to preserve treasured wood furniture even as you use it. Topics include cleaning and repair, maintenance of original finishes, and the care of metal and fabric components. Co-sponsors: CCHS and Windom Community Education. For details call 507-831-1134.

April 11, Cambridge

Preserving Your Family Treasures
Cambridge Middle School

Using items that participants bring in, Herskovitz offers tips on how to preserve, store and display books, textiles, photographs, wood and metal objects and more. Co-sponsor: Isanti County Historical Society. For details call 763-689-4229.

April 23, Perham

Preserving Your Family Treasures
East Otter Tail Historical Society

See description above. Co-sponsor: EOTHS. For details call 218-346-7676.

Field workshops reminder

If you haven't yet registered for a Minnesota Historical Society field workshop this spring, take a moment to do so now. You have three to choose from:

March 22 Shakopee,
Scott County

April 12 Waseca,
Waseca County

May 3 Fergus Falls,
Otter Tail County

This year's theme: historical interpretation – how the past comes to life through exhibits and programs. Sessions promise to be lively!

For more information and registration materials, see the January-February *Interpreter*. Or call grants/field programs assistant David Grabitske at 651-297-4416.



Rahr Malting Co.

Participants in the Scott County field workshop will visit the Rahr Malting Company.

Position open

The Northfield Historical Society seeks an experienced executive director to lead the organization, overseeing its collections, exhibits, education and museum programs, and all other operations. Preferred candidates will have experience in museum and collections management, fund-raising, grant writing and financial planning, with a strong interest in educational programming for middle and high school students. B.A. degree in history, museum studies or related field required; M.A. degree desirable. Salary based on experience and qualifications. Send letter, resume and two references by April 1 to John Fossum, Northfield Historical Society, 408 Division St., Northfield, MN 55057, or e-mail nhsmuseum@rconnect.com.

New grant program funds transportation history projects

A new grant program offered by the Minnesota Historical Society aims to assist nonprofit organizations and units of government in telling the story of transportation in Minnesota. The program is a major component of the Minnesota Transportation History Network, established by the Society to promote better public understanding of the role of transportation in the state's history and development.

Funding has been provided through the federal Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

A total of \$1 million is earmarked for the grant program, which is projected to start with the Society's fall 2002 grants cycle. If the appropriation is not fully expended at that time,

future grant rounds will be held.

Grant size: Details about grant sizes are not final, but it is anticipated that they will be up to \$75,000. They must be matched dollar for dollar.

Eligibility: Applicants must be units of government or regional, county and local nonprofit organizations whose primary purpose is historical preservation and/or interpretation.

Grant categories: Grants will be awarded in seven project categories: historic properties, artifact collections, interpretive programs, oral history, photographic



Minnesota Historical Society

A boat passed under the Stillwater Lift Bridge at its opening in 1931. Today the future of the aging bridge is uncertain.

collections, publications and research, and manuscripts.

Application materials will be available later this spring. Watch for more information in the

Minnesota History Interpreter is published nine times a year by the Historic Preservation, Field Services and Grants Department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Readers are invited to submit information for publication. To be considered, items must reach the editor by the first of the month, two months before publication. Send to Interpreter Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

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