



May - June 2006, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3

**INSIDE**

page 6

**Cooperative effort reopens LeDuc House**

page 8

**State grants-in-aid deadlines**

MINNESOTA HISTORY

# Interpreter

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

## Getting down to business

### Guidelines for documenting the local business community

It's one of the most overlooked areas of collecting by county and local historical organizations. Yet business records play a major role in telling the story of Minnesota's diverse communities. Those records contain the state's economic history - a tale of goods manufactured, services provided, workers employed.

Documenting Minnesota businesses was a goal of the founders of the Minnesota Historical Society, which has amassed one of the largest collections of business records in the country. Jim Fogerty, head of documentary programs for the Society, oversees the huge holdings. Every type and size of business is represented - industries from farming, milling and mining to retailing, food service, real estate, professional sports and more.

"Many smaller organizations find the prospect of collecting business records daunting," says Fogerty. "They're afraid of the volume, unclear about how to appraise the materials, uncertain about what to keep. But business is integral to every aspect of community life. So it's important to attempt to document the companies that provide a community's economic underpinnings."

Following a few simple guidelines, he says, can make the task manageable.



Minnesota Historical Society

Business records at the Minnesota History Center provide a rich vein of research for students working on History Day projects.

#### Where to start

"First, you need a game plan for what to collect and why," Fogerty explains. "Start by looking at things through the lens of your community. Ask yourself what's unique to your area. That will help you decide what companies to approach and what to ask them for."

The local gas station may have been a Main Street fixture, he says, but there was one in every town. "Concentrate instead on businesses that shaped your community and contributed to its development - like Marvin Windows in Warroad or the

**Business** continued on page 2

## Business *continued from page 1*

granite industry in St. Cloud.”

### What to collect

“Next, ask yourself what kinds of material to collect,” says Fogerty. “Of course, you’ll want to collect what best represents each business – what it sold, how it operated, what it did better than other companies.

“But because your storage space is probably limited, think about what materials might have the highest value for researchers and what will be most interesting to your museum visitors.”

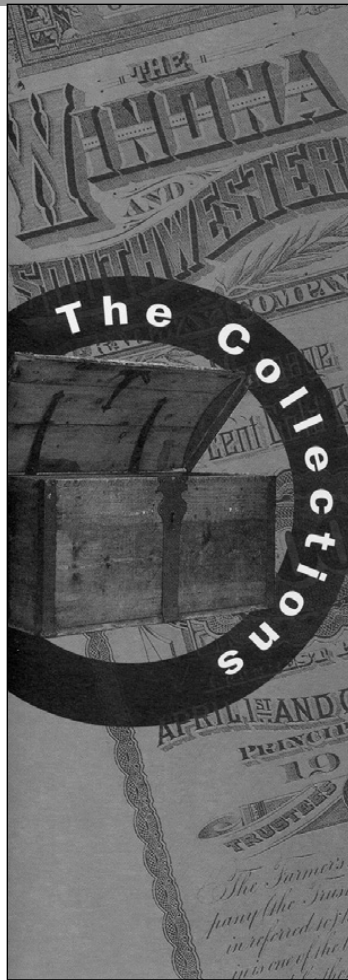
He offers some suggestions:

- **Annual reports.** These provide the most concise summary of a company’s business activities. Old account books and ledgers take up a lot of room and are of little use to researchers, Fogerty says. “Keep one or two for display purposes.”
- **Employee newsletters.** Offering a look at the faces behind the business, employee publications shed light on a company’s culture and document matters of interest to its workers.
- **Advertisements:** Often colorful and graphically interesting, these materials can serve to trace a company’s development as it grows and changes.
- **Photographs:** Photos and company advertisements add immeasurably to museum exhibits.
- **Artifacts:** A strong collection combines manuscript materials with examples of the items a company made and sold.

Fogerty’s advice: “Set your sights on what’s doable. Instead of trying to take on 500 linear feet of records from a business, you might add 10 feet of advertisements and annual reports.”

### Cultivate relationships

When soliciting donations of business records, make your pitch



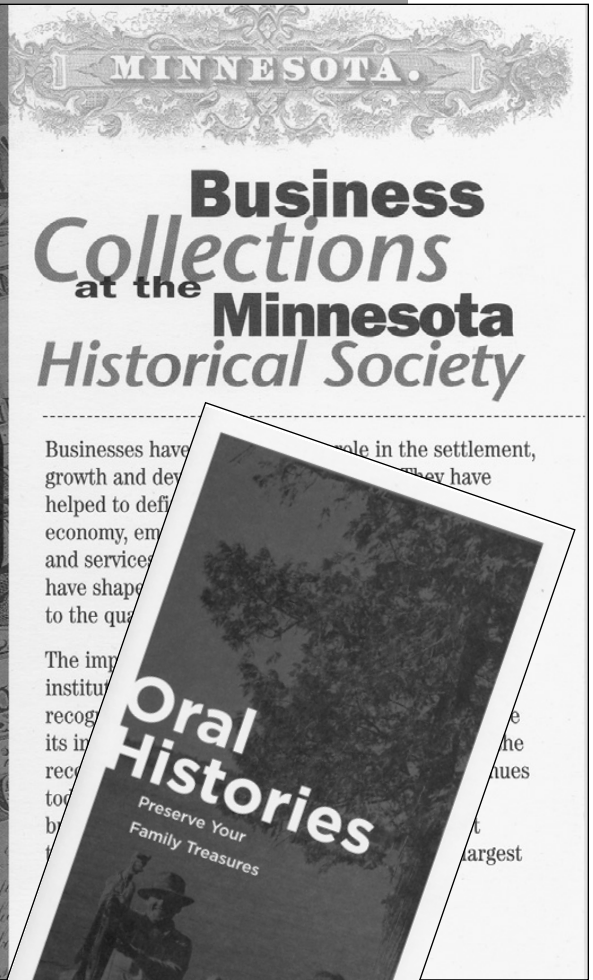
Brochures and online inventories make business collections accessible to more patrons.

skillfully, he counsels. “Explain why the company is an important part of the community’s story. Then suggest a partnership: In return for the donation, offer your services as archivists. You can help them manage their own records – guide them in deciding what to keep, organize the materials and store them in a safe, accessible place.”

Such collections often become important resources for the donor.

**“Suggest a partnership. In return for the donation, offer your services as archivists.”**

*Jim Fogerty  
Minnesota Historical Society*



Businesses have helped to define the economy, employment and services. They have helped to shape the settlement, they have helped to define the economy, employment and services. They have helped to shape the settlement, they have helped to define the economy, employment and services.

The importance of oral histories is recognized by many institutions. Oral histories are a valuable part of a company's history. They provide a unique perspective on the company's culture and values. Oral histories are a valuable part of a company's history. They provide a unique perspective on the company's culture and values.

Oral histories record the stories behind the businesses.

At the Minnesota Historical Society, some of the biggest users of the business collections are employees of the businesses themselves.

“People from 3M are always coming over to the History Center to do research in their own records,” notes Fogerty.

Many companies will be flattered by your proposal and will welcome assistance in organizing their archives, he says. But some may be wary of turning over certain types of records such as financial statements. “So ask for things in the public domain – materials that will help the public understand the business.”

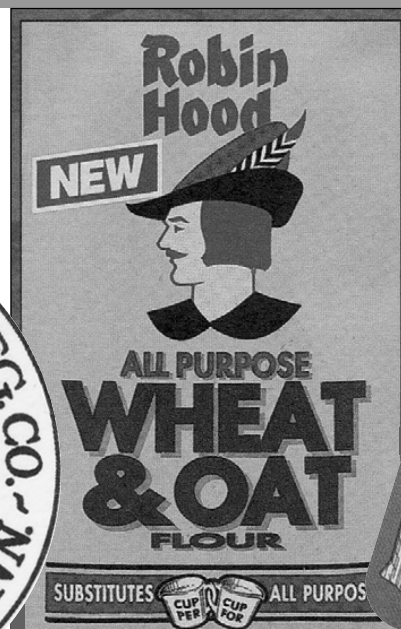
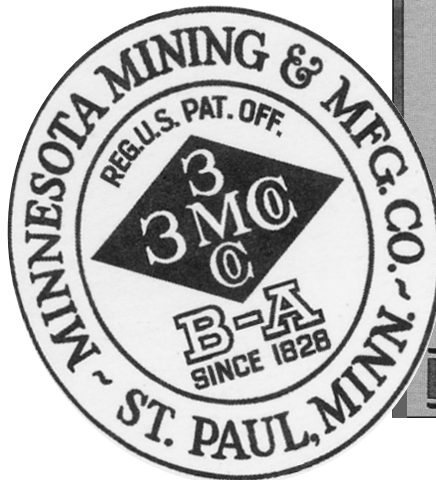
## Get the stories behind the records

After you've acquired a company's records, ask to do oral history interviews with the founding family and some of the workers. "That's a great way to get the stories behind the business that the records don't reveal," says Fogerty.

Even when companies don't have many records or don't want to donate them, it still pays to cultivate relationships. "You might arrange to do oral histories with companies whose papers you can't collect," suggests Fogerty. "That way, you can at least capture for the historical record some of the stories about the business. Those oral histories then become a collection in themselves."

## Where to go for help

"Unfortunately, there is no 'Business Records 101' booklet in print," says Fogerty. But there is plenty



Advertisements can serve to document business growth and change. They also add visual interest to museum exhibits.

of help for doing oral histories. On its web site, the Minnesota Historical Society offers two manuals that can be downloaded and printed:

- Oral History Project Guidelines, and
- Transcribing, Editing and Processing Guidelines.

Both can be found at [www.mnhs.org/collections/oralhistory/oralhistory.htm](http://www.mnhs.org/collections/oralhistory/oralhistory.htm).

To explore some of the Society's business records, go to [www.mnhs.org/collections/](http://www.mnhs.org/collections/)

manuscripts/business.htm. You'll find brief descriptions of more than 120 collections of corporate and trade association records and the papers of more than 70 individuals associated with Minnesota businesses.

Need specific advice about collecting business records in your community or about organizing and using your business collections? E-mail Fogerty at [james.fogerty@mnhs.org](mailto:james.fogerty@mnhs.org).



# An opportunity seized

## Stearns History Museum acquires cache of architectural records

The seeds for a major acquisition of business records by the Stearns History Museum in 2004 were sown decades earlier when the county historical society launched a capital campaign to build its new museum.

Spearheading that successful 1980s fundraising campaign was executive director David Ebnet, who knew the importance of cultivating donors. "We put a lot of effort into building relationships with them," says Ebnet. "And we've worked at staying

in touch over the years. We research their business interests, their hobbies and so on, looking for connections between the museum and our donors and prospective donors. And we always make sure we educate them about what we collect and why."

It's a strategy that continues to pay off.

## An unexpected gift

Among those who supported the new museum with a monetary

gift was the firm of Jim Miller Construction (now Miller Companies) of St. Cloud. More than 20 years later, the donor came forward with another offer. Through a series of mergers, the company had accumulated the files of three prominent St. Cloud architectural firms. The files, dating from 1915 to 1972, were now taking up space needed for other things. "Would the

An opportunity continued on page 4

## An opportunity *continued from page 3*

Stearns History Museum be interested in them?” inquired Miller.

A curator was dispatched to look at the collection and found a treasure trove of materials. Stuffed in cardboard boxes were nearly 1,800 architectural drawings and blueprints for some of the city’s most important buildings – churches, schools, government and commercial buildings as well as much of the St. Cloud State University campus – all the work of noted architect Louis Pinault and his partners.

### Deciding what to take

In addition to the drawings and blueprints, the materials included the architectural firms’ financial records, some furniture, a large stash of trade journals and numerous artifacts. Guided by their collections policy, Ebnet and his staff decided to acquire only records pertaining to Stearns County. So the museum elected to take the architectural plans, selected trade journals and two artifacts – a drawing table and a file cabinet.

“Because the collection was so large, we asked the Minnesota Historical Society for advice on how to proceed,” Ebnet explains. “They referred us to an appraiser who determined the value of the donation.” Ebnet also consulted with Alan Lathrop at the University of Minnesota’s Northwest Architectural Archives to help the donor find a home for some of the non-Stearns County material. The whole process took about two years before the records were officially transferred to the Stearns History Museum in 2004.

### The challenges ahead

Last fall the museum received a



A collection of architectural drawings and blueprints acquired by the Stearns History Museum includes the 1916 Bishop Busch residence in St. Cloud (above) and the 1936 Milaca City Hall (left), both designed by Louis Pinault. The buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places.

state grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society to inventory and catalog the materials. “We’ll use student interns to assist our staff archivists,” says Ebnet. “Eventually, the inventory will go up on our web site, where we’ll list the holdings for each building represented in the collection.”

The next big hurdle will be storing the collection properly. “We don’t have room in our main museum for all the drawings so we’ll have to keep them in a nearby building,” he explains. “That means immediate access will be an ongoing challenge.”

To raise additional funds as the project unfolds, Ebnet plans a direct-mail solicitation of area architects, engineers and construction firms. “They understand the value of the records,” he says. “In fact, they’re already calling to find out when they can look at the blueprints.”

From his vantage as a member of St. Cloud’s Heritage Preservation Commission, Ebnet knew there would be a demand for research in the materials. “A number of historic buildings in downtown St. Cloud are

undergoing renovation,” he says. “Many of them were altered in the 1960s so the drawings hold the key to how the buildings originally looked.”

### A gift that will keep on giving

It’s not just St. Cloud residents who will have the Stearns History Museum to thank for preserving the collection. “Some of the buildings we have blueprints for were built in places outside Stearns County,” Ebnet notes. “Once the inventory is done, we’ll notify other historical societies about materials that pertain to their counties.

“When all of this came up, it was a bit daunting,” he admits. “We knew it would be costly and time-consuming. But we also knew it was too important to pass up. If we hadn’t taken the materials, they probably would have been thrown away.”

For more information on the collection, call Ebnet at 320-253-8424 or e-mail [davide@stearns-museum.org](mailto:davide@stearns-museum.org). When the cataloging is completed, the materials will be searchable on the Stearns History Museum web site at [www.stearns-museum.org](http://www.stearns-museum.org).

## 'Mysteries in History'

Program series reaches all corners of Otter Tail County

Inspired by the popular PBS series "History Detectives," the Otter Tail County Historical Society has created its own series designed to separate historical fact from fiction. Titled "Mysteries in History," the program series has visited seven communities around the county this spring to explore intriguing local stories - and sometimes challenge long-held beliefs.

Retired Concordia College professor Clair Haugen went to New York Mills to shed light on the influx of Communists there in the 1930s. "The mystery," says OTCHS executive director Chris Schuelke, "is how Communism gained a foothold in

staunchly conservative Otter Tail County. It wasn't talked about much after the movement faded. Now we're challenging our audiences to rediscover that part of our history."

"Mysteries in History" was made possible with a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission. For more information on this and other programs in the series, call the OTCHS at 218-736-6038 or visit the society's web site at [www.otchs.org](http://www.otchs.org).

**A 1930s Otter Tail County newspaper reflected local concerns about the activities of a new group of residents. The story behind the headlines is featured in the program series "Mysteries in History."**

### COMMUNISTS ARE IN CAMP ON LEAF LAKE

Seventy Children Enrolled In  
Summer School According  
to Reports

Red flags flare from many tents in a Communistic encampment that is being held this week and all of next week on a point on the south side of East Leaf Lake in Leaf Lake township, according to reports coming from that section of the county.

It is called the summer school for Communists, and it is claimed that 70 children are enrolled. These children come from many sections of the state, it is said.

There are many Communists in the New York Mills country, it is reported, but many of the residents are hoping that the school can be stopped.

Otter Tail County Historical Society

## 'Farm Life: A Century of Change'

Exhibit in Steele County spotlights farm family life

Though the new exhibit at the Steele County Historical Society is borrowed from Wisconsin, its themes of family and community are universal. "Farm Life: A Century of Change for Farm Families and Their Neighbors" tells of the profound economic and social changes affecting farm families in the 20th century as they witnessed rapid advances in technology, farm consolidation and plummeting crop prices.

Through artifacts, photographs and interactive displays, visitors learn what it means to live and work on the land at mid-century. Participants in an opening-day Agricultural Roundtable, including representatives of farm organizations as well as farmers past and present, will discuss their personal experiences in farming and the changing relationship between

farmers and consumers. Following is a Farmer's Share lunch, where each diner pays only what a farmer would have received for the produce from which the lunch was made. "It's a very effective tool for consumer education," says SCHS director Laura Resler.

The traveling exhibit's stop in Steele County, scheduled for May 20 to June 15, is made possible by several local sponsors and in-kind donations. For more information, call Resler at 507-451-1420.



Chippewa Valley Museum

For farmers in the 1950s, hard work was a way of life. It still is. But, today, fewer families work the land.



CHIPPEWA VALLEY  
M·U·S·E·U·M

# Open for business

## LeDuc Historic Estate once again welcomes visitors

One man's dream. A local landmark. A symbol of community pride. The LeDuc Historic Estate in Hastings is all of those things. It is also a tale of triumph over long odds.

Donated to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1958 for eventual use as a historic house museum, the grand Gothic Revival house remained in the hands of its donor until 1986. By then, shifting priorities and budget constraints forced the Society to reevaluate. For nearly two decades the house, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, sat empty, its fate uncertain. When, after a lengthy study, the Society decided to seek another owner, those with a stake in preserving the house joined forces in a unique partnership.

### Negotiations bear fruit

Representatives of state, county and local entities negotiated a joint plan for the LeDuc property: With \$1.2 million from the state legislature, the Minnesota Historical Society would restore the house, the City of Hastings would then assume ownership and maintain the grounds, and the Dakota County Historical Society would operate the estate as a historic site.

In May 2005 the home of the William Gates LeDuc family opened for tours.

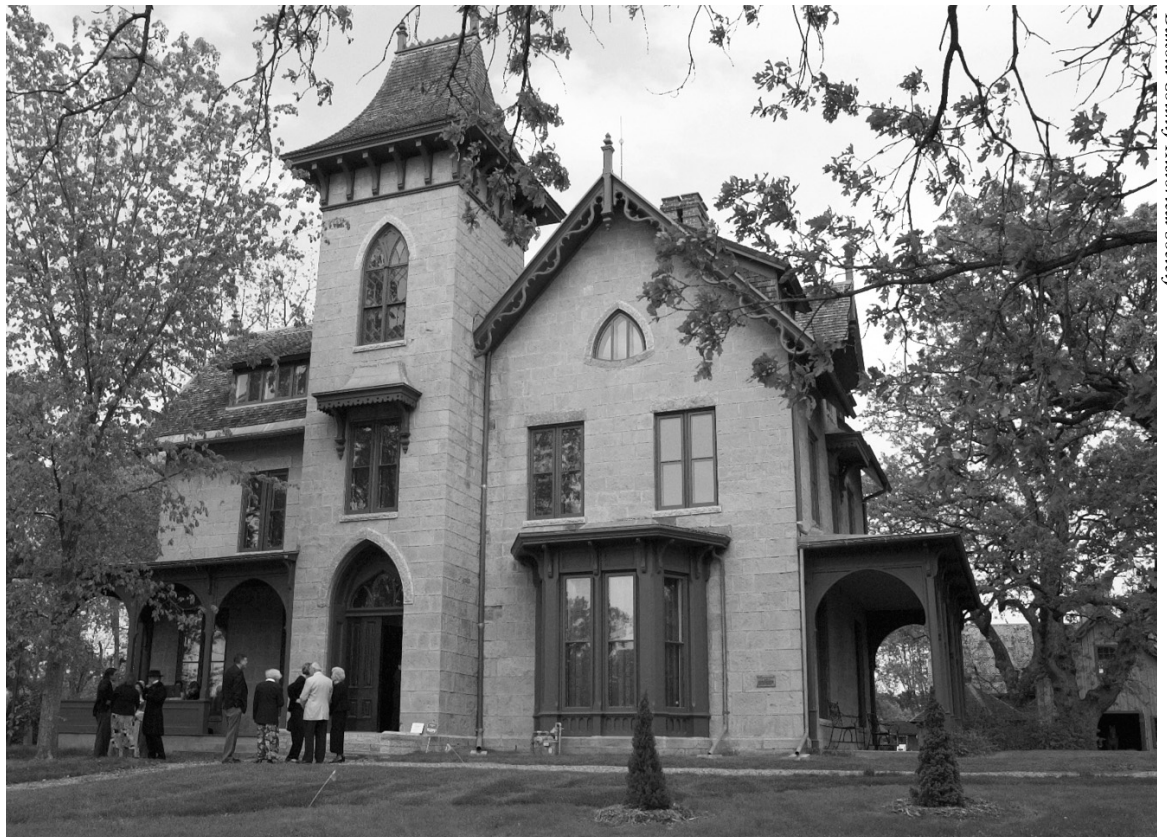
By then, countless individuals – county workers, city business owners, the Friends of LeDuc organization, volunteer garden club members, even students from local schools – had given their time and raised funds to make the community's long-held hope a reality. Last fall, recognizing the community-wide effort that preserved the historic property, the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota honored the project with a restoration award.

### Telling the story

Program manager Joan Mathison describes the interpretive plan: "We tell visitors about both the estate's

significance and the family's life here. The house, carriage barn and four acres of landscaped grounds are thought to be one of the most intact examples of the work of Andrew Jackson Downing, who is considered the father of American landscape architecture. Mary LeDuc used Downing's plan book, *Cottage Residences*, to draw the plan for her family's dream home.

"William distinguished himself as a Civil War officer, then served as Commissioner of Agriculture under President Rutherford B. Hayes. But he was somewhat less successful as



Dakota County Historical Society

The LeDuc family faced many challenges building their Hastings home in the mid-1860s: William LeDuc was away at war, and materials and workers were scarce. The house opened for tours in 2005 after a year-long restoration.

a businessman. His unprofitable ventures in agriculture, milling, real estate and other fields kept the LeDucs in genteel poverty. Two of the grown daughters ended up supporting the family with a custom needlework business they ran from home.”

The interpretation comes to life in an object theater - a multimedia program in the home’s library - which is based on family journals, letters and photographs in the Society’s LeDuc family papers. “We’ve added period furnishings to the house over the winter so that visitors can see the rooms as daughter Alice sketched them for posterity,” says Mathison. “Things are taking shape outside, too, where we’ve been implementing the landscape restoration plan - rebuilding fences, replanting the apple orchard and peony garden with heirloom varieties - with help from local naturalists, environmentalists and gardeners.”

## Second-season highlights

From May through October and for special holiday events, the site’s nine guides welcome visitors for tours and other programs. A highlight of this summer season will be a Civil War weekend, June 3-4, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Daughters of Union Veterans in Minnesota. Details can be found on the Dakota County Historical Society web site at [www.dakotahistory.org](http://www.dakotahistory.org).

Chad Roberts, executive director of the county society, praises what the county and city have accomplished together. “Along with the Dakota County Courthouse,” he says, “this is the second historic site saved by the City of Hastings, which is very

committed to preserving and promoting our historic districts.” To observe Preservation Month this May, the county society will sell an 1867 bird’s-eye map of Hastings with historic walking and driving tours on the back.

To generate additional income, Roberts says, the LeDuc Historic Estate can be rented for business meetings, receptions and photo shoots. For more information on Minnesota’s newest historic house museum, call Mathison at 651-437-7055 or e-mail [leduc@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:leduc@co.dakota.mn.us).



Dakota County Historical Society

David Geister and Pat Bauer, a husband-and-wife team of interpreters, portray William and Mary LeDuc at special events.

## Celebrating Preservation Month

This May during Preservation Month, communities across Minnesota are celebrating their historic preservation successes. Playing a lead role is the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, observing its 25th anniversary this year.

To kick things off, the Alliance unveiled the exhibit “Minnesota Saved!” - a tribute to a quarter-century of historic preservation in Minnesota. A panel of judges selected 25 preservation success stories from across the state to feature in the exhibit. After an initial run at Mill City Museum in Minneapolis, the exhibit will tour Minnesota through 2006 and 2007. To schedule it for your community, call Marvel Anderson 651-293-9047.

Check out other events scheduled for Preservation Month at the Preservation Alliance web site,



Photo by Doug Ohman, Pioneer Photography

The restored Odeon Theater in Belview (Redwood County), a performing arts hall built in 1901, is among 25 preservation success stories featured in a new exhibit from the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota.

[www.mnpreservation.org](http://www.mnpreservation.org), and on the Minnesota Historical Society’s listserv, MNLOCALHISTORY.

## Deadlines for state grants-in-aid

**D**lan now to apply for the fall round of state grants-in-aid and state capital project grants-in-aid. This is the second of two cycles for the 2006-07 biennium. Application deadlines are:

**July 28** Pre-application due.  
**Sept. 1** Final application due.  
**Oct. 3** Grants Review  
Committee meets.

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

Matching grants for historic preservation projects of a capital nature are awarded only to county and local jurisdictions.

**Note:** Monies for capital project grants depend on an appropriation from the Minnesota Legislature. Updated information on results of the 2006 legislative session will be posted on the Society's listserv, MNLOCALHISTORY, and at [www.mnhs.org/about/legis/legis.html](http://www.mnhs.org/about/legis/legis.html).

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

## Nominations sought

**T**here's still time to submit a nomination for a topic to be included in the "Minnesota 150" exhibit, opening in the fall of 2007 at the Minnesota History Center.

The exhibits team is looking for people, places, things and events originating in Minnesota that have sparked change within the state or beyond its borders. Especially needed are ideas from regions beyond the Twin Cities.

To submit a nomination, go to [www.mnhs.org/mn150](http://www.mnhs.org/mn150) and follow the prompts. For more information, call Kate Roberts at 651-297-8839.

### Minnesota History Interpreter

is published bimonthly by the Historic Preservation Department of the Minnesota Historical Society. Unless otherwise noted, photographs are from the Local History Services office.

Material from this issue may be reprinted with the following credit line: Reprinted with permission from *Minnesota History Interpreter*, May - June 2006, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3, published by the Minnesota Historical Society. Do not reprint material taken from another source without permission.

On request, this publication is available in alternative formats: audiotape, large print or computer disk. Back issues can be found online at [www.mnhs.org/about/publications/interpreter.html](http://www.mnhs.org/about/publications/interpreter.html).

Readers may submit news for publication. Send to Interpreter Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

For address corrections, e-mail [michele.decker@mnhs.org](mailto:michele.decker@mnhs.org) or call 651-296-5434. For other matters call Tim Glines at 651-296-5460 or e-mail [timothy.glines@mnhs.org](mailto:timothy.glines@mnhs.org).

**Britta Bloomberg**, Head,  
Historic Preservation Department  
**Tim Glines**, Manager, Outreach Services  
**David Grabitske**, Grants and Field Programs  
Associate  
**Mary Ann Nord**, Editor  
**Kate Raver**, Layout

[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)

## Minnesota Historical Society

345 Kellogg Boulevard West  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102-1906

Address service requested.

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
St. Paul, MN  
Permit No. 854