



INSIDE

page 4

'Greatest Generation' project launched

page 6

State grants-in-aid deadlines

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

Dakota County Historical Society



Funding cuts have made many of the recommendations in the Dakota County Historical Society's CAP assessment difficult to carry out. The society keeps up with cataloging artifacts thanks to longtime volunteer Nancy Hanson.

Taking it to the next level

Conservation Assessment Program offers blueprint for collections care

Let's say you run a small museum on an ever-tightening budget. You're responsible for both the building and its contents - a collection of artifacts and materials entrusted to the museum's care. But you have no formal training in museum studies or conservation.

You know you need help. But where do you start when the job seems overwhelming? Perhaps the

best way to begin is with advice from a professional conservator. That's where the Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) comes in.

CAP gives grants for a general assessment of your museum's collections and sites by a trained conservator, who looks at museum conditions, policies and procedures that affect the care of your collections. The assessor's evaluation

can serve as a blueprint for guiding your museum to the next level of collections care. With your CAP report in hand and your board, staff and volunteers in partnership, you can:

- Begin to improve the care of your collections and your building.
- Prioritize your needs.
- Develop a long-range conservation plan.
- Raise awareness and funds for future conservation projects.

How CAP works

CAP grants, ranging from about \$3,000 to \$6,500, are federally funded through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and administered by Heritage Preservation. They are noncompetitive grants, distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. **This year's application deadline is Dec. 1.**

When you receive your grant, you'll also get a list of professional conservators. It's up to you to do the hiring and negotiate the fee and expenses. The person you select will spend two days on-site conducting the collections survey, then three days writing the assessment report. Among aspects of your operation to be studied:

- Storage and exhibition conditions.
- Museum environment.
- Fabrication and condition of structures housing collections.
- Museum staffing and training.
- Policies and procedures on use of collections.

CAP grants *continued from page 1*

Museums located in structures at least 50 years old are awarded the services of a second assessor – a preservation architect whose report will advise you on how best to preserve your building.

Who is eligible?

CAP grants are for any nonprofit museum that owns objects, exhibits them regularly, is open to the public at least 120 days a year (counting special appointments and tours), and has at least one full-time paid or volunteer staff person or the equivalent. Only museums whose collections and facilities can be surveyed in a period of two days are eligible.

This is a one-time-only grant so it pays to make sure you're prepared for a thorough assessment. More on that in a moment. If you've already had a CAP assessment but, because of changes in museum personnel or areas of collecting, you think you need another, you may undertake a second

CAP survey on a fee-for-service basis.

For more information about this and other particulars of the program, go to www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMS/capover.htm. Get a sample application well ahead of the Dec. 1 deadline to familiarize yourself with the CAP requirements and process.

An untapped resource

Since 2001, only one Minnesota organization has received a CAP grant. That can't be due to stiff competition: grants are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. So the only explanation seems to be that almost no one is getting in line to apply.

"We've had recent staff changes," you might say about your hesitation to pursue CAP funding. That may indeed be good reason for postponing a CAP application. Assessors need information about your collections. If your museum is currently without a director or curator who can provide the

information, your assessment is likely to be less beneficial.

"Shouldn't we wait until we get our collections storage organized?" you might ask. If conditions make your storage area inaccessible, then, yes, you have some work to do first. But if you're just worried about a conservator seeing the less-than-ideal condition of your collections – well, that's the point. You'll get some valuable advice on how to improve things. The longer you wait to seek help, the longer your collections will remain in unsafe conditions.

"CAP assessments give you a base line for your collections preservation planning."

*Bob Herskovitz
MHS Outreach Conservator*

Doable steps

When the Hennepin History Museum applied for a CAP grant in 1999, the museum got funding for two assessors – one for its collections and one for the building that houses them, a 1919 mansion in Minneapolis's Washburn-Fair Oaks Historic District. The assessors' reports covered everything from collections storage and museum displays to humidity and light controls to building maintenance and security.

"They helped us prioritize the work we needed to do," says museum administrator Todd Mahon. "The reports outlined doable steps that we could take right away and reach-for-the-stars projects that require more funding and staffing."

Among work done first: tuckpointing the building's exterior and boxing the textile collection. Staff also used the assessment reports to obtain funding for humidity-

Hennepin County Historical Society



CAP assessors recommended masonry repairs and humidity monitors for the Hennepin History Museum but cautioned against installing a modern HVAC system in a historic building not designed for it.

monitoring equipment. Yet to be tackled are bigger issues such as building-wide environmental controls. The problem, noted the assessors, is that preservation of the historic structure is at odds with preservation of the collections within: Installation of modern, museum-standard HVAC systems poses a threat to buildings not designed for them.

Long-term benefits

“There have been so many long-term benefits,” says Bonnie McDonald, executive director of the Anoka County Historical Society, about its 1998 CAP grant. At the time the society occupied a historic house museum, where the weight of collections stored in the attic had bowed the ceiling of the room below. “We had already begun the search for a new facility,” says McDonald, “but the assessors’ reports spurred our board to give it a higher priority. They took the CAP findings very seriously.” After careful planning and a successful fundraising campaign, the new Anoka County History Center and Library opened its doors in 2002.

“Our assessors outlined doable steps that we could take right away and reach-for-the-stars projects that require more funding and staffing.”

*Todd Mahon
Hennepin History Museum*

McDonald recounts other lasting benefits. “Before the CAP assessment, no one person was dedicated to caring for our collections. That changed after our CAP grant. We used it as a springboard to get funding from our local American Legion post to hire a museum cataloger – support that continues to this day. The same staff person is still here and



A well-timed CAP assessment spurred the Anoka County Historical Society’s move to a new building with more exhibit space, improved storage and full accessibility.

so far has logged more than 60,000 records in PastPerfect.”

Strategies for success

Bob Herskovitz, outreach conservator for the Minnesota Historical Society, advises CAP grant recipients to choose their assessor with care. “Don’t just take the first name on the list,” he says. “Interview candidates to make sure there’s a match between your museum’s needs and their experience. What you want in the end is practical advice you can build on.”

Even then, some museums find their assessors’ reports daunting, particularly when the list of recommendations is long. To address issues that lie beyond the scope of current resources, a long-range plan is essential, says Herskovitz. He invites calls or e-mails for consultation on specific problems and advice on how to prioritize. He also encourages use of the MHS Conservation Lending Library, described at right.

“CAP assessments give you a base line for your collections preservation planning,” says Herskovitz. “Using CAP to shape a long-range conservation plan gives you a good road map for the future.”

Conservation Lending Library

A variety of books, articles and videotapes are available for loan to Minnesota cultural institutions through the Minnesota Historical Society Conservation Outreach Program. Included are resources on such topics as museum lighting, environmental controls, storage, pest management and preservation planning, as well as the needs of specific collections such as books, furniture, photographs and textiles. The only cost: return postage.

Peruse an online, 28-page annotated bibliography of the lending library’s holdings at www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/reports/lending.pdf. Then e-mail or phone in your loan request. For a printed copy of the bibliography by mail, call 651-297-1867.

To contact outreach conservator Bob Herskovitz, call 651-297-3896 or e-mail bob.herskovitz@mnhs.org.

'Minnesota's Greatest Generation'

State Historical Society's four-year project to culminate in sesquicentennial

Much has been written about what many call the Greatest Generation – the men and women who came of age in mid-20th century America as the country went to war. But the passage of time threatens to dim our memory of their many contributions.

Now, in a major effort to ensure that their story is not lost, the Minnesota Historical Society has launched a four-year project to honor Minnesota's Greatest Generation. Through collecting initiatives to gather artifacts and oral histories – via workshops, publications and web-based resources – this ambitious undertaking will reach all corners of the state. The project will culminate with one of the most ambitious exhibits the Society has ever undertaken, slated to coincide with Minnesota's sesquicentennial in 2008.

First phase underway

Among the earliest of the Greatest Generation initiatives is a series of conservation workshops designed to help Minnesotans preserve their family letters, photographs and other

materials. Outreach conservator Bob Herskovitz has already hit the road with the first round of workshops taking place across the state in partnership with a variety of county and local historical societies and tribal organizations.

Titled "Minnesota's Greatest Generation: Preserving Family History," the programs offer a step-by-step approach to preserving various kinds of family memorabilia, particularly from the World War II era. Using items brought in by participants, Herskovitz demonstrates how to care for, store and display family treasures. He also offers guidelines for creating oral histories that are both informative and useful for future generations.

Host a conservation workshop

To date, Herskovitz has worked with groups in Anoka, Martin, Kandiyohi and Stearns counties as well as in the Zumbrota area and at the Red Lake Tribal Archives and Library. He is now scheduling workshops for the fall and, pending continued funding, expects the programs to be offered over the next four years.

If your organization is interested in hosting a workshop, call Herskovitz at 651-297-3896 or e-mail bob.herskovitz@mnhs.org.

Ahead of the curve

Over the past several years, a number of county and local historical



Letters and photographs kept families in touch during World War II. The Minnesota Historical Society's Greatest Generation project will help preserve for future generations these irreplaceable records of life in the mid-20th century.

Minnesota Historical Society photos

Veterans' Memorial Hall, St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth



Above: The YP 61, a Naval Reserve training ship stationed in Duluth, prepared to sail to New York in 1940. Right: A snapshot taken by Naval Reservist Herb Nelson captures shipmates aboard the USS Paducah during their training on Lake Superior.

Center. But with no one to look after it, the hall languished.

In 1997 the St. Louis County Historical Society took over administration of the hall, refurbishing the gallery space and committing to an ongoing program of collecting and exhibiting veterans' stories. Under the guidance of an advisory committee and with help from a local partner, Barr Engineering, the county society in 2001 launched an online exhibit gallery at www.vets-hall.org.

Today the site features more than 4,200 biographies of local veterans, some 3,500 of them from World War II. "The web site has been visited so far by well over 100,000 different users," says Bryan Lean, manager of museum operations for the county society. "It's grown so big that we're now hiring a project curator."

For more information call Lean at 218-733-7582.

Input sought

Randal Dietrich, project director of "Minnesota's Greatest Generation" at the Minnesota History Center, wants to hear from county and local organizations that have documented life in the state during the middle decades of the 20th century. "We want to build on what's been done, not repeat it," he says. He can be reached by phone at 651-296-5530 or by e-mail at randal.dietrich@mnhs.org.



organizations have paid their own respects to the contributions of this generation through projects that document how the war affected Minnesotans at home and abroad. Here are just a few of them:

★ "In Times of War," an exhibit at the Beltrami County History Center, features the letters, photographs and uniforms of veterans who served in wars from the Civil War to Vietnam. The exhibit includes interactive components developed by faculty and students from Bemidji State University, including a USO display where visitors can hear music from every war era. "It's all designed to evoke strong feelings and stir memories," says BCHS executive director Wanda Hoyum. Opened in 2003, the exhibit will remain on view at least through 2005.

★ For a Pipestone County Historical Society oral history project, 20 WWII veterans -

men and women - were interviewed. With support from a state grant-in-aid, the interviews were videotaped and transcribed for eventual publication.

★ The Olmsted County Historical Society recently tapped three local high school students to help create an exhibit titled "Youth in World War II," which focuses on the ways youth were affected by the war.

A hall of their own

Perhaps the most ambitious undertaking by a county historical society is the Veterans' Memorial Hall project in St. Louis County. The hall dates to 1909, when county commissioners established it as a dedicated place to honor military veterans from four counties in northeastern Minnesota. In 1978 it moved to Duluth's Heritage and Arts

Deadlines for state grants-in-aid

Application deadlines for the fall round of state grants-in-aid and state capital project grants-in-aid for fiscal year 2006 are:

- July 29** Pre-application due.
- Aug. 19** Final application due for state grants-in-aid.
- Aug. 26** Final application due for state capital project grants-in-aid.
- Oct. 6** Grants Review Committee meets.

Note that monies for both grant programs depend on appropriations from the Minnesota Legislature. Updated information on results of the 2005 legislative session will be posted on the Society's list service, MNLOCALHISTORY, and at 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.

'Grantseeking for Beginners'

An inside look at foundation and corporate giving

On June 23 the Minnesota Council on Foundations' popular seminar, "Grantseeking for Beginners," comes to Bemidji. You'll learn the key elements of an effective grant proposal, use print and electronic research tools to identify funding sources, and hear Minnesota grantmakers explain their grant review and decision-making processes. (Note: The seminar addresses only foundation and corporate giving, not government funding.)

Seminar details

Registration deadline: June 16.

Fee: \$95 (\$125 after registration deadline). Thanks to the Northwest Minnesota Foundation, residents of the foundation's 12-county service



MINNESOTA COUNCIL
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area (Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Mahnommen, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake and Roseau) are eligible for a \$50 scholarship; call 218-759-2057 to qualify.

The seminar will be repeated at the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus on Aug. 2 and Dec. 1. There are a limited number of scholarships available for residents of Greater Minnesota. For more information and registration materials, call MCF at 612-338-1989 or go to info@mcf.org.

Preservation Assistance Grants from the NEH

Apply now for 2006 projects

The May 16 deadline is fast approaching for Preservation Assistance Grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. These grants help small and mid-sized museums and historical societies improve their ability to preserve and care for their humanities collections. Those collections may include books, journals, manuscript and archival materials, maps, moving images, sound recordings, decorative and fine arts, prints and photographs,

textiles, archaeological and ethnographic artifacts, furniture and historical objects.

Institutions that have never received an NEH grant are encouraged to apply. You may request support for the following activities: 1) general preservation assessments that will help you identify your preservation needs and develop a long-range, prioritized preservation plan; 2) consultations with preservation professionals to address a specific preservation need;

3) attendance at preservation workshops; and 4) purchase of storage furniture, preservation supplies or environmental monitoring equipment.

Projects may start no earlier than January 2006. Download guidelines from the NEH web site at www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pag.html. For more information e-mail the NEH's Division of Preservation and Access at: preservation@neh.gov or call 202-606-8570.

May is Preservation Month

There's no time to lose! Climb aboard the preservation bandwagon now and join in the celebration of Preservation Month. If you hurry, you can still plan a program or event for your community.

Need ideas? The web site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation offers tips on planning and promoting Preservation Month activities. Go to www.nationaltrust.org/preservationmonth to learn about this year's theme, "Restore America: Communities at a Crossroads."

If time allows, you can publicize your event in the weekly MNLOCALHISTORY listserv. Just e-mail details to Tim Glines, the Minnesota Historical Society's manager of outreach services, at timothy.glines@mnhs.org. Include the event name, date, time, location, a brief description, sponsors and contact information.



Historic house tours are popular in many preservation-minded communities. On this St. Cloud tour, a homeowner shared his house restoration experiences.

Two UMCA workshops for the price of one

On **May 23 and 24** the Upper Midwest Conservation Association (UMCA) will sponsor two hands-on workshops at the St. Louis County Historical Society in Duluth that offer practical advice for managing artifact collections.

First up is "Techniques for Documenting Artifacts and Describing What Is Observed" on May 23. You'll learn to keep more accurate records by examining artifacts under magnification and various types of lighting; identifying

materials to distinguish age, provenance, country of origin, and originality; and describing condition problems more precisely.

On the following day "Applying Accession Numbers to Museum Artifacts" will be offered. This workshop covers standardized numbering systems and demonstrates materials and techniques for applying accession numbers to a wide range of artifacts including glass, metals, wood, ceramics, plastics, painted surfaces, textiles and works on paper.

Both workshops are taught by conservator Neil Cockerline, UMCA's director of preservation services. The cost for one workshop is \$135 (\$110 for UMCA members). Or sign up for both for a total of \$245 (\$195 for UMCA members). Organizations with budgets under \$50,000 qualify for a discounted rate of \$75 per workshop (\$50 for UMCA members). For more information call Melinda Markell, UMCA preservation services coordinator, at 612-870-3128.

Two more chances to catch a spring field workshop

You can still get in on a Minnesota Historical Society field workshop. The final day-long workshops on this year's theme, "Milestones," will be held **May 6** at Split Rock Lighthouse and **May 20** in Thief River Falls.

Sessions include ideas for marking community anniversaries; an exploration of the balance between celebrating history and reassessing it; opportunities presented by community, business and organizational anniversaries for augmenting collections; and strategies for fundraising face-to-face. You can also help brainstorm ideas for

observing Minnesota's sesquicentennial in 2008.

To register, call David Grabitske at 651-297-4416.

At a March workshop in South St. Paul, Wendy Freshman (right) gives Carver County's Leanne Brown ideas for planning family events at her museum.



Minnesota Historical Society Field Services photo

Minnesota History Interpreter

is published bimonthly by the Historic Preservation Department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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

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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.

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