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Washington County Historical Society photos



Longtime St. Croix Valley residents studied historical footage of a 1941 Last Buddies Bully Beef Club meeting to identify local World War I veterans.

## 'To the last man'

### WWI veterans take their place in Washington County Historical Society archives

Civil War veteran Charles Lockwood sat alone at a table in Stillwater's Lowell Inn, facing 33 black-draped chairs. Slowly he raised a glass to toast his fallen comrades. It was July 21, 1930 – the last meeting of the Last Man's Club of Company B, First Minnesota Regiment.

The next year Minnesota veterans of World War I formed a new last man's club, dubbed the Last Buddies Bully Beef Club after the cans of dried beef in every soldier's rations kit. Lockwood donated to the club a bottle of wine to be opened by the last surviving member. More

than 280 veterans signed on, vowing to light candles each year on Washington's Birthday in memory of those who had died.

On the club's 10th anniversary in February 1941, several members filmed the ceremony, scanning the faces of the 157 men in attendance. Sixty years later, after the club's last meeting, that film along with club records, a rusted can of beef and the unopened bottle of wine

were turned over to the Washington County Historical Society for preservation. Unfortunately, missing from the donated materials was a record of who was who among the members pictured.

Enter Brent Peterson, WCHS library manager. In March 2002 he gathered a group of longtime St. Croix Valley residents at the society's Resource Center to help match club members' names with the unidentified faces. Together the local experts identified 129 of the men.

Transferred to videotape, the historic film was later shown on the local cable access channel –

the first of a series of half-hour programs produced by the Washington County Historical Society.

Thanks to this archival project, the promise that Bully Beef Club members made to one another will be remembered for generations to come:

*With faith in the ideals of justice, freedom and equal*

*opportunity for all, we pledge ourselves to maintain, protect and perpetuate the way of life that is America. And for that we will serve and sacrifice – to the last man.*

Brent Peterson, Washington County Historical Society library manager, contributed to this article. For more on the Bully Beef Club, go to [www.wchsmn.org](http://www.wchsmn.org).



## Welcome aboard!

The reins of leadership passed to new directors at three county historical societies this year.



Maynard Spitzack

Already a veteran of nine months on the job as director of the Rice County Historical Society is **Maynard Spitzack**.

Elected to the RCHS board of directors in 2001, he took the part-time position of society director in February at the board's urging. A retired pastor, Spitzack will put to good use his considerable administrative skills and experience managing volunteers.

**Lisa Hanson** spent her first few weeks as director of the Clay County Historical Society learning the ropes



Lisa Hanson

from outgoing office manager **Margaret Ristvedt**. This is actually Hanson's second stint at the CCHS museum: she served as an intern there in 1998 while earning a B.A.

degree in public history at North Dakota State University. She returned in May after completing coursework for an M.A. degree in public history at St. Cloud State University and working for three years as curator at the Codrington County Historical Society in Watertown, S.D.

June saw **Bonnie McDonald's** debut as the Anoka County Historical Society's first full-time executive director. The next month she opened



Bonnie McDonald

the society's new Anoka County History Center and Library. With a B.A. in art history and work toward an M.A. degree in preservation planning at Cornell University,

McDonald is ready for the challenges ahead. She's also a veteran of stints at the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota and the State Historic Preservation Office and an internship at the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission.

*Editor's note: If your historical organization has a new director you'd like to introduce to colleagues around the state, send a photograph and brief biography to Interpreter Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102.*

## Improving collections care

### Three counties awarded NEH preservation assistance grants

The National Endowment for the Humanities recently announced grant awards to three county historical societies in Minnesota for projects involving care of collections:

- **Olmsted County Historical Society:** \$4,937 for consultation to develop a plan for storing collections pertaining to the region's history and culture.
- **Carver County Historical Society:** \$4,987 to purchase supplies and storage enclosures for collections related to 19th-century German and Swedish immigrants.

- **Kandiyohi County Historical Society:** \$4,947 to purchase storage furniture to house a collection of artifacts documenting county history from the mid-1800s to the present.

These NEH preservation assistance grants are designed to help small and mid-sized museums, historical organizations and libraries preserve their humanities collections. Eligible activities include:

- general preservation or conservation assessments that help identify overall needs and develop long-range plans;

- consultation with preservation professionals to develop a plan for a specific preservation problem;
- attendance at preservation training workshops;
- purchase of preservation supplies, equipment and storage furniture based on consultation with a preservation professional.

Awards up to \$5,000 are granted. The next deadline is May 15, 2003, for projects beginning January 2004. For more information on this and other NEH grant programs, go to [www.neh.gov/grants](http://www.neh.gov/grants).

## Filling all the cracks

### Sibley County historic house restored

When deteriorating mortar threatened the historic August F. Poehler House in Henderson, the Sibley County Historical Society had plenty of motives for making the repairs. First, the stately 1884 Queen Anne residence is one of the finest buildings in town, designed by architect George Pass of Mankato. Second, it has historical significance as the home of a noted early settler and entrepreneurial businessman. Third, the building currently houses the county historical society itself, along with its collections.

With a state grant-in-aid from the Minnesota Historical Society, SCHS staff contracted to have the house exterior restored. Repairs included repointing masonry joints with new mortar that matched the old and sealing all windowsill joints. Project director Sharon Haggemiller, the society's curator, had high praise for

the contractor's careful work and attention to detail. "They had to make a special tool to duplicate the very narrow profile of the beading," she reports.

Haggemiller also had advice for organizations undertaking a similar project:

- Read the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Compare your list of work to be done with those standards to determine what is or is not recommended.
- If you do not know a reputable contractor, get a list of contractors from the Minnesota Historical Society grants office.
- Interview several contractors to find one with experience on projects like yours. Explain thoroughly the work to be done and inquire about free estimates.



The exterior of the August F. Poehler House in Henderson, built with local brick, was restored with a state grant-in-aid. It has been home to the Sibley County Historical Society since 1949.

- Stay in touch with Minnesota Historical Society staff. Historical architect Charles Nelson can answer questions of a technical nature, and the grants office will help you with grant preparation, project planning and documentation to fulfill grant program requirements.

For more about the Poehler House, call Haggemiller at 507-248-3818.

## Statewide collections management project wraps up

### Two-year initiative fostered networking, best practices

In September the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums brought to a successful close its two-year collections management initiative (see *Interpreter*, November-December 2000). This ambitious undertaking generated two statewide workshops, six video teleconferences at seven sites, and a comprehensive manual on collections management practices.

Funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the project brought together staff from small and rural-area museums across the state to explore

best practices and share resources for improving collections management. Sessions covered such broad topics as collections documentation, care, use and disposition. Said participant Maureen Galvin, curator at the Wright County Historical Society, "The workshops helped us accomplish what none of us could have done on our own."

According to project co-coordinator Irene Bender, the workshops and video conferences provided fertile ground for networking. "Participants from one

teleconference site decided to continue meeting twice a year to work together on their collections management policies," she said. "And thanks to the manual, museums unable to send staff can gain access to all the ideas and resources shared with attendees."

To inquire about videotaped sessions and the course manual, call Alliance president Mary Lou Moudry at the Crow Wing County Historical Society, 218-829-3268, or e-mail [history@twwn.com](mailto:history@twwn.com).

# Boards of directors: Roles and responsibilities in historical organizations

by Timothy Glines, Manager of Outreach Services, Minnesota Historical Society

Like other nonprofit groups, historical organizations are governed by a board of directors. Many of the issues and challenges those boards face are shared across the nonprofit sector. Yet particular governance issues seem to arise with some regularity among historical societies. This article outlines the general responsibilities of boards, reviews varying models of how boards function, and discusses common problems that the boards of historical societies might face.

## Basic responsibilities

The first tenet of service on a board of directors is this: Individuals serving on boards are accountable for the actions of the organization. That's a big responsibility – and the main reason board service should not be undertaken without a full understanding of expectations.

Beyond that basic principle, boards of directors have numerous

duties. Typically, boards:

- determine the mission for the organization, establish long-range goals and evaluate success in achieving the mission and goals;
- help raise the money that the organization needs to operate;
- approve annual budgets and financial policies and ensure that the organization complies with governmental financial regulations;
- hire and evaluate the performance of the executive director, who in turn hires and evaluates the performance of other paid employees. In the absence of an executive director, the board hires and evaluates any other paid staff. Boards should also evaluate their own effectiveness.

## Board models

Think of the way boards function as a continuum, with *working board* at one end and *policy-making board* at the other.

A *working board* both governs and administers. This is often the model in organizations that are new, lack significant financial resources or serve only a few functions. The primary assets of working boards: the time and energy of board members themselves. There may be no paid staff to whom to delegate the administration of the organization. If there are paid employees, they usually have limited duties such as maintenance or bookkeeping.

In addition to such standard nonprofit board committees as finance, membership and fundraising, working boards in historical organizations may have committees

responsible for various programmatic functions such as the library, the museum and special events.

A *policy-making board* governs the organization but delegates the administration of the policies to a paid staff member. That person usually carries the title of director or executive director. Policy-making boards tend to be found in older organizations with larger budgets and more complex operations.

Remember that these terms define a theoretical spectrum and that your board may operate somewhere in between. What's important is for all your board members to agree about what kind of board they are.

## Which type works best?

Most of the literature about board governance assumes that moving from a working board to a policy-making board is both desirable and inevitable. But that may not be the case for many of Minnesota's historical organizations. Some of the smallest county societies, and perhaps the majority of local historical societies, may never grow to the point where they hire a paid executive director.

This means the governing board will continue to be a working board that both sets policy and implements programs. How do you decide which type of board works best for your organization? It depends on your needs and your resources.

## Common problems for historical society boards

Although boards of historical societies encounter many of the same challenges as other nonprofit boards,



A working board: President Jerome Petersen (front row, left) presides over a meeting of the Sibley County Historical Society board. Sharon Haggemiller (front row, center) serves on the eight-member board and doubles as the society's volunteer curator.



A policy-making board: Ramsey County Historical Society executive director Priscilla Farnham (right) joins board members at their monthly meetings. President Jim Russell (back row, third from left) currently heads the 25-member board.

some problems seem to occur with greater frequency. Anticipating those problems will put you in a stronger position to deal with conflicts when they arise.

***Inability to agree on mission and direction***

It's not surprising that people are drawn to board membership at historical organizations because they have an intense interest in a particular area of history. No doubt you've had a board member who is passionate about farm equipment or quilts or genealogy. On one hand, it's great to have board members who are enthusiastic about working on a specific aspect of your program. Their energy can be contagious. On the other hand, problems may arise if a board member insists on pursuing his or her passion at the expense of all other programs and services offered by the historical society, or if board members' passions compete with one another for limited resources.

At some point, board members must be able to set aside their areas of special interest to focus on the larger picture. Each member must help make the decisions that guide the entire organization forward. How do you ensure that everyone stays on track? With a clear mission statement and a good strategic plan.

***Uncertainty about board roles***

Historical society board members often have dual roles. When they meet as a board, they set policy for the organization and give general direction to the executive director who then implements the policy. But many board members also

volunteer in their museum or at public programs. In that volunteer role, they may find themselves being supervised by the executive director who reports to them. Sounds complicated? It can be. If board members are unclear about lines of responsibility, particularly involving the executive director's role, confusion and misunderstandings can result.

Even greater potential for conflict exists when an organization hires an executive director for the first time. The transition requires sensitivity from all parties. Board members need to understand that they may have to change long-established ways of doing things. And the new executive director needs to give the board time to adjust. One way to minimize adjustment problems is to write a new job description for board members that spells out their roles and responsibilities.

***Lack of clear structure, policies and procedures***

Any effective organization needs clearly defined, written structures, policies and procedures. For many smaller organizations, however, there is a tendency to operate on an ad hoc basis. This can work for a while. But at some point in your organization's evolution, the lack of structure will cause problems.

Use the following questions as a checklist for measuring the soundness of your organization:

- Do you have procedures for an annual performance review of the executive director? If you do not have an executive director, does the

board evaluate other paid staff members? Does the board periodically evaluate its own performance?

- When new members join your board, do they attend an orientation meeting before the first regular board meeting? Are they given a packet of board orientation materials?
- Does your board have committees with specialized functions? Are there written descriptions of the duties of each committee?
- Does your board have a policy addressing conflict of interest? Conflicts of interest can occur in a variety of situations. Some examples: paying compensation to a board member for services rendered; using a board member's business as a vendor; having a board member who collects the same kinds of items the Society collects. As a rule, neither staff nor board members should use their institutional affiliation to further their own or their family's personal collecting or business activities.

***Neglect of fundraising responsibility***

Sometimes boards of directors make the mistake of hiring an executive director to relieve them of

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## Boards of directors *continued from page 5*

the responsibility for raising funds for the organization. Certainly, an executive director plays a significant role in fundraising. But no organization can be successful if the board is not committed to it as well.

Some members of your board will be more comfortable than others when it comes to asking for money. Let their active involvement and personal commitment lead the way.

### ***Lack of provision for board turnover***

There are no legal requirements governing term limits for board

members. But it's a good idea to have such a policy. Term limits should be specified in your organization's bylaws.

Term limits enable boards to bring in new leadership. Without that new blood, an organization will eventually stagnate. If your board enjoys strong leadership, the prospect of mandatory turnover may feel painful. But a well-led organization will be able to recruit other great leaders. And if that great leader on your board must step down after completing the maximum number of terms allowed, she or he can always stand for reelection down the road.

### **A lasting contribution**

One last piece of advice: appreciate your board of directors for all it does. Ultimately, the board is your organization's steward, looking after its mission, ensuring that high standards are maintained, shaping its future. A committed, conscientious board makes for a healthy, successful organization that earns the public's trust. That, perhaps, is the very best way to protect and preserve our historical resources for generations to come.

## Resources for board development

**Board Source**, 1828 L St. N.W., Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20036-5114. Phone 1-800-883-6262 or 202-452-6262; fax 202-452-6299; web site [www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org).

– This national organization offers comprehensive resources for board development, including training and publications. The “Frequently Asked Questions” section of the web site is particularly helpful.

**Minnesota Council of Nonprofits**, 2314 University Ave. W., #20, St. Paul, MN 55114. Phone 1-800-289-1904 or 651-642-1904; fax 651-642-1517; e-mail [info@mncn.org](mailto:info@mncn.org); web site [www.mncn.org](http://www.mncn.org).

– MCN provides a variety of resources, many tailored specifically to Minnesota.

**Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits**, 2233 University Ave. W., Suite 360, St. Paul, MN 55114-1629. Phone 651-647-1216; fax 651-647-1369; e-mail [mail@mapnp.org](mailto:mail@mapnp.org); web site [www.mapfornonprofits.org](http://www.mapfornonprofits.org).

– MAP offers classes, publications and an excellent, free online library of materials on nonprofit management. Go to [www.mapnp.org/library/index.html](http://www.mapnp.org/library/index.html).

**Center for Nonprofit Management**, University of St. Thomas, 1000 LaSalle Ave., TMH 153, Minneapolis, MN 55403. Phone 651-962-4300; fax 651-962-4125; web site [www.gsb.stthomas.edu/nonprofit](http://www.gsb.stthomas.edu/nonprofit).

– The Center offers training, publications and customized services.

**Amherst Wilder Foundation**, 919 Lafond Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104-2198. Phone 651-642-4000; e-mail [webmaster@wilder.org](mailto:webmaster@wilder.org); web site [www.wilder.org](http://www.wilder.org).

– On the Wilder web site are several useful publications including *Starting and Running a Nonprofit Organization* and *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations*.

**Springboard for the Arts** (formerly Resources and Counseling for the Arts). 308 Prince St., Suite 270, St. Paul, MN 55101. Phone 651-292-4381; fax 651-292-4315; web site [www.rc4arts.org](http://www.rc4arts.org).

– Although it serves primarily artists and arts organizations, Springboard offers workshops and training relevant to historical organizations.

*Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* by John Carver, 2nd edition (Jossey-Bass, 1997).

– Carver is a recognized authority on all kinds of boards – corporate, governmental and nonprofit. Visit his web site at [www.carvergovernance.com](http://www.carvergovernance.com).

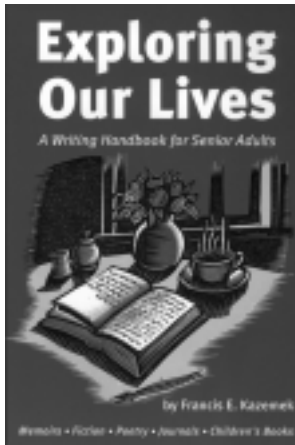
Sample organizational policies from the Minnesota Attorney General's Office:

– Conflicts of interest: [www.ag.state.mn.us/pdf/charities/ConflictInterestPolicy.pdf](http://www.ag.state.mn.us/pdf/charities/ConflictInterestPolicy.pdf).

– Ethics: [www.ag.state.mn.us/pdf/charities/EthicsPolicy.pdf](http://www.ag.state.mn.us/pdf/charities/EthicsPolicy.pdf).

## Hot off the presses

Two new books – one for seniors, one for kids – use storytelling as a vehicle for sharing cultural traditions.



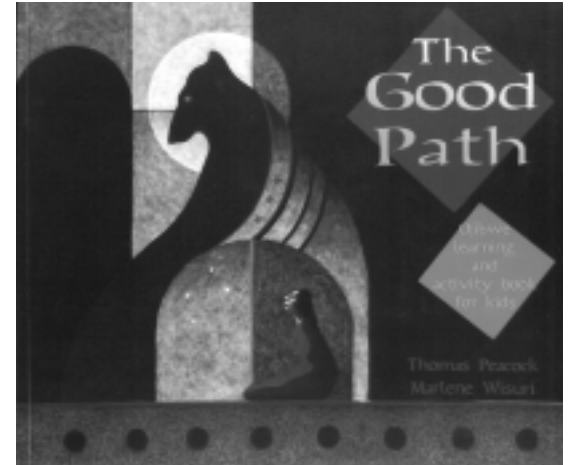
In *Exploring Our Lives: A Writing Handbook for Senior Adults*, author Francis Kazemek demonstrates how seniors can turn their vast reservoir

of memories into written legacies. Kazemek, a professor of education at St. Cloud State University, has conducted writing workshops for

seniors for more than 20 years and developed oral history projects to foster intergenerational storytelling.

To order *Exploring Our Lives* (Santa Monica Press, 312 pages, \$14.95 paper, ISBN 1-891661-26-4), call toll-free 1-800-784-9553. Also available in bookstores.

*The Good Path: Ojibwe Learning and Activity Book for Kids* combines Ojibwe history with cultural stories to introduce readers to the nine universal lessons of courage, cooperation and honor that underlie Ojibwe culture. Author Thomas Peacock, a member of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, teaches at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. Photographer Marlene Wisuri, whose work illustrates



the book, is director of the Carlton County Historical Society.

To order *The Good Path* (Afton Historical Society Press, 128 pages, 122 color and b/w illustrations, \$17.95 paper, ISBN 1-890434-53-1), call toll-free 1-800-436-8443 or 651-436-8443.

## Online course on document preservation

"Preservation 101: An Internet Course on Paper Preservation," offered online by the Northeast Document Conservation Center in Massachusetts, features eight lessons:

- 1) What is Paper Preservation?
- 2) Introducing Archives
- 3) Environmental Damage
- 4) Solutions to Collections Care
- 5) Housekeeping
- 6) Emergency Preparedness
- 7) Care of Photographs
- 8) Preservation Planning

Each lesson includes assignments, self-test questions and resources. Available at [www.nedcc.org/p101cs/p101wel.htm](http://www.nedcc.org/p101cs/p101wel.htm).

## Looking for ideas: How did you observe your anniversary?

With the 150th anniversary of Carver County coming up, Leanne Brown, director of the Carver County Historical Society, wants to know what others have done to observe major anniversaries.

In particular, Brown would like to hear about funding sources tapped and strategies used to commemorate the event. Among her questions:

- Has your county government committed funds to the project?
- What role has your county historical society played in planning and implementing anniversary activities?

- What other organizations and community members have participated in the planning?

Respond by e-mail to [historical@co.carver.mn.us](mailto:historical@co.carver.mn.us) or call Brown at 952-442-4234.

Editor's note: Check out *Historical Celebrations: A Handbook for Organizers of Diamond Jubilees, Centennials and Other Community Anniversaries* by Keith Petersen (Idaho State Historical Society, 1986). Chapters cover planning, fundraising, publicity, documenting the celebration and building on what you've begun.

## 2003 field workshops

One great program, four choice locations

"Seeing Results" is the theme of the Minnesota Historical Society's 2003 field workshops. Choose from the following dates and locations:

<b>March 21, 2003</b>	Red Wing, Goodhue County
<b>April 11</b>	Fairmont, Martin County
<b>May 2</b>	Alexandria, Douglas County
<b>May 9</b>	Virginia, St. Louis County

Topics include volunteer recruitment and retention and the effectiveness of visitor surveys. Watch for registration materials in the January-February issue of the *Interpreter*.



Minnesota Historical Society

Participants in the Alexandria workshop will visit the Douglas County Historical Society, headquartered in the 1874 home of former Governor Knute Nelson.

Meanwhile, address questions to David Grabitske, grants/field programs assistant, at 651-297-4416 or by e-mail at [david.grabitske@mnhs.org](mailto:david.grabitske@mnhs.org).

## State grant deadlines for winter 2003 cycle

Grants will be awarded in two Minnesota Historical Society grant programs during the winter 2003 cycle – state grants-in-aid and Certified Local Government (CLG) grants. Deadlines:

<b>Jan. 17, 2003</b>	Pre-application due.
<b>Feb. 21</b>	Grant application due.
<b>April 3</b>	Grants Review Committee meets.

For details on the CLG program, see the Fall 2002 *Preservation Planner*. For other information go to [www.mnhs.org/about/grants/index.html](http://www.mnhs.org/about/grants/index.html). Or contact grants assistant David Grabitske by phone at 651-297-4416 or e-mail at [david.grabitske@mnhs.org](mailto:david.grabitske@mnhs.org).

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