



September - October 2005, Vol. XXXIII, No. 5

MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

INSIDE

page 4

**Conservation angels visit
Clearwater County**

page 6

AASLH awards

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

Martin County Historical Society



Exchanging ideas at a meeting of the South Central Minnesota Historical Societies in 2002 were directors Bev Jackson of Freeborn County, Bob Burgess of Brown County and James Lundgren, then of Blue Earth County. The Martin County Historical Society hosted the gathering.

Learning the ropes

Advice from colleagues helps newcomers tackle their jobs

Challenges abound for those new to their jobs running Minnesota's county and local historical organizations. Some come to the history field from other endeavors. Others are new to their adopted communities. Some, following on the heels of longtime directors, have big shoes to fill. And some, taking the helm of struggling organizations, must reestablish their museums as

community resources.

Circumstances may vary but the issues remain the same. How do you go about orienting yourself to your new role? When do you begin to implement change? And how do you balance all the demands of the job?

Getting acquainted

"I knew little about this kind of work when I started," says Lenny

Tvedten, a retired teacher who took over as executive director of the Martin County Historical Society in 2001. "I figured that relying on colleagues was part of the job so I started visiting other museums. Tim Glines and David Grabitske at the Minnesota Historical Society connected me with the right mentors."

Backed by a progressive board that recognized the value of learning on the job, Tvedten spent half-days with Bob Burgess at the Brown County Historical Society and James Lundgren, then at the Blue Earth County society. "Linda Fransen in Cottonwood County even arranged for me to meet with members of her board," he remembers.

That kind of networking remains important to the way Tvedten works. He and his colleagues in surrounding counties take turns hosting meetings of the South Central Minnesota Historical Societies, one of several regional groups around the state. "We share ideas, discuss common concerns and brainstorm solutions to problems," he explains. "The smaller organizations find it especially beneficial."

Visits to other museums also figured in Wilma Wolner's new position as director of the Watonwan County Historical Society. When her orientation with predecessor Ruth Anderson, a 35-year veteran of the job, was cut short by Anderson's sudden death earlier this year, Wolner turned

Learning the ropes continued on page 2

Learning the ropes *continued from page 1*

Martin County Historical Society



**Lenny Tvedten, executive director
Martin County Historical Society**

to MHS local history workshops and other, more informal get-togethers for collegial support.

Reaching out

Like Tvedten, Suzanne Updike had no museum background but brought valuable skills to her new job as director of the Wadena County Historical Society. In fact, her years as a marketing consultant helped her land the job. "They want me to put a new face on the museum," says Updike, who is back in northern Minnesota after 25 years away. "We need to reenergize the organization and get the community excited about us again." Among her new initiatives: rethinking exhibits to encompass the whole county, and creating an online searchable database of the society's genealogical records, business histories and photo collection. "We want to strengthen our image as the keeper of our collective history," she says.

A challenge of another sort awaited Susan Hoskins when she became executive director of the Pipestone County Historical Society in 2003. A veteran of living history museums in South Dakota and Iowa, she was new to Pipestone. "Because I was expected to be a spokesperson for the county, I had to learn its history fast," she explains. "So I read everything I could get my hands on and began reorganizing the museum collections to familiarize myself with what we have."

Watwan County Historical Society



**Wilma Wolner, director
Watwan County Historical Society**

To reignite interest in the historical society, Hoskins is reaching out to communities throughout the county. She speaks often to community groups and loans history-themed floats for local parades. A major catalyst to community involvement was the Smithsonian traveling exhibition "Barn Again!" Hoskins booked it last winter and

Wadena County Historical Society



**Suzanne Updike, director
Wadena County Historical Society**

planned a host of programs that drew audiences of all ages.

Also new to his community is Jake Sanders, who signed on as director of the Yellow Medicine County Historical Society in February. "I had to learn who to talk to about what," he says, "so I got myself out there and began building relationships. The museum was hit pretty hard by the '97 flood. We're still rebuilding our collections, exhibits and infrastructure. Now we're working with the City of Granite Falls and the Upper Sioux Community to find a new home for the museum away from the flood plain."

Managing change

With his new job, Sanders inherited a group of longtime employees and volunteers. "I need to change a few things," he says, "but I want to respect the work that others did before I got here. It's a delicate balance. How do I jump in without stirring everything up?"

Prioritize, advises Ben Leonard, a veteran of jobs at the Stevens and Otter Tail county historical societies, the Minnesota History Center and the Mill City Museum. He has been executive director of the Nicollet County Historical Society since July 2004. "Get a feel for the situation, find out what others want, then divide what needs to be done into short-term and long-term goals," he says. "For our museum, new exhibits are a long-term goal. More immediately, I needed to update our computer system, formalize personnel policies and write job descriptions."

One of the biggest challenges facing new directors is working with the board of directors. "When you see them only once a month," says Leonard, "it's hard to develop relationships, especially when they're used to doing things a certain way. You have to be good at explaining complicated things and managing meetings well."

For Jessica Potter, who succeeded James Lundgren as executive director of the Blue Earth County Historical Society in March, working with a board was a whole new experience. "In my previous museum jobs working with collections, I had never gone to a board meeting," she explains. "I'm just beginning to understand the dynamics - how they function, what their roles and responsibilities are. I want to get our board more involved - attending our events, spreading the word about us in the community. My goal is to have one of our brochures in the hands of every Blue Earth County resident by the fall. I need the participation of those 15 board members to do that."

Some final advice

Potter moved up to her director job from a full-time position as collections manager. Until she hires someone to fill that slot, she's doing double duty. Asked what would be most helpful as she juggles her workload, she requests "a good plan for wearing several hats at the same time. Either that or a magic wand."

On a more practical note, Wadena County's Updike offers this key ingredient to meeting the many challenges of a new job. "Be tenacious," she says. "Don't take no for an answer."

Whether you're new to your job or just need some fresh ideas, call the MHS Local History Services staff, Tim Glines (651-296-5460) and David Grabitske (651-297-4416). They offer a multitude of training, consultation and grant opportunities for Minnesota's historical organizations.

Pipestone County Historical Society



**Susan Hoskins, executive director
Pipestone County Historical Society**

Nicollet County Historical Society



**Ben Leonard, executive director
Nicollet County Historical Society**

Blue Earth County Historical Society



**Jessica Potter, executive director
Blue Earth County Historical Society**

Conservation angels revisit Minnesota

Clearwater County reaps the benefits

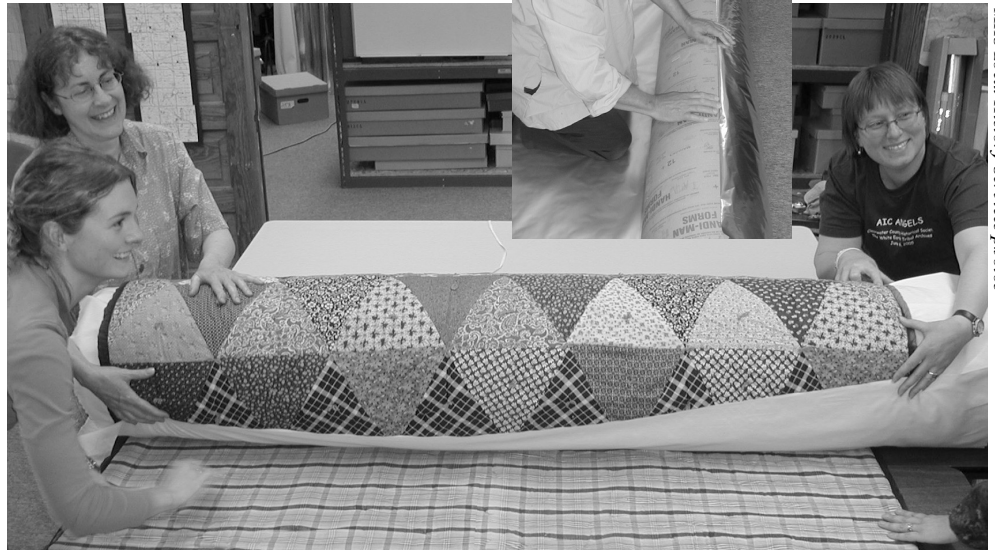
Members of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works are a civic-minded bunch. Wherever they gather for their annual meeting, they carry out an AIC Angels Project, choosing one local museum to receive a full day of donated conservation services. The last time the group met in Minnesota, in 1995, the Hennepin History Museum was the lucky recipient. This time, it was the Clearwater County Historical Society.

“They called out of the blue,” says CCHS director Tamara Edevold. “We couldn’t believe our good fortune.”

Conservator Bob Herskovitz and Tim Glines of the Minnesota Historical Society laid the groundwork for the project. “We picked an organization that was conservation-savvy, or willing to become so, and that had projects we could tackle in one day,” says Herskovitz. “We also needed someone like Tamara who had the courage to open the doors and let our group take the museum by storm.”



Happy recipients of aid from the AIC’s conservation angels and other helpers are Andy Favorite of the White Earth Tribal Archives (front row, left) and Clearwater County’s Tamara Edevold (back row, 6th from left).



Volunteer conservators created a rolled storage system for the Clearwater County museum’s quilt collection.

This Angels Project was different from most, he explains. The Clearwater County museum, smaller than those usually chosen, didn’t have the resources to cover the required supplies. And its location far from the AIC conference site in Minneapolis meant that transportation and lodging had to be provided for the volunteers.

A grant from the Beito Foundation in Thief River Falls made it all possible.

During one very long day in June, the group of volunteer conservators created rolled storage for the museum’s quilt collection and

improved hanging storage for the clothing collection, making padded hangers and muslin dust covers to better protect the garments. They also

expanded shelving for collections storage into underused space.

Meanwhile, paper conservators took on another job, working with Andy Favorite of the White Earth Tribal Archives on a collection of correspondence dating from the 1910s to the 1930s. They cleaned and repaired the papers, then organized them in acid-free folders. In all, the conservators readied more than 2,000 pieces of paper for use by researchers.

The local newspaper and Minnesota Public Radio covered the story, and the whole community showed its appreciation by hosting a farewell pot-luck dinner for the volunteers. “People in town are still buzzing about our Angels Project,” says Edevold months after the conservators’ visit. “It raised our visibility in the community. And we learned conservation techniques we can use to make more improvements. We couldn’t have afforded to pay for this kind of help or this much publicity. We’re very grateful.”

MHS Local History Services photos

Getting teens involved

Olmsted County's Youth Advisory Board delivers results

It all started last year with a grant through the State Arts Board's Audience Development Initiative. The Olmsted County Historical Society's mission: conduct focus groups to find ways to boost involvement in society events, particularly by teens. That project led the society to recruit a dozen teens to help develop "Blast from the Past," a teen component for its annual History Festival.

Their success at drawing a crowd encouraged the teens to form a Youth Advisory Board to develop year-round programs for their peers. To date the group has held a Swing Dance for the opening of an exhibit on youth during

World War II, created by OCHS staff with three high school summer interns. The teens also conducted an online survey on favorite rock-and-roll songs and held a red-carpet event to kick off their Rock-and-Roll Hall of Fame poster exhibit. This past summer OCHS staff once again tapped student interns to interview immigrant youth and create an exhibit that will travel to the local high school.

For a progress report on this teen initiative, call Cheryl Finnegan, OCHS educator and program development manager, at 507-282-9447, or e-mail cfinnegan@olmstedhistory.com.



Olmsted County Historical Society

Taking time out from a swing dance at the Olmsted County History Center, these teens found a seat at the counter of the Princess Cafe exhibit.

Vietnam War remembered

"I left the war in September 1967 but the war hasn't left me. It never will."

Those words, spoken by a Vietnam veteran from Anoka County, set the tone for a new exhibit that opened at

the Anoka County History Center in May. One of the most ambitious exhibits ever undertaken by the county historical society, it's the capstone of a two-year project to record the stories of Vietnam veterans,

a project designed to document the county's recent history.

"Vietnam: The Veterans' Experience" includes such settings as a supply base building, a convoy and even a 1960s living room. "We wanted to chronicle the social upheaval of the times and the experiences of the soldiers after, as well as during, their tours of duty," explains ACHS program manager Vickie Wendel. "Doing our oral histories, we were surprised at how raw emotions still are about the war. So we arranged with state and county veterans' service organizations to have counselors available the night of the exhibit opening for those who needed to talk. They were very busy."

For more information on the exhibit, call Wendel at 763-421-0600. For another Vietnam War exhibit in the news, see page 6, which features the AASLH-award-winning exhibit, "Dignity Through Unity," at Veterans' Memorial Hall in Duluth.



Anoka County Historical Society

Anoka brothers Ron, Ray and Steve Field endured boot camp together in 1969 before shipping out to Vietnam. Their story is one of many told in a new exhibit at the Anoka County History Center.

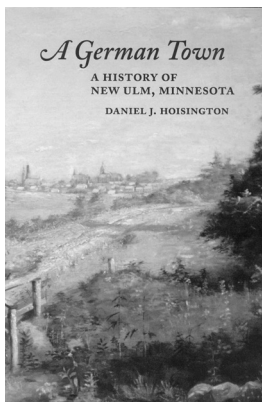
State garners seven AASLH awards

Minnesota museums continue their winning ways

by Ben Leonard, AASLH Awards State Chair

Five projects and one individual from Minnesota will be honored this year by the American Association for State and Local History at its annual conference in September. The total of seven AASLH awards, given for achievement in local, state and regional history, represents another strong showing for Minnesota's historical organizations in the national arena.

Each earning Certificates of Commendation are the Carlton County Historical Society and the City of Cloquet for the city's centennial celebration. Residents celebrated the 100th birthday with a 286-foot-long timeline, a new web site, a CCHS exhibit, numerous citywide festivities and the publication of *A Hometown Album: Cloquet's Centennial Story*. Writes CCHS director Marlene Wisuri in Cloquet's Pine Journal, "It was a very busy time. We're still recovering." Her rest period will be brief: Nearby Carlton turns 125 next year.



Also receiving a Certificate of Commendation is Daniel J. Hoisington's book *A German Town: A History of New Ulm, Minnesota*, published to

mark the city's sesquicentennial. Hoisington traces New Ulm's German heritage from its founders to the city's return to its roots in the 1970s with the advent of Heritagefest. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, director of German-American Studies at the

University of Cincinnati, calls Hoisington's book "a masterful achievement beautifully done!"

Another book, Denis Gardner's *Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places*, published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press, also takes home a Certificate of Commendation. The tome, recipient of a 2005 Minnesota Book Award, tells the stories of 75 of Minnesota's best-loved and most interesting buildings, sites and settings, all listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

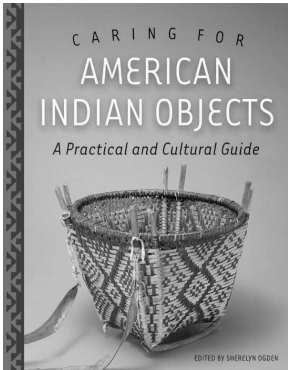
The sole exhibit among Minnesota's Certificate of Commendation winners is "Dignity Through Unity," mounted in 2004 at Duluth's Veterans' Memorial Hall, administered by the St. Louis County Historical Society. The exhibit about Vietnam served as a springboard for veterans to share their experiences with family and friends. Visiting the exhibit last fall, Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, saw in it "the quality of a Smithsonian Institution exhibit" and declared it "an inspiration to museums nationwide."



This exhibit about the Vietnam War at Veterans' Memorial Hall in Duluth earned an AASLH Certificate of Commendation. The exhibit remains on view.

One Minnesotan was singled out this year for her dedication to the field of local history. Opal DeWanz will receive a Certificate of Commendation for her 27-year career managing the Harkin Store Historic Site near New Ulm. Until her retirement last fall, DeWanz tirelessly promoted the site, first for the Minnesota Historical Society, then the Brown County Historical Society and later the Nicollet County Historical Society as oversight of the store changed hands. "Opal dedicated herself to keeping this isolated place on the prairie alive," says Arnold Koelpin, professor emeritus at Martin Luther College. "Her retirement leaves behind a heritage of its own."

MHS Local History Services photo



Press, *Caring for American Indian Objects: A Practical and Cultural*

AASLH's highest honor, the Award of Merit, goes to another book from the Minnesota Historical Society

Guide, edited by Sherelyn Ogden. A textbook as well as a reference book for students, conservators and tribal museum staff alike, the guide features commentary from more than a dozen contributors, many of them American Indians, on general aspects of museum care, techniques for special materials and important cultural considerations.

The AASLH awards program, initiated in 1945, encourages standards of excellence in the preservation and interpretation of state and local history throughout the United

States. Awards of Merit are presented for performance deemed excellent compared nationally with similar activities. Certificates of Commendation recognize excellence within the context of available means and regional standards. The awards program not only honors significant achievement in the field but also brings public recognition to the contributions made by history organizations large and small. For more information, go to www.aaslh.org; call Ben Leonard, AASLH Awards state chair, at 507-934-2160; or e-mail ben@nchsmn.org.

Register now for exhibit planning workshop

Two convenient venues, one great program

Creating exhibits that are engaging to a range of visitors takes careful planning – and a whole lot more. This one-day workshop offers a wealth of fresh approaches to managing an exhibits program. Instructor Tom McKay, local history coordinator at the Wisconsin Historical Society, will lead sessions on content planning, elements of

exhibit design, label writing and exhibit fabrication.

The workshop will be repeated at two locations. Scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. each day, the program includes lunch. Choose one of the following:

Thursday, Oct. 20
Blue Earth County Historical Society
415 Cherry Street, Mankato

Friday, Oct. 21
Morrison County Historical Society
2151 Lindbergh Drive S., Little Falls
Registration deadline: Oct. 17.
Space is limited so register early by photocopying and completing the form below. If you have questions, call Tim Glines, MHS manager of outreach services, 651-296-5460, or e-mail timothy.glines@mnh.s.org.

Registration Form

Name(s) _____ Title(s) _____ E-mail(s) _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Circle one: Thursday, Oct. 20, Mankato Friday, Oct. 21, Little Falls

Number of persons registering: _____ at \$25 each. Total enclosed: _____

Make check payable to Minnesota Historical Society. Mail payment and registration form to:

Minnesota Historical Society

Attn. David Grabitske, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906

Dates to remember

Sept. 14-16

26th Annual Statewide Preservation Conference
Duluth Entertainment Convention Center

Register by Sept. 2. For details call the State Historic Preservation Office, 651-296-5434, or e-mail mnshpo@mnhs.org.

Oct. 7

Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums Annual Meeting and Workshop

Goodhue County Historical Society, Red Wing

Sessions at this year's program, titled "Don't Let Your Mannequins Go Naked: Working with Clothing

and Textiles," cover how to identify, conserve and exhibit clothing. To register, go to the MALHM web site, www.minnesotahistorymuseums.org.

Oct. 10

Minnesota Association of Museums Annual Meeting and Conference
Mill City Museum, Minneapolis

The keynote speaker is Dr. Eric Jolly, president of the Science Museum of Minnesota. For program details and registration information, go to www.minnesotamuseums.org.

Dec. 1

Application deadline for CAP grants

The Conservation Assessment Program's on-site survey of museum collections and environmental conditions lays the groundwork for

long-range conservation planning. Funded on a first-come, first-served basis through grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). For more information go to www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMS/CAPAPPPG.HTM.

Feb. 15, 2006

Application deadline for MAP grants

The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) provides assessments in four areas - operations, collections management, governance and public aspects. Funded on a first-come, first-served basis through IMLS grants. To request a grant packet, call 202-289-9118, e-mail map@aam-us.org or go to www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm.

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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