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

Murray County Historical Society



A recent exhibit at the Murray County Historical Society documented a century of change in downtown Slayton. The city's oldest building, the State Bank of Slayton, served as a post office and community center when it was built in 1884. Since then it has housed a clothing store, jewelry shop, newspaper office, hardware store, beauty salon and photography studio.

The changing face of downtown

Murray County project contrasts past, present

alse fronts. Fires. Financial depressions. There are many reasons for the changing appearance of a town's main street. Sometimes the changes are so profound that residents have little sense of what once constituted the heart of their community.

It was just those dramatic changes that the Murray County Historical Society sought to capture in an ambitious interpretive program titled

"Downtown Murray County - Just a Memory?" Part exhibit, part videotape, part walking tour, the project aimed to foster an understanding of how and why downtown landscapes change and to instill in residents concern for the future of their urban centers. Funded by a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society, the project came to fruition with the help of matching funds raised in the community.

Changing face continued on page 3

There's more than one way to advertise

Using members to spread the word

Adapted from "Curator's Corner" by Maureen Galvin, in the Spring 2001 issue of Heritage Herald, newsletter of the Wright County Historical Society

To draw people to our wonderful Wright County Heritage Center, we need to get the word out. But advertising and promotion can be an expensive undertaking. Newspaper ads, outdoor signs and a booth at the local business expo all come with a price.

To stretch our promotion dollars, we've joined forces with three other museums in the county (the Ames-Florida-Stork House, Minnesota Pioneer Park, and the Cokato Museum and Akerlund Studio) to place a cooperative ad several times a year in the county newspaper and its weekly advertising supplement. This is a simple way for all of us to afford newspaper advertising for our spring and summer programming.

Advertise continued on page 3

Changing face

continued from page 1

Work began in 1999 with research in the county society's photo and newspaper collections as staff and student interns assembled a visual record of 100 years of changes in downtown Slayton, the county seat. Then volunteer photographers were dispatched to record the appearance of present-day Slayton. The resulting photographic exhibit contrasted the two eras, past and present, offering a chronology of selected buildings, their changing owners and uses. An inaugural showing at the Murray County Historical Society and Museum drew Slayton residents young and old and proved popular with visiting school groups. Designed to be portable, the exhibit will be displayed in other community venues.

Adding a dimension to the exhibit was a videotape that compiled old home movies and slides from the society's collection and paired them with recent footage of the townscape, accompanied by a script based on interviews with longtime residents.

Both projects served an archival as well as an educational purpose.

All photos, slides and films used in the exhibit were copied and the originals returned to storage under improved conditions.



The photographic exhibit about Slayton past and present spurred discussions among three generations of residents.

For newcomers to town and others who missed the exhibit, society staff produced a brochure for self-guided walking tours of Slayton, featuring line drawings and a brief history of a dozen historic downtown structures.

Building on the success of the Slayton program, county society staff moved on to other cities in the county. Downtown Fulda was the subject of an exhibit developed in the spring of 2000 with the help of local sixth-grade students. Also on the agenda, as time and funds allow, are Chandler, Currie, Dovray, Hadley, Iona and Lake Wilson.

"This project was a great way for residents to discover that there is more history all around them than they realized," said Carol Busman, director of the Murray County Historical Society. "Our senior citizens were eager to share their knowledge and our sixth-graders studying Minnesota history were amazed to learn that Slayton once had its own hotel and train depot." For more information about "Downtown Murray County" and advice on designing a similar project, call Busman at 507-836-6533 or e-mail society@frontiernet.net.

Advertise *continued from page 1*

But there's another important way we advertise our events and services - and it's absolutely free. We count on our members to help us spread the word.

Here's what we tell them. Talk to people about the museum and the library. Mention us in your conversations with friends. Your promotion of our meetings,

workshops, education programs, exhibits and library resources will benefit all of us in the long run.

If you're too busy to volunteer in other ways or live too far away or don't get around as well as you used to, you can still help. Call your friends and acquaintances. Encourage them to become members. Let them know what they're missing. Your enthusiasm

can be infectious. Think about it - if you tell two people and they tell two people ... there's no telling where it will end. All those good words are the kind of advertising that money can't buy - testimonials from our loyal members that will serve more effectively than any other means to broaden our history community here in Wright County. So keep talking!

The local history apprentice

by Carol Kammen

There are many routes people take to become a local historian. Some are born to the position, inheriting a passion for history from a parent or grandparent. Others find it thrust upon them, stepping in to fill a void with the passing of an older generation. For still others – teachers, genealogists, architecture buffs, newcomers to town – curiosity leads them to investigate some facet of their community and, before they know it, they find themselves known as the local “expert.”

Whatever road people take, they share a common fate. Once they are established as a local history authority, many assume a posture of immortality. That is, they fail to take into consideration the fact that they will not last forever. While local historians work tirelessly to collect, protect, research, educate and exhibit about the history of a place, rarely do they take time to plan for who will carry on when they’re gone. Training others to step in can be a daunting task. It’s easier to assume that those who come after us will find their way into local history in the same way we did. And it might happen.

Preparing for the future

Wouldn’t it be far better if, instead of relying on chance, we prepare for the future while we’re still here? What a gift it would be to our successors to know that they don’t need to learn everything all over again, as we had to do. They could come prepared – knowing how to conduct local research, how to ask good questions about a place, how to put that place into a regional or even a national context.

In other words, wouldn’t it be a good idea if local historians took on apprentices?

My own solution is to create the Adult Local History Workshop. I plan to invite a limited number of people to join; there’s no cost and they’re expected to stay in the class for one year. Participants may be long rooted in the community or they may be recent arrivals. All I require is interest and dedication.

Teaching others how to learn

The group will be given a number of broad topics to consider – race and ethnicity, for example, or the Depression of the 1930s or the political history of our county. Once a topic has been decided on, participants will do background reading, create a work plan and assign research tasks. This research phase will take several months as various aspects of the topic are explored and reported to the group.

Along the way, we’ll discuss what else we need to know, where to find additional information and how best to communicate the results of our work. Throughout our yearlong journey, we will be guided by our three goals: to understand the topic, to develop our research expertise and to foster thinking about ways to educate others.

With the groundwork laid, imagine how much easier it will be for us local historians to step aside down the road, knowing that there are trained individuals who can comfortably and confidently take over researching and communicating our local history.

Douglas County Historical Society



Barbara Grover (left) and Rachel Barduson, past and present directors of the Douglas County Historical Society.

A smooth transition

Throughout Minnesota the staffs of county and local historical organizations face the challenge of their own succession. Recently Barbara Grover, longtime director of the Douglas County Historical Society in Alexandria, passed the baton of leadership to Rachel Barduson.

Careful planning ensured that the transition would be as smooth as possible. Hired in January, Barduson served six months as assistant director under Grover’s guidance before taking over in July. Barduson’s on-the-job training – along with her background in education and journalism, her lifelong passion for history and her roots in the community – will serve her well as she prepares to guide the county society through the years ahead.

Carol Kammen teaches history at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. A longer version of her article appeared originally in the Winter 2001 issue of History News, the publication of the American Association for State and Local History, 1717 Church St., Nashville, TN 37203-2991. Adapted with permission.

Goodhue County society takes day camps on the road

Program features ethnic cultures

Last year kids came to the Goodhue County Historical Museum for a one-week day camp. This year county society staff took the program on the road, hosting seven one-day sessions in six cities around the county.

Attendance soared thanks to arrangements with community education departments that handled program promotion and registration in each city. "It was a great way to reach families with children," said Gabriela Fosado, a summer intern from the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., who helped plan camp activities.

The focus of this year's camp was the county's ethnic cultures. Sessions varied from city to city, with activities - music and dance, storytelling, languages, foods and a dose of immigration history - featuring the ethnic and cultural groups important

to the history of each venue.

Fosado's internship, funded by a Partners Internship Program grant through the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs, included time for background research. She

also recruited volunteers in each community. "There were so many willing participants," she said. "This was my best summer job experience ever."

To learn more about these multicultural day camps, call Cheryl



Goodhue County Historical Society

Volunteer Emily Christianson helps campers make Norwegian ornaments using woven paper in place of the traditional straw.

Finnegan, GCHS educator and volunteer coordinator, at 651-388-6024.

Working all the angles

Small-scale fund-raisers fill budget gaps

Each year the Brown County Historical Society must raise enough money to cover one-third of its operating expenses. Memberships, donations and grants account for most of that total. Twenty percent comes from fund-raisers.

Always on the lookout for new opportunities, staff, board and friends of the museum have put together a year-round array of activities that generate income. There's the bratwurst stands at local grocery stores in the summer and at Oktoberfest in the fall. There's a flea

market, book sale, silent auction, store coupons and a wishing well at the Marketplatz Mall. And of course, there's the donation box at the museum inviting visitors to make a modest contribution.

"We see these fund-raisers as more than ways to bring in money," says BCHS director Bob Burgess. "They provide other kinds of payback, too. Each one helps us raise our community profile by giving people a chance to talk to us about our programs and services. We always have member brochures on hand for

people who wish to join. And the fund-raisers are good for broadening our base of volunteers.

"At the end of the year, our board evaluates each event by measuring the monetary return against time spent," Burgess explains. "Some ideas we've dropped because they didn't bring in enough money. Our biggest success? No contest - the Oktoberfest brat stand." For details on how they make it all work, call Burgess at 507-233-2616 or e-mail bchs@newulmtel.net.

One step at a time

St. James group begins Opera House restoration

The scope of the work to be done is daunting and its timetable long. But the vision of the volunteers behind the St. James Opera House Restoration Project remains strong: to return the 1892 building to its original role as the social and cultural center of the community.

It will be the first restoration of a historical building undertaken in St. James. To drum up local support for the project and apply for grants, a dedicated group of citizens formed a nonprofit organization that will guide the restoration. With a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society, the group has taken the first step:

uncovering the building's original arched entrance, which had been bricked over in the 1950s.

Taking on the task of restoring such a large building has been an education for the group's board and committee members. But as Robert Sorensen explained in the grant application, educating the community has been a much larger task. Group members talked about the project with the city council, civic and service clubs, and other community



St. James Opera House Restoration Project Inc.

organizations. Then they held an open house so that townspeople – the curious and the skeptical alike – could see for themselves the promise that the project holds.

Though local support has been slow to build, the committee remains convinced that restoration of this grand old building will one day be a source of community pride and will serve to awaken the need for preserving the city's historical resources.



In 1892 (above left) the St. James Opera House building housed a bank on the ground level and the opera house above. A 1950s alteration bricked over the storefronts and covered the upper story with paint. Last year restorers began uncovering the original arched entrance (above right).

Video project brings Edina history to life

Last summer in Hennepin County, the community of Edina was founded anew – on videotape, that is, as volunteers reenacted the 1888 town meeting where citizens voted to become a village. It was one of three historical reenactments filmed for a video that premiered at the Edina Historical Society's Fourth of July open house. Other vignettes depict a

ca. 1900 school day in the one-room Cahill School and the adventures of two teenagers from Fort Snelling who canoed up Minnehaha Creek in 1822 to the site that, 30 years later, would become a thriving milling community.

Funded by a generous donor to honor his late wife, who was an EHS charter member, the program will be shown to museum visitors and school

groups. "It's a great educational tool," says EHS executive director Kay Wetherall, "even though, at 60 minutes, it's quite long. We're making a shorter version to take out to the schools." For more information about how the production took shape, call Wetherall at 952-928-4577.

Minnesota death records now in new formats

Older records can be accessed online

The Minnesota Department of Health – long the official repository for state birth and death records – now maintains a computerized system for records dating after 1996. When the system is fully automated, no new paper records will be created. Rather, all birth and death records will be digitally recorded and stored.

That transition to electronic files prompted researchers to question whether access to older records in the care of the Department of Health – those dating from 1908 – will change. The answer is yes, but only in ways that will make it easier for researchers to use them.

The Minnesota Historical Society and the Genealogical Society of Utah

have undertaken a joint project to microfilm the older death records. When completed, microfilm copies will be available for purchase or through interlibrary loan.

In addition, the Department of Health and the Minnesota Historical Society are creating a database index for death records from 1908 to 1955. In July the database for records from 1908 through 1946 went up on the Society's web site. Researchers can now access the records at <http://people.mnhs.org/dci>. The years 1947 through 1955 will be added as microfilming is completed; in a few years the index will be expanded to 1996. The database allows a records search by name alone; it is no longer

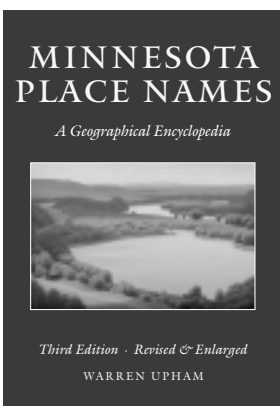
necessary to know the year or place of death. The database also allows, through a Soundex option, searches based on how a name sounds phonetically rather than how it is spelled.

For deaths before 1908, researchers must still contact the county in which the person died.

Creation of the microfilmed records and database does not mean that local governments will dispose of the death records in their custody. State law requires authorization from Minnesota's Records Disposition Panel before any vital records can be destroyed. So far, no local authorities have sought permission to dispose of birth or death records.

Minnesota Place Names expanded, updated

Classic guide available in print and on the web



Generations of readers have turned to Warren Upham's *Minnesota Place Names* for the reasons behind such curious monikers as Rat Root

River, Man Trap Lake and Cucumber Island. Upham, a geologist, archaeologist, librarian and inveterate collector of minutiae, amassed the compendium of place names during

his fieldwork doing geological surveys in the 1880s and 1890s. Published originally in 1920, the book was a pioneering effort in place-name literature.

Now the Minnesota Historical Society has published a new, enlarged edition of this classic guide, *Minnesota Place Names: A Geographical Encyclopedia*. For the revised edition Society staff combed recent literature and databases to update entries and add new names. The result: more than 20,000 names of towns and cities, townships and counties, lakes and rivers – and the stories behind them.

For the new generation of

computer-savvy history buffs and researchers, the Society has gone a step further, using the book as the basis for a new web site, <http://mnplaces.mnhs.org/upham>. Here's your chance to add to the lore about Minnesota place names: the site contains a way for people to send in stories and submit place names not covered in the book.

Cost: \$49.95. Cloth, 736 pp., maps and index. ISBN 0-87351-396-7.

To order by phone, call toll-free 1-800-647-7827; in Minneapolis/St. Paul call 651-297-3243, or fax orders to 651-297-1345. Order on the web at www.mnhs.org/mhspress.

Annandale paintings seek new home

Local buyer preferred

When a building was damaged last winter at Minnesota Pioneer Park in Annandale, staff had to find other storage for several large items. Among them were four oil paintings by Minnesota artist Marjorie Pinkham. Commissioned in 1969 by the Annandale State Bank and later donated to the museum, the five-foot-square paintings depict local scenes – Fairhaven Village, Pleasant Lake, a church and a farm scene.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have the resources to properly store or exhibit the paintings,” said Julia Barkley, vice president of the Pioneer Park board. “We hope to keep them together as a

set and keep them here in the Big Woods area for the enjoyment of future generations.” But initial attempts to find a local buyer have turned up empty. If no one steps forward, the paintings will be consigned to a Minneapolis art gallery.

For more information about the artworks, call Barkley at 320-274-5219 or Minnesota Pioneer Park at 320-274-8489.



Minnesota Pioneer Park

Pleasant Lake by Minnesota artist Marjorie Pinkham is one of four paintings of Wright County scenes in search of a buyer.

Field workshops set for spring 2002

You’ll have three opportunities next spring to attend a Minnesota Historical Society field workshop. It’s not too soon to mark your calendars!

- **March 22, 2002**
Scott County Government Center, Shakopee
- **April 12**
Waseca County Historical Society, Waseca
- **May 3**
Bigwood Event Center, Fergus Falls

Workshop sessions and other activities will focus on the topic of exhibits. Using the theme “Telling the Story,” presenters will explore how to interpret Minnesota history in lively, engaging ways without big budgets or even a profusion of artifacts. Watch for details in future issues of the *Interpreter*.

An 80-year history

Society-sponsored historical assemblies themselves have a story to tell. It was 80 years ago that Minnesota historians gathered for the first state historical convention, held in Duluth in the summer of 1992. With improved automobiles and highways making travel easier, Twin Cities attendees gathered in St. Paul for the day-long drive to the port city, stopping in several towns along the way. At the St. Louis County Courthouse, joined by others interested in local history, they heard papers on “Early French Explorers of Northern Minnesota, 1660-1743” and “The Story of Grand Portage.” Four months later local residents formed the St. Louis County Historical Society.

If you have suggestions for this year’s agenda, call Tim Glines, manager of outreach services, at 651-297-5460

Winter 2002 grant deadlines

Planning to apply for a grant this winter? Deadlines for state-grants-in-aid and Certified Local Government grants are:

Jan. 18, 2002: Pre-application due.

Feb. 22: Grant application due.

April 4: Grants Review Committee meets.

Application forms are available online at www.mnhs.org/about/grants/stgrants.html. For more information, call grants assistant David Grabitske at 651-297-4416 or e-mail david.grabitske@mnhs.org.

or David Grabitske, grants and field services assistant, at 651-297-4416.

Thanks to Alan Woolworth for his article “Origins of the North Shore Historical Assembly,” in the Spring 2001 issue of Overlook, newsletter of the Cook County Historical Society.

Genealogy classes at the Minnesota History Center

Explore sources and strategies for researching family history

These one-session classes at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul are offered by Jim and Paula Stuart Warren, nationally recognized genealogical researchers and lecturers. For registration and costs, call Warren Research at 651-644-6581 or e-mail warren@spacestar.com.

Discover Your Family History Workshop

Sept. 24, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Designed for beginners, this workshop surveys basic repositories for genealogical research.

Twentieth-Century Research

Sept. 24, 1:30 to 3 p.m.

Families that break up or move

frequently are just two of the many challenges facing researchers in 20th-century records. Learn how electronic finding aids can help.

Writing Your Family History in Small, Manageable Pieces

Oct. 6, 10 to 11:30 a.m.

This class offers practical, "write-as-you-go" methods for preserving and sharing your research results.

Salt Lake City! Using Resources of the Family History Library from Near or Far

Oct. 6, 12:30 to 2 p.m.

Salt Lake City's Family History Library contains more than 2.5 million rolls of microfilmed indexes and records from archives, churches, courthouses and

vital records offices worldwide. Electronic search tools and a network of local family history centers make access easy.

Vital Records and Substitutes: Fundamental Tools for Family History

Oct. 8, 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Learn how to streamline your research in birth, death and marriage records using online databases.

U.S. Census Records: Beyond the Basics

Oct. 8, 12:30 to 2 p.m.

Explore the wealth of data in U.S. census records for the years 1790-1930. Highlights include online indexes and special census schedules.

Minnesota History Interpreter

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

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

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