



2016: Issue 1

Winter

Alliance Monitor

Peers Helping Peers Since 1991

Affinity groups form at 2015 conference

Two affinity groups formed at the 2015 MALHM Conference: one for historic house museums and another for curators.

In the MALHM tradition of “peers helping peers,” the groups allow Minnesota history professionals more planned opportunities to learn from each other.

The Curators Affinity group met in January at Scott County Historical Society to hear a talk on deaccessioning laws, and the House Museum Affinity Group met in November at Three Rivers Park District’s **AFFINITY GROUPS to Page 7**



The House Museum Affinity Group formed at one of the most well-known Minnesota houses, Glensheen Mansion, during the 2015 MALHM Conference in Duluth. Photo by Dean Vikan.

MALHM hires first coordinator

For the first time in its 25-year history, MALHM has paid staff. Thanks to funding from a Legacy Partnership grant, MALHM hired Marci Matson in November to serve as coordinator for the volunteer-led organization.

Matson has been a part of the Minnesota history community for the past 12 years as Executive Director of the Edina Historical Society.

“We were happy to find someone with first-hand experience leading a local history organiza-

tion, who would understand the issues that the small to medium sized museum faces,” said MALHM President Dean Vikan.

A graduate of the University of Minnesota’s journalism school, Matson has extensive experience writing for newspapers and magazines and used those skills as well as social media and blogging to triple EHS’s membership.

Matson’s duties will include planning the annual conference, supporting membership and the **COORDINATOR to Page 7**



Connect with your history colleagues on our new Facebook pages!

Follow our page:
[Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums](#)

Join our new affinity groups:
[MALHM Curators](#)

[MALHM House Museums](#)

MAHLM Board of Directors

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Staff

Marci Matson, Coordinator

612-500-7460

PO Box 23554

Richfield, MN 55423

marci@minnesotahistorymuseums.org

Financial Office

Jill Wohnoutka, MALHM Treasurer
Kandiyohi County Historical Society

610 NE Hwy. 71

Willmar, MN 56201

MALHM serves with practical advice, from peer to peer



By Marci Matson Coordinator

I clearly remember the first time I discovered the Minnesota Alliance of Local His-

tory Museums.

A new historical society director with no collections experience, I was organizing the museum library when I stumbled upon a thick white binder with The Alliance's distinctive purple logo on the cover.

Inside, I found practical answers for many of my collections questions. Until my first day on the job, I had never heard the term "accession number," much less known where and how to write it on an object. Our museum had volunteers working with collections, but they were looking to me for expertise and decision-making.

I don't think it's an overstatement to say that MALHM's "Collection Initiative" was my salvation as a new director.

I also relied on my peers in the field, who were generous with their time and knowledge. In turn, I was more than happy to answer questions in my areas of expertise.

"Peers helping peers" is a key part of MALHM's identity, and I can see why. Similar in size with a small budget, our peers provide practical ideas that work.

There's that word, again: "practical."

Small and mid-sized museums need "practical," which by definition means "concerned with the actual doing of something rather than with theory and ideas."

We have all heard inspiring but impractical ideas. I've been impressed and inspired at trade shows, until I discovered that the price tag of a project was double the size of our annual operating budget.

This newsletter highlights a few of the ways MALHM focuses on practical advice from "peers helping peers."

- **MALHM's annual conference**
From "30 Ideas for House Museums" to "Low-Cost Marketing Strategies for Small Museums," you'll find information you can use regardless of your size and budget.
- **Our new affinity groups** for curators and house museums provide a way to interact with your peers between conferences.
- **A new coordinator** - me! - to Please call me at 612-500-7460 or [email me](mailto:marci@minnesotahistorymuseums.org) to discuss questions or find peers who can help. I'd love to talk with you!
- **Survey:** We're looking at other ways to serve the local history community. **Please help us by taking a few moments to answer a brief survey**, which will be emailed to our contact list in early February. If you do not have email or prefer to answer on a paper form, please fill out the survey on Page 3 and mail to us.

Please join our contact list to receive the survey by email and other announcements from MALHM. A signup form is available on our website:

minnesotahistorymuseums.org/contact-us/

MALHM Survey of Local History Organizations

We want to serve you better! Please help us by taking a few moments to answer a brief survey posted online. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FHFZYZH> If you prefer to answer on a paper form, please mail this survey to: Marci Matson, MALHM Coordinator, PO Box 23554, Richfield, MN 55423 by March 1, 2016. Thank you!

Surveys can be anonymous but to have your name entered into a drawing for a FREE registration to the MALHM Conference, please provide your name and contact info below:

1. Are you a member of the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. For non-members: Why haven't you joined MALHM?

3. Rank the benefits of membership (from 1 - very important to 5 - not at all important)

Annual Conference

1 2 3 4 5

Newsletter

1 2 3 4 5

Networking

1 2 3 4 5

Website

1 2 3 4 5

Mutual Assistance

1 2 3 4 5

Collections Initiative Binder

1 2 3 4 5

4. I am more likely to recommend membership in the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums if: (Please rank benefits as 1- very important to 5-not at all important)

I have access to members only website with sample forms, policies and other resources.

1 2 3 4 5

MALHM helps promote and market local history events and museums.

1 2 3 4 5

MALHM provides additional workshops and networking opportunities throughout the year.

1 2 3 4 5

I would get a discount on a collections management software program.

1 2 3 4 5

I can join affinity groups like Historic House Museums or MALHM Curators.

1 2 3 4 5

5. How can MALHM better serve your organization?

6. Are you a: ☐ volunteer ☐ board member ☐ paid staff

7. My primary job function (paid or volunteer) in the local history field is: (Check one)

- ☐ Executive Management
- ☐ Program Management
- ☐ 3D Collections Care
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Research
- ☐ Archives
- ☐ Library
- ☐ Historic Preservation
- ☐ Genealogy
- ☐ Archaeology
- ☐ Maintenance
- ☐ Other: _____

8. I have worked or volunteered in the local history field for:

- ☐ less than two years
- ☐ 2-5 years
- ☐ 6 to 10 years
- ☐ more than 10 years

9. When was your last visit to the MALHM website? (Please check one)

- ☐ In the last month
- ☐ In the last six months
- ☐ In the last year
- ☐ More than a year ago
- ☐ MALHM has a website?

10. Did you know that MALHM has a Facebook page?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I'm not on Facebook

Please insert in envelope and mail or
Fold into thirds and tape sides. Affix first class stamp.

Place first
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here

Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums
Marci Matson, MALHM Coordinator
PO Box 23554
Richfield, MN 55423



Enter to win!

**Survey respondents' names will be entered into a
drawing for a FREE registration to
the MALHM Conference, April 27-28 in Willmar.**

Wide variety of house museums share similar goals

What comes to mind when you think of a house museum?

Is it a home of a famous person or a virtual unknown? Is it a grand mansion or a humble cabin? Has it been painstakingly restored to its original condition or does it simply house exhibits and artifacts?

Minnesota's diverse history community contains all those kinds of house museums and more. Despite a difference in approaches, house museum professionals share similar goals and challenges, said Dan Hartman, director of Glensheen Mansion in Duluth.

Last year he proposed forming a MALHM House Museum Affinity group, which has met twice so far to share ideas and strategies.

Think beyond the "white lace and doily" tours

Historic house museums are trying to connect with new and younger audiences who aren't drawn to the traditional "white lace and doily" tours of decades past, Jayne Becker of the Minnesota Historical Society's Alexander Ramsey house told her colleagues



Glensheen owns much of the Congdon family's collection and can faithfully recreate the original living spaces. To attract new audiences, however, staff is creating programming that goes beyond the family's story. Glensheen photo.

at the group's November meeting.

Ramsey House closed in 2010 to reassess its programs and audience. The result: staff dropped the velvet ropes and opened up the house both literally and figuratively to new audiences.

Marketing information told them that visitors wanted to have their history with a side of social-

izing, so Ramsey House started a "History Happy Hour" series, with admission including a drink and a program.

MNHS also sought out partnerships with social and civic organizations, and private parties boosted attendance figures dramatically, Becker said. Earned revenue jumped to 66 percent of the Ramsey House budget in 2013, up from 27 percent in 2009.

Under the new model, they're marketing the program topics instead of the venue because people think if they've been to the Ramsey house once, they don't need to see it again.

Hartman said he also has to fight that misconception at Glensheen, home of the Congdon family. When the University of Minnesota took ownership of the house in 1979, it also received the nearly intact family collection; for years, the museum successfully focused on the wealthy family's life.

HOUSE MUSEUMS to Page 6



Alexander Ramsey House's "History Happy Hours" have brought in new audiences. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

HOUSE MUSEUMS from Page 5

To attract repeat visitors, Glensheen has created programming that tells the house's story from many different perspectives and not just "a specific family in a specific house," Hartman said.

From flashlight tours and behind the scenes "nooks and crannies" events, Glensheen has managed to turn the tide of falling attendance, which hit a low of 50,000 in 2012 from a high of 140,000 in 1981.

Pick the right approach for your house

Three Rivers Park District in the Twin Cities area owns several historic properties, and each one is interpreted differently.

The Landing (formerly Murphy's Landing) in Shakopee relies on costumed living history interpreters and historically accurate furnishings for the age of the house to tell the settlement story. The longstanding "Folkways of Christmas" remains popular with visitors.

However, Three Rivers took a different approach with frontiersman Pierre Bottineau's 1854 home at Elm Creek Park Reserve.

"We didn't try to recreate Bottineau's house because he was rarely home because of his work as a guide," said Bill Walker, cultural resources manager for Three Rivers. "We also didn't have any artifacts or a narrative that described the home so that we could find the appropriate items."

Instead of historic furnishings and costumed interpreters, the visitor finds modern exhibits and documents in Three Rivers tee-shirts.

Another "house" is the 1876 Schmid Farmhouse at



Schmid Farmhouse. Photo by Three Rivers Park District.

Lake Minnetonka Regional Park on the National Register of Historic Places.

With a collapsed roof and damaged interior, the house could be better described as a ruins, but don't look for Three Rivers to restore the building to its original condition.

Three Rivers, with a Minnesota Legacy grant, plans to shore up the exterior walls in the style of Mill City Museum's Washburn Mill A ruins.

The house will have interpretive signs for self-guided tours for visitors who typically come to the park for recreation but will linger for the history. As they come across the stone and mortar farmhouse, they can learn about Minnetonka's long ago agricultural past.

Tell the story of the hired help

Important houses succeed when they don't limit their interpretation to only the important people who once lived there. Winona County Historical Society has looked beyond the story of the original homeowners Willard Bunnell and his wife Matilda to examine the lives of their hired help.

Last summer, WCHS partnered with Theater du Mississippi to stage an original play at the Bunnell House. *The Hired Girl Gets Married*, based on actual historic accounts of the day, unfolded around the audience.

As the Winona Post described, "Family members burst in and out of doors on all sides of the audience, stomp up the stairs, and holler from the yard. With just a score of audience members seated a few feet away from the action in the small house, the play could hardly be more intimate."

The play was a calculated risk to draw a bigger audience to the house museum. WCHS weighed the



Bottineau home. Photo by Three Rivers Park District.



Lynn Nankivill's play "The Hired Girl Gets Married" was staged inside the historic Bunnell House, operated by the Winona County Historical Society. Winona Post photo.

benefit against the additional wear and tear on the house and furnishings, and the experiment was a success, said WCHS Assistant Director Jennifer Weaver, albeit not a financial one. The grant-funded play cost \$70,000 to produce, a cost not completely recovered by ticket sales.

However, the play brought in new audiences and told the house and community history accurately and from a new perspective.

This summer, look for a new play at Bunnell House. The Elizabeth Callendar King Foundation awarded WCHS and Theatre du Mississippi to write a play about Willard Bunnell's more famous brother, Lafayette Bunnell. Ticket information will be announced later this year on the [WCHS website](#).

Join the MALHM House Museum Affinity Group Facebook page to share ideas.

"30 Ideas for House Museums" at 2016 MALHM Conference

Discover "30 Ideas for House Museums" at the 2016 MALHM Annual Conference!

Dan Hartman, manager of Glensheen Mansion in Duluth, will present his creative ideas to help attract new visitors and to better take care of object collections in an environment that may be less than ideal.

This presentation should be helpful not only for newcomers in the field but also for the "veteran house museum geek."

See Page 11 for registration information.

AFFINITY GROUPS from Page 1

Vern Gagne house to trade ideas and talk about shared goals and concerns.

Prompted by falling visitor numbers throughout the house museum industry, organizations have tried new interpretation methods to rebuild their audiences. (See feature story on Page 4 for examples.)

Curators Affinity Group

The Curators Affinity Group also first met at the 2015 Conference. "When Dan (Hartman) said he wanted to start a House Museum Affinity Group, I thought what a great idea," said Theresa Norman, curator with Scott County Historical Society who helped plan the conference. "I thought it would be helpful to form a similar group for curators."

The group met at SCHS in January to hear about property law and deaccessioning and will meet again at the 2016 MALHM Conference. In between meetings, the group has consulted with each other via its new Facebook page on such topics as how to safely store firearms and how to use the "Collection" field in PastPerfect.

The Curators Affinity Group is for anyone who works with collections and will next meet at the 2016 Conference.

COORDINATOR from Page 1

board, and writing the newsletter, among other administrative duties.

Another key component of the position is developing online continuing education for MALHM's members through its [website](#) [minnesotahistorymuseums.org](#).

Matson is an experienced trainer. Before joining the Edina Historical Society, she worked as a corporate trainer and designed and developed training programs.

For more on Matson, see her column on Page 2. Contact her at:

Marci Matson, Coordinator

612-500-7460

PO Box 23554

Richfield, MN 55423

marci@minnesotahistorymuseums.org



Four new categories added to History Awards

As MALHM celebrates its 25th anniversary, it is only fitting that the organization will bestow its first “Lifetime Achievement” award at the 2016 Annual Conference.

Nominations are now being accepted for individuals who have completed an excellent body of work, not less than 25 years, in the Minnesota history field.

Other new categories this year are: Collections, Partnerships, and Preservation. Brief descriptions of all categories follow. More details and nomination forms are found on the [MALHM website](#). Deadline for submission is March 1.

Public Programs—An exhibition, special event, educational program, film/documentary, and public celebration that sets itself apart from the rest of the state.

Publications—Print publication (book or magazine), newsletter, website, and other printed material for public consumption.

Behind-the-Scenes—A successful fundraising campaign, new set of policies, or some other project that the public would not be aware of that allows an organization to move forward in a manner that should be recognized as an example to the rest of the state’s organizations.

Preservation – Designation of a local historic site or district, saving of a historic building, a historic structure or district report, and the reuse or rehabilitation of a historic structure or district.

Collections – Conservation of a special artifact or collection, improved storage facilities, collection



At last year’s conference, Wendy Bjorn, Executive Director of the Carver County Historical Society, accepted one of two awards for her organization from MALHM Board Member Dustin Heckman. Photo by Dean Vikan.

rehousing project, digital preservation, and improved access to collections.

Partnership – A project or partnership formation between two or more entities that furthers the mission of those involved and can serve as a model for other organizations.

Lifetime Achievement Award honors the excellent work performed by individual in Minnesota’s public history community, who have demonstrated leadership within their organization, their community, and to Minnesota’s history community in the preservation and promotion of local and state history. Individuals must have 25 years or more experience in the Minnesota history field.

2015 Minnesota History Awards Winners

Carver County Historical Society (Waconia) for their redesigned website.

Carver County Historical Society (Waconia) for their publication, *Two Wars on the Frontier: Diaries of a Soldier*.

Oliver Hudson Kelley Grange, No. 834 (Minneapolis) for their Spring Seed Social and Mother’s Day Open House event.

Red Wing History Museums (Goodhue County Historical Society, Pottery Museum of Red Wing, Red Wing Marine Museum, Red Wing Shoe Company Museum, American Ski Jumping Museum & Hall of Fame, and Aliveo Military Museum) for their Red Wing Museum Crawl event.

Register now!

2016 MALHM Conference

April 27-28 in Willmar, MN
Where the Lakes Begin

Lodging

Best Western Plus, connected to the Willmar Conference Center, offers a reduced rate for MALHM: \$100 per night. **Book before April 3** and mention MALHM to receive discount. Call 320-235-6060. Discount not available online.

Holiday Inn Express is located within steps of the Convention Center. Call 320-231-2601. Several other hotels are located in the Willmar area.



Deadlines

History Award Nominations—Submit your nomination form by March 1, 2016. See Page 8 for more information.

Conference Registration—Send your registration form by April 11, 2016. See Page 11 for registration form.

Questions

We're happy to answer your questions.
Please contact:

Marci Matson, Coordinator

612-500-7460

marci@minnesotahistorymuseums.org

Jill Wohnoutka, MALHM Treasurer

Kandiyohi County Historical Society

kandhist@msn.com



MALHM's 25 Years of "Peers Helping Peers"

Minnesota's local history community will gather in Willmar for the MALHM 2016 Annual Conference on April 27-28. We offer the best deal in professional conferences! At just \$60 (or \$75 for non-members), your registration includes:

- Keynote by Minnesota Twins historian Clyde Doepner, the first full-time curator in Major League Baseball.
- An evening mixer at Kandiyohi County Museum and Sperry House, with drinks and desserts. Network and relax with your colleagues!
- Two days of sessions! Learn from your peers who offer practical information for small and medium history groups.
- Two breakfasts, lunches and snacks.
- MALHM annual meeting and History Awards presentation.

Sessions will include topics on all aspects of local history work, including:

- *If I Get Hit By a Bus – Succession Planning for Museums*
- *Interpreting Sensitive Matters in History*
- *Partnerships for Maximizing Programs, Events, and Resources*
- *Low-cost Marketing Strategies for the Small Museum*
- *Preserving and Accessing Movie Film, Sound Recording and Videotape Archives*

Find the final schedule on our website

<http://www.minnesotahistorymuseums.org/workshops/>



**Learn from your colleagues in
the local history community!
April 27-28
Willmar, Minnesota**

Top left photos: Kandiyohi Historical Society will host the Wednesday evening mixer at the museum, historic Sperry House and Guri Endreson Cabin. Right: Todd Mahon, Milissa Brooks-Ojibway and Dan Hartman at the 2015 MALHM Conference mixer on the shores of Lake Superior by Glensheen Mansion. Photo by Dean Vikan





25 YEARS
of PEERS HELPING PEERS
1991-2016

2016 MALHM Annual Conference Registration

April 27-28 in Willmar, MN

For 25 years, the Alliance has been the voice of the local history community in Minnesota. Together, history groups large and small have supported each other, fostered professionalism in the field and collaborated on important projects. Registration includes two days of valuable sessions presented by your peers in the local history community, two breakfasts and two lunches, snacks and an evening mixer. Join us!

Your organization: _____

Contact person: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Mailing address: _____

Attendees' Names: (Please print clearly so that we have the correct spelling for nametags.)

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

Registration fee:

☐ **MALHM Member Organizations:** \$60 per person x _____ persons attending = \$_____ Total

☐ **Non-Member Organizations:** \$75 per person x _____ persons attending = \$_____ Total

Membership dues: (Optional, but join now to save on conference fee.)

☐ \$25 for organizations with paid staff ☐ \$5 for all-volunteer groups

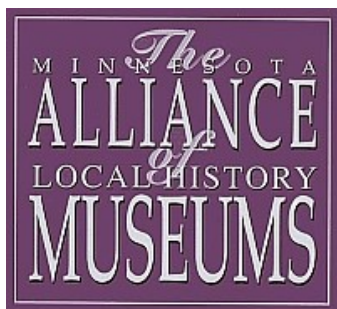
Total enclosed: \$_____ Check #_____

Make check payable to MALHM and mail to:

Jill Wohnoutka, Kandiyohi County Historical Society, 610 NE Hwy. 71, Willmar, MN 56201.

Deadline for Registration: April 11, 2016

Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums
Kandiyohi County Historical Society
610 NE Hwy. 71
Willmar, MN 56201



The purpose of the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums shall be to nurture and encourage an appreciation of the local history of the state of Minnesota by providing the structure to foster collaborative local history projects, communicate curatorial and educational information, and encourage professionalism among local and specialized historical organizations in Minnesota.