



2016: Issue 2

Spring

Alliance Monitor

Peers Helping Peers Since 1991



Survey provides clear messages

What does Minnesota's local history community want from MALHM?

A February 2016 survey of local history groups provided some clear messages.

The **annual conference** received high marks from respondents. It was the most important benefit of membership for most organizations — in fact, the *only* benefit for some who join to get the registration discount.

Given the support of the conference, perhaps it's not surprising that "**additional workshops and networking opportunities** throughout the state" received the most votes for potential expanded benefits.

MALHM could **do a better job of communicating**, said both members and non-members. **SURVEY to Page 6**

History Award Winners named

The Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums will present three Lifetime Achievement Awards and three Minnesota History Awards at its Annual Meeting on April 27.

In its 25th year and seventh year of the awards program, MALHM will bestow Lifetime Achievement Awards for the first time. Recipients are well-known in the local history community: Art and Jan Warner from Morrison County Historical Society and Marlys Hirst from Lake of the Woods

County Historical Society

MALHM will honor a project in another new awards category "Behind the Scenes," to the Northfield Historical Society for preservation of a business collection.

Two programs also won honors: NHS for its *40 for 40* exhibit and Waseca County Historical Society for a timeline exhibit. Both engaged the public and raised the profile of their respective organizations.

AWARD WINNERS featured inside

Promote your organization on expanded MALHM website

Help promote the great work done by local history organizations in Minnesota by submitting photos and stories about *your* group for MALHM's expanded website.

MALHM is looking for photos that show "historians in action," such as leading tours, preserving

artifacts, and engaging in all aspects of history work.

Members should also submit a logo or photo of their main building, as well as public contact info, for a member listing. (See sample listing below.) Send info to: Coordinator [Marci Matson](mailto:marci@minnesothistorymuseums.org) at marci@minnesothistorymuseums.org.

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M-P

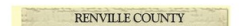
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Connect with peers at conference and with regional history groups



By Marci Matson Coordinator

At an April meeting of Hennepin History Groups, a local historical society board member said she had difficulty finding qualified speakers for programs and walking tours. A man seated nearby — an architectural historian who does walking tours for Preserve Minneapolis — immediately offered his services.

Such is the joy of networking.

Networking is the top benefit of MALHM membership, according to a recent survey of the local history community. (See Page 1 for more on the results.)

Our annual conference has been our most notable networking event. In the past, MALHM has offered regional workshops in addition to the conference, but that practice proved difficult for an all-volunteer organization to sustain.

The survey tells us that members want to bring back regional workshops and networking events — something the MALHM board will weigh as it develops the organization's long-term plan in the coming months.

In the mean time, many regional history coalitions offer networking opportunities. Although these groups aren't an official arm of MALHM, our Board Members who come from all corners of the state are actively involved.

The North Shore Historical Assembly is perhaps the oldest of the coalitions, forming in the early 1930s with Cook, Lake, and St. Louis County Historical Societies,

as well as Thunder Bay Historical Society. The group's goal is to promote historical knowledge of the North Shore of Lake Superior through presenting papers and addresses at their biennial meetings held in each county on an alternating basis.

Minnesota's Historic Northwest, a registered 501c3 non-profit organization, supports tourism, continuing education, networking, and grant writing within the 12 counties it serves. It also creates travelling exhibits and has produced a book.

Northland History Coalition formed with groups in the Northeast area of the state.

Washington County History Network meets quarterly.

West Central Minnesota Historical Association is a collaboration of the county and area historical societies and museums of 10 counties in West Central Minnesota.

Hennepin History Groups includes not only city and county historical societies, but also groups that focus on neighborhoods, preservation and business history. It meets three to four times per year to share ideas and hear speakers.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. Please **contact me** to add your organization's name to a list of regional groups that we'll post on our website.

I look forward to connecting with you! See you at this year's conference or invite me to visit your group's meeting.

Warners, Hirst win first Lifetime Achievement honors

Three people, who collectively have given more than 134 years to Minnesota's local history community, will be honored with Lifetime Achievement Awards at the MALHM Conference and Annual Meeting on April 27.

Honorees are Art and Jan Warner with the Morrison County Historical Society and Marlys Hirst with the Lake of the Woods County Historical Society.

"The Alliance is proud to honor this year's recipients," said MALHM Board member and History Awards Coordinator Dustin Heckman. "Each has proven exemplary in their dedication and service to their local communities in collecting, preserving, and sharing its history."

Art and Jan Warner

Art and Jan Warner were young parents relatively new to Little Falls, MN, when they received a postcard to attend a meeting at the Morrison County Historical Society in 1962.

Formed in 1936, the organization had many successes but had "ceased to function" after the death of its curator, according to the notice from Arch Grahn, then field director for the Minnesota Historical Society.

The meeting re-invigorated MCHS, thanks in no small part to the dedicated service of the Warners.

Within three years of joining MCHS, Art became President of the organization and Jan served as the de facto executive director—positions they would hold for most of their 50-year volunteer service.

"I don't think it an overstatement to say they *were* the Morrison County Historical Society, and by



Jan and Art Warner with the Morrison County Historical Society

sheer force of will and personality, they *built* that museum from scratch," wrote Timothy Houle, who met the Warners during his time as Morrison County Administrator. "The Society thrives today because of the solid foundation they laid and nurtured over decades of service."

Individually, the Warners each have earned recognition in the field and with many other community groups, but as inseparable partners, together they transformed MCHS.

Each played a different role in their shared goals. Jan's outgoing personality and storytelling abilities made her a popular guest speaker and spokesperson, while "Art always seemed the silent partner, the wizard behind the curtain, the fellow who crafted strategies, balanced budgets, and carried heavy loads when no one was looking," wrote archeologist and historian Douglas A. Birk.

One of their shared goals was finding a new home for the museum. In 1975, after years of plan-

ning and fundraising, MCHS moved into a new home on the Mississippi River, The Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum. Built in the midst of the energy crisis of the 1970s, the Warners considered energy efficiency, as well as architectural design, in the building plans.

The museum's innovation showed that the Warners were more than just fans of local history; they educated themselves on professional standards for museums and nonprofits.

"They were without a doubt people who set a good example for us younger historians, and helped articulate the many ways local history could be more than just a building with 'old stuff on shelves,'" wrote Mike Worcester, Museum Director at the Cokato Historical Society.

The Warners' influence went beyond Morrison County. Jan was one of the founders of MALHM in 1991, an alliance formed to advocate for local history groups. While

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Lifetime Achievement Awards

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT from Page 3

serving on the Minnesota American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Jan and others created “a flexible and accessible grant program” that later served as a model for the current legacy-funded Minnesota Historical and cultural Heritage Grants program, according to MNHS Outreach Services Manager David Grabitske. “Jan Warner has influenced the way that history grants have been made for the last 40 years.”

Art Warner died in August 2015 while serving his 47th year as President. Jan Warner retired two weeks later as executive director. Because of their commitment to developing best practices and involving the community in local history, their exit will not result in the fall of MCHS, as happened in 1962.

“Their outstanding contributions to their community and the State of Minnesota will always be there for others, such as myself, to benefit from,” wrote author and researcher Marilyn Chiat, “and for that I am grateful, and so should all of us involved in preserving our past for future generations.”

Marlys Hirst

Marlys Hirst is in her 32nd year as executive director of the Lake of the Woods County Historical Society. She is one of the longest serving Minnesotans in that position, but Hirst qualifies for the Lifetime Achievement Award for more than her longevity.

Hirst has accomplished much during her tenure, for both her organization and the region.

She has written a historical cookbook as well as three local history books: *The Great Minnesota Forest Fire of 1910*, *Lake of the Woods*



Marlys Hirst,
Lake of the Woods Historical Society

County Heritage, and *Lake of the Woods County—A History of People, Places and Events*.

Like many Executive Directors in small organizations, Hirst has worn many hats — curator, historian, fundraiser, janitor, chief financial officer, grant writer and more. However, her true passion has been her work as an archivist, developing an institutionalized process for assessing, collecting, organizing and preserving records of importance to the county and the state.

She returned to school to achieve an associate's degree in history from the Rainy River Community College under noted Minnesota historian Prof. Joe Chlebeczek. “Long before the current trend of continuous improvement, Marlys constantly sought to improve her skills and keep current on best practices,” said Grabitske.

Like the Warners, Hirst also led in building LOWCHS new museum with attention to energy efficiency. The 1979 facility is partially underground with large earthen banks along most of its walls.

Over her tenure, she has been in charge of two more building pro-

jects, which has brought the total floor space to 9,000 square feet. “Directing this latest project, she almost single-handedly sought funding, donations and grants to make it feasible, while working with architects and contractors to make it a reality,” said LOWCHS board member Doug Easthouse.

Her influence extends regionally as a founding member of Minnesota's Historic Northwest, a consortium of the 12 most northwestern counties.

She has served the organization as president, project director and grant writer, and perhaps most importantly, as a mentor to her colleagues.

The organization's recent project in which Hirst played a key role—a traveling exhibit about inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs — won a MALHM Minnesota History Award in 2014.

Plan ahead for the 2017 Awards

To take a slogan from Publisher's Clearinghouse: “you can't win if you don't enter” your project for consideration for a Minnesota History Award.

See our website for project categories and nomination packets for the 2017 Annual meeting, which will honor work done in 2016.

Nomination packets from all six 2016 award winners will be posted as well to serve as examples of excellent history work in the state.

Three innovative projects win Minnesota History Awards

Three local history projects earned Minnesota History Awards this year: two exhibits and a “behind the scenes” effort to preserve a local business collection.

MALHM created the Minnesota History Awards seven years ago to provide a structure to foster professionalism and excellent work among local and specialized history groups in the state.



The Northfield Historical Society worked quickly behind the scenes to acquire the Malt-O-Meal collection — and significant funding to care for it — after the local business was bought out by Post Cereal.

Northfield Historical Society: “The Legacy of Malt-O-Meal Stays in Northfield” Behind the Scenes

The “Behind the Scenes” category this year is designed to honor the work that often goes unseen and unrecognized but is vital to a local history’s mission. Northfield Historical Society won for its work to preserve the Malt-O-Meal collection, moving quickly after the announcement that the business with a 95-plus year history in the community was being acquired by Post Cereal.

NHS staff visited with MOM staff and shareholders and presented a proposal to address the long-term care of the huge collection. They succeeded in winning a \$294,840 grant from the former shareholders (\$126,840 for remodeling, staff time and supplies; \$168,000 for an endowment to care for the collection in perpetuity.)

The grant allowed NHS to increase its storage space by 75 percent, as well as purchase shelving and archival supplies, catalog the collection and create a display featuring Malt-O-Meal artifacts.

“By keeping the company’s historical collection in Northfield, it ensures that its legacy will live on even though it is no longer owned by the (Campbell) fami-

ly,” NHS described in its nomination statement. “(It) ensures that former employees, fans, etc., will always have a place to go and remember.”

Northfield Historical Society: “40 for 40” Exhibit

To celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2015, the Northfield Historical Society presented an exhibit of artifacts from 40 themes in the history of the community.

What elevated this exhibit from a typical one is the effort to include public input in a variety of ways.

NHS divided the themes into three separate displays and hosted three openings. “Anticipation grew with each display as to what might appear in upcoming exhibits,” NHS described in its nomination statement.

In addition, NHS encouraged public participation through its website and social media, by showcasing two potential objects and their stories and encouraging the public to vote on which one they wanted to see in the exhibit.

“This community-centered selection process was innovative and demonstrated both risk taking on the part of NHS but also reflected the passion and the personal connection the community feel with their history and by extension, the NHS collection,” wrote Susan Garwood, Executive Director of the Rice County Historical Society.

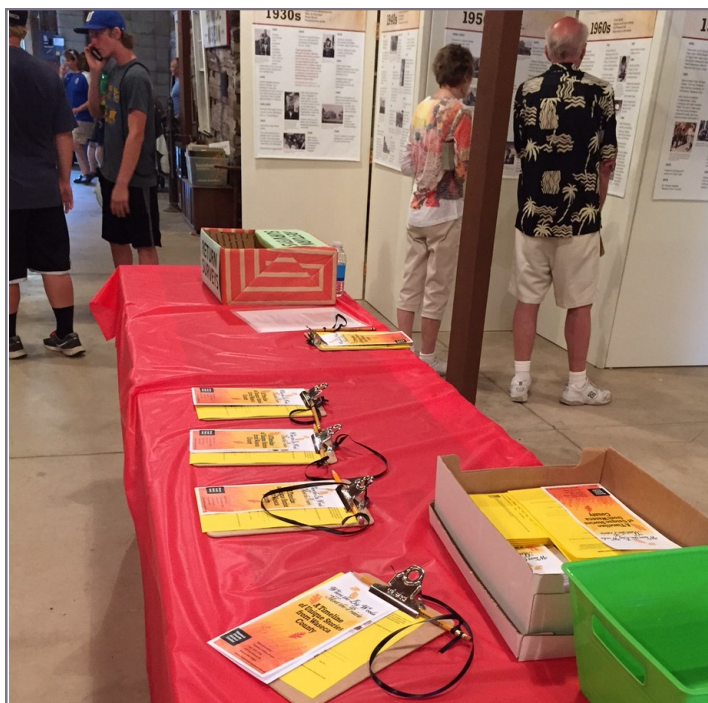


The Northfield Historical Society involved the public in voting for artifacts to be displayed in 40 for 40 exhibit.

Waseca County Historical Society: “The Timeline of Unique Stories from Waseca County” Exhibit

When Waseca County Historical Society wanted to create a timeline exhibit, it turned to the community as much as it did its collection.

The crowd-sourced exhibit relied on feedback from the public, allowing visitors to review the time-
HISTORY AWARDS to Page 6



The Waseca County Historical Society sought public input to find out if any stories were missing from its timeline exhibit.

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line and point out any missing milestones. “The people of the county get to decide what they think is important, so it’s not just the staff saying what’s important,” WCHS Vice President Kate Younberg told the local newspaper reporting on the project.

At the Waseca County Fair, a preliminary display brought in 4,803 visitors and 132 survey responses.

WCHS did not shy away from controversy or stop short of the present day. “The exhibit prompted extensive community discussion about what is history, especially more recent events,” wrote MNHS Outreach Services Manager David Grabitske. “The public, though initially skeptical, seems to have learned much about history work as a result of this project.”

The exhibit, fabricated and installed by independent contractor Museology Museum Services, includes 18 panels, 12 large artifacts and 19 unique cylindrical vitrines inspired by the basswood, maple and oak trees of the surrounding park.

SURVEY from Page 1

bers alike stated in the open-ended remarks.

In response to the question, “Why haven’t you joined MALHM?” non-members wrote comments like “I have not heard of your organization until now” or “I have heard of it, but know little about it.”

Communication and promotion was a theme in the open-ended responses to “How can MALHM better serve your organization?” Respondents asked for more frequent communication, tips by email and updated online resources. Several also wrote that MALHM could do a better job of publicizing its benefits.

MALHM has already taken steps to improve its services, hiring a coordinator in November 2015 with a Heritage Partnership Grant with Minnesota Historical Society Local History Services.



Education

Strong support for annual conference • Want more workshops, held regionally • Want better resources on improved website.

The newsletter is now distributed on a regular quarterly schedule, with email updates as needed between publications.

In addition, an improved website with online resources is expected to go live in May 2016 and will be available for viewing at the 2016 Annual Meeting and Conference, April 27-28 in Willmar.

MALHM Board members discussed the survey results at its regular meeting in March and



Promotion & Advocacy

“Promoting local history” should be important goal for MALHM • Improve communications and raise MALHM’s profile.

again at a special planning session in early April.

MALHM is seeking a second Heritage Partnership Grant to build on the success of its annual conference. The board is looking for members to serve on a program committee and host committee for the 2017 conference, scheduled for April 26-27 at Chase on the Lake in Walker, MN. To volunteer, contact Coordinator [Marci Matson](mailto:marci@minnesotahistorymuseums.org) at 612-500-7460 or marci@minnesotahistorymuseums.org



Networking

Networking is No. 1 reason organizations join MALHM— give us more! • Help us connect with each other with regional events.

Revised statute may help local history groups gain funding

The City of Richfield turned down the Richfield Historical Society's funding request last year, saying "its hands were tied" by state statute prohibiting financing of local historical societies' operating costs.

Its neighbor, the City of Edina, interpreted the same statute differently, and funds the Edina Historical Society up to \$10,000 each year.

Richfield is among several local history groups who have been denied funding based on advice of city legal counsel, but that may change with the addition of three words to Minnesota Statutes 2014,

section 138.053:

The governing body of any home rule charter or statutory city or town may annually appropriate from its general fund an amount not to exceed 0.02418 percent of estimated market value, derived from ad valorem taxes on property or other revenues, to be paid to the historical society of its respective **city, town, or** county to be used for the promotion of historical work and to aid in defraying the expenses of carrying on the historical work in the county.

A proposal to clarify the language has had initial hearings through both the Minnesota House and Senate. (See Legislative Update story on this page.)

Under the new language, municipalities won't be compelled

to fund local historical societies but "they will have to consider the request on its merits," said MALHM Board Member Sara Markoe Hanson, Executive Director of the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society.

Most cities served by her organization have provided some funding over the years, but one consistently has voted down funding based on its interpretation of state statute.

That decision may not change should the amendment pass, but municipalities would no longer be able to blame the state for their funding votes.

Proposed legislation impacts state's history organizations

By David Kelliher

With just over a month to go in the 2016 session, the Minnesota Legislature is working to wrap up its work and meet a constitutional deadline of May 23 for adjournment. While this is a short session, the priorities are to pass a Capital Budget or "bonding" bill, pass a supplemental budget bill, and possibly transportation and tax bills.

Local history legislation

Of specific interest to the history community is a proposal that would clarify an existing law that permits cities and townships to provide financial support to local history organizations. If read literally, the current law, Minnesota Statutes, Section 138.053 permits cities and townships to support only their county historical society, but not local historical organizations. Senate File 3323 and its House companion bill, House File 3558 would add authorization for

local governments to support city and town historical organizations.

The bills have had initial hearings in both the House and Senate, and continue to move through the process. Since this is a short session, it is possible that many policy bills will not be passed this year. Whether a bill on this topic passes or not, we have educated legislators on the work that the local history community does and set the groundwork for future legislative efforts, if they are needed.

If this situation impacts your history organization, it is important to let legislators know that this is important to you. Let us know if you need help determining who your legislators are.

Please contact me at david.kelliher@mnhs.org and/or MNHS Manager of Outreach Services, David Grabitske, at david.grabitske@mnhs.org to add

your organization's name to the list of communities impacted.

Proposals for MNHS

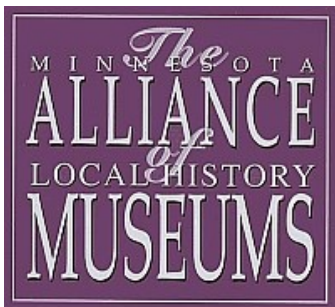
Finally, the Minnesota Historical Society has submitted three capital budget requests of interest to the history community:

- funds for a major revitalization of **Historic Fort Snelling**;
- asset preservation or repair funds for **state historic sites**;
- the **County and Local Historic Preservation grant program**, which helps cities and counties to preserve their most important historic structures.

For more information about becoming an effective advocate, check out <http://www.mnhs.org/historymatters>

David Kelliher is Director of Public Policy & Community Relations for the Minnesota Historical Society

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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.