

# The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

## WINTER 2024 Newsletter



**HISTORY CENTER**  
OF OLMSTED COUNTY

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**REMINDER: Please make sure we have the most up-to-date email and mailing address for you. Thanks!**

### EMBRACE THE OLD, LEARN THE NEW: MASTERING HISTORIC STRUCTURES

By Wayne Gannaway, Executive Director

#### Progress on Phase One of the Barn Historic Rehabilitation

Historic buildings seem pretty straightforward. If George Stoppel and his brother, Franz Joseph, could build the barn in the early 1870s, with their basic tools and techniques, how complicated could it be to fix it up? Perhaps not surprisingly, between deterioration of materials due to the passage of time and the reality that, just because our ancestors built it, does not mean that their work always exemplified the finest craftsmanship, the barn has a few surprises for us. Add to that the rigors of 21st century building codes, and one can understand why an owner might be tempted to demolish a timber-framed barn and just put up a modern pole barn. On the other hand, we (and our descendants) would not learn much about history if we took that approach.

If you've driven or walked by the George Stoppel barn recently, you may have noticed workers busily preparing the building for important, long-needed repairs. They've been patching the weatherworn board and batten siding, filling in woodpecker and knotholes with a wood epoxy, and replacing siding if the existing is too deteriorated to repair. Board and batten siding is a traditional construction method in which wide vertical boards are covered at the joints by narrow boards. The original and replacement siding is cedar, which is naturally resistant to rot caused by moisture. If not properly sealed, exposure to sunlight and water over many years will cause deterioration, especially at the joints. When we must replace a section of a board, we want the new material to blend in and not stand out visually. One technique for doing that is to stagger the length of the replacement boards to avoid extended joint lines (see photo on page 2). After the carpenters finish their work, and when the weather warms up, the painters will put on a new coat of paint, burnishing the view of the barn and protecting the wood.

#### Call in the Engineers

Historical architects and carpenters have noticed a pattern to the construction of the George Stoppel farm buildings.

Regarding the stone house, they noted in the 1987 preservation plan, “Later alterations to the House show a pattern in marked contrast to the growth process of the late nineteenth century: the increasing maintenance needs of an aging building are approached with declining resources, in an increasingly makeshift manner.” Their observation also applies to the barn.

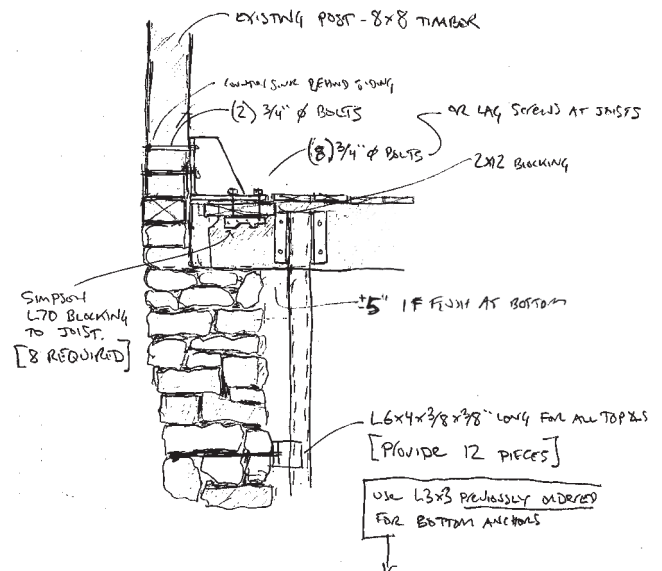
George and Franz Joseph, perhaps with help from neighbors, completed the original barn by 1874. According to family oral history, the barn’s east end was expanded by 50 feet sometime between the late 1880s and 1902. The later addition is not constructed as well as the original barn, as seen in settlement of the foundation, outward (but static) tipping of the stone walls, a sloping floor, and the poor condition of floor framing. Engineering solutions included doubling up the joists (called “sistering”) and adding steel posts to support the upper-level floor. The tipping walls put the foundation itself at risk but also compromised the floor joists.

The structural engineer recommended brackets and blocking that connect the wall to a steel post (see diagram). As a non-engineer, it’s a real lesson to learn how the failure of one structural component can impact other building systems. Carpenters will wrap up critical structural and building envelope work this year. Next year stone masons will restore the entire stone foundation which, along with painting the barn, will wrap up the work funded by the \$500,000 legislatively-directed grant. Lots of work remains, the most critical of which is the replacement of the failing cedar shingle roof.

When it comes to preserving historic buildings, a common question arises: why is repairing original materials prioritized over replacing them with new, similar materials? Over time, most buildings undergo changes. During his ownership, George Stoppel adapted his stone house and barn to suit his evolving fortunes and agricultural goals. These renovations chronicle the history of the family and their land, while preserving the essential character of the structures. Only when historic elements are severely deteriorated, such as a board that cannot feasibly be repaired and reinstalled, should they be replaced with historically accurate materials.



ABOVE: Sistered joists at the southeast bay of the barn  
 BELOW: Structural engineer’s diagram, Benjamin A. Wolf, PE (IA, MN, WI), Short Elliott Hendrickson, Inc.



Board and batten siding repair and replacement







## THE HISTORY CENTER: ADVANCING OUR MISSION THROUGH EDUCATION

By Mark A. Warner, M.D., President

I am pleased to announce that the History Center “family,” consisting of members and volunteers, continues to grow. Thank you on behalf of the History Center’s Board of Directors and our staff. In the coming months, we will introduce a number of pilot projects to increase membership, visitors, and participants in our expanding number of programs. A strong membership provides impetus and resources to offer more educational activities and allows us to better serve our primary mission.

**“To give people of all ages and backgrounds access and opportunity to learn about the past through interpretive programs and exhibits, research, publications and events.”**

At the History Center, we are moving forward to increase the number and value of our many educational programs. Under the leadership of our Executive Director, Wayne Gannaway, and our Education Director, Valerie Wassmer, the staff is pursuing opportunities to grow the quality and quantity of our exhibits, displays, and programs. In this issue of the Newsletter, you will read reports from Wayne and Valerie that describe our educational efforts.

### Why all the emphasis by the Board of Directors and staff on education?

What is more important in our world today than to highlight lessons learned from the past to guide the future?

We are designing our educational programs to ensure learning opportunities for members, visitors, and our communities of all ages and backgrounds. Education is a life-long process . . . and it plays a vital role in informing our evolution as a society.

To increase the scope and value of our educational contributions, we must also grow and improve our resources. To accomplish this, the Board and staff are nearing completion of a master planning project that will be implemented over the coming few years.

The project includes, as you would anticipate, restoration and preservation of our historic structures (e.g., the Stoppel Farmstead) and expansion and modernization for our History Center.

It also leads to better use of our land, with new projects to increase the educational programs we can achieve with it.

Momentum is building, restoration work is proceeding, and new educational programs are increasing the participation of our current members and contributing to the growth of new members. It is an exciting time on West Circle Drive. Please take advantage of the remarkable educational programs.

You will likely be surprised by the new energy, the value of your participation, and the opportunities we can provide to our Olmsted County and southeastern Minnesota communities as we use history to ensure that we make informed decisions far into the future.

**Don't forget to contribute to the Winter Appeal!**

## LEARNER'S DELIGHT: YOU DON'T STOP

By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

When I was a college student, I remember wishing “student” was a career choice, like “architect” or “historian”. Homework aside, I just liked learning. I’ve been an avid reader since I was a kid, too. Why? Because there’s so much out there to know! And whenever anyone asks me what I like about my job, the answer is easy: I learn something new every day. I am your quintessential lifelong learner.

Our archives is an ideal place for others like me. Many a time I’ve heard researchers, or even just visitors



*Volunteer and member Lee Hilgendorf showing a visitor the ropes of how to use a Sanborn map*

who stumble across the archives not knowing it was here, say some version of, “Boy, I could spend days in here!” Our volunteers regularly share information they encounter while working on their projects with whoever happens to be in the room. And if it particularly sparks their interest, they don’t hesitate to keep searching out more information.

They’ll even ask patrons what they’re up to, offering insights and help. Some of those patrons have become members to take advantage of the free admission benefit, and we’ll see them multiple times a year (sometimes even multiple times a week). These are my people. These are HCOC’s people.

With how connected the world is now through social media and the internet, it can be easy to take information for granted. It seems so readily available, something that takes almost no thought to obtain. But this means we lose all the joy that comes with the effort of learning and purposely seeking knowledge.

**Since “student” isn’t a vocation, I wish for all of us in the New Year to embrace it as an avocation; to make learning an intentional and essential act we do every day.**

## A YEAR’S WORTH OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AT MAYOWOOD HISTORIC HOME

**By Molli Funk, Interim Mayowood Historic Site Manager**

I’m proud to say that like my fellow educators around the world, lifelong learning is paramount in my professional and personal life. That was no truer this year managing Mayowood Historic Home than it has been teaching a classroom of children. I have learned so much this year about the history of Rochester, the Mayo family, Mayowood, and working in the museum field. Most importantly, I hope I have imparted the new knowledge I have acquired to the local and global guests who came to Mayowood during the 2024 season.

In January of 2024, I revised the Mayowood tour guide script, which gave me the opportunity to spend time in the HCOC archives going through the Mayo Collection. It was a wonderful experience, not only being able to find the primary source materials that bring Mayowood guided tours to life, but to also learn how the HCOC archives are set up



*Mayowood Nursery decorated by Zumbro River Fiber Arts Guild to represent the country of Norway*

and spend time with the amazing volunteers who choose to spend their free time there. Reading Edith Mayo and Alice Mayo’s letters helped me connect with Mayowood in a way I never have before. It was also a great reminder that history is not stagnant. We learn new things about the past all the time and, as a museum, have the responsibility to interpret that history accurately to the visiting public.

This summer brought about The Women of Mayowood: Mother’s Daughter’s and Staff Specialty tour and exhibit. The visiting public heard for the first time stories about the women who lived and worked at Mayowood Historic Home. The season ended with our annual Christmas tours, “Christmas Around the World.” This year’s dedicated and talented decorators represented the Christmas traditions of 15 different countries through their decorations. I hope that not only did our guests enjoy the holiday decor, but left Mayowood with a new knowledge of the world around them.

Personally, I have been continuing my pursuit of a Museum Studies certificate through the American Association of State and Local History. Learning how to care for a museum’s collection was one of the most valuable skills that I have acquired to date.

As I am thinking about what new learning opportunities I may be able to offer guests at Mayowood, I am in turn looking forward to learning new things from my guests, staff, colleagues, and HCOC members.



# TEACHING YOURSELF TO TEACH WITH OBJECTS: QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT HCOC ARTIFACTS

By Dan Nowakowski, Collections Manager



Joseph A. Leonard – Civil War Saber

The following questions are from a book called *Active Collections*, which examines existing approaches to museum collections and explores practical yet radical ways to improve collections stewardship. These questions are designed to make professionals think beyond the standard description of an object and look at it in different ways. The goal is to train yourself on how to activate your collection.

## What is this object's unique human story? – Who is Joseph A. Leonard?

The object's human story is unique because of the owner, Joseph A. Leonard. Joseph was born in Maryland in 1830, but his family raised him in Philadelphia, where he attended school to become a physician. Joseph eventually left Philadelphia and settled in Rochester in 1858. Once in Rochester, he would pass the bar exam and join a law firm. In 1861, Joseph became the first Republican postmaster for Rochester appointed by President Lincoln. This appointment would not be his only time in service of the government. During the Civil War, Joseph served as a Captain and Commissary of the First Division of the 16th Corps under Generals Mower and McArthur.

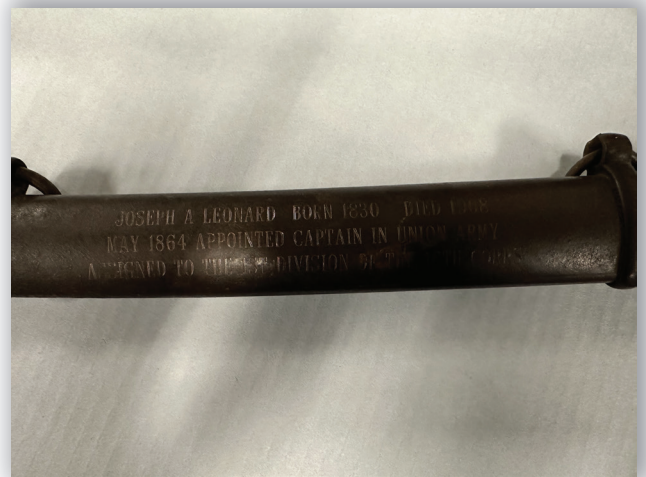
After his service, Joseph returned to Rochester but chose a new career path and became an editor for the *Rochester Post*, a position he held for thirty years. Joseph would return to his political career by serving for one term as a State Senator and becoming a Register of the United States Land office. He would also become the United States Consul General at Edinburgh, Scotland; Calcutta (Kalkata), India; and Shanghai, China. On his return home to Olmsted, he became a Judge of Probate for the county. After a long career, Joseph created a lasting history by compiling and authoring the 1910 *History of Olmsted County* book. This book covers the early history of Olmsted County and the many residents who came to the area to start their new lives.

## How does this object support your current collection scope?

This artifact supports our collection scope because it directly ties to Joseph Leonard, who played significant roles in Olmsted County's community and history.

## Where does this object fit into your collection? Is it merely filling a gap within encyclopedic collections? Does it illuminate a human story?

Because of who Joseph Leonard was and what he accomplished in his life, the object fits into both our military collection and our early settler's collection. The artifact is not just filling a gap; it is expanding the story for Joseph Leonard because now we can include his story with Civil War displays. We can also illuminate his human story further with his service in war, later in politics, and his life in Rochester.



Detail of scabbard inscription: Joseph A. Leonard Born 1830 Died 1908, May 1864 Appointed Captain in Union Army, Assigned to the 1st Division 16th Corps

## DID YOU KNOW?

By Ashley Evans, Rental and Special Events Coordinator

Did you know flamingos can drink near-boiling water? Or that Ketchup used to be sold as medicine? How about the English Parliament banning Christmas from 1647 to 1660? I think it is a safe assumption that you didn't know at least one of these facts – which means you've learned something new! Part of the purpose of the History Center is to encourage the exploration of history and to give people the opportunity to learn; this is what we strive to do with our events and programs. Whether it be through visiting a historic building during a member's social, learning about Ethiopian culture, food, and music at events like Walk Around the World, or finding out what a tin smith does during a Fall Fest demonstration: I am certain I speak for the entire staff when I say we want to see you enjoy the events and capture the knowledge.

Too often learning is seen as something that happens only in the walls of a classroom and while plenty of learning does occur in the Hadley Valley Schoolhouse, the museum, events, and grounds have thousands of stories to teach. I gain newfound knowledge every day working at the History Center, and I have the many visitors, volunteers, staff, and members to thank for that. Just recently, we sent out a Membership Feedback Survey, and I hope to implement in 2025 what I've learned. Suffice it to say, I hope to see new and familiar faces at our gatherings in the New Year where we can teach each other something novel.

Never forget:

**"The capacity to learn is a gift. To learn is a skill. The willingness to learn is a choice."**

**- Brian Herbert**



*Gold Cross EMS Panel discussion*

## NEVER STOP EXPLORING!

By Valerie Wassmer, Associate Director/Education Director

Our recent member survey provided great insight into the benefits, programs, and exhibits offered here at the History Center. A big takeaway for me was the appreciation and the popularity of our Thursday evening Gather 'Round lecture series, which was very encouraging. A large part of my job as the Director of Education is finding interesting topics and speakers for our lectures; a job that is both challenging and exciting.

Since August we have offered presentations about trains, vintage baseball, Art Donahue (WWII pilot), fall gardening, the history and legacy of Gold Cross, the effort to reform Minnesota's State Hospitals in the 1940s, the history of Woodstock '69, and the attempted robbery of the First National Bank in Northfield in 1876 (spoiler alert, it doesn't end well for the James/Younger Gang). I enjoy hearing about new topics and exploring new events; our survey shows that members do as well.

The crowds that participate in our lecture series are practicing being lifelong learners. To some extent, we are all continuing to learn whether we realize it or not, but active and intentional learning after our formal education has ended is important. Those who seek out new learning opportunities show a growth mindset and a desire for personal growth; these lead to greater confidence and personal satisfaction.

Thank you for choosing the History Center of Olmsted County to continue your lifelong learning! We look forward to continued crowds at our Gather 'Round series and invite you to bring a friend, or two.

Please feel free to email if you have any ideas or topics you would like to learn more about.

**Never stop exploring!**

**mail to: [education@olmstedhistory.com](mailto:education@olmstedhistory.com)**





## UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Please check our website and Facebook regularly as the schedule is subject to change, [olmstedhistory.com/events](http://olmstedhistory.com/events)

### JANUARY

- **18th** - Benjamin Franklin Young Inventors Program
- **30th** - Trivia Date Night
- **TBD** - Members Social event

### FEBRUARY

- **8th** - Historic Valentine Making Program

### MARCH

- **9th** - Historic Fashion Show

## STAFF

Wayne Gannaway  
Executive Director

Valerie Wassmer  
Associate Director/Education Director

Darla Buss  
Member Services Coordinator

Ashley Evans  
Rental and Special Events Coordinator

Molli Funk  
Interim Maywood Historic Site Manager

Patrick Gannaway  
Facilities and Grounds Coordinator

Krista Lewis  
Archivist

Dan Nowakowski  
Collections Manager

Brian Boettcher  
Buildings and Grounds Manager

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Carolyn Barsness

Grace Curry

Patrick Dean

Marcia Goodmanson

Joan Hunziker-Dean

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