

The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

WINTER 2022

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!

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM HCOC!

By Paul Scanlon, Board President

For the fourth year, the Creepy Doll Contest brought pre-Halloween fun and attention to the History Center including coverage by Smithsonian Magazine and a number of local news outlets. A cocktail party at the Rochester Art Center on October 29th brought a fittingly creepy conclusion to the contest.

Mayowood is decorated for the Holidays! Volunteers from numerous community organizations decorated many of the rooms, each according to a seasonal theme. If you haven't seen it already, be sure to reserve a spot on the house tours between now and December 18th!

Also, don't forget about the HCOC Museum Gift Shop for gift-giving ideas, lots of local history books and many options for stocking stuffers. If you haven't been out recently, Amy Jo Hahn's Hidden History of Rochester Minnesota and Virginia Wright-Peterson's Rochester: An Urban Biography are the two new additions to Rochester history for 2022. Check them out!



Mayowood Christmas

HAPPY HOLIDAYS - continued

The board is keeping busy monitoring progress with staff on the Stoppel smokehouse rehabilitation project. It should be finished in the late spring or early summer of 2023. We are already thinking ahead to rehab for the barn and the house, having made some headway in seeking grant support and sponsorships. Meanwhile, we are looking at options for critical storage needs, space reconfiguration and other future needs. The board is set to approve the budget for 2023 with improved tracking of projects and new educational programs.

We are excited to welcome several new staff members. Look for announcements from Wayne!

As always, we are so thankful for your support and membership! This has been a fantastic year for the History Center and we look forward to so much more in 2023.



Check out the gift shop for unique gifts and stocking stuffers!



Guests inspect the Creepy Dolls at the Creepy Doll Cocktail Part.

HOPE FOR THE BEST, PLAN FOR THE WORST

By Jenna Collins, Collections Manager

The best offense is a good defense, or so my sports-loving father tells me. In the case of historical societies, our most fearsome opponent is potential disasters like fires or floods. So what's our defensive strategy here at HCOC?

This past September, I had the opportunity to join a training session in St. Paul for the Minnesota Heritage Responders that addressed how historical and cultural organizations can protect their collections, and salvage them in the event of a disaster. The training was led by the Foundation for Advancement in Conversation (FAIC), a program run by the American Institute for Conservation (AIC).

In the months before the in-person event, trainees participated in online lessons. There, I learned more about the worst types of dangers historical collections can face. Frankly, there's a lot of them— but our biggest enemy may be water, and lingering moisture. Water can disintegrate paper, warp wood, stain textiles, and cause metal to rust. And even if water didn't touch an object, being in the same room as standing water can cause mold to start to grow. Substantial mold growth can start within the first 48 hours of a space being flooded if the water is not removed and humidity in the space is not controlled. In the event of a water disaster, steps must be taken quickly. Paper and other types of documents can usually be placed in a freezer— this immediately stops the damage spreading and stops potential mold growth. Documents are in a sort of stasis when they are frozen, and then plans can be made for drying them.

Drying is another process that requires a solid plan. Different types of objects have different needs— some fragile objects do best with air drying, while others could be freeze dried, vacuum freeze dried, desiccant air dried, etc. Part of planning for a water disaster is knowing what's in the collection, and how it could be dried if damaged.

The goal of the Minnesota Heritage Responders Training was to teach people in historical and cultural institutions how to react to disasters, and how to aid other organizations that may need our help. Part of achieving that goal was also educating us in the Incident Command System (ICS), which is a standardized approach to the handling of an emergency situation by responders. ICS is used by first responders like firefighters, police, and other public entities. By using a standardized approach with clear lines of command, responders to a disaster can handle the situation as quickly and effectively as possible. Every person should know their role, and who they report to. In the case of historical and cultural institutions, this means someone needs to be the main leader (Incident Commander), someone is in charge of making sure volunteers and responders are safe in the space (Safety Officer), someone is supervising salvage efforts (Operations), someone is handling information going out to the public (Communications Officer), etc. The people in these roles are ideally identified and know their responsibilities prior to the emergency.

"In the case of historical societies, our most fearsome opponent is potential disasters like fire or floods."



Archival flooding can destroy a lifetime of work.



The Minnesota History Center in St. Paul

with a plan in place, and roles identified, a situation can be managed, and further damage can be avoided. Human safety comes first, so a space must be determined to be safe to enter, and proper protective equipment worn. Then, priorities are identified– can objects be removed from the space? What is most fragile? How best can they be dried? All damage should be documented and photographed for insurance purposes.

At the end of the training, we were all officially made members of the Minnesota Alliance for Response. This means that if there is a disaster and a historical or cultural organization needs help, we are trained to be able to respond and help their recovery process. Further training sessions are being planned for locations throughout the state, and I am working to have one hosted here in Rochester, so that other local organizations can learn how to respond to disasters and salvage their items.

Disasters are inevitable, whether it's a burst pipe or a fire or a flash flood. The safety and preservation of our collection here at HCOC is a top priority for me– and education and having a plan is our best defense.

At the in-person training in St. Paul, myself and 30 other individuals gathered at the Minnesota History Center and engaged in several disaster scenarios. In one scenario, we were separated into teams and given ICS roles– I was given the Operations role of Collections Assessor, in charge of evaluating the needs of damaged historical objects. We were told the imaginary scenario: “An F3 tornado touched down in St. Paul, and the Minnesota History Center sustained substantial structural and roof damage, in particular in the area of the “Our Home” exhibit, which features Dakota and Ojibwe objects on display. The roof was damaged, water is pouring into the gallery, and hanging light fixtures have fallen and broken the cases, damaging objects inside.” As a lover of history and historical objects, I shuddered to think of this scenario happening in real life. However,

Experience Christmas at
MAYOWOOD
HISTORIC HOME
Through December 18th



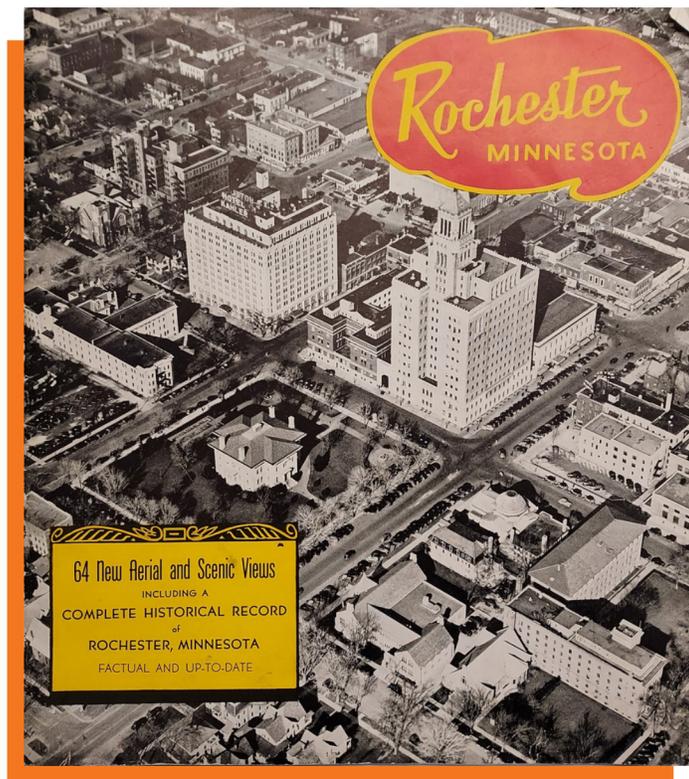
HISTORY: IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE

By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

I recently had a visitor in the archives ask me, "So what is it that makes people interested in history?" My answer: "Well, I think you'd have to ask them." I couldn't give our visitor a real answer because the question was personal; every one of us has our own reasons for being (or not being) interested in history. For me, one of the more fascinating aspects of history is that there really is no one way to tell it; it can be approached by any number of perspectives. Arguably, some may not be as useful as others, but they all add to our overall understanding of the past.

While I find this fascinating, it also poses a challenge for me as an archivist. When evaluating our existing collection or a new acquisition, I have to ask, "How might this be used and by whom?" I want to accommodate as many perspectives as possible, but I also want to avoid falling into the trap of thinking, "Well, someone might be able to use this someday." It can be an agonizing decision to reject things sometimes (nobody likes rejection!), but I like to remind myself of something a former boss and mentor used to say, "It's not like it's the Constitution." It's a bit flip, but the point is a lot of things we produce won't actually be missed if they aren't kept in the historical record. What I do as a purveyor of history involves a lot of "what ifs", and if I let myself get bogged down by them, I would never get anything done.

As I noted, we can study the past from any angle, but there is still one thing that all archivists, and really anyone seeking to learn about or present the past, need to consider: historical perspective. Historical perspective is taking into account the context in which events and people of the past existed, including social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional factors. Not taking it into consideration detracts from our understanding of the past for at least two reasons. One, we can easily slip into judging the past by today's standards. And two, living in the present gives us the benefit of knowing how events played out; the consequences of an action in the past might seem obvious to us, but they weren't to those from the time. We mustn't judge the past based on what we know today. As the old adage goes, hindsight is 20/20.



To keep or not to keep? That is the question. An example of a deaccessioned (rejected) item. Don't worry, we have other copies.

"When evaluating our existing collection or a new acquisition, I have to ask 'How might this be used and by whom?'"

With that in mind, what better time of year to pause for reflection? What might we learn from considering things from perspectives other than our own? How might historians of the future see recent events? How has our own view of recent events evolved with the passage of time? How might our lives change if we let go of the “what ifs”, the “could haves”, and the “should haves”?

Here’s what I’ve gleaned from my own moment of reflection: History, when used improperly, can be used to divide people and cultures and ideas. I won’t argue that history is a great unifying force, but everyone does have a place in it (even if they don’t have an interest in it), and recognizing that is one step toward a more tolerant perspective.



Is this just a football team or something more? Historical perspective says it’s something more. Google “USS Virginia Great White Fleet” to learn more.

CHARLIE MAYO BUYS A CAR

By Sean Kettelkamp, Researcher

We Americans love firsts, from our first president to the first astronaut, it was progress in action and indeed many firsts changed the world forever. Firsts are meticulously documented; everything from the first radio broadcast to the first cell phone call in 1973 to the first text message in 1992. The early 20th Century had many firsts including the Wright Brothers first flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the first talking motion picture, and the first television broadcast.

In Rochester, Minnesota Dr. Charles Mayo, known in town as Dr. Charlie, became the first person to own an automobile. Rochester newspaper the Olmsted County Democrat reported on Friday, January 26, 1900 that the “machine arrived Saturday, but will not in all probabilities make a public appearance for some time.” They went on to say that, “It is of the steam type, the motive power being furnished by a boiler suspended beneath the driver’s seat.” The engine was reported, “indicated [being] 4-horse power, and the speed claimed is up to twenty-five miles an hour.” Also on January 26, 1900, the newspaper Rochester Post & Record stated that, “the automobile, which was ordered some time ago, arrived Saturday, and he is having it set up today. . .” Which goes against the urban legend that Dr. Charlie had bought a car as a kit and assembled it himself. But, in those early days, an automobile would be shipped via the railroad in a wooden crate, with the tires, fenders and perhaps the headlights on the seat inside with limited assembly required.



Charlie Mayo's children with an early automobile.

"Deep in the archives of the History Center of Olmsted County, an obscure document... related a fascinating story"

Though Dr. Mayo was the first to own an automobile in Rochester, his was not the first to roll into town. Deep in the archives of the History Center of Olmsted County, an obscure document handwritten by Bertha Wilcox related a fascinating story. She noted that the first horseless carriage drove into Rochester from Spring Valley, Minnesota. Mr. T.O. Kilbourn was at the wheel. He drew "a large crowd of people; and when he parked in front of the Masonic Temple, the crowd became so dense as to stop traffic." She wrote, "Dr. Charles H. Mayo came out from his office, which was located in the Masonic Temple Building, and examined the machine and asked the owner numerous questions regarding it."

In the spring of 1900, Dr. Charlie appeared on "our streets driving a light tan, three seated steam driven Locomobile without a top," It does not seem as though they used the car for very long, and it was noted by Miss Wilcox "their next car was an Oldsmobile, and the third was a funny looking vehicle with a cover and a door for entering in the back." This was the Thomas Rear Entry Tonneau Automobile, probably Model 17 circa 1902. The Thomas car was photographed by George Nelson, in front of his photo studio on Main Street, the site of today's Downtown Marriott Hotel. In the car were Charlie and Edith Mayo, and guests from Canada.

The Post & Record newspaper had the headline on June 11, 1913, "Flames Catch Mayo Garage." [This was the garage behind the "Red House" on Fourth Street SW]. It said that the "old garage belonging to C.H. Mayo, and two cars, the little Knox and what is popularly known as the "rubber neck" wagon were destroyed this morning by a fire that originated from gasoline." It said too that the "Packard car owned by Dr. Mayo was taken to a place of safety." The "rubberneck" wagon was spoken of as a sightseeing car, where folks would crane their necks out the windows to see large buildings or countryside.

CHARLIE MAYO BUYS A CAR - continued

On July 29, 1954 the Rochester Post-Bulletin in their Parade Preview article wrote "Only 50 Autos Owned in Rochester in 1908." The efficient list read in orderly fashion that C.H. Mayo owned a 7-Knox, 3-Knox, and a 2-Knox, [plus] a Packard. Will Mayo owned a Packard and a Pierce-Arrow, and their father, W.W. Mayo owned a Buick." The article ends saying that it is interesting to note that of the 25 different cars written in their list from 1908, only five were still being made in 1954. The Cadillac, Packard, Buick, Ford, and Oldsmobile.

Charlie Mayo was the first, and many others quickly followed. Gone were the days of having a horse barn behind the house, it was replaced by a garage that in less than 50 years it inched its way closer and became attached to the house. The world evolved, and the automobile changed the world.



Charlie and Edith Mayo in a Thomas Automobile.

MAYOWOOD CHRISTMAS: A THANK YOU TO DECORATORS

By Dan Nowakowski, Mayowood Site Manager

Christmas season is once again upon us, and the Mayowood Historic Home is again beautifully decked out in time for the holiday.

Decorating the home is no small task! Volunteers from all across Olmsted logged over 400 volunteer hours getting the house set for the season. We absolutely couldn't do it without them, and we're beyond pleased by the results of their efforts.

This year's theme is "A Storybook Christmas," and each room reflects a different classic holiday tale. If you haven't been to Mayowood during the holiday season, now is a perfect time to head to the big house and take in the elegant home.

Christmas tours run until December 18th, and special candelight tours are available! Visit olmstedhistory.com/mayowood for more.



Check out Mayowood's Storybook Christmas!

LETTERS FROM MEMBERS: ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS

By Caleb Baumgartner, Communications Coordinator

We're happy to open the forum for feedback from our members, and we're excited that a few of you took the leap and got in touch with us!

Remember, if you have any questions or comments, let us know! Send us an email at comm@olmstedhistory.com (please put "Scribe:" in your subject line, followed by your subject) or send us mail the old fashioned way to Scribe c/o The History Center of Olmsted County - 1195 West Circle Dr SW, Rochester, MN 55902.

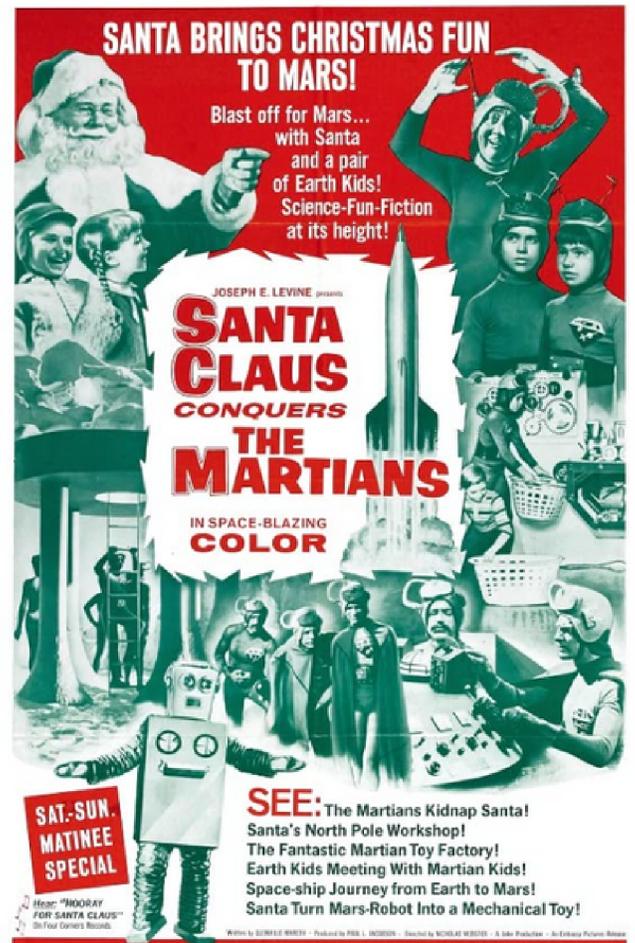
What happened to the member meetings? We haven't had one since the Annual Meeting.

We've been struggling of late between being short staffed and having a significant number of events in a short period (September/October saw the Hootenanny, Fall Fest, Creepy Dolls, and Mayowood decorating.) and we admittedly dropped the ball a bit on providing opportunities for our members to feel like they're a part of something.

BUT! We're hosting a members night out on December 15th featuring a very cheesy movie, food, and an opportunity to enjoy some time at the History Center, and going forward we're going to make time for members more of a priority, even if it's just occasional open house opportunities to mingle and enjoy some presentations and the like.

I've really enjoyed the lectures this last year, particularly the author talks. Is more of that on the way in 2023?

Nothing is pinned down at the moment, but we know that our lectures are one of the best ways for people to get value out of their memberships, and we're excited to line up more for the coming year. At the moment we're talking with a diverse array of presenters hoping to line up some talks about Rochester music history, immigration stories, and more! Stay tuned.



Come check out a very silly movie with us on December 15th!

STOPPEL UPDATE: SMOKEHOUSE 75% COMPLETE, BUT MYSTERIES REMAIN

By Wayne Gannaway, Executive Director

After a slow start, thanks to the unique nature of the work and skyrocketing inflation, stonemasons and carpenters descended on the smokehouse in late August and have made terrific progress. At the end of November the project is about 75% complete and we anticipate finishing by May of 2023. About a year ago observers saw a building in rapid decline, from the tip of the bell tower to the base of the limestone ashlar foundation. Since then, carpenters repaired and painted the white tower and the red board and batten siding while masons cleaned and repointed the mortar joints, relaying or replacing stones where needed, while retaining the distinctive random rubble style.

The stonemasonry was the most crucial and complicated part of the work. As much as possible, the architects and the masons must address the underlying causes of deterioration, namely water and subsurface soil conditions. Since the smokehouse is built into the hill, each rainfall sends a small river racing to the building, constantly working against the mortar joints that bind together the stonework. Over time the water will leach away the mortar. Meanwhile, movement of the subsurface soil pushes against the buried foundation, testing for weak spots. But the masons have another challenge. They can't use just any type of mortar. The mix must visually match and have a similar composition as the original. The type of mortar George and his brother, Franz Joseph, mixed on site was softer than modern stuff and used naturally available sand. In fact, microscopic analysis of a sample of original mortar showed that sand matches the type found in the sandstone walls of the cave. After creating about a dozen mock-ups, the stonemason and architect agreed on a mortar match and submitted it to the Minnesota Historical Society for approval, which they granted in September.

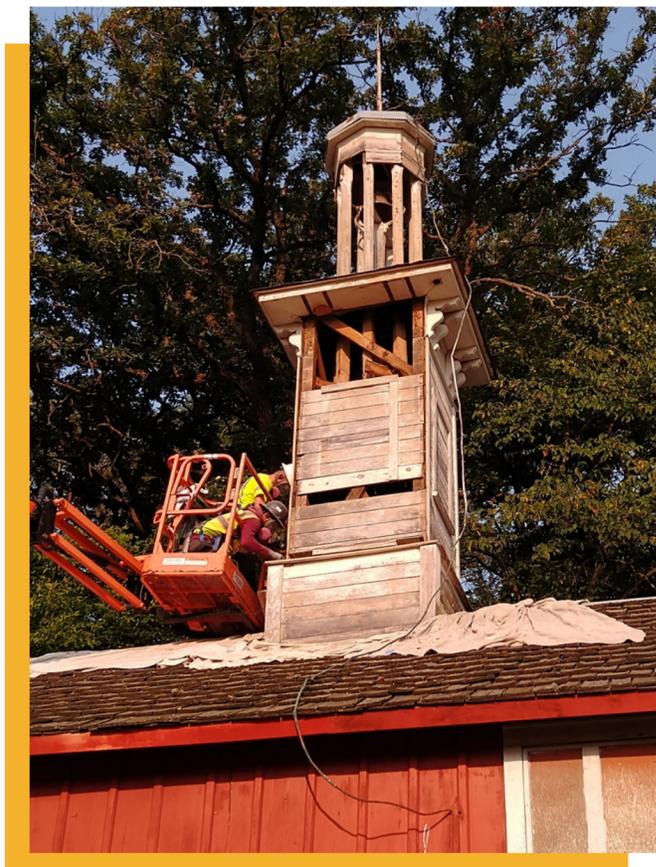


As seen below, the digging process can yield a number of material treasures.



STOPPEL UPDATE - continued

To assess and repair the foundation built into the hill, workers dug an 18 inch trench along the perimeter. This also happens to be prime territory for historic trash, aka, archaeological evidence. Under ideal conditions, before digging we would have professional archaeologists excavate to insure as much archaeological evidence as possible is preserved—not just finding artifacts but documenting their exact subsurface context. Archaeological evidence should stay buried until professional archaeologists can properly research and excavate the site. But given our tight budget and the urgent needs of the smokehouse, that's not realistic. Instead, the workers kept a close eye out for artifacts as they dug and set aside an array of artifacts, or, in the words of James Deetz, the late famed archaeologist, "small things forgotten." Broken ceramic vessels, glass medicine and liquor bottles, a tin compact, and boot section with eyelets were just some of the items unearthed. In all likelihood, some occupant of the second floor of the smokehouse, perhaps an itinerant farm hand, swept up and tossed this detritus in the most convenient location possible. Now, our collections manager will clean, inventory, and research the objects to see what we can learn from them about the occupation of the site.



The smokehouse offers a number of opportunities to learn about our past.

There's still much to do. Carpenters will continue with rough carpentry while they wait for lumber for flooring to be milled and windows repair or fabricated offsite. Meanwhile, the architect is working with the electrical contractor to find an affordable, unobtrusive method to illuminate the cave. If you're like me, you want to hear the bell in the tower ring and can imagine visitors ringing it as they do in the schoolhouse. The problem is, we can't figure out how the Stoppels would have rung it. Upon examination of the bell housing construction, which appears original, we see no evidence of a bell pull. As eager as I am to ring the bell, we don't want to introduce a feature (like a bell pull) that isn't supported by evidence. Would the Stoppels have built a bell tower as a purely ornamental feature? It seems unlikely, though the Stoppel smokehouse is truly a unique structure—a utilitarian combination of a privy, smokehouse, storage space, and hired hand apartment, with a decorative tower. As one architectural historian said, the smokehouse has "few, if any, precedents or peers within its type or region." We're continuing to sleuth out this mystery so be sure to stay in touch with us.

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