

# The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

## SPRING 2021 Newsletter



**HISTORY CENTER**  
OF OLMSTED COUNTY

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## UNCOVERING ROCHESTER'S ROOTS: THE MILL RESERVATION

By Sean Kettelkamp

Very little of Rochester looks anything like it did when pioneers first set eyes on it nearly 170 years ago, but its roots are still present if you know where to look. In 1854, George and Henrietta Head arrived in this area and have gone down in history as the city's founders. Indeed, George Head named the village/town after Rochester, New York, where his family had once lived. He claimed the [falls in the Zumbro River](#) reminded him of the Genesee River falls in Rochester, New York.[1] It is worth noting, however, that the falls no longer exist as the area was dynamited during World War II to clear out trees that had clogged that area of the river during a flood.[2] The Heads built a log cabin done up in the “usual style of frontier architecture” at the intersection of today’s Fourth Street [formerly the Dubuque Trail] and South Broadway.[3]



- Flouring Mill
- Mill Reservation
- Current site of  
Legends Bar &  
Grill
- Mill Race
- George Head  
property

◀ Map detail,  
Rochester,  
1858.



**Christine Rule**  
President

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring always brings a sense of hope and optimism. This year particularly so! The museum is open and we eagerly anticipate a return to full operations and in-person events in tandem with the gradual transition from winter to spring to summer. Thank you to our entire community of board, staff, members, volunteers, and patrons, for your consistent support and encouragement of HCOC during this time. I am confident we will never forget it!

The HCOC Board spent the winter reviewing key contracts and agreements, working to streamline and optimize our marketing impact, and creating and implementing a new business sponsorship program. Be sure to check it out on the new website at [olmstedhistory.com/sponsorship](http://olmstedhistory.com/sponsorship)!

A major effort by the Legacy Committee launched the initial steps in the restoration of the Stoppel Farmstead. This committee collaborated with staff and the Finance committee to guide HCOC through the creation of the Request For Proposal process, conducting interviews, selection of a firm, organizing the financials, and conducting initial walkthroughs of the site.

The architectural firm Miller Dunwiddie was selected to begin the Stoppel Farmstead drawings and designs. Restoring the Stoppel Farmstead will take significant resources of both time and money; achieving this goal will be a major focus of the HCOC Board for the foreseeable future, and will require the support of our entire community. Be sure to watch for progress updates in our newsletters and on social media!

Spring is the season of hope, of planning and preparation. A cultural pattern established in Olmsted County's agrarian roots. One of many pieces of the Stoppel Farmstead memory still living in our community. We are honored to preserve this important National Register of Historic Places site increasing its accessibility to the public.

**“Memory and history turn space into place, investing what would otherwise be a purely biological or geological abstraction with a wealth of human meanings, and thereby turning it into the kind of place we choose to call home.”**

**- William Cronon**

## RESTORING THE STOPPEL FARMSTEAD, FOR THE LONG RUN

**By Wayne Gannaway, Executive Director**

Saving historic buildings feels like a race against time. When it comes to commercial development, sometimes progress happens fast. One day a building is standing tall, the next it has vanished and crews are mobilizing for new construction. But fully restoring (and funding) an historic building is a marathon, not a sprint. In February we heard the "crack" of the starting gun when the historical architects and engineers of Miller Dunwiddie examined and measured the George Stoppel Farmstead historic structures. Now it's time to find our racing stride and pace ourselves.





Now, February 2021

▲ The Miller Dunwiddie team assessing current deterioration in the Stoppel farmhouse.

Throughout the spring, the architects and engineers will be creating architectural drawings and construction documents for the farmstead. That work will include assessing current deterioration, from rotted joists to spalled stone and specifying appropriate repairs. We know that we want to use the farmstead for interpretive tours and programs but, though we aim to restore the buildings as close to their original state as possible, some modern amenities will be needed. Miller Dunwiddie will work with HCOC staff and board members in designing and placing utilities, lighting, restrooms, HVAC, smoke detection, security, etc. in the least intrusive way possible.

With the architectural drawings and construction documents in hand this summer, we will be ready to apply for a large Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant—also known as a Legacy Grant. Awards can range up to \$300,000. Sounds like a lot of money—and it is! But for a farmstead of four structures, it amounts to the first phase of restoration. Think of it as the first leg of the marathon.

While a marathoner can appear alone in their quest, HCOC cannot restore the George Stoppel Farmstead house, barn, and smoke house alone. We'll need the help of volunteers, members, and the larger community. Working together, we can reach the finish line.

## ORIGINS OF OLMSTED COUNTY: ENTREPRENEURS WANTED

By Dan Nowakowski, Curator

Imagine leaving your established life and starting over in a new land. That is what early settlers to the Minnesota Territory did. Moving is no picnic now, but it was even less so in the 1850s, so why did they uproot themselves? Settlers, like George Head and his wife, learned about Minnesota from newspaper articles meant to entice them through the promise of land filled with lush forests and prairies of dark, rich soil ready for planting. Moreover, with land costing just \$1.25 per acre, it all sounded good.

In our exhibit "Origins of Olmsted County," you will discover how Olmsted County attracted settlers and what benefits the county offered to them. You will also learn about the numerous treaties that shaped the state of Minnesota.

To set the scene, the exhibit features a mural created by Marissa Gentling depicting Olmsted County in the 1850s along with a wagon full of hands-on items that settlers would have brought with them.

▼ Our new mural and wagon in progress for the "Origins of Olmsted County" exhibit.



## UNCOVERING ROCHESTER'S ROOTS - continued

In 1856, Judge Frederick A. Olds bought the property across College Street [Fourth Street] in a northeasterly direction, just feet from the George Head property and along the Zumbro River adjacent to the falls. On this property in 1857 he built a grist “flouring mill”, known as Olds Mill, and the entire site became known as the Mill Reservation.[4] The Olds Mill put Rochester on the map, and was its largest industry for more than half a century. Farmers came from all over southeastern Minnesota and beyond to have their grain milled to flour in Rochester.[5] The “falls” of the Zumbro River did not have the force or energy to power the mill, so it depended on a mill race, a feat of engineering designed to carry water to the mill at a faster pace than the river itself.

The [mill race](#), romantically referred to as The Mill Stream, was a 15-foot deep ditch that ran diagonally in a northeasterly direction across three blocks from the [Rommel and Strawberry Dams](#) near the intersection of today’s Sixth Street and First Avenue SW. The Rommel Dam was so named because the Rommel family home was adjacent to it. This dam held back water from the Zumbro in a flooded area known as a [mill pond](#). The Strawberry Dam got its name because of the abundance of wild strawberries in the area, and it diverted water from the mill pond into the mill race. The newspaper described the scene as picturesque, with the dams creating skating areas in the winter and fishing in the summer.[6] The water leading to the mill was known as the “head race.” After turning the mill stones and grinding the grain, the water exited back into the Zumbro River in what was referred to as the “tail race.” The angle and existence of this mill race had a profound impact on the development of this site in the years to come. The only other building of note on the Mill Reservation was the town’s first fire hall. Built over the mill race, its water pumps had access to an inexhaustible supply of water.

After the untimely death of Judge Olds in 1864 at age 54[7], his son Frederick T. Olds became the owner of the mill, and entered immediately into a partnership with his brother-in-law Thomas L. Fishback. The mill then became known as the [Olds & Fishback Mill](#), and continued doing business as such for nearly twenty years.[8] In March 1883, the Olds & Fishback partnership was dissolved, and Frederick T. Olds sold the entire enterprise to John A. Cole, who succeeded his father John M. Cole in the milling business upon the latter's death in the cyclone of 1883.[9] John M. Cole had been the proprietor of the Zumbro Mill in North Rochester. [10] The Zumbro Mill, also called Cole’s Mill, was located on the parking lot at today’s West Silver Lake Drive and Ninth Street NE. Most of the pictures of that tragic cyclone’s damage were taken from atop Cole’s Mill.



▲ Falls in the Zumbro River, 1910s.

- ▲ 1. Mill race
  - 2. Rommel Dam
  - 3. Strawberry Dam
  - 4. Mill pond
- 1900s

▲ Olds & Fishback Mill, ca. 1865.

In 1902, Cole made an agreement with the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Pacific Railroad Co., later known as the Chicago Great Western [CGW] Railroad, to cross the Mill Reservation property along the river.[11] In 1905 both mills were conducted under the new corporation [John A. Cole Milling Company](#), with William H. Knapp as the manager.[12] [It is at this time that confusion begins historically, as now two mills were operating with the name Cole.] Cole converted the former Olds & Fishback mill from the old burr process grist mill to a roller mill and turned out 200 barrels of flour a day with names such as Snow Flake Flour, Graham Flour, and Buckwheat Flour. The mill also produced breakfast cereal, referred to in the newspaper sometimes as Regal Breakfast Food and other times as Royal Breakfast Food.[13] In 1910, the name was changed to Rochester Milling Company. William Knapp presided as president and manager of the company,[14] and the mill got a new dedicated CGW rail track for shipping their products.[15] Picture post cards of the city from the time called it the “Queen City Mill,” or it was sometimes simply called “The Old Stone Mill.”[16] John A. Cole sold his interest in the mill to William H. Knapp in 1912.[17] Knapp died shortly thereafter in September of that year. His son Spencer Knapp became president of the mill, and his younger son Harold became vice president.[18]

The *Rochester Daily Bulletin* ran an article on March 14, 1922, saying that improvements at the mill would increase the capacity to over 600 barrels of flour per day. Production stopped and the mill closed. The newspaper reported on April 1, 1922, that the mill’s interior was being dismantled and removed, and that the mill was bare inside. Plans to remove partitions, rebuild the interior, and add an additional full story to the flour facility had begun. The project was expected to take four months to complete, ensuring all would be in place for the fall wheat crop. On June 24, 1922, the newspaper said that the first intention to build on top of the old stone walls had to be abandoned. It was found that it was more practical to demolish the entire structure and build a brand new brick building. The September 9, 1922, newspaper indicated that the work was far from finished.

Aside from a new building, improvements to the mill included the installation of new water wheels and the use of electricity, with steam power to be used in an emergency. The newspaper declared that all this should be “hailed with delight by those who wish to see a greater degree of prosperity come to Rochester.”[19] Still, the usual water power continued to be used through the race. The September 1, 1922, newspaper pointed out, however, that more of the old mill race was to be covered over with a concrete arch, making it all but invisible from public view. The paper lamented that in time citizens will forget that “the old mill stream exists



▲ John A. Cole Milling Co., 1912.

▲ Retaining wall & Red Owl Grocery Store, 1936.

▲ Unearthed mill race, 2018.

and curbstone quartets may even stand over the race and sing that old harmonious melody. . . [Down by the Old Mill Stream] without knowing they are over the stream.” This notion turned out to be prescient, as nobody seemed to remember that the race was there until portions of it were uncovered.

Legal records show that Mayo Properties Association purchased the Mill Reservation property on September 26, 1930.[20] The mill buildings were leased to General Mills, which opened a Farm Services Store Inc. there. [21] Mayo Properties Association improved the Mill Reservation greatly with the addition of a [retaining wall](#) along the river. This allowed for level land at the south end of the Mill Reservation and an alleyway separating it from the rear of the buildings on South Broadway. Now two newly created level street front tracts of land faced Fourth Street. Tract “A” was number 11 Fourth Street SE, and tract “B” was number 15 Fourth Street SE. A brand new [Red Owl Grocery Store](#) was built on tract “A”. The new Red Owl first appears at this address in the 1936 Rochester City Directory. The Red Owl Store’s blond brick and block construction was unique in Rochester, where red brick had been the common building material to that point.

Construction began on a new movie theater on tract “B” in 1936. In January 1937, the Time Movie Theatre opened. Built in High Style Art Deco blond or cream colored brickwork, it remains unique in its adaptive, odd-shaped construction along the river front. The existing mill race forced both the Red Owl and Time Theatre to be built at an odd angle. Ironically, the construction of the buildings seemed to signal the end of the mill race, yet remnants of it still kept revealing themselves.

In July of 1943, the City of Rochester bought the Mill Reservation property from the Mayo Properties Association, and the old mill buildings were used for city storage.[22] In 1951, the city decided to demolish the mill and create a parking lot. The August 3, 1951, *Rochester Post-Bulletin* headline announced the news saying, “Old Mill, Long-Standing Landmark, To Be Razed.” The story went on to say that the building housing the Nelson Tire and Appliance Company in the 500 block of First Avenue SW had to have its rear wall constructed at an angle to accommodate the water rights of the mill and mill race. That structure, with its odd-shaped east facing wall, is still visible directly behind the new fire hall on South Broadway. With that, Rochester’s milling business passed into history after being the bread of life for a fledgling community and making it a thriving town and city.

That was not, however, the final demise of the mill or its mill race, as time and again they reappeared. When the city widened Fourth Street in 1957, the mill race was found still lying beneath the concrete.[23] In 2018, construction workers [unearthed part of the mill race](#) that crossed property on the former site of the Schuster Brewery on First Avenue at Fifth Street SW. There is probably a long stretch of the mill race beneath the Riverside Building, but it is unclear even today how much of the race still exists.

When the city embarked on its flood control project in the 1990s, the plan included widening and deepening the river bed, and erecting concrete walls and spillways. The project ultimately transformed the appearance of the whole area, including the realignment of the railroad tracks with a new trestle. In the muck and mire dug up by the steam shovels as they excavated along the river, two wheels were discovered, with wooden spokes and brass bushings attached.[24] These were part of the machinery added to the mill in the 1880s when it was converted to a roller mill. The two 400-pound wheels have recently been rediscovered at the History Center of Olmsted County. When the project reached the area of the former Olds & Fishback Mill, work crews dug into the mill site and stumbled upon what they believed was the foundation of the mill. While widening the river sacrificed much of the mill site, the tail race where the mill race emptied back into the Zumbro River became a decorative waterfall.[25]

The structures originally built to house the Red Owl Grocery and the Time Movie Theatre have been home to many businesses over the years, most recently Legends Bar & Grill, which closed in the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But they too will pass into history before long as the Rochester City Council announced its intention to demolish both buildings.[26]

**Perhaps more of the mill race will once again see the light of day.**

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9. Daily Post & Record, August 21, 1919, p. 6.; Warranty Deed, Frederick T. Olds to John A. Cole, April 2, 1883.
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20. Deed Record No. 151, September 26, 1930, p. 193-194 (Rochester Milling Company Convey and Warrant to Mayo Properties Association).
21. Rochester Post Bulletin, September 22, 1953, p. 8.
22. Rochester Post Bulletin, August 3, 1951.
23. Rochester Post Bulletin, May 23, 1957.
24. Rochester Post Bulletin, October 19, 1990, p. 1B.
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## WE ARE WATER MN: UNDERSTANDING HOW HCOC FITS IN

By Kevin Whaley, Collections Manager

For several months now HCOC has been collaborating with We Are Water MN, a program of the Minnesota Humanities Center aimed at bridging scientific knowledges and human relationships with water. The Minnesota Humanities Center, in partnership with the Minnesota Historical Society and four state departments, has developed a traveling exhibit that examines water issues statewide and in local communities through personal stories, histories, and scientific information. It strengthens Minnesotans' relationships with water, exposes visitors to new perspectives, and increases participation in water stewardship activities. From March through May the We Are Water exhibit will be in Rochester at the Rochester Art Center. Visit the HCOC to see our partner exhibit, which will run through the end of 2021. In this exhibit, see how water impacted the lives of early settlers in Olmsted County, influencing where they lived and how they survived. Learn how the City of Rochester would later manipulate the rivers to allow the city to grow. In addition to the exhibits, HCOC and other organizations have a number of water based programs scheduled throughout the summer, including History down the Drain on April 29. Join us for this program and discover the history of wastewater treatment in Rochester.



▲ Zumbro River Flood, June 23, 1908. Floods are one reason the City of Rochester sought to manipulate the river.

Visit [wearewaterrochestermn.com](http://wearewaterrochestermn.com) for more information about We Are Water MN, the exhibits, and programs.

# LIVE FROM YOUR HOME: VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES

By Abby Currier, Community Engagement & Events Coordinator

We are so excited to be able to connect with our visitors both in person and virtually. In January, we started hosting virtual lectures, many of which are free to our members, covering a wide range of topics. These lectures are a rebranding of the previous Princess Café and Alan Calavano Lectures. With a new year, we wanted to try something a little different and we hope you will like the changes that we have made. Here are the three new lecture series:

## Homegrown Histories

This is the closest to Princess Café and invites local researchers and story tellers to share their knowledge of the Rochester/Olmsted County area. If you have any ideas for presentations, feel free to let us know!

## History From Around the Bend

This series looks at a variety of different stories and invites scholars from all over to participate and share some fascinating stories with our viewers. We try to keep this Minnesota themed, but sometimes other topics sneak in.

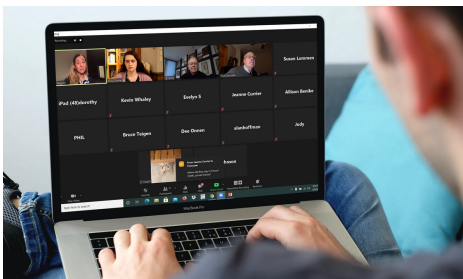
## Alan Calavano Distinguished Lecturer Series

This series invites our viewers to hear from distinguished lecturers on important and deep topics. We invite our viewers to come and hear about some of the biggest issues facing our area today and really analyze and discuss these topics.

By utilizing a virtual platform, we are able to connect with people from all over the state and the country! So far, we have had speakers from Minnesota, Georgia, West Virginia, and even Pennsylvania!

By using Zoom we are able to hear from speakers both near and far, which allows us to explore different kinds of history. So far, we have learned about everything from local architecture to Civil War forts to early attempts at vaccination. Our first talk focused on the historic Spangenberg House up in the Twin Cities which is an example of early German architecture. In fact, it is very similar to our own George Stoppel Farmhouse, which we will all get to learn more about this coming summer! Stay tuned for updates on that. Next, we all got to learn more about the Ellerbe Architecture firm with Ken Allsen, who led us on a virtual tour of several neighborhoods with houses designed by Ellerbe & Associates. This architecture firm normally only designs corporate spaces, so it is really cool that we have actual houses that they designed right here in our city! These talks allow us to share our love of history while staying safe and healthy.

We hope to continue these talks and are looking forward to exploring everything from voting rights in Minnesota to waste water treatment in Rochester to the 1918 Influenza Pandemic and even Antarctic exploration!



◀ Virtual Zoom lecture in progress.

Recording ▶  
Dearest Anna virtual program.



**Our calendar of talks is constantly being updated, so we hope you check out our events often at [olmstedhistory.com/events](https://olmstedhistory.com/events). You can even buy your tickets online at the same address, so there really is no need to even get up off of the couch to join in on these and other great programs! I cannot wait to see you there!**



## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: CORALEE GREBE

2021 started off with HCOC once again closed to the public to help stop the spread of COVID-19. We used that time to start making some new upgrades and improvements to our exhibits gallery. One of those changes is thanks to the great work of one of our volunteers: Coralee Grebe. Coralee has been volunteering with us for a number of years and has recently helped bring some color into our gallery spaces. We are working to break up all of the boring, white walls that you traditionally see and her work has really helped rejuvenate our spaces. We are super appreciative of all of the hard work that our volunteers do for us and we wanted to draw attention to this critical project that Coralee has helped us with. Thank you Coralee! Make sure you check out her work the next time you visit us!



# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

HCOC needs YOU to help with a variety of projects and programs.

We cannot operate without YOUR support.

We have work for all kinds of people and can find a job that will best fit YOU!

### Areas where you can volunteer:

- Outdoor Work
- Storytelling
- Indoor Work
- Archives and Library
- Exhibits
- Collections
- Ambassador

To learn more, check out  
[olmstedhistory.com/volunteer](https://olmstedhistory.com/volunteer)  
and fill out an application!  
We cannot wait to see you!



# GROW WITH US: HISTORY CENTER COMMUNITY GARDEN

By Jean Williams, volunteer

The History Center Community Garden, located on the grounds of the HCOC, was a hub of activity this past season as longtime gardeners and new friends filled the plots with an international cornucopia of produce and flowers. Due to COVID-19 restrictions last summer, The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardeners were not allowed to garden this year, which was unfortunate, as they have provided thousands of pounds of fresh produce each year to the Channel One Regional Food Bank in the past.

The void, however, was filled by a new partner: The Village Agricultural Cooperative & Learning Community, commonly referred to as “The Village.” Under the leadership of Kim Sin, two groups experiencing food insecurity have benefited from the partnership. A group of mostly elderly gardeners from Cambodia were given free plots to grow food for their families. “They face food insecurity as they are living on a fixed income,” says Kim, who is grateful to the History Center for providing the space for these retirees to garden as they did in their homelands. Many of the elderly develop mental health issues upon retirement due to isolation, and the garden has been a wonderful outlet for them. “One of the growers told me that before his grandma passed away, her last wish was to come out to the History Center to pick and cut vegetables from the garden.”

The Village also provided 30 to 50 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables per week to the University of Minnesota – Rochester food pantry for students, as well as an opportunity for students to engage in community service.

After years of managing the gardens, HCOC volunteers Sherry and Tom Lawrence stepped down, and the garden is now being managed by Curt Shellum and a volunteer garden committee. Curt experimented with raised beds, and the project was so successful that an additional ten 20’ x 4’ x 10” beds will be built this spring. Raised beds take up half the area of a standard garden plot and produce two to three times as much produce. They offer other unique advantages: the opportunity to manage the soil, better weed control, the ability to grow perennial crops, and ease of use.

There are 46 garden plots also available to rent to the public from May 15th to October 15th on a first-come, first-served basis. The advantages of the Community Garden over other city gardening options are a 7’ high fence, water and hoses, nearby port-a-potties, spring plot tilling, and a garden shed for storing tools. All the basic garden infrastructure is in place! There are three rental options:

### Standard Beds

14’ x 20’ plots at a cost of \$75 per season (\$50 for HCOC members).

### Donor Raised Beds

4’ x 20’ x 10” high at a cost of \$37 per season (\$25 for HCOC members) plus construction costs. There is no budget for building raised beds, so gardeners would contribute to the cost of building a raised bed (\$200 in 2021). This would be an in-kind tax-deductible donation to HCOC. In return, the gardener is entitled to garden that bed indefinitely by paying the annual seasonal rental fee.

### Rentable Raised beds\*

4’ x 20’ x 10” high at a cost of \$87.50 per season (\$75 for HCOC members). A \$50 dollar premium is included to offset the cost of building the raised bed. Those renting raised beds have the option of reserving the same raised bed annually. \*Subject to availability

**All proceeds go to the History Center of Olmsted County.  
To reserve your plot(s) call 507-282-9447 or email [services@olmstedhistory.com](mailto:services@olmstedhistory.com).**

# 2021 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

All **orange** events and programs are virtual. More details can be found on our website. Please check our website and Facebook regularly as the schedule is subject to change in the event of public health concerns.

|                |   |  |
|----------------|---|--|
| March 23       | ● | Quarterly Members Meeting  |
| March 25       | ● | WWII Heroes: Women from Minnesota  |
| April 10       | ● | Workshop: Genealogy 101: Establishing the Roots of Your Family Tree              |
| April 22       | ● | Turnout: Making Minnesota the State that Votes                                   |
| April 29       | ● | History Down the Drain: A History of Rochester Wastewater Treatment              |
| May 1          | ● | Spring Fling Day   |
| May 6          | ● | Vernacular Activism: Hmong Americans Fighting for Same-Sex Marriage in Minnesota |
| May 15         | ● | Annual Members Meeting   |
| May 20         | ● | Spit Spreads Death: The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919 in Philadelphia          |
| June 6         | ● | Food on the Farm: Stoppel Farm Tour  |
| June 12        | ● | Feeding Olmsted  |
| July 10        | ● | Beautiful Inside and Out: Mayowood Arts and Gardens Specialty Tour               |
| July 17 & 18   | ● | Living History Fair  |
| July 22        | ● | Helping Schools: HCOC and the Curriculum   |
| August 7       | ● | Conserving Mayowood: Past, Present, and Future                                   |
| August 8       | ● | Unearthed History: A tour of the Stoppel Farmstead Caves and Grounds             |
| August 14 & 15 | ● | Days of Yesteryear   |
| September 18   | ● | Hootenanny at the History Center   |
| September 25   | ● | Cemetery Walk  |
| October 2      | ● | Trolley Tour: Visiting Kalmar  |
| October 9      | ● | Harvesting the Crops   |
| October 23     | ● | Creepy Doll Cocktail Party   |
| November 13    | ● | Voting is Everyone's Right   |
| November       | ● | Mayowood Candlelight Tours   |
| December       | ● | Mayowood Christmas Tours   |

## STAFF

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**HISTORY CENTER**  
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View of Stoppel Farmstead, 1960s