

The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

SUMMER 2021 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!

A CASE FOR PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF HISTORY

By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

In the last 18 months we have simultaneously battled a global pandemic, grappled with endemic social injustice, and suffered the consequences of an increasingly polarized political system. Without question, the two latter issues have been simmering for decades and experts will tell you that a pandemic like this was only a matter of time. Eighteen months ago these issues were peripheral to many living in the United States, including many of us here in Olmsted County. We might have been aware of them and maybe even registered some concern, but felt remote enough to not be affected personally by them. The perfect storm that was 2020 utterly disrupted the conditions that made that possible. Rarely have so many of us been pushed so far beyond our comfort zone.

Arguably, it is this very comfort zone that made these recent events as explosive as they were. How? As all good historians know, things do not happen out of nowhere; all events are built on the events that precede them, which in turn provides context for the present. When we have faced crises in the past, there always seems to be a call for change or an investigation into the cause so that we might fix the problem. Demonstrations are held and reports are written, but more often than not, once some time has passed, tempers cool, and other events distract our attention, we end up accomplishing little if anything. We settle back into our comfort zone. So when the next time a similar crisis flares up, we go through the same motions, only now we add the frustration of failing to have prevented it by learning from our past experience. Do this enough times and the painful experiences of one year ago (experiences, frankly, that are far from over) are anything

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES - continued on page 4



Christine Rule
President

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

I have my grandmother’s teacup. It was stored in a barn in northern Minnesota for decades, carefully protected from all life’s hardships and the shenanigans of nine children. And for some reason she wanted me, specifically me, to have it. I know it must have mattered to her a lot, but I don’t know why. She never told anyone the story of why it was important.

We preserve a lot of things at HCOC: knick-knacks, photos, articles, and even whole buildings. But it is not merely the physical objects we are trying to preserve when we add an item to our collection. We are saving why it mattered. What it tells us about our community. The causes cared about, the impact created, the effort applied to achieve goals, will be lost if not recorded. What we do at HCOC is not just an academic exercise or a hobby. We are preserving and sharing the collective memory of this place and the people who live here.

During the past year we witnessed history informing our community response to the pandemic. Dedication to good medical care, neighbors helping neighbors, technological developments, and a passion for civic involvement are woven throughout Olmsted County’s history. It was no surprise to see them present during the recent challenges. Cultural memory was informing action.

This is why our efforts to collect stories of COVID-19 experiences and local businesses matter. This is why preserving the Stoppel Farmstead is critical. They tell important pieces of Olmsted County’s community memory.

The HCOC board looks forward to a fun summer of increasing events, new exhibits, and continued service to Olmsted County citizens and visitors. But most importantly, we look forward to continuing the mission of HCOC because the community memory we preserve matters.

GIVING, LEARNING, AND HAVING FUN: UNCOVERING THE STOPPEL TRAIL TO SECURE THE FARMSTEAD'S FUTURE

By Wayne Gannaway, Executive Director

We’re so excited with the theme of our third annual History Mystery fundraising campaign: The Stoppel Trail. The Stoppel Trail is an online fundraiser that incentivizes donations by revealing secrets about key stopping points in George Stoppel’s long journey to Olmsted County. Each time we reach a donation milestone, we unlock the next step in the journey. The donations we raise will be matched by an anonymous donor, up to \$10,000. In total, our goal is \$20,000. Follow George Stoppel’s progress on his journey by checking out our Stoppel Trail web page: olmstedhistory.com/stoppel-trail.

It’s true, the bottom line for the Stoppel Trail is, well, the History Center’s bottom line; raising money. And with the investments we are making (and will continue to make) in the Stoppel Farmstead, the donations are going to an important cause.

But at the same time, the Stoppel Trail fundraiser is an opportunity to follow along on George Stoppel’s immigration journey, learning about the political and economic climate as well as the day-to-day hardships the immigrant faces at each step. That is what our mission is all about: trying to imagine walking in the shoes of another.



An immigrant's journey to their new home is rarely straight-forward and it was no different for brothers Joseph and George Stoppel, setting out as subjects of King William the First, from the Kingdom of Württemberg (now the state of Baden-Württemberg in southwestern Germany) in the 1830s. They ended up U.S. citizens settling near Rochester in the Minnesota Territory. Even in our day, most immigrants and practically all refugees find themselves temporarily making due in an intermediary nation and moving at least once in the U.S. before putting down roots.

Today, George Stoppel's farmstead (comprised of caves, a stone house, smokehouse, and bank barn) is the oldest intact farmstead in Rochester, and possibly in Olmsted County. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. But how did they get here? Where did they stop on their journey from the Kingdom of Württemberg? Did they leave their homeland for religious, political, or economic reasons? (Donate at olmstedhistory.com/stoppel-trail to find out more!)

June is Immigration Heritage Month

We all know how difficult getting out of our comfort zone can be, and few things can take a person out of their comfort zone more than emigrating. Each step of George Stoppel's journey to Olmsted County must have caused a mix of emotions, from hopefulness and anxiety to excitement, fatigue, and perhaps occasionally boredom. Many of us take for granted the ability to speak English and be understood, yet generations of immigrants (including the Stoppels) had to learn the language on the fly. Fortunately for the Stoppels, there were a few German language newspapers available in Minnesota when they arrived. George subscribed to the St. Paul-based *Minnesota Staats-Zeitung*. Swedish immigrants had even more choices and foreign language newspapers popped up (and sometimes closed down just as quickly) throughout the state for European immigrants. Although we live in a connected world today where anything can be Googled, navigating a new language in a new land will always require stepping out of one's comfort zone.

The Stoppels exemplify early immigration experiences, with the remnants of their farmstead standing in testimony. During Immigration Heritage Month, we want to recognize the story of immigrants persevering, contributing, and making a home in Olmsted County, and the ongoing richness that immigrants have added to life in Olmsted County that continues to this day.

CONNECTING EXHIBITS: UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES

By Dan Nowakowski, Curator

This year we are highlighting two communities that have been underrepresented in Olmsted County's history and have a story to tell: the African American community and the LGBTQ community.

The exhibit *Community Connections: African Americans in Rochester* will focus on church, extracurricular, and social activities that early African American residents created for their children and new families relocating to Rochester. These activities helped combat feelings of isolation and provided social support within this new community. The exhibit *Rochester's Pride: The Beginning of Pridefest* will focus on how Pridefest got its start in 1998 under leadership of the Gay/Lesbian Community Services of Southeastern Minnesota, and how it has grown into an annual celebration.

▼ Visit the new exhibits to learn the story behind these artifacts and the communities they represent.



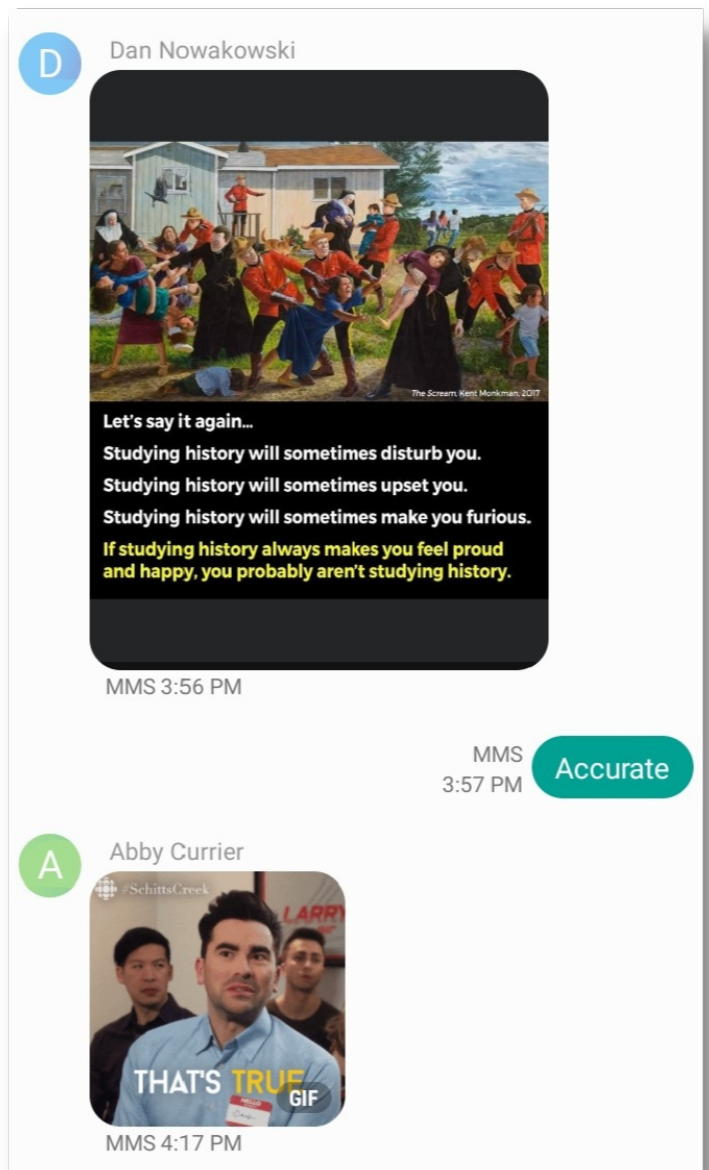
HCOC thanks First Alliance Credit Union for their generous support of the exhibit *Rochester's Pride*.

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES - continued

but surprising. This is not history repeating itself. As our Executive Director Wayne Gannaway aptly said at the annual meeting in May, “History doesn’t repeat itself, it never has...but it does echo.” This is an echo.

So how do we address this discomfoting effect of our comfort zone? In short, we embrace it and turn it to our advantage. Over the course of this last year, HCOC participated in a survey project called Visitors Count! in which we asked 200 visitors to fill out a survey so we could evaluate our strengths and weaknesses. One of the questions centered on uncomfortable aspects of history, asking respondents to rank on a scale of 1 to 10 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) whether or not learning about all parts of history is especially important to them, even the parts that might be considered controversial. Ninety-one percent responded with a 7 or higher. We at the History Center were pleased by this result because, as historians, we know all too well how complex, nuanced, and unresolved the past really is. To illustrate this point, to the right is a screen grab of a recent text exchange among a few staff at HCOC.

Being disturbed, upset, and furious are not states of being that anyone particularly enjoys inhabiting. Though some of us likely felt one or all of these in the last year (albeit about the present rather than the past), most of us actively avoid trying to feel these things and would rather stay in our comfort zone. We are, as the cliché goes, creatures of habit, and for the most part this is fine and actually quite useful. When it comes to history, however, we should be cognizant of our habits and be willing to push past them in pursuit of wider knowledge. In fact, the more light we shed on the past through the acceptance of various perspectives, the less startling new revelations about or approaches toward history become and the less insurmountable present issues seem. Why? Because fuller context makes it more difficult to be misinformed and determining the source of a problem allows for the formulation of a solution. The HCOC’s informal tagline is “Experience, Explore, Examine”. We want our visitors to experience and explore history here and perhaps most of all be encouraged to examine history. That is why it is so reassuring that our audience knows the



importance of learning about all aspects of history. It means they are willing to examine what they know about the past, even at the risk of it being upsetting. The reward for our efforts is an informed, active, and open-minded citizenry capable of critical thinking and analysis.

Getting to this point has its obstacles. For most of us in the United States, our first foray into history is through a textbook in the classroom, and it is that experience that sets the bar of our expectations of what is history (the events, the people, the places) and what history is (boring, exciting, or somewhere in between). Once that bar, that comfort zone, is set, it can be difficult to

escape, particularly with regard to the question of what is history. The difficulty lies in the misconception that history does not change. A good example of this is described by Kyle Ward in his book *History in the Making: An Absorbing Look at How American History Has Changed in the Telling Over the Last 200 Years*. In it he explains that as a high school history teacher in 1992 he was supplied with textbooks published in 1974, and “When I questioned the superintendent about the opportunity to update these texts, I was informed that since history never changes, neither should our textbooks.” Their argument was in essence, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” This is the wrong argument to make because it is not a matter of whether or not history is broken, but of whether or not history is finished. (If you are wondering, the answer any historian will give you is no, it is not.)

Aside from this, the superintendent made two mistakes in their reasoning. The first was in believing that history is an objective subject, like math or physics. The principles of these subjects are immutable. Now, some of you are probably thinking something like, “Yes, and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. That is an event that happened and cannot be changed.” And you are right, but that leads to the second mistake, which is equating history with the past. In many instances, the two words may be interchanged without consequence. The past, as Wikipedia puts it, “is the set of all events that occurred before a given point in time.” In the frame of education, history is not the past but rather the *study* of past events. So while the events themselves do not change, our interpretation of them does because inevitably our societies and cultures change.

History is written by humans, and for it to be objective it must lack the influence of personal feelings and opinions. But what are humans if not a bundle of personal feelings and opinions? This is not to say historians purposely inject their feelings and opinions into what they write. Indeed, an internet search for the definition of objective provides the sample sentence of “historians try to be objective and impartial.” (Notice we historians “try to be” and not “are” objective and impartial, perhaps because we are human!) But it must be understood that historians absorb and are shaped

by their experiences of the world around them as much as anybody. The experiences of a historian today are not the same as those of a historian one hundred years ago, so why would we expect them to interpret the past in the exact same way? For that matter, why would we expect two contemporary historians to interpret the past in the exact same way?

Here again we test the boundaries of our comfort zone because this suggests there is no consensus with history. If we cannot agree on history, then why bother with it at all? If our history is wrong, then where does that leave us? If we let ourselves step outside of our comfort zone, of our preconceived notion of what is history, maybe we would see that a diversity of interpretation is what makes history dynamic and exciting, that it is the engine that generates new ideas that both deepen and strengthen our understanding of the past. Different does not have to mean bad. The new does not have to negate the old. We can be two things at once. Have you ever had sea salt on brownies? Sweet AND savory! It’s amazing!

While this last year was uncomfortable, it also presented opportunities. When have we ever accomplished something truly worthwhile from within the confines of our comfort zone?



Remember to ask yourself that when you feel yourself clinging to yours out of inertia or fear of change. History will thank you.

APP WALKING TOUR: A MODERN WAY TO VIEW OLD ROCHESTER

By Kevin Whaley, Collections Manager and Lee Hilgendorf, Volunteer

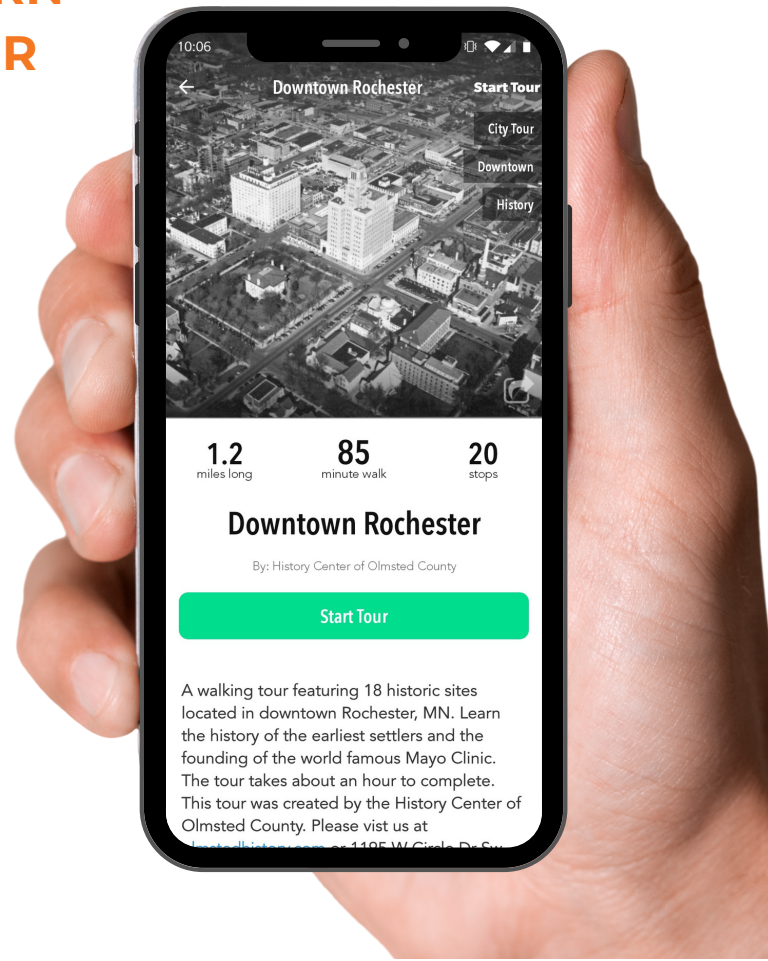
Learning about the early history of a destination gives us a real understanding of a community's background. It is how we make a true cultural connection with the people we meet and the places we visit. With that goal in mind, the History Center of Olmsted County has created a free app for mobile devices that will take you on a self-guided walking tour of a long-forgotten downtown Rochester. Guided by GPS technology, you will learn about 20 downtown locations using photos from our archives, with stories written by local authors and narrated by local personalities. The locations vary from medical buildings to theaters and hotels, and from intact buildings to those long paved over. This look back in time has been created completely in-house by HCOC volunteers and staff. This is a work in progress, and we value your opinion, so please let us know what you think. In addition, be on the lookout for future tours, possibly of Pill Hill and the Stoppel Farm.

To sign up, download [Pocketsights](#) on either your Android or Apple device. Once downloaded, search for [Downtown Rochester](#). Remember to turn on the volume. The tour can also be accessed on your PC. The easiest way to find the tour on a PC is to use your favorite search engine to search [Pocketsights Downtown Rochester](#). It should be the first link on the results list.

RENEWED EDUCATION: NEW DAY CAMPS

By Dan Nowakowski, Curator

This summer HCOC is offering a series of new day camps. These camps will cover everything from ancient fossils to early pioneers. Our newest camp, Digging the Past, is bringing paleontology to the museum. We are working with paleontologists from the Science Museum of Minnesota, who are presenting some amazing fossils from their collection and giving kids the chance to learn firsthand how to dig for them. The other day camps focus on early pioneer life and school life in the 1880s.



Now that summer is here and public health restrictions have eased, there is no better time to get out and explore our local history!



All the day camps are designed to offer a variety of different activities that highlight the subject they are covering. To learn more, visit olmstedhistory.com/programs.

LIVING HISTORY
FAIR RETURNS!

JULY
17 & 18
2021

Sat. 9am-5pm
Sun. 10am-4pm

**SAVE
THE
DATE**



Come explore the 19th Century here at the History Center! This year, we will be recreating the Battle of Wilson's Creek while transforming our grounds into a robust 19th-century village complete with handcrafts, a tin smith, and oh so much more! Join the Union Army, learn how to sew a quilt, check out the latest fashions, and watch cannons explode in this action-packed, family friendly event!

HCOC OUT IN THE COMMUNITY: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND FORGING RELATIONSHIPS

By Abby Currier, Community Engagement & Events Coordinator

With restrictions lifting and a fully vaccinated staff, the History Center of Olmsted County's staff has been excited to get back outside of our bubbles and start exploring again. This past quarter we began reaching out to different community groups and working with these new contacts to work on a variety of projects.

Back in April, Wayne Gannaway, Dan Nowakowski, and Abby Currier went out to meet with Kalmar township supervisors to talk about our upcoming exhibit on Kalmar township. We were able to meet at the Kalmar townhall and learn all about what townships are and how they function as a subsidiary of the county government. Next, we headed into Byron to meet with the Byron Historical Society. We were really excited to meet with this group of individuals and will be highlighting some of their stories in our upcoming exhibit on both Kalmar Township and the City of Byron. We love working with our local community partners to help them tell their stories. To learn more about these interesting places, be sure to come in and visit our new exhibit when it is up at the end of June!

In addition to visiting some of these local destinations, we also decided to stretch our legs and go visit another county historical society. We like to keep in close connection with other historical societies so we can exchange ideas and help to bring you the best ideas we can!

On May 5th, the entire staff went up to Carver County to visit their historical society and hear about their historical farm: the Historic Andrew Peterson Farmstead. Wendy Biorn, Carver County Historical Society executive director, gave us a tour of both the historical society and the farmstead. They are working with Miller Dunwiddie Architects to restore their historic farm site. We are working with the same firm to get architectural drawings of our historic George Stoppel Farmstead, so it was nice to see a project that had progressed further than ours and it inspired our work and gave us ideas for how we can best preserve and protect this treasure. Be sure to stop by and check out the preliminary drawings and take a look at the farm. We also have several exciting events coming up this summer about the farmstead. Check out olmstedhistory.com/events to see the most up to date list of upcoming events and sign up for a couple!



▲ Wayne talking to Jim Hanson, Township Supervisor for Kalmar Township.

▲ Byron Historical Society.

▼ We had some surprise guests on our tour of the Andrew Peterson Farmstead.

▼ Our tour of the farm was both informative and chilly.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

JEAN GUTSCHENRITTER AND JERRY SWANSON

The History Center of Olmsted County is located on over 50 acres of gorgeous farm land. While we love our campus and the open air we have right outside, it can sometimes be a bit too much to manage. That is why we are always so grateful to our volunteers that help us keep HCOC looking its best. In particular, we wanted to highlight Jean Gutschenritter and Jerry Swanson who help us keep our lawn looking beautiful at all times.

Both Jean and Jerry come out once a week and mow all of our grass to make sure that our guests can walk around freely and we don't get that shaggy, overgrown look. We are always so impressed with their work and the fact that they dedicate a day each week to helping us. The next time you are here on the grounds and see someone on one of our riding lawn mowers, give them a wave and a thanks for keeping HCOC beautiful!



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
and fill out an application!
We cannot wait to see you!

OUR GENEROUS SPONORS:



- RMS Law Firm, PLLC
- Marco Technologies
- Olmsted Medical Center
- Dunlap & Seeger, P.A.
- Ryan Siding & Windows



Thank you for helping us make history happen every day!

2021 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

All **orange** events and programs are virtual. All **teal** events and programs are hybrid. More details can be found on our website. Please check our website and Facebook regularly as the schedule is subject to change.

June 16	●	Pioneer Life (day camp)
June 17	●	Turnout: Making Minnesota the State that Votes
June 23	●	Pioneer School Day (day camp)
June 30	●	Digging the Past (day camp)
July 7	●	Pioneer Life (day camp)
July 8	●	Discovery, Exploration and Science in 36 Miles of Cave Passages
July 14	●	Pioneer School Day (day camp)
July 15	●	Poplar Forest: The Lost Private World of Thomas Jefferson
July 15	●	The Confederate Battle Flag: Symbol of Heritage or Discord?
July 17 & 18	●	Living History Fair
July 21	●	Pioneer Life (day camp)
July 22	●	Helping Schools: HCOC and the Curriculum
July 22	●	Exploring the Unknown: Lessons from George W. Gibbs Jr.'s Legacy
July 28	●	Digging the Past (day camp)
August 4	●	Pioneer School Day (day camp)
August 5	●	A Village in the Sixties
August 8	●	Unearthed History: A Tour of the Stoppel Farmstead Caves and Grounds
August 14 & 15	●	Days of Yesteryear
August 26	●	Tracks to the Future: The History of Trains in Rochester
September 9	●	Lost & Hidden History of Rochester, Minnesota
September 18	●	Hootenanny at the History Center
September 23	●	Volunteer Appreciation Event
September 25	●	Cemetery Walk
September 28	●	Members Quarterly Meeting
October 21	●	Fall Fest
October 23	●	Creepy Doll Cocktail Party
November 13	●	Voting is Everyone's Right
November	●	Mayowood Christmas Tours
December	●	Mayowood Candlelight Tours
December 28	●	Members Quarterly Meeting

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Don't forget to head over to
olmstedhistory.com/stoppel-trail to
help us reach our fundraising goal.
Your support is appreciated!