

# The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

## SPRING 2024 Newsletter



**HISTORY CENTER**  
OF OLMSTED COUNTY

### WHAT'S IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

Milestones and Boundary Markers .....	1
Thank You Supporters!.....	3
President's Letter .....	4
A Familiar Face with a New Role at the History Center.....	5
HCOC Programs: Starting Strong for 2024 .....	6
How and Why Change Happens: Answering History's Toughest Questions .....	7
From the Vaults: Ediths Wedding Dress.....	8
Spring Refresh: Exhibits at The History Center .....	8
A New Face at the History Center .....	9
Let's Flash Forward to Summer .....	9
Staff and Board Members .....	10
2024 Events & Programs .....	11

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

## MILESTONES AND BOUNDARY MARKERS

By **Wayne Gannaway** | Executive Director

**We historians love milestones of all kinds, from civic and architectural birthdays to booms and busts in population, business growth, or acreage cultivated.**

Yes, we history buffs also take note of the obituaries, from those who passed last week or in the last century. These milestones are markers in time, evidence that a person, place, or object was part of a larger story—or historical context, as historians call it.

But I also enjoy anniversaries because they're simply fun—like birthdays. Over the last few years we have explored Olmsted County's history by co-creating exhibits with other nonprofits looking to celebrate a milestone. In 2019 we partnered with Rochester Symphony to create an exhibit to celebrate their 100th anniversary and last year KTTC shared many of their artifacts and created a multi-media presentation to celebrate their 70th. And I haven't even mentioned the many History Center exhibits that marked important civic and community milestones.

And we do have a lot of anniversaries coming up. (Do you know what big anniversary is coming in 2026?) This spring look for a co-curated exhibit with the Rochester Area Foundation marking their 80th year as an essential building block of local philanthropy.



▲ The Plummer House shortly after it was finished.



▲ The Plummer Building

## 2024 is also the centennial of an architectural landmark in Rochester, the Plummer House, a milestone that will coincide with the restoration of the eye-catching Plummer Tower.

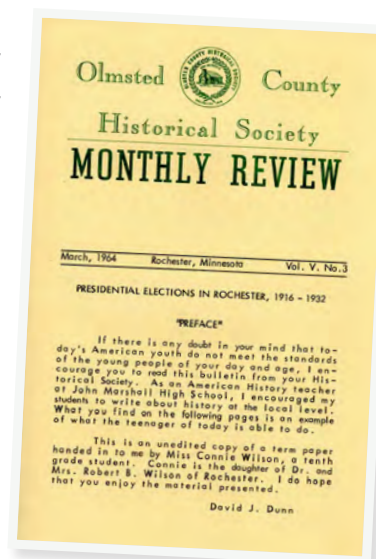
Dr. Plummer crammed his house with amazing domestic innovations, while his wife, Daisy, ran the household and secured the property as a public asset by donating it to the Art Center, which eventually transferred it to the City. Dr. Plummer’s house also proved to be a preview of Rochester’s most enduring and iconic landmark, the Mayo Clinic’s Plummer Building, completed in 1928. The History Center is thrilled to be partnering with the Plummer House Centennial Steering Committee to co-curate an exhibit showcasing the Plummers and their incredible house. Many don’t realize that the Plummer House and grounds are owned by the City of Rochester and that the public are free to stroll the grounds and tour the home (with paid admission) seasonally on Wednesdays. Watch our Facebook and Instagram pages and our e-newsletter for more details on the steering committee’s upcoming centennial celebration plans.

A lot was happening in Rochester during the 1920s. It was a formative period of civic vision and achievement shaped for the common good by the children of Olmsted County’s earliest generation. From infrastructure, public health, and the arts (Daisy Plummer helped establish the Rochester Symphony), community leaders recognized a greater good.

## FOUNDER OF HCOC’S SCRIBE PASSES

I also want to recognize the recent passing of David J. Dunn, an HCOC executive director from 1964-1967 and the founder of what we now call the Scribe. David helmed the Olmsted County Historical Society, as it was called then, during the period when Dr. Chuck and Alice Mayo bequeathed Mayowood to the organization. As a former teacher at John Marshall, David emphasized outreach to teachers and students, including a Junior History program, traveling classroom exhibits, and a training program for 2nd grade teachers. He was a prolific writer of local history, in the Scribe, the Post Bulletin, and monographs. Reflecting on David Dunn’s tenure, as well as those who came before and after him, I am reminded that executive directors (and board members) are caretakers of this nearly 100-year old community asset. We ought to take ownership of the opportunities and challenges of directing it, while remembering that we are not owners, but stewards.

An OCHS newsletter from David Dunn’s tenure as executive director.



# 2024 IS OFF TO A GREAT START, THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS!

**By Wayne Gannaway**  
Executive Director

History Center supporters pulled out all the stops late last year, giving local history a big boost entering into 2024. We cannot thank you enough. When Olmsted County budgeted a 16% decrease in the annual allocation to the History Center, you stepped up as the best advocates any local history museum could ask for. And I know, like me, you are grateful for the county board's thoughtful reappraisal of their initial budget and for restoring our funding.

Our supporters also delivered our best winter appeal in recent memory, increasing end-of-year giving by 21% compared to last year. And more people participated in our appeal than in 2022 or 2021. It's not unusual for donors to give in the name of a deceased loved one. This year someone gave to the annual appeal on behalf of two of his next door neighbors, a first in my time at the History Center. Each gift is special and deeply appreciated.

Through the winter appeal, many of our donors leveled up, becoming members of our History Makers giving society. We established History Makers last year to encourage philanthropy at HCOC and to do a better job of acknowledging our donors.

To learn more, check out our **History Makers web page:** [olmstedhistory.com/individual-giving](http://olmstedhistory.com/individual-giving)



▲ Members enjoying a winter potluck picnic and trivia on February 17th.

## A big thank you to History Makers and all who gave in 2023!

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▶ Visit our website to see a full list of donors from 2023



## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

By Paul Scanlon | President

Greetings! The unseasonably warm weather recently has made travel to the History Center (HCOC) easier than most winters. We await the upcoming Rochester City Lines trial bus route to the History Center in hopes that we will be accessible to more people in the near future.

On Saturday, February 17th, the History Center hosted a winter indoor “Picnic”. The potluck bonanza included hearty sandwiches, salads, casseroles, relish trays and a large variety of delicious desserts. After a relaxed meal and a chance to renew friendships and acquaintances, the group enjoyed an historical trivia contest devised by Ashley and staff. It featured historical categories of Olmsted, Minnesota, US and World, and dealers choice. Expertise was spread evenly enough that scores were close throughout the contest, which was eventually won by Dick Krom’s team “The 1st MN”. Included among the questions was the founding year of HCOC, 1926. It serves as a reminder that the Centennial of the History Center is coming in 2026, just two years away.

The Center has seen a quiet but steady stream of visitors recently. Two new exhibits include: “Life and Death in Olmsted County”, which explores local practices regarding death and mourning through the lens of Oakwood Cemetery, which had its 160th Anniversary (1863-2023) last year. 1863 was also important in Mayo Clinic history because it saw the arrival of William Worrall Mayo in Rochester to serve as examining physician for the Union Army for Southern Minnesota. Preparation is underway for the annual Cemetery Walk on September 21, 2024.

Meanwhile, the “Get to Know a Township” exhibit has been refocused on Cascade Township, a 6 by 6 mile square of land

which, prior to annexation included the north side of town up to 75th Street, and spanned from 60th Avenue NW to about 11th Avenue NE. Historical tidbits are enlightening.

The Willson Wicklund Research Center (“the archives”) has been active as a source for local historians and genealogists, whose work is published in the Post Bulletin and in the many local history books carried by the History Center’s gift shop. Tom Weber and Loren Else continue their steady production of historical interest items for the Post Bulletin, and Andrew Wood’s recent biography of his father, Earl Wood, entitled “Life at High G-Force”, is available in the gift shop along with many other works of local history.

We continue progress on restoration of the George Stoppel farm. Work on the smokehouse is complete and we anticipate more work on the barn this spring and summer. Fundraising efforts are ongoing with support from State funds, as well as from individuals, local businesses, and private foundations.

Operational funds provided by the county were threatened with budget cuts, but fortunately, were restored in the final budget for this year. We have noted that funding in this county is well below that provided to county historical groups in the comparable Minnesota counties of St. Louis (Duluth) and Stearns (St. Cloud).

**The staff continue to plan for regularly scheduled events as well as new and special events. We hope you’ll come visit us soon!**



## A FAMILIAR FACE WITH A NEW ROLE AT THE HISTORY CENTER

Greetings History Center enthusiasts. My name is Molli Funk and I am the new Interim Mayowood Historic Site Manager. If you frequent the halls of the History Center of Olmsted County my face may be familiar to you. I joined HCOC as a Mayowood Tour guide in 2018. After leaving HCOC for a brief period, I returned in 2022 to resume giving tours at Mayowood Historic Home, and then became the Mayowood Historic Site Assistant in 2023. I am thrilled to now begin my new role at the History Center as the Mayowood Historic Site Manager and have been busy preparing for the 2024 season at Mayowood Historic Home.

Here's a little bit about my background. I consider myself a local girl, growing up in Plainview, MN. I have been a history lover from the time I was small. While on vacation, my parents made a deliberate effort to visit as many museums and historic sites as possible. I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Graphic Publications and a minor in American History from St. Mary's University in Winona, MN. I started my career as a Lifetouch photographer, managing a portrait studio in Edina, MN. I decided to return to school and received my master's degree in education in 2013. During the last 10 years I taught children age birth to 6, both typically developing and with special needs, as well as their parents. I enjoyed implementing history into my lesson planning and field trips. I am currently enrolled in a certificate program through the American Association of State



▲ Molli Funk

and Local History (AASLH). It is exciting to make the shift into the public history field. I was not surprised to learn that the practice of child directed learning, which is embraced in many preschool programs, mirrors how we learn when we visit museums (indirect learning).

**I am excited for the upcoming Mayowood season, which is just around the corner.** Not only do I have the privilege of leading a talented group of tour guides, but this season will feature a new event that will give visitors a more inclusive view of the home. In July, we will hold a specialty tour with a corresponding exhibit featuring the mothers, daughters, and staff of Mayowood. More information will be added to our events page soon. Make sure to check our website!

**I look forward to seeing new and returning visitors at Mayowood. The regular season begins April 3rd!**

# HCOC PROGRAMS: STARTING STRONG FOR 2024

By **Madeleine Lawler** | Education Coordinator

We are only a few months into 2024 and the lecture and the programming schedule is busy! We hosted two lectures and two Saturday programs. Both lectures were given by HCOC members Lee Hilgendorf (“The First 50 years of Flight in Rochester”) and Phil Wheeler (“Immigration Then and Now and Southeast Minnesota”). Both lectures are now available on our YouTube page!

However, the big change this season has been the increased weekend programming. We kicked off with “Decorate Your Own Wunderkammer,” and a discussion about how artifacts fit into our collection. February saw a huge success with our “Vintage Valentine Making” program. We had Valentine cards from our collection (some from the Mayo Family) on display for guests to take inspiration from. Over 34 people of all ages attended! This program would not have gone nearly as smoothly as it did without the help of one of our volunteers: Marcia G.! Marcia was able to lend her expert creative eye to guests and show off the Valentines from our collection.

Our volunteers are the heart and soul of the History Center, the Magic Makers if you will. From deck rebuilding (thanks Build Crew!), to giving lectures, scanning documents, transcribing letters, answering research questions, helping with Saturday programs, and reading for Story Time. We would not be able to make changes without you— thank you!

**Be sure to keep an eye on our website for more upcoming programming!**



▲ (Top) Wayne introducing Phil wheeler before his February 19th lecture.

(Bottom) Guests making Valentines on February 10th.

# HOW AND WHY CHANGE HAPPENS: ANSWERING HISTORY'S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS

By Krista Lewis | Archivist, CA

Benjamin Franklin is known for many things, including saying, "...in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." I would add a third thing: change. Change has been on my mind a lot lately. Changes here at the History Center, both recent and forecasted. Change to the Minnesota state flag. Even an art exhibit that we visited as a staff at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in January focused on change, particularly highlighting Thomas Cole (1801-1848), noting he "was deeply concerned about the changing appearance of America's landscapes."

It's all brought to mind an article I wrote for the Summer 2021 newsletter called "A Case for Pushing the Boundaries of History" (available on our website). In it I try to make the point that history, as the study of past events, isn't static. Our understanding of the past is constantly changing as we uncover new evidence and sources, or simply analyze things from a different perspective. More broadly, history is very flexible: it can be a recounting of the past, a nostalgic reflection on lived experiences, and the legacy we leave behind. But in my opinion, above all, it's a tool to help us grasp how and why things change.

In that article, I also talked about how we generally don't like going outside our comfort zones. Change often forces us to do just that, therefore, we don't like change either; it brings with it a degree of uncertainty. PBS has a digital short program called "It's Okay to Be Smart", and in season 9, episode 12 the host spoke about uncertainty in terms of science, but I think what he had to say works just as well if we're speaking about history, so it's quoted here at length:

*Uncertainty is an uncomfortable feeling for us psychologically speaking... We'll unconsciously choose the conclusions that we want to be true, and then seek out information that supports that conclusion instead of looking at the information and*



▲ Thomas Cole's "Distant View of Niagara Falls", 1830. In the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.



▲ My own view of Niagara Falls, August 2021. Notice the subtle changes since 1830.

*using that to draw our conclusions. We all do this... Our default mental state is being uncomfortable with uncertainty, and it takes work to get comfortable being in that strange middle place where you don't know everything, of not being sure, and then letting new, better information guide you to your conclusion, not the other way around. Science is how we do that... Understanding how science works means embracing uncertainty, being aware of your uncertainty, and letting it guide you to a better place, and we all need to keep practicing that.*

Change isn't always good, and it isn't always necessary, but it can't be avoided. Rather than shunning it, we should use history to seek to understand it. Then maybe the next time change comes into our lives we'll take a beat before drawing our conclusions about it. To quote again from the Thomas Cole exhibit: "By looking to the landscapes of the past, we can, hopefully, rethink our future."

# FROM THE VAULTS: EDITH'S WEDDING DRESS

By Dan Nowakowski | Collections Manager



Marriage has experienced many changes throughout history, but one piece has remained customarily untouched: the wedding dress. Characteristically, the bride chooses the dress for their special day. These dresses range in different styles, patterns, and even colors.

▲ Edith Graham Mayo's restored wedding dress

This past year, the History Center undertook a noteworthy restoration project of Edith Graham Mayo's Wedding Dress. The restoration, completed by Midwest Art Conservation Center, included cleaning the dress, repairing shattered lace and silk, and addressing creases and distortions; and it means we can appropriately display it for future exhibits and highlight Edith Mayo's story.

Judith Hartzell, granddaughter-in-law to Edith Mayo, commented on the dress in her 2015 book, *Mrs. Charlie—The Other Mayo*, saying, “According to the newspaper, Edith ‘was extremely beautiful in a dress of cream silk crepe.’ It was trimmed at the high neckline and hem of its long, full skirt with ecru lace and had puffed three-quarter sleeves.”

Edith and Charlie had a spring wedding on April 3, 1893. We count ourselves lucky to have such a one-of-a-kind artifact, and with its restoration we look forward to sharing it for many generations to come.

## SPRING REFRESH: EXHIBITS AT THE HISTORY CENTER

By Jenna Collins | Collections Manager

Spring seems to have come a little early, and with it, new updates to exhibits at the History Center! Our exhibit on the history of IBM in Rochester has been refreshed with new pedestals for artifacts, labels, and photographs. The large mural “Marking Broadway” in the exhibit hall also has new display information, and the original concept art that inspired the mural in the 1930s is now featured as well. Last but certainly not least, the Get to Know a Township exhibit has a new feature: Cascade Township!



▲ Jenna sprucing up the IBM exhibit.



▲ The 1874 Atlas of Minnesota.

**Learn about the origins of Cascade and see several artifacts, including a site marker that sat on the border of Cascade and Haverhill townships.**

Also on display is an 1874 Atlas of Minnesota, full of illustrations that visitors can page through themselves. Illustrations include the George Stoppel farmstead, Dr. W.W. Mayo's original home on 2nd Street, and other illustrations from around the county and state.





## A NEW FACE AT THE HISTORY CENTER

Hello, my name is Brian Boettcher and I am the new Buildings and Grounds Manager for the History Center. I'm very happy and excited to be here with such a friendly and talented group of people. This is a rather unique experience to be able to work on everything from preserving and restoring historic buildings, building maintenance on newer structures, to grounds keeping, all on 54 acres of beautiful southeastern Minnesota farm land.

A little bit about me and my background. I grew up in southern Minnesota on my father's farm where we raised chickens, pigs, dairy cattle, corn, oats, beans, alfalfa, and always had a large garden. I kept involved with the farm while working at Mayo Clinic for 47 years. At Mayo Clinic, I worked in the Facilities Department most of those years except for the last few years when my group was transferred to the IT Department. I had many different jobs while at Mayo Clinic but all of it in some way revolved around installing and maintaining medical equipment.

Since starting at the History Center, everyday has been an adventure. The collection of artifacts is large and impressive and presents challenging storage issues. The environment must be carefully controlled and monitored, from temperature and humidity to mice and insects. Some of the building control systems needed work, and of course there was lawn and garden equipment that got some hard use this past summer and needed repairs. Plus, plans are being made to begin the Stoppel barn restoration this summer beginning with the foundation and main structural supports. It's going to be a fun and exciting year. Hope to see you here this year enjoying the History Center and all it has to offer.

## LET'S FLASH FORWARD TO SUMMER

By Ashley Evans | Events Coordinator

Why do we do events? To see your smiling faces, of course! At our most recent member's event, the Winter Picnic, many people came and enjoyed a great potluck and fun team trivia. It was a great place for comradery, and I certainly hope you all join us for the next member's only event in summertime. Now, this time of year is quite slow for many people working special events – though we have many educational programs through the year. So, let us flash forward and look at summer.

May is when our special events are going to largely take off. We will host "Mother's Day at Mayowood", a lovely afternoon tea and tour, our summer member's social, and the event I am personally most excited for: Walk Around the World. Now, that may sound familiar, and that is because it is the same beloved IMAA event with some new additions. We are partnering with IMAA to expand and explore the breadth of such an amazing cultural event. This year it will occur on June 22nd at the History Center; more details to come.

**While it may be quiet in our halls now, I am ready for things to ramp up as the ground begins to thaw. I expect to see all of your amazing smiles at our upcoming events!**



# HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

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# 2024 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

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

- **March 22** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **March 23** ▶ Joint program with SPARK: What Keeps Animals Warm?
- **March 29** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **April: National Volunteer Appreciation Month**
- **April 3** ▶ Mayowood regular season tours begin
- **April 5** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **April 12** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **April 19** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **April 26** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **May: National Historic Preservation Month**
- **May 3** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **May 9** ▶ Lecture: Gary Heyn at OCGS presents *Standing at the Grave*
- **May 10** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **May 11** ▶ Mother's Day at Mayowood
- **May 16** ▶ Lecture: Steve Gardiner presents *Historic Bridges of Southeast Minnesota*
- **May 17** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **May 22** ▶ Lecture: Bill Hickey and Mike Nigbur present *Rochester's Plummer House: Celebrating a Legacy*
- **May 23** ▶ 83rd Annual Meeting
- **May 24** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **May 31** ▶ Story Time Fridays at the History Center
- **June 22** ▶ Walk Around the World
- **July 13-14** ▶ Specialty tour and exhibit: *Women of Mayowood: Mothers, Daughters, and Staff*



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