

The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

SUMMER 2025 Newsletter



HISTORY CENTER
OF OLMSTED COUNTY

WHATS IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

Fun Facts: What History Is Made Of	1
An Unexpected Finding	2
Historic Mayowood Preservation	3
Delightfully Unexpected	4
Celebrating 50 Years of Fiber Arts	5
We Have Chickens	6
Welcome, Laura Singh.....	6
Upcoming Events and Programs	7
Staff and Board Members	7

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

FUN FACTS: WHAT HISTORY IS MADE OF

By Valerie Wassmer, Executive Director

Ask anyone who has traveled or spent significant time with me, and they might well mention the sometimes interesting, sometimes annoying, Valerie fun fact. Sometimes it's a quick remark about an event or location we may be visiting, sometimes it comes out as a full-fledged history lesson; either way, I find it interesting enough to share. When visiting Galena, Illinois, and touring President Grant's home, for instance, I felt it necessary to share the fun fact that Grant's wife Julie Dent had a condition known as Strabismus, more commonly known as being cross-eyed.

Julie packed her bags for Philadelphia when it was discovered the condition could be corrected with little risk, however, she decided against the procedure when her beloved husband wrote that he didn't want her eyes corrected as they were the eyes that he fell in love with. Now, that is a fun (and romantic) fact that you might not read about in your history books.

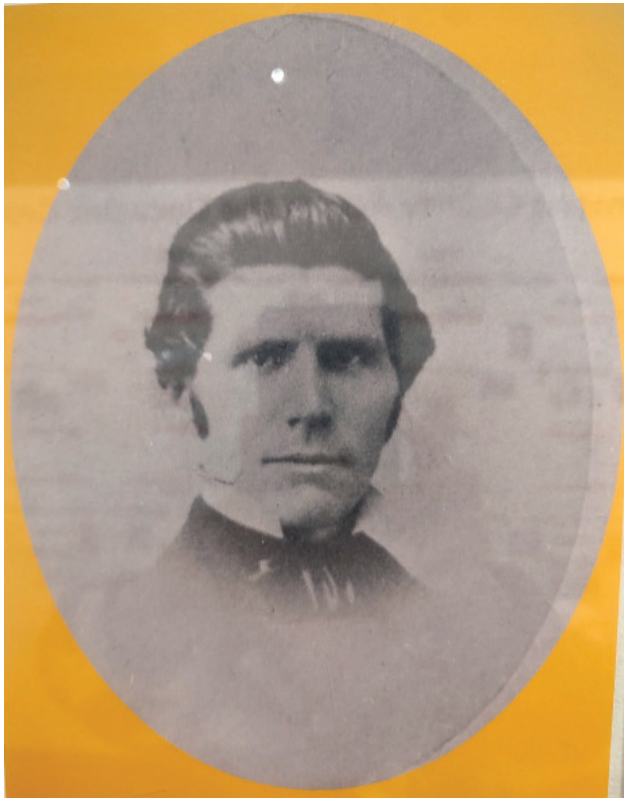
Approaching my one-year anniversary here at the History Center, I am happy to report on a plethora of new fun facts that I've learned related to Olmsted County. As a dog lover, one of my favorites is Lucy Wilder, a bookstore owner who sent her daily deposits to the bank via her Great Dane named Thor! Another fun fact, known to many historians in the area: Olmsted County is named for a man who never lived here. David Olmsted was born in Vermont, lived in Iowa, and moved to Minnesota where he became the mayor of St. Paul in 1854.

He did many things, but he never lived in Olmsted County! Closely connected to the History Center campus, fun facts regarding George Stoppel and his 1860s farmstead include an 1877 story in the Record and Union that stated that a man by the last name Stoppel (who claimed he was George's nephew) was charged with departing town with a good number of his friend's horses; he was held on \$500 bail while awaiting his trial with a grand jury.

FUN FACTS - continued on Page 2

George and Maria had at least ten different hired farmhands over the years, most came from Germany, but several are listed on the census as being from Russia. Fun fact, at that time, Russia allowed German farmers to use the land near the Volga and Black Sea areas of Russia, they were known as the 'Russian Germans'.

For those who think history is boring, perhaps you simply need to listen for the fun facts!



David Olmsted, he'll always be remembered here, even if he didn't come here.



Lucy Wilder, ca. 1945, who had a very well-trained dog (photo from Post-Bulletin).



AN UNEXPECTED FINDING – ACADEMICS AND OUR HISTORY SOCIETY

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

This issue includes a number of unexpected or funny discoveries about the history of Olmsted County as found by staff while working with the collection. I'd like to add my own unexpected discovery about the History Center: collectively, the History Center has not contributed many academic articles to peer-reviewed, indexed history journals for the past half century.

We have a proud culture of contributing many articles to our county communities through non-peer-reviewed communications such as the Rochester Post-Bulletin. Our members, such as Lee Hilgendorf and Tom Weber, write amazing stories that keep our county's history top-of-mind to many of the newspaper's readers. Others, such as Paul Scanlon and Virginia Wright-Peterson, have written outstanding books on a variety of county historical topics. We are so fortunate to have such good people involved in our mission of disseminating the history of Olmsted County.

Surprisingly, we have not had many members in the past half century writing academic articles about historic events, people, and groups in our county. Specifically, we have published few articles in Minnesota History. This journal is published by the Minnesota Historical Society and is one of the country's most respected academic history journals. From the founding of the Olmsted County Historical Society in 1926 through 1950, members and staff often published excellent articles about Olmsted County history in Minnesota History. However, almost no such articles have been published in that important journal since 1950.

Why is it important for us to publish academic articles in peer-reviewed journals? Peer-reviewed articles are the result of dedicated research and discovery into the history of our county. There are so many great stories to tell about our communities and county, ranging from our earliest natural history through Native American cultures to immigration, the founding of Mayo Clinic, and the start of IBM and the many companies that have developed from it. For example, few counties in Minnesota can match our stories such as having one of the most creative communities in the state based on patents issued to IBM and Mayo Clinic personnel over the years. Articles in indexed journals are easily discoverable by others who are interested in history and may stimulate further investigations into our county's

AN UNEXPECTED FINDING - continued on Page 3

history and its contributions to the greater society.

In the coming year, we will be pursuing academic links with the Minnesota Historical Society and one or more major state universities. We will consider opportunities to increase our academic productivity and discovery of new stories. Hopefully, we will restart publishing articles about Olmsted County in Minnesota History, clearly documenting the remarkable stories and contributions of our communities to the development of our region, state, and nation.

HISTORIC MAYOWOOD PRESERVATION: DEVOTION AND JOY

By Molli Funk, Historic Mayowood Site Manager

In the last year and a half that I have managed Mayowood I have made many unexpected discoveries. The majority of these discoveries revolve around the history of artifacts, or learning new information about the Mayo family. There are also the moments that I discovered a source to verify conflicting information. But what has truly been the most unexpected discovery working at Historic Mayowood, was not a physical object but an action, that of devotion.

Those who work and volunteer at Mayowood express devotion to the preservation of Mayowood and the Mayo story. I see it demonstrated in the tours that are conducted by Mayowood guides, in those who spend time in the History Center and Mayo Clinic archives researching the history of Mayowood and the Mayo family, and in the care given to the artifacts in the home. Mayowood invokes a sense of joy for those who choose to invest their time, energy, and resources into it. This sense of joy and expression of devotion is not limited to the current generation at Mayowood.

The HCOC archives contain a plethora of records from past History Center employees and Friends of Mayowood detailing programs, fundraising, and restoration work that were implemented to support the preservation of Mayowood. As I look forward to the 2025 season, I'm excited to once again work with our talented Christmas

decorators as they share their time, talent, and resources to help HCOC transform Mayowood for the Christmas season. As for myself, walking into Mayowood invokes a sense of joy that I hope to impart that to all of HCOC's guests through guided tours and programming.



HCOC Archivist Krista Lewis is pulling box 14 from the Records of Olmsted County Historical Society in the archives. The box contains documents related to past Mayowood programming.



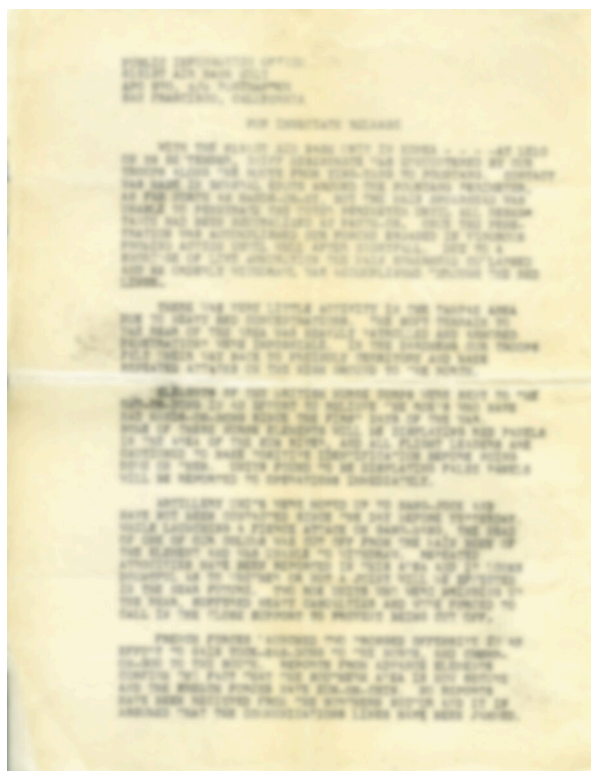
DELIGHTFULLY UNEXPECTED: ARCHIVAL SURPRISES

By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

In general, I'm not one who likes surprises. Yet some of my favorite moments on the job or in doing historical research are the ones that I don't see coming. And what's surprising about that is it happens a lot here at the History Center. Here are just a few examples.

The first is from one of the first projects I tackled, and it remains one of my favorite documents in the collection. It's what appears to be a military press release about maneuvers and operations in Korea, which I came across while organizing the Mayo Family Papers. Upon careful reading, however, you quickly realize it's all double entendres or innuendos.

You may think it odd that such a raunchy thing would be a favorite collection item, but it is because it's so very human. History is often equated with being stiff, boring, dry – any number of synonyms for “uninteresting”. But history is created by humans, and we do and say stupid things on a daily basis just to make the people around us laugh. Someone 70-odd years ago took the time to draft a legitimate looking and rather creative narrative of off-color jokes just to amuse their friends. And now it's in an archive!



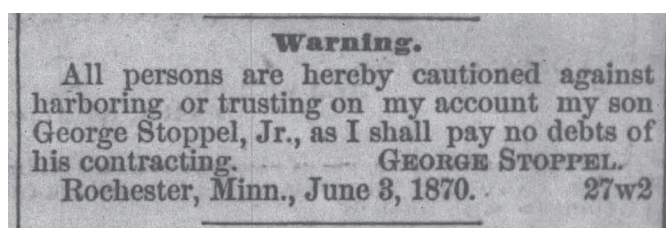
The second is a photograph of a youth hockey team from 1977-78. It was one of 338 such photos donated in 2022. The cataloging process can become repetitive when you're dealing with so much similar content, so I'm pretty sure I laughed out loud when I took a close look at this one. On the far right in the second row, one of the players strategically hid the lower half of his face behind the player in front of him. And to the left of that player's head, you can see a golden can of Miller beer. Teenagers, am I right?



Finally, the last example certainly wasn't intended to be funny when it was created. It's a one line “Warning” printed in the Post and Record on June 4, 1870, in which George Stoppel, whose big red barn we're currently rehabilitating, tells readers not to trust his son and he won't pay his debts for him.

Maybe it's just me, but the passage of 155 years has cast this in a more amusing light, and it makes the characters, who were of course real people, all the more relatable. What says “tough love dad” more than getting fed up and calling your son out in the newspaper?

We often think of the future as the realm of surprises and the unexpected, but clearly the past still has a few things hidden up its sleeve.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF FIBER ART IN SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA

By Chris Delisle, Assistant Education and Event Coordinator

On behalf of the History Center of Olmsted County and all of the artists of the Zumbro River Fiber Arts Guild, we are extremely proud to present a diverse exhibition of fiber-based artwork. This exhibition spans the past, looks at the present, and plots into the future. It is an alluring collection of colors, forms, patterns, and textures. These amazing artists have been producing artwork as a group since 1976 and are currently celebrating their 50th Anniversary.

The origins of the Guild have a long connection to the History Center of Olmsted County. Elizabeth Remfert, who was a founding member, along with Marge Manthei and Rene Bergstrom all met through a weaving class through community education. After their class ended, they then began spinning regularly as part of the Historical Society Round Table Group here at the History Center. This was the genesis of the Zumbro River Fiber Arts Guild. Currently, there are 105 members, who span Southeastern Minnesota and occupy 11 counties within the state.

The exhibition consists of two galleries of artwork, the first focusing on the guild as a whole, showcasing a large variety of textiles and fiber work from different artists and different practices. The second gallery spotlights a specific artistic practice within the world of fiber art, and this gallery will change every month to showcase a different technique. For example, one month highlights weaving, the next crocheting, followed by fabric dyeing, etc. This is a great reason to check out the exhibition multiple times over the course of its tenure, there will always be something new to experience. Support these amazing artists and experience their work.



WE HAVE CHICKENS!

Allow us to introduce our newest staff members! Nine chickens joined our team at the History Center some weeks ago. They are growing very quickly and are getting ready to run the place soon. We are still collecting name suggestions for the ladies on our little "naming tree" at the History Center.



WELCOME, LAURA SINGH!

Hello! My name is Laura, I joined the HCOG team in April. You'll currently find me at the front desk, and I'll be involved in marketing and events over time. I'm so excited to further get to know the HCOG and the many dedicated people who make this place so special!

We moved from Heidelberg (Germany) to Rochester last summer and had a great start here. I love being outside in nature – these days mostly on playgrounds with my 2-year-old who keeps me on my toes when I'm not at the History Center. To combat culinary homesickness, I started baking my own bread, which after a few frustrating attempts has become a great and surprisingly time-consuming hobby (ask me about it and I promise I won't stop talking about bread...!)



2025 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Please check our website and Facebook regularly as the schedule is subject to change, olmstedhistory.com/events

- **June 14** – Zumbro River Fiber Arts Guild Knitting Demonstration
- **June 15** – Rochester Roosters Home Opener
- **June 19** – Gather 'Round Lecture Series, "The History of America's Negro Leagues" with Richard Bogovich
- **June 21** – BBQ at the Farmstead
- **June 23** – Post Bulletin Online Access Celebration, panel discussion and Q&A at the Rochester Public Library
- **June 29** – Rochester Roosters Celebrity Base Ball Game
- **July 1** – The Village Farmers' Market (every Tuesday through the summer)
History Day Camp (every Tuesday in July)
- **July 9** – 4-H Day Camp
- **July 19** – Zumbro River Fiber Arts Guild Dye and Surface Design Demonstration
- **August 9** – Zumbro River Fiber Arts Guild Spinning Demonstration
- **August 9-10** – Days of Yesteryear hosted by MHRT
- **August 14** – Dog Days of Summer, K9 dogs & pet walk
- **September 6** – Driftless Concert

STAFF

Valerie Wassmer
Executive Director

Brian Boettcher
Buildings and Grounds Manager

Darla Buss
Member Services Coordinator

Chris Delisle
Assistant Education and
Event Coordinator

Molli Funk
Historic Mayowood Site Manager

Krista Lewis
Archivist

Laura Singh
Marketing and Events Associate

Barb Whipple
Accountant

MAYOWOOD GUIDES

Jean Joyce Williams
Historic Mayowood Site Assistant Manager

Carolyn Barsness
Grace Curry
Patrick Dean
Tessa Harmon
Joan Hunziker-Dean
Jeanne Klein
Dana Knaak

Kathy Lamb
Megan Magnuson
John McKee
Jane Olive
Elizabeth Schmidt
Meredith Tuntland
John Wiater

BOARD MEMBERS

Mark Warner
President

Ben King
Vice President

Paul Scanlon
Past President

Linda Willihnganz
Secretary

Katherine Lutzke
Treasurer

Dave Senjem
Olmsted County Board of
Commissioners Representative

Kyle Benish
Jordan Cepress
Jean Marvin

Amanda Mikhail
Kerry Olsen
Dan Penz
Josefina Pozas
Christine Rule
Jim Suk
Samuel Wick



HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

1195 W Circle Dr SW
Rochester, MN 55902

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
ROCHESTER MN
PERMIT NO 242



The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

