



# The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

## WINTER 2025 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!**

## WE GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR SPONSORS, PARTNERS, AND VOLUNTEERS

By Lori Milanowski, Associate Director

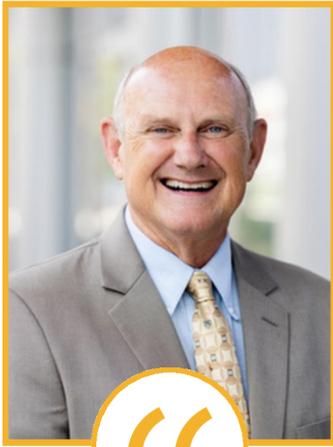
It truly takes a village to make all of our programming, events, and exhibits happen. Preserving our campus's 54 acres, collections, and historic buildings is only part of our mission and vision. We also strive to be a community gathering place that makes history accessible to all, offering engaging programs where cost isn't a barrier to participation. Part of my job is finding creative ways to offer exciting programming at a low cost to the community, and it is possible thanks to the generosity of sponsors, partners, and volunteers who provide sponsorships, in-kind donations, and their time and talents.

I have had the pleasure of connecting with many generous individuals and businesses to coordinate the community support that made our work possible in 2025 and we celebrate all who helped us bring history to life this year. ▶

In our 100th year, we plan to expand programs and events, but we can't do it alone. You can help by connecting us with businesses or individuals who share our passion for education, community, and history. Together, we can make 2026 our most impactful year yet!



*Sponsors benefit from brand exposure; we love promoting our sponsors and partners at events, our exhibits, and on social media!*



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

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

2025 was a fresh start for the History Center. The HCOC Board of Directors set a new agenda forward in early 2025. This has resulted in a dramatic shift in our staffing and brought innovation to our education programs and exhibitions. The appointment of Valerie Wassmer as our new Executive Director has triggered renewed commitment to serve the county and our visitors. Our new education programs and exhibits have contributed to a 50% increase in our membership during 2025. Thanks to generous donors, great staff, and gracious volunteers, we have re-invigorated school field trips that excite children, with many of them subsequently asking their parents and grandparents to visit HCOC with them.

Our Board of Directors has wholeheartedly endorsed rejuvenation of our 54-acre campus with our new master plan. Phase 1 is restoration of the George Stoppel Farmstead. We were recently awarded a state Legacy grant of \$515,000, and we are nearing the \$1.67 million Phase 1 fundraising threshold that will trigger an additional \$833,000 award from the Jeffris Family Foundation. I should note that our Board directors personally committed \$400,000 to our Phase 1 project. In total, the \$4 million Phase 1 effort will be completed by Summer 2027.

In 2025, we expanded our effort to put the HCOC on a path to long-term financial sustainability. We were fortunate to partner with our county and city government colleagues to provide nearly a quarter of our operating income. A special thank you to our members and grateful visitors who have supported our income-generating programs and donated to our operations.

**The atmosphere at HCOC is upbeat and enthusiastic. We are on a mission to fulfill our mission, “(To) give people of all ages and backgrounds access and opportunity to learn about the past through interpretive programs and exhibits, research, publications and events.” It is a noble mission, and we are blessed to have members of our Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers who are dedicated to meeting it.**

## REFLECTING ON OUR PAST, CELEBRATING OUR PRESENT, AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

By Valerie Wassmer, Executive Director/Education Director

As we close out another remarkable year at the History Center of Olmsted County, we’re reminded that history isn’t something that just happens—it’s something our community makes possible.

This past year was filled with memorable moments. We welcomed nine new staff members who reside in the coop (arguably our most popular staff), offered free field trips that opened doors and imaginations for students, hosted approximately 1200 guests from the Mayo Clinic Cardiology Department, and enjoyed many successful gatherings. All of this was made possible through the generosity and engagement of our members and donors.

*A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.*  
-Marcus Garvey



As we look ahead, we are especially excited to approach a rare and meaningful milestone—the 100th anniversary of the Olmsted County Historical Society. Our centennial year will be a time to honor our past, celebrate our present, and prepare for our future. The celebration will begin at the History Center on Saturday, January 17th. Watch our website and eblasts for additional information. (continued on page 3)

# GOODBYES AND NEW BEGINNINGS

By Peter Limbert, Collections Manager

The History Center's artifact collections have undergone significant changes over the course of 2025. Dealing with environmental hazards such as humidity, heat, and dirt has been a major undertaking, involving the reorganization of several large storage facilities to make them safer and more efficient. New humidity control measures prevented the loss of artifacts and sets the groundwork for safer artifact care in the future.

Perhaps the largest task of 2025 has been the reevaluation of our current collections. It is vital to ensure that any item we care for is relevant to our mission and our goals. Detailed surveys revealed a large number of artifacts that were of questionable provenance or utility to our mission, forcing us to go through the process of deaccessioning a number of pieces related to agriculture, industry, and woodworking. Deaccessions are never undertaken lightly, and it is our hope that many of the pieces can find appropriate homes elsewhere.

2025 has also been a major year for exhibits. With the help of our wonderful collections intern, Tanner Peters, the History Center has curated three new exhibits. "Odd Fellows of Olmsted County" explores the rich history of one of Rochester's oldest secret societies. "War Stories of Olmsted County" highlights the role that individuals from Olmsted County played in some of America's most important conflicts. Finally, "Flash to the Past" recreates the emotional spaces of recreational life in the 1980s.

As we move into 2026, we look forward to curating the History Center's centennial celebrations with never-before-seen artifacts documenting how the preservation of Olmsted County's history has evolved since 1926. We also look to continue our success in re-envisioning the size and scope of our collections to capture our community's ever-growing collective memory.

2025's  
newest  
exhibits.



Collections intern Tanner Peters curated the History Center's exhibit on the American Civil War.

While we are excited to share our successes in 2025, we also want to be transparent about the realities of operating in the nonprofit world. Costs continue to rise, and like many organizations, we are continuing to look for ways to ease our operating budget. Beginning in January, our newsletter will transition to a digital-first format to save on printing and increasing postage fees. We realize many enjoy receiving the paper copy; you may request a mailed copy by contacting us at [services@olmstedhistory.com](mailto:services@olmstedhistory.com). To help cover bank processing fees, a 3% addition will be applied to credit card transactions.

Despite these challenges, our mission remains as strong as ever. With your continued support, we are confident that the next 100 years will be just as impactful as the last. Thank you for helping us keep history alive. Here's to the future—rooted in the past, thriving in the present, and moving forward.

# THERE IS SO MUCH TO SEE NEXT YEAR, DON'S MISS IT

By Chris Delisle, Exhibit and Education Coordinator

In 2026 the History Center of Olmsted County (HCOC) will be celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> year as an institution, we are so excited! We will be showcasing important moments from HCOC's 100-year history and its connection to Olmsted County. As we move into a year of celebration, we are curating exhibits which highlight important aspects and moments of the History Center's path from its origins, to its current place now, and where we want to be in the future.

We have multiple exhibits planned throughout the year. One exhibit will focus on the origins of the Stoppel farmstead, and the story of the family's immigration from Germany to America. We will also highlight important people and places which were integral to the creation, expansion, and development of the History Center. But there's more to us than our past, so we will be presenting our strategic plans for the future, as HCOC investigates expanding for the next generation of

history connoisseurs. The History Center will be showcasing some of our partner groups that we work together with on several educational and outreach programs. We have held some of these partnerships for many years and want to celebrate our collaborations. We also are doing an exhibit of staff favorites from the vault. We have over 30,000 physical objects in our 3D collection, so what better time to learn from the staff at HCOC which obscure objects are our favorites and why. There is a lot to look out for in the upcoming year. But wait, there's more!

Another major educational and exhibition component to 2026 is the curating and staging of our 1860s barn. In 2025 we finished restoration of the barn's exterior, interior stonework, and replacement of the roof. Next is to turn it into a unique and awe-inspiring museum space.

## Stay tuned!



Chris inspecting objects to include in an upcoming exhibition.



Meticulous notes and drawings used to plan and prepare for next year's installation schedule. The messier the better.



Chris thinking about the massive task of staging the barn.

# SO LONG 2025, NICE TO MEET YOU 2026

By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

Well, another year is in the books. Let's take stock of what happened with a summary of activities in the Research Center.

As of this writing, we had 437 visitors and 58 remote research requests. Attendance was down, but still near the average of where it's been over the last 10 years. Remote requests were also down quite a bit, but there are some factors at play. The number recorded here reflects requests that generated invoices. Plenty of reference questions came in by email and phone that did not result in an invoice. These were often simpler questions or ones where we could direct people to a variety of online resources. With each passing year, more resources are becoming available online, so fewer people have the need to come directly to us. This year we gained access to one such popular resource: newspapers.com (strictly for Olmsted County papers), which has been a boon for our research capabilities.

As for collections, we accepted 67 donations. For the archives side of that, we cataloged 387 new objects. But that too doesn't reflect the total

number of archival objects that came in. If we cataloged absolutely everything, we'd have a backlog a mile long! It also doesn't reflect the total number of objects cataloged, since significant work goes toward updating existing collections and object records. On the flip side, we removed 444 objects from the collection. The vast majority of these were magazines from national publications that had no direct relevance to Olmsted County. Thinning this collection has been years in the making and has freed up valuable shelf space. We hope to complete this by the end of the year or early next year and move onto another bloated section of the collection: plat books!

This barely touches on all that goes on here over the course of a year. We're used to helping people find and tell their own stories, but with next year being HCOC's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we're looking forward to doing something a little different and using our collection to tell our own story!

**Keep an eye on what we're up to. It's going to be a big year!**



2025 brought us newspapers.com, our new best friend in the archives.



Coming to a YouTube channel near you in 2026!

# HISTORIC MAYOWOOD: HIGHLIGHTS FROM A SUCCESSFUL 2025 SEASON AND PLANS FOR 2026

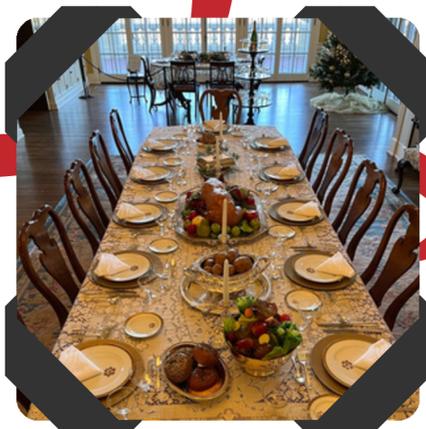
By Molli Funk, Historic Mayowood Site Manager

This year brought many changes to Mayowood. We welcomed several talented new guides—Jane Olive, Jeanne Klein, Tessa Harmon, and Meredith Tuntland. It has been a pleasure to bring them into our group of dedicated and skilled Mayowood Guides who work at the History Center.

As I shared in last month's article, the History Center and Mayo Clinic's Christmas program looks different this year. Our focus has shifted from a traditional holiday theme to one centered on the Mayo family and their artifacts. Four rooms were inspired by Mayo family oral histories. Two rooms were decorated by the Alice Mayo Society, and the remaining rooms were decorated by local designers to reflect traditions from the decades when the family lived in the home. The results are both elegant and inviting, offering our guests a meaningful glimpse into Mayowood's past. Photographer Michael Joyce has beautifully documented this season for the History Center, which are included below.

Looking ahead to 2026, the History Center will be celebrating its centennial, as well as the United States Semiquincentennial. In honor of the centennial, next year's Mayowood programming will focus on Dr. Chuck and Alice Mayo, who played an integral role in HCOC's history by gifting Mayowood to the History Center in 1965. For 48 years (1965–2013), HCOC cared for Mayowood. Dedicated employees and the Friends of Mayowood worked tirelessly to preserve the historic landmark, a treasured part of Rochester's history. Because the first two generations of the Mayo family who lived at Mayowood served in the military, I am envisioning a special program to honor their service. This will be part of our recognition of the nation's 250th birthday and the important role military service has played in our country.

I look forward to sharing more details soon!



# 2026 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

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

January 8	●	Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, Mark Warner on “An Adventure in Medicine”
January 9	●	Library Storytime and Tour of HCOC
January 15	●	Lecture, <i>Untold Stories: WWII and the Women of Olmsted County</i>
January 17	●	<b>HCOC 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Kick-Off Celebration!</b>
January 22	●	IBM Exhibit opening and discussion
February 5	●	Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, Sister Tierney Trueman on “Healing Hands”
February 7	●	Vintage Valentines
February 8	●	<b>Dancing Through the Decades 1920s era dance lesson</b>
February 14	●	Valentine’s Day Storytime; MHRT Sleigh Rides
February 15	●	<b>Dancing Through the Decades 1930s era dance lesson</b>
February 19	●	Lecture, <i>Powers Ventures: Over 50 Years of Business and Philanthropy</i>
February 21	●	Family game and puzzle time
February 22	●	<b>Dancing Through the Decades 1940s era dance lesson</b>
March 1	●	<b>Dancing Through the Decades 1950s era dance lesson</b>
March 5	●	Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, W. Bruce Fye on “A Reputation for Caring”
March 8	●	<b>Dancing Through the Decades 1960s era dance lesson</b>
March 14	●	Storytime
March 15	●	<b>Dancing Through the Decades 1970s era dance lesson</b>

## STAFF

**Valerie Wassmer**  
Executive Director/Education Director

**Brian Boettcher**  
Buildings and Grounds Manager

**Darla Buss**  
Member Services Coordinator

**Chris Delisle**  
Exhibit and Education Coordinator

**Molli Funk**  
Historic Mayowood Site Manager

**Krista Lewis**  
Archivist

**Peter Limbert**  
Collections Manager

**Lori Milanowski**  
Associate Director/Accountant

**Laura Singh**  
Marketing and Events Associate

## MAYOWOOD GUIDES

**Jean Joyce Williams**  
Historic Mayowood Site Assistant Manager

**Carolyn Barsness**

**Patrick Dean**

**Tessa Harmon**

**Joan Hunziker-Dean**

**Jeanne Klein**

**Dana Knaak**

**Kathy Lamb**

**Megan Magnuson**

**Jane Olive**

**Elizabeth Schmidt**

**Meredith Tuntland**

**John Wiater**

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