



# The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

## SPRING 2026 Newsletter



**HISTORY CENTER**  
OF OLMSTED COUNTY

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## HOW WILL HISTORY REMEMBER US?

By Valerie Wassmer, Executive Director

As we mark the 100th anniversary of the Olmsted County Historical Society, we pause to celebrate a remarkable milestone, but also to ask a deeper question: what will be remembered about us in another 100 years? Anniversaries invite reflection, and this one challenges us to look beyond today's exhibits and events toward the legacy we are actively creating.

At the History Center of Olmsted County, we believe history comes alive through hands-on learning and visual storytelling, grounded in the artifacts, photographs, documents, and landscapes that tell our shared story. When you stand before our restored 1870s barn and imagine the Stoppel family members hauling grain in horse-drawn wagons, history becomes alive. When holding a washing board that was used by someone who lived and worked here generations ago, history becomes personal - and unforgettable.

I'm guessing history might not have been a favorite subject for many while in school; it felt distant, abstract, or disconnected from real life. That reality challenges us to take a fresh approach to history, one that invites curiosity instead of memorization, and experiential instead of passive learning. This is the legacy we are building here at the History Center, with your help.

(continued on page 3)

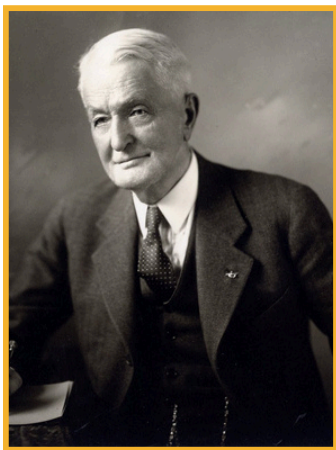
**REMINDER: Please make sure we have the most up-to-date email and mailing address for you. Thanks!**





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

**Burt W. Eaton.**  
President (1926-1941)



## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Celebrating Our History Center’s Centennial

Few private organizations survive to serve the public for 100 years. That makes our History Center’s centennial celebration unique. It also provides us with a wonderful opportunity to contemplate how we started and how we will evolve into the next century of service.

#### The Start: Preserving and Exhibiting Our County’s History

Burt W. Eaton moved in 1855 at one year of age with his family from New York to west Rochester. His father soon became the city’s first justice. Mr. Eaton followed in his father’s footsteps and became one of Rochester’s most enduring and consequential lawyers. During the first 45 of his 62 years of practicing law (1879 – 1941), he founded the Olmsted County Bar Association and served as president of the Minnesota Bar Association. As a close associate with Drs. William, Will, and Charlie Mayo, he wrote the agreements for their initial partners (e.g., Drs. Henry Plummer, Don Balfour, Christopher Graham, and Edward Judd) and the contracts that established the Mayo Foundation.

Mr. Eaton was a ubiquitous leader in Olmsted County’s early civic life. He founded the Rochester Public Library and served as its initial president, starting in 1895. Four decades later, he led the fundraising for its 1937 building (now the Mayo Medical School Building on 2<sup>nd</sup> St. SW). Mr. Eaton founded and led the Rochester Water Company to address safety concerns related to repeated flooding of the Zumbro River. He was our county’s official attorney and, in 1898 and 1899, served as Rochester’s mayor.

Most consequential for our History Center, he was a life-long collector of artifacts about Olmsted County’s history. At the robust age of 69 years in 1924, he grew increasingly concerned about maintaining the county’s history. He enlisted the assistance of the Minnesota Historical Society and organized our Olmsted County Historical Society in 1926. He served as our society’s first president and remained in that role for the last 15 years of his life. His dream of preserving and exhibiting the history of Olmsted County was firmly established.

#### The Future: Evolving As An Educational Institution

During our first century, the History Center has served ably as an outstanding archive and resource center, achieving many of Mr. Eaton’s goals. For example, prior to 1950, research articles on Olmsted County’s history were routinely published, providing academic credibility for the History Center and insights into the county’s transition from an area rich in geologic, flora, fauna, and Native American impact to one of immigration, agriculture, and innovation in medical sciences. More recently, the History Center’s historical research has shifted to public and social media and provided a rich source of story-telling.

In the coming years of our second centennial, we will increase our value to the community by accelerating and expanding our educational programs. Examples include developing a research grant program to increase our understanding of our past. We will institute new child learning programs (e.g., school field trips, in-school presentations) on our campus and in the more than a dozen public school districts and private schools in our county, plus add more adult education programs in-person and online. With completion of our master plan’s Phase 1 (Stoppel Farmstead restoration) in Summer 2028 and Phase 2 (History Center facility modernization and expansion) by 2032, we will implement expanded onsite learning programs for members and guests of all ages.

## History is important in Minnesota

The fifth action taken by Minnesota Territory's first legislature in 1849 was to create a historical society. Ken Rothchild, one of the most important leaders ever of the Minnesota Historical Society, noted in a 2014 presentation (paraphrased here), "The growth and success (of any historical society) goes back to when we decide to take seriously the fact that we are an educational institution."

We have amazing stories to tell about Olmsted County. We take our roles of preserving and sharing our county's history seriously. In our second centennial, we will advance the educational programming that will make our History Center one of the finest in Minnesota and provide outstanding value to our members and guests.

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Our reality is not without challenges. The building is old. The coffers are low. These are truths we do not shy away from. Yet even in these circumstances, we hold tight to our mission of preserving and sharing history. We do so because we believe our work matters—not just for today's visitors, but for people we will never meet, living decades from now. We do it with your help; the members, donors, and sponsors. One hundred years from now, may we be remembered as good stewards: committed to truth, open to new ways of telling stories, and unwavering in our belief that keeping history alive is essential to the future.

## EVENT RENTALS: WHEN HISTORY MEETS CELEBRATION

By Laura Singh, Marketing and Events Associate

Last September, we hosted our largest event rental yet - and what a celebration it was! The entire Mayo Clinic Cardiology Department chose HCOC for their annual staff appreciation event, bringing over 1,000 guests to our grounds. With historic activities woven throughout the day, it was a perfect example of how HCOC expertise and local stories can elevate any event.

Since then, we've been sharing more about our event rental options - and the response has been wonderful. Over the winter, our two indoor spaces, the Crawford Room and the Sertoma Room, hosted a wide variety of gatherings, including corporate meetings, holiday parties, a murder mystery dinner, a wedding, a funeral gathering, and even a concert. Each event brought its own unique energy, and we loved seeing our spaces transformed in so many creative ways.

Now, as summer bookings begin to fill the calendar, we're especially excited to reopen our outdoor Pavilion. With space for up to 200 guests, the Pavilion is a favorite for graduations, corporate gatherings, and weddings that take advantage of the nearby treeline for ceremonies.

One of our favorite parts of event rentals? Getting creative! We love helping clients turn gatherings into truly historic experiences. Imagine butter churning for kids at a family reunion, vintage baseball lessons for a team-building day, or guided tours of our historic buildings and caves during a client appreciation event. The possibilities are as wide open as our grounds.



**We can't wait for another season of exciting event rentals – especially when history isn't just the backdrop, it's part of the celebration!**

# EVERY DECADE HAS A DANCE

## AND EVERY DANCE HAS A HISTORY!

### Dancing Through the Decades: The HCOC Eras Tour and Grand Dance Celebration

By Lori Milanowski, Associate Director

Every decade has iconic dances: from the 1920's Charleston to 2020's viral dances, Olmsted County residents have danced many different styles in a lot of different venues. When the Olmsted County Historical Society was formed in 1926, folks were dancing the Charleston and foxtrot to live music at the Armory. Several ballrooms were added to the scene from the 1930s to 1960s, including the Pla-Mor, Valencia, Trianon and Rainbow, and eventually more modern dance spaces like The Outrigger in the '60s and the Aquarius Club in the 1970s opened, featuring disco, line dancing, and club style dance. Today there are many dance studios in town, one ballroom, and social dance lessons hosted by USA Dance, and we can't forget viral dances, happening just about anywhere.

Since dancing has always been a part of Olmsted County's history, HCOC is hosting 11 weeks of Sunday dance lessons (mostly) at the History Center, celebrating each of the decades that the History Center has been in operation with a popular dance of the decade taught by local dance instructors in partnership with USA Dance Southeast Minnesota Chapter #2017. The History Center's vision to become a gathering place for the community that encourages the exploration of history has guided the development of this historic event series, creating immersive history at a low cost, perfect for beginners and pros alike.



*Dancers from the foxtrot lesson  
taught by April Dahl of Dahl Dance*

To bring it all together, on April 25<sup>th</sup> we're hosting a Grand Dance Celebration at the historic Chateau Theatre. Join us in your favorite decade's best duds, dance to a curated playlist of top songs from the past 100 years, snap a school dance style pic at our photobooth, fuel up with snacks and punch, and view curated artifacts from our vaults! To top off the night our local dance pros will be putting on a Decade's Demonstration, highlighting the top dances of the past 100 years. Whether you want to dance, watch the demonstration, see historic artifacts or just want an excuse to get out of the house on a Saturday night, we'd love to see you and celebrate 100 years of the History Center of Olmsted County!

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**GRAND DANCE CELEBRATION**  
**APRIL 25<sup>TH</sup>, 6PM-10PM**  
**CHATEAU THEATRE**  
**\$15 MEMBERS/\$25 NON-MEMBERS**

You can learn more and get tickets at  
[olmstedhistory.com/dancing-through-the-decades](https://olmstedhistory.com/dancing-through-the-decades)

# BIG BLUE: IBM'S IMPACT ON ROCHESTER

By Chris Delisle, Exhibit and Education Coordinator

The History Center of Olmsted County is celebrating its centennial year with a comprehensive exhibit highlighting IBM's significant contributions to our community. IBM has been innovating in Rochester for over 70 years, and we are proud to share many of the company's most important accomplishments.

The exhibit features examples of the groundbreaking technological inventions developed at the IBM plant in Rochester, beginning in the 1950s with the design of the Collator. From there, visitors can explore the evolution of data storage through displays of various disk technologies. This period marked the height of IBM Rochester's manufacturing operations and influence.

One of the exhibit's highlights is the AS/400, widely considered IBM Rochester's greatest achievement. In recognition of this innovation, IBM Rochester received the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The award was presented by President George H. W. Bush and remains the highest presidential honor in the United States for performance excellence. This recognition marked a major milestone in the company's history.

IBM Rochester also played a significant role in the development of processing chips for three major video game consoles of the era: the Xbox 360, the Sony PlayStation 3, and the Nintendo Wii. The global impact of this technology has been immense, influencing millions of people—including myself.

The exhibit also highlights IBM's work in the emerging field of quantum computing. Quantum computing harnesses the principles of quantum mechanics to solve problems beyond the capabilities of even the most powerful classical computers.

Finally, the exhibit looks ahead to the future of IBM and computing technology, focusing on artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence refers to the ability of computers or computer-controlled systems to perform tasks typically associated with human intelligence, such as reasoning, learning, problem-solving, perception, and language understanding. As this field continues to evolve, IBM remains at the forefront of advancements shaping the future of AI.



**This exhibit is the culmination and hard work of many individuals from both HCOC and IBM. We are very proud to share this with the community.**



# STREAMLINING OUR COLLECTION AND OUR METHODS

By Peter Limbert, Collections Manager

The History Center's centennial year has brought with it new challenges and changes for its vast artifact collections. With issues related to environmental control successfully behind us, we now turn towards a more ambitious project of streamlining our institution's approach to how we use our collections to best implement our mission.

The greatest challenge we continue to face is efficiency. There is a growing number of items found in our vaults that have never been properly assessed since they came to us. These objects we lovingly refer to as "found in collections," and they place the bulk of the strain now facing our storage facilities. In all of 2024, there were 455 items with no donation record. In 2025, there were 128. In January and February of 2026 alone, we have cataloged 152. These items range from the very small, such as books, pamphlets, toys, etc., to the very large, like an enormous collection of vintage typewriters. When evaluating the utility of pieces in our collections, these items are generally the first to be slated for deaccession. In 2025 alone, we deaccessioned 657 items. (Rest assured, with all deaccessioned items, the HCOC does all due diligence to ensure that artifacts find their appropriate and proper homes.)

It may sound mundane, but weeding through these types of items is one of the most important functions we perform around the clock. It is an essential job to make sure that we can continue preserving Olmsted County's rich history. Downsizing in this area gives us greater freedom to choose the kinds of stories we want to highlight and preserve for future generations. As the History Center moves through its centennial year, we hope to increase the efficiency of our collections in a way that makes the museum experience better for everyone who wishes to see their community's shared history preserved through all the years to come.



Saying goodbye to a collection of mystery typewriters (above left) gave us room to accept this vintage 1917 Conley camera (above right) made in Rochester, a generous donation from the family of Carlyle Inglett.

# WHEN LEAST EXPECTED, THE PAST AND PRESENT MEET

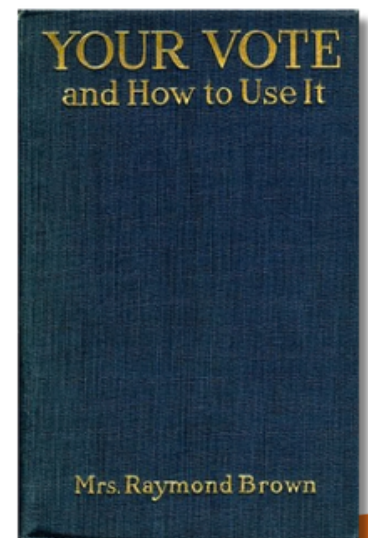
By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

With the busy holiday season behind us and the short, cold days, the first quarter of the year is typically slow. That has hardly been the case this year as we launched right into our anniversary with new exhibits, a dance series (there are still six lessons to enjoy!), and our monthly History in the Making podcast (available at [youtube.com/@OlmstedHistoryCenter](https://youtube.com/@OlmstedHistoryCenter)). It's hardly been a quiet winter for the rest of Minnesota, either. While we take time this year for celebration, we must not forget that what we do now matters and will matter for those who come after us. The podcast title was chosen well in advance of this winter, but it's an apt reminder that we, as citizens and societies, are making history every day.

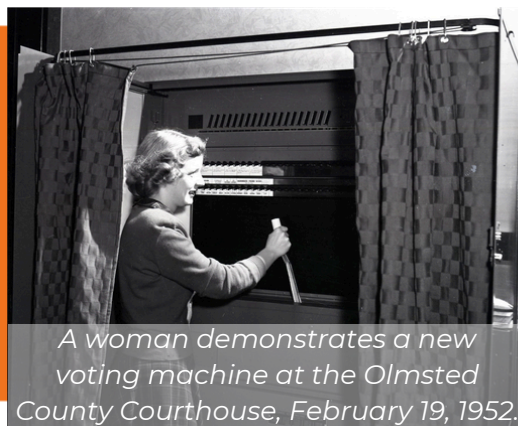
Whether you agree or disagree with recent actions that occurred across our state and in our own local communities, it's impossible to ignore the role civil disobedience played not only in the moment, but in shaping the path – the history – leading to the moment. March being Women's History Month, it's worth noting that civil disobedience was among the tactics used toward women's suffrage, and after decades of work making their case and persuading those in power to extend the vote to women, it was finally achieved with the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920.

Not long before that, Carrie Chapman Catt formed the US League of Women Voters. The *Daily Post and Record* of October 30, 1919, reported, "Minnesota women yesterday took the first steps in preparing themselves for their coming citizenship by the formation of a state branch of the League of Women Voters..." Edith Mayo\* was named First Congressional District chairman. A couple of years later, she was a delegate to the League's national convention held in Cleveland, Ohio. Speaking at the convention, the president of Minnesota's League, Marguerite Wells, remarked, "The League of Women Voters was organized to aid all women in intelligently casting their vote. We firmly believe in hearing both sides of every question and silently casting our vote. A lesson all voters must learn is to keep the eyes and ears open and their mouths shut." Good advice even today.

One device in aiding the country's new voters was the book\* pictured here, published in 1918 (women in New York got the vote in 1917). In the foreword, Catt wrote, "Citizenship has been very lightly regarded by our country in the past. ...It remains now for women to treat it with a new dignity and to give it the importance it deserves. ...Every man and woman who grows up under the protection of our flag should feel the obligation to give of his and her best to make our democracy a better expression of our ideals." Good advice yet again. It appears Olmsted County's women took up the task with verve. On election day of our anniversary year, November 2, 1926, the *Post Bulletin* reported, "With close contests on between the candidates for some of the county offices, and with women's organizations taking an active part, it is expected that the vote in the 22 districts of the county outside of the city of Rochester, will be large."



Civil disobedience may be a contentious topic, but at least it reminds us that we are all active participants in our own history.



A woman demonstrates a new voting machine at the Olmsted County Courthouse, February 19, 1952.

\* The article actually refers to "Mrs. Charles Mayo" and the book's author is given as "Mrs. Raymond Brown", though she provides her first name in the preface (it was Gertrude). The e-blast sent to members the last week of February includes a reflection on the use, or lack thereof, of women's names in the historical record.

# HCOC FACES AND PLACES: BURT EATON AND MAYOWOOD

By Molli Funk, Historic Mayowood Site Manager

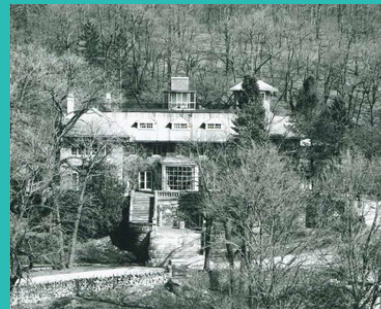
HCOC's centennial year kicked off with a bang this January, and the HCOC staff has done a wonderful job showcasing the people and places that make up the History Center of Olmsted County. As the Historic Site Manager for Mayowood, I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to take a page from Paul Harvey's "The Rest of the Story" and share some background on how Burt Eaton, the founder of the History Center, is connected to Mayowood and the historic property itself.

In 1900, Burt Eaton was practicing law in Rochester when Drs. Will and Dr. Charlie Mayo realized that managing their growing investments had become challenging. They turned to Eaton, who was already overseeing investments for his clients. As author Judith Hartzell notes in her book *Mrs. Charlie: The Other Mayo*, "By 1910 there was enough money in the account for Dr. Charlie to indulge in a beautiful, original house for his large family" — the home we now know as Mayowood. That is how the founder of HCOC is connected to an HCOC historic property.

Now, let's turn to the house itself. The home built by Dr. Charlie and Edith Mayo, spans approximately 29,159 square feet across five floors. The original acreage was 3,300 acres, and Dr. Chuck and Alice Mayo were the second generation of Mayos to live there. They generously donated the home to the Olmsted County Historical Society on December 30, 1965.

What made Mayowood an HCOC property is that Dr. Charles W. Mayo stipulated in his will: "It is my desire that Mayowood be preserved for its historical significance along with such furnishings as are selected for such purpose (by the executors) or are otherwise given for such purpose." Dr. Chuck and Alice were deeply invested in preserving the home's historical legacy. Under an agreement with the Historical Society, they continued to live in the home, paying just one dollar per year in rent, while serving as caretakers. They oversaw the home's upkeep, assisted in public tours, and ensured that the residence and its contents were properly displayed. This arrangement continued until Dr. Chuck's death in 1968.

Over the years, Mayowood's care and management evolved from private caretakers to curator and site manager. On July 29, 2013, the deed to the home transferred to the Mayo Clinic, with the History Center retaining responsibility for the artifacts and continuing to provide public tours and programming. Throughout all these changes, the guiding principle has remained the same: to preserve Mayowood as a historic site, keep it open for public use, and honor it as a memorial to the Mayo family.



*Top: Mayo Family donating Mayowood to Olmsted County Historical Society in 1965.*

*Bottom left: Mayowood  
Bottom right: Mayowood tour, July 26, 1987.*

The History Center could not function without our community's generosity of time, talents, resources and connections. Your support helps us collect, preserve and educate while ensuring Olmsted County history is accessible to all!

## Donations allow us to keep the cost of our programming low and accessible. For example:

- Starting in 2025 our annual History Mystery fundraiser, along with a generous donation from a member, allowed us to start to offer free field trips to all 3<sup>rd</sup> grade RPS students.
  - A donation of:
    - **\$210 covers 1 school bus to and from the History Center.**
    - **\$150 covers the cost of a class of 30 students to visit.**
    - **\$75 provides a sponsorship for 1 student to attend summer camp.**
  - Senior Programming is returning, a donation of:
    - **\$25 helps us provide coffee & cookies for one session**

Did you know that less than 30% of our Revenue comes from state and local government?

## Everyday Needs

- Forever stamps
- Copy paper
- 3M Velcro Strips
- Gorilla or 3M double sided tape
- Disposable Blue Vinyl Gloves (Sz L)
- Plain T Shirts (XS-3X)
- Paint Supplies (trim brushes, rollers, paint trays)
- Seed Packets
- Gift Cards:
  - Kwik Trip (lawn mower gas)
  - Menards (Building Maintenance Supplies)

Do you own or know of a local business that could benefit from low cost advertising that also supports HCOC?

Email:

lori@olmstedhistory.com

## Dreaming Big:

- Display Cases (new or used)\*
- Epson Expression 13000XL Archival Scanner

\*Please Check with HCOC staff on size/usability

## Volunteer Opportunities!

- Do you have experience working with kids? Join us as a field trip guide April-July, September-October
- Do you like tidying up? Help us keep our museum space clean and especially dusted!

Email us your old dance photos to be a part of Dancing Through the Decades! Send your photo to [archivist@olmstedhistory.com](mailto:archivist@olmstedhistory.com).



We offer a number of free events throughout the year because we never want cost to be a barrier to accessing history! If you enjoy them and are able, a donation of even \$5 per person at a free event helps us to continue to put on programming and keep costs accessible to all!

# 2026 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

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

- March 19 ● **“The Story of the Stoppels” exhibit opening + lecture with Peter Schuller**
- March 22 ● **Dancing Through the Decades 1980s era dance lesson**
- March 26 ● Lecture, “Planning Your Spring Garden with a Master Gardener”
- March 28 ● Pastries, Pop-Ups, and Podcast: “Wining About Herstory”
- March 29 ● **Dancing Through the Decades 1990s era dance lesson**
- April 2 ● Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, “*The Mayo Aero Medical Unit in World War II*”
- April 4 ● **Dancing Through the Decades 2000s era dance lesson**  
Easter Egg Hunt, 2pm-4pm
- April 11 ● Storytime snack and craft
- April 12 ● **Dancing Through the Decades 2010s era dance lesson**
- April 16 ● Lecture, Orson W. Estes’ Snake Farm
- April 19 ● **Dancing Through the Decades 2020s era dance lesson**
- April 25 ● **Grand Dance Celebration at Chateau Theatre**
- May 2 ● History of May Day
- May 7 ● Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, “*The Remarkable Life of Dr. Henry S. Plummer*”
- May 9 ● Storytime snack and craft
- June 4 ● Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, “*Mayo and the Mississippi*”
- June 13 ● Storytime snack and craft

## 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

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Historic Mayowood Site Assistant Manager

**Joe Hendren**  
Site Assistant II

**Carolyn Barsness**

**Patrick Dean**

**Tessa Harmon**

**Alexus Heins**

**Joan Hunziker-Dean**

**Jeanne Klein**

**Dana Knaak**

**Kathy Lamb**

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OF OLMSTED COUNTY

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