



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!

HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO

By Valerie Wassmer, Executive Director

Life in the non-profit world has its challenges; competing for support with dozens of other worthy causes, attracting talented professionals for less money than they would likely make elsewhere, and working long hours including many nights and weekends. Despite these challenges, we have been making tremendous strides at the History Center. Memberships are increasing, programming attendance continues to grow, lectures are drawing larger audiences, and we are seeing a continual uptick in visitors exploring our campus, exhibits, and events.

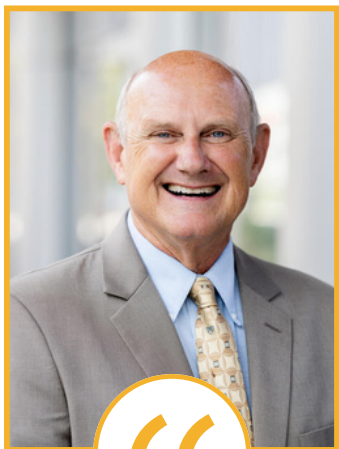
People often ask, "How do you do it?" The answer is not complicated, but it does require commitment, energy, and a shared vision.

First and foremost, you must have a passion for what you do. History is not simply about dates and artifacts - it is about people, stories, and connections. Passion is what keeps ideas moving forward and encourages others to become involved. Visitors can tell when an organization genuinely believes in its mission.

Second, you must be willing to step outside your comfort zone - growth and success rarely happen by staying comfortable. Don't be afraid to try new things; you never know what might happen when you try new programs or reach out to new people.

(continued on page 2)





Mark A. Warner, M.D.
President

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Few months in the History Center's 100-year history have matched this May. In just one week, our Board and staff reached several major milestones in our 10-year master plan while advancing our mission: "Give people of all ages and backgrounds access and opportunity to learn about the past through interpretive programs and exhibits, research, publications and events."

- On May 18, the state legislature approved \$2.3 million in bonding support to begin modernizing and expanding the 53-year-old History Center facility. We anticipate that the full project, estimated at approximately \$10 million, will take four to five years to complete.
- On May 19, our staff and volunteers hosted the final grade-school field trip of the year. More than 1,000 students from Rochester schools participated in our revitalized field trip program during this academic year. We expect the program to expand to all eight county public schools and five private schools in the coming years, reaching as many as 1,600 students.
- We are confident in reaching the \$1.667 million fundraising threshold needed to unlock an \$833,000 grant from the Jeffris Family Foundation in Janesville, Wisconsin. Together with previous state Legacy grants, these funds bring the total raised since 2022 to \$3.5 million. This support will allow us to fully restore the Stoppel Farmstead and implement educational programs focused on the evolution of agriculture in the latter half of the 19th century and the impact of early European immigration on southeastern Minnesota. We expect the restoration to be completed by the end of 2027.

The Board of Directors and staff remain guided by our mission. We continue to follow our master plan closely and, I am proud to report, remain on schedule. I extend special thanks to the many donors and volunteers whose generous support is helping the History Center fulfill both our 10-year master plan and, most importantly, our mission.

(continued from page 1)

Third, success requires a commitment to being a team player - no one person can accomplish all of this alone. Staff, board members, volunteers, presenters, and supporters all play important roles in making the History Center successful. Collaboration creates momentum, and shared enthusiasm strengthens everything we do.

Fourth, it is important to surround yourself with like-minded people. We are fortunate to work alongside individuals who believe that preserving and sharing history matters. Their creativity, dedication, and encouragement help move the organization forward every single day.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we never forget to appreciate our members and volunteers. Their generosity of time, talent, and financial support makes all of this possible. Every lecture attended, membership renewed, artifact donated, and volunteer hour contributed helps keep local history alive for future generations.

The progress we have made together is something worth celebrating. While there is always more work to do, the continued enthusiasm from our community gives us great confidence for the future.

WELCOME TO THE HISTORY CENTER: HOW WE CONNECT

By Darla Buss, Member Services Coordinator

My role as membership coordinator is a mishmash of data management, storytelling, and hospitality! When you donate or become a member, I keep the records to ensure that every supporter is recognized and valued. I am not just filing you away, I remember you as part of our family. Whether someone is curious about the chickens we adore, Mayowood, the history of the Stoppels, or how to support our organization, I am the person at the desk who turns your curiosity into experience and knowledge. I am here to welcome people from all over the world by being excited about our area.

Not only do I answer when you call the History Center, or update the website with current podcasts and events, I also send a weekly eblast keeping the community connected to both the big events and the small, joyful moments of the week, and objects from the collections. This last part is more than just posting a picture; I use our archives to add information about items and expand their story, making sure what the public sees is accurate and meaningful. I also use these same attributes for posting information to Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. I am here to make sure the community knows about events and programs by posting them on public forums throughout the community, and making flyers, while adding you to the ever-growing list of attendees with notification of your ticket purchases.

I manage a wonderful collection of books by local authors and one-of-a-kind items in our gift shop, updating the inventory and Point of Sale system so your checkout is always a breeze! Need a garden plot? I can set you up with what may fit you best, explaining our policies and best practices for our very popular community gardens.

Stop in anytime Tuesday through Saturday, 9am–5pm. I am always here for you!



BUILDINGS & LAND & ANIMALS: HOW WE MAINTAIN HCOC

By Brian Boettcher, Buildings & Grounds Manager

Winter at the History Center is challenging for the Buildings and Grounds Manager with snow to remove, ice to salt, and freezing downspouts to open up, but the greatest concern is keeping the building warm with its outdated heating and ventilation system constantly breaking down.

Eventually, however, spring and summer arrive, and that's when the fun begins. Spring brings the opportunity to travel around the 54-acre property in a golf cart and watch the flowers bloom, the grass turn green, and the trees begin to bud. It's also the time when I introduce a new queen to the beehive, and she begins producing thousands of bees and, of course, plenty of honey. The chickens also emerge from their winter home in the garage and return to their coop behind the historic cabin where they hunt for worms, grubs, and insects - and lay eggs.



(continued from page 3)

Summer is when the work really begins. The HVAC system switches from Winter to Summer mode, which always needs extra attention. In addition to the main building, HCOC has 12 buildings to maintain, three of which are on the National Register of Historic Places. Another 12 buildings are maintained by the Mechanical History Roundtable. The chickens must be fed each day and the roost cleaned periodically. The lawn mowers, tractor, pickup, and UTV (see picture on page 3) need annual maintenance, and there always seems to be a flat tire on something. The History Center has four wonderful volunteers that mow the lawn, a task that takes about 12 hours each week, plus another four hours of trimming. It's also the time of year when events take place outside that require picnic tables, garbage cans, restrooms, and other necessities.

There's so much to see and do here. I hope you'll come and visit the building and grounds!

MAKING ENDS MEET: HOW WE DO FINANCES

By Lori Milanowski, Associate Director & Accountant

You probably know that most museums are non-profit organizations, but there is an enduring misconception that the History Center is operated by Olmsted County. While we receive modest financial support from the county, which we greatly appreciate, we are not owned or operated by Olmsted County. The History Center is in fact an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit and over half our annual revenue comes from community contributions!

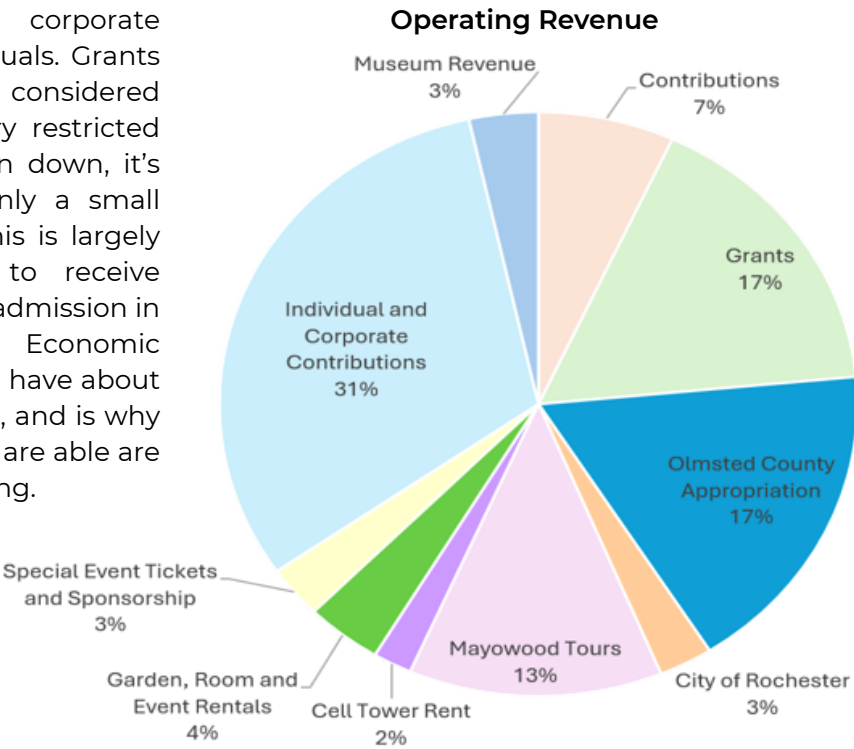
How is the History Center Funded? We have two distinct revenues and expenditures streams:



Unpacking Operating Revenue:

Operating income is available to use towards operations and programming on the History Center campus and at Historic Mayowood. Most operating revenue, like capital income, comes from individual and corporate contributions, with 99% coming from individuals. Grants are the second largest category, and while considered operating income, these generally have very restricted purposes. When operating income is broken down, it's clear that the museum itself generates only a small portion of annual revenue for operations. This is largely because we have been lucky enough to receive sponsorships by local businesses to offer free admission in selected months throughout the year. Economic accessibility is a part of every conversation we have about museum admission and special event pricing, and is why sponsorships and contributions by those who are able are so integral to our continued operational funding.

As you read earlier in Mark Warner's article, we've been working toward a \$1.667 million fundraising campaign to complete restorations of the Stoppel Farmstead. Over half of our revenue raised in 2025 was capital income.



Where does our funding go?

Financial Reports play an important role in showing the overall financial health of an organization, but it doesn't always show the unique fiscal challenges of an organization.

What are our largest operating expenditures?

- Salaries, Wages and Benefits make up 36% of our annual expenditures. We have a small but mighty staff that all step up to fill in for multiple roles!
- Because we have a small staff, we also must invest in outsourcing some functions like financial audit fees (\$12,000 in 2025) and snow removal, for example.
- Advertising is also critical so residents and visitors alike know we are here! The budget in 2025 was \$11,270, lower than in previous years.
- Printing and mailing costs are another huge expenditure that sometimes gets lost in the budget shuffle. In 2025 we spent \$31,290; this cost will be significantly reduced in 2026 with the switch to a mostly digital newsletter!

A large part of how we do what we do is, unfortunately, not the most exciting topic of discussion. Beyond staff costs, our largest expenditure category is... Occupancy.

History Center Campus Occupancy Costs



So, what are the takeaways from doing a slightly deeper dive into HCOC finances?

- **Every donation, every time you attend a program or special event, any appeal letters you respond to, all have a huge impact.**
- **We work hard to ensure we make every dollar work hard for us to create a better History Center!**

BRINGING THE BARN TO LIFE: HOW WE EXHIBIT

By Chris Delisle, Exhibit and Education Coordinator

2026 is an exciting year. Not only is the History Center of Olmsted County (HCOC) celebrating its 100-year anniversary, but we are also staging the historic 1873 Stoppel barn as a functioning museum space.

This project is a massive collaboration between HCOC staff, the build crew (a group of volunteers who donates their time and expertise, and who assists with building projects at HCOC), and also a group of researchers and family descendants, all who help tell the story of the Stoppel family and their immigration to America in the 1850s. We want to say thank you to all these people, without their help we couldn't tackle a project of this scope.

The Stoppel barn is an iconic structure here in Olmsted County, and it is a privilege to work on such an exciting project. We are staging the barn to showcase a glimpse of farm life and agriculture from the 1860s through the 1930s. It takes a lot of time, money, expertise and research to properly execute a large-scale project like this. Since the barn is on the historic registry there are specific rules and regulations to adhere to when fixing, maintaining, or adding anything to the building. As an exhibit designer you must be cautious of many different things while trying to maintain the historical integrity of the barn, all while trying to tell your story. Education is a major focus of the History Center, and the barn is going to be an integral tool in educating the public, not only on the Stoppel story, but also the history of agriculture in our region of the country. Farming is integral to the Midwest and so many of its people, so this is an opportunity to explore farming at its earliest stages in Olmsted County. Come check it out for yourself.



A preview of what you'll see when you next visit the Stoppel barn.

THE ART OF CURATION: HOW WE COLLECT

By Peter Limbert, Collections Manager

If someone made a movie about the life of a curator, it probably wouldn't do well at the box office. Cinema historians are often knee-deep in records finding hidden secrets or uncovering ancient relics in the desert sand. The reality is often less glamorous but just as thrilling!

Curation requires a number of finely-tuned skills and a willingness to embrace both excitement and drudgery. For every 3rd-century Roman coin found hidden in a box (yes, that happened recently), there are a hundred identical drill bits from the Great Depression. Each one has its own story, and discovering that story is only one small part of the curator's daily job.

Before an item comes to us, we need to make certain that it *belongs* with us. If it doesn't tell a story that sheds light on Olmsted County's history, it might need to find a different home. Once a donor has given us an object, that's when the real work begins. It starts with paperwork, like all good things do. We make sure that we know *where* each item came from, *what* it is, and *how* it tells a unique story. Once we have these pieces, we create a digital and physical record of it, add a label to it, and find where it best fits into our different storage facilities. For many items, it may be the only time they're interacted with for years; only a fraction of items at the History Center are put on display.

The larger struggle is making sure collections are properly cared for *after* they've been cataloged. This includes regular inspection and cleaning, as well as daily monitoring of environmental conditions in our facilities. Disaster prevention is a huge focus of the average curator.

To that end, the History Center has implemented a wide range of systems to ensure proper care, including more rigorous climate control, pest protection, and regular collection inspections. No museum has a perfect system, but we're excited to be making great leaps in our ability to not only take in more items than before, but to care for them the way they deserve.



Movie fiction

Real life storage
and monitoring



SO YOU WANT TO BE AN ARCHIVIST: HOW WE ARCHIVE

By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

Since you're reading this newsletter, you clearly have an interest in history and in supporting HCOC, but you may not really know what it is each of us does. When I meet someone new and am asked what I do, the usual response to "I'm an archivist" is some version of, "Oh, interesting! What is that?"

Much of what Peter wrote in his article applies to the archives side of collections work, too. But there are two sides to the collections for a reason. Each is quite distinct and is used differently. I describe the archival collection as anything that was created with the intent of conveying information, which, broadly speaking, means material in printed, photographic, or recorded formats.

My job is twofold. The first is caring for and processing the materials so that they remain in usable condition and are accessible. Caring for them means a variety of things, including but not limited to storing everything in archival quality containers, ensuring those containers aren't over or under-filled, keeping contents neat and orderly, removing or creating barriers to harmful objects (e.g. acidic paper, rusty paperclips), scanning fragile photos or documents for preservation, and documenting conditions so we can track and address changes. Processing means creating catalog records for some items, but it's more often about arranging and describing the contents of a collection of records. This helps us know exactly what we have, make sense of what we have, and allow others to access what we have with relative ease.

Which gets to my second core responsibility: assisting researchers. There would be no point to the first responsibility if people never used the archival collection. Every week I field calls, emails, and walk-ins with any number and variety of questions related to Olmsted County's past. Sometimes people expect us to give them a complete history, but that's not how this works. We provide you with the puzzle pieces, you must put them together. It can be a lot of detective work, yet there's much satisfaction in discovery. This part of my job is where I've learned the most about our collection and our county.

I would be remiss if I didn't note that I'm assisted in all that I've described here by a cadre of knowledgeable and talented volunteers who I am immensely grateful for.

**So now the next time someone tells you they're an archivist,
you can say, "Oh interesting! I've heard of that."**

Paperclips are a big no-no!



Orderly, perfectly filled, archival container, ready for access!



Where the scanning magic happens. Flat bed scanner (far left, behind monitor), overhead camera scanner (center), book/large format scanner (far right).

THE CREATION OF “STORIES OF SERVICE”: HOW WE INTERPRET MAYOWOOD

By Molli Funk, Historic Mayowood Site Manager

In honor of our nation’s 250th birthday, I, with the assistance of my guides, researched and wrote *Stories of Service*, a specialty tour that highlights the Mayo family’s deep commitment to their country and their long-standing tradition of military and public service.

A specialty tour at a historic home is a themed experience that explores a specific topic, person, or event connected to the site beyond the standard house tour. Through focused storytelling, artifacts, and historical research, these tours provide visitors with a deeper understanding of the home and the people connected to it.

At HCOC, we interpret the artifacts, buildings, grounds, and stories of Mayowood through extensive historical research conducted using the HCOC and Mayo Clinic archives. This research ensures that the tours we develop each year present accurate historical information while helping preserve and share the legacy of the Mayo family for future generations. Primary source materials, including photographs, personal letters, and historical documents, were used to help construct an accurate and engaging interpretation of the Mayo family’s service and public contributions.

Once research is completed the program is written room by room. This includes the artifacts, photographs, and interpretive panels used in each space, the script for guides, and instructions for setup and takedown. I also create a floor plan as a visual tool to help guides learn and navigate each new program.

I hope you will be able to join me for this specialty tour, which will be offered throughout the month of July at no additional cost with regular admission.

Some of the key features guests will learn about include Dr. Will Mayo’s and Dr. Charles Mayo’s roles in military medical preparedness during World War I; President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s visit to Rochester on August 8, 1934, including the widely reported Mayowood luncheon; and Dr. Chuck Mayo’s leadership of the 233rd Station Hospital in Finschhafen, New Guinea, during World War II.

Visitors will also see Dr. Will Mayo’s World War I uniform, Dr. Chuck Mayo’s World War II uniform, and photographs of the Mayo family from the History Center and Mayo Clinic archives.

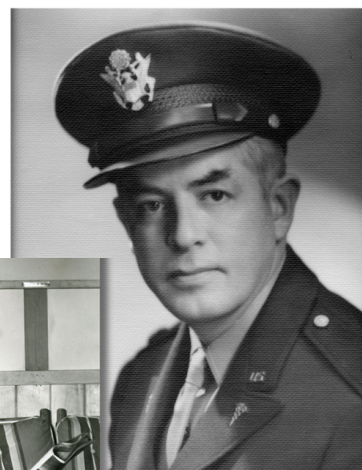
Program Information

“Stories of Service” will be offered July 1 through July 30, 2026. Historic Mayowood will be open Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays in July.

- Adults: \$20
- Children (ages 3–12): \$10
- Children under 3: not recommended



*Mayos in the service. ▶
Clockwise from top left:
Charlie with Edith &
unknown soldier, Chuck, Sally.*



2026 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

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

- June 16 ● Panel Discussion, "History of Rochesterfest"
- June 18 ● Lecture & Practice, "Fun with Roosters Vintage Base Ball"
- June 20 ● **BBQ on the Farmstead**
- June 21 ● Roosters Home Opener
- June 23 ● Presentation, "Veggie Santa" children's book author Marlene Petersen
- June 25 ● Rochester Public Library Bookmobile at HCOC
- June 28 ● Roosters vs. Hens & Roosters vs. Celebrities
- July 1 ● Heritage, Heroes, & History: "Lobb Field" America's 250th Birthday Bash
- July 9 ● Rochester Public Library Bookmobile at HCOC
Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, "Serving with Honor"
- July 17 ● Storytime snack & craft
- July 20-24 ● Summer Camp 2026: A Step Back in Time (ages 6-10)
- July 23 ● Rochester Public Library Bookmobile at HCOC
- August 1 ● Rochester Reads at the History Center (Book/Author Event)
- August 5 ● Heritage, Heroes, & History
- August 6 ● Rochester Public Library Bookmobile at HCOC
Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, "Mayo Clinic & the White House"
- August 7 ● MHRT Barn Dance
- August 8-9 ● MHRT Days of Yesteryear
- August 14 ● Storytime snack & craft
- August 20 ● Rochester Public Library Bookmobile at HCOC
Heirloom Garden Tour & Lecture, "Planning Your Fall Garden"
- August 22 ● Booker Mini Band 50th Anniversary Concert

think BANK

Special thanks to
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FREE ADMISSION
for June & July!

- September 1 ● Nicholas David, aka "Nick the Feeling", Concert
- September 2 ● Heritage, Heroes, & History
- September 3 ● Mayo Clinic Lecture Series, "Education at Mayo Clinic"
- September 12 ● Storytime snack & craft

STAFF

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Darla Buss
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Chris Delisle
Exhibit and Education Coordinator
Molli Funk
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Krista Lewis
Archivist
Peter Limbert
Collections Manager
Lori Milanowski
Associate Director/Accountant
Laura Singh
Marketing and Events Associate

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Jean Joyce Williams
Historic Mayowood Site
Assistant Manager
Joe Hendren
Site Assistant II
Carolyn Barsness
Patrick Dean
Alexus Heins
Joan Hunziker-Dean
Kim Illg
Jeanne Klein
Barb Knott
Kathy Lamb
Megan Magnuson
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Elizabeth Schmidt
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HOW WE CELEBRATE 100 YEARS!

As part of our 100th anniversary celebration, we partnered with USA Dance Southern MN Chapter #2017 in an event series called Dancing Through the Decades, which started with 11 weeks of dance lessons from various styles popular in each decade of the last 100 years. The lessons culminated in a wonderful Grand Dance Celebration at the Historic Chateau Theatre. Staff and attendees got into the spirit of the event, dressing in the style of their favorite decade. In addition to dancing, we had an exhibit of dance themed objects from our collections, DM Creative was on hand to take photos, Bebap mixed up amazing cocktails, Nothing Bundt Cakes fed our sweet tooth, and local dance professionals and groups entertained attendees with spectacular performances.

It was a night to be remembered! Thanks to everyone who helped make it happen!



The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY