The Year in Review

As we publish this last newsletter of 2015, we’d like to peek behind us, highlight our current endeavors, and gaze into future possibilities. Bear with us; this will be a fun ride.

The year began with Executive Director Todd Mahon accepting a new position at the Minnesota Historical Society and the ACHS Board of Directors voting to hire Rebecca Ebnet-Mavencamp in his stead. Through these months, staff began planning the Heritage Home and Garden Tour, held programs at Anoka County libraries, and maintained business as usual for patrons using the library. Transitions in leadership bring a learning curve for all involved, but with a busy summer of events and deadlines, the ACHS adapted and moved on in short order.

Appearances at the County Fair, Nowthen Threshing Show, Linwood Family Fest, Anoka Car Show, Riverfest, and Rice Creek Arts Festival gave us the chance to meet new people, volunteers, and partners. One of these new partners, North Metro Mayors Association, provided many opportunities in networking, who notified us of events like the dedication of the Curling Club in Blaine as an Olympic training facility or various meet and greet nights. Faithful partner organizations including the Chamber of Commerce and Rotaries, the VFW and Legions, brought us in to provide programming and activity updates. A tour of City Councils and other public entities, as well as a unification of nonprofit groups in the County, furthered the ability of ACHS to connect with the stories we must tell.

And speaking of stories…were you in Fridley on October 30? Rebecca joined other speakers on the TED Talk carpet, a bright red circle you can find all over the internet, that night to admit she would let her diaries burn. She said that as important as saving nitty gritty details can be, we can’t save it all and what we do save should tell the story of us as clearly as possible. Couldn’t make it? The recording will be available online soon.

So much of what ACHS does is related to storytelling. Whether it’s helping authors like Johannes Allert, June Anderson, and Mel Aanerud research and promote their newest publications, or supporting the Genealogical Society’s work on Tuesday mornings as they sift through records looking for requested information, we make the collection publicly accessible. Sometimes this comes in the form of a new book, like our recently published Anoka Halloween Collectibles that compiles pictures and dates all in one place. Sometimes it’s digitization efforts through the Minnesota Digital Library (find our collection at reflections.mndigital.org). Sometimes it’s the creation of a program detailing a town’s history or the expansion of a popular program like the State Hospital, or maybe just a fresh delivery of an old favorite like Rum Runners or Logging.

Of course, the time commitment for staff to create quality, new programming and events runs high and we have an obligation to get the most “bang for our buck” out of each minute. That’s where some of the future talk comes into play—our exhibit plans for interpreting the suburbanization of Anoka County.

We’re highly fortunate to have one of the early leading documents discussing this concept, prepared for us in The Story of the Suburbs in Anoka and Hennepin Counties by Jodi Larson, Kyle Engelking and Karen Majewicz. The information contained in this report, combined with general documentation and research on the likes of Orrin Thompson who built acres and acres of

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From the Director…
By Rebecca Ebnet Mavencamp

We speak often about telling your story—heck, I just did a whole TEDX talk on the subject. But what does that mean for your family this holiday season? Regardless of how you celebrate, when you celebrate, or with whom you celebrate, I’m sure the next few months will have a gathering or two on the calendar.

We have a favor to ask of you during this time. The ACHS strives for inclusion, but the realization of that goal is only as good as the stories we receive. We know untold tales live along the edges of the county, or that our immigrant population doesn’t have much real estate in our exhibit hall. We understand that the languages spoken at home aren’t reflected in our library or archives. We can only preserve the stories that come to us, however.

During the next couple of months, as you and those you know gather together, jot down some notes of those traditions. Copy the special recipes and make an extra print of the group picture you mail out. Think about how you can contribute to the gaps in our database and collection, or who you know that could. Then bring them to ACHS for us to see!

There are thousands of voices in Anoka County with more experiences than we could ever tell. But with your help reaching out to residents who aren’t members and new residents who don’t know we exist, we can certainly try to make a dent in that void.

Thank you for being on our team and making the ACHS a top-notch organization!
new housing in the 1950s and 60s, will provide the basic structure on which to hang a number of additional conversations over the next several years.

It’s from these additional topics we will develop an enormous amount of product. Consider how suburbanization impacted energy use, wildlife, immunizations, agriculture, work life, transportation, schools, and clubs like 4-H—if each of these topics received an intensive study by one staff member, that single body of research could not only create an exhibit in the museum, but also an education box for teachers to use in the classroom, a published booklet, an oral program, website content, digitized records to increase public access, oral histories, and youth activities. Over the course of time, the material could come together in an online encyclopedia or coffee table book, while exhibit pieces get downsized and made into a travelling display available for city halls, community centers, libraries, or other public places interested in hosting them.

And the interest is there. If we had any doubt regarding the enthusiasm of area students in history, they were laid to rest in one fell swoop on the first day of the new History Club. Boring title, lots of fun, trust us. The teachers in question volunteered their time to bring 10 students to the museum after school for an hour long program of something different each month—how to use the library, how to identify a photo, how to find your house on a map etc. The Amazing Lisa (cape included, I do believe) called rather sheepishly a week prior to the event saying her numbers had risen to 30. We said no sweat. We changed a few things. Lisa came back. This time in person, she looked a bit paler. Clearing her throat, she announced she had capped the activity at 75. Recovering from our shock, we revamped the program and introduced everyone to turnips, the back storage area, and how we do our jobs. This month, we tackled archeology.

It’s always neat to look at the bones and arrowheads we have in the collection, but even more so now. We had the opportunity this year to partner with Ramsey County, Scott County, and Dakota County on a Legacy grant that hired an archeologist to produce a number of reports, conduct scientific analysis, and outreach programming. Jeremy Nienow has proved a tremendous asset to the program of something different each month, as effectively as we can. Thank you for being with us on the journey!
Collections Corner

By Audra Hilse, ACHS Archivist & Administrator

It goes without saying that people bring us interesting things as artifact donations. As often as possible, we try and get the story that goes with the interesting artifacts, in order to make them even more engaging. Sometimes, though, the full story of an object is not known to anyone still living, and the most that we can get is tantalizing hints.

The doll pictured, right, falls into the latter category. It was brought to us recently as part of a collection of things found inside the walls of a house in the city of Anoka. The family who owns the house had remodeled in 1980, and found a number of interesting items which they fortunately kept, and lately brought to the Historical Society. Among other interesting items (including a shoe, a corn-cob pipe, and envelopes postmarked from the 1890s and early 1900s), was this little doll.

She is just 6 and ¾ inches high from the top of her head to the hem of her dress, and is obviously homemade. Her round head is stuffed, probably with rag pieces, and secured with string to form the neck. Her arms are made of fabric rolls that were stitched together. The dress is made of fabric that probably dates from the 1870 to 1880 – the combination of plain, plaid and stripes as the fabric pattern is unusual. Her apron has a little pocket on it. We estimate that the doll itself is probably c. 1900, but would have been made with fabric scraps leftover from other household projects, so it is not surprising to find that an older fabric was used to make it.

This is where the mystery begins, however, because we do not know anything else about her. Prior to the current family, the house was owned by someone in the Barstow family, but we do not know if that ownership goes back to the time period when these items would likely have been put into the walls. There is also the question of why the doll was put inside the wall in the first place – did the girl who owned (and likely made) it not want her anymore? We will keep digging, to see if we can find out who lived in the house at the time and what stories we can learn about them.

Even if we can’t ever learn her full story, the doll is still an intriguing addition to the collections, giving us a glimpse into the life of a young girl in Anoka more than a hundred years ago.

Preserve your Blaine History

Where: Northtown Library
711 County Rd 10 NE,
Blaine, MN 55434
When: November 21
Time: 11 a.m.—4 p.m.

What part of Blaine’s history is hiding in your basement? Perhaps there are photographs of a long-gone Blaine Business, the family home or community events. Perhaps there are documents produced by a local club, or the brochures given when moving into an Orrin Thompson home.

Discover your history and bring it to the Northtown library to get scanned with equipment provided by Minitex and the Minnesota Digital Library. Community scanning is offered in partnership with Minitex and the Anoka County Library. All materials digitized will then be added to the collections of the Anoka County Historical Society, the Anoka County Library, and the Minnesota Digital Library in order to better preserve the history of our community.

This service is free and open to the public, but scanning will be limited based on the time constraints of the day.
Meet the Amazing ACHS Interns!

Zach: Greetings! My name is Zach, and I am an intern at ACHS. I’ve been working here since the beginning of September, and my primary task has been analyzing boxes of documents donated throughout the years by surrounding communities. I am pursuing a degree in Library Technology, but I feel that the skills learned in such a program work well with the needs of the patrons of a historical society, as our focus is on technical aspects like indexing and archiving.

That’s enough about me. I want to tell you briefly about my expectations and opinions of your community and my internship. It’s worth noting that I am from Minneapolis, and had never visited Anoka County prior to my internship. When I discovered this opportunity, I was thrilled. While I had never been to Anoka before, I had certainly heard about it being the Halloween capital of the world. Halloween is my favorite holiday, so I was really excited to be up to my neck in unsorted plastic pumpkin pails and Garrison Keillor costumes. I quickly found that this wasn’t the case at all. Instead, I’ve discovered a vast collection of letters, government documents, yearbooks, report cards, and personal effects that have revealed the deep and rich history of Anoka County. I recently discovered a short story about the settlement of the area that was just tucked away in a stack of documents from the 1800s.

I’m looking forward to making more amazing discoveries, and continuing to piece together the story of Anoka County.

Molly: I am a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin where I earned a Bachelor’s degree in Anthropology, with a certificate in Archaeology. In June 2015, I joined ACHS as an intern and my first task was to create a “Museum in a Box” activity based on immigration to Anoka County, Minnesota. This box is available for rent by teachers across Anoka County as a hands-on learning activity for students, which serves to tie the immigrant data of the past to the immigrant data of the present, highlighting how the past can teach and guide the future.

Using my background in archaeology, I am currently creating an exhibit on the archaeology of Minnesota that will be installed in January and will showcase actual prehistoric artifacts from collections at ACHS. These artifacts will also be used in my second “Museum in a Box” program that will show their relevance to Anoka County, past and present. Drawing from my skills in curation, I have also photographed the prehistoric collection at ACHS and have built appropriate storage mounts for those artifacts. Other projects I have been involved in through ACHS include a weekend of living history at a local threshing show, a public presentation on archaeology, and a beginner’s grant writing conference in St. Paul, Minnesota.
Contributions & New Members – Thank You

All lists are current to October 21, 2015

General Donations
Benevity Community Impact Fund
D.A.R., Anoka Chapter
Friends of Fridley Senior Program
June Anderson
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Ed & Marg Faherty
Arthur Reese
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If you want more information or your business would like to become a member or sponsor with ACHS call, 763.421.0600, email Audra@AnokaCountyHistory.org or visit our website AnokaCountyHistory.org
Book Talk and Signing
Images of America: Ham Lake by Mel Aanerud
Tuesday November 17
5-7 p.m. book signing, 5:30 p.m. book talk
Location: Anoka History Center
Ham Lake is a perfect geographical township, six miles by six miles square as provided in the Northwest Territories Act of 1787. This book on the history of Ham Lake by Mel Aanerud follows the process of those lives as they farmed, built houses of worship, houses of learning and houses of commerce. It follows a few interesting characters, award winning businesses and some who had political prowess. Book signing held 5—7 p.m., book talk to be held at 5:30p.m. No registration required.
Cost: FREE

Library Program
The History of Blaine
November 21, 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.
Location: Northtown Library
711 County Rd 10 NE, Blaine, 55434
Join us for a program about the history of the city of Blaine. Many early pioneers in Anoka County settled in this area, and there are many fascinating stories about life in Blaine from the time before it was a city all the way up until the present. This program will be presented twice: at 1pm and again at 3pm. Programs are offered in partnership with Anoka County Library and are funded with money from Minnesota’s Arts and Cultural Heritage fund.
We will also be pilot testing a new project, where community members are encouraged to bring materials important to them and their family history to be scanned with equipment provided by Minitex and the Minnesota Digital Library. Community scanning is offered in partnership with Minitex and the Anoka County Library. These programs are free but seating may be limited. See page 4 for more information.
Cost: FREE

Library Program
Quilt Facts, Folklore and FABRICation
December 12, 1 p.m.
Location: Northtown Library
711 County Rd 10 NE, Blaine, 55434
So many stories have been handed down, but they don’t always hold up under a close look at history. Find out the real stories behind what we all thought we knew about the history of quilting. Actual quilt squares, small quilts, books and period patterns are available for attendees to see and compliment the many color photos of antique quilts in the program. The “warmth” and variety of this program is sure to delight even non-quilters.
No registration is required for this free program but seating may be limited. For more information call 763-717-3267. This program is offered in partnership with Anoka County Library and is funded with money from Minnesota’s Arts and Cultural Heritage fund.
Cost: FREE

Library Program
Rum Runners and Temperance Tantrums
January 23, 1 p.m.
Location: Rum River Library
4201 6th Ave, Anoka, 55303
The 18th Amendment made it illegal to manufacture, sell, or transport intoxicating liquors and it took effect on January 17, 1920. However, the law did not eliminate the problem! The clash between those opposed to intoxicating beverages and those who wanted to imbibe was sometimes violent, sometimes comical or even just amazing. Bootleggers and rum runners thrived in Anoka County and Minnesota even before prohibition went nationwide in 1920. Why such a law was thought necessary, how was it enforced (or not) and the people it affected make for great stories.
No registration required for this free program but seating may be limited. For more information call 763-576-4695. This program is offered in partnership with Anoka County Library and is funded with money from Minnesota’s Arts and Cultural Heritage fund.
Cost: FREE
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