



## St. Louis County Historical Society 2009 Annual Report

The people of St. Louis County have always had an abiding interest in the history of their region. For nearly a century the residents of the county have largely accomplished the goal of understanding the local past through the St. Louis County Historical Society, a county-funded, member-supported (at the end of 2009 numbering 573 members) nonprofit corporation, which collects, presents and preserves knowledge of the history and prehistory of both the county and region. The Society operates museum spaces in the St. Louis County Heritage & Arts Center (the Depot) and continues its contractual partnership with Minnesota Historical Society and the University of Minnesota at the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, repository of the Society's archival materials (paper records, photographs and electronic materials). It also continued its ongoing partnership with six affiliated area (Iron Range) historical organizations: Ely-Winton Historical Society, Hibbing Historical Society, Minnesota Museum of Mining, Sisu Heritage, Inc., Tower-Soudan Historical Society, and Virginia Area Historical Society.

### Exhibits

The largest exhibit opened by the Society in 2009 (August) was *Generations of Service*, a Veterans' Memorial Hall project designed to

portray all eras of United States involvement in wars in which soldiers from St. Louis County participated, from the Civil War to the current Global War on Terror. The exhibit includes many diverse artifacts from the Society's VMH collection and many stories from local veterans. It also includes a wall showing the names of all soldiers killed in action and a computer available to visitors to add their own stories.



This exhibit (*section shown above*) was the long-term successor to *Dignity Thru Unity*, which featured the Vietnam War and the era in which it occurred. It occupies the same exhibit space, which was entirely re-done, from the flooring and other aspects of the infrastructure. The exhibit was supported by grants from U. S. Steel (which made the underground mining scene possible), Wildey-Mitchell Foundation, Minnesota Historical Society, and in-kind donations from many sources, including a substantial donation of labor from Lake Superior College students, whose group effort quickly built much of the infrastructure. Both a private reception (August) and public grand opening (October) were held in the Great Hall of the St. Louis County Heritage & Arts Center (the Depot) for *Generations of Service*. At the public event, Civil War enactors were on hand to provide more

historical information and awareness to guests in attendance.

*Right: Flutist  
Cochise Anderson  
at Eastman  
Johnson exhibit  
reception*



Another major exhibit event was the necessarily time limited showing of the Society's entire Eastman Johnson collection in the Great Hall of the St. Louis County Heritage & Arts Center, opening with a well-attended, elegant, and well-received gala reception event on September 26<sup>th</sup> and continuing for the following week. Beautiful new maple display cabinets were constructed for this purpose (which will also display other exhibits, subsequently), with the financial support of the Depot Foundation. Black Woods catered this event with an array of distinctive appetizers and donated the cost. Earlier in the year, Minnesota Historical Society had exhibited the collection in the History Center in St. Paul, from February through early May, which was seen by approximately 85,000 visitors.

The Society also continued with its traveling exhibit program. *Nowhere to Hide*, an 8-panel traveling exhibit providing a historical understanding of the present worldwide HIV/AIDS pandemic by comparing it to the 1918 flu pandemic, re-opened on May 4<sup>th</sup> in the Fesler Gallery and was available to Depot visitors through June 30<sup>th</sup>.

*Finns of Western Lake Superior* also was on display at the Virginia Courthouse from May 12<sup>th</sup> through September 20<sup>th</sup>. This exhibit covers the socio-political and cultural aspect of Finnish immigrants' lives in this area, primarily between 1895 and 1910. The content was developed by regional historian Marvin Lappa and fabricated by Venture Exhibits, a local exhibit team.



*Tamburitza band - from Old Country exhibit*

During Fall Semester of 2009, an intern from the College of St. Scholastica worked with Society staff developing a new traveling exhibit: *Preserving the Old Country: The Experiences of Croats, Serbians, and Slovenians in St. Louis County*. The two main periods of immigration explored were the 1860s and a larger wave that took place between the 1880s and the 1920s.

Another exhibit, *Selections from the St. Louis County Historical Society Collection: Paintings by David Ericson and Gilbert Munger*, opened in December of 2009 in the Fesler Hallway of the Great Hall. This exhibit of some works of two widely known area artists included a Duluth "skyline" from the waterfront in 1882 completed by Ericson when he was only 13.

In addition, the Society initiated an exhibit collaboration with the Duluth Art Institute in October 2009 featuring as the first Fesler Gallery offering *Full Circle*, an Ojibwe beadwork exhibit, including contemporary pieces created by a Grand Portage artist and some older, historical pieces from the Society's collection.

### **Educational Programs**

The Society's newspaper, *Rootprints*, continued to provide educational articles to the public, with a distribution of 5000, including in-depth articles on some aspect of St. Louis County history as center features. These included "Ojibwe Faces and Stories: The Legacy of Ancestral Portraits in the Eastman Johnson Lake Superior Indians Collection", by Dr. Linda Grover, Professor of American Indian Studies, UMD (in conjunction with the Society's exhibition of this collection in September) and an article on the Prindle Mansion, recently home to the John Duss Music Conservatory, operated by the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, by Thomas Vaughn. The publication also includes many shorter educational articles and news about its six affiliated historical organizations located throughout the Iron Range.

*Ely-Winton History Society provided the picture of Grandma Tobacci with her dog outside the Post Office, below, for one of our issues of Rootprints. It is from their Les Brownell collection.*



The Society continued throughout 2009 with its popular, monthly three-hour public service "Antique Appraisal" event offered by board member and professional appraiser R. Dan Sershon, with the occasional assistance of other area appraisers in the Rotunda area of the Depot, which gives community members a chance to get free appraisals and to learn more about the items they bring in, including the historical era in which they were produced.

The "Lunch with the History People" series of free, noon lectures on a wide variety of topics, also continued throughout the year. Titles in 2009 included: "Invincible" History of the Duluth Boat Club", by author Michael J. Cochran; "Hard Work and a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Minnesota" by Barbara Sommer; "The History of Lakeside" by Wendy Grethen; "Wood, Concrete, Stone and Steel: Minnesota's Historic Bridges" by Denis Gardner; "State Representative Willard Munger: All the Things You Didn't Know about Minnesota's *Mr. Environment*", by Judge Mark Munger; "Of Vikings & Voyageurs" by Jack Salmela; and "Reviewing the Art of Photography While Taking Photos in St. Louis County" by Tony Kuznik.

Veterans' Memorial Hall, a program of the Society, held its annual veterans' remembrance dinner, on November 19, 2009, honoring the veterans who served during the Cold War this year. VMH also participated in the Veterans' Day March from the old Armory to the Depot, which also provides assistance for handicapped veterans to participate in the march.

In October, another "Coney Day" was held at the Depot, primarily as a fund raising event, but also promoting awareness of the existence and mission of the Veterans' Memorial Hall program itself.

The internship program of the Society also flourished throughout 2009, with 9 interns providing help and acquiring knowledge through all academic terms of the year. Emphases were primarily history and marketing, with interns coming from the College of St. Scholastica, University of Wisconsin Superior and the University of Minnesota Duluth. They assisted with exhibit production, event coordination, and artifact research and recording. Many of the interns were based in the Veterans' Memorial Hall program. One intern designed a non-VMH traveling exhibit, as outlined above in the Exhibits section.

#### **North Shore Historical Assembly**

The Society hosted this assembly's 2009 meeting. Dr. Linda Grover gave the featured presentation; all participants also presented topics of interest from their organizations. The North Shore Scenic Railroad provided an enjoyable train ride (to and from Lester River) with a lunch on board, and an entertaining and educational narration by Ken Buehler, Executive Director of the Lake Superior Railroad Museum.

#### **Annual Meeting of the Membership**

The 87<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Members of the Society was held in the Great Hall on May 5, 2009, with Cathy Wurzer, of Minnesota Public Radio, the guest speaker. Her topic derived from her recently published book *Tales of the Road*, which was about the history of

Minnesota Highway 61. The dinner was catered by Savories.



*Cathy Wurzer (left) and Executive Director JoAnne Coombe (right) at the 2009 Annual Meeting*

New board members Jill Dupont, Assistant Professor of History at the College of St. Scholastica; Michele Miller, staff attorney at Johnson, Killen & Seiler; Michael Gillespie, a biology teacher at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College; and Carinda Horton, former local radio talk show host and co-owner of Horton's Gym were elected that night by the membership.

The new board then elected its officers (President Vern Zacher, Vice President Dan Serhson, Secretary Dwight Nelson and Treasurer Robin Tellor) at a brief meeting following the meeting of the membership and also affirmed the nomination of former board president Robert S. Mars, Jr. as Vice President Emeritus.

#### **Collections/Artifacts**

During 2009, 2,120 individual objects already existing in the collection were catalogued into the Society's museum software. In addition there were 26 new items added to the 2009 Veterans' Memorial Hall collection and 19 added

to the general collection. Over 200 photos of artifacts were downloaded to the Society's artifact database.

Some of the most unique items added to the collection include: a life jacket from the *SS Nautilus* – the nation's first nuclear submarine, two Duluth Boat Club medals from Walter Hoover's family, pieces of foundation from Adolph Hitler's house retrieved by a Duluthian serving in Germany after WWII, and milk bottles from Duluth Minnesota Dairy Association and the accompanying history of the dairy farm near Ely that provided the milk to fill these bottles.

#### **Veterans' Memorial Hall Program**

The Veterans' Memorial Hall Program focused heavily and expended most of its resources on successfully finishing the new exhibit, *Generations of Service*, during 2009. Its website redesign was also completed in 2009. 301 new and/or improved (new information added) veterans' stories were added to the website, as follows, listed in ascending order of length and complexity: 277 basic biographies; 8 expanded biographies; 5 memoirs; and 11 oral histories.

In addition, the new VMH Program Assistant, Patra McSharry Sevastiades, revised several historical articles on the website, revised all the explanatory text on the website, and wrote an article appearing in *Rootprints on Generations of Service*.

#### **Service Statistics (Individuals Served)**

St. Louis County Historical Society alone served a total of 199,844 individuals in 2008, through museum visits (43,490 - total of 31,216 paid and

12,274 free admissions); archives use at the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center (approximately 2,000, per NEMHC Curator Pat Maus); website accessing - VMH (12,274) and Society (5,257) websites; visitors to Society traveling exhibits 31,870; attendance at and participation in special events (Society - 813, VMH - 500); mail, email and walk-in service requests (Society - 2600, VMH - 360); and Depot rental patrons using areas enhanced by Society exhibits (15,680). Approximately 85,000 visitors to the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul saw our Eastman Johnson art collection in February - May of 2009.

In addition, our Iron Range affiliated historical organizations report that they served through their programs/special events, membership and exhibit visitation totals as follows for 2009:

Ely-Winton H.S. - 1722  
Hibbing H.S. - 606  
Minnesota Museum of Mining - 5037  
Sisu Heritage Inc. - 1504  
Tower-Soudan H.S. - 6731  
Virginia Area H.S. - 3507  
**Total Served by Affiliates - 19,107**

#### **2009 Staff of**

##### **St. Louis County Historical Society**

JoAnne Coombe, Executive Director  
Julie Bolos, Manager of Administrative Services  
Susan Schwanekamp, Executive Assistant  
Milissa Brooks-Ojibway, Collections Manager  
Daniel Hartman, Veterans' Memorial Hall Program Director  
Patra McSharry-Sevastiades, Veterans' Memorial Hall Program Assistant