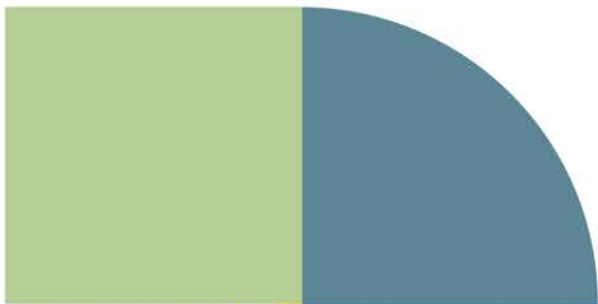




# ANNUAL REPORT



## MISSION STATEMENT

The general nature and purpose of the Society shall be the discovery, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge about the history and prehistory of St. Louis County and the State of Minnesota.

In addition to collecting and preserving objects of material culture and historical research material, the Society shall maintain and operate a museum and materially participate in the collections and operations of a historical research center adequate to serve the region encompassing St. Louis County and northeastern Minnesota.



# CONTENTS

---

## **MISSION STATEMENT 2**

---

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE: A YEAR OF STABILIZATION AND RENEWAL 4**

---

## **GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP 6**

---

Board of Governors & Leadership List 6

Strategic Partnerships & Advisory Committees 7

Board Spotlight:  
Leone Graf 8

Affiliate Information 9

## **PRESERVING THE PAST 11**

---

The Collection: Unique Artifacts & Special Donations 11

A Treasure Reclaimed: The Sjogren Figurine Donation 11

Legacy Feature: The Forest History Room 12

## **ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY 13**

---

Events & Outreach 13

Educational Programs Spotlight: Traveling Exhibits 15

Veterans Memorial Hall 17

## **EXPANDING OUR REACH 18**

---

Connecting Our Community: 2025 Communications Impact 18

## **FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP 19**

---

Financial Stewardship: A Year of Growth and Sustainability 19

Revenue and Expense 19

Museum Collections: For the Betterment of the Community, Not the Bottom Line 20

## **GRATITUDE & THE FUTURE 21**

---

Mapping Our Path to 2027: A Vision for the St. Louis County Historical Society 21

Donor Roll & Acknowledgements 22

Publication Details and Acknowledgements 23

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE: A YEAR OF STABILIZATION AND RENEWAL



We entered 2025 facing significant challenges and a landscape of unknowns. While our journey of renewal is ongoing, this past year has been defined by our ability to resolve long-standing issues, stabilize our most critical operations, and clarify the scale of the work ahead.

## Building a Resilient Team

Upon my arrival in February 2025, our immediate priority was addressing significant staff turnover. Today, I am proud to share that our team is approaching its first full year together—a milestone that reflects a deep, renewed commitment from both our veteran staff and our newest members. Although we continue to operate at a lean level of four full-time and two part-time employees, our collective accomplishments over the last twelve months have been substantial.

## Restoration and Remembrance

Our resilience was tested following the devastating water incursion of 2024. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of our staff and volunteers, we have fully restored **Veterans Memorial Hall**, once again welcoming visitors to engage with the stories of our region's service members. Looking forward, we continue to research and record the histories of veterans from across the Arrowhead region. This vital

data will eventually power a modern online registry to replace our current site, a project for which we continue to seek and appreciate community support.

## Elevating Professional Standards

In late 2024, a peer review through the **Museum Assessment Program (MAP)** provided a roadmap for improving our stewardship and governance. One of our most significant shifts this year was ethical and financial: in accordance with museum best practices, we have ended the practice of capitalizing our collections on our balance sheet. Because we hold these artifacts in the public trust rather than as convertible financial assets, removing them from our balance sheet provides a far more accurate and transparent picture of our financial position.

Simultaneously, we have made the rigorous management of our collections a top priority. We are systematically ensuring that every object is recorded in our database—including “found-in-collection” items that lacked previous documentation. While there is more work to do, including comprehensive photography and the eventual migration to a publicly accessible database, our progress is steady.

## Strategic Partnerships and Stewardship

We are thrilled to have renewed our partnership with **UMD's History Department**. After a brief hiatus, UMD interns are once again making significant contributions to our cataloging efforts and helping the Society advance its stewardship duties.

Stewardship also requires a long-term solution for our collections. Since 2022, the majority of our 13,000 artifacts have been housed in off-site storage. We are incredibly grateful to the **St. Louis County Board of Commissioners** for securing the rent on this facility through 2029. To transition from “temporary” to “permanent,” the Minnesota Historical Society recently awarded us a grant to work with **The Museum Ladies**, specialized collections consultants, to develop a formal Collections Storage Plan, critical to developing storage space into museum-quality preservation space.

## A Changing Landscape at the Depot

While the County's HVAC renovations at the Depot have disrupted our traditional exhibit spaces, they have also provided a unique catalyst for renewal. We are currently partnering with the County and the Society's Mining Industry Advisory Committee to create ***A County Built on Iron***, a new, state-of-the-art exhibit. Additionally, a grant from the **Depot Foundation** is allowing us to relocate and renew our **Lake Superior Ojibwe** gallery, moving it to the J.C. Ryan Gallery on the second floor. By working closely with contractors during the HVAC upgrades, we are gaining vital efficiencies as we prepare these new experiences for the public.

## Connecting Through Programs and Exhibits

Our mission truly comes to life through the stories we share and the people we bring together. In 2025, we were proud to debut the traveling exhibit, ***Sovereign Nations: Discovering the Treaty Story of Minnesota's Indigenous Peoples***. Developed in close partnership with our **American Indian Advisory Committee** and made possible through the generous support of the **Depot Foundation** and the **1854 Treaty Authority**, this exhibit provides a vital platform for understanding our shared history. This commitment to Indigenous history continued with our **American Indian Heritage Day** family festival, which brought generations together for a day of cultural celebration and education.

Our work with the veteran community also remains a cornerstone of our public programming. With the invaluable support of the **Veterans Memorial Hall Advisory Committee** and **Duluth's Women of Today**, we hosted a deeply moving **Veterans Day ceremony and luncheon**. We also gathered for our annual **Remembrance Dinner**, where we honored the legacy of Pearl Harbor with a fascinating and poignant presentation by **Northern News Now Meteorologist Dave Anderson**.

## Mapping Our Future

These changes mark the beginning of a new era for the Society, but growth requires a clear roadmap. Last year, we assembled a strategic planning committee to define our vision for the years to come. With the expert pro bono assistance of consultant and facilitator **Madeline Kvale**, and the volunteers on our planning team, we are on track to complete and implement a new strategic plan by May 2026.

## An Expression of Gratitude

None of these achievements would be possible without the community that sustains us. To our donors, members, and the organizations that provide the financial and volunteer power behind our work—thank you.

We are particularly grateful to the **Depot Foundation**, the **1854 Treaty Authority**, and the **St. Louis County Board of Commissioners** for their significant investments in our facilities and programming this year. Your trust in our stewardship allows us to transform these challenges into a new era of excellence for the St. Louis County Historical Society.

Thank you for standing with us as we preserve and share the stories of our region.



# GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

## Board of Governors & Leadership List

### Officers

---

**Jeffrey Wencil**, President

**Steven Matthews**, Vice-President

**Michele Hakala-Beeksma**, Secretary

**Ronald Hein**, Treasurer

### Members

---

**Robert Baeumler**

**Jess Edberg**

**Leone Graf**

**Tim Grover**

**Karen Keenan**

**Timothy McLoughlin**

### Affiliate Representatives

---

**Nick Wognum**, Ely-Winton Historical Society

**Mary Palcich Keyes**, Hibbing Historical Society

**Charles Palmquist**, Minnesota Museum of Mining

**Mary "Mickey" White**, Sisu Heritage, Inc.

**Linda Folstad**, Tower-Soudan Historical Society

**Susan Hoppe**, Virginia Area Historical Society

**Kenneth Buehler**, Heritage Preservation Commission  
Liaison



## Strategic Partnerships & Advisory Committees

### Audit and Finance

---

**Ronald Hein, Chair**

**Robert Baeumler**

**Tim Grover**

### Affiliate Relations

---

**Nick Wognum, Ely-Winton Historical Society**

**Mary Palcich Keyes, Hibbing Historical Society**

**Charles "Chuck" Palmquist, Minnesota Museum of Mining**

**Mary "Mickey" White, SISU Heritage, Inc.**

**Linda Folstad, Tower-Soudan Historical Society**

**Susan Hoppe, Virginia Area Historical Society**

### American Indian Advisory (AIAC)

---

**Vernon Zacher, Chair, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

**Jaylen Strong, Bois Forte Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

**Marie Spry, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

**Michael Gillespie, at large representative, Oglala Lakota**

**Michele Hakala-Beeksma, at large representative, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

### (VMHAC)

---

**Andrew Meyer, Chair**

**Ronald Hein, Vice-Chair**

**David Anderson**

**Julie Anderson**

**Donna Bergstrom**

**Scott Markle**

**Paul Pedersen**

**Daniel Streu**

**Nadine Wells**

### Nominating and Governance

---

**Karen Keenan, Chair**

**Donna Bergstrom**

**Nick Wognum**

### Museum Operations and Archives

---

**Michele Beeksma, Chair**

**Leone Graf**

**Karen Keenan**



## Board Spotlight: Leone Graf

Dedicated to Our Shared Heritage The St. Louis County Historical Society is driven by a board of directors who are as passionate about our region's future as they are about its past. This year, we are proud to feature Leone Graf, whose insights and commitment continue to shape our organization. Leone is a past Board President and champion of Iron Range history.

### A Connection to the Community

Leone's journey with the Society began with her work at SISU, Inc. in Embarrass, Minnesota, which led to a desire to connect more deeply with the stories that define St. Louis County. Since joining the board, she has become a vocal advocate for the programs and artifacts that show the full history of Minnesota's largest county.

### Reflections from the Board

During her tenure, Leone has witnessed the Society's growth firsthand. When asked about her experiences, she shared:

- **Meaningful Impact:** Of all the exhibits and programs supported during her time on the board, Leone takes particular pride in those that bridge the gap between historical research and public accessibility.
- **Hidden Histories:** One of the most rewarding aspects of her service has been discovering the surprising, often overlooked nuances of our county's industrial and social history.
- **Future Vision:** Looking ahead, Leone sees a significant opportunity for the Society to expand its community engagement, ensuring that the next generation of Minnesotans feels a personal connection to our regional heritage.



### Beyond the Boardroom

When she isn't helping guide the Society's strategic direction, Leone can be found embracing the natural beauty of Northeast Minnesota. Whether she is exploring the rugged shores of Lake Superior or enjoying the local trails, her love for the region informs everything she does for the Society.

*"The biggest opportunity for the Society lies in our ability to grow alongside our community, making history feel alive and relevant for everyone."*

## Affiliate Information

### Hibbing Historical Society

The general nature and purpose of the Hibbing Historical Society shall be the discovery, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge about the history of Hibbing, Minnesota, and its part in the story of the Mesabi Iron Range, St. Louis County, and the State of Minnesota. **Contact** [hibbinghistory.org/](http://hibbinghistory.org/)

Patrons Visited: **785 (October '24 through Sept. 30, 2025)**

Members: **269**

### Minnesota Museum of Mining

The Minnesota Museum of Mining serves to educate visitors about the history of mining in Minnesota, and illustrates the life of ordinary people, mostly immigrant families, from the earliest years of European settlement and mining in Chisholm. The Minnesota Museum of Mining is the only museum of its kind in the country, dedicated to preserving the history of iron mining in Minnesota, and telling the stories of the men and women who made a living working on the Iron Range.

**Website:** [mnmuseumofmining.org/](http://mnmuseumofmining.org/)

### Sisu Heritage, Inc.

SISU Heritage is a non-profit organization that preserves the unique Finnish-American history and handcrafted log architecture of the Embarrass region. It manages several National Register of Historic Places sites, including the notable Seitaniemi Housebarn and Nelimark Homestead. Visitors can experience these historic farmsteads through guided tours that operate from Memorial Day through Labor Day. **Website:** [sisuheritage.org](http://sisuheritage.org)

Patrons Visited: **2223**

Members: **152**

### Tower-Soudan Historical Society

The mission of the Tower-Soudan Historical Society is to promote an understanding of the history of the Tower-Soudan area by collecting, preserving, exhibiting, and interpreting that history and by advocating for broader understanding, education and presentation of our history to citizens and visitors.

**Website:** [towersoudanhistory.com](http://towersoudanhistory.com)

Patrons Visited: **1,316**

Members: **141**

### Ely-Winton Historical Society

The mission of the Ely-Winton Historical Society shall be to identify, collect and preserve articles of material culture, and to disseminate information about the history and culture of the local area through public display of relics, artifacts and other physical addenda and evidence of history' public lectures; and publication of books and pamphlets. The Society shall maintain a museum and historical research center and encourage historical research.

**Website:** [elywintonhistory.org](http://elywintonhistory.org)

Patrons Visited: **1,062**

Members: **157**

### Virginia Area Historical Society

The Virginia Area Historical Society believes it's important to keep alive the history of the Virginia area. We're collecting and preserving objects, photos and other materials that tell the stories of this community and the people who lived and worked here. We create exhibits and plan programs to bring those stories to the public. Our large collection of photos, newspapers, books and documents is available for researchers.

**Website** [www.virginiamnhistory.com](http://www.virginiamnhistory.com)

Patrons Visited: **681**

Members: **239**

ST. LOUIS COUNTY,  
MINNESOTA



TOWER-SOUDAN  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ELY-WINTON  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



MINNESOTA MUSEUM  
OF MINING



SISU HERITAGE INC.



HIBBING HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY



VIRGINIA AREA  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ST. LOUIS COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# PRESERVING THE PAST

## The Collection: Unique Artifacts & Special Donations

### A Treasure Reclaimed: The Sjogren Figurine Donation

The St. Louis County Historical Society's collections grew in 2025 with a deeply personal and culturally significant addition: two new figurines by the renowned woodcarver Oscar Sjogren. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Ralph and Irene Eckman family for their generous donation of these incredible carvings.

One of the most poignant pieces in this collection, held by Margaret Anderson in the photograph here, beautifully depicts Sjogren alongside his family physician, Dr. Ralph J. Eckman. Dr. Eckman was Margaret's father, and the carving serves as a lasting tribute to a life dedicated to the West Duluth community.

In donating these pieces, Margaret shared a touching reflection on her father's dedication to both his profession and his family. Dr. Eckman was known for taking his children along on house calls, even late at night, finding creative ways to spend time with them while serving his patients. It is a story of balance and service that resonates with the heart of working families everywhere.

The Society is proud to house a world-class Oscar Sjogren collection. As we move forward with our refreshed galleries, we look forward to returning these irreplaceable treasures to public display soon.



## Legacy Feature: The Forest History Room

*Terry Johnson, Curator*

Since 1979 the St. Louis County Historical Society has welcomed millions of visitors to the Depot in downtown Duluth to learn about the history of our forests, the logging industry, and the work of immigrants whose labor built the region that we know today. The J.C. “Buzz” Ryan Forest History Gallery has featured artifacts, films on the logging process, a display of William Roleff’s photographs of camp life, modules on forest fire prevention and the Civilian Conservation Corps, and a dedicated section on Ryan himself.

The gallery’s namesake, James Carlyle “Buzz” Ryan (1900–1992), was born into a logging family. His father owned a lumber company, and as a young man Ryan learned every job in the industry, from timber cruising to running saws in the mill. In 1929, he was appointed District Ranger and Forester for the Cloquet Valley District, based at the Cloquet Valley Ranger Station near Makinen. In a 1989 interview with the Duluth News Tribune, Ryan said “I started foresting in this area in nineteen hundred and twenty-two. My boss said ‘Those Finlanders you’ll be working with, they’re a tough bunch. I’ll give you six months.’ I stayed forty-seven and a half years.”

Beyond his fieldwork, Ryan was active in the Society of American Foresters, the St. Louis County Promotional Bureau, and served for 20 years as president of the State Forestry Employees Association. He also worked closely with Civilian Conservation Corps Company 719, which he first joined during the New Deal era. Known for his humor and storytelling, Ryan became one of the nation’s leading forest historians, recognized in 1990 as the second most prolific in the country by the Forest History Society.

The Forest History Gallery has been a steward of our county’s logging history for nearly half a century. But just as Ryan understood the importance of preservation, we must do what we can to protect the artifacts for future generations. It is standard museum practice to “rest” objects after long periods

on display, to avoid unnecessary damage. So, like Buzz Ryan himself, after 47 years it is time to retire the Forest History gallery.

It’s ending, but the moment has been prepared for. Going back, the land we call Minnesota, and the region that is now St. Louis County, has been home to the Ojibwe for nearly 9,000 years. As the Forest History Gallery rests, we will expand our Lake Superior Ojibwe Gallery, telling that story more fully. Through Ojibwe eyes, with Ojibwe voices...



# ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

## Events & Outreach

### Early 2025

- **February 3:** Wayne Gannaway officially began his tenure as the new Executive Director of the St. Louis County Historical Society
- **February:** Wayne visits Iron Range Affiliates
- **February 27:** Wayne attends History Matters Day at the state capital in St. Paul
- **March:** Announcement of the 2025 Mike Colalillo Medal of Honor Scholarship application period.
- **March:** St. Louis County Courthouse Exhibit Planning and Implementation
- **March:** Terry Johnson named Curator of St. Louis County Historical Society



Terry at STEAM Festival



Duluth County Courthouse

### Spring 2025

- **April 8:** Twin Ports Festival of History and Celebration of Veterans Memorial Hall Reopening
- **April 22:** 103rd Annual Meeting of the Members at the St. Louis County Depot. Keynote address by Executive Director Wayne Gannaway titled *"The Business of the Past is the Future."*
- **May 17:** STEAM festival at the Depot
- **May:** The Society adopts a new CRM software system, Neon CRM

### Summer 2025

- **May – September:** Seasonal opening of affiliate museums, including the Minnesota Museum of Mining and Sisu Heritage, Inc.
- **June 14:** Annual John Werner 5K Fun Run
- **June:** Alfred Woolson sculpture cleaning and restoration
- **July:** Appearance at S. St. Louis County Fair
- **July:** Five Guys in July with VMH Program Manager, Jay Hagen
- **August 8:** History in a Pint event featuring acclaimed historian Greg Gaut, discussing his book *The War at Home* regarding Minnesota's internal struggles during WWI
- **August:** Ron Hein and the Erie Mining Team in Hibbing for St. Louis County Fair



Annual John Werner 5K Fun Run

## Fall 2025

- **September 27:** SLCHS at St. Louis County Depot's Bienvenue Coffee Festival
- **September 30:** The Depot United Campaign kick-off Event
- **October 4:** Slovenian History, Culture, and Cuisine Festival at the St. Louis County Depot, co-sponsored by the Slovenian Union of America
- **October 11:** Spooky art installation as part of North Shorror at the Depot
- **October 14:** Udac *Include* Exhibit Open House and exhibit
- **October 23:** History in a Pint: Eagle's Nest with Jay Hagen
- **November 1-20:** Participation in the 17th Annual Give to the Max fundraising campaign
- **November 11:** Veterans Day Ceremony featuring a free lunch and documentary screening at the St. Louis County Depot (co-sponsored by Duluth Women of Today)
- **November 22:** Native American Heritage Day Activities included Ojibwe hand drumming, frybread tacos, and the unveiling of the traveling exhibit *Sovereign Nations*



Slovenian History Festival

## Winter 2025

- **December 4:** 20th Annual Remembrance Dinner at the St. Louis County Depot. Keynote by Dave Anderson
  - o **Mike Colalillo Scholarship** winner, Ely Young, and the unveiling of the new USS Duluth exhibit
- **December 9: History in a Pint: "Hold the Line"** featuring storyteller and author Darrell Pedersen at the Lake Superior Railroad Museum
- **December 14:** Society Seasonal Art Display as part of the Great Hall Marketplace
- **December:** The Society begins its yearlong **Strategic Planning**, facilitated by Madeline Kvale



Mike Colalillo Scholarship  
winner: Ely Young

## Ongoing 2025 Initiatives:

- **Antique Appraisals:** Held each month throughout the year
- **100 Years Book:** A limited-time membership benefit offered throughout 2025 to commemorate the Society's centennial milestones
- **Board and Committee Meetings** (bi-monthly)
- **Rootprints:** Quarterly publication
- **Monthly newsletters:** Featuring unique, long-form articles and event listing

## Educational Programs Spotlight: Traveling Exhibits

The St. Louis County Historical Society is proud to offer over 20 traveling exhibits exploring a diverse array of regional history. We've recently refreshed our Traveling Exhibits Catalog to include our latest additions, making it easier than ever for schools, libraries, and fellow non-profits to bring history to their own communities. You can browse the full collection and find reservation details at [thehistorypeople.org/traveling-exhibits](http://thehistorypeople.org/traveling-exhibits).

### American Indian:

Ojibwe Faces and Stories

**New in 2025:** Sovereign Nations: Discovering the Treaty Story of Minnesota's Indigenous Peoples



### Fine Art and Photographs

Albin Zaverl Art: Old Country Memories

William F. Roleff: Forest History Photographs



### Immigrants:

Children of the Finnish Homesteads: Growing up in Northern Minnesota, 1900-1945

Finns of Western Lake Superior

Preserving the Old Country: The Experiences of Croats, Serbians, and Slovenians in St. Louis County

To America with Love: Journey of a Young Woman from Southern Italy to Northeast Minnesota



## Local and County History:

Marshall Wells Hardware

Return to the River: The History of the St. Louis River and the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD)

The Promise, The Promise Kept, The Promise Realized, The Promise Renewed: The History of the Erie Mining Company

Wreck of the Mataafa



## Military Related:

500 Days: 125th Field Artillery Photographs

Albert Woolson - the Last Civil War Soldier

Desert Medics

Duluth and the Cold War

James Joseph Hubert: Duluth WWII Hero Returns Home

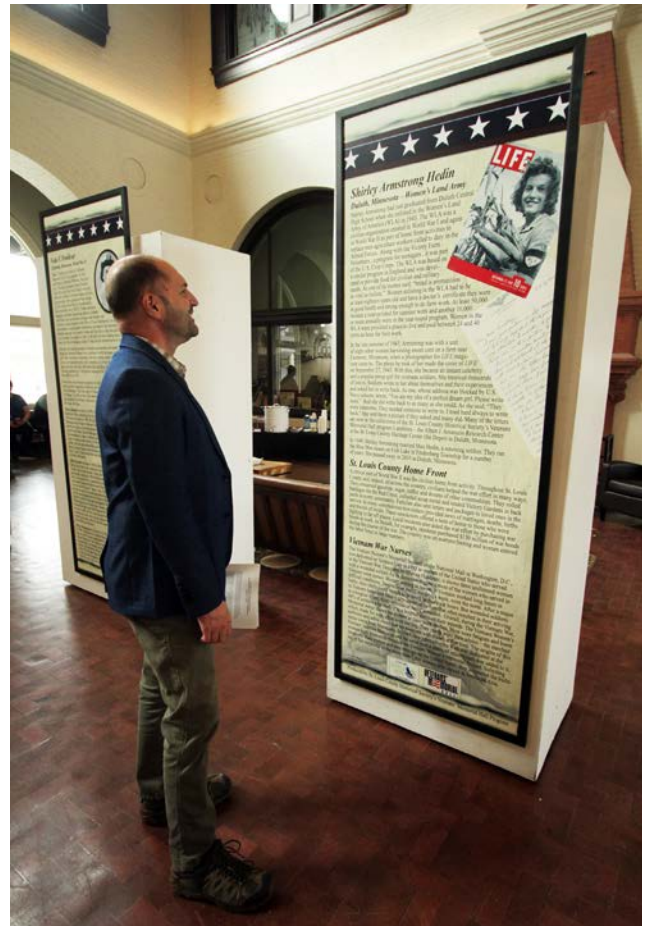
Joe Gomer: Honoring a Legacy

Joe Gomer: Preserving a Legacy

Never Forgotten: Man Behind the Medal: The Life of Henry A Courtney, Jr.

Salute to Servicewomen: Women in the United States Military

The 18 – A Civil War Exhibit



## Veterans Memorial Hall

The past year has been a period of significant momentum for Veterans Memorial Hall (VMH), as the team wrapped up the work related to the water damage setback in 2024. The year was marked by new exhibits, robust community engagement, and a clear vision for the future. The Veterans Memorial Hall Advisory Committee remains dedicated to ensuring that the stories of our regional veterans are preserved with the honor they deserve.

### Exhibit Highlights & Collections

We are making exciting progress on our physical and digital presence:

- **Medal of Honor Row:** Plans are underway for upgrades to “Medal of Honor Row,” including the addition of three new pedestals and the acquisition of two replica medals to enhance this cornerstone display.
- **Cold War & Artifacts:** We successfully utilized \$22,000 in funding from the Depot Foundation for new exhibit cases, including a specialized display for the BOMARC missile. Progress also continues on the USS Duluth display and the Shirley Armstrong Hedin letter project, which brings personal wartime narratives to life.
- **Digital Transformation:** We are nearing full funding for a new, integrated website that will feature a robust, dedicated area for Veterans Memorial Hall, making our archives more accessible than ever before.

### Community Events & Engagement

Our calendar remains a vital link between the Society and the veteran community:

- **5K Run-Walk:** We are proud to announce that the John S. Werner Memorial 5K Run-Walk will return on June 13, 2026, the week prior to Grandma’s Marathon. Under the leadership of Project Manager Ron Hein, this event continues to

serve as a meaningful memorial and community gathering.

- **Annual Traditions:** Planning is already in motion for our signature events, including the Remembrance Dinner—with a theme celebrating the “American 250”—and our annual Veterans Day observance in coordination with the Duluth Women of Today.
- **History in a Pint:** Our “History in a Pint” series continues to draw crowds, recently featuring presentations on unique topics like military cartooning and graffiti.

### Permanent Statues Honoring Veterans

The Society owns and maintains three statues honoring veterans and their service.

Statues honoring Joe Gomer (Tuskegee Airman, World War II) and David Wheat (POW, Vietnam; see photo) are placed permanently at the James L. Oberstar Terminal, Duluth International Airport.

In addition, the statue of Albert Woolson (Civil War) remains in the front garden of the St. Louis County Heritage & Arts Center (the Depot), just outside the Society’s windows.



*New USS Duluth Display in the St. Louis County Depot*

# EXPANDING OUR REACH

## Connecting Our Community: 2025 Communications Impact

In 2025, the St. Louis County Historical Society continued to expand its digital footprint, moving beyond simple updates to create a vibrant, interactive space for regional history. From our quarterly “Rootprints” publication and blog to our informative monthly newsletters, our communications program is thriving, driven by an audience that is deeply invested in our mission.

### Digital Reach by the Numbers

Our online presence serves as a 24/7 gateway to the County’s history:



**Facebook Community:** We are now supported by a loyal following of **4,758** followers, a testament to our growing social media engagement.



**Website Impact:** Our digital archives and resources drew **6,650** unique visitors and fueled **9,595** site sessions this past year.



**“Rootprints” Blog:** Our historical deep dives continue to resonate, garnering **4,618** individual blog post views.

## A Highly Engaged Inbox

While many organizations struggle to be heard in a crowded digital landscape, our email program stands out for its health and resonance:

- **Exceptional Open Rates:** Our monthly e-newsletter—delivered 11,000 times this year—boasts an average open rate of 28.50%. This significantly outperforms the non-profit industry standard of 20–25%.
- **Trusted Communication:** Our audience values the content we share; our “Abuse Report” rate is a negligible 0.04%, proving that our members view our updates as a trusted resource rather than spam.
- **Driving Action:** We don’t just share news; we inspire movement. With an average click rate of 2.69%, our emails consistently drive our supporters to engage with our exhibits and programs.

## The Bottom Line

These metrics point to more than just numbers—they reflect a loyal, engaged audience and a technically robust program that effectively reaches and resonates with the people of St. Louis County.



# FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

## Financial Stewardship: A Year of Growth and Sustainability

The 2025 fiscal data reflects a significant and positive shift in the Society’s financial health. While our partnership with the County remains a cornerstone of our operations, this year was defined by a remarkable increase in diverse funding sources, demonstrating the growing community investment in our mission.

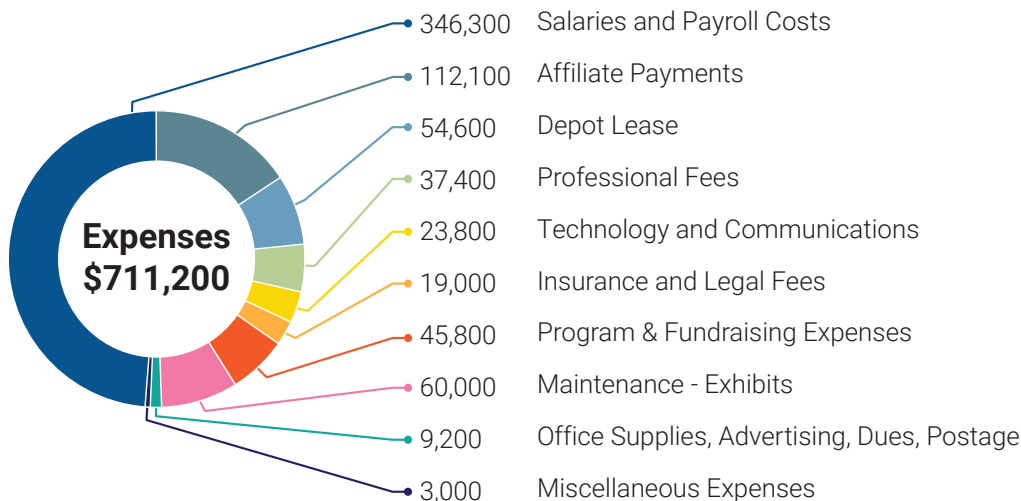
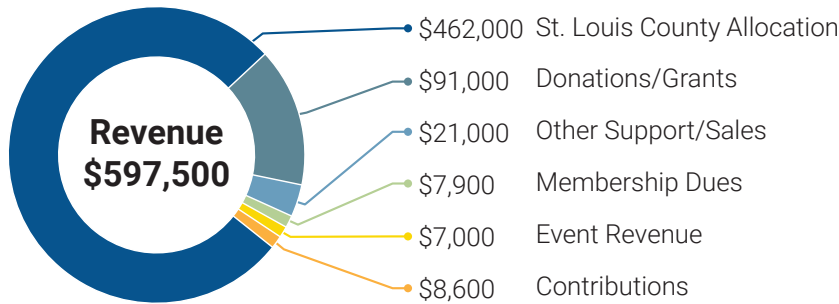
### A Foundation of Partnership

This trend toward a diversified funding model ensures that the St. Louis County Historical Society is more resilient, sustainable, and better equipped to preserve our region’s history for the next century.

**Note:** Annual audits and 990 forms are available on our website at [thehistorypeople.org/official-documents](http://thehistorypeople.org/official-documents).



## Revenue and Expense



## Museum Collections: For the Betterment of the Community, Not the Bottom Line

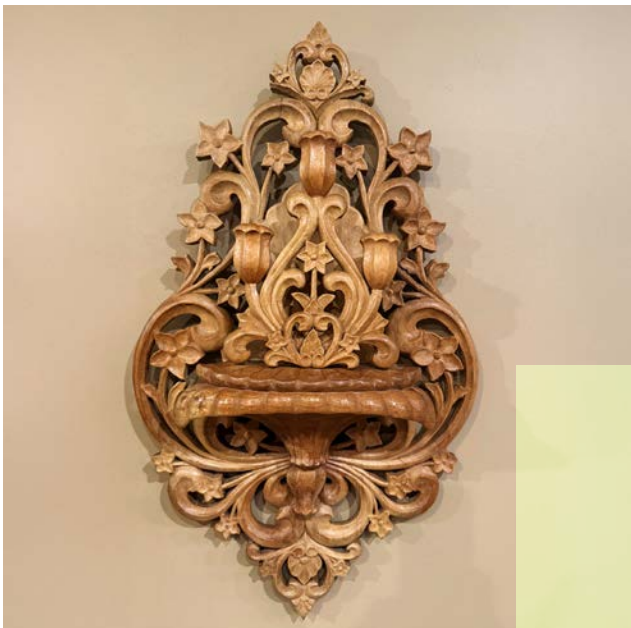
Wayne Gannaway

When you hear the term “Balance Sheet,” your first instinct might be to look away. However, a significant change in the St. Louis County Historical Society’s financial reporting this year tells a compelling story about our values and our role as stewards of your heritage.

If you compare our audited financial statements from 2023 to 2024, you will notice a striking shift: Total Assets appeared to shrink from \$3,879,155 to \$798,911. You might naturally ask if the Society suddenly became \$3 million poorer.

The answer is a resounding no. This change reflects a strategic decision to stop capitalizing our museum collections—the act of assigning a cash value to historical property within financial reports.

In a standard business sense, an asset is something of financial value that can be sold or leveraged for a loan, such as computers, desks, or financial instruments. Up until our 2024 audit, the Society’s practice was to include our artifacts, textiles, and artwork in this category.



By removing these from our balance sheet, we have aligned our practices with the American Alliance of Museums and the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH). Their professional standard is clear: “Collections shall not be capitalized or treated as financial assets.”

Unlike a private collection or an auction house, a public museum does not collect items as an investment. We collect to fulfill our mission of discovery, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge.

This distinction carries important ethical weight:

- **Mission-First:** We cannot sell a historical artifact to pay for salaries, equipment, or utility bills.
- **Ethical Standards:** If an item is sold, the proceeds can only be used for the direct care of our existing collection or the acquisition of new artifacts that serve our mission.
- **Invaluable Heritage:** While we appraise items for insurance purposes, the true historical significance of our 13,000+ artifacts far surpasses their fluctuating market price.

Ending the capitalization of our collections provides a more transparent view of our actual operating health. It confirms that the Society is not sitting on an “untapped fortune” to be liquidated. Instead, we are the proud stewards of a collection that is invaluable for the education and inspiration of all St. Louis County citizens.



# GRATITUDE & THE FUTURE

## Mapping Our Path to 2027: A Vision for the St. Louis County Historical Society

In late 2025, the St. Louis County Historical Society (SLCHS) embarked on a transformative nine-month journey to define our future and ensure the vibrant stories of our region thrive for generations to come. This strategic planning process, running from November 2025 through June 2026, will result in a roadmap designed to guide our mission over the next three to five years.

We are not simply drafting a document; we are collaborating with our community to build a resilient, relevant, and impactful organization for the 21st century.

### Why This Plan Matters

This process is driven by a commitment to organizational excellence and community service. We are currently focusing on three pillars essential for our transformation:

- **Securing Our Treasures (Preservation):** We are seeking permanent, stable long-term stewardship solutions for our collection of over 13,000 irreplaceable artifacts and artworks.
- **Building a Strong Foundation (Governance & Operations):** We are committed to achieving lasting financial stability and creating a transparent structure that models best practices across all departments.
- **Elevating Storytelling (Inclusivity & Engagement):** We are redefining our mission to be a model for inclusive regional history, ensuring that all voices from St. Louis County, especially those from underrepresented communities, are preserved and celebrated.

### A Community-Driven Future

A strategic plan is only as strong as the people it serves. We are honored to partner with facilitator Madeline Kvale of MKC, who is generously leading this inclusive process on a pro bono basis. To ensure this plan reflects our entire region, we are gathering perspectives from staff, board members, regional partners, and, most importantly, you.

## Progress Report: The Discovery Phase

Throughout early 2026, we immersed ourselves in the Environmental Scan phase to understand the unique needs of our stakeholders.

Key milestones reached include:

- **The Wall of Wonder:** An interactive session with our Strategic Planning Team to analyze our organizational journey and take stock of our collective history.
- **Key Informant Interviews:** Engaging with local leaders and St. Louis County Commissioners to align our goals with regional needs.
- **Community Surveys:** Actively collecting data from members, supporters, and partners to inform our future direction.

## Looking Ahead

The work completed during this “Discovery Phase” is now leading to the formal drafting of our new Mission, Vision, and Values. As we move through the spring of 2026, our team will identify organizational barriers and outline the final strategic pathways that will define our work through 2027 and beyond.

If you are passionate about our shared history, we invite you to stay engaged. Please watch for upcoming input opportunities or contact us at [history@thehistorypeople.org](mailto:history@thehistorypeople.org) to share your perspective.

We look forward to building this new path forward together.



## Donor Roll & Acknowledgements

**THANK YOU!** Your contributions will have lasting impacts for generations to come.

**With Special Gratitude to St. Louis County and The Depot Foundation**



The citizens of St. Louis County, through their elected representatives on the St. Louis County Board of Commissioners, provided major support in 2025. This significant investment forms the foundation from which we preserve the history of this region, explore our shared history through the various program areas, and approach private entities to make additional contributions to maximize our ability to meet our mission.

We extend our deepest thanks to Richard and Catherine Andree, Kevin and Debra Jo Appel, and Ron and Joyce Hein for their extraordinary commitment and foundational support of the Society this year.

We are also immensely grateful to all grantors, members, sponsors, and community partners whose contributions of time, funds, and energy sustain our mission, especially:

- Carla Bayerl
- Matthew H. Beaumier, Beaumier Donor Advised Family Fund
- Enbridge
- Linda LeGarde Grover & Tim Grover
- Michele Hakala-Beeksma
- Al & Erika Hodnik
- Lake Country Power
- Lakehead Constructors Inc.
- North Shore Bank Of Commerce
- Carolyn Sundquist
- Margaret R. Wood

Your gifts enable us to continue our Mission to Collect, Preserve, and Disseminate our shared local and National histories. We look forward to continuing our partnership and legacy with you in the future.



# Publication Details and Acknowledgements

## 2025 Annual Report | St. Louis County Historical Society

### Credits and Attributions

Unless otherwise noted, photography in this report is provided by Society staff, dedicated volunteers, and our valued affiliate partners. We also extend our gratitude to the St. Louis County Depot and the Northeast Minnesota Historical Collections, now a permanent part of the University of Minnesota's Kathryn A. Martin Library, for the use of their archival images.

### A Legacy of Service

As the state-designated history service provider for St. Louis County, the Society is proud to present this 103rd Annual Report. This document continues a tradition of transparency and storytelling that began in 1923 when our first president, William E. Culkin, submitted his inaugural report to the Minnesota Historical Society.

In that 1923 report, Culkin noted that while historical work often proceeds slowly, "a little well done every day soon mounts up in achievement." Over a century later, this philosophy of incremental progress toward high ideals remains the heartbeat of our organization. As we navigate our current strategic planning and look to the future, we remain committed to that same steady, dedicated pursuit of preserving our region's irreplaceable heritage.



