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ON THE COVER
The wonderful Carnegie Library in Bemidji is PAM’s first Site Worth Saving. It is in the middle of a major fundraising and advocacy campaign to come up with a brighter future for the building through a partnership between PAM and the local advocates.
I hope that you have come to look forward to the each upcoming issue of The Minnesota Preservationist. It is something that we take a lot of pride in and strive to improve each year.

I believe that you will recognize the progression that has occurred over the last few years from a thematic focused magazine (“Historic Cemeteries”; “Heritage Tourism” or “Incentives for Preservation”) to a magazine more focused on telling interesting stories of people, places and projects. This change in emphasis has allowed us to be a little more flexible in what stories are being conveyed to you our members.

This focus got us thinking though, we’ve spent so much time telling the stories of other people and other organizations work that we haven’t always done the best job conveying our stories and our work. We’re trying to change that and are placing new emphasis on talking about what is going on in our world and what we’ve been up to.

We will continue to have a mix of stories about preservation projects that include PAM and those that don’t. This issue is indicative of the mixture that we hope to include. You’ll have the opportunity to read more about first Site Worth Saving (the Bemidji Carnegie Library) and our efforts to ensure that the memory of Porky’s is not gone from that part of University Avenue in Saint Paul. At the same time, we’ve got a great book review of Bill Morgan’s Earth, Wood, Stone: Central Minnesota’s Lives and Landmarks, Vol II as well as a piece about the lessons learned by Willmar Design Center’s Beverly Dougherty at the National Main Street Conference.

It is my hope that you find every issue engaging, informational and maybe even a little inspirational at times. We love celebrating the great preservation work happening all across the state.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to email me at wokeefe@mnpreservation.org.

Sincerely,

Will O’Keefe
Editor

On September 27th, more than 200 preservationists gathered to celebrate some of Minnesota’s most impressive preservation projects at Christ Church Lutheran as part of our Minnesota Preservation Gala.

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Thinking about Historic Signs
By Aaron Hanauer

Imagine the Downtown Minneapolis riverfront without its iconic signs. How bare would it look without the Grain Belt Beer, Pillsbury Best Flour, Gold Medal Flour or North Star Blanket signs? The loss of any of these landmarks would be a major detriment to our state’s history. On the brighter side, imagine all of these signs completely restored, providing a brilliant Minneapolis riverfront light display as they once did.

The Minneapolis riverfront signs are some of the most well known historic public advertisements in our state, but there are dozens of others throughout Minnesota—unique, one-of-a-kind gems that are important parts of the landscape of their communities and our state’s history. These include signs advertising for Anchor Paper, 1st National Bank, and St. Clair Broiler in Saint Paul; the Androy Hotel in Hibbing, the Jolly Green Giant in Le Seur, Apollo’s Liquor Superette in Austin, the Bay Fish Supper Club Walfeye in Bena, the Gail Motel in Pine City, City Café and Bakery in Fergus Falls, and Ebner’s Bait in Elk River. These signs communicate a part of the history of each community and the businesses that operate(d) there. Like the Minneapolis landmarks, their physical condition varies and the future of some is unknown.

As Michael J. Auer points out in the National Park Service’s The Preservation of Historic Signs brief,

Signs speak of the people who run or ran their businesses, shops, and firms. Signs are signatures. They reflect the owner’s tastes and personality. They often reflect the ethnic makeup of a neighborhood and its character, as well as the social and business activities carried out there. By giving concrete details about daily life in a former era, historic signs allow the past to speak to the present in ways that buildings by themselves do not.

Organizations across the country have had great success in preserving these important elements of the built landscape. Efforts include the LUMENS (Living Urban Museum of Electric and Neon Signs) Project in Los Angeles, which has restored more than 130 neon signs from the 1920s to the 1940s in the Los Angeles County area. The National Park Service’s Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program has restored and relit at least 15 historic signs along this historic American byway. And the Save Our Signs initiative in Eastern Tennessee has restored and relit at least three vintage signs in the last three years. The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota wants to play a similar role in protecting our state’s historic signs through the Minnesota Historic Signs Initiative. There are four initial goals of this upcoming initiative:

1. Define what qualifies as a historic sign.
2. Document the important signs throughout our state.
3. Raise the awareness of signs as important historical, architectural, and artistic features of our built landscape.
4. Help provide financial and technical assistance for the restoration of our state’s important signs.

Before diving into any of the other goals, it will be important for PAM to define the characteristics and features that distinguish a historic sign. This will help in determining what we want to focus our efforts on for surveying, restoring and preserving. Do we want to focus our efforts on restoring signs built before a period of time? And/or are there particular signs that we want to focus our efforts on such as neon blade signs, theater marquees, or roadside architecture?

Unfortunately, historic signs are not as well documented on a comprehensive level as other built structures such as buildings and bridges. Once we have defined what constitutes a historic sign, it will be crucial to conduct an inventory of the signs that meet the definition of a historic sign. We’ve discovered many unique examples
through our travels and from websites and blogs devoted to historic signs, but there are likely countless others throughout the state that are not as well-known but deserve to be. When completing this survey it will also be important to analyze which of these signs are community icons, which ones are hardly noticed, what condition the signs are in, whether they have been abandoned, and what is the threat level they face. In addition, some effort should be spent cataloguing the important signs that we have lost, and those that were put in storage for safekeeping (and remain there), with the intention of one day being brought back into the public eye.

Raising awareness within the general public of signs as important historical, architectural, and artistic features of our built landscape will help the preservation effort. Although they can be taken for granted by those that pass by the sign on a daily basis, one-of-a-kind signs help provide a sense of place for a community. Auer eloquently states,

Signs often become so important to a community that they are valued long after their role as commercial markers has ceased. They become landmarks, loved because they have been visible at certain street corners—or from many vantage points across the city—for a long time. Such signs are valued for their familiarity, their beauty, their humor, their size, or even their grotesqueness. In these cases, signs transcend their conventional role as vehicles of information, as identifiers of something else. When signs reach this stage, they accumulate rich layers of meaning. They no longer merely advertise, but are valued in and of themselves. They become icons.

On a national scale, the Domino Sugar sign in Baltimore and the Citgo sign in Boston are examples of iconic signs that let you know that there is only one place that you could be. Although not well-known on a national scale, there are numerous examples throughout Minnesota in which a theater marquee or large neon restaurant sign were designed to be a unique focal point, neighborhood marker, and meeting place. Some of these signs continue to serve that function and could once again be a source of pride for the community.

The Minnesota Historic Signs Initiative will aim to help provide financial and technical assistance for the rehabilitation and restoration of our state’s historic signs. Historic signs can be expensive to maintain and repair especially if preventative maintenance is not continued on a regular basis. The Minneapolis riverfront signs are a good example. In 2000, the rehabilitation and relighting of the Gold Medal Flour, which was unlit for 35 years, cost $240,000. Preliminary estimates for the rehabilitation and relighting of the Grain Belt Beer sign have ranged from $500,000 to $750,000. The North Star Blanket signs, located on top of the converted North Star Blanket Condominium Building, are a beacon for those walking on the Stone Arch Bridge from the East Bank to Downtown. The restoration of these signs is estimated to cost $240,000 to help repair the metal letters and structure. The relighting of the sign could cost an additional $70,000. This is an enormous amount of money for a 30-residential unit condo association that is committed to help protect an iconic sign of business that has not been in operation for more than 60 years. If the signs are restored it would not only be a benefit to their building, but to the thousands that see the sign each year.

Restoration efforts for signs, like buildings, are often spurred as a reaction to the threat of potentially being demolished. This is an important approach and can rally people in a time of need to help save important historic landmarks. However, it will be more powerful and we will be more successful in preserving more signs if we couple the reactive response with a proactive plan. If a program is established specifically for signs it could help make communities and business owners not feel overwhelmed in restoring their signs knowing they have a place to go to for financial and technical assistance.

We would love to hear from you. How would you define a historic sign? What are your favorite signs in Minnesota? Do you know of signs that have been put in storage for safekeeping and are interested in having back in the public eye? Are there signs that you know of that are in immediate danger?

By raising the awareness of signs as a part of our history and culture, identifying important signs throughout our state, and having a proactive effort dedicated to restoring the signs, the hope is that we will preserve these important landmarks for generations to come and that you will join us in that effort.
When the topic of Minnesota history is of conversation it’s more than likely a discussion of the Twin Cities or perhaps the northern city of Duluth. Rightfully so, these areas of the State represent major developments that have created Minnesota’s modern landscape. A place often overlooked, however, is Central Minnesota which has played its own major role in Minnesota’s cultural and economic growth. Such is the topic of William Towner Morgan’s most recent book Earth, Wood, Stone: Central Minnesota Lives and Landmarks, Volume II. The book is a second edition of a collection of articles written for Morgan’s monthly piece in the St. Cloud Times.

Morgan, a Professor at St. Cloud State University, begins the book by discussing his background and what brought him to his interest in Central Minnesota. After growing up in Pipestone, Minnesota and spending a fair amount of time away for this great state he returned to begin his position at St. Cloud State. Morgan explored his interest in pioneer-period buildings after receiving a plat map that indicated extant nineteenth century log-buildings in Stearns County. The project of documenting these buildings extended to several counties within Central Minnesota and was eventually published under the title Light from the Hearth, Central Minnesota Pioneers and Early Architecture. Around this same time a growing number of historic buildings in St. Cloud were being demolished in the name of progress. Public outcry would begin to gain traction to ensure that this trend did not continue. Morgan and his colleagues worked to institute St. Cloud’s Historic Preservation Commission and begin the process of documenting, registering and preserving St. Cloud’s historic resources.

The compilation of articles paints the picture of a period of time when Central Minnesota was a collection of budding municipalities. Each article focuses on a different subject, be it a person or place that is associated with the area. The author’s profound knowledge of the history and architecture in Central Minnesota is evident through his writing and the stories are easy to follow and entertaining to read.

A reader who is unfamiliar with the Central Minnesota might have a difficulty with some of the references given in the book which tended to be quite specific, such as particular street names or landmarks. As a St. Cloud Tech High School and St. Cloud State graduate I consider myself very familiar with the area but at times while reading I felt the need to reference a map to give myself some context of the location of some of the buildings. Though I thought it would have been helpful to include a map of the different buildings discussed, the text does include many beautiful and descriptive pictures that I felt went a long way to provide a visual framework to accompany the articles.

Morgan’s enthusiasm for Central Minnesota’s history is evident through his articles and the eight chapters represent different topics: Central Minnesota Landmarks, St. Cloud’s Downtown, St. Cloud State University, Central Minnesota Ethnic Groups, The Great Depression and WWII, the Natural World, Remnants of Early Sites and finally Special Topics. The structure allows for an easy to read text however, since they are all separate articles they don’t necessarily flow together in the traditional fashion. I enjoyed the book and am encouraged by Morgan’s pursuit of this topic. I believe there is a growing audience interested in not only the history of Minnesota’s biggest cities, but our small towns and rural areas that have played a key of a role the development of our state identity.
Close on the intersection of MN State Highway 197 and 5th Street NW stands a mute testament to the aspirations of Bemidji three generations ago, and to the generosity of a philanthropist who never set foot in the town. The Bemidji Carnegie Library, built in 1910 to the designs of W.D. Gillespie, provided our grandparents and great-grandparents access to a wealth of knowledge previously unavailable. It stands today a symbol of a culture’s belief in the potential for anyone, through education, to become as great as the self-made man whose wealth made the construction of this building possible. Though no longer in use as a library, the building is an irreplaceable touchstone for Bemidji’s history, a reminder of a time gone by and of a dream, a belief in the intrinsic power of humanity, which America has never given up.

By the time A.P. Ritchie wrote to Andrew Carnegie in 1908 to request funds for the library’s construction, the library movement in Bemidji was well underway. In the immediately post-Civil War era, women’s clubs, perhaps growing out of the societies formed by women on the home front during the war to produce bandages and other necessities, became increasingly interested in founding public libraries. Teva Scheer, in a 2002 article, estimates that women’s groups prompted the founding of 75-80% of America’s public libraries in this period.1 Such was certainly the case in Bemidji. The Bemidji Ladies Library Society collected 600 volumes in 1903, and opened the first town library in a room in the courthouse in 1904. The collection continued to grow, with 1400 volumes by 1907, and new quarters were needed.

By 1908, Andrew Carnegie had long secured his fortune, and was busily dispersing it. With an estimated net worth equivalent to $298.3 billion in today’s dollars,2 he had the means to support a wide variety of causes. His offer to supply the construction funds for a library in any town which met his qualifications resulted in the construction of 2,509 buildings between 1883 and 1929. The requirement: that a city demonstrate the need for a public library, provide the building site, ensure that maintenance be paid for by public support, and provide free service to all, were easily satisfied by Bemidji’s application. $12,500 was granted, designs drawn up, and the new library opened on May 10, 1910. It served its original function for more than 50 years, until the structure became inadequate for the needs of Bemidji residents. A new facility was constructed a few blocks away, and the Carnegie building has been occupied by a succession of governmental and non-profit tenants since.

When first constructed, the Carnegie building stood proudly as the focal point of a tree-lined, landscaped boulevard, closing a vista just as any substantial Neoclassical building ought (fig. 1). Over the intervening century, increased automobile traffic and commercial development have dramatically altered the Carnegie’s surroundings, and while it may not terminate an axis with quite the aplomb it once mustered, this is still an imposing building. In truth, it is not the alterations to 5th Street which are of most concern, but the changes to the cross street, now State Highway 197. What was formerly a modest road is now a 5-lane highway, and the increased width came primarily at the expense of the Carnegie. With the lawn now buried under asphalt, visitors to the building are “literally at risk of falling into traffic when exiting the building’s stairs” as one description put it.3 Even the building itself is under assault from the highway. With only 5 feet of space between the curb and the Carnegie’s walls, the building spends the winter half-buried in slushy drifts thrown up by the snowplows, and road salt is rapidly eroding the stonework of the façade (fig. 2). This damage, coupled with decades of
deferred maintenance, is the primary contributor to the Carnegie's current state of disrepair.

Even in this state, the Carnegie building is still a notable piece of architecture. What's more, beneath its pleasant surface runs an undercurrent of symbolic meaning, as is frequently the case with buildings designed in the Victorian era. The Victorians were a particularly symbolic race, and took meaning from visual cues which go largely unnoticed, or perhaps un-deciphered, today. Examine, for a moment, the front façade of the building (fig. 2). The design scheme is Neoclassical, intended to evoke the architectural feats of Ancient Greece such as the Parthenon. This is particularly clear in the use of Ionic columns to frame the porch, and the, albeit modified, temple-front-type arrangement of pier, column, and pediment. This allusion to Greek architecture is probably clear even to the lay observer, but what may not be so obvious is the meaning which the Victorians took from it. In the Victorian mind, Greece and Rome represented the epitome of cosmopolitan civilization. The Ancient World of art and science was contrasted against the Dark Ages of repression and loss. And in America, Grecian architecture symbolized not only the pinnacle of civilization and art, but the spirit of democracy itself. As the cradle of democracy, Ancient Greece was a powerful imagined precedent for the "great experiment." Furthermore, Jefferson himself claimed, “the cornerstone of democracy rests on an informed electorate.” For a building designed to produce an educated electorate, could a more appropriate style than the Grecian be chosen?

Further symbolic elements at work in this façade are, perhaps, more subtle. The pediment, in keeping with Classical tradition, frames a sculpture group. Here, a wreath of laurel rests on a pair of cornucopias. The cornucopia is still a familiar symbol, representing abundance. Laurel wreaths are generally symbolic of victory and achievement, usually in the military and the arts. The specific reference evoked here is likely the awarding of laurel wreaths to honor scholastic and literary prowess, particularly at the completion of a university degree. Italian universities revived this ancient practice during the Renaissance, and it persists there to this day. The pediment sculptures are, essentially, advertising the presence of an abundance of scholarship within the building. The flight of stairs leading from the street to the front entrance is common to many Carnegie libraries, and is meant to symbolically suggest that simply by demonstrating interest in the contents of the library you have begun to elevate yourself. The pursuit of knowledge, in and of itself, raises you a step higher. Another common feature to Carnegie libraries, though no longer present here, is the inclusion of lamps above or near the doors (historical photographs indicate the Bemidji Carnegie library once placed two on the low plinths on either side of the front staircase). In reference again to the Greeks, these were meant to evoke the mythical lamp of knowledge, which once kindled could never be extinguished. Again, a most appropriate
selection for a building designed as a repository for the accumulated knowledge of a civilization.

The citizens of Bemidji have long recognized the remarkable confluence of history, culture, and aesthetics present in the Carnegie building, so when the City Council voted to demolish the structure in September 2011, protest was immediate, fervent, and widespread. Preservationists and local residents recognized that the building had its problems: dangerously and destructively close to a major highway, in disrepair, and virtually impossible to make ADA compliant, but the majority of citizens felt, and stated, that demolition was certainly not the proper course. A social media campaign, including a series of YouTube videos in which citizens discussed why the Carnegie mattered to them, rallied the community, and in March 2012 the Council reversed its decision. They stipulated, however, that the building must be moved away from the road, deeper into the park, and brought up to code.

Fundraising efforts are underway. Volunteers are collecting donations at community events, and staging events of their own as they strive to reach the needed $1.6 million. Half a year after the start of the fundraising campaign, more than a third of the funds has been collected. Contributions large and small have been received from private donors, charitable institutions, and state and local public sources. Contributions are still being eagerly sought, to preserve and restore this cornerstone of Bemidji's cultural past.

The Moorhead firm of MJ Burns, Architects completed a building assessment in 2012, and drew up preliminary plans for an addition to the structure to resolve the ADA issues (fig. 5). The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, in recognition of the outstanding work by local preservationists and the importance of the structure, named the Bemidji Carnegie Library the first entry in their Sites Worth Saving program. Staff members are aiding local advocates with grant applications and publicity for the project. Current project timelines suggest that construction work, slated to begin in the spring of 2015, will be completed by late fall that year. Hopes are high, and the citizens of Bemidji firmly believe that their Carnegie library, having just completed its first century, will be in prime condition to celebrate a second one.

If you'd like to learn more about effort to Save the Carnegie Library, consider visiting SavetheCarnegie.org.

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**We’re taking our Historic Pub Crawl Series on the road in 2013! We’ll be exploring historic drinking establishments in Lyn-Lake on Tuesday, November 26th. We hope you can join us!**

For more information and to buy tickets: [http://www.mnpreservation.org/historic-pub-crawls/](http://www.mnpreservation.org/historic-pub-crawls/)
Hamline Park Playground: Many Times Threatened, Once Again Saved
By Krista Hanson

The Hamline Park Playground building located on the east side of Snelling Avenue between Lafond and Thomas in the Hamline Midway neighborhood of St. Paul was built in 1940. According to the definitive text Cap Wigington: An Architectural Legacy in Ice and Stone by David Vassar Taylor with Paul Clifford Larson (2001, MHS Press), the building was designed in 1938 yet wasn’t built until 1940. The cornerstone on the building notes that it was built in “1938 by Works Progress Administration.” The city of St. Paul received grants funds from this federal relief program in the 1930s and 40s.

Charles A. Bassford was the city architect at the time, however credit for the design was later attributed to Clarence “Cap” Wigington., who has been recognized as America’s first African American municipal architect. Taylor and Larson’s research has indicated that Wigington was lead architect on the project. The sleek style of the building has been termed “WPA Moderne” by architectural historians. According to Taylor and Larson, “The Hamline Playground Stone Shelter and Wilder Playground building are Moderne in sensibility, with faces of smooth-cut Mankato stone, a rectilinear geometry, and just enough subtle modeling of the wall surfaces to serve as ornament. They remain splendid examples of a monumental style shrunk to neighborhood scale” (90).

In 1958 the playground group became the Hamline-Griggs Athletic Association joining with Griggs Recreation Center, according to Drassal.

It was well documented by Drassal that during the 1930s and 40s, St. Paul community parks were actively used by many community groups and were the hubs of community activity. However in the 1960s and 70s, many such buildings fell into underuse and disrepair. By the 1980s, many of these historic buildings were threatened during that decade’s recession and consequent city budget cuts.

In 1982 a Historic Sites Survey was completed on the building in the joint project taken on by the Ramsey County Historical Society and the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission. A glance at the building permit told the researcher that the Hamline Park Playground building was “constructed by the W.P.A., at a cost of $29,500 for the city of St. Paul.” It is also noted on the survey that the building “may be threatened by city budget cuts.”

According to Michael Jon Olson, Executive Director of the Hamline Midway Coalition (St. Paul Planning District Council #11), the HMC started to organize around preserving and renovating the building in 1992 and moved into the building in September of 1993. This work was done through active community support, fundraising, and advocacy. A plaque placed on the building honors the work to save the building. The plaque reads: “This Historic Renovation of the Hamline Park Playground Building was achieved through the combined special efforts of the Hamline Midway Coalition & Justin Properties, Inc. November 30, 1993”

The building has been an active location of the HMC and host to countless community meetings over these last 20 years. However with tight city budgets, the HMC staff had shrunk to 2 people as of the fall of 2011. The building was too big for HMC and too expensive to maintain. City budget issues were also putting constraints on
the nearby Hamline Midway library building (which was threatened with closure in 2010). A good compromise was for the HMC staff to move into the lower level of the Hamline Midway library in a former meeting room keeping the library an active community hub and utilizing smaller and cheaper office space for HMC. The library fortunately has a lower level auditorium which is a fitting place for large community meetings. However, HMC’s move from the Hamline Park Playground building left that building without a tenant and its future uncertain.

The Hamline Midway library auditorium was the location of a community meeting on October 10, 2011 when the City of St. Paul’s Parks and Recreation department disclosed to community members that with the HMC having vacated the building (which HMC had been leasing) that the city had come up with two potential options for the building. 1) “Find a private developer to renovate and use the building, or 2) Demolish the building and reprogram the space for community use” (source: HMC event filer).

Community members organized and spread the word and the auditorium was the site of a vocal meeting of community members and local architects and preservationists who would not stand for demolition even being an option. The Parks and Recreation department representative was adamant that the city no longer wanted to be leasing park properties, although many park properties were currently being leased. Because the land was dedicated park land, the land could not be sold. However, at the meeting many community members began actively throwing out ideas of who or what organization could take over use of this building.

Enter the building’s savior, Lori Greene, owner of the business called Mosaic on a Stick (previously located at 595 Snelling Avenue) and an active mosaic artist herself. Greene says that she “received a call from Parks and Rec in October 2011 asking if I was interested. They then had to put out a formal call to everyone in January.”

According to Olson of the HMC, the City issued an RFP for reusing the building and Mosaic on a Stick was the only viable proposal. Then according to HMC’s Michael Jon Olson it took “months and months” for the City and Mosaic on a Stick to get all “of the ducks in a row, including re-zoning the parcel” to allow Mosaic on a Stick to take up occupancy.” Greene and Mosaic on a Stick already had an active relationship with the HMC and Hamline Midway neighbors in a community art project involving adding mosaic art made by community members to brighten up the concreted planters located on Snelling Avenue.

According to the St. Paul Park board minutes found online regarding the Hamline Park Building/RFP, “Director Hahm said the Department is seeking a tenant for the Hamline Park Building located at 1564 Lafond Avenue as the Department considers the building a nonfunctioning facility. There was consideration to raze the building but the community would prefer that it not be taken down. Two RFPs have been received with one not being accepted. The Department’s plans are to work with the community and District 11 Community Council to establish a process and determine a use.”

Lori Greene states that she submitted a rather lengthy application, hired a lawyer and an architect to help her get everything together. “We found out we won in May of last year (2012). From then on it was lots paperwork and a rezoning of the building and the entire park,” said Greene.

Greene states that “Parks and Rec was great to work with but it was a very slow process; it took six months more then I had hoped it would take.” Mosaic on a Stick is leasing the building and they are using the entire space for classes and studio. Greene states that “I hope to expand to some programs in the park and community events.” Greene says she is “hoping to do something to honor Cap Wigington for his beautiful architecture. It is quite an honor to be able to use this beautiful building. I invite everyone to come see it. We have made it very colorful inside it deserves a tour.”

This community member and preservationist hopes that it is many years before we need to come together again to save this building. Thanks to HMC for 20 years of good stewardship of the Hamline Park Playground building and continued advocacy for our Hamline Midway Neighborhood. Thanks to the community for rising up and not letting this building be demolished. Welcome to Mosaic on a Stick to the Hamline Park Playground building. Thank you to Lori Greene and Mosaic on a Stick for helping the building find a new life and a new tenant and a vibrant spot for the community to continue to gather.

Krista Finstad Hanson is a Hamline Midway History Corps member, Hamline Midway homeowner, writer, historian, and preservation advocate.
It’s official—another community has joined our Minnesota Main Street program as a designated community! This community is one I am sure many of you are familiar with. As I sit here and listen to the Rolling Stones, I hope to garner artistic and thought provoking literature to read about so you may all have some background on Winona and the people that are keeping its history in mind.

Winona sits upon the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, and was first plotted in the early 1850s. Since then the city has been a major addition to our state, quickly becoming a regional center of industry and higher education. The city now has over 27,000 people, made up of college students and families, arts and industry, natural beauty and history. To capitalize on these points and move forward with growth and quality of life in mind, Mayor Mark Peterson, Main Street Manager David Bittner, and the city of Winona looked towards their downtown as an asset that could be exploited to promote these goals and attract development for future generations to enjoy.

The Mayor:

Mark and his family moved to Winona in 1983 where since then has become a very active member within the community working with the city’s Heritage Preservation Commission, Visit Winona, Chamber of Commerce, as well as being the executive director of the Winona County Historical Society. His position as mayor seems to be a good fit thus far for him, with his interest in preservation and politics having the ability to mold into a progressive outlook for the future of Winona. It is these small victories that calm our nerves, as preservationists, knowing that Winona’s downtown will now not be looked at as a problem that needs to be fixed but rather an opportunity that has the ability to flourish under the right oversight. His goal is to reinvigorate downtown through the promotion of it as a destination, through construction projects that will aid in the reformation of Levee Park as a quality green space and certain areas of the central business district. Through various means of construction, marketing, and community development, under his administration there is hope both physical and ideological changes will take place so Winona’s downtown may once again be a cornerstone of community pride and private development.

The Director:

With the inception of the Main Street program in Winona, a manager had to be chosen to lead the program and promote it as a viable addition to the community. Enter, David Bittner, the man that will be the fresh face of the Winona Main Street program. With this position, David will focus primarily on the creation of partnerships among business owners, residents, city officials, and community leaders to actively promote downtown to the broader community. Many times not everyone is aware of all the great things that are occurring within the community around them, which is why programs like Main Street can be such a positive addition to cities and their local economies. Which forces me to note, as you dear reader skim through this article, I hope to instill in you the active interest and support we all need to begin and continue to take in the local businesses and historic districts that make where we live the unique and special place that it is. Ranting aside, the program has taken off at a quickened pace with 55 local businesses or individuals.

Preservation Resources

We recently updated the preservation resources available on our Web site, made possible by the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund.

We hope that you find the resources to be organized in a more intuitive manner.

www.mnpreservation.org/resources1/
committed to the Main Street partnership already, and more projected to join as the program matures.

The Events:

Events are a key component to promoting the Main Street program, so to kick off the program, two events have been held thus far to promote community involvement. The first being a Saturday morning coordinated volunteer effort to bring to highlight the need for beautification within the downtown area as well as the work that can be accomplished through a few hours work on a Saturday morning. The volunteers cleaned up public areas, planted, and dispersed mulch around a surface lot in the downtown to try and spruce up the bland, black-top filled space.

The second event which was held on July 18th, called the Sweet Stroll Downtown, was intended to bring people downtown with the lure of free baked treats and showcase the unique business services and quality found downtown. Over 25 businesses participated in this event with an initial goal of only attracting 20 businesses to partner with the event. With each business having a different locally baked good, I am sure there were some stomach aches and need for a second stroll to work of all the sweets.

It is these kinds of activities that will continue to be created and promoted as ways to garner interest and supply the local businesses with the community support they need to stay open as the shadow of the local Walmart Supercenter looms ever closer.

The Winona Main Street program brings the number of designated communities within our program to five, with the hope of increasing this number again by years end. As these programs continue to prove their worth, communities will be provided with a blueprint to improve their central business districts and garner the necessary community support to support the businesses and activities that create a thriving downtown. In the case of Winona, with such strong support for preservation from the Mayor’s office, and the initial relationships between David and local business leaders, the future looks bright for Winona and its historic downtown. I personally have never been to Winona, and as a born and raised Minnesota, this simply seems wrong. With my work here at PAM, I now feel as though I have to make a point to travel down to this city on the bluff, and see the changes that are taking place, and the positive outcomes that are being created from the partnerships that have been formed. Since there are so many exciting things going on in Winona in the present and foreseeable future, this only means that now we must all travel there to experience what this city is all about.

Lake of the Isles Open House

We're throwing open the doors to three amazing, historic homes on Lake of the Isles for you to get an inside look!

We've all seen these homes from the outside, but this is your chance to see the incredible architectural details that exist on the inside as well. You'll have access to each of the homes: pick one, spend as much time as you like, then move on to the next and so on. We'll have volunteers available to provide you with some information about each of the homes.

More information is available at https://lakeoftheislesopenhouse.eventbrite.com/
This summer PAM has been conducting a research project focusing on “University Avenue’s Car Culture in the Mid-Late 20th Century”. The research project, funded by the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grants Program, was initiated after Episcopal Homes and PAM began discussing how best to honor the former Porky’s Drive-In Restaurant and the car culture that led to its landmark status on University Avenue. Episcopal Homes is in the process of constructing a new, seven-story, 174-unit senior building on the former Porky’s site, located at the southeast corner of University Avenue and East Lyndhurst Avenue. Episcopal Homes has generously agreed to fund the creation of a site-specific work of public art, which is planned to be incorporated into the exterior details of a portion of the new building. The results from the research conducted by PAM, which will include a historical narrative, collected photographic images, and recorded oral histories, will provide an accurate yet varied historical context to inform and inspire the creation of the public artwork.

Before the interstate highway was built, University Avenue was the primary thoroughfare connecting St. Paul and Minneapolis. When the personal automobile took hold in the beginning of the 20th century, University Avenue became the center for auto-oriented businesses in St. Paul. In the 1950s when the car-craze really took hold of the young generation and anyone who was anyone was out cruising with their friends on Friday and Saturday nights, University Avenue and Porky’s drive-in were the places to be seen. University Avenue was known amongst car clubs as far away as California, and was referred to there as “the five mile strip.” With its long, wide straightaway and plenty of stoplights it was the perfect location for impromptu drag races and showing off custom cars.

After I-94 was built just a couple of blocks south of University Avenue in the mid-1960s, however, most of the traffic was diverted and with it the auto businesses declined and began moving to the burgeoning suburbs. Today, St. Paul’s University Avenue shows few signs of its once thriving auto-oriented development and with the recent construction of the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit line the entire feel of the avenue has changed dramatically. Since 1953 Porky’s neon pig sign was a beacon to fast-food lovers and the drive-in’s parking lot was the social headquarters for car-lovers, hot-rodders, and street-racers, both old and young, until its very last day. When it closed in 2011, it was one of the last operating representatives of the car culture that dominated University Avenue for more than half a century.

Though the tangible aspects of the once booming car culture on University Avenue are now mostly gone or have been altered dramatically, this research project, and the public art installation that will result from it, will help ensure that the car culture of University Avenue will not be lost to history and future generations. The research portion of the project is on track to be completed this fall so stay tuned to PAM’s website for the full report and updates on the art project.

PAM’s Special Project Intern for the summer, Anne M. Ketz, is heading up the project under the direction of Field Representative, Erin Hanafin Berg. Anne comes to PAM with one year of graduate school under her belt in the Master of Historic Preservation program at the University of Maryland College Park. Anne is a native of St. Paul, a former Outreach and Advocacy volunteer for PAM and worked herself for many years in the area of University Avenue and Vandalia Street prior to returning to school.
Willmar, Minnesota’s Response to the Cultural Economy—New Orleans 2013

By Beverly Dougherty

As a Main Street Manager, I’ve listened to “you have to do it yourselves” many times in the last 8 years, since the birth of the Willmar Design Center, a designated Main Street community in Minnesota. Our mission is to “Restore the Heart of the City”. I finally heard it in New Orleans at the National Main Streets Conference. Cultural Economy, Local Food, Sustainable, Micro-Economy, Healthy Eating. How have people gathered for centuries? Over sharing food. Food is essential to all cultures, it is a melting pot for gathering, for community, for what successful downtowns strive to be. A place.

Willmar, Minnesota, is developing a place-based Downtown Local Food System, thanks to the vision of the South West Regional Sustainable Development Partnership and their funding. The grant is being hosted by the Willmar Design Center, with the mission of “increasing the use of local food in the Region”.

We have pooled these partners:

1. Willmar Public Schools—will buy what we can grow (Farm to School),
2. Willmar Area Food Shelf will grant a long-term, minimal lease for Willmar Design Center to build two side-by-side passive solar greenhouses on their downtown property, 3) this requires an aggregation-distribution center with value added processing for the region.

The SWRSDP consists of 25 Minnesota Counties with assets of tillable land that can produce local foods for local consumption. Our mission is to remove the barriers to making more local food available. What are they?

1. Difficulty in ordering from multiple sources;
2. Lack of startup farmers who love the land, and want to grow food for local consumption;
3. Lack of affordable small acreage;
4. Building buyers—restaurants, coffee shops, nursing homes, hospitals, other institutional buyers;
5. Increase education on benefits of healthy eating;
6. Provide cooking lessons from cooks at schools to consumers at home;
7. How to save bountiful crops for winter months? Preserving and freezing!

Our Plan for community, economic development, jobs that cannot be exported, healthy living, sharing the most important thing—food.

1. Build urban greenhouses (2) downtown, more to follow;
2. Purchase building(s) downtown for an aggregation/cleaning/cooling facility;
3. Include a value-added processing center (commercial kitchen) for producers;
4. Develop a distribution plan with other planned food hubs in the SW Region;
5. Encourage and assist new growers to be producers;
6. Provide training in food rules, how to deliver top-quality produce—“grow the Growers”;
7. Develop markets in addition to the Willmar Public Schools.

Steps:

1. Secure funding for greenhouses;
2. Secure funding for property purchase for aggregation/value-added facility;
3. Develop business plans for both facilities;
4. Secure funding for upgrades to school kitchens, training for kitchen staff;
5. Develop Policy for Local Foods in Public Schools;
6. Increase education at public level—Why local? Benefits?
7. Increase number of greenhouses to lengthen the Minnesota growing season;
8. Grow investors’ interest.

How big is the market?
The Willmar Public Schools (including New London-Spicer School, Community Christian School, Montevideo Schools) under one Food Service Director, serves 72,000 meals per day. Currently, one item of one meal a month is a locally-grown item (greens). The potential is unlimited. This is just the number for schools. How can this translate into economic vitality in our downtowns? It is exponential.

What will our downtown look like when this vision is underway?

1. People will be working in the greenhouses;
2. People will be moving food 3 blocks (instead of 1,500 miles) to a cleaning and cooling facility;
3. Food will move to local schools from the cooling facility, 30 miles maximum;
4. Growers besides the greenhouse growers will be delivering to the value-added kitchen;
5. Local buyers will be picking up local food with their own delivery system;
6. The kitchen will be teaching preserving-freezing.

Farming incubators will be set up at multiple locations. Growers will share information and equipment. Small Business plans will be initiated. Additional greenhouses will be built with list of buyers in hand. Willmar, Minnesota has an opportunity to live a healthier life. The Region benefits from the activities in the largest city in the SW region. We all get it—that we have to develop a micro-economy that supports all of us. This is what I learned in New Orleans at the Cultural Economy Conference.

www.MNreservations.ORG
Hello all! To those of you who have not met me at our events or spoken with me at the office, I am officially the newest addition to PAM! I graduated this past May from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities with a Bachelors of Science in Urban Studies and Geography minor. I have had the pleasure of working for PAM the past 8 months and am excited to continue with this great organization.

It is a wonderful opportunity to still be a part of the team here at PAM. After starting here as an intern in Resource Development back in January, I have been given other opportunities to continue with the organization and hone my post-graduate skills. I will soon be completing my position as Minnesota Main Street Assistant which I have had since June. My new position as Community Action Assistant will deal with research and written projects within the state. I am very excited that this new position will allow me to develop my research and writing skills.

I hit the ground running with my first project with a historic survey of Dinkytown. I am sure that most of you are familiar with Dinkytown, a historic neighborhood and commercial district located adjacent to the University of Minnesota. With the recent rash of apartment developments around the University, especially in Dinkytown, a fresh look at the commercial district and its historic character is being conducted to reevaluate this growth and offer suggestions on the impact. As this project progresses Erin and I will make sure to update social media on our findings.

I have always been interested in history and architecture but never fully considered working in the preservation field until I interned with PAM. After my time here, I have become more interested and had the distinct pleasure of seeing firsthand what it means to be a preservationist and what it takes to succeed as such. For some, preservationists carry a bad taste due to the supposed reluctance we feel towards change and progress; however, I have quickly learned that this is simply untrue. I will in fact not be chaining myself to a building for the purpose of saving it from the wrecking ball but seek to propose thoughtful approaches to what can otherwise be perplexing problems. My colleagues and I are not here to stand in the way, but simply to shape progress into something beneficial for everyone instead of a few interested parties.

I am excited for what my future holds here at PAM and cannot wait to continue with other projects.
Perhaps you’ve heard about silos. Not the ones that dot the rural landscape, cozed up next to barns and farmhouses, but the figurative ones that tend to keep us operating in our own professional spheres. The silos I’m thinking about contain us in a rigid system, preventing us from engaging with and learning from others in the fields around us. In early June, I had the opportunity to bust out of the preservation silo I too often find myself in, and I’ve spent the past several weeks reflecting on how PAM’s field services programs can cultivate a richer, more relevant type of preservation.

I attended community organizer training at Camp Wellstone, presented by Wellstone Action, during the first weekend in June. Over two and a half very intense days, I learned about strategic planning, developing and communicating an effective message, organizing and mobilizing grassroots campaigns, and building a volunteer program. This was mind-blowing stuff for somebody who has spent most of her academic and working career concentrating on architectural styles and National Register eligibility. Increasingly, I have been feeling that what people are asking of me – and of PAM – is more along the lines of community development than pure preservation, and advocacy work in particular requires some skills that were outside of my realm of experience. One of the key messages that emerged during that weekend was that being righteous and passionate about our issues is not enough—it takes serious strategic planning to win at campaigns, be they political or preservation-al.

Fortunately, community organizer training was just what I was looking for, and I learned some valuable tools that I will be deploying immediately in our new Sites Worth Saving and Places of Interest programs. As an added benefit, this people-power-focused training helped me recognize and appreciate why it is that I’m committed to this work: the historic resources we seek to preserve, protect, and promote all have rich stories to tell, but so do the people who care about them. Preservation will flourish in Minnesota when we are committed to collecting, sharing, and valuing those stories about the places that matter in our communities.

I had not quite recovered from the intensity of community organizer training when I went to the Rural Arts and Culture Summit at the University of Minnesota-Morris later that week. I was a last-minute addition to this conference, asked to speak about Cultural Legacy and specifically the opportunities for use of the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Funds. I intended to use my podium time to hop onto my usual soapbox, urging communities to use these grants to do historic resource survey and inventory—we need to do a better job of identifying our historic assets so we can value them and promote their rehabilitation and reuse before they are threatened. But my presentation changed shape after hearing that morning’s keynote speaker, Michael J. Strand.

Strand, a professor at North Dakota State University, describes himself as the “village potter,” making functional stoneware like cups and bowls. His true artistry lies in the creative ways he has found to share those objects with other people, and the memory and meaning that those experiences attach to the object. One of his projects, the Misfit Cup Liberation Project, gathers and shares the stories behind the random cup in everyone’s cupboard—the cup that doesn’t match, that rarely gets used, but that still holds enough meaning that it hasn’t been thrown away. Michael, through interactive events where people exchange their misfit cup for one he has made, has developed a way to recognize the value in those cups and share their stories with a broader community. He is a tremendously engaging speaker, and learning about his work was inspiring and invigorating and thought-provoking.

A few minutes later, I borrowed Strand’s metaphor of the misfit cup to introduce my own session topic. How do we tell the stories of our communities’ misfit places, or even recognize whether they’re of value or not? Too often we just chuck them in the trash, without discerning whether they have tales to tell and are still capable of serving a purpose. My thoughts that morning were only half-formed ideas, and have not taken on a discernible shape since then. But I am intrigued enough by the concepts I was introduced to in early June – from fields outside my own – that I will keep thinking about and working towards them, looking past the silos to the rich and varied landscape that defines our state.
Main Street® is well known for its Four Points: Design, Economic Restructuring, Promotion, and Organization. What it is less known for – but crucial to creating the strong foundation for the work of Main Street – are its Eight Principles: Incremental, Comprehensive, Self-Help, Partnerships, Leveraging Existing Assets, Quality, Change and Implementation.

This is the second in a series of articles in the Minnesota Preservationist focusing on each of the Eight Principles.

I do enjoy many aspects of the National Trust Main Street Center’s Main Street Approach®, but the piece that keeps me going year after year is how comprehensive it is. Meaning, I get to learn new things all the time. However, being “comprehensive,” isn’t included as one of the eight guiding principles because it keeps nerdy people like me entertained endlessly. It’s included because it is a key piece to building and sustaining a successful program of historic commercial district revitalization.

Main Street looks at the entirety of commercial district, taking into account all aspects of it. Main Street programs don’t just look at the district’s physical nature – what it looks like, smells like, how the buildings are holding up. Nor does the program seek only to fill every storefront or recruit that big anchor business to downtown. Main Street programs work on those facets of the district, but also on how people come to know the district (through events, marketing), what the district’s image is, and all of the consensus building, volunteers, fundraising, and communications needed to keep this work going long-term.

Why is it important to look at the district as a whole and not just focus on one aspect or another when working to revitalize it for the community? Let’s say you focus just on making the district look its best, but don’t work with the existing businesses to make them better, stronger businesses. Streetscape work, building improvements, better signs, will all make the district appear more attractive to customers – and to new businesses.

However, those costs will be borne by existing property owners, business owners, and local government. Commercial rents and property values are largely a function of how profitable (per square foot) the commercial space is. If costs increase substantially without the profits also increasing, it will become more difficult for existing businesses to remain open and for existing building owners to lease space to start-up businesses (as they will need to charge higher rents for to pay for improvements). Local government will have difficulty financing their portion of the public improvements unless property values increase over time as well.

At the same time, it’s likely that if the district doesn’t have enough customers, its appearance isn’t the only reason that people aren’t shopping there. What are the businesses’ hours? When do people in their community do most of their shopping? What goods and services are being offered and how does that match up with the local market? Where are people doing their other shopping and why? What kind of an experience is it to shop in the district? Do people know what businesses are in the commercial district and what they sell? These questions and others play into a district’s economic health just as much as what it looks like.

As you can see, balancing the need to improve the appearance of the district with the need to improve its economic base is crucial to achieving long-term success. The same picture could be painted with Promotion. If you are promoting an image of shopping at several boutique clothing stores and fine dining, but your district doesn’t live up to that image, the visitors who come as a result of that promotion will be deeply disappointed. The disappointed visitor (or resident) will tell that story a dozen times.

For these reasons, it’s important to make sure all Four Points improve in balance with one another and are addressed comprehensively.

The Minnesota Main Street Program is recognized by the National Trust Main Street Center® as the official statewide coordinating program in Minnesota.

Minnesota Main Street has been financed in part with funds provided by the State of Minnesota from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society.

Emily Northey is the Minnesota Main Street Program Coordinator.
The Last Word
The Executive Director’s thoughts ...

As I meet more and more of Minnesota’s burgeoning preservation community, a common question always bubbles to the surface. Why did you get involved in historic preservation or why are you a preservationist? This really gets to the core of what we do and the direction the preservation movement is going to take in the future. I thought I could share my stories on why preservation matters to me and then hopefully everyone can share their stories with us on Facebook.

Historic schools have always had a special place in my heart. To me they represent community cohesion, shared cultural experiences, and architectural grandeur. Historic schools located at the core of the community, promote walkability and community gathering. I was lucky enough to attend and walk to the same school as my parents and grandparents situated blocks away from the county courthouse and a historic downtown. Education, government, and enterprise in close proximity help define a community. While I was away at college, the community made the decision to demolish this historic school, leaving a black hole in the center of town. For twenty years there has been no new development at the site and it continues to be a large vacant lot in the middle of a small town. And of course, kids now have to drive or bus to school since it is located on the outskirts of town.

I have a love of places that blend architectural and natural beauty with a taste of history. As a kid, I enjoyed crawling to the top of fire towers and surveying the forest below me. As I got older, I appreciated the view, especially on a clear autumn day. When I went to grad school, I decided to use my love of fire towers and public lands to write my thesis on the history of fire towers. This way I had the opportunity to scamper up every fire tower that was left standing in the Missouri Ozarks and see some amazing oak forest situated by beautiful springs spilling water. This love of nature and historic places also fuels my passion for recycling old places. Sometimes advocating for reuse is as simple as we don’t want to see them sitting in the dump. Since construction waste makes up nearly 50% of landfill material we need to preserve what we have so we can protect wild and scenic places with the added benefit of preserving our historic places.

The other preservation cause that is near and dear to my heart is the preservation of modernism and buildings from our recent past. This love of the recent past happened while I was at the University of Wisconsin studying history in the Humanities Building, a great example of brutalism. Every nook in the building has special meaning, the music that filled the building epitomized the creative environment, and the indoor and outdoor relationship created strong ties to the setting. Preservation is more than just keeping architectural gems standing. Preservation is about finding innovative new uses and fostering creativity to discover those new uses. Modernist buildings and landscapes really push people to use their imagination which is a really exciting place to be.

I am so thrilled that the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota is actively engaged to preserve places that are close to my heart. Preserving Peavey Plaza, the modernist living room of Minneapolis, is pushing people to view landscape architecture through a different lens and evoking creativity to ensure future generations are able to gather at this space. Bemidji Carengie Library is definitely a Site Worth Saving, situated on the banks of Lake Bemidji, this property blends the natural and cultural worlds perfectly. Lastly our work with schools statewide, especially at Kasson and Alango, is helping to keep these buildings in use promoting communities that are walkable, unique, and have strong intergenerational cultural connections.

Let us know why preservation matters to you. What got you involved and what are preservation issues that make you tick. Won’t you email Will O’Keefe at wokeefe@mnpreservation.org with your story?

Sincerely,

Doug Gasek
Executive Director
Thomas Lutz, and Robert Roscoe, Candace pointed out that Winona is the newest Designated Main Street Community.

During the Great Depression artists were hired under the auspices of the WPA to paint murals across the United States, many in community post offices. Where would you go to find this magnificent post office mural?

My e-mail address is: wtmorgan@stcloudstate.edu.

A couple of readers thought that the 1911-12 Merchants National Bank in Winona by Purcell, Feick, and Elmslie was Louis Sullivan’s masterpiece - his prairie bank from 1907-08 in Owatonna. George Elmslie executed the ornamentation for both of these national treasures. Readers who correctly cited the Winona bank were Candace Dow, Justin Fortney.