

Celebrating Minnesota's History-Making Women

Minnesota has eighty-seven county historical societies and scores of city or town historical societies and local historical sites. Women have played an overwhelmingly dominant role in establishing and leading some of these organizations. Indeed, many would not exist today without the extraordinary efforts of women in all roles: from the front of house to collections to leadership.

In addition to celebrating the women who have made RCHS, we asked staff from area historical societies to nominate the remarkable women who have worked to shape history across the state of Minnesota. These are just some of the countless women who have dedicated their lives to telling the story of our state.



REBECCA SNYDER

Dakota County Historical Society

Rebecca has been providing top-shelf support for thousands of researchers of local history for decades while also performing many of the necessary operational tasks that come with running a historical society. Her efficiency, skill, and work ethic are a model to which local history leaders should aspire.



CAROL VANORNUM

*Twin Cities Civil War Round Table,
Minnesota Civil War Symposium*

Carol VanOrnum is the glue that has held the Twin Cities Civil War Round Table organization together through challenging times. Although a new board and president are elected each year, Carol's willingness as a volunteer secretary and treasurer to manage the behind-the-scenes-operations has been key to the organization's continuing excellence.

Carol has also secured national recognition of the TCCWRT by her active participation in the Civil War Round Table Congress, formed to encourage best practices in the face of declining round table memberships. As vice president and editor of this group's quarterly newsletter she shares what has made our local organization successful with scores of similar groups.

Many round tables and their programs are heavily male-oriented. Thanks to Carol's consistent leadership on the board of directors, the TCCWRT has produced far more diverse programs and have attracted and retained many more female members. As such, the TCCWRT can be rightfully proud of its seventy-year legacy and ever optimistic of its future.



ALICE THOMAS

Save the Northfield Depot

Alice is the fearless leader behind saving Northfield's depot. She worked to incorporate a nonprofit, move the depot, and restore the depot—which all required research into the depot's history. There were many challenges with saving Northfield's depot, and many continue. Funds needed to be raised to restore the building, and the building needed to be moved. She worked with other volunteers to find creative solutions. She also faced the challenge of people not caring about the depot, so she worked to educate others on the importance. Alice is passionate about her work and her enthusiasm inspires others.



TINA BURNSIDE AND COVENTRY COWENS

Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery

Tina Burnside and Coventry Cowens cofounded the Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery at a time when there was no Black history museum in the state. They present exhibitions and programs that tell the hidden stories about Black people in Minnesota and their contributions to the community. They also created youth programs teaching curatorial skills to teenagers and adult artist residency and history fellowship programs to provide a platform and opportunities. Tina and Coventry are frequently out in the community tabling at events making Black History, art and culture accessible to the public.

There were challenges involved with starting an institution with limited funding and resources, but they found inspiration to build on the legacy of those who had done this work in the past. Tina and Coventry did not know each other before starting the museum, but joined together for the purpose of serving the community by creating a space to celebrate Black history, art, and culture.



MARY COONS AND CLAUDIA PINGREE

Hanover Historical Society

Mary Coons, right, has been secretary of the Hanover Historical Society since its inception in 2003 and has written three books on Hanover history. She has also done history presentations at the local elementary school, and helped create a time capsule that is buried under a historic schoolhouse bell. Originally seen as an "outsider" after moving into one of Hanover's oldest historic houses in the early 2000s, Mary had to gain the respect and trust of the community and locals in order to learn about and then document Hanover's rich history. She is now well known in the town as a local historian and has made it a big part of her life's mission since moving to Hanover.

Collections Manager Claudia Pingree lives and breathes history. As a former avid antiquer, she is responsible for the Hanover Historical Society hosting an "Antiques Roadshow" style event with a silent auction for the past decade-plus. She will tell anyone she meets about the organization's facility, the Hanover Area History Center, and what they are doing for the community. She is also an avid gardener, and her garden club is responsible for maintaining the site's grounds.



DR. LAURA MUNSKI

East Grand Forks Heritage Village

Dr. Munski's knowledge, persistence, and patience have fed the East Grand Forks Heritage Village, from her work finding grants to her help transitioning the museum into an educational facility. She has also been the instigator in creating pollinator gardens and wildlife habitats on the museum's grounds. Dr. Munski's knowledge, persistence, and patience are an inspiration to all who work with her.

JEAN KEOGH

Montgomery Historical Society

Jean Keogh began her commitment to history in 2005, joining the Montgomery Historical Society as one of its charter members and serving as its longtime secretary. In 2019, she started working to have a portion of the City of Montgomery's downtown commercial district listed on the National Register of Historic Places, providing the historic building owners with tax incentives to preserve and restore approximately twenty-nine buildings along Montgomery's Main or First Street. She helped to gather the historical data and photos of Montgomery's downtown buildings needed for the listing documents, assisted with a town hall meeting to encourage buy-in for this project from the residents of Montgomery, and submitted numerous updates on the progress of this project to the local newspaper to keep the community informed. Her efforts resulted in the Montgomery Historic Downtown Commercial District being listed on the National Register on April 9, 2021. She has also developed a walking tour of the historic district.

Jean was also the first female to be elected and serve as mayor of the City of Montgomery (2011-2016) for three consecutive terms. As mayor, she was instrumental in a land swap that resulted in the location of a new Veterans Memorial Park on city property, which was dedicated on Memorial Day in 2011. This park is home to veterans' photos and stories on plaques, some of which also line the downtown businesses. There are over 300 veterans tributes now located in Montgomery as a result of the establishment of this park.



RENEE GEVING

Cass County Museum

Renee has dedicated her life to collections, displays, and the research of Cass County history. In the late '80s, the city of Walker wanted to turn its museum into a liquor store. After a long fight in which she was active in citizen input and protest of the move, the county agreed to build a new museum.

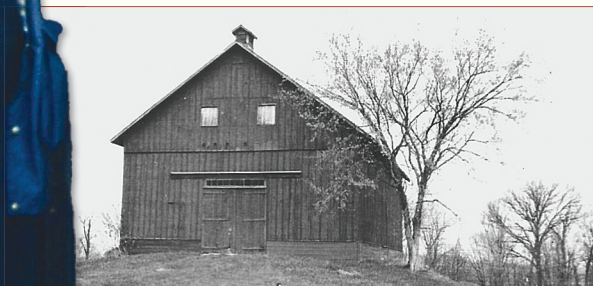
Renee dedicated her adult working life to one entity and continues past retirement age as historian of the Cass County Museum. Her ability to find needles in a haystack in the research department is phenomenal.



JOAN BRAINARD

Hill Farm Historical Society

Joan Brainard and her husband, Ben, were the second people to buy a lot in the then newly formed Village of North Oaks in the early 1950s. Joan lived the rest of her life in her beloved North Oaks. She served on the City Council, the North Oaks Homeowners Association, the Planning Commission and countless committees and task forces in the community. There is a street named after her. Joan was a founder and first editor of the *North Oaks News*. She was the co-author of *Three Bold Ventures*, the story of the founding and development of what became the City of North Oaks. And in 1989, she was an incorporator and an important leader in the formation of the Hill Farm Historical Society and served on its board of directors from its inception until her passing in 2023.



Joan spent thousands of hours researching the details of the Hill Farm. No detail was too small to escape her scrutiny. Her research is preserved in the many exhibits in the Hill Farm buildings and plaques on the property. Without her significant efforts, the Hill Farm would not have been registered on the National Register of Historic Places. The Hill Farm Historical Society is one of her legacies that will live on forever.



BETH MARVIN, MARG MARVIN, AND RUTH STUKEL

Warroad Historical Society, Warroad Heritage Center

Volunteers Beth Marvin and Marg Marvin have been instrumental in gathering Warroad history and dedicated years of volunteer work to researching, collecting, and expanding the Warroad Heritage Center. Beth organized events and fundraisers, and helped gather artifacts and documents from the public to help create the museum. She went through over 100 years of newspapers and books mentioning Warroad, the area, and families from the community, and compiled over 1,500 family files with copies and references to find the missing history of Warroad. She published her findings in weekly historical articles for the local newspaper. Marg has dedicated many years to collecting artifacts and materials that are key to telling the history of Warroad. Many displays that are still currently up were created by her with materials that she has gathered. Former mayor Ruth Stukel was a founding member of the Warroad Historical Society back in 1968, and was also crucial in researching veterans of the area; she is the author of the book *A Proud Salute to Warroad Area Veterans*. Ruth's work is still present today and the museum still benefits from her efforts. She has left a legacy within the community.



WENDY PETERSEN BIORN

Carver County Historical Society

From the purchase of the historic Andrew Peterson Farmstead property and buildings, to fundraising, to getting the property on the National Register of Historic Places, Wendy Petersen Biorn has shown the determination it takes to get projects done and the history preserved. Carver County is still somewhat of a rural county, although growing fast. Funding, fundraising, and hosting programs and events for a small population can be challenging. These challenges have been overcome by Wendy's determination and knowledge, which has made the Carver County Historical Society one of the foremost local historical societies in the region. Without her vision, much of Carver County history would have been lost.

JEAN RAE LEGRIED

Freeborn County Genealogical Society

Jean founded and served as president of the Freeborn County Genealogical Society, served on the Minnesota Genealogical Society for several years, and helped many families in the area trace and document their family roots. She was also responsible for educating the community on genealogical research through her multiple presentations. Jean was not afraid to express her opinion in the newspaper and was a contributing writer for the *Leader-Press* in Glenville, Minnesota, and the *Albert Lea Tribune*.

Jean was an advocate for providing equal rights/accessibilities for disabled peoples in the 1960s and '70s, a time when their needs were not taken seriously. She was born with muscular atrophy and lived with crutches and leg braces until 1951 when she began "traveling on wheels" permanently. Her disability never stopped her from exploring new places or from living life. She was president of the Friendly Handicap Club in 1976, and poured a huge amount of energy and time into making Albert Lea accessible through a program called Access Albert Lea. She was also a mother and wife on top of her many projects.

Jean's ability to create change was strong. She adamantly pursued a goal and backed up her claims through tireless action. She was determined to make everyone feel accepted and comfortable in their own skin. Through it all, she maintained an inviting attitude and wonderful sense of humor. Plus, she never hesitated to express her opinion, regardless of its acceptance within the majority. She was a fierce, fearless woman who loved history, but more importantly, she was willing to change it for the better.



CECELIA WATTLES MCKEIG AND SUE BRUNS

Beltrami County Historical Society, Cass County Historical Society

With at least 17 history books to her credit, and more in her computers, Cecelia is fluent in Minnesota history, but especially Bemidji history. Self-publishing before it was popular, she wanted to not only collect and preserve history but to share it through her books and website; thus, she financially carried her publishing by herself. She prolifically writes articles for local newspapers, books, and social media alongside colleague Sue Bruns. Sue and Cecelia also co-authored *Bemidji 125* for Bemidji's 125th anniversary.

Sue Bruns has been on the board of directors, and indeed, when without an executive director, she took on that roll as well to keep the place running, directing volunteers and doing history. She has taught memoir writing classes and will do so again this October at the History Depot in Bemidji. She continues to dig into history for her articles and books (a book on beer in Bemidji is forthcoming) and to teach people how to search and write family histories.



LINDA SCHLOFF

Upper Midwest Jewish Archives, Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest

Linda Schloff has been responsible for creating exhibits, writing books and articles, and otherwise preserving Jewish history for the upper Midwest region. When the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSUM) and the Minnesota Historical Society teamed up to create an exhibit about Jewish women in the Upper Midwest that showed how they transported, transmitted, and transformed Jewish life in this region Linda wrote a companion book called, *"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher": Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest since 1855*. The exhibit itself was transformed into a traveling exhibit that was shown in various sites in Minnesota and the Dakotas.

Linda established and edited *Upper Midwest Jewish History* as the society's journal, and has written articles for other journals, co-created a video about the Jewish North Side, conducted numerous oral histories, taught at Macalester for several semesters, and spoken before numerous groups. She also amassed a

sizeable archive devoted to Jewish history in the Upper Midwest, which is housed at the Andersen Archives at the University of Minnesota and accessible to a global audience online.

Through it all, Linda has pushed back on the idea that Jewish history in this region is inconsequential, and has worked to revise the notion that Jewish history in this region is only about anti-Semitism.

KATHY EVAVOLD, LEANN NEULEIB, AND MISSY HERMES

Otter Tail County Historical Society

Kathy Evavold started and continues to oversee the Township Historian program. Due to the size of the county and the number of townships (sixty-two) this was a large undertaking, but it encouraged buy-in and participation from township boards and officers. The program made township residents see their connection to the county and the historical society, and has enriched the Otter Tail County Historical Society's collection.

LeAnn Neuleib is a longtime employee who has created newsletters, posters, social media, and exhibit contributions. LeAnn's skill at photograph, slide and negative scanning is superb, contributing to the image collection. And her love of photography has led to the creation of a thorough database of local photographers.

Missy Hermes continues to bring forward and advocate for the underrepresented people in local history and rural Minnesota. Her innovative "History by the Highway" Facebook live posts were created for a COVID audience to help them get outside and see the history all around them while highlighting the richness of the archives. The series now has a world-wide following, and was even recently transferred to an in-person bus tour through the county.





DIANE MOSTAD

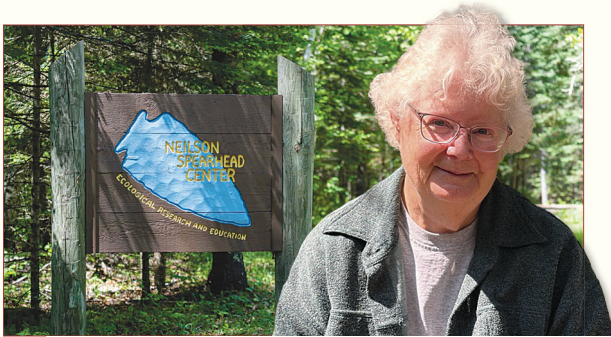
North Beltrami Heritage Center

Diane Mostad and her family manage, maintain, and promote the area at the North Beltrami Heritage Center in Kelliher, Minnesota. Diane works tirelessly to keep the WPA Auditorium Museum relevant to summer visitors with pioneer stories, books, high school yearbooks, and much more local history for North Beltrami County. If one were to ask anyone in the Kelliher area about history, they would say, "Call Diane!"

GEORGE-ANN MAXSON

Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society

George-Ann has maintained the archives of the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society for more than thirty years. She has contributed her first-hand knowledge of the history of the Neilson Spearhead Center and the George W. Neilson family. She handles recordkeeping for nearly all aspects of MHAS business, such as membership lists, meeting minutes, and treasury reports. As a representative of the local Audubon Society chapter, she performs outreach at science, nature and outdoor activity events to connect with other organizations and members of the Bemidji community. She also leads nature walks open to the public where she identifies native plant and bird species and discusses their ecology.



George-Ann has also managed the Neilson Spearhead Young Naturalist Program for the past three decades—a summer program where kids spend a week at the Neilson Spearhead Center learning about nature through hands-on activities such as hiking, swimming, canoeing, foraging edible plants, competing to find the most species, and playing ecology-themed games such as fox and squirrel.

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SUSAN ROTH

State Historic Preservation Office

Susan was the Minnesota National Register of Historic Places historian. She began in the 1970s, when the program was newly created as the result of 1966 federal historic preservation legislation. Under her tenure, the program matured and grew. Susan made state-wide connections with local preservationists and building owners and was an effective ambassador for the National Register program. This required diplomacy in dealing with citizen inquiries, consultants, developers, Minnesota Historical Society staff, and state and federal staff, as well as the citizen review board that met quarterly to consider whether the completed nominations would be accepted for final review in Washington DC.

Behind-the-scenes bureaucrats are rarely recognized, yet each successfully nominated building has yielded civic pride, valuable historic documentation, and in some cases eligibility for tax credits that aid in community vitality. Susan faced these challenges with a tremendous amount of hard work.



NOMINATIONS SUBMITTED BY:

Tim Andersen, Tina Burnside, Teri Hammarback, Missy Hermes, Lois J. Jenkins, Edward Keogh, Erin Maxson, Reeve Needham, Stephen E. Osman, Brent Peterson, Chad Roberts, Sarah Rosten, Titiana Sanchez, Linda Schloff, Brady Swanson, Andrea Swensson, Laura Weber, and Colleen Williams.