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# THE MINNESOTA HISTORY Interpreter

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## INSIDE

Preservation grants available... 2  
Tech Talk: Architectural styles III... 3  
Staff news... 7

## AASLH Award of Merit to William C. Melton for Rescue of Veblen Farmstead

The Thomas and Kari Veblen Farmstead near Nerstrand in rural Rice County was built in the years 1867-1870 by Thomas Veblen, father of Thorstein Veblen, internationally renowned economist and author of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Thorstein lived there during his boyhood years and for four years following his graduation from Yale University.

Though the Veblen family left the farm in 1893, it was occupied as an active farm until 1970 and abandoned shortly thereafter. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1981. In 1982, the Veblen Preservation Project bought the property and financed emergency repairs. It continued to deteriorate, however, and was listed as a Priority I National Endangered Site by the National Park Service in 1989.

The Minnesota Historical Society's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) sponsored a reuse study in 1990, which concluded that private sale was the best option for the landmark's survival. SHPO took the lead in seeking a buyer. The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota (PAM) agreed to accept a preservation easement on the property, which ensures preservation in perpetuity and provides for annual monitoring and for a requirement that the property be open to the public a set number of days each year.

When William C. Melton of Edina acquired the property in 1992, he said, "The key point is that the farmstead must be saved." Melton found a highly qualified restoration architect, Steve Edwins of SMSQ Architects in Northfield, to oversee the project, and Peter McKinnon to be lead contractor.

Melton is an economist, scholar and historic preservationist. His careful research added to an understanding of the experience of Norwegian Americans during their transition from the old world to the new, and of the Veblen family in particular. Thorstein was the most famous, but the entire family was notably accomplished. Thomas, the father, was a highly skilled carpenter, eight of the nine children completed secondary school, three graduated from



SHPO file photo



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*Above: the Veblen Farmstead in April 1989, before restoration, and below, after restoration. The exterior is in the Greek Revival style, though the porch and stairway derive from traditions in the Valdres district of Norway, from which the Veblens migrated in the 1860s. The interior plan and decoration are predominantly Norwegian.*

Carleton College, and one, Emily, was reputedly the first daughter of Norwegian immigrants ever to graduate from an American college. Melton's equally thoroughgoing and painstaking research on the house and out-buildings guided their meticulous restoration.

For these reasons, and for his financial support and unflagging commitment over a period of five years in rescuing this landmark, Melton received a 1999 Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History.

The Veblen Preservation Project re-acquired the property in 1998, and the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota continues to retain the preservation easement.



## Workshops for Historic Preservation Grant-writers

Peggy Tolbert, Administrative/Grants Assistant, SHPO

Workshops were held in July in Windom, Bemidji and St. Cloud to assist organizations seeking grants from the two state-funded historic preservation grant programs that are administered by the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). Britta Bloomberg, David Nystuen, Mandy Skypala and Peggy Tolbert from the MHS historic preservation, field services and grants department spoke to 65 workshop participants about the State Grants-in-Aid and State Capital Projects programs. The participants were representatives of county and local historical societies and city and county agencies.

Topics included: applicant eligibility and project guidelines for both programs, grant-writing tips, and the MHS application and review process. Workshop participants reviewed successful grant applications in each project category of both programs, critiqued several applications on their own, and discussed future grant projects with MHS staff.

Future grant workshops will be offered in January at the History Center in St. Paul and next summer in other locations around the state. Watch the *Interpreter* for more information.

Special thanks to the Cottonwood County Historical Society, the Beltrami County Historical Society and the Stearns History Museum for hosting the three July 1999 grant workshops.

The Fiscal Year 2000 fall grant cycle deadlines have passed, so here are the deadlines for the winter cycle (State Grants-in-Aid and federally funded Certified Local Government grants):

### *Grant Deadlines, Winter Grant Cycle:*

Pre-application deadline	Jan. 21, 2000
Application deadline	Feb. 25, 2000
Grants Review Committee meeting	April 11, 2000

## Historic Preservation Grants Still Available

The Midwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is accepting applications for grants through Friday, Oct. 1. The grants, available from the Trust's Preservation Service Fund (PSF), require a one-to-one match. They are designed to provide seed money to non-profit organizations and public agencies in the Midwest for preservation projects. Grants can be used for technical assistance in planning and for educational programming. The maximum grant award is \$5,000; typically, they range from \$1,000 to \$3,000. Last year the city of Nashwauk, Minn., received \$2,000 to develop an adaptive use plan for its old city hall. For information, call Jim Guelcher at 312/939-5547, ext. 229.

## Early American Furniture Exhibit

Pieces from the Chipstone collection, an outstanding private collection of early American furniture, is on display at the Elvehjem Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The exhibit, titled *Makers and Users: American Decorative Arts, 1630-1820*, includes furniture, ceramics and prints from early America that tell much about the aesthetics, production and commerce of the time. The museum is the former home of the couple who built up the Chipstone collection.

For a 72-page catalog with 16 full-page color illustrations or for more information, call 608/263-2240.





### THE BRIC-A-BRAC STYLES

by

Charles Nelson

Historical Architect, Minnesota Historical Society

This is the third in a series of five Tech Talk articles on Minnesota's architectural styles. The next one is scheduled for the Nov. 1999 issue of *The Interpreter*.

All properties pictured in this article are listed on the National Register of Historic Places or in National Register Districts. The latter are noted as (NR District).

The years following the Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia in 1876 were marked by a change in architectural tastes. The Italianate and French Second Empire styles gave way to a more picturesque, and at times exotic, expression that emphasized highly ornamental design.

The styles that rose to popularity during the next 20 years, the Queen Anne, Eastlake, Shingle and Stick styles, were labeled "romantic," "bric-a-brac," and "free-classic." For the most part, this was because of their exuberance and their unprecedented non-traditional profusion of design features, which were extracted and interpreted from a wide variety of sources. These sources included such diverse bits of architecture as the English cottage, the Moorish mosque and the classical temple. They were translated into three-dimensional architecture by the creativity and technology-based ingenuity of the architect/artist/craftsman of the day. Paradoxically, the standardization produced by the machine, coupled with its ability to produce what seem to be countless variations, resulted in highly individualized buildings. This characteristic is obvious even when two seemingly identical houses were constructed next to each other.

Events such as the Centennial Exposition were important. We might now call them "media" events, for through them, new ideas, technological advancements and an exposure to the outside world could be experienced by a wide audience. Visitors to expositions took their experiences home, often translating them into expressions of "tasteful" design and lifestyle. Other cultures, architectural styles and decor mixed with the features of common, middle class living. The result set the theme for the last era in the Victorian Era, an era of architects and authors as taste-makers. The Bric-a-Brac styles epitomize the American Dream.

#### Stick Style

The first to emerge was the Stick style. Loosely based upon the English Elizabethan half-timber cottage, the American version was popularized in illustrated books. It is important to note that "picturesque" styles are a result of the transition from builders' guides to pattern books. Builders' guides often contained only plates of classical orders and structural details, whereas pattern books concentrated on plans and designs for houses and out-buildings.

Andrew Jackson Downing had hinted at the Stick style in his publication *Country Houses* (1861), and many Stick style buildings are often also called Gothic. Their primary design characteristic is the use of exposed stick work, which is more often applied than structural in nature. Proliferation of the Stick



SFPO file photo

*The C.P. Noyes Cottage in White Bear Lake, an example of Stick style architecture. (1879)*

style was due largely to pattern books such as *Country Houses*; by the mid 1860s it had achieved its place as fashionable architecture. This status was insured by the popularity of the New Jersey Building, one of the main attractions at the Centennial Exposition.

Stick style buildings usually are disproportionately tall, with steeply pitched roofs. With a profusion of gables and porches, they form a complex and irregular massing and silhouette. During the period, and particularly in regions such as Minnesota where

#### Editor's note:

TECH TALK is a bimonthly column offering technical assistance on management, preservation and conservation matters that affect historical societies and museums of all sizes and interests. Comments and suggestions for future topics are welcome.



*Continued from p. 3*

lumber is readily available, they are mainly of frame construction. The frame is sheathed with clapboards, and overlaid with horizontal, vertical or diagonal boards dividing the wall surface into panels. Eaves at the roof lines project considerably and are usually supported by large brackets, which, together with the stick work, sometimes give the building the appearance of a Swiss chalet. The open porch or verandah is a common feature; roofs are supported by posts (rather than the more common column) with diagonal braces. Polychromatic paint schemes are employed to enhance the stick work patterns.

### *Queen Anne and Eastlake*

The Queen Anne and Eastlake styles were popular in Minnesota from the early 1880s to the turn of the century. The two styles are similar in massing and picturesque quality, and differ primarily in type of ornamentation. A Queen Anne building is noted for its extensive use of curvilinear, slender profile forms, whereas the Eastlake is often noted for its geometric, more massive forms. The Queen Anne style was developed by English architect Richard Norman Shaw as a picturesque style reminiscent of the medieval

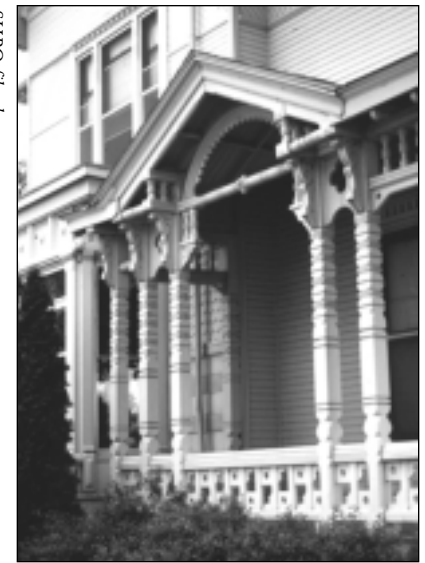
cottage or manor house. Its introduction in America attracted much attention from architects and the general public alike. Ironically, acceptance was based on the fact that, while Queen Anne buildings supposedly revived vernacular English architecture of centuries past, they stirred in Americans an association with their own colonial past.

The earliest American Queen Anne buildings were strongly reminiscent of Dutch colonial houses, though more abstract and ornamental. By the 1880s any design that evoked nostalgia for the past was loosely labeled "Queen Anne." A similar analogy may be made for the Eastlake style. Although it had roots in the earlier Gothic style, Eastlake was so named for its association with English architect Charles Locke Eastlake. It made its debut in his book, *Hints on Household Taste* (1868). We see again that the popularity of both the Queen Anne and Eastlake styles was definitely the result of pattern books.

The common design characteristics that identify the Queen Anne and Eastlake styles are: irregularity in plan, volume and shape; a variety of surface textures, roof and wall projections; steep roofs with multiple or intersecting gables; and bay windows, towers, wrap-around porches and tall chimneys with intricate caps. The Queen Anne also often uses patterned shingles in gable areas, towers and bays. Porches have classically inspired columns and spindlework railings; eaves are decorated with dentils (small square blocks along the underside of the eaves) and brackets. Windows are tall with large panes of



SHPO file photo



SHPO file photo

*Above, left: front of the George W. Taylor house (1890) in LeSueur, an example of the Eastlake style; right: a detail of a side porch in the Taylor house.*



SHPO file photo

*(Above)  
The F.D.  
Sargent  
House, St.  
Paul (1890),  
a Queen  
Anne-style  
house. (NR  
District)*



SHPO file photo

*The Martin Gunderson House in Kenyon, a house in the Queen Anne style. (1895)*



*Continued from p. 4*

glass, and stained glass is a trademark feature. The complexity and placement of ornamentation makes the Queen Anne an ideal candidate for polychromatic color schemes.

On the other hand, Eastlake ornamentation is more geometric, being the product of the scroll-saw rather than the lathe. Although turned elements are used, they are decidedly massive—in stark contrast to the Queen Anne. Towers are often square in plan and capped by pyramidal roofs rather than the conical roofs found in the Queen Anne. Colors are more

*Right: Detail of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Depot in Fulda (ca. 1890). An example of Eastlake ornamentation.*



SHPo file photo

subdued, similar to those found in Victorian Gothic buildings.

Architect/author Henry Hudson Holly said that the Queen Anne was the “natural building style for America.” In his article in *Harper's* of May 1876, he makes the following argument:

“In what is loosely called the ‘Queen Anne’ style we find the most simple mode of honest English building, worked out in an artistic and natural form, fitted with the sash windows and ordinary doorways, which express real domestic needs, and so in our house-building, conserving truth in design far more effectively than can be done with the Gothic. One great practical advantage in adopting this and other styles of the “free-classic” school is that, in their construction and in the forms of the mouldings employed, they are the same as the common vernacular styles with which our workmen are familiar... Nevertheless, they are very genuine and striking buildings, which are certainly some of the most beautiful and suitable specimens of modern cottage architecture in England; and exemplified by the cottages erected by the British government on the Centennial grounds at Philadelphia.”

*Right: the Elizabeth Gilbert House, St. Paul (1883), an example of the Shingle style of architecture. (NR District)*

The Queen Anne style was also adapted for use in commercial architecture during the period from 1885 to 1900. For the most part, these buildings were constructed of brick. They had tall, rectangular or segmentally arched windows, parapets embellished with corbels or dentils, decorative inset panels of patterned brick or terra cotta, and on occasion, false gables or corner towers with prominent roofs. The Queen Anne superseded the Italianate as the standard design for commercial buildings. Examples survive throughout the state.

## Shingle Style

Whereas the Queen Anne and Eastlake styles were considered nostalgic and ornamental, the Shingle style is decidedly modern and uncluttered. It, too, owes its popularity to the Centennial Exposition, and to architects like Henry Hobson Richardson and the firm of McKim, Mead and White, who distilled its pure forms from the exuberant Queen Anne and Stick styles. Like its contemporaries, the Shingle style utilizes an irregular plan with complex roof lines and chimneys, but a skin of shingles is its distinguishing design feature.

The use of shingles to create patterns, textures and the play of light and shadow signifies an integral ornamentation rather than a reliance on applied ornamentation. The result is a refined composition that exhibits a quality of timelessness. (For this reason, the Shingle style remains popular in contemporary architecture.) Its strong association with colonial architecture is due in part to its early years of popularity in New England, exemplified by large seaside “cottages” and country estates with gable or gambrel roofs, sweeping porches, massive chimneys, and dormers. In Minnesota, the Shingle style was introduced in the early 1880s (some



SHPo file photo



Continued from p. 5



*The U.S. Fisheries Station/Limnological Research Station in Duluth (1885), an example of Shingle style architecture.*

SHPO file photo

architectural historians attribute its introduction to Cass Gilbert) and remained in fashion through the turn of the century.

Characteristics of the Midwestern Shingle Style are exterior walls—most often upper stories—with a covering of

shingles (lower stories are usually either masonry or wooden clapboard); window sashes divided into small panes; irregular hip, gambrel or gable roofs that are usually lower in pitch than the Queen Anne; and broad roof lines, which often extend over open porches or verandahs to create a feeling of penetration into the interior space. Minnesota examples are rarely totally sheathed with shingles, although shingles form the prominent feature of the design.

### Exotic Influences

Another influence on late 19th-century architecture that can be traced to the Centennial

Exposition was a taste for the exotic, in particular Middle Eastern and Oriental motifs. New buildings were designed to incorporate such features, while older ones were remodeled in response to fashion. Popular motifs included metal onion-like domes, spiral-turned posts, keyhole arches, vivid colored stained glass and pagoda-like roofs. For the most part, the exotic influence was felt in matters of decorative arts and interior design such as wallpaper, furnishings and treatments. Those instances where the exotic was expressed in the exterior were considered outdated within a few years after the turn of the century. Fortunately, a few examples of this period remain, such as the Bardwell-Ferrant house at 2500 Portland Ave. in Minneapolis, constructed as a simple Queen Anne residence in 1883 and transformed into a “Moorish fantasy” by architect Carl F. Struck in 1890.

### Preservation Considerations

Since ornamentation is integral to bric-a-brac style buildings, retention and restoration, or replacement, of this design feature poses the greatest challenge to their preservation. Changes in taste and the effects of harsh climate have contributed to the demise of these fragile buildings. Cost of appropriate replacement materials and availability of original technology are also factors. In recent years, a renewed interest in Victoriana has spurred a number of

manufacturers, suppliers and craftspeople to focus on the restoration of late 19th-century buildings.

As a result, virtually everything in the way of design elements from the last century is again available. It is difficult for the amateur restorer to resist the lure of the popular market, which always tends to embellish beyond the original design. Before undertaking a project, one must become thoroughly acquainted with all aspects of the time, tastes, and social and economic circumstances of which the building is a product. Only then can the project be put into perspective and judgments be made with credibility. A good rule is, “Resist the temptation to create a historical image that never existed.”



*An example of exotic influences: the Bardwell-Ferrant house in Minneapolis (1883, altered in 1890); above, front view; right, detail of tower.*

SHPO file photo



SHPO file photo

**Charles Nelson**, Historical Architect at the Minnesota Historical Society since 1971, is known throughout Minnesota for his preservation work, presentations and workshops.



## Staff News

### Kanabec County Historical Society Seeks New Executive Director

The Kanabec County Historical Society (KCHS) in Mora is seeking an executive director to oversee the operations of the society and the Kanabec History Center; the annual operating budget is \$120,000. The new director must have skills in museum operation, fund raising, program development, grant solicitation and management of an endowment campaign.

For a full position description and other information, contact the Search Committee, Kanabec History Center, P.O. Box 113, Mora, MN 55051, or visit its web site at [www.kanabechistory.com](http://www.kanabechistory.com). The deadline for applications is 4:30 p.m., Nov. 1, 1999. KCHS is an equal opportunity employer.



### Steele County Historical Society Seeks New Director

The Steele County Historical Society (SCHS) is searching for a full-time director to supervise SCHS activities and special events, coordinate volunteers, prepare grants and arrange displays in the historic Village of Yesteryear.

A bachelor's degree in history or related field is required, experience in museum administration is preferred, and public relations skills are essential. Salary, \$24,000 – \$25,000.

Send resumes to SCHS, 1448 Austin Road, Owatonna, MN 55060, by Friday, Oct. 15. For more information, call 507/451-1420.

### New Head of Conservation at MHS

Sherelyn Ogden, former director of field services at the Upper Midwest Conservation Association in Minneapolis, is the new head of conservation at the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). Trained in library and archives conservation at the Newberry Library in Chicago, Ogden was director of book conservation at the Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover, Mass., for 17 years.

She believes strongly in preventive preservation, which includes "appropriate storage, handling, security and sound preservation planning, for that is the most practical approach to preserving collections and is within reach of most institutions." She is looking forward to helping historical societies, heritage preservation commissions, libraries and archives meet their preservation needs. She can be reached at 651/205-4661 or by e-mail at [sherelyn.ogden@mnhs.org](mailto:sherelyn.ogden@mnhs.org).

### Volunteerism 2000 Meetings Begin: Volunteers of All Kinds Invited

To assess volunteerism in Minnesota and develop its leadership plan for the next five years, the Minnesota Office of Citizenship and Volunteer Services (MOCVS) will hold "Volunteerism 2000," a series of nine free meetings around the state. The first meeting is at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 14, at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, and is scheduled to last for two hours.

MOCVS representatives will invite the public to talk about such things as the impact of volunteerism in their community, trends that will affect volunteerism or the need for volunteers, and how organizations foster and sustain volunteerism. They also will be interested in stories about volunteer experiences that made a difference in someone's life, and will accept written remarks.

MOCVS has scheduled the following meetings; all are free:

Monday, Sept. 20, St. Joseph's Church, Moorhead  
 Tuesday, Sept. 21, Paul's Playhouse, Bemidji  
 Monday, Sept. 27, Ridgewater College, Hutchinson  
 Tuesday, Sept. 28, General Mills Auditorium,  
 Golden Valley  
 Tuesday, Oct. 5, Central Lakes College, Brainerd  
 Wednesday, Oct. 6, Duluth Public Library  
 Tuesday, Oct 12, Minnesota West Community and  
 Technical College, Worthington  
 Thursday, Oct 14, Assisi Heights Auditorium,  
 Rochester.

Call MOCVS at 651/296-4731 for more information.



## Annual Meetings for a Wider Audience: A Success and Some Suggestions

The third annual meeting of the Hubert H. Humphrey Museum (HHHM) in Waverly on June 15 was by design a more public event than its first two annual meetings. Held at the Bayrischer Hof in Montrose, the meeting was attended by 51 people. The German buffet was enlivened by the chef, who announced all the German dishes, including *Zwiebelhühnchenbruket* (strips of chicken breast in onion sauce). Nellie Stone Johnson (see photo) spoke, and Sid Stamm, a 1999 graduate of Dassel-Cokato high school, gave a reading from Humphrey's civil rights speech at the 1948 Democratic Convention.

Irene Bender, HHHM executive director, offered suggestions for holding an annual meeting that goes beyond a business

meeting. Preparation for such a meeting can be compared to planning an exhibit opening, she said, which means, first of all, allowing enough time. She says, "Think of the annual meeting as giving a party—food is the most important ingredient!" Market it, with press releases, invitations, ads, and asking board members to bring guests. Then, "that evening, put the board members to work. Make sure everyone feels welcome."

For more information, contact HHHM, P.O. Box 508, Waverly, MN 55390; 612/658-4505.



Courtesy HHHM. Photo by Mike Gilmer. Springbook Photography, Waverly.

*Nellie Stone Johnson first became acquainted with Humphrey 75 years ago. A leader in labor and education throughout her life (she is 94), she was portrayed in the Great American History Theatre's production of Favorite Son: The Humphrey Perspectives.*

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Readers are invited to submit information for publication. To be considered, items must reach the editor by the 18th of the month, two months before publication (example: the deadline for the October issue is August 18). Send to: **Interpreter** Editor, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906; 651/296-8196 or [jjm.smith@mnhs.org](mailto:jjm.smith@mnhs.org).

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