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## MATERIALLY STRENGTHENED: THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND PROVIDING FIELD SERVICES

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When traveling through Minnesota, it is easy to see why the state is known as “The Land of 10,000 Lakes.” Water is everywhere, and flows into three great watersheds. Local history organizations are similarly ubiquitous. This is no accident. The Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) has diligently tended to the history environment through “Field Services” since 1916. This level of active support for local history is strong in Minnesota and in the Midwest region more generally because Rueben Gold Thwaites created a service to develop the local capacity to save and share history. Thwaites knew that even strong state history enterprises would be stronger through cooperation with local history organizations.<sup>2</sup> Today, through what are called “Local History Services,” many Midwestern states bolster the community of history practice by distributing technical information, strengthening relationships, locating resources (often financial), identifying leaders with specialties, and encouraging consistent operations that the public may rely upon. If the main channel of a watershed is stronger because of wetlands and tributaries affiliated with it, then the main history enterprise is likewise stronger because MNHS provides assistance to its numerous affiliates.

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<sup>2</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, “State and Local Historical Societies,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 4, no. 2 (April 1906): 260.

### Background, 1896-1915

While local history work in Minnesota essentially began with the chartering of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1849, early-twentieth-century historians in the Midwest began to consider how to save and share a more complete record than ever before.<sup>3</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites in Wisconsin, Clarence Walworth Alvord in Illinois, and Solon Justus Buck at MNHS, among many, sought and developed sustainable and practical ways for saving and sharing history by drawing upon good examples found in other fields.

The intellectual foundations of local history work derived partly from Fredrick Jackson Turner who advocated for history to be studied in sections, such as by physical region or by cultural boundaries. State lines appeared artificial to Turner, but others found state boundaries convenient.<sup>4</sup> In Minnesota, Solon Buck grasped the practicality of using state boundaries, following the example of Thwaites and Alvord, to create a local history service.

Reuben Gold Thwaites developed local history services in 1896. Thwaites headed the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW) and admired the border-to-border service commitment of the University of Wisconsin.<sup>5</sup> Thwaites wanted state historical societies in the Midwest to be a “model of progressivism among state historical societies.”<sup>6</sup> Where Thwaites’ predecessor Lyman Draper had amassed a large reference library, Thwaites would use the border-to-border service model to persuade the Wisconsin Assembly that his organization, like the university, was statewide, and to fund modern history in a modern facility on the university campus that was open to all.<sup>7</sup>

Thwaites contrasted the two types of history organizations at the time: that of the East where organizations were funded by private donors, and that of the West where they were often associated with the state, received public funding, and conducted “field work” (local history services).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of these efforts, see Jon K. Lauck, *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Dixon Ryan Fox, “State History I,” *Political Science Quarterly* 36, no.4 (December, 1921): 574-575.

<sup>5</sup> John Zimm, *The Wisconsin Historical Society: Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories Since 1846* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015), 23. See also, Townsend, *History’s Babel*, 47-48. Prof. Lucy Salmon of Vassar College followed Thwaites’ lead by proposing an affiliation model in 1897.

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Thwaites, “State and Local Historical Societies,” 251-252. Tom McKay, “A New Idea (1896-1913),” *Exchange* 38, no. 1-2 (1996): 1.

His western-style organization saw the urgency of democratically saving history by soliciting “documentary and artefactual [sic] material from private citizens, the memories of the pioneers” while these materials were still widely available. And to effectively share history, he advocated that state history organizations “organiz[e] historical societies as ‘auxiliaries’ to augment the capacity and the ability of the state historical society to preserve the state’s history.”<sup>9</sup>

Historians Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf hint at why local history services developed in the Midwest. They note that “at the end of the nineteenth century many middle class Midwesterners were interested in the origins and history of their culture” and sought to fund research on the region. They also note the clause in the Northwest Ordinance of 1785 that “education shall forever be encouraged” – and historical organizations from the start had educational purposes. The emphasis of Midwestern historians on connecting local organizations to the state history enterprise reflects the desire of like-minded people to “combat isolation” by defining themselves “through participation in a larger cultural community” and by joining “voluntary associations” that bound communities of strangers together. As migration transformed society in the Midwest, people found a personal identity based on history (among other things). The Midwestern historians wanted other people to “share in their discoveries” about history work, and “they became zealous in advocating their positions” as can be seen in many writings of the era. As a function of state history enterprises, local history services embody the educational foundation, the building of an identity, and the advocacy for historical resources that support the importance of the Midwest.<sup>10</sup>

Clarence Alvord in Illinois employed Guy Stanton Ford and Solon Justus Buck. This was Buck’s first professional experience out of graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In an age before the internet, the easiest means of disseminating primary resources was to transcribe them and print them because the books conveyed permanence and official-ness that would cross state lines into other research libraries. They produced volumes on both the history of the region and Illinois specifically. Most importantly, this assignment trained Solon Buck in how to conduct

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundation of Public History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 18. Thwaites, “State and Local Historical Societies,” 252.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf, *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 118, 24, 59, 44, 53, 55, 58, 125. Interestingly the authors use the term “material progress” (p. 24) much as Solon Buck said the Minnesota Historical Society would be “materially strengthened” (n. 55, below) by using local history services.

field work and helped him see its value first hand. Ford soon left for a professorship at the University of Minnesota, and subsequently recruited Buck as the first “Superintendent” (Director) for MNHS in 1914. Alvord later followed his protégés Ford and Buck to Minnesota in 1920.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to Buck’s arrival, the Minnesota Historical Society was quartered in the old state capitol building where it was focused strongly on archaeology. Prominent state archaeologists had dominated MNHS priorities during the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the death of Jacob Brower in 1905. MNHS Secretary Warren Upham’s 1906 report in the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* on his organization’s plans stand in contrast to the emerging direction detailed by Thwaites earlier in the volume.<sup>12</sup> Ford’s encouragement for Buck to come to Minnesota was meant to bring Minnesota on line with its neighbors, Iowa and Wisconsin, by broadening MNHS priorities to the entire history field. To help Buck understand the scope of that field, Upham guided Buck on visits across the state.

In an October 1915 letter, historian Warren Upham described his progress on a book documenting the origins and the names of the landmarks, water bodies, and towns throughout Minnesota. To compile the book, he traveled from county to county, interviewing local historians, town residents, and librarians. However, Upham found that the information he sought was rarely centrally located, which made historical information more difficult to access. Buck saw this as reason for action to gather Minnesota history in central repositories. And, in Buck’s assessment of the project, he noted how effective Upham was in working in the field with people. Buck knew then that the MNHS needed to have a full time worker in the field.<sup>13</sup>

A month later, at the annual meeting of MNHS, Buck noted that the Historical Society needed to encourage better care of county records which to that point had been inadequately preserved. He called for the historical society to become the state archives and for the society to acquire documents from around the state to preserve them as had been done in Iowa and in Wisconsin.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>12</sup> Warren Upham, “Minnesota Historical Society,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 4, no. 2 (April 1906): 313-315.

<sup>13</sup> Lauck, *The Lost Region*, 33. Lauck credits Buck with reviving the Minnesota Historical Society because he “proceeded to reorganize and revolutionize the institution.” (p. 36). Buck to Ford, April 21, 1914 and September 29, 1914, and Buck to Upham, November 11, 1914, Buck Papers, MNHS Archives. Buck, Memorandum, “Minnesota Geographic Names,” October 19, 1915, Superintendent’s Reports 1914-1918, Reports of Divisions 1914-1927, MNHS Archives. Buck knew the value of having someone in the field from his time working for Alvord. Buck reflects that value in his assessment of Upham’s work.

<sup>14</sup> Buck, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (January 1915): 31-32.

While the call to action was clear based on Upham's observations, less clear were the specific methods and the means to fund the work.

### Soft Money Start, 1916-1944

Through funding from the Public Archives Commission Buck hired the first MNHS local history services professional. The Public Archives Commission began in 1899 as a way to preserve government records on a local level. In the absence of a formal National Archives (created in 1934), this funding helped veterans and others more quickly access public records.

Buck's hire was a 33-year-old master's candidate in history at the University of Minnesota. Franklin Fisk Holbrook followed Upham's path going from county to county in his work to organize government archives and records.<sup>15</sup> Holbrook photographed historic sites, encouraging preservation of objects of historic importance, and collected printed materials such as handbills and pamphlets.<sup>16</sup> To address Upham's frustrations, Holbrook advocated establishing a repository in every county for the purpose of "securing local publications and private collections."<sup>17</sup> By 1917 Holbrook had visited 35 communities in 24 counties.

Holbrook found it difficult to measure his success; however, in each visit he successfully found a local contact to advise him about historically important materials.<sup>18</sup> By the end of 1917 Holbrook capitalized on the public impression of the future historical importance of documents and materials related to the Great War. He contacted the Commission of Public Safety to encourage them to have their field staff advocate for preserving war records.<sup>19</sup> The Commission's work was to encourage loyalty during the war, and its structure was one of general state expectations put into practice as needed on a local level. This has since been the model used by local history services.

Project-based funding, though, underscored Thwaites' earlier recommendation that field work be staffed with full time professionals. Buck believed "just as the state has an auditor who keep[s] the accounts for all departments, and a treasurer to handle the funds for all departments," that the state should also "make provision for some agency whose business it would be to look after the

<sup>15</sup> Buck, "Notes," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 1, no. 2, (March 1916): 71.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Franklin Holbrook, *Report of Field Agent of the Minnesota Historical Society for September and October 1916*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Holbrook, *Report ... for September and October 1917*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. Buck to Public Safety Commission, July 9, 1917, Buck Papers, MNHS Archives.

records of all departments.”<sup>20</sup> While Buck was speaking about the State Archives, the principle easily translates to coaching local efforts.

Since Congress defunded the Public Archives Commission in 1917, Buck advocated for a War Records Commission (WRC), which the state legislature established by act in 1919, and required every county to create a local war records commission. Holbrook, on new project money, would return briefly to the field before heading the commission’s work. Cecil Shirk assumed Holbrook’s field duties and was later credited by the commission for the success it enjoyed in collecting records.<sup>21</sup> During their time in the field, Shirk and Holbrook also worked to organize the newspaper collections and county histories. In the summer of 1921, the work of gathering materials concluded, and Shirk left to help Hennepin County finish their War Records reports.<sup>22</sup>

The year 1922 ushered in much of the modern practice of local history services. For the first few years the service model was identifying and gathering written materials, mostly at the state level and by MNHS staff. With the project transitioning from collecting to publishing documents, no longer would there be project staff in the field meeting face-to-face with people working locally to save and share history. To solve this problem, local history services needed to expand the number of local history organizations and to ensure that members of these organizations had regular contact with one another. The Society held its first Local History Conference, predecessor of the continuing education training provided by Local History Services to this day. This conference brought members of state, county, and local historical societies together to share and coordinate history work. Buck believed the strong attendance alone was proof of a desire for local history. Orrin Libby, superintendent of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, advocated to attendees the opportunity to capitalize on the enthusiasm generated for preserving history during the war by converting local war records commissions into permanent local historical societies. Shirk had similarly advocated converting old settlers associations into local history organizations.<sup>23</sup> Most

<sup>20</sup> Buck, “Minnesota Historical Society,” *Michigan History Magazine* 4, no. 4 (October 1920): 708. Buck, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (Jan 1915): 31.

<sup>21</sup> Buck, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (September 1919): 157-158. Holbrook, *Quarterly Report November 1916 to January 1917*, 2. Buck, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (May 1918): 75. Holbrook, *Annual Report of the Field Agent*, January 1, 1919, 2-3. Buck, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (September, 1918): 243.

<sup>22</sup> Buck, “Historical Society Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 4, no. 3 (September, 1919): 165. Shirk only appears in MNHS records thereafter as a book reviewer.

<sup>23</sup> Memorandum, “Report of the Field Secretary for Quarter Ending,” June 1, 1922, C. W. Shirk Correspondence, 1922 (D-Sh), MNHS Archives. Shirk wrote, “They have a vital interest in Minnesota history, and careful attention from the society could certainly produce local historical societies at some future date.”

importantly at this conference, Buck introduced a template constitution for historical organizations. This is the first written document meant to standardize practice throughout the state's local history community.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1920s, as Libby and Shirk had suggested, some local war records committees and old settler associations did reorganize as permanent history organizations. Buck offered former legislator William E. Culkin a half time position with local history services. Culkin then formed the St. Louis County Historical Society to address the "new model" of permanent organization.<sup>25</sup> He would go on to found the Lake County and Cook County historical societies, modeling a practice for later local history services staff. Other local history organizations had existed before St. Louis such as the Red Wing Historical Society established in 1857 and numerous old settlers associations, but as Red Wing ceased with the Civil War and old settlers eventually would pass from the scene, Culkin similarly believed "that such societies once started should be kept going."<sup>26</sup>

Holbrook, Shirk, and Culkin all created templates for early local history services work and helped develop the fledgling program in its early years.<sup>27</sup> The mission statement written in 1922 for local history organizations remains the most common mission statement among Minnesota history organizations nearly 100 years later.

The departure of Solon Buck in 1931 and then the New Deal programs meant to address the Great Depression of the 1930s had similar impacts. The new superintendent of the society was Theodore Blegen, a Minnesotan with strong ties to rural Nicollet County. Blegen had been assistant superintendent since 1922 and adopted Buck's passion for local history initiatives.<sup>28</sup> In his first years, much of the local history services work involved Blegen responding to letters seeking advice from local and county societies. Blegen did continue the summer tours of the state begun by Buck in order to gather the local history community for training and networking. Blegen also continued

<sup>24</sup> Buck, "Local History Conference, 1922," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 7, no. 1 (Feb-May 1922): 250-251.

<sup>25</sup> Buck to Culkin, August 25, 1922, William E. Culkin MNHS Correspondence, 1921(H)-1922(C), MNHS Archives. Blegen, "The Progress and Prospects of Local History Work in Minnesota," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (March 1930): 14.

<sup>26</sup> William E. Culkin, "Getting a County Historical Society Started," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 7, no. 2 (September 1926): 233.

<sup>27</sup> Minnesota Historical Society, "Franklin Fisk Holbrook," Biography Index Collection, MNHS Archives.

<sup>28</sup> A.J. Larsen and Bertha L. Heilbron, "T.C. Blegen and the Historical Society," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 20, no. 3 (September 1939): 291.

the annual local history conference every January as a means to further his predecessors' call for encouraging local history workers to network and learn from one another.<sup>29</sup>

When New Deal programs began to employ historians and writers, Blegen funded local history services through these programs.<sup>30</sup> Blegen worked with staff member Jacob Hodnefield, who had been with the historical society for nearly as long as Blegen. Hodnefield held various positions with MNHS, including head of accessions and head reference librarian.<sup>31</sup> Hodnefield left for a position with the James J. Hill Reference Library for six years, but in 1935 returned to the Historical Records Survey. Hodnefield based the survey's work on notes left by Holbrook,<sup>32</sup> and expanded his duties to include surveys of historic sites, buildings, monuments, trails, and cemeteries. The expansion also built upon the 1930 inception of the Minnesota State Historical Markers Program, which was primarily intended to reach the traveling public in cooperation with the state highway department. Today, historical markers are in most interstate highway rest areas across the state. Throughout his work Hodnefield traveled the state, meeting with local historical societies and growing the number of historical organizations from 21 in 1931 to 56 by decade end.<sup>33</sup> Hodnefield left his position in 1938, again for the James J. Hill Reference Library, and was succeeded by Richard Sackett, who finished publishing New Deal projects.<sup>34</sup>

### Full Time, 1945-1979

Following World War II, the practices of local history services began to parallel broader themes for developing capacity and professionalization of nonprofits, public history, and museums. From the beginning local history services benefited from professionally trained historians like Buck, Blegen, and Holbrook, and editor Appel and librarian Hodnefield. After World War II two photographers in succession led local history services to the eve of the National Bicentennial before a professional archaeologist named David Nystuen changed the service forever.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 291-292.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>31</sup> Buck, "Notes," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 4, no. 3 (May 1923): 165. Buck, "Notes," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (March 1929): 334-335.

<sup>32</sup> Blegen, "Notes," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 17, no. 1 (March 1936): 55.

<sup>33</sup> Larsen and Heilbron, "Blegen," 291. Buck, "Notes," *Minnesota History Bulletin* 11, no. 3 (September 1930): 314-315.

<sup>34</sup> Minnesota Highway Department and Division of State Parks, Conservation Department, *An Historic Sites Program for Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1940), iii.

Arthur J. Larsen became superintendent in 1939. Unlike Buck and Blegen, Larsen believed that the best way to reach the public was more through publications and less through expensive, transitory direct contact.<sup>35</sup> Without project funding for staff, much of the work of local history services fell to the superintendent. Larsen perhaps had insufficient time to consider the usefulness of local history services before he left to join the army.

Lewis Beeson became superintendent and continued pondering how best to reach other members and local partner organizations. In 1943, due to wartime rationing, the annual tours started in the early 1920s that featured travel to historic sites across the state stayed in a single location, Fort Snelling, and suffered for attendance.<sup>36</sup> The remedy, Beeson realized, was permanent staff traveling to local historical societies, advising them and assisting them in their work.<sup>37</sup> Beeson promoted Richard Sackett to become “field director,” a position primarily intended to organize historical societies for the upcoming state territorial centennial.<sup>38</sup> This effort to create county historical societies in every county built on the necessity Warren Upham saw and MNHS had long tried to implement.

After just three years, Sackett left to work for the State Territorial Centennial Commission.<sup>39</sup> He recommended Arch Grahn, whom he had met while on leave in 1945 working for DuPont, to the new superintendent, Harold Dean Cater.<sup>40</sup> Grahn’s first task was finishing the organization of a historical society in every county for the territorial centennial, a task he would repeat for the Statehood Centennial in 1958. As he traveled Grahn would ask newspaper editors for names of local historians. He would then go to their home and convince them to become president of a new historical society.<sup>41</sup>

Just as the Society realized it needed full time staff to service the local history community, Grahn believed local history organizations needed ongoing operational support. When he started in 1948,

<sup>35</sup> Arthur Larson, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (March 1939): 40.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis Beeson, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (March 1943): 30.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis Beeson, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (March 1945): 40.

<sup>38</sup> Lewis Beeson, “Notes,” *Minnesota History Bulletin* 29, no. 1 (March 1948): 54.

<sup>39</sup> Arch Grahn oral history, interviewed by Rhonda Gilman, 1990, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

county boards granted \$50 to \$150 each year for history work. Since the 1920s state statutes permitted county board to appropriate money for county historical societies, but not to exceed one thousand dollars, a restriction lifted in the 1950s.<sup>42</sup>

When Grahn retired from his position in 1973, Director Russell Fridley hired David Nystuen, a professionally trained archaeologist. Nystuen had wanted to teach, but changed his mind when he worked with Alan Woolworth on the highway archaeology program at MNHS.<sup>43</sup> After following Woolworth around the state to various dig sites, Nystuen saw an opportunity to work with people by succeeding Grahn.<sup>44</sup> Nystuen began his position by preparing the field to mark the National Bicentennial. Fridley wanted a newsletter for historical societies, more paid staff at partner historical societies, additional funding for museums and local history, and better interpretation of history – all of which Nystuen worked to change or improve.<sup>45</sup>

Local history services still functioned as Thwaites had designed it – information bureaus for local organizations – but Fridley hoped for something more impactful.<sup>46</sup> Deputy Director Nina Archabal led the Society through an unprecedented self-study in 1979. Archabal and others searched widely for examples of self-studies in comparable organizations. In the end, they created the methods to conduct a self-study along with analysis to remake MNHS for the modern era ahead.<sup>47</sup>

### Modern, 1980–present

When the United Nations organized, it soon began a program to develop the capacity of nations emerging from colonialism to govern for the benefit of their populations. Similarly, on account of the expanding federal government programs, federal authorities realized that they needed to provide capacity development to state and local governments to ensure consistency of service across the nation. Many programs benefited the broad world of history including archaeology, historic preservation, and museums. The emergence of capacity development as a profession that crossed

<sup>42</sup> Minnesota State Legislature, *Session Laws of Minnesota, 1929* (St. Paul: Legislative Printing Office, 1930), 415-416.

<sup>43</sup> David Nystuen oral history, interviewed by James E. Fogerty, 2000, 1-3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> Tom Webb, “Bicentennial Frivolity Irks Historian,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 7, 1976.

<sup>47</sup> James E. Fogerty, personal interview with David Grabitske, January 13, 2016.

disciplines – plus the professionalization of museums and nonprofits in general – drove professionalization of local history services. The goal of all of it was to help people save more history and have greater access to history.<sup>48</sup>

The 1979 Minnesota Historical Society Self-Study was part of professionalization. Reviewers for local history services came from local history organizations and provided three observations. First, reviewers felt that those in local history services were dedicated to their job, but that they lacked adequate training to develop capacity in other organizations. Nystuen had professional training, but in archaeology rather than outreach. Second, they felt that local history services should offer more programming that local museums could plug into their offerings. Third, they wanted to see more “purpose and understanding of their role within the Minnesota Historical Society.”<sup>49</sup> These criticisms exposed a vague understanding of the purpose of local history services. Nystuen contended it was not his place to tell local history organizations specifically what to do, and that they would stay on top of developing methods and techniques by fully participating in the profession and then applying those to local conditions.<sup>50</sup>

Even leaders of the Society debated whether local history services should simply drive revenue, or whether the service should build capacity for saving and sharing Minnesota history. Evidence supports both and Nystuen took the political middle ground and advocated for doing both. Nystuen responded to the self-study by improving content for workshops and the newsletter.<sup>51</sup> Senior Society staff continued to debate the issue of purpose, however, even as late as 2003 in the context of a large budget reduction at a time when other state history enterprises had eliminated their local history services functions.<sup>52</sup> Another contribution of the self-study was that it provided greater definition of the relationship between the Grants Office and Local History Services.<sup>53</sup> The self-study helped group local history services with other functions that were often in the field: historic

<sup>48</sup> See David Grabitske, “State History Enterprises and Capacity-Development Services,” DBA diss., Metropolitan State University, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> *Minnesota Historical Society Self Study Report* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1979), 143.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-147.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick McCormack, personal interview with Grabitske, May 4, 2007. Those that ended their local history services following the dot-com bust were Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, and Oregon (2004, 2004, 2002, and 2001, respectively). This debate prompted the theme for the 2002 Winter Meeting of the Field Services Alliance in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The theme provided the research question for David Grabitske’s 2014 doctoral dissertation measuring local history services by comparing the revenues of state history enterprises between those providing the services and those that did not in 2012.

<sup>53</sup> *Minnesota Historical Society Self Study Report*, 151.

preservation and grants. This grouping remains uncommon among state history enterprises, but has served Minnesota well.

By 1979, however, local history services needed to professionalize as local history organizations were professionalizing in response to new expectations for nonprofits and museums. That year, Internal Revenue Service changed Form 990, for example, to require greater transparency and accountability among nonprofits. Anticipating greater professionalization among his colleagues, Nystuen became an advocate for adopting technology, especially software to manage museum object collections.<sup>54</sup>

On the national level, the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) brought together local history service providers in 1988 at a meeting in Chicago, which became Field Services Alliance (FSA). FSA brought structure and greater professionalism to the pre-existing informal relationships among local history services workers.<sup>55</sup> On the state level, Stearns History Museum led all history organizations in the state – including the Minnesota Historical Society – in earning accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums. Local history organizations met at the Stearns History Museum in 1991 to form the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums to provide technical training on emerging technology, such as websites and collections management systems. In every healthy network of organizations, leadership will arise from many corners, which is what Nystuen said he hoped to foster in 1979.

Timothy Glines succeeded Nystuen in 2001 in the rebranded position of Manager of Outreach Services.<sup>56</sup> Glines enjoyed people and brought with him to the position extensive contacts useful to the service. Unlike Nystuen and his predecessors, Glines was not appointed by the director. He would lead a team of professionals in grants, conservation, and historic preservation planning. Using his connections and staff, Glines reached out to the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums more fully for greater collaboration. Glines continued Nystuen's focus on technology by initiating the transition of the paper-based newsletter to email listservs and newsletters.

When Glines retired in 2007 David Grabitske succeeded him. Glines provided him an excellent education in how to conduct local history services: that specific training suggested in the 1979 self-study. In 2007, Grabitske also became chair of the FSA and began improving training for Field

<sup>54</sup> Timothy C. Glines to David Grabitske, email, January 18, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> McKay, *Field Services Alliance*, presented September 9, 2008 at Field Services Alliance Meeting, 1-3, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Glines, *Quarterly Report: Local History Services*, July 1 2005-September 30 2005, 1-7.

Services Alliance members.<sup>57</sup> When MNHS launched in 2009 its Legacy-funded grant program, the Society tapped Grabitske to temporarily become Grants Manager, a position vacant since 1991. The temporary assignment lasted until October 2014, which meant that local history services were often bound up in grants work and continued on a limited basis. Local history services returned to the field visiting all 87 county historical societies in the last six months of 2015.

Over the century of service new methods and strategies have emerged, and yet today's modern local history services still carries on many of its functions and attributes developed in the past, such as record collections, workshops, grants, newsletters, markers, and so much more. While its success remains hard to measure, there are some indicators of success. For example, in the past decade AASLH has awarded nearly ten percent of all of its awards to history organizations in Minnesota. As senior staff debated the value of the work in the face of drastic budget cuts in 2003, they ultimately kept local history services. And, in 2014 a major financial study of state history enterprises provided data validating that 2003 decision. Local history services in Minnesota embody Solon Buck's promise that the Minnesota Historical Society would be "materially strengthened"<sup>58</sup> through collaboration with local history organizations.

While the number of Minnesota history organizations are not as numerous as the state's lakes, the quality of both history and water depends on stewardship. As time marches on making more history, the documentary evidence could easily overwhelm even very large organizations. By supporting and caring for its network of affiliated organizations, the Minnesota Historical Society is stronger because its network of partners is stronger. This duality then serves the people of the state well as more history can be saved and shared, helping to transform people's lives.

<sup>57</sup> McKay, *Field Services Alliance*, 18-19.

<sup>58</sup> Solon Buck, *Report of the Executive Committee* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1924).