

CITY HALL, HIBBING, MINN.

2024

ANNUAL
REPORT



Louis County Court House, Duluth, Minn.

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MISSION:

“The Society is organized and shall be operated exclusively for charitable, educational, literary, and scientific purposes. The general nature and purpose of the Society shall be the collection, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge about the history and prehistory of St. Louis County and the State of Minnesota. In addition to collection and preserving objects of material culture and historical research material, the Society shall maintain and operate a museum, through agreement with St. Louis County.”

STATEMENT FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WAYNE GANNAWAY

03

Taking the helm of any nonprofit requires looking forward, to new opportunities, relationships, and possible headwinds. Of course, it also means looking back, to celebrate wins and take stock in setbacks. I've been especially heartened by the prospect of warm relationships and productive partnerships, many of which I encountered during my recent visits to our affiliates. I'm also grateful for the introduction's folks have helped me make in Duluth and right here in the historic Depot.

On the other hand, with a county historical society that is celebrating its 104th annual meeting, looking backward, especially to the recent past, is a prerequisite. I reviewed last year's presentation, appropriately entitled "Changes, Challenges, and Transitions." For better or worse, we could simply amend that moniker with the sub-title: The Work Continues.

2024 alone was bookended by major staff changes, most notably with the hiring and departure of a new executive director and curator. It was preceded by a massive move offsite of most of our collections. This time last year, no one anticipated a major water damage emergency in our Veterans Memorial Hall and the Albert J. Amatuzio Research Center. Perhaps we can look to one of our affiliates as we plot a way forward: Sisu Heritage, of course, refers to the nonprofit that oversees the collection of historic buildings in Embarrass. Sisu is also a Finnish concept that means "inner strength, determination, and perseverance." After a tough year, we surely have displayed some of that characteristic.

And there is progress. The Society hired the two key positions—the Executive Director (me) and the Curator (Terry Johnson). Terry started with the Society in 2017 and, among other staff, embodied sisu as he worked through 2024's challenges, all while learning crucial skills of collections management.

Since the water incursion in the Veteran's Memorial Hall, Terry, Jay Hagen (VMH Program Manager), and Ron Hein (Board Treasurer) have worked tirelessly to restore the space and exhibits to its former glory—and they have succeeded, with its reopening in early April.

In collaboration with the Board of Commissioners, staff and volunteers installed art, artifacts, and traveling exhibits in the county's three courthouses, in Duluth, Hibbing, and Virginia. The goal is to work with our affiliate partners to provide engaging, educational exhibits on a rotating basis.

In 2024, the Historical Society underwent a rigorous Museum Assessment Program (MAP) review. The MAP is a comprehensive best practices audit that evaluates a museum's strengths and challenges through self-assessment and an onsite peer review. While the assessment process itself is demanding, the real work begins when the museum receives the final report. The MAP report identified several areas for improvement at the Historical Society, including collections management, exhibits, staff retention, funding, and strategic planning. However, the peer reviewer also highlighted one of the Society's key assets - an "exemplary collection."

An exemplary collection is a key strength for us to build upon while reinventing the organization. The Board and I can't do it alone, but with your support, we'll write the next inspiring chapter of the St. Louis County Historical Society.



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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OFFICERS

Jeffrey Wenzl, President

Steven Matthews, Vice-President

Michele Beeksma, Secretary

Ronald Hein, Treasurer

MEMBERS

Robert Baeumler

Jess Edberg

Leone Graf

Tim Grover

Karen Keenan

Timothy McLoughlin

Linda Nervick



AFFILIATE REPRESENTATIVES

Nick Wognum, Ely-Winton Historical Society

Mary Keyes, Hibbing Historical Society

Charles Palmquist, Minnesota Museum of Mining

Mickey White, Sisu Heritage, Inc.

Linda Folstad, Tower-Soudan Historical Society

Susan Hoppe, Virginia Area Historical Society

Kenneth Buehler, Heritage Preservation Commission Liaison

AUDIT AND FINANCE

Ronald Hein, Chair
Robert Baeumler
Tim Grover

AFFILIATE RELATIONS

Nick Wognum, Ely-Winton Historical Society
Mary Keyes, Hibbing Historical Society
Charles Palmquist, Minnesota Museum of Mining
Mary "Mickey" White, SISU Heritage, Inc.
Linda Folstad, Tower-Soudan Historical Society
Susan Hoppe, Virginia Area Historical Society

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Jaylen Strong, Bois Forte Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Marie Spry, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Michael Gillespie, at large representative, Oglala Lakota

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Nick Wognum

MUSEUM OPERATIONS AND ARCHIVES

Michele Beeksma, Chair
Leone Graf
Karen Keenan

MINING INDUSTRY ADVISORY (MIAC)

Ronald Hein, Chair
Dennis Hendricks
Jim Scott
Dean DeBeltz
Rick Crum
Al Hodnick
JoAnne Coombe

2024

Patrons Visited
 New Memberships
 Researchers Assisted
 Volunteer Hours

Ely-Winton HS
 981 12 146 315

Hibbing HS
 1000(avg.) 291(present members) 313 1000+

MN Museum of Mining
 4475 36 31 2499.8

Sisu Heritage, Inc.
 2486 15 (presently we have 142 members, of which 32 are lifetime members) 0 1075

Tower-Soudan HS
 1283 136(includes 12 new) 0 2904

Virginia Area HS
 NA

The Ely-Winton Historical Society exists to collect, preserve, and display to the public, artifacts and information relating to the history of our amazing area in northern Minnesota. Through our museum, our extensive archive of documents and photos, and various informative events throughout the year, we hope to share with you the story of the shining jewel of the Northland. EWHS (<https://www.elywintonhistory.org/>)

The general nature and purpose of the **Hibbing Historical Society** shall be the discovery, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge about the history of Hibbing, Minnesota, and its part in the story of the Mesabi Iron Range, St. Louis County, and the State of Minnesota. Contact <https://hibbinghistory.org/> The Minnesota Museum of Mining serves to educate visitors about the history of mining in Minnesota, and illustrates the life of ordinary people, mostly immigrant families, from the earliest years of European settlement and mining in Chisholm. Contact <http://www.mnmuseumofmining.org/>

Sisu Heritage, Inc.: Enhancing the Embarrass region by preserving and sharing its unique culture, climate, and history. Contact <http://sisuheritage.org/>

The mission of the **Tower-Soudan Historical Society** is to promote an understanding of the history of the Tower-Soudan area by collecting, preserving, exhibiting, and interpreting that history and by advocating for broader understanding, education and presentation of our history to citizens and visitors. Contact [facebook.com/pages/Tower-Soudan-Historical-Society/](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tower-Soudan-Historical-Society/)

At **The Virginia Heritage Museum** We believe it's important to keep alive the history of the Virginia area. We're collecting and preserving objects, photos and other materials that tell the stories of this community and the people who lived and worked here. We create exhibits and plan programs to bring those stories to the public. Our large collection of photos, newspapers, books and documents is available for researchers. Contact www.virginiamnhistory.com/

2024- The Society re-granted \$112,116 of operational funding to six affiliated historical organizations: Ely-Winton Historical Society, Tower-Soudan Historical Society, Minnesota Museum of Mining in Chisholm and SISU Heritage, Inc. in Embarrass, MN.

ST. LOUIS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY FINANCIALS

2024	General Operations	Museum Operations	County Project Grant	Veterans Memorial Hall	American Indian	Fesler Gallery	Erie & Mining History	Totals
<u>SUPPORT/REVENUE</u>								
St. Louis County Allocation	430,665			101,333				531,998
Contributions, Scholarship Funds, & Depot United	10,673	12,195		4,301	2,709		386	30,264
Grants: MHS & Depot Foundation		40,442		12,500				52,942
Fundraisers: 5K and Remembrance Dinner				25,027				25,027
Change in Assets Held by Others	13,342							13,342
Membership Dues	8,299							8,299
Erie Books & Prints Sales & Antique Appraisal Funds	356			14	49		3,641	4,060
Interest Income & Misc. Revenue	242			270				512
Total Income	463,578	52,637	0	143,444	2,758	0	4,027	666,444
<u>EXPENSES</u>								
Payroll Expenses	159,660	45,993	1,242	89,469				296,364
Program/Fundraising	764	10,720		16,182	1,999		300	29,965
IT, Equipment, Internet, Website, Phones	16,906	2,982		4,055	222			24,165
Office Supplies, Postage, Dues & Subscriptions	2,872	299		982	25		120	4,298
Staff Expenses & Training	265	164		157	121			707
Audit, 990 & Accounting Services	17,780			7,620				25,400
Office & Exhibit Cleaning	5,670			2,430				8,100
Other Professional Services				426				426
Legal Services	1,348			731			650	2,729
St. Louis County Depot Rent	36,426			15,611				52,038
Maintenance of Artifacts/Exhibits & Insurance	2,733	9,395	18,021	21,217	641	914	3951	56,871
Interest Expense, Newsletter & Misc. Expenses	5,317	55		967				6,339
Six Iron Range Affiliates Distributions	112,116							112,116
Total Operating Expenses	361,857	69,608	19,263	159,847	3,008	914	5,021	619,518

NOTES

1. MHS: Minnesota Historical Society/Legacy Grant
2. Cents are rounded to nearest dollar in figures reported but used to calculate totals, so there may be a slight variance of \$1 or \$2.
3. Figures are based on December Financials for 2024.
4. Payroll includes staff paid by a Legacy Grant for collections inventory as part of the Collections Accessibility Initiative.
5. When expenses exceed income, the Society used funds from prior years or was reimbursed the next year.

For adjustments and additional details, please see our audits and 990s at <https://www.thehistorypeople.org/official-documents>.

The 2024 audit and 990 should be posted online by 11/15/2025 or sooner.

Monthly antiques appraisal took place every 3rd Wednesday (with the exception of December being too proximal to Christmas.). Our appraiser Denny Mager of Northern Specialties, continued his commutes from Grand Rapids, and was joined by our newest volunteer, Lori Johnson.



In June the Society opened its exhibit, "Views of Duluth," capturing quiet streets, scenic overlooks, grand theaters, and exciting recreational venues. Historic images provided insight into the industry and entertainment that shaped the city, featuring prints by Hugh McKenzie and other notable Duluth artists whose works highlighted the architecture of the early 1900s.



In July, the Society took part in Duluth's "Sidewalk Days." Superior Street was closed to traffic, filled instead with vendors, concessions, and local cultural organizations. Visitors received a free Society button at our booth on Superior Street & 5th Ave West, by our friends at the Duluth Public Library, staffed here by Terry Johnson.



The Society maintained a continuous run of its quarterly newsletter Rootprints. The July, 2024 issue featured a history of the Jóhann Einarrson family- Icelandic emigrants to Duluth- based on research inspired following the donation of an elaborate photo album. Pictured here- Johann and his wife Elín (née) Benonisdóttir.



Our traveling exhibit “The Promise, The Promise Kept, The Promise Realized, The Promise Renewed: The History of the Erie Mining Company” was placed on view at the Virginia courthouse. To learn more regarding how your group or institution might also host an SLCHS traveling exhibit, visit www.thehistorypeople.org/traveling-exhibits.



In May we completed our 2021, 2022, and 2023 Annual Report(s). If not for the strenuous efforts of our former Administrative Assistant, Hannah Greenwho wrote, re-wrote, and collated innumerable statistics and mountains of verbiage- this might not have been possible.



The 1854 Treaty Authority hosted Native American Heritage Day. Pictured here, a panel discussion from a variety of Native women: Jill Doerfler, Linda LeGarde Grover, Chanda Blesi-Geyschick, Marie Spry, and Michele Hakala-Beeksma moderated by Jaylen Strong.



Mary Palcich Keyes of the Hibbing Historical Society addressed “The Importance of Boarding Houses” at our Annual Members Meeting. Often managed by women, such housing not only involved a tremendous amount of labor- meal preparations, laundry, housekeeping- they grew to be like islands of democracy where immigrants from diverse regions shared traditions.



History in a Pint returned in August at the St. Louis County Fair. The topic was St. Louis County resident and Denfeld H.S. student Mike Colalillo who was awarded the Medal of Honor for “his intrepidity, and inspiring courage” during World War II.



The Command Sergeant Major John S. Werner Memorial 5K Run-Walk was held in Rice Lake (where he had served as its Mayor). Werner’s granddaughter Mackenzie won the girl’s 1-16 group with a time of 26:16!



Brigadier General Ray Klosowski USAF (Ret.) spoke to the topic of “Duluth During the Cold War” during events marking Memorial Day at the Depot. The Society also premiered its exhibit of the same name with numerous panels and artifacts.



The Veterans Memorial Hall Oral History Project neared a milestone in 2024 of having collected almost 29,000 stories from local Veterans, including World War II Veteran Jack Birk, pictured here.



Our Annual Veterans Memorial Hall Remembrance Dinner at the Depot featured astronaut, author, and artist Col. Jeffrey Williams who took us high above present conflicts to a place of cooperation, to a place of pure awe.



On November 11 we celebrated Veterans Day- sponsored by Veterans Memorial Hall and the Duluth Women of Today. The event also premiered PBS North's "Cold War Secrets of Northern Minnesota." Special thanks to Brig. Gen. Raymond T. Klosowski and producer Mike Scholtz.



Jaedyn Roemhildt's winning essay for our 2024 Mike Colalillo Medal of Honor Scholarship eloquently described her father's journey from personal trauma to earning a master's degree in social work and in time becoming the Director of Duluth's Vets Center.



ONE DEFINITIVE SETBACK

In July we experienced a serious water incursion resulting in extensive damage to Veterans Memorial Hall. A late night "all hands" effort saved the Hall's artifacts, yet we are still in the process of restoring the space as of March 2025. You can support our recovery efforts here: www.thehistorypeople.org/ways-to-give



The SLCHS has 19 traveling exhibits covering a wide range of historical topics. They were viewed by 430,000+ people. In addition, the Traveling Exhibits Catalogue was refreshed to include new exhibits. It is on the Society's website and includes information on how historical societies, schools, libraries, and other non-profits may borrow an exhibit. The Catalog is available on our website: thehistorypeople.org/traveling-exhibits

AMERICAN INDIAN:

Ojibwe Faces and Stories

FINE ART AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Albin Zaverl Art: Old Country Memories

IMMIGRANTS:

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

Finns of Western Lake Superior

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

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

LOCAL AND COUNTY HISTORY:

Marshall Wells Hardware

Return to the River

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

MILITARY RELATED:

500 Days: 125th Field Artillery Photographs

Albert Woolson – the Last Civil War Soldier

Desert Medics

Duluth and the Cold War

James Joseph Hubert: Duluth WWII Hero Returns Home

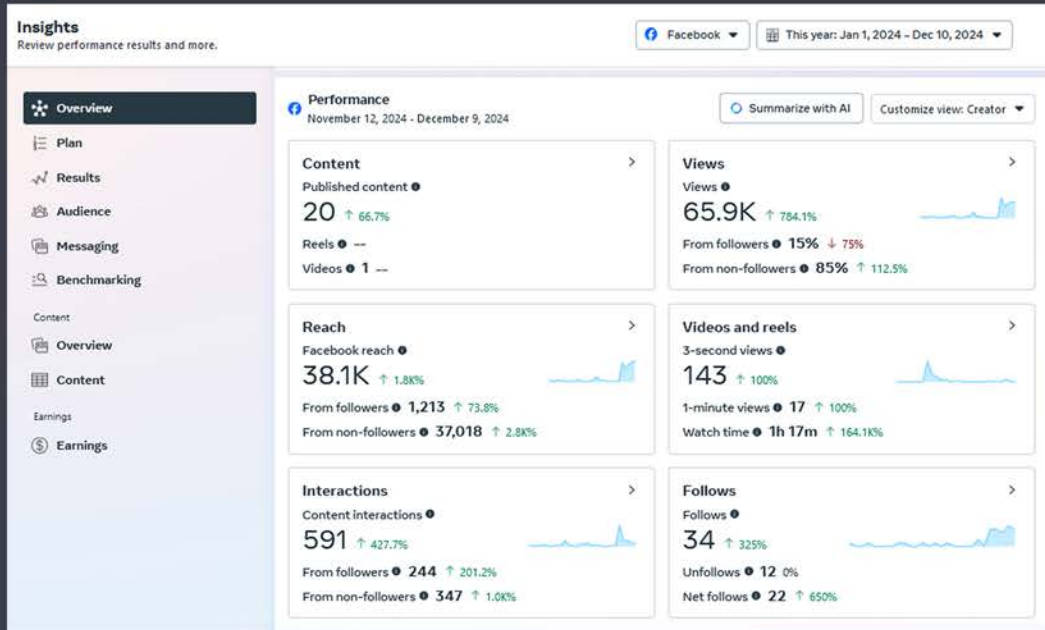
Joe Gomer: Honoring a Legacy

Joe Gomer: Preserving a Legacy

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

Salute to Servicewomen: Women in the United States Military

The 18 – Civil War Exhibit



In 2024, nearly all metrics indicated an upwards trajectory; in the Society’s content, interactions, views, and followers (in most cases increases of 100s of percent gain). “Reach” - the number of unique people who have seen your posts, page, or advertisements at least once, a key means for understanding the audience in particular - saw an 1800% increase between January 1, 2024 and year’s end. The interactions with our content came from non-followers, indicating that while there isn’t consistent follower growth, the content we are creating is still being seen by more and more people.



Data suggests that areas for improvement would include reaching a broader demographic, in that our audience skews heavily to those aged 65 and older. Where the Society could focus efforts in the future is creating content that engages a younger, more diverse group of people. It is worth noting that as it is, 60.7% are women. It is also worth mentioning that the above demographics do not include Instagram analytics which is a social media platform that tends to skew younger (though trends there are similar to those above).

Donations to the Society often do not require being of tremendous financial worth to be consequential. Albums of family photographs are a notable example of gifts that are not intrinsically valuable, and yet can be priceless. Last year, Kim Taylor brought in numerous images of her relations- the Thomas W. Cameron and Jessie C McLeod family of Park Point, Duluth from the early 20th century.

Before becoming recognized for having one of the top 25 beaches in the U.S., or recently as the grounds for a billionaire's demolition spree, Park Point was a generally rustic neighborhood of modest means. A 2012 article in Lake Superior magazine by Ann Klefstad which includes the recollections of several lifelong residents (seen right and below).

"Margaret (McGillis)- she goes by Mugs to her friends - still lives in the house where she was born, a building that was once the bandstand for White City, the long-gone Point amusement park. Reminiscing in her kitchen, Mugs, now 88, remembers the old days on the Point with sharp wit and a lot of love. The walls of her house showcase photos of Park Point in years past. "It was a great place to grow up. We were always special. The Oatka Boat Club was active when I was small. There's a photo on the desk of my brother there. We could go over there and use the tennis courts and boats, canoes and things, as long as we were helping out.



"Everybody knew everybody then, from one end of the Point to the other." She has strong memories of the Point's salty souls. "There was a bootlegger down here who ran the streetcar. He could stop and get bottles at his house, and then he stopped for his clients along the line. Mugs and her father, a typesetter at the Duluth Herald, spent a lot of time on the water: they collected wood to burn in the winter, taking a skiff across the

bay. "I'd go wade out in the bay and pile the wood in the boat, my dad would sit in the boat and row. ... We'd saw it up and... make a party of throwing the wood down in the basement." Tom Mackay tells similar stories. His grandparents settled in a little cabin in 1918. "Most of the houses were summer cabins that people expanded into year-round homes. ... We were pretty much poor people, but we were really close-knit. There's a fine line between people watching out for each other and people being nosy, but mostly it stayed on the good side."



From Dave Anderson's article "The Depot's Antique Appraisal uncovers local treasures," April 24, 2024.

The Northland has had its own version of the popular series "Antiques Roadshow" for years as The Depot in Duluth does monthly antique appraisals. Lori Johnson (was) in line to have an expert check out the vase her father brought back from Navy service. "This was purchased in Japan by my father in gosh between 1953 and 1954," Johnson said. Denny Mager of Grand Rapids is the appraiser, and he tells us the most common things brought in are pocket watches. "Just a common pocket watch not working you are looking at \$50 to \$100," Mager said. In working condition, they're worth three times more and vintage working wristwatches like an Art Deco piece can bring in the bucks. Right now, petroliana items are the hot ticket in collectibles. "Gas and oil advertising items are getting real big money for that type of stuff," Mager said. As generations age, once common things become collectible. First-generation Star Wars action figures are giving way to superheroes on collector shelves. "And that's what a lot of young people are getting into, taking over from Star Wars and moving forward," Mager said. Cooling down drastically are things like collector plates. "That type of merchandise has almost no value," Mager said. A Lord Elgin Chevron watch was worth around \$1,000 at this appraisal. A brass ashtray from Egypt could pull in \$100 to \$200. Lori's Japanese vase turned out to be valued between \$200 to \$300. "Maybe the more I hang on to it the more it will increase in value, but it does have sentimental value, so I'll keep them," Johnson said.

Denny Mager has been a 'treasured' volunteer for the SLCHS since 2013

THANK YOU! Your contributions will have lasting impacts for generations to come. Thank you to St. Louis County, The Depot Foundation, grantors, members, sponsors, local military veterans, contractors, community members, staff, and all who contribute time, funds, and energy to the Society. Your gifts enable us to continue our Mission to Collect, Preserve, and Disseminate our shared local and National histories. We look forward to continuing our partnership and legacy with you in the future.

"No one who achieves success does so without the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude."

Alfred North Whitehead, English mathematician and philosopher

The 2024 Annual Report of the St. Louis County Historical Society was designed by Tim White with contributions from Nicholas Jenson, Wayne Gannaway, Ronald Hein, Julie Bolos, JoAnne Coombe, Jay Hagen, Terry Johnson, Michele Hakala-Beeksma, and many more. Photos not directly attributed are from Society staff and volunteers, affiliate partners, the Depot, and The Northeast Minnesota Historical Collections -housed in the Kathryn A. Martin Library, on permanent loan from the St. Louis County Historical Society. Special thanks to St. Louis County, The Depot Foundation, University of Minnesota Duluth, and the Lake Superior Railroad Museum for their ongoing support for general operations and special projects. SLCHS serves as the state-designated history service provider for the County of St. Louis. This is the s102nd annual report that will be submitted to the Minnesota Historical Society since William E. Culkin submitted his report in 1923.



506 W Michigan Street
 Duluth, MN 55802
 218-733-7586
 218-733-7585 (fax)
history@thehistorypeople.org

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