

WASHINGTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

News Release

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Editor: The following opinion article is for your free, unrestricted use. 469 words.

The Importance of Our Shared Heritage

By Monica Fogg, new Washington County Historical Society board chair

As Minnesota celebrates its 150th birthday, those of us who live in Washington County, the state's first, share the excitement in our own special way.

For 74 years, the Washington County Historical Society has operated as an independent, nonprofit organization helping to collect, preserve and share the rich, diverse history of our region.

For residents of all ages, this sesquicentennial year is an ideal time to discover or rediscover the heritage we all share, because all of us are a part of this vital story.

Our history is important and living, growing with each passing day as we all contribute to it in our own unique way. The so-called past is all around us in very real ways. Think of our county historical society's collections as our cultural attic. In it you'll find a physical, tangible record of what Washington County once was, and a trail of discovery to the present.

We live against this backdrop of landscapes, old documents and photographs, clothing, tools and machines, artifacts and buildings. It's all central to who we are today as a community.

And just look out at the vistas we enjoy. The ancient St. Croix River became a boundary, an early line of defense, a provider of food and water, and an artery for trade and travel.

This heritage and our beautiful location, courtesy of the Pleistocene Era, help define us as a people and a community, creating a strong sense of place and cultural cohesion.

It is from this vibrant and constant layering of culture and heritage that Washington County's identity evolves. Pioneer settlements, river towns, logging center, railroad center, tourist destinations, and economic engine of commerce – Washington County history is the story of Minnesota's beginnings.

This heritage is for our community what memory is for each one of us. We remember and learn and become better. We become more fully acquainted with ourselves as a people by knowing what's happened in the past.

History is important. It helps us to learn from the past.

So our lives today don't simply follow the past, they are rooted in it. And we all draw strength from this shared, living tradition.

Washington County's heritage brings a richness to our lives. It brings new meaning to the communities where we live and visit, the books we read, the water we fish and boat, and the hiking trails and ribbons of rolling roadways we explore.

Our shared heritage – this ever-growing history - connects our past and present, each person and event a cobblestone in our community's path to the future. We invite you to discover and explore your roots during this important Minnesota sesquicentennial year.

Monica Fogg is the new president of the Washington County Historical Society board of directors, assuming leadership on heritage projects in Minnesota's first county as the state marks its sesquicentennial birthday. For more information, please visit www.wchsmn.org.

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Founded in 1934, the Washington County Historical Society is a donor-supported, nonprofit organization with more than 700 individual, family, and business members. WCHS is supported by individual gifts, memberships and earned income, and government and foundation grants. WCHS is one of only two financially self-sustaining historical societies in Minnesota, receiving no funding from county government.