



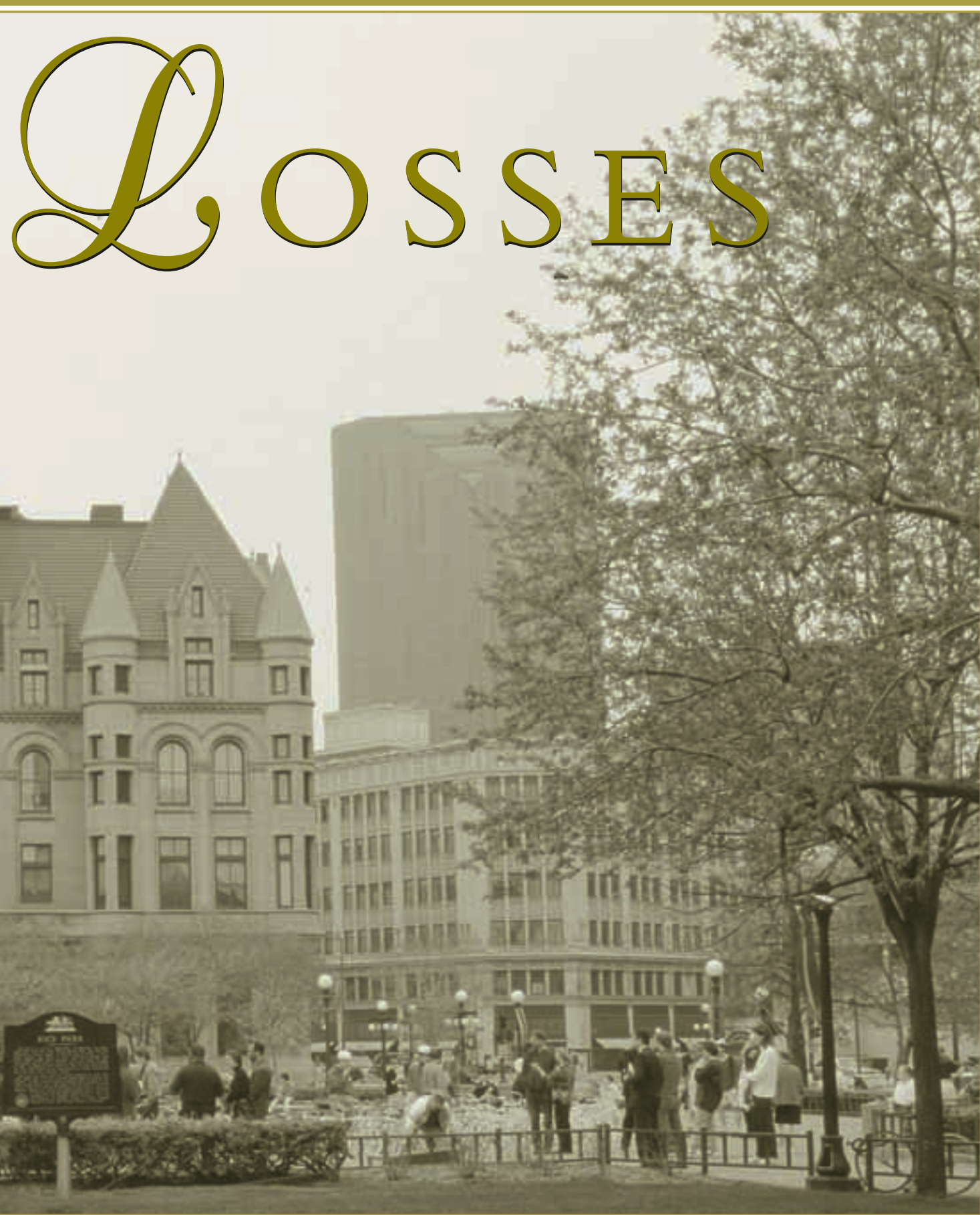
# WINS *and*

## **The National Register of Historic Places in Minnesota**

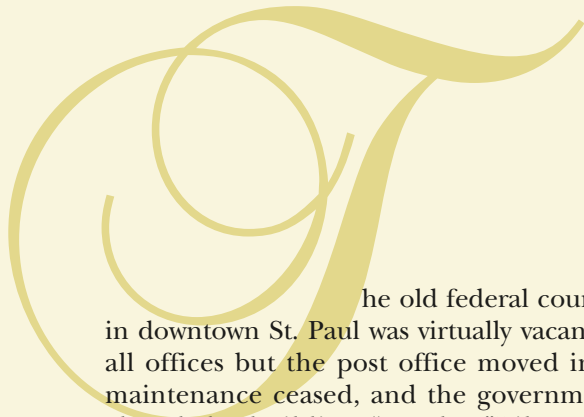
LAURA WEBER

*St. Paul's busy Landmark Center, saved from the wrecking ball and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969*

# Losses







The old federal courthouse in downtown St. Paul was virtually vacant. After all offices but the post office moved in 1967, maintenance ceased, and the government declared the building “surplus.” Like so many grand edifices from earlier eras, it seemed destined for the wrecking ball.

The 80-year-old Romanesque landmark did not, however, join other casualties of the 1960s frenzy for urban renewal. Rather, in 1969 the U.S. Post Office, Courthouse, and Custom House (its official name) was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the first nomination by Minnesota’s new State Historic Preservation Office. A coalition of citizens, with the support of four St. Paul mayors, saved and restored the building. It reopened in 1979 as Landmark Center, home to cultural and arts organizations and site of festivities both public and private. The renovation marked a new high point in the popularity of the historic preservation movement in the state of Minnesota.<sup>1</sup>

The National Register is the “official list of the Nation’s cultural resources worthy of preservation.” More than 1,500 historic Minnesota listings have joined Landmark Center on the National Register, including 116 historic districts comprising 5,225 resources. Most of them may be

seen and enjoyed today, but not all. Seventy-one Minnesota properties—less than five percent of the total—have been taken off the National Register since 1981 when federal regulations for removing properties were first published.<sup>2</sup>

It might come as a surprise that there are “lost” National Register properties. Once a property is listed, it seems protected from the laissez-faire arena of the marketplace. But this is not necessarily so. The National Register has no authority to compel a state or local government or private-property owner to preserve historic resources. Accordingly, a property is removed from the National Register if it suffers destruction by demolition, neglect, or an act of nature; unsympathetic alterations; or removal from its original site.<sup>3</sup>

Historic preservation, according to sociologist Diane Barthel, rests on the conviction that historic structures, as a “tangible form of evidence of the past,” are “a resource that should not be wasted or treated casually or negligently.” In spite of preservationists’ best efforts, however, historic buildings, structures, and objects are vulnerable to the hand of man and, like all physical objects, the hand of time—decay or entropy, “the first law of preservation.” Some loss of historic properties is inevitable. Of Min-

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<sup>1</sup> Preliminary Design Conceptual Brochure, Old Federal Courts Building, Stahl/Bennett, Inc./Winsor/Faricy Architects, Inc., July 1974, p. 1; *Minnesotan* (St. Paul) 1 (Fall 1973): 2–5; *Washington Post*, Nov. 23, 1974; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Apr. 11, 1982—all in U.S. Courthouse, Post Office, and Custom House National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) file, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); Larry Millett, *Lost Twin Cities* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992), 273–74. All original paperwork relating to the National Register is in National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C.; hereinafter, citations refer to NRHP files in SHPO.

The author wishes to thank Susan Roth, National Register historian, SHPO, for her extensive assistance and support. She also wishes to thank Caroline Holje and the volunteers of the Dassel Area Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> National Register of Historic Places, brochure, 1996, copy in SHPO; information on Minnesota listings from SHPO, Aug. 1996.

<sup>3</sup> On removing properties, see *Code of Federal Regulations*, pt. 36 (July 1993), 265.

nesota's 71 lost National Register properties, 41 were demolished. Twelve more were destroyed by fire and one by tornado, two were altered unsuitably, and the remaining 15 were moved. Representative stories illustrate each type of loss and the lessons learned from it, while other tales, with happier endings, tell how destruction or threatened demolition galvanized communities, leading to triumph.<sup>4</sup>

The honor of National Register listing is not reserved solely for grand architectural masterpieces or buildings where great events occurred. A grist mill, a bridge, a modest house, even a boat can depict broad patterns of the past and, therefore, be included on the National Register.

To be listed, a property must meet one of the following criteria: association with significant persons and events; architectural or engineering significance; or possible presence of important information about our history or prehistory. In addition, a property must also have a quality preservationists call *integrity*; in other words, its physical features, location, and setting must be able to convey its historical significance. In 1969 Minnesota's SHPO began to identify and inventory a wide range of properties in all 87 counties for their historical, architectural, and archaeological significance. More than 45,000 properties were listed in the state inventory as of 1997. The most significant of these are nominated to the National Register by SHPO staff or others working under their direction. After consideration by the 14-member State Review Board and a final review by the State Historic Preservation Officer, a nomination is forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register at the National Park Service. Files on registered properties are maintained with the state inventory at SHPO.<sup>5</sup>

The chief protection offered by the National Register is *from* the federal government. Jerry L. Rogers, a long-time National Register employee, recalled, "Large, well-funded and powerful federal agencies . . . had been carelessly destroying historic properties [and] had to be brought into some sort of responsibility." These agencies are thus required to consult with SHPO staff to determine whether any listed or eligible properties may be harmed by proposed federally funded or licensed projects. If so, the federal agency must explore alternatives that "avoid or mitigate harm." SHPO reviews more than 3,000 federal undertakings in Minnesota each year. Minnesota law also provides for public review and possible intervention before destruction of National Register properties can occur in cases requiring federal, state, or local action, such as issuing demolition permits.<sup>6</sup>

The most intangible incentive offered by National Register designation, especially to private-property owners, is the honor of being listed. The National Register is also the pivot point for dispensing financial incentives, currently in the form of federal tax credits for commercial, industrial, rental, residential, or other income-producing capital investments in historic buildings. Instituted in 1976, tax incentives have been instrumental in rescuing threatened historic buildings for renovation into artists' studios and living space, condominiums, and office buildings. As of August 1997, nearly 500 historic properties in Minnesota have been revitalized using \$435 million in federal tax credits. Examples include the Mankato State Teacher's College's Old Main building, now residential property; Minnesota Stoneware Company in Red Wing, converted to retail, office, and residential use; and the Crown Roller Mill building in Minneapolis, now offices.<sup>7</sup>

If, in spite of these protections and incentives, an owner chooses to make insensitive ren-

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Wilson, "From the Editor," *Preservation*, Mar./Apr. 1997, p. 4; Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 2; Robert E. Stipe, "Historic Preservation: The Process and the Actors," in *The American Mosaic: Preserving A Nation's Heritage*, ed. Robert E. Stipe and Antoinette Lee (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee, International Council on Monuments & Sites, 1987), 11.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Dept. of Interior, *National Register Bulletin #15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, rev. ed., 1995), 2, 44; SHPO, *The National Register of Historic Places: Minnesota Checklist* (St. Paul: MHS, 1997), iii-iv; SHPO, *Preserving Minnesota: Planning for Historic Properties into a New Century* (St. Paul: MHS, 1991), 8, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Rogers, "National Register," 95-96. The protection offered by the National Register is described in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966; see also *Preserving Minnesota*, 10-11, on the state's protective statutes.

<sup>7</sup> *Preserving Minnesota*, 11; tax-credit figures from SHPO database.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRESERVATION MOVEMENT

Preservation in the United States was first the province of private organizations or individuals whose chief aim was to acquire historic homes and items associated with nationally famous individuals or events. Federal protection for historic properties located on public land began with the Antiquities Act of 1906, which allowed the president to declare the greatest of these sites national monuments. In 1935 federal involvement expanded with the Historic Sites Act, which authorized the National Park Service to acquire historic properties and to survey and inventory others of national importance. The list that resulted from this survey was a precursor to the National Register of Historic Places. After World War II, however, it became apparent that the National Park Service “could not own, manage, and interpret more than a tiny fraction of the nation’s historical and cultural resources.” In 1949 the nonprofit, private-sector National Trust for Historic Preservation was congressionally chartered as a partner to the park service to acquire historic properties, disseminate information and to instigate appreciation and activism on the local, state, and regional level.<sup>1</sup>

During the next two decades, the preservation movement’s efforts were no match for the destruction caused by federal and state government-funded urban renewal, interstate highway construction, and the demands of a growth-oriented postwar economy. Razing old buildings was taken as a sign of progress after years of depression, war, and sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-1960s, however, significant numbers of people were beginning to voice discontent over the dwindling “sense of place” in many American localities. They questioned the general assumption that change was synonymous with progress. In 1966

the U.S. Conference of Mayors’ Special Commission on Historic Preservation’s report to Congress, *With Heritage So Rich*, concluded: “We must concern ourselves not only with the historic highlights, but . . . with the total heritage of the nation and all that is worth preserving from our past as a living part of the present.”<sup>3</sup>

This was a call to expand and democratize federal historic preservation efforts by designating as significant local and regional resources—as well as national ones. On October 15, 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Historic Preservation Act, one of seven pieces of natural- and cultural-resource preservation legislation enacted into law. The new, diffuse program would include many players and exert influence based on information and persuasion rather than ownership. It would give preservationists a legal framework for planning on a national scale and for delaying or halting proposed harmful actions to buildings not protected by local landmark ordinances. The mandate to include properties of local significance on the newly created National Register of Historic Places marked a shift from seeing historic resources as “theatrical backdrops for history” toward viewing them as the “fabric of everyday life.”<sup>4</sup>

It is human nature to feel most connected to those things we know best; it is at the local level that preservation can be most effectively promoted. The 1966 federal legislation created the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to shift preservation to the local level. SHPOs in each state and in seven U.S. territories administer the National Register program. In Minnesota, SHPO is a department of the Minnesota Historical Society.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 470, 558; W. Brown Morton III, “What Do We Preserve and Why?” in *American Mosaic*, 162–63, 165; Barthel, *Historic Preservation*, 19–20; James A. Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Preservation Program, 1957 to 1969* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1990), xiii, 6. The Historic Landmarks program, the Historic American Buildings Survey, and the Historic American Engineering Record, all still in effect, date to the 1935 legislation.

<sup>2</sup> Millett, *Lost Twin Cities*, 237.

<sup>3</sup> Jerry L. Rogers, “The National Register of Historic Places: A Personal Perspective on the First Twenty Years,” *Public Historian* 9 (Spring 1987): 91–92; Morton, “What Do We Preserve,” 169.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Hertfelder, “The National Park Service and Historic Preservation: Historic Preservation Beyond Smokey the Bear,” *Public Historian* 9 (Spring 1987): 138; U.S. Dept. of Interior, *Questions and Answers about the National Register of Historic Places* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, Aug. 1990), 3; Gregory E. Andrews, “Historic Preservation in the Private Sector,” in *American Mosaic*, 211.

<sup>5</sup> J. Myrick Howard, “Where the Action Is: Preservation and Local Governments,” in *American Mosaic*, 114; Hertfelder, “National Park Service,” 137.

ovations, move a property from its site, or demolish it, the only penalty is removal from the National Register. Among Minnesota's lost National Register properties are examples of each. Their stories illustrate the hard issues, good—if misguided—intentions, triumphs, and disappointments that are all part of historic preservation.

Since properties that have been altered unsuitably or moved from their original site still exist, why, according to the standards of the National Register, are they no longer able to represent the “broad patterns of the past”? The answer is tied to the concept of integrity, a sometimes elusive quality for both preservationists and the public. Integrity involves preserving a historic structure “in a context free of contaminating purposes or self-serving interpretations. . . . Additions to structures must be distinguished from and not fundamentally change the original physical structure. Future generations of experts must be able to ‘read’ what this generation has done and to undo it if necessary—all in the service of authenticity.”<sup>8</sup>

The Mount Tom lookout shelter in Kandiyohi County is one of only two Minnesota buildings removed from the National Register for unsympathetic alterations. Its story illustrates different views of what constitutes the public good, taken by two state agencies charged with preservation—SHPO, of cultural resources, and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), of natural resources.<sup>9</sup>

Mount Tom is located in Sibley State Park, the highest point for 50 miles. In 1938 the Civilian Conservation Corps built a lookout shelter on its summit for the National Park Service. Besides the structure's historical connections with depression-era relief programs and the development of Minnesota's state-park system, its distinctive rustic-style construction featured “irreplaceable labor-intensive methods and finely crafted detailing,” according to its National Register nomination. Its design had no counterpart among the state's other park shelters.<sup>10</sup>

The DNR was aware of Mount Tom's status as a historic resource as early as 1989 when

SHPO began the Register nomination process for it and other depression-era rustic-style buildings in 22 state parks. In 1991 and early 1992 while Mount Tom's nomination was being considered in Washington, D.C., DNR notified SHPO of plans to add a second story to the shelter because the growth of oak trees and other vegetation had “obscured the once spectacular view.” Other remodeling would stabilize the heavily compacted and eroded ground surface and improve the trail from the parking lot to the summit. SHPO's formal response strongly recommended against the proposed second-



*Kandiyohi County's unique, rustic-style Mount Tom lookout shelter, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1938*

story addition: “The plans . . . would compromise the design integrity of the tower to the extent that it would no longer qualify for listing on the register.”<sup>11</sup>

Events transpired relatively quickly. After Mount Tom was added to the National Register on January 31, 1992, SHPO sent a letter on March 30 informing the DNR and the state Department of Administration of the nomination. The disputed alterations were nevertheless made in September. These included enlarging

<sup>8</sup> Barthel, *Historic Preservation*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> The other structure was Brown County's Cobden jail, built in about 1900, remodeled between December 1988 and March 1989, and removed in 1991; Mike Brubaker to Britta Bloomberg, June 27, 1989; Request for Removal from National Register, Apr. 1991, both in Cobden Jail file, SHPO.

<sup>10</sup> Mount Tom Lookout Shelter, NRHP registration form, 1992, Mount Tom file, SHPO.

<sup>11</sup> Nina Archabal to Sandra J. Hale, Joseph N. Alexander, et al., Feb. 17, 1989; David S. Radford to Dennis Gimmestad, Jan. 2, 1992; Britta Bloomberg to David Radford, Feb. 6, 1992—all in Mount Tom file.



the single-level shelter into a two-level observation tower with staircase and second-story deck, landscaping and fencing around the shelter, and removing the granite-slab steps at its base. As a result, Mount Tom was removed from the register July 22, 1993.<sup>12</sup>

The removal form cited severe loss of five of the seven types of integrity required for the National Register: materials, design, workmanship, feeling, and association. The same type of stone used in the original base was chosen for the tower extension and elsewhere, thereby vio-



*Mount Tom shelter after alterations; it was removed from the National Register in 1993.*

lating the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* which states, "The new work shall be differentiated from the old." SHPO also felt that the alterations were incompatible with the aesthetic principles and workmanship of the original shelter and the rustic-style design philosophy, which was to complement its surroundings: "The new tower competes with it."<sup>13</sup>

The roots of the disagreement between DNR and SHPO can be traced to opinions about the setting. While the growth of vegetation had motivated the DNR to alter the look-

out to preserve the view, SHPO pointed out that the structure's original function was to shelter observers who climbed to the summit, not to promote observation. Therefore, growth of trees "should not be used as a reason to alter the historic physical integrity."

In August 1993 Michael Lane, acting secretary of the State Review Board, wrote to DNR commissioner Rodney W. Sando, criticizing the department's decision to remodel "even though it had been informed that this action would destroy the structure's historic and architectural significance." Commissioner Sando's response noted that the DNR did "an outstanding job" as curator for more than 500 Minnesota structures on the National Register. While acknowledging the review board's concerns, he stated that state parks must be managed in the public interest and that the renovation was suggested by private citizens who wanted to be able to view the surrounding countryside and who had funded the project through donations. Sando felt that the renovations "actually enhanced the existing structure" and preserved its character, thus serving the public: "On June 4, 1993, about 150 citizens from Kandiyohi County gathered to dedicate their work in a special ceremony," he wrote. "It needs to be stressed that the local people were extremely proud of the work. . . . It was noted that people will gather at the site in 50 years to honor the work done in 1993 just as we honor the work done in the 1930s."<sup>14</sup>

While alterations to a historic building may or may not meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, moving a property, even one that is endangered, is automatic cause for removal from the Register. The integrity of location—the *actual* place where the property was constructed or where the historic event occurred—is of prime importance to its meaning. However, if a property has been listed for its architectural significance or because it is the surviving link to a person or event, it can be renominated if moved to a setting compatible with its original location. This situation is rare. Of the 15 properties taken off the Register because they were

<sup>12</sup> Nina Archabal to Dana Badgerow and Rodney W. Sando, Mar. 30, 1992; Request for Removal from National Register, Mar. 1993; Britta Bloomberg to Rodney W. Sando and Debra Anderson, Dec. 20, 1993—all in Mount Tom file.

<sup>13</sup> Here and below, Request for Removal, Mar. 1993, Mount Tom file. The other two types of integrity are location and setting.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Lane to Rodney W. Sando, Aug. 3, 1993; Sando to Lane, Aug. 18, 1993, both Mount Tom file.



*Minneapolis's Elisha and Lizzie Morse house in the Whittier neighborhood, successfully relocated in 1991 and renominated to the National Register four years later*

moved, only the Elisha and Lizzie Morse house in Minneapolis has been relisted.<sup>15</sup>

Built in early 1870s at 2402 Fourth Avenue South, the Morse house was nominated in 1976 as one of the few remaining Italian villa-style buildings extant in the Twin Cities. Dwellings across the street were lost when Interstate 35W was built; in 1966 a footbridge was constructed that crossed over the freeway and terminated within ten feet of the Morse house, “destroying the aesthetic setting that the picturesque house historically possessed.” It was moved in December 1991 seven blocks down Twenty-fourth Street to another corner lot comparable to its original site. Returned to the Register in

1995 through the work of the Whittier Alliance, a neighborhood group that owned it, the Minneapolis Community Development Agency, and SHPO, the Morse house won a certificate of award in 1996 from the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission.<sup>16</sup>

While loss of National Register status may be only symbolic for private-property owners, owners of potentially income-generating property face the loss of tax credits, while nonprofit organizations and local units of government face ineligibility for grants. This loss affected

<sup>15</sup> *Code of Federal Regulations*, 263–64; U.S. Dept. of Interior, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria*, 29–30. In 1995 SHPO approved plans to move and rehabilitate the Chicago Great Western depot in Rochester (moved and removed from the Register in 1987) to a site it occupied about four years after its construction in 1899. It is potentially eligible for relisting.

<sup>16</sup> Elisha Jr. and Lizzie Morse House, NRHP [re]nomination form, 1995, Morse House file, SHPO; Susan Roth to author, undated, in author's possession; *Preservation Matters*, June 1996, p. 7.





*The modest Chicago and North Western section house in Comfrey, Brown County, before its move to End-O-Line Railroad Park in 1988*

local citizens who banded together to move an endangered Minnesota National Register property, the Chicago and North Western section house in Comfrey. The residence of a railroad section-crew foreman and family, the building had been nominated to the National Register in 1979 for having the best integrity of the remaining turn-of-the-century section houses in Brown County. In the 1980s a feed-and-seed company purchased the property on which it stood, later donating the house to the city. A local historical group moved it fewer than two blocks, hoping to stabilize and find an appropriate use for it. There it remained, deteriorating, until June 1988 when it was relocated to a collection of structures called End-O-Line Railroad Park and Museum in nearby Currie (Murray County).<sup>17</sup>

The centerpiece of the railroad park is another National Register property, the Currie

turntable, dating from 1901. A nearby depot, a railroad water tower from Walnut Grove, and other artifacts—for example, a cabooses, locomotive, and HO scale-model train display—complete the park.<sup>18</sup>

Although groupings of thematic “heritage” objects are often popular with the public, preservation guidelines do not approve of such “staged symbolic communities,” where history has been dismantled and then unauthentically reassembled. Historian Michael Kammen notes that they result in a popularized, socially inclusive, but commercialized version of the past.<sup>19</sup>

In a 1988 application to the Minnesota Historical Society for funds to help move the section house to the park, the director of End-O-Line Railroad Historical Society stated, “By moving and restoring this house we will be able to more fully tell another part of the railroad

<sup>17</sup> Chicago and North Western Section House, Minnesota Historic Properties inventory form; *Comfrey Times*, Aug. 11, 1988, both in Chicago and North Western Section House file, SHPO.

<sup>18</sup> Currie Turntable, NRHP nomination form, 1977; *Comfrey Times*, Aug. 11, 1988, July 6, 1989—all in Currie Turntable file, SHPO.

<sup>19</sup> Kammen, *Mystic Chords*, 537, 626–28; Barthel, *Historic Preservation*, 36–53.

story. . . . Many tourists visiting our park say this is by far the most educational railroad museum they have visited.” Explaining why the project was not eligible for funds, a representative of the historical society replied, “We believe the significance of historic properties depends not only on the buildings . . . but also on their locations and settings. In other words, there are relationships between historic properties and their locations that explain their meaning.” Artificial groupings of buildings collected at a single site, even to protect them from demolition, “may create a false sense of history, more illustrative of 20th-century perceptions of the past than of the realities of an earlier historic period.” Moved to the railroad park, the section house is not eligible for renomination.<sup>20</sup>

“The core of the problem of preserving old buildings and neighborhoods is simply a matter of economics,” wrote preservationist Robert E. Stipe. “Americans always tended to view real estate as a marketable commodity whose principal purpose is to provide capital gains or income to its temporary owner.”<sup>21</sup> This view leaves historic properties vulnerable to two strongly held American values: the rights of private-property owners and the notion of progress. If profit is possible, the old must inevitably make way for the new. The stakes are especially high in this arena because demolishing a historic building is irreversible. This is where battles to save historic properties erupt between community activists and developers. Preservationists have learned to bring suit under federal and state laws to delay or prevent demolition. In less urgent situations, preservationists advocate appropriate rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings as an economic and cultural boon to communities.

Owners of private property listed on the National Register may maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they wish, providing they do not need federal funds, permits, or licenses to do so. Many owners view their listing as an honor, a way to establish credibility for

incentive programs (including a few public grant and low-interest loan programs), or as an attempt to attract attention to the historic importance of a property. Sometimes, however, owners display apathy or hostility to the National Register, ultimately leading to their property’s removal from the Register.<sup>22</sup>

The Jacob Marthaler house in West St. Paul was demolished by its owner, Joseph Marthaler, despite the wishes of his grandson to preserve it. Built in 1863 by Jacob Marthaler (Joseph’s grandfather), an early settler of Dakota County and a prime mover in the effort to create West St. Paul in 1889, the house was a rare and intact example of early residential architecture influenced by the federal style. It was listed on the Register in 1988 through the three-year effort of Joseph Marthaler’s grandson, Michael McDonough, who hoped that the ensuing prestige would catalyze support to preserve it. Born in the house, the 89-year-old Marthaler had lived there until constructing a new dwelling on the site in 1961. He did not want any part of the nomination process, considering the building, vacant for 15 years, “more trouble than it’s worth.” The house was demolished in 1993. A consoling letter to McDonough from SHPO National Register historian Susan Roth summarized the preservationist predicament: “Your hopes to bring the importance of the house to light by National Register listing was the best choice. However, sometimes private ownership prevails, and listing can’t stop the eventual removal of the property.”<sup>23</sup>

The notion that history, in the form of a building, must not stand in the way of progress has informed public opinion as well. In 1986, for example, some members of a Shakopee downtown-development committee felt the deteriorating, “unsightly” 103-year-old Reis Block did not “make a good impression on people entering Shakopee.” The Reis Block, listed in 1980, was built as an opera house and commercial building and served for many years as an important center for community activities.<sup>24</sup>

Local news accounts of the city’s acquisition of the building and hopes for spurring downtown development displayed no sentiment

<sup>20</sup> Louise Gervais to Tim Glines, Nov. 18, 1988; Glines to Gervais, Nov. 30, 1988, both in Currie Turntable file.

<sup>21</sup> Stipe, “Historic Preservation,” 5.

<sup>22</sup> Carol Shull, NRHP chief of registration, to Dee Callstrom, Nov. 5, 1990, Kenyon Opera House NRHP file, SHPO; *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), Jan. 6, 1996, p. H5.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Marthaler house, NRHP nomination form, 1988; Susan Roth to Michael McDonough, Sept. 29, 1993, both in Jacob Marthaler House file, SHPO; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Apr. 21, 1993, p. 2DW.

<sup>24</sup> Reis Block, NRHP nomination form, 1980, Reis Block file, SHPO; *Shakopee Valley News*, June 4, 1986, p. 2.

about the loss to the community of such a historic anchor. “The building . . . was demolished this month to make way for progress,” the *Shakopee Valley News* declared in its post-mortem. Progress, in this case, was a right-turn lane onto Highways 169 and 101 that would decrease traffic congestion. Yet the same news story also suggested for the first time, when it was too late,

that the demolition of the landmark would affect the town’s collective memory. DeLoris Hoy, a former owner of the building, reported a “lump in her throat” thinking of “all of the memories that were in the building . . . work, sweat, sorrow, joy.” The newspaper concluded sentimentally: “Today the building is no more. The view across First Avenue is different, for the



*Before and after scenes at the site of West St. Paul’s Jacob Marthaler house, built in 1863 and demolished 130 years later*



first time in 103 years. . . . There is no more Opera House where, for many years, the heart-beat of the townspeople of Shakopee could be heard.”<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes when local governments, like private owners, decide to replace older buildings that communities perceive as outmoded, preservationists attempt to save the structures they see as vital to the town’s collective identity. When local preservationists learned in 1981 that the Murray County Courthouse in Slayton (built in 1892 and listed on the Register in 1977) could

<sup>25</sup> *Shakopee Valley News*, June 4, p. 2, Nov. 12, p. 5, Dec. 17, p.1, Dec. 24, p. 1, 8—all 1986.



be renovated for the same price as a new building, they suggested that the courthouse—at three stories, the tallest building on the flat prairie of southwestern Minnesota—be spared. They obtained a restraining order on the county board's plans to destroy the building. The order was later lifted, however, when preservationists could not come up with a \$300,000

the chief reason for the demolition of two buildings in 1996: the Scenic Hotel in Northome (Koochiching County), not yet officially removed from the Register, and the Brainerd Armory, which was in the process of being nominated.<sup>27</sup> A similar fate could have easily befallen the Androy Hotel in Hibbing. But the efforts of passionate citizens and the ability to attract a



*Shakopee's Reis Block, listed on the National Register in 1980 and razed in 1986 to make way for a right-turn lane*

bond that would have protected the county if a long court fight led to an increase in construction costs.<sup>26</sup>

When the wrecking ball arrived, it took the entire day to tear the building down. A newspaper account suggested, "It's being held together by the ghosts of Norwegian bricklayers." A one-story government center building was later constructed on the site.

Lack of an economically feasible reuse was



<sup>26</sup> Here and below, *Murray County Herald*, Oct. 1, 1981, p. 1; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Sept. 25, 1981, p. 8B.

<sup>27</sup> *Preservation Matters*, Aug. 1996, p. 4, 11, Sept. 1996, p. 9.



*The stately Androy Hotel, Hibbing's grand gathering place in the early 1920s, rehabbed in the 1990s after a long struggle*

developer turned the Androy's fate into a happier one.

Completed in 1921, the four-story Renaissance revival structure built by the Oliver Iron Mining Company served for many decades as Hibbing's social center. When taconite plants

were built in the 1960s and 1970s, the hotel catered to construction workers, and local residents stayed away. Then the boom ended, and the Androy was left without a customer base. It closed in 1977. After four banks foreclosed on the "Grand Old Lady of Howard Street," the





hotel became the property of the city of Hibbing.<sup>28</sup>

In 1985 a report on the Androy's economic viability concluded that no commercial use could be supported except, possibly, luxury senior housing. The city council agreed to hold

a public forum on the building's future before taking action. Ninety supporters of the hotel attended the August hearing and established a special committee to oversee future efforts on behalf of the landmark.<sup>29</sup>

Hibbing preservationists enlisted state and national assistance. Dennis Gimmestad of SHPO and Tim Turner of the National Trust for Historic Preservation wrote to Mayor Richard Nordvold explaining the Androy's historic significance and the benefits of preserving it. Turner mentioned that nomination to the National Register would make the hotel eligible for investment tax credits and reminded the mayor, "Historic preservation projects create more jobs per dollar invested than does new construction." The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, a private organization, featured the Androy in its newsletter. In February 1986 the Hibbing City Council authorized submission of the application to place the Androy on the National Register. It was listed in June.<sup>30</sup>

More than two years passed, and the Androy remained vacant. In February 1989 a city councilor brought up a resolution to demolish the hotel if a viable plan to preserve or develop it was not produced within six months. The resolution was defeated, but two years later the city council voted, with only one dissent, to tear down the hotel. A contractor from southwestern Minnesota was selected to remove asbestos and demolish the building as early as May 1, 1991.<sup>31</sup>

The ensuing outpouring of opinions, both supporting and opposing the council's decision, "reached epic proportions," according to the local newspaper. After a series of heated meetings, the council stood by its decision, citing lack of funds to develop the hotel and fear of a

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<sup>28</sup> *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, July 30, 1982, Androy Hotel NRHP file, SHPO; Arnold R. Alanen, "Years of Change on the Iron Range," in *Minnesota in a Century of Change: The State and Its People Since 1900*, ed. Clifford E. Clark Jr. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 187.

<sup>29</sup> *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, July 2, Aug. 20, 1985, Androy Hotel file.

<sup>30</sup> Dennis Gimmestad to Richard Nordvold, June 28, 1985; Pat Mestek to "Dennis, Henry & David," July 2, 1985; Mestek to Gimmestad, Aug. 7, 1985; Tim Turner to Nordvold, Aug. 16, 1985; *Preservation Matters*, Aug. 1985; George D. Gibeau to Al Albert, Feb. 18, 1986—all in Androy Hotel file.

<sup>31</sup> *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1989, Apr. 2, 1991, Androy Hotel file.



lawsuit from the company that had been awarded the demolition contract.<sup>32</sup>

Instead, the lawsuit came from Androy supporters who, in May 1991, sought a temporary restraining order to prevent the city from razing the building. (The Minnesota Environmental Rights Act allows individuals or groups to bring suit to protect natural and historic resources “unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative and the proposed action is reasonably required for the promotion of the public health, safety, and welfare.”) Both sides agreed to a hearing within the next two weeks. Newspaper accounts in the *Hibbing Daily Tribune* began to note that the Androy was listed on the National Register.<sup>33</sup>

On May 30, a temporary injunction was granted, and a trial was set for June 18 to determine “whether the city . . . has and will in the future properly comply with the state environmental protection law.” The trial was to focus only on that issue, not “whether or not it is in the best interests of the City of Hibbing to demolish the Androy.”<sup>34</sup>

Instead, on June 19, the two sides reached a settlement. The Androy Project Committee would pay the city \$10,000 within the next 30 days as a one-year option for buying the building for \$1; after the first year the group could have an additional three-month option for an additional \$5,000. The city agreed to use half of the option money for marketing, developing, and maintaining the hotel until it was purchased and to sell a parking lot across the street for fair market value if a buyer were found. The final condition was that no further appeals would be considered. If the Androy was not developed as provided in the settlement, the city would be allowed to tear it down.<sup>35</sup>

The required \$10,000 was raised, and, in June 1992 the committee exercised its three-month option. On August 26 it announced it would buy the hotel for \$1.<sup>36</sup>

In 1993, after 12 years of proposals from close to a dozen developers, Brighton Development

of Minneapolis came forward with a plan to build 48 units of senior housing in the upper three levels and recreate the historic lobby, coffee shop, and banquet facilities on the main floor. Financing for the \$3.3 million project included the 20 percent federal historic tax credits the Androy’s National Register status allowed.<sup>37</sup>

More than 200 visitors attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony in April 1995. By mid-December the coffee shop and dining room were completed, and, according to Richard Brustad of Brighton Development, by February 1997 the Androy was “full [of residential tenants] and working well.” The coffee shop was thriving and the banquet facility catered events “200 nights a year from private events to DFL Party and mining company events.” Pat Garrity, a Hibbing resident who helped save the Androy, summed up the drama and its happy ending by reporting that none of the people associated with the project ever gave up hope. “We knew it was an economically viable option. . . . It was just a matter of waiting it out.”<sup>38</sup>

Occasionally, Minnesota National Register properties have been lost solely through neglect. The Worthington and Sioux Falls freight depot in Luverne (Rock County) is one example. In 1988 the Chicago and North Western railroad abandoned the line on which the depot was located. As a condition for abandonment, the Interstate Commerce Commission required that the railroad try to find a new owner to rehabilitate the 1876 building, which in 1980 had been nominated to the Register. By 1991 the railroad had been unable to find a buyer, and the city of Luverne wanted the building removed as it was “deteriorated past the point of utilizing or restoring.” A Historic American Buildings Survey, consisting of large-format photographs, detailed drawings, and additional historic

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<sup>32</sup> *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, Apr. 18, May 5, May 7—all 1991, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, May 19, 1991, p. 1, 12; Dennis Gimmetstad, “The Minneapolis Armory: Can it be Saved?” in *Historic Preservation*, vol. 20 of *Roots* (Spring 1992): 4, 17.

<sup>34</sup> *State of Minnesota v City of Hibbing*, June 5, 1991, hearing; Mark Anfinson to Britta Bloomberg, June 10, 1991, both in Androy Hotel file.

<sup>35</sup> *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, June 20, 1991, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, July 9, 16, Nov. 21—all 1991, p. 1; June 12, Aug. 27, 1992, both p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Brustad, telephone conversation with author, Feb. 21, 1997, notes in author’s possession; *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, Feb. 10, 1994, p. 1, 8; author’s compilation of potential developers, in her possession.

<sup>38</sup> Brustad conversation; *Hibbing Daily Tribune*, Apr. 19, 1995, p. 1.

research, was completed before the depot was razed in April 1992.<sup>39</sup>

Nature has done in relatively few National Register properties in Minnesota. Wright County's Titrud round barn in Stockton Township has the distinction of being the only Minnesota National Register property destroyed by a tornado, which occurred on June 16, 1992. The 1908 structure had been nominated in 1979 as an example of the unusual circular barns constructed in Wright County in the early 1900s that allowed cattle to face the middle, making cleaning easier and central feeding possible. At the time of the nomination, the farm was still being worked by descendants of the original settler, Olof M. Titrud, who arrived in Stockton Township in 1868.<sup>40</sup>

Fire is the most common force of nature to cause loss, though human hands are actually behind more than half of the Minnesota examples. Five of the 14 properties that burned down did so in what appear to be accidental fires. The rest were cases of arson or suspected arson.

The Winnebago Agency House in Blue Earth County's McPherson Township was deliberately burned, though not by vandals. It was used as fuel for a firefighters' training exercise. Built in 1855 as an office and dwelling of the Indian agent for the Winnebago at their Blue Earth reservation, the house was all that remained of a model-farm complex and village constructed between 1855 and 1863 after hunting and fishing became impossible on the small reservation. (The rage of whites after the Dakota War of 1862 so terrified the Winnebago that they consented to be moved to a new reservation in Dakota Territory in 1863.)<sup>41</sup>

Used as a hotel and stagecoach stop in the 1870s and 1880s, the agency house was eventually converted to a home with modern conveniences. It was placed on the National Register in February 1975. In 1983, its fifth owners, Marvin and Pat Preston, unsuccessfully sought funds for renovation. By June 1985 the house was scheduled to be razed (the Prestons having moved out six months earlier when the deteri-

orating southeast corner collapsed). St. Clair firefighters set the house afire on the evening of April 15, 1986.

Dassel, in Meeker County, bears out preservationists' assertion that "Americans are proud of their heritage and are honored when properties in their communities and States are entered in the National Register." The town's West End elevator was one of Minnesota's oldest and best preserved examples of an industrial building still serving the community in the same capacity for which it was built. When nominated to the



*The Titrud round barn in Wright County, Minnesota's only National Register property lost to a tornado*

National Register in March 1985, it was exactly 100 years old and, "except for the vehicles passing by," the site looked the same as it had for more than 50 years.<sup>42</sup>

The elevator's new National Register status inspired the Dassel Village Council to purchase a large, bronze historical marker. In August 1985 a centennial ceremony was held and a

<sup>39</sup> Dennis Gimmestad to Richard Otten, Oct. 31, 1991; Elaine Kaiser to Gimmestad, Nov. 27, 1991; Otten to Dana White, Nov. 25, 1991; Historic American Building Survey (HABS) Memorandum of Agreement—all in Review and Compliance file, Worthington and Sioux Falls Depot, Minnesota Historical Society Archives, MHS. HABS originals are stored at the Library of Congress.

<sup>40</sup> Titrud Round Barn, NRHP nomination form, 1979; Susan Roth to Marcia Lantto, Jan. 12, 1993, both in Titrud Round Barn file, SHPO.

<sup>41</sup> Here and below, Winnebago Agency House, NRHP nomination form, 1975; *Mankato Free Press*, Aug. 26, 1983, Apr. 16, 1986; *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, June 17, 1985—all in Winnebago Agency House file, SHPO.

<sup>42</sup> NRHP brochure; West End Elevator, NRHP nomination form, 1985, West End Elevator file, SHPO.

signed, limited-edition print of the elevator was commissioned in honor of its anniversary and Register listing. A grant proposal for funds to paint the exterior of the building and reshingle the roof was prepared, and plans were made to publish a brochure explaining how the century-old machinery lifted grain.<sup>43</sup>

Then, in February 1987, a fire destroyed the working interior of the elevator, which contained 3,000 bushels of corn. Careless smoking by a group of boys was determined to be the cause. The ruins were razed in July.<sup>44</sup>

The fire catalyzed a group of history-minded Dassel residents. “The idea of a historical society and museum in Dassel has been tossed about for years, but with the loss of the Dassel Farmers [West End] Elevator in February, the talk has been more fervent,” the local newspaper reported. Thirty people attended a May 1987 meeting to gauge interest, and at the end of October the charter meeting of the Dassel Area Historical Society was attended by 250.<sup>45</sup>

After the flurry of activities in 1987, the historical society focused its efforts on identifying a suitable property to house its museum. Five

years later the group reorganized and identified the Universal Laboratories building as its preferred museum site. In July 1993 the vacant building’s owner announced he would donate it to the historical society. The city council voted to accept the donation, “banking heavily on substantial volunteer work from the historical society” to restore and refurbish the building and solicit grants. The city provided insurance, utilities, and general maintenance, acquiring the deed in October 1993.<sup>46</sup>

From 1993 through 1997, the Dassel Area Historical Society gained new members, provided volunteer labor to stabilize the building, and raised funds. The city authorized two \$10,000 allocations for, as Dassel Mayor Gerald Bollman said, “A good museum and cultural activities add to a community’s development as much as industry, housing, and jobs.” The Minnesota Historical Society awarded a total of \$95,000 over three years in state bond-funded county and local Preservation Project grants, which the Dassel society matched.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, the process of nominating the Universal Laboratories building to the National Register was underway. Although a nondescript, two-story wood-frame structure, it is nationally significant for the role the company played during World War II as the country’s first reliable supplier of ergot, a toxic fungus that grows on grains and grasses but also the active ingredient in medicines that treat a variety of ailments from migraines to postpartum bleeding. Dassel’s ergot cottage industry developed in the late 1930s when political upheavals interrupted supplies from Europe and Russia, the world’s primary ergot-producing areas. And, as the National Register nomination describes, ergot derivatives were used during World War II as a coagulant for wounds and for treating combat stress. When Universal Laboratories was sold to British-based Burroughs-Wellcome Company and ceased producing ergot in 1975, the building was left vacant. It was nominated to the National Register in April 1996.<sup>48</sup>

Plans for the building include a community center, performance and gallery space, and the



*Dassel's West End (Farmers) elevator, nominated to the National Register in 1985 and lost to fire two years later, spurred citizens in Meeker County to continue preserving local history.*

<sup>43</sup> *Enterprise and Dispatch* (Dassel and Cokato), July 24, Aug. 21, 1985, Feb. 11, 1987—all in West End Elevator file.

<sup>44</sup> *Enterprise and Dispatch*, Feb. 11, July 22, 1987, West End Elevator file.

<sup>45</sup> *Enterprise and Dispatch*, May 13, p. 1, May 20, p. 2, Oct. 28, p. 1—all 1987.

<sup>46</sup> *Enterprise and Dispatch*, Dec. 23, 1987, p. 1; Mar. 23, p. 1, July 13, p. 1, Oct. 26, p. 12—all 1993.

<sup>47</sup> *Enterprise and Dispatch*, Nov. 9, 1993, p. 1, Apr. 26, 1994, p. 1, Oct. 25, 1994, p. 1, May 9, 1995, p. 1, May, 14 1996, Jan. 21, 1997, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Universal Laboratories Building, NRHP registration form, 1996, Universal Laboratories file, SHPO.





*Unprepossessing Universal Laboratories building, added to the National Register in 1996 and home to the Dassel Area Historical Society*

historical society's museum. "The National Register has lots of advantages and adds credibility," said Carolyn Holje, president of the historical society and editor of the *Dassel-Cokato Enterprise and Dispatch*. "Before the West End Elevator, people in town were not aware of the National Register or the importance of the elevator. Now there's been so much publicity that people are really aware."<sup>49</sup>

Listing on the National Register is an honor that carries some protection and financial incentives to preserve, even if it does not protect properties unilaterally. Market forces, private-property rights, and acts of nature can destroy properties outright, and moving or unsuitable alterations cause them to lose their designation. Many Minnesota properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places; few are lost.

In the three decades since passage of the

National Historic Preservation Act and establishment of the National Register, Minnesota SHPO has amassed an impressive inventory of historic properties in all corners of the state and receives increasing requests for preservation assistance. The number of local heritage preservation commissions increases steadily. Efforts continue to include more cultural environments, landscapes, and historic districts, as well as grittier, more mundane resources such as bridges, barns, and dams.<sup>50</sup>

These varied resources, too, are fragile, and some losses will inevitably occur. But the wins now outnumber the losses. Preservationist John Kuester's observations on the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota capture the movement's spirit as well: "I've seen it evolve from an organization that celebrated failure—the loss of this structure or that—to an organization that is much more proactive, with a limited tolerance for funerals."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Enterprise and Dispatch*, Apr. 23, Aug. 6, both 1996, p. 1; Carolyn Holje, telephone interview with author, Jan. 10, 1997, notes in author's possession.

<sup>50</sup> *Preservation Matters*, Apr. 1996, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Preservation Matters*, Dec. 1996, p. 7.



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