

# MEMBER PROFILE

Krista O'Malley, MNHS Executive Council

Krista O'Malley, CEO and principal of the experience design firm cmnd+m, joined the Minnesota Historical Society's Executive Council in 2019. As a board member and North Star Circle member, O'Malley has achieved a fuller appreciation of MNHS's goal of preserving and telling the stories that comprise our shared, complex history. Several firsthand experiences have inspired O'Malley to share the richness and depth of the MNHS collections with others.

O'Malley recalled a behind-the-scenes collections tour at the Minnesota History Center with emeritus council member Judy Corson. "I look over and see this 1800s steamer trunk, so ornate, and right next to it was what appeared to be a temporary storage container covered in tape. I'm thinking, 'What is the connection here?' The curators at MNHS were able to provide the context. In this case, both items were used by immigrant families moving to Minnesota at different times but experiencing the same emotions."

When O'Malley caught sight of the 10-foot sailboat *Yankee Girl*, built by Minnesotan Gerry Spiess and sailed on a solo voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in 1979, her understanding of the role collections can play in evoking personal memories expanded. O'Malley recalled seeing the boat as a child during a public exhibition in South St. Paul. "History is most exciting when it's personal and brings people together through their recollection of shared moments in time," she noted.

Attending the opening of the *Our Home: Native Minnesota* exhibit, O'Malley learned about the meanings of the objects on display and the stories they tell about the individuals and families who contributed to the exhibit's development. This experience further spoke to the power of personal narrative in understanding broader historical contexts.

In September 2021, O'Malley visited with MNHS art curator Brian Szott to take a closer look at pieces for an exhibition of Minnesota art opening at the Minnesota History Center in February 2022. "Do you know how incredible this is?" she remarked upon entering the storage space, a room filled floor to ceiling with art spanning the decades from the 1830s to present day. Szott explained how works make their way into the collections, from actively sought acquisitions to surprise donations.

Contemplating her experience on various visits, O'Malley applauds MNHS's continuing commitment to providing a forum for conversation. "Everyone has a history. It's the role of MNHS to create opportunities for patrons to make connections and allow



Krista O'Malley, in front of a painting by Clarence Morgan in the MNHS Collections

people to bring their own experience to the table. If stories are told in a compelling way through exhibits and programs, it sparks conversation. We don't know what the conversation will be, but we can set the table and get people talking."

To learn more about ways to invest in the Minnesota Historical Society, please contact Chief Development Officer Jennifer Pogatchnik at 651-259-3116 or [jennifer.pogatchnik@mnhs.org](mailto:jennifer.pogatchnik@mnhs.org).

Visit MNHS Collections Online (<https://search.mnhs.org/>) to see the items mentioned in this piece. *Our Home: Native Minnesota* is on view at the Minnesota History Center and can be explored online at [www.mnhs.org/historycenter/activities/museum/our-home](http://www.mnhs.org/historycenter/activities/museum/our-home).



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