

## MNHS MEMBER TOM H. SWAIN

Eat Slowly, Walk Briskly, and Stay Involved

Born in Minneapolis on July 4, 1921, Tom H. Swain, age 103, has been a member of the Minnesota Historical Society for 68 years. To put this in perspective, he has supported and has been involved with MNHS for over one-third of the organization's history.

Swain graduated from Washburn High School, Minneapolis, when he was 16 years old. He then began taking courses at the University of Minnesota, where he worked in the school's athletic ticket office to pay for college. In 1942, he graduated from the university's Carlson School of Management and subsequently served four years overseas with the US Army Air Corps. Swain then returned to Minnesota to work as the university's first athletic scholastic adviser in which his role was to keep grades up and students like Bud Grant and Verne Gagne in school.

During his lifetime Tom had 16 salaried jobs, with eight of those in the private sector—including at the St. Paul Companies (now Travelers) for 23 years—and eight in public service. He served as chief of staff to Governor Elmer L. Andersen, as vice president for University Relations at the University of Minnesota, and as chair of numerous state commissions.

From 1985 to 1990 (age 85–90) Swain was the mayor of Lilydale, and at age 100, in collaboration with the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, he raised \$600,000 in support of efforts to combat climate change. His role in history as someone with a relentless commitment to making Minnesota a better place to live cannot be overstated. He truly embodies one of his mottos: "You're never too old to take a risk."

But according to Swain, his most meaningful career experience began in 1956, when he was hired to be the executive director of the Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission. The purpose of the 1958 centennial celebration was to remind Minnesotans of the great state they lived in. More than 900,000 Minnesotans—almost one-third of the total population at that time—participated in one or more of the commemorative events. According to a January 1, 1959, issue of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, "The name and fame (of Minnesota) were spread across the world."



Tom H. Swain holding his memoir, *Citizen Swain: Tales from a Minnesota Life*

When asked about his experience as executive director, Swain replied, "Myself, I learned a lot about the state I didn't know before. And picked up a terrific yen for history, too." In the same year he began work on the centennial, Swain became a member of MNHS—and he's remained a member ever since. He feels fortunate to be a longtime citizen of Minnesota and notes that understanding and celebrating the state's history is a part of that state pride.

What can Minnesotans do today to ensure that the state remains a good place to live? "Stay vibrant and solve problems to make people's lives better," says Swain. With a century's worth of wisdom, he also shares his advice for living a long life: "Eat slowly, walk briskly, and stay involved." And of course, "If you live in Minnesota, wear a hat."

Interested in learning how you can support the work of MNHS? Contact Jennifer Pogatchnik, Vice President of Advancement, at [jennifer.pogatchnik@mnhs.org](mailto:jennifer.pogatchnik@mnhs.org) or (651) 259-3116.



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