



Anoka County  
Historical Society



# HISTORY 21

Volume 47 No.5 September-October 2017

Scandium (atomic number 21) is our spirit element

[AnokaCountyHistory.org](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org)

*History 21 (in honor of the 21 cities in Anoka County) is published by the Anoka County Historical Society six times yearly as a member benefit. The ACHS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible within the allowable limits of the law.*

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*Front Cover: Coon Rapids School Band circa 1937. Object ID#: 887.1.09*

*Front Row: John Foley, Mary Foley, Dave McArdle, unidentified.*

*2nd Row: Joyce Miller, [unintelligible] Soterberg, Allie Soterberg, Roberta Haines, unidentified, Jim Edwards, Bob Jacob.*

*3rd Row: unidentified, Bob Ramacher, Unidentified, Unidentified, Daisy Westland, Evelyn Swanson, Earl Jacob, Jerry Jacob.*

*Back: L.O Jacob.*

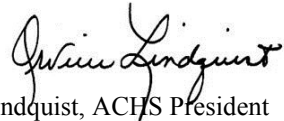


## From the President

Summer is over; so is the State Fair . . . time for “back to school”.

Whether your school days took place in a one-room schoolhouse, in a new suburban school of the 1960s or in a technology-laden building of today, going to school is one of our unifying experiences. Love it or hate it, school days are part of our childhoods and formative to our adult lives. September gives me more feelings of nostalgia than any other time of the year. Seeing the ads for new clothes, lunch boxes and backpacks bring me right back to being a teenager . . . not to mention how my inner geek emerges when I see all those marvelous school supplies! Even if you remember Junior High or High School with something less than fondness, take a moment now to think back. Find something or someone that was important to you from those days. Maybe even reach out to that old school friend or make a visit to your hometown. Think about how much that world has changed since “way back when” and how far YOU have come.

In my younger years, I was one of those kids who had trouble sleeping the night before the first day of school. Truth be told, I still do.

  
Orville Lindquist, ACHS President



## From the Director

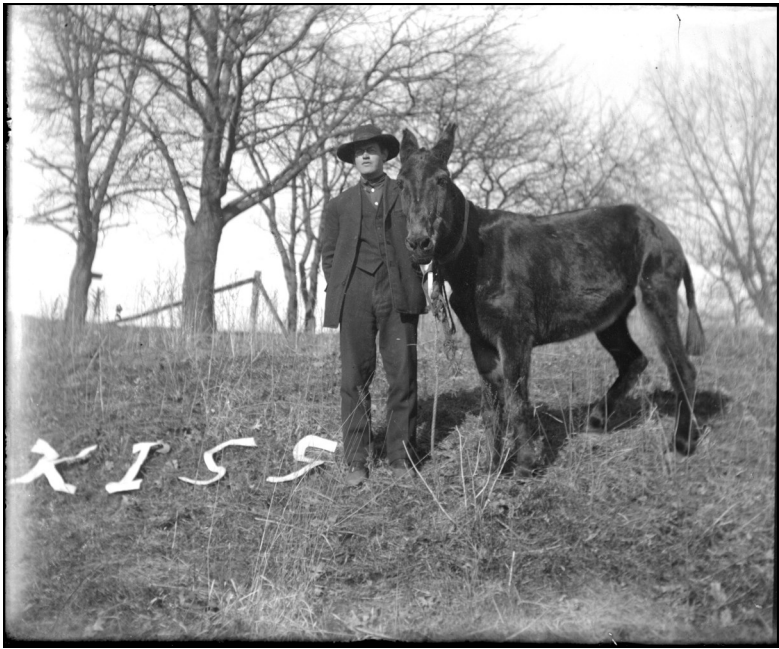
Trying to disrupt the assumption that history is only for people who seek out information from the past, ACHS took advantage of a generous offer from Chema Malu in August. The Main



Street Anoka storefront donated a portion of the space they occupied in Northtown Mall for a pop-up exhibit and gift shop, allowing us to get in front of different people than we typically see. Although a temporary location, it afforded us the opportunity of creating a fun space to showcase our publications, the art of Jon Arfstrom, and some free handouts. The partnerships that exist between ACHS and businesses like Chema Malu, as well as the other non-profits in Anoka County, are vital for our existence. It’s with true gratitude for these relationships that I write this.



Rebecca Ebnet-Mavencamp, Executive Director



Object ID# 2005.1361.279

## WHAT TO DO WITH THAT?

Museums collect stories of past generations to allow present generations a better understanding of the events and circumstances that brought us here. Unfortunately, not every story can be saved, nor every artifact preserved.

In an ideal world, the collections of ACHS would reflect the exact demographic nature of the County we serve, as well as the interests of those individuals and their era-specific lifestyle. In reality, however, an artifact collection is only as strong and diverse as the donations we receive and the donors they represent. Additionally, the donations that do make it into our archives often only reflect the best sides of the residents who owned them—but clearly some break that rule!

What does a museum, or history center, do when an artifact forces you to take a mental step back? ACHS feels it's critical to not reject items that come to us based on how distastefully we may perceive them; keeping in mind the historical context in which items lived or worked helps us to accurately reflect the individuals who owned them. However, just because we choose to preserve a tarnished view of the people who preceded us, doesn't mean that it is always appropriate to exhibit or display these items. If we do choose to display them, the context or understanding, both of the past and the present, must be acknowledged.

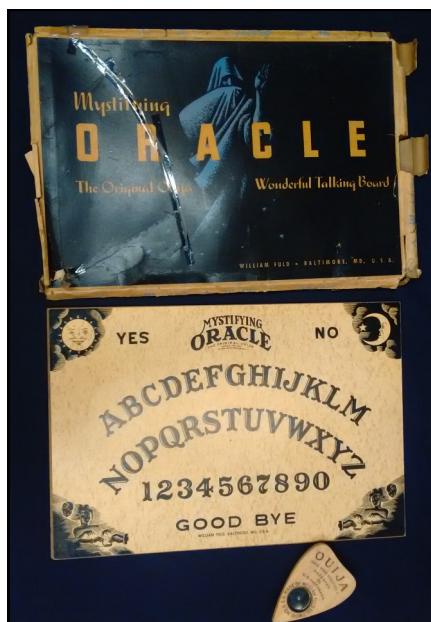
A few things in the ACHS collection traverse the spectrum of potentially offensive materials.

The above image originated as a glass plate negative. This means that the photographer inserted a small sheet of glass that had been treated with a dry, gelatin-type emulsion on one side into the camera, then exposed the glass to light entering through a lens to record the image. This particular negative (reversed into the positive

when it was scanned for the ACHS collection) comes from the Downs Family collection, and is one of many such negatives, most of them dated c. 1900 and taken in either Ramsey or Anoka. In this one, some effort was clearly taken to send the message of “Kiss A--,” or possibly “Kiss my A--.” Since this is a sentiment that might well be expressed today, it is interesting to have this photograph, which shows us quite clearly that people living in Anoka County almost 120 years ago were not too dissimilar to us. It serves as a good reminder that people of the past were not as uptight or straight-laced as we sometimes imagine them; they had senses of humor like ours, used insults as we do, and were sometimes willing to go to great lengths to thumb their nose at someone. In this case, the message here is subtle and mild enough that we feel comfortable sharing this photo on our Facebook page, as well as here in the newsletter.

Another glass plate negative in the collection bears a more explicit swear word etched down the front of a young man’s shirt. While we reprinted the first image in this newsletter without alteration, the second would require censoring to publish it, as many would find it a great deal more offensive: the profanity “pig f-----” could indicate a literally inappropriate relationship with pigs, or simply an expression of derision. Since the context for this is missing, we can only guess as to its real truth. Was it written to indicate a strong dislike of the person in the picture? As a literal accusation? A pal ragging on a friend? We don’t know. We do believe that having a more rounded, rather than a rosy, view of Anoka County’s past is beneficial. To that end, we will preserve the image even though we probably wouldn’t display it publically.

Another item potentially more controversial than potty-mouthed photographs is the Ouija Board in the collection. People view this item through many different lenses. For some it represents a toy, but for others it strikes a much deeper, religious chord. “Talking boards” as they were known outside of the name brand, were developed in the mid-1800s as part of the spiritualist movement that swept across America during that time. These boards usually depicted the letters of the alphabet, numbers 0-9, plus “Yes” and “No.” People used them to gain answers more quickly while communicating with spirits of the dead. The Ouija board is the familiar version of a talking board developed by entrepreneurs Charles Kennard and Elijah Bond of Massachusetts in 1891. The pair patented and sold it as a game or toy. Later, William Fuld ran the company and he and his descendants continued to manufacture the game well into the 20th century. It did not become widely controversial until the movie *The Exorcist* was released in 1973; the movie depicts a young girl being possessed by a demon through her use of a Ouija board. After the movie’s release, Christian religious groups have objected to the use of talking boards, considering them offensive and potentially dangerous. Practitioners of the Wiccan religion sometimes use talking boards, often



Object ID# 585

cautioning users to take proper precautions according to their ritual practices. This complicated recent history coupled with the fact that Ouija boards are still bought and used by many people today, means ACHS must have a larger context in mind when exhibiting the one in the collection; while it is just a toy to some, to others it is a tool, or even something that is culturally offensive.

We have a couple pairs of Victoria's Secret underwear in the collection here at ACHS. Does that surprise you? We have underwear from earlier eras, including corsets, pantaloons, and petticoats. It's unlikely anyone would think twice if we displayed any of these in the exhibit hall, although that would be quite scandalous to someone from the 19th century. Somehow it feels different when the underwear is "old." But residents of Anoka County purchase and wear lingerie, and just as we have an interest in how people clothed themselves in the past, people 50 years from now will be interested in how people dress themselves today.



*Victoria's Secret bag and underwear (never worn). Object ID# 3058 & 3059*

In 1916, a city of Anoka resident named Roe Chase wrote a pageant titled "History of Agriculture," which was subsequently performed at the Anoka amphitheater. The play consists of 12 separate scenes, placed in a vaguely chronological order. It begins with a Biblical scene, then progresses on through scenes of agriculture in several cultures, such as Ancient Egypt, China, and Early America, with Native Americans, Pilgrims, and enslaved peoples. In the time and place Chase wrote this play, his understanding of some of these cultures was different from our understanding today; a consequence of this is that some of the depictions are fairly

offensive to modern eyes. The photograph below depicts actors in black face, and scene six, set in China, instructs the "about forty Chinese men and women" characters to "all jabber Chinese words such as 'Wong ting che fang tong wan hung chho,' etc in a shrill voice." Keeping these things in mind, the script of the pageant is something that ACHS chooses to keep and preserve, as it gives us information about what people in Anoka County knew and believed at that time. We would likely not consider staging the pageant as a live play, however, since



*Cast of the "History of Agriculture" by Roe Chase at the Anoka Amphitheater, 1916. Object ID# 2076.1.97*



*Nazi paraphernalia brought back by an Anoka County soldier after WWII.*

that format does not allow for the context and interpretation that are possible for an artifact in a museum.

In our current WWII exhibit, there is a section displaying items that soldiers brought home with them. Those stationed in Germany often brought back Nazi materials, and a few of those have made their way into the collection at ACHS. One man brought back some knives

previously owned by Germans, which have the swastika on them, and also a large red banner, which features the swastika in a white circle on one end. These items were brought to the United States as spoils of war, taken from a defeated enemy, and were later donated to ACHS by that soldier's family. When we put up our WWII exhibit last December, we wanted to display these items because they are interesting and show a common behavior of American servicemen stationed in Europe late in the war. But Nazi symbols have very strong historical meanings and context, so we chose how to display them carefully; they lay flat in a locked exhibit case, with the banner folded up so that only part of it is showing. This, and the signs that we have put out with these artifacts, make their context clear as things brought home by an American soldier in the wake of Nazi Germany's defeat. To display them in another manner, such as to hang the banner at full-length on the wall, would have been less appropriate.

The current political context for these artifacts from Nazi Germany has changed since we put up the exhibit. It is part of our job as historians and museum curators to understand that perceptions of imagery change around us, sometimes rapidly. How do we in the history world respond to these changes? Removing them from the exhibit is not our current choice (though eventually that section of the exhibit may change to something else entirely). Rather, we will try to remain aware of the changing context of the present, and be prepared to hold a conversation with anyone visiting the museum who might have concerns about the artifacts being on display.

Culturally sensitive materials like Nazi swastikas, Ouija boards, and pin-up art can be on display if done carefully and with background accompanying them to create context. Items such as the photos, however, would cross a line for many families and will remain in a red folder to reduce the possibility of offence. Preservation and exhibition are two separate aspects of museum work, and while we try to make sure that all artifacts are preserved, not all of them are appropriate for the exhibit hall.

It is important to remember that Acquisition staff and committees are a crucial gatekeeper to what future generations know about the lives we led. We would like, if possible, to preserve an accurate picture of Anoka County's past, which often means thinking about preserving an accurate picture of Anoka County's present. This is not always easy, and mistakes can be made. If we keep our eyes and minds open, though, we have a better chance of recognizing and preserving those artifacts that give us a thorough, well-rounded view of our history.

## Halloween Happenings

With September upon us, the Halloween Capital of the World is gearing up for its favorite holiday! We here at ACHS are doing the same. Over the past few months we have set up a photo studio in the front of the Exhibit Hall here at the History Center. Having this dedicated space with appropriate lighting and back-drops to take photographs of our artifacts has proven immensely valuable already, and it will continue to make the collections better moving forward!

We took advantage of the studio recently to make sure that we have high-quality photographs of all our Anoka Halloween artifacts. In addition to the many buttons and medallions, we have some rarer items as well, including the license plate topper pictured at the top left. We look forward to expanding our collection of Anoka Halloween artifacts as that organization moves towards its 100th year.



**HALLOWEEN**  
unlock<sup>ed</sup>

September 20

October 11

Spend an evening at the museum as we unveil Halloween Collectibles in the ACHS collection. From the earliest Anoka Halloween buttons to original art from the designer of the Halloween Medallion, Alyce Vick. Join other Halloween lovers in September or October and share your stories about the Halloween Capital of the World. Plated gourmet dinner and behind the scenes tour included. Social Hour begins at 5:30 p.m.

**Tickets:** \$50, available for purchase at [AnokaCountyHistory.org](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org) and at ACHS. Seating is limited.



## The Anokan Artist: Alexander S. Masley

We have the good fortune here at ACHS to be (re) discovering treasures in our collection on a regular basis. Recently, staff member Don stumbled across a series of original drawings that were done for the 1922 Anokan, the yearbook of Anoka High School. In researching the name of the artist, Alexander S. Masley, we realized that these were some early pieces of art from someone who became internationally famous later in his art career.

Alexander Masley was born in 1903 to Czechoslovakian parents in Akeley, Minnesota. The family had moved to Minneapolis by 1905, and the 1920 federal census shows the Masleys in Anoka. By that time, Alexander was 16 and attending Anoka High School.

By his senior year, “Alex” was well-known among his classmates for his art. The 1922 Class Will states that he bequeaths his “artistic genius” to the “already adequate store” of two younger students. He and fellow senior Martha J. Mox are listed as the official Artists on the Annual Board of the Anokan for that year. They collaborated on the artwork heading each class section of the yearbook (Seniors, Juniors, etc.), but Alex did the section art for the rest of the 1922 yearbook (Faculty, Athletics, Press, Alumni, etc.) There are 12 illustrations in total, including the four collaborations between Alex and Martha; we have the original drawings for all but one of them here at ACHS, donated many years later by the woman who was Editor-in-Chief of the Anokan in 1922. The class illustrations are a set, showing the development of the students from an “ape” as freshmen up to being a wise older man as seniors. The other section illustrations show Alex’s talent, his style shifting to fit with the topic of each drawing.

The 1922 class prophecy printed in the Anokan pinned him as being editor of the Chicago Tribune Art and Cartooning Department later in his life, but the truth is even more interesting. He went on to study first at the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis School of Art, and then studied abroad in Europe during the 1930s. He became focused on wood engraving, wood-block prints, and printmaking, and it was in these areas that he became well-known as an artist. During the 1940s, he finished degrees at the UofM and Columbia University. Having earned his doctorate, Alex was invited by the University of New Mexico to create a Department of Art Education in Albuquerque, a position that he held until he retired in 1969. The department later named a building after him, and Alexander Masley passed away in 1996.

ACHS will be putting up a lobby exhibit about Masley and the 1922 Anokan artwork in the next couple of weeks. Stop in to learn more about him and see the art!



## RESEARCH LIBRARY FINDS

Parades and festivals throughout the summer sparkle with the crowns from each town's crowned Ambassadors and Royalty. The cities of St. Francis, East Bethel, Fridley, and Anoka all have royalty that represent their city throughout the year.

While Anoka's Halloween Parade dates back to 1920, the city Queens did not begin to appear in the newspapers until 1941. The newspaper described the 1941 event specifically as a "beauty contest," the winner of which would then go on to attend community and civic events. With the United States committed in World War II and many men in the County fighting overseas, the Anoka Halloween parade took a hiatus for two years, but the next Queen didn't appear until 1946 when Marion Peterson was crowned. Marion would represent the city at the St. Paul Winter Carnival and Minneapolis' Aquatennial.

The local newspaper is a time-capsule for details of these early parades and events. What did people read about each week, and what news was important to the town? ACHS has a collection of local newspapers from around the county on microfilm all available to browse on our digital microfilm machine.

Come browse an interesting year, or look for something specific, you may trip across a fun find, like who was crowned Halloween Queen.



1946 Halloween Queen entrants at Greenhaven



Reprinted from the *Anoka Union*, October 29, 1941.

### ***Harriet Pitchford Halloween Queen***

*Miss Harriet Pitchford, petite, charming, twinkling-eyes brunet, will reign as "Miss Anoka, Queen of the Halloween Capital of America," for the coming year and represent Anoka in the Minneapolis Aquatennial next summer. Her two attendants, Miss Evelyn Leger and Miss Ruth Johnson, will be seen on the queen's float in the parade Friday night. ...*

*The 25 contestants, attired in formal wear, were reviewed in a group, from which Cedric Adams chose six girls to compete in a quiz program. The girls were then presented in groups of 10, and the winners announced. Miss Pitchford was award first place with a gift of \$25 in cash and a beautiful bouquet of roses. Misses Leger and Johnson each received \$5 in cash and the honor of being attendants to the queen in the parade Friday night.*



# Murder

# Mystery

## Hollywood Lies September 27 at the Anoka County History Center

It's a night of glamour at Hollywood's prestigious movie "Eric" awards. As movie stars and directors arrive they reel from news that Best Actor nominee Tom Speed has died in a mysterious car accident. Why did this actor have to die, who isn't what they seem, who will come out of the night as winners and who will be unmasked as a murderer? Gourmet, buffet dinner.

## Murder at Sea October 18 at the Mad Hatter Restaurant

Board the SS. Libertania at the Mad Hatter Restaurant for a trip across the Atlantic set in 1914. The moment the ship sets sail, the Captain announces war has been declared on Germany. In the aftermath of this momentous news, the Captain is shot....dead. All passengers and crew are suspect. Can the murderer be caught and their secrets unearthed by the time the Libertania arrives in Southampton? Light buffet. Sponsored by the Weaver Family.

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### Get your Tickets now!

It's a who-done-it night of mayhem! Become detectives, interrogate suspects, try to get away with murder, or just watch the fun at ACHS's inaugural murder mystery dinners. Social time begins at 5:30 p.m. and seating is limited for both events. Character profiles given prior to event. Shhhh they're confidential until the night. No spilling secrets.

**Tickets:** \$50/each Available for purchase at [AnokaCountyHistory.org](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org) or at the Anoka County History Center.



### ACHS Volunteer Venture

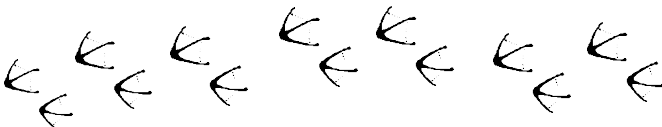
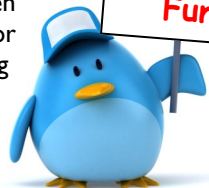
You may have noticed a new emailed newsletter in your inboxes this past month dedicated exclusively to keeping up with all the volunteer happenings around the History Center. Our amazing volunteers do so much for our organization: you wash dishes after events, scan photographs, travel back in time to work in our 1920s General Store or answer the phone on the first ring. On top of that, new opportunities come around more frequently than this main newsletter can keep up with, or some of our volunteers aren't members and won't receive this publication.

So—I have created the ACHS Volunteer Venture. This monthly e-newsletter will keep all of our volunteers up to date on new volunteer opportunities, and stories about what other volunteers have been up to.

If any ACHS member would like to join the ACHS Volunteer ranks let me know and I can officially place your name on our volunteer roles. You will then keep up to date with volunteer happenings and needs around ACHS and the County with this new e-newsletter. We keep history alive and help others discover the richness in our county because of help from people like you.

THANK YOU!

Sara Given  
 Volunteer Coordinator  
[Sara@AnokaCountyHistory.org](mailto:Sara@AnokaCountyHistory.org)



**Nowthen Threshing Show!**

The General Store opened to the Threshing Show crowds August 18-20 and began selling candy and pickles right away to excited kids and adults. We sold over 9 gallons of pickles, and countless dum-dums, smarties and other treats.

Those who entered the store traveled back in time to 1920. While some took to time-travel well, others became confused and wouldn't believe us until we pointed out the date on the calendar on the wall. With the passage of the 18th amendment prohibiting alcohol, and the 19th amendment giving women the vote, there was plenty to talk about around the store.

Thank you to all who visited the store, if you placed an order and are waiting for your vacuum cleaner or washing machine, we are still waiting for the shipment to arrive. 😊 Also thank you to all the

volunteers who jumped right in, helped with important candy choice decisions, and kept our store the best spot on the show grounds.



**ACHS Remembers**



To those members, volunteers, friends and neighbors who are no longer with us —you will be missed.

Maxine Larson  
1933-2017

**General Donations**

Anonymous  
 Richard Bergling  
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As a Business Member you receive membership benefits, a listing in our newsletter and website, an ACHS window cling to display— \$75



**NEW!** (For Individuals or Businesses) A Sustaining Membership includes the benefits of a regular membership, a shout-out in our newsletter, and recognition on our web site. You also receive an annual free personalized Group Tour for you and 14 friends (must be scheduled in advance). Will come with complimentary refreshments.— \$150

If you want more information or your business would like to become a member or sponsor with ACHS call, 763.421.0600, email [Audra@AnokaCountyHistory.org](mailto:Audra@AnokaCountyHistory.org) or visit our website [AnokaCountyHistory.org](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org)

MONTHLY

**Visit the History Center! Open 5 days a week, NOW FOR FREE:**

Tuesday 10 a.m.—8 p.m.  
 Wednesday-Friday 10 a.m.—5 p.m.  
 Saturday 10 a.m.—4 p.m.

**ACHS Board Meetings**

Second Thursday of each month. 6 p.m. at the Anoka History Center  
 Open to membership and the public.

**Rum River Writers Group**

Every Thursday, 1:15 p.m. at the Anoka County History Center  
 Open to interested and aspiring writers

**Rum River Rovers Baseball Team**

Watch and cheer on our Anoka County baseball team. These players play a gentleman’s game using original 1860s rules. Full schedule at: [anokacountyhistory.org/rum-river-rovers-vintage-base-ball/](http://anokacountyhistory.org/rum-river-rovers-vintage-base-ball/)

**Ghosts of Anoka Walking Tours**

Join a costumed guide on a tour of history of mystery around the city of Anoka. Public tours run throughout September and October.  
 Tickets: \$9 adults, \$7 members & children (age 6-17) Available for purchase at [AnokaCountyHistory.org](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org) or at the Anoka History Center.

**Night at the Museum Dinner: Halloween Unlocked**

September 20 & October 11 at the Anoka History Center.  
 Tickets: \$50. See Page 8 for more details.

**Murder Mystery: Hollywood Lies**

September 27 at the Anoka History Center  
 Tickets \$50. See page 11 for more details.

**Murder Mystery: Murder at Sea**

October 18 at the Mad Hatter Restaurant  
 Tickets \$50. See page 11 for more details.

**Keep up with the Fun at ACHS!**

Don’t wait another two months to discover what the ACHS is up to. Find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We share photographs and artifacts from the collections, updates about upcoming programs, and a behind the scenes look at antics around the History Center.



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