



## HERITAGE PRESERVATION/DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION MEETING AGENDA

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Wednesday, February 12, 2025

6:00 P.M.

3033 St. Croix Trail  
Afton, MN 55001

### AGENDA

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

**2. ROLL CALL**

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair Edwards  
\_\_\_\_\_ Vice Chair Livingston  
\_\_\_\_\_ Commissioner Bolton-Iverson  
\_\_\_\_\_ Commissioner Vujovich  
\_\_\_\_\_ Commissioner Thomas

**3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

A. Approval of Agenda for February 12, 2025 meeting

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. Minutes of the January 8, 2025 Meeting

**5. BUSINESS**

A. Walking Tour

- i. Q&A with Matt Thueson, who designed the QR Code-based walking tour for Stillwater and adjacent cities.
- ii. Review of Draft Walking Tour Materials Provided by Kate Thomas and Leslie Thomas

B. SHPO Grant:

- a. Log hours: 75 hours needed
  - Please bring your total hours to the meeting so we can have a running total

**A quorum of the City Council or Other Commissions may be present to receive information.**

[Link to City of Marine Walking Tour Example](#)

Here's an example of what the QR code online history sites look like that Matt created for the other cities:

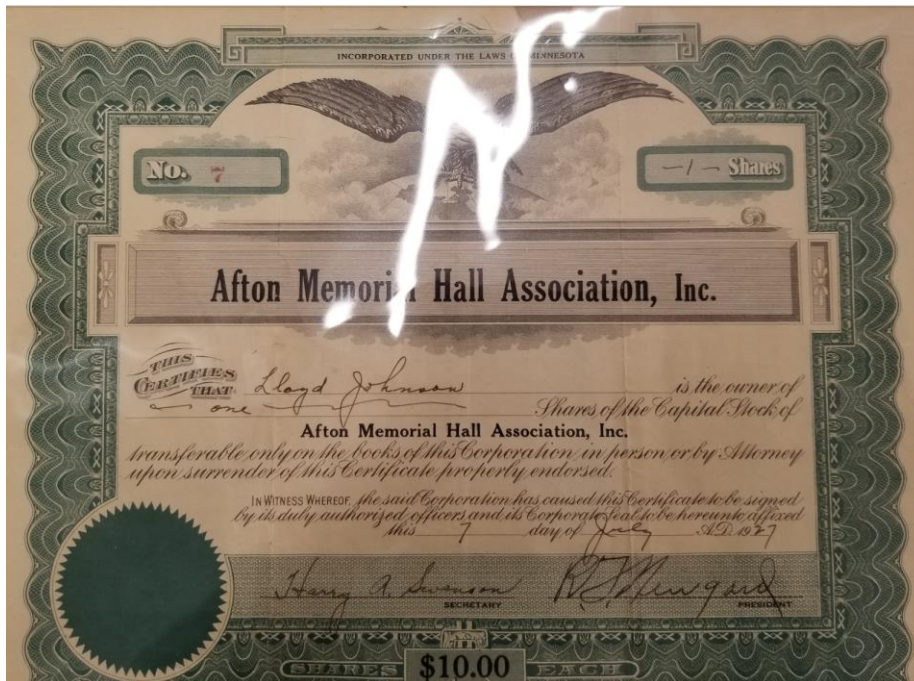
<https://historicplace.org/marine/marine-creamery/>

They have clickable photos but ours will be a clickable list of sites.

**Museum building and historical society history recap, written by Leslie Thomas on behalf of the Afton Historical Museum for the Online Walking Tour.**

**MUSEUM BUILDING HISTORY**

Congregational Church of Afton: constructed in 1868 by the Congregational Church Society. The Congregationalists owned the building until 1904, when declining membership influenced its sale to the American Methodists. In 1926, the American Methodists rejoined the Swedish Methodist church in Afton and sold the building to a group of Afton men's organizations, including the Modern Woodmen of America and the American Legion. Later that year, the building suffered damage during a severe weather event on May 25, 1926, called a Cloudburst. [\(Link to Cloudburst story and photos\)](#) The building was moved one lot south to its present location and set onto a new raised basement. An attic and stage were also added for music, plays and other community events. Not too long after, the Citizens State Bank foreclosed on their mortgage and the Village of Afton purchased it next. A new mortgage was issued in 1928 to the Afton Memorial Hall Association.



Source: Afton Historical Museum, Museum history file (Add image ID #)  
(Note: better quality scanned image needed)

The new stage was a popular feature, “Giving Afton the nearest thing to a theater.” Former longtime Afton resident Sandy Berglund remembers acting as the wicked witch during a puppet play of the Wizard of Oz in grade school. There was also a community piano and longtime Afton residents recall music events held in the building.

List of names having subscribed  
to the piano at the Afton Hall

Bashin	B.B.	100
Burford	J.H.	100
Borum	Chas.	100
Carlson	Ernest	100
Frederick	Paul	100
Fether	George	100
Karlman	Hels	100
Karlman	Alie	100
Kallgren	E.H.	100
Karlman	Hels	100
Kallgren	Al	100
Keys from	Wm	100
Johnson	Fred	100
Johnson	Edward	100
Johnson	A.L.	0
Johnson	G.V.	0
Johnson	Oscar	0
Lofgren	Martin	200
Melius	K.G.	100
Nelson	Chas	100
O'Connell	M.	100
Peterson	Dwan	100
Piedell	Fred	100
Piedell	Ernest	100
Piedell	Al	

Source: Afton Historical Museum, Museum History file (Add image ID #)

(Note: better quality scanned image needed)

The extent to which the building was used for government affairs during the thirties, forties and fifties is unknown. By the 1960s, an "Afton Village Hall" sign hung above the front door, and council meetings were held here. Two events in the 1970s brought media attention on the building as a polling place. In a vote taken here in 1970, village residents approved the consolidation of Afton Village and Afton Township to become the City of Afton. The newly incorporated municipal government met here until the present city hall was completed in 1983. The building received national attention when Vice-presidential candidate Walter Mondale cast his vote here for himself and Jimmy Carter in the 1976 presidential election. Senator Mondale and his wife Joan were legal residents of Afton at the time.

Add previously written text about VP Mondale & related images here. Here's another great story by longtime Afton resident Cynthia Davidson Bend, author, and mother of former Afton mayor Richard Bend.

## A Powerful Brush with Greatness

Cynthia Davidson Bend

I was a non-political mom in 1964 when I heard my first major campaign speech delivered by "Fritz" Mondale, soon to be Senator Mondale. He spoke from a podium somewhere in St. Paul. What surfaces from the holes of my memory is awed admiration of his command of his subject matter and the array of facts he mustered to support his position, all delivered with the smooth indisputable clarity of conviction.

Memory holds much stronger on my next brush with the soon-to-be Vice-President of the United States of America. In 1976, Afton, on the St. Croix River just east of St. Paul, was still a small rural town, well known for its Fourth of July parade. But, on this Saturday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Bicentennial took precedence. This pre-election event was to be led by Senator Mondale, Guest Dignitary, and our neighbor, Dawson Bradshaw, was to supply transportation down the main street of Afton in his horse and buggy.

On that blazing July 3<sup>rd</sup> I was slated to drive Dawson's second buggy. For the event I was antequely attired in a dress from my grandmother's distant past - a gray silk gown spangled with pink rosebuds. Large black George and I clicked down two miles of asphalt from our house to the starting point where we were assigned the spot just behind Mondale's patriotically festooned buggy. The milling marchers in or out of costume, in wagons or antique cars, on bicycles, horses, roller skates or feet, were finally subdued.

The starting gun fired.

Dawson Bradshaw held Pheasant, his shining sorrel, to a high-stepping walk as the red, white and blue bunting lightly rippled with the



breeze. Soon-to-be Vice-President Mondale sat high on the back seat of the open buggy attending to waves, smiles and cheers from the admiring multitude lining the quarter-mile street through Afton. My steed had a very different response to the starting gun and the celebratory din. George abandoned the discipline of his five precisely cued gaits and decided the racetrack would better suit his mood. As he bolted the short distance between his muzzle and Mondale's back, I abandoned my demure-lady role and, to the sound of ripping silk, hauled at the reins with maximum power, my serene expression replaced by a fierce grimace as my small strength vied with my steed's iron mouth. I had a choice: to let George race into the milling crowd or hold him straight where his speed would be blocked by the lead buggy, his flaring nostrils steaming Mondale's neck. As the illustrious Guest Dignitary felt George's hot breath - with the likely consideration of teeth to follow, Mondale turned and faced me with a certain toughness which must have served him well when facing angry rivals. But George was unmoved, and I held to my best-of-bad choices, avoiding a chariot race by guiding him up against Mondale's sedate buggy.

The drive ended with my apology; "Fritz" Mondale, in spite the grassy drool staining his white collar, gave me his forgiveness.

Source: Cynthia Davidson Bend, *The Afton Historian*, June 2009. Afton Historical Museum, Historical Newspapers IF (Add item ID #)

Following the completion of the present Afton City Hall, the City of Afton leased the building to the Afton Historical Society. They held their grand opening here in June, 1988 and still occupy the building today.

### Sources

Phone conversation between Afton Historical Museum Vice President Leslie Thomas and former Afton resident Sandy Berglund.

Esther C. Robb, *History of the Afton Methodist Church Afton, Minnesota 1854-1954*, (Star-Observer Publishing Company: Hudson, 1954)

MacDonald & Mack Architects, Engineering Systems, Inc. and Oertel Architects, Afton Museum Condition Assessment report prepared for the Afton Historical Museum, 2021

Edward D. Neill, *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley*, (North Star Publishing Company: 1881), 402-3;

Edwin G. Robb, *Afton Remembered* (Afton Historical Society Press: Afton, 1996)

Special Collections File, Afton Historical Museum, Afton MN



## Cloudburst

On May 25, 1926 an extremely heavy rain event pummeled Afton after a period of drought, delivering a reported 4 feet of sediment into the village from the surrounding hills.

The Stillwater Gazette reported on June 2, 1926 that it “had been the driest May since 1900.” The rainfall deficiency for the year was 4.42 inches and it was 3.9 degrees above normal temperature. Pastures were observed as “practically burned up”. Then, on the afternoon of May 25, 1926, a cloudburst of “great intensity struck Afton and its immediate vicinity, such as never before was experienced within the memory of any of the oldest inhabitants.” A member of Afton’s Swedish Lutheran Church described the Cloudburst like this:

*Cellars, living rooms and streets were flooded with rushing, debris-laden, tidelike waves of water. In the twinkling of an eye, gullies were filled with roaring avalanches of water, and gently flowing trout streams were transformed into raging torrents. Tons of silt were deposited in cellars and on living room floors, and a considerable amount of poultry and young livestock was drowned. While attempting to close the kitchen door of his home against the inrushing water, Alfred Swanlund was overwhelmed for a moment when an uprooted tree or log was hurled against the door, shooting through the kitchen and out the door on the opposite side. Several families were forced to seek shelter in their attics.*

The Stillwater Gazette reported on May 26, 1926 that the storms isolated Afton, both by wire and by road. Six bridges were washed out, 300 feet of railroad track was damaged, and highways were damaged so that they were only passable by foot. Farm machinery was left buried in fields, home foundations were damaged, business houses were ruined, and farm outbuildings were blown away by wind.



*Silt deposition in Afton Village after storm event May 26, 1926 and damaged structures.*  
Source: Afton Historical Museum ([Add image ID #](#)).



*Erosion of roads after storm event exposes drainage pipe.*  
*Image source: Afton Historical Museum. (Add image ID #)*

Note: An economic study focusing on agriculture and soil erosion completed in the late 1930s for Washington County, Minnesota noted, “Both sheet and gully erosion have long been evident, but the effect on crop yields was relatively small during the earlier decades...during the very droughty years in the past decade soils became extremely loose and powdery and were in poor condition to withstand heavy downpours.” Decades of unsustainable farming practices and livestock grazing lead to widescale erosion throughout the Great Plains states during the 1920s. This combined with several major droughts caused the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

In response, the Soil Erosion Service (now the NRCS) was created in 1933 to assist farmers with soil conservation. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was also established in 1933 as part of the New Deal public work relief program. The CCC employed many workers throughout MN, including Washington County. In Afton they worked on road and water diversion projects, installed rock and sod flumes, fenced livestock, and planted thousands of trees to prevent further erosion, and repair rill and gully formation. Much of their work is still part of Afton’s landscape today.

### Sources

Stillwater Gazette June 2, 1926, Minnesota Historical Society Digital Newspaper  
Stillwater Gazette May 27, 1926, Minnesota Historical Society Digital Newspaper  
Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church. Luther League. Album Committee. (1932). After fifty years, Swedish evangelical Lutheran church. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society.  
A Brief History of the NRCS <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/history/brief-history-nrcs>  
Civilian Conservation Corps, U.S., Company 1774-V, Bayport, Minnesota. *Vets Voice*, April 19, 1940 through Sept 20, 1940. Minnesota Historical Society, collection.mndigital.org/catalog/mhs:4730 Accessed 20 Jan 2025.  
*Washington County Minnesota. (1940). Preliminary Report of Washington County Land Use Committee.*

## AFTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY HISTORY

*Note: the list of people who have generously dedicated their time and talent to the Afton Historical Museum during the past 45 years is long, and most are not recorded here. For more information on the museum's history, please contact the museum.*

**1979:** The Afton Historical Society organized with a nine-member Board of Directors. Maurice Scroggins served as temporary chairman for the Afton Historical Society's formation and first meetings

<Need photo of Maurice Scroggins>

**1980-1997:** (Note: I edited Gloria's write-up from the draft walking tour Ron provided) Gloria Haslund elected museum first president of the Afton Historical Society. She worked tirelessly to acquire the building as a permanent home for Afton historical artifacts and cultural events, and then achieved a longer term lease so that investments could be made for needed renovations. Haslund served as President of the historical society for 17 years, overseeing community donor campaigns, major building renovations with David Haslund (Fyi Dave's title was supervisor of building renovations), artifact acquisitions, as well as a series of "Chautauquas," or educational events. Meetings were held monthly and open to the public. Note: current academic literature is mixed on the term 'Chautauqua' (appropriation). I was going to use this term for my new museum speaker series, but declined out of concern. I would just say educational events.

<Need interview with Dave and Gloria's daughter in Afton for more information.>

<Add images from draft>

**1997-2003:** Rebecca Gombkoto, president.

Under Rebecca Gombkoto's guidance, her team worked to increase museum membership, add to the museum's collection and genealogy files, research early Afton residents and establish key relationships with Washington County historic organizations. They hosted 'Wednesday Weavers' as a fundraiser and exhibit, updated the walking tour brochures and continued adding to Afton's comprehensive chronology book.

<Need photo of Rebecca Gombkoto>

**2003-2006:** Charlotte Farago, president.

Charlotte Farago shared this about her term and team;

*Sandy Berglund contacted me in 1988 for help with the museum's new computer system and for the next 20 years we undertook a myriad of projects, starting with accessioning the museum's entire collection. I recorded all the pictures in the museum using a handheld tape recorder to enter into the first PastPerfect software.*



*Sandy and my husband, Les, who were both great photographers, took photos of buildings, historic sites, and events for our next project which was to produce a then-and-now book, Afton Village (162 pages), along with the Afton Village CD to be sold at the museum*

*A Wednesday night Lecture series included the popular presentations “Ghost towns along the St. Croix River” and “Wanted: One Good Woman”. The old Red Sox baseball team was resurrected in the park, playing by 1860 rules and Herbfest was started as an annual historic garden event, later joined by Hudson as a joint summer event. I was honored with the Afton Village Visionary Award for my work between 1988-1999.”*



*Charlotte Farago*

*Note: Permission granted to use on walkng tour site*

**2006-Present:** Stan Ross, president

Stan Ross and team have continued the museum’s tradition of serving our community, hosting cherished holiday events and engaging speakers. They took on management of Afton’s historic Mt. Hope Cemetery, removing buckthorn and restoring vandalized grave markers, partnered with the Minnesota Historical Society for numerous projects funded by the State of Minnesota, through the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund and managed by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Some of these projects include properly rehousing the entire collection (over 10,000 items), installing climate control and fire suppression systems for the storage room, and restoring two important artifacts; a large 100+ year-old mural ([Link to Mural write-up](#)) and the Village of Afton’s remarkable territorial-era map, hand drawn on fabric ([Link to Map write-up](#)). Many building upgrades have been accomplished, along with a new collection storage system. Current projects include a multi-year Interpretive Plan, item digitization, and plans to make the building ADA compliant.



*Museum Treasurer Laurel Ross and President Stan Ross wear many hats and volunteer countless hours for the museum and our community. Here they are painting the lower-level museum kitchen area.  
Photo credit: Leslie Thomas*

*Note: Need approval from Laurel & Stan to use this image, or they may wish to use a different one.*

## **Mural**

The large Afton Museum mural, titled *My Beautiful America*, was painted by Norwegian immigrant Christian R. Iverson sometime between 1903-1917. Iverson lived in St. Paul, where he worked for a painting company. He used the grid method to paint the selected small image onto the large museum wall. The US flag addition is a mystery and not part of the original painting. We believe it was added between 1918-1940, during a resurgence of patriotism. Interestingly, the mural was completely hidden underneath a wall for over 40 years. It was discovered during structural work after the museum moved here in 1983.



*Note: replace with better quality mural image*

The mural underwent major necessary restoration in 2022, with grants funded by the State of Minnesota, through the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (also known as Legacy Grants) and managed by the Minnesota Historical Society.

The work included multiple phases: securing the mural, structural work behind the mural, cleaning the mural of decades of dirt and soot from the old coal fired furnace, and filling & inpainting many cracks. The year-long project involved a collaborative effort between the museum leadership and many others (see the detailed photographic journal of this process at the museum.) Midwest Art Conservation Center was hired as the restoration team – the same group who restored Bell Museum’s world-renowned dioramas. After it was complete, the museum hosted a special celebration, including everyone involved in the restoration, city leaders, museum members and donors, the Minnesota Historical Society and descendants of the painter, Christian R. Iverson.

Leslie emailed Christian’s family member for photo and approval to add here

During this process, the museum leadership team experienced a fun ‘full circle’ moment. Before the restoration work started, they met to discuss the plan. Someone asked about the yellow dots on the mural, but no one knew what they were or when they were painted. Soon after, they discovered that David Haslund, former Afton resident very involved with the museum in the early 1980s, had added his own touch. In a 1983 news article David shared “Since there is a road in the picture, I thought there ought to be more signs of human occupation, so I put white dots on the distant shore to indicate house lights.” The dots have since turned yellow. David added “Forty years from now, some member of the historical society will probably tell people that they don’t know when the lights were painted in.” Dave must have had a crystal ball, because that is exactly what happened! He was off by just one year. Even though they are not original to the painting, a decision was made that the lights needed to stay as part of the mural’s history and Afton’s story.

<Add picture of Dave>

### **Original Map of Afton Village – Formation of an Early Frontier Town**



*Ann Carlson, descendent of Alexander McHattie, former Afton landowner who sold his lots (along with former Afton resident Andrew Mackey) to create the Village of Afton, viewing the Village of Afton's original plat map, handwritten on fabric. Photo credit: Leslie Thomas*

*Note: Leslie received permission from Ann Carlson to use this image for the online walking tour.*

The original plat map of the Village of Afton is not dated but was likely created between 1848 and 1855. Interestingly, they had a different name planned for the town than Afton. Contact the Afton Historical Museum to see the map.

#### Dating the map: a Tale of Three Maps between 1848 – 1855

**The 1848 Survey Map:** After a heated border battle, Wisconsin became a state on May 29, 1848 with its western border set along the east side of the St. Croix River. Shortly after, on March 3, 1849, Minnesota organized to become a territory and the 1848 land surveys were edited to reflect the new state borders. The Village map would have started after the 1848 survey was completed. (A copy of the first Survey Map is at the museum.)

**Original Afton Village Map:** Sometime between 1853 and 1855, Andrew Mackey (from Ireland) and Alexander McHattie (from Scotland) sold their land to a group of four investors who formed the Village of Afton. Mackey kept lots in Block 21 for himself and McHattie moved to Woodbury to build on land he owned there. The four Village investors (often called the town 'company') had moved to Afton from eastern states and included: Joseph Haskell, Ralzman Haskell, Charles S. Getchell and Hewit L. Thomas (an early MN judge).

Ralzman Haskell purchased the Village land with a partner from the East and divided it amongst his other partners. Ralzman died shortly afterwards in 1857 and is buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery. Power of Attorney was given to Charles S. Getchell to sell Village lots to new settlers for the investors. (Read about a fascinating early Afton dispute and legal case at the museum regarding these lots in the 1860s!).

**Recorded 1855 Afton Plat:** In 1855 the official Afton Plat was signed by the four town founders and submitted to the Stillwater Land Office, Washington County, St. Paul and Washington DC for recording, in 1855, three years before Minnesota became a state.

#### Early Town Land Use Decisions as depicted on the map

Many of the land use decisions made by the town founders have remained to the present day. Streets were arranged in a grid pattern, following an earlier template established in eastern frontier towns. The Village was divided into equal sized lots, except for a section of land near the gristmill along the river, twelve lots were designated for a two-story hotel near the river, several lots to build and operate a sawmill at the mouth of Kelle's Creek, twenty-two acres dedicated for a public cemetery on the bluff top (Mt. Hope), two acres for a public square in the center of the village, and there were two steamboat landings in what is now Steamboat Park.

#### Sources

Haskell, H. (1941) (Haskell booklet needs Museum location)  
Warner, G., Foote, C., Neill, E., & Williams, J. (1881). History Of Washington  
County And The St. Croix Valley. Minneapolis : North Star Pub. Co.  
Shaw, J. (1857). (Shaw Letters need Museum location)  
Vogel, R. (1988). Landmarks of Democracy: The Cottage Grove Lyceum and  
Town Hall. Looking Back: City of Cottage Grove.  
Warner, G., Foote, C., Neill, E., & Williams, J. (1881).  
Washington County Minnesota. (1940). Preliminary Report of Washington County Land Use  
Committee. \_\_\_\_\_