

## Stories at Lawshe Memorial Museum

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DCHS & South St. Paul Public Library Trustee, Leslie Greaves Radloff, shares a story with children during a History Storytime.

### Background

In 2016, Dakota County Historical Society hired a new director, Matt Carter. Prior to his coming, the public library which is next door, had tried to interest previous directors in collaborative programming with no success. Matt was open to meeting and interested in anything that would help boost the museum's visibility within the community while promoting its mission of teaching local history, and something that would increase the vitality of both museum and library programming, in other words: something new.

After scouring the internet for ideas of museum/public library partnerships and history related programming for children, we opted for two things: an ongoing once-a-month history Storytime for preschoolers and an opportunity for teens to take a mini-dive into

what it is like to curate a text panel for an exhibit. The following article talks about the pre-school story time now in its second year.

### Storytime

On the third Tuesday of the month, our regular Storytime goes who range in age from 0-5 years old meet in the museum for Storytime. Children gather on the floor of the museum's 'Great Hall' to hear tales of blizzards, the Mississippi River, railroads, stockyard history, and farming. Amy Commers, Youth Services Librarian, selects 2-3 books that present the topics from a historical angle if possible, and also looks for books that reflect the Minnesota landscape. We've featured many books by authors in our state, and while unintended, this has added lots of fun while connecting to the topics.



A young visitor to Storytime looks at pictures related to the month's theme

The historical society staff pulls primary source materials for this group, mostly photographs and artifacts that are used in a 'Show and Tell' between books. White gloves and the care that has to be taken with each is explained, but the children can come up and get a close-up look. Children and caregivers are seated in the Great Hall with its floor size map of the county which is also utilized. Dakota County lakes, rivers, farmlands, orchards, some roads and railroad tracks can easily be identified. The map has allowed

participants to canoe on the rivers to the Okee Dokee Brothers, trace roads and train tracks, and locate century farms memorialized on the mural. These activities have led to interactions with the adults who share their knowledge providing more information for all.



South St. Paul High School's mascot, Sir Loin, addressing the visitors to History Storytime

During November the Storytime focused on football and the city's high school team, The Packers. The team name comes from the city's historic stockyards and the businesses that were the life of the city. To provide background without getting into the gritty business of meat-packing the historical society focused on containers for the various products shipped from the stockyards and businesses. Lard buckets, Swift's canned meat and boxes showed packing as we focused on product *not* process. Photos showed employees on an assembly line packing packages of meat at one plants while another showed processed meat products in small containers being packed into still larger containers to be packed onto trucks

and trains for mass distribution across the country following the roads and railroads that the children had seem criss-crossing the county on the floor map. This package/ packing was a gentle approach for the littlest learners. At the end of story time the high school mascot Sir Loin came in and visited thanks to another city librarian.

The first Storytime of 2018 came one day after a snowstorm. As the focus that day was snow, a blizzard, to be exact, the children and teachers had a frame of reference, so after the first story we looked at pictures from historic storms/ blizzards and how the city workers and residents took care of the snow. Little ones had no trouble identifying snowplows even from 1944. They were surprised at the height of the snow banks and the old shovels (probably coal shovels) used to "shovel out". A photographic display of the March 1917 storm with stuck trolleys and skies used by the men who cleared the tracks and streets brought 'ohs'. So did the look at the hall's roof which is as tall as many of the snow banks of that storm. Then back to the Great Hal trudging and skiing to hear Keats' *The Snowy Day*, and finally to create their own blizzard with snowflakes that didn't melt.



Children participate in a hands-on activity with South St. Paul Public Library's children's librarian, Amy Commers.



Visitors prepare for Storytime in the Lawshe Museum's Great Hall exhibit space