

April 3, 2002

Liss
FYI

To the Board of Curators:

To those of you with whom I previously served on the Board, I send my warm regards. To those of you who do not know me from Eve, it would probably be wise to give you some background before I proceed with this correspondence.

(Positions 1985-1996)

President, Wisconsin Council for Local History

Chairman of THIPPS Committee (Teaching History in Public and Private Schools)

Member Board of Curators

Served on Awards Committee & State Relations Committee

(State Relations Chairman - 3 yrs.)

Member of Executive Committee and Director's Search Committee

I list my involvement not because I believe I have bragging rights, since I know many of you have devoted more years than I, but because I need to remind you that, I too, have given of my heart and my time to the cause of history and the State Historical Society. Even though I was unable to stay involved due to personal commitments, my interest in the Society and the welfare of the local history network, of which I am still involved, has never been diminished.

It is with great disappointment and sadness that I have learned of the vote of the Board of Curators which would eliminate Debbie Kmetz' position in the Office of Local History. When I left the Board 6 years ago, I believe the relationship between the Society and the local historical societies was exceptionally good. I directly credit the local historical societies for the four-year grass roots effort required to gain the unanimous vote of both the House and Senate to secure passage of the legislation establishing the Office of School Services. When I first became President of the WCLH, I, along with the local history establishment, worked very hard to successfully turn Debbie's position from a one-half time to a full time position. We also did this through the legislature.

I understand that budget cuts have been required. I've been in local government for 21 years and I am not unfamiliar with the concept, albeit on a smaller scale. But I also know that priorities are set at the top and there are always ways that important programs can be saved. The local history program through the State Historical Society is nationally recognized and so are the people who staff the office. Cutting one position is the beginning of the end for the Office of Local History. What comes next then? The Office of School Services? The library and archives have also been terribly affected. From the outside looking in, it certainly appears that serving researchers, students, local historians and the general public is no longer a Society priority. We cannot blame all those things on budget cuts. We need to investigate how the priorities of the Society are being established and turn this situation around before this 156 year old venerated institution is brought to its knees.

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Board of Curators

I have been in touch with Senator Rick Grobschmidt, with whom I have worked closely in the past on the legislation to establish the Office of School Services. He informs me that \$100,000.00 has been added back into the Historical Society's budget. One of the reasons I believe this money is being put back in is also because of the response from the grass roots of the local history movement to the cuts. I encourage you make sure that a part of those funds are used to keep the position in the Office of Local History.

Sincerely yours,

Sharon L. Leair

To: Rick Grobschmidt
From: Sharon Leair
Re: SHS budget

Rick: I am faxing the letter which I sent out to the Board of Curators today and a copy of Pat Boge's letter to the local history people.

I have contacted the President of the Wisconsin Council for Local History, John Grek, and he is emailing to those on his list to have them contact their Senators by email or hot line thanking them for adding the \$100,000 back into the Society budget, that it be kept there and that part of it be used to restore the position in the Office of Local History.

I have also made some contacts of my own. Because time is so short before the vote, which you said may take place on Friday in the Senate, we probably won't be able to make as many contacts as we would with a full fledged effort, but will do our best and hope it helps.

I'll talk to you soon.

Sharon

P.S - We are also going to request that letters write to the Board of Curators.

WISCONSIN



**WISCONSIN
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March 28, 2002

Dear Friend:

As president of the Wisconsin Historical Society, I am writing to inform you of drastic actions taken at Friday's meeting of the Board of Curators to deal with large reductions in the Society's state funding and ways in which we will attempt to address the needs of affiliated local historical societies. The cuts total \$1.6 million, or about 16% of the program money we receive from the state. Last year, we removed approximately \$500,000 from the operating budget without reducing staff; on March 15, we removed \$1.1 million more.

These cuts are so deep that the board could find no plausible alternative to layoffs, the cancellation of vacant positions, and additional funding reductions. Therefore, on July 1, the Society will lose 18.5 positions, twelve of them currently occupied by loyal, able staff members. The Library-Archives Division, our largest, will lose 6 occupied and 3.5 unoccupied positions; and Historic Sites will lose two occupied positions at Stonefield and one at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland. Public History will lose one of two occupied positions in the Office of Local History; Historic Preservation will lose one occupied position associated with the preservation newsletter and the rural initiative and one archaeology position that will be vacated in July. The division will also freeze the historical markers program for the rest of the biennium. The Administrative Services division will lose an occupied personnel position, and the Historical Museum will lose a currently vacant exhibits director position and will employ contractors for this function for the foreseeable future. In addition, the cuts will result in diminished resources for the burial sites and marine archaeology programs, though we are able to retain the key staff members in those areas. Our managers will be working hard over the next several months to determine which specific services we can continue to provide, and we ask your patience and understanding as they deal with all the complications of major change.

The reductions are especially severe for the library and archives, which have not been adequately funded for decades. Our reputation as the "Library of Congress of the Midwest" is now in serious jeopardy because of the loss of more state funding. Our upcoming capital campaign for the Society can help somewhat, but the crisis is real and immediate. The board has directed the Society's management to conduct "forthwith" a study to determine the needs of the library and archives in order to maintain its world-class status and to explore different

ways of ensuring its future. This could conceivably include renegotiation of our relationship with the University of Wisconsin, as well as consideration of fees to support library use.

These are extraordinarily difficult and challenging times, and the near future looks even more threatening. In the course of our meeting, our legislative board members said that the state's fiscal condition is unlikely to improve this year. Even if the current biennial budget is balanced in the next few months, the legislature will face another \$1 billion shortfall in the next budget. It is quite possible that we could see another round of budget cuts as deep as the ones we have just experienced.

The Local History Office will continue to be available to provide general assistance and help with affiliation issues. You can reach Tom McKay at 608/264-6583 or at trmckay@whs.wisc.edu. You can reach Debbie Kmetz at 608/264-6584 or at dekmetz@whs.wisc.edu until June 30. In addition, I urge you to take advantage of the other services that the Society will continue to provide. We have a wide array of talented specialists who are ready to help you in a variety of areas. These continuing services are outlined below.

Museum Collections. Curators from the Society's Museum Division will be available for consultation on the care of collections in your museum. Please call Paul Bourcier 608/264-6573 (pgbourcier@whs.wisc.edu) or Ann Koski 608/261-9359 (alkoski@whs.wisc.edu) so they can put you in touch with the proper museum expert to assist you.

Programs for Elementary and Middle School Students. Bobbie Malone from the Society's Public History Division can provide ideas and advise on ways to work with local elementary school teachers in involving elementary and middle school children in local history. Bobbie can be reached at 608/264-6547 or at bsmalone@whs.wisc.edu.

Programs for Middle and High School Students. Kris Maldre from the Society's Public History Division can assist you in involving middle school and high school students in local history through the National History Day program. Kris can be reached at 608/264-6487 or at kimaldre@whs.wisc.edu.

Building Restoration and Rehabilitation Techniques. If you have questions regarding how to properly restore or rehab your historic building, contact Brian McCormick or Jim Sewell. Brian can be reached at 608/264-6491 or brnccormick@whs.wisc.edu and Jim can be reached at 608/264-6490 or jasewell@whs.wisc.edu.

Applying for Tax Credits for Rehabilitation of Your Members' Historic Homes. If you would like to relay information to your members regarding how they may apply for tax credits when they rehab their historic homes, contact Jim Sewell. Jim can be reached at 608/264-6490 or jasewell@whs.wisc.edu.

Getting Involved in Your Community's Cultural Resource Planning Process. By 2010, most communities in Wisconsin will need to have a comprehensive plan in place. These plans must address several issues including the preservation of cultural and historic resources. Contact Rick Bernstein to learn how other history organizations throughout the state are getting involved in this local effort. Rick can be reached at 608/264-6506 or rbernstein@whs.wisc.edu.

Care of Historic Cemeteries. Contact Deirdre March if your organization needs information on protecting historic cemeteries. Deirdre can be reached at 608/264-6502 or dcmarch@whs.wisc.edu.

Preservation of Native American Burial Sites. If your organization has questions regarding the identification and protection of Native American mounds, contact Leslie Eisenberg. Leslie can be reached at 608/264-6503 or leeisenberg@whs.wisc.edu.

Protection of Archaeological Sites. Contact State Archaeologist Bob Birmingham with questions regarding the identification and protection of archaeological sites. Bob can be reached at 608/264-6495 or rabirmingham@whs.wisc.edu.

Maritime Preservation and Archaeology Programs. Contact State Underwater Archaeologist Jeff Gray regarding historic maritime resources such as lighthouses and shipwrecks. Jeff can be reached at 608/271-1382 or jjgray@whs.wisc.edu.

Applying for National Register of Historic Places Status. Contact Daina Penkiunas if you have questions regarding the Register or would like to nominate a building, site or district to the Register. Daina can be reached at 608/264-6501 or djpenkiunas@whs.wisc.edu.

Researching Historic Buildings or Districts. Contact Joe DeRose if you have questions regarding how to research historic properties. Joe can be reached at 608/264-6512 or jrderose@whs.wisc.edu.

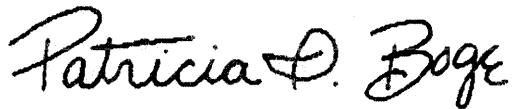
Working with Government Agencies to Protect Historic Resources. If a government agency project may negatively impact a historic resource your organization is affiliated with, contact Chip Brown for information on how to work with the agency. Chip can be reached at 608/264-6508 or chbrown@whs.wisc.edu.

Finally, I want to address a specific issue. Some of you have written, e-mailed, or called to ask why the Society is reducing one position in Local History while "creating three new ones elsewhere in the Society." The short answer is we aren't. The three positions in question are existing vacant positions that have all had previous incumbents. These positions are: the site director at the H. H. Bennett Studio, the historic sites program's financial assistant, and the

information technology specialist responsible for the Society's website. The sites program depends on earned revenue for two of every three dollars it spends and must raise \$2.3 million each year just to stay in business. The Bennett site director and the financial assistant are critical to earning the dollars to keep the sites open. The information technology specialist is responsible for a website that receives nearly 25 million hits and 1.4 million visitors a year. The website is also an important means of generating earned revenue for the Society as a whole. Thus, all three are urgently needed hires to generate earned income, and in order to fill them in less than a year, we must budget for them immediately. Please help correct any misconceptions about these positions.

None of us wants to see reductions in the work of the Society. Similar problems are occurring throughout state and local government. I know many of us are disappointed in seeing programs that are near and dear to our hearts cut back. That's why it's so important for us to avoid recriminations within the historical community over a diminishing pie of resources. I ask you to engage in dialogue with us in the coming years to figure out ways to grow support for history in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia A. Boge". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Patricia A. Boge
President