

Making Local History Live: A Collaborative Partnership with a Technology Base

Mary Alice Anderson, Lead Media Specialist
Winona Middle School
1570 Homer Road
Winona MN 55987
Maryalice.Anderson@winona.k12.mn.us

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Technology has a considerable supporting role in fostering partnerships between our middle school media program and our county historical society and technology helps make local history come alive for middle school students.

As schools and cities were discovering the Internet in the early 90's, Winona was fortunate to be a pioneer among wired communities. A privately funded local grant program was initiated to support the development of innovative, computer and video-based learningware. Because local information is often difficult to find, and because our community is changing dramatically, we chose to apply for a grant to develop a web site centering on the theme of Winona's changing demographics. We wanted to recognize the contributions of Winona's many different ethnic groups including many recent Hmong immigrants. The goals of our project were to:

1. Develop an interactive learning product that will help students and staff develop an understanding and appreciation of cultural and ethnic groups in Winona.
2. To provide an opportunity and forum for teachers to collaboratively develop a product that will be used as an interdisciplinary teaching and learning tool.
3. To foster active learning by promoting interdisciplinary activities.
4. To develop teaching and learning materials that will help teachers teach about diverse cultures in Winona and throughout the world.

Most of the grant funding was used to pay a local multimedia production company that designed, produced and hosted our web site. Other monies went towards substitutes so the committee could have time to plan, work, and learn during the school day and to reimburse committee members for time spent researching and writing outside of the school day. We also paid a professor of local history who worked as a content consultant, providing insight and content expertise. We conducted our research using media center resources, the Winona County Historical Society, other community museums and churches, and by interviewing community members.

Students also were involved in telling their stories. A 7th grade student wrote about the Luxembourg heritage in a small community that is part of our school district. Hmong students -- our community's newest immigrants -- wrote about their culture and how they came to live in Winona.

Teachers representing diverse curriculum areas had opportunities to learn, have fun, and become a team. The project enabled our school's most experienced technology users to stretch their visions and expertise. We truly became a team and proud of our accomplishments. We learned basic web design and honed their expertise in using scanners and digital cameras. And of course, we learned a great deal about our community. I acquired enough web development skills to take over our fledgling school web site.

Winona's Cultural History: Changing Demographics of the Winona Area reaches people all over the world; we've had feedback and questions from former Winonans, researchers, and genealogists. A researcher sent us a short piece he wrote and copies of primary source documents. A publisher from Luxembourg sent a book about the community settled by people from Luxembourg.

Collaboration and technology came together a second time in the development of *Wabasha Prairie to Winona*, a web site about the history of Winona before statehood.

The objective of this web site is to encourage students to study the development of a community during a period of significant historical change. This web site is based almost entirely on primary sources. . . the evidence historians use to discover and write the history of a people and their community..

Media specialists will want to look at this site and look for information about the Goddard family and Charley Goddard, the central character in Gary Paulsen's popular novel, *A Soldier's Heart*. Select the link to "Pioneer Settlers and Charles Ely" to see read about Charley Goddard's river escapade and read the eulogy given at Charley Goddard's funeral. Follow the links to the Historical Society's *Company K at Gettysburg* for more primary sources including Charles Goddard's letters home. (Note: The novel is fictionalized; the resources mentioned will provide background.) Non-Winonans may find the information about Native Americans and steamboats of special interest.

Funding for *Wabasha Prairie to Winona* was provided by a grant from the Minnesota State Historical Society; the Media Program and County Historical Society partnership made it happen.

Our third collaborative project centers on bringing artifacts, historical photographs, and guest speakers to the Middle School media center and social studies classrooms. These resources are used to heighten awareness of the resources at the Historical Society, introduce students to primary resources, and help students as they study Winona history. Other core goals are to better organize and preserve local history resources, provide staff development focused on primary resources and local history web sites, and promote historical society resources and programs to educators. The project is funded by an \$8000.00 grant from a regional library

agency. Funds were used primarily for display cases, archival supplies to preserve bicentennials issues of the local newspapers, and staff time.

Students enjoy peaking in the display cases! The exhibits are popular and are planned to complement support curricular and interest needs of students! A display of a rifle, medals, uniform and other civil war artifacts “A Soldier’s Heart,” A toy stove and sink from the 1950’s are attention-getting items in the old toys display. Other artifacts include a doll, a wooden hutch from the 1920’s, a toy gun, a buggy, a wind-up elephant, and more!” Going to School in the early 1900’s,” our “Back to School” display captured the attention of parents visiting the school during fall orientation. Grant funds also pay for visits to middle school by the society educator who works with groups of students, sharing information about the artifacts and photos.

Technology is not at the center of the project, but contributes to the project’s full implementation. The Historical Society used grant funds to purchase a printer capable of printing large historical photos that are displayed on the media center’s walls and in the display cases. The photos support curriculum and prompt” I remember that!” discussions among adults. Grant funds pay for the Society archivist’s time required for scanning, printing and hanging the photos.

Media Center staff used *FileMaker Pro* to create a searchable database of the contents in special editions of historical newspapers published during Winona’s 150th anniversary in 2001. Without technology these invaluable resources would be much less accessible to students.

The local history project also supports a family timeline project that students complete each year. They interview family members, scan family photos, and search for historical information and photos online. We encourage them to use primary source photos from The Library of Congress *America’s Library* because they can find what they need quickly, allowing time to concentrate on the important content of their project. They create their timelines with Tom Snyder’s *Timeliner* and bring him family artifacts for their presentations. (My favorites are a World War II navy uniform and a program from a 1956 Elvis concert.)

These are collaborative projects that work. The web sites and local history projects are practical, manageable, and sustainable. There are no bells and whistles and no difficult or demanding technologies to manage. Grant funding was local and regional, the type of funding that is typically less complex (and easier to receive) than a state or federal grant. Most importantly, we’ve achieved our objectives of using technology as a tool to enhance access to local history.

Take a virtual tour on the web sites listed as part of this article:

Web Sites Mentioned in the Article:

Local History Project

<http://www.rschooltoday.com/winonamiddle/mediacenter/> (Select the local history button)

Winona's Cultural History: Changing Demographics of the Winona Area

<http://www.rschooltoday.com/demographics/index.html>

Winona County Historical Society

<http://www.winona.msus.edu/historicalsociety/>

(Select *Wabasha's Prairie to Winona* and *Company K at Gettysburg*)

Charles Goddards' letters:

http://www2.smumn.edu/deptpages/~history/civil_war/newpage21.htm

(Primary source materials for the study of Gary Paulsen's *A Soldier's Heart*)

Also of interest:

Local History on the Web A staff development class

<http://www.rschooltoday.com/district861/> Select the Educators tab and then select the Technology Staff Development link.

Using Jump Back in Time Photos to Complement Family History Timelines

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/educators/newsletter/november01/ti5_8.html

An article explaining our family history project

Mary Alice Anderson is a frequent contributor to professional journals and a conference presenter. She is an adjunct instructor in the College of Education at Winona State University and an online instructor for the University of Northern Iowa Professional Development program. The Winona Middle School Media/Technology Program has received both state and national recognition and awards. She is also the lead media specialist for the Winona Area Public Schools and was a Library of Congress American Memory Fellow in 1999. The Winona Middle School Web site can be accessed at <http://www.rschooltoday.com/winonamiddle/> Communications to the author may be addressed to: Mary Alice Anderson, Media Specialist, Winona Middle School, 1570 Homer Road, Winona, MN 55987; e-mail: maryalice.anderson@winona.k12.mn.us, <http://www.rschooltoday.com/winonamiddle/maryaliceanderson/>