



Grant Recipient
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL
& CULTURAL GRANTS

Made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans
on November 4, 2008. Administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE URL:

<http://www.litchfieldoperahouse.com>
www.mnhs.org/legacygrants

The Minnesota Historical Society Awards the Greater Litchfield Opera House Association Inc. a Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant

Local organization directly benefits from funds appropriated by the Legacy Act.

<Litchfield, MN> (May 22nd, 2012) –

The Minnesota Historical Society has awarded fifty-nine organizations from thirty-one counties a total of \$3,879,343 in grants for fiscal year 2012. The grants are awarded to support projects of enduring value for the cause of history and historic preservation. The Greater Litchfield Opera House Association, Inc. is proud to announce its award of \$208,298 to finish repairing the damaged exterior envelope of the Litchfield Opera House.

The need for this project is evident as the building envelope is experiencing disintegrating and spalling masonry, cracks in mortar joints and walls, and possible water intrusion. This project will restore the physical and visual integrity of the masonry envelope, and provide handsome and period appropriate entries into the building.

During the summer of 2012 crews from American Masonry Restoration will remove the destructive portland cement and repoint mortar joints; replace deteriorated brick; rebuild the central column between main doors on west façade; install period appropriate entry doors and correlating transoms; close four non-original cuts on the south façade; repair sandstone windowsills; fix all windows on the south façade; and install exterior lighting. Leaded glass transoms will be custom made to closely represent those present at the turn of the twentieth century. The Opera House will be in various stages of construction throughout the year, with project completion slated for December 2012.

GLOHAI's long-term goal is to restore the Litchfield Opera House building to its original

stateliness and function, making a useful and accessible space where community members and organizations can gather for meetings, social events, lectures, and exhibitions of arts and theater.

The benefits of this exterior undertaking were recently summed up by Tim Cook, GLOHAI President "This projects symbolizes a significant step forward in the process of restoring the Opera House to its original use and stateliness. Securing the envelope of the building allows us move forward without the fear of water infiltration or further damage to the original 1900 brickwork, two of the primary reasons the building was at risk of demolition, in the first place. In 2013, we can safely and confidently, begin to shift focus to interior projects such as stage, lighting, flooring, bathrooms and other components that will allow the building to once again be used by the community as a gathering place and center for the arts".

To learn more about the Greater Litchfield Opera House Association, Inc. please visit:
<http://www.litchfieldoperahouse.com/>

Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grants

The Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants Program has been made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008. The grants are administered by the Minnesota Historical Society and awarded to support projects of enduring value for the cause of history and historic preservation across the state.

History

The Litchfield Opera House has been an active participant in community life for 112 years. The historic building was designed by St. Paul architect William T. Towner to serve the community as a gathering place for social functions and entertainment. It was built in 1900, constructed of locally made yellow brick with designs in red brick and terra cotta.

In the early years, the Opera House was well attended; Litchfield newspapers documented performances by numerous visiting national theatrical groups and frequent events such as concerts, high school commencements, debates, plays, and visiting dignitaries.

In 1935, coming out of the Great Depression, the Opera House was completely remodeled and reopened as the Litchfield Community Building. The main (west) entry was modified, removing the doors and brick column; the sloped floor was changed to a flat grade, and the interior was upgraded to 1935 standards. The function of the building remained the same; community members and organizations still gathered here regularly for meetings, wedding celebrations, dances, and exhibitions of arts and theater.

Beginning in the early 1970s, the Opera House was again renovated to house City offices. The exterior was sandblasted; masonry joints were repointed with portland cement too hard for the brick; aluminum doors and windows were installed; and the interior was extensively divided and altered. For decades the building served the City until its closure in 2002 due to indoor air quality issues. Between 2003 and 2007, the Litchfield City Council voted at least three times to demolish the building, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. During that same period, a group of active citizens fought to save the building by conducting an independently financed re-use study and nominating the Opera House to the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota's Ten Most Endangered list for a second time in 2007. The city conducted a mandatory Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) in 2006 in preparation for sale or demolition and, in the spring of 2007, commissioned a second reuse study to circumvent a court challenge. As the study neared completion, members of the reuse study committee and other interested citizens formed the Greater Litchfield Opera House Association Inc. (GLOHAI) as a non-profit organization. The City, acknowledged the group's effort, abandoned the demolition plan and sold the property to GLOHAI in January 2008 for one silver dollar with the understanding that GLOHAI would undertake a building renovation project. The date on the coin was 1900, commemorating the construction date of the opera house. A rehabilitation program has been in place ever since.

This volunteer-led effort has obtained numerous grants to restore the exterior envelope and return the building to active use. The effort to save the Opera House has also resulted in an increased preservation ethic in Litchfield, and was recognized by the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota in 2008 for "community awareness of both the significance and possibilities for historic properties in Litchfield launching a new source of pride in the community."