

P.S., A PARTNERSHIP

September 25, 2016

To: Office of the Director, Institute of Museum and Library Services
RE: Nomination for National Medal for Museum Service

Dear Nominations Director and Board:

If the National Medal for Museum and Library Service is an honor reserved for those organizations and institutions whose service to their constituents and outreach to their communities goes above and beyond ordinary expectations, then we can support without reservation the nomination of the Charles Weyerhaeuser Museum of Little Falls, Minnesota, for that honor.

Our observations are made from afar, not as community members or even as residents of Morrison County or of the state of Minnesota, but as historians and independent scholars whose work depends on the invaluable assistance of archivists and librarians across the country. As researchers who "know the territory," so to speak, we feel we can speak to some of the ways in which this particular museum has become an invaluable asset to its community.

Our initial association with the Weyerhaeuser Museum dates to spring of 1982, when we sent a letter (the first-class stamp cost us 18 cents) from our then-home in Montana, to then-director, Jan Warner, telling her of our research into the experiences of nineteenth-century women who were either temporarily or permanently left behind to manage family, farm, and business affairs when their husbands went west in search of gold, land, or adventure. In pursuing the story of one such woman, Pamelia Fergus, we had come across a collection of nineteenth-century letters that could be traced to a family in Little Falls. To several families in Little Falls, in fact.

Three days later, the phone rang and we had our first impression of the folks at the Weyerhaeuser Museum. Enthusiastic, knowledgeable, enterprising, energetic, and driven to do all within their power to locate, acquire, contextualize, preserve, and display all manner of documents, photographs, and other materials pertinent to the history of their area--to make those materials and the knowledge they represented available to citizens within their own community and beyond.

That was the beginning of a collaboration conducted through letters, phone calls, and on-site visits, a collaboration that resulted, nearly a decade later, in the publication of *The Gold Rush Widows of Little Falls*. And what a collaboration this was! The museum staff directed us to all sorts of local, county, and state documents, to vintage newspapers and pertinent memoirs, and to several descendants of some of the very women whose westering husbands had all but deserted them in 1860.

We, in turn, were able to introduce the museum staff to a veritable treasure trove in the form of the personal and business papers of James Fergus, one of Montana's earliest and most influential

Linda Peavy · Ursula Smith

169 Garron Road · Middletown Springs, Vermont 05757 · Phone/Fax (802) 235-2844
ps@vermontel.net www.peavyandsmith.com

pioneers—and, it turns out, one of the earliest and most influential settlers of Little Falls, Minnesota, as well. But until our correspondence with Jan Warner, this early mover and shaker had been little more than a cipher to folks back in Minnesota, for James had left town after a series of business disasters, and once he finally sent for his family, he gave Pamelia explicit instructions to bring all his business books and papers on her journey out to Montana Territory.

The museum's gala celebration of the publication of our book was but one aspect of their use and celebration of the information contained in that book and, more specifically, of the materials that were now a part of their holdings. By combining materials from their own collections with information gained through documents contained in the Fergus Papers, the museum staff delved deeper and deeper into the early history of the town, the "pre-Weyerhaeuser" years, the years before the lumber baron took the fledgling settlement to a new level of economic enterprise. Like homesteading women of the past, the women (and men!) of the Weyerhaeuser Museum made use of every available scrap of material available to them as they designed, installed, and dedicated historical markers around the town and county, devised walking tours led by enthusiastic volunteers, created special programs celebrating various aspects of the lives of the areas earliest residents—including the Ojibway and other native peoples whose interactions with incoming explorers, traders, and settlers are so crucial to our understanding of the dynamics of pioneer life in that town on the banks of the Mississippi.

One of the most significant outcomes of the museum's untiring dedication to the goal of sharing its resources with the larger community was the publication of *Little Falls on the Big River*, a fifth-grade history curriculum guide. We were reminded of this publication during our perusal of two large file folders containing decades of correspondence with the museum personnel, plus copies of the highly professional newsletters that have kept the organization's members and supporters apprised of the many, many programs, projects, and partnerships through which this amazing "little engine that could" has managed to serve its community's needs in ways that would belie its relatively small size.

The building, the grounds, the collections; the newsletter and the website; the five-member staff; and the cadre of hardworking Morrison County Historical Society volunteers who have made the creation and ongoing support of the museum and its mission their top priority—all these, in combination, help make the Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum a more than worthy nominee for receipt of the 2017 National Medal for Museum Service award.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures. The first signature on the left is "Linda Peavy" and the second signature on the right is "Ursula Smith". Both signatures are written in cursive ink.

Linda Peavy Ursula Smith