Dear AJHA members,

Your 2014 local host committee is delighted to give you Minnesota’s nicest welcome to our capital city, St. Paul! We’d like to point out some local standouts in the program for you, as well as make some suggestions for research (and leisure!) on your own during our conference.

Beginning at the end – this year’s Saturday gala dinner will be on a historic paddle-wheel riverboat, cruising up the Mississippi River past Gilded Age mansions, 1820s Fort Snelling – and many bald eagle nests, including one right next to the boat launch, across from downtown St. Paul. We will have bus service to and from the boat launch, but it’s less than a mile away from the hotel, so if you want to take advantage of fall colors, which will be peaking along the Mississippi then, feel free to walk across the Wabasha St. Bridge and through Harriet Island Park.

A couple of the sites we’ll glimpse from the boat will be featured on our Friday history tour, beginning with Fort Snelling (http://www.historicfortsnelling.org/), high on a cliff at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, where costumed guides will trace for us local history ranging from the military to Dred Scott to the Dakota War. Next, we’ll take a guided tour of the James J. Hill House (http://sites.mnhs.org/historic-sites/james-j-hill-house), perhaps the grandest of the late 19th-century mansions along elegant Summit Avenue. From there, it’s a couple of minutes’ drive to the Minnesota History Center (http://www.minnesotahistorycenter.org/) museum and library, where we highly recommend the interactive “Open House” exhibit, which recreates the lives of German, Italian, African-American and Hmong families who lived in a single home in St. Paul. Finally, we’ll wrap up the day with a bus “gangster” tour of downtown St. Paul’s hot spots.

And if you want to spend more time at the History Center, they have offered AJHA members on the tour free weekend passes – it’s a 10-15 minute walk from the hotel, or within the range of the hotel’s free shuttle, so go back at your leisure. (You might want to check out their excellent media archives, too – see http://sites.mnhs.org/library/ to explore the collections and schedule a visit in advance.)

To prep us for such an intense tour, our local history panel – 4:10-5:10 pm on Thursday – will focus on “The Peoples of Minnesota: A Multicultural History,” featuring three scholars of Native American, labor and immigration history as well as a local journalist covering the state’s changing face.

Last but not least, the opening reception following the local panel will award our outstanding journalist in the public interest, Paul McEnroe, who in 34 years at the Star Tribune has covered social justice issues all over the region – as well as wars overseas. On Friday, we will give the Donna Allen award to Mary Stucky, a former award-winning broadcast journalist who, from her Minnesota base, is leading an initiative to train binational teams of young multimedia reporters digging deep into under-the-radar stories.

But of course there’s much more in St. Paul (and the Twin Cities) than we could fit into the program!

For research, check out the online catalogs of the archival collections at History Center, the University of Minnesota (http://www.lib.umn.edu/), and the Immigration History Research Center
Also, within walking distance of the hotel are the Pioneer Press, Minnesota’s first daily, and Minnesota Public Radio – both are happy to welcome AJHA members interested in research there. If you would like to set up an appointment, email your local host committee chair, Giovanna Dell’Orto (dell0014@umn.edu), with your request and she will pass it on.

For fun, a few more historical sites within walking distance of the hotel are the Cathedral of St. Paul (http://www.cathedralsaintpaul.org/), which will celebrate its centennial next year and sits at the beginning of Summit Avenue, where literary luminaries as different as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Charles Schulz lived; across from it, the State Capitol, designed by Cass Gilbert (http://sites.mnhs.org/historic-sites/minnesota-state-capitol); and down the hill, the Alexander Ramsey House (http://sites.mnhs.org/historic-sites/alexander-ramsey-house), a Victorian timepiece next to lovely, gingerbread-houses-lined Irvine Park – did we say fall colors??

More historical sites are a half-hour light-rail (http://www.metrotransit.org/metro-green-line) ride away in Minneapolis, beginning with the University of Minnesota’s old campus historic district (buildings dating from the 1880s/1900s) and the alma mater not only of yours truly, but your president too – the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, which is turning 75 this year (http://sjmc.umn.edu). A couple more train stops will take you to the heart of Minneapolis’ historic riverfront, home to Stone Arch Bridge, the Mill City Museum (http://www.millcitymuseum.org/) – once the world’s largest flour mill – and the spectacular new Guthrie Theater, with its cantilevered bridge projecting onto the Mississippi.

Speaking of theater – during the conference, the Guthrie will feature a Chinese fable, “The White Snake” and, on its landmark thrust stage, “The Heidi Chronicles” (http://www.guthrietheater.org/plays_events/plays). In St. Paul, across the square from the hotel, is the Ordway Theater, home to the Minnesota Opera, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and The Schubert Club, as well as musicals (see http://www.ordway.org/ for performance during the conference). Still within walking distance is Minnesota Public Radio’s 104-year-old Fitzgerald Theater, home to A Prairie Home Companion as well as book readings and other shows organized by MPR (http://fitzgeraldtheater.publicradio.org/). A five-minute taxi ride away in St. Paul is the Penumbra Theater (http://www.penumbratheatre.org/), for nearly 40 years home to innovative performances focusing on the African American experience.

OK, enough food for the soul, how about food? Two St. Paul restaurants at the opposite end of the price spectrum are on the National Register of Historic Places: Mickey’s Diner (http://www.mickeysdiningcar.com/) is open 24/7/365 in an Art Deco railroad-style diner serving comfort food parked a few blocks from the hotel since 1939, while a long walk or short cab ride away is W.A. Frost (http://www.wafrost.com/), upscale American cuisine in an 1880s sandstone building with tin carved ceilings on Cathedral Hill. For more recent history, take the light rail a few stops to the authentic Chinese and Southeast Asian restaurants on University Avenue (for a mapped selection, see http://www.twincities.com/restaurants/ci_23640239/university-avenue-food-tour) – after all, the Twin Cities have the country’s largest Hmong community. You will also see quite a few Southeast Asian farmers at the St. Paul Farmers’ Market, which will still be going on the conference weekend from 6 am
to 1 pm a few blocks from the hotel (http://www.stpaulfarmersmarket.com/). Finally, in the last few years, downtown St. Paul's dining scene has exploded. Inside the hotel is one of St. Paul's top steakhouses, the St. Paul Grill; across the street is a local brewery, Great Waters Brewing Company; within walking distance as two Italian standouts, Pazzaluna for modern takes is just across the street, while the grocery store with deli restaurant, pizzeria, gelateria and rooftop bar Cossetta's has been a staple of Minnesota's Italian immigrants since 1911. Back across the street from the hotel is French bistro and oyster bar, Meritage, and sticking with seafood, two local institutions for sushi are also nearby -- Fuji Ya and Sakura.

And to walk off all that food, remember that mid-October is the perfect time to enjoy fall colors in the Twin Cities – the average high for the conference days is 61 degrees, with a low of 41. The hotel is within a short walk to trails along the Mississippi as well as down historic Summit Avenue, for some power walking, jogging, running under our "maroon and gold" oaks, maples and birch trees. Some trails along the river are part of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area – see these walks and hikes recommended by the National Park Service: http://www.nps.gov/miss/planyourvisit/ptgkeyhikingwalk.htm If you prefer a bike, check out the bike sharing program Nice Ride Minnesota (https://www.niceridemn.org/), with scores of stations across the Cities.

Speaking of transportation and related safety – the light rail will take you from the airport to the hotel (use the Central Station stop, two blocks away) with one change (at the Downtown East station in Minneapolis, from the Blue Line to the Green Line), but the ride – interesting and historic as it is – will last about one hour (see www.metrotransit.org for schedules and maps). The only other public transportation option is bus #54, which also goes to downtown St. Paul in about 40 minutes, or of course taxis and shuttles. St. Paul is an extremely safe city, but we advise caution on the light rail at night and we do not recommend walking after dark south of the river or north of 7th Street.

Well, it’s pretty clear that we love our state, and we love to welcome you to it ... so please don’t hesitate to contact Giovanna (dell0014@umn.edu) with any questions about St. Paul!

See you in October!

Giovanna Dell’Orto and Mavis Richardson