SIBLEY SITE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT REPORT:

A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE MINNESOTA STATE LEGISLATURE

Minnesota Historical Society and Sibley House Association, 1990

Pursuant to 1989 Laws, Ch 269, Sec 21
subd 7(a), Para #5

SIBLEY SITE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT REPORT:

A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE MINNESOTA STATE LEGISLATURE

Minnesota Historical Society and Sibley House Association, 1990

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....1

II. Background.....2

III. Historic Importance.....4

IV. Economic and Educational Importance.....7

V. Relevant Legislation.....9

VI. Findings of the Sibley Site Committee.....10

VII. Issues of Continuing Concern.....12

VIII. Budget.....13

IX. Schedule for Transfer.....14

X. Appendices.....15

I. INTRODUCTION

The Sibley Historic Site, located in Mendota, is one of the most important sites in Minnesota's history. The six buildings and the collection of thousands of artifacts offer a unique opportunity to understand the life and times of the pre-Territorial years in Minnesota and of one of Minnesota's foremost 19th century leaders: Henry Hastings Sibley. Sibley, who came to Minnesota in 1834 as a fur trader, was prominent in fur trade and other contact with American Indians of the Dakota and Ojibway tribes for some 15 years. Beginning in 1848 he entered a public career that was central in the earliest annals of Minnesota. He was, successively, Territorial delegate to the U. S. Congress from Wisconsin, Territorial delegate to Congress from Minnesota, and first governor of the State of Minnesota. The Sibley Historic Site was his home during these years of public service.

But the site in Mendota is more important than just its association with Sibley would suggest. The first permanent civilian Euro-American settlement in Minnesota, the site was an economic and social center for this area. The area was a point of close contact between American Indians and Euro-Americans for several decades. As such, it is pivotal in the earliest history of Minnesota

The Sibley site was first preserved in 1910 through the initiative and efforts of the Minnesota Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). For 80 years, the DAR and its affiliated organization, the Sibley House Association (SHA), have kept the house and properties open to the public, using for the most part volunteer labor and donated money to manage the site. The efforts of the SHA have recently been supplemented by legislative appropriations administered through MHS. Over the past decade or so, however, the increasing age of the houses, developing curatorial needs for the collections, increased interpretive responsibilities, and increased costs have convinced the SHA that a change in management may be appropriate. This report describes the history and importance of the site, the discussions leading up to recent resolutions on continued ownership and management, funding, and a schedule for transfer of the site from the SHA to the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).

This report contains the recommendations agreed upon by the SHA and MHS, namely that the Sibley Historic Site be transferred from SHA ownership to MHS ownership, contingent upon funding for operation of the site. The first priority, identified below under "Budget," identifies a number of studies that are necessary before a Master Plan can be completed that will fully articulate what is needed to preserve and develop the site.

II. BACKGROUND

When this study was mandated by the Legislature, nearly a year ago, the future ownership of the Sibley Historic Site was uncertain. The Minnesota Society of the DAR, an all volunteer organization, had acquired the Sibley House in 1910 and various other buildings on the site during the 1920s and 1930s. During the first 70 years or so of the DAR's ownership of the site, institutional objectives and abilities matched the demands of administering the site. Over the past decade or so, however, the continued aging of the buildings and artifacts, along with increasing interpretive needs, have necessitated discussions about a change in ownership.

When the DAR acquired the Sibley House in 1910, it was in generally poor condition. Decades of general-purpose use, including a period as storage space for local farmers, had left the 75-year old house in need of immediate restoration. This is what the DAR, acting through its subsidiary organization the SHA, did. The Sibley House was opened to the public in 1910. The DuPuis House (1854) was acquired in 1924, and the Faribault House (1840s) bought in 1935 and opened to the public in 1937. The Bishop Whipple Collection of 19th century Dakota and Ojibway artifacts was purchased and housed first in the Sibley House and moved to the Faribault House in 1937. A tea house was opened in the DuPuis House and became something of a local landmark over the next few decades. By 1940, the Sibley Historic Site had acquired the configuration it was to keep for roughly the next four decades.

Many complex factors converged to make the decade beginning in 1978 a significant period for the management of the Sibley Historic Site. Women entered the work force in growing numbers, thereby reducing the availability of DAR volunteers to manage the site. Even as the prospects for all-volunteer administration shrank, problems with the property, mostly attributable to age, grew larger. A 1978 structural report identified nearly half a million dollars worth of restoration work needed immediately to keep the buildings in sound condition. Some of these structural problems were visible, but many were not readily apparent. Interpretive needs began to outstrip the possibilities of volunteer tour guides, as visitors increasingly wanted information that only substantial scholarly research could provide.

A big step in the development of professional management of the site came in 1981 with the hiring of a full-time, paid site manager. As the 1980s progressed, research into the the life and

times of Mendota, the history of these properties, of American Indians in the area, and into Henry Sibley's life, became increasingly integrated into the site's programming, which enlarged its focus from an interpretation of Sibley's public career to include domestic life of women and families as well. The programming itself expanded when it began to reach out to particular groups in the community. Better care and more systematic registration of the thousands of artifacts in the collections was also initiated. Also during this period, state allocations to the Sibley Historic Site, administered through the fiscal agency of the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), increased to cover some salary, operations, and repair expenses.

Despite the increased attention of professional management, and the best efforts of all involved with the site, problems continued to mount. It is important to remember that these properties had aged considerably during the DAR's administration. In 1985, the DAR marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the acquisition of the Sibley House, meaning that the house had been DAR property for more than half of its existence. A great deal of restoration work had been initiated, but that work had only addressed the most immediate, critical needs.

Through the past four years, a number of studies have been undertaken to determine precisely the condition of the properties and collections, and to assess the strengths of current collections management techniques and educational programming possibilities for the future. These studies have been intended to serve as the base for a long-range management plan for the site, a plan that would identify priorities for stabilizing the physical resources and developing a focused interpretive program.

Concurrent with these studies, the SHA has begun discussions with the MHS for transfer of the site to MHS ownership and management. After a series of meetings detailed below under "Findings of the Sibley Site Committee" and upon the unanimous recommendations of both parties, an agreement in principle has been reached that the Sibley Historic Site be transferred from SHA ownership and management to MHS.

III. HISTORIC IMPORTANCE

The Sibley Historic Site must be considered one of the most significant sites in Minnesota's history. Henry Hastings Sibley came to this site in the early 1830s as a representative of the American Fur Company. The Company's site was strategically located near Fort Snelling, and Sibley made the most of his opportunity. During his long and varied public career, he was territorial representative to the U. S. Congress, first Governor of the State of Minnesota, fur trader, negotiator with the Dakota, and a prominent St. Paul businessman and civic leader, lived on this site from 1834 until 1863. He lived in the Sibley House from its construction in 1836 until his move to St. Paul in 1863. In the 1840s, Alexander Faribault, a colleague of Sibley's, built a house that is now part of the historic site. Still later, in 1854, Hippolyte DuPuis, Sibley's clerk, completed the group of buildings now known as the Sibley Historic Site by building the brick residence that fronts present State Highway 13. As a site of early commerce with American Indians, of early Euro-American settlement outside the military post at Fort Snelling, and the home of one of Minnesota's foremost 19th century citizens, the Sibley Historic Site is clearly deserving of special attention.

The Sibley House was built in 1835-36 of limestone over wooden beams. The building housed Sibley and his family, where they hosted many important visitors to the Minnesota territory. During his early years in the house, Sibley was married to a Dakota woman, Red Blanket, a marriage which was just as important to his trade with the Dakota as his later marriage would be to his prominence in St. Paul business affairs. In 1843, Sibley married Sarah Jane Steele, sister of Franklin Steele, sutler and one-time owner of Fort Snelling who later to become a pioneer land developer and miller in Minneapolis. Through the rest of the 1840s, as Sibley's participation in public affairs grew more pronounced, there was a steady stream of visitors, friends, businessmen, and politicians through the Sibley House and the growing number of other structures in Mendota.

Almost from the beginning of his residence in Minnesota Henry Sibley was a public figure. He was appointed a justice of the peace in the 1830s, when the Mendota settlement was part of Iowa Territory. Later, he became postmaster at Mendota. In 1848, he was elected to Congress as the delegate from Wisconsin, with the primary goal of gaining territorial status for Minnesota. In 1849, he was elected Territorial delegate from Minnesota. In 1852, while serving in this office, he helped negotiate ratification of treaties opening southern Minnesota to

settlement. When Minnesota became a state in 1858, Sibley was elected its first governor, a position he held for the customary one term before becoming a prominent St. Paul businessman.

Although this brief chronology of Henry Sibley's career while living on this site is, in itself, enough to make this location important in Minnesota's history, there is a significance that goes beyond the chronology. Mendota was a center of affairs during the earliest period of settlement by Euro-Americans. The fur trade and pioneer commerce carried on at Mendota made the town centrally important until the rise of milling around St. Anthony Falls and developing state government in St. Paul began to draw population away to the north and east. As prototypical of a certain stage of development, Mendota, and the Sibley Historic Site in particular, are emblematic of the state's earliest social conditions and settlement patterns.

No less significant is the site's role in early contact between Euro-Americans and American Indians. It is true that the fur trade fundamentally changed American Indian culture by introducing Western patterns of commerce, but Sibley's dealings with the tribes were generally fair. By all accounts, he gave fair price for the furs he bought, did not participate in the injurious whiskey trade, and grew to be liked and trusted by American Indians that he dealt with. In 1837 Sibley journeyed to Washington with representatives of the Winnebago and Dakota tribes to help negotiate treaties with the Federal government. He also represented a number of persons of mixed American Indian and Euro-American descent in their attempts to have land claims recognized. His reputation with American Indians suffered due to his participation in the 1851 treaties and as commander of troops during the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.

After the Sibleys moved to St. Paul in 1863, they continued to own property in Mendota for a short while. In 1867, he sold the house to a group of nuns associated with St. Peter's church, who operated a school for girls there between 1867 and 1879. The house then underwent a number of diverse uses until 1910, when it was bought by the DAR and restored.

Aside from the historical importance of the buildings and artifacts associated with the life and career of Henry Sibley and the early interaction in the area between American Indians and Euro-Americans, the Sibley Historic Site contains another collection of great importance. The Bishop Henry Whipple collection of nineteenth century Dakota and Ojibway materials was bought by the DAR in the 1930s and is an integral part of the entire site. The collection, the largest single grouping of the fifteen to twenty thousand items in the site's overall collections, includes beadwork objects, ceremonial pipes, photographs of Dakota and Ojibway culture, and manuscripts.

Bishop Whipple, the first Episcopal bishop in Minnesota and a man widely respected among American Indians, assembled the collection between 1859 and his death in 1901. A portion of the collection, not purchased by the DAR, remains in several other institutions throughout the Midwest and in Washington, DC. The Bishop Whipple collection is integral to the site and to the Dakota and Ojibway tribes who make up such a large part of the history of the site, and is relevant to Sibley's life because of his intimate association with American Indians during most of his years in Mendota. Furthermore, other collection holdings of the SHA, include an extensive collection of quilts and coverlets, DAR archives, and the potential archaeological resources on the site. Taken together, these resources make the site as a whole uniquely important as a window into the life and times of mid-nineteenth century Minnesota.

IV. ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Currently, the Sibley Historic Site is open to the public both for organized tours and on a walk-on basis. The SHA staff offers guided interpretive tours of the site as well as programming for special events. Each weekend during the season, from May through October, the staff presents special programs on a variety of topics such as sugaring, lace making, and the fur trade. Two interpretive groups offer special assistance on these programs. La Compaigne is a fur trade reenactment group that provides interpretation of the collections holdings related to the fur trade as well as program assistance. The Living History Society helps with several summer events.

School groups are perhaps the largest single constituency of visitors to the site. During the month of May, and again during September and October, school groups provide the bulk of the site's visitors. Pupils generally make the trip in conjunction with lessons on Minnesota history, and spend between one and two hours at the site. Sibley House staff estimates that most school groups come from the seven-county metropolitan area, with around 60% coming from the Minneapolis and St. Paul suburbs. Around one third of the year's visitation comes from school groups.

Trends in visitation at the Sibley Historic Site have been mixed. Staff reports that tour attendance, from schools and senior citizen groups, is up while the number of walk-on visitors is down slightly. Overall, attendance figures for the past three years have risen slowly, but steadily, from 4600 in 1987 to 5307 in 1988 to an estimated 5400 in 1989. These visitors have been handled by a minimal interpretive staff, usually one full-time paid employee and between two and four part-time staff members. The cadre of volunteers, particularly members of La Compaigne and the Living History Society who together provide well over 1000 hours of free labor, are extremely important to the site's interpretive programs.

There is great potential for expanding visitation and the economic impact of the Sibley Historic Site. MHS staff estimates that visitation could double immediately when the site is included in MHS marketing material, and could double again or triple, to reach about 30,000 or more visitors annually, as a marketing program becomes well established. Just across the river from the Sibley Historic Site, Historic Fort Snelling had 108,024 visitors in 1989. The close proximity of the two sites will serve to increase visitation at both. The current efforts at promoting the site to senior citizens are very important; some studies indicate that historic sites are a preferred vacation of choice of more than 50% of people aged 50 or over. More than 60%

of people in this age group who are travelers with group tours indicate a desire to visit historic sites.

Clearly, the economic impact of the Sibley Historic Site, while already important, can grow even more with concentrated efforts at promotion and marketing. Furthermore, the site's economic impact transcends admission increases and jobs created by expanded programming. A more highly visible Sibley Historic Site will create direct linkages to the nearby Fort Snelling Historic Site and Fort Snelling State Park, thereby creating a highly visible tourism "package" for the area. Increased visitation will undoubtedly provide a boost to the travel-service economy of the Mendota area, as tourists seek out places to eat, lodge, and shop while visiting the area's historic attractions.

V. RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The legislation that mandates this study reads as follows:

> The Minnesota historical society shall study and report to the governor and the legislature by July 1, 1990, on the ownership and management of the Sibley house historic site, which includes the Sibley, Faribault, and DuPuis houses. The purpose of the study is to prepare for transferring these properties to the state for inclusion in the state's historic site network. The study must include the governance of the site, funding needed to repair and restore the site, restoration priorities, funding needed to operate the site, and ownership of the collections. The study must contain joint recommendations of the society and the association regarding these issues as well as a recommendation on when the site should be turned over to the state. Recommendations for funding must be included in the 1992-1993 biennial budget request.

Since 1980, budgets allocated to MHS have included provisions making MHS the fiscal agent for state allocations to the Sibley Historic Site. The monies, for salaries, operation, and repairs, have increased from $40,000 in 1980 to $93,000 in 1989.

VI. FINDINGS OF THE SIBLEY SITE COMMITTEE

The events and discussions that led up to this legislative request, and the present document which fills that request, began in the mid 1980s, when the membership of the Minnesota Society of the DAR instructed its officers to investigate joint ownership or some other solution to funding needs for the site's permanent continuance. After a series of meetings between the management of the SHA and the MHS, the legislature requested this report.

In the fall of 1989, a Sibley House Study Committee was formed composed of eleven members, six from the SHA and five from the MHS. At meetings in January and February 1990, various possible management and ownership roles were considered. Issues discussed in detail included future accessibility of the site's collections and the continued role of the SHA in the management of the site.

In March 1990, an Agreement in Principle was passed unanimously by the membership of the SHA and by the Executive Council of the MHS. Included in the deliberations by the MHS Executive Council was a Resolution of Commendation to the Minnesota Society of the DAR for its work in preserving and administering the Sibley House. The complete text of this resolution can be found in Appendix A.

The Agreement passed by SHA on March 9, 1990 is as follows:

1. Transfer ownership of Sibley Site properties to the MHS or the State of Minnesota (to be determined by MHS), with a continuing advisory role for the SHA and with condition of gift that the site remain open to the public and that uses for the DuPuis House be further negotiated with SHA.

2. Transfer ownership of Sibley Site collections to the MHS with a continuing advisory role for the SHA.

3. The MHS will manage and determine mission, interpretation, and budget of Sibley Site with advice from the SHA.

4. The relationship between the MHS and the continuing advisory role of the SHA regarding the Sibley Site will consist of the following:

   A. Appoint a member of the SHA to the MHS Executive Council and/or B.

   B. Appoint a member of the SHA to the MHS Executive Council Historic Sites Committee.

C. And create a Friends of the Sibley Site group that would serve in an advisory role by working directly with the MHS site manager and/or the Head, Historic Sites Department.

5. The recommended schedule for transfer consists of a request to the 1991 legislature to fund the development of a master plan and budget in FY 1992. Based on this master plan, capital development and operations money would be requested for FY 1994. If the funding is forthcoming, the transfer would take place in FY 1994. If the funding is not appropriated, the SHA would retain ownership and management of the Sibley Site property.

The MHS Executive Council on March 15, 1990 unanimously approved each of these positions except 4A.

VII. ISSUES OF CONTINUING CONCERN

The discussions of the study committee identified various issues of continuing concern with respect to the transfer of ownership. Three concerns in particular stood out.

Both the DAR and MHS are anxious that the site remain open with continued funding. There are two sources of concern here. The first is the question of possible closing due to budget cuts. The SHA recognizes that MHS may close the Sibley Site either in whole or in part on a temporary basis for repairs, renovations, and the like. It is felt that Minnesota State Statutes, Chapter 138 "Historical Societies; Historic Sites; Archives; Field Archaeology" provides a measure of the state's commitment to maintaining historic sites and managing them in a historically appropriate manner. Point 1 of the Agreement in Principle includes the wording "with condition of gift that the site remain open to the public." Future agreements at the time of transfer will specify the pertinent conditions of deed attached to the legal ownership of the property.

The second continuing concern addresses the Sibley Historic Site collections. With regard to the transfer of the Sibley Historic Site collections, the point of discussion centered around the issue of accessibility of the collection on site. After discussion of the needs to store some of the artifacts in temperature and humidity-controlled surroundings, it was agreed that a portion of the collections would always be available at the Sibley Site, with a complete catalogue and photographs of the entire collection also available. There was reference during these discussions to a "Faribault House Covenant," made in the 1930s in association with acquisition of the Faribault House and the Bishop Whipple Collection, which stipulates that the collections not be separated from the house. No written copy of this covenant could be found, however.

The final issue of continuing concern addresses the availability of a meeting place for the DAR and SHA on site and the provision of space for records storage. It was felt that the language of point 1 "uses for the DuPuis House be further negotiated" addressed this issue.

VIII. BUDGET

a. Planning

Budgets for development and continued operation of the Sibley Historic Site cannot be determined until a Master Plan for the site has been prepared. What follows are budget items pertaining to the planning needed to develop a new Master Plan.

1. Structures Report and Analysis.....$25,000

2. Archaeological tests and mapping.....$30,000

3. Historical research into the historic context and social history of the site.....$25,000

4. Master Plan.....$10,000

5. Documentation of title and transfer clarifications.....$8,000

TOTAL $98,000

These funds will be requested in the 1992-1993 biennial budget. They represent the priorities that were asked for in the legislation requesting this report (see above, p. 8).

b. Operations

A capital and operations funding request will occur in Biennium 1994-1995. Transfer of property to MHS would take place only after legislative funding for development and operations has been committed. There is therefore a need to continue present funding arrangements to SHA until the transfer is completed in FY 1994.

IX. SCHEDULE FOR TRANSFER

March 1990	Approval of agreement in principle
May 1990	Rough draft of legislative report completed
June 1990	Final draft of report completed
Oct. 1990	Final approval of report by MHS and SHA
July 1991	Funding for research and development of Master Plan
June 1992	Master planning complete and capital and operations budget submitted
July 1993	Funding and transfer

X. APPENDICES

Appendix A--Resolution of Commendation

Minnesota Historical Society

A Resolution of Commendation
to the Minnesota Society of the Daughters of the
American Revolution and the Sibley House Association

March 15, 1990

WHEREAS, the properties that comprise the Mendota Historic District are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and have great distinction in the territorial history of Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the properties contained in the Mendota Historic District include the Henry Hastings Sibley House built in 1836 as a home and store for Henry Sibley, then an agent of the American Fur Comapny; and

WHEREAS, Henry Hastings Sibley served as the delegate to the U. S. Congress in 1848 and secured a bill creating Minnesota Territory, and in 1858 was elected Minnesota's first state governor; and

WHEREAS, the Mendota Historic District includes the Hypolite DuPuis House built in 1854, for DuPuis who served as a clerk for the American Fur Company; and

WHEREAS, the Mendota Historic District includes the Faribault House, built between 1836 and 1840 by fur trader Jean Baptiste Faribault; and

WHEREAS, the Faribault House contains several importasnt collections of American Indian artifacts including the Winston and Whipple Collections which are considered to be of great significance; and

WHEREAS, the Minnesota Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution obtained the Sibley House in 1909, the DuPuis House in 1924, and the Faribault House in 1937, purchased the Whipple and Winston Collections in the 1930s and 1940s, and formed the Sibley House Association to manage the properties; and

WHEREAS, the Sibley House Association has preserved and maintained these historic properties and the significant American

Indian artifact collections for the benefit of the people of Minnesota for much of this century; and

WHEREAS, the members of the Minnesota Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution were the first to recognize the historic importance of this area and acted to preserve and interpret it; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Executive Council of the Minnesota Historical Society commends and expresses its great appreciation to the Minnesota Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sibley House Association for their accomplishment in saving, preserving, and maintaining the historic treasure that is the Mendota Historic District.

Appendix B--Sibley House Study Committee

Nancy Moses--SHA President

Dean Randall--MHS Executive Council Member

Charlotte Olsen--SHA

Dorothy Bennett--SHA

Judy Payne--Site Manager

Robert A. Minish--Chair Person for SHA Advisory Board

Nancy Sour--Financial/Corresponding Secretary

Ian Stewart--Deputy Director for Interpretive Programs, MHS

John Wood--Executive Assistant to the Director, MHS

Thomas Woods--Head, Historic Sites Department, MHS

Kendra Dillard--Curator, Historic Sites Collections, MHS