

Vital Aging Network Forum Lenox Community Center

December 11, 2007

“Preserving Family Heirlooms”

Speakers: Bob Herskovitz, Minnesota Historical Society
Host: Dolores Zeller, Vital Aging Network

INTRODUCTION: Dolores Zeller, Vital Aging Network member, welcomed the participants to VAN’s December forum held at the Lenox Community Center, Saint Louis Park, MN. Dolores asked the participants to introduce themselves and answer this question. “Do you have a memory of a family heirloom and does it have special meaning for you?” The answers varied greatly, but all spoke about the memories each heirloom brought to mind.

Dolores introduced Bob Herskovitz, Outreach Conservator with the MN Historical Society. Bob gave a short speech about the importance of preserving family heirlooms. Even though most heirlooms have no great monetary value, the memories they invoke are the important thing. As family members pass away, family history is lost unless the family member took the time to provide their oral or written history, and passed it on to the next generations. In the same way, unless the history of an heirloom is preserved, its story is also lost to upcoming generations. By tape recording and transcribing stories about these heirlooms, the owner is able to pass down family stories and history for the benefit of the rest of the family.

Bob spent time with the participants answering questions on how best to preserve their treasures, noting that when deciding if a broken heirloom is worth fixing, the owner must decide based on the value they attribute to that object.

Bob gave several tips on preserving family mementos. They were:

- Photos should have the names of the subjects and the dates taken, and should be stored in cool, dry, dark spaces. If placed in a frame or album, be sure to use acid-free paper.
- When framing photos, always use a mat or spacer to separate the photo from the glass to prevent sticking. If a photo gets stuck to the glass there is no way to unstick it! Also, be sure the glass has a UV filter to prevent fading.
- Don’t store metal objects in oak cabinets, as chemicals in the wood cause tarnishing.
- Preserve wood finishes by cleaning with 100% mineral spirits, then waxing with clear butcher’s paste.
- Keep in mind that technology changes, and data may require transfer to another form of technology down the road.