The Great Depression brought hard times to Hokah, a southeastern Minnesota farm town on the Root River, but also a major opportunity. Hokah had lost its town hall to fire in 1913, and locals had no place for public events. In 1937 city leaders learned that the Works Progress Administration would build a hall if the city could finance 40 percent of the cost. The council won voters’ approval for a bond sale, and the WPA agreed to construct a multipurpose, Art Deco building on Main Street. It would feature a gymnasium/auditorium with a balcony on the upper level and shower rooms, city offices, a dining hall, and two stalls for fire trucks on the lower level.

Hokah’s leading citizen, Herbert Wheaton, the flamboyant editor of The Hokah Chief, was an ardent Republican who used his newspaper to bash Democrats and Farmer-Laborites. For Wheaton, the WPA was a wasteful “make work” program that served as the butt of jokes. The completion of WPA’s town hall in 1939 forced him to reconsider. Speaking as the recently elected mayor, Wheaton announced that he was thrilled with “this magnificent new municipal building.” He praised state WPA director Linus Glotzbach who told the crowd at the dedication ceremony that an unemployed worker on a WPA project “is as much entitled to be proud of his earnings as any other workman.” Reporting on the event, Wheaton wrote that Glotzbach had “cleared up considerable misunderstandings in local circles.”

Hokah citizens christened their new town hall by singing “A Hot Time in Old Hoky Tonight,” followed by a dance. Since then, hundreds of dances and other community celebrations have been held in the building. It has also been a sports venue, home to high school basketball games and amateur boxing matches. Occasionally, it has been used for funerals, including Wheaton’s in 1954.

In recognition of its central role in Hokah’s history and its distinctive architecture, the building was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places. The upper level still hosts a full schedule of community events. City offices and the fire department have moved out of the lower level, opening up space for the Hokah Public Library and a food shelf. The town hall remains a beehive of daily activity, a living tribute to the New Deal.

—Greg Gaut and Marsha Neff

This feature was made possible by the Henry and Donna Morgan Fund for Research and Publications.

Greg Gaut and Marsha Neff write about history from their home in Winona. Their article on the Winona Post office in Minnesota History’s Summer 2013 issue won the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians’ David Stanley Gebhard Award.
If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

**Students and researchers**
- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: [http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html](http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html)
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

**Teachers**
- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. **Contact us** for more information.

**About Illustrations**
- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see [MHS Library FAQ](http://www.mnhs.org/mnhistory).