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FOLLOWING THE PATHS of OUR PEOPLE AND PLACES

# ROOTPRINTS

## The Ojibwe Gallery

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**By Kristi Johnson**  
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*The opening of the  
Ojibwe Gallery will  
be announced soon.*

You may have seen this statement appearing in *Rootprints* for several issues now, and yes, we still expect the opening of Ojibwe Gallery to be announced in the near future.

What is the story here?  
Why the wait?

The story is a complex one, one whose main character is a massive 122-year-old French Chateausque-style structure built to impress those traveling by rail. Its name: The Duluth Union Depot, now known as the Saint Louis County Heritage & Arts Center (the Depot.)

The Depot is a shining example of “adaptive reuse.” That means taking a building designed for one purpose and adapting it to serve another use -- or even multiple uses -- such as offices, shops, and gallery space. Each use comes with its own environmental standards. The toughest of all to meet is the museum gallery environment.

But first, in order to have a gallery, you need a superb collection to display -- one

that can pull visitors in from across the nation, or increasingly, around the world. The Society’s stellar Eastman Johnson (American, 1824-1906) collection of paintings/drawings and its Ojibwe artifact collection comprise that level of quality. Eastman Johnson, an accomplished artist with an international reputation, spent 1856 and 1857 in the area working on portraits of the Ojibwe in charcoal, crayon and oil. The Society owns 37 pieces, nearly everything Johnson produced during those years.

Turning a section of the Depot into a gallery for the preservation and display of this superb collection has been a long and complex road.

### **Birch bark and paintings**

Museum curators note that the most notoriously difficult items for Collections



*The Ojibwe Gallery remains empty until HVAC issues are fine-tuned and resolved and humidity levels can be guaranteed not to fluctuate.*

Managers like the Society’s Milissa Brooks-Ojibway to maintain in pristine condition are artworks on canvas and paper, as well as birch bark items. Both can be seriously, and irreversibly, degraded by fluctuating humidity levels.

Together they comprise the majority of the exhibit material in the Ojibwe Gallery.

“For several years, the Society-owned Eastman Johnson collection of oil paintings and charcoal drawings were stored off-site to ensure their

*continued on page 2*