Introduction:

Hello and welcome to the Minnesota Historical Society Library's reading room. We’re in the Weyerhaeuser Reading Room and my name is Patrick Coleman. I’m the Acquisitions Librarian here, or, I guess, the curator of printed materials at the Minnesota Historical Society.

The library here is really the, probably the foundation of everything that happens at the Minnesota Historical Society. The very first charge of the territorial legislature was that the Historical Society would build a library, and the very first money spent at the Minnesota Historical Society was on library books. Since then, we’ve amassed a collection of over 500,000 volumes and they’re all here and available whenever the library is open.

When a researcher comes into the library, there’s a method for finding material, and requesting that material, and having that material brought out. And the reason for this is that we have closed stacks. And the closed stacks assure two things: First of all, that the books are very well protected and will be here for posterity; and secondly that no book will be checked out, it'll always be here when you come to see it. So we’re going to show you how one goes about getting that book.

The Process:

Alright, so here we have our volunteer, our summer intern Claire, and she is looking for a specific book. Her topic of research is the St. Croix River. So what Claire has to do is, first of all, go to the home page of the library and, to find the correct database, she’s looking in our library collection so she would click on that database and get a page that will offer her some tips on if she wants to look for something by the exact title, or the exact author, or subject heading. And she has punched in the subject of “St. Croix” and found the book that she wants.

In order to get that, you fill out a card with your name, the table number that you’re sitting at, and the date, along with the location number or call number. That gets
put in a box and picked up by one of our Reference Assistants who double-checks to make sure the information is there.

That gets put on a dumbwaiter and sent down into our library stacks, which are a couple of different floors, and picked up in the stacks by another Reference Assistant who again checks the call number and walks through our library of 500,000 volumes to find the right aisle that this book is going to be in; the aisles are marked. The book that Claire was looking for is an oversized book so it’s shelved with some of our larger library books. And Nick is finding that the call numbers match, it’s the right title, and he is bringing that back again to the dumbwaiter. And you have a rare opportunity to see the inside of the dumbwaiter. And that’ll be sent back up to the library reading room.

Once the book is on its way back up to the reading room, and Claire has been waiting patiently for a few minutes for this particular volume, and it’s brought out to her at the desk that she identified that she would be sitting at, she opens it up and discovers that it is exactly what she’s been looking for. It’s a particularly nice volume of illustrations of the St. Croix River. This particular book happens to have been a donation from our former governor, Elmer L. Andersen. And everybody’s happy.

Conclusion:

The library is free and open to the public and we’d like to encourage you to come in and see if we can make you as happy as we made Claire. You can research any topic that relates to Minnesota’s history or culture. You can do sports history, you can do family history, you can do local history. And we’re open six days a week including our brand new Sunday hours, so come on in and join us.