

Wisconsin Historical Society: Names Christian Overland as the new Ruth and Hartley Barker Director

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Current executive vice president of the Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, will head Wisconsin’s premier historical organization

Madison, Wis. – The Wisconsin Historical Society announced today that its Board of Curators has appointed Christian W. Overland as its new Ruth and Hartley Barker Director. Overland is currently the executive vice president of The Henry Ford, an internationally-recognized history destination in Dearborn, Michigan.

“The Wisconsin Historical Society is rich in educational resources and one of the best history organizations in our nation,” said Overland. “I am very excited about working with the Society’s staff and Board of Curators to create meaningful and memorable mission-based experiences through access to history.”

“Christian emerged following a national search as our top choice to lead the Society,” said Brian Rude, the president of Society’s Board of Curators. “His impressive career at an important historical institution gives him the skills, insights and experience to lead the Wisconsin Historical Society forward.”

Overland has held a variety of administrative roles at The Henry Ford since 1992. Since 2010, he has been responsible for leading and managing strategic planning,

historical research, the maintenance and growth of the institution's collections and visitor experiences as its executive vice president. Overland also has overseen education programs, experience design, museum operations and national positioning.

The Henry Ford is a national historic landmark that draws nearly 1.8 million visitors annually to its five attractions: Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation, Greenfield Village, Ford Rouge Factory Tour, Benson Ford Research Center and The Henry Ford Giant Screen Experience.

Major leadership initiatives by Overland have included the master plan effort, restoration and transformation of Greenfield Village as well as planning, developing and implementing the Henry Ford Museum Master Plan.

Overland will replace Ellsworth Brown, who announced his intention to retire last August. Brown has led the Society since July 2004.

"Ellsworth's efforts have enhanced the national standing and reputation of the Wisconsin Historical Society," said Rude. "The Board of Curators thanks him for his leadership in the preservation of Wisconsin's heritage and his unwavering commitment to helping the Society connect people to the past by collecting, preserving, and sharing important stories."

Overland, a Minnesota native, will be moving to Wisconsin with his wife Maura and their three children.

Prior to his positions in Michigan, Overland worked for the Minnesota Historical Society and was a volunteer gallery lecturer at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. He earned his undergraduate degree in American Studies and Art History at the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis and his master's degree at the State University of New York College at Oneonta and New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown, NY in American History and Museum Studies.

Overland will begin his new assignment in Madison on February 12.

According to Rude, Overland will be taking over leadership of the Society, its diverse operations and its exceptional North American history resources at an exciting time. In 2018, the Society will move into a new 188,000 square foot State Archive Preservation Facility and explore ways to upgrade the Wisconsin Historical

Museum in Madison.

About the Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.