



Austin-Whittemore House

HOME OF THE *Clay County Historical Society*

15 Austin Street, Vermillion SD 57069

605-624-8266 / www.cchssd.org / claycohistory@yahoo.com

Quarterly Publication

April 2014

A Letter from the CCHS President

This year is breaking all records for swiftness and busyness – it seems that we are always planning another event for the Clay County Historical Society and can look back on some very successful endeavors so far. Our Tour of Homes was very successful and this was thanks to Dan and Gloria Christopherson and Erin Conlon who undertook the job of being chairpersons for this event. They found houses willing to be toured, planned the publicity, and sold the tickets. Diane Rienke designed a beautiful wreath for raising even more dollars – everyone who attended enjoyed seeing the beautiful homes in their holiday finery and enjoyed and appreciated the hospitality of the host families. As usual, a delicious selection of holiday confections was offered at the Austin-Whittemore House and the beautiful old dining room table groaned under the selection of good food. Anne Severson and Judy Sullivan worked long and hard to trim the House into a festive state and they had much help from Gary Bottolfson, Marvin Walz, and Joe Hoffman – all the board members helped, but these folks especially worked hard to get the task finished. Thanks to all the folks who helped make this event the success that it was. The Saturday following, the now annual Sweets and Treats holiday bake sale was held and once again, the special delicacies created by our members were enjoyed by an enthusiastic crowd of customers. Some even got the treats all the way home before they were sampled!

We have had some great gatherings which have included the famous potluck meals and featured programs

of interest. Our latest program was based on the history of the one-room schoolhouse replica. Before too long, the new replica of the replica will be placed on the grounds of the Austin-Whittemore House for folks to enjoy. Elsewhere, there is a story about how this project is progressing and how it came about in the first place. As usual, Art Rusch has an in-depth story about this project and the history he shares is intricately interesting. Then, Judy Sullivan and I have been working on creating a style show of the wedding gowns that we have here in the House. This style show will be presented on March 15 at St. Agnes School Auditorium as the program for the Catholic Daughters. We have some lovely models and some beautiful dresses and by the time this newsletter comes to you, I know we will have had a successful show!

Otherwise, we will be preparing for our ice cream social in June – the first one of the season – and electing officers at our annual meeting. Remember, all members and guests are more than welcome at our meetings and we would like to see a full house. Thank you for your continued support of our activities.

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Clay County Historical Society Annual Meeting will be held Thursday, April 24th. The CCHS Board will host a potluck at 6:05 p.m. followed by a program and the election of new officers.

Notes from the Office

HAVE YOU EVER LOOKED FOR A LONG LOST RELATIVE?

There are times when an arrow is shot into the sky and it lands at the Austin-Whittemore House in Vermillion, SD. This is what a gentleman from Sweden told us when we located his grandfather who came to South Dakota in 1914 and had not been heard from since that time. Stig Hokengren who lives in Sweden, found a post card that his grandfather had sent to the family in 1914 telling them to contact him at the home of Mrs. Anna Erickson at Meckling, SD as that is where he was staying since he arrived in South Dakota to make his fortune and then send for his family. The family did not hear from him after that date. It seems that his grandfather, Niels Petersen was a great carpenter and a great musician and spent the rest of his life in the Meckling, SD area. It was a sad time when the family no longer heard from him and always wondered about his life in the United States. Thanks to the internet, Stig came across information that led him to send an email to us at the Austin-Whittemore House. Within 30 minutes, we had found the obituary of his grandfather and sent the information back to him. He was so astounded to think in a few minutes we had found the one they had looked for all of these years. The following year, Stig and his wife Inga made the trip to Meckling, SD to visit the area and see where his grandfather spent the rest of his life. However, the reason that the family didn't get to join Niels was sad. When Niels would get paid for his work, he would go into town and celebrate until the money was gone and then return to work on a building project again. Many buildings and barns in the Meckling area were built by this man from Sweden. It is sad that his immediate family were not able to join him.

SOUNDS FROM THE BASEMENT

It is not unusual for visitors to ask if the Austin-Whittemore House has a ghost that lives in the house. Our answer is that we really haven't seen one around but we do wonder why the chair in the music room moves out from the wall and strange sounds have been heard in the basement. One day a few months ago, a young man told us that he was sure we had a ghost upstairs as he could feel "hot spots" in one of the rooms.

Just a couple of weeks ago, one of our Board members was checking something in the basement. As he went down the stairs, he became a little frightened as there were two big green eyes looking right at him. Suddenly, the eyes darted the other way and he discovered a cat in the basement. However, the story didn't end there when another cat appeared. It wasn't long until our Board member told his story to another Board member and they decided to bring live traps into the basement and catch the cats. The next day they came with the trap and a can of tuna to encourage the cats to have a feast inside the trap. One cat was soon in the live trap and was taken outside and let loose. The other cat was very smart, entered the trap, ate the tuna and went free without getting caught. This went on for several days and at the end of the week, eight cats were finally caught and let loose. Because this happened in the very cold weather we had, the cats were so happy to have a nice warm place to live. They had found a way into the basement through a small opening on the west side of the house. It wasn't long until the opening was closed so no more cats came into the basement and the strange sounds from the basement are gone.

**We are always looking for members with an interest in the history of
Clay County to serve on the Board.**

Update on the Clay County Historical Society's Project

PRESERVING THE PAST

Restoration and Reconstruction of the Replica of Dakota Territory's First Permanent School House

A yet-to-remain anonymous donor has stepped forward and will match funds dollar-for-dollar to \$10,000. The total project is expected to cost between \$17,500 and \$20,000. As of March 1, donations in the amount of \$1,150 have been received.

Judge Arthur Rusch has prepared a PRESERVING THE PAST presentation which highlights the First Permanent Schoolhouse in Dakota Territory constructed in 1864. He has shared it with several organizations in the community; and if you wish to schedule the presentation, he may be reached at 605-624-8723.

We are looking forward to commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the First Permanent Schoolhouse in Dakota Territory at a dedication ceremony on Wednesday, September 3 BUT we need financial support from our members, the community and friends to have "the replica" completed and fully funded. Any funds received beyond the costs, will be set aside for future maintenance needs.

We hope we can count on you as we strive to PRESERVE A PIECE OF VERMILLION'S PAST.

Please see donation sheet on page 9.



Construction Progress on log school house replica

The concrete slab/foundation and obtaining the necessary logs have been completed. The logs have been sized, cut and part of them installed. Approximately fifty percent of the log work is complete. The balance of the construction yet to be completed includes the roof, windows, door and wood floor. The expected time of completion of the project is mid to late summer 2014.

Style Show Was A Big Hit!

On Saturday, March 15, the Clay County Historical Society presented a style show of Wedding Gowns Through the Ages at the annual spring luncheon sponsored by the Catholic Daughters at St. Agnes. Ten dresses were modeled and several more were displayed on dress forms; a display of other items, including a wedding cake by Monica, were placed on tables. Some of these were umbrellas, gloves, photographs, jewelry, lace articles and even included some perfume. All of the dresses chosen for modeling were beautiful and the lovely models wore them well. One of the dresses modeled was one that had been worn for three generations of Bottolfson brides; grandmother; granddaughter, and great-granddaughter with a history beginning in 1914. The dress, fashioned of silk, featured pleated cuffs and had been modified for each wearing to suit the bride. The last bride wore a silk hat to finish up her special look. This was probably the last time this dress will be shown in a style show as it's becoming very fragile. We had handmade dresses from long ago; we had a black wedding dress which had been worn by Mrs. Hazel Hoy; we had long trains, short dresses, a flower girl in a dress first worn 66 years ago; and we had a bridesmaid; Judy Sullivan and Maxine Johnson wore fur jackets from the House; there were many dresses that the Civic Council had rescued and gifted to the CCHS, and we had stories to tell about most of the dresses. It was a good afternoon that told many people about the CCHS, the Austin-Whittemore House, and the ongoing school replica project. Now, it's time to put the dresses back in place, dust the corners, and draw the shades to help preserve these treasures.



W.H. Over Museum News

The past few months have been busy at the Over Museum – we chose to close our doors to the public from December 24 until January 20 in order to undertake some projects that needed to be completed. We installed a new floor outside of Sletwold Hall and prepared the floor in the Discovery Room for new floor covering. We did some cleaning and dusting and rearranging and were ready to re-open in good time. We will commence completion of the floor installation in a few weeks. We held our annual meeting in January and were royally entertained by John and Susan McNeill and had a good report for our membership. The storm we had that day was very irritating but the weather managed to behave long enough to get our board and members together to conduct the business. We held our annual fundraiser early in March and had an extremely successful event. At that time, it was announced that the Over would be the recipient of a mounted animal collection later this year and that Greg Preheim would be painting a mural behind the newly configured buffalo exhibit. Dan Kilbride entertained us with his banjo, guitar, and quick wit. The three student-designed exhibits are completed and the staff is working hard on getting the collection identified and computerized.

Pansy's White Lilac

A few years ago we decided that the BIG old lilac bush in front of the Austin-Whittemore House needed to be renovated as it was just too large. During this process I decided to try and create some new starts for a possible fund raiser for the society. I have been successful and several new starts of this antique white classic are available on a first come first served basis! Several years ago I discussed the giant white lilac with Helen Vann (a daughter of this house) she told me it was planted before 1910 and that its blooms had graced the tables of many of Vermillion's major events. Being one of the first blooming plants of the season Pansy (her Mother) was always giving arm loads of the flowers away! If you would like to grow a piece of Vermillion's history please call Joe Hoffman @ 605 670 2429. Leave a message if no answer and I will give you a call.

Board of Directors

Maxine Johnson, Interim President/VP

Judy Sullivan, Secretary

Luann Ouellette, Treasurer

Joe Hoffman, Past President

Life-time Directors:

Cleo Erickson

Ann Severson

Elected Directors:

Gary Bottolfson

Dan Christopherson

Art Rusch

Marvin Walz

Happy Easter

HISTORICAL RELATED ITEMS AVAILABLE

From the River Valleys to the Rising Bluff A Pictorial History of Vermillion, South Dakota 1859-2009

304 pages. This publication was sponsored by the Clay County Historical Society, Inc. for the Vermillion Sesquicentennial in 2009. The book conveys Vermillion's history through pictures and text.

Price \$35.00 + 7.5% tax = \$ 37.64 / add \$ 5.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses

Price \$35.00 + 5.00 shipping/handling to other states

History of Dakota Territory ... originally published in 1869 and 1870. 125 pages

A history of the Territory of Dakota tells about the Homestead land and the towns in the area. It describes the location of timber land, steam mills, water, and the climate and soil. It's a good source for those looking at the area.

Price \$15.00 + 7.5% tax = \$ 16.13 / add \$ 5.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses

Price \$15.00 + 5.00 shipping & handling to other states

Dakota's First Lynching ...

The booklet tells the lively story about James Hogan, a "desperado of the worst character". James Hogan's body was seen hanging from a roadside tree near the mouth of the Vermillion River on 26 February 1866. It's a mysterious little book to read.

Price \$5.00 + 7.5% tax = \$ 5.38 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses

Price \$5.00 + 3.00 shipping & handling to other states

Hay Country ...

A history of the Meckling and Gayville SD area makes this a great book for a historian. It also contains the history of many families that settled in Norway and Meckling townships.

Price \$12.00 + 7.5% tax = \$ 12.90 / add \$ 5.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses

Price \$12.00 + 5.00 shipping & handling to other states

History of Clay County ...

The book was written in 1976 by Dr. Herbert S. Schell and tells the "grass-roots" story of Clay County. The author traces Clay County from the pre-settlement period to the 1970's. It has numerous illustrations and a comprehensive index.

Price \$15.00 + 7.5% tax = \$ 16.13 / add \$ 5.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses

Price \$15.00 + 5.00 shipping & handling to other states

Clay County Place Names ...

Names of schools, churches, villages, parks are listed in the book. A map of the county is included showing exact locations of the above name places. Some pictures are included.

Price \$7.00 + 7.5% tax = \$7.53 / add \$ 5.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses

Price \$7.00 + 5.00 shipping & handling to other states

Clay County Country School CD ... A history of the country schools in Clay County with many photos of schools buildings and students. The CD contains many Clay County 8th Grade Country School graduation pictures. Most have students identified. Would appreciate names of "unknown" students pictured.

Price \$10.00 + 7.5% tax = \$10.75 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses

Price \$10.00 + 3.00 shipping & handling to other states

Clay County Homestead Map of 1884 ... approximate size 17-1/2" x 22-1/2"; shipped in mailing tube

Price \$10.00 + 7.5% tax = \$10.75 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling to SD addresses
Price \$10.00 + 3.00 shipping & handling to other states

1902 Clay County Map ... compiled and drawn from Special Services and Office Records by E. Frank Peterson, Map Publisher, Vermillion. Approximate size 17-1/2" X 22-1/2"; shipped in mailing tube.

Price free / \$3.00 for shipping & handling to either SD addresses or addresses in other states

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**TO ORDER:**

please make check payable to Clay County Historical Society, Inc.

and mail to 15 Austin St.  
Vermillion, SD 57069

At this time, we do not have the capability to accept debit or credit card charges. We're sorry for any inconvenience this may cause.

**QUERIES**

Questions, such as shipping and handling costs outside the United States, please contact the Historical Society at the address above or

phone 605-624-8266 e-mail [claycohistory@yahoo.com](mailto:claycohistory@yahoo.com) website [www.cchssd.org](http://www.cchssd.org)

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR BUSINESS

**Annual membership dues for the 2014-2015 year are due in April.
Please see the application form on page 8 to renew. Thank you.**

Clay County Historical Society Membership Application / Renewal

Membership Year is April 1 – March 31*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

_____ Individual Member:	\$ 15.00	_____ Family Membership:	\$ 25.00
_____ Institutional:	\$ 50.00	_____ Life Member/per person:	\$200.00

Please mail check payable to Clay County Historical Society, Inc.

And mail to
CCHS
15 Austin Street
Vermillion, SD 57069

If you have questions about membership or the Society, please call us at
(605) 624-8266 or e-mail us at claycohistory@yahoo.com or write to us
at the above address.

***NOTE:**

In a revised opinion, we were able to revert to the CCHS Fiscal Year being April 1-March 31.

Any news you'd like to share?

Clay County/Vermillion area surnames of interest to you

We hope we can count on you ... as we strive to

PRESERVE A PIECE OF VERMILLION'S PAST.

The Clay County Historical Society would appreciate
your financial support of

PRESERVING THE PAST

Restoration and Reconstruction

of the

Replica of Dakota Territory's First Permanent School House

Dedication to be held Wednesday afternoon, September 3, 2014 ... time to be announced

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Donation amount _____

Checks payable, please, to: Clay County Historical Society (a 501(c)3 entity)

Mailed to: CCHS Preserving the Past, 15 Austin Street, Vermillion, SD 57069

Clay County Historical Society, Inc.
15 Austin Street
Vermillion, SD 57069