



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 Newsletter

Winter 2016

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Elected Directors:

Gary Bottolfson
 Dan Christophson
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Executive Director:

Wess Pravecek

Newsletter Editor:

Judy Sullivan

Message from CCHS President Maxine Johnson

It hardly seems possible that the Clay County Historical Society has accomplished all the things that were planned this past year. What an incredible set of folks to dedicate themselves to the well-being of the presence of the Historical Society while keeping the doors of the Austin-Whittemore House open for all to enjoy. There is something so very heart warming about watching a dedicated group of folks, like our board, quietly go about the business of preserving the past. This effort takes many paths and forms – from one member diligently researching the best way to ensure the security of the building and its precious contents; to the drudgery of making sure the roof doesn't leak or that the bushes are not overgrown; even to lawn care which includes whether or not there is a hidden hole which would cause someone to trip; to the massive task of taking care of finances and keeping the board apprised of how good a job of caretaking we are doing; one day when we all clean out the accumulated interesting trash under the bushes or make sure the feral cats aren't finding a way into the basement; decorating for each holiday or occasion; we have some of our members who are meticulous in seeing that boxes are moved, that furniture is moved or that sidewalks are repaired or paved anew. In short, all of our board members contribute mightily to the welfare of this place and each of them contributes the best of what they are and do whether it's baking, dusting, setting up chairs and tables, bringing down seasonal items, or contributing dollars; most of all, each planned event is well attended and supported by all of the board members. Thank you all.

We also have folks, members of the Clay County Historical Society, who do not serve as members of the board but are what I call our "go to" people when we need extra help such as contacting members when we need help such as the wildly successful Sweets 'n Treats bake sale this past December or planning our traditional first of the season ice cream social each year. It is always practically impossible to convey the deserved and proper thanks to each and every one who have and always will support the endeavors of this organization – so, please accept thanks and appreciation for what you have done to make this such a successful year. I think if you regard serving on a board such as this, or helping out with events however you are requested to do, that if it's regarded as a privilege it becomes a pleasure to have these sorts of things part of your life. [Soapbox officially stored!]

It's always a good thing to look at things accomplished and an even better thing to look ahead to what can be done next. Once the Christmas decorations are down and stored, the House will probably have a good cleaning and be set to rights. Funding sources are always something to be thought about and we will be looking at some innovative ways to raise supporting funds. One of the first big items needing to be addressed is our annual meeting and we will need to present a slate of officers for consideration. We will need a new president, treasurer and secretary as all of these positions will need to be filled. If you are interested, please let Wess know so that your name can be included on the ballot. More details about that important meeting will be forthcoming. Programs are always fun to plan and there are always lots and lots of stories from the past that we can visit once again and then it's always fun to plan one of our appraisal meetings when our resident appraiser can look at that wonderful thing that Aunt Jane always said was handed down from a distant but famous relative and tell us whether or not that is true or if was bought at the Ben Franklin store some time or other. It's funny, but it usually doesn't make any difference whether or not there is great value or great story to an item; it's something from our family and we just plain enjoy having it no matter what the story or worth. One thing that has always impressed me about living in this city is that there are so many knowledgeable, interesting folks who are willing to share what they do with all of us. How many other places would have a state senator who is a lawyer and has been a judge who writes books about many things and is willing to share those wonderful interests with many groups?

Maxine

Highlights of the CCHS Minutes since last newsletter was published....

September 21, 2015

- Wess visited St. Agnes School and the Social Studies class at the School of Education and gave a presentation on the A-W House and the log school house.
- About 50-60 teachers came through for a tour served cookies and lemonade.
- Jim, Gary and Marvin installed a kitchen cabinet and counter top that had been donated.
- Volunteer Day-high school kids will help with trimming, racking, loading leaves, etc.
- Plans to pursue a bathroom on main floor and to pursue a grant to help finance the project.

October 19, 2015

- Security system has been checked and is running correctly.
- Wedding scheduled in gazebo for Nov. 28, 5pm
- Clay County Commissioner's luncheon scheduled for Oct. 21, 11:30 am

- Tabled bathroom discussion until January meeting.
- Allocated \$2000 to fix leak in cupola.
- Jim redid windows in cupola.

November 16, 2015

- Approved to go with Midcontinent for phone and internet service.
- Tour of Homes: working on posters, tickets, signs in yard and advertising. Bus secured. Members will donate food for the reception following the tour.
- Sweets and Treats: Wess will be calling members to furnish cookies for this fund raiser.

December - No monthly meeting

January minutes have not yet been approved.

The Annual Meeting is scheduled for April 28, 2016.

More information will follow before the meeting

2015 Tour and Treats!

The 2015 holiday season was busy, exciting and a roaring success. The Austin-Whittemore House hosted the annual Tour of Homes on December 4th. The theme for this year's tour was "Twas the Night Before Christmas". The Austin-Whittemore House was all decked out and I'm sure that the spirits of the house were thrilled with the colorful decorations and the fellowship that passed through the house through the holiday season. Thanks to Jessica and Tyler Messersmith, Carrie and Tony Roerig, Lindsey and Doug Jennewein, and Teresa Stephensen for opening their homes for this year's tour. Their homes were beautiful and their generosity of time was appreciated. 148 tickets were sold and 18 of the "tourists" rode on the tour bus which was donated for the evening by the Vermillion Transit Company. Santa Clause made an appearance as guests enjoyed beautiful and tasty treats. This year's event raised over \$1,800.



The Sweets and Treats bake sale was held on December 12th. Members were asked to donate festive holiday cookies and candies and they really came through. These donations of beautiful goodies not only dressed up the dining room table but helped to raise over \$870.00. Thanks to everyone for baking and shopping!

From the Desk.....



I have to admit that fall and winter are my favorite seasons. It must be my Norwegian heritage that makes me handle the winter weather as well as I do. Before Thanksgiving even arrived, Judy Sullivan and I were almost done decorating the house for the Christmas holiday. We had an extra incentive because we had a wedding scheduled to be held in the gazebo on Thanksgiving weekend. A suspended lighted wreath, icicle lights and greenery with bows adorned the outdoor chapel and there was something magical about the ceremony. Preparations for the annual Tour of Homes were wrapped up that same week and all of our cookie-making members were recruited to bring goodies for the Sweets and

Treats bake sale which was held the weekend after the tour. Our membership and community of volunteers are wonderful and always willing to step up to help with events.

I've been getting requests to hold events at the house this winter so my 2016 calendar is getting some use. The always-ready-to-take-on-a-project board will soon be working on some house projects so that we'll be ready to go for spring. So far when I mention that "I've got an idea", no one is running in the other direction so I guess we're still having fun.

Throughout December, I had several families who had vacation from work and school stop in to see what the Austin-Whittemore House had to offer. My question to local people who haven't visited the house yet is "what's holding you up"? In 1882 the house became someone's home and it continues to be one. Thanks to all of you for your support. Stop in and see me and you may get in on one of our fun projects. All are welcome and the coffee pot is usually on.

Wess Pravecck

FIRST SCHOOL DISTRICT ON RECORD ORGANIZED IN NORWAY TOWNSHIP

While people in Clay county have long been aware that the first schoolhouse in Dakota Territory was built in Vermillion, we are ready to wager that very few know that the first school district of which there is any record in Dakota Territory was located in Norway township, Clay county.

The school district in question, then District No. 3, was organized February 20, 1866, at a meeting held at the farm home of Isaac Finch. The district included all of Norway township, an area of 36 square miles. Since then the township has been divided into three districts.

Minutes of the first meeting are still on record and were made available to Plain Talk by Iver Iverson, a descendant of Aslak Iverson, clerk of the original school board.

At the first meeting it was decided to build a log schoolhouse by subscription and the building was finished in the fall of 1867, school starting December 17. Dr. G. S. Agersburg was the instructor during the first term, which lasted only a month and a half.

When not used for school purposes, the building was used for religious services for four years by the Bergen Lutheran congregation. It has hitherto been claimed that the first confirmation service had been held in this school but this is not true, the first services of that nature being held October 8, 1864, when the church was organized by the Rev. J. Kron. On that day 11 were confirmed and 22 baptized.

In 1881 the school was destroyed by the flood but the following year a slightly larger building was constructed on the same site.

The minutes of that first meeting as recorded by Aslak Iverson, first clerk, follow:

Original Minutes

"District No. 3, Clay county, Dakota Territory.

"Pursuant to notice issued by Franklin Taylor, county superintendent of public instruction, a school meeting of District No. 3, of said county, was duly held at the house of Isaac Finch in said district on the 20th day of February, 1866. Present: Messrs. Aslak Iverson, James Whitehorn, H. J. Austin, Amund Hanson, Christ Larson, Lewis Larson, Ole Bottolfson and others. On motion of Ole Bottolfson, H. J. Austin was elected temporary chairman and the following district officers were then duly elected for the ensuing year: School director, Ole Bottolfson; treasurer, Aslak Iverson; clerk, Christ Larson, director in the chair.

"Aslak Iverson moved that a committee of three be appointed by the chair to select a suitable site for the schoolhouse and to report this afternoon at 2:00 o'clock p. m. Adopted.

"The chair appointed on said committee Aslak Iverson, Amund Hanson and Christ Larson. The meeting then took a recess until 2:00 o'clock p. m.

"At 2:00 o'clock, the meeting was called to order by the chairman. The committee then reported through its chairman that they had selected a schoolhouse site on the southeast quarter of the northeast quarter of Section No. 14, Township 92, Range 52 west (Norway township.) The report was adopted.

"Aslak Iverson moved to have a log house erected by subscription, 18 by 24 feet. Adopted. On motion of C. Larson, the meeting was adjourned.

OLE BOTTOLFSON,
CHRISTEN LARSON, Chairman,
District Clerk.

Just a little history of the Austin-Whittemore House for our new members. To see the complete story visit [Clay County Historical Society](#) web page.

The Austin-Whittemore House

The home was built by Horace J. Austin in 1882 and remained in the family until 1969. At that time the house was donated to the Cay County Historical Society

Mr. Horace J. Austin came to this area as a land surveyor. He met many home-steaders who came here to seek free land.

The town of Vermillion was built below the bluff near the Missouri River. In March of 1881 a flood devastated much of Clay County. The flood washed the little town away. The residents and merchants moved above the bluff, where the town is presently located.

Mr. Austin had acquired land on the bluff and decided to build this lovely brick house for his wife and him. For ten years prior to his death, he enjoyed the home while serving in the state legislature.

Many legislators and local people were served an elegant dinners and receptions in the house. Mrs. Austin (Rachel Ross) was an active member of the WCTU and many of the meetings were held in this home. Mrs. Austin was also a school teacher at the "old Log School House" when she met Mr. Austin.

After Mr. Austin's death, Mrs. Austin built an addition to the house which included a dining room, a conservatory south of the dining room and a large bedroom on the second floor.

The Austin's had one daughter Helen whose nickname was Pansy. Pansy and her husband, Arthur Whittemore, were the parents of five children. It was after Pansy's death, the Clay County Historical Society acquired the house.

The following books/ maps are for sale. Details regarding the books can be found on [CCHS web site](#).

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

304 pages.	Price	\$25.00 / add \$ 5.00 shipping & handling
<u>Dakota's First Lynching</u> ...	Price	\$3.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling
<u>Hay Country</u> ...	Price	\$6.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling
<u>History of Clay County</u> ...	Price	\$8.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling
<u>Clay County Place Names</u> ...	Price	\$6.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling
<u>Clay County Country School CD</u> ...	Price	\$10.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling
<u>Clay County Homestead Map of 1884</u> ...	Price	\$10.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling
<u>1902 Clay County Map</u> ...	Price	Free / \$3.00 for shipping & handling

TO ORDER: please make check payable to Clay County Historical Society, Inc.
and mail to 15 Austin St., Vermillion, SD 57069

Dues are due by April 1, 2016

Annual Membership dues April 1, 2016 - March 31, 2017

Membership Dues: Individual/\$25 Family/\$40 Institutional/\$75 Lifetime/\$250

Clay County Historical Society

15 Austin Street

Vermillion, SD 57069

**The Austin-Whittemore House is available for family gatherings,
meetings, class reunions, weddings, showers, etc..
Call 624-8266 to schedule your event.**

Remember to check Clay County Historical Website for news and events.

<http://www.cchssd.org/>

We are on facebook too!

A-W House is open:

Monday/Wednesday/Friday

10am-2pm

Thank you for your support!