

Joint Newsletter of the
CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
W. H. OVER MUSEUM AND THE
CLAY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Clay County, Vermillion, South Dakota

Spring 2021

Hometown Holiday Lighting Contest

In February 2020, the Clay County Historical Society (CCHS) Board of Directors were making plans for another active year of hosting public events. The organization would begin the year with its annual meeting in April. The society's very popular Ice Cream Social would follow in June and the fairly new Cemetery Tour in October. The year would conclude with the well-received Tour of Homes in December.

The following month, in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic cancelled all the public events that the historical society was planning for the year. The board halted its in-person meetings, switching to monthly Zoom sessions. The Austin-Whittemore House was closed to the public. If it wasn't for the director's dedication to family histories and other associated inquiries that continued to come in by email and telephone, all society activities would have ceased.

The only bright spot on the historical society's otherwise dismal year was the October Cemetery Walk. The board decided to hold the event because it was outdoors, groups touring the burial sites of political figures were purposely kept small and participants were required to wear masks and adhere to social distancing rules.

Then, during its November Zoom meeting, Erin Burrow and Wess Pravecek presented an idea that excited the rest of the board – the Clay County Historical Society would promote a holiday decorations contest! The “fun-filled community event” would be held in early December and consist of three



*Traditional Category: 1st Place -
The Burbachs, 1128 S. University Street*

categories or levels of “intensity of decorations”. Entrants could choose from one of the following categories:

1. Clark Griswold (*the lighting display could be seen from outer space!?*)
2. Traditional (*classic holiday decorations*)
3. Stocking Stuffer (*a small display that would be limited to a window, front door, porch, etc.*)

The contest would be open to all residential properties within the city limits of Vermillion.

The Vermillion community pitched in, with the Vermillion Chamber and Development Company (VCDC) donating \$900 for contest prizes. An additional \$900 was raised from local businesses and community members. The top three contest winners in each category would be awarded Vermillion Bucks. Wess Pravecek stated that the local currency would “encourage folks to do business in town”.

Erin and Wess went about developing contest posters and entry forms and advertised the contest in local media outlets. Judging would take place December 9th through the 11th, with contest winners selected and announced on December 13th.

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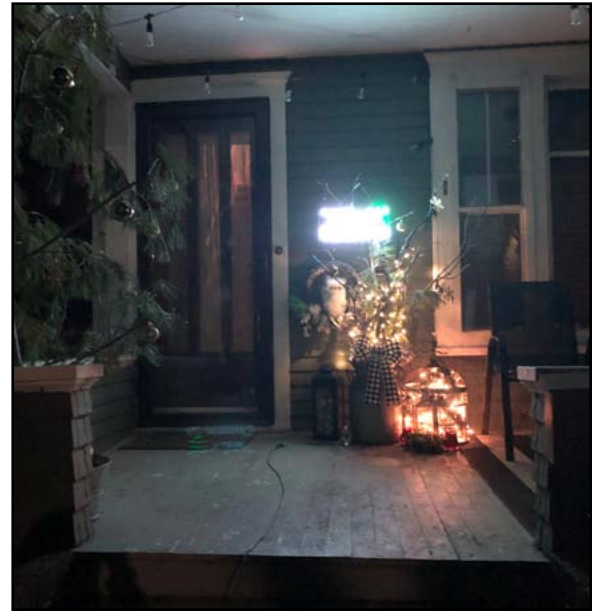
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Twenty-nine entries were received by the December 7th deadline date – a very good showing for what could become a new annual community event! There were many quality decorations displays, which made it quite difficult for the judges to select their top three winners in each category. First place winners received \$300 in Vermillion Bucks, with the second and third place winners each being awarded \$200 and \$100, respectively.

A BIG THANK YOU to our sponsors, the Vermillion Chamber and Development Company, Maloney Real Estate, Dakota Realty, Nikki Peters, First Dakota National Bank, and Lisa Johnson (Vermillion Beauty Shop), the community member support, and the judges for their hard intense work.

The Clay County Historical Society was involved in an event that ended the Covid-19 pandemic-impacted year with a joyous display of community involvement and pride. If all goes well, the 2021 holiday decorations display contest will involve even more properties, placed in several categories, and enjoyed by many decoration display enthusiasts.

Note - Griswold Category: 1st place - Jeff Hovden, 228 Anderson Street, photo not available.



*Stocking Stuffer Category: 1st Place -
Kaylee Sosa, 302 S Pine Street*

2020 Spoken History Cemetery Tour “It’s All About Politics”

By Joni Freidel

The political history of Clay County was formed through movements, events, parties, politicians, and grass roots efforts. The annual cemetery tour, “It’s All About Politics” presented the life stories of people involved in this rich history.

In addition to the SD governors, Andrew E. Lee and Carl Gunderson, included in the Cemetery Tour were Elvira Bliss, Morris Chaney, Rachel Austin, and brothers William and George Russell were featured. Thanks to the actors (behind the politician’s name) who donated their time and expertise.

Andrew E. Lee (Dr. Kurt Hackemer) His political career began as a city alderman and completed it as the third governor of South Dakota (1897) on the Populist ticket. His second term was on the newly formed Fusion Party ticket, an alliance of independents.

Carl Gunderson (Dr. David Burrow) A Republican, he was elected to state office (1892) and served in the SD House of Representatives, as the 13th Lieutenant Governor (1921), and the 11th Governor (1925).

Elvira Englund Bliss (Kelly Herbster) A rural school teacher prior to her election as the Clay County Superintendent of Schools (1938-1971), she served in this position for 30 years, running every two years for reelection.

Morris J Chaney (Steve Gapp) He was elected as a Republican representative in the SD House (1903-1909) and was SD Speaker of the House for both 1907 and 1909 congressional sessions.

Rachel Ross Austin (Joni Freidel) A founding member



*L to R: Kelly Herbster, Joni Freidel, Chad Passick,
Kurt Hackemer, David Burrow and Steve Gapp*

of the Dakota Territory Women’s Christian Temperance Union (1879), she also chaired the 1900 Women’s Suffrage campaign. She had a long tenure on the Clay County School Board.

The Russell Brothers (Chad Passick) Both William (1933-36) and George (1937-40) served as sheriffs of Clay County during prohibition. In 1934, they stood trial in federal court for supposed involvement in a large still operation. They were exonerated.

Much appreciation to local sound engineer, Brian Adams (Adams Production Services), who donated his time and use of sound equipment for the presenters. This made social distancing possible for the almost 100 attendees.

Mark your calendars for Monday, October 11th for the 2021 tour.



Clay County Historical Society
15 Austin St, Vermillion, SD 57069

Phone - 605-624-8266

Web page - cchssd.org

Email - claycohistory@yahoo.com

We are on Facebook – Search for
Clay County Historical Society
Vermillion South Dakota

The Austin Whittemore House
is closed until further notice,
but can call or email.

CCHS Web Page includes:

- Upcoming events
- Newsletter
- Story of Austin-Whittemore House
- List of pictorial books and maps of
Vermillion and the Clay County area
- Officers/Directors

**MEMBERSHIP DUES
ARE DUE April 1, 2021**

Membership Dues are:
Individual \$25
Family \$40
Institutional \$75
Life Member \$250

**CCHS Elected Board of Directors:
April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021**

President - Dan Christopherson
Vice President - Kevin Jacobson
Recording Secretary - Erin Burrow
Membership Secretary - Ruth Bylander
Treasurer - Joni Freidel
Past President - Maxine Johnson
Directors - Barb Campbell,
Jim Stone, Art Rusch, Judy Sullivan,
Tom Sorensen, Doris Hodgen

Appointed Positions
Executive Director Wess Pravecek
CCHPC Representative Jim Stone

Future of the Clay County Courthouse?

(Edited for CCHS newsletter)

My name is Tom Sorensen. My roots in Clay County are very deep on both sides of my family. Currently, I am a member of the board of the clay county historical society and chair the clay county historic preservation commission; however, my remarks are my own opinion and not as a spokesperson for those two fine organizations.

It takes leadership to make decisions for the people and it takes input from us all to reach them. In our positions of leadership, there come times when the “right thing” is obvious and sometimes when it is not. Leaders are elected to be objective, fair and to try hard to “do the right thing.” The people sometimes need to reach the ultimate decision.

Lately in our county’s history, there seems to be a lack of media watchdogging government. I have always urged people with questions to go straight to the source and find the official, open public records within our courthouse. Misunderstanding comments and opinions and too much reliance on rumors as sources can confuse the actual issues.

Our handsome, historic courthouse serves as more than just another old building among others in our historic town. Our history in this county is rich in so very many ways. The current courthouse building replaced what, in the past, had both burned and was subjected to flood waters. Those events forced our county community to look to the future with the opportunity to construct what exists -- a wonderful, respectable, solid-as-a-rock and now historic courthouse uptown. The historic cornerstone was laid by people in the community from a historic lodge formed more than 150 years ago in Dakota Territory. Our masons took much pride in important participation in dedicating this structure in Clay County. Now, there is a variety of options to turn to, which may or may not agree with the committee or perhaps some of you. But, please do not forget the strong symbol of our government seated locally in Vermillion, another of our French-derived names rooted in what the Yankton Sioux, who welcomed us after the treaty of 1858 called, and still call, “Valley of the Paint” or “Wase Wakpa.” Those early Europeans (French) traveling up the super highway of the day, the mighty Mo -- the longest river in these United States -- shortened this historically-artistic name to a French term for a rich, reddish color -- “Vermillion.”

Finally, please make a covenant with our people as the current “owners” and as a signal of leadership in protecting the future existence of this iconic courthouse. Please express your cultural sensitivity in sending a clear message of historic importance by adding to our property’s title of ownership a covenant which will attach and travel with it to protect this as the historic building it should remain. Show us that you really care for the future of our courthouse.

The clay county courthouse is symbolic, much like a capitol, whether in Pierre or Washington, DC It is meant to stand and be kept, maintained, and admired. Please do not forget that this is a strong symbol of our government, seated locally in Vermillion, Clay County, South Dakota. Thanks again.

From the Desk

What can I say? My desk has been pretty quiet this past year. Even though the Austin-Whittemore House has been closed to the public, I stop in a couple of times a week to make sure phone and email messages are tended to. It's also been a good time to do some projects in and around the house. When I talk about the CCHS board being a great group of worker bees, I'm not kidding. When the Vermillion high school student work day didn't pan out this year, the board stepped up with rakes, loppers and pickups and masks. We're also in the process of reorganizing one of the rooms upstairs to showcase some of our existing displays plus adding some new/seasoned things. When the house is open for visitors, come and see what we've done. Stay tuned.

Our annual fundraising events were pretty much put on hold. Because our cemetery tour is outside, we were able to move forward with that interesting and well received event. Thanks Joni. With our Tour of Homes postponed until 2021 (hopefully), we put together a Holiday Lighting Contest. This event encouraged families to deck out their houses and get "judged". It turned out to be a lot of fun and something families could plug their family energy into. Thanks to our sponsors and judges for making this what may become an annual event.

We've all probably felt some loneliness in 2020, keeping ourselves safe and confined to our homes but we've been able to use our phones to order groceries, talk with friends and family. We've also had the luxury of ordering meals to be delivered or picked up so that our isolation is somewhat bearable. I've found that calling folks that I don't get to spend time with, has been therapeutic for all of us. Walking my dog has also helped me to get exercise and fresh air and as much as we've walked, Willow's legs should be shorter and I should be thinner. Not so much!!

I think about how the pioneer families and individuals who helped to settle Dakota Territory to make a better life but there were a lot of obstacles and hardships. I wonder how they dealt with their loneliness in the 1800's.

In Horace Austin's diary, I found an entry from April 18, 1868 where he talks about being alone at his homestead... no one within three miles and it was 'rather lonesome'. He said that he would go to bed and forget this gloomy world in his dreams. Horace had to find ways of dealing with his loneliness away from his family who lived on the east coast. Work kept him busy and then there was Miss R. Life got better for him.

This is what we are looking forward to as well, that life will get better. We will all do our part. We'll find ways to support each other and look forward to a new kind of normal. I hope that this newsletter can be a part of moving forward. Remember that we still look forward to hearing from all of you. Our new fiscal year starts on April 1 so it is our hope that you will continue supporting the CCHS with your membership and gifts. Thank you and stay healthy!!

*Wess Pravecek, Executive Director
Austin-Whittemore House*

THE CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING HAS BEEN POSTPONED.

Membership Renewal

The Clay County Historical Society begins a new fiscal year April 1. Please help preserve our history.

Individual Membership is \$25,

Family Membership is \$40;

Business/Organization Membership is \$75,
and Lifetime Membership is \$250.

Please send checks to CCHS, 15 Austin St.,
Vermillion, SD 57069.

Thank you for your support.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

(Thank you for the donations made to the Austin-Whittemore House)

Donated items-

- * Nancy Connor - 5-Year diary starting 1943 belonging to her mother Anna Hedlin. Was a gift from Georgina Dahlman
- * Cathy Bell - Burbank photos
- * Nancy McCahren - List of delegates and minutes of 1884 Vermillion Convention
- * Connie Krueger - Single spindle bed

* Miner County Historical Society - SD Quilt that had been made in Clay County in 1911

* Margot Schultz - Property Abstract of Titles from Clay County - 1901 - 1958

* Helen Berntson Estate - Misc. linens and Calenders

Memorials -

Glennis Stewart from Tom VanBruggen

Dick Brown from Judy Sullivan

History of Clay County, South Dakota

Written by Herbert S. Schell – published in 1976

Aviation Excerpts

*from Herbert Schell book,
(compiled by Dan Christopherson in 2019)*

The exhibition flier made his first appearance in South Dakota in the spring of 1911 at a public gathering in Rapid City. The phenomenal success of this event prompted the South Dakota Fair Board to include it as a special attraction at the state fair in Huron the following August. By the following year the services of the Curtiss Exhibition Company, a California firm owned and operated by Glenn H. Curtiss, were in great demand throughout South Dakota. Although Yankton was able to feature a stunt flier during 1912, Vermillion's plan miscarried and had to be postponed until the following season.

In the advance publicity for the Clay County Fair in 1913, the fair board announced the appearance of Fred DeKor, "world famous bird man" with his Curtiss biplane for all kinds of stunts on September 24 and 25. A large number of people, most of whom had never seen an airship, were on hand for the spectacle. The exhibition, which for some reason was delayed for a day, was hardly a confirmed success. The first flight came to an abrupt end in a cornfield north of the fairgrounds; while the second flight was successfully completed without any stunting. A broken propeller blade ended the third flight, likewise in a cornfield. About thirty hours later the repaired plane completed the last of four flights for which the plane was under contract. From this time on the scheduling of stunt fliers at the county fair became a routine matter.

The end of the WWI in 1918 introduced a more sophisticated and more thrilling phase of exhibition flying in the form of "barnstorming" and stunting which included rope ladder stunts, wing-walking, and hair-raising parachute jumps. The participants were mostly war veterans who had been in the Army Air Service. These so-called gypsy fliers mostly performed with planes purchased from the government as war surplus material. At times several of them combined their efforts to form aero squadrons for formation flying and to simulate attacks upon an imaginary enemy.

Such performances by the so called "flying circus" were especially popular during 1919 and 1920. The Sioux City Aerial Club was a special feature in the soldier homecoming celebration held in Vermillion in August 1919.

A near tragedy occurred at the Alsen Labor Day picnic in 1921 when one of the aviators, during a flight with one passenger, crashed into a tree, landing on the ground between two parked automobiles. Fortunately, both pilot

and passenger escaped with only slight injuries. In addition to exhibition flying, licensed pilots began to appear in Clay County, offering to take up passengers for a fee that, incidentally, dropped from \$15 a flight in 1919 to \$5 a flight in 1921.

Young engineering students were, likewise, turning their knowledge of aeronautics toward practical application. For instance, Swen S. Swanson of Irene and Edgar W. Freeman of Elk Point constructed two airplanes in the engineering shops of the University of South Dakota at Vermillion during 1922 and 1923. The second and larger one, on a trial flight in November 1923, rose to the air perfectly after only a short run on the landing field west of Vermillion. The pilot, brought in from Sioux City for the testing, was able to execute several nose dives and tail spins with the biplane. Swanson subsequently became identified with a Missouri firm engaged in manufacturing airplanes. Freeman in 1937 organized a Yankton firm that later made the production of aircraft parts its specialty.

The Vermillion Airport was an outgrowth of promotional efforts by the local American Legion post during 1928. Financial backing, mostly from the Vermillion Chamber of Commerce made it possible to lease an alfalfa field a mile west of the City for about \$500 a year. At the same time, the University was offering aeronautical training of various kinds under the direction of Professor R.V. Newcomb. Some eighteen students built gliders and took courses in aeronautical engineering, glider flight training, and meteorology, making use of the improvised Vermillion airfield for practical work with gliders. The program ended in 1933 with the discontinuance of the College of Engineering. The landing field was abandoned during the same year.

The University of South Dakota received a Civil Aeronautics Authority contract in October 1939 for a civilian pilot training program. This preparedness was necessitated by world hostilities leading up to WWII. Approximately twenty men and women were accepted for the two semester course. Enrollees had to be between age nineteen and twenty-six. And of at least sophomore standing. Since Vermillion at the time lacked airport facilities, arrangements were made to transport the aviation students to Rickenbacker Field located near North Sioux City. One of the first students in the program was Joe Foss, later awarded the Congressional medal of Honor for exploits in the South Pacific as a Marine Corp fighter pilot. Foss served as Governor of South Dakota 1955-1959.

Faced with the threat to close out the program unless

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local flight facilities were provided, the Vermillion City Council during the summer of 1940, leased a tract of 68 acres four miles west of the City on highway 50. The field was available in time to accommodate twenty registrants—ten to a plane—by the latter part of September 1940. The E.L. Graham Flying Service of Sioux City supplied the planes, adding a third one for private instruction, as well as flight instructors Harold Davidson and R.C. Starrett. No more than two planes were needed at any one time for the University program. As the flight program became accelerated during the fall of 1941, twenty-eight acres were added and the building was enlarged to provide for advanced training. Under arrangements worked out with the City Council, Vermillion maintained the airport and the University used it for its civilian air program. By the end of 1941, fifty-seven students, including a few women, had received pilot licenses.

As WWII progressed, the C.A.A. flight program, started in in the fall of 1939 and accelerated in 1942, underwent

changes. During April 1943, a group of twenty-five servicemen arrived in Vermillion for primary flight training lasting 60 days. These were to be followed by similar detachments each successive month up to a total of 150. Later during the summer before further plans could be finalized the federal government ended all flight training at the University. In consequence, the City airport was closed down for nearly a year when it was reopened under private auspices.

A lasting gain for the Vermillion community from its war activities was the municipal airport, which the termination of federal flight training had left in abeyance in 1943. With an eye toward the future, the city council wisely retained a two-year option upon the property, reserving the right to reactivate the airport at any time within that period. The hoped-for opportunity presented itself a year later in 1944 when Harold Davidson, the former instructor with Graham Flying Service, offered to operate the airport as a private enterprise upon a rental basis.

W. H. OVER MUSEUM NEWS

W. H. Over Museum President's Corner

By Larry Bradley

In mid-March of 2020 as the Covid-18 pandemic surged, the staff and volunteers at the Over Museum decided to close the museum until further notice. Working hours for museum employees were reduced and volunteers resumed normal activities on a limited basis. Early on during the museum closure the staff and volunteers returned to near normal daily activities.

Salvage operations at the Thompson House became the focus of activities for the museum as the USD Foundation set and reset the date for demolition of the historical structure. Building woodwork, fixtures and other components were salvaged with their aim of eventual incorporation into an exhibit at the W. H. Over Museum.

Although closed to the public, limited tours guided a few visitors through the museum. The descendants of the Orton circus family toured the facility and visited the remains of Hero the elephant. Unfortunately, the family lacked memorabilia or much knowledge to add to the museum archives. Other guided tours during the lockdown included four different Anthropology classes.

Building maintenance presented its own set of problems during the past year. Our heating system was limping along and as the temperature dropped required daily monitoring. Attempts to repair the water heater by local plumbers failed miserably. Electrical, security, and fire prevention inspections added to the cost of maintaining the facility. Other recurring costs included photocopying,

security alarms, internet, phone, refuse collection, natural gas, electricity, and taxes. All bills are up to date and would have been required when we will be open to the public.



Address: 1110 N. University
414 E. Clark Street | Vermillion, SD 57069
605-659-6151

Email: whoever@usd.edu
Website: whoevermuseum.org

WH Over Museum Officers and Board Members 2020-2021

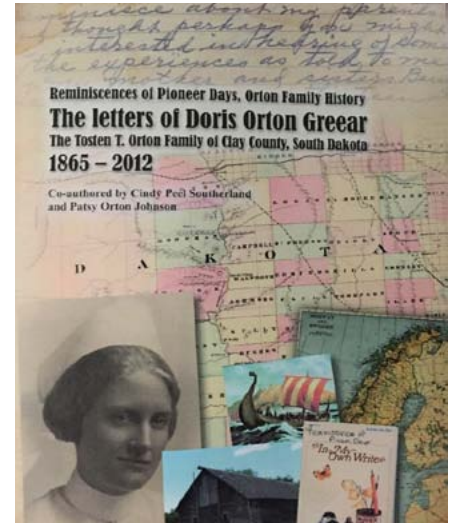
Larry Bradley (President)	Lynn Muller
Maxine Johnson (First Vice President)	Gary Bottolfson
Evelyn Schlenker (Secretary)	Sarah Chadima
Nancy Craig	James Stone
Kevin Jacobson	Bill Ranney
Scott Jensen	Patrick Gross (ad hoc)
David Moen	Gene Iverson (honorary)

The Tosten T. Orton Family of Clay County, South Dakota

By Maxine Johnson

Recently the Friends of the W. H. Over Museum received a copy of the book: *The letters of Doris Orton Greear: The Tosten T. Orton Family of Clay County, South Dakota 1865-2012*. This is history of the Cindy Southerland's family written with her co-author and cousin, Patsy Orton Johnson. Ms. Southerland's great grandparents were Tosten T. Orton, and Seselia Thompson Orton. Tosten Orton arrived in Bethel Township, Dakota Territory in 1872 and homesteaded there. The book focuses on their life in Clay County and contains a collection of letters, which encompasses twenty years of historic reminiscing about the family written by the author's great aunt, Doris Orton Greear. The letters are included in their original hand-writing and are transferred into print for easier reading. The book also contains many family photographs as well citizenship records, many documents and family history and genealogy. The barn located on the original homestead, was part of Jim Stone's 2012 survey of barns was still standing at that time. The letters, along with the photographs and written comments give a graphic

portrayal of life as a homesteader in Clay County, SD. Stories about members of this family who served in World War I, some of the illnesses, such as the 1918 flu epidemic add to the story of a homesteader's life and how some homesteaders became American citizens. In the 1860 census, there were 169 Norwegians – by the 1880 census, one-tenth of South Dakota's population was Norwegian – a total of 9,827. Doris Orton Greear had entitled her series of letters "Reminiscences of Pioneer Days in My Own Write". This book adds personal views of a family's struggles and triumphs to the long history of Clay County.



From the Collections

By Tami Plank

The end of March 2020, the W H Over Museum leaders, staff, and volunteers met in the coffee room at the museum and decided unanimously that due to Covid-19 we would temporarily cease our work at the museum. The museum had already been closed to the public two weeks earlier. Despite this, as head of the Collections Department, I maintained a varied work schedule in the Museum's Collections Department through 2020.

The W. H. Over Museum Collections Department staff and volunteers have been conducting an inventory of the museum's collection over the past several years. An inventory establishes the description and location of the collection pieces. The inventory also identifies problems such as lack of accession numbers, separation of individual pieces from a specific collection, and lack of documentation. Despite Covid-19 and the absence of volunteers, I continued working on the backlog of these problems throughout the spring and summer. Starting the end of September volunteers also started assisting.

Despite the W. H. Over Museum being closed to the public, donated artifacts to the museum's collection continued to come in. Between March 2020 and March 2021, a total of 177 artifacts plus over 1,500 items (including 700 fireplace wall-tiles) from the Thompson House were donated to the W. H. Over Museum. These items were processed including assigning accession numbers, writing up

descriptions, and preparing the items for storage or exhibit.

Volunteer Dave Moen used conservation methods on several items both new to and within the existing collection. A 1920s beaded flapper dress was removed from a hanging position and placed in an acid-free box lined with acid-free tissue. Holes were developing in the material from the weight of the beadwork. Another project Dave worked on was a fireman's helmet especially made for wearing while putting out oil-well fires during Desert Storm. Jim Stone built a platform which Dave prepared to enable the helmet to rest without putting pressure on its extended sides.

Volunteer Bill Ranney is cataloging wallpaper, hardware, and other structural pieces saved from the Thompson House. Bill is developing a detailed numbering system for the different categories of material such as doors, hardware and wallpaper. These items will be receiving a standard accession number. Jim Stone and Evelyn Schlenker have been instrumental in identifying the pieces and where they were in Thompson house demolished in September 2020. Bill has also been encapsulation items in the collection as is needed.

In my 32 years of experience in Museum work the past 12 months will always remain memorable. The masks, washing hands, whipping down surfaces, social distancing, closed doors to the public and changed work schedules but did not stop the ongoing work of the Collections Department at the W. H. Over Museum.

Assembling the Thompson Exhibit at the W. H. Over Museum

By Evelyn Schlenker and Jim Stone

This article highlights the collection and restoration of items from the Thompson House. It begins with a brief history of the building, followed by a description of items removed from the house prior to its demolition on September 28, 2020, and finally reassembling the items to form a new exhibit at the W. H. Over Museum. The Thompson exhibit, named after the family who built the house, also features narratives describing the historical significance of the owners and each component of the exhibit. Thus, although the building no longer stands, this exhibit tells the story of this remarkable house built by Anna (1849-1930) and Myron Thompson (1847-1929), an influential Vermillion pioneer family.

The original wood-frame two story Thompson house was built in 1873 on the bluffs at the south end of what is now Forest Avenue and the western end of Lewis Street. During the flood of 1881, a large whirlpool washed out part of the bluff just west of the house suggesting the motive for moving the building to 403 East Main Street in 1882. In 1893 the structure was enlarged with the addition of two stories of rooms to the north. The new first floors room and added porches on the east and west side of the building were all faced with Sioux Falls quartzite. A tower built on the west side of the building was destroyed in a storm and is missing from later pictures. Over the years there were substantial modifications to the structure especially when it became an apartment building.



The Thompson House also known as "The Pink House"

On March 16, 2020 representatives from the Clay County Historic Preservation Commission, the Clay County Historical Society, and the W. H. Over Museum toured the abandoned "Pink House" (called that because of its color) or the Thompson House named after its owners Mr. and Mrs. Myron Thompson. The purpose of the tour was to assess what items could be salvaged for an exhibit at the Over before the building was demolished. At the time there were historic doors and hardware, lighting features, a large bank vault, radiators, a fireplace, as well as other architec-

tural features. However, the presence of unique wallpapers was not known since most of the interior walls and ceilings were covered with paint. The extensive wallpaper findings discovered were described in a Vermillion Plain Talk article from September 25, 2020 entitled "The Pink House" and in the previous Joint Newsletter.



French doors and the large, beveled glass transom

During the following months, items were removed from the building by members of the W. H. Over Museum, especially by Jim Stone with help from Brad Waage. Some items such as tiles and corbels associated with the fireplace were difficult to remove and keep intact. In contrast, doors and hardware were easier to remove. The large, leaded beveled glass transom, a major feature of the large north facing first floor room was carefully removed. An aluminum window on the outside had protected it all these years. Evelyn Schlenker removed many samples of wallpaper from the older and newer rooms. One room contained three layers of wallpaper on the ceiling.

In the interim, Jim Stone started designing the exhibit at the W. H. Over museum. To make room for the new exhibit, other exhibits such as the shanty were relocated. A wall that divided the One Room Schoolhouse exhibit from the shanty was removed and the back of a wall that was part of the Thompson exhibit became the front of the schoolhouse



Original siding and constructed trim surrounding a 5-panel door

exhibit. The plan called for the construction of a “room” which would house the magnificent Victorian fireplace, contain five distinct doors (a trifold door, a pair of French doors, an arched glass inset door, a pocket door, and a five-paneled door), the large, leaded beveled glass transom, light features, wainscoting, molding, 3x4” x 2-1/4” oak flooring (that forms the floor of the exhibit), molding, and items from the oldest part of the house. The Thompson exhibit dimensions are 12’ east to west x 14’ north to south x 10’ tall with two indentations, one of which is used for to display items found in the house.

In August 2020, the frames of the exhibit walls were built. The walls of the exhibit are composed of plaster-board. Gary Bottolfson was the master drywaller on the project. Once the walls were built, the first door installed was a double pocket door and the hardware associated with it. By September, the fireplace insert was put in place and walls finished. Before the building was demolished on September 28, 2020, one half by six-inch maroon siding from the 1873 house were salvaged and cleaned for the exhibit. Trim was constructed and painted a forest green to resemble the color of pieces salvaged from the original house.

The restoration of the fireplace took several weeks and included cleaning the tiles, corbels, the mantle, and over mantel, followed by staining the wood. Some tile pieces were missing and were replaced. Then the surround tiles and hearth tiles were adhered to plywood platforms. The hearth was grouted. Once all components of the fireplace were refurbished, the fireplace was assembled in its central location in the exhibit. The processes used to restore the fireplace and hearth to its former glory are documented in a recent publication (<https://cchpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-thompson-house-fireplace-restoration.pdf>).

In the intervening months, four doors and their hardware were cleaned and placed into the exhibit. Before the wainscoting and picture frame holding molding were installed, the inside and outside walls of the exhibit were painted. The south wall of the exhibit was covered with original 1873 house siding (found when the quartz blocks on the east side of the house were removed) and new trim was painted a forest green to match pieces salvaged from the original building.



A dress that belonged to Anna Thompson

Toward the end of September, Cyndy Chaney, great-granddaughter of the Thompsons, graciously donated wedding pictures of Anna and Myron Thompson (married on January 6, 1870) to the Over. The pictures are part of the exhibit displayed in frames donated by Maxine Johnson. Cyndy also donated a picture of the New York home Myron was raised in that had features seen in the original Vermillion house. In addition, Cyndy gave the museum clothing owned by Anna Thompson including a brown silk dress, a black silk two-piece dress with beautiful trimming, and a tan and blue floral silk skirt. The brown dress is displayed in the exhibit.

Near the fireplace an enclave is used to exhibit pictures of the Thompson house circa 1910 and another showing the building in 1950. These pictures show the architectural changes that occurred over the 40-year period leading up to enclosure of the porches on three sides of the building. In addition, a small display case exhibits items found in the older part of the house including a skeleton key produced by Yale and Towne, a sample of the cement that was used to hold the amber tiles to the fireplace surround, a sample of plaster containing horsehair, samples of wall-paper one showing the gilded Imperial brand wallpaper, and the sample consisting of layers of wallpaper. Another set of items in the display case are different sized handmade square nails.

Below the display case on a lower shelf is a large and a smaller pink quartzite block, a piece of limestone that was used to build the foundation of the north addition, and a handmade brick from a fireplace found in the original building. The brick is soft and believed to be manufactured in east Vermillion below the bluff by the Bower Brick Factory. A larger block of quartz that contributed to the façade is located on the floor below.

The next items installed in the exhibit include, a magnificent the 21 by 69-inch leaded, beveled glass transom window above the French doors, and a sample of unused wallpaper called "Brittany" made by the Thomas Strahan Co. (dates 1928-1950). The wallpaper consists of 4 panels containing two shepherds, lambs, flowers, and butterflies. To simulate decorative ceiling beams noted in the Thompson house, wooden beams were constructed. These are used to hang two ceiling lighting fixtures found in the house, one an elaborate 1910s bronze chandelier and the other a large pale green globe surrounded by bronze colored metal leaves.

The major mover in the removal of items and the construction of this exhibit was Jim Stone aided by Evelyn Schlenker and Gary Bottolfson. Without their hard work and the support of the USD Foundation and the W. H. Over Museum, this exhibit that preserves a part of Vermillion and South Dakota history would not have happened.

All article photographs by Evelyn Schlenker



The enclave with the display items

-- Upcoming Museum Exhibits --

Medallions and Medals

PEACE MEDALS

Tokens given to Native Americans
Jefferson: 1801- Harrison: 1889

INAUGURATION MEDALS

Commemorating the inauguration
of a US president from 1841 -1945

EXPOSITION MEDALS

Commemorating world's fairs

ART MEDALS

Were issued by the Society of Medalists
and made by the Medallist Art Co., NYC.
Importantly, these medals consist of the
first medal issued by the Society in 1930 up
to a 1940 issue. These medals were designed
by famous sculptors and generally
(as almost all other medals in the exhibit)
are made of bronze.

CCHPC

Clay County Historic Preservation Commission



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 Vermillion, SD 57069
 Website: cchpc.org
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Clay County Historic Preservation Commission Board Members

- Tom Sorensen (Chair)
- Evelyn Schlenker (Secretary)
- Patrick Morrison (Treasurer)
- Tim Schreiner
- Bill Ranney
- Jim Stone
- Monica Iverson
- Dennis Konkler
- Victoria Job
- Jim Wilson

The Clay County
 Historic Preservation
 Commission Board
 has 2 vacancies.
 Please check the
 cchpc.org website
 for information about
 the organization.
 If you are interested on
 serving on the Board,
 please contact
 Tom Sorensen
 (tomseq@gmail.com).

Then and Now

By Evelyn Schlenker

On Forest Avenue there are two houses that Halver E. Hanson (Nov. 20, 1840-Jan. 4, 1928) built. Both are part of the Forest Avenue Historic District. One was constructed in 1873 (305 Forest Avenue) and the other was built in 1883 (126 Forest Avenue). Halver E. Hanson came in the United States from Norway in 1861 arriving at Chicago and then traveled to Wisconsin. He fought in the Civil War from 1862 until 1865 during which he was wounded. In 1872 Hanson arrived in Vermillion and worked for Finally McKercher, owner of C.I.K. or Cash is King. Hanson built his first house in 1873 on the western edge bluff overlooking Ravine Road on what is called Noble Street. About that time two other Vermillionites built houses in the vicinity, further south overlooking the bluff. They were McKercher who later sold his house to Darwin Inman and Myron Thompson. In 1882 both owners moved their houses to East Main Street. Hanson went on to become the Register of Deeds, mayor of Vermillion (1900-1903), member of the Grand Army of the Republic, co-owner of a hardware store, and served on the second Board of Directors of the University of South Dakota.

305 Forest Avenue House

The house located at 305 Forest Avenue, is described in the Forest Avenue Historic District nomination form for National Register of Historic Places as follows:

This one-and-a-half-story, Gothic Revival style house was constructed in 1873. The house rests on a stone foundation, is faced in clapboard siding, and has a side gable roof that is covered with asphalt shingles. The house features two steeply pitched front gables on the façade and an interior brick chimney. A shed roof porch, supported by square wood columns, is located on the façade. This porch was built in 1917 and replaced the original porch that featured gingerbread trim. Fenestration consists of tall, narrow two-over-two, double-hung, wood windows a single-leaf wood door; all featuring drip molds. A two-story, front gable addition is located on the rear elevation.

The house and a garage built in 1930 are contributory to the historic district. Another larger garage built in 1990 is not contributory.

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Above is a photograph of the house (from about 1900) from Judith Krueger's book (see note) prior to major renovations to the porch and other additions to the south and west of the house noted in a 2021 photograph.

Interestingly, the base of the mailbox located on Forest Avenue contains bricks embossed with the following “Purington Pavers”. These bricks made by The Purington Brick Co. in East Galesburg, IL date back to the time the house was built. More information about the bricks and the company that manufactured them can be found at this website (<https://www.historicalbricks.com/resources/brick-history/>).



Examples of the bricks found surrounding the mailbox

126 Forest Avenue House

Halver Hanson had a second house built by H. Puck in 1883 located on 126 Forest Avenue. The description of the house that is contributory to the historic district is as follows:

This house was constructed in 1883 as a two-story Second Empire style house. The house was heavily remodeled in the 1920s into its present, almost foursquare form with Colonial Revival detailing. This was done by adding a new hip roof with hipped roof dormers to create an attic, enclosing the northwest corner above the porch, and changing the stylistic details of the house. The building rests on a brick foundation, is faced in clapboard siding, and has a hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles. The house features Tuscan corner boards, the original wood window surrounds, including carved Second Empire style surrounds on the first story, a porch on the northwest corner with a turned corner post, and hipped roof dormers on the north, west, and south elevations. An original, one-story Second Empire style wing is located on the rear elevation. The wing features a mansard roof and open porch on the southeast corner. Fenestration consists of one over-one, double-hung, vinyl windows and a single-leaf door.

The picture on top right was taken from Judith Krueger’s book and demonstrates what the house looked like prior to extensive remodeling by William Beede who purchased the house from Hanson and whose family lived there for decades. At one time Grace Beede, a well-known Classics professor at the University of South Dakota and daughter of William Beede, owned this house.



Above are two pictures taken in 2021 that show the front and side of the house and one showing the back porch. Note mansard roof over the partially enclosed back porch. In addition to the changes to the house described in the nomination, the building was raised, and a full basement constructed.

Thus, we can appreciate the two historically and architecturally important houses built by Halver Hanson and the changes that subsequent owners made to both structures over 130 years of their existence.

Notes: Nomination form for the Forest Avenue Historic District: <https://history.sd.gov/preservation/docs/ForestAvenueHistoricDistrict.pdf>

Judith Gudger Krueger. *The Forest Avenue Historical District*, Vermillion, South Dakota, 1873-1980. Broadcaster Press; January 1, 1982.

Preservation Awards Given in 2020

On November 18, 2020, the Clay County Historic Preservation continued its tradition of awarding individuals and groups for preserving buildings and sites. Because of COVID, the Vermillion Rotary hosted the event virtually. The categories for this year were:

1. **Individual Preservation Projects**
(restoring a specific structure or site)
2. **Lifetime Achievement**
(maintaining the integrity of a structure over time).

Lifetime preservation achievement was given to the **United Church of Christ Congregational** (226 E. Main St.). The First Congregational Church was started in Vermillion, Dakota Territory in 1870, making it now more than 150 years old. The current building, the 4th church, was designed by well-known Sioux City architects Buettler and Arnold who designed the Dakota Hospital and the 1925 extension to the First Baptist Church. The corner stone was laid 1928 and the building finished in 1929. The colonial style is unique in South Dakota, but more common in New England. Over the years, the Congregation has maintained the building's beauty and unique architectural characteristics. In 2020 major renovations occurred including placing new underlayment on the roof necessitating the removal, rehabilitation, and replacement of some of the beautiful red ceramic tiles and refurbishing the bell tower. In 2021, Liz Almlie, Southern Historic Preservation Specialist, wrote a nomination of this magnificent building to the National Register of Historic Places.



Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker

The next category of preservation of individual sites included the **Franklin Taylor Granary/Elevator** owned by Alex & Stephanie Ufford (31828 Fairview Ave) The granary was built from 1887-1895 as part of Wayside Farm first owned by Franklin Taylor. A scale in the granary used to weigh grain was available to other farmers. The granary has been in the Ufford family for over 100 years.



Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker

The next award went to **Larry and Sandy Bradley for their home** built in 1912 and located at 610 East Main Street in Vermillion. Past owners included well known Vermillion residents such as lawyer Peter Olson and businesspeople Francis and Nels Abrahamson. At some period, the porch was enclosed and faced with Sioux Falls granite. The building, part of the University Historic District, was maintained as is for over 100 years.



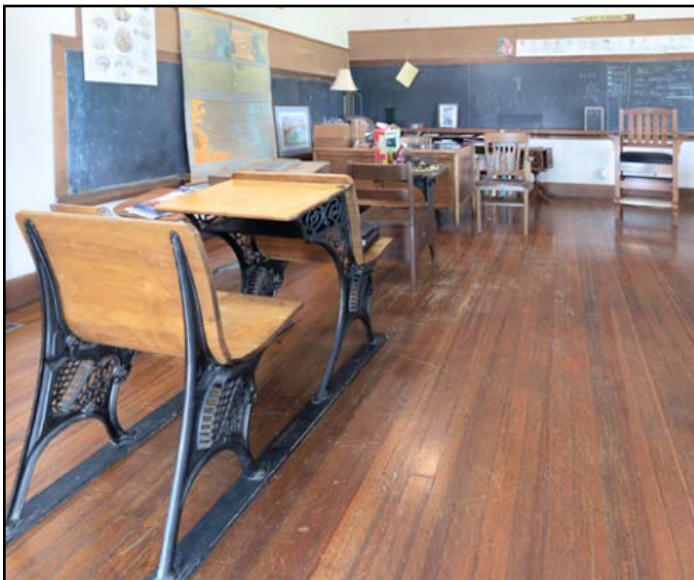
Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker

Continued on page 14

The next preservation award is the *Lincoln Schoolhouse No. 12, Meckling, SD* owned by Ron & Josette Lindahl. During the awards ceremony Ron gave an excellent presentation describing the extensive work done to restore the schoolhouse to its historic condition. The schoolhouse was built in 1914 and was in use until 1969. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.



Photograph by Tim Schreiner



Photograph by Tim Schreiner

The last structure to be recognized is *Wakonda Hotel and Bar "The Pit"* located at 101 Ohio St., Wakonda, SD and owned by Chad Anderson and Jennifer Sundem. The two-story wood frame structure was built in 1890 by Anthony Collins and served as a hotel. In the 1930s Carl Watson added brick veneer to the building and created a bar/"nightclub", "The Pit" in the basement. Aside from functioning as a hotel and having rooms for rent, the building also housed a doctor's office. The building is one of Wakonda's oldest commercial buildings in continual use.

Congratulations to all the awardees!



Photograph by Evelyn Schlenker

Vermillion Historic Preservation Commission Update - March 2021

The Vermillion Historic Preservation Commission's mission is "...to protect, preserve, and restore Vermillion's historic and cultural assets through public education, workshops, and outreach to the community.

The commission has continued to meet online. Business has included providing input on the downtown streetscape plan, reviewing the United Church of Christ-Congregational Church nomination to the National Register and planning projects for next year. A public workshop will be announced for late spring.

The VHPC is continuing its pursuit of a potential new historic district in an area bordered by Main Street on the north, South University Street on the east, the bluff on the south and South Harvard Street to the west. With funds from the State Historic Preservation Office the commission hired consultant Michelle Dennis from Rapid City to write the nomination to the Department of the Interior for potential listing on the National Register. It is anticipated that she will finish the nomination in FY22.

In cooperation with the city Department of Parks and Recreation, we are beginning to plan for a Prentiss Park centennial celebration in 2023. All interested persons are invited to contact us with any historical accounts, pictures, and suggestions relevant to this celebration.

The VHPC is comprised of seven members with rotating terms. Members are chosen for their interest and expertise in history, architecture, archeology, city planning and related fields. Interested residents of Vermillion may apply annually at the city website. Current commissioners are Susan Keith Gray (Chair), Ed Gerrish (Vice-Chair), Bill Dendinger, Dietrik Vanderhill, Cyndy Chaney and Jim Wilson. There is one vacancy.

Publications and Archeology Survey by Clay County Historic Commission Board Members

Over the last year, CCHPC Board members published two documents that are available on the cchpc.org website. In one booklet Evelyn Schlenker and Jim Stone documented the many steps taken to restore the Thompson house fireplace probably built in the 1890s and how it was incorporated into a new exhibit at the W. H. Over Museum. The booklet can be accessed at <https://cchpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-thompson-house-fireplace-restoration.pdf>

Jim Stone authored a book entitled “The History of the Burr Broom Factory” accessed at this URL: <https://cchpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-History-of-the-Burr-Broom-Factory-final.pdf>.

Much of the information in Jim Stone’s book is taken from newspaper articles, letters, and descriptions of items in the Burr Broom exhibit at the W. H. Over Museum. In addition, at the end of July 2018 Jim surveyed what remained of the Burr building. His survey includes narratives, an architectural study, and photographs. The building was torn down in August 2018. Thus, the book documents the history of the Burr Broom Factory, the Burr family members who sold brooms for about 100 years in Vermillion, SD, and the fate of a two and a half-story brick building built in 1892.

William Ranney: Archaeological Survey

The Clay County Archaeological Survey hopes to begin anew in the spring of 2021, after the hiatus imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Back in June 2019 we conducted an archaeological survey of several historic properties, primarily along the Vermillion River. The project was sponsored by the CCHPC, and the survey was conducted in conjunction with the University of South Dakota (USD) Department of Anthropology and Sociology. William Ranney (CCHPC) and Dr. Anthony Krus (USD) conducted the survey, with the assistance of one of Dr. Krus’ students. Although the original intent of the survey was to concentrate on the bluffs overlooking the Vermillion River valley searching for prehistoric sites, we have expanded the survey to the other areas of Clay County and are also looking for historic sites.

We will continue the investigations into the town sites of original Vermillion and Bloomingdale, expanding the research to include the former communities of Lodi, Greenfield and Alsen. Seven landowners have thus far given permission to survey their properties. The terrain includes upland cultivated fields, pastured bluff edges, and wooded slopes. There is at least one schoolhouse site that has two privies to be located. Two areas that have purported prehistoric artifact scatters will be examined. The survey will again be held in conjunction with the USD Archaeo-

logical Field School. Thirteen students have enrolled in the USD field school, which begins May 17 and continues through June 11, 2021. Masks and social distancing will be required.

Progress on the Brown Book

In addition, Preservation Commission member Tim Schreiner is revising the so-called Brown Book that chronicles all the sites and structures in Clay County that are listing on the National Register of Historic Places. He is searching for old photos of the structures and is taking current photos of buildings and bridges that are still standing. He is also reviewing the original applications to the National Register to supplement the information about the sites.

University Historic District Association Activities - March 2021

In September 2020, the University Historic District Association (UHDA) held its semi-annual neighborhood Clean Up Day. We took yard waste and unpainted wood from our neighborhood to the city landfill. Clean Up Days are usually held in September and April. Residents and property owners are notified of the date by email and newsletter.

In December we delivered or mailed holiday cards to all owners/residents of the district.

We are focusing our board meeting discussions on zoning protections for our neighborhood based on density. We are considering a new historical residential zone. This spring we will begin to meet with neighborhood property owners to determine support for this proposal. Anyone interested in attending our meetings and would like more information, please contact us by email for the meeting code.

The UHDA board meets monthly. General meetings for the entire neighborhood are held in June, September and March (postponed this year). The June meeting is the annual meeting where new board members are selected. Meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the 2nd Thursday of the month. Meetings will be held online until further notice. For information, visit our Facebook page or contact Susan Keith Gray, president, at susankeith.gray@gmail.com or Randy Von Ehwegen, co-secretary, at randyvonehwegen@gmail.com. Other board members are Jill VonEhwegen (co-secretary), Ed Gerrish (vice-president), Dan Neufeld, Teresa Gilbertson, Claude Garelik, Joan Holter, Martha Fagg, and Ariel Wei.

Joint Newsletter of the
CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
W. H. OVER MUSEUM AND
CLAY COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
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