



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

Fall 2014

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Message from CCHS President

We're feeling a little prideful at the Clay County Historical Society these days; and, I must say, it's well deserved pride. This hardworking board has accomplished a deed that has been several years in the doing and that is restoring to its original glory, the replica of the replica of the first schoolhouse in Clay County. This is the anniversary of formal education in our state, and this project has put an exclamation point behind that fact. The dedication of this replica took place on a day in early September and found the new replica, in all of its restored glory, reposing on the south lawn of the beautiful Austin-Whittemore-House. The day was marked with a celebration featuring sugar cookies and lemonade ala Pansy Whittemore's birthday party which is recorded for posterity by Ron Backer in one of his nostalgic paintings.

The program, which was created by Dan Christopherson, was so well presented and included some beautiful trumpet music by Jordan Hoffman and a stellar speech by Kurt Hackemer along with proclamations from the Mayor of Vermillion and Governor of South Dakota – folks were recognized for their hard work and former board president, Tom Thaden who had done so



much to accomplish this deed, was also present. Life memberships were given as appreciation to Dave Hawkins, Jim Stone, and Nick Bruyer. Dave and Jim were the forces behind the actual construction and Nick was our major donor who helped us to reach the needed level of funding to complete this ambitious project. All in all, it was a fun day and master of ceremonies, Jack Marsh, kept the program moving along. There were several board members who put in many hours to make sure the schoolhouse was ready for its opening to the public. Thanks to all of you who put forth so much effort; it is greatly appreciated.

(continued page 2)



We had several groups of students visit the little school that first day and by the time our teachers, Donna Schafer and Shirley Huber, led them through a typical long ago school day, they were deep in thought as to what it was like to go to school when “there isn’t even a bathroom or water”. Thoughts to think for all of us.

Earlier, we had a wonderful reception to honor the years of dedicated service Cleo Erickson had provided for the Society. Again, the mayor was present with a proclamation and son, Paul, and daughter, Susan, shared memories of “mom’s other house”. Cleo had worried that nobody would come and by the time everyone had signed the guestbook and eaten a piece of cake, her worries were over and the stack of cards she has to remember this day will serve to remind her that her time with the House and her love for this history of Vermillion was something to commemorate in fine style. Again, we thank you, Cleo; it was certainly a pleasure.

With the departure of Cleo, there were some thoughts of how would we ever find anyone to take her place. Well, things have a way of happening sometimes that find things turning out pretty well. As luck would have it, Wess Pravacek retired and “needed” a little something to do with her time that would still give her the freedom to enjoy her retirement. You will find a cheerful Wess at the House every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday each week and other times by special arrangement. Wess is still working at learning the ins and outs of finding answers for folks, but we feel very, very lucky to have her at the House and taking care of business. So, welcome, Wess, we’re glad to have you!

In the meantime, we are gearing up for our annual signature Tour of Homes in early December and hopefully, we will have our annual Sweets ‘n Treats sale in December, also. Watch for the date and time of our next potluck meeting when we invite guests to enjoy a nice meal and a short program – this one will be, surprise, something about one-room schools. Also, one of our board members, Art Rusch, has just had his latest book published – Court Houses in South Dakota – so watch for his book signing and be proud that he was part of the Festival of Books in Sioux Falls. Enjoy this beautiful season and look forward to the festivities to come!

Maxine Johnson, CCHS President

NOTES FROM THE OVER

The newly acquired collection of exotic animals are now almost all out for viewing. Three new mounts are on the floor in Plexiglas cases that allow some up close and personal viewing of a handsome lion, leopard, and hyena. Other heads are wall mounts. The new Preheim mural is completed and truly a beautiful depiction of our South Dakota sky. The Discovery Room floor has a new coat of paint and is sporting several new area rugs for sitting along with a wonderful small red bench crafted by Marvin Walz. All of these were showcased during an After Hours on September 23 and we were so pleased with the wonderful crowd that came to see our new exhibits. Right now, we’re in the middle of pumpkins and getting ready for the Christmas festival which takes place the first Sunday in December. Hope that many of you can take the time to visit us and spend some time looking at our exhibits.

Update on.....PRESERVING THE PAST

Many, many thanks to all those who supported the Clay County Historical Society in its endeavor to replicate the original replica of the First Permanent Schoolhouse in Dakota Territory. An article about the Dedication on September 3 appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

This article is about costs and income ...

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>24,353.54</u>
Match from Nick Bruyer	10,000.00
DAR Paha Wakan CD	5,500.00
CCHS funds	5,000.00
Donations	3,853.54
<u>EXPENSES</u>	<u>18,590.86</u>
Construction & tree removal	18,326.92
Fund Raising	253.94
<u>ENDOWMENT FOR UPKEEP</u>	<u>5,762.68</u>

This, of course, reflects only the financial component. There were many members who contributed labor and materials and time. To all who made this possible, THANK YOU.

Luann Ouellette, CCHS Treasurer

Greetings from the Desk!



Since this is my first official message to you, I'd like to introduce myself. I've actually been a member of the Clay County Historical Society and upon my retirement in May from a 32 year career as a state employee, I was invited to be a part of the "House". I'm not exactly sure what my title is but some of my duties include responding to phone messages and family history inquiries, giving tours, registering donated items and a variety of other fun and interesting things that teach me something new every day. I grew up in Wakonda so I'm a Clay

County native. My dad was Merlind Berntson and my mother was Lillian Gilbertson Bern-tson. My Norwegian heritage has given me the ability to take a joke, the need for a good cup of coffee and a yearning for lutefisk and lefse this time of the year. I have three grown daughters one son-in-law, four granddaughters and a dog. My life is good. I hope that you'll stop by and have a cup of coffee and I'll keep you posted on what's coming across the desk.

Wess Pravecek



Please join us for the Tour of Homes 2014....

The event will be held December 5, 4:30 – 7:30 pm. We have some charming homes that are participating and they will be all dressed up for Christmas! The homes that are on the tour this year are listed below.

Nick and Mary Merrigan – 2224 N. University Road

Randy and Jane Uhl – 44 Cypress Drive

Luann Ouellette – 10 S. Norbeck Street

Doug and Jennifer Peterson – 323 Lewis Street

Austin-Whittemore House – 15 Austin Ave. (Refreshments served)

Tickets are \$15 – Available at the Austin-Whittemore House, Nook'n Cranny and Vermillion Beauty Shop. There are rides available this year, with a limited number of seats, sponsored by Vermillion Public Transit. For more information call Clay County Historical Society at 605-624-8266.



We will also have the “Sweets and Treats” coming up Saturday, December 13, 2014 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at the Austin-Whittemore House, 15 Austin Street, Vermillion. Select your own homemade goodies and your Christmas baking will be done.

All proceeds for the Tour of Homes, Sweets and Treats and the Ice Cream Social go towards the maintenance, repairs and supplies for the Austin-Whittemore House.



Clay County Historical Society is on Facebook. We will be using the page to share events that will be happening at the Austin-Whittemore House. To find our Facebook page search for Clay County Historical Society-Vermillion. We invite you to “like” us with your personal page to help us spread the word about our page.

Or see our web page at <http://www.cchssd.org/events/>

Canton's Old Cannon

IT WAS MADE FOR CANTON'S CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION WHEN THE EFFORT TO STEAL ELK POINT GUN FAILED

Dakota Republican – July 23, 1908

In 1872, Yankton had a brass mountain howitzer and Vermillion a brass siege gun, both furnished by the Territory to kill Indians with. That year the Elk Pointers were patriotic and wanted a gun to celebrate with, and as these were the only two, as stated above, a crowd of Elk Pointers entered Vermillion during a dark and stormy night and stole Vermillion's gun and hid it. Vermillion vowed vengeance on Ringsrud's town down the road, but their vengeance is still smoldering unsatisfied as the gun is still kept under lock and key in the county jail of Elk Point.

Vermillion must have a gun and under the inspiration of Charlie True and Silas Kidder, both of them now dead, a forlorn hope was organized to steal the Yankton cannon and the warlike mission was successful, as they found the gun where the writer hid it after breaking nearly all the window glass in Yankton in celebration of the fall of Paris in 1871. Yankton at that time having a numerous German population and, of course, they were wild with delight over the victory. The Vermillion boys captured the cannon during the early hours while the old capital city slumbered and took it home with them, and to make sure of their prize dug a hole in the ground and buried it, and it was well they did, as nearly a hundred greatly enraged Yanktonites were organized into a military company whose purpose was to march on Vermillion and recover the gun at any cost. Charlie True, then editor of THE DAKOTA REPUBLICAN, sent word to the writer that the gun was buried and absolutely safe from capture. Then Yankton was determined to go down to Vermillion and lick the whole town and make them give up the gun, but the wiser counsels prevailed and the matter was dropped: but Yankton has never seen her dear old cannon since.

This introduction is necessary to show how Canton got her cannon in 1876.

The centennial year was noted for its patriotism all over the country and Canton in her glory and pride wanted a cannon to celebrate with. The writer learned that the Elk Point cannon was hid in the basement of Hoffman's hardware store from a tinner who had worked for Mr. Hoffman. A party was organized in Canton to make a night raid on Hoffman's cellar, and they started one evening expecting to reach Elk Point before daylight and capture the gun. W.M Cuppett, Dan Harris, and the writer were in the party, but the boys never got to Elk Point. After fording the Sioux River at Fairview the driver missed the raid and the gun stealers became demoralized in the intense obscurity of the night and camped out until daylight revealed their proximity to the home of Captain Wheelock, who provisioned the outfit, and they returned home disgusted. It was fortunate the boys got lost, only six of them, for twenty men could not have carried that big brass gun out of Hoffman's cellar, and the boys undoubtedly missed a serious scrap besides.

Canton's hope for a cannon in this situation failed, but a cannon must be had to properly celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of our independence, it was then decided to have a cannon to use for the occasion. Mr. Cuppett started a subscription paper which was signed by enough of our citizens to guarantee enactment. Mr. Cuppett made arrangements with the foundry firm of L.P. Lyons of Sioux City to cast a gun and have it ready for the Fourth of July, 1876. The gun was made and it reached Canton in time for service. On the 4th of July the cannon and the ammunition ready and at midnight opened up the liveliest celebration ever seen in Canton.

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From 1876 to 1891, the favorite old cannon did all kinds of work on the powder burning line and finally an overcharge exposed a small crack near the transom and the gun was considered unsafe. In 1891, the writer fired the last shot to prove the gun was safe enough but people were afraid of it and after the last shot filled the wind with lead, since that time the famous old gun has had its home on the court-house square until last week when it was mounted upon a cement base by H.H. DeLong, where it is liable to remain through the coming years as a relic of pioneer patriotism and established in the memory of those who had it made, and left for future generations to protect and care for.

Canton had another cannon, but that was carried away years ago. John Smith of Parker made a handsome little cannon and presented it to the writer who in turn presented it to the city and turned it over to the care of the militia company, then commanded by Dr. Brown. It seems that Dr. Brown had the gun mounted at the cost of \$10 or \$12, and when he left here he carried the gun away because no one would pay him for the expense he assumed voluntarily. Brown had no right to the cannon and the writer had no knowledge of the cannon until he sold it to parties down in Nashua, Iowa. Brown's act was disgraceful because he knew the gun was presented to the city of Canton and he could acquire no vested right in the gun under any circumstances. The mount was his but the cannon was not. It was one of the best and safest guns ever made, brass-bound and handsome.

Canton will have a booming Fourth of July in 1909, and John Smith, of Parker, must be incited to come and bring old "Prohibition" along – the gun he made to celebrate statehood with. John Smith may not be as well known in romance and story as the "Gunmaker of Moscow," but he is no less famous as a mechanic and a patriot. The Fourth of July without a cannon lacks one of the proper elements of a due and proper observance of the day. A national salute to the forty-six stars on the flag at sunrise would make the Sioux Valley echo and boys jump out of bed in a hurry. John Smith can make a whole celebration himself.

Another Report About the Artillery

Dakota Republican – Feb. 16, 1911

By J.C. Bower

Colonel Arthur Linn's breezy chronicle concerning the historic cannon and its rescues, recently copied into the columns of the **Dakota Republican**, has resulted in the publication of another readable version contributed by Mr. J.C. Bower of Rapid City and printed in the **Daily Journal** of that city on Wednesday of last week. Mr. Bower's narrative sheds considerable new light upon occurrences to and in which he was both eye-witness and participant, and follows herewith:

I notice in the **Yankton Press and Dakotan** that Colonel Arthur Linn, being in a reminiscent mood, spoke of the larceny of Vermillion's cannon by the Elk Pointers and the larceny of the Yankton cannon by the Vermillion boys. His story is partially correct. As I was a resident of Vermillion at the time, I am familiar with the details of that event. Vermillion's cannon for a long time occupied a commanding position on the bluffs just east of the old log schoolhouse and easily captured by the enemy, but not so Yankton's artillery. After the loss of our cannon, a party of ex-soldiers consisting of Captain Isaiah Washburn, Hat Washburn, Hank Washburn, Pete Cook, Lance Fisher, and one or two officers under the command of Captain Joe Fisher went to Yankton with two fine teams, and, halting in some brush near the Missouri River a scout located the Yankton cannon, and just at dark the invaders bombarded it and made good their escape. As luck would have it, its abduction was not discovered until near Gayville. The Washburn boys were old artillery boys. They came into Vermillion about 11 o'clock p.m., making the trip in about four hours, 28 miles. The

The colonel is in error about Vermillion not daring to expose their gun. It was used on the Fourth of July, a month or so after its capture. I know this to be so for I rammed the wad of grass and paper into its muzzle and Henry Butler, the photographer, caught it on the fly with his camera, as the explosion of the powder, done up in an old stocking leg, sent it skyward. It is believed that this was the first successful attempt to photograph a flying object. After the celebration the cannon disappeared and only a few knew of its place of burial. When the Dakota Southern railroad reached Yankton and preparations were made for a big celebration a committee of Yankton citizens came to Vermillion and pledged their word and sacred honor that if the Vermillionites would loan the gun to Yankton for the event, they would return it. Their request was granted, provided Charles True, of the **Dakota Republican**, should go along as its custodian. This provision was accepted and Charles never looked better and the smile on his honest face never looked broader, than when he stood on the flat car by the side of that old cannon with the flag of his country waving. The cannon came back according to agreement.

As to the Elk Pointers not being able to use their stolen cannon, such is not the case. It was used at the first meeting of the Grand Army in Dakota at Elk Point. A sham battle was arranged. An impromptu fort was built, Captain LaGro, who was well known in Rapid City, was to defend the fort with about twenty men. Two companies of infantry under the command of Captain G.G. Bennett and Captain Alexander Hughes made the assault. It was arranged that the fort was to surrender when hard pressed. The battle raged with fearful loss on both sides. The cannon belched forth its fiery flame, and the wounded urged their comrades to fight to the death. I was drummer boy on that occasion and was hitting the high places on my old drum. The fort seemed doomed. The white flag was run up, but when Captain LaGro saw it he tore it down in the excitement, and swore that he would never surrender. It took a squad of men to silence him and the cannon. Magnanimous terms were offered and we capitulated and marched out, drums beating, colors flying, arms at right shoulders. We were ordered to report at the public square where we were provided with rations to get home on and tobacco enough to smoke the pipe of years forever more.

Note: The cannon buried ten miles north of Vermillion after the Fourth of July in 1873 has never been found and the cannon stolen by Elk Point was retrieved for Vermillion by the members of Delta Tau Delta in a raid in 1921 and is now in the possession of the W.H. Over Museum.



The books below have been reduced in price. If you order now you could have them by Christmas.

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 \$25.00 / add \$ 5.00 shipping & handling

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 \$10.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling

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 \$3.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling

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 \$6.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling

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 \$8.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling

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 \$6.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling

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 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling

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

Price \$10.00 / add \$ 3.00 shipping & handling

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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 ORDER:

please make check payable CCHS and mail to:
Clay County Historical Society, Inc.
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

website www.cchssd.org

Thank You For Your Business

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Membership Application / Renewal

Membership Year is April 1 – March 31

Name: _____

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Newsletter Delivery ☐ E-Mail ☐ Mail ☐

☐ Individual Member: \$ 15.00 ☐ Family Membership: \$ 25.00

☐ Institutional: \$ 50.00 ☐ Life Member/per person: \$200.00

☐ Donation to Austin-Whittemore House (for help with maintenance and supplies)

Please mail check payable to CCHS, and mail to: County Historical Society, Inc.
15 Austin Street
Vermillion, SD 57069

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Vermillion, SD 57069

**The Austin-Whittemore House is open
Monday—Wednesday—Friday
10:00 am—2:00 pm
Or you may call the House @
605.624.8266
and schedule a time to visit.**

Clay County Historical Society
Meetings are held the 3rd Monday
of each month at 9:30 am
Annual Meeting is held the 4th
Thursday in April.
All members welcome.

Happy Holidays!