

h e a d l i n e s

23 reflections for 2023

If we were to mark 2022 at Heritage Hall Museum & Archives in the tradition of the early American Indian tribes who used winter counts – pictorial calendars – to record the primary events in their lives, our museum would document last year with a sketch of the Ludwig and Susanna Deckert House.

Our staff and volunteers devoted hundreds of hours to the final steps in the relocation/restoration of the historical early-1880s home last year. We opened the house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, to the public with special events in October. We have a few things to tidy up, but we're thrilled that after a five-year process, we can share its rich history with our guests once again.

But 2022 was also filled with dozens of other important and exciting projects. We've compiled them – primarily in chronological order – to



This detail of the winter count in our Arrival on the Prairie Gallery comes from the Cheyenne River Sioux Nation. Drawn on elk hide, it depicts events from 1769 to 1860. Each pictograph, recorded in winter, marks the past year with a single event.



Our museum complex in January 2023; the photo was taken by Jeremy Waltner.

help document the life and times of our community's museum.

1. In January we began the final phase of renovating the front area of the museum and mercantile area. We updated the lobby and remodeled/improved the office, thanks to a generous donation from a friend of the museum.

2. We also extended the walls to the ceiling in our new Faith Traditions Gallery, painted the ceiling black and installed new track lighting. The lighting project was made possible by a generous grant from Golden West Telecommunications.

3. On Feb. 4, our museum was prominently featured in the debut of Dakota Life, a South Dakota Public Broadcasting program that told Freeman's story.

4. From Feb. 6 through April 24, the historical Bethel Church became home to "Voices of Conscience." This traveling exhibit from the Kauffman Museum of North Newton, Kan., shares stories of those who questioned and challenged the 1914-18 conflict we know as World War I. It was rescheduled from 2020; it had been postponed because of Covid-19. The exhibit attracted a number of groups, including students from Freeman Academy who incorporated it into their history class. We also scheduled several programs in conjunction with the exhibit. On March 25 and 26, Dora Maendel of the Fairholme Hutterite Colony in Manitoba and Dr. Duane Stoltzfus, professor of communication at Goshen (Ind.) College and author of

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Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

PO Box 693 • 880 S Cedar St. • Freeman, SD 57029

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The Director's Perspective

"When you get a groove going, time flies." – Donald Fagen.

Time has definitely been flying by at the museum and our "23 reflections" give you just a glimpse of what we were up to – what our "groove" was – in 2022.

But a new year has begun, and we are looking forward to what is ahead. We have a new board of directors, and you'll find them listed at the bottom of this page. They are already gathering in committee work to focus on the various aspects of building a better organization. It is exciting to welcome the newcomers to this group of individuals who are committed to improving our organization and making HHM&A a better place.

Meanwhile, the HHM&A staff continues to work on a variety of projects, most notably the Natural World Gallery. This multi-faceted gallery will cover various aspects of the physical world we are part of here in southeastern South Dakota. We are so happy that such a variety of people have been willing to collaborate with us on this, and we're excited to show visitors what's been happening.

While it is a relief to have the Deckert House project behind us, the "project" will continue as we finish up the little things and move on to others like landscaping and, perhaps, starting "Susanna's Garden" to feature plants that our forebears brought with them from Russia and/or grew or utilized here on the wide-open plains. There will always be projects and possibilities related to this budding farmstead on the east side of our museum complex.

And, as is the case with wooden buildings subject to the elements, some of our historical buildings will be needing paint. Built in 1896 just south of Freeman, the Diamond Valley schoolhouse needs some TLC.

Another concern that we need to grapple with is that of security and how to best protect and secure our historical buildings and the entire museum complex.

These are just some of the things that will take our time and attention this year. As always, we welcome those who have expertise to share or who volunteer to help out. And financial donations are always needed and appreciated.

We are hopeful that 2023 will offer a return to the level of activities (and visitors) we saw prior to the disruption of Covid-19. If you are in the area, please stop by. Check out our mercantile. Take some time to meander through the museum complex or research in the archives. There is an exciting "groove" going on here at HHM&A!



Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer
Executive Director/ Archivist

Schmeckfest returns

After a three-year hiatus (thank you Covid-19) Schmeckfest 2023 is just around the corner. This community festival is a fundraiser for Freeman Academy, and we are grateful that they are willing to share the activities at HHM&A with their guests. We have a variety of programming planned. In addition to visiting the museum and archives and perusing the mercantile, we'll be featuring basket-weaving and rope-making demonstrations and our model train is always fun to watch. And the ever-popular Heritage Pickers will be back, sharing 10-minute talks about a variety of topics related to our museum collection. In the Bethel Church, we have several presentations planned, including a visit with one of our mercantile artisans, Kevin Gross of Goshen, Ind., about the fractal artwork that he creates, and a presentation by Hutterite historian and area native, Rodney Hofer of Lawrence, Kan.

Watch the Freeman Courier, our Facebook page, and our website for more details in the upcoming weeks.

Counting up to 150

The Freeman area was settled largely by Germans from Russia – German-speaking people who had lived in Russia for a time and chose to immigrate to America in the 1870s. With the availability of land to homestead in the Great Plains region, many came here to begin a new life with an immigration wave that began in 1874. 2024 will mark 150 years since they began to settle in the larger Freeman area, and we plan to be a part of celebrating this milestone. If you are interested in helping us brainstorm and plan a celebration, please contact us. And if you know of documents, photos, recordings or stories that could enhance the history we share, let us know. This is "our story," and we are passionate about preserving it and inviting others to explore the impact of these and others who came to Dakota Territory, persevered, created this community and made it their home.

Our Mission

is to preserve, educate and foster appreciation for the diverse natural and cultural history of the greater Freeman area, settled largely by Germans from Russia in the 1870s.

HERITAGE HALL
Museum
& ARCHIVES

PO Box 693 • 880 S Cedar St.
Freeman, SD 57029 • (605) 925-7545

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“Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War,” shared the story of four local Hutterite men who were imprisoned at Alcatraz; their story is part of the Voices of Conscience exhibit. The program was supported in part by a grant from the South Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. On April 2, the Freeman Network for Justice and Peace sponsored a program that shared other local stories.

5. Seth Varner and friends of Wandermore Publishing visited the museum on March 14 as part of their whirlwind tour of all 310 incorporated towns in South Dakota. Their goal is to showcase and document every town’s history, architecture, etc. through photographs for people to enjoy for generations. They proclaimed Freeman as the “Chislic Capital of America.”

6. After being canceled in 2020 and 2021 because of Covid-19, Schmeckfest returned as a significantly scaled-back “Schmeck Stop” on March 26 and April 2; we opened for visitors with extended hours on both days.

7. A derecho roared across the region on May 12 causing widespread damage. Although our museum was spared, the two large HHM&A billboards both north and south of



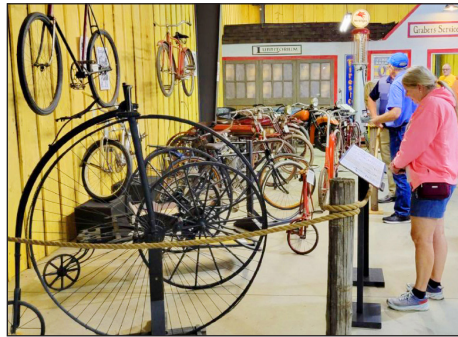
Freeman along Highway 81 were knocked down. Maxwell Hutterite Colony assisted us by getting

them back up in June. The billboards are important tools in our marketing and promotion; guests often comment they’ve stopped in because they’ve seen our signs.

8. Two interns joined our staff in summer 2022. Ryan Mews, a graduate student at USD, helped research and refresh the interior of the Deckert

House. Madeline Hofer, a Freeman native studying at Dordt University, assisted with weekend staffing at the museum, recorded video interviews and helped prepare materials for an interactive kiosk planned in the Deckert House.

9. Madeline also helped us set up Square, a new point-of-sale system that we’re using for admissions, mercantile sales and inventory management. This improves our efficiency and customer service.



A special exhibit featuring vintage bicycles opened in the Unruh-Tieszen Wing in June.
Photo courtesy of Carol Eisenbeis

10. On June 3 we offered a special program about bicycles titled “200 Years on 2 Wheels” to participants of RASDak (Ride Across South Dakota) who had gathered in Freeman in preparation for a (motorized) trip to Hill City where they began their trek back to Freeman. The program was held beside our special exhibit in the Unruh-Tieszen Wing that featured our vintage bicycles and several bicycles on loan from Linden Graber of Freeman and the Kauffman Museum in Kansas. The exhibit is a reminder that things are always changing with something new – even for local visitors who’ve been to the museum recently.

11. Guests gathered at the Prairie Arboretum Interpretive Center on June 5 for a Sunday afternoon tea party with Phyllis Schrag, sponsored by Heritage Hall Museum & Archives as a fundraiser for the museum.

12. We hosted several activities for attendees of the Central Plains Mennonite Conference held in Freeman June 16-19, including a showing of our movie, “Three Groups,

One Story.”

13. Organizers of the S.D. MCC Relief Sale held on the Freeman Academy campus July 9, included our museum in their promotion and we extended our hours to welcome those attending the sale.

14. On July 10, we sponsored a program at the Salem-Zion Mennonite (North) Church featuring Ellen Ortman, who shared her research on East Freeman Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite nicknames. We later printed a booklet of the information Ellen compiled. It’s on sale in our mercantile.

15. July 30 was a big day in Freeman with the 2022 South Dakota Chislic Festival held on the grounds of the neighboring Prairie Arboretum. We had a steady stream of visitors tour our museum with extended hours from morning until evening. Museum director Marnette Hofer and Ian Tuttle of Omaha shared the history of chislic in presentations at the festival.

16. In August, Freeman’s new disc golf course opened on the southeastern portion of the Prairie Arboretum. The Freeman Lions Club, which established the course, invited our museum to be a partner so our mercantile added individual discs and disc sets to our inventory – both for rent and sale.

17. In August, Freeman native, author and historian Gary Waltner, who has lived most of his life in Germany, returned for what he said may have been his final visit to his home community.

On Aug. 21 he shared migration stories of the Germans from Russia who began settling in southeastern



Dakota Territory in the 1870s, during a well-attended event at Pioneer Hall on the Freeman Academy campus.

18. On Sept. 12 we inaugurated

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“Main on Mondays” a weekly Facebook feature that shares a photo and bit of history from our archives. It began as a way to celebrate the opening of Freeman’s new Main Street, but it has become a popular weekly history lesson that we’re continuing every Monday.



19. After being closed since 2018 for moving, renovation, restoration and refurbishing, the 140-year-old Ludwig and Susanna Deckert House was reopened with special activities on Oct. 14-16. We invited Deckert descendants for an open house on Friday and then opened the home to the public with extended hours on Saturday and Sunday. We also sponsored three programs. Ryan Mews and Marnette Hofer offered a closer look at the Deckert family, their home, and the project we had just completed. Another program, “New Discoveries in Volhynian Low German Mennonite History” was presented by Rodney Ratzlaff, a Low German Mennonite historian who lives in Olathe, Kan., and “The Dutch Golden Age – Mennonite to the Core,” featured Dr. Lauren Friesen of North Newton, Kan. All the programs were held at the neighboring Bethel Mennonite Church.

20. Fall 2022 also marked the conclusion of renovations and restorations at the Johannesthal Reformed Church, which served parishioners west of Freeman from

1902 until 1967. The improvements included bringing electricity and new lighting to the church. We can now offer both the Johannesthal and Bethel churches to groups/organizations wanting to rent space for programs and meetings.

21. One area we branched into last year is technology in our storytelling. Our website and social media have become important tools for us in recent years. We’ve added QR codes to broaden the scope of our exhibits. We’ve been digitizing some of the materials in our archives and conducting video interviews. We’re grateful to the Freeman Public School District for donating three Promethean Boards to the museum that enable us to create interactive displays for guests. We’ve established a YouTube channel. We’ve tried – with marginal success – livestreaming events. We are committed to strengthening this aspect of our museum.

22. One of the most exciting developments of 2022 was the collaborations that emerged. We noted Freeman Public School’s donation of the Promethean boards, the invitation from the Lions Club to join the disc golf project, the working relationship with the MCC Relief Sale. We also were pleased to participate with Schmeckfest, the S.D. Chislic Festival and Freeman’s Hometown Christmas. Perhaps the most heartwarming example of collaboration is what’s happening in our Natural World Exhibit. Last spring, Thor Aanenson, then an 8th grader at Freeman Public, visited the museum with his parents. His interest in our plans for the natural world exhibit led him to apply for and receive a grant from the Freeman Community Foundation to help us tell the story of the mosasaur fossil we have in our collection. The Freeman Lion’s Club funded the creation of a



replica of the mosasaur skull that will be the centerpiece of our restructured Natural World Gallery. The gallery will also include a refreshed display of our mounted animals. Local artist Michelle L. Hofer is bringing her artistic skills to transform the beams that frame the diorama into trees. A backdrop featuring Jeremy Waltner’s photo of the Turkey Ridge Valley sets the scene for the birds and animals. Other elements of our natural history will be incorporated into the gallery, which we hope to fully complete by the end of the year. We’re thrilled by the collaboration on these projects, which has also included local science teachers.

23. Our review of 2023 would be incomplete without acknowledging the war in Ukraine; many of us in our community trace our roots to that region. Russia’s invasion came shortly after we helped sponsor an ongoing project promoting “velotourism” (bicycle tourism) in the Ostrog area of Ukraine. This area was formerly known as Volhynia and was home to a number of the Germans from Russia that eventually came to this community, including the Low German Mennonite village of Karlsvalde. Because of this project, photos of former Mennonite homes (many like our Deckert House) began to come to light. We grieve for the people of Ukraine. We hope and pray for peace in that region and look forward to a time when this project can resume.

Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

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Your support enables us to continue developing our museum

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A word (or two) about membership

On the other side of this page, you will find the list of those who chose to become members and make donations to HHM&A in 2022.

We are humbled and so grateful to each person on that list. Without their generosity, we could not have accomplished so much. Without their support, the mission of our organization would be unable to continue. We value every gift and express our thanks to each of you.

Starting with 2023 we are making some changes in how we acknowledge these gifts.

Donations and memberships dated January 1 through December 31, 2023, will be recorded as gifts for 2023 unless indicated otherwise.

However, the benefits of membership – patron passes, reduced admission, newsletter subscriptions, etc. – will extend a full 12 months from when we receive your gift. For example, a membership dated July 1, 2023, will include benefits through July 1, 2024.

And we're pleased to announce that we've added another membership benefit – a 10% discount on all purchases from our mercantile.

Another change this year is that we will record memberships at three basic levels: Homesteader (\$30), Shopkeeper (\$50) and Conductor (\$100).

Contributions starting at \$250 will be recorded as Sustaining Donations, with the same levels we have been using in recent years. Those donations will include the benefits of membership at the Conductor level.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, we will provide tax-deduction receipts, by request, and for all donations above \$250.

The accompanying form enables you to specify your intent.

Regardless of the amount, we appreciate your generosity and will continue to recognize both Basic Memberships and Sustaining Donations in future newsletters.

Thank you for your continued support!



We value your ongoing support through your memberships, donations and volunteer time. Your contributions enable us to continue and expand our mission of sharing our community's history.

We offer three basic membership levels and nine sustaining donation levels; please indicate your choices.

Thank you for your support.

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DIAMOND

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\$75,000+

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