

h e a d l i n e s

Off and running in 2025

Summer hours began May 1 at Heritage Hall Museum & Archives, the start of our “busy season,” as we enter the heart of the tourism season. But the first four months of 2025 have already been busy with physical improvements and welcoming guests.

Upgrades

In February, Valley Electric replaced the five banks of fluorescent bulbs in the Kauffman Wing with 18 LED fixtures. They provide better and consistent light, use less electricity and require less maintenance. The project was funded by a major gift from the estate of Duane Schrag, a \$2,000 grant from GoldenWest Telecommunications, and major donations from Graber Jerseys, Rachel Nealis Grant, Vernon J. and Norma Hofer, and Ellie Unruh.

A new exhibit in the Unruh-Tieszen Wing features Freeman Implement, which began in 1909 and eventually became Freeman International. It includes dozens of artifacts from the IHC dealership, donated by the Earl and Marian Gering family that was part of the business for seven decades.

The rocks and minerals exhibit in the Natural World Gallery got a total makeover. Thor Aanenson, a junior at Freeman High School who did a first-semester internship at the museum, did research for the upgrade. Graphic artist Nancy Miller – with input from Thor and his mother, Jill Aanenson, and museum staff – created



The rocks, fossils and minerals exhibit, the genesis of Heritage Hall Museum, has a brand-new look.

five narrative panels. A multimedia component will be added this summer. The project, which also includes new lighting, received a grant from the Freeman Community Foundation.

A new exhibit in the Kauffman Wing features a working 1957 Zenith television in a circa 1950s living room setting. Jerry Merkouris, a Valley Springs resident who enjoys restoring vintage televisions, volunteered his time and materials in making the TV functional.

Guests

Schmeckfest was, once again, a highlight of the first part of the year. More than 800 people toured the museum on April 4 and 5. The museum was open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. both days. Traffic was steady and the mercantile was a busy place.

We featured six artisan demonstrations – leather tooling, loom weaving, letterpress printing, rope making, spinning, and basket weaving – eight “Her-

itage Pickers” presentations (10 minutes), two extended programs (30 minutes), and artisanal ice cream samples. Although all programs were in the museum, the HHM&A movie “Three Groups, One Story” was shown at the Bethel Church both days.

Hands-on kids activities included making ropes, letterpress printing projects, the model train, coloring sheets, examining rocks and a 20 questions scavenger hunt.

Speaking of kids, our museum served as an extended

classroom for three school groups in early 2025; each involved the scavenger hunt model that has proven to be very popular. Students must locate an exhibit or artifact and then answer a specific question, i.e., “When was rose quartz named the South Dakota State Mineral?” The answer, by the way, is 1966.

On Jan. 23, we welcomed grades 1-8 students from Freeman Academy (FA) and residents from Freeman Regional Assisted Living (FRAL). Their scavenger hunt focused on artifacts and exhibits around the theme of the book “Katy, the Little Rose from Ukraine.” Karla Rupp, who teaches grades 1-2 at FA, assisted with this collaborative exercise. It was gratifying to see the elementary students working in tandem with FRAL residents exploring the museum. A bonus was being joined by Joan Mueller Peters, who co-authored

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Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

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These ‘uncertain times’

I wonder how often throughout history people have said, “We live in uncertain times.” It’s a sentiment that certainly echoes today – especially among museums, libraries, and cultural institutions across the country. Just this morning, another email landed in my inbox referencing “grant cancellations and funding disruptions.”

The good news – for HHM&A, at least – is that we’re on relatively stable footing. We don’t depend on federal grants or government funding. As an independent 501(c)(3), we rely instead on the generosity of our donors and our own earned income, from admissions and mercantile sales to facility rentals and programs. That independence offers us a measure of comfort, even in uncertain times.

Still, there are other storms we cannot ignore. I’m deeply concerned by on-going efforts to sanitize or selectively edit the historical record in order to tell only the stories people like or that make them feel good. That is not our mission. History can be complicated and messy and it is our responsibility to preserve and share history as it truly happened, in all its complexity.

Truth be told, I love history because of that complexity. There is always more to learn, new stories to uncover, and fresh perspectives that challenge what we thought we knew. And by being true to our history, we also honor those that came before us. We honor both their struggles and their accomplishments. Their lives inspire us and give us hope for the future.

Many of us trace our roots to people who came to this region from far places. They struggled. There were challenges and heartaches and catastrophes. But they persevered. Some of your stories stayed here in southeast South Dakota, while others did not. But tentacles of your past are still rooted here.

With that in mind, we decided to join Travel South Dakota’s efforts to celebrate “Forever 605.” Their website notes that this campaign is “dedicated to protecting and celebrating the heart of South Dakota.” Our state’s 605 area code makes June 5 (6/05) a logical day to celebrate the place that we call home.

So, we have deemed June 5 to be HHM&A’s “Forever 605 Giving Day” for donations above and beyond your regular gifts. Every extra dollar you give helps us preserve and share the full, honest story of our past – one that’s rich, complex, and worth protecting. Whether it’s caring for artifacts, creating programs, or keeping our doors open to all, your generosity makes it possible. Join us in keeping history alive – both today and for generations to come.



Director’s View
Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer
Executive Director/ Archivist

Off and running

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the book with her sister, Lisa Mueller Howard.

Students from the Learning Lab, a Christian microschool from Parker, visited on Feb. 28. Their field trip also included a scavenger hunt that involved identifying details about our local history.

On April 11, we hosted students and staff members from Freeman Public School for a special 30 questions activity. The visit was part of a new “Copilots” program at Freeman Public. Rebecca Hofer, who leads the program, describes it as offering experiences “that pair older and younger students so that together as copilots, they can navigate the tricky world/skies of social development while fostering and nurturing friendships across multiple ages.”



Students from Freeman Public’s Copilots program look for answers to the 30 questions in a scavenger hunt at HHM&A.

Outreach

In addition to activities in the museum this year, HHM&A has also taken our story on the road.

That included participating in State Tribal Relations Day at the Capitol in Pierre on Jan. 28. Sec. David Flute of the South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations invited Freeman representatives in response to the Indigenous Peoples’ Celebration Freeman Academy (FA) hosted last October. A display documented collaborations by FA, HHM&A, FRAL and the Freeman Prairie Arboretum (FPA) under the theme “Faithful Connections.” Tim L. Waltner, HHM&A Education/Communication Coordinator, joined

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.

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Lynnelle Allison (FPA), Peggy Muchmore (FRAL) and Karla Rupp (FA) in visiting with legislators, state officials and visitors to the Capitol that day.

An unexpected highlight was the presentation of a Star Quilt to Freeman Academy. Sec. Flute, who recognized all four partner groups, said visiting the museum was a highlight of his Freeman visit. The quilt will be on display at the museum this summer.

On March 17, HHM&A Executive Director/Archivist Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer and Waltner shared their multimedia presentation about the history of Schmeckfest with the students and staff at Freeman Academy.

Then on April 24, Hofer and Waltner joined Joan Mueller Peters and Lisa Mueller Howard in a presentation at the 57th annual Dakota Conference on the Northern Plains at the Center for Western Studies at Augustana University. Their hour-long program, "From Russia to Dakota; The Amish, Hutterite and Mennonite Journey," blended the history of Anabaptists, the Germans-from-Russia migration story, and the personal stories of the



Attendees at the Center for Western Studies annual history conference listen to a presentation by HHM&A and Joan Mueller Peters and Lisa Mueller Howard at Augustana University on April 24.

Mueller/Miller family that the Mueller sisters explore in their "Katy" books.

Plans for upcoming months

While details are still being finalized, this year the museum is focusing on the one-room country school experience. A series of programs will provide both historical perspectives and personal recollections of the educational system that was an essential element in community life during the first nine decades of our local history.

For the second year, HHM&A will partner with the Freeman Public Library Summer Reading Program. Participants will come to the museum on Thursday afternoon, July 17 as part of the "Color My World" theme. Last year, the museum provided a hands-on

look at geodes.

HHM&A is again participating in the South Dakota Chislic Festival. This year we will be the "Family Zone" on Saturday, July 26. We plan to include kid-friendly experiences similar to what we had in place for Schmeckfest.

We've already received reservations through the Harvest Hosts network that we joined last year. It allows self-contained RVers to stay overnight at unique locations around the country. We're welcoming them from Memorial Day through mid-August. Last year we had visitors from as far away as England (they shipped their RV to North America).

We're pleased to welcome Rebecca Hupp as our summer intern from mid-May through mid-August. She has training in museum methods and is pursuing her master's degree in history at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

"I love studying the history of agriculture on the Great Plains," she says. "I am very excited to have the opportunity to work with the people and the unique stories at HHM&A this summer."

Women's work – wrangling the mangle

The official day to honor all the mother figures in our lives is just past. In thinking about all they do, one can't help but ponder the women and mothers of long ago and the work they did to keep their families and homes running. And we're talking physical, back-breaking work—without the benefits of refrigeration, indoor plumbing and electricity, every chore required significant effort and time.

Take doing the laundry for example. Water must first be carried to the house, heated on the stove, poured into a tub, swished around with what resembled a plunger and then scrubbed with bar soap (most likely homemade) on a washboard.

This is when the mangle comes in. Used to press water out of the wet



Curator's Corner

Heather Haggerty, Curator

clothes, the rollers date back to the 18th century and many different versions exist. The museum has some that attach to the washtub, so you can first press the dirty, soapy water out before dropping the clothes into the tub of

clean water, and some are much larger, freestanding versions that sheets and towels could be rolled through easily.

Last year a wooden mangle board and roller were donated and I used Google and YouTube to figure out how they worked together (it's literally using a giant rolling pin to smooth out wrinkles without using heat). Their history goes back centuries further; in Scandinavia they were used as betrothal gifts. The suitor left a carefully carved board on the front porch of his beloved in the evening. If it was gone the next day, she had accepted the proposal, but if it was still sitting out the answer was a hard no. Sadly, the rejected suitor could not reuse the board.

Mangle board or diamond ring? What a choice!

Perspective from HHM&A Board Member Lisa Mueller Howard

Join the HHM&A VIP Team

I am humbled and excited to join the HHM&A Board of Directors and I've discovered we have some amazing long-time volunteers. I've enjoyed seeing them in action while working in the archives. From helping with mailings, research and maintenance, to greeting guests at Schmeckfest, these volunteers are vital to the success of

our mission.

So, I'm inviting you to join our VIP (Volunteer Impact Program) Team!

You don't have to commit to a regular position, but as part of our VIP Team you would be on a contact list. When we have specific needs or an upcoming event, we'll contact you. That could include helping with office tasks,

research, technology, scanning photos/documents, welcoming guests at the museum, cleaning, yardwork, etc.

Of course, we also welcome regularly scheduled volunteers.

To join our VIP Team, stop in, call 605-925-7545, email info@heritagehallmuseum.com or use our online form at heritagehallmuseum.com.

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We've included a remittance envelope with this newsletter for your convenience when mailing your HHM&A membership/donation.

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