

h e a d l i n e s

The summer of 2024 at HHM&A

It's been an active summer at Heritage Hall Museum & Archives. A change in summer hours – open 10-4 Mondays through Saturdays – reflects expectations of out-of-town guests.

School visits beginning in May (Maxwell Colony and Freeman Academy) continued in June and July with two visits from elementary students in a summer program at Marion Public School.

This summer featured three special programs focusing on the 150-year-mark of the immigration wave to this area. A panel of Dan Flyger, Marnette (Ortman) Hofer, Norman Hofer and S. Roy Kaufman shared perspectives from the unique settlements, which were based largely on faith traditions in this community.

They began at the Bethel Church on June 2, focusing on the Russia experience; about 80 attended. The second session, July 14, explored the trip from Russia to Dakota. It moved to the Interpretive Center at the neighboring Prairie Arboretum because of the excessive heat; more than 100 attended. The Aug. 4 program, focusing on the arrival in Dakota Territory, was held in Pioneer Hall, because of the anticipated size of the audience; about 120 attended.

The three programs were recorded and videos are being produced. They will be available as DVDs and on the



The first of three programs about the Germans from Russia who began arriving in Dakota Territory in 1874 was held at the historical Bethel Mennonite Church on June 2. Programs featured a panel of Marnette (Ortman) Hofer, S. Roy Kaufman, Norman Hofer and Dan Flyger.

HHM&A YouTube channel; production includes adding captions. To order or access, contact the museum by calling 605-925-7545 or emailing info@heritagehallmuseum.com.

Another program with a 150th theme was held at the Interpretive Center on Aug. 18. Sisters Joan Mueller Peters and Lisa Mueller Howard spoke about their recent book, "Katy," a historical fiction account of their great-great-grandfather's sister's experience moving from Russia to Turner County.

The 150th theme will continue on Sept. 15 when Jeremy Waltner will present "Forming Freeman: From West to East; Freeman on the move." The 3 p.m. program at the Bethel Church will explore the grassroots growth of the community following the arrival of Germans from Russia in the 1870s.

Plans are still being finalized for an October/November program on the impact of the immigration wave on the indigenous people for whom this land had been home.

Chislic festival

While not on the same scale as Schmeckfest, the South Dakota Chislic Festival at the Prairie Arboretum on July 27 brought an influx of guests to the museum. Special activities included making rope and an "archeological dig" in which kids explored a sand-filled plastic swimming pool

looking for pottery shards, seashells, cephalopods, keys and coins; they were set up on our lawn near the arboretum. In addition to touring the exhibit halls and visiting the historical buildings, guests could try their hands at letterpress printing as well as running the model train. Special exhibits included farm equipment and motorcycles on the lawn and, inside, Indian motorcycles on loan from Linden Graber.

Wilder exhibit

Another special exhibit in the Arrival on the Prairie Gallery this summer takes a look at the largely unknown connection between author Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Freeman community. In July 1894 she and her husband, Almanzo, and daughter, Rose, moved from DeSmet to Mansfield, Mo. Her

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Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

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Adding to the story

"We don't know what we don't know." These were the wise words of Tim L. Waltner, who is quite aptly our communication and education coordinator. We were discussing our recent programs and the bits and pieces of information that we continue to learn and to share.

This is what challenges us every day: *What are the things that we don't know about _____ that we should know? What is the most important? What is not that important but fascinating? What is the bigger story that needs to be told? What can we learn about ourselves or our culture or our world? What can we add to the story?*

This year we've been focusing on the arrival of Germans from Russia in Dakota Territory. It began in 1873, when the very first immigrants stepped off the Dakota Southern Railroad at Yankton, but that trickle became a wave in 1874, and that wave continued into the 1880s.

Earlier this year, we revamped our Arrival on the Prairie Gallery to highlight details that we tend to pass over, such as *what were conditions like on their journey? What did they bring with them? What did they use to build their first homes? How did they break the land? Where did they actually settle?* We also tried to answer the question of *who lived here before the Europeans arrived?*

And yet, just as we think we've finished, we realize that these stories only prompt more questions - more things we didn't know that we didn't know - such as, *who did they leave behind? How much food did they bring along? How did they actually decide which plot of land to choose in Dakota? Did they have interactions with the Native Americans? And how did they adjust to leaving everything and living in such a barren and desolate land? What effect did that have on them, their families... and on us?*

Too often we "remember" these people as black-and-white semblances of names we've read on gravestones instead of as real people that were as complex and individually unique as we ourselves are. My hope is that we can continue to collect, preserve and share their stories and give them life through our displays and exhibits. And in doing so, we can pay homage to the courage, determination and strength of character that built this region of South Dakota.

This is why YOU are so important. We want your stories, your knowledge and your experiences. Your expertise, your time and your donations are vital to the success of this museum. Thanks so much for partnering with us in these efforts!



Director's View

Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer
Executive Director/ Archivist

Summer

continued from front page

diary details the trip that brought them near Bridgewater, Freeman and the Jamesville Hutterite Colony. The diary became a book, "On the Way Home" published in 1965. A copy is available in the museum's archives.

Welcoming guests

The summer has been marked by a refreshingly steady stream of guests from literally across the nation – and beyond. For example, the Aug. 9 register shows visitors from Mitchell, Burkittsville, Md. and Oceanside, Calif. Thus far this year, guests have come from 63 South Dakota cities, 33 other states and five countries.

Joining the Harvest Hosts network this summer yielded 12 reservations from travelers as far away as England (they shipped their RV to North America) and New Brunswick, Canada. The program allows self-contained RVers to stay overnight at unique, small businesses around the country. HHM&A participated May 25-Aug. 10. Most guests spent time touring the museum and response was very positive.

Here's one of the reviews:

"This is an incredible Harvest Host and is much more than an overnight stop, this is a destination unto itself. Were it not for the Harvest Host program I may never have visited here, may never have had such an engaging conversation with our hosts, and I would definitely be the poorer for it ... After entering and viewing the first two rooms of the Museum I passed through the doorway leading into the next area, stopped and stared with an awestruck gaze and thought, I'm going to need a week! The museum is truly a gem, impeccably clean, archived, and arranged ... a joy to lose track of time and take in all that there is ... This is one of the most beautiful stops that we've had in our six years of being Harvest Host members ... we average about two dozen Harvest Hosts annually."

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
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Internship offers new appreciation for museums

Kat Boeding, a student from Kimball studying anthropology and German at the University of South Dakota, was an intern at Heritage Hall Museum & Archives from late May through early August. In addition to helping staff the museum, Boeding worked on several video projects – including the 150th programs – and the diorama in the Natural World Gallery. Boeding, who is planning to study in Germany this school year, shared these reflections.

I honestly didn't know what Heritage Hall Museum & Archives was going to be like when I first visited for Schmeckfest. I was fascinated by the sheer amount of items and history there was. It really is an entire community's history, going back 150 years, well preserved and documented in one place. It's really amazing.

Working at a small-town museum



has made me realize quite a few things. Mainly that there is a lot of work that goes into keeping a museum up and running. You have to document any artifacts you find/receive, host events, keep both the inside and outside of the museum looking nice, maintain multiple buildings, and so much more. That's a lot of tasks when there's

usually only one to five people (including volunteers) working at the museum on any given day.

Working at Heritage Hall has also gotten me interested in studying local histories rather than the main events that everyone learns about in school. I always thought that I would never want to focus on small town happenings with my studies, but that might change!

I am so grateful to have spent my summer working at HHM&A. There are so many experiences that I will never forget. I don't know whether I'll be a guest or a volunteer next time I go to the museum, but I will certainly return someday. I also encourage anyone with even a slight interest in history or anthropology to come and visit the museum.

There's a lot to learn from small towns and local people.

What we carried; a reflection on the 150th

When things started to go south for the Germans from Russia busily thriving in Ukraine and it became apparent that time was running out, a flurry of activity began to prepare for an epic journey. Imagine the process of whittling down a hundred years' worth of accumulations to what you could carry on board a ship, train, or wagon.

At the museum, we have a variety of artifacts that were deemed worthy and important enough to have made the cut and are still here 150 years later. Precious Turkey Red wheat seeds are in a vial. Brass bowls and Russian samovars for tea are displayed next to metal forks and wooden cooking utensils that were brought for on-ship cooking and eating. German song books and Bibles are in another case. These Bibles were no pocket-size hotel Bibles. The hefty books would have taken significant space and added several pounds of weight.



Curator's Corner

Heather Haggerty, Curator

There are several large, solid wooden (no particle board here!) trunks built just for the journey. Beside them are chests with handles and latches that were woven of sturdy willows by the young men of the villages. They might have been lighter to carry, but did they protect the contents from all the elements?

Most intriguing to me are the

wooden "boxes" of smaller sizes that were made for carrying important documents like passports and birth certificates. Some of these have no handles or any way to make for easy transport. Whose job was it to tote these? And how? Under one arm? Strapped to their back? I think of the person who bore the responsibility of never letting that box out of their sight, whether it was down in the hold of a heaving, storm-tossed ship, or sitting on a wooden plank in a modified boxcar on a train, or bumping along in a wagon heading north from Yankton. What an immense relief it must have been to set it down for the last time.

I wonder what they'd think if they knew that some of their carefully chosen belongings are now in a museum, helping us remember and appreciate their sacrifice and decisions made about what they would carry to America.

Perspective from HHM&A Board Chair Jeanne Carter

Volunteers are essential to HHM&A

We have had a very active year at Heritage Hall Museum & Archives with historical programs, special activities and events. A critical component has been volunteers who joined staff to make these events possible. We appreciate each of you who have stepped forward.

We invite more of you to join us in continuing to expand our mission of preserving and sharing area history. There are countless ways in which you can share your skills! One current need is assistance with filling the role of facilities manager. That position has not been permanently filled since last

spring. We are seeking an individual or team of individuals to assist with basic maintenance and snow removal until the position is filled.

We are compiling a list of specific tasks. If you have interest, please contact the museum or me directly at Jeanne@heritagehallmuseum.com.

Thank You

To Our Current Heritage Hall Museum & Archives Members

May-July 2024

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- "Headlines" quarterly newsletter
- 10% HHM&A Mercantile discount

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With harvest around the corner, we remind you that commodities such as crops or livestock can be sold in the name of Heritage Hall Museum & Archives, allowing you to meet your giving goals, enjoy tax benefits and make a unique and lasting impact!

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