

# On-site visit advances museum's MAP program

This spring, Heritage Hall Museum & Archives (HHM&A) undertook a major one-year project through the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) included a self-assessment exercise designed to explore "big picture" issues, including policies, budget, governance and other circumstances unique to the museum.

It began with weekly one-hour meetings of board members Brett Eisenbeis, Marlan Kaufman and Charles Schrag and staff Marnette Hofer, Terry Quam and Tim L. Waltner from April into July. Using a workbook, the group discussed and completed a wide range of topics that explored a variety of museum-related issues.

- Collections Stewardship
- Education and Interpretation
- Facilities and Risk Management
- Financial Stability
- Mission and Planning
- Public Trust and Accountability The completed workbook was

submitted to AAM in late summer and in September, Karrie Porter Brace, a museum professional from New Mexico, came to Freeman for an on-site visit. She had reviewed the workbook and her visit was designed to take a closer look at our work in the context of the museum itself and the people who are entrusted with keeping it vital – and to



Karrie Porter Brace, a museum professional, spent time exploring Heritage Hall Museum & Archives, including the Diamond Valley School during a threeday visit in September. She also visited with board and staff members during her on-site visit that was part of the Museum Assessment Program offered through the American Alliance of Museums.

offer a professional assessment of our strengths and weaknesses.

Porter Brace, who has extensive experience working with museums, has been a volunteer with AAM for 15 years. She toured the museum, visited with board members and staff, toured the community and soaked in the experience. A native of Wisconsin, she related well and had an appreciation for the rural nature of the Freeman community and HHM&A.

She has submitted her report and the museum is anticipating learning more by the end of this year.

"Working on the workbook was really beneficial in understanding museum standards in general and our own assets and challenges," said HHM&A Executive Director and Archivist Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer. "Karrie's visits with staff and board members were valuable in enabling her to understand both what's working well and areas needing improvement.

"I expect her report will be helpful because it will focus on specifics," Hofer said. "Her perspectives and recommendations will be critical as we set our shortterm and long-term agendas, particularly regarding sustainability. That's important as we continue to evolve as an organization and strengthen our mission."

MAP has helped more than 5,000 small and mid-sized museums to strengthen their operations, plan for the future, and meet industry standards, Hofer noted.

"We are fortunate to be part of this program," Hofer said. "We're looking forward to where it takes us."

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# **The Director's Perspective**

I've said it before, but it bears repeating: it takes all of us doing our part to make Heritage Hall Museum & Archives a healthy, thriving place.

Over the past year, we've made a conscious effort to work with and learn from experts in our industry. The self-assessment process of the Museum Assessment Program was informative and our visit with Karrie Porter Brace helped us see ourselves in a more analytical way. The report from the American Alliance of Museums will help us better evaluate where we are at and where we want to go as an independent 501(c)(3) organization.

As we strive to improve how we share the history of this community, we also work to care for the amazing collection we've been entrusted with. Over the past few years, we've focused on our historical buildings, and in September, there were once again hymns, Scripture and stories being told in the Johannesthal Reformed Church. It may have been the first program held there since the congregation disbanded in 1962. Efforts to bring the little church "back to life" began several years ago, when descendants of those who attended the church came to help repaint the exterior. Then board members, staff and volunteers worked to clean, repair and repaint the interior. Last summer, we brought electricity to the church and installed new efficient lighting. We're thrilled that this lovely country church can again host programs, meetings and small groups.

Our next focus will be the Diamond Valley School that operated just south of Freeman from 1897-1967. Once again, we're excited to see how the greater community rallies to celebrate the era of the one-room country school by sharing their memories and sharing their resources to help us make much-needed repairs and improvements a reality.

We appreciate being part of a vibrant community, and our guests notice that there's something special here. About a month ago, I got a letter from visitors that received much-appreciated assistance from Saarie Auto Body, who helped with an RV breakdown but refused payment. These visitors sent a donation to the museum in honor of the folks at Saarie's. What a great testament to the community we are part of!

It takes ALL of us to give visitors a fabulous experience. When you become a member, you join this effort. Your sustaining donations help us stride forward. Our volunteers, our artisans and authors, our demonstrators and speakers – all play an important role as we work together to make Heritage Hall Museum & Archives a healthy, thriving place.

#### **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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Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer Executive Director/ Archivist

### **HHM&A** inviting decorated trees at Bethel Church

Heritage Hall Museum & Archives is planning "Christmas at the Bethel Church" during the full month of December. The historical church, located on the museum grounds, will be decorated and the museum is inviting busi-

nesses, churches, families and organizations to sponsor and bring decorated Christmas trees to the church to



help celebrate the season.

More details about sponsoring trees and a registration form are available at the museum as well as online at the museum's website: heritagehallmuseum.com/. There is no charge to sponsor a tree and each sponsor will receive four one-time museum passes to use during December. To reserve a spot for a sponsored tree, contact the museum by Wednesday, Nov. 22. Trees can be placed in the museum, by appointment, anytime between Nov. 27 and Nov. 30.

The museum will hold a Christmas Carol Sing-Along at the church on Saturday afternoon, Dec. 2 starting at 2 p.m. The church will be open free to the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. that day. Light refreshments will be served.

The trees will remain in the church through all of December and will be available to anyone touring the museum during the museum's regular and holiday hours.

In addition to the Dec. 2 events, the museum is also extending its regular hours - noon to 4 weekdays - to include Saturdays, December 9 and 16, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., to give additional opportunity to tour the museum (and the Bethel Church) and explore the HHM&A Mercantile, which features items created by local artisans.

For more information, stop in at the museum, call 605-925-7545 or email info@heritagehallmuseum.com.

Dear Friends of HHM&A,

As the year comes to a close, we want to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support of Heritage Hall Museum & Archives. Your generosity is making a real difference as we share our stories with visitors and work to celebrate and preserve our history for future generations.

This year, we welcomed more than 2,000 visitors to the museum, including several student groups on educational field trips. In our archives, we were able to help a variety of individuals who were researching their own history or trying to learn more about the stories of the greater Freeman area. Schmeckfest made its return and we were pleased to offer a variety of demonstrations, speakers and "Heritage Pickers" for our Schmeckfest guests. We also hosted other events and groups throughout the year, and are thankful for your support to make all of this possible.

As we look ahead to 2024, we are excited to continue our mission to educate and inspire our visitors. Join us in commemorating the 150th anniversary of the diverse immigrant groups that have enriched the tapestry of the greater Freeman area, including the Lutheran, Mennonite, Hutterite, and Reformed communities who settled in southeastern Dakota Territory.

In the spirit of legacy gifting, we invite you to consider leaving a lasting impact by including Heritage Hall in your estate plans. Your commitment to preserving our cultural heritage can extend beyond your lifetime, ensuring that the rich history of Freeman continues to be celebrated and shared with generations to come.

Your continued commitment, be it through a one-time donation or an expanded contribution, will help us preserve and share our history for future generations. Please consider making a gift today to support our ongoing efforts.

Sincerely,

All of us at Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

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# h e a d l i n e s

## Auch offers Johannesthal church history lesson

More than 60 people turned out to hear the history of the Johannesthal Reformed Church on Sept. 17 at the historical church that was relocated to the museum grounds in 1979.

Steve Auch, of Yankton, who has both an interest in and family ties to the church, presented "Die Johannesthal Kirche: 1820 South Russia-1884 Dakota Territory" at 3 p.m. and again at 7:30 p.m. In addition, Deb and Kerry Carden led a hymn

### Haggerty joins HHM&A staff as curator

Heritage Hall Museum & Archives is pleased to announce that Heather (Kaufman) Haggerty has joined the staff as curator. She is filling the positon recently held by Terry Quam, who retired in August.



sing at the church starting at 6 p.m.

The church, which was built in 1902 seven miles west of the northeast edge of Freeman, served the Johannesthal congregation until 1967 when the church closed. It was

then donated to the Freeman Historical Society and later to HHM&A.

"We've been making upgrades to the church for several years, including painting both the interior and exterior, and we recently brought electricity to

Quam spent several days helping in the transition when Haggerty began in September. With this issue, we're introducing a new feature to the newsletter, a quarterly "Curator's Corner" column," which you'll find on this page.

# **Classes provide unique** hands-on traditional experience

A weekend of willow-weaving classes attracted 46 participants in the Kauffman Wing at Heritage Hall Museum & Archives Sept. 28-Oct. 1.

Viki Graber, a Freeman community native who regularly demonstrates this craft at Schmeckfest, not only taught the classes, she also provided the willow shoots that were fashioned into stars, trivets, vindspiralers and baskets. Participants were able to take their willow creations home with them.

Graber, who lives in Goshen, Ind. – and is a member of the HHM&A Board – returned to her home community to offer the classes. A fourth-generation basket-weaver, Graber is continuing a skill her great-grandfather Jacob Graber brought with him when he was part of the Germans-from-Russia migration to Dakota Territory nearly 150 years ago.

"I wanted to teach these classes in Freeman because of the rich history

willow basketry holds here," she said. "It helps us connect with nature and with our ancestors."

There was a broad spectrum of ages involved – elementary students to senior citizens – 18 making stars, 14 making vindspiralers, nine making trivets and five making baskets.

Not only did Graber share the traditional art, she also donated materials and her time as a fundraising project for the museum; it raised \$1,400.



Viki Graber shows students how to make trivets from willow shoots.

the building and installed new lighting," said Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer. "It's a lovely space and we're happy to see it being used."

Auch traced the roots of the church to the Ukrainian village of Johannesthal – the "valley of Johannes," a Russian official. When the group migrated to the United States starting in the early 1870s – arriving in Yankton in the spring of 1873, the new settlement – and church – retained the name.

Knowing our history is important, Auch said, because it helps shape how we view the present.

## **Curator's Corner**

I am happy to introduce myself as the new museum curator. I am a Freeman native and Freeman Academy and Goshen College graduate. My husband, Dan, and I have three



Heather Haggerty, Curator

grown sons and a teenage daughter.

I came onboard mid-September and quickly learned that every day is different and you never know who or what will come through the doors. I have been working with Tim, Marnette, and Terry Quam (retired curator) to learn everything from the software programs used to catalog items and design signage, to where artifacts are located on display and in the storage rooms, to researching mystery items that Donovan Friesen continues to find as we clean and sort storage areas. We have plans this winter to add more shelving to make better use of space and better organize the collection.

I have always had a strong interest in and appreciation for the history of this community and my Germans from Russia ancestors and I am looking forward to being part of the team working with ongoing and future projects.

### We feature the work of local artisans and authors with ties to our community

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Open Monday-Friday from Noon to 4 p.m. & by appointment - 605-925-7545 (October-April)

**SPECIAL HOLIDAY HOURS** 

Open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 2, as part of our Christmas at the Bethel Church program, and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays, Dec. 9 & 16.

We invite you to stop and see our expanding inventory of unique handcrafted items and the selection of books for sale. If you're looking for one-of-a-kind, locally made gifts, our mercantile is the place to visit.

We also welcome orders by phone and email. We will work with you to find the perfect gift from our inventory of local artisans' unique creations.

For more information call 605-925-7545 or email us: info@heritagehallmuseum.com

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