

h e a d l i n e s

Rediscovering our museum

In early January, Shelly Wanninger, development and marketing director for the city of Freeman, visited Heritage Hall Museum & Archives (HHM&A) for a conversation with the staff. She had already toured the museum; this time she came to learn more about the museum for a promotional campaign she's working on that will highlight local businesses and organizations this year.

"What don't people know about you?" she asked at the start of a stimulating conversation that lasted nearly two hours.

It was a great exercise, appropriate at the start of a new year when one typically reflects on the past year and plans for the new one. It was an opportunity for us to rediscover our museum and take stock of what we often take for granted. Here are some observations and perspectives that emerged in the conversation.

- HHM&A is one of the oldest organizations/businesses in Freeman. It emerged on the campus of South Dakota Mennonite College (today Freeman Academy). In the winter of 1911-12, according to the 1912 Freeman College catalog, a "friend of the college" donated a collection that became a "Museum of Geology and Minerology" at the school. Described as "a helpful collection of specimens," this small assortment was the genesis of the HHM&A collection today. Only



This panoramic view of the Unruh-Tieszen Wing comes from Kevin J. Gross, who has put together a virtual tour of the museum complex that is available on our website: heritagehallmuseum.com

a handful of local businesses/institutions are older and remain in business today. That includes Freeman Public School - 1880, Fred Haar (continuing as C&B) - 1882, City of Freeman - incorporated 1893, Merchants State Bank - 1899, South Dakota Mennonite College (continuing as Freeman Academy) - 1900, Freeman Courier - 1901, First National Bank (continuing as CorTrust) - 1902, Farmer's Implement (continues as Freeman International) - 1909.

- Although the museum didn't get an official name until 1975, and the look and feel of the museum has changed dramatically over those 110-plus years, the mission of collecting and preserving the rich history of the community has remained consistent.

- The museum has an ethical responsibility as the steward of a collection entrusted to us for safekeeping. That includes safety, accuracy, accountability and accessibility.

- A museum is not simply a ware-

house for historical artifacts. We are also an educational resource not only for our community but also for anyone who has an interest in history. These artifacts, documents, photos and collections tell the stories of this region and the people who have lived here.

- While the museum's core mission is preservation and education, there is also a strong economic and social component. Along with the Prairie Arboretum, HHM&A is the only year-round tourism/recreational attraction in Freeman. The museum brings people to Freeman from literally around the world. Here are some stats from our record of visitors last year.

70 South Dakota towns

30 U.S. states

Eight countries outside of the United States and Canada.

The 1500+ visitors included individuals, families, school groups, clubs, organizations, historians, researchers and authors.

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Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

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It's a numbers game

People count. Making this organization successful takes visitors to walk through our doors – to tour our museum, utilize our archives and shop in our mercantile. It takes guests to attend our events and willing individuals to share in our programming. It takes volunteers to help as docents, hosts, cleaners, fixers, builders, organizers, researchers, and so much more. It takes employees to complete the day-to-day tasks, to interact with our guests, oversee volunteers, plan programs, care for our artifacts and create exhibits that make history come to life.

Money counts. To keep moving forward takes funds! Our museum complex is expansive and requires ongoing maintenance. Our main buildings were built in 1975 and 1999, and there are numerous issues to address. For one, we should replace the inefficient and outdated furnaces installed half a century ago. Ideally, we would move to an HVAC system to keep artifacts at consistent temperatures and humidity levels. We need to be ever-vigilant to care for all that has been entrusted to us. Insurance has more than doubled in just the past year. We need ADA-compliant walkways to our historical buildings and improved security complex-wide. We need modern display cases that protect artifacts from curious hands and other contaminants. We need to fire-proof our archives. We need a rolling storage system to maximize archives space. And the list goes on.

Yet look how far we've come! In the past ten years we've made major updates to our exhibits, lobby and office/work area. We undertook a major facelift of our exterior. We moved and renovated the Deckert House. And we've seen growth. I recently looked back at some of our numbers. In 2015, we had 24 museum members and a mailing list well under 100. Last year, we had 230 museum members and a mailing list of over 400. A quick review reveals that more than half our members are from the Freeman area, but 20 communities in South Dakota are also represented, from border to border. The rest of our membership hails from 24 states, from east coast to west, north to south... and even Hawaii!

It is YOU. You make the difference. You make it possible for us to *preserve* the past, to *educate* our present and to *foster appreciation* that will continue into the future. But it is still a numbers game and we need to increase our membership, our donations and our visitor numbers. These are goals we will keep before us in the year ahead. As always, your assistance is very much appreciated!



Director's View

Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer
Executive Director/ Archivist

Perspective from HHM&A
Board Chair Jeanne Carter

Welcome Ryan and Lisa

The Heritage Hall Museum & Archives Board of Directors welcomed Ryan Mews and Lisa (Mueller) Howard as new members during our 2025 annual meeting.

Ryan has been a summer intern at the museum and currently works in the archives at the University of South Dakota. He lives in Vermillion.

Lisa lives in Sioux Falls. She is co-author of "Katy: The Little Rose from Ukraine" and runs the Rock Steady Boxing program designed for people diagnosed with Parkinson's. Ryan and Lisa join the board, whose names are listed below on this page.

The beginning of the year always brings a renewed sense of excitement and anticipation. The museum has seen tremendous growth in membership, programming, and activities throughout the last year, which we see continuing at an even greater level in 2025. We have a great staff which celebrates what we have as well as envisions what the future holds as the museum continues to tell the story of this part of South Dakota.

Stop in to see what is happening at your museum. Also, please remember to renew your membership.

Schmeckfest 2025

Heritage Hall Museum & Archives is planning for Schmeckfest 2025.

The museum will be open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on April 4 and 5, with special activities starting at 1 p.m., including traditional craft demonstrations, programs and Heritage Pickers, (10-minute looks at selected artifacts). Wristbands will enable Schmeckfest guests admission both Friday and Saturday. That includes the \$20 family pass for parents and children (through grade 12).

A detailed schedule will be published in the Freeman Courier and posted online at heritagehallmuseum.com.

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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Heather Haggerty, curator
Tim L. Waltner, communication/ education coordinator

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Rediscovery *continued from front page*

• HHM&A also contributes to the local economy directly. Sales tax collected from admission and mercantile sales go into the city coffers. We strive to purchase products and services from local businesses. The museum provides local employment opportunities with five part-time positions as well as summer internships.

• The museum strives to be a unifying force in the community. The decision to build a museum building in 1975 included merging with the Freeman Historical Society and expanding the mission from a school-related museum to a community museum. The divestment of HHM&A from Freeman Academy approved in 2019, led to the museum becoming an independent 501C3 not-for-profit organization and has strengthened that broader mission.

• A major challenge is that our facility is 50 years old. In addition to aging infrastructure, there are physical limitations and challenges in the space we have. That means being resourceful, creative and innovative in how we share the collection entrusted to us. A related challenge is that our four



This aerial photo from Kevin J. Gross shows the sprawling museum complex that includes two exhibit halls and four historical buildings that share the history of the local community.

historical buildings require ongoing maintenance as they face the challenges of age and South Dakota weather.

• HHM&A is not a static organization or facility. Adaptation has been central to how the museum functions both in organization and how we interact with the community. While the collection reflects donations of artifacts and documents going back more than a century, we have worked to develop up-to-date processes and procedures. That includes migrating to new technology. For example, efforts to

document everything in the collection in a searchable computerized system that began 15 years ago are nearly complete. It's a painstaking but important part of our stewardship. Updating, redesigning and creating new exhibits is constant and ongoing. We're seeking a balance between the informality and organic nature of the museum historically with a more modern and professional environment.

We invite you to visit. We're confident you too will rediscover what we have in our museum and archives.

A 'cure' for what ails you. Or not.

A year ago, in the midst of the season of sickness, I presented you with a number of home remedies that came from items easily available to our predecessors (often involving onions). This winter I bring you store-bought remedies from yesteryear, on display at the museum's General Store and popular a generation ago. Google warned me numerous times that these remedies contained ingredients today considered controversial, and that even at the time they were being sold their effectiveness was highly questionable.

A bottle of St. Jacobs Oil in a box promises to relieve everything from neuralgia to muscle stiffness and soreness. With its main ingredients of chloroform and turpentine, it also warns one not to apply near fire or flame.

Sulfathiazole was probably used to



Curator's Corner

Heather Haggerty, Curator

treat common infections, hopefully carefully administered by the physician who had read the label's notice that the drug may cause "severe toxic reactivity and irreparable damage."

Research reveals "Acid Phosphoric Syrup" was used to treat nausea, or

by dentists to clean teeth. Perhaps one applied it to their dog's teeth as well, as the label advises its use only under a physician, dentist or veterinarian.

New Discovery Herbs promise to "Cleanse the System, Producing New Life and Vitality to a Weak and Run Down System." Taken regularly it will "keep the system in its proper condition and disease will not bother you." Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? If only the box told you what the combination of herbs, roots, barks and berries was.

Perhaps less alarming are Rexall's Little Liver Pills, although I'm not sure why one needs water extracted from one's bowels and the pressure lowered in the portal system.

Honey and onion juice is looking better all the time.

Thank You

To Our 2024 Heritage Hall Museum & Archives Members

Platinum (\$2,500+)

annual gifts of \$5000+ in bold italics

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