

h e a d l i n e s

Doors open at Deckert House

Heritage Hall Museum & Archives reopened the historic Susanna and Ludwig Deckert House the weekend of October 14-16.

It was the culmination of a restoration project that began five years ago. The 26' by 38' house, built five miles west of Marion in Rosefield Township of Turner County in the early 1880s, was moved to the museum in 1979. But by 2017, there was growing concern that the house's foundation was providing inadequate support. The need to install a new foundation led to the decision to move the house from the row of four historical buildings south of the museum to a more spacious location east of the museum. Initial plans to move it were delayed by extremely wet conditions in 2018 and 2019. In July 2020, the house was finally moved onto its new foundation. Since then, museum staff and volunteers have been working to prepare the house



for reopening, including repairs, restorations, cleaning, painting, landscaping, installing a sidewalk and expanding exhibits.

The museum invited descendants of the Deckerts, as well as individuals and businesses that have played key roles in this project, to a private "grand reopening" Friday evening, Oct. 14. In addition to showing the newly refurbished house, the gathering included *faspa*-themed refreshments. *Faspa*, a late afternoon lunch, is a common Low German tradition; the Deckert family traces its roots

to the Low German Mennonites. In many ways, the weekend served as an "extended family reunion" with family coming from out-of-state specifically for the reopening.

The museum, closed weekends from October through April, opened its doors and the Deckert House to the public Saturday morning, the 15th. Two programs were offered Saturday and the museum/house reopened Sunday afternoon at 1 with a third program at 3. The programs were held at the neighboring Bethel Mennonite Church and focused on the Deckert House and the Low German Mennonite roots of the Deckert family.

Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer, executive director and archivist at HHM&A, and Ryan Mews, a graduate student at the University of South Dakota and a 2022 HHM&A summer intern, presented a Saturday afternoon program focusing on the Deckert

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The Ludwig and Susanna Deckert House

A 140-YEAR TIMELINE

From Rosefield Township to Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

1874: Ludwig and Susanna Deckert arrive in the United States from Russia

1875: Deckert family homesteads in Rosefield Township, Turner County, Dakota Territory

Circa 1880: Ludwig begins construction of two-story 26x38 wood-frame house that becomes home to Deckert family (four daughters and four sons) for seven decades



Photo Circa 1900

1919: Property passes to Andrew Deckert (son)

1920: Property passes to Eva (daughter)

1958: Property, including now vacant house, sold to John H. Waltner



1979: House donated and moved to Heritage Hall Museum & Archives complex in Freeman

1980: House restored/refurbished and opened to museum guests



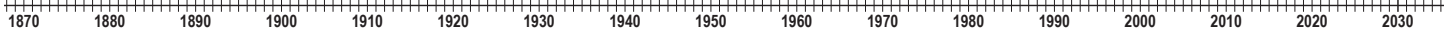
2018: House closed for restoration

2020: House moved to new location, restoration begins

2022: Restoration complete; house reopens



Moving Day



Heritage Hall Museum & Archives

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

(605) 925-7545 • info@heritagehallmuseum.com • www.heritagehallmuseum.com

The Director's Perspective

Some see museums as just a collection of things. But I see our museum as overflowing with bits and pieces of the lives of many individuals.

By the strength of their hands and fierce determination, individuals built their lives on the Dakota Territory prairie. Years later, their descendants saw value in that, choosing to preserve the tools and everyday items that were part of their lives. And in doing so, they paid tribute to those whose hands had shaped their lives.

We see this pattern repeatedly at the museum. Children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews and others see the value of preserving the lives of those who came before them and donate items to our collection. In doing so, they give value to the work of their ancestors' hands and allow their stories to live on.

We saw this close-up as we put the finishing touches on the Deckert House; it was a project of "many hands."

As a master builder, Ludwig built a solid house. It was well cared for and sold, but not destroyed. It was identified as important to preserve and carefully moved to our museum complex. Members of the family and the community worked to restore and furnish it. And now it has been moved and restored a second time.

Now, 140 years after it was built, the house stands solid, paying tribute to the hands that built it and cared for it, and open to visitors to experience it.

With Thanksgiving around the corner and this milestone project completed, I've been reflecting on the many who have helped move forward our museum's mission. First and foremost, I think of Terry, Brian and Tim. Without a staff that cares about this place and is willing to do the work, our mission would wither.

Without board members who tend to the administrative details and volunteers and interns pitching in to help where they can, our mission would fade away.

Without the monetary support of our members and donors – including our local business community – our mission would die.

And with the help of researchers, writers, and speakers willing to share, we can learn and tell more of the stories. With the help of those who keep alive the crafts and skills and recipes, we can add meaning and rich flavor to the facts and share all this with the visitors who walk through our doors.

We are fortunate to have this treasure, shaped by many hands over many generations. Thanks for joining this journey and enabling us to move forward.



Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer
Executive Director/ Archivist

Bits & Pieces

A behind-the-scenes peek at some happenings at HHM&A

Plans on the table

2022 has been a year of some major changes at the museum; the Deckert House is an obvious example. But we also remodeled our office, lobby and welcome area, opened the Faith Traditions Gallery, set the renovation of the Natural World Gallery in motion and completed renovations at the Johannesthal Reformed Church. We were able to accomplish these improvements because of generous donations from HHM&A members.

As the year winds down, we're identifying areas we hope to focus on in 2023. That includes refurbishing the Diamond Valley School, continuing to add elements to the Natural World Gallery, adding security to our historical buildings and upgrading the lighting/electrical elements in the Kauffman Wing.

If you have a particular interest in any of these projects, please contact us. We'd love to visit with you about what we're thinking and to learn more about what you'd like to see happen at the museum.

Onboard assistance

We're grateful to the Freeman Public School District for donating three Promethean Boards to the museum. The school declared the 72" interactive whiteboards surplus property and offered them to us to use in expanding how we share the stories about our artifacts and history. We used one to play a slide show in the Deckert House when we opened it in October, including photos, maps and narratives to help tell the history of the family and house. It will be permanently installed there as part of our interactive kiosk. We plan to use the others in the Kauffman and Unruh-Tieszen Wings. We particularly appreciate the support from Freeman Public School Super-

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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Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer, executive director/archivist
Terry Quam, curator
Brian Skinner, facilities manager
Tim L. Waltner, communication/education coordinator



Hands-on history at HHM&A

Our museum is an educational resource as we share our community's history. Here are two examples of how we have become an extension of the classroom.

Dr. Nathan Bates, a University of South Dakota professor, brought seven of his "German in South Dakota" students to the museum on Oct. 28 (above). They spent the afternoon touring the museum and historical buildings and exploring the archives. Bates, who first visited us in spring 2017, sees the museum/archives as a resource for his students and, based on their positive reaction to their visit last month, so do they.

Another example is Allison Waldner, (right) a Freeman Public School senior who is spending time at the museum during the school day as part of her Capstone project, a multifaceted assignment during her final year of high school. She'll spend at least 15 hours at the museum, working alongside HHM&A Executive Director/Archivist Marnette D. (Ortman) Hofer and curator Terry Quam to get a firsthand look at the many aspects of museum life. She will write a research paper about archiving and curatorship and create a multimedia presentation to document what she's done and what she's learned.



intendent Jake Tietje and Technology Coordinator Seth Loofbourrow in helping make this donation possible.

More tech talk

While we've been recording programs and conducting video interviews to help preserve history, we are still fine-tuning our efforts on how to best share them online through live-streaming and YouTube. We appreciate your patience as we navigate new technology and incorporate it into our mission to collect and share our shared history.

Membership

We've made an adjustment to our annual memberships. Your membership year is based on when you join/renew. For example, if you became a member in November 2022, our re-

ports will show you as a 2022 member.

However, the patron passes we include as part of your membership are now good for 12 months from your membership date. Thus, your November 2022 membership will give you free admission to our museum and a discount on HHM&A programs through November 2023.

Volunteer opportunities

Volunteers continue to be an invaluable resource for us. We have a handful of folks who come to the museum regularly and others who respond when there are projects like cleaning and painting.

But there are many opportunities for volunteers. And, thanks to technology, some of them can be done by those of you who live outside the community.

- Cleaning
- Construction
- Data entry
- Digitizing photos/documents
- Editing videos
- Giving museum tours
- Groundskeeping
- Identifying details about photos
- Landscaping
- Online support
- Painting
- Repairing
- Researching artifacts
- Researching history
- Staffing/mercantile clerk

If you're interested in being a volunteer, please call us at 605-925-7545.

Finally, we regretfully say goodbye to Monica Hofer, who has stepped down as our volunteer mercantile manager. We thank her for her year of service.

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Deckert House *continued from front page*

family and house. The house includes three unique features:

- A central “black kitchen”;
- A grass-burning German-Russian oven that extends from the kitchen into the adjoining rooms;



Rod Ratzlaff detailed Low German migration.

- A massive beehive second-floor chimney that served as a smokehouse.

That evening, Rod Ratzlaff, a Low German Mennonite historian, offered details

about the Deckert family’s roots. He traced their history from Przechowka, Poland in the 1700s and their migration to Jadwanin in Volhynia, Russia, and shared photos of the German-Russian architecture that can still be found in those areas.

Sunday afternoon, Dr. Lauren Friesen shared details about Mennonite influences in “The Dutch Golden Age.” A distinguished professor emeritus at the University of Michigan, Friesen spoke of the era (1585-1732) in which early Mennonites played important roles in promoting art, drama, literature, medicine and music in the Netherlands. That includes their influences reflected in the work of



Lauren Friesen spoke about Mennonite influences in Dutch life in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Rembrandt.

Donations from the Deckert family, museum members and the Freeman business community, along with grants from the Deadwood Fund and Freeman Community Foundation, helped make the restoration project possible.

The Deckert House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thank You

To Our Latest 2022 Heritage Hall Museum & Archives Members

Your support enables us to continue developing our museum.

August-October 2022

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Jean Ralston, Fountain Valley, Calif.

Platinum

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Homesteader

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\$30



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CONDUCTOR
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\$500



GOLD
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\$1,000



EMERALD
\$5,000



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FOUNDER
\$75,000+

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Shopkeepers: 2 annual patron passes; Conductors: 4 annual patron passes; Bronze: 6 annual patron passes;

Silver & above: Additional passes and personal tours for six guests upon request. Recognition for sponsoring businesses.

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