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State Historical Society-Archives goes digital

PIERRE, S.D. -- The South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives has gone digital.

The State Archives, located at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, collects, preserves, and makes available manuscript collections, South Dakota state, county and local government records, photographs, maps, and other archival materials which have permanent historical and research value. Now, the South Dakota Digital Archives, an online resource that went live in January, makes these collections more accessible to the public, as well as to protect the originals.

“This is an exciting online resource that we only anticipate getting more robust,” said Chelle Somsen, State Archivist. “This resource has been in the works for a number of years and the staff is thrilled to release it to the public.”

The government and manuscript collections are being digitized and cataloged by staff archivists and include items such as publications, brochures and audio files. More items are added regularly.

While the resource contains documents from government and manuscript collections, the largest collection consists of photographs, which are made available through the “Preserving South Dakota in Photos” initiative. The archives photo digitization staff are digitizing photographs from the collections and have scanned and cataloged more than 16,050 images which are now available on the website at <http://sddigitalarchives.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm>.

Photographs available online include statewide historic buildings and structures, and photographs from the Black Hills collections, including scenery, towns, railroads and people.

“Currently, we are working with a collection of slides,” says Somsen, “but we’ve digitized prints and negatives and we hope to start working on glass plate negatives next.”

The photograph digitization project is funded by private donations and grants. If you are interested in sponsoring a photograph collection, please contact the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation at (605) 773-6001.

“The photographs and documents at the State Archives are a wonderful resource,” Somsen said. “In order to make them more easily accessible to the citizens of South Dakota, we wanted to make them visible online. The images are useful to authors, filmmakers, students, teachers and those who are curious about our state’s history.”

The website is searchable and contains information on copyright and use rights as well as ordering information.

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The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.