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State Historical Society Adds Online Index to 1905 South Dakota State Census

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives recently added an online index of more than 440,000 names from the 1905 South Dakota State Census.

The index can be found by going to the State Historical Society-Archives website at history.sd.gov/archives and clicking on the link to “1905 State Census.” Information found in the index includes last name, first name, age, county residence, town/post office, township name; section, township and range numbers; and census card number.

“This information can be a valuable tool for people researching their South Dakota ancestors,” said Chelle (SHEL-ee) Somsen, state archivist.

“The Laws of the Ninth Session of the Legislature – 1905” dictated the procedures for counting the state’s population. The legislation established that a census be taken in the state every tenth year, starting on the first day of May 1905.

Inmates at the Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield assisted the Archives Microfilm Unit there by entering the census card information into the index. The project began in 2003 and was completed in March. The task for the inmates was to decipher the handwritten census cards from the early 1900s, with a goal of entering 200 cards per day.

“The inmates did a great job and feel a sense of pride in preserving South Dakota’s history,” said Chris Harmon, microfilm unit coordinator. “The Microfilm Unit’s inmates play an important role in preserving this information; without their diligence, this project would have taken an extensive amount of time and money to complete.”

The inmates are currently indexing the 1915 State Census.

The original census cards from 1905, 1915, 1925, 1935 and 1945 are stored at the State Historical Society-Archives at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

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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, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, 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.