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### **Settling of South Dakota Focus of April History Book Club Meeting**

PIERRE, S.D. – A novel that tells of the settlement of the Great Plains will be the focus of the April meeting of the History and Heritage Book Club.

Kathy Antonen, a professor of English at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City, will lead the discussion of “The Land They Possessed” by Mary Worthy Breneman.

The meeting will begin at 5:15 p.m. CDT on Tuesday, April 8, at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. Everyone is welcome to attend the free meeting.

“The novel was chosen as a book club selection because of its portrayal of pioneer life in South Dakota. Discussing it is a way of commemorating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of South Dakota becoming a state on Nov. 2, 1889,” said Michael Lewis, president of the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation.

The foundation is the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center and a sponsor of the History and Heritage Book Club. The program is made possible by a grant from the South Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Antonen has previously led book discussions in Pierre. She has been well-liked by those attending the discussions for her way of drawing people into the conversation, Lewis said.

Jim Pollock of Pierre will also attend the meeting to tell about his artwork that illustrates the book’s cover.

“The Land They Possessed” is set in the Eureka/Leola/Ipswich area from 1885 to 1894. The novel was an alternate selection of the Literary Guild when it was first published in 1956.

“It’s a coming-of-age novel,” Antonen said. “It depicts not only the challenges and hardships of early pioneer life but the beauty of the West. It depicts the prairie in all seasons, especially flowers and birds. Interwoven are references to the Ghost Dance, Wounded Knee, South Dakota becoming a state, the wheat crop and talk about where the capital of Dakota Territory and later South Dakota should be. The book gives us these landmarks to historic events.”

Another theme of the novel is the concept of America as the melting pot, Antonen said. The novel tells of the settlement of the Eureka area by Germans from Russia, and the clash of the Anglo-American culture versus the Germans from Russia immigrant culture.

Mary Worthy Breneman is the pen name of co-writers Mary Worthy Thurston and her daughter Muriel Breneman. Thurston came to Dakota Territory with her parents in the 1880s and grew up on homesteads in north-central South Dakota. The story reflects her early years in Eureka and her interest in why the Germans from Russia stayed in the area while others moved away.

Copies of "The Land They Possessed" are available for loan at the Cultural Heritage Center.

For more information, please call (605) 773-6006.

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*The South Dakota Historical Society Foundation is a private charitable nonprofit that seeks funding to assist the South Dakota State Historical Society in programming and projects to preserve South Dakota's history and heritage for future generations.*

*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](http://www.history.sd.gov) for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.*