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## **South Dakota's First First Lady Being Brought to Life**

PIERRE, S.D. -- South Dakota's first first lady will be brought to life during a program on Tuesday, July 8.

Humanities scholar Joanita Kant will portray Margaret Wylie Mellette, the wife of Arthur C. Mellette. Arthur Mellette was the last governor of Dakota Territory and the first governor of South Dakota.

The program will begin at 7 p.m. CDT on Tuesday, July 8. Kant will be speaking from Brookings, with the program broadcast via the statewide interactive video communications system Dakota Digital Network to DDN sites in Pierre and Sioux Falls.

People may join Kant at Room 205 at Pugsley Hall on the campus of South Dakota State University or participate in the program at the Cultural Heritage Center, 900 Governors Dr., Pierre; and Room 145 of the administration building at the South Dakota University Center, 4801 N. Career Ave., Sioux Falls. Those at the Pierre and Sioux Falls locations will be able to see, hear and speak to Kant.

Everyone is welcome to attend the free event.

"Maggie Mellette was called the governor's 'balance wheel.' As South Dakota observes the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of statehood this year, this program sheds light on a person who was important in the early history of South Dakota," said Michael Lewis, president of the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center.

The foundation is hosting the program as part of its History and Heritage Book Club. The event is made possible by a grant from the South Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Maggie Mellette was born on Aug. 6, 1843, in Bloomington, Ind. Arthur and Maggie were married on May 29, 1866. They became the parents of four sons. The Mellettes moved to Springfield, Dakota Territory, from Indiana in 1879 because of Maggie's failing health. They later moved to Watertown and built their brick home, now called the Mellette House, in 1883.

Maggie served as South Dakota's first lady from 1889 to 1893. She was hostess at the South Dakota building at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, Ill., during the summer of 1893. Arthur died in 1896 in Pittsburg, Kan., at age 53. Maggie outlived her husband by 42 years, dying at age 95 on Nov. 29, 1938, in Pittsburg.

Kant is a post-doctoral researcher in the department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at SDSU in Brookings. She has portrayed Maggie Mellette since the early 1990s. She edited "Maggie: The Civil War Diary of Margaret Wylie Mellette" and co-edited "The Civil War Diary of Arthur Calvin Mellette." Both books are available at the Cultural Heritage Center.

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

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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](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.*