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Extensive Collection of Railroad History Donated to State Historical Society

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre recently acquired the R.C. Lathrop (LAY-throp) Railroad Collection.

The R.C. Lathrop collection contains extensive materials on South Dakota's railroad history, including photographs, photo albums, negatives, slides, maps, booklets, ledgers, research materials, oral histories, time tables, legal materials, union materials and correspondence.

Lathrop, formerly of Aberdeen and now living in The Philippines, started working on the railroad at age 18. He worked 20 years with the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, and an additional 22 years with the Burlington, Northern & Sante Fe Railroad. He was a brakeman, conductor and switchman. He retired in June 2004.

In his spare time, Lathrop amassed a large collection of photographs, research materials, and other items connected to railroad history in South Dakota.

A catalog of the photo albums alone provided more than 1,400 individual photographs. Most of the images are of railroad depots, but other images include elevators, roundhouses, tracks, rail yards and other railroad-related buildings throughout South Dakota.

"The scope of the collection encompasses the entire state, making it a valuable addition to our collections," said Chelle (SHELL-ee) Somsen, state archivist with the South Historical Society-Archives.

Further processing and cataloging of the collection will continue, Somsen said.

"We're seeing just the tip of the iceberg," she said. "A collection of this size will take some time to fully process."

To donate items relating to the history of South Dakota, contact Matthew Reitzel, manuscript archivist, at (605) 773-3615 or Dan Brosz, museum curator of collections, at (605) 773-6013.

The State Archives is open Monday through Friday and the first Saturday of each month from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. CDT. Contact the archives by phone at (605) 773-3804, or email archref@state.sd.us



Caption: The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, & Pacific railroad depot at Alexandria, taken by R.C. Lathrop on March 11, 1967 (Photo courtesy South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives).

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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.