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Pierre woman to discuss schoolhouse book at Cultural Heritage Center

PIERRE, S.D. – Reading, writing and research were the three Rs for Betsey DeLoache.

The Pierre woman spent three years interviewing people who had attended or taught at rural schools. The resulting book, “Country Schools: Past and Present,” contains the rural school experiences of more than 350 students and teachers from many of the counties in South Dakota, as well as stories from people in a few other states.

DeLoache will tell about her book at 7 p.m. CST on Tuesday, Feb. 9, at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

“Many South Dakotans attended country schools or had family members who attended them. They recall riding to school on horseback, starting the day by raising the flag, dusting blackboards and eating a meal packed in a lunchbox,” said Michael Lewis, president of the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation. “The stories contained in Betsey’s book preserve those experiences and enlighten people who are not familiar with country life and country schools.”

The foundation is the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society and is sponsoring DeLoache’s presentation as part of its History and Heritage Book Club. Everyone is welcome to attend the free program.

DeLoache’s interest in country schools began in 2012 when she entered a drawing of a rural schoolhouse in an art contest in Pierre. People’s reaction to the drawing was to say that they or a family member had attended a country school, followed by them sharing their memories of rural schools. DeLoache grew up in Massachusetts and was unfamiliar with the concept of pupils in all grades being taught by one teacher in a schoolhouse often consisting of one room, located in a rural setting. Intrigued by the stories she heard, she began traveling throughout South Dakota to interview people who attended or taught at country schools.

“I was fascinated with the people who had ridden their horses to school and lived without electricity, telephones and/or running water,” DeLoache said. “There is a passion in their stories. Many leaders have a country school background, which was surprising to me at first, until I learned more about the country school system. The system encourages self-reliance, life skills and a creative and resourceful approach to education.”

DeLoache also took pictures of country schools. An artist, she used the photographs as the basis for colored pencil drawings of the schools that illustrate the book.

“Country Schools: Past and Present” is available at the Heritage Stores at the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol.

Call (605) 773-6006 for more information about the program.

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About the South Dakota State Historical Society

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Education. 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.

About the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation

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.