

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 26, 2018

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Cultural Heritage Center program to focus on sod houses

PIERRE, S.D. – Sod houses will be the topic at a May 8 program at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

Guest speakers Molly Rozum and Casey Crew Blom will tell about several sod houses that are still standing in South Dakota. The program will begin at 7 p.m. CDT on Tuesday, May 8, and is part of the History and Heritage Book Club sponsored by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation.

“Soddies are visual reminders of homestead days,” said Foundation President Catherine Forsch. “Many sod houses have disappeared, melted away by rain or caved in. Learning about sod houses is a way to learn how life was for early settlers in western South Dakota.”

All are welcome to attend the free program.

Rozum’s article, “It’s Weathered Many a Storm: The Enduring Sod House in Northwestern South Dakota,” appeared in the Winter 2017 issue of “South Dakota History,” the quarterly journal of the South Dakota State Historical Society. She details the ways in which homesteaders in northwestern South Dakota constructed buildings with the materials at hand. The article tells about three remaining sod houses near Bison. All were constructed by homesteaders between 1907 and 1910.

Rozum, a native of Mitchell, is an associate professor and Ronald R. Nelson Chair of Great Plains and South Dakota history at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. She specializes in the Northern Great Plains of the United States and Canada. She earned her master’s degree in American folklore and her doctorate in United States history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

People visiting Prairie Homestead north of Interior are able to see an original sod house built by Ed and Alice Brown in 1909 when they came from Nebraska to homestead 160 acres in the Badlands. Prairie Homestead was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. Blom will talk about the history of the Browns and the privately-owned Prairie Homestead.

Also participating in the program will be Jeanne Ode, managing editor of “South Dakota History.” She will discuss the work involved in publishing the quarterly.

“South Dakota History” as well as books about homesteading are available in the Heritage Store at the Cultural Heritage Center.

Please 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.