

“The Pen” helps commemorate 125th anniversary of Dakotas

I accompanied Gov. Dennis and First Lady Linda Daugaard to Bismarck on Aug. 15 to help North Dakota commemorate our states’ 125th anniversary. My role was to transport “The Pen” that President Benjamin Harrison used to sign our statehood documents to Bismarck and make sure it came back. The State Historical Society of North Dakota graciously included “The Pen” in its 125th anniversary exhibition for four hours. When the case was unveiled, the Governors had a good-natured debate about which state should have “The Pen” and which state actually entered the Union first.

We had insisted on tight security for “The Pen.” So after transporting the Governor and First Lady to the North Dakota Governor’s Mansion, I was accompanied by the North Dakota highway patrol officer in charge of the Governor’s security to the North Dakota Heritage Center. He walked me from the vehicle into the secure entrance of the center and passed me off to the head of security at the Heritage Center. We then walked through the building until we got to the exhibit case, and a security guard remained at the locked case during its exhibition. A steady stream of North Dakotans took advantage of this opportunity to see “The Pen.”

The story is that President Harrison had the documents covered, and he shuffled them so when he signed the paperwork, even he did not know if North Dakota or South Dakota became a state first. “They were born

From the SDSHS Director



Jay D. Vogt

together—they are one and I will make them twins,” the President said. Today North Dakota is considered the 39th state and South Dakota the 40th state simply based on alphabetical order.

As for “The Pen,” it is back on exhibition in the Proving Up Gallery at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center. I think that visitors walk right by “The Pen” and do not realize that a President held it and used it to sign our statehood papers. Also on display is the original, hand-written State Constitution, a hand-made gavel used at the three statehood conventions (we have an interesting and unique history as to how we became a state), and the silk banners used at a pro-division 1883 meeting held

See “Vogt,” Page 2

Field Reports



The Minnehaha County Historical Society’s “Free Program Thursday” for September will be held on the 18th at 7 p.m. at the Old Courthouse Museum in Sioux Falls. The program is “Patchwork of the Prairie,” featuring Yvonne Hollenbeck, author of “From My Window — and other poems.” In addition to sharing her poetry, Hollenbeck will display quilts of five generations of one family on the prairies of Dakota and Nebraska, from homesteading to modern day. The MCHS Statehood Celebration Committee will be giving 125th statehood magnets to all fourth-grade students in Minnehaha County in September.

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The Dakota Discovery Museum in Mitchell was visited by 1,230 area students in the past year. Students from as far away as Sioux Falls, Harrisburg, Brookings, Nebraska and Minnesota toured the museum to enhance their studies and understanding of the history and culture of the Upper Great Plains. The museum was recently a recipient of an award from the South Dakota Broadband Initiative that has allowed it to offer free internet access to the public.

See “More,” Page 2

More Field Reports

Continued from Page 1

The 22nd annual West River History Conference will be held Oct. 16-18 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Rapid City. This year's theme is "Digging for History's Roots in the West." For more information contact: West River History Conference, Inc., PO Box 9276, Rapid City, SD 57709; phone (605) 343-4852; email wrhistoryconf@gmail.com

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Officials of the Homestake Opera House in Lead kicked off the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the building with several events on Aug. 29-31. A Friday program included speakers sharing memories of the opera house followed with a concert by the Black Hills Blend Quartet and 50-member Shrine of Democracy Chorus. Saturday was movie day, starting with a kids movie, followed by black-and-white classics and the last movie shown in the theater before the 1984

Vogt

Continued from Page 1

in Huron. These are key statehood artifacts on display every day at your Cultural Heritage Center. The banners are extra special because they were given to our first First Lady Margaret Mellette following the pro-division rally and displayed in their home until she gave them to the South Dakota State Historical Society in 1906. The banners have been restored.

The North Dakota Governor and First Lady will join the Daugaards for a South Dakota commemoration of our 125th anniversary in September when the wagon train arrives in Pierre. In addition, both states are planning individual events the weekend of Nov. 1-2. The Dakotas became states on Nov. 2, 1889. I hope your organization is planning some activity or event to commemorate statehood day. Forty-two communities are official 125th celebration communities. Visit 125.sd.gov for more information. JDV

fire: "Indiana Jones & Raiders of the Lost Ark." Sunday featured tours of the building. For more information visit HomestakeOperaHouse.org.

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The Minnilusa Historical Association held its annual potluck dinner and presentation on Aug. 24 at the Journey Museum in Rapid City. After the meal, Dr. Frank Van Nuys presented a program on predator control in the American West.

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The South Dakota State Railroad Museum in Hill City is having its first "Chew-Choo B-B-Q" on Sunday, Sept. 21. The event includes tours of the museum from 1-3 p.m. followed by a meal of beef brisket, pork and all the trimmings from 4-6 p.m. Entertainment will be provided by "Hogger" Hank Harris and "Porter" Kenny Putnam from 3-

5:30 p.m. There is a silent auction throughout the afternoon and some special items will be auctioned off live at 5:30 p.m. The event concludes with the announcement of the museum's 2015 raffle. Tickets for the event are \$25 for adults, with children 10-and-under free. Call (605) 574-9000 for more information.

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The State Historical Society's Historic Preservation Office is gathering information to use in revising the State-wide Preservation Plan. Interested citizens are being asked to provide their thoughts by completing a short online survey that can be accessed at www.surveymonkey.com/s/6GXF92G. Suggestions from the public are of great importance in determining the course of historic preservation across the state over the next five years. The deadline to complete the survey is Sept. 30. For more information call (605) 773-3458.

Mellette Home in Watertown offers visitors unique experience

The home of South Dakota's first elected Governor was deserted for many years until the Mellette Association was formed in 1943 to save it from demolition and restore it.

The home has many of the original Mellette furnishings, heirlooms and family portraits, including two drawn by First Lady Maggie Mellette — a portrait of herself as a young woman and another portrait of the four Mellette sons.

A massive circular staircase twists its way from the first floor to a small tower room above the second floor that provides an excellent view of the surrounding landscape. The home also features a double parlor, four bedrooms, a library/office, dining room, kitchen, sitting room and dressing room.

A small museum shop on the first floor features several unique items for sale, such as reproductions of the paper dolls that Mrs. Mellette played with in her childhood, historic paddle fans, a history of the Mellette family, John Timm's biography of Arthur Mellette and both Arthur Mellette's and Maggie



The Mellette Home in Watertown was the home of South Dakota's first elected Governor. (Courtesy photo)

Mellette's Civil War diaries.

Today's South Dakotans can see how Gov. Mellette and his family lived in the late 19th century by visiting the Mellette House at 421 Fifth Ave. NW in Watertown. It is open to the public 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, May 1 through Sept. 30.

Learn more at mellettehouse.org