Happy Birthday, South Dakota — celebrating history day after day

The 125th anniversary of the state does not cause the same level of excitement as the centennial anniversary. I remember 25 years ago the anticipation of the commemorating South Dakota’s history with books, exhibits, fireworks, parades and events. As history organizations, we “do history” every day, and an anniversary event gives us an opportunity to have a party. Nevertheless, we celebrate our local and state history regularly -- in that artifact donated by a member of the community or someone who moved away and wanted it returned home; in the piece of research which lay undiscovered until someone was poring over a newspaper article; or in the wonderment of a visitor to the museum saying, “Wow, I didn’t know that!” or in the delight of school children in learning more about the American Indians and pioneers who called South Dakota home.

In nearly every talk I give, I say that: “History is the account of things said and done in the past. All of us have a history -- an account of where we come from and how we got to be who we are.” Our efforts to collect, preserve, interpret and promote the history of our area, community, county and state are valuable because knowing about our past helps us to use good judgment and make worthy choices. On a political level, isn’t that what a democracy is all about -- the people, you and me, making well informed, if not, good decisions? The wider understanding of our history leads to wisdom. And what is wisdom other than the ability to think and act using practicality, knowledge and intuition? That is what the understanding of history provides all of us.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work in celebrating our history daily. Our organizations are the sources of information needed during these commemorations. If your organization needs assistance, the staff of the South Dakota State Historical Society is prepared to help answer your questions or provide advice. Our archivists, curators and historic preservation specialists are willing to visit your site. Our website, www.history.sd.gov, has lots of resources, everything from on-line photographs to information for genealogists.

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Field Reports

Mary Kopco has left her position as director of the Deadwood History Inc. to pursue other career interests in Fort Collins, Colo. Kopco has been the driving force behind preserving Deadwood’s history for 19 years. DHI is the umbrella organization for four quality facilities around Deadwood, including the Adams Museum, Days of ’76 Museum, Historic Adams House, and Homestead Adams Research and Cultural Center.

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The South Dakota National Guard Museum in Pierre was recently remodeled and is now a more spacious, “modern-feeling” museum. Among other improvements, the ceiling of the museum’s north gallery was raised, new lighting was installed and new display cases were brought in. The improvements make it easier to process and preserve the artifacts of the museum, which opened in 1982.

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The latest exhibit at the Codington County Heritage Museum in Watertown features the record...
collection of Chuck Olson, former owner of the Disc Shop in Watertown. The exhibit, which runs through December, includes phonographs, record players and, of course, lots of records. The program for the fall meeting of the Codington County Historical Society was “125th Anniversary of What?” Local historian Prudy Calvin spoke about what Watertown was like in 1889, what the city did to try to become the capital, and South Dakota’s first governor, Arthur Mellette’s part in it all.

The Dakota Discovery Museum in Mitchell recently had its doll collection undergo a comprehensive assessment by Nicole Grabow, objects conservator from the Midwest Art Conservation Center in Minneapolis. The museum’s collection consists of over 300 doll-related items, including 76 dolls. The assessment will help the museum determine exhibit recommendations and provide an exhaustive database for all of its doll-related items, in addition to a comprehensive review of each piece in the collection. The assessment was funded by the Mitchell Area Charitable Foundation and the Mary Chilton DAR Foundation in Sioux Falls.

The National Music Museum at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion has become the first South Dakota institution to have artifacts featured online at Google’s Cultural Institute. The online collection allows people to browse high-resolution photos of art and step virtually into galleries around the world. More than 80 pieces from the Vermillion museum are featured on the Google site, located at google.com/culturalinstitute.

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The annual meeting and luncheon of the Dalesburg Scandinavian Association is Nov. 11 in Vermillion. The 37th annual “Celebration of the St. Lucia Tradition in Dalesburg” is Dec. 13 at Dalesburg Lutheran Church north of Vermillion.

Other holiday events in the Vermillion area include: the Clay County Historical Society’s 2014 Tour of Homes on Dec. 5 and the society’s Sweets and Treats Goodies bake sale on Dec. 13, the annual Lutefisk & Meatball Dinner at St. Paul Lutheran Church in rural Elk Point on Dec. 6, a Christmas Festival at the W. H. Over Museum in Vermillion on Dec. 7 and the St. Mark’s St. Lucia Festival on Dec. 11-13.

The Museum of the American Bison in Rapid City has moved its collection to the Crazy Horse Memorial near Custer. Bison museum officials said the museum did not attract the visitors they had hoped for in downtown Rapid City, and they hoped that having their collection at Crazy Horse will bring in even more people to that attraction. Crazy Horse officials said they were excited to include the buffalo collection at their visitor center.

The annual Holiday Open House of the South Dakota State Historical Society is Friday, Nov. 28, at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The event, from 12-4:30 p.m., features holiday entertainment and treats, living-history demonstrations, special buys at the Heritage Store and photos with Santa Claus. The new “Play Ball!” exhibit is a big hit. And it’s all free! Bring a canned good for the Pierre Food Pantry to help others in the holiday season.

If you’d like to tell other history groups and museums what’s happening with you, send your information to “Hoofprints.” Group members of the SD State Historical Society have priority to the space, but you don’t have to be a member to submit information.