

STURGIS & MEADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter, February 2018, Vol. 3, Issue 1



Photo Courtesy of Bob Davis

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NOTE — Annual Meeting & Board Election

Our Annual Meeting, previously held during History Day, will be held this year at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 20, in the meeting room at Sturgis Regional Hospital. There are five board positions up for re-election. If you are interested in running for the Board, please call Leona Schroeder: 605-939-9979. Or nominations from the floor at the meeting are also permitted.

All members are welcome and encouraged to attend the Annual Meeting!

Spring Scoop of History

First Presbyterian Church of Sturgis . . . Linda Beulke, FPC Secretary

Our Society

MEMBERSHIPS

- 50 individual
- 29 family
- 1 lifetime member
- (117 total members)

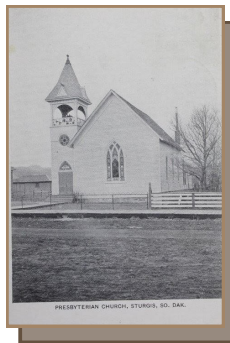
SPONSORSHIPS

- 4 paid sponsors
- 13 in-kind sponsors
- (17 total sponsors)

Your interest and monetary contributions help us move forward in preserving the history of Sturgis & Meade County. If you are not already a member, please consider joining us! You will find a membership form on page 7 of this newsletter.

*(Information provided by
Joan Bachmeier.)*

Sturgis was a little frontier town in 1884 when the Reverend J. Logan Sample, a Home Missionary representing the Home Mission Board, arrived driving a 'team of blacks' to organize the First Presbyterian Church of Sturgis. This being accomplished in October of 1886, the house of worship was subsequently built and was dedicated on January 23, 1887.



Charter members of the Sturgis Church were: Mr. And Mrs. R. B. Zoll; Mrs. L. A. Carpenter; Mr. And Mrs. C. C. Polk; Mrs. Isabela Davidson; Mr. And Mrs. James Kinzer; Mrs. Agnes Quinn; Ft. Meade Postmistress Mary Hall; and Mrs. Metta Pratt Johnson.

From 1886 to 1906 there were ten missionary ministers that served the First Presbyterian Church. In 1906, immediately after graduating

from Lake Forest College, Reverend Carroll Erskine arrived in Sturgis. Reverend Erskine served until 1953.

One of the details first noticed and admired in the original church building was the assemblage of beautiful stained glass windows. Many of those windows are still being enjoyed in the current church that was built in 1966.



In October of 2018, the First Presbyterian Church of Sturgis will be celebrating its 132nd anniversary. It is one of the oldest congregations in the Sturgis area.

We look forward to hosting the Scoop of History on Sunday, April 8, at 2 p.m. We will have our history books out and will be glad to walk you around the church to see, among other features, the beautiful stained glass windows.

Hope to see you there!

The Charles Nolin Monument ... *Ross Lamphere*

The Nolin Monument is complete. All stone and concrete work, along with installation of the five plaques, has been finished and it looks great! We are more than pleased with how everything came together and how it looks. There have been many positive comments made by people already enjoying the historical addition to our community.

The dedication is scheduled for Friday, June 15, 2018 at 3:00 p.m. This will be in conjunction with our annual History Day and community-wide 140th anniversary celebration.



The dedication will take place at the Nolin Monument site on south Junction next to the new hospital emergency room and clinic. Immediately following the dedication, you are invited to a community mixer at the City Auditorium at the corner of Main Street and Junction.

The Nolin Monument was first dedicated in 1932 with nearly 5,000 in attendance. Let us make this dedication one to be remembered as well. We are designing a commemorative postcard that will be carried by a Pony Mail Carrier from the dedication to the local post office to receive a special cancellation stamp. These will be for sale during the dedication, so be sure to look for them!

A big Thank You to all the supporters and contributors to this project, especially the committee members who have given of their time and talents.

4th Annual History Day/140th Birthday Celebration

Tentative Schedule

2018 will mark the 140th birthday of Sturgis and Ft. Meade. To plan the celebration events, a group of representatives from the City, Historical Society, Ft. Meade Museum, Art's Council, Chamber of Commerce, and others have been meeting to coordinate efforts.

The major event of the 140th commemoration will be the 4th Annual Sturgis History Day. Planners are coordinating with several community organizations to provide special activities. The tentative schedule includes:

Friday, June 15

3:00 p.m.: Dedication of the renovated Nolin Monument

4:00 p.m.: Reception, snacks, cash bar, booths, and conversation downtown at the auditorium

Saturday, June 16

9:00 a.m.-Noon: Booths open at the auditorium

10:00 a.m.: Parade downtown. Following the parade, there will be bus tours of historic Sturgis sites

Noon: Lunch on your own at a local Sturgis restaurant

1:00 p.m.—7:00 p.m.: Ft. Meade Barry Stadium: pony rides, old photo booth, shooting range, free concert, ticketed chuck wagon feed, and retiring of the colors

Sunday, June 17

Possibly: bicycle and/or horse rides in and around Sturgis to historic sites

'Taste of Sturgis' Recap ... *Kris Hubbard*



Matt Downie (left) and Daniel Hirsch of Elk Creek Steakhouse serve up prime rib and duchess potatoes to Mary Ann Stroschein.



Gumbo was the featured food at the Jambonz Grill and Pub table. Spooning out the samples is Krissie Traversie.



Pizza from the Sidehack Saloon was popular with those attending the Taste of Sturgis. Leslie Cole (right) marks the participants' cards as they move through the line.



Jan Weimer, of Weimer's Diner & Donuts, explains the different flavors of donuts to Ron and Diane Johnson.

The third annual Taste of Sturgis, a fundraiser for the Sturgis and Meade County Historical Society, was held January 26 at the Boulder Canyon Station Convention Center. Almost 200 people were present to sample food provided by area restaurants. From pizza and prime rib to chicken tips and chocolate covered donuts, attendees had an opportunity to sample a variety of food and then vote for their favorite.

Voting was close, but the final count for the People's Choice Award for Appetizer went to Loud American for its jalapeno poppers. Elk Creek Steakhouse and Chef Daniel Hirsch received the People's Choice Award for Main Dish for his prime rib, while the award for best dessert was presented to Weimer's Diner & Donuts.

Following close behind in the voting were Grocery Mart for brats; Jambonz Grill and Pub, gumbo; Sidehack Saloon, pizza; and The Knuckle Saloon, chicken tips.

Historical Society President Mark Rambow thanked those who attended the group's fundraiser and the businesses for participating. "As our only true fundraiser of the year, this Taste of Sturgis is very important to the Historical Society as we continue our work of preserving, protecting and promoting the history of Sturgis and Meade County," he said. "Without the generous support of these businesses and our other sponsors, this event could not be possible," Rambow continued.

Rambow encouraged the public to assist the Historical Society in carrying out its' mission by contacting him with items and stories they have which may help in comprehensively documenting the area's history. "We are looking at developing forums and venues to share this proud history," he added, which will include History Day this June 15-16.

Officers and board members of the Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society include, in addition to Rambow, Ross Lamphere, vice president; Leona Schroeder, secretary; Janice Lundgren, treasurer; Joan Bachmeier, historian and membership chairman; Duane Boy, Mary Wood Fossen, Cady Barden, Kristine Hubbard, Jan Lamphere, Katherine Ward Martel, Richard Moeller, Rebecca Porter-Watson, Kathi Schneider and David Super.

In addition to the businesses named above, Historical Society sponsors include Black Hills Title Company, Boulder Canyon Station Convention Center, City of Sturgis, DA BUS, Davenport Family Real Estate, First Interstate Bank, First National Bank, The Homeslice Group, KBHB Radio and Sturgis Photo & Gifts.



Annie Meyer helps her father Ryan at the Grocery Mart table where Linda Morgan samples three varieties of brats.



Loud American Roadhouse featured jalapeno poppers and breaded pickle slices. Greeting those to the table is Carol Agosto (right).



Mick McAuley, with the Knuckle Saloon, serves chicken tips in white sauce to Dorothy Pulscher. Not pictured is Ken McNenny.

Sturgis Town Constable, Murdered!

Mark Rambow



Having written recently about the early and respected Sturgis officer W. F. L. Souter, I thought I should share a story of another Sturgis lawman who suffered from a different reputation.

The following is a listing of the deputies serving the Sturgis area prior to William Souter taking over in 1883. It seems that being the town constable in Sturgis was a tough job as there were no less than nine men who served in the office during the town's first five years (from 1878 into 1883).

According to the *Sturgis Record* of January 1, 1887, the first constable in Sturgis was Charley Burch. After Burch quit, Justus Schnell assumed the 'six-shooter' of office followed by George Heber, Harry Ash, and Jimmy O'Neill.

At that point came an ex-soldier by the name of Gus Dannenfelzer who was followed by Ed Green, Fred Dickley, and then Souter, in the order named. (When, in 1883, Baldy Ford chased Dickley down the street, using vile and insulting language, the people thought that as a peace officer Dickley did not fill the bill and it was then that Bill Souter started his long career in town.)

The focus of my tale is Mr. George Heber, also known as "Big George" or "Dutch George." Heber was a "tough" and a bad man generally who took pains to brag that he was at the side of a desperado named "Lame Bradley" when he had been shot down in Texas. Heber once chased away a Lawrence county deputy sheriff at the point of a gun while he was trying to serve George with a warrant. George was big and powerful and was made constable to fill out a term in hopes that the honor would civilize him a little. The *Record* later reported that "He was held in fear by the citizens generally, and it is said that if, in a social game of draw poker, he ran against a streak of bad luck, he would calmly grab what money lay around the table, shove it in his pocket, and walk off." After his rise to the office of constable he was no better than before, and the town was helpless. He was said to carry two large six-shooters and loved to stick them under the chin of anyone with whom he disagreed.

The other character in our tale was a local young man by the name of Sylvester Merritt. He was the son of a respected local man named Joseph Merritt. Sylvester (also known as "Ves") worked as a night watchman for M. S. Harmon. Harmon, the largest merchant in town, had him carry a gun to protect his merchandise and horses, some of which had been stolen. Merritt was described as a fine young man, quiet, friendly, and quick to help a friend.

The night of October 25th, 1880, was a wild one in Sturgis. The soldiers at Fort Meade had recently been paid and were painting the town. The Republicans of Sturgis also held their election caucus. One of the people they chose, ironically, was Sylvester Merritt to run for the office of constable. The celebrations had turned into a drunken affair, with brawls, shooting and other disorderly conduct on the rise. It was the second night of merriment in a row as the Democrats had held their caucus the previous night naming, among others, George Heber as their candidate for constable.

(continued on page 5)

Merritt was concerned about his friend, Adam Mitchell, who was quite inebriated. He wanted to get Mitchell on his horse and take him toward his home in Pleasant Valley. It is described as a somewhat comical scene of Merritt attempting to wrestle Mitchell onto his horse and keep him secure while there was gunfire happening a bit further down the street. Merritt finally got Mitchell to cooperate by purchasing a bottle of whiskey for him for the ride home.

At the other end of the street George Heber was having a few drinks in Miller's saloon. At the urging of Judge Ash, who felt things were getting a bit out of hand, Heber headed down the street to find the source of the noise and put an end to it.

As he entered the second block of Main, Heber spotted Merritt trying to stabilize Mitchell on his horse. Heber came up behind Merritt and, grabbing him by the collar, threw him to the ground and began to try pulling Mitchell from his horse. Merritt quickly jumped up to explain that he was Mitchell's friend and he wanted to get him home. Big George spun around and, knocking Merritt back again, drew his two big six-shooters and shoved them toward him. Faster than he even knew he could do, Merritt pulled his own gun and fired. The bullet struck Heber between the eyes and killed him instantly.

With the chaos going on around them, the shooting went mostly unnoticed when it occurred. Merritt went to Harmon's store and, finding Harmon, gave him the gun, simply saying, "I have killed Dutch George." He quietly saddled his horse and left town going to his father's hay camp on Elk Creek. "Merritt later explained that he felt that there was too much beer flowing and he wanted to absent himself until people had clear heads.

Young Merritt turned himself in the next morning. He was quickly tried before Judge Ash, who found the case to be self-defense and released him. However, the county coroner came that day and, studying the facts, had Merritt re-arrested and sent to Deadwood for trial.

Merritt was held in jail for more than two weeks while the Deadwood court waited. When the hearing was finally held on November 10th, several eye-witnesses testified to the facts of the shooting. Others testified to the character of "Big George." When the ruling was made, Sylvester Merritt was acquitted for the second time.

While that seemed to be the end of the matter, it wasn't that simple. A grand jury was held in December and they took another look at the case. They, once again, indicted Sylvester Merritt for the killing of George Heber. Merritt's father, Joseph, in a letter to the *Black Hills Times* indicated Sylvester was out of town on business but would return immediately for the trial. However, when the date of the trial arrived, Merritt did not show. It was reported that he had "fled to parts unknown." I would suppose that young Merritt, having been cooperative and acquitted twice before, had had enough and just left.

No further comment is made about Sylvester Merritt regarding this shooting. There is no indication that anyone went looking for him or that the case was ever pursued. Sylvester "Ves" Merritt shows up again in the papers a few years later. He was ranching and working as a "stock detective." He got married and raised a family, and no one ever seems to have tried to pursue the matter any further.

I can, to date, find no record of "Big George's" burial. As with most homicide victims, he was likely taken to Deadwood for autopsy and buried in Mount Moriah.



Scoop Recap: “Gettin’ Rubber In All Four Gears”... *David Super*

Audience story telling continued at least into the early evening of Dec. 2, 2017, following the most recent Scoop of History program titled “Gettin’ Rubber In All Four Gears.” Retired journalist David Super and current Rapid City Journal business report Jim Holland were starters for the afternoon event that recounted the years of informal challenge drag racing that took place on Alkali Road east of Sturgis and elsewhere on state and county highways throughout the Black Hills.

Both Sturgis natives, Super and Holland set the stage inside the Knuckle Saloon’s taproom by describing the then freshly paved roadway that served as a drag strip from the early 1960s until well into the next decade. The journalists provided highlights of the county road, the cars



Skip McBrayer: 421 GTO, 442 OLDS

and drivers. From that point, audience members within the crowd of more than 50 took turns at the microphone to recall their adventures of the side-by-side challenge races.

Talk of gear ratios, engine size, car colors and hijinks with Highway Patrol troopers that Super described as the “loyal opposition” were part of the program. In addition to all of the racing stories, audience members made additions and corrections to a list of drivers and their cars that will

become part of the Historical Society’s archive.

Photos of racing along Alkali Road are rare. Thanks to the loan of snapshots taken by Linda Kenoyer Burge in the spring of 1966, audience members were able to see a small sample of how local racers brought their hot rods to the starting line for a quarter-mile sprint and claims to bragging rights at least until another day of racing.

“The story remains very open,” explained Super during his presentation. People with stories and photographs related to informal challenge racing from that era are invited to contact him for inclusion in the “Gettin’ Rubber” archive. Super can be reached at [605-716-5523](tel:605-716-5523) or by e-mail at david.super@verizon.net.

Familiar Names & Faces in 20th Century Sturgis and Ft. Meade

WE WANT YOUR PHOTOS

The Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society, along with some other local groups, are busy planning the biggest History Day yet! We are going to combine our History Day this year with the rededication of the Nolin Monument, and also celebrate the fact that 2018 marks the 140th Birthday of Sturgis and Ft. Meade.

For the past few years, our historical booths have primarily highlighted local places and institutions. This year we want to celebrate all of the Names & Faces that were familiar to us as we grew up in Sturgis and Ft. Meade during the last 140 years.

With that in mind, we are inviting you to **put together a collection of pictures of your family and join us in**

exhibiting the largest collection of familiar faces from the past as we can collect. If you have a large exhibit, we will provide you with an entire table. However, if you have only a few items but want to be a part of this, we will divide tables and give you an opportunity to share your memories without feeling the necessity to fill an entire table. Feel free to exhibit your immediate family, or extended family, or neighborhood, or school class, or whatever, as long as we highlight those Familiar Names & Faces from 20th Century Sturgis & Ft. Meade. Imagine the auditorium full of all the faces from the past. **I can’t wait to see it!**

We are asking that all exhibits be set up between 1:00 and 3:30 p.m. on Friday,

June 15. The Nolin Rededication will be at 3:00 p.m. at the monument and then everyone will come to the auditorium for a reception from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. On Saturday morning, June 16, we will open the auditorium again and visitors will be able to view the exhibits, along with tours and speakers at other sites, until noon when we will all remove our exhibits and end the Sturgis part of the day and move to Ft. Meade for their activities.

So...contact me as soon as possible and reserve your booth space!

Leona Howe Schroeder, Secretary
Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society

leonags@aol.com

605-939-9979

Calendar of Upcoming Events ... *Leona Schroeder*

Tuesday, February 13, 5:30 p.m.: 140th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION COMMITTEE MTG ... Chamber Office

Friday, February 16, Noon: HISTORY AT HIGH NOON, Library

Tuesday, February 20, 6:30 p.m.: MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Friday, March 16, Noon.: HISTORY AT HIGH NOON, Library

Tuesday, March 20, 6:30 p.m.: ANNUAL MEETING, Sturgis Regional Hospital Meeting Room

Sunday, April 8, 2:00 p.m.: SPRING SCOOP, Presbyterian Church

Tuesday, April 17, 6:30 p.m.: MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Friday, April 20, Noon.: HISTORY AT HIGH NOON, Library

Tuesday, May 15, 6:30 p.m.: MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Friday, May 18, Noon: HISTORY AT HIGH NOON, Library

Friday, June 15 and Saturday, June 16
4th ANNUAL HISTORY DAY/140th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF STURGIS & FT. MEADE
Various Times And Places

STURGIS & MEADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Our goal is to preserve, protect and promote the history of Sturgis and Meade County. We cannot do this alone ... this is done through memberships, sponsorships and donations. The Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society is a 501©3 nonprofit organization. Therefore, sponsorships and donations are tax-deductible; membership dues are not tax deductible.

Registration Information

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Level Desired

_____ Individual: \$25.00/year _____ Family: \$35.00/year _____ Student: \$15.00/year
_____ Business Sponsorship: \$250.00/year _____ Life Membership: \$5,000.00

Please send this form, accompanied by a check for your membership, to:

Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society
P.O. Box 221
Sturgis, SD 57785

You may also register, pay dues, and donate online with a credit card or PayPal at: www.SturgisHistory.org

STURGIS & MEADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



P. O. Box 221, Sturgis, SD 57785

Board Officers

Mark Rambow, President, mark@sturgishistory.org
Ross Lamphere, Vice President
Leona Schroeder, Secretary, leonags@aol.com
Janice Lundgren, Treasurer

On Line

E-mail: info@sturgishistory.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/sturgishistorypage/
* Watch for new and updated social media links in our May newsletter *

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Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society

P. O. Box 221

Sturgis, SD 57785

“Study the past if you would define the future.”

— [Confucius](#)