

**STURGIS  
&  
MEADE  
COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

Newsletter, December 2019, Vol. 4, Issue 4



Photo Courtesy of Bob Davis

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**PRESIDENT'S REPORT...*Mark Rambow***

We are now over 5 years into the work of the Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society, and things are happening! We have an ever-growing collection of materials, photos and reference material. We continue to host interesting and important programming, such as History Day and our Scoop of History events. We undertake fundraising at A Taste if Sturgis, and we partner with a variety of other organizations and individuals in the community, to promote and preserve our local and regional history.

This is all enjoyable and rewarding, and it all has one thing in common. The vast majority of it has been done by the members of the board of directors. I cannot say enough about this dedicated group of people! While we have a lot of fun, and spend significant time “story-telling,” we also multi-task a variety of events, presentations and administrative tasks.

While we love “having our fingers” in all the details of the Society, we could be doing so much more! That is why we are putting out the “Help Wanted” sign. We need your help to take the organization to the next level. We need you to volunteer to do something that you would love to be doing anyhow! Would you like to help identifying speakers and activities? Our Program Committee could use your help! Do you like working on a newsletter, or promoting a fundraiser? Our Public Relations and Marketing Committee is the place for you! Do you want to help photographing, documenting and cataloguing items in our collections? Our Research and Collections Committee could use your help!

Please let us know your interest, and we can match you up with a volunteer task! As we expand our activity, so can you!

SOCIETY COMMITTEES

Membership/Fundraising Committee \* Finance & Budget Committee  
Public Relation & Marketing Committee \* Program Committee  
Research & Collections Committee

**PLEASE NOTE**

Our society is missing some very important members! Are you one of them?

Check out the list of our paid members on page 6 of this issue. If your name is missing but you think you have paid, let us know!

Otherwise, please consider sending in your membership dues ASAP to help us preserve the diverse and illustrious history of Sturgis and Meade County for our descendants.



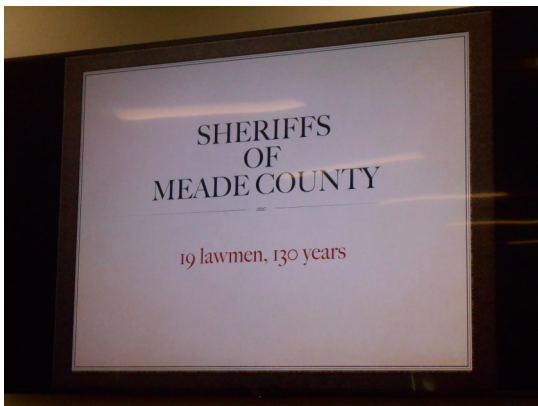
## SCOOP OF HISTORY - SHERIFFS OF MEADE COUNTY ... *David Super*



Tales of exploding wells, whizzing bullets and courtroom hijinks were delivered with a “Scoop of History” on Dec. 7, when amateur historian and retired journalist David Super presented his Sheriffs of Meade County program at the Sturgis Public Library.

Super, who started his journalism career at the Sturgis Tribune/Black Hills Press, has researched the highlights of 19 men who have served as sheriff of Meade County since 1889. “I’m not finished,” he announced to the audience that filled the library’s recently re-dedicated community

room. “There is an endless reservoir of information about the sheriffs, their deputies and events connected to providing law enforcement across 3,500 square miles of our county.”



Starting with W.F.L. Souter, the county’s first elected lawman, Super presented the high points - and some low points - of each sheriff. His talk also included a brief review of how the elected position of sheriff became a part of the nation’s law enforcement system, an English custom carried forward from the early colonists to the present day.

Several audience members added to the discussion by recounting personal stories about various sheriffs. Among the special contributors was retired Deputy Sheriff Merlin Ehlers who served as John Egger and Floyd Cleland’s chief deputy. Ehlers also served as the county’s acting sheriff in 1986 when Egger retired early from his final term in office.



Scoop of History programs are held quarterly by the Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society. We are always searching for quality presentations and welcome ideas and assistance from the public.

**Photographs courtesy of Kathi Schneider**

## HISTORICAL FEATURE ARTICLE ... *Mark Rambow*

### CHRISTMAS OF YORE

As we prepare for the traditions of our holiday season, it is interesting to compare those traditions to those of the earliest days of Sturgis, Fort Meade, and the surrounding area. We look back to that era with nostalgia and longing, a simpler time when Christmas was peaceful and less commercial. However, everything is not always as it seems!

The first Christmas memories are few. We are reliant on reports in the Deadwood papers for local news until 1883, when Sturgis got a permanent paper. The only Christmas report from December of 1878 regarded Fort Meade, then still known as Camp Ruhlen. It was reported that the barracks housing Companies E and M of the 7th Cavalry had been completed enough to allow the men to enjoy their Christmas dinner sitting on the floor. Those men had it much better than some of their comrades. Lieutenant Wallace, of the Seventh Cavalry, with a detachment of three non-commissioned officers and twelve privates, left on Dec. 21st, under orders to conduct a party of deserters to Fort Keogh, Montana, to a general court-martial. The trip of 250 miles was said to be "across the wastes of frozen snow and in the face of northern Dakota blizzards, not a Christmas frolic to be hankered after."



The holidays were quite cold that year, as a man named Henry Mardon froze to death just outside Sturgis on New Year's Eve. He was found two days later, possessing \$50 and a bottle of whisky.

By 1879, things had become much more civilized. A Christmas Eve Ball was held at Fort Meade, which was kicked off by a grand march of more than 70 couples, and highlighted by a banquet, dancing, decorations and live music. The music was provided by the 7th Cavalry String Orchestra, of which it was reported, "it would be impossible for them to put forth anything but strains that are semi-divine. It really seemed that when the enchanting heart-and-heel-stirring tones of Mr. Eixenburger's violin fell on a person's ear it was impossible for him to keep his feet upon the floor."

The first detailed report of the actual celebrations in Sturgis did not appear until December 1881. It was reported as follows: "Christmas with its attendant revelries visited Sturgis. On Friday evening we had the ball at Scollard's. It was a gay and happy assembly of beaux and belles – all nicely attuned to the voluptuous humming of four instruments. The men sometimes are over-devotional to Bacchus, but put a curb on their bibulous habits, and were robust in their gallantry. A repetition is solicited and promised.

"The big event of the week was the Christmas tree. The good ladies of Sturgis determined that the children should have an obtrusive ray in their bright little lives. Accordingly, committees were appointed, subscriptions solicited, and a week's hard labor culminated on Saturday night in a pleasant and joyous exhibition. Four large, somber looking spruces were made to scintillate with the copious fruitage of toys and joys. Every branch was embellished with sparkling tokens of love and friendship.

"Music and romances made up the programme of the evening until the mystical Santa Claus made his appearance. He soon robbed the tree of its trait and left its dismantled branches and distributed article after article according to label until all were made happy."

And thus it was through the years, with reports of Christmas balls being given at Sturgis and Fort Meade, and celebrations being held at the various churches of the town. One report in the Sturgis Record from 1886 stated, "Christmas passed quietly in this city, and Santa Claus made his regular rounds as usual. The Methodist people had a large tree and an interesting programme, consisting of music and recitations, on Saturday evening, that was hugely enjoyed by the audience. The Catholics also got up a tree for the benefit of the juvenile members of their flock, that was largely patronized. High mass was celebrated at 12 o'clock Saturday evening, the church being filled with a large audience. Numerous trees were erected by private families in the city, and all in all, the children had no cause to complain of the liberality of old Santa Claus."

Another in 1890 said, "Exceedingly pleasant exercises were held at all the churches in Sturgis on Christmas Eve. At the Methodist church, an elaborate program had been prepared and was presented to a very large audience. The children were remembered by gifts dispensed from an elaborate Christmas tree, and the juveniles must have enjoyed the celebration, judging from the many expressions of delight escaping them.

"At the Presbyterian church, an innovation was introduced consisting of an imitation snow house, from the windows of which old Santa Claus dispensed his presents to the children. The children were invited to the church late in the afternoon, and allowed to romp and play to their hearts content. After partaking of refreshments, old Santa made his appearance and amid a veritable storm of youthful huzzas, distributed his wealth to all. The party broke up late in the evening. The innovation was a success in every way.

(Continued on page 4)



“At the Catholic church, the Benedictine sisters of St. Martin's academy held appropriate exercises and pleased the little ones connected with that denomination by distributing presents from a heavily loaded tree.”

While these reports tend to confirm our image of the idyllic Victorian Christmas, other realities of life in the old west were also present, some sounding similar to the concerns of today. Many people urged parents to stop spoiling their children with too many gifts. Others felt that gifts should be more practical, and less commercial. Local stores and shops advertised extensively, encouraging people to come and buy their gifts. They would plead with people to shop local and not to order in gifts from catalogs. Examples of this were:

“Sunday is Christmas. There remains only today and tomorrow to buy presents. Look around this Record and see who advertises, and then patronize them. Never go outside of your town to buy for Christmas. If you make purchases here you make a Christmas present to the store - and (don't forget it) one to yourself, even if it is incidentally.”

“It's now about the time of year when anxious people think of sending off for Christmas presents. How foolish! Right here in Sturgis, Fishel has a larger and better selected stock, than was ever in the Hills. You go in there and you have the advantage of a personal examination of the goods – everything displayed in fine shape and for sale cheap. Among other things are about 150 bisque and wax dolls of all sizes and at absolutely eastern prices; plush goods in an endless variety; books and fancy goods; and an enormous variety of toys.”

The major complication to traditional Christmas spirit would be the split-personality of Sturgis City. Sturgis was still “Scooptown,” and when the holidays coincided with payday at the post, or the arrival of a group of bullwhackers or cowboys, which it usually did, mayhem was still likely to break out. This could often take the form of drunken soldiers racing horses down Main street, gunfire, fistfights and brawls, or sometimes more serious activity. In 1883, the Record reported one such incident. “One of the boys from the post got quarrelsome Christmas day, and provoked a row with a very small Scooptown gentleman. After the smoke and snow cleared away the soldier was discovered lying on the ground, and the civilian was on top of him, battering his frame from one end to the other.”

But it wasn't until 1894 that a story surfaced of Christmas in the earliest days of Sturgis. It was reported in the Los Angeles Herald, which had asked people for their first Christmas memories. A reporter, on a trip to the prison, had spoken to a prisoner named “Kid Thompson.” It read:

"My first impressions of Christmas you want, eh?" It was "Kid" Thompson the train robber who spoke. His cold hard face brightened up at the thought, and he pressed his face harder against the iron bars that shut him from the outside world; from friends, home and loved ones, for despite big crimes, he has some love left for those to whom he was once very dear.

The mention of Christmas, it could be seen, caused his thoughts to return to other days; his boyhood's home in the Dakota hills; the loving father and mother, who are waiting for a wayward son who will never return.

"Impressions of Christmas, eh?" he repeated. "Oh, yes; I remember. The first Christmas of which I have any recollection was spent in the Black Hills, in South Dakota. My impressions of that night will linger with me as long as I live.

"It was in what was called Scooptown, now known as Sturgis, three miles from Fort Meade. On Christmas night a large number of soldiers came into the place, which was inhabited by only miners, cowboys and tough characters. In a drunken brawl, five soldiers and several cowboys were killed.

"My first Christmas was wildly eventful, and it was only a forecast of every other Christmas for me since that time. I was but 9 years old, yet the impression it left upon me was lasting. I have seen shooting, drinking or gambling on every Christmas since, and to say the impressions are undesirable is but a faint way of expressing it.

“The Kid's” recollection, based on his age, would have put his Christmas memory about 1878 or 1879. It's hard to say, of course, but that many deaths should have made the Deadwood papers. There are reports of a blow up around that era between a large group of soldiers and bullwhackers, but not of deaths. It was supposed to have been closer to Thanksgiving than Christmas Eve. However, it could be his youthful memory.

Christmas memories are like that. We tend to selectively remember details of the past to tell the story we wish to remember. Exact details are optional!



“Kid Thompson”

## MEMBERSHIP REPORT ... *Leona Howe Schroeder, Membership Chairman*

As you may recall, last year the Historical Society voted to make all memberships due on June 15 each year to simplify collecting of dues. Our new system began this past June 15 during History Day.

If paying your dues has slipped your mind, below is the membership form and information on how to submit your payment. Feel free to share this information with others who you think might be interested in joining.

Because we are in the middle of the year, memberships are now effectively half off! What a great gift idea for friends, family members, or yourself! Simply complete the form below and return with your check.



On the following page, I have listed those members who have paid their 2019-2020 dues. If you aren't on the list but feel you did pay, contact me at [leonags@aol.com](mailto:leonags@aol.com) or call me at 605-939-9979.

We appreciate all your support and contributions to the Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society and hope you are enjoying your membership as well.

### 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. New membership year starts June 15.

#### Registration Information

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

#### HALF YEAR MEMBERSHIP – GOOD UNTIL JUNE 15

##### Membership Level Desired

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual: \$12.50/half year \_\_\_\_\_ Family: \$17.50/half year \_\_\_\_\_ Student: \$7.50/half 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

## CURRENT MEMBERSHIP FOR 2019-2020 ...*Leona Howe Schroeder*

Adams, Linda	Jackley, Michael & JoAnn	Otto, Robert & Donna Laughlin
Ackerman, Vonnie Whitman	Jenter, Dr. George & Ellen	Rambow, Charles
Afdahl, George & Annelle	Jolley, Clint & Sandy	Rambow, Mark & family
Alberts, Francie & Mike	Karels, Gordon & Earla	Reed, Jason
Asheim, Bernard	Kenoyer, John	Rose, Gordon
Bachmeier, Luke & Joan	Kenoyer, Clifford	Rose, Coleen
Balyeat, Don	Killam, Lola	Roth, DeeAnn
Basel, Dallis & Tammy	Kleven, Marguerite	Schneider, Kathi
Boy, Duane & Rita	Kotab, Gordon & Marlene	Schroeder, Leona Howe
Carpenter, Larry & Nancy	Kusser, Bob	Shaver, Craig & Patricia
Chaney, Joe & Jeri	Lamphere, Logan	Speakman, Gordon & Valorie
Chaplin, Susan	Lamphere, Ross & Jan	Steinle, Jan
DesJarlais Farms family	Larue, Denise	Stoltz, Violet
Draine, LeRoy & Cathie	Lindquist, Helen	Stroschine, Lee
Edwards, Guy	Linn, Marv	Super, David & Carol
Erickson, Carl	Lundgren, Janice & family	Tesch, Bob
Graf, Frances	Martin, Michael & Linda Coyle	Thompson, Jim & Sherry Solberg
Hafner, Cathy and family	Massa, Joseph	Walker, Janeen
Hardenbrook, Linda	Massa, Mark & Beth	Watson, Joan
Hendrickson, Linn	McNenny, Dean & Sandi	Watson, Michael & Rebecca
Holland, Deb & Jim	McPherson, David & Susan	Weyrich, Bruce & Darci
Howe, Bob & Joan	Moeller, Allen	Whitford, Jesse
Howe, Stan	Moeller, Richard	Wood-Fossen, Mary
Hubbard, Bruce & Kris	Nickelson, Stacey	
Huston, William	Olson, Edyth	

## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS ... *Leona Howe Schroeder*

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

Friday, January 10, 2020—5TH ANNUAL TASTE OF STURGIS, Auditorium

January 17 - History at High Noon - Tim Velder - "Frozen and Boiled, Weather Records 1936"  
- Sturgis Library

Tuesday, January 21, 6:30 p.m.—MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Tuesday, February 18, 6:30 p.m.—MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

February 21 - History at High Noon - Keith Keffeler - "Keffeler Family History" - Sturgis Library

Tuesday, March 17 - 6:30 pm - MONTHLY BOARD MEETING, Chamber Office

Friday & Saturday, June 19 & 20, 2020—6TH ANNUAL HISTORY DAY, Auditorium

# **FIFTH ANNUAL TASTE OF STURGIS**

**A fundraiser for the  
Sturgis & Meade County  
Historical Society**

## **WHEN**

**Friday, Jan. 10, 2020  
5:30 p.m. until food is gone**

## **WHERE**

**Sturgis City Auditorium  
on Main Street**

## **COST**

**\$10 per person**

## **FEATURING**

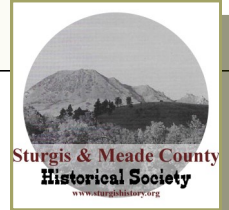
**Arby's  
Grocery Mart  
Jambonz Grill & Pub  
JR's Rhodehouse BBQ  
L. Jeffery Catering  
La Risa Mexican Cuisine  
Loud American  
Roadhouse  
Sidehack Saloon  
The Knuckle Saloon  
The Oasis Bar  
Uncle Louie's Diner  
Weimer's Diner &  
Donuts**

A People's Choice Award will be presented to the business with the most popular menu item based on votes cast by those in attendance.

Sponsors are  
City of Sturgis,  
Davenport Family Real Estate, First Interstate Bank, First National Bank, KBHB Radio, Meade County Commission, Meade County Senior Center Association, Sturgis Photo and Gifts, The HomeSlice Group, The Local

# STURGIS & MEADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 221, Sturgis, SD 57785



## Board Officers

Mark Rambow, President, [mark@sturgishistory.org](mailto:mark@sturgishistory.org)

Ross Lamphere, Vice President

Rebecca Porter-Watson, Secretary

Janice Lundgren, Treasurer

## On Line

Website: [www.sturgishistory.org](http://www.sturgishistory.org)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/sturgishistory.org](https://www.facebook.com/sturgishistory.org)

## OUR SPONSORS

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Cuisine

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Roadhouse

Meade County

Commissioners

Meade County Senior  
Center

The Oasis Bar

Papa John's

Sidehack Saloon

Sturgis Photo & Gifts

Wanda's Kitchen

Weimer's Diner &  
Donuts

Sturgis & Meade County Historical Society

P. O. Box 221

Sturgis, SD 57785

*"We are not makers of history. We are made by history."*

Martin Luther King, Jr.