

Humanities Nebraska Speaker Brings Early History To Life

TERRI LICKING

History of the communities of Brewster, Dunning, Purdum, and Halsey, is now on display in the old Home State Bank building in Dunning.

Thanks to hard-working volunteers, the 100-year-old building has been turned into the Sandhills Heritage Museum. It is now in its second year of operation.

“We have done much this last year to fulfill our mission statement of being a place to collect, document and preserve the history and heritage of Blaine County,” said Kathie Martindale, chairperson for the Sandhills Heritage Museum board. Their mission statement goes on to say it will be utilized as a research center for genealogy and historical purposes and will have seminars for the county and surrounding area. Donations have helped and the latest project of indoor plumbing and running water has been completed.

Realizing the museum would be too small to hold seminars, the Village of Dunning helped co-sponsor the first seminar in the 80-year-old community center located a block away. Approximately 40 people were in attendance to hear Humanities Nebraska speaker, Vicki Troxel Harris speak on “African-American Settlers and Cowboys of Nebraska.”

Troxel Harris grew up in the Sandhills between Thedford and Valentine. She remembers her grandmother speak well of the “good neighbors.” Troxel realized there was no one else collecting and passing stories of these dedicated, hard-working homesteaders, respected businessmen, or top trail hardened cowhands who helped carve Nebraska history out of its soil and whose color was not like hers.

Her passion began as a teacher who was given the task to teach tolerance to her students.

“I can tolerate box elder bugs, gossip, and a whole slew of other inconveniences, but this became more of teaching appreciation for another race. Back then race was not an issue in the Sandhills as elsewhere. Survival and depending on each other was primary.”



MARCIA HORA - THOMAS COUNTY HERALD

Vicki Troxel Harris, Humanities Nebraska speaker, stands in front of one of the pictures she used as part of her presentation at the Logan County Library in Stapleton.

Troxel Harris stated in the 1854 census of Nebraska, there were 14 blacks listed as slaves. After the Civil War, African-Americans came to the state as cowhands, laborers, cavalrymen and homesteaders.

Jim Kelly and Amos Harris were in the Lexington area. She shared pictures from Fort Robinson of mounted cavalrymen, the “Buffalo Soldiers” of the 10th cavalry, an all-black regiment.

“We’ve all heard of Roosevelt and his rough riders going up San Juan Hill,” Troxel Harris said. “His ride was made safe because the 10th cavalry Buffalo soldiers went first.”

Of special interest was the story of the settling of DeWitty, a Cherry County settlement not far from Brownlee. Located between Thedford and Valentine, and close to where her grandparents lived, DeWitty was a settlement of African-American families.

“When the 1904 Kinkaid Act was amended to the Homestead Act, providing 640 acres for homesteads in the Nebraska Sandhills, the influx from Overton, Nebraska of African-American families who had moved from Canada years earlier, moved and formed DeWitty,” Troxel Harris said. By 1910, 24 families filed claims and in 1917, 100 families called the

community home. The town had a post office, barber, general store, three school districts, and a very good baseball team. Troxel Harris shared pictures of Brownlee and DeWitty residents enjoying community picnics and other social gatherings. She had pictures of classrooms with students from both races.

Troxel Harris said this would be her last year as a speaker with Humanities Nebraska.

“I have done this for 26 years. It’s time to concentrate on the health of my husband and myself.”

She hopes her notes, photos and contacts will find a home in the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The Sandhills Heritage Museum board hopes to bring more presenters to Dunning to help enthuse and educate area residents about history that needs to be shared. If you have ideas on presenters, please let Kathie Martindale know. If you would like to help them continue their renovations, which will include an early day Dunning Post Office, as well as a mini-theatre with digital capabilities, donations may be sent to the Sandhills Heritage Museum, P.O. Box 6, Dunning, NE 68833. They are also in need of volunteers to help keep the museum open. Like their Facebook page to learn more.



COURTESY PHOTO

One of the photos used in the presentation by Vicki Troxel Harris was this picture of the 20th Cavalry, the Buffalo Soldier Brigade at Fort Robinson. All were African-Americans and decorated Civil War soldiers.



COURTESY PHOTO

This photo used in her presentation is a Custer County family photographed by Solomon Butcher.

Dueling pianos coming to Thomas County Fair



Where will you be Saturday night, July 28?

Hopefully, you will be part of the huge crowd situated in the pavilion located at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. That’s where the action will be, as dueling pianos lay the groundwork for great entertainment.

You can enjoy any genre of music and they will gladly play your requests. However, if someone tosses a larger bill on one of the pianos, they immediately cancel your tune and play a new request.

This is something the Thedford Area Community Foundation board

has wanted to do for several years, and this year, there was a gap in activities after the barbecue. The time seemed right.

This is a really fun activity that any age person can enjoy. We hope many people will come out for an enjoyable evening.

Thedford Fire & Rescue called to head-on crash

Thedford Fire & Rescue was called to a two-vehicle head-on crash, Sunday, July 1, north of Thedford. The accident occurred at approximately 10:30 a.m. when a southbound Ford Fusion collided with a northbound motor home.

Loper football player Preston Hall, 20, was trapped in the car, and one person was trapped in the motor home.

Valentine Fire & Rescue assisted at the scene.

One person was air lifted from the crash site and one person was transported to Great Plains Regional Health.

Hall, a junior at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and a tight end for the Lopers, was listed in critical but stable condition at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

The cause of the accident is unknown.

A call to the Cherry County attorney for more information on the accident was not returned.

Watch Upcoming Issues For Information On All The Thomas County Fair Events!

California Man Killed In Arthur County Plain Crash

The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating the cause of a plane crash that occurred Friday, June 28 in Arthur County.

Nick Hanson, 28, from California, but working in Alliance, died in the crash

between 11:30 a.m. and noon MDT approximately three miles southeast of Arthur.

Last Pass Aviation of Alliance owned the Champion single-engine, fixed-wing plane.

The plane was traveling

from Iowa and had refueled in Thedford.

Arthur County Fire & Rescue and the Arthur County Sheriff worked the crash scene.

Witnesses said the plane appeared to stall out before crashing nose-first.

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News Briefs

Thedford Art Gallery will feature open show art entries the entire month of July, including the Thomas County Fair which ends Sunday, July 29.

The Thedford Art Guild worked with the Art and Gift Gallery in North Platte and brought entires from the Nebraskaland Day show. Be sure to stop in at the Gallery.