



This drawing shows how the expansion of the North Dakota Heritage Center will change the look of the state museum. Construction has begun and will be completed in time for the celebration of North Dakota's 125th anniversary of statehood in 2014.

40 Years (and More) of Educating, Experiencing and Expanding: THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NORTH DAKOTA

By Kylie Blanchard, Clearwater Communications

North Dakota boasts a long and varied history, and almost every community has a story to tell or a site to visit related to the state's rich past. But ensuring this history is preserved for visitors and future generations is a monumental task. Over the past 40 years, the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) has played an instrumental role in shaping the collective foresight, dedication and appreciation of many individuals and agencies dedicated to the state's history.

"Keeping up with North Dakota history allows us to know who we are," says Merl Paaverud, director of the SHSND.

Beginning in 1889 as the Ladies' Historical Society of Bismarck and North Dakota, the Society incorporated as the North Dakota Historical Society in 1895. Since 1903, when it was reorganized as the SHSND, it has evolved into a state agency with a 12-member board and 62 professional staff members focused on identifying, preserving, interpreting and promoting North Dakota history.

Educating

Education has played a key role in the organization's efforts to preserve the state's history. "We want to be able to provide our children and visitors with information about North Dakota," says Paaverud.

For a century, North Dakota history has been included in school curricula across the state. "There are a number of publications dating back to 1910 that were used in North Dakota schools," notes Paaverud. These materials have continuously evolved and the North Dakota Studies Project,

which began in 2005 in partnership with the North Dakota Center for Distance Education in Fargo, published the first fourth grade curriculum guides and the secondary North Dakota Studies text book in 2006.

Educational efforts also began to move outside of the classroom as the SHSND outreach program began in 1975 to provide technical assistance throughout the state in creating historical exhibits and programming. "We began offering our professional staff to share their expertise about how to preserve artifacts and interpret their history," says Paaverud.

This outreach encourages communities to explore their historical ties and also helps the SHSND expand its knowledge. "We learn a little more about local history," he says. "Our hope is we can keep these places going and keep history where it happened."

Digging into the state's beginnings, the SHSND also began a partnership with the North Dakota Geological Survey in 1991. "They provide their outstanding expertise in geology and paleontology," says Paaverud.

This partnership, along with similar affiliations with the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, and the U.S. Forest Service also provide additional means of understanding and interpreting the state's history. "There are so many layers of information we can now provide people," Paaverud says.



Merl Paaverud

Experiencing

Fifty-five state historic sites are owned, maintained and preserved by the SHSND, allowing visitors and residents to experience the state's history up close. "We're pretty well covered around the state," says Paaverud. "These sites have helped people to realize our history is important."

Over the last two decades, many improvements have been made to these sites including the Pembina State Museum, 1996; Fort Buford, 2002; Fort Clark, 2003; Former Governors' Mansion, 2004; State Archives addition, 2005; Chateau de Mores, 2006; Fort Abercrombie, 2007; and Double Ditch Indian Village, 2009. Paaverud says this effort has helped bring more people to the sites. "We really appeal to families because these are places everyone can visit and enjoy together."

The Cultural Heritage Grant Program, which began in 2003, has also provided another means of experiencing history on a local level. "One of the things local history groups were asking for was a grant program so they could do some things they can't afford on a local level," he says. The one-to-one matching grant program has since awarded over 200 grants and scholarships totaling \$1,279,500. "This program was such a wonderful thing to have happen," says Paaverud. "It's been very successful and very popular."

The Passport to North Dakota History program, beginning in 2008, and History on Call program, beginning in 2009, have also worked to place historical knowledge in the hands of visitors and residents.

The Passport to North Dakota History, created with the support of the SHSND Foundation and in partnership with Tesoro and the U.S. Forest Service, provides a travelers guide to the state's historic sites, parks and grasslands. The History on Call program, also in partnership with the SHSND Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service, provides 24-hour access to historic sites and attractions through streaming video and short narratives over the phone. "We're trying different levels of marketing to reach everyone from students to visitors," says Paaverud.

The SHSND has also created publications to enhance its informational offerings. In the last 40 years, the SHSND

has published or helped publish 46 books. In addition, *North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains*, the Society's quarterly publication sharing the history and culture of the state, has been published since 1906, and *Plains Talk*, the Society's quarterly newsletter, has been published since 1963.

Expanding

Paaverud says the SHSND is experiencing exciting growth with the upcoming expansion of the North Dakota Heritage Center. The initial planning for the current Heritage Center facility began during the 1963 legislative session with the establishment of the North Dakota State Heritage Planning Commission. In 1967, the Heritage Foundation was established as a nonprofit organization to help fund and support the project and, in 1972, the Bicentennial Commission

adopted the Heritage Center as an official project. In 1973, \$500,000 was appropriated by the legislature for construction of the Heritage Center and the current facility was completed in 1981.

"Through the diligence of past governors and state leaders, and the collective idea and belief that we should have a heritage center, this facility was built," says Paaverud. "I honor those folks because they set it up for future expansion."

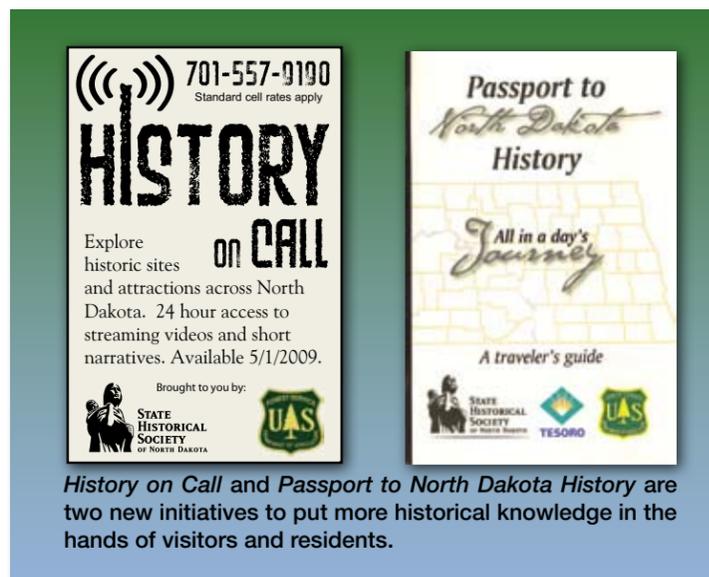
Groundbreaking for the Heritage Center Expansion

Project was held November 23 and construction is underway. The project's completion is slated for 2014, the 125th anniversary of North Dakota's statehood. "You can only imagine how exciting this timeline is," Paaverud notes.

The success of the SHSND in bringing the state's history to life is due in part to many people and partners, says Paaverud. "When people believe in what you are doing and believe in their history, positive things happen."

And Paaverud notes the work of the SHSND will continue well into the future. "Our work goes on and it never ends, because history is made every day."

The State Historical Society of North Dakota preserves and interprets treasures past and present, and works to share them with residents and visitors through a variety of services. For more information about the state's history agency and its programs, call 701-328-2666 or visit www.history.nd.gov.



History on Call and Passport to North Dakota History are two new initiatives to put more historical knowledge in the hands of visitors and residents.