Administration Report

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Having the public back in the Cultural Heritage Center has been good, especially after being closed for two years. We moved out in April/May time frame of 2023, moved the staff back in the CHC in October of 2024, and brought the archival and artifacts back home this April-June. The Archival staff have been super at planning ahead and making plans to have the public back in the new research room. So, our three-step process of first, renovating the current CHC, second adding on to the current CHC, and lastly designing, constructing, and installing new museum exhibits is 2/3rds complete. From the beginning, our intent was to have the museum completed by July 4th, 2026. It is now looking more and more likely that will not be completely done until later in 2026. We do plan on having our “Grit and Glory” exhibit open to the public in June of next year. That exhibit’s theme comports with America 250 and we are striving to keep that aspect moving while the museum’s main galleries open a few months later.

I attended an America 250 Convening of States and Territories in Washington, D.C. in July. The national activities are worth reviewing and can be found on their web site America250.org. Fifty six states and territories are also actively planning and it was interesting to see how the various approaches to 2026. Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts are putting a great deal of effort into this and have already done a wide variety of activities, re-enactments, and public events. As one moves further west, less and less has happened but that doesn’t mean westerns states won’t be doing as much by the end of next year. We kicked off America 250 at the state fair with an event where the Governor joined school kids signing copies of the Declaration of Independence. A few days later at the fair, a South Dakota brewer, Platte River Brewery in Geddes, show cased its, “Dakota Liberty,” beer under a merchandising agreement with the Foundation. We hope more brewers will join that effort making that recipe. The Legislature plans to mark the occasion with a Thomas Jefferson re-enactor both on the floor of a joint session on 18 January as well as having him at the Legislative Reception at the CHC later that afternoon and evening. Lots more is coming and the state’s commission now has over 50 partners all planning activities in their communities. The state’s activities can be found at Americas250th.sd.gov.

Conference season is upon us. I and several members of the society staff will be traveling a great deal in September and October to Museum and Archival conferences, the SD Humanities council book festival in Spearfish, the Northern Great Plains History Conference in Mankato, and the West River History Conference near Deadwood. It’s part of our effort to share and promote the state’s history.