

Director's Update
12 December Trustee meeting

Ben Jones
State Historian and Director

McGough with Split Rock Studios support, began the general construction in the museum space on Monday, November 3rd. They are, in effect, building the shell into which the exhibits will go. Split Rock arrived on Nov 12th and are inspecting the area and the exhibits from the former museum, such as the sod house and “Kitty” the stagecoach to confirm aspects of the exhibit design. McGough is officing in the upstairs conference room while this work is ongoing and coming and going from the service entrance doors by the loading dock in order to avoid being the public lobby.

The American Indian advisors, who include Trustee Francis Whitebird, are meeting to review the entire text that will accompany each of the exhibits and artifacts in the museum design. The curators and I have reviewed all the text, some three hundred pages. Once the American Indian advisors comment and approve this can go to Split Rock for their incorporation in the exhibit creation.

Mark your calendars for 1 July. Split Rock, ISG, McGough, and the State have agreed that we will have museum exhibit areas A, B, and the temporary gallery *open to the public on about 1 July 2026*. That will give the Semiquincentennial visitor something to see as part of the nation's celebrations. The temporary gallery work is an exhibit called, “Grit and Glory,” highlighting key events in state history and relating them to the nation's founding. Area A is the welcome gallery and area B is the “What is History” gallery. The remainder will be under construction and completed by the end of 2026.

As we've shared in the past, planning is underway for our history conference June 1-3, 2026. The theme is Grit and Glory: a South Dakota Perspective at America's 250th. A gift has been secured for a \$1000 award to the History teacher of the Year from the members of the Board of Education Standards. I hope you can come as I think it will be a fantastic conference.

Chelle included some of the impact of Archives month activities. It was a great opportunity for us to showcase the improved space for researchers and the state's investment in growing the collection.

We see a future partnership and research opportunities coming with two different initiatives on our public university campuses. First is the stated goal of SDSU to become an R1 university. This goal has prompted them to put into place a graduate degree in social sciences and aspects of that will focus on rural studies. The second one is the new Center for Civic engagement at BHSU. It was recently awarded an America 250 grant of \$2.5 million over three years to create instructional materials

about the nation's founding for K-12 teachers. I've discussed with leaders on both campuses what we do and hope to support in ways that make sense.

The America 250 events are coming into focus. There will be much more than the events at Rushmore on July 3rd. We are planning to have a state and support local efforts for a nationwide simultaneous reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8th, we are seeing interest in participating in a nationwide potluck on Sunday, July 5th, and are working with the Legislature to have a Thomas Jefferson re-enactor come on January 15th and join our reception at 4 p. m. Other things such as the planting of a Liberty Tree and the creating time capsules both state and local ones, are also under discussion. We continue to speak to local groups to spread the word. David and I have presented to groups in Pierre, Watertown, Aberdeen, Sioux Falls, West River History Conference, and online. Our list of partners is approaching 90. We have recently added a merchandising agreement with a Sioux Falls flag and banner retailer as well so our South Dakota America 250 flag will be available alongside the national America 250 flag.

As always, I'm very proud of the staff and their professionalism in collecting, preserving, publishing, and promoting our state's history. Thank you for all your work to make so much of this happen.