Case Library plays crucial role in Black Hills area

Bobbi Sago, the Special Collections Librarian, cultivates a stimulating research environment where scholars can explore the various collections. Whenever I am in the Case Library I always find myself looking at the old pictures and newspapers—and I am immediately transported back in time.

It truly is a place where you can pause and reflect upon history. I also provide our freshman students with tours of the library. One of the stops on these tours is the Case Library. They always seem very impressed when I take them into the reading room for a quick presentation by Bobbi. They leave the Case Library with the knowledge that there is an outstanding collection where they can pursue local history projects. In addition, numerous university classes such as Black Hills History, South Dakota History, and Historiography incorporate research using the Case Library as a part of their coursework. This is very beneficial for our students who get hands on experience using the Case Library’s unique collections.

Also, let us not forget about our community and out of town researchers who flock to the Case Library to explore the extensive collection. I am proud to have the Case Library as a part of the E.Y. Berry Library and I am also proud of Bobbi who helps researchers of all types navigate the collection.

Highlighted Resource: Lawrence County tax records

Lawrence County Tax Records – The Case Library holds Lawrence County Tax records. Holdings include: Ledgers, from 1880 through 1974; Spearfish Assessment books from 1914 through 1955; numerous tax sale certificate books, and some receipt books. This includes deed books and receipt books. There are a number of uses for County Tax records. They include: charting ownership of a property, establishing when historic buildings were constructed, and plotting the development of an area.

Several authors have used the records during their research in recent publications. They include Lilah Morton Pengra for her book, Sarah Campbell: The first white woman in the Black Hills was African American, and David Wolff in his book, Seth Bullock: Black Hills Lawman.
Case Library updates

Roberta Sago, Special Collections Librarian

2011 was busy in Case Library. Two hundred and eighty two students, faculty, and off campus researchers utilized Case Library resources.

Approximately 1,000 books, manuscript collections, and photographs were used. In 2010 we added more than two hundred books to the collection both by purchase and donations. Manuscript materials received include additions were made to the Lesta Turchen Papers, additions to the Bob Lee Papers, and a new collection the Joe Sanders papers. Student workers continue to scan images and inventory collections. During National Library week, Case Library hosted an Open House. Attendance was modest.

The Case Library Facebook page was created in March of 2011. So far we have 36 followers and growing. Facebook posts include many images from the Case Library and University Archives collections, news, and links to great research sites.

Several Case Library Patrons were working on reunion presentation using University Archives materials. The first reunion was the Lab School reunion in conjunction with the Spearfish All School Reunion weekend in June. Their committee used Archives photos for a slide show. The debate club had a reunion during swarm week and their coordinator referred to the student newspaper for this.

The big project was the 90th Anniversary reunion of Props and Liners. Bobbi worked with the alumni representative to put together a slide show retrospective of the student organization. The 30 minute slide show was a big hit at the reunion. Case Library staff created a display of archive material to take to the reception and there is a current Props and Liners exhibit in the display area near the coffee shop in the E.Y. Berry Library.

At the West River History Conference, Bobbi gave a presentation titled “Demystifying the Case Library” explaining the kinds of resources available for researchers.

Local Happenings:

South Dakota State Railroad Museum 2011 Trees and Trains Extravaganza – for dates and times call 605-574-2222. There is a $5 admission fee for adults, children under 12 years old get in free.


Rose Hill Cemetery Tour – Local group made history come alive with a tour of Rose Hill Cemetery. Saturday, Sept. 24th actors portrayed 11 people from Spearfish history in a walking tour of Rose Hill Cemetery. Photographs of the event are available at: http://bit.ly/rvZa0c


Rapid City Public Library seeks memories of the 1972 Rapid City/Black Hills Flood to commemorate the 40th anniversary, June 2012. To contribute memories or photos to the online community archives go to: http://bit.ly/tqlc7v


West River History Conference Call for Papers – The theme for the 2012 conference is “Western Legends Remembered” send your proposal to wrc@shebbyleetours.com. Conference dates to be announced.
The records donated by the Wharf Mining Company deal primarily with the Bald Mountain Mining Company (BMMC), which was organized in 1928 and operated intermittently in the Bald Mountain/Terry Peak areas until 1959. While the company was a late arrival in terms of Black Hills mining history, the ground it worked had been prospected and developed since 1877. In that year, A.J. Smith located the claims that eventually became part of the Bald Mountain Mining Company. The first actual mining company to precede the BMMC was the Portland Mining Co., organized in 1880, but its production was limited because of difficulties in treating the area’s refractory gold ore. In 1911 the Portland Company purchased the American Eagle Mining Co., including its cyanide mill, and the property was reorganized as the Trojan Mining Co. From that time until 1923, the Trojan company produced about 300,000 ounces of gold. Rising costs caused this company to close, and the property underwent another reorganization, this time as the Bald Mountain Mining Co. The new entity did some exploration, but actual production did not begin until 1933 when the government raised the price of gold to $35 an ounce. The increase allowed the company to do well, but only for a time. With the price of gold fixed at $35 an ounce through the 1950s, profits disappeared and the operation closed. The Wharf took control of the property in the 1980s when the federal government stopped regulating the price of gold, and mining again became profitable.

The Wharf Records collection consists of 10.5 cubic feet of records and more than 1,000 mining maps and blueprints. Materials are dated from 1893-1960 and include: Balance Sheets 1949-1954; Journal dated 1934-1958, recording ore mined, weight, dry, bullion, percent of water, percent of bullion; Invoices 1956-1958, detailing purchase Records, Stock Records of Equipment, List of and location of Equipment on property, Record of Supplies Purchased from the Company by the miners; Information about other mining companies; BMMC Investigations into other types of ore; Mill performance data; Surveyor’s Log; Continued on next page

Case Library Congratulates Watson Parker

Case Library congratulates Watson Parker who was named to the South Dakota Hall of Fame. Parker, well known Black Hills and Western Historian, is a long time Friend of Case Library. In 2004 he donated the Troy L. and Watson Parker collection to Case Library. This collection consists of 41 linear feet of research materials and an extensive collection of books from his library. To read more about Watson’s induction into the South Dakota Hall of Fame, go to the following website: 
http://bit.ly/tRzrC1

If you would like to receive the newsletter electronically, please send us an email to Roberta.Sago@BHSU.edu. Please put “Black Hills Historian” in the subject line. We won’t give or sell your address. We will just send you the twice a year newsletter and announcements of Case Library events.
Highlighted Collection
Continued from previous page

General Assay Book; Test Notes; Oil Lands and Leases 1897-1920; Uranium, Uranium Mining 1953-1955, Uranium Legislation 1950-1955, Uranium Analysis 1953-1955; Advertising Pamphlets and catalogs; Information on and correspondence concerning new equipment 1934-1958; Personnel Records; Order book; Wage scale; Abstracts of Title; Shipment Statements; Purchase Orders; C.E. Dawson Correspondence, 1937-1948; Traverse Sheets; and Calculation Sheets.

Wharf Resources, Inc. donated these records in 1987. You can search the inventory of the maps online at http://bit.ly/tmOyDp. In addition to the materials donated in 1987, The City of Deadwood Archives donated 28 boxes of materials and nine ledgers to enhance the Wharf / Bald Mountain Mining Records collection. These documents cover the company history from the 1930s to the 1950s.

University Archives plays “role” in Props and Liners reunion

On September 10th, 2011, Props and Liners, the theater student organization held their 90th Anniversary Reunion. BHSU theater graduate Joe Saracco worked with Bobbi Sago to create a 30 minute slide show showcasing images from Props and Liners history. The presentation was shown during the cocktail hour and dinner given at Panburn Hall. The Archives also provided a small display of yearbooks, programs, and historic posters as well as three posters of historic photographs created by Michelle Tracy in Marketing and Communication. Props and Liners is the oldest continually active student organization. It was established in 1921 by Lavina Jones Humbert, instructor of expressions. One of the aims of the organization was to take trips to major cities to see live theater. Students raised money for the trips by selling concessions at plays and providing lighting for homecoming and other events. More recently the students fund their participation in the Kennedy Center College Theater Festival held at various locations year to year. Lavina Humbert was a beloved instructor who taught at BH from 1919 – 1957. The dormitory, Humbert Hall is named for her.

There is currently an exhibit of Props and Liners photos and ephemera in the E.Y. Berry Library in the display cases near the coffee shop.
Two students receive Friends of Case Library Scholarships

Each year the Friends of Case Library fund two scholarships for freshman History majors. This year’s winners were Elizabeth Leonhardt from Mansfield, S.D., and Brooke Steckleberg of Chamberlain, S.D. All campus scholarship winners were acknowledged at a reception on October 19th.

Friends of Case Library Freshman Scholarship winner works in Case Library

Elizabeth Leonhardt, graduate of Northwestern High School in Mellette, S.D., is the recipient of one of the Friends of Case Library Scholarships. She grew up on a family farm in Mansfield, S.D. Elizabeth is a freshman with a double major in History and English and a minor in Library Science. Her interest in History began in the sixth grade when she had a very good history teacher. Historical fiction such as the Little House on the Prairie series and the Royal Diaries series furthered her interest. She likes history because there is “so much cool stuff that happened and you can find bits of it wherever you go”. Though she doesn’t have a particular favorite historical period, she feels her knowledge of the Pioneer period is the strongest.

She selected Black Hills State University for several reasons including: BHSU has a Library Science program, she has family in the area, and she likes the Black Hills. Her favorite class this semester is her Speech Class and she is a member of the Speech and Debate team. In her free time she enjoys reading, listening to music, watching movies, and playing with little kids and cats. Elizabeth is a student worker in the Case Library. One day she would like to work in the National Archives or the Library of Congress.

How to donate to the scholarship

Donations to the Friends of Case Library Scholarship can be sent to:
University Advancement
Black Hills State University
1200 University, Unit 9506
Spearfish, SD  57799-9506

Please make checks payable to the BHSU Foundation. Let them know that the gift is for the Friends of Case Library Scholarship. Or you can donate online at: http://www.BHSU.edu/Donate

How to apply for the scholarship

To apply for scholarships students can go to the online application form: http://www.BHSU.edu/Scholarships

Obituary: Donor Joseph R. Douda

Joseph R. Douda, an expert on Black Hills railroad history, of Black Hills history in general, and a Friend of Case Library, passed away this summer at the age of 77. Joe lived in Westmont, Ill, and for much of his life worked for Fisher Body Company in Willow Springs, Illinois. But Joe’s passion was railroading, and especially the Burlington operations in the Black Hills. For nearly three decades he made annual pilgrimages to the Hills to trace old roadbeds, watch trains on the Burlington Highline, and do research. In between his trips west, Joe visited archives and museums throughout the country, gathering more railroad information. Unfortunately, he never finished his planned book on Black Hills railroads, but prior to his death, Joe donated some of his research material to the Case Library, including maps and the Deadwood station logs.

Joe was preceded in death by his wife Joanne, and is survived by two daughters, Kathy and Diane, and two grandchildren. Joe’s passing is a loss not only to his family, but to all his friends who shared his love of Black Hills railroading.

Help us save our history

These links are to the Society of American Archivists pamphlets on donating your personal papers or business records to an archive. Please consider donating your historical photographs, scrapbooks, diaries, personal and family papers, and business or organizational records relating to the history of the Black Hills to the Case Library (or another favored archives or museum).

http://bit.ly/w0FrMZ
They call it Johnson Siding: A History of a Black Hills Sawmill

About the author
The author is Erik Iverson, an Adjunct Instructor of History for Black Hills State University at University Center Rapid City. The article is an abstract from a larger piece that Erik wrote while enrolled in the Mountains of History (MOH) program supported by a Teaching American History grant from the U.S. Department of Education. MOH was a collaboration of Black Hills State University, TIE of Rapid City, Mt. Rushmore National Memorial, Crazy Horse Memorial, and the Chiesman Foundation of Rapid City. The full paper may be accessed through the TIE web site: http://moh.tie.net/content/docs/JohnsonSiding.pdf

Ten miles west of Rapid City, state highway 44 bisects a small community known as Johnson Siding. Few who travel this route, tourists and locals alike, know the origin or meaning of “Johnson Siding.” But among the modern structures sits a building that put Johnson Siding on the map. It stands as a monument to four generations of Johnsons and the thriving sawmill they built at that location.

Archives Month Presentation
In celebration of South Dakota Archive Month, the Case Library at Black Hills State University hosted the presentation Beyond Mount Rushmore: Three Other Black Hills Faces Thursday, Oct. 27 at 7:30 p.m. in the David B. Miller Student Union, Jacket Legacy Room. Approximately 40 people attended the presentation.

Mary A. Kopco, director of Adams Museum, the Historic Adams House and the Homestake Adams Research and Cultural Center in Deadwood, discussed the history of Mount Rushmore.

According to Kopco, in 1923 Doane Robinson, the superintendent of the South Dakota State Historical Society, pitched a colossal idea to his United States senator, Peter Norbeck. Robinson proposed the carving of a patriotic monument out of one of the Black Hills’ granite rock formations. With Senator Norbeck on board, Robinson then approached famous sculptor Gutzon Borglum who also enthusiastically embraced the idea. By 1925, Borglum and four hundred workers had begun carving out the faces of four American presidents on a granite mountain named for nineteenth-century attorney Charles E. Rushmore. Completed in 1941, Mount Rushmore continues to attract millions of visitors to the Black Hills each year.

While the granite busts of Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln may be South Dakota’s most identifiable faces, the region’s history is replete with the stories of the many people who carved out lives here. Kopco will talk about three remarkable people whose stories deserve to be told.

Kopco earned her M.A. in history from James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, and has been employed in the museum field for over 25 years. She was recognized with three Emmy certificates for providing historical research for the HBO® series Deadwood. This past October, she received the prestigious Mountain-Plains Museums Association President’s Award. Kopco’s book The Adams House Revealed was published in 2006. Most recently she edited and wrote an introduction for the South Dakota Historical Society Press anthology Beyond Mount Rushmore: Other Black Hills Faces.

The John Johnson family, which included nine children, immigrated to the United States from Sweden in the later years of the 1880s, with the hopes of finding a homestead and starting a sawmill. After a search, John settled along Rapid Creek. It met the criteria he needed: water for a steam engine, land for grazing, and plenty of timber. In January of 1892, the elder Johnson filed for a land patent of 156 acres. With the land located, John and his son Elmer promptly built a one-room, dirt-floored cabin with enough room to house two men and a cook stove. They followed this with a sawmill, a home for the family, and they began the business of felling trees, one-by-one.

Their location proved fortuitous. Four months before John filed for his land patent, a railroad began construction up Rapid Creek. Financial difficulties stalled it, but in 1906 Charles D. Crouch took the line over and as he built by Johnson’s sawmill, he bought ties and timbers. When the railroad was completed, Rapid City was within easy reach, doubling the sawmill’s market. The Crouch Line stopped twice a day at Johnson mill, loading lumber and unloading supplies. It wasn’t long before people changed the informal name of the area from “Johnson Mill” to “Johnson Siding”.

With the arrival of the Crouch Line, the family business expanded. They took on hired hands, and built a bunkhouse for unmarried men to live. In addition to providing free room and board, the Johnsons paid between $1.50 and $3.00 per day. Elmer’s brother, Carl, cooked for the men. Another big break happened for the mill in 1911 when the Dakota Power Company decided to build a flume down Rapid Creek to a powerhouse at Big Bend. The Johnson mill provided the 2x6 inch planks, and the flume and powerhouse opened in 1912, providing power to the 5,500 residents of Rapid City.

Continued on next page
In 1918, Elmer decided to close the mill and move to a new location with more suitable trees to harvest. The family kept the original homestead to ranch and farm while the construction of a new mill was completed. Elmer acquired land for the new sawmill near the Bogus Jim Creek, two miles northwest of their original location. Of the original nine children who emigrated from Sweden only Elmer and Carl remained in the Black Hills. Elmer and his hired men spent the next two years building the new mill.

Although trucks and other modern machines were beginning to be used by larger sawmills, the Johnson mill continued to mill as it always had, using horses and bulls. Since the family still had the original homestead at Johnson Siding, they continued to use the Crouch Line to market their lumber. In addition to the Rapid City customers, a new and ultimately more lucrative buyer was found in A.C. Kingsbury Lumber Co., which placed the first of many large orders in 1924. The twenties, however, proved to be the financial high point for the Johnson mill.

When the Great Depression brought high unemployment and little construction, the Johnson mill could not survive. Elmer consequently quit milling to concentrate on farming and ranching with his three boys, moving to a location near the original homestead. Then with the return of prosperity, the three sons built another sawmill. When it opened at the new location, the Johnson mill operated with trucks and loaders in place of the horses and hired men. The three boys tried to run the mill themselves, but it was not to be. Elmer’s first son Bud, who had come back from World War II with breathing problems, soon found sawmill work too strenuous, and he quit. Later he started the “Johnson Siding General Store” and became a storekeeper. Elmer’s second son, Milton, and third son, Fred, kept up the best they could until Fred became crippled by arthritis. From then on Milton ran the mill, occasionally hiring help, with Fred running the ranching portion of the business. Neither Bud nor Fred ever married or had any children. Milton and his wife Elin had one child, a son named Paul.

Paul would grow up learning the business, but after fighting in Vietnam, he worked as an auto mechanic in Rapid City. He would still help in the mill when he could, but as Milton aged, Paul began doing more and more. But the lumber industry in the Black Hills had changed. Larger lumber corporations had replaced the small, independent sawmills. Pope and Talbot in Spearfish and Continental Lumber Company in Hill City were winning most of the bids to harvest trees. In Paul Johnson’s words, “These companies could log out an area in one week where it would take me one year. They made it hard for the little guy to compete. Ultimately I couldn’t get logs anymore because they could get the job done quicker and cheaper than I could.” Although the mill is capable of operating as it once did, it has not produced lumber to sell in over ten years. Nevertheless, the area ten miles west of Rapid City will always be known as “Johnson Siding”.

Books recently added to the Leland D. Case Library Collection:

Eighteenth annual West River History Conference papers Relative riches, family stories from the region and beyond, Rapid City, West River History Conference, 2010


McDermott, John D., RED CLOUD’S WAR: THE BOZEMAN TRAIL, 1866-1868, Norman Oklahoma, Arthur Clark Co., 2010

Pomeroy, Earl, IN SEARCH OF THE GOLDEN WEST: THE TOURIST IN WESTERN AMERICA, (introduction by William Deverell) Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2010


South Dakota Historical Society Press publication chosen for 2012 One Book South Dakota


For information on the South Dakota Humanities Council go to http://www.sdhumanities.org.
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Please return to:
Dr. David Wolff, Friends of Case Library
Black Hills State University
1200 University St., Unit 9059
Spearfish, SD 57799

From the Archives

Students sledding at Terry Peak in 1971.