

Country school is new display

Written by gothenburgtimes
Friday, 26 April 2013 14:36 -



Gothenburg Historical Museum opens next week

Lift-up desks, roll-down maps, slates with chalk and cursive writing books.

Those things may conjure up past education memories but what makes a new exhibit at the Gothenburg Historical Museum unique is that it focuses on country schools.

Museum board member Jane Sheets attended a country school outside of Gothenburg for a couple of years.

“The exhibit, and seeing old country school photos, brings back such memories,” Sheets said, remembering an eighth-grade graduation in Lexington for all Dawson County rural school children.

Some folks may remember learning to read with Dick and Jane books, that are on display, as are numerous photos of country school teachers and students.

Long-time country and town teacher Elsie Cyriacks donated a whole album of pictures of students she taught.

A photo of first U.S. President George Washington and an attendance register from 1909 came from District #47 (Valley School) which was located a few miles east of town on the old highway.

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In the 1930s, in the valley around Gothenburg, fellow board member Dick Larson said about every other country section had a rural school.

“They were no more than a mile apart so kids could walk or ride a horse,” Larson said.



Mary Theasmeyer, another board member, said the early one-room schoolhouses had outhouses and were heated by wood or coal stoves.

Both Theasmeyer and Sheets remember feeling scared when they left rural school to continue their educations in town with many more students.

“I was afraid I wasn’t going to find the right classroom and how to figure out my locker and where to put my books,” Sheets said.

Theasmeyer, who attended grade school outside of Beatrice, transitioned from country school to a Catholic school where she said the nuns were strict.

“Our dresses had to touch the floor when they made us kneel and if they didn’t, we were sent home,” she said.

Another exhibit, new to the public this year, is about the whooping crane “Old Pete” that lived near the Platte River south of town on the Gothenburg Refuge as it was called in 1935, according to local biologist Mark Peyton.

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