

Carthage celebrates opening of museum

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Mitchell Daily Republic

Monday July 14, 2003

CARTHAGE - Speakers extolled the virtues of small town and rural America during the dedication of Carthage's new museum Saturday afternoon, saying that childhood memories draw many adults back to their old hometowns in South Dakota.

The Heartland Historical Society of Huron hosted the ceremony where the building was named the Campbell Original Straw Bale Built Museum, for Bill Campbell, of Henderson, Nev., a major donor to the building's construction.

About 150 people listened to Tom Kilian, of Sioux Falls, a South Dakota and Great Plains historian, speak about the losses some individuals experience



Contestants had their fill of chocolate-crème pie Saturday during a pie-eating contest held after the dedication of the Campbell Straw Bale Built Museum in Carthage.

when they leave their rural birthplaces for cities or suburbs.

"We remember the smell of the newly-mowed hayfield," Kilian said. "We remember the sound of the meadowlark. ... There are many things you can't buy that make up our memories of home."

Kilian's comments were echoed by Campbell, 64, a retired executive who grew up in Carthage and graduated from the town's high school in 1957. Campbell spoke about his fond boyhood memories of the Carthage High School Eagles sports teams, the town's Little America Theatre, Kaiser Frazer automobiles and trains that were run by the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad.

When Campbell was a child, Carthage's population - presently 187 - totaled about 350. His father was employed as a state highway worker and his

mother waited on tables at Brisch's Café.

"People here cared for each other," Campbell said. "People were generous to a fault, and I believe that what you have learned first, you have learned the best. The education I received in Carthage gave me a great start in life."

Campbell said the museum would preserve some of his memories of Carthage and he thought it was his responsibility to help the custodians of the town's history.

Visitors to the weekend festival saw demonstrations of wool spinning, quilting, soap making and wheat weaving. A square dance was held Saturday night at the new museum on the corner of East Main and Frederick streets.

Area residents built the museum walls from straw bales framed with wood recycled from old Carthage buildings. To fund the project, donors purchase the straw bales used to build the walls. The wire-bound straw bales were stacked like bricks, covered with woven wire and coated with stucco. Barbara Hurne, of Carthage, secretary of the Carthage Museum and Historical Society, said volunteers have put about 33,000 hours of work into constructing the 6,384-square-foot building at a cost of about \$70,000 worth of material.

Workers started framing the walls during the summer of 2002 and started applying stucco to the outside walls on October 2002. The first coat of stucco required six tons of concrete applied by 15 workers. The outside walls still require two additional coats of stucco, but Hurne said those coatings will require less concrete.

The museum supporters are also gathering additional donations to finish applying stucco to the building's interior walls and install interior electrical wiring. According to Hurne, the museum board doesn't want to schedule any work until they have all of the money needed for each stage of construction.

"The museum is debt-free, and we're going to stay

debt-free,” Hurne said. “That’s our goal.”

Hurne said festivals such as last weekend’s are part of the museum’s mission. Its supporters want to preserve some of the traditions of small towns and rural America along with preserving some historical artifacts.

“We’re hoping to have something of this order twice a year - festivals presenting a living history about the people and traditions of the rural Great Plains,” Hurne said.

Ivan Loesch, of Huron, president of the Heartland Historical Society, said the museum was more than a storehouse of the past. According to Loesch, the museum is a symbol of Carthage’s future, bringing sons, daughters and other relatives back to the town as tourists to revisit their families’ roots.

“It’s important, because history is worth working for, it’s worth keeping and it’s worth handing down to our children,” Loesch said.