



Celebrating Christmas at Austin-Whittemore

Nestled in downtown Vermillion is a beautiful example of a historical South Dakota home, the Austin-Whittemore House.

Originally built in 1882, the home was a showpiece of Vermillion from the day it was designed, and continues to be a talking point for the community as the home of the Clay County Historical Society.

Each season throughout the year, the board members, staff and volunteers of the Austin-Whittemore House take great strides to decorate and show off the history of the community through seasonal decorations and tours. This upcoming Christmas season will be no different, says executive director Wess Pravecek.

However, she said to understand why they make the effort, you have to first understand the history of the home.

A Look Back At Austin-Whittemore

"The house was built in 1882 by Horace Austin and his wife, Rachel," she said. "He came to Dakota Territory in 1860 to be the surveyor for the opening of the homestead land in Clay County. He was having a real pity party that he wrote about in his diary about not finding the love of his life. Then Rachel Ross came to town to be a teacher at the first school in Dakota Territory. They married and through the years he had a pretty successful career, in that time he was also buying land up above the hill.

"After the flood, their home was not destroyed down the hill but they thought it would be a good time to move up because the town was moving up the hill then."

Pravecek said the Austin's were not blessed with biological children of their own, however they did adopt their daughter Helen (Pansy) and together the family lived and grew in the home that was at the center of the community.

"Even when the home was built it was very large for its time," Pravecek said. "Then



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