Joyce Scherr lays groundwork for national designation for hall

By Zachary Vietz

Joyce Scherr has lived on a Zeeland farm since 1979, a little ways outside of town. While she was not born here, Scherr has made it her home and looks after it as if it were her hometown.

So, when the Zeeland Hall was in need of repairs, she got things in motion.

“There was a hole in the roof they had to put plastic over,” Scherr said.

Water would leak through when it rained, which created obvious problems.

People around town agreed it was time to set about repairing the hall. After Joyce talked with her cousin, she was led to Lorna Meidinger, an architectural historian at the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

From Meidinger, Scherr learned more about the National Register of Historic Places, and about Dr. Tom Isern with North Dakota State University (NDSU). Among many other things, Dr. Isern works with small towns and other communities to help get their buildings registered.

The first step was to get estimates for repairing the hall and fill out the required paperwork to get it listed.

With the application task, Joyce noted, having Dr. Isern was a blessing. His own expertise, along with that of his graduate assistants, Clarence Herz and Amanda Biles, and colleague Heather Fischer, an architecture and landscape architect at NDSU, made the process less painful for those in Zeeland.

According to Scherr, Dr. Isern and his team “just started rolling with it.”

The Zeeland Centennial Committee, of which Scherr is a part, was also a big influence concerning the project. They agreed to match half the funds for the grant from the State Historical Society. The committee had some funds from the centennial event they held onto just for projects like this in Zeeland.

After all the hard work from Dr. Isern’s team, the building was successfully approved at the state level and went on to be listed on the National Register of Places.

Scherr was excited. It is “really the only building in Zeeland where you can have any kind of large function,” she said.

It is important to the community, and its upkeep is needed, she noted.

After the listing, the centennial committee, plus community volunteers, came together to put on an event to celebrate.

“Thank God for all the volunteers,” said Scherr. “All the food, all the expenses, people donated.”

Zeeland Oil donated roughly 100 pounds of Frank Meier’s sausage, many people left anonymous donations and people showed up to help set up chairs, tables and work in the kitchen. Scherr said she was “so happy” the event had a great turnout and that so many people helped.

As far as the future of the hall is concerned, there is hope in Scherr’s mind. She mentioned that Dr. Isern is planning on applying for additional grants to help with preventative maintenance at the Zeeland Hall. Dr. Isern also hopes to bring NDSU students to help with the hall.

“I sure hope that we can keep it up and keep it usable,” said Scherr.

Scherr’s next project, tentatively, is the Zeeland Arch. She is actively looking for someone in Zeeland who knows about the construction of the arch and could help with its restoration.

“If we are going to spend the time and effort on it, we are going to do it right,” she noted. “It’s another staple of Zeeland.”

FDR’s WPA put people back to work

(Editor’s note: Some of the information in this story is from Wikipedia.)

The Zeeland Hall was built as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project to create jobs in the area under a jobs program created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933 at the height of the Great Depression.

The WPA financed over 200 projects in the two Dakotas, the first of which in North Dakota was the Emmons County Courthouse in Linton in 1933.

Other projects in the area include the Long Lake Wildlife Refuge at Moffit, several projects in Wahpeton—city park, community swimming pool, Wahpeton Civic Center and many of the sidewalks in town, Beaver Lake State Park at Burnstad, the Moberg

President Roosevelt
Post Office and mural, the Eureka sewer system and a survey of Campbell County cemeteries.

The Great Depression ended with the coming of rains and the country’s entry into World War II. The WPA, along with other Roosevelt New Deal programs, ended in 1943.

There were an estimated 10 million unemployed people in the country in 1935, and the WPA alone helped three million of them.

FDR knew the country would not survive the Dirty Thirties without federal relief programs, and he was committed to having something to show for the federal aid. WPA workers built highways, schools, hospitals, airports and playgrounds, and they restored historic buildings and sites.

The WPA also put actors, writers and other creative arts professionals back to work by sponsoring federally funded plays, art projects, such as murals on public buildings, and literary publications. FDR safeguarded private businesses from competition with WPA projects by including a provision in the act that placed wage and price controls on federally funded products or services.

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