Every county has stories, and many of them are historic.

Emmons County is no exception. That’s a driving force for the Public History Field School that takes place from May 30-June 10 at the Emmons County Museum in Linton. It is led by Dr. Angela Smith, a public historian and associate professor of history at North Dakota State University. Smith and eight of her NDSU students will “take up residence” in Linton for a couple of weeks.

“Our goal is to partner with the community and take students into Linton where they can contribute to the preservation, conservation and collection of local history,” Smith said. “It’s a hands-on learning experience for students, and the community has a stake in it.”

The public history field school is a collaboration between the Emmons County Historical Society and the class. The town’s residents provide housing and meals for students and faculty during their stay, and the students bring energy, knowledge and creativity to the local museum. The result is an energizing experience for both the students and local citizens interested in local history.

While in Linton, the students will work with the museum board to update exhibits, write exhibit labels, work on storage and preservation strategies and digitize photos.

During Dairy & Ag Day on Fri., June 2, the students will staff an Emmons County Historical Society booth to promote the organization and the museum. Stop by and see them.

On Sat., June 3, students will offer a digital genealogy class, a scanning class and conduct oral histories.

Students will send out an invitation to the county’s residents to join them at the museum on the evening of June 9 for a grand re-opening for Emmons County citizens to revisit their history and see the updated museum.

The students also want to invite the community to stop by the museum and share photographs, letters, documents and stories that link to the county’s past.

What can I do?

• Look through your photos, letters, and documents that might have some historical importance.
• Stop by the museum and make an appointment to share your stories and photos with the NDSU student team.
• Don’t worry. You don’t have to leave your items. Images will be scanned and made into digital files while you’re there, and you’ll get them back immediately.
• Another part of the project is to collect oral histories—recording stories that are part of the county’s history. Maybe you remember a drought or a fire or a parade or a story your great-grandmother told you that her grandmother told her. You may be the only person who knows it. The students hope you’ll share the story and let them record it.

What else?

Several free workshops will help you learn more about scanning photos, digital genealogy or becoming a museum volunteer.

Area high school students interested in history are invited to come to the museum and spend some time working alongside and learning from the group.

Other public events and talks will be announced.

The NDSU students are excited about the work in Linton. They will spend a lot of time at the museum and the library; you’ll also see them around town.

“I’m from a small community in Minnesota, and I want to see how another small community embraces its history,” said Emily Kulzer, an NDSU senior.

She and the seven other students, as well as Smith and Danielle Stuckle of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, will work in the Emmons County Museum. They will create signage and add to exhibits as appropriate, and they will also roll up their sleeves to clean and organize.

Clearly this has been made possible by a broad effort.

Locally, Mary Ann Gefroh, Eileen Morris and the rest of the Emmons County Historical Society Board took on the challenge. They have secured money to feed the students. Members of the historical society are coordinating housing as well.

Smith also has support through a $1,500 grant from the North Dakota Humanities Council; equipment on loan from the Digital History Lab and the Public History Program at NDSU; and the Department of History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies.

Two summers ago, Smith led the first NDSU Public History Field School in Ellendale, where students worked on the Coleman Memorial Museum.

“I discovered that most towns really want to preserve their history,” Smith said.

She also found common problems—the pool of volunteers is small, and the pool of money is even smaller.

“I thought that if I could take a group of students into a town for a couple of weeks, it would be great for the students and great for the town.”

In the week before their arrival, students were in the classroom at NDSU, learning hands-on skills that they’ll use while they are in Linton.