

Report to the Legislative Budget Section

Lawrence Welk Homestead Project

Merl Paaverud, Director

State Historical Society of North Dakota

The State Historical Board directed the State Historical Society to update the Budget Section on the status of the purchase of the Lawrence Welk Homestead. The Historical Board will be meeting again on January 10, 2014.

In 2012, a feasibility study was completed for the Welk Homestead, located near Strasburg, North Dakota. The study focused on the condition of the existing structures, preservation of the site going forward, and future heritage interpretive possibilities for the site. Included in the study was analysis to restore and/or maintain the original structures including the house, summer kitchen, blacksmith shop, out building, wind mill and barn. Possible future improvements to the site with cost estimates were included in the study.

In HB 1018 (Chapter 18, 2013 Session Laws), the 2013 Legislature included \$100,000 in the Society's project pool to purchase the homestead site. Section 5 stated, "The project pool line item in section 1 of this Act includes funding that may be used to purchase the Lawrence Welk homestead. If the homestead is purchased, the state historical society shall determine repairs that must be completed by the property owners and negotiate with the property owners to have these repairs made prior to the state's purchase of the Lawrence Welk homestead, during the biennium beginning July 1, 2013, and ending June 30, 2015."

The State Historical Board toured the site this past July 12. Since then, the Welk heirs, with the assistance of the Pioneer Heritage Foundation, the Tri-County Tourism Alliance, the Germans from Russia Heritage Society, the NDSU Extension Service and other local residents have compiled a list of artifacts, projects and services that they would provide and complete prior to the closing of the purchase in order to comply with the intent of the legislation. According to the individuals connected to the site, \$147,000 was previously expended to restore and upgrade the site and buildings. Volunteer supporters have committed to paint the buildings on the site. The Tri-County Tourism Alliance has committed to provide workers to operate the site for the remainder of this biennium. The repairs to the buildings are valued at \$6,000 and the value of the time committed by the volunteers is \$14,300 for a total of \$20,300 that the local groups would expend prior to the acquisition by the state. Independent of the feasibility study, KLJ donated its services to assess the barn structure. The barn is an existing building that requires structural repairs. These commitments are appreciated. Throughout the history of the site, volunteer support has been very important.

The State Historical Society is composing a list of capital projects for possible inclusion in a purchase agreement. If the purchase is completed, the Society will request operating funds for the ongoing maintenance and operation of the site during the 2015-17 biennium. In the future, possible capital improvements that may be offered to the Legislature are stabilization of the barn, the addition of a visitor center, a collections building and parking lot.

This concludes my report.