

Sculpture planned to honour pioneer women

“Many times the family had to lie on the floor with wet towels across their faces waiting for the wind, loaded with topsoil and sand, to die down. . . . Sand and drift dirt piled up and only the tops of the fence posts could be seen. It was a very bad time.”

—Anna Maria Gebhardt, a pioneer woman who came to Canada in 1906, writes in a diary entry

By Stephanie Classen
of The StarPhoenix

Decades ago, hundreds of pioneer women glimpsed the unforgiving conditions of the Saskatchewan prairie for the first time. Far from their homes, they toiled alongside men to build a foundation for the province and to make the new country a home.

To honour their sacrifices and courage, a local group plans to erect a statue at River Landing entitled Egg Money.

The idea originated after Rosa Gebhardt, a member of the Saskatoon German Days Committee, was struck by the stories of pioneer women, including her mother-in-law, at her husband's family reunion in 2000.

“Relatives told me about some women whose spirits were just broken. It was too much for them to bear,” she said. “It just stuck with me. I couldn't shake it. I'm an immigrant as well but nothing in my experience compares with that.”

Gebhardt, who came to Canada 41 years ago from Germany, is crusading to honour Saskatchewan's pioneer women. The German Days cultural event was celebrated in 2005, after a more than 70-year absence, with a focus on those brave and hardworking females. The event, which included a speech of tribute to the women, made the organizers even more determined to provide Saskatchewan with a tangible tribute to their heroism.

Egg Money, a six-foot-tall bronze sculpture created by Shirley and Don Begg of Cochrane, Alta., got the green light from city council earlier this summer for prime placement in River Landing near the Farmers' Market. The piece features a pioneer woman as well as two children, several chickens and a cream pail. While the installation



—SP Photo by Richard Marjan

Rosa Gebhardt (left) and Barbara Hoggard-Lulay display a miniature version of the sculpture they hope to erect at River Landing

date hasn't been finalized, the committee hopes to have the piece up by September 2009.

While the committee considered holding a competition with Saskatchewan artists to design the piece, the cost and time needed to do so was prohibitive.

Gebhardt and committee chair Barbara Hoggard-Lulay were thrilled when they found Egg Money. Saskatoon's

version of the statue will be one of three similar works of art. Two others, with slight variations, are already installed in Alberta.

With a design and location chosen, “it's just a matter of raising the funds we need to get the sculpture installed,” said Hoggard-Lulay.

The German Days Committee has raised about 20 per cent of the total funds for the sculpture, which will cost more than \$100,000.

To help fund the piece, the committee is appealing to the families of pioneer women. For a donation of \$1,500 or more, the woman's name will be inscribed on the base of the statue. The piece has room for 72 names, 12 of which have already been purchased.

Hoggard-Lulay said the group is also looking for corporate sponsors now that the location of the statue has been finalized.

While the project is being headed by the German community, Hoggard-Lulay stressed that families related to pioneer women of all ethnic groups are invited to be part of the project.

Egg Money, Gebhardt said, is a way to be grateful for the invaluable contributions pioneer women made to Saskatchewan.

“They were really the bases of the province,” she said.

The Saskatoon German Days Committee can be contacted by e-mail at info@saskatoongermansdays.ca or by phone at 373-3328 or 979-4911. This year's German Days — a celebration that includes food, drink and entertainment — will be held on Sept. 27 at the Farmers' Market. The event is on from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and admission is free.

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