

## **Custer County Historical Society Monthly Program**

**Lois Wells – Program Director**

**Rachel Nepper -- Recorder**

### **“The Polio Epidemic Here”**

**Ms. Cindy Messinger – June 6, 2015**

Following the refreshment period, Lois introduced Cindy Messenger, a librarian from Hot Springs who had gotten interested in the building that was once the West River Crippled Children’s Hospital. Her program was on the polio epidemic. She first gave the history of the disease (first diagnosed in 1789 in Great Britain), (first iron lung in 1928), (a vaccine was being worked on in 1935). The disease was virus-caused and there were various levels which then could result in paralysis and death. There was an outbreak of polio after WWII when 20,000 cases were reported and 52,000 by 1952. It was a frightening disease and polio hysteria developed. By 1957 a vaccine had dropped the number of cases to 5,000. The last case of “wild” polio was reported in 1979. There were several types of polio and then a post-polio syndrome could develop later in life. Ms. Messenger told about the Hot Springs facility that received patients from numerous states (15). She told of various treatments available such as hydro-therapy, electro and mechanical therapy. Children would be covered with wet, hot wool blankets twice a day and they also went swimming twice a day. She told of an iron lung that had a patient inside who was transported on a flatbed from Deadwood to Hot Springs while the family members hand-cranked the device. The hospital changed over the years. Ms. Messenger had slides on photos of children and nurses and their therapy sessions. Members of the audience told of their experiences with some having had polio; one had built an iron lung out of cardboard as a school science project.