



Nonprofit Organization  
 U.S. Postage Paid  
 Permit No. 7  
 Owatonna, MN 55060

# Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 1-800-423-6466 | e-mail: [museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us](mailto:museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us) | [www.orphanagemuseum.com](http://www.orphanagemuseum.com)



*History is in our hands.  
 When we lose a historic place,  
 we lose a part of who we are.*

— Quote from National Trust for Historic Preservation

During past issues of this newsletter, we have often focused on the many "tangible" accomplishments in preserving the history and remembering the children of the State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children.

During this Holiday Season, we would like to focus on the many, precious "intangible" gifts that have affected so many people. By preserving the State School history, many State School adults, for the first time, have started to share experiences with their children and grandchildren. Talking has brought healing. Many other families have discovered "family secrets" through the State School records that could have been lost forever.

The museum, cemetery, miraculous discovery of the 1930s historic video, and now the documentary "The Children Remember" have touched thousands of lives.

Today we are asked to share the State School story with college classes, social workers, adoption agencies, and over 50 bus tours/other groups each year, including our annual visit from Owatonna's 3rd grade students. Today our generation is passing along the incredible value of family and the effects of institutionalizing children. This precious legacy will live on for future generations. Our work has truly been blessed—and blessed—since 1992 because of the financial support of so many of you, the "in-kind" help of the City of Owatonna and the Owatonna Arts Center, volunteers, and a wonderful group of Owatonna citizens who serve on our Board of Directors.

To all of you, our gift is A GIFT OF GRATITUDE.  
 God Bless you for caring and sharing.

*Maxine Ronglien, Chairperson – Board of Directors*

Important: To ensure receiving future Newsletters, please inform us of any address change.

Mailing Address: 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060. Checks should be written out to: MN State School Orphanage Museum.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

If you wish to purchase a board, please print clearly the words you wish to have inscribed.

- Yes, I'd like to purchase a board(s) at \$35.00 each!
- Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary DVD at \$34.95 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.
- Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary video at \$29.95 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Interested in purchasing The Children Remember or a board on the Memorial Boardwalk? Please fill in the form below. Your support is greatly appreciated!

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 1-800-423-6466 | e-mail: [museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us](mailto:museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us) | [www.orphanagemuseum.com](http://www.orphanagemuseum.com)

# Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

Return Service Requested

# Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 1-800-423-6466 | e-mail: museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us | www.orphanagemuseum.com

## State School Reunion Planned for August 14, 2004

As part of Owatonna's Sesquicentennial (150th) Celebration in 2004, the week of August 8-14 has been designated West Hills (Orphanage) History Week. Our Board of Directors and many volunteers are busy at work planning for this big event.

A "Welcome Back" reception is being planned for Friday evening, August 13, from 5-6:45 p.m. in the Owatonna Arts Center (former children's dining room). At 6:45 p.m., we will wander over to the School auditorium for viewing of "The Children Remember" documentary film on a large screen.

We would like to extend a special invitation to all State Schoolers—as well as their families and friends—to return to the grounds for a reunion of FELLOWSHIP AND FUN, on Saturday August 14, 2004. Saturday is "State School Reunion Day" with activities planned throughout the day.

On Sunday, you are invited to attend the huge Sesquicentennial Parade in downtown Owatonna. Additional activities will follow at the Steele County Fairgrounds after the parade. For those of you wishing to extend your stay further, the Steele County Free Fair will open on Tuesday, August 17.

This event will be a wonderful opportunity to gather together and talk about "old times" that were lived on these historic grounds. We hope you will be a part of the festivities.

### Questionnaire

To help us with planning, we are asking that you please take a few moments to complete the included questionnaire and return it to us NO LATER THAN JANUARY 20, 2004. Your input will be invaluable in

helping us plan for this Sesquicentennial event. A complete calendar of events will be published in a future newsletter.

### Accommodations

A list of places to stay in Owatonna is included below. It will be a busy time in Owatonna, so we suggest you make your reservations early if you plan to attend.

#### AmericInn

245 Florence Ave, Owatonna, MN 55060-2774  
(507) 455-1142

#### Best Budget Inn

Jct Hwys I-35 & US 14, Owatonna, MN 55060  
(507) 451-0776

#### Ramada Inn

I-35 & Hwy 14 W, Owatonna, MN 55060  
(507) 455-0606

#### Comfort Inn

2345 43rd St NW, Owatonna, MN 55060  
(507) 444-0818

#### Country Inn & Suites By Carlton

130 Allan Ave SW, Owatonna, MN 55060-2766  
(507) 455-9295

#### Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites (with water park)

2365 43 St NW, Owatonna, MN 55060  
(507) 446-8900

#### Microtel Inn & Suites Of Owatonna

150 St John Drive NW, Owatonna, MN 55060  
(507) 446-8255

#### Northrop-Oftedahl House Bed & Breakfast

358 Main St E, Owatonna, MN 55060-3037  
(507) 451-4040

#### Super 8 Motel

1818 Hwy 14 W, Owatonna, MN 55060-5643  
(507) 451-0380

# Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 1-800-423-6466 | e-mail: museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us | www.orphanagemuseum.com



## Documentary News

We are most gratified by the continuing positive comments and the number of videos purchased. Thank you for your support.

*From Tom Holter, Program Director - KTCA:*

"You will be happy to know the broadcasts of 'The Children Remember' drew some significant audiences. On August 27, on average 39,866 households viewed the TPT2 airing. On September 2, on average 15,947 households viewed the TPT17 broadcast. This would be above the prime time average audience for each of the channels, so congratulations, and thank you again for allowing us to acquire the rights to broadcast the documentary."

*Connie Brenke, St. Peter MN -*

"The video "The Children Remember" was excellent. Now we know why Mom never talked about that time in her life."

**Connie's family would love to hear from anyone who remembers Stella Smith (507-931-3658).**

### Documentary Expands Broadcasts – *You can help us spread the State School story.*

"The Children Remember" will soon be offered for free to your own Public Television Station and we could use your help. Please call or write your local PTV

station programmer—soon—before January 20, 2004. Give them the full name of the program, "The Children Remember: Life at the MN State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children, 1886 - 1945" and ask them to download it on Tuesday, January 20, 2004 from 4:30-6 p.m. on 512. (or in their language: 1/20/04 1630-1800/512). As to when your station will eventually schedule it for your community, you may request "family hours," (as opposed to late night). If you have seen the video or know what it is about, please share with them the important story that should be told and how professionally it was done. (And you may note that any additional public relations the station can do would bring in lots of viewers - examples at left of viewer numbers from the first two showings.)

Another way you could help us in this endeavor is to make a contribution towards the necessary expenses we have incurred—which is in the ballpark of \$1,500—for the licensing fees and the public relations costs to inform the station that the show is available and (that we believe) the show is worth showing!

*Betty Armbruster, Faribault, MN -*

"What you people said [in "The Children Remember"] about the school and the places we went to after was true."

### Share the Story during the Holiday

Many have commented that "The Children Remember" is a wonderful video to share with family during holiday gatherings. To order, see the back of this newsletter. You may also order by phone (507-444-4321) by using VISA or MASTERCARD.

Another excellent gift idea is the State School coffee mug available for \$5.00 plus \$2.00 shipping & handling.

## State School Memories

### Steaming Good Time

I remember the first time I felt that radiator brush on my bare bottom. I thought at age 5 it was so neat to urinate on a hot radiator and see the steam rise. I thought it was real funny until a Matron caught me. I think I can feel that sting to this day.

**Memories of Florence (Logan) Wuollet,**  
Glenwood, MN (Placed in good home at age 15 and later became a registered nurse.)

### I remember...

...One girl per size taken to the Shakopee Women's Prison in the summer so the women prisoners could get accurate sizes of the dresses they would sew for us. We were given lunch at the prison . . . what a big day for us girls!

...Our chair was our whole life! A special memory is sitting in our chairs a half hour before bedtime and saying our prayers together out loud. This prayer was my favorite:

Now the light has gone away  
Savior listen as I pray.  
I ask of thee to watch and keep  
and to guide me while I sleep.

Jesus Savior wash away  
all that has been wrong today  
Help me every day to be  
Kind and gentle - More like Thee.

Now my evening prayers I give  
Thou has died that I might live.  
All my blessings come from Thee  
Oh how good Thou art to me.

And then we said "The Lord's Prayer."



...Little babies being laid out naked in the summer to get their Vitamin D. The Matrons also had us older boys and girls lay out in the sun (in our "sun suits") to get our Vitamin D and also prevent later sunburn.

...Sunday afternoons going to "New Testament League" in the Chapel. We sang and also got our own little copy of the New Testament.

...SINGING! We sang all the time! I still love those old songs.

...Going to the power plant to get light bulbs.

...As a Girl Scout going house to house in Owatonna selling candy bars (Baby Ruth, O'Henry, etc.). Girl Scout training was excellent.

...Playing "Kittenball."

...Having to eat EVERYTHING on our plate!  
(Including spinach and parsnips)

...Every Saturday polishing our shoes and washing our hair.

...Wearing black bloomers that came to the knees.

...Miss Putter, head nurse at the hospital, actually was a Doctor in Germany before she immigrated to the U.S. However, because of the language barrier, she could only be called a "Head Nurse" at the State School hospital.

Many children remember that Richard Luoma lived at the hospital—and the other children never understood why. Florence informed us his problem was diabetes.

### The Last Dance

**Vivian (Swan) Manthe Garland, TX (C-4 1939-44)**

Remember how boys and girls segregated? We couldn't even stand in the windows to watch the boys shovel snow in the winter or mow the yards in the summer...talking to a boy was forbidden... Then one fine day in 1943... Miss Mittlestadt and Miss Eidem decided that a dance would be held in the gymnasium. I can only speak for the girls that lived in C-4, and I can tell you that excitement reigned the day of the dance. Hair was washed and curled...cheeks were pinched until we looked like we had rouge on...We bit our lips until they were red (remember, no make up was allowed). Girls practiced dancing with each other...we could not believe our good fortune...we were finally going to be with the boys...a dream come true for a teenage girl.

Like always, we lined up two by two and off we marched to the gym. Girls filed in first and took the chairs on the left side of the gym...followed by the boys who all came in hanging their heads and shuffling and dragging their feet...taking the chairs on the right side of the gym. There we sat...girls prim and proper

and ready to dance and the boys looking like they would all like to run away.

Miss Mittlestadt put a record on and there we sat...Miss Mittlestadt put another record on and there we sat. Since the boys were not coming over to ask for a dance... the girls all started dancing with each other. Miss Mittlestadt talked to the boys, and a few started to ask a girl to dance. The dance only lasted for an hour, but the way things were going an hour was LONG enough. Thinking back to my first dance... we all had high expectations... dreams of maybe having a boyfriend... but it all fizzled out. Another dance was never held. How many remember this dance???

### Finding James

In 1940, five young Prondzinski children from Little Falls, MN were placed in the State School Orphanage. Of these children, Maxine was placed in a St. Paul home, Betty adopted, Ray and Jerry placed on a farm near Owatonna, and youngest brother James adopted by a family in Orr, Minnesota. Ray and Jerry would later learn of Maxine's and Betty's whereabouts, but the question always haunted the four, "What happened to James?"

Over the years, many attempts were made to find James, but adoption laws and name change stifled their efforts. The questions lingered, "Was James alive or dead? What happened to him? Did he find a good home and a good life?"

James did find a good home. Unbeknownst to his siblings, James' three daughters were prodding *him* to find out about his birth family. James eventually made the decision to call Social Services in Little Falls. They were successful in locating Ray and asked if he would like to meet his brother James. Stunned, Ray responded with a joyous "Yes" and was given James's phone number. continued...

# Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 1-800-423-6466 | e-mail: museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us | www.orphanagemuseum.com

## State School Memories

### Finding James Continued...

In April of 2003, 62 years later, the three brothers were finally reunited—at a truck stop in Blaine, Minnesota. James was later reunited with sister Betty in California but unfortunately never with Maxine, as she had already passed away.

Of being reunited, Ray tells us, "We're brothers! It's like we've never been apart. There are so many similarities. We've all lived different lives, but the bond is there and the joy has extended to our children and grandchildren. We get together often, we talk on the phone, and we even had a big family reunion. After 62 years, our family has been restored, and we're at peace."



Brothers reunited after 62 years—Ray, James, and Jerry Prondzinski

## Share Your Memories.

If you have a memory you would like to share in a future newsletter, send it to: State School Orphanage Museum, 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060. Please keep your story brief as space is limited.

## A Special Tribute—to a Special Lady

She never was a State Schooler. She never stepped on the grounds. Yet, because her sister Julia Keefe (Matron and Teacher) thought so much of "Her Boys" at the State School, Kathleen Baumgartner became the largest INDIVIDUAL donator to our financial success. Since 1992, Kathleen donated several thousands of dollars for the restoration of State School history. Sadly, Kathleen passed away this past August.

## Charitable Giving

If you are planning any charitable giving, please consider the State School Orphanage Museum. We are a 501.c non-profit organization with no paid staff. All monies are used directly for continued efforts in preserving the history and remember the children of the State Public School.

### Please help us update our mailing list.

Please call us (507-444-4321), e-mail us (museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us), or write us (Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum, 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060) if one of the following is true.

1. You wish to be removed from our Orphanage Museum Newsletter mailing list.
2. You have recently moved and have a new address.

### State Schoolers Deceased

Donald Allford  
Anna G. (Markeson) Kelley  
Franke Children (Chuck, Bill, Mary Ellen, Gordon)

# Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 1-800-423-6466 | e-mail: museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us | www.orphanagemuseum.com

Please tear off this page and return by January 20, 2004  
(mail to: 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 or fax to: 507-444-4299.)

## QUESTIONNAIRE:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

I am a \_\_\_\_\_ State Schooler \_\_\_\_\_ State Schooler Family Member \_\_\_\_\_ Other (\_\_\_\_\_)

(If a State Schooler, years at school: \_\_\_\_\_)

### I am interested in (please check all that apply):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Attending a State School reunion
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attending a dedication ceremony for the "new" rock garden
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participating in a sing-a-long of old State School songs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seeing "The Children Remember" Documentary Video
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attending a memorial service at the Children's Cemetery
- \_\_\_\_\_ Taking a tour of the grounds
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Walking \_\_\_\_\_ Trolley
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hearing and sharing stories of the past
- \_\_\_\_\_ Purchasing State School souvenirs and/or a video
- \_\_\_\_\_ Volunteering
- \_\_\_\_\_ Information on other Owatonna attractions
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Cabela's \_\_\_\_\_ Village of Yesteryear
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Northwest Bank \_\_\_\_\_ Steele County Free Fair
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other (\_\_\_\_\_)

Other suggestions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you!*