

# The Radiator Brush



Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum & Historic Cottage 11 Boys' Cottage  
~ Spring 2014 Newsletter Edition ~

## *"We Were Called State Schoolers" Capstone Event*

**Saturday, May 17 at 3:00 PM**

Owatonna Arts Center Performance Hall (former State School dining room)



The Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum Board is pleased to announce the capstone performance of the original play, "We Were Called State Schoolers" on Saturday, May 17, at three o'clock in the afternoon. The State School children will be portrayed by actors, who will use the children's own words to bring their memories to life.

The performance will be the culmination of months of work by author Cheryl Finnegan, who poured over hours of the Museum's oral history collection to create this play, which is written in a readers' theater format.

A reception will follow the performance and the Museum and Cottage 11 will be open to visitors until 5 PM.

The May 17 event is open to the public. There is no cost to attend the play; however, a \$5.00 per person freewill donation would be greatly appreciated.

After the capstone performance two versions of the play will be available, a student version for middle school students and one for other organizations, as another level of outreach and education, and also as a way to raise additional money for The Children Remembered - Orphanage Legacy Trust Fund. If you are unable to attend the capstone event, but would still like to make a donation, you may do so using the enclosed envelope.

This production is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

*Definition of capstone: "the crowning achievement, point, element, or event."*

### **Readers' Theater in a Nutshell**

Readers' theater is a form of performance in which actors read from a script, rather than memorizing lines. It is especially accessible to and engaging for the audience, involving actors of all skill levels, with minimal rehearsal.

In our case, the purpose of the readers' theater is to provide an additional level of outreach and education for local, regional, and state communities to learn about the Minnesota State School for Dependent and Neglected Children and the people who lived there. The production will be an example of transforming oral histories into theater, which tells stories in an exciting, effective way.

Since this format is widely used in educational settings, "We Were Called State Schoolers" readers' theater performances could reach more local schools and provide an additional draw for groups visiting the museum.

*Author! Author!*

Funding for the readers' theater project came from a grant by the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council (SEMAC). That may sound simple, but for anyone who has been involved in a grant project, you know it is not as simple as sending a letter requesting money!



First comes an idea and then right person to make it a reality. Cheryl Finnegan of Pine Island, Minnesota, was initially involved in helping Dan Moeckly with the Oral History digitization project grant. As she listened to the former wards tell their stories, she felt there was a real opportunity to translate these individual stories into a new medium. Cheryl has an extensive background in theater, so she suggested a readers' theater format, wrote the grant proposal, got Board authorization, and received approval from SEMAC!

Cheryl has written and produced more than 25 short plays and scripts, with a focus on interactive theater and incorporating local history. She organized and wrote scripts for the Oakwood Cemetery Walk; wrote and produced Bridges, from oral histories for the Rochester Area Alliance for the Mentally Ill; and wrote and directed five plays for the Mantorville Opera House, including a melodrama commemorating the Hubbell House 100th anniversary.

Thank you, Cheryl, for creating this new opportunity to share the orphanage story.

*Allow Me to Introduce Myself*

by Anne Peterson

My name is Anne Cummins Peterson and I am beyond thrilled to assume the duties of Museum Director for the Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum. It's a very exciting opportunity for me, and a bit daunting, since I am following in the footsteps of Maxine Ronglien, whose dedication to preserving the memories of the State School children sets a high standard.

I'm an Owatonna native and have always been aware of the State School, mainly because my great-aunt Mary Shimpach worked at both state-run institutions on West Hills her entire adult life. I can remember driving up the sweeping driveway to pick up Mary for family functions at the Main Building, long before the City of Owatonna took over the property.

I also found the State Schoolers' books very interesting over the years and I remember attending the Cottage 11 Open House and being very impressed. I guess I was appreciating the growth of the Museum from a distance, but never in my wildest dreams did I think there would be a time when I'd be working for the Museum itself.

After a nearly 30-year career at Federated Insurance, I retired and was looking for a part-time position, which eventually led here. History—especially family history—has always been a passion of mine, and the Orphanage Museum is definitely one of the top historic places in Owatonna. Things just fell into place.

I thank the Board of Directors for offering me this new role and the Rongliens for mentoring me. It's nice to find a dream job after a person retires, I think!

## *Memories – Become Part of Our Written History*

*This note came from Carolyn “Lee” Doerfler, February 2014*

“I was a State Schooler in the early '40s. I was also a bed wetter! The morning matron was very mean to me, so my sister (who was in the same cottage) would purposely wake up early and change my sheets. This happened every night. (I can understand why the matron was upset.) What's interesting is, once adopted at age 11, I never wet the bed again!

“All nine of us were sent there because both parents (severe alcoholics) simply walked away—same day! We grew up living on the streets. But one day someone called the police because some of us were barefoot and walking in the snow. An ambulance came and took us to the hospital. We had very bad impetigo. And soooo skinny and hungry. Our favorite restaurants were the garbage pails and my most favorite the Old Dutch Potato Chip factory. Yum. A little rancid, but delicious! I loved the orphanage and to this day have fond memories of being there...their napkins and cups that held milk.



“My brother, who ran away to join the Marines, showed up at my waitress job when I was 19. Of course, I didn't know him, but after he proved he was my brother, he took me to meet our mother. She lived in a room above a bar and, when he introduced me, she simply turned her back on me and looked out the window. But after meeting another brother, we all went out to meet my sister—the one who had changed my sheets!

“I was always appreciative. God always took care of me though.”

The following excerpts are from a letter from Peggy Wills, widow of Virgil Wills:

“I have been reading The Radiator Brush. Thank you for sending it. Each one brings back memories of a time when Virgil was there (1926-1941). He ran away

when he was seventeen. He said he had tried a couple of times, but didn't make it, that he was caught and beaten. This time he said he told no one and planned carefully, gathering things he needed to take and knew just when the freight train came by. He was successful and rode with the hoboes to Minneapolis and they instructed him on what to do. A Salvation Army lady named Irma befriended him, even making a place on her kitchen floor for him to sleep one night at -40 degrees, so he wouldn't have to search for a new place, as he could only stay a certain length of time at each place. When Pearl Harbor came, Virgil told Irma he wanted to join the Navy. She took him to be enrolled and he was eventually given a position on a mine sweeper. He was on the coast of Iwo Jima when the captain announced, “The flag is going up on the mountain!”

“His memories of the Orphanage were not so good. It seems that he had been so very mistreated by the man over his cottage and that this is where most of his alienation came from. There were a few good memories though. He had to milk cows before school and after school. This man was kind to him and his cows knew him and would come when he was there and knew what to do.

“Virgil passed away on March 4, 2002. He was 78. He was left with a lot of problems, but was a devout Christian and the dad who all his daughters adored. I am living here because of him and have thanked God for giving me this wonderful man.”

### **A Note to Our Readers**

*This issue of The Radiator Brush includes memories from a former State Schooler and the wife of another, who were inspired to write to us after receiving the last issue of our newsletter. We appreciate them taking the time to share their remembrances with us...and for allowing us to share them with you. If you feel inclined to put pen to paper, we will be very grateful. (And don't stress about writing a great novel!) Please send your stories to Orphanage Museum, 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060. Please indicate whether we have your permission to share your memories in the newsletter.*

## *Feeding the Children Before Refrigeration*

by Maxine Ronglien

In the March 9, 2014, Minneapolis Star Tribune newspaper, Food Editor Lee Svitak Dean wrote an interesting article on how “Refrigeration Changed the World.” As she pointed out, refrigeration didn’t arrive on the scene until around 1925.

So, how did the State School feed 200-500 children three meals a day, seven days a week, from 1886 to the 1920s without refrigeration? While we don’t have all the answers today, we can marvel at how those earlier generations coped with limited resources to preserve food.

The Root Cellar, built in the late 1880s and still existing today, provides one answer. The many root vegetables grown on the farm, such as potatoes, carrots, squash, and onions, were stored in the Root Cellar. This cellar maintained a constant 40 degree temperature.

Some vegetables, like green beans and peas, were canned. As State Schoolers have told us many times, boiled vegetables like cabbage and carrots were a mainstay of many meals. Springtime meant cleaning out the rotten vegetables from the Root Cellar—a dreaded task for the boys, because of the awful smell of rotten potatoes.

Actually, the State School didn’t purchase a lot of food except for barrels of staples, such as flour, sugar, and oatmeal. Butter was exchanged for cream sold at the local creamery. And, the large dairy herd provided milk for the children. How it was kept cool in those early days is not known; but, we do know the milk was pasteurized in the basement of the Main Building.

The State School also did their own butchering of beef and pork. In the early days, the meat was perhaps preserved by canning, drying, or salting it. In later years, a “cooler” was established in the basement of the Main



Building. Ice was no doubt used for cooling the room. Chickens on the farm provided eggs for cooking and baking, however, eggs were not served to the children.

We don’t have exact dates, but we do know that harvesting ice from the Straight River became a popular way for the State School to preserve perishable foods from spoiling. After the ice block were harvested by staff and State School boys, it was brought to the grounds and stored in a shed with sawdust layered between the ice blocks. Surprisingly, the ice stayed frozen until early summer. It isn’t known when “ice boxes” became a part of the kitchens, but an employee and a State School boy with a horse-drawn buggy would deliver ice to the kitchen ice boxes. These ice boxes would have to be replenished with new ice every few days and were never as cold as today’s refrigerators. However, this was a giant step forward in preserving the food!

It should also be mentioned that fresh fruit for the children was rare. Occasionally, a cottage would receive a crate of apples. Children have related that apples were so treasured that they would store the apples in the window sills and, oftentimes, the apples spoiled before they were eaten because the children so savored them.

Along with “mush” (oatmeal) served for breakfast, home-baked bread, many vegetables, milk, limited meat, and an occasional gingersnap cookie, sauce, or pudding, the diet proved healthy for the children.

*Pictures in this article are part of our State School Museum and help tell the story of how the State School preserved food with the harvested ice. Thanks to State Schoolers Harvey Ronglien and Vivian Swan Manthe for their memories of food at the State School.*



## *“Minnesota Man – From Ward to War”*

We were recently notified that there is a new book written about the life of a State Schooler titled “Minnesota Man – From Ward to War,” which tells the story of Randy Turner (not his real name).

*Note: Currently, it is only available on Amazon's Kindle as an eBook. When there's a print version, we'll try and have some available in our Gift Shop.*

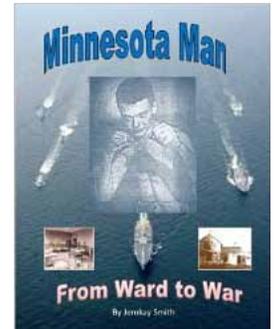
*Amazon.com promotes the book this way:*

“At the tender age of two, Randy Turner is placed in an orphanage after his father is sent to jail. This difficult beginning sets the stage for the inspiring true story of Randy's life as he grows from a young boy to a young man in rural Minnesota during the first half of the twentieth century. Along the way he encounters abuse and kindness among five different families, lives through two surgeries, manages to avoid jail, becomes a boxing champion, and joins the U.S. Navy. His naval experiences before, during, and after World War II take him to four continents, subject him to kamikaze attacks, and make him a witness to the devastation wrought by the atomic bomb. Based on information gleaned from personal accounts, state school documents, and military records, history and geography are served up in this saga of a boy who must come to grips with the harsh realities of life. Minnesota Man is a moving tale of survival that takes the reader back in time yet carries the timeless message that adversity can be overcome.”

The author, Jemkay Smith, is the daughter of “Randy Turner” and sent this message to the Orphanage Museum:

“My intent here is not to promote sales of the book, but rather to express my gratitude. I could not have captured my dad's legacy without his records from the State School and am so thankful to Harvey Ronglien and others who have dedicated themselves to preserving the School's history.”

Thank you, Jemkay, for sharing your father's story.



*Interesting Fact*

According to the same report, from 1901-06, 253.7-298.7 were served at mealtimes at the school, and the fiscally minded Board of Control carefully calculated the annual cost to feed each ward at \$36.20-\$40.27. Only the School for the Deaf achieved a lower cost; most state-run institutions were in the \$40-\$47 and as high as \$75 at the State Reformatory in St. Cloud.

Thank you to Brad Johnson for sharing this information with us.

STATE PUBLIC SCHOOL, OWATONNA.		
BILL OF FARE FOR WEEK ENDING JUNE 19, 1905.		
BREAKFAST.	DINNER.	SUPPER.
	<b>Tuesday, June 13.</b>	
Oatmeal, white and rye bread, butter, coffee, milk, sugar.	Mutton stew, potatoes, bread, rice pudding.	Rolls, syrup, bread, butter, milk.
	<b>Wednesday, June 14.</b>	
Cracked wheat, white and graham bread, butter, coffee, milk, sugar.	Baked beans, potatoes, bread, apple sauce.	Stewed tomatoes, bread, butter, milk.
	<b>Thursday, June 15.</b>	
Creamed potatoes, white and rye bread, butter, coffee, milk, sugar.	Boiled beef, gravy, potatoes, bread, junket.	Asparagus on toast, bread, butter, cookies, milk.
	<b>Friday, June 16.</b>	
Oatmeal, white and graham bread, butter, coffee, milk, sugar.	White fish, potatoes, creamed parsnips, bread, brown betty.	Rolls, syrup, bread, butter, milk.
	<b>Saturday, June 17.</b>	
Cracked wheat, white and rye bread, butter, coffee, milk, sugar.	Baked beans, pickles, potatoes, bread, apple tapioca pudding.	Corn meal mush, syrup, bread, butter, milk.
	<b>Sunday, June 18.</b>	
Creamed codfish, white and graham bread, butter, coffee, milk, sugar.	Cold sliced beef, potatoes, bread, milk gravy, peach pie.	Sugar cookies, bread, butter, milk.
	<b>Monday, June 19.</b>	
Oatmeal, white and graham bread, butter.	Bean soup, bread, corn bread, butter, corn starch blanc mange.	Bread, butter, apricot sauce, milk.



### Orphanage Legacy Trust *Update:*

Balance as of March 2014: **\$27,733.29**

2014 goal: **\$100,000** | goal by end of 2016: **\$300,000**

## *Food, Glorious Food*

The Superintendent's Biennial Report listed the Bill of Fare at Owatonna for the sample week of June 19, 1905. Breakfasts presented oatmeal three times a week with white and rye or graham bread, butter, coffee, milk and sugar. Dinner was the main meal of the day, with potatoes and bread the staples. Mutton stew was served on Tuesday, baked beans on Wednesday, boiled beef on Thursday, White fish on Friday, baked beans on Saturday, cold sliced beef on Sunday, and bean soup on Monday. Dinner featured a dessert of sorts: rice pudding, apple sauce, junket, brown betty, apple tapioca pudding, peach pie (Sunday), cornstarch blancmange (dessert). Gravy was presented once a week and milk gravy another day. Supper was basically a snack, with one of the following items: corn meal mush with syrup, rolls and syrup, asparagus on toast, sugar cookies, stewed tomatoes, rolls. Bread and butter and milk were the common element in the suppers.

## Legacy Trust Donors

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Maureen Alexander

## *Check Out Our Newly Redesigned Web Site*

Our redesigned website went live at the end of March. The URL is still [www.orphanagemuseum.com](http://www.orphanagemuseum.com), and we invite you to check out its new look and features. It will also be much easier to make changes and updates because we want to keep the site current.

## Memorials

Greg & Darlene Thomas  
Harvey & Maxine Ronglien

## Word of Deceased

Donald Felch  
Gene Thunstrom



# State School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle  
Owatonna, Minnesota 55060



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Permit No. 7  
Owatonna, MN 55060

## Return Service Requested

*If you plan to change your address please let us know as each returned newsletter costs the museum \$0.46 plus \$0.49 to re-send. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and helps us to save \$\$\$.*

Interested in purchasing "The Children Remember" or a board on the Memorial Boardwalk? How about purchasing an "apple" for the Apple Giving Tree displayed in C-11? Please fill in and mail to our address the form below. Your support is greatly appreciated! Checks should be written out to: MN State School Orphanage Museum. Donations are tax-deductible.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary VHS at \$10.00 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.

Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary DVD at \$25.00 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.

Yes, I'd like to order  plush State School afghans at \$40.00 each plus \$7.95 shipping/handling.

Yes, I'd like to purchase  board(s) at \$50.00 each. (\*We are now using new materials for extended life of the boardwalk.)

Yes, I'd like to pledge an "apple." (  Red (\$1,000+),  Gold (\$500-\$999),  Green (\$250-\$499)  Silver (\$100-\$249)

Yes, I'd like to make a tax-deductible donation of \_\_\_\_\_. (  Donation for C-11  Legacy Trust  Non-specified)

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

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

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