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Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum ~ Fall 2008 Edition

Summer is past... Fall has arrived

It's time to put shoes on again after going barefoot all summer, and start thinking about another year of school.

Looking back, summer was fun! Several events broke up the usual routine of work and play. While several kids executed their plan and ran away, few made it far, and most were glad to return. Punishment followed, of course, but no doubt there will be another attempt not far in the future.

Fun times such as the Mineral Springs picnic, spending a day swimming at Clear Lake in Waseca, a day at the Steele County Fair, and the big Fourth of July celebration provide glorious daydreams these last days of freedom. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts cherish the memories of days spent at camp, while others back on the grounds remember glory of softball, other games, and the big playground equipment. Walks around town with the Matron occasionally took us off the grounds.

It wasn't all fun and games however. Older kids mowed lawns in teams, picked strawberries, rhubarb, raspberries, and string beans, while youngsters weeded the gardens. There was also plenty of time to give the cottage a full turn, polishing every inch, beating mattresses, and washing windows. Girls could be found peeling and chopping vegetables and preparing meals.

On one notorious summer day an unfortunate minority had their tonsils removed. The smell of ether filled the grounds. It is unclear how far in advance State Schoolers knew who would be selected for this endeavor. (If you have a story about this day, please let us know!)

continued...



Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 507-774-7369 | e-mail: museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us | www.orphanagemuseum.com

Interested in purchasing "The Children Remember" or a board on the Memorial Boardwalk? How about purchasing an "apple" for the Apple Giving Tree for C-11? Please fill in the form below. Your support is greatly appreciated!

Name _____ Phone _____

Mailing Address _____

Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary video at \$29.95 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.

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 purchase _____ board(s) at \$35.00 each!

Yes, I'd like to make a tax-deductible donation of _____. (Please check one: Donation for C-11 Non-specified)

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

Mail your check, along with this form to: MN State School Orphanage Museum, 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060.

Checks should be written out to: MN State School Orphanage Museum.

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

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Continued...

Many old friends were placed out and new kids arrived daily. Matrons and assistants would go on vacation and a substitute would fill in. Now the leaves are falling, potatoes need digging to be stored in the root cellar, and school is ready to begin.

With the many new boys and girls who arrived during the summer, the first day of school will be exciting! Footballs will replace softballs after school, and fun playing in the leaves begins. Fall has arrived!

A Note from Harvey Ronglien

This summer there has been a wave of new interest in the history of the State School. Among the many visitors have been adult children and grandchildren of former State Schoolers. They've come eager to learn more about life at the former orphanage. I've had the pleasure to meet dozens of relatives of former wards, hungry for information as to what life was like. Was it good? Was it bad? How did they treat you? What was a day like? They can't believe when I tell them what a large institution it was; how we all lived together; how we worked, played, learned, laughed, and cried.

When I tell them I lived here, they look at me in wonderment, amazed and astonished that they are actually talking to a real live "State School Kid." To them it is a history of the distant past, dark and dreary.

They can't believe as I tell them stories of their relatives. They also can't believe as I laugh and joke and tell them that I loved the State School. They expect tales of despair and life without hope. I show them where their loved ones ate, slept, played, and worked.

Sure there were hard times and tears, but it was overshadowed by good times, good friends, and the exuberance of youth and its competition. When I relate stories and show them pictures of their relatives as

children, their hugs, tears, and laughter warm my heart and make all that we do worthwhile.

Maxine and I along with our Museum Board thank all of you who have helped make this possible. Your donations help us to tell the stories which continue to touch many lives, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU KNOW THIS.

What a thrill it will be next May when we open the doors of Cottage 11 and tell the story of how children actually lived in a cottage environment. It will be a truly unique experience!

Introducing Ourselves

Dale Tracy, Board Member

Dale Tracy's involvement with the State School Museum began in the mid 1990's when he met former Mayor Pete Connor through the Owatonna Jaycees. This connection led to an invitation to serve on the West Hills Commission. It was in the Commission meetings that Dale met Harvey and Maxine Ronglien and learned of the museum project. Through their many conversations Dale's interest was piqued. He joined the Board of Directors in 2006 and has been a loyal board member since.

Now in his 28th year of marriage, Dale and his wife Cindy have two daughters and one grandson. Dale enjoys NASCAR, local dirt racing, flea-markets, baseball games, and weekends with his grandson Cameron. Dale and his employer, Advanced Coil Technology, have been instrumental in the production of a dozen replica beds for Cottage 11. Thanks Dale!

Tom Watson, Board Member

Tom Watson is the newest member of our board and a pretty new member of the Owatonna community. Recently brought on board at the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce, Tom has worked with the

museum on a number of issues regarding advertisement and tourism.

As an Eagle Scout, Tom enjoys camping, kayaking, traveling, photography, and is an active member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America. His writing talents leap off the written page and into the tones of guitar on which he has composed many songs.

Shelby Zempel, Vice Chairperson

Shelby Zempel is a human dynamo. Whether creating advertisements, serving on nearly every committee, or laying out the newsletter, Shelby is always ready to help. Shelby has lived in Owatonna for fourteen plus years and is employed by Federated Insurance Companies. She and her husband Darren have two daughters - Hunter and Haley.

Shelby has been involved in the Orphanage Museum for about 13 years. Shelby noted that the history of the city, school, and children was truly something to cherish, and to share. Shelby has been on the Orphanage Museum Board since its inception.

In her spare time, she enjoys playing with her kids and family, playing softball and volleyball, gardening, coaching, church activities, and volunteering.

Nancy Sletten, Board Member

Nancy Sletten became involved with the Museum while working as the Director of Wee Pals Child Care Center. Nancy also met the Rongliens through the West Hills Commission. As a tenant of the West Hills Complex, Wee Pals was encouraged to participate in the West Hills Commission. Nancy's love of efforts and events that educate the community and preserve history for the future came to fruition when she joined the SPS board.

Nancy and her husband have three grown sons. Today her job as a real estate agent and activity in local events and organizations does not leave a lot of time for hobbies. Yet when she has time to indulge she enjoys gardening and the company of family and friends.

News on Campus

Preservation, a never ending project

The West Hills Complex was originally constructed to serve as Minnesota's only state run orphanage, the planning of this project commenced in 1885. The orphanage was not completed in one swoop, rather it saw nearly constant repair, renovation, and expansion over its 60 year run.

Many people would presume that the Administration Building was the first to be constructed as it is the hub of the large institution. However, the initial allocations from the State Legislature were not large enough to complete the Administration building, not to mention any cottages.

The founding State Public School Commission rightfully saw the orphanage as a "most necessary and benevolent charity," and one that must operate as soon as possible. Based on this reasoning a precedent was set, the Minnesota State Public School would not begin any project which its current funding could not see through to completion. In this way they could immediately begin applying their funding to remedying the suffering of "those poor little waifs."

The first phase saw the construction of Cottages 1, 2, and 3 in 1886. One cottage was assigned for boys, one for girls, and one for the superintendent. The Superintendent's cottage housed himself, his wife, the children's initial dining hall, school room, and administrative office. The third cottage was designed in a similar fashion to the others. It could be quickly put into its purpose of housing children when proper funding was attained to build a dedicated school and administration building.

As a result subsequent buildings were constructed over the years each being connected to the campus infrastructure individually. This has led to an engineering situation which, to the layman appears impossibly complicated. The Administration Building

itself is a prime example, it was constructed in 3 stages 1887-88 (center), 1891 (south wing), 1893(North Wing). Its basement is a maze of pipes, electric wire, and gas lines, many of which are in disuse and simply unnecessary for its modern function.

Sculpted over 100 years ago, areas of the grounds offer mysteries waiting to be uncovered. This is one of the



purposes behind a project which has been in progress for months and will continue throughout the summer and into the fall. Greg Thomas, Buildings and Grounds Superintendent, is the organizing force.

“Preservation, repair, and improvement are constant projects here on campus. These buildings are over a hundred years old; they need maintenance. What makes it hard is that we don’t always know what to expect, where things are, or where pipes go.” Greg stated.

For those who visited this summer or fall, some projects will be more visible than others. For example, the

Administration building is being refitted with a new chiller, five fresh air exchanges, and being upgraded to a four pipe environmental control system.

This work is often invisible to the visitor as it is focused in the basement, walls, and other unseen gaps. These are all aspects of a massive clean air project intended to make the building more efficient, comfortable, and less susceptible to mold, mildew, and other deteriorating agents.

In very stark contrast you won’t miss the tuck pointing project. The grounds surrounding the Administration Building and Wood Shop (SPS Laundry) will be excavated. After the

soil is removed, the foundation will be washed with high pressure water to remove weak mortar and brick. These areas will then be repaired before the foundation is sealed and coated with a rubber insulator.

The final step includes new tiling across the campus. This is essential to further protect the buildings from moisture-related decay. Greg Thomas anticipates finding a great deal of collapsed and rotten tiling as well as unknown surprises as the project proceeds. Yet the buildings are still in good shape.

We can be thankful for the location selected for the State School. The area of “the western hills of Owatonna” was selected due to the view, its expansibility, proximity to the railroad, and its excellent drainage. While natural drainage has contributed to the preservation of the buildings, a modern tile system will vastly extend the life of these buildings.

The ironwork will wrap along the entire ramp and provide a handle for the stairs. The other larger piece will extend from the upstairs dormitory, over the porch roof, to the porches north edge, and terminate in a set of stairs leading to the ground.

Everyone working on this project grows more excited every day as months of work near fruition. We have the utmost confidence that you will all enjoy the exhibits very much. Again, we look forward to seeing all our readers, their friends, and their families for this celebration.

Follow up... CCC

Our last newsletter focused on the Great Depression. In passing we mentioned two organizations whose lifestyles and practices were no leap for State School boys; the military and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Part of the 1933 New Deal, CCC was designed to curb unemployment, build a healthy generation of Americans, and curb actual distress. The camps were strictly run by the U.S. Army; each participant was fed with locally produced groceries, housed on site, and paid \$30 per month. Of their \$30, \$25 was sent home by law!

This leaves us asking, what about State Schoolers? Where did unmarried State Schoolers send \$25 of their monthly pay? If you know, drop us a line at museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us or 507-774-7369.

This program was fiercely opposed by labor unions, it could create a skilled workforce which would compete for scarce jobs. To curb these fears, those employed via this program worked primarily in unskilled positions. But, participants were welcome to attend courses from basic literacy, University level, or technical training in areas without unions.

This program produced a broad scope of effects; it fed the hungry, clothed and housed the destitute, provided education, honed the army’s ability to coordinate large numbers of men, and provided a well-organized workforce to construct military camps after the attack on Pearl Harbor. This was of course its final task, although many of the camps and public works it created continue to serve us today.

Inspiring Art

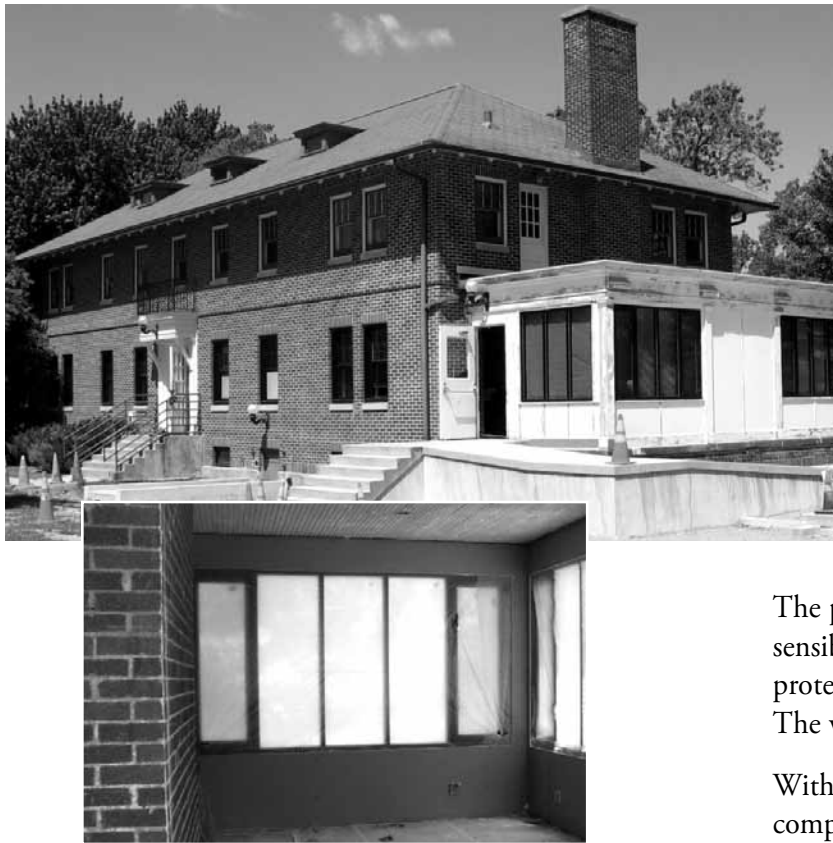
Northfield Arts Guild recently hosted an art exhibition featuring artist Jenna Cooper Erickson, a fifth year apprentice at St Olaf. Jenna, herself a mother, began exploring the lives and experiences of children raised away from their biological family. This is the point at which she learned of the state school.

The art in this exhibition was created at a time when Jenna was pregnant with her second child. To her surprise, she found that the experience made her able to identify with the mothers, more so than the children.

Scholarly Publishing

Recently, we came into contact with a budding historian Claudia Beaty. A Masters student in History at Chico State University, California, Claudia recently published an article on social history which discussed aspects of the Minnesota State Public School.

This article specifically focused on family rights and the placement process describing the experience of her own family as three children became wards of the state. Those interested in reading the article may find The Chino Historian Volume 18 on the web at: www.csuchico.edu/hist/stud_acti/chico_hist.htm.



for the change of plans; suffice to say we would love to have all our readers here for the event, and we want it to be top-notch. Full details will be posted on our web site, in the Owatonna People Press, and in a special C-11 edition of our newsletter slated to be released in February.

Major construction is nearly wrapped up on the interior of C-11 with the completion of the insulation and sheet rocking of the porch. This is one of the few changes we have made to the building's interior. We felt that this brightly lit area would be an ideal place to great our guests.

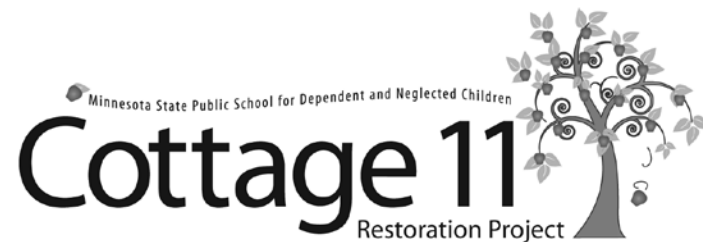
The porch was originally open air, but with our modern sensibilities we realize our volunteers would appreciate protection from mosquitoes and our Minnesota winters. The windows are sure to be greatly appreciated.

With the paint and hardwood floors of the upstairs complete, we are nearly ready to begin moving in exhibits. In fact, installation may have begun by the time you read this newsletter. The main floor walls and ceiling are nearly finished, the wood trim has been prepared for painting, and floors are ready for polish. (Any former wards interested in helping?)

The final interior steps include installation of plumbing for both the historic and modern restrooms. The patches from Kasota Stone arrived in June and were installed. The material and craftsmanship are so spot on we are left guessing... which pieces are the replacements, amazing.

The exterior however has several large projects yet to complete. The basement door which the children used daily is slated for replacement. The entrance ramp was completed in May with the pouring of the last cement.

The largest remaining piece is the ironwork, which has just arrived, will be installed in early September. The ironwork constitutes the railings for the stairs and ramp, as well as the emergency exit stairs for the second level.



The Cottage 11 opening date has been pushed back! The Grand Opening has been reset to Spring 2009.

While C-11 will be ready as planned, the SPS Museum Board wants the whole campus to shine. We have voted to use this extra time for fine tuning our volunteer program and tour system. This means a short delay as projects are wrapped up over the winter.

This delay also creates a greater opportunity for community involvement as more and more groups have been inquiring about participation. We do apologize

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