

Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, Minnesota 55060 | phone: 507-451-2149 | www.orphanagemuseum.com



Interested in purchasing *The Children Remember* or a board on the Memorial Boardwalk? 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 purchase ___ board(s) at \$35.00 each!

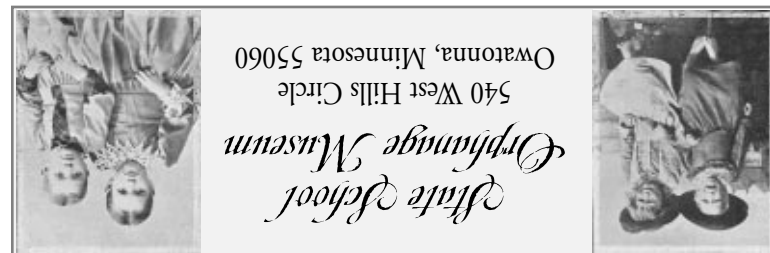
If you wish to purchase a board, please print clearly the words you wish to have inscribed.

Mail your tax-deductible contribution, 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.

Thank you.

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In this issue . . .

...Come Visit Owatonna!

...An update from
Editor/Producer Kathleen
Laughlin on the documentary,
"The Children Remember"

...Minnesota State Historical
Society nominates video

...Annual meeting, June 3, 2003

...News on Campus

...Owatonna's Sesquicentennial
planned for 2004.

...2003 Owatonna Area Festivals
& Events

...A Bird's Eye View of the State
Public School from 1886-1900

Come Visit Owatonna!

With the warm summer season ahead, we invite and encourage you to plan a trip to Owatonna, visit the Orphanage Museum, and walk the beautiful grounds of the campus that so affected the lives of 10,635 children. To our knowledge, the Orphanage Museum is the only one of its kind in the United States, that offers a broad view of orphanage life in the late 1800s to mid-1940s. See the 2003 Owatonna Area Festivals & Events schedule in this newsletter to coordinate other area activities with your visit!

The Museum is located in the Main Building (front door) from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday through Friday (except major holidays.) The "State School Kids" memorial is located in the front of this building.

Weekend access is through the Owatonna Arts Center, the rear entrance of the Main Building, from 1 - 5 p.m. The 1930's historic video and short 1993 Channel 11 video are available for viewing on the TV/VCR located inside the Museum. A "Walking Tour Guide" is available from the staff for \$.50. The Documentary is also available for purchase, as are several other items of interest. Come visit this historic site...you won't be disappointed!

Maxine Ronglien, Chairperson
Orphanage Museum Board of Directors

Documentary Update

By Kathleen Laughlin

It has been six months since the completion and premiere of our video, *The Children Remember: Life at the Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children*. As the director of this 87-minute program, I am proud, humbled and amazed at the strong impact it seems to have on audiences so far. The video is well done—everyone who worked on it went beyond expectations—but I have no doubt that the heart and soul of this video is the State School participants and the genuine giving of themselves that happened the day they came for their interview.

In front of the camera is not always a comfortable position to be in, but for most of these people it was serious challenge. For them so much of life was struggle, and it is the struggle we see in their telling of their lives, that resonates with every new audience. Viewers receive this very "real" sense of what the State School was like through two strands—the historical photos and narration facts which are woven through the larger strand of stories told by the interviewees. Precisely because there is that sense of giving—in spite of the struggle, which we see in each face, hear in each voice, that these stories shine with honest emotion. And the audience can open to new feelings and understandings. Through the video these thirteen "State Schoolers," plus a daughter and a "sister" and a wife had processed a lifetime of experiences and were willing to share them.

The Children Remember is acquiring a life of its own, as the videos are zooming back and forth across the country, over 400 copies sold so far. Allow me to share with you the various screenings with live audiences I have witnessed.

It all began October 26, 2002 with the video's premiere at the Minnesota History Center, and quickly followed

with three full-capacity screenings in Owatonna (in the old State School dining room) in November. The next screening was March 6, 2003, at the Fargo Film Festival (www.fargofilmfestival.com). *The Children Remember* received the Best Feature Documentary Award, so we were invited to be part of the four-day event. I went for two days, spoke at a luncheon and mixed with the audience. Eva Carlson Jensen, one of our video participants also joined us in Fargo.

For the festival, we screened on Thursday at 1 p.m. in the Historic Fargo Theater—not a prime time—but even so, we garnered an audience of over 50 people, most of them middle aged or older. They were visibly moved afterward as I heard comments like "Now I understand my father, who was in a similar institution in South Dakota, and who had a hard time being a father."

The next amazing experience I had with the video was at the annual conference of the MSSA (Minnesota Social Service Association - www.mnsocialserviceassoc.org) in Minneapolis on February 20, 2003. They previewed it early on and were immediately willing to put it on the schedule, offering credit for those who went. When I arrived there was no place to park in the huge parking lot, so I knew something was up. I soon appreciated the massive attendance (mainly from out-state I was told) at this conference; I walked into our screening room as they were pressing the door closed on 200 people packed into the space! About a third of the audience could not see the TV very well, yet every single person stayed till the end, and gave a rousing ovation.

This was my first experience showing the video to an audience of those who worked in the realm of child

welfare. I remember one person commenting "Every legislator in this state should see this!" Many took the opportunity afterward to question Harvey about the School and Maxine about the museum.

Going on a tip from the MSSA conference, I knocked on the door of the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota and found the well-known Professor Esther Wattenberg. After a little coercing, she watched *The Children Remember*, which then led to a classroom session over lunch period months later—April 10, 2003—with a small group of professors and grad students from the School of Social Work or other related departments. I was invited to present excerpts from the video and talk a bit about the project. Also presenting with me was the distinguished Dr. Charles A. Nelson, professor in the Institute of Child Development at the University, as well as director of the Center for Neurobehavioral Development. He spoke of his work on early experience and brain development and a groundbreaking study being conducted in Romania on children randomly taken out from orphanages and placed in foster homes, as well as on the children still in the orphanages.

To read more about Nelson and the study, visit www.macbrain.org/resource.htm, www.washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20030214-065343-6947r.htm, or www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/interviews/nelson.html

Our next big success was having *The Children Remember* accepted and presented at the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival, where it was one of only four local programs amidst a panoply of 130 films. Our screening was on Saturday, April 5, 2003 at 11 a.m. Although not an ideal timeslot, the media did give us great support with a two-page spread in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, the Minneapolis Star Tribune had a three star recommendation and description, and the Pulse gave it a "Hot Tix" spot on

their opening page. So...the crowd came! We were just short of capacity in the 350-seat Bell Auditorium, and for the first time really had a very broad general audience. Maxine and Harvey Ronglien and their family were on hand showing their support, and helped immensely in the rush of people telling us their stories, as well as participating with myself in a question and answer time at the end.

Because of the crowd we generated, and the ballots audience members filled out, we were awarded an additional screening during the third "Best of the Fest" week. (They average scores versus number of ballots and we were ranked the #2 favorite through April 14.) Our second screening landed on April 20 (Easter Sunday) at 7 p.m. We had about half a theater full of people—many of whom came by word of mouth and others who read the City Pages weekly that did do a favorable review that week. The question and answer period was more leisurely this time, and included discussion about the making of the film and the editing process.

In our near future, a screening in Little Falls is in the works, as is the finalizing of a KTCA Twin Cities Public Television air date in August or September of 2003. (For updates, call 651-229-1330 or visit www.viewerservices@tpt.org.)

The video has also been sent to several other documentary festivals to give it exposure—Washington DC, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz to name a few. Acceptance and screenings are still pending.

We invite you to write us with any good ideas on people/places/institutions to whom we could sell the tape, plan a screening, or even get a review written. Be sure to visit our website: www.orphanagemuseum.com as we continue to update it!

It is a pleasure to have shared my experiences with you.

Video News

Minnesota State Historical Society nominates The Children Remember for AASLH Award

We have received generous grants from the Minnesota Historical Society for the documentary video project. This project is the first of its kind that they have financially supported.

Because of the exceptional work and handling of this project, David Grabitske of the Minnesota State Historical Society has nominated the documentary film "The Children Remember" for consideration by the American Association for State and Local History Awards. The AASLH is a national organization that began in 1904. They recognize state and local history projects for exceptional merit. We expect to hear some time mid-summer whether or not this project has received such an award.

News on Campus

New Cabinetry

The Wood Gallery, a local Owatonna store, recently donated a 1912 wood display cabinet to the Museum. This cabinet has provided us with ten feet of additional display space. The new space is currently featuring "sewing" at the State School (both teaching girls the craft of sewing and the "sewing ladies" who were hired to sew clothing for the children), the greenhouse, and the farm. We are grateful to the City Park and Recreation staff for refurbishing and lighting the cabinet for display use.

New Museum Display - Children's Deaths

A separate new display focuses on the deaths of the children. Several obituaries were obtained from the Steele County Historical Society, listing deaths from measles, infantile stomach disorders, pneumonia,

diphtheric paralysis, diphtheria and bowel trouble. The Society provided a ledger from the Boice Funeral Home which lists the charges for coffins (\$10.00 each) and embalming (\$10.00 each) from 1907-1914.

The Grim Reaper, July 28, 1902

Little Mary Barrett, a ward of the State Public School in this city, died at that institution last Thursday at about noon, of measles.

The child was about two years of age and was brought to the school last April from Pine County. The funeral was held Friday morning, and the remains were interred in the cemetery at the school.

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the State School Orphanage Museum will be held at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, June 3 in the Owatonna Arts Center. Anyone is welcome to attend. If you have any ideas you would like to have considered, please send them to:

State School Orphanage Museum Board, 540 West hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060.

News on Campus (cont.)

Corner display - the Rock Garden

One can almost smell the flowers and hear the water trickling from the fountains it pours through the Rock Garden. The Rock Garden was erected on the grounds in the 1930's, but was later graded up (year not known). It is currently the feature display in the museum, located in the small alcove between the south and west corridors. A future goal of the Board, West Hills Commission and the City of Owatonna is to re-create a similar rock garden on the grounds.

Refacing of the Historic Root Cellar

When visiting the cemetery, be sure to stroll over to the newly refaced Root Cellar. The new signage explains the construction and also how this unique, historic treasure was used. Refacing the front and adding signage was a joint project of the City Park and Recreation Department and the Orphanage Museum in 2002.

Memorial Boardwalk

The boardwalk continues to grow, thanks to so many of you who have purchased boards. Over 400 boards are now in place, covering nearly two-thirds of the former "Cinder Path" which led to the cemetery. Many unique memories have been engraved on the boards. Each records a special memory, message or family name and provides an interesting walk through time. Boards are still available for \$35.00 each. See the back of this newsletter for information on ordering.

Orphanage Website

The Board has recently purchased new software to enhance our website. (www.orphanagemuseum.com). Keep checking for future updates.

Remember the children in the Children's Cemetery

The cemetery gate is open for the season and visitors are most welcome. The cemetery is walking distance from the Main Building and Arts Center, or, if you choose, drive down and park on Ronglien Lane. You can then enjoy the new sidewalk en route to the cemetery and Memorial Boardwalk.

State School Tours

Harvey and Maxine Ronglien continue to tell the State School story to many scheduled groups throughout the year. Presently, 20 bus tours are scheduled for the upcoming summer months. Harvey's presentation includes his views on the pros and cons of orphanage life, what happens when children grow up without family and love, how it affected their adult life and the value of family. Harvey's presentations have become a dynamic part of Owatonna's tourism package. To schedule a presentation for ten or more, phone 507-451-2149. Cost: \$4.00 per person.

Memorials

The board is most grateful for the many memorials we have received. These monies are being set aside for a future special restoration project. We hope to have more specifics in the next newsletter.

Recent Deaths

Bertha Wold, Teacher
Anna (Brink) Moehrle, Librarian
Josphine (Zack) Kurimey
Harvey Ferris
Merlin Martinson
Dick Bates
Bob Raymond
Alfred Fritz
Wallace Cheney

2003 Owatonna Area Festivals & Events

- Hometown FairMay 29 - June 1
Steele County Fairgrounds (Owatonna)
- Cabela's Sidewalk SaleJune 21 - 22
Cabela's (Owatonna)
- Medford 150 Year CelebrationJune 25 - 29
Medford Citywide
- Old Fashioned Fourth of July Parade.....July 4
Blooming Prairie
- Historical Society ExtravaganzaJuly 13
Village of Yesteryear (Owatonna)
- Car Nuts Auto ShowJuly 20
Steele County Fairgrounds
- Five Days of Fun (Owatonna)July 23 - 27
- Duck Duck Goose RaceJuly 23
 Dartts Park
- Crazy Days ShoppingJuly 24 - 25
 Citywide
- Hog Roast/Street Dance.....July 25
 Downtown
- Main Street Owatonna Festival of the WinesJuly 26
 Arts Center
- Festival of the ArtsJuly 26 - 27
 Central Park
- Pontiac & GMC Car Show/Sidewalk SaleJuly 26 - 27
 Medford Outlet Center
- Steele County Free FairAugust 12 - 17
Steele County Fairgrounds
- CulturfestSeptember 27
Washington School (Owatonna)

History of State School Continues to Be Remembered.

We are pleased to report that feature articles have recently appeared in these Minnesota publications: Rochester Post Bulletin, St. Paul Pioneer Press, Minnesota Genealogist Magazine and the Owatonna People's Press.

Owatonna Sesquicentennial Celebration-2004

Planning for special events and happenings is already well underway for Owatonna's 150th Anniversary Celebration. Each week in 2004, from May through August, the city will feature a special theme. The week of August 8-14 will feature the history of the State School. A large community parade will follow on Sunday, August 15. Many ideas, including a State School reunion, are being considered. More details will follow, but for now, mark your calendars to be a part of this gala celebration!

A Bird's Eye View

of the State Public School from 1886-1900

Legislation in 1885 established the State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children in Owatonna, Minnesota. The State School opened December 1, 1886 with three buildings in place. Children were admitted through probate court, made wards of the state and all parental rights were cancelled.

Continued on next page.

Patterned after the State School in Coldwater, Michigan, children entering the school became part of the institutional system:

1. Family like life in cottages
2. Placing out program (adoption or indenture)
3. Emphasis on discipline and useful labor
4. Education

The belief of the 19th century Americans was in perfectibility, hard work and moral uplift. Dependent children were not delinquent and could be saved. Preventative measures such as a pastoral environment and discipline could render children deprived of a family acceptable to a new family.

The 1900 Bi-annual Report records the following:

Children Received	2148
In MN homes	1499
In homes-other states	238
Died	66
Returned to county	87
Present at School	258

Indenture Contracts

Adoption rates were low so many of the children were put out on indenture contracts. While some children found good homes most were taken out strictly for work and were ill treated. They were allowed only a meager education, if any at all. These children quickly fell behind in their learning and often were too embarrassed to return to school. Add to that the discrimination of being an orphan, life was extremely difficult for these children in the 1880s and 1890s.



Superintendent Merrill

Galen Merrill, a 26 year old professor, from Coldwater, Michigan, was named superintendent and served until 1934.



Mary and Clara

Mary and Clara arrived by train August 17, 1892. The photo at left was taken when they arrived at the school. Little did they know that they would become "poster children," showing the good work being done to save the children of Minnesota (photo at right).

Ole E. Quesseth, ward in 1895, recorded the following in his book I Remember When:

1. Assembly room (chair), morning prayer, roll call.
2. March to breakfast
3. Back to Assembly (chair); if no school, mustered out to the playground.
4. Noon whistle; we all head back to assembly (chair) in cottage.
5. Line up and march to dinner
6. Back to cottage and assembly (chair). Then mustered out to school or play.
7. Five o'clock whistle for assembly (chair). Then line up, march to supper.
8. After supper, back to cottage, assembly (chair) and evening "get together" with matrons being "masters of ceremony" as it were.

"The Chair" continued to control until the closing of the school in 1945.