



*State School
Orphanage Museum*

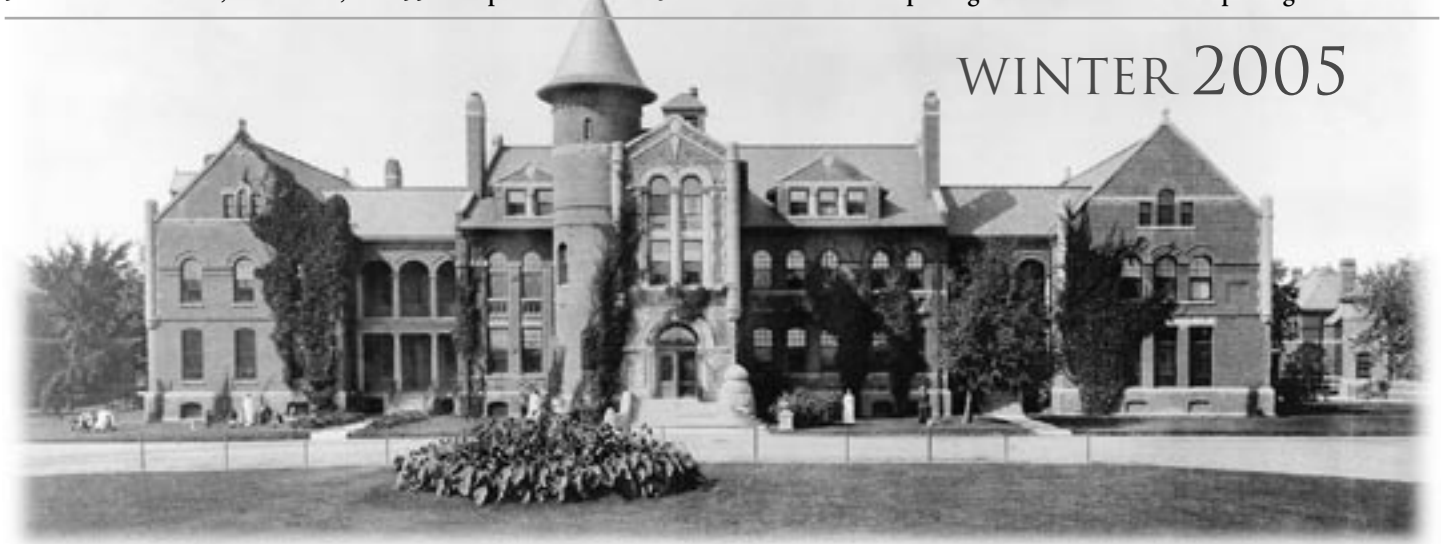
540 West Hills Circle
Owatonna, Minnesota 55060

Nonprofit Organization
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Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 1-800-423-6466 | e-mail: info@orphanagemuseum.com | www.orphanagemuseum.com

WINTER 2005



Return Service Requested

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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 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 _____.

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.

"Holidays Are a Perfect Time to Preserve Your Family's History."

Quote from Minnesota Historical Society's 2005 November/December newsletter "History Matters."

In the November/December newsletter "History Matters," the Minnesota Historical Society's Director, Nina Archabal, points out the need for families to share stories "recounting exploits of recent times and of past generations. In this way, families perpetuate their own history."

Nina's comment reminds us of the many, many times we have heard the comment, "I just wish I had asked my Mother (or Father or Grandparent) more questions about their life at the State School."

During this Christmas season as you gather with your family, may we encourage, if you still have a State School relative (or even if they are deceased) to share stories of their lives with the younger generation. As Nina points out, "There is no better way to ensure that your history will be there for your own enjoyment and enlightenment and for all who will come after us."

Yes, we are well aware of the comment—"He (or she) would never talk about their State School experience." We hear that often. Yet, we know today that "talking brings healing." Perhaps with a little gentle persuasion, Grandma or Grandpa will start to share some of those

buried memories and the family will have a deeper appreciation of their early life and family history.

Another suggestion is to bring the family to visit the State School grounds, Museum and cemetery in 2006. We promise an enlightening experience.

From all of us working to preserve the history of the State School here in Owatonna, to All OF YOU—our warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. We also send our gratitude for your interest and financial support in helping us preserve this precious history for future generations.

Sincerely,

Orphanage Museum Board of Directors

Sandy Dinse	Corky Kolander
Deb Kotec	Carol Raetz
Harvey Ronglien	Maxine Ronglien
Nancy Sletten	Greg Thomas
Nancy Vaillancourt	Shelby Zempel

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Christmas - Always a Joyous Time at State School

December 29, 1905 (as recorded in local newspaper)

"As always a delightful occasion this year. The observance of Christmas in every family where there are children has become an essential duty, and the happiest home where it is not observed must be a gloomy one for the little ones on Christmas Day. When the cherished children of comfortable homes and loving parents cannot contentedly do without Christmas, how much more is the Christmas observance a necessity in an institution like the State Public School, where little ones are herded together, comfortably and happily maintained, it is true, but none the less losing a mother's care which nothing can replace.

"This has always been fully realized by the State School authorities, and the Christmas celebrations at the School have been a delight not only to the children, but also to all privileged to witness their happiness on these occasions.

"This Christmas at the State School was no exception to the rule. A big Christmas tree was held in the assembly room Saturday evening, and a program of songs and recitations rendered, to the vast delight of the small wards of the great state of Minnesota. Every child received a remembrance from Santa Claus, and it was a happy time for hundreds of little ones to whom it meant much more than the bountiful Christmas of children in cozier private homes."



A Note from Harvey

FAST FORWARD TO THE 1930s (by Harvey Ronglien, sPs 1932-1943)

The nation was suffering through The Great Depression. Bread lines and the loss of jobs replaced bountiful Christmases. Throughout the land, families were just trying to stay warm and find food for their families.

Thanks to the State of Minnesota and the generosity of Owatonna citizens, the 16 cottages filled with 500 kids at the State School, were to be treated royally. Each cottage had their own Christmas tree. Each child received a least three small gifts, plus an apple or orange and small sack of candy. Each cottage also got a cottage gift. Bedtime was 9:00 P.M. A great thrill! Full of expectation and excitement, the State School children were not forgotten or disappointed. Christmas is a special time and it was at the State School in the 1930s.

**Here are two newspaper articles
Mavis Gasner recently uncovered:**

December 13, 1932

SANTA CLAUS TO VISIT STATE SCHOOL TODAY
Santa Claus, in route from St. Paul to Albert Lea, will make a visit to the Minnesota State Public School today. Santa and two of his eight reindeer, probably Dancer and Prancer, are due here shortly after the dinner hour. He is to get the best and finest reception he has had when he arrives at the State School. The merry old man will spend more than an hour with the children and pass out sticks of candy.

December 25, 1932

**CHRISTMAS TREE AT STATE SCHOOL
ONE OF PRETTIEST**
One of the outstanding of the many electric trees in Owatonna is the one on the State School grounds before the home of Supt. G.A. Merrill.

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The tree towers fifty feet high, has hundreds of colored electric lights, while on top is a lighted star. The light can be seen from a great radius. It does shine radiance and cheerfulness—significant of the Christmas spirit.



Remember When... State School Christmas Memories

Typical Cottage Gifts

Chinese Checkers, Sled, Checkers, Erector Set, Tinker Toys

Typical Christmas Dinner

Turkey, Potatoes, Gravy, Bread and Butter, Cookies or Cake, Milk

Typical Boy's Gift

Pencil Box, Yo-Yo, Mouth Organ, Jacks, Marbles, Rose's Hair Oil, Jump Rope

Typical Girl's Gift

Bobby Pins, Hair Ribbons, Coloring Book, Dolls & Paper Dolls, Jacks, Crayons, Small Game, Comb & Brush

Favorite Outdoor Events during Christmas Season

King of the Hill, Skiing, Sledding, Skating

LIFE AT THE STATE SCHOOL 100 YEARS AGO IN 1905 (AS RECORDED IN OWATONNA NEWSPAPERS)

July 21

A SAD DROWNING—JOSEPH WOZ, A LITTLE NINE-YEAR-OLD STATE SCHOOL BOY, DROWNS AT SANDY BEACH STRAIGHT RIVER HE DISREGARDS ORDERS TO STAY IN SHALLOW WATER, AND GETS INTO A HOLE, NEVER RISING. Body Recovered After Long Search—Little Lad Was From Duluth a Month Since. (When boys visited the cemetery in the 1930s, a favorite saying was: "Joe Woz—but he ain't no more.")

August 9

State School Picnic—Two wagon loads of State School boys left Wednesday morning for the mineral springs where they will spend the day enjoying their regular annual picnic. The day was very pleasantly passed in playing games, including baseball and other sports and a most enjoyable time was had by all who were fortunate to attend.

August 8

INMATES HAVE A RICH DIET—State School Produces Food—Fine Eatables—Local State School Has Big Farm and Big Crop This Year. The State School located in this city has one of the largest farms of the various state institutions of the state and this year has a large crop. It is predicted that this vast garden will grow more vegetables and other foods than the state children can eat during the winter. If this is the case the surplus will be disposed of to other state institutions. The inmates of the state institutions will live in luxury the coming winter. They will have all the raspberry jam, and strawberry preserves they can eat, besides vegetables such as celery, cabbage, squash, turnips, onions, potatoes, and tomatoes.

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LIFE AT THE STATE SCHOOL 100 YEARS AGO IN 1905 (AS RECORDED IN OWATONNA NEWSPAPERS)

September 1

HIS DREAMS FULFILLED—General Hubbard much pleased with State School. The development of Minnesota's charitable Institution Accomplishes the Purposes and Aims of Legislators Who Founded the School—General Hubbard visited the State School and Viewed the Result of His Action Favoring the Institution While Governor. 'I am and feel more than repaid for that which I have done towards making the Minnesota State School possible.'

September 2

LARGE BARN DESTROYED BY FIRE AT THE STATE SCHOOL. Fire took place Friday Evening Shortly After Eleven O'clock—Origin is Unknown—Fire Department Unable to Control Fire Before Barn was Destroyed But Were Able to Save Hospital—Loss Covered by Insurance. Seventy-two tons of hay, nine tons of feed, four calves and valuable farm tools were destroyed. Cattle fortunately were out in pasture—large silo also destroyed—was valued at \$550—total loss at this time can not be exactly estimated. Prof. Merrill left early Saturday morning for Saint Paul to make definite arrangements to have the barn replaced as soon as possible as it is absolutely necessary to have a building of this kind at the school to take proper care of cattle.

September 5

A general discussion took place at the meeting of the firemen as to the fire protection that is afforded at the State School. The recent fire was instrumental in bringing this matter up before the men. This is the second time (main building fire 1904) that they have had to make the long run to the School and on each occasion they have found that the water supply at the institution is not as large as is necessary to control a large fire at that place.

September 18

Award Contract—for new Laundry (\$5,200) and New Barn (\$3,000)

September 21

Little Florence Matson, one of the State School Children, was put on the train at Waseca and sent to Owatonna—Did not seem to know where she was going and was taken to the State School. It was later learned she had been one of the wards and had been sent out to a home near Waseca and was placed on the train near that place and sent to Owatonna to be returned to the School. The local School authorities had not been told of her coming and this accounted for their not being there to meet her and the confusion which resulted.

September 30

John Liddell, judge of probate, has taken action in the matter of properly caring for the children of Knude Knudson, the section foreman who is in jail on a serious charge. Steps have been taken to have the children taken to the State School for Dependent Children at Owatonna (Wadena Tribune.)

October 3

RUN AWAY BOY IS FOUND HERE (Waseca) Marshall Misgen discovers lad at home of John Cater and turns him over to State School Authorities. Boy had been placed in home of Henry Maw and ran away from there.

October 10

The seven children of Mrs. Hannah Lund, the 'baby farm' manager who was last week sentenced to a term in the penitentiary, have been committed to the State Public School in this city.

October 13

THREE STATE'S WARDS DIE during the past six days—two at the institution's hospital and one little baby but recently placed in a home in Minneapolis.

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November 17

BROKE OUT OF SCHOOL
Juvenile Court to Dispose of Runaway from Owatonna—Charles Soakup, 15 years old, was in the juvenile court this morning. He ran away from the State School at Owatonna about three months ago and has been working and keeping quiet since then. Judge Orr will dispose of his case tomorrow.

November 25

THE STATE'S THANKSGIVING
State Institution Wards Dine—Local State School children will be given turkey dinner thanksgiving regardless of high price of national bird. Average price of 18 cents a pound. In addition, barrels of cranberries were bought at 11 cents a barrel and 100 gallons of oysters at \$1.40 a gallon. In addition the state wards will have the necessary vegetables and appetizing side dishes. It will be a real Thanksgiving feast.



Thank You, James Smith!

Brothers James and Malcolm Smith were placed in the State School in the 1930s. Both went on to serve in World War II. Malcolm was wounded in the Pacific and later died aboard ship. James (right) is shown here presenting the brothers' metals to Harvey Ronglien (left) for the State School Museum. While hundreds of State Schoolers served in WWII, we know at least twenty-five paid the ultimate price with their lives. We are proud to honor all State Schoolers who served their country in all wars.

Canadian Publication

We were honored that a Canadian genealogy magazine "Family Chronicle" contacted us for a short segment on the State School Orphanage for their December 2005 publication. The story was entitled "Children in the System—Maureen Taylor looks at the adoption, foster care and indenture of orphans." Two photos were published along with the following write-up:

"Anyone interested in what orphanage life was like in the 19th century should visit the Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum in Owatonna, Minnesota www.orphanagemuseum.com." It was home to more than 10,000 children over a period of 60 years. It is now a museum that offers a view of orphanage life from the late 1880s to the 1940s."

For more information on the entire article visit their website www.familychronicle.com.

June 1900 U.S. Census

Speaking of genealogy, Erwin Varnes, former State Schooler, recently sent us a copy of the June 1900 U.S. Census that listed all of the State School children and employees as of that date. If this could be of value for your family research, please send a postage-paid return envelope to 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060, attn: State School, PLUS the full name of the individual at that time and we will check for the name and send you a response.

Clarifying the Chapel History

In our Summer Newsletter we stated the chapel in the Main Building was no longer used as a chapel after the 1933 new school with an auditorium was built. Marion Loges has corrected us. She states her husband, Rev. Ralph Loges, was the first (and last) Resident Chaplain at the Owatonna State School from 1967-1971 where he held Protestant services. Marion believes Father Gernes also held his Roman Catholic Mass there as well. We appreciate Marion's clarification.

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In Memory of Bud Blekeberg

We are sorry to report that Bud Blekeberg passed away from cancer in October 2005. Bud was the Owatonna citizen who erected the State School Cemetery Memorial in 1993, and Bud was also instrumental in erecting 151 named—crosses for those children buried only by a number. Bud's motivation always was, "All those children shouldn't be forgotten." Thanks to Bud Blekeberg, these 198 children will now always be remembered.



Reprinted with permission of Owatonna People's Press
Story by Tim Neuenschwander; photos by Thom Caya.
October 30, 2005

One by one, Alex Vaillancourt worked with volunteers to provide a proper resting place for children who were forgotten over the years.

One by one, children who never had a family received the attention they deserved from a child no older than

some of those buried.

As part of his project toward the Boy Scout's Eagle badge, 14-year-old Alex worked with family, friends and volunteers to reset headstones at the children's cemetery at the old state school orphanage in West Hills.

"These people were orphans and they had no love in their life," Alex said, "so we had to give them love when they're dead, because they didn't have it while they were alive."

Alex is pursuing Eagle Scout recognition through Faribault's Troop 3-2. He is one of five scouts from his troop trying for the highest honor presented to Boy Scouts. The project originated from Alex's desire to do something to help his hometown. A call to the Owatonna Parks and Recreation Department revealed that repairing headstones in the cemetery was at the top of the city's work list. Though the project meant working with graves of children around his age, the scout was eager to give something back to the former orphans. "I was all for it," Alex said. "They needed to be remembered somehow."

After the city handed the project to Alex, it was just a matter of planning for the job and recruiting volunteers to complete the task.

"After more than 100 years—some stones date back to 1888—it was no surprise that some of the stones had shifted in various degrees off their spots," said Brian Vaillancourt, the scout's father.

The volunteers, friends, family and fellow church members then took shovels and elbow grease to the cemetery to reset the stones on top of cement slabs, which were previously poured by work-release inmates from the Faribault prison.

"To complete the job, volunteers poured gravel under the headstones, leveling off the surface, and placed the slabs back in place," the scout's father said.

The volunteers also used a joint compound to help re-seal a few of the headstones that were fractured from

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age, abused from years of being left at the mercy of the elements. In all, the group restored 51 headstones, previously in need of repair.

"It was a good experience," Brian Vaillancourt said of the project. "It required a lot of physical labor and hard work. Anybody who showed, we found a job for." Their motivation, he said was understandable.

The tombstones tell sad stories; many of the children were only as old as Alex when they passed. Some never made it that long, their stones one of the only reminders that remain of their short lives.

On average, Alex said, the children buried in the cemetery only made it through their fourth birthday. Some children (who died) at the orphanage were reclaimed by their natural families. But at the still-tender age of 14, Alex said he was touched by the fact that many of the graves mark the lives of those who were even younger than himself. "You have to stop and think every so often." He said, "It got a little sad."

For a time, the children buried in the cemetery were represented solely by the number of their admittance to the school.

One stone slab, flush with the ground, represents an infant dropped off at the school one night, an infant who didn't even make it long enough to receive a name. The inscription "Baby" is the only recognition on the grave. "It was like the Jews in the concentration camps," Alex said. "They were just given a number."

"There were 10,635 children at the school over the years; an exact count as each child was assigned a number upon arrival," said Harvey Ronglien, a former student and founder of the school's museum.

"In the cemetery alone, the numbers reach into the 9,000s. In all, roughly 300 children died in the state school," Ronglien said. "Of that number, only 198 were buried in the cemetery."

However, Ronglien said it was stirring to see another generation of community members working to preserve those children's memories. "It means a lot to all of us," he added. "We appreciate that it's being remembered."

Donations

We are most grateful for the following tax-deductible donations and memorials received since the summer 2005 Newsletter.

Owatonna High Class of 1955

Tim & Wendy Beard	Christina Pompillio
Barbara Varner	Delores Maness
James Smith	Donna Sheets
Larry & Marla Kunkel	Harriet Grunklee
Jerry Robinson	Milo Beuthien
Buzz Wilson	Jim Chauncey
Luella Edin	Metro Connections
William & Louisa Sheets	Victor Laskowske
Janice Thiemann	Frances Treinen
Ida Jacobson	Fred Herr
David & Janet Nelson	Michelle Hinze
Kathleen Sherman	Lou & Vernon Johnson
Roy Malm	

Memorials Given By:

Family of Clara Wilker	Harvey & Maxine Ronglien
Leola McNearney	Mary Larson
James & Diane Guse	

Recently Deceased State Schoolers

Edward (Webber) Wilson