

The Radiator Brush



Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum & Historic Cottage 11 Boys' Dormitory
~ Summer 2021 Newsletter Edition ~

DINING HALL DUTIES!

BY VIVIAN SWAN MANTHE, COTTAGE 4

Our duties were to carry the dishes to the dishwasher after meals. One girl at the machine would run the washer by hand. A couple of girls dried and stacked for pickup. Girls set the tables for each meal and swept and cleaned the floor.

underwear so we didn't have to drag our dress through scrub water. I just remember the Saturdays when we had more time to really scrub the darn floors. That floor was really gleaming white when we got through with our job.

We got our pail, scrub brush, rags, and soap from the utility room. We scrubbed floors on our hands and knees. Since we wore dresses, we would tuck our dress hem under our

I took care of our four tables. It didn't take that much time to take the dishes to the dishwasher and reset the tables. One thing we were all taught at the school, was working FAST and doing it RIGHT. I remember once suggesting using mops. Big mistake! I was told in no uncertain terms. "We do not use mops. They just push the dirt into corners."



You have to remember, Harvey (Ronglien) was in C-3. It was called the "bad boys" cottage. Those were also the tables where the barn boys ate and they always had dirty shoes. We girls were not allowed off the sidewalk.

Here's a fact. When we got married, I scrubbed my kitchen and bathroom floors on my hands and knees. This is no joke. You know the floors were always clean.

photo reenactment

2021 50/50 RAFFLE TICKET

Your raffle ticket has arrived! It's your chance to contribute to the Orphanage Museum and, if you're lucky, share in 50% of the money raised! The more tickets sold, the larger the pot to split. Tickets are \$20 each.

Past Prize Winners Received

2016 \$1,987.50
 2017 \$1,300.00
 2018 \$1,430.00
 2019 \$1,240.00
 2020 \$1,200.00

Send a \$20 check (made out to the Orphanage Museum) in the enclosed self-addressed envelope by Thursday, **September 30, 2021**. Be sure to include the ticket with your name and contact phone number. The drawing will be held at 5:00 on September 30.

You could be the 2021 winner!

Though donations to the Museum are tax deductible, the raffle ticket purchases are not.

MUSEUM RECEIVES A FACELIFT

During the time the Orphanage Museum was closed due to COVID-19, the City of Owatonna undertook several projects that affected the Museum. They included adding new carpeting, patching and repainting walls, changing lighting, and adding safety features to minimize contact between visitors and City employees.

When visitors returned on May 1, a refreshed Museum was ready to greet them. And they have been coming at a steady pace. In the three months we've been open we've had visitors from 25 states and two foreign countries sign our guest book.



Pictures that came down for the painting, needed to go back up. Thankfully, "before" photos were taken for placement.



An office door was sealed off, on the left, where the display case ends. The office door was moved to a more private hallway.

ORPHAN TRAIN MOVEMENT IN MINNESOTA

We are often asked if any State School kids came on the Orphanage Trains. The short answer is "No." Our children were placed here by Minnesota counties. However, there were Orphan Train stops in Minnesota. Below, Roger W. Toogood, former Executive Director - 1969-1996 of the Minnesota Children's Home Society, writes about how his organization was formed and its relationship with the orphan train movement.

Between 1854 and 1929 approximately 150,000 orphan children from New York City were put on trains and shipped west. A young minister by the name of Charles Loring Brace, with the New York Children's Aid Society, came up with the idea. The movement ended in 1929, 75 years after it had begun as a social experiment.

At that time there were no foster homes or orphanages. The kids whose parents had died coming from Europe just had to live on the streets. The idea of shipping them west to work on farms, in factories, helping in homes, etc. was a creative and positive development.

As the train system developed with connections all the way to California, thousands of kids were put on the trains. At each small town on the way west the kids were taken out and put up on the railroad dock for inspection by the farmers, merchants and housewives. That is where the expression still used today came from — "Put up for Adoption."

Some children who were of small build or with handicaps could end up going all the way to the west coast and never be selected. The founder of the Children's Home Society of Minnesota Rev. Savage observed the experience at the Minneapolis railroad station. His heart was moved to do something!

In 1889, he organized some other ministers and got families willing to provide temporary care as he and his wife spent their weekends taking the kids to churches around the state in their horse and buggy to find families for the kids. This effort grew until he opened a large "Receiving Home" in 1903.

The first President of the Board was Cyrus Northrup, who was then President of the University of Minnesota. His leadership and connections helped improve services and the laws to protect the children and also put

Homes Wanted For Children



A Company of Orphan Children

of different ages in charge of an agent will arrive at your town on date herein mentioned. The object of the coming of these children is to find homes in your county, especially among farmers, where they may enjoy a happy and wholesome family life, where kind care, good example and moral training will fit them for a life of self-support and usefulness. They come under the auspices of the New York Children's Aid Society. They have been tested and found to be well-meaning boys and girls suitable for homes.

The conditions are that these children shall be properly clothed, treated as members of the family, given proper school privileges and remain in the family until they are eighteen years of age. At the expiration of the time specified it is hoped that arrangements can be made whereby they may be able to remain in the family indefinitely. The Society retains the right to remove a child at any time for just cause, with agrees to remove said child unsatisfactory after being notified.

Remember the time and place. All are invited. Come out and hear the address. Applications may be made to any one of the following well-known citizens, who have agreed to act as local committees to aid the agent in securing homes.

A. J. Hammond, H. W. Parker, Geo. Barber, J. F. Dunson, J. F. Hines,
B. N. Walsh, J. A. Armstrong, F. L. Durgin.

This distribution of children is by consent of the State Board of Control, and will take place at the

G. A. R. Hall, Winnebago, Minn.

Friday, Jan. 11th, '07, at 10.30 a. m. & 2 p. m.

H. D. Clarke, State Agent,

Dodge Center, Minn.

Office: 105 East 22nd St.,
New York City.

Minnesota into a major force on children's services for the orphans. A major difference with some of the public orphanages was the decision not to house the children, but to get them placed with families as soon as possible. That led to a publication entitled — "The Home Finder," which featured children needing permanent families.

One hundred and thirty-two years later, the Children's Home Society is still placing orphaned and legally free children into permanent, loving adoptive families.

FAMILY STORIES FROM THE PAST

BURTON ELLIS - CASE 8196

Burton Ellis was sent to the State School in 1928, along with a brother and two sisters, when he was 6 1/2 years old. Here's a photo of the Ellis children taken before they were separated. It would be many years before they were together again.



The four older Ellis children came to the State School

Although both parents were living, they were not living in the same location. In fact, Clarence Ellis, the father, didn't know where his children were until after they had been placed in Owatonna. Here's the text of a letter sent on February 1, 1928, from the Clerk of Probate Court with that news.

Dear Mr. Ellis;

Your letters regarding your children from this office were missent and were returned to me. Your four children (Ronald, Norma, Edythe, and Burton), have been sent to the State School at Owatonna to remain there for a period of six months. They were taken yesterday by the Judge's wife. Mrs. Ellis has the youngest child with her (Merlie).

*Yours very truly,
Vandah Christenson
Probate Clerk*

Clarence Ellis saved the letters he received from Burton and Burt's daughters donated those original letters to the Museum.

Next is a letter sent in 1932.

Dear Father;

I have a show Friday night. The men are making a sidewalk in front of the main building. There are two new cottages 14 and 15. We have a gymnasium. Our gym teacher is Mr. Wallen. We play football at our cottages. I am 11 years old now. It snowed yesterday. Goodbye,

From your loving son Burton Ellis

While the initial letter said the children were going to the School for six months, they remained wards of the State until they reached 18.

The photo on the right was taken on the front lawn of the State School during a visit from Clarence. Since he was still wearing knickers, Burt was younger than 13 at the time.



Clarence and Burton Ellis, father and son

Following his State School stay and time in farm indenture, Burton worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and then joined the Army Medical Corps, serving in the Philippines during World War II. He was wounded, returned to duty, and became a Prisoner of War, eventually testifying at the Tokyo Crimes Trials. He certainly had a tenacious spirit.

NIEMI (RIESKANIEMI) FAMILY - CASES 4445 - 4451

Shortly before the COVID-19 lockdown began, we received an email from a North Carolina woman, asking if there was a chance that any children with the last name of Neimi children had been at the State School.

While all the State School records are kept at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, we did happen to have a photocopy of 1912 admissions and found that seven of the ten children of Finnish immigrants John and Greeta Niemi were admitted to the State School on February 28, 1912. They were Sigrid (12), Selma (11), Swante (9), Seyna and Sepina (8), Sadie (5) and Svenne (2). A tenth child had been born on January 10, 1912, who did not come to the school.

As with every child, they were each assigned a case file number and their numbers went from oldest to youngest. It was common that the oldest child was given the first number and the file may hold more detailed information.

This bit of genealogical information was quite exciting to them! They finally knew where the children went when they left their parents.

It is unclear what family events lead to the children being placed in the orphanage. Perhaps Greeta was not able to care for them after the tenth child was born. John died on December 30, 1913, in Canada.

The Minnesota History Center's Research Library is open again, but very busy with backlogged requests. In fact, State School records are still temporarily unavailable. Our friends in North Carolina are patiently waiting to get copies of the actual records to try and complete their family's story. We were happy to be able to help them out.



The photo above was taken about 1905 on their farm in Wisconsin. It's sad to realize what was going to happen to the family in seven years.

21	4445	Sigrid Niemi	1777	St. Louis	Finland
	4446	Selma Niemi	1778		
	4447	Syana Niemi boy	2117		
	4448	Sepina Niemi	1781		
	4449	Sepina Niemi	1782		
	4450	Sadie Niemi	1783		
	4451	Svenne Niemi boy	2118		

Admissions information February 28, 1912.

ARE YOU A SECOND-GENERATION STATE SCHOOLER?

We think you can lay claim to being a State Schooler by simply being related to an original State School kid.

More than 10,000 children came through the Minnesota State Public School system in Owatonna during its 60-year history. If we expand that number by offspring, the number does not diminish, it grows.

And even though it's been 75 years since the State School closed, we are seeing a renewed interest by the children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren of original State Schoolers to discover what life was like at sPs.

Our visitors tend to come in three categories: general history buffs, social work historians, and family members. But, it's family members who have the

most personal connection to the Museum's stories. How often we hear the comment, "So that's why Dad/Mom was the way he/she was!" after a visit.

With that in mind, we want to remain in contact with second- and third-generation State Schoolers. We are working to expand our reach. If you know of someone who would like to receive our newsletter, please send their contact information to the Museum or to museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us.

We are also interested in sharing experiences of what it was like to be raised by a parent who had been in the State School, both good and maybe not-so-good. You're the only ones who can tell firsthand stories.

Look for more information in upcoming newsletters. You are important to the future of the Museum.

THANK YOU, SANDY

Sandy Dinse, a true second-generation State Schooler, has relinquished her duties of making seasonal changes to the Museum displays. This is a task she's quietly done for decades in memory of her mother, Eva Carlson Jensen. Eva wrote the book "No Tears Allowed. Sandy was a long-term Board Member and worked closely with Maxine Ronglien to create and maintain the displays in the main Museum and Cottage 11. Thank you, Sandy, for your dedication.



Each season, related display pieces are set out and appropriate clothing changes are made.



DONATIONS**MEMORIALS**

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**Total \$68,427.32 in Legacy Trust.***Donations to the Legacy Trust are always welcome and are tax deductible.*



Nonprofit Organization
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Return Service Requested

Interested in purchasing "The Children Remember" or brick on the School Plaza? 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 _____

I'd like to order a copy of "A Real Treasure" 1930 historic film DVD at \$25.00 plus \$7.00 for shipping/handling.

I'd like to order a copy of "The Children Remember" documentary DVD at \$19.95 plus \$7.00 for shipping/handling.

I'd like to purchase brick(s) at \$100.00 each. Fill out inscription below.

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

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

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

