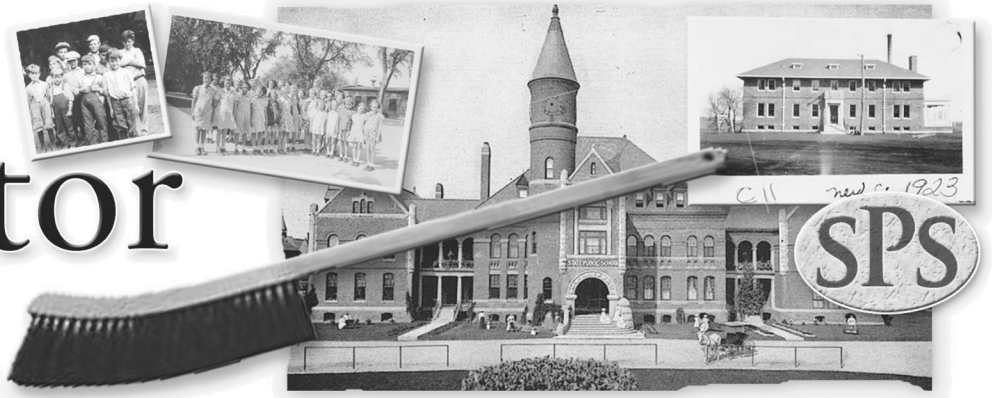


The Radiator Brush



Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum & Historic Cottage 11 Boys' Dormitory
~ Spring 2022 Newsletter Edition ~

GREAT NEWS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE MUSEUM ORPHANAGE MUSEUM & STEELE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MERGE

ANNE PETERSON, MUSEUM MANAGER

After nearly 12 months of meetings and deliberations, it was announced on November 18, 2021, that the Orphanage Museum and the Steele County Historical Society (SCHS) would join forces, with the Museum coming under the bigger umbrella of SCHS.

The mission of the Historical Society is "to preserve and share history today for tomorrow," which definitely aligns with the Museum's goals. In fact, we discovered that when the Rongliens were starting the Museum they approached SCHS about becoming a part of that organization, but apparently the timing wasn't right then. It was now.

The 2021 report handed out at the the SCHS Annual Meeting had a map on the cover that showed all the communities in Steele County. Since the State Public School was a community unto itself for 60 years, it makes sense that it is now included with the others on the map under the care of SCHS.

On the surface things remain the same. Day-to-day tours and day-to-day Museum activity will go on as usual. My feeling is that the Museum is going to benefit greatly from this new relationship. I hope you find that reassuring.

I am happy to have access to additional resources and expertise to help preserve our stories and collections.

AS OF NOVEMBER, 2021
THE ORPHANAGE MUSEUM
OFFICIALLY BECAME PART
OF THE STEELE COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



For anyone outside of Steele County who is not familiar with the SCHS, it's a private, nonprofit, educational organization established in 1949, and is one of the oldest in the state. Located near the Steele County Fairgrounds, SCHS is home to the Village of Yesteryear, offering 19 historic structures, and the History Center, which houses an exhibit hall, gift shop and the Zamboni Genealogy, Archives, and Research Lab that are open to the public and funded by private contributions. Peter Razor got a start on his book, "While the Locust Slept," by working with the Historical Society more than 20 years ago.

MEET KELLEN HINRICHSEN, STEELE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For those of you from outside of the Owatonna area whom I have not met, my name is Kellen Hinrichsen and I am the executive director of the Steele County Historical Society (SCHS).

I am excited to have the opportunity to have the Orphanage Museum become a part of the SCHS, as I see its level of importance with regards to our local history (and beyond). The State School and its residents have had an indelible impact on our local history and I am proud to see what has been done to preserve these stories and their associated artifacts.

Our plans are first and foremost to preserve this history and to provide as much assistance as possible to aid in these efforts. I do not intend to change how things have been done, as the museum runs well and tells the history in an approachable and impactful way. I am here to help ensure that this preservation continues long into the future and to work to help making connections and sharing what we have with the public.

I have been working in museums professionally for 15 years now. I received my master's degree in

museum studies from the University of Denver, with specializations in exhibit development, collections management, and audience research. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to work in several institutions, including the Amache Historical Society Museum (a WWII-era Japanese American internment camp), the Dallas Holocaust Museum, the Molly Brown House Museum, the Durham Museum, and most recently the Warren County Historical Society in Monmouth, Illinois. These museums and the positions that I held have taught me many things, but most importantly is how vital it is to preserve our history and the importance of the stories that people have to share.

It is an honor to be in this position and I take what I do very seriously. I also have an open-door policy and welcome anyone to contact me with questions, comments, or concerns that you may have. My email is Kellen@SteeleHistoryMuseum.org and you can reach me by phone at 507-451-1420.

I hope you are as excited as I am about the future of our organization.



Left: Anne Peterson, Museum Manager, and Kellen Hinrichsen, Executive Director of the Steele County Historical Society, the day after the merger was announced. Kellen brings a great museum and exhibit background that can help enhance our displays in the future. For now, things are remaining the same.

Below: Steele County History Center



THE ENIGMATIC SUPERINTENDENT MERRILL

The person largely responsible for keeping the Minnesota State Public School in tune with contemporary social thought was its superintendent, Galen A. Merrill.

Born and raised in Michigan, Merrill himself lost his father when he was barely 9 years old, but compassion for children in similar circumstances wasn't reflected in some of his policies.

Educated at the University of Michigan, and an agent for Michigan's state public school, Merrill moved to Owatonna in 1886 at the age of 26. He arrived days after his marriage to Estella Ogden and they spent their entire married lives at the State School. He was superintendent until his death in 1934.

During his years as superintendent, Merrill became conversant with the most progressive social-work theories through service as director of the National Association of Charities and Corrections, contributor to the 1893 volume on the history of child-saving in the United States, and delegate to the first White House Conference on Dependent Children in 1909.

It was Merrill who pressed for more and better cottage facilities at Owatonna, who continued to modernize the school's educational system, who implemented a program to prevent the spread of contagious diseases, who demanded and obtained proper funding of the state agent's program, who required close investigation of prospective foster families, and who **often denied impoverished natural parents custody of their children.***

While the physical and educational needs of the State School children may have been met, they still had to deal with emotional upheaval on their own. Merrill's progressive thinking seemed to end when reuniting a family unit was involved.

**"With Wise and Benevolent Purpose - Poor Children and the State Public School at Owatonna, 1885-1915" by Priscilla Ferguson Clement, Minnesota History, Spring 1984.*



Above: Galen Merrill standing on the front steps of the Administration Building holding his hat. His wife and children are in the middle of the photo, ca. 1894. Merrill can often be found standing in the background of posed State School photos. It's much harder to find a formal portrait of the man.

Below: Solitary Superintendent Merrill sitting in his garden, ca. 1932.



“LITTLE BY LITTLE – THE LIFE STORY OF TOM LITTLE”

“Did any of you ever amount to anything?”

Harvey Ronglien liked to repeat the story about when he was asked that question. It originally came from a Dodge Center High School student. Harvey’s answer was, “Your superintendent (Marv Tenhoff) is a State School kid!”

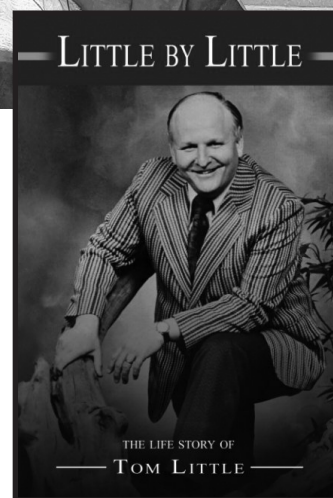
Actually, we hear many success stories! While not everyone became rich and famous, many made their mark on the world after a touch start.

This past summer, Betty Jo Little visited the State School with a copy of the book “Little by Little,” which is the inspirational story of her husband.

It’s about the life of Donald Nejedly (Tom Little) (1931-2002), who was abandoned by his mother and spent two years as a ward of the state at the Minnesota State School for Dependent and Neglected Children. Donald was considered one of the fortunate percentage from the State School who was placed for adoption with what appeared to be a loving family. His adoptive father, who immediately changed Donald’s name to Tom Little, was cruel and abusive, yet Tom went on to touch many lives as a teacher and pastor with his love, positivity, and strong faith.



Author Mary Beth Frost and Tom Little’s widow, Betty Jo, came down from the Duluth area last summer to bring us a copy of the book of his inspirational story.



If you are interested in getting a copy of this book, you can order it online at the link below:

www.blurb.com/b/10846504-little-by-little-ii

DOLL HOLDS SPECIAL MEMORIES FOR 90 YEARS

Little Dorothy Holm came to the State School with her brothers in 1930, when she was only 3. It wasn’t long before she was chosen for adoption. Ferdinand Meier, the man who made the trip from northern Minnesota to pick up his new daughter, brought along a special doll to welcome her into the family. Dorothy played with her doll on the farm growing up. After she was married and raised three children, she displayed her doll in her home. Dorothy passed away at 94 and was remembered by her daughter as “a gentle spirit, hard worker, and...Our Angel.” The doll made a return trip to the State School last fall.



Above: Newly adopted Dorothy with her doll.

Left: Linel & Tim Mehus with Dorothy’s doll.

We are always happy to receive State School memories and stories. One of the benefits of joining together with the Steele County Historical Society is the help we can get on archiving these documents properly.

COWBOY JOE

The six children of Valentine and Barbara Babczak, Polish immigrants, entered the State School from Hennepin County on May 2, 1925. With the death of her husband, Barbara--who most likely did not speak English--was left with six children, another on the way, and no way to support them.

Five of the children were "placed out," but the youngest boy, Joseph, remained at the School because he was diagnosed with a congenital heart problems. It was advised "no activity except to walk slowly were it is necessary to go." Also, "because of his heart condition he has been babied to a considerable degree."

Mendus Vevle became superintendent in 1934 and worked to get Joe medical attention for his heart at a different facility.

Joe didn't let his circumstances get in the way of living his life. He had an independent streak. In 1938, he ran away and went to his sister's home. From there he went to the farm where his brother Louis was living.

When WWII began, the Babczak children entered the war effort and were spread around the world. Unable to serve, Joe ended up living a cowboy life in Nevada and Arizon as a ranchhand. He even married and had a son before his health caught up with him. He died at age 30 during a heart test. The doctor said "Joe had a huge heart, instead of having two ventricles, he had one." He did more than most expected in his short time.



Ed, Louis, Carl, Victoria, Joe Babczak. Sister Mary was also at the State School, but is not in this photo.

CASE FILE 7518 - JOE BABCZAK

Cottage 3 Record - six reports from April 20, 1935, to July 20, 1936, on Joe Babczak shows the following:

Tries hard to please.

As active as most children.

Mixes as much as possible.

Is well liked.

Sympathetic and kind to others.

Holds his own.

Enjoys recreation and is a good "sport."

Plays most with children of his own age.

Does the job set for him unsupervised.

Is very pleasant and likeable.

Carries out his religious practices.

Table manners acceptable.

Never refuses to eat what is served.

Is never untruthful.

Never takes things that don't belong to him.

Never swears, uses profane or abusive language.

Never shows any undesirable sex behavior.

Never flies into a rage or has tantrums.

Never shows fears or frights.

Frequently tattles on others.

Never wets or soils himself or his bed.

A lot of paperwork was involved for State School children. Each child's case file contained reports like this by their matron, as well as school reports and medical reports. Imagine being scrutinized like this!

LEGACY GIVING - FORMER STATE SCHOOLER BESTOWS FUNDS TO STATE SCHOOL MUSEUM

Violet Glasby (1934 - 2021)

"Violet was comical, had a big heart, and was generous all the way around. She was thoughtful, loved meeting new people, and making new friends."



Violet was born December 3, 1934. At a very young age, Violet was placed at the State School, where she stayed until she was 18. She then went to work as a housekeeper for the Mayo family and, later, at Rochester Methodist Hospital. While at Methodist, Violet was awarded the Karis Award for her outstanding dedication and performance.

As a young adult life, Violet met Elizabeth Cole, and helped care for Elizabeth's mother. Elizabeth "adopted" Violet and became her mother figure. Violet loved to travel and went on many trips throughout the world with her "mom." She was a faithful, Christian woman and was an active member of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church since 1954, and was proud to be in the very first confirmation class at the church. Violet never married but made many life-long friends whom she considered family.

Violet passed away on September 24, 2021. Shortly afterwards, we were informed through the Rochester Area Foundation that one of their donors had passed away and made a substantial bequest to the Orphanage Museum in her estate plan--it was Violet! We are so very grateful! She truly had a big heart.

STATE SCHOOL OBITUARY BOOK

One of the first projects undertaken by the Steele County Historical Society's Archives and Collection people is digitizing the newspaper obituaries and funeral cards we've already collected and put in a binder. Each one will be scanned and typed, creating a searchable, permanent database.

I first learned about Violet Glasby when my sister-in-law sent me her obituary from the *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, because it mentioned the State School. I also receive obits of State Schoolers from John Dalby of Dalby Database when he spots a reference to "state school" or "orphanage." I also know that some people prefer not to mention the State School.

In the past, we asked our readers to send us any funeral-related pieces you may have and we did receive a nice response. If you aren't sure if you've already sent something in, please do. Right now, the Minnesota Historical Society has the only complete listing of all 10,635 children who were here. If we can expand what we have--even from years ago--we will be very grateful for your help.

LEGACY FUND UPDATE



**The Children Remembered
Orphanage Legacy Fund
recently reached a total of:**

\$88,148.49

Donations made help ensure
the Museum's work continues.
Donations are
tax-deductible.

DONATIONS

GENERAL FUND

Carol Etzel
 Linda Schroeder – *in memory of all the children*
 Gary & Kathleen Hadley - *In memory of Emery, Ben, and Vernon Hadley*
 Peter Razor

MEMORIALS

In memory of John Perhay
 Mark & MaryAnne Andreason
 Jim & Carrie Becker
 Sue & David Rademacher
 Kathy & MaryJane Hubert

MEMORIALS - LEGACY TRUST

In memory of Harvey Ronglien
 Peter Henry
 Douglas Grunklee & Family
 Gary & Phyllis Terrill
 Julie & Dave Lyons
 Russ Tenhoff
 Silvan Durben
 Bonnie & Greg Krueger
 Craig & Lisa Havelka
 Don & Vivian Manthe
 Mark M. Walbran
 Michael McEnaney
 Kenneth & Sandra Dille
 Mary E. Larson
 Jerry Prondzinski
 Glenn & Carol Kruckeberg
 Roger & Diane Rehman
 Gregg & Kathy Anderson
 Larry & Lori Jandro
 Brent Sanders
 Alan & Maren DeLaitsch
 Marcia & Dennis Bartz
 Caroline M Sorenson
 Doug & Connie Ruth
 Anthony & Barb Nowak

Gwen Kubista
 Ken & Sandy Dinse
 Jim & Sharon Klein
 Nancy Jewison
 Orvin & Carolyn Thompson
 Dan Gorman
 Jack Reuvers
 Kevin Nelson
 Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism
 Janet Tippet
 Greg & Darlene Thomas
 Kay Tillotson
 Dave & Kim Ramsey
 West Hills Commission
 Norman & Ruth Grunklee
 James & LeAnn Meservy
 Bob & Diane Jungbluth
 Ardella Brenner
 Kathleen Laughlin
 Shelby Zempel
 Al & Gloria Kolander

LEGACY TRUST

Virginia Curtis
 Peter Razor
 Virginia Babczak – *In memory of Louis Babczak, Victoria Babczak Pull, Carl Babczak, and Mary Babczak Croyle, Edward Babczak, and Joseph Babczak*
 JoAnn Larson
 Fred H. Fritz
 Kathryn Megyeri – *in honor of Sandy Dinse*
 John & Denise Perhay – *in memory of Maxine & Harvey Ronglien*
 Tom & Stephanie Shea
 Lawrence & Norma Raiha – *In memory of Arnold, Rudy, Sylvia, Jonas and Martha Raiha*

WORD OF DECEASED STATE SCHOOLERS

Victor "Vic" Laskowske



Nonprofit Organization

U.S. Postage Paid

Permit No. 108

Owatonna, MN 55060

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: Steele County Historical Society. Donations are tax-deductible.

Name _____ Phone _____

Mailing Address _____

☐ I'd like to order a copy of "A Real Treasure" 1930 historic film DVD at \$28.95 (includes tax and shipping and handling.)

☐ I'd like to order a copy of "The Children Remember" documentary DVD at \$28.95 (includes tax and shipping and 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.
