

The
Radiator
Brush



ORPHANAGE MUSEUM

Children's Cemetery Project Expanding - Adding Children's Personal Stories

Cleaning the 47 stone monuments in the Children's Cemetery has grown into a bigger project to honor the 198 children buried there. The Museum's cemetery booklet, which lists all the children buried in the cemetery, is being expanded as new information becomes available. The children deserve that.

At the Cemetery votive lighting ceremony on December 23, 2023, Tim Shea—expert monument cleaner—mentioned it was exactly 100 years since the death of one of the children, Williams Stevens. His page in the current cemetery booklet didn't provide much information at all. (*See right*)

To fill in William's missing information, we went to Faribault County, site of a car crash. The Faribault County Recorder confirmed that William Stevens, 17, died on December 23, 1923, as the result of a car accident. A Faribault County Historical Society member then took it upon himself to find any related news articles and he hit the jackpot. Car accidents received a lot of coverage, especially one involving the loss of young lives.

It was a freak accident made by an inexperienced driver that killed his two passengers. Young William was thrown from the car, broke his neck, and died instantly. Area newspapers carried a lot of gruesome details, but a portion from the article below revealed personal facts about William's short life.



STEVENS, William

Race:
Sex: *Male*
Born: *April 9, 1906*
Died: *December 23, 1923*
Cause of Death:
Age:
Father: *William McArdle*
Mother: *Claudia McArdle*

SUNDAY MORNING SPIN RESULTS IN FATAL AUTO ACCIDENT TO TWO OCCUPANTS OF STUDEBAKER ROADSTER

“Although but seventeen Stevens had more tragedy mingled in his life than usually comes to so young a person. His parents died when a tiny boy and he was placed in the state school at Owatonna. Tho he had all the care and needs that the state can furnish him, he never knew the love of a mother, the happiness of a home, or the helpfulness of a father. When he got old enough to shuffle for himself, he was sent to a couple near Plainview who stated they wanted a boy and would gladly make a happy home for him.

“Again fortune was unkind to young Stevens for his foster parents seemed more interested

in getting a man's work from the boy than in furnishing him a home. At last he got discouraged with life there and left the place to work in North Dakota. Last September he decided to come to Wells where his lifelong pal, Ralph Keech, lives. Keech and he were raised together at the state school and a warm friendship grew up between them that lasted until the end. Stevens came to Wells and hired out to John Parks, setting pins in the bowling alley. Mr. Parks states that he could never find a finer boy and that in the time he had worked there Stevens never uttered a profane word, nor did he have any bad habits. His life was just a series of hardships, and

discouragement and it ends as it began—in tragedy.

“A brief funeral was held at the undertaking parlor. Altho Stevens had been in town just since September, he had made many loyal friends who supplied beautiful flowers and crowded the undertaking parlor to pay their respects for the last time to the friend they had just learned fully to appreciate. The body was shipped to the state school at Owatonna for burial. An agent came down at once when notified of the accident. He left it to Stevens' pal [Keech] to decide where the interment should be.”

The Forum-Advocate, Wells, Minnesota. December 27, 1923.

MEMORIALS

Word of Deceased State Schooler

Erwin Varns (1927-2023)

Erwin Varns and his older brother, Virgil, ended up the State School during the height of the Depression. At 17, Erwin joined the Merchant Marines, but was drafted to the US Army Air Corps when he turned 18. His military career took him through Weather Observer School and later Maryland University, where he received a B.S. degree. In 1967 he retired from the US Air Force as a Chief Master Sergeant. After his military service, he went to work for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In 1986 he retired as a Forecaster in Charge. Sometimes we get asked the harsh question, "Did any State Schoolers amount to anything"? Of course they did! Erwin is a good example of someone successful in his personal and professional life. Erwin Varns (right) greets Harvey Ronglien at the 2019 dedication of Maxine's Garden. He came all the way from Tennessee to attend and visit with members of the farm family where he lived.



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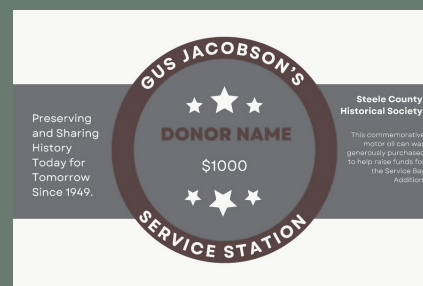
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The SCHS Service Bay Committee is meeting with architects and getting proposals for the Service Bay Addition project. We hope to share updated renderings at the 75th Anniversary dinner. At the dinner, guests will have the opportunity to purchase a limited-edition oil can that will be displayed in the new addition. Only 100 oil cans will be sold for \$1000 each.

Current funds raised: **\$104,281.10**



"You know what makes a Cottage 11 tour guide's day? Hearing the "ding" go off when the door opens. That ding lets us know we've got visitors to greet. Sharing the museum's story makes my heart happy."
 ~ AmandaJean Beaulieu, Cottage 11 Volunteer

Interested in being a Cottage 11 Volunteer?

If you'd like information on becoming a Cottage 11 volunteer, send a message to museum@owatonna.gov to learn more.