

STEELE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2024 | VOLUME 75 | ISSUE 1



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STEELE COUNTY
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
It's About Time...



“Mother Goose” Mural

A hidden treasure resides in the library of the 1934 school building, now known as Merrill Hall. A whimsical mural surrounds its walls. Miriam Ibling created the “Mother Goose” mural in 1938, as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) program creating public art in Minnesota. One of her lithographs is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

Merrill Hall is now home to Wee Pals Child Care Center and Little Theatre of Owatonna. It is next on the City’s agenda to get much-needed mechanical upgrades. They are aware of the historical importance of the mural and have plans to protect it, as well as other significant features of the school.

New Exhibit Coming Soon - Childhood in Steele County

Depending on your generation, grab your Walkman, pet rock, or cellphone and get ready to step back into your childhood. SCHS is bringing the childhood experiences of Steele County youth to life. Spanning the generations, this exhibit highlights the many different phases children experience as they mature. From personal relationships, homelife, work, institutions, and free time, this exhibit showcases the many different experiences children may encounter and how their homelife and environment shape their development. Guests can follow a specific Steele County child to learn more about the time period the child grew up in and how life experiences influenced adulthood.



AROUND THE ORGANIZATION

Thank you, Volunteers

The Steele County Historical Society staff and 2023 Board of Directors send a special thank you to all who volunteered their time this past year to make the many SCHS events and programs possible. SCHS appreciates the time and dedication our volunteers give to the Society, and we recognize that would not be able to welcome as many visitors to our sites or provide the quality of service our community has come to expect from SCHS. It is the volunteers who are the first face people see when they come to our sites, they are our tour guides, building hosts, committee members and the heart of the organization. Thank you for all that you do.

We hope you enjoyed this past year with the organization and if you would like to play a greater role at SCHS please join us for Tour Guide and Village Interpreter training in April.



Important Newsletter Update:

The 2021 merger of SCHS and the Orphanage Museum included combining the organizations' mailing lists. SCHS gained nearly 1,000 contacts, extensively growing our newsletter readership. Unfortunately, the increasing costs of printing and postage exceed SCHS' resources. In order to be true to our membership benefits, we made the difficult decision to limit newsletters to SCHS members only. Beginning with the Second Quarter 2024 issue, **only SCHS members will receive a copy.**

To continue receiving the newsletter, you have the option to become an SCHS member. **Please visit our website www.SCHSMN.org to purchase an SCHS membership today!**

In addition to the newsletter, members receive discounted admission for SCHS programs and events and enrollment in the Time Travelers program. This program provides free admission into more than 500 museums, historical societies, and historical sites across the United States.



Volunteer Spotlight

Kathi Upham has been volunteering at the Orphanage Museum since 2021. Prior to retirement, her passion as a 1st grade teacher drew her to the Orphanage Museum; she loves young children! She is a tour guide of Cottage 11 and enjoys meeting people from all over the world who are connected in some way to the Orphanage Museum. The many stories that are shared through tours is what she enjoys each and every tour opportunity.





Community Show & Tell Online Thursday, January 11, 2024

6:00 - 7:30pm

By popular demand, SCHS will be hosting three Community Show & Tell programs in 2024. The first program will be held online via Zoom. This provides participants the opportunity to showcase some of their oversized or delicate items which present a challenge in transporting to the History Center. Join Zoom Meeting by scanning the QR code. **Free and open to the public.**



Life & Times During the Mountain Man Era Saturday, January 20

Noon - 3:00pm

Have you driven by or attended the Extravaganza and seen the white tents? Come meet the participants, talk one on one with Rendezvous re-enactors and see if you have what it takes to survive in the pre-1840s. Re-enactors will have their wares available for you to see. **Free for members and \$5 for non-members.**

Bold and Cold Soup Supper Friday, January 26

Pick-up from 4:00 - 6:00pm

Order your soup by calling 507-451-1420 to reserve your containers. 12 oz. containers of Chicken Wild Rice Soup and/or Chili will be sold for **\$7 per container. RSVP your order by January 23, 2024.** Carry-out containers will be available.

Adult Victorian Tea Saturday, February 10

Reserve your place at 10:30 am or 1:00 pm

The theme of this year's tea will focus of Fashion trends from the late 1800s to the 1930s. Dresses from our SCHS collection will be featured in our display. The cost per person which includes lunch is **\$25 for members and \$30 for non-members. RSVP by February 5, 2024.**

Genealogy Games Live at the Owatonna Arts Center Saturday, February 24

10:00 - 11:30 am

Doing research on State School kids can be very challenging. Join us as we follow the life of this cute young fellow. You'll learn how to get over some of the hurdles facing State School family history by playing the Game of Life. Light refreshments will be served. **Free for members and \$5 for non-members.**



History Uncorked Thursday, March 21

6:00- 7:30pm

Ready for a little murder and mayhem? Join us as we act out a notorious criminal case in Steele County's history. Guests are encouraged to dress in period costume relevant to the cases timeline. More details will be shared about the case on Facebook and Instagram. Stay tuned for more information. Light refreshments will be served; ticket price includes first beverage at the bar. Additional beverages will be available for purchase. **\$10 for members and \$15 for non-members.**



Owatonna State School Presentation at Owatonna Arts Center

Saturday, March 30

10:00- 11:30 am

This program will expand on the history of the Owatonna State School, which existed from 1945-1970. This story is often treated as simply a footnote of West Hills history. We recently took an oral history with Irene Alvarez Sticha, 91, who came to Owatonna just as the two schools transitioned. She still has a lot of good memories of her times at OSS. There was a definite shift in how the children were treated. Come learn more about OSS or share your own stories. Light refreshments will be served. **Free for members and \$5 for non-members.**

Cemetery Lighting at Christmas

We are delighted that the Children's Cemetery is getting so much extra care this year. Besides the stone cleaning by volunteer Tim Shea, we received a donation from Marie & Mike Miskovich to do something for the children at Christmastime. On the afternoon of December 23, a group of volunteers placed votive lights on each of the 198 graves.



Artifact Spotlight: Owatonna City Hospital Bassinet

Does this look familiar? If you were born or hospitalized as a baby at City Hospital before 1961, you may have spent some time in this bassinet. SCHS received the piece earlier this year from the West Concord Historical Society (WCHS) in Dodge County.



The Owatonna City Hospital was initially located in the Oppliger House at 828 South Cedar. The property was purchased for \$6,500 for the development of a hospital. An addition was added to the existing residence and improvements to the interior began after the purchase of the property. On January 5, 1901, the first City Hospital opened. Over the years, it underwent more additions and renovations, mainly in 1906 and 1932.

By 1958, they began a \$1.3 million addition that was completed in 1961. This bassinet was removed from the building because they were being replaced during the renovation process. This bassinet was rescued by a former medical records librarian, who donated it to the WCHS. Due to its significance to the history of Steele County, WCHS reached out and the bassinet was transferred into our collection.



Owatonna City Hospital

Over the next couple of decades, the City Hospital went through more renovations. In 2005, plans were approved for the construction of a new hospital on 26th Street NW. It opened on October 16, 2009. The old hospital was eventually pulverized in January 2013 to make room for Fareway Meat & Groceries.



ORPHANAGE MUSEUM

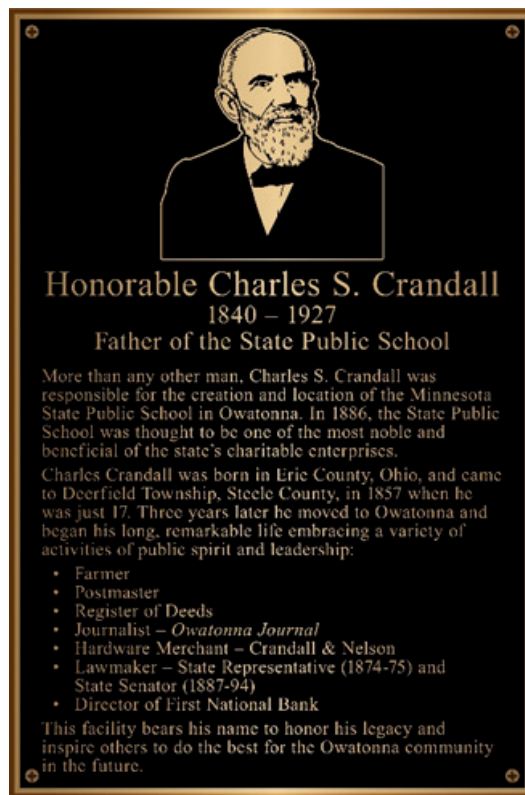
The Charles S. Crandall Center Uncovering the Past

On November 21, 2023, a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony took place in the renovated City Council Chambers, now known as the Charles S. Crandall Center. It ended a seven-month project upgrading the facility. Nancy Vaillancourt and Anne Peterson from the SCHS were asked to do research and suggest someone from Owatonna history to honor. It didn't take long to come up with the name of Charles S. Crandall and the City Council approved the proposal.

An historic display will soon be added in the Crandall Center to tell how the State School came to Owatonna and its impact on the town.

Their research led to additional discoveries about the room. Here's some of what we found:

- The architect's design for the Main Building referred to the north wing as the "Amusement Hall and Chapel."
The north wing opened in September 1893 and included a stage with a drop curtain, footlights, piano, and stage scenery.
- Plays, cantatas, seasonal programs, and professional musicians filled the room with much entertainment over the years. Holiday programs were especially popular.
- The north wing was destroyed by fire in 1904 and was quickly rebuilt.
- Superintendent Galen Merrill's funeral, as well as the funerals of many of the children, took place in the former Council Chambers.
- The room as a place for church services continued until the Owatonna State School closed in 1970.
- The first Owatonna City Council in the Chambers was on June 1977.



Inscription reads:

More than any other man, Charles S. Crandall was responsible for the creation and location of the Minnesota State Public School in Owatonna. In 1886, it was thought to be one of the most noble and beneficial of the state's charitable enterprises.

Charles Crandall was born in Erie County, Ohio, and came to Deerfield Township, Steele County, in 1857 when he was just 17. Three years later he moved to Owatonna and began his long, remarkable life embracing a variety of activities of public spirit and leadership:

- Farmer
- Postmaster
- Register of Deeds
- Journalist – *Owatonna Journal*
- Hardware Merchant – Crandall & Nelson
- Lawmaker – State Representative (1874-75) and State Senator (1887-94)
- Director of First National Bank

This facility bears his name to honor his legacy and inspire others to do the best for the Owatonna community in the future.



MEMORIALS

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|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
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| Doug & CJ Brase | Gary Kjos | | |

LEGACIES AND DONATIONS

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Norman & Vodi Balek
Linda Brandt
Susan Condon

ORPHANAGE MUSEUM DONATIONS

Gail Plathe
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LEGACIES

SCHS

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CHILDREN REMEMBERED

Current level: \$121,707.16

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- Trudy Pierce
- Gary & Salie Schuweiler
- Warren Slagle

SERVICE BAY ADDITION

In 2023, SCHS moved the Service Bay Addition funds into an investment account similar to the Legacy funds. This allows your donations to continue to grow as SCHS seeks and raises the remaining funds necessary to complete the addition to the American Alliance of Museum standards.

Current funds raised: **\$101,506.00**



SCHS is turning 75 in 2024!



Join us on Friday, April 26, as we celebrate 75 years of preserving Steele County's history and the bright future ahead.

We will have an exhibit highlighting the organization's history and a dinner catered by the Hubble House.

Please stay tuned for more details.



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alzheimer's association

2023 Owatonna Walk to End Alzheimer's
 Saturday, September 23, 2023
 Steele County Historical Society Parking Lot

Visiting Angels Home Care

We can help you or your loved one stay safely at home for as long as possible.
 507-451-1124

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