



ORPHANAGE MUSEUM

Reiff Sisters of St. Paul Adopted 9 Girls Majority from the State Public School

Are you ready for a feel-good story? Etta and Minna Reiff were two remarkable ladies who opened their large home to the girls in the photo below. Many of the girls came from the State Public School in Owatonna.



A January 17, 1925, article in the St. Paul Journal said: *"St. Paul lays claim to the most remarkable family in the world, consisting of all girls—sisters and two guardians. Fifteen years ago, the Reiff Sisters—Misses Minna and Henrietta—had a spacious home that was too large for them. They adopted a little German girl and found the experience so interesting they have since adopted three Scottish girls, French twins, and a Finnish, Bohemian, and Canadian girl. Top row, left to right: Emma and Muriel of Scotland; Dorothea of Germany; Amy of Scotland. In the front row: Ernesta of Bohemia; Margaret of France; Miss Henrietta Reiff, Amelia of Canada, Miss Minna Reiff, Elizabeth of France, and Martha of Finland."*

The Reiff sisters came from a wealthy family. They said they would never marry, but did want to provide a good home for children in need. Dorothea was the first adopted. She must have been an agreeable child because they soon wanted another. They then adopted Stephanie and named her Ernesta, but realized two toddlers were a handful. Solution: Adopt an older girl to help! That's when Muriel left Owatonna, along with a white-haired baby name Martha. Muriel then negotiated to have her two sisters, Amy and Emma, join the family, making a family of six girls.

The Reiff sisters' reputation was well known, so they were asked to consider adopting premature twin girls whose mother died. Margaret and Elizabeth then joined the family. However, they were called "Pinkie" and "Blueie" because of the outfits worn when they arrived. The last baby was born in Montana, and named—Montana, but called "Tana." Nicknames were very common! Martha was called "Phinney" due to her Finnish heritage and white hair! All nine girls had the chance for a good education and comfortable life thanks to the sisters' care.

We became aware of the Reiff saga when Martha's family contacted the Museum. That led us to find out about the other girls. Check the Museum's Facebook page or YouTube for the video "From Strangers to Sisters: The Legacy of Etta & Minna Reiff" for more info.

Children's Cemetery Event

On December 23, a group again gathered at the Children's Cemetery to place votives on all the graves. Seeing the lights twinkle at night was a beautiful remembrance. Thank you to Marie & Mike Mischovich for funding again this year and to all our willing helpers.



Photo: Josh LaFollette
Owatonna People's Press

2025 Fall Celebration - Sept. 13

Add the Orphanage Museum's Fall Celebration to your new 2025 calendar! On the afternoon of September 13, we'll be having our annual event. More info will be in upcoming publications and in Facebook posts. State Schooler families are especially welcome. We love making the connections!

MEMORIALS/LEGACY FUNDS/DONATIONS

Given by	In Memory of	Given by	In Memory of	Given by	In Memory of
Patty Jessop	Keith Bangs	Gerald Lewison	Jerry Rysavy	Dennis & Becca Ringhofer	Darlene Schmidt
Barbara Schmidt		Dennis & Becca Ringhofer		Ardella Schmidt	
Mike & Gloria Bang	Delores Bishman	Mary Ann Rysavy		Barbara Schmidt	
Pat & William Hoverston		Harvey & Jill Degen	Darlene Schmidt	Craig & Kelly Schmidt	
James & Cindy Fisher	Charles & Emily Herrmann	Anna Homuth		Dale Spindler	
Darwin & Barb Kasper	Dr. Melvin Kirchoff	Kathy & John Ihlenfeldt		Michael J. Trom	
Gene & Kaye Fransen	Derek Larson	Dwight & Angie Jensen		Joan Vaith	
Wayne & Mary Bjoraker	Judith A. Olson Peterson	Arlene Johnson		Jim & Jo Hartle	Marian Spindler
Wayne & Mary Bjoraker	Deuel & Delores Potter	Curtis & Judith Johnson		Mary Larson	
Jim & Jo Hartle	Vern Ptacek	Melissa Johnson		Jerry & Janet Besser	Curt Stendel
Lyle & Gloria Meschke		Mary Larson		Barbara Schmidt	Roy Wilmott
Barbara Schmidt		Robert & Carol Prokopec			

Given by	In Honor of	Given by	In Honor of	Given by	In Honor of
Dawn Ebeling	Reuben & LaDonna Ebeling	Ernie O'Toole-Tomczik	Michele (Kuntz) Freeman	Todd & Laura Resler	Dede Zamboni

Memorials as of December 23, 2024

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Claudia Beaty	Donald & Vivian Manthe
Jean Bendt	Gloria Stock Mickelson
Ida Brocle	Pat Moon
Janis Casey	Greg Norman
Jim Cole	Jodi Richards
Michael & Martha Erickson	Richard & Paula Rollins
Shirley Fulmer	Susan Sawyer-Evans
Lance & Kay Grevious	Loretta Simonet
Russ Gross	David Small
Nancy Hunt	John Stadler
Derek & Tanya Jensen	Lynette Stauff
Mark Livingston	Jessica Tuttle
B. J. London	Loel Wessel
Julie Tenhoff Lyons	

LEGACY FUNDS

Funds as of this printing:

SCHS

\$1,363,550

CHILDREN REMEMBERED

\$185,627

SERVICE BAY

\$116,022



DONATIONS

SCHS Legacy Fund

Patricia & Mark Arnesen MD	David & Jean Krause
Tim & Julie Blazek	Gerald Lewison
Jeff & Sandra Boss	Gary & Salie Schuweiler
Gene & Kaye Fransen	Shankland Family Trust
Lance & Kaye Grevious	Derald & Linda Shaw
Barbara Hartle	Tom & Stephanie Shea

The Children Remembered Legacy Fund

Beth & Ron Gilthvedt	Julie Tenhoff Lyons
Werner & Jacki Knuth	Janet Mealey
Kathy Linder	Richard & Paula Rollins
B. J. London	

Orphanage Museum Donations

Anonymous - Cottage 11 Volunteer Luncheon
 Norma & Richard Le Clerc - in memory of Bob Ryan
 Sherry Wendt - in honor of Conrad Heusinkveld
 Kat Vann - in memory of the Children
 Greg & Darlene Thomas - in memory of Gary J. Johnson
 Linda Allen - in memory of the Children
 Mike & Marie Mischovich - State School Cemetery
 Tom & Stephanie Shea
 Lana Reich
 Gary & Kathleen Hadley