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Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum ~ Spring 2008 Edition

Return Service Requested

Spring breathed *new life* into the State School...

Then... . . . the boring routine changed as balls and bats came out. Marbles, hopscotch, and jump ropes reappeared on the sidewalks. Boys started sneaking off their playgrounds and heading to the wooded areas for slingshot branches (FORBIDDEN!). At last the moment of truth was arriving for rambunctious boys who had stewed adventurous runaway plans all winter.



April 1st was a big day. Boy could shed their long underwear and wool knickers and trade them in for lightweight socks and khaki knickers. Girls could shed their standard long, brown, cotton stockings and long underwear and trade them in for white anklets and new dresses fresh from the just-opened box. "It was wonderful to get a new dress," commented a former State Schooler. Sometimes there was even a box of new straw bonnets. The rule was every girl had to wear a hat for Easter church service. New shoes were also issued if the old ones had holes in the soles.

Playgrounds came alive with 'Rover... Red Rover,' Hide & Seek, 'Run Sheep Run,' Tag, Kick the Can, jumping rope, and of course, ball games.

Spring, however, wasn't all fun and games. With the arrival of late Spring's warmer weather, some of the Matrons had their boys lie on the sidewalk with their shirts off to prepare their skin for the hot summer sun ahead. The daily routine was lying 15 minutes on their

back and 15 minutes on their stomach. On the bright side, this meant an end to daily Cod Liver Oil pills.

The huge farmland was being tilled in preparation for the Spring plantings. The greenhouse was thriving with flower and vegetable plants – soon to be transplanted into one of the many flower beds and gardens. The root cellar was cleaned out, snow shovels packed away, and hand lawn mowers made ready for the boys to start mowing.

Some children dreamed of finding a new home this spring; others hoped they would stay forever.

Ah, yes... spring was in the air and it was wonderful!

Now... . . . With the approach of spring many of our seasonal projects are underway.

The City crews are busy on campus cleaning and repairing any outdoors item in need. We hope to have the outdoor audio tour stations running by the beginning of May.

The Children's Cemetery is now open and several new boards are being added to the boardwalk. As in the past, soon flowers will be transplanted on the grounds, cemetery, and flag pole plaza.

We are also preparing new exhibits for the museum, so start planning your visit! Finally, we are now just two short seasons away from the opening of Cottage 11.

Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060 | phone: 507-774-7369 | e-mail: info@orphanagemuseum.com

Interested in purchasing "The Children Remember" or a board on the Memorial Boardwalk? How about purchasing an "apple" for the Apple Giving Tree for C-11? Please fill in the form below. Your support is greatly appreciated!

Name _____ Phone _____
 Mailing Address _____

- Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary video at \$29.95 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.
- Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary DVD at \$34.95 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.
- Yes, I'd like to purchase ___ board(s) at \$35.00 each!
- Yes, I'd like to make a tax-deductible donation of _____. (Please check one: ___ Donation for C-11 ___ Non-specified)

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

Mail your check, along with this form to: MN State School Orphanage Museum, 540 West Hills Circle, Owatonna, MN 55060. Checks should be written out to: MN State School Orphanage Museum.

Important: To ensure receiving future Newsletters, please inform us of any address change.

Introducing Ourselves

Corky Kolander, Secretary of the Board

Corky Kolander has served on the State School Museum Board since its inception, after also serving on the West Hills Commission. She is the current Secretary of the Board. Over the years, Corky has consistently been an advocate for children. She has served on a variety of Boards and is an active member of the Exchange Club, Big Brothers-Big Sisters, Family Commission at Trinity Lutheran Church, Youth Scholarship Assistance Fund Board, PTA through her children's schools, and many sporting Boards.

Corky feels very strongly about preserving the history of the Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children. As Corky's office is directly adjacent to the museum, visitors frequently stop and tell her stories of family members that lived at the State School. As a result, she has been touched by stories of individuals from around the country, and around the world. Corky is a treasured addition to the State School Board.

Carol Raetz

Carol Raetz has been involved with the restoration of State School history since the museum's inception. She and her mother were among the first volunteers who stepped forward to erect 151 crosses in the Children's Cemetery in 1993. Soon after, Carol spearheaded the effort with Lutheran Brotherhood to construct a Guardian Angel to forever watch over this cemetery and the children.

Carol is an avid golfer, a Brooktree Golf Course Ranger, and a "history buff." After retiring from SPX Corporation, Carol joined our Museum Board. Presently she is also working on installing a bell in her new rural church after fire destroyed the original church years ago. Carol is constantly watching for new artifacts for the museum, and is a loyal supporter of our State School history restoration efforts.

Nancy Vaillancourt

Nancy Vaillancourt joined our Board one year ago after serving several years on the Steele County Historical Society Board of Directors. Consequently, she brought a wealth of experience to our Board. Nancy continues to be the research coordinator for the Society and the head of their photograph preservation team. One of Nancy's primary efforts on our Board is seeking recognition for the State School grounds on the National Register of Historic Places.

A long time employee of the Owatonna Public Library, Nancy is also a published author. She conducts historic walking tours of the city for the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce/Tourism and serves on their "Main Street" project to preserve the historic downtown area. Nancy specialized in family history and worked in the Owatonna Children's Library until recently when she was promoted to Director of the Blooming Prairie Library, a branch of the Owatonna Library.

Follow up...

In our last issue we wrote of why children frequently came to the State School unable to speak or understand English. Recently we discovered the following statistics.

In 1900 Minnesota had a population of 1,751,394 of which 505,318 were foreign born. Of the remaining 1,246,076 native Minnesotans, 808,321 were first generation Minnesotans and Americans.

This represents a huge part of the population—in fact, a huge majority. How many of those first generation Americans did not speak English as a primary language? We think it may have been many of them. Another example is New Ulm, Minnesota. German was spoken as the primary language there until the mid 20th Century.

A Look at Context...

In this issue we will be taking a look at the Great Depression. The Great Depression is commonly thought to have begun on Black Friday. While the stock market crash of October 29, 1929, made the depression very real for a wider majority of Americans, it really began early in the 1920s.

The roots of the depression may be found in an economic slowdown following the end of military mobilization after World War I. This turn had a steady, building effect on both industry and raw material gathering economies, setting off a chain reaction which caused trade, wages, tax revenues, and personal incomes to plummet. The chain reaction trickled down the line, soon affecting rural Minnesotans through falling grain/produce prices. Cash crop prices fell 40 – 60 percent leaving many farmers deep in debt and often unable to even produce enough food to feed their families.

This created an effect strongly felt by the State School. This widespread desolation of our economy led to record numbers of dependent and orphaned children. Population at the State School swelled and despite the construction of new Cottages throughout this period, a waiting list was common. In fact, as reported in his book, our Chief Historian Harvey Ronglien remained on a waiting list in 1932 for several months before space opened up for he and his brother.

With the soaring prices of basic supplies, it became more important than ever that the State School was self-sustaining. With large stretches of farmland, the School had a definite advantage; not needing to pay market prices for much of the food consumed.

For most children arriving at this time, the State School certainly provided more safety, security, and stability than they had known, and probably some of the best meals they had in their young lives. Yet in many minds this does not make up for lost family, and rightly so.

At the same time, boys reaching 18 found little opportunity for employment. The creation of the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) in 1933 was a real blessing for many. This "New Deal" program was created for the relief of unemployment through the performance of useful public works such as the building of roads, bridges, and buildings throughout the nation. Many boys left the State School and immediately joined the Corps. Although more advanced, this lifestyle was similar to State School life and provided a fairly smooth transition into "the real world."

During these difficult depression years, most girls were placed out on farms and expected to work for their keep. Others placed into city homes became domestic servants. While some had a positive experience with a new family, more often than not, life was difficult with few privileges of being a part of a family.

Later in the 1930s as the foundations of WWII were laid, State School boys were anxious to join the military and fight in the war. Like the CCC, the military was simply a continuation of the disciplined life at the State School. But in the military, they got paid for their service and got a ticket to the outside world.

Looking back today, many State Schoolers have commented to us, "What would have happened to me if I hadn't come to the State School? Maybe life would have been worse." We can only add that at the time, Minnesota felt it was fulfilling their mission "to save the children from a life of crime and poverty."



Cottage 11 Update...

Since December we have made great progress toward the completion of the Cottage 11 project. The interior has truly undergone a transformation, especially during the month of February. This period saw the completion of the walls for the public rest room, and the restoration of an original wall that divided the sewing room from a general storage room on the first floor.



With the arrival of materials from Kasota stone, and a resource discovered for original plumbing fixtures, the hard working renovation crew is poised to complete the restoration of the original rest rooms. By necessity, we are unable to restore the complete original first floor bathroom as this space has been designated as the new public rest room to comply with state code and regulations.

The past two weeks has seen the plasterers come and go. The walls are prepared, and painting has begun—back to the original colors of the interior.

The building's exterior also saw some changes in spite of our particularly cold and snowy winter. Contractors were able to successfully pour footings and sides for the handicap entrance ramp at main entrance as well as replacing the stairwell to the basement. While the ramp is a new feature (to comply with code), and not original to the building, the basement stairwell should prove to bring back memories for any Cottage 11 child, as this was their daily portal to and from the cottage.

With interior restoration nearly complete, the museum staff and Board is taking a closer look at the artifacts we possess and assessing our needs for Cottage 11. We are still seeking two couches. The ideal items will be 1920s or 1930s vintage and in good shape. Many of the objects needed, like children's shoes, knickers, and bed sheets will have to be purchased to assure that they match, therefore cash donations for C-11 are still greatly appreciated.

We are also going to be producing a wide variety of replica textiles for our exhibits. If you or someone you know in the Owatonna area is skilled with a sewing machine and is interested in a volunteer opportunity, please call our office at 507-774-7369. We will get back to you as soon as possible.

We thank everyone who has responded over the past year, either financially or with artifacts. Without question, this project would not be as far along without your support. THANK YOU AGAIN!

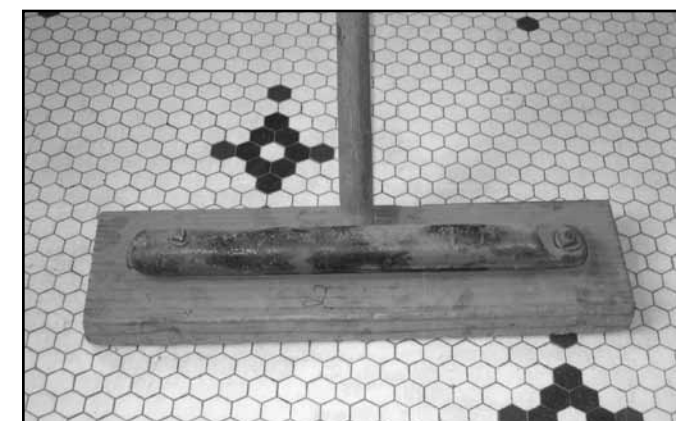


Original Artifacts Found!

Maintenance work around the West Hills Complex is a nonstop task. No one knows this better than Joe Eagan. Through his daily work, and in the last four weeks alone, Joe has recovered and given us four original artifacts from the State School era.

While preparing the attic of Cottage 11 for insulation, Joe found a pair of objects. One was recognizable, while the other remains a mystery. His first find harkens back to hard work we all face on snowy Minnesota mornings—a snow shovel. The shovel is a simple 14" x 18" flat bladed design with a short (32") handle. This, like so many other objects at the State School, appears to have been passed around. On the wooden handle one can note 'C2' carved deeply near the bottom, while 'C-11' is written in bold, black ink.

The second item consists of a long handle attached to an 18" long 2" x 4" board, with a 20 pound metal weight on top. Even our Chief Historian cannot place this object, but office speculation suggests that perhaps this was a tool for polishing floors. We wonder how this heavy tool could be handled by young children...?



Mystery artifact. Please let us know if you recognize it!

Joe's most recent discovery came during maintenance of the school house. Over the years, there has been a need to replace the radiators. Finally, just this February the last original radiator completed its service to the school

building. While the radiator itself is being saved, the unforeseen treasure is what we found behind it, a ruler. It is one foot long, made of wood, with a dark stain. We think this must have been a very deluxe ruler for that period. It measures inches millimeters, centimeters, and decimeters. In addition it has conversions from inches all the way to kilometers, and includes a protractor on the back.

We truly appreciate the interest the building and grounds staff shows in the State School history.

Volunteer Opportunities...

With the completion of the Cottage 11 exhibit approaching, it is time we begin to set our plan into motion for its operation. The current vision of the program is certainly incomplete, but we have a strong start. Our goal is to recruit upwards of 30 volunteers from the surrounding community.

We are seeking people of all ages, technical, and social backgrounds. In this way we hope to draw not only a large number of museum greeters, but also researchers, maintenance, and people to help with exhibit design, fabrication, and installation.

If you are in or near the Owatonna area and are interested in this volunteer opportunity, please phone or e-mail our office and we will get back to you (507-774-7369, E-mail: museum@ci.owatonna.mn.us).

Donors...

We would like to thank the following individuals for their generosity in giving to our museum. All gifts make a difference.

Nina Zak
 Jerry Prondzinski
 Fred Herr
 Jerry Robinson
 Kaye & Lance Grevious continued on next page...

Donors... (cont)

Emily Herrmann
Arlis Hall
Art Schouweiler
Jack & Donna Hall
Gladys Bedney
Leonard Richards
Armstrong/Alcorn Families
Verna Minges
Vernon Johnson
Roger & Idella Nelson
John & Betty Boerema
John & Joyce Winters
Rosemary Link
Bob Charnell
Mary Ann Novotny
Rochester Fransiscan Sisters
The Zamboni Twins

Memorials

Harvey & Maxine Ronglien
James & Lanette Kniefel
Family & Friends of Hulda Klingbeil
Dennis & Jackie Meillier
Family & Friends of James Smith

Word of Deceased...

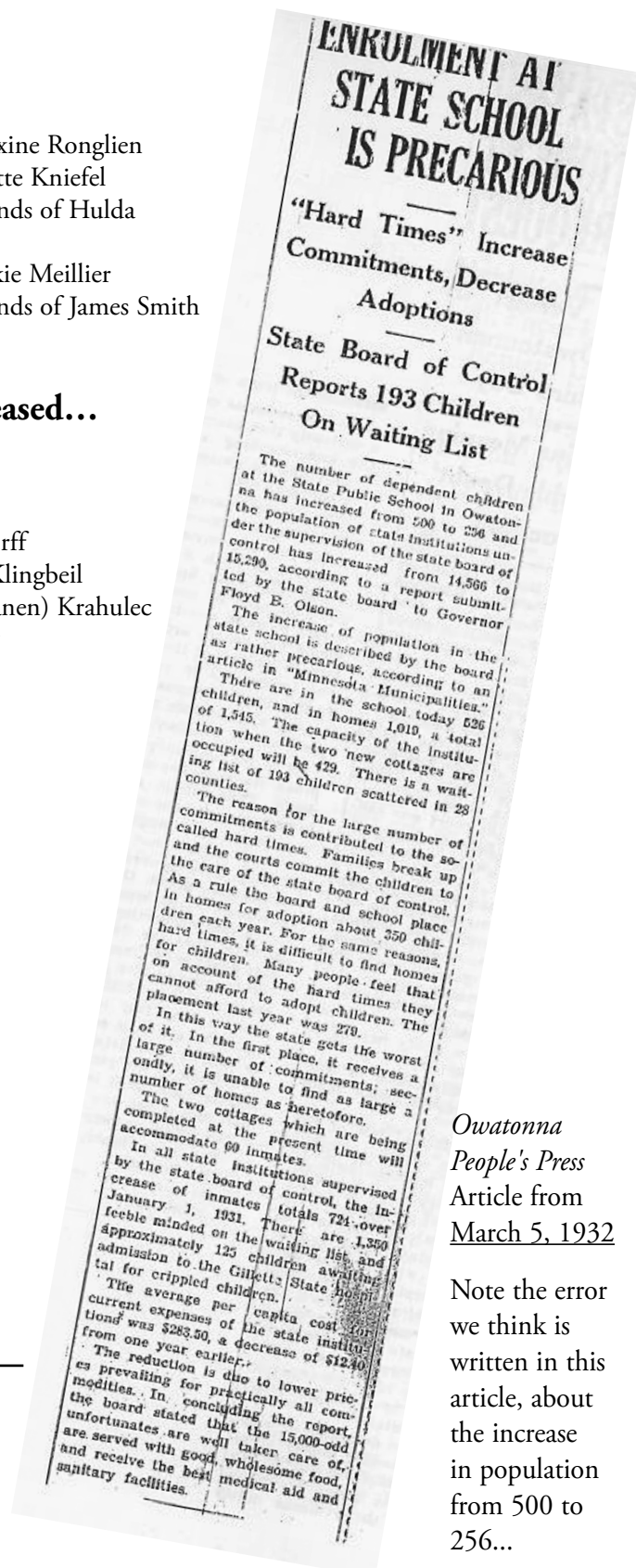
Chester Rice
James Smith
Robert Doyle
Gordon Lindorff
Hulda Rider Klingbeil
Sophia (Wurtanen) Krahulec
Emery Hadley



Maxine Ronglien, Jan Clementson (presenting check), and Harvey Ronglien pictured in the museum.

Special Visit and Donation

Jan Clementson shared stories of her mother and presented a check in memory of her mother Hulda Klingbeil, a ward of the state for many years. Like many other children, Hulda's experience of being 'placed out' was very negative and affected her adult life."



*Owatonna
People's Press
Article from
March 5, 1932*

Note the error we think is written in this article, about the increase in population from 500 to 256...

WPA Clothing - Plain, but Colorful

The Museum's current feature exhibit showcases an important State School trade that seems almost a thing of the past in today's world—sewing. Sewing is a vital part of State School history, just as it was integral to their economic status.



"Dresses were hand sewn by 'sewing ladies' employed by the school. They were cotton, very plain, but colorful, and tied in the back," says Vivian Swan Manthe – SPS Ward 1930 – 1940. She continues, "No girl had her own dress."

Rather, dresses were dealt out of the cupboard, clean work dresses were handed out on Tuesday and Saturday, while a "good" dress was supplied before church on Sunday and then worn to school all week.

Ellen H. Anderson recently related to us her experiences with the State School.

Ellen stated: "During the Depression of the 1930s, President Roosevelt started the Works Progress Administration (WPA). I was District Supervisor of sewing projects in the 26 Minnesota counties between South Dakota and Wisconsin. This program ordered people to work for food and clothing. The Welfare Board submitted the workers. Dependent women were put to work under this program as seamstresses and paid about \$44 bi-monthly. 10 -15 Steele County women were given jobs under this program to sew for the State School..."

Though there were many children, we seldom saw them, I just assumed they were in school or working...I remember the scrubbed white floors."

Our exhibit in the Administration building has these stories and more. Please stop in and enjoy. While you are here be sure to sign our guest register.

Kevin Kling Recognized...

Just a few short years ago, the State School Museum produced the documentary "The Children Remember." What you may not remember is the name behind the voice—the video's narrator. That voice was of Kevin Kling, a now celebrated writer and story teller.

According to the Minneapolis Star Tribune, January 20, 2008, with the publishing of his latest book "The Dog Says How," Kevin has been elevated from local treasure to nationally recognized artist. We feel truly privileged to have had Kevin tell our story, and we wish him well in his continued career.

