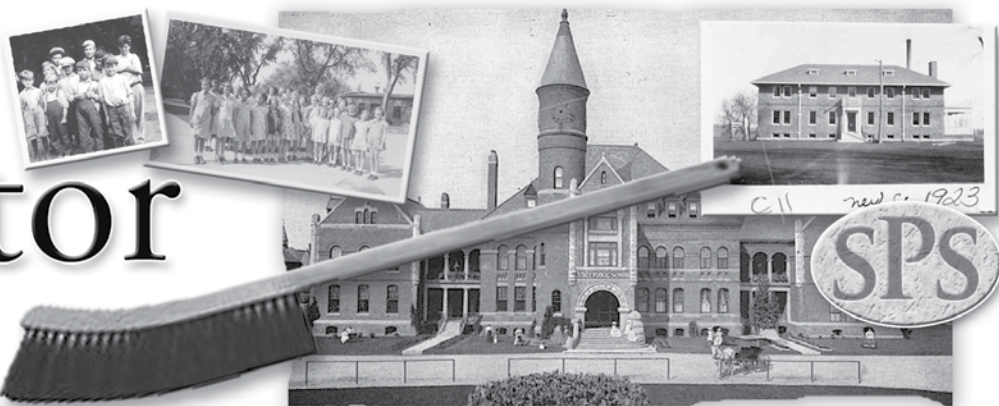


# The Radiator Brush



Minnesota State Public School Orphanage Museum & Historic Cottage 11 Boys' Cottage  
~ Winter 2014 Newsletter Edition ~

## *Looking Back 100 Years Later*

Galen Merrill, State School Superintendent (1886-1934), commented in the early years that it would probably take 100 years to determine how the State School Orphanage would be judged in history. Certainly we're not qualified to answer that remark today.

We can only point to the many, many negative and positive stories the Museum has accumulated over the years as to how the State School experience affected the children as adults.

The following two stories give us a glimpse of how the separation from family and being institutionalized affected the lives of these children. While life at the State School was perhaps better than the homes they came from, many children were then placed in "new homes." Oftentimes, these homes were equally bad—or worse. Consequently, the children suffered from another bad situation. As we contemplate these stories, we ask, "Is it any wonder these children often had great difficulty adjusting to life as an adult?"

### **State School Legacy by a Granddaughter**

This photo, taken on October 1, 1906, shows a mother turning over her three children (ages 4-9) to State School matrons. No doubt

this family had arrived by train from Minneapolis, since it was the only mode of transportation in that era. The mother was too ill to care for them; the father was in the workhouse as a result of drinking and spousal abuse. The hope was that the children would be cared for until the home situation improved.

Unfortunately, that never happened. Two of the children were placed in different homes in Minneapolis and occasionally did see their mother. The middle child was indentured to a family in Northern Minnesota. Her records indicate she was desperate to see her mother again, but that never happened while she was indentured.

Eventually the three children were reunited as adults; however, none had easy lives. All had difficulties as a result of their separation from family as children.



## *Looking Back 100 Years Later*

### **State School Legacy by Harvey Ronglien**

I was reminded of Mr. Merrill's comment when our local paper recently wrote a series called "A Home to Share," about local families who had taken in dependent children who needed a home and family. The series provided a direct contrast between families taking in a child or institutionalizing a child. It reminded me of a five-year-old boy, eighty-one years ago, abandoned on the Benson County Courthouse steps.

Unbeknownst to this child, he had just received the deepest wound to his psyche he would ever absorb. He had just taken a blow that would forever affect his character. Shunned by the love of a family, he was destined to be raised under the philosophy of institutional control for 11 years at the State Public School in Owatonna. He would have to learn the value of family by osmosis.

Without going into all the details, he would learn it's an overwhelming responsibility to raise a child. It's not a game. He would learn not to take your family for granted. Compare it to our health. We take it for granted until we lose it. Then it hits us.

He learned that every child is deserving of dignity and worthy of love. He learned that the greatest craving in human nature is to be loved and appreciated. He learned that having a loving family is worth more than gold and silver. He learned the most important possession a parent will ever have is their children. These are qualities an institution cannot provide.

Yes, I was that five-year-old child and I admire any family who takes a chance and invests it in a child's future, like those families featured in the series. While the State School provided food and a warm bed, the children suffered life-long effects

of losing loving parents and family. These parents know that family is the cradle of the human race. It is here the character of the child is formed—either for good or for evil.

We are often blown away by a celebrity's accomplishments, when all around us there are more deserving people for us to respect and admire. I'm grateful that today we have caring families in each of our communities who are willing to provide a home and family for needy children.

### *Minnesota Historical Society Executive Board Pays Visit*

On September 25, members of the Minnesota Historical Society Executive Board of Directors made a stop in Owatonna during a tour of southeastern Minnesota. We were honored to host this group, even if it was for a short time.

Greg Thomas, Facilities & Grounds Superintendent, and Harvey Ronglien escorted the group through the Museum and C-11. These individuals are dedicated to the preservation of Minnesota's historical places and were very impressed with what they saw here. For most, it was their first visit.



"It's always great to visit West Hills, see the Orphanage Museum, and visit with Harvey. Cottage 11 is amazing!! I really think the MHS board members were thoroughly impressed, and having Harvey there added a personal touch which had a tremendous impact on the group. Several board members commented that seeing the museum and Cottage 11 was a highlight of the trip," said Michael Koop, of the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office.



## *One of Five Coolest Museums*

The Orphanage Museum has been featured in two recent publications: the November issue of Rochester Magazine and the January issue of Old Times magazine, which is distributed at antique shops all across Minnesota. This is such wonderful free publicity and recognition!

Rochester Magazine hailed the Orphanage Museum as one of the “Five Coolest Area Museums You Didn’t Know Existed.” Now that the secret’s out, we hope to have more visitors from the Rochester area come visit us. Coincidentally, the freelance author happened on the scene while Harvey Ronglien was working as a Cottage 11 volunteer, so she got some firsthand information.

*This is your chance to take a firsthand look at a sometimes touching, sometimes tumultuous piece of Minnesota’s past. In its 60-year history from 1886 to 1945, Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children housed more than 10,000 orphans ages birth through 18—making it the third-largest orphanage in United States history. Roughly 500 children lived in the building at any given time, under the care of a staff of 100.*



*If you’re lucky, you may find one of the “children”—Harvey Ronglien—still roaming the grounds as a tour guide. When Harvey’s mother died of tuberculosis and his father was imprisoned, Harvey and his seven siblings were put “up for grabs” at the Benson county courthouse. Unclaimed, Harvey, then five years old, and his older brother, age six, were sent to live at the State School.*

*During the tour, Harvey may tell you about the benefits of institutional life: three meals each day, a warm bed, a structured schedule, education, and plenty of physical activity. He*

*may also tell you about the drawbacks some of the children faced: little love or emotional care, growing up without the nurturing support of a family, and physical discipline he describes as “abusive by today’s standards.”*

*After you’ve finished seeing Cottage 11, where Harvey lived from age six to fourteen, you’ll walk through the main building where he went to eat meals, bake bread, get his hair cut, see a doctor, or visit administration if he got in trouble. You’ll walk the halls that now house a museum of artifacts, photos, and records from the school. You’ll watch the only known video footage of children at the school, taken in the 1930s.*

*You may take a walk across the grounds, past the root cellar that kept produce from the garden, to the State School cemetery. Approximately 300 children died at the State School in its 60 years; 198 of these children were unclaimed by their families and buried there. Rows of headstones populate the cemetery, most of them children ages “baby” through four.*

*Even if you don’t happen to run into Harvey, the museum and grounds are easy to navigate. Buildings are clearly marked and mapped, exhibits have corresponding reading material, and, for 50 cents, you can take a self-guided audio tour of the grounds. It’s a moving, historical look at an era that some would rather forget, but needs to be remembered. The museum’s message? Remember The Children. And you will.*



## 2013 Tourism Season Results

When the results were tallied for the 2013 tourism season, which officially ended on November 21, there were 41 groups, made up of 673 adults and 455 student, who had made the Orphanage Museum a destination for Harvey Ronglien's presentation and C-11 tour. In addition, approximately 5,000 walk-in tourists visited the site.

Campers, Red Hat Ladies, church groups, social studies college students, third grade students, family groups, and large bus tours all found their way to Owatonna and the Orphanage Museum. Here are some of the great responses we received after the tour. It is so gratifying to know that all the work that's gone into creating the museum is so appreciated by our visitors!

*"We very much enjoyed our visit. The orphanage and presentation by Harvey was the highlight. He is quite a figure and really makes everything come together in telling the story of the orphanage. I was impressed by the large number of volunteers involved with that as well."*

– Doug Herriott, Golden Agers, Rockford, Illinois

*"That stop in Owatonna was a highlight of our Fall 2013 Tour. Harvey made a big difference."*

– Maury Oehler, Prairie du Chien Historical Society

*"It was wonderful! I am having my students do journal reports on our trip. Expect another trip from me two years from now, when I will have a brand new set of students!"*

– LaDonna Peterson, Central Lutheran School, Newhall, Iowa

*"I am so glad all this important history has been preserved for generations to come."*

– Carline Sargent, Multicultural/Diversity Liaison, St. Francis School District



## Lighting the Path Event

Our inaugural Lighting the Path event was blessed with clear fall weather and attendees who respectfully remembered the children who had lived at the State School. Through this event, we were able to raise awareness and raise money for our Legacy Trust Fund in the amount of nearly \$7,000. We are grateful to the committee who put the event together and for the people who came, some from far distances.

Excerpts of the article are reprinted with the permission of the *Owatonna Peoples Press*. It ran on September 23, 2013, and was written by Ashley Stewart. Photos are also courtesy of the *Owatonna Peoples Press*. It captures the emotions and events of that special evening.

### Owatonna area residents attend 'Lighting the Path' event to remember the orphans, history

OWATONNA — Lorraine Finne has always felt a special bond with the Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children in Owatonna, though she never attended the school.

But more than 10,000 orphaned, abandoned, or abused children did between 1886 and 1945.



"I've lived here for 30 years, and it tugs at your heart. The children tug at your heart," Finne said. "It's important to remember. It's history."



On Saturday night, more than 80 people attended the inaugural "Lighting the Path" fundraiser for The Children Remembered — Orphanage Legacy Trust, which was established by the State School Orphanage Museum Board.

"All of this is for when Maxine and I are gone," said Harvey Ronglien, former State Schooler, who has spearheaded the museum project since 1993 with his wife. "It'd be a shame if we left and no one remembered all this."

The trust was established in 2011 to fund the operations of the Orphanage Museum and Cottage 11, preserve historic records and provide tours and educational opportunities for the community and family members of those orphaned and remembered at the museum, said Shelby Zempel, orphanage board chair.

As the sun set, Zempel approached the flag pole plaza at the front of the State School Orphanage Grounds to welcome the event's attendees.

Maria Diaz, who was in the Little Theatre of Owatonna's production of "Jesus Christ Superstar," led the group in several state school songs, and Ronglien sang, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

"I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for all of you who have come up here tonight," Ronglien said before the tour of historic stops.

Two groups of people followed a luminary path around the grounds through six locations that feature sites that are still standing and those that no longer exist.

Some of the stops included information about laundry, farming, the cemetery, the root cellar, Cottages 3, 8 and 11, as well as others.

"It was nice to hear the different history stops," Finne said. "Each time, you hear something new, even if you've been here a couple times."

After the tour, the Rongliens lit their candles and led the two-by-two walk along a lit luminary path to honor and remember the children, and raise funds to continue the work of the State School Orphanage Museum.

Jan Johnson attended the event with her husband, Larry.

"We've brought our nieces and nephews, kids and grandkids here for a tour so they could hear the history," Jan Johnson said. "We wanted to teach the kids how things used to be — the good and bad — and this was a founding thing in Owatonna."

Deanna Dantzman of Owatonna attended the event with her husband and children.

"We love going to the State School Museum, and we love the history part," Dantzman said. "I think it's a keepsake in the community. History is always important."

Dantzman's eighth grade daughter, Olivia, agreed.

"I didn't really learn about it in school. The teachers mentioned it here and there, but we didn't learn about the children and the history," Olivia said. "Our history is important to know about."

**The 2nd Annual Lighting the Path Event is in the works. More information coming soon!**





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### Orphanage Legacy Trust *Update:*

Balance as of December 2013: **\$26,273.29.**

2013 goal: **\$100,000** | goal by end of 2015: **\$300,000**

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### Memorials

Harvey & Maxine Ronglien  
Orphanage Museum Board  
Greg & Darlene Thomas

### Apple Giving Tree

Harland & Ramona Strohschein



**Fun Fact: First kindergarten in Owatonna  
was at the State School**



# State School Orphanage Museum

540 West Hills Circle  
Owatonna, Minnesota 55060



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Interested in purchasing "The Children Remember" or a board on the Memorial Boardwalk? 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: MN State School Orphanage Museum. Donations are tax-deductible.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary VHS at \$10.00 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.

Yes, I'd like to order a copy of The Children Remember documentary DVD at \$25.00 plus \$5.00 for shipping/handling.

Yes, I'd like to order  plush State School afghans at \$40.00 each plus \$7.95 shipping/handling.

Yes, I'd like to purchase  board(s) at \$50.00 each. (\*We are now using new materials for extended life of the boardwalk.)

Yes, I'd like to pledge an "apple." (  Red (\$1,000+),  Gold (\$500-\$999),  Green (\$250-\$499)  Silver (\$100-\$249)

Yes, I'd like to make a tax-deductible donation of \_\_\_\_\_. (  Donation for C-11  Legacy Trust  Non-specified)

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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