

St. Olaf College, Men's Dormitory
(St. Olaf College, Ytterboe Hall)
1520 St. Olaf Avenue
Northfield
Rice County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-159-A

HABS
MINN
66-NOFI,
2A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Great Lakes Systems Office
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68102-2571

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. OLAF COLLEGE
MEN'S DORMITORY (YTTERBOE HALL)

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HABS No. MN-159-A

- Location:** St. Olaf College, Northfield, Rice County, Minnesota
- Present Owner:** St. Olaf College
- Present Use:** Classrooms, offices, theater, student lounge
- Significance:** The Men's Dormitory, erected in 1900-01, was the second permanent building on the St. Olaf College campus. Its construction marked a turning point in the evolution of the college, which had been founded as a secondary school by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants in 1874. A college curriculum was initiated in 1889. After a decade fraught with financial problems and Lutheran synod conflicts, the college was adopted by the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1899. With this support, the college began expanding its academic offerings and campus facilities, soon becoming one of the leading private liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. In 1914, the dormitory was named in honor of Halvor Tykeson Ytterboe, a key figure in the college's early development. The building served as the school's only men's dormitory until 1948, and has played an important role in campus life to the present day.
- Project Information:** This documentation has been voluntarily prepared by St. Olaf College to record the history of the Men's Dormitory prior to its demolition.
- Historians:** Charlene K. Roise and Shawn P. Rounds
Hess, Roise and Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota
May 1997

Building Description

St. Olaf College occupies a hill on the western edge of Northfield, a city with a population of about 14,700 in southeastern Minnesota. A residential neighborhood borders the campus to the east. Land to the north, west and south is primarily agricultural, although the area is experiencing some commercial and residential development. Before the Men's Dormitory, now Ytterboe Hall, was built, the campus was heavily forested and contained only two structures, the Main (now known as "Old Main") and the Ladies Hall. The Men's Dormitory was sited some distance to the north, on the edge of a ravine that dropped to the north and east. In the following century, the college has gained dozens of buildings, and the campus has been attractively landscaped with broad lawns fringed with mature trees. Ytterboe Hall is on the northeast corner of the central yard, which is crisscrossed by pedestrian walkways and edged by a variety of buildings, most faced with cream-colored limestone. Directly east of Ytterboe is Rølvaag Memorial Library; to the west is Boe Memorial Chapel. Both are examples of the late, restrained Gothic Revival style. This style, and variations on the International style, define the general architectural character of the campus.

Ytterboe's orange-red brick walls and early twentieth-century eclectic design stand in sharp contrast to the predominant campus aesthetic. The three-and-one-half-story structure rests on a high basement. The building's front facade faces southwest, with the wings of the H-shaped plan to the northwest and southeast. The brick bearing walls, which step out slightly at the watertable, are laid in running bond. Another horizontal element is a stone string course at the level of the third-floor window sills. The window sills on the first, second and third floors are of the same stone. Window openings on the basement, first and second floors are rectangular, with replacement one-over-one double-hung metal-framed sash. Some of the basement window openings have been filled in with brick. The semi-circular-arched upper lite of the third-floor windows is fixed; one-by-one side-sliding replacement sash is below. The arched lintels are comprised of three courses of flush header bricks trimmed by one course of slightly projecting header bricks. The projecting course terminates in a square stop.

In the middle of the front facade, just below the third-floor string course, is a rectangular stone plaque inscribed: "St. Olaf MCM." The square "cornerstone" is centered on the front of the southeast wing, just below the first-floor window sills. It features the words "Fram Fram Cristmenn Crossmenn / St. Olaf College" encircling a shield holding a bas-relief lion rampant wielding a broad ax.

Two corbeled brick courses above the third-floor windows define the base of a plain brick frieze below the denticular cornice. Boxed eaves are supported by shallowly curved modillions. The hipped roof, sheathed with modern composition shingles, is punctuated by a series of large wood-frame dormers. Three dormers rise above the cornice over the center section on both the front and back, with another over each wing; four dormers interrupt the roof slope on both

sides. Each dormer holds a pair of windows divided by a paneled mullion. The dormer's boxed eaves are topped by a Flemish gable that culminates in a needle-shaped finial with an orb. Similar finials ornament cubic pedestals flanking the gable. The gable, which is trimmed with flat molding, holds a blind oculus.

A tall, open cupola is situated at the center of the roof's ridge on a shingled base. A slightly projecting molding traces the extrados of three semi-circular arches on each face of the cupola. The outside arches spring from paneled posts at the cupola's corners; two slender Tuscan columns serve as supports between the posts. The cupola's denticular cornice has an unornamented frieze. Slightly curved modillions support the eaves of the octagonal, bellcast roof. Crowning the roof is an octagonal paneled pedestal that serves as a base for a tall, slender pole. Historical photographs show spires near the intersections of the ridges of the main and wing roofs, but these have been removed and only a trace of the base of the southeast spire is visible.

The building's main entry is centered in the front facade. The gable roof of the portico serves as the pediment for a Classical Revival entablature. The peak and ends of the gable were once ornamented with acroteria, but these have been removed. A deeply recessed tympanum is trimmed by dentils and egg-and-dart molding. The center features a bas-relief cartouche edged by rosettes and stylized vines. Egg-and-dart molding also runs beneath the denticular cornice. A low-relief garland decorates each end of the frieze, which is otherwise unadorned. The molded architrave is supported at each corner by brick piers with square-section stone capitals. Recessed horizontal courses, which are spaced at regular intervals on the piers, suggest rustication. The piers stand on stone pedestals, which also serve as the base of Ionic stone columns flanking the entry. Engaged brick pilasters matching the brick piers project from the building's facade at the back of the portico. The pilasters flank a compound semi-circular arch in the brick wall that holds the doorway. A ribbon of glazing at the outer edge of the doorway's wood frame echoes the line of the brick arch, and trims a semi-circular glass transom above the double, glazed, wood panel doors. A narrow paneled band separates the glazed arch and the transom. The lintel above the doors extends across the glazed arch, providing a visual counterpoint to the curved form.

Between the portico and the southeast wing, a stairway descends to a basement door. A shed roof, supported by wood turned posts, protects the entry to the lobby of the Lion's Pause, located in the original gymnasium.

The southeast and northwest facades are virtually identical. Each has a first-floor entry, which is situated slightly off-center. The entry is approached by a flight of concrete steps edged by a low brick parapet with stone coping. Some of the parapet's brick has a wire-cut surface and a redder hue than the building's walls, suggesting that it is not original. A metal pipe railing runs down the middle of the stairway. The gable roof over the concrete landing forms a

pediment, which holds a deep tympanum trimmed with dentils. A simple denticular entablature is below. The roof's front corners rest on wood Tuscan columns. Wood balustrades stretch from the columns to wood, fluted pilasters bracing the back of the roof. Most of the balusters are rectangular-section planks; the south railing on the southeast entry has turned spindles. The pilasters flank the stone-silled doorway, which holds a pair of glazed, wood panel doors. The open stairs of a metal fire escape crisscross the wall above and to the side of the entryway. On the southeast side, the ground drops to the north, exposing the stone foundation.

A fire escape is also juxtaposed over the entry bay centered in the rear facade. The entry bay, which marks an interior staircase, is accentuated by brick pilasters that rise two-and-one-half stories. Chicago-style tripartite windows light the landings between the first, second and third floors. The stone-capped pilasters are topped by a projecting cornice. Above the cornice is a oculus ringed by three slightly stepped courses of header brick. A projecting brick course follows the upper half of this circle, then sweeps in a reverse curve to engaged corbeled pedestals surmounted by engaged, mounted, stone orbs. Two projecting rows of brick above the oculus give the appearance of an attenuated keystone.

A plain cornice crowns the semicircular-arched back doorway, which is trimmed with brick courses. A modern metal frame holds two glazed doors, with fixed glass panels beside and above the doors. Much of the rear wall below the first-floor window sills is covered with a rose-tinted masonry coating. A metal door in the northwest wall of the southeast wing provides access to a basement utility room, once the boiler room. A small, single-story extension in the angle between the building's main section and the northwest wing also has a basement door. Four brick chimneys emerge from the roof near the same intersection. The cornice line is broken by the top of a chimney which rises along the wall to the left of the center back entry. The interior of the dormitory features a double-stacked plan: a center aisle with rooms on either side. The original plan remains essentially intact, although a number of partitions and lofts have been added and portions of stairways have been blocked. Walls, floors and other surfaces, however, have experienced substantial alteration. Most original doors have been replaced, and the doorways reconfigured. On several occasions within the past decade, the sprinkler system has malfunctioned, causing significant water damage on the third floor.

Traces of the original interior are most visible in the basement. The basement can now only be reached from the first floor by a central stairway, which rises all of the way to the attic. Stairs located near the intersections of the wings and the center block, which appear to have once extended to the basement, now connect only the first, second and third floors. The top of another stair that gave access to the basement of the northwest wing, once the dining hall, has been blocked, but the staircase remains intact. The dining hall, now a student lounge known as the Lion's Den, has been extensively remodeled. The capitals of a row of cast-iron columns are hidden by a dropped ceiling. The north end of the wing is now divided into smaller rooms.

The hall extending along the basement's long axis is lined with a simple wide-board wainscot. Doorways along the hall between the Lion's Den and the central stair are deeply recessed, and trimmed with recessed panels. Although the doors and transoms have been removed, the original configuration is still apparent. Southeast of the central stair is a small lobby with a flight of steps descending to the floor level of the southeast wing. The greater ceiling height was necessary for the area's original function as a gymnasium. In more recent decades, the space has been used as a theater, the Lion's Pause.

The first and second floors now serve as offices and classrooms. Wood floors are covered with carpeting and linoleum. The wood wainscot has been replaced by marbled linoleum. Duct work, pipes, and the sprinkler system are exposed below the ceiling. Lighting is provided by fluorescent fixtures. Doors are wood or steel, with wood or steel frames. None are original. Only a few architectural details have survived. A pair of scroll brackets with pearl and enriched talon moldings remain on the first floor, near the northwest end of the center hall. The center stair's newel posts have recessed panels and low, pyramidal caps. The newel posts, railing, and vertical-board wainscot have been painted in the center stair, but some of the northwest stairway's original oak is exposed.

The third floor has not been used since 1989. Many of the loft structures that students built in the dormitory rooms remain. A small part of the southeast end of the attic was built out as dormitory rooms, but most of the attic is unfinished and dedicated to storage. Metal hooks hanging from bracing beams were apparently used for this purpose.

Context, Construction and Change: The History of the Men's Dormitory (Ytterboe Hall)

Between 1825 and 1928, Minnesota attracted more of the approximately 850,000 Norwegian immigrants entering the country than any other state. By 1880, Norwegian immigrants ranked with Germans and Swedes as the three largest ethnic groups in the state. Lured by the prospect of a rural, agricultural life, many of these Norwegians settled on the fertile lands of southeastern Minnesota. These immigrants brought traditions and practices from their homeland to the new country. The Lutheran church, the official state religion of Norway, became a central institution for Norwegian-Americans. A Norwegian-immigrant scholar, Laurence Larson, observed: "In the study of our history we shall never get far away from the church."¹

¹ Carlton C. Qualey and Jon A. Gjerde, "The Norwegians," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, ed. June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 220-223; Larson quote and other information on Norwegian immigrants in Eugene L. Fevold, "The Norwegian Immigrant and His Church," in *Norwegian-American Studies, Volume 23* (Northfield, MN: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1967), 3-16.

Education was also highly valued by Norwegian immigrants and here, too, the church played an important role. Public grammar schools were common in nineteenth-century America. Some immigrant parents and clergy, however, feared that their children would quickly forget the Norwegian language, ethnic traditions and Lutheran morals under the influence of a secular education. In addition, there were few options for high school and post-secondary education. Prospective ministers had to return to Europe for training, or attend schools operated by other groups, such as the German immigrants' Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. To address these needs, Norwegian-Americans sought to establish a parochial grammar and secondary school system paralleling the public school system. This met with limited success. Efforts to found church-related colleges, on the other hand, were far more fruitful in the long term. A number of schools still active in the late twentieth century can trace their roots to the educational aspirations of Norwegian-American immigrants: Augustana College in South Dakota; Luther and Waldorf in Iowa; Pacific Lutheran in Washington; and, in Minnesota, Concordia (Moorhead), Augsburg (Minneapolis) and St. Olaf (Northfield). "These institutions," according to historian Odd S. Lovoll, "must be considered one of the great and permanent structures that Norwegian immigrants erected in America."²

St. Olaf College evolved from St. Olaf's School, a residential co-educational academy for students fifteen years and older. The academy, in turn, was the outgrowth of a school established in 1869 at the home of Bernt Julius Muus, a Norwegian-immigrant pastor in the southeastern Minnesota hamlet of Holden. In 1874, Muus encouraged a Northfield merchant, Harald Thorson, to offer the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the "Norwegian Synod") a five-acre plot in Northfield and \$500 cash to found an academy. Although the synod was in favor of the St. Olaf venture, it promised no financial assistance, and continued to support the formation of schools elsewhere in the region. Fortunately for Muus, several Northfield businesses recognized the advantages of having a such an institution in their town, and contributed much of the money needed to purchase two former public schoolhouses just east of downtown Northfield. St. Olaf's School was incorporated on November 6, 1874, and began offering courses in the following January. In 1876, the school felt confident enough of success to secure its present site, a wooded hill west of Northfield where "the mosquitoes and woodticks were plentiful . . . and the grounds were covered with underbrush and burrs." Subsequently christened "Manitou Heights," the evolution of the site began with the laying of the cornerstone for the school's first permanent building in 1877. By September 1878, the school occupied its new quarters in the Main (now "Old Main"), which contained residential and

² Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 99-100, 112; Fevold, 14-15.

administrative space, as well as classrooms. A Ladies Hall, constructed from pieces of the school's original downtown buildings, followed in 1879.³

Although St. Olaf's School had no formal ties to the Norwegian Synod, its leaders became entangled in a schism over doctrinal issues in the 1880s. Synod traditionalists, who wanted to remain associated with German theologians in St. Louis, were known as the Missourians. St. Olaf became allied with the splinter group that formed in 1884, the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. Two years later, the group founded its own divinity school on the St. Olaf campus. Realizing that they would also need an undergraduate facility, the Anti-Missourians helped finance the establishment of an undergraduate program, which was officially named St. Olaf College in 1889. St. Olaf's School continued to offer secondary education until 1917.⁴

Rather than fracture further the Norwegian Lutheran community, which produced at least fourteen synods in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Anti-Missourians invited synods not sympathetic to the Norwegian Synod to join together in 1888. Two years later, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church was officially established, incorporating the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod, the Conference of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. The new enterprise encompassed some 152,000 congregants, making it by far the largest Norwegian-American synod. Church leaders successfully addressed a number of contentious issues, but ran into conflict over whether the synod's official divinity school and college should be on the same or separate campuses, and whether these programs should have a single administration or be independent. Proponents of a system with two separate, independent schools prevailed. Augsburg was selected as the official theological seminary and St. Olaf as the synod's college. Backers of Augsburg, however, opposed plans to close the school's undergraduate program, and refused to transfer control of the Minneapolis school to the synod. The United Church and Augsburg turned to the courts to settle the controversy, which raged for eight years. In the meantime, the synod established an independent theological training program and, in an attempt to placate the Augsburg faction, withdrew support from St. Olaf College in 1893. This left the Northfield school once again afloat as an independent institution, relying entirely upon the financial generosity of local businesses, alumni, and other interested Norwegian-Americans.⁵

³ Quote from Mrs. Anna E. Mohn, "Reminiscences," *Manitou Messenger*, April 1906, 26-27; see also Joseph M. Shaw, "The Founding of St. Olaf's School," in *Nordics in America: The Future of Their Past*, ed. Odd S. Lovoll (Northfield, MN: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1993), 15-25.

⁴ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 99-114; Shaw, "The Founding of St. Olaf's School," 15-25; I.F. Grose, "The United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America," in *Quarter Centennial 1874-1899 Souvenir of St. Olaf College* (Northfield, MN: Northfield News Printery, 1900), n.p.

⁵ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 102, 110-112; Grose, n.p.

One man, Halvor Tykeson Ytterboe, is often credited with seeing the school through the difficult period between 1893 and 1899. A native Iowan, Ytterboe was born in 1857 and graduated from Luther College in 1881. After a brief enrollment at the University of Iowa, he joined the faculty at St. Olaf in the following year. In 1890, he became principal of St. Olaf's School. When the financial crisis threatened the college's survival in 1893, the Board of Trustees tapped Ytterboe to travel around the Midwest to raise funds, a mission that took him away from teaching. By the late 1890s, he was registrar and treasurer of the college. His persistence raised an average of about \$6,500 a year.⁶

The year 1899 marked the end of St. Olaf's initial stage of development. The synod once again adopted St. Olaf as its college when, after years of acrimony, Augsburg Seminary and the synod parted ways. In December, the school newspaper, the *Manitou Messenger*, observed that "we shall have entered upon the last year of our eventful century and into the dawn of another" before the next issue would be published. The report added omnisciently: "We are standing on the threshold of a new era in the history of our college."⁷

This optimism was bolstered by the synod's decision at its 1899 annual convention to appropriate \$100,000 for building campaigns at St. Olaf and at a new divinity school in the Twin Cities. Planning for St. Olaf got underway in early November of the same year. Anticipated improvements included construction of a men's dormitory and a residence for the president, plus the addition of a 500-seat chapel to the west side of the Main. Residential space in the Main would be converted into classrooms. Erection of a central power and heating plant was also considered. Further expanding the scope of the project at a meeting in December, the building committee "decided to have a part of one of the new buildings fitted up for a gymnasium."⁸

A St. Paul firm, Omeyer and Thori, were selected as architects to design the Men's Dormitory. Partners since 1888, Diedrik A. Omeyer and Martin P. Thori were responsible for the design of numerous buildings throughout Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. By 1900, the partners had completed commissions for a wide variety of residential and commercial buildings. Company catalogs offered the firm's plans for sale. Around the time they were working on the Men's Dormitory at St. Olaf, Omeyer and Thori were involved in at least three other projects in Minnesota for the United Norwegian Lutheran Church: a dormitory for the church's normal

⁶ "Prof. H.T. Ytterboe," *Manitou Messenger*, June 1898, 1; *Manitou Messenger*, March 1904, 350-351; Joseph M. Shaw, *History of St. Olaf College, 1874-1974* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College Press, 1974), 100-101.

⁷ *Manitou Messenger*, December 1899, 155, 169.

⁸ "New Dormitory for St. Olaf College," *Northfield News*, 3 February 1900; Grose, n.p.; William C. Benson, *High on Manitou: A History of St. Olaf College, 1874-1949* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College Press, 1949), 110.

school in Madison (ca. 1898); a residential/academic building at Park Region Luther College in Fergus Falls (1900-01); and the first permanent building at the church's seminary in St. Paul (1900-01). Apparently not bound by any synod loyalties, the firm also designed the main building at Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis (1901). Constructed with brick and stone, these multi-storied structures featured a variety of Neoclassical motifs similar to those appearing on Ytterboe: decorative bas-relief garlands, pilasters, pediments, semi-circular and segmental-arched window lintels, prominent string courses, modillion cornices and roof lines articulated with fanciful spires and dormers.⁹

As is illustrated by the above commissions and by St. Olaf's Main, late nineteenth-century college buildings in the Midwest typically served a number of functions, essentially housing an entire nascent campus under a single roof. As a school grew, its physical plant expanded from this nucleus, as A.D.F. Hamlin, an adjunct professor of architecture at Columbia University, observed in 1903: "Other dormitories and recitation halls, laboratories, and a library were added as the resources of the institution permitted, and placed as the convenience of the occasion seemed to dictate -- in parallel rows, or around a vast square, or in more fortuitous groupings determined by the topography." This rather haphazard evolution stood in sharp contrast to the model provided by Oxford, Cambridge and other British universities, where carefully arranged quadrangles showed the influence of monastic cloisters.¹⁰

Construction of St. Olaf's Men's Dormitory thus followed the typical pattern of American college campus development. While the building was to shelter a dining hall, gymnasium, and meeting rooms, its main purpose was residential. Late nineteenth-century publications offer little information on the state-of-the-art approach to dormitory planning, but the St. Olaf dormitory presumably features a standard design for that era. Omeyer and Thori were apparently unfazed

⁹ Three of these buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places: the Augsburg Seminary building (New Main, Augsburg College), the Park Region Luther College project (now Hillcrest Lutheran Academy), and the United Church Seminary facility (Bockman Hall, Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary). Following their dormitory commission at St. Olaf, Omeyer and Thori went on to design Steensland Library (1902, on the National Register) and Hoyme Memorial Chapel (1906-07, burned in 1923) for the college. A successor firm, Thori, Allan and Fisher, designed Mohn Hall, the women's dormitory, in 1911-12 (demolished in 1967). A catalog of company plans, published in 1893, is entitled *Homes for All: Containing Designs for Houses and Cottages, Stables, Hotels, Schoolhouses, Courthouses, Banks, Business Blocks, Churches, Etc. Etc.*. The catalog, as well as other information on the architects, is in the collections of the Northwest Architectural Archives, St. Paul. Additional material on the Minnesota buildings designed by Omeyer and Thori is in the files of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dennis Gimmestad of SHPO in providing information on the architects and related material.

¹⁰ A.D.F. Hamlin, "Recent American College Architecture," *Outlook* 74 (1 August 1903): 790-799; Ashton R. Willard, "The Development of College Architecture in America," *New England Magazine* 16 (July 1897): 512-534.

by the architectural challenge, completing a preliminary design within two months of winning the Men's Dormitory commission. The January 6, 1900, issue of the *Improvement Bulletin*, a publication devoted to national construction news, described the general specifications: "It will be 193 x 93, three stories and basement, of red pressed brick, cut stone, and cedar shingle roof. The gymnasium, heating plant, kitchen, laundry, bath and toilet rooms will occupy the basement. The upper floors will be used for students' quarters and will have hard wall plaster, electric wiring for bells and lights, and plain pine interior finish. Cost \$60,000." At the same time, the publication noted, the architectural firm was preparing specifications for the \$15,000, three-story, 40' x 70' chapel addition, as well as for "two frame dwellings of ten rooms each." One was the new president's house; the other was presumably a residence for the family of former President Mohn, who died in 1899 after guiding St. Olaf through its first quarter-century. A week later, the *Improvement Bulletin* announced that the contract for supplying the stone for the dormitory's foundations had been let to H.A. Whittier. He was apparently ready to deliver the order: the January issue of the *Manitou Messenger* noted that "cords of stone are the first signs of the future building activity on our hill." Brick for the walls may have been supplied by the Northfield Brick Company, which was established in 1895. The capacity of the plant had reached two million bricks by the 1899 season.¹¹

In June, an action at the annual synod convention forced St. Olaf to scale back its plans. After reviewing development costs for the college and the new seminary in St. Paul, the group decided to allocate more funds to the St. Paul campus. As a result, it was only feasible to build the Men's Dormitory and the president's residence at St. Olaf. The "Mohn Memorial Cottage" was subsequently erected with donations from alumni and the citizens of Northfield.¹²

On July 7, 1900, the construction contract for the dormitory was awarded to Charles Skooglun of St. Paul. Three days later, Professor Ole G. Felland, a faculty member since 1881, led the ground-breaking ceremony for the new building.¹³ The heavily-wooded site lay northwest of the Main. Work began immediately, according to the *Northfield News*: "Mr. Skooglun has sub let the contract for excavating to Chas. Hosford of this city, who has already begun grubbing and blowing up stumps, so things are now humming on Manitou Heights. Contractor Skooglun is

¹¹ *Improvement Bulletin*, 30 December 1899, 6 January 1900, 13 January 1900; "Home Happenings," *Manitou Messenger*, January 1900, 14; "Northfield Brick Yard," *Northfield News*, 30 March 1895; "Northfield Brick Company Closes A Successful Season," *Northfield News*, 18 November 1899; *Northfield News*, 23 June 1900.

¹² Benson, 110-111; "New Buildings for Manitou," *Northfield News*, 23 June 1900; *Manitou Messenger*, December 1899, 156, January 1901, 17-18.

¹³ An excellent collection of photographs documenting the construction of the building is preserved in the St. Olaf College Archives at Rølvaag Memorial Library. The authors wish to thank archivist Joan Olson for her assistance during the preparation of this report.

expected next week." By October, the *Manitou Messenger* reported that "the woods re-echo with the noise and hammer[ing] . . . of the busy workmen and the outlines of our new buildings become more and more distinct. The campus is filled with a swarm of students as never before. . . . The future looks promising. . . . All glory to expansion."¹⁴

The cornerstone for the new dormitory was laid amid much fanfare on November 6, 1900, the anniversary of St. Olaf's incorporation. According to the *Manitou Messenger*, the event "signif[ie]d the era of expansion upon which St. Olaf has entered." Visitors came from across the state for the ceremony, which started in the unfinished dining hall of the new building. A representative of the church's seminary, an alumnus, and Professor Felland gave speeches. Selections by the college band and choir rounded out the afternoon, which culminated in the laying of the cornerstone by synod president Gjermund Hoyme "in the corporate name of St. Olaf College, in behalf of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." A time capsule contained a Bible, hymnals and other church publications in Norwegian and English, a copy of a St. Olaf diploma, U.S. coins, and other memorabilia.¹⁵

Construction proceeded throughout the winter. On February 28, the dormitory was ready for Professor Ytterboe, the first resident manager, to move his family into their first-floor suite of four rooms near the front entrance. Mrs. Ytterboe later remarked that upon their arrival "several things were left to do. At the east entrance, for instance, the rubbish, plastering boards, etc., were piled so high that one could walk in on the boards without using the stairs." Only one week later, however, the building committee officially accepted the project as complete.¹⁶

The administration wasted little time before fully utilizing the new space to serve the over 300 students enrolled for the 1900-01 school year. By March 18, the male students had been shifted from the Main to their new quarters. On March 23, the gymnasium and dining hall hosted an inaugural social gathering, which was attended by virtually the entire student body and included an ambitious agenda of speeches and musical selections. "The program," opined the *Manitou Messenger*, "was very interesting, though there was perhaps too much of it." The dining hall

¹⁴ "New Buildings for Manitou," *Northfield News*, 23 June 1900 "Contract Granted," *Northfield News*, 7 July 1900; *Manitou Messenger*, October 1900, 106, and March 1901, 74; "Builders at Work," *Northfield News*, 14 July 1900.

¹⁵ *Manitou Messenger*, November 1900, 138; "Cornerstone Duly Laid," *Northfield News*, 10 November 1900.

¹⁶ Elise Kittlesby Ytterboe, "Reminiscences from St. Olaf," in File: "Elise Kittlesby Ytterboe, ca. 1938," in H.T. Ytterboe Papers, St. Olaf College Archives; *Manitou Messenger*, March 1901, 74-75.

could comfortably serve 250 people, and hold up to 400 when necessary. The floor of the 40' x 80' gymnasium was lower than the rest of the basement, thereby providing an 18' ceiling clearance to accommodate sports activities.¹⁷

The *Manitou Messenger* gave a detailed description of the building, noting that “no pains have been spared to make it as complete and perfect as possible”:

The first floor has four entrances, one in the center of each wing, one in the front and one on the rear of the central division. Before each entrance is built a porch in the Renaissance style. The floors are of quarter sawed Georgia pine, and the stair-ways of red oak, built in the colonial style. Each wing is entirely separated from the main part by a fire proof wall, having also sliding iron doors which can be closed in case of fire; a large hose is also placed on each floor. Each division has a large stairway. On the first floor to the right of the main entrance are the manager's office and rooms, and to the left the parlors. On this floor two rooms have been set aside for hospital use. On the remainder of this floor and on the second and third floors are students' rooms to the number of 124. Each room is furnished with two single iron beds, a large book-case, table and chairs. All furniture has been supplied except the wardrobes. The cost of equipping one of these rooms is about \$35. The Ladies' Utile Dulci Literary Society has furnished the parlor, which has the aspect of a miniature palace parlor. The Ladies' waiting room has been exquisitely furnished by St. John's Ladies Aid Society of this city. . . . [T]he building is three times the size of the old one, being the largest structure in the city.¹⁸

The building's only bathroom was in the basement. Showers and bathtubs offered both hot and cold water. The building was heated by a steam plant in the basement, at the north of the gymnasium. Wiring for electricity was installed, although electric power was not available on campus until 1905. Additionally, the dormitory could boast of having a freight elevator serving all floors including the attic.¹⁹

Eager to show off the new dormitory, St. Olaf held an open house for the people of Northfield in March. On June 15, the dormitory's formal dedication ceremony attracted an estimated 2,000 people. A large United Church delegation traveled from Minneapolis, where sessions of the

¹⁷ Shaw, *History*, 174; *Manitou Messenger*, March 1901, 74-75; “Fine Structure Opens,” *Northfield News*, 16 March 1901.

¹⁸ *Manitou Messenger*, March 1901, 74-75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; “Recent Improvements,” *Manitou Messenger*, October 1905, 128-129.

synod's annual meeting were suspended for the occasion. The program consisted of a series of speeches in English and Norwegian by clergymen, the president of neighboring Carleton College, and the mayor of Northfield, followed by the dedication of the building by Reverend Hoyme. The afternoon's festivities were topped off by an outdoor lunch consisting of sandwiches, crackers, cheese, pickles, doughnuts, and coffee.²⁰

The completion of the Men's Dormitory in 1901 signaled many changes in the routine of the campus. Former dormitory rooms in the Main were converted into laboratories, classrooms, administrative offices, and a library. The new parlors and dining hall in the men's dormitory accommodated meetings, lectures, and social gatherings. Chapel services were moved into the new gymnasium, where "for the first time in two years the students have been comfortably seated during these exercises." The *Manitou Messenger* reported: "Though a gymnasium does not make the most suitable kind of a chapel, yet the appreciation it met with was seen on the first morning in the pleasant countenances of teachers and students." The gymnasium's popularity for chapel and other large gatherings sometimes conflicted with the facility's intended use. A campus group, the Athletic Union, intended to outfit the gym with equipment for the newly introduced physical education program, which offered gymnastics instruction to both men and women. They complained, though, that "our plans seemed like air-castles, because the gymnasium is being used as an assembly hall. . . . What could be done to overcome the obstacle caused by the chairs that occupied the floor?" They finally met with the school's president, who agreed to dedicate time for their exclusive use of the facility.²¹

The new and remodeled buildings housed an increasingly ambitious academic program initiated under the leadership of President John Nathan Kildahl. In 1899, Kildahl had replaced the school's first president, Thorbjorn N. Mohn. During Mohn's tenure, students took a prescribed series of classical and literary courses designed primarily to provide background for theological studies and teaching. Within a year, Kildahl expanded the curriculum to include a scientific track leading to a Bachelor of Science degree. The curriculum was further broadened in the following decade, and in 1913, the school adopted a modern system in which students could elect major and minor concentrations. During Kildahl's fifteen years of leadership, the faculty grew from fifteen to thirty-four, while the student body expanded from 184 to 518.²²

²⁰ *Manitou Messenger*, June 1901, 154-155; "Dormitory Dedication," *Northfield News*, 22 June 1901; Ytterboe, n.p.

²¹ *Manitou Messenger*, April 1901, 99, November 1901, 204.

²² *Manitou Messenger*, February 1901, 48; C.A. Mellby, *St. Olaf College Through Fifty Years, 1874-1924* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1925), 34-37.

The completion of the Men's Dormitory launched this vital period, and reconfirmed the school's original mission. The project "has necessitated great expense and sacrifice," the school paper observed on the eve of the dormitory's occupancy, "but there is hope of reward. The men and women who receive their training here are expected to be loyal to the Lutheran faith and bring forward still further the work and mission of the Christian church." The article also noted: "The Norwegian people fully realize the importance of higher education. This is clearly shown both by the large attendance and by the hearty support which they give."²³

In the midst of this optimistic period, however, the school was shaken by tragedy. During the winter of 1902-03, a student returned from Christmas vacation with a scarlet fever infection, which quickly spread through the dormitory's population. The building's hospital facilities became overwhelmed, and the third floor of the north wing was appropriated for additional space. In an attempt to halt the spread of the sickness, Professor Ytterboe fumigated the dormitory bathroom with formaldehyde every night for almost ten weeks. Although by spring the epidemic had abated, the battle was won at a high cost. During the summer of 1903, Professor Ytterboe began showing signs of severe formaldehyde poisoning. Stepping down from his duties as dormitory supervisor in the fall, he entered Luther Hospital in St. Paul for a short time and received a dire diagnosis. He returned to the campus to live out his last days, dying in a third-floor dormitory room on February 26, 1904. Funeral services were held on March 2 in the gymnasium. A decade later, the dormitory was named in his honor.²⁴

After the death of Professor Ytterboe, the college administration allowed Mrs. Ytterboe to draw her husband's salary and remain in the family quarters until the end of the term. Then, she and her children moved out of the manager's apartment, although she remained active on the campus by taking over as head of the dormitory's food service. For a number of years, the dormitory's dining hall accommodated all students on campus. According to Gertrude M. Hilleboe, the college's Dean of Women from 1915 to 1958: "The students were seated by classes, seniors at the south end, freshman[sic] at the north with the other classes between." In 1912, a cafeteria was opened in the new (original) Mohn Hall for the upper classes, but freshmen continued to eat family-style in Ytterboe's dining hall. Food service was provided at Ytterboe until 1960, when the cafeteria in the new student center opened.²⁵

While the Men's Dormitory experienced few changes prior to World War I, the destiny of the college as a whole was dramatically transformed in 1911, when St. Olaf officially became the

²³ *Manitou Messenger*, February 1901, 28.

²⁴ Ytterboe, n.p.; *Manitou Messenger*, March 1904, 350-358.

²⁵ Ytterboe, n.p.; Gertrude M. Hilleboe, *Manitou Analecta* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1968), 27-29.

property of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church.²⁶ This not only guaranteed the continued support of the synod, but also reinforced the religious mission of the school as it broadened and upgraded its curriculum to meet national standards.

With the outbreak of World War I, many students, faculty, and alumni enlisted in active duty, and several service organizations formed on campus to contribute to the war effort. In the fall of 1918, St. Olaf hosted two companies of the Student Army Training Corps, consisting of a total of 228 enlisted men and six officers. The Men's Dormitory served as a barracks and mess hall. In November, after the Armistice, the building also became a temporary hospital as an influenza epidemic struck the campus, sickening over 100 people and killing four. Shortly thereafter, on December 18, the college's military unit was disbanded.²⁷

The 1918 epidemic highlighted the need for more dormitories and other buildings to relieve overcrowding on campus. The situation was exacerbated in 1923, when Hoyme Memorial Chapel was destroyed by fire. The physics department, which had been housed in the basement of the building, set up its salvaged equipment in the gymnasium and shower rooms of Ytterboe Hall. This, in turn, required the dormitory residents to rely on facilities in the new gymnasium building, which had been dedicated in 1920.²⁸

By 1930, enrollment was slightly over 1,000 students, only about a third of whom could be accommodated in the dormitories. Because Mohn Hall, the women's dormitory which had been completed in 1911, held only 108 residents, the school's first building priority was providing a new, larger structure to house more female students on campus. Ground was broken in 1937 for the new facility; Agnes Mellby Hall opened in 1938. Ytterboe Hall, which remained the sole men's dormitory for the campus until the opening of Thorson Hall in 1948, was refurbished during the same period with fresh paint and new chrome furniture. The basement shower and locker rooms were transformed into a recreation center. The dormitory office, which supplied such necessities as a vacuum cleaner and laundry service, also operated a canteen for the residents' convenience. Three years later, the entire dormitory received new fire equipment and electrical outlets in many rooms as part of a campus-wide improvement program. These

²⁶ In 1917, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church joined with the Norwegian Synod and Hauge's Synod to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (later the Evangelical Lutheran Church). Control of St. Olaf formally passed to the new body in 1920; see Benson, 224-225.

²⁷ Mellby, 41-42; Benson, 210-211.

²⁸ Shaw, *History*, 290-291; Erik Hetle, *Lars Wilhelm Boe: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1949), 116.

improvements, however, did nothing to relieve the overcrowding. Even the building's attic was called into use as an overflow library space.²⁹

Although the tight quarters were a problem for the administration, the situation reflected St. Olaf's success at attracting more and more students. Despite the fact that St. Olaf's finances and enrollment were adversely affected by the Great Depression of the 1930s, the institution ranked as the largest Norwegian-American college in the Midwest by 1935. At that time, its grounds, buildings, equipment, and endowments were valued at approximately \$3 million. As the 1940s began, St. Olaf counted a student population of 1,125.³⁰

The onset of World War II saw new military involvement on the college's campus, this time on a much larger scale than the brief activity of 1918. In 1942, the Navy approached the administration about establishing a 600-cadet Pre-Flight Preparatory School on the campus. Housing and dining facilities were already overburdened by student demand, so the school was initially uncertain about the feasibility of the proposal. The school and the Navy reached an agreement, however, in mid-December 1942, making St. Olaf one of twenty schools in the country with such an arrangement. The college made a commitment to supply the twenty-eight instructors needed for the program, which included courses in mathematics, physics, communications and navigation. Two-hundred high-school graduates were due to start the three-month course in January, with 200 more in February and another 200 in March. The Navy leased several facilities, including Ytterboe Hall, most of Mohn Hall, portions of the gymnasium, and several classrooms in Main and Steensland Hall. A 1943 article entitled "The War Comes to Our Campus" in the *St. Olaf College Bulletin* reported that "the transformation which took place on the campus during the Christmas recess of 1942 will long be remembered." The Navy funded the approximately \$48,000 of renovations. At Ytterboe Hall, the plumbing was extended to the first through third floors, a cafeteria line was installed in the dining hall, a sprinkler system was added, and the dormitory rooms, recreation areas, and offices were modified to handle up to 400 cadets. Despite the plumbing modifications, there was still a shortage of showers, so some men had to bathe at the gymnasium. The cafeteria in the basement of Mohn Hall was adapted to serve the entire student population. Students in Mohn Hall, dubbed the "S.S. Lexington," were crowded into quarters in Agnes Mellby Hall, while those boarding in Ytterboe Hall, nicknamed the "S.S. Enterprise," were forced to find rooms

²⁹ Orville Dahl, "From A Window in Ytterboe Hall," *Manitou Messenger*, December 1937, 12-13; *Manitou Messenger*, November 1940, 17.

³⁰ O.M. Norlie, "Norwegian-American Colleges," *Trønder-American*, June 1935, 28; J.M. Bly, "Significant Trends in Student Enrollment," *St. Olaf College Bulletin*, December 1936, 12-14; Shaw, *History*, 354.

off campus.³¹ St. Olaf also hosted a Navy Academic Refresher Unit between the summer of 1944 and January 1946, when all Navy programs ended. All told, 3,510 cadets received preliminary training at the college. In recognition of this accomplishment, the Navy awarded St. Olaf a certificate of merit for distinguished service.³²

Although the cadets moved on with the end of World War II, crowded conditions at St. Olaf did not ease, as returning veterans squeezed into every available space.³³ A temporary dormitory, Viking Court, was built from material salvaged from an old college barn. Another building was leased from the Odd Fellows Old People's Home, and a trailer camp was set up to accommodate married students. Ytterboe Hall, still the school's only permanent men's dormitory, was fitted with extra beds in the basement, gymnasium, and attic. To help feed all the newcomers, the building's dining hall was expanded with a wood-frame annex, one of several surplus military structures obtained from the Federal Works Administration; a second, similar addition off the kitchen provided space for a bakery. In 1948, Ytterboe was once again the object of renovation work, which included installing an automatic sprinkler system, covering the original wood floors with asphalt tile, and constructing closets and enclosing door transoms in dormitory rooms.³⁴

Since the 1950s, Ytterboe Hall has experienced a number of other interior alterations. In 1950, permanent installation of a stage, dressing rooms, and seating formalized the gymnasium's transformation into a theater, which was christened the "Lion's Pause" in 1968. Support columns were added in the space in 1954. The dormitory officially became co-ed in 1971, and soon thereafter became headquarters for the Paracollege. By 1974, the dining hall had been transformed into a recreation center, the Lion's Den, and the former kitchen was given over to storage. The building was threatened with demolition in 1977, but continued space shortages on campus granted Ytterboe a reprieve from the wrecker's ball. In 1982, a half-million dollar

³¹ "St. Olaf Will Accept Navy Unit," *Manitou Messenger*, 11 December 1942, 1; "Navy Officials O.K. Facilities at St. Olaf College," *Northfield News*, 24 December 1942; J. Jørgen Thompson and A.O. Lee to Commandant, Ninth Naval District, 11 December 1942, and Paul V. McNutt to the Presidents of Colleges and Universities, 12 December 1942, in File: "C.M. Granskou, 1942-1943, Military Affairs," St. Olaf College Archives; "College Navy Program in Action; Several Faculty Changes Made," *Manitou Messenger*, 15 January 1943, 1; Peter E. Fossum, "The War Comes to Our Campus," *St. Olaf College Bulletin* 34 (May 1943): 25-27.

³² President's Annual Report, 1945-46, 2, in St. Olaf College Archives.

³³ In September 1944, 89 men and 666 women made for a total enrollment of 755 students. By September 1946, the numbers had increased to 818 men and 759 women, 612 of which were veterans, according to Joseph M. Shaw, *Dear Old Hill: The Story of Manitou Heights, the Campus of St. Olaf College* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, Northfield Printing, 1992), 149.

³⁴ Benson, 322-325; Shaw, *History*, 394; Shaw, *Dear Old Hill*, 151; Rick Lund, "Nostalgia: Remembering Old Ytterboe," *Manitou Messenger*, 8 February 1974, 5.

project enclosed the building's stairwells, and removed the one-story additions from the 1940s. At the same time, the dormitory's electrical system was replaced, the heating system was updated, and new energy-efficient windows were installed. Ytterboe Hall ended its long career as a dormitory in 1989, and began serving as office and classroom space. Since that time, the east wing of the building has been damaged twice by flooding when the sprinkler system failed.³⁵

Although Ytterboe's role as a dormitory has ended, the building's legacy survives in the memories of the thousands of students it sheltered. As college historian Joseph M. Shaw observed: "The rich and uproarious life which Ytterboe Hall has added to the campus over the years defies recounting."³⁶ Keeping control of the dormitory's energetic male inhabitants was a challenge from the outset. An historical account of the first resident manager's experience remarked that "the 'ten o'clock p.m. and lights out' rule in a building with numerous exits and convenient entrances did not always make life pleasant for Professor Ytterboe." A hand-written list of "suggestions" to residents, dated 1919, included the following: "Do not enter the room occupied by others unless you are wanted there. . . . Do not spit on the floors. Keep your rooms clean. . . . Do not use profane language. Do not gamble. . . . Go to Chapel. . . . Go to church on Sundays." The list ended with a Biblical mandate from the first book of Samuel: "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men." Quiet hours were imposed from 1:30 to 4:00 in the afternoon, and from 7:15 to 10:30 in the evening, with no noise permitted thereafter.³⁷

Despite the rules, mischief was apparently inevitable. A 1932 letter to the editor in the *Manitou Messenger* took issue with "the general opinion of 'off-campus St. Olafites' . . . that Ytterboe Hall is a veritable mad-house," blaming noisiness in the dormitory on the reverberations of the building itself. Another student quickly responded: "I realize that the building does act as a 'sounding box' for any noise in it, but I also know that a large percentage of the uproar is caused entirely by the inmates. 'When a bunch of Bolsheviks roll waste cans down the steps, they can't blame the resulting clatter to the weak points in the dorm's construction.'"³⁸

³⁵ Lund, 5; slide show typescript, "Historical Background on Ytterboe," in Photograph Collection, "Ytterboe Hall, 1952-," St. Olaf College Archives; Kristin Nelson, "A Dorm for All Seasons," *Manitou Messenger*, 25 September 1980, 8; "Improvements Begun on Ytterboe," *St. Olaf Magazine*, Spring 1982, 7; Pete Sandberg, "'Ytt's' Time Has Come," *Saint Olaf*, November/December 1996, 11-14.

³⁶ Shaw, *History*, 181.

³⁷ Benson, 128; photocopy of "Suggestions," 5 March 1919, in St. Olaf College Archives; Nelson, "A Dorm for All Seasons," 8.

³⁸ "Noise in the Dormitory," *Manitou Messenger*, 16 February 1932; "A Remedy," *Manitou Messenger*, 23 February 1932.

In later decades, students took advantage of the dormitory's high ceilings to construct lofts, significantly increasing the square footage of the small rooms. Resident managers were less tolerant of other student "improvements," such as flooding the floor to create skating rinks and swimming pools.

Perhaps because of this hard use, Ytterboe was considered somewhat outdated as early as the 1930s. An article in the *Manitou Messenger* in 1931 referred to "the venerable old hall" -- "ancient Ytterboe." The paper's December 1937 issue noted that "though Ytterboe Hall occupies a prominent place physically on the campus, a discussion of its attributes is usually predicated on reservations and apologies." The author elaborated:

Living as we do in the Middle-west, we have been exposed to a fluxive environment. Old buildings have been condemned, old roads have been torn up to make way for the skyscraper and the highway. In view of this growth and maturity, it was natural that the emphasis should have been placed upon the new. It is undoubtedly the possession of the "new" which is the substance of the search for happiness in modern life.

The article reached a prescient conclusion: "One thing is certain, when the time comes for Ytterboe to be torn brick from brick to make way for the new, then in many hearts a silent tear will be shed because of the passing of a real friend."³⁹

Ytterboe Hall is scheduled for demolition in summer 1997. A new college commons will be erected on the site.

³⁹ Dahl, "From a Window," 12-13; Nelson, "A Dorm for All Seasons," 8.

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