Minnesota State Academy for the Blind
400 6th Avenue Southeast
Faribault
Rice County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-161

HABS
MINN
66-FARI,
2-

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

HABS
MINN
66-FARI,
2-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MINNESOTA STATE ACADEMY FOR THE BLIND

For information about other structures at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, see:

HABS No. MN-161-A Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Blind Department Building
HABS No. MN-161-B Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Dow Hall

HABS No. MN-161

Location: 400 6th Avenue Southeast
Faribault
Rice County, Minnesota

Architects: Monroe Sheire, Clarence Johnston

Present Owner: State of Minnesota

Present Use: Storage buildings at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind

Significance: The Minnesota State Academy for the Blind was established in Faribault in 1866. The Blind Department Building (HABS No. MN-161-A), completed in 1874, was the first structure designed specifically for the school. The school quickly outgrew its elegant Second Empire building, which became a wing of the larger Dow Hall (HABS No. MN-161-B), built in three sections between 1883 and 1917. Clarence Johnston, the state architect, substantially changed the architectural style of Dow Hall in a 1917 remodeling, extracting a Classical Revival structure from the original Second Empire design created by Monroe Sheire of Saint Paul. The school's physical and programmatic evolution reflects national trends in educating the blind and visually impaired. The school also pioneered an adult education program that addressed the needs of those blinded later in life. For well over a century, the school has made an invaluable contribution to the state of Minnesota by providing academic and vocational training to thousands of children and adults.

Project Information: In 1996, the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind received funds from the Minnesota State Legislature to undertake several projects on campus, including the demolition of Dow Hall (HABS No. MN-161-B) and the Blind Department Building. Key architectural elements were to be salvaged for incorporation into a commemorative exhibit near Dow Hall's site, which was to be converted into a parking lot. In 1997, Studio Five Architects, with Thomas E. Hunt as principal-in-charge, was hired to complete the project. Studio Five retained Hess, Roise and Company

as a subcontractor for the HABS documentation. Charlene K. Roise served as principal investigator for Hess Roise and helped draft and edit the reports. Staff historians Shawn P. Rounds and Cynthia de Miranda conducted research and prepared the reports. Jerry Mathiason, as a subcontractor to Hess Roise, completed the photographic documentation. Gary Paulson oversaw the production of this report for the Minnesota Department of Administration. Elaine Sveen reviewed the report for the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind.

OVERVIEW

The Minnesota State Academy for the Blind was founded in the southern Minnesota town of Faribault in 1866. Since that time, the institution has continually adapted its facilities in response to changes in educational philosophy and student population. Initially a division of the Minnesota Institute for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, the school occupied a series of temporary quarters until moving into a structure erected for its use, the Blind Department Building (HABS No. 161-A), in 1874. The next year, James J. Dow became the school's principal and, in 1879, its superintendent. During his long tenure, which continued until 1920, Dow initiated a variety of programs to provide the blind with vocational, as well as academic, training. He also oversaw expansion of the school's physical plant, including the construction in 1883 of the campus's dominant building (HABS No. 161-B), which was later named in his honor. The structure was enlarged in 1895 and again between 1914 and 1917. The latter renovation, planned by state architect Clarence Johnston, transformed the building's style from Second Empire to Georgian Revival. To make way for a north addition, the Blind Department Building, which had served as a wing of the hall, was relocated. Although both buildings continued to house a variety of activities in the following decades, their functions were gradually usurped by new buildings on campus. At the same time, national education policy began discouraging residential programs for the disabled in favor of "mainstreaming," which reduced the school's population. By the late twentieth century, the school had concluded that Dow Hall and the Blind Department Building were functionally and structurally obsolete and should be demolished.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The campus of the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind lies on the east bank of the Straight River immediately north of the Faribault Correctional Facility, about forty-five miles south of the Twin Cities. The greater part of the city spreads along the opposite riverbank. A steep, tree-lined bluff marks the west and north edges of the school's grounds, and Minnesota State Trunk Highway 298 forms the east boundary of the campus. Dow Hall (HABS No. MN-161-B), once the school's main building, is the northernmost structure on the grounds. Behind it and extending southward along the river bluff stand a brick laundry building, a wood-frame garage, and the Blind Department Building (HABS No. MN-161-A). Access to the property is provided by a road that branches east from the highway at the northeast edge of the campus, forming a circular driveway on the broad lawn east of Dow Hall. A road extends west from the southwest corner of this loop along the south side of Dow Hall, then turns south to pass along the east side of the Blind Department Building. The road terminates in a large parking lot. Other school buildings are grouped south and southeast of Dow Hall. The modern Library, Administration Building, and Activities Building are south of the circular driveway; West Cottage and the Vocational Building are adjacent to the parking lot. Concrete sidewalks connect the buildings across landscaped lawns.

HISTORY OF THE MINNESOTA STATE ACADEMY FOR THE BLIND

Educating the Blind

The first three institutions established to educate blind children in the United States opened between 1832 and 1833 in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. While these schools served a population previously neglected in this country, their organization was not a pioneering step in the history of American special education: the first school for the deaf had been created fifteen years before, in 1817. These three private schools, however, laid the foundation for blind education in this country.[1]

Their founders took some ideas from European facilities, most of which were modeled after *L'Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles* (National Institution for Young Blind People), Europe's first school for blind children. The school was founded in Paris in 1784 by Valentin Hauy, who had been moved by the sight of blind beggars being ridiculed and resolved to help them. He originated a system of relief printing that enabled his blind students to read and improved on existing methods of instructing the blind. Hauy's students learned arithmetic, geography, history, and music. They gave public demonstrations of their intellect and talent as a means of raising awareness of, and funds for, the school. Like Hauy's teaching tools and methods, the demonstrations were imitated at schools across Europe.[2]

In the United States, however, pioneering educators were more cautious about adopting Hauy's approach. One of the leaders on this side of the Atlantic was a physician, Samuel Gridley Howe. In 1831, Howe became the first director of the New-England Asylum for the Blind, later renamed the Perkins School for the Blind, perhaps the best known of the first blind schools in America. He immediately embarked on a tour of European schools, which he found to be "beacons to warn rather than lights to guide."[3] The programs abroad, he felt, paid insufficient attention to the needs and talents of individual students and offered an unbalanced education. Some schools emphasized academics and neglected the trades, while others did just the opposite, all in spite of the student's own interests and capabilities. At Perkins, Howe resolved, students would receive a well-rounded education built upon their demonstrated abilities.[4]

---

[1] Ishbel Ross, *Journey into Light* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), 133-155; Gabriel Farrell, *The Story of Blindness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 41-52.

[2] Ross, 96-118; Farrell, 23-29.

[3] [Samuel G. Howe], "Education of the Blind," *North American Review* 37 (July 1883): 34, quoted in Harold Schwartz, *Samuel Gridley Howe: Social Reformer, 1801-1876* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 50.

[4] Ibid., 50-51; Milton Meltzer, *A Light in the Dark: The Life of Samuel Gridley Howe* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 73-74.

Howe did imitate Huay's practice of showing off his students' achievements in public displays. Throughout the 1830s and into the 1840s, Howe traveled throughout New England with a few pupils in search of funding and new students. He also hoped to inspire other states and individuals to establish schools to educate blind youth. Soon, Howe expanded his circuit as far west as the Mississippi River. He visited congressmen in Washington, urging the creation of new schools and better programs for the blind.[5]

When Howe began his lobbying efforts, many American children who were physically, mentally, and/or socially disadvantaged came under the care of local authorities operating within the guidelines of poor-relief laws. As a result, some were shunted into almshouses along with the indigent. This began to change, however, by the mid-nineteenth century. With the work of educational institutions for the physically handicapped came a change in the American public's view of special education. Although advocates at the start appealed to the hearts of supporters and legislators to secure funding, the schools' successes prompted a flurry of popular interest based not on charity, but on the principle of betterment. By 1860, twenty institutions dedicated to the education of blind youth had been established throughout the United States.[6]

Educating Minnesota's Blind Children

Perhaps inspired by Howe's efforts, Minnesotans, along with the rest of the country, recognized the need for a special education program comparable to that offered the general population through grade schools. In January 1858, the Minnesota legislature established a residential school for indigent "deaf and dumb" children in Faribault, contingent upon receiving forty acres of land from the local community for the facility. Faribault donated the land, but the legislature did not allocate funds for the project for five years. Finally, in 1863, a small appropriation of $1,500 enabled the Minnesota Institute for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb to admit deaf children who were wards of the state. A successful first year encouraged legislators to grant the school permanent status in 1864. At the same time, the state expanded the program to include all deaf and blind children in Minnesota and changed the school's name to the Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind. The school's board, citing insufficient funding, did not open the Blind Department until 1866.[7]

---

[5] Meltzer, 81; Schwarz, 62-65.

[6] Harry Best, *Blindness and the Blind in the United States* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1934), 306-319.

[7] A. C. Rogers, "State Institutions," in *History of Rice and Steele Counties*, vol. 1, ed. Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge (Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr., and Company, 1910), 352-353; Gioh-Fang Dju Ma, *One Hundred Years of Public Services for Children in Minnesota* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 18.

Blind Department officials immediately began searching for space, since the Faribault commercial building that served as a temporary home for the Deaf Department could not accommodate both programs. The blind division, much smaller than the Deaf Department, took up quarters in the Fitzgerald and then the Tanner houses, both private homes in Faribault. Meanwhile, the original parcel of donated land was sold and another purchased on a bluff overlooking town from the east side of the Straight River. In 1868, both departments were brought together in a single structure built on the property, which almost immediately was filled beyond capacity.[8]

This move, the first of many for the blind program, forced a combination that was not ideal from the perspective of educators, although legislators justified it economically. While deaf and blind programs also shared facilities in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, the union was bound to favor the program with more participants. In Minnesota, the school housed fifty-three deaf and fourteen blind students by 1870. The overcrowded facility had to turn away applicants, even though mandated to accept any blind or deaf resident between the ages of ten and twenty-five.[9]

Under these cramped conditions, it was challenging enough for the Blind Department to maintain its existing educational program, which included academic courses as well as vocal and instrumental musical training. The division wanted to expand, however, into industrial arts and piano tuning, following the lead of the Deaf Department, which had a cooperage. Echoing Howe's philosophy, Minnesota officials stated that "the blind may, with proper encouragement and discipline, be made self-supporting. In their case it is important that the two, education and a trade, should be acquired together."[10]

Along with intellectual, physical, and musical education, manual training had become a standard component of blind education in America. Shops for instructing the blind in the manual arts had been included at several American institutions in the 1850s, with the goal of

---

[8] Minnesota Braille and Sight Saving School, "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound, 1866 to 1966," 1-2, copy at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault; Rogers, 352-353.

[9] Grouping the blind and the deaf together remained common into the twentieth century and a cause of concern among educators: "Not seldom in the public mind the blind and the deaf are thought of together, and the problems of one class believed to be those of the other. As a matter of fact, there is but one point of resemblance between the two: both are 'defective' in that they are each deprived of a most important physical sense. The gulf that really separates the blind from the deaf is far deeper than that which lies between either of the two classes and the normal population." *Proceedings of the National Education Association, 1903*, 990, quoted in Best, 279-280. See also Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Eighth Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1871), 7; Best, 327, 336-337, 695; Ma, 20.

[10] Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Tenth Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1873), 7, 33-36.

providing blind students with the means to support themselves upon graduation. The 1854 report from the Iowa School for the Blind reflected a common view: "It is confidently believed that the blind, with proper instruction, will be able to maintain themselves free of charge from their friends or the State. There will be as few exceptions among this class, according to their numbers, as among those who have sight." Educators also viewed industrial training as a way to instill self-confidence in students.[11]

Such convictions had faded somewhat by the mid-1870s. Schools began reporting that, while the blind could work, many were still unable to support themselves due to insufficient wages. For a time, institutions felt obligated to provide assistance to their graduates by creating opportunities in industrial employment. This experiment generally failed, however, and most schools reverted to the idea that their role was merely to provide, in addition to an academic education, instruction in those trades thought to be most suitable and practical for the blind.[12]

Despite these changing attitudes, officials at Minnesota's Blind Department were anxious to establish a balanced curriculum, which required more space. This ultimately led the legislature to acknowledge the need for separate facilities for the deaf and blind, although the process took several years. In 1870, when the school's administration requested $40,000 to add a wing to the two-year-old building, the legislature initially authorized only $25,000. A year later, with the wing under construction, the administration applied for $20,000 to finish and furnish the new wing, plus $12,000 for a separate structure for the Blind Department. Finally, in 1873, the legislature appropriated funds to enable the Blind Department to build separate quarters.[13]

In August, institute officials purchased the property of Alexander Faribault, which lay south of the deaf school, for the site of the new building. Faribault had chosen a spot on the high bluff of the Straight River that overlooked his namesake community. Institute officials enthusiastically reported on their transaction to state lawmakers: "We decided, after long examination and comparison of relative expenses, to purchase the homestead of Alexander Faribault, a tract of ninety-seven acres, consisting of about thirty acres of timber, mostly maple, and about sixty-seven acres of cultivated and ornamental grounds. In the midst of a fine grove of domestic evergreens, on the most romantic and beautiful bluff within the limits of our city, stands the Faribault mansion. The desire to secure this inviting site, as a permanent home for our Blind wards, grew upon us irresistible, and we finally secured it for the sum of eight

---

[11] *Report of the Iowa School, 1854* is quoted in Best, 474; see also pages 384 and 473.

[12] Ibid., 472-480. This policy was later validated by reports that a higher percentage of graduates from such programs were employed than were members of the general blind population.

[13] Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Eighth Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1871), 7, 55.

thousand five hundred dollars. We are confident that the wood, estimated at from 800 to 1,000 cords, and the improvements on these grounds, exceed in value the price paid."[14]

Plans called for the immediate addition of a second structure on the south side of the wood-frame Faribault residence. The new 40' x 60' brick building (HABS No. MN-161-A) rose two stories above a high basement, with the mansard roof providing a third story. A verandah encircling the building's first floor was connected to a porch on the Faribault house. The interior of the new building was finished with oiled and varnished pine, butternut, and oak. Staff and students took up residence in the Blind Department Building in summer 1874. The new accommodations seemed to please everyone greatly: "At an expense of about twelve thousand dollars, we think, we have furnished the State as much pleasant and convenient room as can be shown for that money in the land," the directors proclaimed in their annual report. "It is a pleasure to visit the Blind in their new, beautiful and quiet home, enjoying their music and their work free from all disturbance."[15]

Of the project's total cost, $9,000 went to Waite and Kingsley, a local construction company. The building may have been designed by Monroe Sheire, a Saint Paul architect.[16] Sheire studied architecture in Detroit before moving to Saint Paul in 1860. As a member of the firm Leonard and Sheire, he worked with his brother Romaine Sheire and Charles S. Leonard. The firm designed many residences and businesses, including a house for Alexander Ramsey, a former state governor and United States senator. When Leonard died in 1874, the firm continued as Monroe Sheire and Brother.[17]

---

[14] Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1874), 10.

[15] *Faribault Republican,* December 24, 1873, 3; Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1875), 9.

[16] No architect is named in documentation dating from the time of construction. A decade after the Blind Department Building was erected, however, school officials implied that Monroe Sheire had designed it: "Monroe Sheire of St. Paul, to whom we are indebted for the working plans, drawings and specifications of all the buildings which have been erected for the use of this institute . . . ." See Minnesota Institute for Defective Children, *Fourth Biennial Report* (Saint Paul, [1886]), 8.

[17] William Spenser Kingsley was born in Saint Paul in 1869 and lived in Faribault until he left school at the age of fifteen to become a carpenter; by 1892, he was in business as a contractor. A 1915 biography credits him with buildings at all three state institutions in Faribault as well as a local high school. He also served on the board of the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and the School for the Blind. Henry A. Castle, *Minnesota: Its Story and Biography* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1915), s.v. "William Spencer Kingsley"; Architects Research Files, Northwest Architectural Archives, Saint Paul; Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1874), 10.

Curriculum Development under James J. Dow

Although the Blind and Deaf Departments still operated under a single supervisor answerable to one board, the programs now had separate facilities in addition to their own superintendents. In 1875, as the Blind Department settled into its new home, James J. Dow began his decades-long tenure as head of the program. Born to missionary parents in Midnapore, India, in 1848, Dow had served in the Union Army during the Civil War before entering Carleton College at Northfield, Minnesota, in 1869. Dow and fellow student Myra Amelia Brown made up the school's entire first graduating class in 1874. That same year, the two classmates married and settled in Austin, Minnesota, where Dow had accepted the position of public-school principal. A year later they moved to Faribault, and Dow took charge of the Blind Department.[18]

When Dow arrived at the school in 1875, the curriculum consisted of a five- to seven-year course that included reading, spelling, arithmetic, and vocal and instrumental music. Students learned to read both Braille and the New York Point system, an adaptation of the raised-dot Braille alphabet. Particular emphasis was made on musical instruction, as was the case at many schools for the blind. The musical focus of many curricula may have been based on a public perception that blind people were generally musically gifted. Most schools encouraged choral singing and offered instruction on both the piano and organ; some programs included string and wind instruments as well.[19]

Dow, like the administration, wanted to add classes teaching practical skills that would help the blind find employment. In his remarks in the school's 1875 annual report, Dow echoed nationwide sentiment on the monetary and moral benefits of occupational training:

> However beneficial to the mental and moral nature of the blind a purely literary education may be, it will leave its possessor but poorly equipped for the struggle of life unless supplemented by a practical knowledge of some handicraft. The amount of unoccupied time cannot fail to foster a habit of indolence which is exceedingly injurious. . . . We seek to guard against this by encouraging outdoor sports and exercise, and such in-door employment as bead-work and plain sewing . . . and some simple housework; but nothing can fully meet the case except regular employment in some useful work. Hence the pressing necessity for some further occupations for the blind.[20]

---

[18] "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound," 18-19.

[19] Ibid., 2; Best, 386.

[20] Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1876), 23-24.

Despite Dow's efforts, no industrial arts classes were established during the first two years of his tenure. By 1878, however, he could report modest progress: one student was receiving training on a sewing machine; six were learning to cane-seat chairs; and twelve spent time on beadwork. These students, he wrote, were "learning a light and pleasant employment, while they at the same time acquire a sensitiveness and delicacy of touch and a ready use of the hands, which will be of great general service."[21]

The turning point for industrial training in the Blind Department came in 1879 with the introduction of broom-making. Hoping to demonstrate the value of manual arts, Dow had the required machinery installed in a small room in the Blind Department Building (HABS No. MN-161-A). The brooms sold well. By the end of the year, a separate shop building was erected and the equipment transferred there. Smaller than the main school building at 24' x 36', the one-and-one-half-story shop nevertheless reflected a similar style, featuring a mansard roof. Two work areas occupied the main floor: one for making brooms and the other for caning chairs. By 1881, seven of the department's twenty-six students were working on brooms, producing about twenty-five each day. Teachers planned to begin courses in mattress production and carpet-weaving in the attic.[22]

Dow continued to expand and strengthen both the academic and industrial programs as the Blind Department's population rose steadily, reaching eighty students by 1900. The department introduced high-school classes by 1886, and offered a complete twelve-year course of study by 1900. Several new areas of training were incorporated into the curriculum as well: students made hammocks, nets, and mattresses; wove rugs, carpets, and rattan; and practiced *sloyd*, a Swedish form of woodcarving. By 1914, Minnesota's educational program for the blind, particularly the manual training component, had garnered attention from outside the state. George D. Eaton, the director of Iowa's state institution for the blind, had high words of praise for the Minnesota school: "The industrial work which Dr. Dow has inaugurated here is very effective. . . . It is not copied after any of the other schools in the country, but shows a carefully worked out and original plan. The weaving work being done is particularly striking, and on the whole, I believe that the industrial work in the Minnesota institution is far in advance of that of any other state institution which I have ever visited."[23]

---

[21] Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Minneapolis, 1879), 24.

[22] Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *First Biennial Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Peter, Minn., 1881), 32; "New Shop," *Faribault Republican,* November 19, 1879, 3; "State Institutions," *Faribault Republican,* January 26, 1881, 3.

[23] Minnesota Institute for Defectives, *Seventh Biennial Report of the Directors and Officers* (Minneapolis, 1892), 90-91; Ma, 47; "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound," 2-5; "Blind School Given Praise by Iowa Man," *Faribault Republican*, February 25, 1914, 1.

Dow also brought innovation to adult education. The need to address this population had been recognized as early as 1871, when school officials lamented that "those now in the State too old to enter school must lose the advantages of education."[24] Twenty-five years later, Dow reported that the school was unable to take in several homeless blind women. "A grave question arises," Dow said, "whether humanity does not demand that something be done for this distressed and unfortunate class."[25]

Finally in 1907, Dow established an adult education program, the first of its kind in the United States and possibly in the world. The program consisted of a ten-week summer-school course that instructed eight blind men in all subjects and trades currently taught at the school. Presumably because of the age and gender of the adult students, more emphasis was put on industrial training than on academics. A four-week version was extended to blind women in 1914. By this time, Dow had recognized that the value of educating blind adults might not be purely vocational: "It had come under our observation that there were many blind women in the state whose lives would apparently be made happier if they could be taught to read tactile print and do some of the simpler kinds of hand work."[26] Still, the ultimate goal of the adult program was employment, at least for the men. In a 1913 address given at a Faribault church, Dow spoke of the need for industrial and traditional education for adults as well as children "in order that the blind people of the state can make their own living." The state justified the program's cost by hoping that the trained men would get a job and be able to support themselves and their families, eliminating the need for state aid. Committed to helping the blind find work, Dow also directed the state's agency for blind employment.[27]

Dow was clearly proud of the adult education program: "The establishment of the Summer School for Blind Men four years ago is absolutely unique in the history of the training of the blind, and is believed to be an important step in the direction of aid and training for those who have lost sight too late in life to enjoy the advantages of schools for blind youth." The

---

[24] Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, *Ninth Annual Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1872), 21.

[25] Minnesota Institute for Defectives, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1896), 48.

[26] Minnesota State Board of Control, *Seventh Biennial Report* (Minneapolis, 1915), 378-379.

[27] "Work for the Blind Explained by Dr. Dow," *Faribault Republican*, October 1, 1913, 1; Minnesota Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Fifteenth Biennial Report* (Minneapolis, 1908), 108; James J. Dow, "Organizations for Aiding the Adult Blind to Become Self-Supporting," in Minnesota School for the Blind, *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the Board of Directors and the Superintendent* (Faribault, 1915), 11, 42-55; James J. Dow, "Necessary Evils," in *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-first Annual Meeting*, ed. the National Education Association (N.p.: The Association, 1902), 842-843; Minnesota Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Sixteenth Biennial Report* (Minneapolis, 1910), 7-8; "Summer School Circular," ca. 1907, at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault.

program also impressed others in the field. Dow quoted "one of the oldest and most intelligent educators of the blind," who wrote that the program "is one of the most valuable suggestions that have been submitted to the profession in my personal knowledge of the work among the blind. If it succeeds, as it can scarcely fail to do, it will go far toward helping the institutions of the country to meet their great responsibilities."[28]

Not all of the blind, however, were interested in manual labor. Some sought to continue their education in college, and in the early twentieth century schools for the blind began addressing this desire. A 1902 report from the Faribault facility, which had just been renamed the Minnesota School for the Blind, explained that the goal of its academic program "is to do systematic, thoro [*sic*] work, that the student, if he stops here, may have a substantial preparation for his life work; if he goes farther, a good foundation on which to pursue a college course."[29] Obtaining post-secondary education, however, was problematic: educators believed that the blind were best served by a separate college, but no such institution existed. Congress had established Gallaudet College for the deaf in Washington, D.C., in 1864, but continued appeals to Congress for a college for the blind were unsuccessful.

Lacking other alternatives, a handful of graduates of the Minnesota School for the Blind had completed bachelor's and law degrees at the University of Minnesota by 1908. One student continued his studies at Yale University and earned a Ph.D., which was "believed to be the first degree of this kind to have been earned in residence and received in this country by a blind man."[30] Encouraged by such successes, educators and advocates for the blind began lobbying states and private organizations to grant college scholarships to blind students. By 1916, an appropriation from the state legislature allowed the Minnesota School for the Blind to provide graduates with small grants for continued education at approved colleges and universities. The demand for the grants often exceeded the amount available in the scholarship fund as the number of graduates wanting to attend college grew throughout the next decades.[31]

Building Management under the State Boards

Just as the curriculum experienced significant evolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so, too, did the school's management and operation. In 1881, the Blind and Deaf Departments were formally joined by the School for Idiots and Imbeciles, a program for developmentally disabled youth that had been established as an experimental venture in

---

[28] Minnesota Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Sixteenth Biennial Report* (1910), 80.

[29] B. P. Chapple, "What Minnesota is Doing for Her Blind Children," in the National Education Association's *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-first Annual Meeting*, 841.

[30] Minnesota Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Fifteenth Biennial Report* (1908), 108-109.

[31] Minnesota State Board of Control, *Eighth Biennial Report* (Minneapolis, 1916), 271; Best, 348-349.

Faribault in 1879. As before, each department was run independently with its own supervisors and employees but was overseen by a single central board.[32]

Another agency, the State Board of Corrections and Charities, was formed in 1883 to examine the condition and management of public charitable and correctional institutions. The board also gathered statistics on these organizations, offered suggestions for improvements, and supervised all new construction at any of the facilities. Shortly after the board's creation, the Blind Department initiated the construction of a new main building (HABS No. MN-161-B). The expansion was much needed. An article in the *Faribault Republican* reported in February 1883 that "while the buildings for the deaf and dumb department are amply sufficient for the present, that for the blind is largely overcrowded. There are eighty-four blind persons in the State of schoolable age, but no more [than the current population of thirty-six] can be received until a new building is provided. The erection of a main building 45 x 80, three stories in height, is recommended."[33]

Planning began in March 1883, when architect Monroe Sheire visited the site to take measurements and notes. The new building was to be located south of the existing Blind Department Building (HABS No. MN-161-A) and the Faribault mansion. Sheire completed plans and specifications by the end of April 1883, and the school broke ground that summer. At the same time, the school made carpentry and masonry repairs to the older buildings and installed steam pipes and radiators to accommodate a new steam-heat system. The plan called for buildings to be ready in time for the new school year in the fall, but the work fell behind schedule and the administration had to delay the start of fall term until November. Even then, only a section of the new building was ready for classes. Dow's November 1883 report to the board of directors reflected his impatience with the pace of construction: "The presence of workmen on every floor is still a serious but unavoidable annoyance. . . . The necessary furniture for the fitting up of the rooms has been purchased but there still remain unshipped the reception room, the teachers' sitting room and the spare room. These will probably not be furnished for a month to come and perhaps not then." He was, however, able to offer some good news: "Heat from the steam apparatus is ample to keep the whole building old and new in perfect comfort."[34]

---

[32] After briefly being known as the Minnesota Institute for Defective Children, the school's name was shortened to the Minnesota Institute for Defectives in 1887; see Minnesota State Board of Corrections and Charities, *Third Biennial Report* (Saint Paul, 1889), 23.

[33] Ibid.; State Archives index entries for "Faribault State School and Hospital," and "Corrections and Charities, Bd. of," Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul; Ma, 18-22, 30-32; "The State Institutions," *Faribault Republican*, February 14, 1883, 3; "Report of State Institutions," *Faribault Republican*, February 21, 1883, 3.

[34] "Report of the Superintendent to the Board of Directors for the Month of March 1883," "Report of the Superintendent to the Board of Directors for the Month of April 1883," "Report of the Superintendent to the Board

Upon its completion in early 1884, the new main building increased the official capacity of the Blind Department from thirty students to around sixty. Its amenities included a pupils' sitting room in the basement, offices and reception rooms on the first floor, and an assembly hall on the third. The old Faribault family residence, the northernmost structure of the three connected buildings, provided accommodations for Superintendent Dow and his family. During the spring of 1884, the governor joined members of the State Board of Corrections and Charities in a tour of the expanded facility. In its first biennial report to the legislature, the board expressed satisfaction with the "commodious new building," adding that, "being now well equipped and furnished, and having an efficient superintendent and corps of teachers, prosperity and success are to be expected. . . . So far as we are able to judge, this school calls for no criticism nor any special legislation."[35]

The board's prediction seemed sound. The Blind Department settled into the enlarged quarters and again commenced classes. The school faced only minor inconvenience over the next few years as roads and landscaping were completed and gas was introduced by the extension of a line from town. A spring supplied water to the campus, and a standpipe system provided both interior and exterior fire protection for the buildings.[36]

By 1890, however, the school's chronic need for space became apparent once again. Rising enrollment and the expanding industrial training program quickly filled the main building. In response, the administration built a separate hospital and converted the 1880 shop building into a boys' dormitory. The front half of an old barn and carriage house was moved to a new site and retrofitted to accommodate displaced industrial activities. This makeshift solution lasted less than two years before a more substantial rearrangement was necessary to relieve the crowded conditions. Dow and his family moved out of the Faribault house and into first floor of the 1880 building, which was remodeled to meet their needs. The Faribault residence was

---

of Directors for the Months of July and August 1883," "Report of the Superintendent to the Board of Directors for the Month of September 1883," and "Report of the Superintendent to the Board of Directors for the Month of November 1883," in "Record Book of Minnesota Institution for the Blind, Opened February 1883: Personal Property of J. J. Dow," at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault; "Blind Institute Open," *Faribault Republican*, November 21, 1883, 3.

[35] Minnesota State Board of Corrections and Charities, *Second Biennial Report* (Saint Paul, 1887), 60; "The State Institutions," *Faribault Republican*, February 11, 1885, 2; "Report of the Superintendent to the Board of Directors for the Months of May and June [1884]," in "Record Book of Minnesota Institution for the Blind, Opened February 1883: Personal Property of J. J. Dow," at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault; Minnesota State Board of Corrections and Charities, *First Biennial Report* (Saint Paul, 1884), 25.

[36] "Report of the Superintendent to the Board of Directors for the Month of September 1884" and "Report of the Superintendent to the Board of Directors for the Month of October 1884," in "Record Book of Minnesota Institution for the Blind, Opened February 1883: Personal Property of J. J. Dow," at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault; Minnesota Institute for Defective Children, *Fourth Biennial Report* (Saint Paul, [1886]), 7.

then put to use housing the school's female employees; it also held two sick rooms, a sewing room, and a "clothing distribution" room. The boys displaced by the Dow family were relocated in the main building, which also accommodated the entire female student population. School officials optimistically predicted that "sufficient room is thus vacated . . . amply to provide for the needs of the girls for dormitory room for some years, and the work and care of the household is greatly facilitated."[37]

The boys' "crowded and uncomfortable quarters," though, were far from ideal, and the administration continued to pursue funds for additional space. These efforts were rewarded in 1895 when the legislature allocated money to construct a new 40' x 60' dormitory and classroom wing on the south side of the main building. The design of the addition matched the height and style of the 1883 structure. The fire-protection and lighting systems were extended from the original building to the wing, and new sewer lines were laid. The wing's interior configuration was described in the school's 1896 report to the state legislature:

> In the basement are the boys' play and sitting rooms, closets, bath rooms, and clothes lockers. On the first floor are two dormitory rooms, the high school room and a teachers' room. On the second floor are three dormitory rooms, a supervisor's room, and a commodious lavatory with a night closet. On the third floor are a gymnasium occupying one side of the building, and a singing class and orchestra room on the other, with a hallway and a small musical practice room adjacent.[38]

To meet the greater demand for heat, another boiler was added to the steam heating plant behind the building, requiring an expansion of the boiler room and coal sheds and the erection of an exterior smokestack. Other work around the school grounds during this construction campaign included repainting exterior woodwork, removing the old Faribault barn and sheds, and laying new roads and approaches to the campus.[39]

New Era, New Approaches: The Cottage Plan and Clarence Johnston

The relief provided by the new wing was brief: within a few years, the school again faced overcrowding. With the new century, however, its approach to facility planning changed, following a national trend among comparable institutions. Rather than incorporating many functions in single large building, the "cottage plan" grouped smaller residential "cottages" in

---

[37] Minnesota Institute for Defectives, *Seventh Biennial Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1892), 91-92.

[38] Minnesota Institute for Defectives, *Ninth Biennial Report of the Directors and Officers* (Saint Paul, 1896), 46-47.

[39] Ibid.

clusters around an administration building. This arrangement was thought to foster a more domestic atmosphere on campus, simulating the familial experience lost when young students attend residential schools. Additionally, students could be segregated in the cottages by gender or disability. The cottage plan was probably first used in Massachusetts and Ohio at juvenile correctional institutions in the 1850s. By 1870, the Perkins Institution in Massachusetts began using cottages for girls to create a home-like setting, and, in 1877, Illinois adopted the model at a state hospital. In Minnesota, the cottage plan apparently first appeared in 1885 at the State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children at Owatonna; the State Training School in Red Wing employed the plan at the turn of the century. By the 1910s, the cottage plan was common at state institutions across the country.[40]

Many new and expanding blind schools in the United States enthusiastically followed the famous Perkins Institution in adopting the cottage plan. Dow, however, did not share the view that a residential school could recreate a home atmosphere. He wrote that "institutions are not homes, and, even with the best and highest intention, can never be homes. The home idea as developed in the family life can only be got in the home itself, and the child removed from the home during the critical decade between six and sixteen can never really know the meaning of the word 'home.'"[41]

The implementation of the cottage plan at the Minnesota School for the Blind, therefore, might have been driven by pragmatic, rather than idealistic, concerns. Other state schools in Minnesota adopted the cottage approach under the direction of the State Board of Control, an administrative body created in 1901 to replace the State Board of Corrections and Charities. In an effort by the legislature to consolidate management, the new group was given complete control over all state institutions except the Schools for the Deaf and the Blind and the State Public School. Even at the latter institutions, though, the board oversaw finances and supplies, which included funding and supervision of construction. The board might have pressured the Blind School to follow the pattern of the other institutions, despite Dow's misgivings.[42]

---

[40] For a discussion of the architecture of Minnesota's state hospitals and schools, see Patricia Murphy, *The Public Buildings of the State of Minnesota: An Architectural Heritage* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), 19-21. Murphy notes that "the cottage and colony plans had a major influence on new construction at Minnesota's state hospitals from 1900 to the 1940s. During this time 'cottages' were built at almost every state hospital, and they range in scale from what might be mistaken for large houses, as at the Anoka State Asylum, to huge brick institutional-looking structures, as at Cambridge State Hospital. At several Minnesota hospitals using the cottage system, patients were separated in different cottages according to their ability, the level of care they needed, or their behavior."

[41] Dow, "Necessary Evils," 852-853; Farrell, 60-65; Murphy, 13, 26; Minnesota Division of Public Institutions, *Eighth Biennial Report* (Stillwater, Minn., 1940), 113.

[42] *History of the State Board of Control and the 17 State Institutions Under the Management and Jurisdiction of the Board, 1901-1922* (N.p., ca. 1922), 5.

Work on the school's first cottage began in 1903; it was completed by 1905 at a cost of $18,000. The new building, East Cottage, provided residential space for about thirty boys who had previously been housed in the hospital and gymnasium of the main building. Even with the new quarters, crowded conditions persisted, necessitating the construction of a second boys' dormitory, West Cottage, which opened for occupancy in 1908.[43]

Design and construction of the cottages, as well as work on the main building after 1902, was carried out under the direction of state architect Clarence H. Johnston.[44] Born in 1859 in Waseca County, Minnesota, Johnston received his early education in Saint Paul before pursuing further study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and abroad. In 1886, Johnston returned to Minnesota and entered private practice. His industrious professional life included an active association with the American Institute of Architects. Prior to his appointment as state architect in 1901, Johnston had some experience with state-funded work, including buildings at the State Training School in Red Wing and a hospital at the School for the Feeble-Minded in Faribault. Even after becoming state architect, Johnston maintained a busy private practice.[45]

Johnston's approach to design was based on the practical realities of budget and function. At the School for the Blind and the other state schools in Faribault, he had also faced the challenge of adding new facilities to campuses that had been cobbled together over a period of time without a master plan. The selection of the Georgian Revival style for the cottages at the School for the Blind was apparently an attempt to update the appearance of the campus while maintaining continuity of building materials and massing.[46]

Even as the work began on the first boys' cottage, Dow continued to lobby for additional changes to the main building. In particular, Faribault's wood-frame house was deemed a fire

---

[43] Minnesota School for the Blind, *Thirteenth Biennial Report* (Faribault, 1904), 13; Minnesota School for the Blind, *Fourteenth Biennial Report* (Faribault, [1906]), 12; Minnesota School for the Blind, *Fifteenth Biennial Report* ([Faribault, 1908]), 18-19; "New Boys' Building," *Faribault Republican*, August 14, 1907, 3; *History of the State Board of Control*, 5.

[44] Among Johnston's more well-known public works are the Stillwater State Prison (completed in 1914) and several buildings on the University of Minnesota campuses in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. At the Anoka State Asylum and the State Sanatorium for Consumptives at Ah-Gwah-Ching, to name just two institutions, Johnston pointedly made use of the cottage ideal in his designs. See Paul C. Larson, *Minnesota Architect: The Life and Work of Clarence H. Johnston* (Afton, Minn.: Afton Historical Society Press, 1996), 116-118; and Murphy, 21. For insight into what Johnston considered important among his designs during this period, see Clarence H. Johnston, "Architectural Design of Minnesota State Institutions," *Western Architect* 19 (June 1913): 50-51.

[45] "Clarence Howard Johnston," *Western Architect* 3 (December 1904), 3; "In Tribute to Clarence H. Johnston, Sr.: A Great Architect," *Northwest Architect* 1 (January 1937), 8-9.

[46] Larson, 110-115.

hazard, ill-suited for use in regular school activities. Noting that the school's present laundry facility was inadequate, Dow urged the relocation of the Faribault building to a spot behind the boiler house, where it could be put to use as a laundry. To compensate for the lost space, a new house would be built for the superintendent and his family. A story would be added to their former residence (the remodeled shop building), which would be converted into a girls' dormitory. Dow also sought funds to overhaul the heating system of the Blind Department Building and replaster many of the rooms. During the 1908-1910 biennium, money was finally appropriated for moving Faribault's house and converting it into a laundry. The legislators did not fund some of the other projects, but did provide money to finish the basement and upper floor of West Cottage for use as a gymnasium, piano-tuning rooms, and music-practice rooms.[47]

In the meantime, attention was again turning to the main building. Of primary concern was the need to completely fireproof the structure. Dow proposed moving the Blind Department Building away from the main building and replacing it with a modern fireproof annex. In 1910, Dow reported that "detailed sketches" of the new north wing "have been submitted to the architect of the State Board of Control, and have received his hearty approval." The 1895 south wing needed to be retrofitted with fireproof floors and stairs, so Dow lobbied to have the mansard roof replaced by a full third story while the building was under construction. As well as upgrading the interior space, a hipped roof over this wing would improve the campus's architectural coherence. Dow also sought a 20' addition to the wing which would hold classroom and library space on the first floor, a dormitory on the second, and a gymnasium on the third.[48]

Funds were not allocated until 1913, when the School for the Blind received an appropriation of $95,250. Of this amount, $55,000 was earmarked for construction of a new north wing and $30,000 for work on the south wing, while $6,000 was dedicated to relocating the Blind Department Building. Another $3,000 went to plumbing and heating repairs.[49]

Preliminary work got underway in October 1913, but the main thrust of the construction campaign was scheduled for the summer and fall of 1914. At Johnston's request, school

---

[47] Minnesota School for the Blind, *Thirteenth Biennial Report* (1904), 19-21, *Fourteenth Biennial Report* (1906), 13-14, and *Sixteenth Biennial Report* (Faribault, 1910), 20.

[48] *Sixteenth Biennial Report* (1910), 23-24.

[49] "Institutions Get Money for Building," *Faribault Republican*, May 7, 1913, 1; State Board of Control to James J. Dow, August 21, 1913, and State Board of Control to James J. Dow, October 15, 1913, in "Board of Control Correspondence, August 1913-July 31, 1914," at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault; entry for Commission No. 2095: State, Faribault Blind, Industrial Building in "Transfer Ledger—Clarence H. Johnston, St. Paul, Minn.," volume 3, at Northwest Architectural Archives, Saint Paul.

officials closed the 1914 spring term early, holding graduation near the end of April rather than in June. Despite this accommodation, the opening of the fall term was delayed until late December, and contractors continued working through the winter. According to payment schedules from Johnston's office, the south wing remodeling was finished in April 1915, and completion of the new north wing followed in October.[50]

Johnston's office next prepared specifications for remodeling and fireproofing the 1884 central section. Plans called for radical alterations to make the central part of the building match the recently completed wings. The mansard roof was removed and a full third story added; it was articulated with windows that mimicked those on the lower floors and a stone beltcourse like that on the wings. Slate covered the new hipped roof, which featured eyebrow windows—also copied from those on the wings—and a large, balustrade-rimmed flat peak. The tower on the west side was removed, necessitating a great deal of interior and exterior work in that area, including rearrangement of the floor plan. Throughout the central block's interior, floors, joists, doors, doorframes, and window components were replaced. Kasota-stone thresholds and marble plinths were installed under most door casings.[51]

With the reconstruction completed, the School for the Blind had a main building capable of supporting several types of activities. The basement under the north wing and central block contained service areas, including storerooms, kitchens, and a scullery, as well as dining rooms for students and employees. The south wing's basement was used for industrial training activities. Classrooms occupied the first floor of the central block and south wing, which also housed the library. Public areas such as parlors and offices were at the front of the central block, and the kindergarten room, the officers' dining room, the girls' sickroom and a few employees' bedrooms were located in the north wing. That wing also accommodated a gymnasium and a locker room. Girls' dormitory rooms and quarters for teachers and a matron dominated the second floor of all three sections. On the third floor, a large auditorium with a stage and pipe organ on the east side took up most of the central block; music practice rooms flanked the area. Music rooms and several maids' rooms shared the south wing.[52]

---

[50] James J. Dow to B. B. Sheffield, February 18, 1914, in unmarked volume of correspondence, Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault; "School for the Blind to Close for Repairs," *Faribault Republican*, April 15, 1914, 1; Minnesota School for the Blind, *Nineteenth Biennial Report* (Faribault, 1916), 17; Entries for Commission Nos. 2021 (School for the Blind, South Wing) and 2112 (State School for the Blind, North Wing) in "Transfer Ledger—Clarence H. Johnston, St. Paul, Minn.," volumes 2 and 3, at Northwest Architectural Archives, Saint Paul.

[51] Plans for Order No. 2283, February 18, 1916 and June 10, 1916, at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault.

[52] Plans for Order Nos. 2021, 2112, at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault.

The relocated Blind Department Building, now known as the Industrial Building or the Utility Building, provided much-needed space for manual training. In 1918, Dow reported that "the industrial department has never been stronger both in the Main School and in the Summer School than at the present time." He continued: "I think I may say without the charge of boastfulness that the industrial department of this School both in equipment and in teaching force stands well towards the head among the Schools of the country of this kind. The new Industrial Building devoted to piano tuning, wood working and [Braille] printing on its three respective floors has greatly facilitated the work in these directions."[53]

Consolidated Management

As the construction activity that so altered the face of the institution's campus wound down, the School for the Blind entered a period of consolidated management. In 1917, the state legislature passed a sweeping series of bills, known as the Children's Code of Minnesota, that revised and codified the state's child-welfare laws. In doing so, the state maintained that it was ultimately responsible for the welfare of its children, a principle adopted from English common law. Legislators placed responsibility for administering the new laws in the hands of the State Board of Control.[54]

Previously, the three Faribault schools had been classified as educational facilities rather than charitable institutions and were thus largely exempt from the state board's review. The new statutes grouped the schools in the same class as the institutes for delinquent children and the developmentally disabled. Three laws in particular had a significant impact on the School for the Blind. One abolished the Board of Directors for the School for the Blind and the School for the Deaf, giving exclusive management responsibility to the State Board of Control. The second law required blind children between the ages of eight and twenty to enroll in the School for the Blind unless excused by the State Board of Control. This also applied to any child whose vision problems might lead to failure in public schools. The statute put blind children under the same policy as the deaf, who had previously been mandated to attend the School for the Deaf. The subsequent increase in enrollment at the blind school was accelerated by the third new law, which created a Children's Bureau and county child-welfare boards. Although these bodies were not directly affiliated with the School for the Blind, they served as a conduit for new students by identifying blind children throughout the state. More vision problems were

---

[53] Minnesota School for the Blind, *Twentieth Biennial Report* (Faribault, 1919), 10-11.

[54] In 1925, the State Board of Control was merged into the newly created Department of Public Institutions, although this did not seem to affect its operation. The board was abolished in 1939, and the Division of Public Institutions was in turn taken into the Department of Social Security; see *Session Laws of the State of Minnesota Passed During the Forty-fourth Session of the State Legislature*, Chapter 426, Article 13; *Session Laws of the State of Minnesota Passed During the Fifty-first Session of the State Legislature*, Chapter 431, Article 7; Ma, 83-95.

diagnosed by an aggressive program to examine school children's eyes and ears established by the American Medical Association and the Minnesota State Medical Association around 1903.[55]

In the midst of these changes, Superintendent Dow took a year's leave of absence, turning over the school's operation to his sister, Julia Dow. In 1920, Dow resigned his position as head of the school, a post he had held since 1875. The State Board of Control honored him with the title of Superintendent Emeritus and appointed Julia as his successor. She stepped down after only two years and was replaced by Joseph E. Vance, formerly of the Evergreen School for the Blind in Baltimore, Maryland.[56]

Dow passed away six years later. His funeral service was held at the School for the Blind with music provided by the students. Edward Allen, Superintendent of the Perkins Institution, commended Dow's work: "No American leader in his labors for blind people has given them longer and more faithful service." A scholarship fund for students excelling in the areas of English, music, and handwork was established in Dow's memory, and, as an additional honor, the school's main building was renamed Dow Hall.[57]

The School Expands Its Scope

By 1923, the school's population included a sizable percentage of students who were visually impaired, but not blind, and were capable of reading print. This was hardly surprising given the expanded enrollment since 1917. A study recommended that visually impaired students attend special "sight-saving" or "sight-conservation" classes designed to stabilize, or even improve, poor vision in school-age children. Often, the most important factor in a sight-saving class was to change the classroom environment by providing sufficient and well-placed light, reducing glare, and painting walls with pale colors to reflect more light. Reading books with clear-faced, 24-point type printed on unglazed paper also helped visually impaired students improve their academic performance. Sight-saving classes were first established in American public schools in Boston and Cleveland in 1913; twenty years later there were more than four hundred such classes across the country, concentrated in larger urban areas. Five cities in Minnesota offered sight-saving classes by 1922.[58]

Prior to 1924, the Minnesota School for the Blind taught all students as though they were completely blind. In 1924, the school established a sight-saving department and installed a system of indirect lighting in classrooms, increasing light levels by three to four hundred

---

[55] Minnesota School for the Blind, *Twentieth Biennial Report* (1919), 7, 13-14; Ma, 206.

[56] Minnesota School for the Blind, *Twenty-first Biennial Report* (Faribault, 1921), 9-10; Ma, 204.

[57] Minnesota School for the Blind, *Twenty-fourth Biennial Report* (Faribault, 1927), 21-24, 33.

[58] Best, 122-124; Minnesota State Board of Control, *Eleventh Biennial Report* (Minneapolis, 1922), 111.

percent. The goal of the department was to return sighted children to the public school system. Each year, the school checked every student's level of vision. Those with sufficient eyesight were taught to read both clear-faced type and Braille; the latter was continued due to a lack of advanced materials in clear-faced type. To improve the availability of clear-faced type and Braille books for the school's students, as well as others in the region, the school's library became an official Library of Congress repository in 1933, allowing students in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Montana to borrow books by mail. This designation reflected the school's national stature: only one other school for the blind, the Perkins Institution, had a similar affiliation with the Library of Congress.[59]

The school's service to the sight-impaired continued to increase, and by 1940, only one-third of the student population was totally blind. Even so, administrators found that some parents were hesitant to send their sighted children to a "School for the Blind." To highlight the two teaching divisions, the state legislature approved a new name, "Minnesota Braille and Sight Saving School," in 1941. This year also marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the school, which had welcomed over one thousand children and four hundred adults, and had seen class enrollment rise from four students in 1866 to an average of 125 students annually.[60]

Over the course of the school's history, the public's perception of the blind had evolved. Early questions about the value of educating the blind had been answered by the success of the program: eighty-seven percent of those graduating from the school between 1922 and 1947 were financially independent. Not content to rest on past accomplishments, the school continued to expand programmatically. Completely blind students now received instruction in physical orientation, learning how to use a white-tipped cane to find their way alone. The school also establishing more clubs, musical groups, and sports teams on campus and provided more social activities for the students. [61]

Modernizing the Campus

In the 1940s, the school embarked on an extensive campus-wide program to replace old equipment and improve interior spaces. This effort was spearheaded by another influential school superintendent, John C. Lysen, who served from 1934 through 1965. Despite improvements in the 1920s, Lysen noted upon his arrival that "lighting was poor (there were, for example, only two 50-watt electric lights in a classroom); buildings were full of echoes

---

[59] Minnesota State Board of Control, *Sixteenth Biennial Report* (Stillwater, Minn., 1932) 153; "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound," 10; Ma, 206; Minnesota State Board of Control, *Seventeenth Biennial Report* (Stillwater, Minn., 1934), 180-181.

[60] Minnesota Division of Public Institutions, *Ninth Biennial Report* (Stillwater, Minn., 1942), 138-139.

[61] Minnesota Division of Public Institutions, *Twelfth Biennial Report* (Stillwater, Minn., 1948), 171.

because of the absence of acoustic tile and rugs; [and] interior walls were drab—the lower part was painted brown, the upper part cream."[62] Dow Hall, one of the worst offenders, saw many improvements under the modernization effort, including fluorescent lighting, new furnishings, colorful paint, and in some areas, acoustical tile ceilings. An electric organ replaced the pipe organ in the auditorium. Pantries and storerooms in the basement were remodeled to meet sanitary codes, and new equipment was installed in the kitchen. A steam tunnel was excavated to connect the school with the nearby state hospital's heating plant, allowing the school to shut down its boilers. Consequently, the smokestack behind Dow Hall was demolished.[63]

There were other changes on campus as well. In 1941, officials declared the Industrial Building a fire hazard and unfit for students. A new industrial building with six shops, erected south of West Cottage, replaced it. At the same time, the school's enormous library collection had spilled out of its original quarters in Dow Hall and into former dormitory rooms. The administration eyed the abandoned Industrial Building as the site of a new library, but did not receive funds for the project. Instead, the old Industrial Building was apparently found sound enough to hold the Talking Book Library for a period in the 1940s and 1950s.[64]

During the 1950s and 1960s, it became increasingly difficult for the school's oldest buildings to accommodate changing educational philosophies, recreational needs, and health and safety standards. The movement to mainstream students previously isolated at state institutions reduced the school's population. At the same time, older facilities were superseded by new construction. In 1957, the Activities Building replaced Dow Hall's third-floor auditorium as the venue for physical education and entertainment programs. The library moved out of Dow Hall and the Industrial Building in 1959 upon completion of a separate facility. Dow Hall was completely vacated in 1984 with the opening of the Lysen Learning Center, which contained classrooms and dormitory space. Dow Hall had experienced a series of renovations: enclosed exterior stairwells replaced exterior fire escapes on the building's north and south ends; concrete was substituted for wood porches; and, on the interior, fire-resistant doors were added, transoms sealed, and lighting and wiring updated. Despite these and other changes over the decades, Dow Hall (HABS No. MN-161-B) and the Blind Department Building (HABS No. MN-161-A) retained sufficient integrity to merit listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. The designation, however, was not sufficient grounds to preserve the

---

[62] "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound," 17, 25-26.

[63] Minnesota Braille and Sight Saving School, *Thirty-fourth Biennial Report* (N.p., [1947]), 5-6; "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound," 13.

[64] Ibid., 12; Minnesota Division of Public Institutions, *Biennial Report for the Period Ended June 30, 1942* (Stillwater, Minn., [1942]), 144.

buildings, which the state found obsolete. This Historic American Buildings Survey documentation is mitigation for the demolition of both structures in 1998.[65]

---

[65] "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound," 14-15; various project plans held at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault; telephone interview with Barb Morrissey, Administration Office at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, conducted by Shawn P. Rounds, June 17, 1997; Thomas R. Zahn and Jacqueline Sluss, "Blind Department Building and Dow Hall, State School for the Blind," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1989, copy on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Published Sources

Allen, Edward E. "Progress of the Education of the Blind in the United States in the Year 1912-13." In *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year Ended June 30, 1913: Volume I*, 471-480. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914.

Best, Harry. *Blindness and the Blind in the United States*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1934.

Castle, Henry A. *Minnesota: Its Story and Biography*. 3 vols. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1915. S.v. "William Spencer Kingsley."

Chapple, B. P. "What Minnesota Is Doing for Her Blind Children." In *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-first Annual Meeting*, edited by the National Education Association, 840-844. N.p.: The Association, 1902.

"Clarence Howard Johnston." *The Western Architect* 3 (December 1904): 3.

Dow, James J. "Necessary Evils." In *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-first Annual Meeting*, edited by the National Education Association, 851-857. N.p.: The Association, 1902.

Faribault Republican. 1873-1915.

Farrell, Gabriel. *The Story of Blindness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.

History of the State Board of Control and the 17 State Institutions Under the Management and Jurisdiction of the Board, 1901-1922. N.p., ca. 1922.

Hoisington, Daniel J. *A Splendid Little Town: A History of Faribault, Minnesota*. Faribault, Minn.: Faribault Heritage Preservation Commission, 1994.

"In Tribute: Clarence H. Johnston, Sr.: A Great Architect." *Northwest Architect* 1 (January 1937): 8-9.

Johnston, Clarence H. "Architectural Design of Minnesota State Institutions." *Western Architect* 19 (June 1913): 50-51.

Jordan, Philip D. *The People's Health: A History of Public Health in Minnesota to 1948*. Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1953.

Larson, Paul C. *Minnesota Architect: The Life and Work of Clarence H. Johnston.* Afton, Minn.: Afton Historical Society Press, 1996.

Ma, Gioh-Fang Dju. *One Hundred Years of Public Services for Children in Minnesota.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.

Murphy, Patricia. *The Public Buildings of the State of Minnesota: An Architectural Heritage.* Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986.

Neill, Edward D. *History of Rice County, Including Explorers and Pioneers of Minnesota, and Outline History of the State of Minnesota.* Minneapolis: Historical Company, 1882.

Ohnstad, Karsten. *The World At My Fingertips.* Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1942.

Ray, John E. "Institutional Care and Training of the Blind." In *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-eighth Annual Meeting*, edited by the National Education Association, 1050-1053. Winona, Minn.: The Association, 1910.

Rogers, A. C. "State Institutions." In *History of Rice and Steele Counties, Minnesota*, edited by Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, 352-361. Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr., and Company, 1910.

Ross, Ishbel. *Journey Into Light: The Story of the Education of the Blind.* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951.

Sanborn Map Company. Fire insurance maps for Faribault, Minnesota. 1884, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1905, 1909, 1914, 1921, 1930.

Swanberg, Lester E. *Then and Now: A History of Rice County, Faribault, and Communities.* Faribault: Rice County Bicentennial Commission, 1976.

Van Cleve, Edward M. "The Outlook for the Blind Youth." In *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-seventh Annual Meeting*, edited by the National Education Association, 889-894. N.p.: The Association, 1909.

Government Reports

Minnesota Commission for the Blind. *Report*, 1923.

Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind. *Annual Reports,* 1870 through 1878.

Minnesota Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind (later the Minnesota Institute of Defectives; Minnesota Schools for the Deaf and the Blind). *Biennial Reports,* 1879 through 1902.

Minnesota School for the Blind (later Minnesota Braille and Sight Saving School). *Biennial Reports,* 1904 through 1944.

Minnesota State Board of Control. *Biennial Reports,* 1902 through 1938.

Minnesota State Board of Corrections and Charities. *Biennial Reports,* 1884 through 1900.

Minnesota State Division of Public Institutions. *Biennial Reports,* 1940 through 1952.

Unpublished Sources

Grossman, John. "Ramsey (Alexander) House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1969. Copy on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

Larson, Paul C. "Yoerg, Anthony, Sr., House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1988. Copy on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

Minnesota Braille and Sight Saving School. "One Hundred Years of Sight and Sound, 1866 to 1966." Copy at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, Faribault.

Neckar, Lance, and Carole Zellie. "Historic Landscape Report: The Alexander Ramsey House," 1995. Copy on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

Zahn, Thomas R., and Jacqueline Sluss. "Blind Department Building and Dow Hall, State School for the Blind," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1989. Copy on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

Archival Collections

Minnesota State Academy for the Blind Archives, Faribault. Superintendent's Reports, 1883-1896. Board of Control Correspondence, 1913-1915. Miscellaneous reports.

Northwest Architectural Archives, Saint Paul. Architects Research Files. Clarence H. Johnston Transfer Ledgers (State Commissions).

Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul. Minnesota State Board of Control Minutes, State Archives Collection. Rice County Photograph Collection.