



MINNESOTA

Preservation Planner

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A newsletter on historic preservation from the State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society

An uncertain future Adaptive reuse sought for hospitals facing closure



The Fergus Falls State Hospital Complex (1888–1907) is one of the few remaining Kirkbride-plan hospitals in the country.

Months of state budget uncertainty have drawn to a close. But budget woes are only partly responsible for the threat of closure facing three state-owned health facilities, all sprawling historic hospital campuses listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Administered by the State Department of Human Services (DHS), the three facilities – Fergus Falls State Hospital Complex in Otter Tail County, Ah-Gwah-Ching in Cass County and Willmar Regional Treatment Center in Kandiyohi County – were built at a time when large residential-care institutions dominated state health care systems.

Communities competed to be the site of such state-owned facilities; they meant jobs and economic vitality for their region. And the architect-designed campuses were a symbol of civic pride.

But as the philosophy of state health care shifted to a community-based system of smaller facilities such as group homes, occupancy at the large institutions plummeted. Today, these historic facilities are in a race against time: the state plans to decommission them in just 18 months. Each is at risk of being vacated and falling into disrepair.

Their pending closure presents a host

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CALENDAR

MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

Sept. 18–19: Minnesota's 24th Annual Statewide Historic Preservation Conference, New Ulm. This year's themes: meeting the economic challenges of historic preservation and administering local preservation programs. Tours take in Schell's Brewery and more. See page 4 for details.

CAPITAL GRANTS

The state bonding bill passed by the Minnesota Legislature in May made \$300,000 available for the Minnesota Historical Society's State Capital Projects Grants-in-Aid program in fiscal year 2004. The program provides matching grants to county and local jurisdictions for historic preservation projects of a capital nature. Grant awards range in size from \$10,000 to \$75,000.

Eligibility requirements: Grant applicants must be public entities, the property in questions must be publicly owned, and grant recipients must match state funds on at least an equal basis. All seekers of a capital grant must submit a pre-application.

For application materials, go to www.mnhs.org/about/grants/capitalcontents.html; write the MHS Grants Office, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906; call 651-296-5478; or fax 651-282-2374.

Aug. 1: Pre-application due by 4:30 p.m.

Aug. 29: Grant application due by 4:30 p.m.

Oct. 2: Grants Review Committee meets.

SAVED

Koochiching County: Koochiching County Courthouse (1910), International Falls.

Designed by Charles E. Bell, the courthouse features a courtroom with ornamental plaster, polychrome finishes and oak trim. Rehabilitation of the courtroom, funded in part with a grant from the State Capital Projects Grants-in-Aid program, included repair of decorative molding, painting based on the 1910 design and installation of light fixtures.



Third-floor courtroom of the Koochiching County Courthouse during (left) and after rehabilitation.

Sibley County: Sibley County Courthouse (1916), Gaylord.

The leaky roof and dome of this Beaux Arts building have been rehabilitated using funds from the State Capital Projects Grants-in-Aid program. Work included installing a new roof, replacing skylights, repairing stained glass windows, restoring ornamental plaster and molding, and improving access to the attic.



Stained glass window in the dome of the Sibley County Courthouse before (left) and after rehabilitation.

REGISTRATION

Recent additions to the National Register of Historic Places

Cass County: Conservation Building (1934–36), 205 Minnesota Ave., Walker.

Prepared by Rolf T. Anderson and Melanie Mullins.

Nicollet County: Nicollet County Courthouse and Jail (1880–81, 1906–07), 501 S. Minnesota Ave., St. Peter. Prepared by Amy Squitieri.

Built to promote the conservation of Minnesota's natural resources, the Walker Conservation Building (right) also stimulated local tourism and economic development. Its construction during the Great Depression was sponsored by the State Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The building still houses its original wildlife museum with built-in display cases and dioramas. On one corner of the property, framed by spruce and cedar trees, is a rock garden, also built by the WPA.



The Nicollet County Courthouse and Jail (above) have served as the seat of county government since 1881. The pair of buildings is among the few surviving examples of a once-common building set in Minnesota. (Most historic county courthouses have lost their adjacent jails.) Architects Edward P. Bassford and Andrew J. Van Deusen designed the Romanesque Revival courthouse and Queen Anne jail, respectively. Bassford (1837–1912) was one of St. Paul's most important early architects, serving as the city's supervising architect for the U.S. government.

Governor to join preservation panel

Governor Tim Pawlenty was named by the White House in May to serve on the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), which advises the president and Congress on national historic preservation policy.

Pawlenty will fill a slot permanently reserved for a state governor. The 20-member council also includes

Interior Secretary Gale Norton and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman. Pawlenty will serve the remainder of a four-year term expiring in June 2005.

The ACHP is an independent federal agency established by the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. In addition to its advisory role, the council encourages federal agencies to factor

historic preservation into federal project requirements and reviews federal programs to ensure consistency with national preservation policies. The ACHP also undertakes preservation initiatives such as heritage tourism to promote preservation with state and local governments, Indian tribes and the private sector.

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of complex issues – for the State of Minnesota, for the communities in which the facilities are located, and for preservationists who hope to see the historic properties preserved. Under state statute, such state-owned properties must be advertised for sale, at not less than the appraised value, to units of government for a public purpose. But nearly all levels of government these days are strapped for funds. And the large size of the facilities makes it difficult to find practical new uses for them. Yet, adaptive reuse is the best means of ensuring their preservation.

At the Fergus Falls State Hospital, the U-shaped main building alone stretches more than a quarter of a mile and encompasses some 500,000 square feet. Built between 1888 and 1907 to alleviate overcrowding at facilities in St. Peter and Rochester, the complex is significant as the only institution in Minnesota, and one of few in the country, to retain a complete Kirkbride-plan hospital design. The state and the City of Fergus Falls have wrestled for years with the hospital's underutilization. Last year the State Historic Preservation Office stepped in to help the DHS conduct a reuse study, an important first step in identifying critical issues and potential new uses.

Reuse studies are currently underway for the Willmar and Ah-Gwah-

Ching hospitals. The Willmar Regional Treatment Center, or the Willmar Hospital Farm for Inebriates as it was originally known, was built between 1912 and

1933 on the edge of town.

The complex of residential cottages was designed by State

Architect Clarence H. Johnston Sr. in a variety of revival styles. Johnston also designed the Minnesota State Sanatorium for Consumptives, as Ah-Gwah-Ching was first called. Built in 1907 near Walker, it became the first state-operated facility for treating tuberculosis. As stakeholders explore development options, Ah-Gwah-Ching's beautiful northern Minnesota lakeshore setting is sure to be a major asset. But the challenge remains of rehabilitating and reusing a large number of historic buildings in an out-of-the-way location.

The clock is running down. Who among us will step forward with a vision for the future of these state hospitals,



State hospital complexes near Walker (left) and in Willmar (above) were designed by State Architect Clarence H. Johnston Sr. Their future use is the subject of two reuse studies.

which tell the story of Minnesota's role in caring for its vulnerable citizens? If we preservationists are to have a hand in finding new uses for these grand facilities, we need to pool our creative thinking – especially in this troubled economic climate. I urge each of you to join us in tackling this and other preservation issues at the 24th Annual Statewide Historic Preservation Conference in September (see page 4 for details). With a theme of "Making Historic Preservation Work in Hard Times," it couldn't come at a better time.

– Britta L. Bloomberg, Deputy
State Historic Preservation Officer

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New Ulm to host statewide conference

The 24th Annual Statewide Historic Preservation Conference, to be held Sept. 18–19 in New Ulm's historic Turner Hall, will focus on two important themes – the economic challenges of historic preservation and the nuts and bolts of administering local preservation programs. Delivering the keynote address will be Constance Beaumont, former director of State and Local Policy for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Working sessions will address such topics as the economics of reusing historic buildings as cultural centers and innovative approaches to design guidelines. A field workshop will explore the history and technology of American Artstone, a 90-year-old manufacturer of cast stone products. Bus tours are scheduled to Schell's



August Schell Brewery, ca. 1910.

Brewery, the restored Wanda Gág Home, New Ulm's residential historic districts, and the nearby towns of Hanska and Sleepy Eye.

Registration materials will be mailed soon. For more information, call the SHPO at 651-296-5451 or e-mail mnshpo@mnhs.org.



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