

Compiled by ELIZABETH J. ALMLIE

Rehabilitating Yankton's Historic Mead Building

Report from the Field

Introduction

The Mead Building, a three-story, Neo-Renaissance-style structure of concrete and Sioux quartzite, is the surviving centerpiece of the historic Human Services Center (HSC) campus in Yankton. Originally constructed in 1909 as the women's unit of the State Hospital for the Insane, the building remained in service until the late 1970s. It then stood unused for nearly three decades until the Yankton County Historical Society (YCHS) spearheaded the present effort to rehabilitate and reuse the structure as the society's new home. Founded as the Dakota Hospital for the Insane in 1878, the HSC is the oldest public institution in the state. Because of its historic buildings and significance to the history of mental health care in South Dakota, the HSC campus earned listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

In 1991, Governor George S. Mickelson directed a review of HSC facilities, and the South Dakota Legislature authorized the construction of a new mental health complex to the north of the historic campus the following year. The new George S. Mickelson Center for the Neurosciences, named for the late governor, opened in 1996. As a result, several more historic HSC structures fell into disuse. By 2007, many of the abandoned buildings were in serious disrepair. State officials proceeded with demolition plans for several buildings in 2013–2014.

Fortunately, the YCHS saw an opportunity in the grand historic edifice at the center of the HSC campus. In 2008, the society proposed rehabilitating the Mead Building to create the Mead Cultural Education Center, a future home for its Dakota Territorial Museum. Governor Dennis M. Daugaard lent his support to the idea, and in 2012, state officials leased the building to the YCHS so that restoration work could begin. The following year, the Yankton College Board of Trust-



The Mead Building (left) is the only survivor of the structures shown on this postcard of what was then called the Yankton State Hospital. The gravel driveway indicates that the view was probably recorded before 1950.

ees reached an agreement with the YCHS to locate a new Yankton College Alumni and Educational Center on the third floor of the Mead Building. The center will house records and memorabilia of the college, which closed in 1984. Under its lease agreement with the State of South Dakota, the YCHS is committed to move into the Mead Building by the end of 2018. When that goal is met, the society has the option to purchase the building for a nominal price. The following accounts from individuals involved in various aspects of the project provide a glimpse of the project's vision, scope, and progress to date.

Leonard C. Mead and His Buildings

The institution first known as the Dakota Hospital for the Insane opened for patients on 11 April 1879. The location of the hospital was then about three miles north of Yankton, near the present intersection of South Dakota Highway 50 and United States Highway 81 on the city's north side. In 1891, Dr. Leonard C. Mead became the institution's superintendent. Except for a period when he studied in New York

from 1899 to 1901, Mead led the hospital until his death on 13 January 1920. He left a lasting mark on the institution not only as a doctor, but also as a teacher, engineer, architect, business professional, and artist. Mead advanced the progressive notion that the people under his care were patients, not criminals, and therefore deserved a comfortable home. Moreover, he believed that a pleasant physical setting would have positive therapeutic effects on his patients. Mead explained this idea in the language of the day: "In the treatment of the insane we find that their surrounds are very important. Normal people are influenced much more than they realize by the pictures and buildings about them, by beauty or by ugliness. They are improved or degraded by what they look upon. The same is true of the insane."

Mead designed several of the buildings constructed during his tenure as superintendent of the hospital, including the structure that now bears his name. Residents of the facility provided much of the necessary labor. The doctor's architectural work reflected his philosophy of patient care. While the buildings he designed were massive in order to give the impression of permanence, Mead incorporated open spaces, natural lighting, and finely wrought appointments into his plans. He



The grand marble staircase inside the Mead Building reflects Dr. Leonard C. Mead's belief that pleasant surroundings would benefit his patients.

insisted on quality workmanship and intended the structures to stand the test of time. As a Neo-Renaissance-style structure, the Mead Building exhibits features we do not often associate with contemporary construction. It is especially treasured for its elegance, appealing design, and remarkable white marble staircase. While the restoration project has changed the building's purpose, its impact remains the same. Because structures this grand are rarely built today, we prize the Mead Building for its unique appearance and are confident that it will appeal to visitors and Yankton residents alike. We look forward to its new mission as a repository of this region's history.

Lois H. Zimmerman Varvel, Chair
Mead Restoration Committee

The Decision to Restore

The YCHS board was planning to build a new home for the Dakota Territorial Museum before the Mead Building became available. Board members realized that our present steel building, which is over forty years old, would soon exceed its useful life span. It was becoming difficult to heat, cool, and control humidity in the existing facility. Accordingly, the board approached the Yankton School District in 2007 about selling the 4.8-acre parcel of land known as the Westside Athletic Field that lies directly east of the present museum. We planned to build a new museum on that property, which the school board agreed to sell for \$114,000.

The YCHS board finalized the land purchase after first getting a conditional use permit for the building project as well as approval from the city planning board and the city commission. Larry and Diane Ness generously provided financial help in cooperation with First Dakota National Bank. Together, they donated one-half of the purchase price for the property. Larry Ness is a longtime member and a past president of the YCHS and chairman of the board at First Dakota. The remaining balance has been paid off, and the society now has clear title to the land. Two different appraisers have estimated its current market value at five hundred thousand dollars.

Later in 2007, as the YCHS was making preliminary plans to build a new museum, state officials announced that planning for the demolition of several old structures at the HSC complex was under way. The YCHS board decided that rehabilitating the Mead Building was a better option for replacing our present museum than building a new one. If funding could be found, we would save a historic place. Restoration work could also be done in stages as funds became available. In 2014, the society put the former Westside Athletic Field up for sale, with the proceeds earmarked to support the Mead Building restoration.

G. Malcolm Jameson
Mead Restoration Committee

Winning Community Support

Our fundraising efforts for the Mead Cultural Education Center have been varied. We use as many different media as possible to maximize our exposure. We are active in social media, and our blog posts include regular progress reports. We have weekly radio and print advertisements, in addition to coverage during special events at the Mead Building, such as the “raise the roof” celebration in 2012 or the May 2015 open house. These events have been a great way to let everyone see the phenomenal progress that has been made in repurposing the building. We have exposed thousands of individuals to the facility in only a few years—and we have not yet opened our doors. We do our best to remind the public that the Dakota Territorial Museum and the Mead Building are intertwined and that we need their support to see this project through to the end.

Our marketing approach is fluid and depends on the group we are working with at a particular time. For example, if we have a group of manufacturers touring the building we will focus more on the architecture, while a class of nursing students would learn about the building’s history in medicine. Of course, the more striking architectural features—such as the stencil work on the ceilings, the grand staircase, and the verandas—are always popular. Our campaign to fund the restoration of the windows has been especially successful. We have sold



Visitors enter the Mead Building during an open house held in May 2015.

sponsorships for almost every window, along with naming rights for other features, rooms, and items of interest. Unique fundraising and marketing opportunities like the window sponsorships help us to stand out from other projects and gain the interest of potential donors.

Laura Beall, Marketing Coordinator
Dakota Territorial Museum

Partnering for Success

Our partnership with Yankton College has been serendipitous in many ways. Dr. Joseph Ward and his wife, Sarah Wood Ward, founded the college in 1881. Dr. Ward helped to lead the movement for South Dakota statehood, participating in the 1883 and 1885 constitutional conventions. Earlier, Governor William A. Howard of Dakota Territory had appointed Ward to oversee the establishment of the Dakota Hospital

for the Insane. Over the years, collaboration between the college and the hospital provided training and housing for hospital nursing staff and educational opportunities for college students. Yankton College closed its campus in 1984, just a few years after the HSC stopped using the Mead Building. By welcoming the Yankton College Alumni and Educational Center into the third level of this historic building, the YCHS has created an active alliance with the college. Now guaranteed into perpetuity, historical artifacts, student records, Ward family memorabilia, and much more will become a part of an important cultural center.

Joan Neubauer, President
Yankton County Historical Society

Conclusion: Present Progress, Future Goals

The YCHS has approached planning for the Mead Building rehabilitation systematically, identifying priority needs and tackling each one in turn. Restoration began in 2012 with repairs to the Ludowici clay tile roof at an estimated cost of six hundred thousand dollars. Large



Renewal of the stencilwork on the ceilings is a key element in restoring the historic appearance of the Mead Building.

contributions from Larry and Diane Ness and First Dakota National Bank provided much of the financial backing for this phase of the project, together with grants from the Deadwood Historic Preservation Commission and the South Dakota State Historical Society Deadwood Fund. Workers pulled the original roofing nails and carefully stacked serviceable tiles from the historic roof inside the building until the roof decking could be repaired. Stonebrook Roofing, Inc., used stainless steel nails to attach the reused tiles to the new roof decking. Spare tiles that had been stored in the attic for many years served as replacements for broken pieces. In an inspired example of creative fundraising, the original roofing nails are for sale as souvenirs in the Dakota Territorial Museum shop.

With the roof restoration completed in 2013, the next steps include lead paint abatement and encapsulation followed by repairs to interior plaster and historic windows, fabrication of new storm windows, tuckpointing of mortar joints around the building exterior, and rehabilitation of the structure's plumbing and electrical systems. Roger Huntley of Yankton, who worked on plaster restoration projects at the South Dakota State Capitol, now oversees plasterwork restoration at the Mead Building. Repairs to flat wall plaster, special moldings and dentils, and painted stencil designs are required throughout the building. One of the biggest challenges of the Mead Building project is a shortage of craftspeople qualified in historic building materials and techniques. For this part of the project, the YCHS has hosted a series of workshops for interested individuals, and Huntley has worked with his assistants to train people in the repair of historic plaster. This educational effort is especially important to provide direction to the numerous volunteers who donate labor to the project.

Ben Brunick of Chalkstone Woodworking in Yankton oversees the restoration of the historic windows. Brunick and his workers reuse the original window parts whenever possible and replace unserviceable rails and stiles with custom-built duplicates fabricated in an on-site workshop. Under his direction, inmates from the Yankton minimum-security unit of the South Dakota Department of Corrections are building new wood-frame storm windows that add insulation value and protect the historic windows. They use mortise-and-tenon joints in



Hand tools are used in the repair of historic plaster moldings.

the wooden window frames, as did the makers of the original windows. Brunick cites this joining technique, which allows the wood to expand and contract with changing weather conditions, as a reason why many of the original window sashes remain salvageable. He also engineered a custom steam box for loosening old paint and glazing from even the largest parlor windows. As part of the restoration, Chalkstone Woodworking will reglaze all the windows and repaint their frames.

Mead Building project director Gregg Homstad supervises the tuckpointing work on the mortar joints between the concrete and stone blocks of the building's exterior. These repairs, along with the roof and window restorations, will protect the structure from water infiltration. The tuckpointing project began in the summer of 2015. Inmates from the minimum-security unit provide much of the labor and receive training in masonry work.

The YCHS has taken a comprehensive approach to building support for the project. In addition to website and social media pages, the society maintains communications with the *Yankton Press & Dakotan* and other local media to ensure that progress reports and information on upcoming events reach a wide audience. The society's outreach strategy has been a notable success. Because people love to take a peek



Dakota Territorial Museum
Director Crystal Nelson and
Ben Brunick of Chalkstone
Woodworking show a restored
parlor window frame at the
Mead Building in May 2015.

behind the curtain, the YCHS hosts special tours of work spaces and periodic open houses to provide potential donors and the general public the opportunity to “meet” the Mead Building in person and learn about the society’s vision for its new home. In each room, visitors see the building plans and the work in progress. On-site signage gives the status of fundraising efforts and identifies opportunities to sponsor future museum galleries. As every fundraiser knows, one must actually make the “ask” in order to succeed. At open houses and other special events, YCHS staff members set up donation boxes and a table to sell items from the museum gift shop, including books about HSC history, roof nails, ornaments, and more. Staff, board members, volunteers, and craftspeople all attend the open houses to tell the story of the Mead

Building and share their vision for its future. Fill the space with passionate people, and the enthusiasm is contagious.

Community support for the Mead Building is strong. In May 2014, Yankton County created a historic preservation commission. In September 2014, the YCHS welcomed news that the Mead Building was Yankton's designated legacy project for the 125th anniversary of South Dakota statehood. Yankton County voters demonstrated their appreciation for historic preservation in general and the Mead Building in particular at the November 2014 general election by approving a mill levy to fund the new historic preservation commission and its work in determining other worthy preservation projects.

The HSC is a significant part of South Dakota history. The stories of its patients, their families, and its staff tell us how we have cared for our citizens' mental health through the years. Some of these accounts focus on achievement, intelligence, caring, and healing. Others are less positive, but they are important nonetheless. Archived records and oral histories contain many stories of the HSC, but the buildings them-



This temporary wooden structure encloses a section of the porch to help ensure a lead-free environment for those working on the window renovation project inside.



The wooden structure seen here supports the scaffolding used by workers repairing the ceiling plaster near the grand staircase of the Mead Building.

selves also have tales to tell. The ways in which people designed and used the buildings of the HSC campus provide another perspective on what took place there. Many states have built new mental health care facilities in recent years while abandoning historic campuses made up of solid, impressive structures. Here in South Dakota, as in other parts of the country, finding new, adaptive uses for these historic buildings has been a struggle. Fortunately, the Mead Building lives on, thanks to the vision of the Yankton County Historical Society, the Yankton College Alumni Association, the citizens of Yankton County, and the craftspeople whose labors are making the vision a reality.

For blog posts, photographs, videos, donation opportunities, open house dates, and links to the project's Facebook and Twitter pages, visit the Mead Cultural Education Center website at www.meadbuilding.org.

Elizabeth J. Almlie

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On the covers: Nels P. Christensen recorded the Missouri River scene in 1903, as Louis DeWitt parked his wagon (back) at the former site of Fort George in central South Dakota. In this issue, W. Raymond Wood delves into the history of the fur-trading post, which the Union Fur Company abandoned in 1845. John R. Henris details the introduction of trout (inset) to the Black Hills at the turn of the last century in his article on the development of the region's fishery.

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