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**Walking Tour:  
Historic Buildings of the University of Minnesota, Morris**

**by Stephen Granger and Susan Granger  
October 1998**

Thirteen historic buildings on the UMM campus are briefly described on the following pages. The information is arranged in the form of a walking tour that begins at the Minority Resource Center on the southern side of the Mall, travels along the eastern and northern sides of the Mall, and ends at the Student Center (formerly Edson Hall).

**Campus History**

From 1887-1896 the Sisters of Mercy (an order of Catholic nuns) operated a boarding school for Native Americans at the location of the Morris campus under contract with the Federal Office of Indian Affairs. By 1896 this campus consisted of about 14 woodframe buildings. At about the center of the present Mall was a rather large main building that included a chapel, kitchen, dining room, the girls' dormitory, and classrooms. To the southeast, where Spooner Hall now stands, was a second large building known as the Boys' Dorm. East of the main building were assorted farm buildings.

In 1897, the federal government purchased the facility and operated the Morris Indian School until 1909. By 1902 the government had added the first four brick buildings to the campus. One of those buildings, the Boys' Dormitory (built in 1899), still stands and is now the Minority Resource Center. It is the oldest remaining building on the campus. In 1909, because of a change in policy reducing non-reservation schools, the federal Morris Indian School was closed. The Minnesota legislature accepted the facility from the federal government in 1909 and the University of Minnesota made plans to open an agricultural school and experiment station on the campus and its 300 acres of adjacent farmland.

The West Central School of Agriculture opened with 103 students in October of 1910. The all-time WCSA enrollment high of 455 was reached in 1947. In 1959, it was announced that the School of Agriculture would be phased out, making way for the conversion of the campus to collegiate classes beginning in the fall of 1960. When the WCSA graduated its last students in 1963, there were about one dozen major buildings available for collegiate use, as well as numerous barns, storage buildings, and shops. Most of these ancillary buildings, with the exception of the seed house and the machinery building on the northern edge of the campus, were eventually removed.

**Architecture**

Nine of the buildings that now comprise the UMM campus were designed by Clarence H. Johnston, Sr. -- one of the state's most prominent architects. These were built between 1912 and 1926 for the WCSA. (Johnston also designed the Assumption Catholic Church in Morris, built in 1905.) The Johnston buildings at UMM are intentionally modest, rather than ornate, in design. Rather than creating "ivy league"-type collegiate buildings that might have been associated with European, East Coast, and perhaps elitist historical precedents, Johnston chose -- through use of simple massing, hipped roofs, wide

eaves, dormers, and relatively smooth wall surfaces -- to create what some have called a "Populist" campus because of its Progressive, unpretentious design. The buildings were inspired by the Craftsman and Prairie School architectural styles. Most of the buildings were also inspired by residential architecture, a choice that emphasizes the domestic, sheltering function of this campus built in the midst of what Johnston probably perceived as a somewhat desolate expanse of western Minnesota prairie.

The Mall around which the WCSA was built was the result of a campus plan prepared by the firm of Morell and Nichols in 1911, shortly before the first WCSA building was constructed on the Mall. (The firm of Anthony Morell and Arthur R. Nichols was perhaps Minnesota's most prolific landscape architecture firm.) Much of the subsequent landscaping of the campus, including its magnificent trees, can be credited to John A. Anderson who was on the staff of the School of Agriculture from 1916 until he retired in 1959. The landscaping around the Mall as it exists today is the result of a 1968 plan by Minneapolis landscape architect Roger Martin.

#### **Minority Resource Center (formerly the Morris Indian School Boys' Dormitory)**

The Minority Resource Center, the oldest structure on the campus, was built in 1899. Originally a boy's dormitory, it is the only structure that remains from the 22 years that the campus was an industrial school for Native Americans. Directly across the Mall to the north there was a twin building -- a Girls' Dormitory -- that was constructed in 1898. It was razed in the 1950s when the Humanities Building was built.

The Indian School Boys' Dormitory is a two story, red brick structure on a tall limestone foundation. The southern (now rear) side was the original main facade and the building originally had four chimneys, tin shingles, and a more steeply-pitched roof. If you look closely, you will see that the upper three courses of brick on the exterior do not match the rest of the red brick. Two of these courses are yellow brick that has been painted red, and one course is actually wood that has also been painted to resemble brick. This work is a remnant of a 1921 remodeling (under Clarence H. Johnston's direction) that added a new roof, dormers, a new main entrance, and a front porch to the building so that it would match the other WCSA buildings on the Mall.

The building was used as a dormitory until 1913, as the Agronomy Building until 1920, and as a Music Hall until 1989 when it became the Minority Resource Center.

#### **Education Building (formerly the Hospital)**

The Education Building was constructed in 1923 as the infirmary for the WCSA. Designed by Clarence H. Johnston, Sr., this brick building contained room for 25 beds, nurses' quarters, and an infirmary kitchen. The decorative brickwork above and below the first story windows and the front porch with its wooden Tuscan columns reflect a Renaissance Revival influence in the design. An enclosed concrete block stair tower was added to the western facade during a 1974 remodeling.

During the early years of the School of Agriculture, it was necessary to care for ill students on the campus rather than in a local hospital. After adequate hospital facilities were established in Morris, this building served as the health service for WCSA until 1961. When UMM was founded, the health service

was moved to Pine Hall where it remained until 1967 when the UMM Health Service moved to new quarters in Clayton A. Gay Hall.

From 1961 until 1967, the former Hospital housed the UMM administrative offices. (In 1964 it was the site of an infamous prank in which Dean Briggs' office was sodded, wall to wall, by a group of students. The scene included not only a full carpet of grass "borrowed" from the local greenhouse, but the flag from one of the greens at the golf course. The perpetrators were never caught, which is a good thing since Briggs was not amused.) By 1967, the building had become the headquarters of the Division of Education with administrative and faculty offices and several seminar rooms. The University Relations offices now occupy the basement level.

### **Spooner Hall**

Spooner Hall, built in 1913, was one of two identical dormitories -- the other was Girls' Dormitory (now Camden Hall) -- that were constructed almost immediately after the opening of the WCSA. It was designed by Clarence H. Johnston, Sr. and was named for Lewis C. Spooner, the local state representative who lobbied for the transfer of the federal Indian School campus to the State of Minnesota in 1909. Spooner Hall has always been a dormitory.

It is a three story brick building with a raised basement, Kasota stone trim, and 1/1 sash. Its hipped roof has wide eaves and gabled dormers. The southern (rear) facade has a series of Tudor-arched windows that light a projecting sunroom-like dorm lounge that matches a similar room on the rear of Camden Hall. The building originally had open porches that matched those on Camden. These were removed during remodeling in 1960. At the same time, the main entrance at the center of the main facade was closed, and three story stair towers were added at each end of the building. The interior of Spooner was refurbished and the dorm lounge restored in 1990-1993.

### **Blakely Hall (formerly Senior Hall)**

Blakely Hall was constructed in 1920 as a boys' dormitory for the WCSA. Originally named Senior Hall, it is built of brick with Kasota stone trim and was designed by Clarence H. Johnston, Sr. It originally had an open porch like that on Camden Hall. In 1960, the original front entrance in the third bay was bricked up and a brick stair tower was added to the northern end of the building. A similar stair tower was added to the southern end in 1988. The building has always served as a residence hall.

Incidentally, the current name, Blakely Hall, does not honor a person. Shortly after UMM was founded, it was decided to rename three of the WCSA dorms -- Senior Hall, Girls' Dormitory, and Junior Hall. Blakely's name was chosen simply for its phonetic appeal by a group of staff and students. The same method was used to choose the names of Camden, Pine, and later Independence halls.

### **Behmler Hall (formerly the Dining Hall and Gymnasium)**

Behmler Hall, designed by Clarence H. Johnston, Sr., was constructed in 1918 to serve as the dining hall, gymnasium, and auditorium facility for the WCSA. It is constructed of brick with extensive Kasota stone trim and is one of the most ornate buildings on campus. Originally, the five tall window bays on the main facade contained two-story-high gymnasium windows. In 1926, a two story rear addition was constructed to provide food storage and living quarters for dining

hall staff. After the new Gymnasium building (the PE Annex, razed in 1998) was completed in 1931, the gym floor and stage were replaced by two floors of dorm rooms, and the structure became known as the Junior Girls' Dormitory. The building served the WCSA as a dining hall and dormitory until the school closed in 1963.

The building was renamed about 1963 for Fred W. Behmler, a local physician and legislator who actively lobbied for the establishment of UMM. The building served as UMM's dining hall until the construction of the new Food Service in 1971. Its basement was the location of the cafeteria and a student-faculty gathering spot that was named "Louies' Lower Level" by founding Provost Rodney Briggs. The second and third floor dorm rooms were converted to the Social Science Division faculty offices in the early 1960s. Behmler Hall is now the administrative center for the campus.

#### **Social Science Building (formerly Agricultural Hall)**

The Social Science Building was constructed in 1920 as a major teaching facility, named Agricultural Hall, for the WCSA. It was designed by Clarence H. Johnston, Sr. Located on the northeastern corner of the Mall, it is a two story brick structure with a raised basement, 8/8 sash, and Kasota stone trim. Like many of the other WCSA buildings, it has a hipped roof with wide eaves, curvilinear rafter tails, and hipped dormers. The building's unique rounded-arched entrance has brick pilasters with ornate stone capitals, a stone shield in the tympanum, and other decorative brick and stonework. In 1949, the current one story addition was built on the northern side. It contains a steeply-sloped auditorium designed for the display of animals to classes. To this day, this auditorium is known by all as the "cow palace."

The Social Science Building housed WCSA classrooms, offices, laboratories, and meat cutting and cold storage facilities. The interior was remodeled in 1975 and an elevator and stair towers were added to the rear. In the 1960s, the building was successively named Humanities, then Humanities/Social Science, and then Social Science/Education. The book store and post office were located in the basement until 1969. At present, Social Science remains one of three major general purpose classroom buildings on the campus.

#### **Saddle Club Barn (formerly the Cattle Barn)**

This large barn, located to the northeast of the Mall, was constructed in 1914 as the cattle barn for the West Central Experiment Station. (It was probably designed by Clarence H. Johnston.) After a haymow fire in 1950, the originally gambrel roof was replaced by the present rounded roof with small dormers. (The new, rounded roof shape was widely promoted by state agricultural experiment stations and county agents for use in dairy barns because it increased the capacity of the hayloft over gambrel roofs, although it was somewhat more difficult and expensive to construct.) The dairy barn served the Experiment Station until new research facilities were constructed on the University's eastern farm in 1973. Since 1973, about half of the barn has been used to stable the horses of the UMM Saddle Club and the remainder has been used for storage.

#### **Recycling Center (formerly the Seed House)**

The Seed House was constructed in 1929 as a seed grain processing and storage facility for the West Central Experiment Station. It was designed by Roy Lund who later became the University-wide Director of Plant Services. It is a two

story structure with a hollow tile first floor and lap siding on the second story. The building was used by the Experiment Station for seed processing and storage well in the 1990s. It is currently used by UMM Plant Services as a recycling center. The steel-sided maintenance building next door to the west is the former WCSA Machinery Shop.

#### **Community Services Building (formerly the Engineering Building)**

The Community Services Building, a two story brick structure, was constructed in 1915 and was another Clarence H. Johnston design. Unlike the other Johnston-designed buildings, however, it does not have stone trim, possibly reflecting a cost-saving measure instituted because the building did not need to match the other WCSA buildings, all of which faced the Mall. The northern wing of Engineering -- a one story brick structure with segmental arched windows that now houses the UMM's Duplicating Services -- was originally built as a blacksmith shop. It predates the main building by a few years. The Engineering Building originally contained mechanical, electrical, and carpentry shops and labs, the forge and blacksmith shop, and engineering classrooms and office.

When the WCSA closed in 1963, Engineering served as the headquarters of the West Central Experiment Station until the new Station headquarters was opened in 1973 on the University farm east of the campus. In 1960, the southern wing of Engineering became a chemistry lab. By the early 1970s, the bookstore, post office, and duplicating shop had moved to the first floor. When the Experiment Station moved to its new facilities in 1973, the building was taken over completely by UMM and renamed the Community Services Building. The second story now houses the offices of Continuing Education, Regional Programs, and related outreach activities.

#### **Camden Hall (formerly Girls' Dormitory)**

Camden Hall (first known as Girls' Dormitory) and Spooner Hall were originally identical. They were twin residence halls that were designed by Clarence H. Johnston, Sr. and built in 1912 and 1913 to house the students of the newly opened West Central School of Agriculture. Camden Hall is a brick building with Kasota stone trim, 1/1 sash, a hipped roof with wide eaves, and hipped dormers.

In October of 1949 -- on the day that students were moving onto campus for the WCSA fall term -- the third story of Girls' Dormitory was engulfed by fire. Students had been unpacking their trunks and moving them into the attic all day, and it was believed that the fire was accidentally started there by surreptitious smokers. The Morris Fire Chief was almost lost in the blaze -- he was on the roof aiming a hose into one of the dormers when the roof collapsed. He slid down to the eaves and dangled from the gutters of the three story building until he was rescued by the rest of the crew. The building was badly damaged by the fire and was reconstructed as a two story, rather than a three story, dorm.

When Clayton A. Gay Hall was completed in 1969, Camden was taken out of service as student housing. In 1969 it was renamed Camden Hall, a name picked solely for its pleasing sound. It then became a faculty office building and the headquarters of the Social Science Division.

### **Humanities Building (formerly Home Economics)**

Designed by Bernard J. Hein, the Home Economics building -- now the Humanities Building -- was constructed in 1954 to provide modern home economics facilities for the WCSA. (It was built on the site of an 1898 Indian School Girls' Dormitory that had been the twin of the current Minority Resource Center.) The present Humanities Building is a two story, flat roofed brick structure with a raised basement and Kasota stone trim. Originally the building had four classrooms, two craft rooms, four laboratories, a home economics parlor, a dining room, and an office. Beginning in 1960 when UMM was founded, some of the home economics facilities were converted to college biology labs. The building was used primarily as a science building for UMM, but art classes were also taught here in the early 1960s. When the new Science Building opened in 1967, this became the headquarters of the Humanities Division. The Humanities Building remains the second major general purpose classroom facility for the campus.

### **Pine Hall (formerly Junior Hall)**

Built in 1926 for the expanding ag school, Junior Hall, as it was originally named, served as a boys' dormitory for WCSA through 1962 when it was taken over by UMM for use as a residence hall. It was similar in appearance to the other Clarence H. Johnston-designed residence halls and originally had an open front porch like Camden's. It is a two story brick structure with a raised basement, Kasota stone trim, 8/8 sash, and a hipped roof with wide eaves and dormers. The attic was used as a recreation room and "smoker" for the WCSA boys. On the eastern end of the first floor there were four separate rooms for female faculty members. This suite of four rooms housed the UMM Health Service from 1961 until 1967. The building was renovated in 1960 and an enclosed brick stair tower replaced the front porch. It was renamed Pine Hall about 1960.

### **Edson Hall/Student Center**

The original Edson Hall, a one story, flat-roofed, brick structure, was completed in 1959 as an administration and auditorium building for the WCSA. The building was designed by Bernard J. Hein to replace the WCSA Administration Building on this site that dated from 1924. The 1959 building was named to honor Allen W. Edson who had joined the WCSA faculty in 1922 and served as the Superintendent of the School from 1947 until 1958.

Almost immediately after it was opened in 1959, Edson Hall was used by the newly founded UMM for its administration. It also housed the college art gallery for a time during the 1960s. From 1968 through 1992, it fulfilled the function of a campus union by housing student activities, student government offices, the student radio station, a student store, recreation rooms, a cafeteria, and the auditorium. In 1992, Edson Hall was incorporated into the newly constructed Student Center which, although technically a \$4,178,000 addition, actually nearly consumes the original building. The Student Center now houses meeting rooms, recreation rooms, lounges, study areas, a cafeteria, student activities and student government offices, a radio station, and the original Edson Auditorium.

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