
OAHE CHAPEL NEWS

Fall 2011

Newsletter of the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society

Pierre, SD

New Signage at Oahe Chapel

Oahe Chapel will have a new interpretive sign installed in front of the chapel next spring. Leigh Raderschadt with the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office worked tirelessly to develop the new design of the panel. She went through the archived collection of photos to select the best examples of what Oahe Chapel has meant to the communities it continues to serve. An image of the sign is below. ❖

OAHE MISSION

The chapel before you did not always sit here above the dam. The Oahe Mission, which operated the Oahe Industrial School boarding school from 1884 to 1914, was built five miles north on Peoria Bottom. The chapel was used for both worship and as a classroom. Other buildings included the Industrial School, the Riggs' home, and several outbuildings. The chapel continued to be used for worship services and Sunday school after the school closed. When the Oahe Dam was constructed, creating Lake Oahe, Peoria Bottom and the remaining buildings were flooded.

Thomas L. Riggs, a Congregationalist minister, and his wife Nina founded the Oahe Mission to serve the Dakota Indians in what is now central South Dakota. Starting with an ABC primer, Dakota men, women, and children learned to read the Bible, first in Dakota and then in both Dakota and English. Later, it was taught only in English.



Oahe Mission c. 1915 from left: Oahe Chapel, school room and store house, barn, and Oahe Industrial School.



Students learning English at Oahe School in the chapel.



Students and their teacher take time out of class to pose for a photograph in 1907.

In the 1950s, the chapel was given to the State of South Dakota during construction of the dam. The State Historical Society became responsible for the chapel's restoration and preservation. The chapel moved to a temporary location in 1957 to avoid flooding before settling at its current location in 1964. In 1984, the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society was established to work with the state to maintain the chapel. The Preservation Society completely restored the chapel in 1988 and rehabilitated the windows in 2010.

Sponsored by the South Dakota State Historical Society, a Preserve America grant, and the Deadwood Historic Preservation Commission. Images courtesy of the South Dakota State Historical Society.



Chapel overlooks Missouri River Flood Damage

This summer brought historic challenges to the residents of the Missouri River valley in the form of the worst flooding since 1952. Despite road closures and limited access to the Oahe Dam area, church services continued this summer. At the end of May, Board members and volunteers from the South Dakota State Historical Society tidied up the Chapel before the summer services began. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day Oahe Chapel hosted 14 church services. The Chapel provides congregations a sense of how their ancestors may have worshiped out on the open prairie a century ago.

The serene setting of Oahe Chapel was the perfect backdrop to 1 memorial service and 5 intimate weddings.

The Oahe Chapel continues to be a treasured location for the community and, with the support of interested patrons such as you, it promises to be so for years to come. ❖

RENT THE CHAPEL

Call now to reserve the Oahe Chapel for your wedding, church service, family reunion, or other special event! The Chapel is available for rent year round. The cost to rent the facility is \$50, and members of the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society are eligible to rent the facility for a reduced rate of \$35. To learn more, contact the South Dakota State Historical Society at (605) 773-3458. ❖

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Membership funds help to maintain the Oahe Chapel. Please renew your membership, or join as a new member. Simply complete the form below and return it with your check.

Oahe Chapel Preservation Society Membership Form

Membership investment is for one year. Members will receive the annual Oahe Chapel News to keep up-to-date with current projects at the Oahe Chapel. Members are also eligible to rent the chapel at a reduced rate of \$35. Donations are tax deductible where allowed by law.

Please detach this form and mail with check to:

Oahe Chapel Preservation Society PO Box 7201 Pierre, SD 57501

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS (optional): _____

Check one:

- Sustaining Membership \$500.00
- Patron Membership \$100.00
- Family Membership \$ 25.00
- Individual Membership \$ 15.00
- Enclosed is my one-time gift of \$ _____

