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# OAHE CHAPEL NEWS

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Newsletter of the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society

Summer 2006

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## Brief History of Oahe Chapel

*From Oahe Chapel brochure*

In 1874, Reverend Thomas L. Riggs, a Congregationalist minister, and his first wife, Cornelia Margaret (“Nina”) Foster, established the Oahe Mission to serve the Sioux Indians of central South Dakota. The missionaries chose to build on the site of an old Arikara Indian village called *Ti Tanke Obe*, later shortened to “Oahe.” The name of the Indian village was eventually given not only to the mission, but also to the dam and lake that now cover the site.

The Oahe Mission was located on the east bank of the Missouri River at Peoria Flats, about five miles upriver from the modern-day location of the chapel. In the beginning, a log house was the center of the mission. By 1877, the house had become too small, and the Indians agreed to help Reverend Riggs build a chapel, which was finished by September of the same year.

Like any frontier structure, the chapel was expected to serve a dual purpose—it served as a schoolhouse and as the center of religious life. Academic and religious classes were held in the chapel. Starting with an ABC primer, the men, women, and children of the mission learned to read the Bible first in the Dakota language and later in English. Because of these classes, a number of lay and ordained ministers were able to assist in the mission’s work on the Cheyenne River and Standing Rock reservations.

As white neighbors moved into the community, they joined in Sunday and holiday worship at the chapel. Services were originally conducted in the Dakota language but by 1931 only English was used.

In the 1950s, when it became evident that the completion of the Oahe Dam would flood the mission location, the chapel was given to the State of South Dakota. The South Dakota State Historical Society was then put in charge of the restoration and preservation of the chapel. In 1957,

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## Support the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society

*Become a member today!*

Over the years, the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society has continued in its mission to maintain and preserve the chapel for the enjoyment of the public. To that end, the organization has undertaken a number of maintenance projects, including stabilizing the foundation, leveling and reinforcing the floor, repairing and replacing the siding, and repairing the bell tower. None of these projects would have been possible without the generous support of our members. This summer, the Society plans to repair the window sills, repaint the windows, reshingle the west side of the roof, and repair some of the exterior trim. You can help us tackle these projects by sending your donation today. A **membership form** is located on the back of this newsletter. Donations to the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society are tax deductible where allowed by law. Thank you for your continuing support! ❖

### OAHE CHAPEL PRESERVATION SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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the chapel was moved to a temporary location, and in 1964, it was relocated to its current location at the eastern end of the Oahe Dam.

In 1984, local citizens formed the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society with the purpose of restoring and preserving the chapel. With donations and volunteer labor, plus the assistance of the South Dakota State Historical Society and the State Historic Preservation Office, the major restoration work was completed in 1988. Today, the Oahe Chapel Preservation Society continues in its mission to maintain and preserve the chapel for the public's enjoyment. ❖

## Remembering 126 Years of the Oahe Chapel

In 2003, the Oahe Chapel celebrated its 126<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The celebration included a special service by Reverend Webster Two Hawk of Fort Pierre, South Dakota, a picnic lunch and commemorative program, and tours of the chapel. Approximately 100 people attended the festivities. If you were unable to attend, don't despair! The celebration was recorded by 00 Films of Pierre, and a special DVD of the festivities was created by the company. You can borrow one of the DVDs by contacting the Cultural Heritage Center, Rawlins Public Library, the South Dakota State Library, or the South Dakota State Archives, all in Pierre. Call today and enjoy the celebration! ❖

### RESERVE THE CHAPEL

Call now to reserve the Oahe Chapel for your wedding, anniversary, family reunion, or other special event! The cost to rent the facility is \$50. Beginning in 2006, members will be 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. ❖



Oahe Chapel  
North of Pierre, South Dakota, on Highway 1804

## 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 will also be 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 payment 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            \$20.00
- Individual Membership        \$10.00

Enclosed is my one-time gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_