

Boiler House / Power Plant

Steam Heat, Utilities, and Campus Operations at SDSA

The Boiler House, later commonly known as the Power Plant, was one of the most important service buildings on the South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD) campus. Built in 1899–1900, the structure originally provided centralized steam heat for the growing campus and later supported laundry services, utility operations, athletic facilities, and campus maintenance for more than a century.

Construction and Early Use

By the mid-1890s, the boilers located inside the Main Building and Boys' Dormitory had become outdated and inefficient. School officials requested construction of a separate steam heating plant to improve safety and campus operations.

The new Boiler House was completed in 1899–1900 and included a smokestack approximately 70 feet tall. Steam pipes connected the building to other campus structures, replacing the older individual boiler systems.

One unusual story from the project involved the old boiler inside the Main Building. Because it was too large to remove through the basement openings, workers reportedly buried the boiler beneath the basement floor and poured concrete over it.

Laundry and Campus Services

During the Dora Donald era, new laundry machinery was installed inside the Boiler House, helping modernize campus operations. Over time, the building expanded to include:

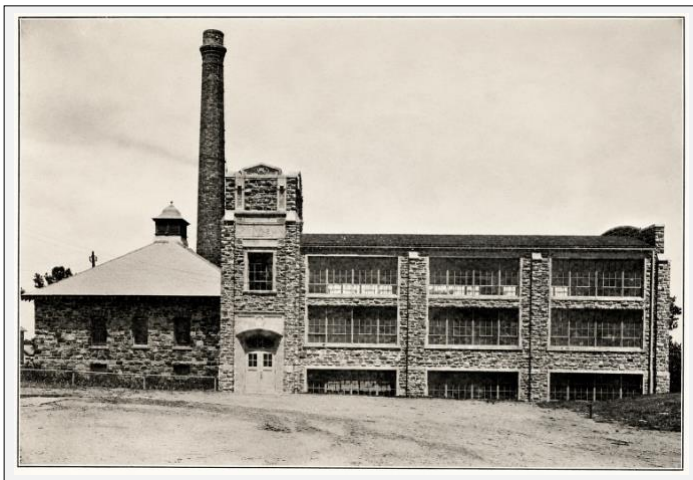
- laundry facilities
- coal storage
- utility operations
- greenhouse space

The structure became an important service hub supporting daily campus life.

Expansion and Renovation

In 1913–1914, the Boiler House underwent major remodeling. Improvements included installation of three new Kewanee boilers and replacement of the original smokestack with a taller 90-foot stack that improved heating efficiency across campus.

During 1928–1930, stone from the demolished Industrial Building was reused to construct a gymnasium addition connected directly to the Boiler House. Laundry and vocational programs were later moved into the expanded complex.



Boiler House and adjoining gymnasium addition, circa 1930s. Stone from the demolished Vocational Building was reused in construction of the gymnasium.



Boiler House and smokestack shortly after construction, circa early 1900s. The building provided centralized steam heat for the growing SDSA campus.



Location:	Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Coordinates:	43° 32' 52.73" N 96° 42' 08.66" W
Constructed:	1899-1900
Architect:	Unknown
Original Purpose:	Central steam heating plant
Structure:	One-story Sioux quartzite steam plant building with smokestack
Key Features:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 70-foot Smokestack• Steam tunnel system• Laundry facilities
Major Renovations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Kewanee boilers (1913)• Gymnasium addition (1930)• ADA accessibility improvements (2000s)
Later Uses:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Locker rooms• Equipment storage• Physical Ed. offices
Present-Day Use:	Part of the Empower Campus
Known for:	Longtime utility and service building for the SDSA Campus

Structural Concerns (1929)

By 1929, Superintendent E. S. Tillinghast warned state officials that the Boiler/Heating Plant required urgent repairs. Reports presented to the state legislature described serious structural concerns involving wooden trusses supporting a heavy concrete floor. According to the report, parts of the structure had sagged nearly six inches and developed major cracks.

The Boiler House became part of a larger campus improvement effort during the late 1920s as SDSU worked to modernize aging facilities.

Later Changes

When the gymnasium addition was constructed, athletic locker rooms were originally located beneath the grandstand seating area. During the late 1960s or early 1970s, those locker rooms were removed and replaced with wooden movable bleachers.



Present-day view of the former Boiler House, now part of the Empower Campus, with modern ADA Accessibility improvements, concrete ramps and updated lobby facilities.

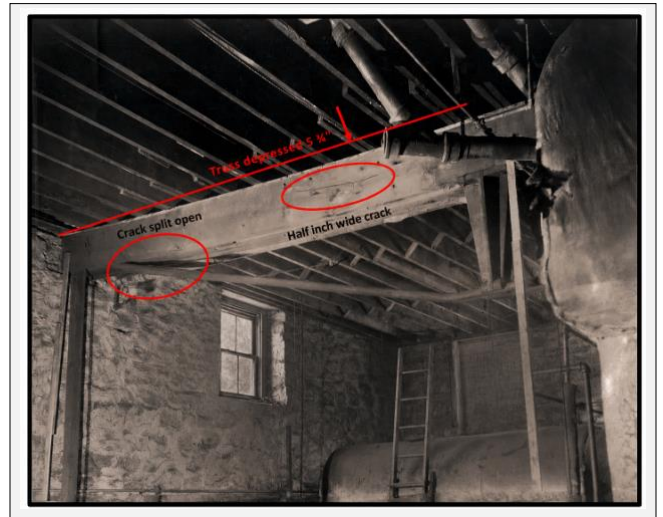
Present-Day

Today, the former Boiler House continues to serve the former SDSU campus as part of the [Empower Campus](#) operated by the [Sioux Falls Ministry Center](#). The building now functions as a public entrance to the former gymnasium area, which is used for community outreach and thrift activities.

Legacy

For more than a century, the Boiler House adapted to the changing needs of the South Dakota School for the Deaf campus. Originally constructed to provide steam heat, the building later supported laundry services, athletic facilities, campus utilities, storage, and student activities.

Through numerous renovations and changing uses, the structure remained an important part of daily campus operations and reflected the continued growth and modernization of SDSU throughout its history.



Photograph documenting structural concerns inside the Boiler/Heating Plant in 1929. Reports described sagging wooden trusses and major cracking that required urgent repairs.

As a result, the athletic locker rooms, sports equipment storage, uniform storage, and physical education offices were relocated into the first floor of the Boiler House.

During renovations in the 2000s, the former locker room and storage areas were completely remodeled. The older athletic facilities and offices were removed and replaced with a modern entrance lobby and updated restrooms for men and women.

Around this same period, ADA accessibility improvements were added to the building. The original granite block entrance steps were removed to make room for a concrete access ramp with steel railings.