

Girls' Dormitory (French Hall)

The Girls' Dormitory, later known as French Hall, was originally planned as a hospital (infirmary) for the South Dakota School for the Deaf. However, due to funding limitations and administrative challenges, the building was only partially completed at first and later repurposed to meet the school's growing housing needs.

History

The need for a dedicated hospital had been recognized as early as the 1890s, but construction did not begin until 1901–1902. The building was intended to be a two-story structure with a basement, but limited funding allowed only one story to be completed initially, with a temporary roof installed. Additional funding in 1903 made it possible to complete the second floor.

Soon after completion, shifting priorities led to a change in use. By 1905–1906, the building was converted into a girls' dormitory, as student housing became a greater need than a separate hospital facility.



Early view of the Girls' Dormitory, originally constructed as a hospital (c. 1903)

Development

The dormitory continued to evolve over time:

- A permanent stone connection to the main building was completed in 1907–1908, replacing an earlier wooden walkway.
- An addition and attic expansion were constructed in 1913–1914.
- Final acceptance of the expanded building was delayed due to construction issues with the roof, requiring correction before approval.
- Later improvements included bathroom upgrades, interior renovations, and fire safety systems, reflecting changing standards over time.



Completed Girls' Dormitory following expansion, including the attic and connecting structure to the Main Building (C.1910s)

Despite these improvements, portions of the building were never fully utilized, including attic space completed in the 1920s.

Later Years

The building became known as French Hall and remained part of campus life for decades. Structural maintenance was periodically required, including reinforcement to address stress between original and expanded sections.

In 1993, during a major transition of the SDSU campus, the property was divided, with the western half sold to support construction of a new dormitory. French Hall was located directly on the dividing line between the retained and sold portions of the campus and within the planned site of the new dormitory, leading to its demolition.

Significance

French Hall reflects the evolving needs of SDSU, illustrating how buildings were often adapted rather than purpose-built due to financial and political constraints. Its transformation from a planned hospital into a dormitory highlights the school's flexibility during a period of growth and limited resources.



Location:	Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Coordinates:	43° 32' 51.32" N 96° 42' 10.11" W
Built:	1901-1903
Architect:	Unknown
Original Purpose:	Hospital/Infirmary
Structure:	Two-story with a high basement and attic
Converted:	1905-1906 (Girls' Dormitory)
Connected:	1907-1908 (To Main Building)
Expanded:	1913-1914 (Attic)
Material:	Sioux Falls quartzite
Later Name:	French Hall
Demolished:	1993



Demolition of French Hall in 1993, marking the end of a long-standing part of the campus history and decades of memories for the SDSU community.