

Olde School (Boys' Dormitory)

Overview

The Olde School, originally constructed as the boys' dormitory, is one of the earliest and most historically significant buildings at the South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD). Completed in 1886 under Superintendent James Simpson, the building established the school as a residential institution.

Expanded in 1912 under his son, [Superintendent Howard Simpson](#), the structure evolved into a combined dormitory and academic facility. Over time, it adapted to changing needs, serving as housing, educational space, and later apartments. Today, it remains in use as a residential building, representing over a century of continuous adaptation.

History

Original Construction (1885–1886)

The boys' dormitory was constructed during a period of rapid growth at the Dakota Territorial School for the Deaf.

- Funding authorized in 1885 through territorial appropriations led in part by [Richard F. Pettigrew](#)
- Completed in 1886 as a 2½-story structure with basement
- Located approximately 125 feet north of the Main Building

The building featured:

- Construction of Sioux Falls quartzite with Pipestone jasper trim
- Well-lit and ventilated rooms with transoms
- Two large study halls
- Basement playroom with cement floor

Notably, the east wall was intentionally left unfinished, anticipating future expansion.

Early Improvements (1886–1910)

As the school developed, the building was upgraded with heating systems, fire escapes, and improved entryways. Interior spaces were adapted for bathrooms, washrooms, and a temporary hospital ward, while the building was connected to city water and sewer systems. Ongoing repairs were also made to flooring and roofing due to heavy use.

These updates reflect the building's intensive use in student life.

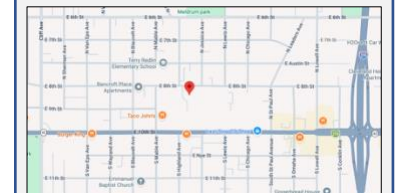
By the early twentieth century, growing enrollment placed increasing pressure on the existing dormitory. What had once been a modern facility was no longer sufficient, and the need for additional space and expanded educational functions made enlargement of the building necessary. The original design had anticipated this need, making expansion a natural next step in the school's development.

Expansion Under Howard Simpson (1912–1913)

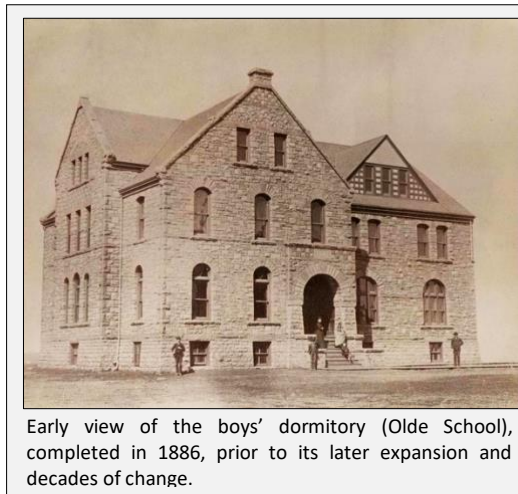
Purpose and Planning

By the early 20th century, increased enrollment created overcrowding in the boys' dormitory.

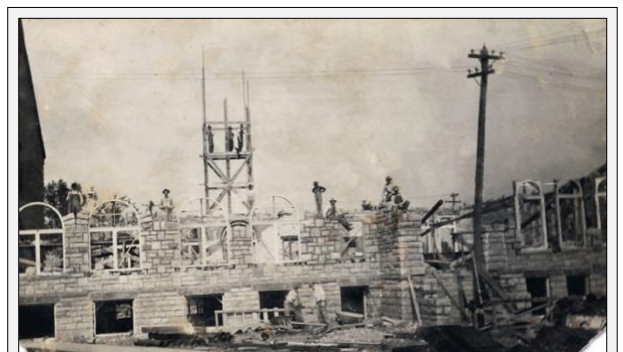
- State appropriations funded a major expansion
- Architect [John C. Chapman](#) was commissioned for the project.



Location:	Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Coordinates:	43° 32' 53.14" N 96° 42' 12.04" W
Name:	Olde School (originally Boys' Dormitory)
Constructed:	1886
Authorized:	1885
Major Expansion	1912 (completed 1913)
Superintendents:	James Simpson (construction) Howard Simpson (expansion)
Architect (Original):	Likely Wallace L. Dow
Architect (Expansion):	John C. Chapman
Material:	Sioux Falls quartzite with Pipestone trim
Original Use:	Boys' dormitory
Later Uses:	Classrooms, assembly space, teacher housing, apartments
Current Use:	Apartment housing



Early view of the boys' dormitory (Olde School), completed in 1886, prior to its later expansion and decades of change.



Construction of the 1912 addition to the boys' dormitory (Olde School), showing early stonework and structural framing during the expansion under Superintendent Howard Simpson.

Construction and Design

Construction began in 1912, utilizing the east wall originally designed for expansion.

The addition included:

- 11 classrooms
- Principal's office
- Two basement gymnasiums
- Assembly hall (later used as a roller skating rink)
- Woodshop on the third floor

The building:

- Maintained quartzite exterior to match original construction
- Used fire-resistant tile interior construction

The expanded structure was completed and occupied in February 1913.

Impact

The expansion transformed the building from a dormitory into a multi-purpose educational facility, supporting continued institutional growth and modernization.

Later Modifications (1913–1970s)

Mid-Century Changes

- Dormitory rooms subdivided into smaller living spaces
- Areas converted for teachers' housing and specialized student use
- Ongoing upgrades to plumbing, heating, and electrical systems
- Chimneys removed and safety improvements implemented

Fire Incident and Student Response (1928)

In February 1928, a serious fire broke out within the school building, threatening both the main structure and the adjoining boys' dormitory.

The fire was discovered at approximately 10:40 p.m. by members of the boys' and girls' basketball teams, along with [Superintendent E. S. Tillinghast](#) and several staff members, as they returned to campus from a game. Flames were observed in a hallway where six wooden lockers were burning intensely.

Students acted immediately. Within minutes, older boys had deployed two lines of hose and multiple fire extinguishers, bringing the fire under control before the city fire department arrived. The fire was largely under control before the fire department arrived, and the danger passed quickly.

The fire caused approximately \$200 in damage, largely confined to the hallway area. However, the intensity of the heat cracked glass in doors and transoms and damaged plaster, requiring repairs.

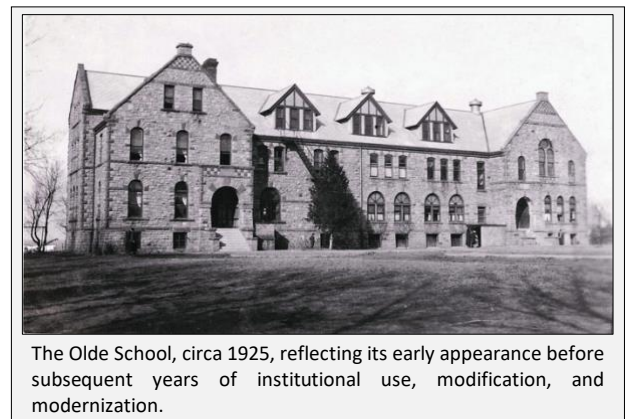
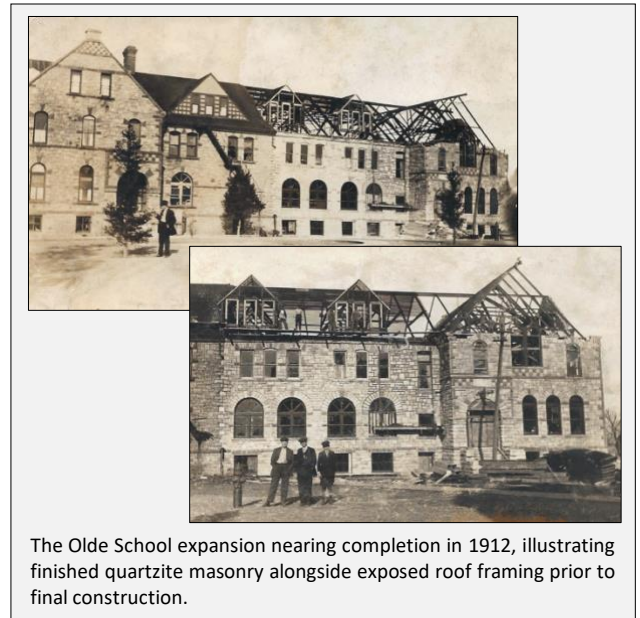
The incident highlighted both the risks present in older institutional buildings and the effectiveness of fire-resistant construction, which helped prevent the fire from spreading to the entire structure and the adjoining dormitory.

Several individuals were recognized for their actions:

[Lester Chizek](#) and [George Call Him](#) were commended for taking the lead with fire hoses [Bennie Soukup](#) was first on the scene with fire extinguishers [Mrs. Willard](#) ensured the safety of younger students

The fire was believed to have been caused by oil-soaked rags left in a locker following floor maintenance, despite prior instructions to properly remove such materials.

The quick response of students and staff, along with the rapid arrival of the fire department, prevented what could have been a devastating loss to the school.



A February 1928 Argus Leader article credited SDS students with preventing a major fire through their quick response before the fire department arrived.

Transition in Use (1947–1979)

- A new boys' dormitory was constructed in 1947, reducing reliance on the original building
- The Olde School gradually shifted to mixed uses, including educational and support functions

In 1979, SDSD relocated to a new campus, marking the end of its original institutional - educational role.

Closure, Community Ownership, and Redevelopment (1979–Present)

End of Campus Use

- The building was idled in 1980 following relocation of the school

Purchase by the Deaf Community (1993)

- In December 1993, the property was acquired by the South Dakota Association of the Deaf (SDAD) in coordination with Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD)
- Approximately nine acres were purchased to preserve and reuse the historic campus

Redevelopment Vision (1994–1995)

Plans included:

- A Deaf Cultural Center
- Office space for deaf organizations
- Low-income housing and community development

Grant funding in 1995 allowed initial renovation work to begin.

Adaptive Reuse (1995–2000s)

- 1995–1996: Renovated into apartment housing
- Later used for a mix of residential, office, and storage purposes
- Portions of the building became underutilized over time

Redevelopment Planning (2014)

A new redevelopment phase began:

- Partnership formed with Lloyd Companies
- Plans proposed a mixed-use redevelopment of the former campus
- Historic buildings, including the Olde School, were targeted for:
 - Preservation
 - Conversion into affordable housing

Present Use

Today, the Olde School is operated as an apartment building, commonly known as the Olde School Apartments.

The structure remains part of the historic SDSD campus landscape and continues to serve a residential function more than a century after its construction.

Significance

The Olde School reflects the full evolution of the SDSD campus, from its establishment as a residential institution in 1886 to its expansion in 1912 and continued adaptation into community housing today.

It reflects both the legacy of the South Dakota School for the Deaf and the ongoing efforts of the deaf community to preserve and adapt historic spaces.

[View full historical record](#)



The Olde School in the mid-1980s, shown sitting largely idle following the school's relocation, with visible alterations including replacement block windows and modifications beneath the central



By the late 1990s, the Olde School was being renovated into apartment housing, beginning a new chapter of community use after years of dormancy.



Present-day view of the Olde School, now operating as apartment housing with additional use as a photography studio, reflecting its continued adaptation and preservation more than a century after its original construction.