

Main Building (Simpson Building)

The Main Building, later known as the Simpson Building, was the first permanent structure of the South Dakota School for the Deaf in Sioux Falls. Completed in 1884, it marked the transition from temporary wooden facilities to a lasting institutional campus. For many decades, it served as the center of education, administration, and residential life at the school.

Planning and Construction

By the early 1880s, increasing enrollment made the original wooden school building inadequate. In 1883, the Dakota Territorial Legislature approved approximately \$12,000 for construction of a permanent main building.

The structure was designed by Sioux Falls architect Wallace L. Dow. Local landowner C. K. Howard donated land valued at approximately \$5,000, helping establish the permanent campus location. Construction was completed in 1884, although the identity of the building contractor remains unknown.

Architecture

The building was constructed of locally quarried Sioux Quartzite, a durable pink stone widely used in historic Sioux Falls architecture.

Originally, the building featured:

- Steep rooflines
- Prominent chimneys
- Arched stone entrances
- A central roof cupola
- Multi-purpose interior spaces

These elements reflected late-nineteenth-century institutional design and helped establish the architectural identity of the SDSA campus.



One of the earliest known photographs of the Main Building, taken shortly after stucco and exterior paint were applied in 1885. The image shows the original roof cupola, which was later removed during modernization work in the 1930s.

Photo credit: Siouxland Heritage Museums

Campus Center and Family Residence

The Main Building functioned as the heart of campus life, housing classrooms, dormitory rooms, administrative offices, and the superintendent's living quarters.

Although Howard Simpson was long believed to have been born in the building, he was actually born in 1882, prior to its completion. He was therefore likely born on campus in the earlier wooden school structure. Later Simpson children—including Grant (1884), Laurence (1889), and Sara (1892)—were born during a period when the family resided in the Main Building. It is therefore believed that they were born in the building, particularly since Sioux Falls did not have an established hospital until 1894, and births commonly took place in the home during that time.

The building also served as a setting for significant personal and community events. Sara Simpson, daughter of Superintendent James Simpson, died on April 20, 1892, and funeral services were held in the building. Civic gatherings, invitation dinners, and meetings for local organizations such as Sertoma and Kiwanis were also hosted there.

Changes and Improvements

Over time, the Main (Simpson) Building was updated to meet the changing needs of the school and to improve safety and comfort for students and staff. Although the sturdy Sioux Quartzite structure remained largely unchanged, a number of improvements were made to modernize the building and extend its usefulness. These changes demonstrate how the historic building remained an active and important part of campus life for many decades.



Location:	Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Coordinates:	43° 32' 51.40" N, 96° 42' 11.49" W
Area	15,000 Sq. Ft.
Built	1884
Architect	Wallace L. Dow
Architectural Style	Sioux Quartzite
Expansion	Early Fall 2001
Area	15,000 Sq. Ft.
Architect	Bob Visser
Contractor	Stencil Construction
Project Manager	Kevin Barber



Supt. James Simpson, his son, Howard, and his wife Anna Laura, spent their reading time in the building.

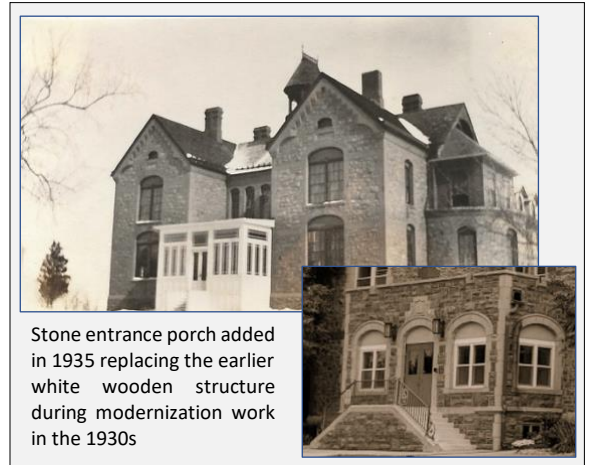
Photo credit: Siouxland Heritage Museums



Telephone poles and overhead lines installed along the front of the building reflect the arrival of modern communication systems serving the school

Notable changes to the building included:

- 1924–1925: Telephone system installed connecting campus buildings
- 1930s: Roof repaired and resurfaced with fire-resistant materials
- 1930s: Masonry repairs and tuck-pointing completed
- 1930s: Historic photographs indicate the original roof cupola was removed
- 1936: Wooden entrance replaced with a permanent stone porch
- 1950s: Major modernization included removal of the original chimneys, installation of new roof shingles, and addition of glass block windows in the basement
- Early 1960s: Automatic sprinkler system installed
- Various years: interior maintenance and window replacements



Stone entrance porch added in 1935 replacing the earlier white wooden structure during modernization work in the 1930s

Administrative Center

In 1975, administrative offices were brought together in the building as part of ongoing changes in how the school operated. From that time forward, the structure was commonly known as the Administration Building and remained an important center for school leadership and daily operations.

In 1978, the building was officially renamed the Simpson Building to honor early superintendent James Simpson and his family, who played a significant role in shaping deaf education in South Dakota.

Transition and Preservation

By the late 1980s, administrative functions gradually shifted to newer campus facilities.

In 1992, the South Dakota Legislature authorized the sale of portions of the SDDS campus, including the Simpson Building.

The structure was later acquired by the South Dakota Association of the Deaf and renovated for office and cultural use. It became part of the Communication Services for the Deaf (CSD) campus and has continued to be preserved through adaptive reuse.

Expansion of the Complex

To accommodate growing services, an expansion building was constructed adjacent to the historic structure. Construction began in fall 2000 and was completed by early fall 2001.

The project provided approximately 34 additional offices and expanded facilities for Video Relay Services (VRS) operations in the basement. The building contains about 15,000 square feet of space with two stories above a basement.

The expansion was designed by Bob Visser, built by Stencil Construction, and managed by project manager Kevin Barber.



Historical Importance

Today, the Simpson Building remains one of the oldest surviving structures associated with deaf education in South Dakota. Its history reflects the transformation of the school from a frontier institution into a modern educational and service campus while preserving one of the most recognizable historic landmarks on the former SDDS campus.

View the video of the transition of the Main building in 3D images:
[Main Simpson](#)