



Confluence

Where Past Meets Present

Volume 31 Issue 1

BELOIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jan./Feb., 2022

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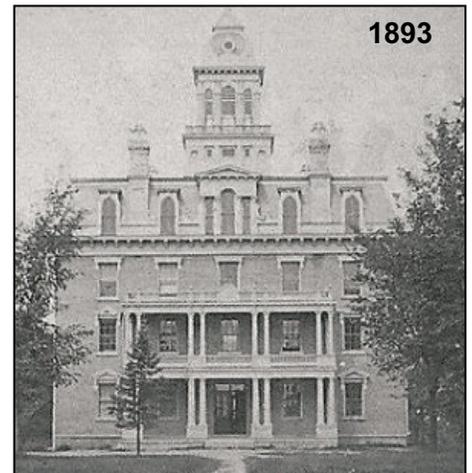
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MIDDLE COLLEGE THROUGH THE YEARS

Beloit College is the oldest college in Wisconsin.
It was chartered by the territorial legislature in 1846.
The first classes began in 1847 in Middle College.



Looking Back



1877 Beloit

This early view of Beloit was taken from the cupola of Middle College. It shows the dam constructed by James Hanchett in 1844. If you were thinking it might be the railroad, you would be wrong. The round (S) railroad bridge wasn't built until 1883 south of the dam. It was dismantled in 1926 and a new bridge was built on the north side of the dam. The wide expanse of river on the left is the start of the mill race. The **hand-dug** race was built shortly after the dam and was 16' wide and 9' deep. The race powered many of Beloit's early industries. The hook of land that can be seen farther up the river is a natural wetland that a 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps project turned into the lagoon at Riverside Park. The smokestack just south of the wetlands belonged to Eclipse Wind Engine Co. The horizontal road was the west end of Emerson St. now part of the college grounds. Far back on the horizon is what would become Big Hill Park in 1926.

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The 615 Story

by Tom Larsen



The house at 615 Broad St. was built in the early 1900s by Richard and Anna Gordon. After Richard died, Anna converted it into the **Gordon Hotel and Annex** (circa 1926). During Prohibition, the hotel featured a "speakeasy".

The property was sold in 1936 to R.F. Pollard and C.W. Curtain who opened the **615 Tavern**. Ted Wunsch bought the tavern a few years later and renamed it the **615 Club Tavern**.



During WWII a going away party was held for servicemen leaving for the war. They hung their hats on the wall before leaving the tavern. All 59 hats were reclaimed by their owners after the war ended.

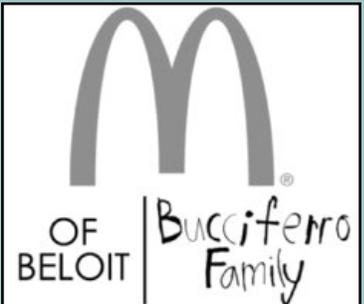
Frank and Tip Quinn purchased it in 1948 and renamed it **Quinn's 615 Club**. It was sold to Dennis and Georgia Quinn in 1974. In 1985, Dan and Bette Schultz took over and called it **Dan-Be's 615 Club**. It became a members-only establishment called the **615 Executive Club**. William Amundson operated **Billy's 615** in 1990 until his death in 2003. Mike and Mandy Crawl ran the club for about 2 years closing it in June 2006. In September 2006, Greg and RayAnn Hatley along with Kent Palmer, took over and undertook extensive renovations, stripping the club down to reveal its original features. When it opened, chefs and former owners Dennis and Georgia Quinn returned to provide the same great food we still enjoy today.



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NAACP in Beloit

A **Beloit Daily News** article dated **June 6, 1963**, Harry Hamilton, author of *"The Thirtieth Star"* published by the Wisconsin State Historical Society wrote that:

- "In 1919 there were only a handful of Negroes in Wisconsin when the **first branch of the NAACP in this state was organized in Beloit.**" (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)
- 'At that time Beloit had the largest number and highest proportion of "Negroes" of any city in the state.
- From the beginning, the Beloit chapter had a bi-racial membership with founders that were Beloit College professors, ministers and priests in Beloit churches and leading members of the "Negro community".
- The first officers of the Beloit chapter of the NAACP were Dr. F. E. Norman, a dentist and the only "Negro professional man in Beloit at the time"; Leon Peterson, secretary, and J.D. Stevenson, J.E. Guy, L.J. Ousley and G.P.L. Gordon.



Leon and Ocie Peterson



Sadie Bell

The Beloit Historical Society is collaborating with **Community Action** to provide a program at their Pathways location in the Eclipse Center on February 2, 2022, as part of the **Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours**. The digital presentation features Black individuals in Beloit who have made significant contributions to the city and have been inducted into the City Hall of Fame. Important individuals include Leon and Ocie Peterson and Sadie Bell.

Leon was a charter member of the NAACP Beloit chapter in 1919 and served as its secretary. His wife Ocie was a woman of extraordinary leadership in the community as she worked with many organizations. She was president of the **Wisconsin State Association of Colored Women's Clubs** and a charter member of the oldest Black club in Beloit, **The Women's Culture Club**.

Sadie Bell was also a prominent figure in Beloit's history. Moving to Beloit as a child, she championed the cause of equal rights very early. Sadie marched in Montgomery, Alabama, at great personal risk and was present in Washington D. C. for Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. She was **president of the Beloit chapter of the NAACP** for eight years. Her community involvement was instrumental in making the community aware of racial equality issues.

'One busload of Wisconsin residents who participated in the march on Washington D.C was met by Councilman John Falco (left) when it stopped in Beloit. Among the demonstrators were (from left) Miss Sadie Bell, president of the Beloit chapter of the NAACP; the Rev. William E. Morton, pastor of the Asbury Methodist Church, Janesville; Robert Abts, Janesville and the Rev. George W. Vann, pastor of the St. Paul A.M.E. church, Madison. The 38 passengers were from the Beloit, Janesville and Madison district.'



Photo taken by Beloit Daily News photographer Bill Heath ©All rights reserved; Beloit Daily News; Adams Publishing Group

Beloit Daily News article printed 8/30/1963.

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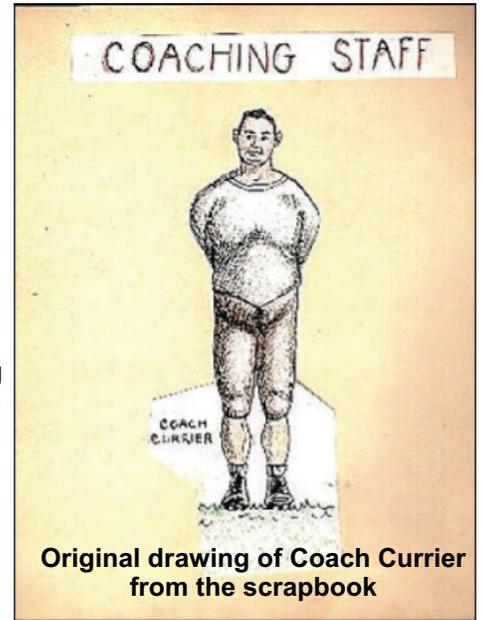
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Kenneth Currier Memorabilia

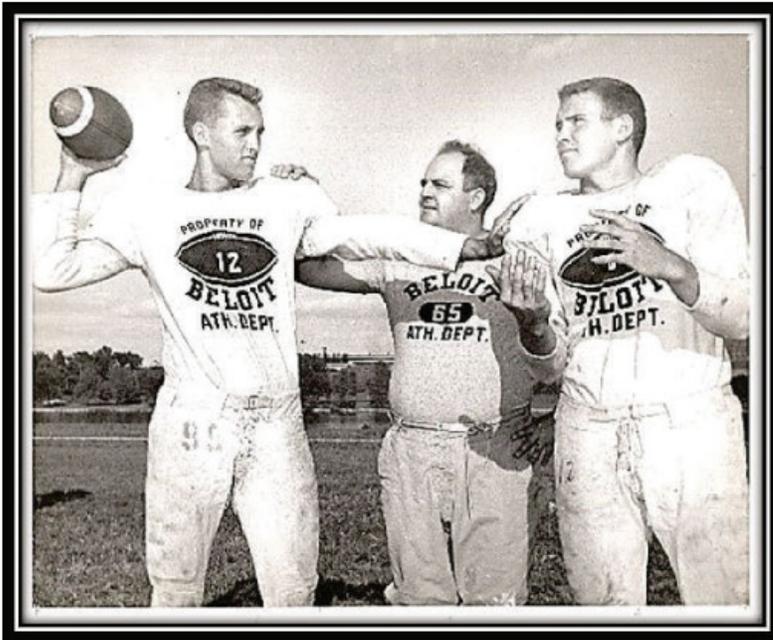
The Beloit Historical Society recently received a donation from Elizabeth Currier of materials that illustrate Kenneth Currier's athletic and coaching careers. Photographs, scrapbooks, letters, certificates and films of three 1952 Beloit High School football games during their championship year depict Kenneth's achievements and contributions to the City of Beloit.

Ken Currier was born on May 25, 1922, in Rice Lake, Wisconsin. He was a versatile, all sports athlete while attending Rice Lake High School; excelling in football, basketball and track. He was inducted into the Rice Lake High School Hall of Fame posthumously in 2002. The award was accepted in his honor by his son Charles. Ken attended the University of Wisconsin and was the starting guard on the 1942 team, one of Wisconsin's best football teams ranked third in the nation. Ken served as a B-29 pilot during World War II and returned to play football for the 1946 and 1947 seasons. He was destined for the Packers on Curly Lambeau's personal, written invitation, but he injured his knee against Northwestern in the second to last game of that year ending his playing career.

After graduation Ken was hired by Beloit High School where he was head coach of the football team from 1950 to 1959 and of the track and wrestling teams for seven years. All three sports won conference championships under Ken's coaching guidance. Ken's 1952 football team was the first undefeated football team at Beloit since 1936.



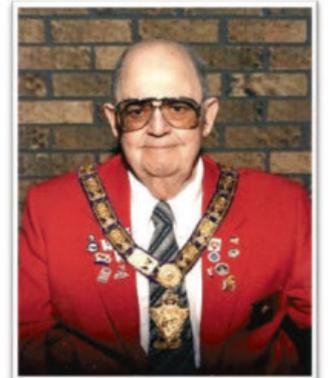
Original drawing of Coach Currier from the scrapbook



Ken (center) coaching two of his players

The donation includes a scrapbook of original sports drawings. Many of them were printed in the Beloit High School newsletter, *Increscent*. Ken served as the Athletic Director at Beloit Memorial High School for 34 years. During his tenure eight varsity sports were introduced for girls and hockey for boys. In 1990, Kenneth Currier was inducted into the Beloit Historical Society's Sports Hall of Fame.

Ken contributed to the City of Beloit through his participation and membership with a number of organizations. He was a member of the First United Methodist Church serving as an usher and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Beloit Lion's Club, Beloit Elk's Lodge No. 864 and National W Club of the University of Wisconsin. Ken was Exalted Ruler of the Beloit's Elk Lodge No. 864 for two years and District Deputy for a year. He passed away in 1998.



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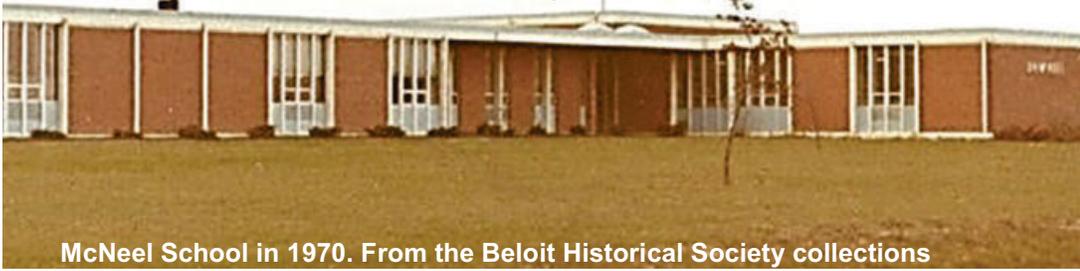
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New to the Collection



McNeel School in 1970. From the Beloit Historical Society collections

McNeel School was built as an elementary school in 1963 at 1524 Frederick St. when Beloit was expanding to the west with housing developments. The school was named after J.H. McNeel who was principal of Beloit High School from 1913 until his retirement in 1946, in recognition of his contributions to the education of youth in Beloit. When McNeel Elementary School opened its doors to students in 1964, Principal Peter Peterson welcomed them. He remained in this position until June 2, 1982, when the school closed its doors for renovations to become a junior high school, reopening September 8, 1985.

McNeel School Quilt



The quilt was made by students and staff in 1982 to commemorate the years the school served elementary age school children and their families. The quilt, measuring 110" x 95", is made up of student drawings that were transferred to fabric and sewn into rows. A large center square highlights the school's staff with embroidery. It was given to Peter Peterson as a gift in recognition of his service as principal. Arlene Peterson donated the quilt to the Beloit Historical Society in time for it to be part of the Quilt Show held November 6 & 7, 2021. It was a favorite of visitors as they recognized names of friends who had attended or worked at McNeel School.



Peter Peterson, principal of McNeel School
1964 – 1982.

Photo courtesy of Arlene Peterson

McNeel School quilt on display in the Beloit
Historical Society Quilt Show November 2021.

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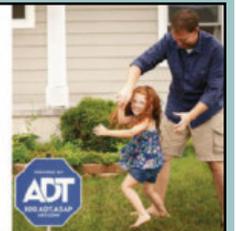
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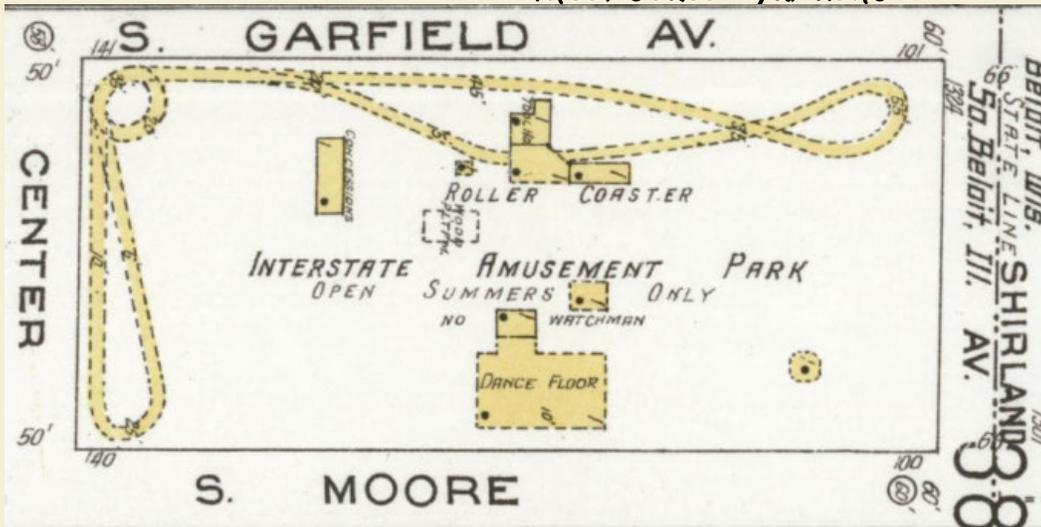
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Interstate Gardens



The following is taken from a short history written by Carl Harold Ramquist II in 1983 at age 75. He was living in Beloit at the time of his death.

Years of operation
1921-1926+

An amusement park, **Interstate Gardens**, was opened on the corner of Shirland Ave. and Moore St. It had a roller coaster, shooting gallery, various amusements and an outdoor dance pavilion. Interstate Gardens was open Saturday and Sunday nights. Streetcars went up Grand Ave., went south on Moore St. to the park, then north on Moore to Liberty Ave. then back to town.

Early 1900s Childhood Memory from a Beloit



Kids today complain there is nothing for them to do. Of course, there is television and other electronic devices. But what has become of the art of making your own equipment? In the summertime old baby buggies and tricycles became racing cars, scooters and any variety of wheel toys to keep busy having fun for hours at a time. Then, when snows came, if one was not fortunate enough to have his own skis, he made them from barrel staves. Today we have steel drums and plastic kegs, but barrels are very rare. Not so years ago. Empty wooden barrels were plentiful and a piece of old leather harness was cut and nailed on for a foot strap. These skis were not very controllable, so going downhill was an uncertain adventure usually ending with the skier downed in the snow but guaranteed hours of fun.

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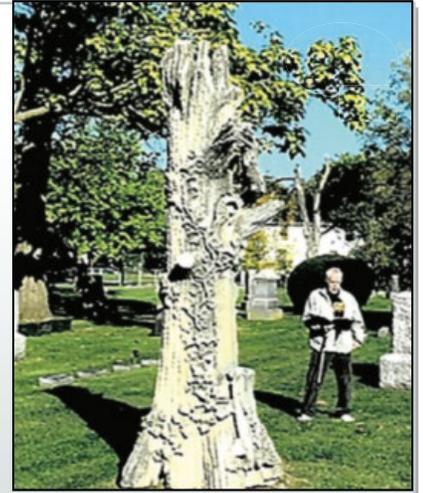


Cemetery Tour and Folklore



On October 23, the Beloit Historical Society, in conjunction with the City of Beloit Parks and Recreation Division, sponsored an Oakwood Cemetery Historical Walking Tour. A crowd of over 60 **taphophiles**, (someone who takes interest in cemeteries, tombstones, or memories of past life), were led on the tour by **John Kalkirtz** (left) and **John Sabaka** (right).

The tour brought to life stories of many of Beloit's founders and early residents. One such story involved Dollie Grout (1863-1884). Legend states she was killed by lightning while taking refuge under a tree. However, the *Beloit Weekly Press* states she died of Typhoid Fever.



Treestones were popular from 1880 until the early 1900s. They reflected the interest in "rusticity" - a desire for simplicity and getting back to nature. They might contain symbols about the deceased because of the versatile style and greater surface area. They were also symbolic because it takes a long time for a tree this size to grow from seed - that the person's life has been cut short. They were so popular that Sears, Roebuck & Co. sold treestones in their catalog back in the day.

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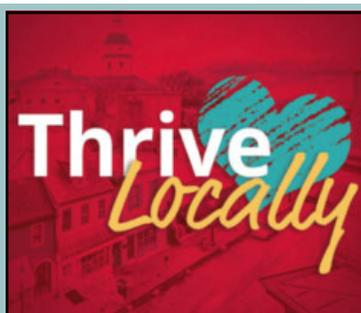
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To Those Who Love Rustic Art in Monumental Work

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Message from Executive Director, Donna Langford



2021 has drawn to a close and 2022 promises opportunities and continued growth. Thank you to everyone who provided support throughout 2021 and helped to make our year end appeal successful, meeting our goal of \$20,000 for general operating support. Our year-end report and list of our donors will be in the next *Confluence* issue.

2021 was a challenging year as the COVID-19 pandemic continued. We successfully addressed challenges through the continued implementation of safety protocols. Volunteers and six interns worked on a variety of projects including the research and installation of two new exhibits, scanning historic photographs and digitizing the biographies of inductees into the Sports and City Hall of Fames. Remote projects for the transcription of historic letters and setting up databases were successfully implemented.

We reopened our doors to general visitation Tuesdays – Thursdays and it was a pleasure to meet everyone who came in. The Leubke Family Memorial Library is once again in use by researchers and we were able to host a private party rental in our Community Room.

In January, we welcome a new staff member, **Vincent Friedrichs**, as our **Administrative Assistant**. He has a degree in Historic Preservation and experience working in museums. He will be a great asset as we finish up an interpretation plan and work on our strategic goals to increase accessibility to the collections to share Beloit's rich history in new ways. This spring semester we also welcome **intern Alexa Brooks** who will be assessing storage conditions of our art collection.

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and I look forward to seeing you at the Beloit Historical Society!

East End Club

We would like to thank the members of the East End Club for their donation to Beloit Historical Society to honor former members:

Judy Adams
Janet Nicolls

Each of these women was a valuable contributor and supporter of BHS. Thank you so much for honoring them with a donation in their names.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Charleta Affeldt
Diane Anderson
Beloit FilmWorks (business membership)
Cheryl Ann Blake
Darrah Chavey family
Lynda Wallis

Welcome New Volunteers

We are extremely happy to welcome two new volunteers. **Vick Hutchison** started volunteering for us this past fall. She is working remotely transcribing World War II letters.

Elizabeth Brewer started in December. She is helping us catalog archive donations into the collections.

Autumn Oakley (our fall 2020 intern) is returning as a volunteer on Saturdays to assist with collections.

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DID YOU KNOW?

* In 1856, a clothing merchant advertised “A busy place but we will wait on you. The season is at hand to put on a change of underwear. Let us supply your needs and help you save on doctor bills.”

* 1878, Selvy Blodgett purchased a local 960 pound hog and sent it to the Chicago Board of Trade to inform members what Beloit could raise! Talk about a Beloit booster.

* In 1879, the Eclipse Windmill Co. (mentioned in picture on page 2), had agencies in Moscow, Bombay, Paris, Liverpool, Havana and Rio De Janeiro.

* In 1907, swimmers disturbed eels that were 6 feet in length at Yost Park Beach.

* In 1917, Ken Hill walked to Lake Geneva from Beloit on wooden stilts.

* Bob Wilson, manager of the Wilson Opera House, was very superstitious. He always made the rounds of all doors 3 times to make certain that they were locked for the night before leaving. The he habitually walked across the street and kicked the light pole before going home. One night Ron Dougan and George Garrigan, finding out about this habit, prevented Wilson from kicking the post for over an hour.

TRIVIA TEASER

Question: How did an early pilot know the direction of the Beloit airport?

Answer: All he had to do was fly over the utility company's gas holding tanks. Spelled out in letters 10 feet high, 2 feet wide and 6 feet between was the word “BELOIT” with an arrow pointing to the airport. The arrow was 110 feet long with an arrowhead 14 feet wide.

Quilt Show Results

Quilts filled the Community Room at the Beloit Historical Society on November 6 and 7, 2021, for a local Quilt Show. The show celebrated the rich quilting heritage of the stateline region.

Quilts made in the late 1800s to the present were displayed, illustrating a wide range of methods and use of color.

Quiltmakers chose to enter their quilts for display only or to be judged in the categories of bed quilts or wall hangings.



Visitors voted on their favorite quilt for a Viewer's Choice Award which was given to **Robin Gausebeck's** appliqued quilt, “Art of the Ancient World”. Each block contains Robin's interpretation of the decorative motifs of sixteen ancient civilizations.

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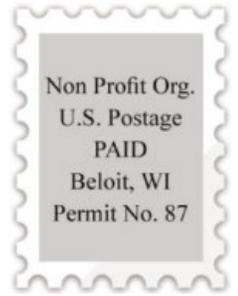


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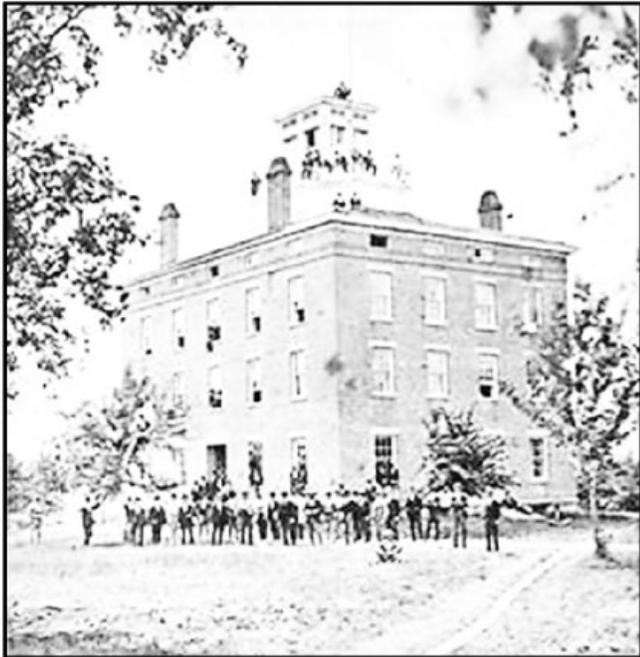
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Do you recognize this building?

See answer on cover of this
issue of Confluence.

(It also plays a part in the details on page 2)

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