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Drawing A Bead On Mead

Photographer
Puts Historic
Building On
Display At
GAR Gallery

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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As David Jensen did a photographic study of the historic Mead Building in Yankton, he was left with no doubt that it will persevere in some sense against the challenges of time and nature.

However, he wants the building to have the opportunity to do more than simply stand as a reminder of the distant past.

"I would hope that the building does more than persevere," Jensen said. "I would hope that it would again become useful, occupied and that people work there and visit it."

The more than century-old structure was vacated in 1980 by the South Dakota Human Services Center and placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Abandonment has taken its toll on the building, and it has slowly deteriorated.

However, early efforts are under way to renovate the Mead Building and make it the new home of the Dakota Territorial Museum.

Jensen spent about two weeks during the course of three months taking photos of the Mead Building with a film camera. The negatives were then digitized to allow Jensen to work with them.

The result of his work can be seen in a Yankton Area Arts exhibit called "Mead" at the G.A.R. Hall, located at 508 Douglas Avenue. The exhibit runs through July 17 and consists of 16 black and white photographs, along with written commentary.

The project represents a departure for Jensen, who spent much of his professional career as a magazine editor.

"I've taken many, many photographs," Jensen said. "But as a magazine editor, I would cover a story and then support it with photographs. This project is the other way around. In this case, I did research. I spent about three days at the Human Services Center library doing research. But the research was to support the photography. It was fun and I enjoyed it."

Originally, he had planned to train his eye on the Dakota Theatre, another historic Yankton structure and a place where he spent a good deal of time as a youth. But a friend suggested he take a look at the Mead Building.

The dramatic lighting of the facility through its large windows intrigued Jensen, and he settled on making it his subject.

At first, he didn't have a photo exhibit in mind.

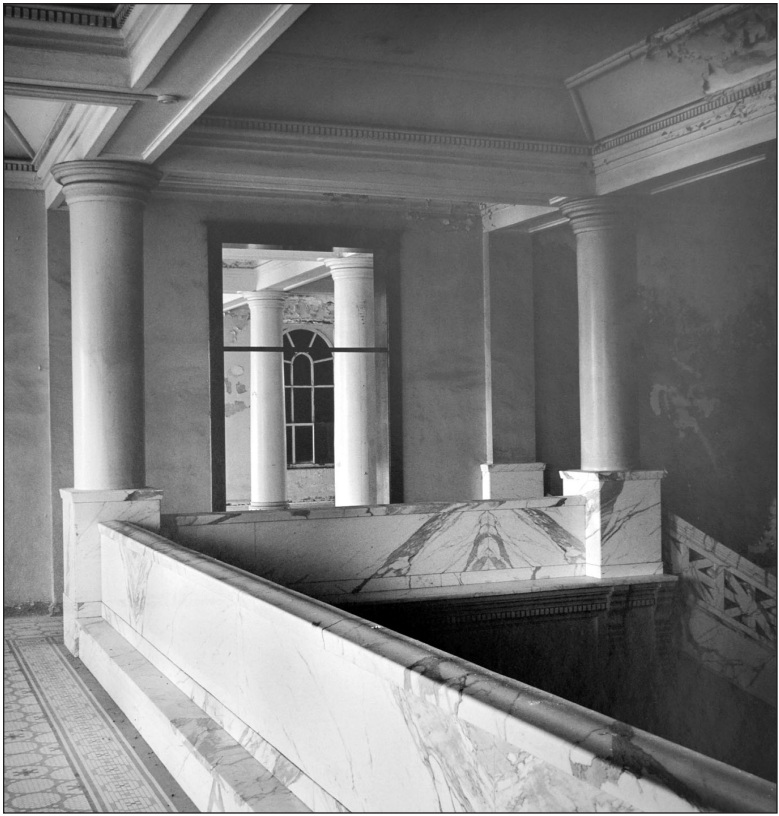
"Once I started making the investment (in film and time), I felt I had to have some end result," Jensen said. "It didn't have to be a return, but it had to have a result. I couldn't invest that kind of time and money and just have nice pictures in a box."

Originally, Jensen and his wife had agreed to have a joint show for Yankton Area Arts. Eventually, the two decided that the Mead photos should be an exhibit on their own.

Jensen said the intent of the show is to create awareness of the Mead Building rather than advocate for its renovation — even though he wants to see the building have a productive future. In fact, 10 percent of the proceeds from any photos sold will go toward the renovation of the Mead Building.

"I want people to be aware of what they've got," he said. "I think Yanktonians have a lot, and I don't know if they all realize it. If there is any way I can heighten that realization, that's what I want to do."

Signaling that his interest is informing people beyond the use of images alone, Jensen made the



The two images to the left are part of the "Mead" exhibit showing at the G.A.R. Hall in Yankton through July 17. Photographer David Jensen (right) of Yankton trained his camera on the historic Mead Building on the South Dakota Human Services Center campus during the course of three months. He hopes the exhibit creates awareness of the more than century-old structure. (Courtesy photos)

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