



Remaking Mead

The Yankton County Historical Society is in the process of renovating one of Yankton's historical buildings, the Mead Building on the former Human Services Center campus. When the renovations are complete the building will house the society's immense collection of Yankton's history and the Dakota Territorial Museum.

The project, under the supervision of the YCHS board of directors and museum director Crystal Nelson, is a big undertaking and has provided those involved with a unique perspective of Yankton's history.

The Mead Building, which was the women's dormitory of HSC was built in 1909. The building itself is inextricably tied to Dr. Leonard C. Mead, who served as superintendent of the care facility for some 27 years and was the mastermind behind the building's design.

"Dr. Mead was a forward thinker," Nelson said. "He believed in surrounding patients with beauty."

Dr. Mead was not only a doctor, but also a teacher, engineer, architect, business professional and artist. Under his management, he advanced the progressive notion that residents with mental illness were patients, not criminals, and deserved a home among ideal surroundings and nature, which would soothe and promote healing. This attitude was reflected in design of the grounds, as well as the many build-

ings he built over the years, and this statement by Dr. Mead:

"In the treatment of the insane we find that their surroundings are very important. Normal people are influenced much more than they realize by the pictures and buildings about them, by beauty or by ugliness. They are improved or degraded by what they look upon. The same is true of the insane."

Dr. Mead did not tolerate shoddy work and intended the buildings built on the HSC campus to stand for centuries. Built in 1909, Mead is a three-story Sioux quartzite and cast concrete building. Identified as a Neo Renaissance style structure, it exhibits features we do not often associate with contemporary construction. Like many others on this site, labor for this building was provided largely by supervised patients and residents.

The building, which bears his name, was representative of his humanist philosophy and belief that an environment, both pleasant and attractive, was an important therapeutic tool, and contributed to well-being and healing. His philosophy of embracing beauty extended to gardens, grounds and impressive landscaping to the benefit of patients and caregivers.

"Under Dr. Mead's direction every building on the campus was filled with fresh flowers every week," Nelson said. "He bought artwork with his own money and surrounded the patients with beauty