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Dodge County Independent

1918 Kasson School Architect and History

What's Happening Around Town

By Joe and Flo

Flo: Hey Joe, That was a great movie. Thank you for inviting me to the historic Kasson State Theater. Where are we going for a bite to eat?

Joe: I am taking you to Daniels. I love their homemade bread, salads and all the great food they have there. You can follow me in my car.

Flo: I parked next to you. Thanks for getting a table. I like the tables by the windows. Say, I called Sherman Associates yesterday to ask some questions about the purchase agreement for Kasson's historic 1918 School. I asked if there was anything I could do to help. They said they have received lots of calls from citizens in Kasson. Did I tell you my sister attended elementary school there? Blanche Neseth was one of her teachers. Blanch still lives in Kasson.

Joe: Yes, I know Blanche. She wrote a letter to the editor last fall supporting the reuse of the school.

Flo: Who designed that beautiful school building?

Joe: Good question. An architect name Nels Sydney Jacobson Jr. designed it as well as many other schools in Minnesota and elsewhere. He also designed Owatonna's high school which, like the Kasson School, was also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Both Nels and his brother David were born in Owatonna, Minnesota. Nels was born January 10, 1892 and David was born on October 31, 1889. David was a structural engineer. He worked with Nels on many of his designs to include the Kasson School. After graduating from Owatonna public schools, the brothers completed their education at the University of Pennsylvania. They returned to their hometown of Owatonna to practice architecture and structural engineering. They eventually founded the architectural and engineering firm of Jacobson & Jacobson in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Nels was the youngest of five Jacobson brothers and the son of Mr. and Mrs. Nels S. Jacobson. Nels served in the Army in World War I in an aeronautical drafting and architecture unit. Nels went to heaven in August of 1947 and David joined him shortly thereafter on October 15, 1947. Say, isn't your brother an architect?

Flo: Yes he is. My brother loves the design of the Kasson School. He recently told me the school's architecture exhibits a beautiful neo-classical revival-style design. The remainder of the building's architecture leans toward prairie school style as exhibited in

the trim and the sweeping overhanging eaves. There is no other building in Kasson like it or for that matter in this entire area.

Joe: Yes, the Kasson School building is a gem. After it opened the state inspector of school buildings stated there is nothing equal to it in the entire state in the way of completeness and architectural design. After the Owatonna School opened in 1921, the Minneapolis Journal proclaimed it to be a “masterpiece” of architectural design and function as a school. One of the Jacobson brother’s more celebrated design accomplishments is the Federated Insurance Company building in Owatonna which they originally designed for the Minnesota Mutual Fire Insurance Company in 1922. The Federated building is one of the last examples of Prairie School architecture built in the Midwest. The building’s architecture has been recognized by the Minneapolis Institute of Art and is include on architectural tours of the state.

Flo: Wow! Kasson is privileged to have a school building of this stature. This project is going to be very exciting. It will be a boost to main street businesses. Imagine all those residents living within walking distance of everything Kasson’s main street has to offer. Hey Joe, I have to run. I have many more questions to include some about your city council and staff but I will save them for next time.

Sponsored by KARE (Kasson Alliance for Restoration)

For more information call 507-634-7435

<http://www.kassonalliance.org>

KassonAlliance@Kmtel.com

See the Webpage for Facebook and YouTube Links.

KARE's mission is to preserve Kasson's history, historic buildings and historic structures to serve as landmarks to Kasson's heritage while being a source of education in the importance of historic preservation.