

# They left their heart in San Francisco – township hall, that is

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Before and after (pictured) photos of the recently restored historic San Francisco Township Hall. (Photos by Minnesota Historical Society and Al Lohman)



In just over two weeks, folks around the county will be going to their municipal polling place or township hall to vote in the general election. In San Francisco Township, residents will be casting ballots in their historic, newly restored town hall which was once a one-room school.

The District 22 schoolhouse located in Carver County's southern township between Carver and Belle Plaine is on the National Register of Historic places. It was recently repaired and stabilized through a Minnesota Historical Society legacy grant.

The landmark 1917 one-room school reflects the township's heritage and the value placed on education by early Swedish settlers, historians say. The building served as a school until educational consolidation and now continues as a voting precinct and public meeting place. It's also one of the few brick one-room school houses still standing — the only one in Carver County, although that might not be the case had it not been for San Francisco Township supervisors and a group of committed residents.

The largely abandoned building was literally falling apart when in 2017 supervisors determined something needed to be done. The foundation was crumbling, bricks were tumbling, windows were boarded up, there was no heat or plumbing, and the place was infested with mice, bats, even raccoons.

So explains Phillip Solseng, township resident and civil engineer, who was tapped to lead a citizens advisory committee to determine what to do with the structure.

The first step was to hire an architect to do a building assessment. With the price of restoration anticipated to be greater than the township budget, the next step was to try to get the building designated as a historic site to enable the group to apply for state Legacy funds. That was a lengthy process, with designation of the town hall to the National Register of Historic Places finally attained in 2021.

Then came another round of technical evaluations and cost estimates followed by grant-writing with guidance from the Carver County Historical Society and led by resident Maddie Wagener. The Legacy grant was awarded in 2022 through the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund in the amount of just over \$175,000. The bulk of the repair work was completed in 2023.

Repairs involved in filling the basement, stabilizing corners, fixing foundation walls, installing drain tile, repointing limestone bricks, repairing the chimney base and cracking, and adding new downspouts and windows. Community members also added an ADA-compliant wheelchair ramp as a grant match.

Solseng notes that there is still some interior work remaining that might have to wait for another grant or budget round. But overall, residents and historians say they are pleased the township hall will continue to represent the schooling history of the area while serving as a meeting and voting place for the 900 residents who live in San Francisco Township.

Ironically, Lois H. (Dahlke) Scott, an East Union native who attended classes at the one-room school, died just a few weeks ago at the age of 94. San Francisco Township Clerk Heidi Schmidt conducted an interview with Scott a few years earlier where she shared her recollections about old school days.

She attended the one-room school from 1934-1942. Classes went through 8th grade with no kindergarten. There were usually two students in each grade with one teacher, Scott recalled. Warren Hallgren was her classmate, Hildur Carlson was her teacher.

There was an outhouse in the back of the school and no running water. The boys had to go across the road where there was a pump to bring in water for the day. The school was heated with a wood stove in the winter.

A bell started the school day at 9 a.m. School was dismissed at 4 p.m. All students walked to school, most about a mile. If the weather was bad one of the dads would take them all with horse and buggy, Scott said in the interview.

After grade school, Scott attended high school in Belle Plaine and after graduation went on to the College of Medical Technology in Minneapolis, which led to a career as a lab/x-ray technician and administrator with Valley Medical Clinic in Chaska.

As a footnote, Scott graduated as valedictorian from both her high school and college classes, while classmate Warren Hallgren was salutatorian at Belle Plaine High School.

She attested that to the great education they had received at the District 22 one-room school house.

## **Historical footnote**

There are just two San Franciscos in the country, according to historical accounts — the city by the bay in California and the township along the Minnesota River in Carver County. William Foster, a surviving member of the ill-fated Donner Party wagon train to California, worked as a carpenter in San Francisco before moving his family to Carver County in the mid-1850s to start a village of San Francisco in these parts. Foster was one of the first commissioners in Carver County, but returned to California about 1860 as his ambitions for a San Francisco, Minn., fell short of expectations with the expansion of Carver and Chaska to the east, and a series of disastrous spring floods along Carver Rapids on the Minnesota River.

San Francisco was the original county seat of Carver County, but lost that status to Chaska in 1856. Now the township is mostly picturesque farmland, and wooded banks and bluffs of the river.