



## Children Find Home:

# Diocese Constructs St. Thomas Orphanage

**T**he townhouses in the Bishop Square development at 3900 S. 27<sup>th</sup> are a relatively new addition to the neighborhood. Although areas that surround the Square were developed in the 1950's, the townhouses were not constructed until the mid-1970's. Prior to that time, the 10-acre site was occupied by the St. Thomas Orphanage.

Sponsored by the Catholic Diocese in Lincoln, the orphanage was home to more than 10,000 children over a 60 year period. A detailed account of the institution is found in Loretta Gosen's book, *A History of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Lincoln: 1887-1987* and serves as the basis for much of the material and quotations in this article.

The St. Thomas Orphanage was the brainchild of Lincoln's first Catholic Bishop, the Most Rev. Thomas Bonacum. As early as 1898, Bishop Bonacum saw a need for an institution that would house the children of Lincoln who were left homeless by the neglect or loss of one or both parents. He wanted it to be "an impressive structure which would serve as an ornament to the vicinity." He hoped to locate it near the Bishop's residence (the southeast corner of what is now 27<sup>th</sup> and Calvert) in the hopes that an electric trolley line would eventually be built in that direction. He also wanted to connect a fully functioning farm to the institution. Finally, he insisted that the orphanage be constructed without putting the diocese into debt.

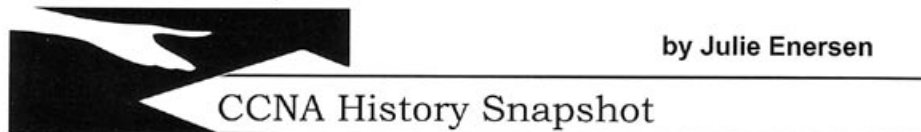
A committee of clergy and laymen was formed and determined that the funds from the Easter collection would be directed toward the building of the orphanage. In 1901, the committee purchased land southwest of the Bishop's residence to use for the orphanage and began soliciting construction bids with the stipulation that the building cost no more than \$42,000. All of the bids exceeded that amount and were therefore rejected.

However, the committee was anxious to get the project underway and decided to use available funds to complete the first phase of the

construction in 1902. "Five years of contributions, consisting mostly of quarters and half-dollars from the five thousand families in the diocese, had resulted in financial resources for constructing only the basement." As a result, Bishop Bonacum decided to pay a personal visit to each of the families in the diocese in order to make an appeal for contributions. As donations began to amass, the Bishop remained personally involved in the construction process. He solicited numerous bids and traveled extensively to find the most economical building materials available.

*(Continued on Page 2)*

by Julie Enersen



## CCNA History Snapshot



Upon its completion in 1906, the St. Thomas Orphanage was considered one of the most attractive buildings in the western U.S. *Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society.*

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In the end, Bishop Bonacum's dreams were realized. The impressive structure and its adjacent farm were free of debt when the \$80,000 orphanage was completed in 1906. (Eventually, an electric trolley line would run past the institution.) The first seven residents arrived in 1907 to be cared for by the Sisters of Charity of Quebec, Canada. After that, the numbers increased rapidly with enrollment peaking at 110 children in the late 1930's. In addition to studies in education, health, values and religion, the boys were trained in farming and the girls in domestic science.

"An engineer, two farmers, and a gardener aided the sisters. The farm supplied milk, eggs, butter, and meat for the children, while the garden supplied the vegetables."

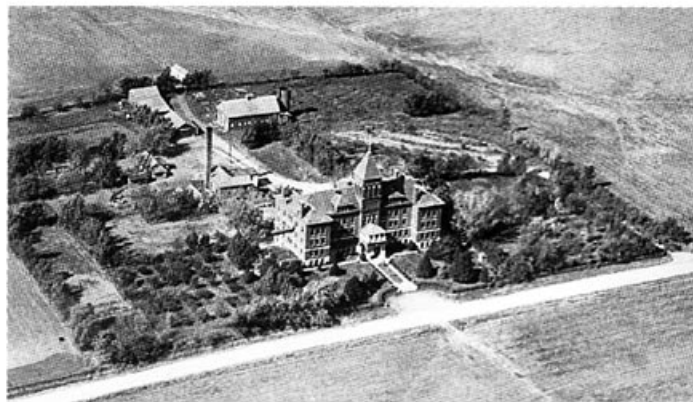
The orphanage served area children through the 1960's until two

factors contributed to its demise. First, foster care was now seen as a preferable option to even the best institutional care. "With better placement techniques, expansion of the foster-home program and the efficiency of the Catholic Social Services Bureau, the large and expensive orphanage became somewhat of an anachronism."

Second, the building had become an obsolete fire hazard and bringing the building up to code was simply too costly. The St. Thomas Orphanage was razed on December 21, 1966.

The area was subsequently rezoned for

residential, multiple-family use and sold to developers who planned to build a number of four-plex homes. The project stalled over the ensuing years until the builders were replaced by developer Gale Goodwin and architect Jim Junge from Colorado. Forty-eight townhouse units in Bishop Square now share the site with trees which once stood on the St. Thomas Orphanage lawn.



The St. Thomas Orphanage occupied the ten-acre area now known as Bishop Square. Courtesy of the Catholic Church Diocese of Lincoln.

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**Helpful Tips for Maintaining Your Home**

by Ryan Omel



This time of the year it is easy to stay indoors and enjoy the comforts of air conditioning and forget about doing anything outside; however, if you haven't started that summer project, now is the time. In this issue I will discuss some common sense approaches to keep in mind when you're working on your home this summer. The key in the heat is not to over do yourself. Take plenty of breaks (in the shade), drink fluids (avoid drinks that contain high amounts of sugar) and wear light colored clothing.

If you are working on a larger project that requires more than one person, get to know your fellow CCNA neighbors and ask for help or divide the project into smaller projects and do part of the work over several days. If you have just had it with the heat, you can always wait until the cooler fall weather comes our way. In the mean time, here are some things you should check at home this time of year:

- **Air conditioner:** Always ensure leaves and debris have been cleared from the outside unit. See if fins are bent, which may affect your air conditioner; this should be checked by a professional.
- **Downspouts and gutters:** If you have moved the downspout extensions, make sure these are put back after mowing.
- **Exterior siding/shingles:** Inspect siding to make sure it is not loose, rotted or missing. Inspect your roof using binoculars if you don't want to climb it. Summer storms can damage shingles/flashing.
- **Test GFCI outlets:** Test your GFCI (Ground-fault circuit-interrupter) outlets. They are they outlets in kitchens and bathrooms that have two buttons in the middle. Make sure you plug in an appliance and press test. If it shuts off, you're ok to press reset. If not, contact a qualified service technician.