

The Chatfield Heritage Preservation Commission presents:

# SELF-GUIDED TOUR & HISTORY HUNT



Chatfield  
center for the arts

*The historic Chatfield School has been an integral part of the heritage of the Chosen Valley for over 100 years. The 1916 high school building is historically and architecturally distinguished and reflects a community's desire to embrace early twentieth-century educational reforms in school instruction, building design and construction.*

*Since it opened in the midst of the Great Depression, Potter Auditorium has been an irreplaceable community asset as well as a potent symbol of the town's commitment to the cultural enrichment of citizens of all ages.*

*Together, these historic properties have been preserved to continue to inspire, educate and connect future generations. This tour is designed to do the same. We hope you find yourself a bit more knowledgeable and a perhaps a bit inspired by the architecture and stories contained within these walls.*

---

## 4TH STREET ENTRANCE | 1916 SCHOOL

For almost 160 years this city block has held a school. First in 1865 then in 1888 when the 1865 school was replaced. The high school addition you are standing in was built in 1916 as the district stood to lose state funding if they did not improve their overcrowded building. It was attached to the 1888 Graded School and opened with 131 students. The architects were Tyrie and Chapman of Minneapolis and it featured a "progressive" school design with modern amenities like electricity, plumbing, laboratories, and large windows. This entrance is not original but instead the space was part of the the Manual Training (Industrial Arts) classroom.

> Have you ever noticed the bell that sits in front of the current High School? It's the original bell that hung at the 1865 school. The school trustees held a ball to raise funds for its purchase.

## MAIN FLOOR HALLWAY | 1916 SCHOOL

Moving into the hallway, to your left is the former "boys entrance." The original main entrances were along Main Street and designed to be used separately by boys and girls. Just past the boys entrance, also on your left, is the "Legion Room." It was originally three rooms, the superintendent's office with a security vault and two Commercial Department classrooms (one typing room and one finance room.) The white grate covers you see around the room were an aesthetic choice added during the latest renovation to hide the original state-of-the-art-for-the-time air handling system designed by the Charles Pillsbury Co. (of Pillsbury Flour/Dough fame.) It is now referred to as the Legion Room because the local Legion donated funds to restore the space.

> Can you find on the floor where the walls, bank teller station and vault were once located?

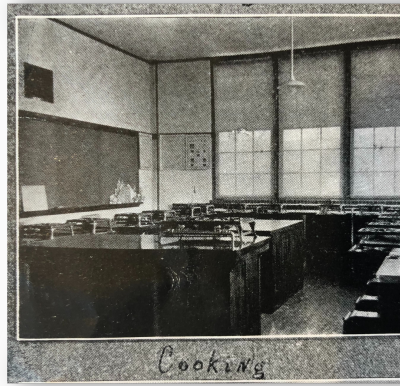
Back out in the hallway and across from the Legion Room is the "Sunken Gym." It was originally designed and used as a below-grade gym so that the hallway could be used as a "spectators gallery."

The space was quickly outgrown after it was built; a newspaper article notes that girls had to run across the street to the town hall (which stood where the fire department now stands.) In later years it was used for shop class and then the floor was raised so it could be used as a library.

> Looking at the walls, can you find the height of the raised floor?

## SECOND FLOOR - 1916 SCHOOL

Just across LINK bridge you'll come to an open space room on your right and restrooms on your left. Originally designed as part of the Domestic Science program, this space housed the Cooking and Sewing classrooms with a model dining room and living room in between. A dumbwaiter was built to lower food down to the first level but was covered up in a later remodel.



Moving past the top of the staircase, you'll come to the large open "Assembly Room." Originally called the "Study Room," it was filled with rows of desks that faced a small stage on the far wall. The stage was flanked by two recitation rooms and a small library. The Assembly room was later divided into classrooms ultimately obscuring the skylights until the most recent renovations revealed them once again. The nearby "Domestic Kitchen" provided food for community and school events. The doors to the right open up into what is now the Studio. Originally the Science Lab, it had rows of tables and built-in cabinets.



> Can you find evidence of where a staircase once led from this room into the 1887 school?

## STAIRWAY TO FIRST FLOOR

With Mission Revival-inspired arches and iron balconets, the stairway to the main floor is a great example of the building's external historic architecture. "Mission Revival drew inspiration from the late 18th and early 19th century Spanish missions in California. It was most popular between 1890 and 1915, in numerous residential, commercial and institutional structures, particularly schools and railroad depots." The Class of 1921 is memorialized in this space but it is unknown as to when they donated and what the landscaping features were.

> Did you notice all four memorial plaques as you walked around the building?

## EXTERIOR NOTES

- The green trim you see around the 1916 school is very close to the original paint color.
- The sidewalk pattern on the Main Street side of the buildings was also the original design.
- The parking lot on the Twiford Street side of the building was where tennis courts once stood before they were moved to the current High School.

---

The Chatfield Heritage Preservation Commission is a group of seven mayoral appointees charged with assisting in the preservation of historic and/or architecturally significant buildings, structures and sites. For information about meeting agendas, meeting minutes, or project information visit: [www.ci.chatfield.mn.us/government/boards-commissions/heritage-preservation-commission](http://www.ci.chatfield.mn.us/government/boards-commissions/heritage-preservation-commission)

As you progress further down the hall, you will see the Girls entrance on your left (now an emergency exit) followed by the "1916 Gallery." The gallery and the hallway space were originally the Agricultural Department classrooms. (See photo.)

It is now a visual arts pop-up gallery and bar space.

> Can you find the original door to the 1916 Gallery/Ag Room?



## THE "LINK"

Moving from the original school building you are now entering the "Link." In 1916, this was the outside of the building with a greenhouse attached to the back of the Ag Room. A walkway was later built to connect the school and auditorium, eliminating one of the Agriculture Rooms.

> Can you find evidence of where the greenhouse and walkway were once attached to the school?

## MAIN FLOOR - POTTER AUDITORIUM

From the LINK, head through the wooden doors onto the main floor of Potter Auditorium. Built in 1936 as a PWA (Public Works Administration) project, it had a construction cost of \$88,000 (2.5 million in today's dollars.) The PWA was a New Deal program created to give emergency relief to the construction industry during the depths of the Great Depression. 45% of the building cost was financed through the PWA with the remaining through bonding. The bond passed by just 11 votes. The architects were Tolz, King and Day from St. Paul. TK&D played a significant role in designing many historic landmarks, including the Como Park Conservatory, the iconic Hamms Building and the Robert and Wabasha Street bridges. The auditorium's design is considered "PWA Art Moderne" in which structures were meant to depict permanence, stability and authority. Stone and other durable materials (relaying strength and prosperity) were used significantly. The building got its name in 1972 when it was dedicated to George Potter, superintendent of schools who was the primary champion of the project in 1936. Prior to that it had often been called "Potter's Folly."

Originally seating 916, the seats were replaced in 2015 reducing the number to just over 600 but made to match original design. The class of 1936 delayed their ceremony to be able to walk the stage and it was the largest crowd assembled indoors in Chatfield up to that time. The stage was also used as a recreational space for basketball, volleyball, wrestling, amateur boxing and shooting. Bullet holes can still be seen on south wall of the stage. Other original features include a ticket booth at the Main Street entrance and one tiny bathroom for each gender at rear. Oh, and we can't forget Potter's ghost...

> Can you find the ticket booth? Can you imagine selling tickets to a 1938 U of MN "Galloping Gophers" basketball match or a 1983 Golden Gloves Boxing competition?

## BALCONY - POTTER AUDITORIUM

Heading out the doors at the rear of the floor toward Main Street and up the left stairway you'll find yourself in the balcony. Featuring original wooden seats and light fixtures, the bars on the balcony were added as a safety measure after the building was completed.

> Have a seat. Imagine two hours here with no air conditioning. Did you hear Potter's ghost?