Few North Dakota colleges provide president's homes

By: Amy Dalrymple, INFORUM

VCSU house now used as guest inn

A former Valley City (N.D.) State University president’s house was slated to become a parking lot until a group of volunteers stepped in to save the Victorian home.

At one time, VCSU and each of the other 10 North Dakota state universities had a president’s home.

Today, North Dakota State University, the University of North Dakota and Dickinson State University are the only ones that continue providing housing for their presidents.

Both NDSU and UND recently completed new homes for their presidents, prompting a look at what other universities in the region provide for housing.

When the VCSU president’s home was no longer going to be used as a residence in 1993, the President’s House Preservation Society formed to restore it and turn it into a money-maker for the university.

“One of the options was to tear down this house and use it for parking, which we didn’t want to see,” said Becky Heise, co-chairwoman of the group.

It is now a historic landmark and guest inn.

The Valley City president’s house was built in 1901 by Ludvig S. Platou, who built Valley City’s first hospital and served as the city’s mayor.

In Platou’s obituary, it stated he was a friend of Teddy Roosevelt, said Heise, also a researcher for the local historical society.

A popular, though undocumented, story about the house is that Roosevelt once delivered a speech there, Heise said.
Carlos Eben Allen was the first VCSU president to live in the home. He moved into the home in 1918 and bought it for the university in 1921.

The house is on a steep incline with 36 steps leading up to the front door. Accessibility was a major reason the house was no longer suitable for a president, who needs to host events.

The society is working to improve the accessibility after completing significant work to the rest of the house.

The house can be rented for events such as bridal showers or business meetings and for overnight stays.

Once the restoration is complete, the home will be returned to the university to decide if it should be an alumni center or serve another purpose, said Jan Stowman, co-chairwoman of the society.

“Our whole purpose was to restore the home and save it,” she said.

**Mayville State**

The Mayville State University president once lived in Northwest Hall, a building that was constructed in 1911 as an infirmary for sick students.

It was converted to a president’s house in the 1930s and used for that purpose through 1955, said Steve Bensen, vice president for business affairs.

At that time, a nonprofit called the Mayville Mutual Aid Corp. constructed a new home for the president using private funds.

The group received authorization to spend $34,000 on a one-story rambler across the street from campus, he said.

The nonprofit sold the home in 2000 or 2001, and it’s now occupied by a private resident, Bensen said. Northwest Hall is being renovated by alumni and friends to be an alumni center.

**Minot State**

Minot State University had a president’s house that was completed in 1941, said Mark Timbrook, an adjunct history instructor who is writing the campus’ history.

The two-story home was constructed by the National Youth Administration, a New Deal agency established following the Great Depression.

In 1985, it was sold and moved off campus to make way for Lura Manor, a residence hall, Timbrook said.
Minot State University used this president’s house from 1941 until 1985, when it was sold and moved off campus. Special to The Forum

The home was moved about five miles north of Minot along Highway 83, where it is still occupied, Timbrook said.

**Moorhead homes**

Concordia College has owned three homes for presidents. The first one, used from 1903 to 1920, has since been razed.

Between 1920 and 1951, the president lived in what is now called the Aasgaard House, named after President J.A. Aasgaard. The building now houses the Office of Communications and Marketing.

Concordia’s president has lived in the current house at the corner of Eighth Street and Seventh Avenue South since 1951. The home was built in 1910.

Minnesota State University Moorhead has not provided a home for its president.

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