




MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Johnston Hall, Faribault, Minnesota A Case Study in Reuse

<b>Address</b>	633 S.E. First St., Faribault (Rice County)	
<b>Date of Study</b>	November 1986	
<b>Date of Construction</b>	1888	
<b>Owner</b>	Ankeney/Kell Architects	
<b>Cost of Study</b>	\$6,500	
<b>Study Sponsors</b>	National Trust for Historic Preservation Johnston Hall Preservation Committee City of Faribault	
<b>Projected Rehab Costs</b>	\$968,030	
<b>Actual Rehab Costs</b>	\$1.3 million + costs after rehab	
<b>Past Use</b>	Classrooms for Seabury Divinity School, later classrooms for Vo-Tec Institute	
<b>Current Use</b>	Houses medical specialists associated with adjacent District One Hospital	

### Background:

Erected in the spring of 1888 from Faribault blue limestone, this magnificent building was the new home for the Seabury Divinity School, charged with training missionaries to work with the region's American Indian peoples. Johnston Hall's significance derives from its association with Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple, who founded one of the state's most prominent religious and educational movements. In addition, the building is an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, displaying massive rusticated stonework, an arched portico and windows, and a prominent bell tower.

Occupied since 1960 by the Faribault Area Vocational/Technical Institute, the building was vacated in 1984 after the Minnesota Department of Education determined it unsafe. Mortar on the exterior had deteriorated and settlement of the bell tower created a hazard. In the summer

of 1985, a group of Mankato physicians called Seabury Partners came forward with a proposal to restore Johnston Hall to its original grandeur for use as an orthopedic clinic. After purchasing the building from District One Hospital for \$20,000 and being offered more than \$1.4 million in tax increment financing and industrial revenue bonds by the City of Faribault, Seabury Partners pulled out of the deal due to anticipated high restoration costs. District One Hospital then voted to demolish the building.

Enter the Johnston Hall Preservation Committee in February of 1986. Formed by concerned citizens, the committee requested that demolition be postponed while a plan was developed to save the building. After numerous meetings, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota were brought in to assist with a reuse study.

### **The Reuse Study: Process and Conclusions**

The reuse study for Johnston Hall was patterned after the National Trust's Preservation Advisory Services Team (PAST) model, which emphasizes the need for objective professional participation in successful building reuse projects. The study was funded by the National Trust, the City of Faribault, and the Johnston Hall Preservation Committee at a cost of about \$6,500. The sizable team of professionals included an architect, two preservation architects, a planner, a health care consultant, an arts space planner, a development consultant, and a preservation planner.

A series of interviews with area professionals clarified issues on the feasibility of Johnston Hall's reuse. In their final report, the study team categorized the issues by economic, community, arts, and medical factors.

After assessing the positive and negative impacts of each issue and examining the associated costs with an economic pro forma, the team recommended that Johnston Hall be redeveloped as a health provider facility. Such a facility would be compatible with nearby services offered by District One Hospital, the team concluded. And the use of investment tax credits and façade easement programs would help to make the restoration project more economical and attractive to prospective developers.

The estimated cost of redeveloping Johnston Hall was put at roughly \$940,000. Previous estimates by the City of Faribault based on a "first-class," meticulously restored building had been much higher. The revised cost estimates helped alleviate fears in the community that rehabilitating the building was beyond economic feasibility.



## **Current Building Use**

Owned and developed by Ankeny/Kell Architects of St. Paul, Johnston Hall has become the venue for a variety of services including ophthalmology, physical therapy, and orthopedics. All services are affiliated with Faribault's District One Hospital.

The development of Johnston Hall into a working medical facility was not easy. Following the reuse study, a unanimous vote by the District One Hospital delayed demolition for six months while a developer was sought. Ankeny/Kell Architects (then Ankeny Builders) was selected on the basis of its proposal to renovate the interior of the building and repair and retain the exterior. In the end, actual rehabilitation and post-rehabilitation costs proved higher than expected.

Today the exterior of Johnston Hall remains true to its original form, with architectural details salvaged or replicated to match the originals. Those who work in the 120-year-old building take great pride in their distinctive workplace.



**Photos: National Register File**