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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form Nat. Register of Historic Places National Park Service

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name First Trinity Lutheran Church

Other names/site number "Red Brick Church" Original name: Trinity Lutheran Church; GA00-183

Name of related multiple property listing n/a
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & Number 11668 W State Hwy 4

City or town Beatrice State Nebraska County Gage

Not for publication Vicinity

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Michael J. Smith SHPO/Director 06-17-2016
Signature of certifying official/Title: Nebraska State Historical Society Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official Date

Title State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Joe Salter 8.4.2016
Signature of Keeper Date of Action
fn

First Trinity Lutheran Church
 Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
 County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property (Check only **one** box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	Buildings
1	0	Sites
0	0	Structures
0	0	Objects
2	2	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion/Religious Facility
 Funerary/Cemetery
 Religion/Church School
 Religion/Church-related residence

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion/Religious Facility
 Funerary/Cemetery
 Religion/Church School
 Religion/Church-related residence

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)

Church Building – Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals/Late Gothic Revival.

Cemetery – N/A

School Building - Modern Movement/Moderne

Parsonage – Modern Movement/Ranch Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions.)
 Principal exterior materials of the property:

Church - Brick walls and foundation, asphalt roof.
 Cemetery – N/A
 School Building – Brick walls, asphalt roof.
 Parsonage – Brick Walls, asphalt roof.

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

Description:

Summary Paragraph (Briefly describe the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

First Trinity Lutheran Church (1875-present) resides in an early 20th Century Late Gothic Revival brick church (c.1905). The well-preserved church features a central bell-tower entry with pointed Gothic windows. The church is laid out in a standard hall plan with a nave and a sanctuary with an apse opposite the entry. The structure is complete with a high gable roof, and main entry facing south. The walls and foundation are formed of red brick while the roof is of asphalt construction. The church interior has been preserved and retains its original grandeur along with its first electric Reuter pipe organ. This is a rural country church located along Nebraska Highway 4 (formerly "The Grain Growers Highway"), west of Beatrice, Nebraska. The church building was constructed in 1905 with the cornerstone being laid on April 16 of that year.¹ The church sits on a 5 acre section directly northeast of Nebraska Highway 4 and SW 117th County Road. The church has a nearby school building (c.1960) and parsonage (c.1988). Directly south, across the highway, rests the First Trinity Cemetery (c.1878) on a 5 acre plot. The entire church property is well maintained; the primary church building is in excellent condition and has only had minor alterations since its construction.

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

The First Trinity Lutheran Church is located in rural Gage County, approximately 7.5 miles from the center of nearby Beatrice, Nebraska, and nearly adjacent to the Homestead National Monument of America. The church is located at a crossroads, and includes the 1905 church building designed by George H. T. Schaefer, a 1960 school building which replaced the original 1879 wood-framed church turned school building, a 1988 non-contributing parsonage, and the 1875 First Trinity Cemetery. The site includes a 5 acre churchyard donated to First Trinity in 1879 by Charles Bartels and adjacent First Trinity Cemetery.

1905 Church Building

The most prominent and historically significant of the structures on this site is the First Trinity Lutheran Church building. Based on plans by George H.T. Schaefer, this structure was constructed of red brick and completed in 1905 for a total cost of \$7,000. Church history books state that church members assisted with the construction of the church. Their assistance primarily came by way of digging the church basement and delivering building materials to the construction site, including the brick shipped to the Hoag railroad depot.² Hoag no longer exists as a town site but its location was two and a half miles east and a half mile north of the church, near the Big Blue River, northwest of Beatrice. The red brick church, as the building is often described, is a great representation of the Late Gothic Revival style form the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.³

¹ *First Trinity Lutheran Church – Beatrice, Nebraska – 1875-2000 125th Anniversary*, (Beatrice, NE, 2000), 12.

² *First Trinity*, 12 & 16.

³ Lewis, Michael J., *The Gothic Revival*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2002), 86-95

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

The First Trinity church building is a rectangular, front-gabled freestanding brick church with a prominent gothic steeple. The front facade is symmetrical in organization. A central brick steeple consists of a brick central tower with brick buttresses. A wooden belfry with gothic arches, gables, and spire tops the tower. The original bell remains and is in use in the belfry. At the pinnacle of the belfry rests a large (presumably bronze) cross that is estimated to be twelve feet tall and six feet wide. A gothic arch frames the main entrance. The main entrance consists of a double set of wooden doors. A large name block is located above the entrance and is inscribed: First Trinity Lutheran Church Mo. Synod U.A.C. 1905. A pointed arch stained-glass window is located on the second story of the central bell tower. Decorative brick corbelling is located below the tower cornice line. A band of decorative brickwork intersects with the gothic window at the springing of the arch. The buttresses and entrance arch have stone accents. On each side of the central bell tower are two large pointed arch stained glass windows with decorative brick bands extending out from the springing of each arched window. Just below the gabled roof line the brickwork features decorative stepped brick corbelling following the lines of the gabled roof.

The east and west facing walls of the church feature decorative brick corbelling just under the eave of the gabled roof. A series of four identical pointed arch stained glass windows are prominent along each wall. Each window is contained in its own bay and separated by brick buttresses with stone accents. A band of decorative brickwork intersects with the gothic windows at the springing of their arches. At the base of each wall are four glass block windows allowing light into the church's unfinished dirt floor basement. The rear of the church is of a lesser quality brick, painted red. Protruding from the main rectangular hall design of the church is a centrally located, single story apse; continuing east from the apse is a short, single-story rectangular enclosure. The enclosure allows for a rear entry to the church and small office directly behind the interior pulpit doorway. This enclosure's roof line rises about two thirds of the way up the rear wall. The rectangular enclosure features two pointed arched stained glass windows facing north and a pointed arch doorway with stained glass above the springing points of the arch. This doorway faces east onto a small raised step before the gravel parking lot. The apse portion has a half-conical hipped roof. The apse's two exposed corners show off obtuse angled brick corners.

The church has seen few alterations over the years. The first noted exterior renovation came in 1939 when the church roof was rebuilt⁴. From 1946 to 1950 church windows were repaired.⁵ In 1964 brick repair and waterproofing was undertaken.⁶ In 1979 a new asphalt roof was put on the church followed in 1980 by storm windows and repainting.⁷ In 1988 the Church steeple was painted.⁸ In 2011 the front entryway was modified to be ADA compliant. It was done in a way complementary to the architecture and brick construction of the church. Plans are in place to reroof the church with similar asphalt roofing during the summer of 2016.

⁴ *First Trinity*, 22

⁵ *First Trinity*, 24

⁶ *First Trinity*, 30

⁷ *First Trinity*, 33

⁸ *First Trinity*, 35

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

The interior of First Trinity has also maintained its historic integrity and consists of an entryway/vestibule located under the balcony/choir loft that opens via two double doors to the sanctuary. The balcony houses the church's 1923 Reuter pipe organ, access to the bell tower, and provides additional seating and choir area. The sanctuary is of an open hall design. The only supports being two beams supporting the balcony/choir loft at the rear third of the sanctuary. The original rows of wooden pews are set in two columns, separated by a large central aisle and are flanked by narrow side aisles. The altar is located at the far end of the sanctuary recessed slightly from the main hall design and is on a raised platform that separates it from the nave and congregation area. The front of the church (nearest the altar) features three prominent pointed arches with the central arch above the altar being of greater height and delineating the raised, vaulted sanctuary. A raised wooden pulpit extends out from the wall and is accessed through a pointed arched doorway. The original hymn board and baptismal font are also located along and near the wall nearest the altar. The freestanding altar of wooden construction is centrally located in the sanctuary and is a fine example of craftsmanship. The altar is of a symmetrical design and features a reredos with a life size sculpture of Jesus at its center niche. The reredos has a series of intricate spires reaching up to the ceiling. Just behind the altar and to the East is a small room that serves as a preparation room, office, and entry to the pulpit through a pointed arched doorway.

The interior wooden floors remain underneath modern carpet, with the exception of the exposed marble vestibule. The interior wood work is intact and all baseboards and doorframes are stained. The interior plaster walls are inset with wood window frames that match the pointed arches of the exterior stained glass windows. The ceiling is vaulted and features decorative painted metal with gold leaf accents that arches down on both sides to meet the walls at the springing point of the Gothic pointed arched windows. The main lighting fixtures are elongated, octagon-shaped pendant fixtures suspended from the ceiling by chains. The church basement is accessed through the rear of the sanctuary or through an outside entry on the east side of the church. The basement is unfinished with a dirt floor, modern heating and air system, and space for storage.

Few changes have occurred even to the interior. The first interior change took place when electric lights were installed in the church in 1923; at that time the church obtained their Reuter pipe organ that is still in use today.⁹ In 1925 and 1943 a 'redecorating' was noted¹⁰. In 1958 the pulpit and pulpit door were lowered with a new lectern being built from the lower portion of the pulpit that was removed. 1965 saw another small 'redecorating.'¹¹ In 1987 pew cushions were added and in 1996 hymnal racks and other minor items were added.¹² In 1997 the church was re-plastered and a complete restoration was completed in 1998 and received the Heritage Award for outstanding contribution to historic preservation in Gage County by the Gage County Heritage Preservation, Inc.¹³

⁹ *First Trinity*, 17

¹⁰ *First Trinity*, 18 & 24

¹¹ *First Trinity*, 30

¹² *First Trinity*, 34-35

¹³ *First Trinity*, 35-36

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

First Trinity Church Cemetery

The First Trinity Cemetery is located across the highway to the south of First Trinity Church and is situated on a 5 acre plot purchased in 1878 for \$50.00. According to church records the cemetery was officially laid out in 1878 and is still in active use today¹⁴. The first recorded burial took place on June, 22 1872 and there has been 235 burials or plots reserved since that time (as of March 2016)¹⁵. Many of the early markers are written in German and assist in telling the broad story of First Trinity and its members. The grave markers are carved of various types of stone and exhibit a variety of styles. However, not all markers have survived and some burials are unmarked.

The cemetery is located in the southwestern-most quarter of the 5 acre plot. It is rectangular in plan, with burials oriented east-west. There is no system of formal plantings, and only a few small trees or bushes. The entrance to the cemetery is framed by a white, wrought iron entrance gate with decorative scroll work and black lettering stating "First Trinity Cemetery." A new cemetery fence was installed in 1993. The cemetery has a long and connected story to First Trinity and predates the construction of the brick church. The cemetery site is believed to be a contributing site to the property.

Church School—Non-Contributing

A short distance from the church building sits the church school and parsonage. The church school building is located to the northeast of Trinity Lutheran. It faces south towards an open gravel parking lot. The present school building was constructed in 1960 in a square modern style for \$33,000. It replaced the original wood-framed school building, which was the original Trinity church from 1879 until 1905, when the present church was completed. The school building is of red brick construction and was designed by Dale Spilker with its main entry facing south¹⁶. The school is symmetrical in design and features a central entryway with sidelights. Centrally located between the front entryway and the corners are a set of three connected fixed windows over an awning pane. The sides and rear are basic in design and feature primarily single pane awning windows. In addition, the east and west facing walls also feature a double fixed window over a single pane awning window and have a simple modern door providing additional points of entry and exit. The west wall features a name block at the southwest corner. The school has maintained its original condition with the exception of its original, flat roof design. In 1995 the flat roof was modified to an asphalt hipped roof, designed by Dean Damme, to avoid water damage and reduce maintenance costs.

The interior features two primary classroom spaces on the south side separated by a central hallway. Just off the southeast classroom is a pair of offices. Down the central hallway and at the rear of the classrooms are two restrooms. To the east is a small storage area which also serves as a small classroom. To the west is the utility room, side access into the kitchen, and doorway to the outside. From where the central hallway ends one can access the auditorium area through a set of double doors. The auditorium also serves as a large classroom and dining hall. It is on the north side of the

¹⁴ *Seventy-fifth Anniversary, First Trinity Lutheran Church Beatrice, Gage County, Nebraska 1875-1950* (Beatrice, NE, 1950), 3

¹⁵ *Cemetery Records*, (2016), 4

¹⁶ *First Trinity*, 29-30

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

building with a connected kitchen on the northwest corner. The school building was originally designed to hold two classrooms and an auditorium. It didn't take long however for the church school to outgrow this space requiring the auditorium to be turned into a third classroom¹⁷. Other noted alterations took place in 1986 and 2015 with new flooring installed in parts of the building's interior. 1987 marked the last year of the 107 years of regular Christian day school classes connected to First Trinity¹⁸. Pre-school classes would continue until 2008. The building is still used regularly for church and family functions, Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, and a variety of bible cases. The playground is still intact and is in wonderful condition just east of the school building.

Parsonage—Non-Contributing

The parsonage was constructed in 1988 and is located north, northeast of the church. It was constructed for a cost of \$78,904 by Koenig Construction¹⁹. The parsonage is of a modern ranch style construction set up in a rectangular design running east/west with the main entrance facing south. It is of brick construction with asphalt roofing. It continues to serves its duty as the parsonage for the church. The parsonage is not a historically contributing resource of the First Trinity property.

¹⁷ First Trinity, 32

¹⁸ First Trinity, 33-34

¹⁹ First Trinity, 35

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** Removed from its original location.
- C** A birthplace or a grave.
- D** A cemetery.
A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- E** A commemorative property.
- G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture
Exploration/Settlement

Period of Significance

1878-1905

Significant Dates

1878 Cemetery officially laid out, parsonage constructed, and First Trinity incorporated.
1879 first church (doubling as a school) building erected.
1905 Current Church Building Erected.

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

German

Architect/Builder

G.H.T Schaefer of Atchison, Kansas (b.1857-d.1951)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

First Trinity Lutheran Church (originally Trinity Lutheran Church) came together as a congregation in 1875 and currently resides in a Late Gothic Revival style church built in 1905. This church, its buildings, and cemetery site stand as a testament to the architectural and early settlement history of the area and Nebraska at large. First Trinity as a rural parish church differs from its neighbors for its architectural uniqueness; it is one of the very few rural brick churches of the area. While a Gothic

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

Revival church of this time would not be a rarity, First Trinity is one of the few examples of brick construction in the region. First Trinity was the first Lutheran Church in rural Gage County west of Beatrice (founded in 1875); the church's early history closely follows the German settlement of the area. Today the church serves the area well and has helped establish many sister churches. In addition, its early history is connected to the Freeman School (now part of Homestead National Monument of America, NPS to the east of First Trinity). The Freeman School was home to some of the earliest Lutheran church services held in Nebraska. This first location was the meeting place for First Trinity's members between 1872 and 1879. It is with these facts in mind that First Trinity and its surrounding buildings and sites meet the National Register Criterion under criteria A and C for architectural significance and early settlement history. The period of significance begins in 1878, when the church formally purchases land for the cemetery, and ends in 1905, when the new brick church was completed, marking the end of the settler period for the congregation.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Settlement

First Trinity Lutheran Church is a rural church along the old 'Grain Growers Highway' (Nebraska Highway 4) and is in the heart of America's bread basket. Located only a few miles from the Nation's first Homestead claim site, and present location of Homestead National Monument of America, First Trinity was at the center of early settlement in the area. For nearly 150 years the church has served the surrounding area, seeing many changes to the region over the years. The one thing that has remained constant has been First Trinity (founded in 1875), its cemetery (laid out in 1878), and school (founded in 1879).²⁰

First Trinity as stated before was the first Lutheran Church in its immediate vicinity. The church's early history closely follows the German settlement of the area. Settlers of German decent began to arrive in the area in 1865 and desired a place of worship but lacked the means to call their own minister. The first services for the area took place at the nearby Freeman School building by a traveling minister by the name of F.W. John starting in 1872.²¹ Pastor F.W. John officially served a congregation near Elk Creek, approximately 39 miles distant in Johnson County. Starting in 1874, Reverend Tr. Haessler, who serving a congregation in Kramer, NE around 23 miles distant in Saline County, was called upon to hold occasional services at the old school building. Haessler encouraged the growing German communities in Gage County to form their own congregation. In 1875 First Trinity got its official start by calling Pastor C. Lentzsch, who would serve First Trinity until 1881. Pastor Lentzsch would begin preaching regular services at the Freeman School. He originally resided in Clatonia, some 13 miles north, for lack of a parsonage. In addition to his duties at First Trinity, Lentzsch also served as a traveling missionary throughout the area.²²

When First Trinity was organized in 1875, it was called to serve a vast region. Few Lutheran churches existed near First Trinity and those that were in the region also proved to be newly formed fledgling

²⁰ *First Trinity*, 7-9

²¹ *Centennial, First Trinity Lutheran Church 1875-1975*, (Beatrice, NE 1975), 4

²² Wegener, A.F., *A Brief History Southern Nebraska District of the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod 1922-1947 Formerly Part of the Nebraska District 1882-1922*, (Seward, NE: Southern Nebraska District, October 1947), 64-65

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

congregations. To the east was St. Peter's in Elk Creek, NE around 39 miles distant and founded in 1871; to the northeast was Immanuel in Sterling, NE, approximately 39 miles distant and founded in 1874; to the north was St. John's in Kramer, NE, about 23 miles distant and founded in 1874; and finally to the west was Zion in Hebron, NE 44 miles distant and founded in 1874.²³ The problem of distance was compounded by a shortage of pastors left few congregations and worship opportunities for the growing number of Lutheran families settling in Nebraska. Other Christian denominations had churches closer to First Trinity, but these were located primarily in towns such as Beatrice to the east and Plymouth to the west.

The vast distance between these early Lutheran Churches often meant members would come from great distances and from a variety of backgrounds and origins to worship at First Trinity. This differed from some of the later Lutheran churches of the region that would be known for serving a particular group of mostly German decedents (for example, Hanover Germans located to the northeast of Beatrice). It appears First Trinity was truly home to all who desired the 'true' word and sacraments as offered by the Lutheran Church. There is one account at the Gage County Museum of a young couple, Phillip and Margaret Bindernagel, who traveled approximately 20 miles from their homestead near in eastern Gage County (near Filly, NE) to attend services at First Trinity. This young couple was married at the Freeman School in 1872. They eventually traded their homestead for another nearer First Trinity. Their first born child, Rosena would be baptized at Trinity in 1875.²⁴

For a few of the early German settlers these first Lutheran churches proved to be too little, too late. A surprising number of Germans settlers in the region had turned to more established Methodist churches, or had fallen prey to 'false Lutheran preachers' (as described by the official church history) who had led them away from the 'true calling.' This proved to be a great issue that the emerging tide of Germans settling in Nebraska wished to solve.²⁵ Having a Lutheran Church such as First Trinity was a great asset to these early settlers.

As a result, First Trinity continued to grow and soon outgrew its home in the Freeman school building. It was decided that the Church needed to grow. To this end 5 acres of land was bought for \$50.00 west of the Freeman School in 1878. The First Trinity Cemetery was officially laid out and a parsonage was constructed on this new ground in 1878.²⁶ While the church obtained the land in 1878, the first recorded burial took place on June, 22 1872; there have been 235 burials or plots reserved since that time (as of March 2016).²⁷ Many of the early 19th and 20th century stones are written in German and assist in telling the broad story of First Trinity and its early members. In 1879, church member Christ Bartels, donated 5 acres directly across the road to the north of the cemetery location and a wood frame church was constructed in the same year. This first church would also serve as a school.²⁸ The region saw continued growth, largely from German settlers that arrived as homesteaders (figure 5).

²³ Wegener, A.F., *A Brief History Southern Nebraska District*, 82-101

²⁴ Gage County Historical Society Museum Records – Mr. Phillip Bindernagel Family.

²⁵ Wegener, A.F., *A Brief History Southern Nebraska District*, 11-12

²⁶ *First Trinity*, 9

²⁷ *Cemetery*, 4

²⁸ *First Trinity*, 9

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

The continued growth of the First Trinity Congregation gave rise to a number of neighboring sister churches. Several new congregations were started by early First Trinity members who sought to have a church closer to their homes and farms. Other congregations were started by the traveling ministry efforts of First Trinity's pastors. According to First Trinity's 90th Anniversary book (1965) First Trinity helped start sister churches located throughout the region including the locations of Plymouth, Harbine, Daykin, Beatrice, Fairbury, Odell, Jansen, Wymore, Tobias, Gladstone, Clatonia, and Gilead.²⁹

The area directly around First Trinity continued to see growth in what were predominantly German settlements. Not long after First Trinity called their first minister a number of German Mennonite's began to settle the area immediately surrounding First Trinity. Later they constructed a Mennonite church a few miles east of Trinity. In addition there was a significant number of German Methodist, and Catholics residing in Gage County.³⁰ Despite these additional groups of Germans, there is little doubt that the largest numbers of German settlers were Lutheran in religious practice. While the County and the regions surrounding it did not start off as German communities, the area was quickly becoming German in heritage and background.³¹

With increasing settlement, First Trinity again saw the need to grow. A building committee was formed and George H.T. Schaefer was selected to design a new brick church for the congregation. G.H.T. Schaefer was born in 1857 the son of a Lutheran minister in Indiana; he died in 1951 in Atchison, Kansas. Schaefer was listed as a carpenter and builder in census records and appears to have been a prominent and long-time citizen of Atchison, Kansas.³² It was Schaefer who was to draw up the present Red Brick Church building that First Trinity still calls home today. Church members assisted with the construction of the church, primarily by way of delivering building materials, including the brick delivered to the nearby Hoag railroad depot (Hoag, no longer in existence, was located a little over two miles east of the church), and by digging the church basement.³³ Over the years the church has seen very limited changes and looks much as it did when constructed in 1905 (figure 6).

In addition to regular church services, First Trinity served as a place of Christian education for school children for over 107 years. It appears that the first school classes were held in the first wood church starting in 1879 (figure 7).³⁴ The school and its teachers would have several different homes on the First Trinity site. The longest serving school building would prove to be the original wooded church building as it would serve as the school from 1905 to 1960. In the later years the church school saw considerable growth resulting in the construction of the current school building. The current modern movement styled school building was designed by Dale Spilker and constructed in 1960. Within a short time the new building had to be modified to hold additional classes of children. At its height the school required three teachers and classrooms to meet the needs of the many students.³⁵ 1987

²⁹ 90th Anniversary, *First Trinity Lutheran Church*, (Beatrice, NE, June 6, 1965), 17

³⁰ Dobbs, Hugh J., *History of Gage County, Nebraska*, (Lincoln, NE: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1918), 212-222

³¹ *Gage County History*, (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1983), 5-16

³² Ingalls, Sheffield. *History of Atchison County, Kansas*, (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Co., 1916), 554-556

³³ *First Trinity*, 12 & 16

³⁴ *First Trinity*, 9

³⁵ *First Trinity*, 29-30

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

marked the last year of the 107 years of regular Christian day school classes connected to First Trinity.³⁶ Pre-school classes would continue until 2008. The current school building is still used regularly for church and family functions, Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, and a variety of bible cases. The only significant alteration to the school building came in 1995 when flat roof was modified to an asphalt hipped roof.³⁷ The school playground is still intact and is in wonderful condition just east of the school building.

Criterion C: Architecture

The 'Red Brick Church,' as First Trinity is often called, is historically significant for architecture as it is an early 20th Century, late Gothic Revival building. The well-preserved brick church features a central bell-tower entry facing south. The wooden belfry incorporates off gothic arches, gables, and spire tops to the tower. The church furthers the Gothic Revival style with its pointed arched windows, arches, brick buttresses, and doorways. The church is laid out in a standard rectangular hall pattern with a high gable roof typical of Gothic Revival parish churches. The walls and foundation are formed of red brick while the roof is of a newer asphalt construction. The church interior has also been preserved and retains its original grandeur; large pointed arches and vaulted ceiling continue the Gothic feel. To this day it is one of the very few remaining Late Gothic Revival brick churches in the region.

Based upon a county-wide survey in 1992, only three churches remain extant in rural Gage County: First Trinity Lutheran Church (1879, 1905) to the west of Beatrice, Immanuel Lutheran Church (1905), and Zion Lutheran Church (1880, 1916).³⁸ All three are examples of the Gothic Revival style. Immanuel Lutheran church, located on the Nebraska-Kansas boarder, is a wood frame, gothic revival church with a polygonal tower and steeple (figure 8). The church retains its historic cemetery, parsonage and school, and, like First Trinity, was founded to serve the local German population; the cemetery entrance is through an ironwork gate with the name "Immanuel Friedhof," German for "Immanuel Cemetery." The construction of an addition to the church adjacent to the cemetery entrance somewhat diminishes the integrity of this property. To the northeast of Beatrice is the larger brick gothic church of Zion Lutheran, constructed in 1916 to replace a church from the 1880s (figure 9). The church features two towers on its façade and large, elaborate windows, and is constructed of a buff brick. A brick parsonage and school/parish hall are located to the south of the church. The cemetery is located approximately a ¼ mile south. Like First Trinity and Immanuel Lutheran, Zion served a predominantly German population. A fourth church, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran (1893), was located in northern Gage County between Courtland and Firth, and is no longer extant. While the wood frame, carpenter gothic church no longer exists, the cemetery remains. Other churches, long since demolished, are similarly attested by solitary cemeteries located at crossroads or surrounded by fields. First Trinity is therefore a rare example of a rural, gothic revival brick church. While Zion Lutheran Church is larger, First Trinity predates this church by ten years and may have served as inspiration for the congregation when they sought to replace their previous church.

³⁶ First Trinity, 34

³⁷ First Trinity, 35

³⁸ Rural churches in this case are churches not located in established villages. Rural churches served the dispersed farming population and were centrally located, often at crossroads, within the population they served. These churches were part of complete complexes consisting of a church, parsonage, school, and cemetery.

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties

First Trinity Lutheran Church derives its primary significance from its direct connection to the settlement of western Gage County. The church's foundation is associated with the influx of German settlers who desired a Lutheran church that was more closely located to their homesteads. As the population increased, the church, founded in 1872, moved from its original location in the Freeman School to a plot of donated land across the road from the church cemetery in 1879. Continued settlement led to the growth of the congregation, the establishment of daughter churches, and in 1905, the construction of the present brick gothic-revival edifice.

Criteria Consideration D: Cemeteries

The First Trinity Cemetery, established in 1878, derives its significance primarily for its direct association with the settlement of the area by German immigrants. The cemetery, containing burials that predate its official establishment, was an early center for the community by providing a place for the internment of family and commemoration of their memory. The original 5 acres of land, purchased by First Trinity for \$50.00, determined the future location of the church, which was constructed one year later on 5 acres of donated land across the road to the north. The establishment and growth of the cemetery clearly reflected the growth and make up of early settlers in the area.

Additional Historic Context

First Trinity's history is also loosely connected to the Nebraska Supreme Court ruling on separation of Church and State in 1902. The lawsuit began in 1899 and brought into question biblical teachings at the Freeman School, the original home of First Trinity. In *Freeman vs. John Scheve, Et. al.* the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled in favor of Freeman (America's first homesteader) further defining the separation of church in state in Nebraska, years before the US Supreme Court's ruling on the matter³⁹.

This small rural church has proven to be instrumental to the early settlement history of the area. As stated before Trinity's earliest ties to the area reach back to 1865. It saw its official beginnings in 1875, eventually leading to the birth of many area churches and the continued growth of First Trinity. Today First Trinity Lutheran Church is still a strong part of the rural community and serves members from rural Beatrice, Plymouth, Dewitt and the surrounding areas. The architecture represented by the First Trinity Church building is a prime example of the Late Gothic Revival style and is one of the few brick rural churches of the region. The First Trinity story does not end with the church itself, it has been carried on through the church cemetery, modern style school building, and more recent parsonage. There is little doubt that First Trinity deserves historical recognition. Trinity has had a strong impact on the early settlement of the area, especially those of German decent and is a fine example of Late Gothic Revival architecture.

³⁹ "Freeman School Bible Court Case." National Park Service. Accessed March 11, 2016.
<https://www.nps.gov/home/learn/historyculture/freeman-school-bible-court-case.htm>.

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (Insert bibliography here – cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form.)

“90th Anniversary, First Trinity Lutheran Church” Beatrice, NE, June 6, 1965.

Cemetery Records, March 2016.

“Centennial, First Trinity Lutheran Church 1875-1975” Beatrice, NE 1975.

Dobbs, Hugh J. History of Gage County, Nebraska, Lincoln, NE: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1918.

“First Trinity Lutheran Church – Beatrice, Nebraska – 1875-2000 125th Anniversary” Beatrice, NE, 2000.

"Freeman School Bible Court Case." National Park Service. Accessed March 11, 2016.
<https://www.nps.gov/home/learn/historyculture/freeman-school-bible-court-case.htm>.

Gage County Historical Society Museum Records – Mr. Phillip Bindernagel Family.

Gage County History, Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1983

Ingalls, Sheffield. History of Atchison County, Kansas, Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Co., 1916.

Lewis, Michael J. The Gothic Revival, New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2002.

“Seventy-fifth Anniversary, First Trinity Lutheran Church Beatrice, Gage County, Nebraska 1875-1950” Beatrice, NE, 1950.

Wegener, A.F. A Brief History Southern Nebraska District of the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod 1922-1947 Formerly Part of the Nebraska District 1882-1922, Seward, NE: Southern Nebraska District, October 1947.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other (Name of repository)
Church Office

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): GA00-183

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 10 USGS Quadrangle PLYMOUTH, NE Quadrangle

(Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates. Delete the other.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

- | | | | | |
|----|----------|------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1. | Latitude | <u>40.306653</u> | Longitude | <u>-96.879230</u> |
| 2. | Latitude | _____ | Longitude | _____ |
| 3. | Latitude | _____ | Longitude | _____ |
| 4. | Latitude | _____ | Longitude | _____ |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Church, School, and Parsonage Legal description SEC 16-4-5 SW 5A OF SW
Cemetery Legal Description SEC 21-4-5 PT NW 5.00 AC

The primary church property including the First Trinity Church building includes Southwestern most 5 acres of Section 16 of Blakely Township in Gage County Nebraska at the Northeastern corner of Nebraska Highway 4 and County Road SW 117 intersection. The Church Cemetery property includes the Northwestern most 5 acres of Section 21 of Blakely Township in Gage County Nebraska; this is the Southeastern corner of Nebraska Highway 4 and County Road SW 117 intersection.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These boundaries were selected as they are the Church Property boundaries as on record with Gage County and include the church building, cemetery, school building, and parsonage.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael Sothan/Congregation Member
organization First Trinity Lutheran Church date 3-25-16
street & number 210 S 2nd Street/PO Box 12 telephone 308-293-8055
city or town Steele City state NE zip code 68440
email msothan@mainstreetbeatrice.org

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
SEE ATTACHED PDF
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map. **SEE ATTACHED MAP**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO for any additional items.)

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

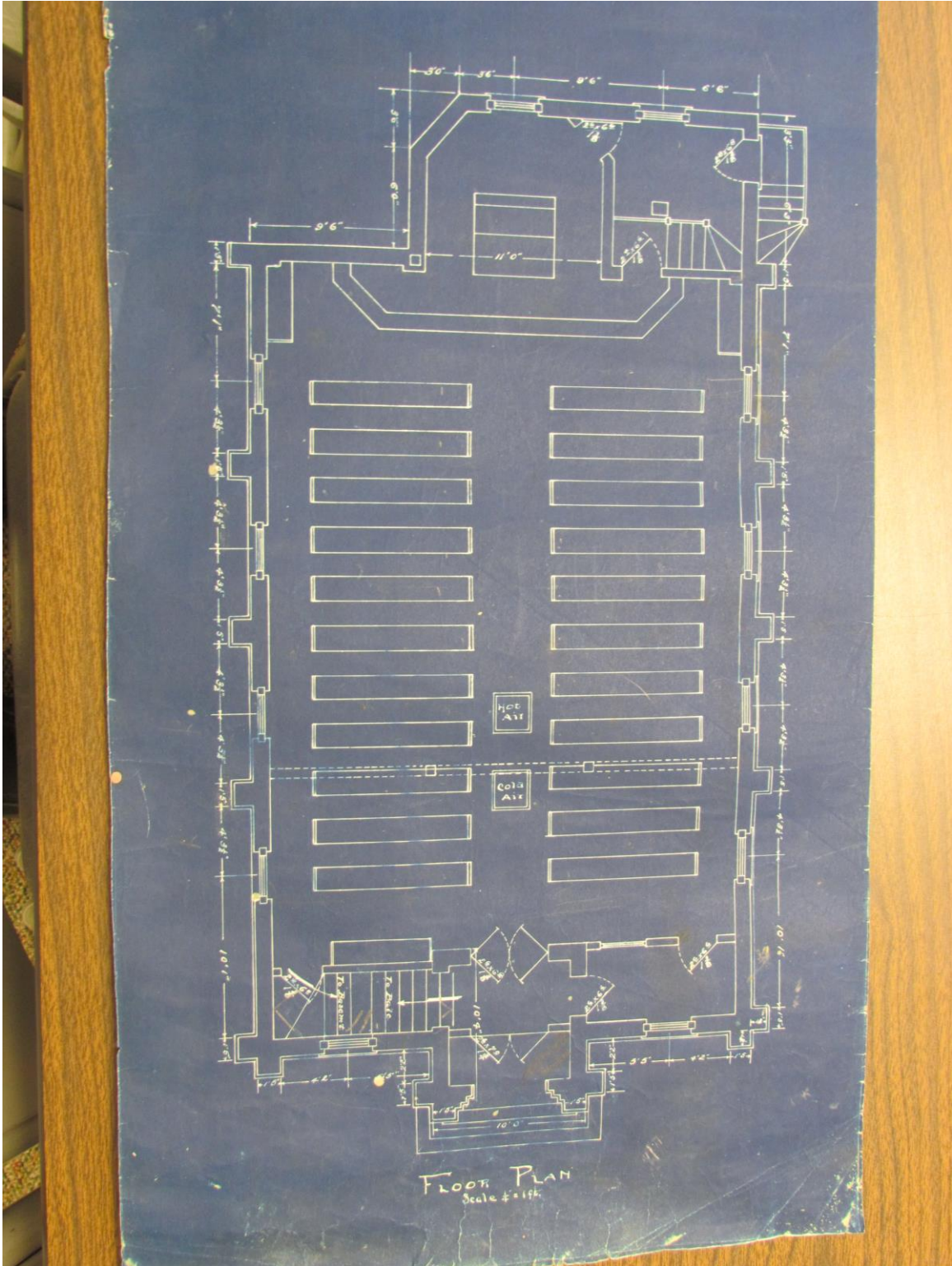


Figure 1: Floor Plan

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State



Figure 2: 1905 First Trinity Church front elevation

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State



Figure 3: Pulpit, Baptistry, and Altar details.

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

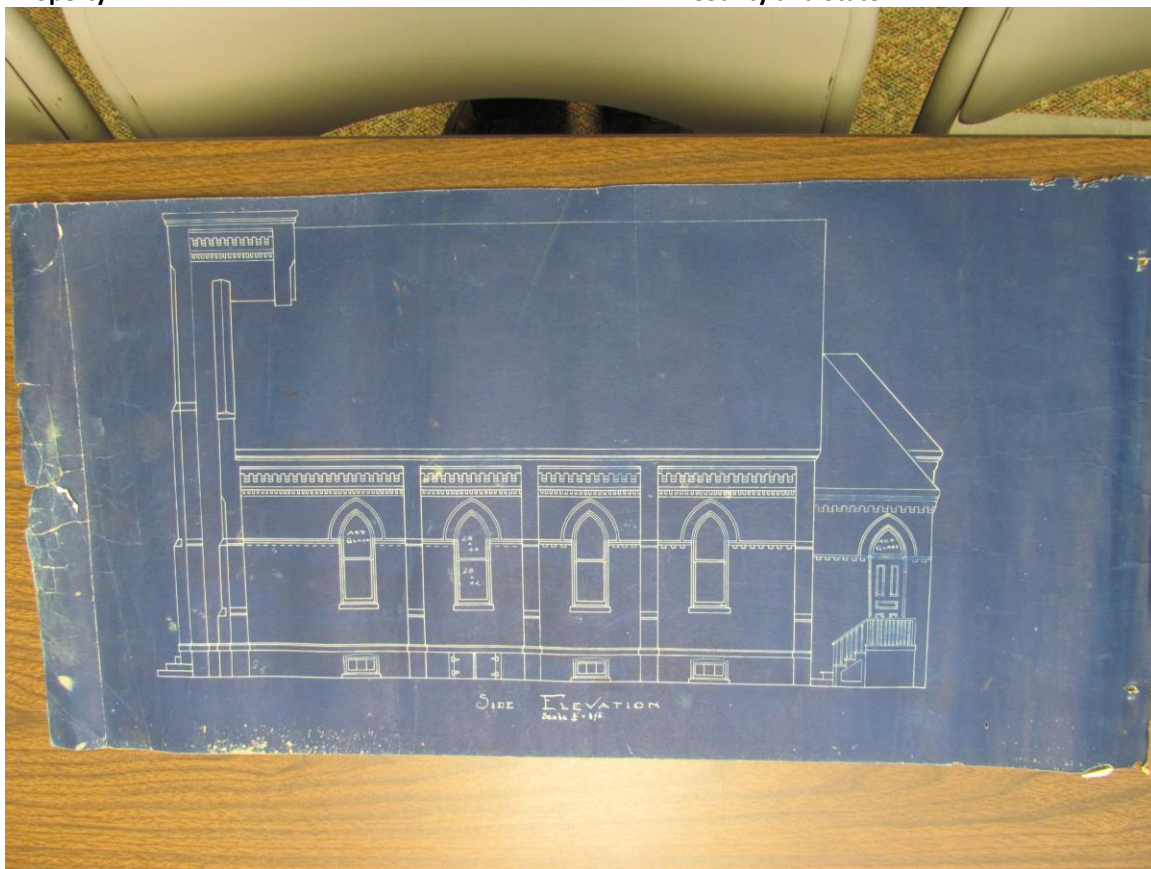


Figure 4: Side Elevation.

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska
 County and State

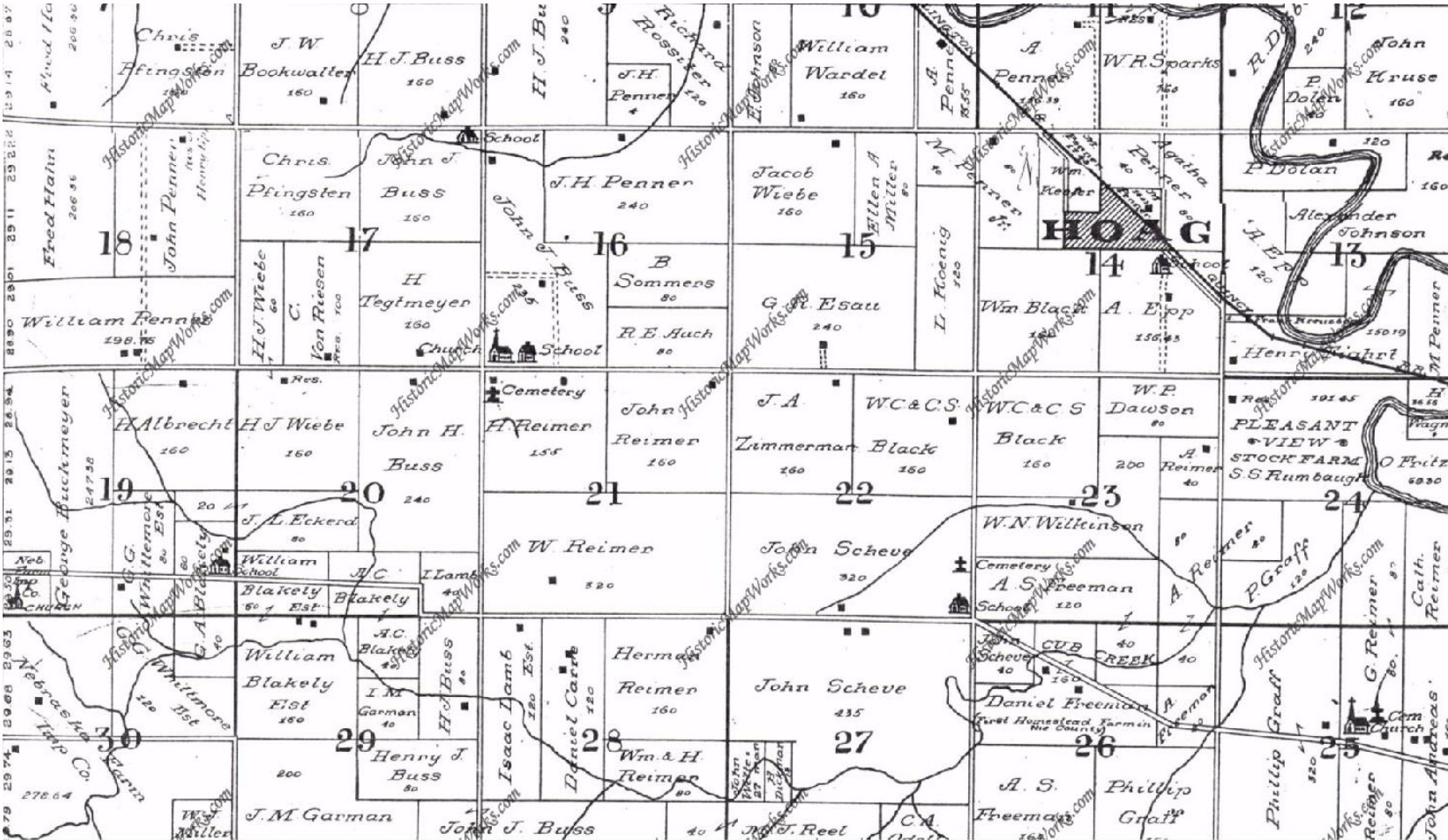


Figure 5: 1906 Plat map showing location of First Trinity Lutheran Church and school in Section 16 and the Cemetery across the road in Section 21. The original Freeman School is located in the SE corner of Section 22. Much of the land is still owned by German immigrants in this map. ("Blackely Township, Hoag, Blue River" *Standard Atlas of Gage County Nebraska*. Chicago: George A. Ogle & Co., 1906. Available online <http://www.historicmapworks.com/Map/US/102437/Blakely+Township++Hoag++Blue+River/Gage+County+1906/Nebraska/>. Accessed June 13, 2016.

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

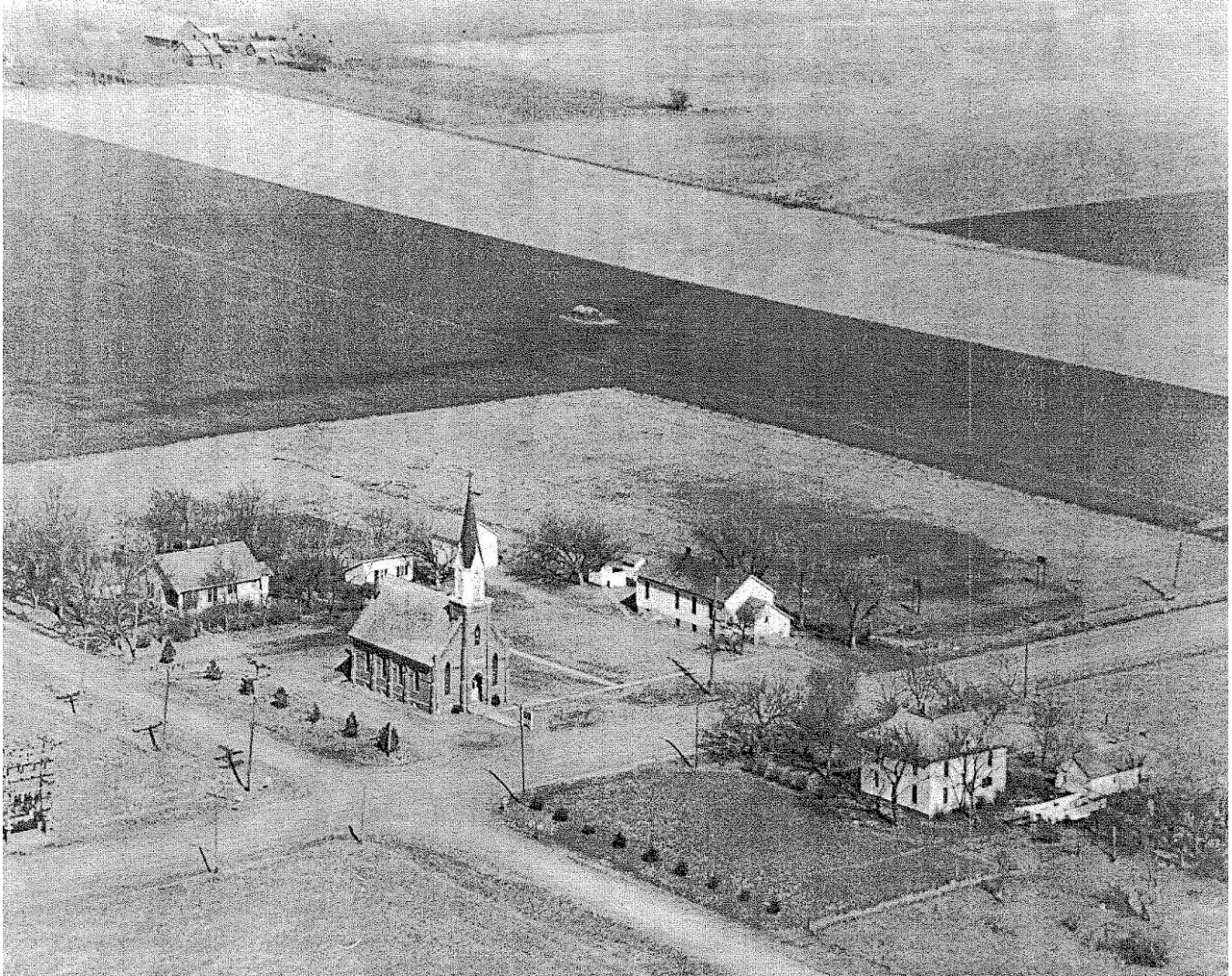


Figure 6: Historic aerial view to the NE of First Trinity Lutheran Church showing the 1906 brick church and the 1879 church building, which was repurposed as a school. The church cemetery is at the bottom of the frame adjacent to the original parsonage building. To the rear of the church is a house, most likely belonging to the Bartels family, which donated five acres north of the parsonage and cemetery to the church. ("First Trinity Lutheran Church – Beatrice, Nebraska – 1875-2000 125th Anniversary" Beatrice, NE, 2000.)

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State

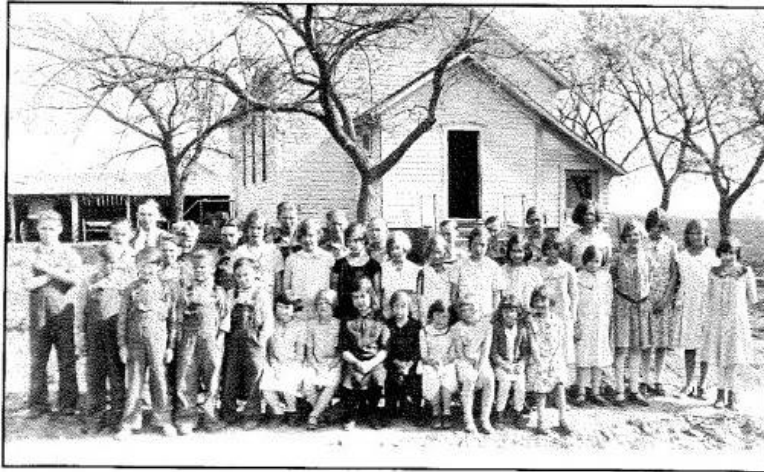


Figure 7: Sunday school class of 1930. The original 1879 wood church is visible in the background. (“First Trinity Lutheran Church – Beatrice, Nebraska – 1875-2000 125th Anniversary” Beatrice, NE, 2000.)



Figure 8: Immanuel Lutheran Church, also known as State Line Church, in 1991. The complex preserves its original organization including school, church, parsonage, and cemetery. A large addition to the front of the wood-frame church (visible on the left) reduces its integrity somewhat. (GA00-019, Gage County Survey Image, 1991)

First Trinity Lutheran Church
Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska
County and State



Figure 9: Zion Lutheran Church, constructed 1916, as seen in 1991. The church is the largest surviving rural church in Gage County. (GA00-105, Gage County Survey Image, 1991).

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Gage, Nebraska

Name of Property

County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property First Trinity Lutheran

City or Vicinity Beatrice County Gage State Nebraska

Photographer Michael Sothan Date Photographed 3-13-16 and 3-27-16

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

1. First Trinity Church Building. Shot taken facing north from NE Highway 4.
2. First Trinity Church Building. Shot taken facing northwest from NE Highway 4.
3. First Trinity Church Building. Shot taken facing southwest from church parking lot.
4. First Trinity Church Building. Shot taken facing southeast from church parking lot.
5. First Trinity Church Building Southeast corner. Shot taken facing west.
6. First Trinity Church building marker and entrance. Shot taken facing north.
7. First Trinity Church Bell Tower. Shot taken facing upwards and north from Church Entry.
8. First Trinity School Building. Shot taken facing north, North East church parking lot.
9. First Trinity School Building. Shot taken facing west, from school playground.
10. First Trinity School Building marker. Shot taken facing east, church parking lot.
11. First Trinity Parsonage. Shot taken facing north from church parking lot.
12. First Trinity Parsonage. Shot taken facing southwest from parsonage lawn.
13. First Trinity Parsonage. Shot taken facing southeast from church parking lot.
14. First Trinity Cemetery. Shot taken facing east from County Road SW 117.
15. First Trinity Cemetery. Shot taken facing north from within cemetery.
16. First Trinity Church Building interior viewed through front entry from outer step toward the altar and north.
17. First Trinity Church Building interior view from balcony/choir loft down toward the altar and north.
18. First Trinity Church Building interior view (with congregation) from balcony/choir loft down toward the altar and north.
19. First Trinity Church Building interior southeast corner of balcony/choir loft.
20. First Trinity Church Building interior southwest corner of balcony/choir loft showing the organ facing north.
21. First Trinity Church Building interior looking up at balcony/choir loft from main sanctuary.
22. First Trinity Church Building interior looking at altar (North) from directly under balcony/choir loft.
23. First Trinity Church Building interior ceiling details close up.
24. First Trinity Church Building interior view of stained glass window.
25. First Trinity Church Building interior close up of the altar.
26. First Trinity Church Building interior enclosure directly behind pulpit.
27. First Trinity School Building interior looking in from front entry, facing north.
28. First Trinity School Building interior, southeast classroom and offices.
29. First Trinity School Building interior, southwest classroom.
30. First Trinity School Building interior, Auditorium with kitchen in the background, facing northwest.

First Trinity Lutheran Church

Name of Property

Gage, Nebraska

County and State

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

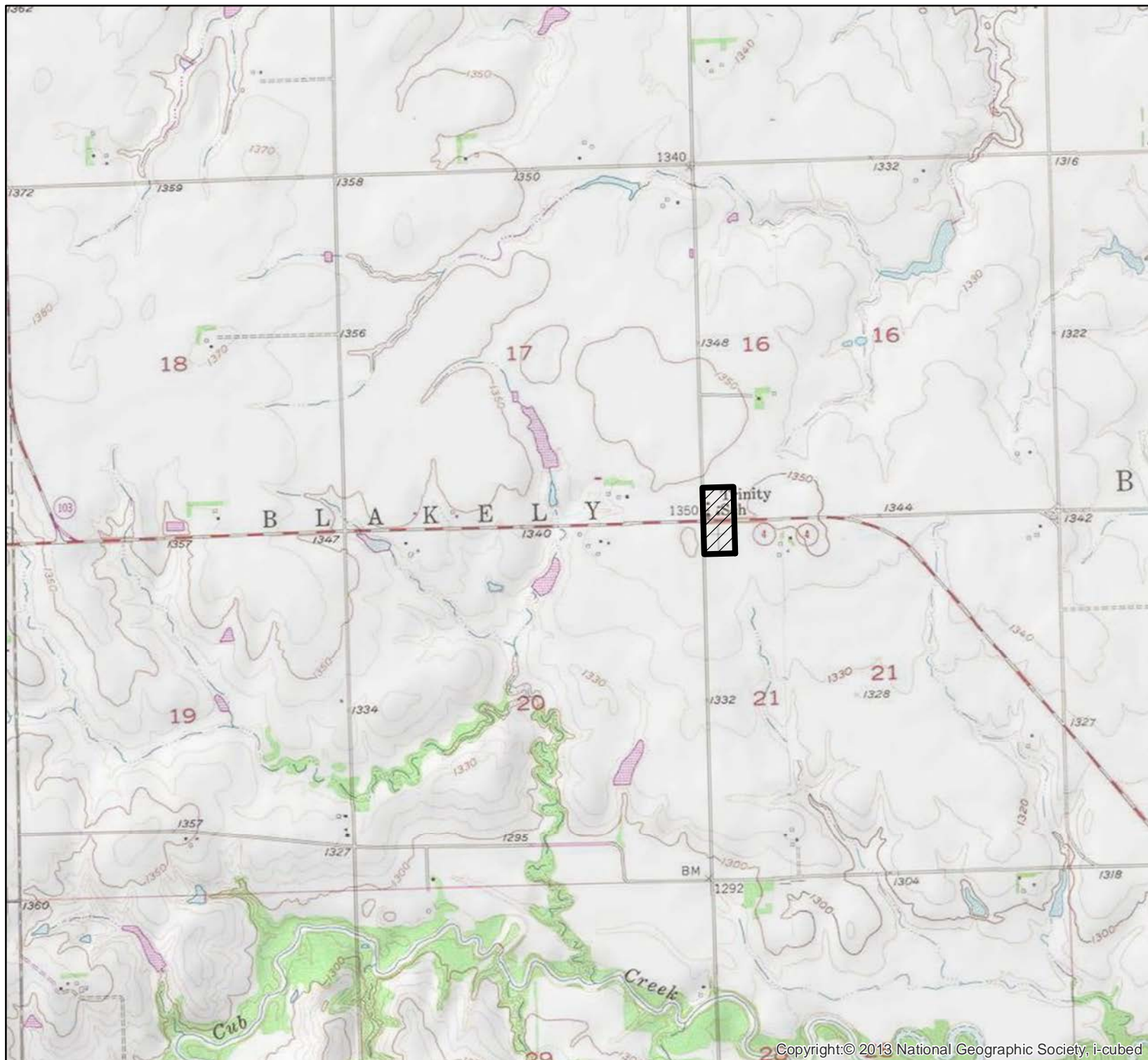
**First Trinity Lutheran Church
Missouri Synod**

**11668 W State Hwy 4
Beatrice, Gage Co.,
Nebraska**

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates:

- A) 40.307782, -96.879446
- B) 40.307787, -96.877775
- C) 40.305090, -96.877781
- D) 40.305056, -96.879435

Datum: WGS84



Legend

 Proposed NRHP Boundary

1:24,000



0 800 1,600 3,200
Feet

0 262.5 525 1,050
Meters

**First Trinity Lutheran Church
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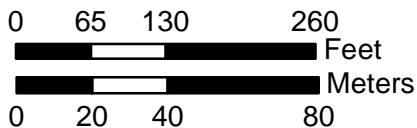
Datum: WGS84



Legend

 Proposed NRHP Boundary

1:2,000



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community, Esri, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors









INCORPORATED

DECEMBER 10, 1878



FIRST TRINITY LUTHERAN
CHURCH
MO. SYNOD U.A.C. 1905









FIRST TRINITY
LUTHERAN
SCHOOL
1960









FIRST TRINITY
CEMETERY

BUSS

PFINGSTEN







MURPHY
1831
EVANS
1857 1878
1888 1898
1877 1898
1878 1881

HE IS RISE
HALLELUJAH

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RISEN



WEDNESDAY
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12:30
1:30
2:30
3:30

HE IS RISEN

CHRIST IS RISEN









EPIPHANY
1851
MAYNERS
1857 1878
1888 1898
1907 1908
1925 1931

HE IS RISEN
HALLELUJAH

Alleluia
CHRIST IS RISEN

















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY First Trinity Lutheran Church
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEBRASKA, Gage

DATE RECEIVED: 6/24/16 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/15/16
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/01/16 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/09/16
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 16000514

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 8-04-2016 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Good brick gothic Revival church in a rural setting; reflects
the importance of German settlement in the area.*

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept C + A

REVIEWER J. Gilbert DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/~~N~~ see attached SLR Y/~~N~~

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



RECEIVED 2280

JUN 24 2016

Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

June 21, 2016

J. Paul Loether
National Register—National Historic Landmarks Programs
National Park Service
1201 "I" Street NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

RE: First Trinity Lutheran Church
11668 W State Hwy 4, Beatrice vicinity, Gage County, Nebraska

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for the above referenced property to the National Register of Historic Places. This form has met all notification and other requirements as established in 36 CFR 60.

If you have any questions concerning this nomination, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ruben A. Acosta". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ruben A. Acosta
National Register and CLG Coordinator
Nebraska State Historical Society

Enclosure

1500 R Street
PO Box 82554
Lincoln, NE 68501-2554
p: (800) 833-6747
(402) 471-3270
f: (402) 471-3100
www.nebraskahistory.org