

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH 0693430

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RECEIVED JAN 25 1971

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

St. John's Lutheran Church Complex

(NH00-32)

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

SW of Auburn

NE corner, NE quarter, Sec. 9, Township 4 north, Range 13

CITY, TOWN

east CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Auburn

X VICINITY OF

1

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Nebraska

31

Nemaha

127

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church Council

STREET & NUMBER

Rural Route 1

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Auburn

X VICINITY OF

Nebraska

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

County Clerk's Office

STREET & NUMBER

Nemaha County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Auburn

Nebraska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic Preservation in Nebraska

DATE

1971

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Nebraska State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Lincoln

Nebraska

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The St. John's Lutheran Church Complex is composed of three buildings and a cemetery located 1,000 feet northeast of Muddy Creek in rural Nemaha County, Nebraska. The surrounding terrain is level and is used strictly for agricultural purposes. Auburn, the county seat of Nemaha, is approximately seven miles northeast.

The earliest building is the "Old Stone Church," built between 1867-68 (see site location map and photos 1, 2 and 3). Construction is of roughly squared stone, and the design was provided by Christian Schwan, a German immigrant. This gable-roofed, rectangular building has lower hip-roofed projections of frame construction at either end. The projection on the east is an entrance vestibule, while that on the west is this former church's apse. Small brackets adorn the eaves of the apse, and each of its three sides contains a pointed-arch window. ~~Similar windows--four on each wall--~~ pierce the sides of the stone building. Two rectangular windows are in the gabled end above the entrance.

In 1874, a frame bell tower capped by a small steeple was added to the Stone Church, but this was dismantled in 1903 when the building ceased being used as a house of worship. During the 1950's the Stone Church was renovated to include a kitchen and rest room facilities, and the building has served since as a social hall.

The present St. John's Church (see site location map and photos 1, 2, and 4) was erected in 1903. The building is of frame construction and measures 36 x 83 feet. Stylistically, it is modified late Gothic Revival and is somewhat reminiscent of New England Congregational churches. Readily identifiable Gothic features such as hoodmolds, labels, buttresses and pinnacles are not present, however. The main facade has a strictly symmetrical arrangement, and the church is entered through double doors beyond a small gabled porch that has an arched opening. A multi-tiered bell tower is centered on the front, and crowning the tower is a metal-sheathed steeple that achieves a height of 83 feet. Four equilateral-arched windows are on each side wall. Tracery in these openings repeats the tracery in two smaller windows on the main facade. Projecting from the rear gabled wall is a one-story polygonal apse flanked by a sacristy/enclosed postern whose original approach has been replaced with a concrete block stoop. The entire building rests on a stone foundation.

Few changes have been made to the interior of St. John's. The ceiling over the sanctuary is concave and is presently covered with acoustical tiles. A low dado is on the side walls and asphalt tiles now cover the original floor. In the apsidal recess is an elaborate aedicula containing a life-size statue of Jesus. The pews, a pulpit, and a marble baptismal font are late Victorian contents. A balcony spans the rear, and suspended from the ceiling are three identical light fixtures consisting of several circular tiers decorated with fringes of glass prisms. The light fixtures were illuminated by gas originally and the brass pipes are intact.

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Approximately 200 feet northeast of the 1903 church is a frame, two-story parsonage built in 1925 (see site location map and photos 1, 2, and 5). The proportions and openings of this residence show held-over tendencies of the type of neo-classicism popular among middle-class houses of the early 1900's. The parsonage's hipped roof--almost pyramidal--is steeply pitched, and hip-roofed porches are centered on front and rear.

Immediately west of the complex is a two-acre cemetery used by St. John's parish (see photos 1, 2, and 6). Over 500 tombstones, the earliest one marked 1857, dot the burial ground. A metal fence installed in the 1920's surrounds the cemetery, and a German message in Gothic lettering (photo 6) identifies the ground as "The Acre of God of the Evangelical Lutheran Parish of St. John."

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW					
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES 1868, 1903, 1925

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The St. John's Lutheran Church Complex is significant to Nemaha County and southeastern Nebraska as being an unusual assemblage of three buildings and a cemetery associated with a religious congregation--unusual in the compactness of the arrangement and in its concordant setting in the midst of a farming area still worked by descendants of those families who settled the land and founded the church. Historical significance is augmented by the setting, for the complex has strong associations with the tide of German immigrants that composed 33% of Nebraska's settlers; and the development of the complex reflects the comfortable security that Germans in Nebraska quickly attained. As a complex, the buildings also reflect changing trends in Midwestern and American architecture.

German settlement in the Benton precinct of Nemaha County commenced in the Spring of 1856 with a band of thirteen persons who came from Illinois to take land along Muddy Creek. Others followed, and the earliest Lutheran worship services in the vicinity were conducted in private residences and in a rural school house. A Lutheran congregation was formally established in 1866 and the first St. John's Church, a modest stone building (see photo 3), was dedicated in 1868 (Centennial Publication of St. John's Lutheran Church, 1966, pages unnumbered).

A highlight in the church's history occurred in 1874 when a bell weighing 1,521 pounds was placed in a tower added to the stone building for the purpose. Reverend Leonard Feistner, minister at that time, had written to Kaiser Wilhelm I in hopes of receiving a cannon captured by the Kaiser's troops during the Franco-Prussian War--the metal to be re-used for a bell. The German emperor honored the request by sending two fine pieces of French artillery to Troy, New York, where the Meneely Foundry converted the cannons into a bell for St. John's.

The German Lutherans who founded and affiliated with St. John's had been attracted to the Benton precinct by the timber-lined Muddy Creek, and by the productivity of the soil and grasslands that made good pasturage for livestock. These people benefited greatly from the land, and in 1874 The Nebraska Advertiser, printed in nearby Auburn, spoke of St. John's parishioners as such: "This class of citizens (the Germans) have, by industry, economy, and intelligent farming, acquired for themselves a degree of prosperity and independence unequalled, perhaps, by any other class of our people. They have good farms, good houses, plenty of stock, good schools, church buildings, and everything that should mark a progressive, intelligent and thrifty people (July 30, 1874, page 3)."

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Centennial Publication of St. John's Lutheran Church. Auburn, Nebr.: St. John's Lutheran Church, 1966.

The Nebraska Advertiser. Auburn, Nebr.: July 30, 1874.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3

QUADRANGLE NAME Howe SW

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 115 24881210 44687130
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE

Daniel Kidd, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

1500 "R" Street

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

DATE

December 1978

TELEPHONE

402/432-2793

STATE

Nebraska

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Martin B. Kenneth 12/5/78

TITLE

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

1-25-79

ATTEST:

William H. Abraham

1-25-79

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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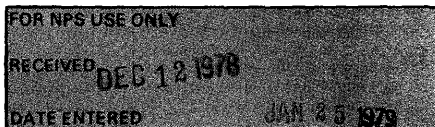
CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Two years after the stone church of St. John's received its bell and tower, a parsonage and a barn were constructed in close proximity; And in 1896 an abandoned Methodist frame church was moved to St. John's grounds and converted into a Sunday school building. The school burned ca. 1900 and the loss prompted the construction of a new church in 1903 (see photo 4).

Between 1877-1915, 1,020 people were baptised at St. John's, and records indicate that ten other Lutheran churches established during that period or since regard St. John's as their mother body (Centennial Publication, 1966, no page). Until 1933, sermons were delivered exclusively in German.

A more substantial parsonage replaced the old one in 1925--the newer residence being built 200 feet northeast of the 1903 church (see photo 5). Immediately west of the three-building complex is a two-acre cemetery enclosed by a fine metal fence. "The cemetery is older than the congregation. 1857 is the date of the earliest grave bearing an inscription, this being the grave of the young wife of Thomas Caspers who later gave the land to the church (Centennial Publication, 1966, no page).

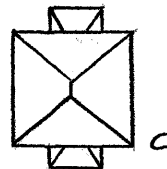
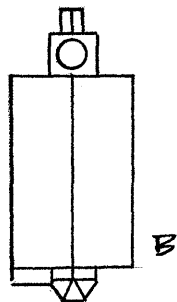
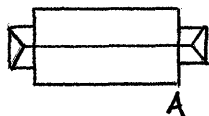
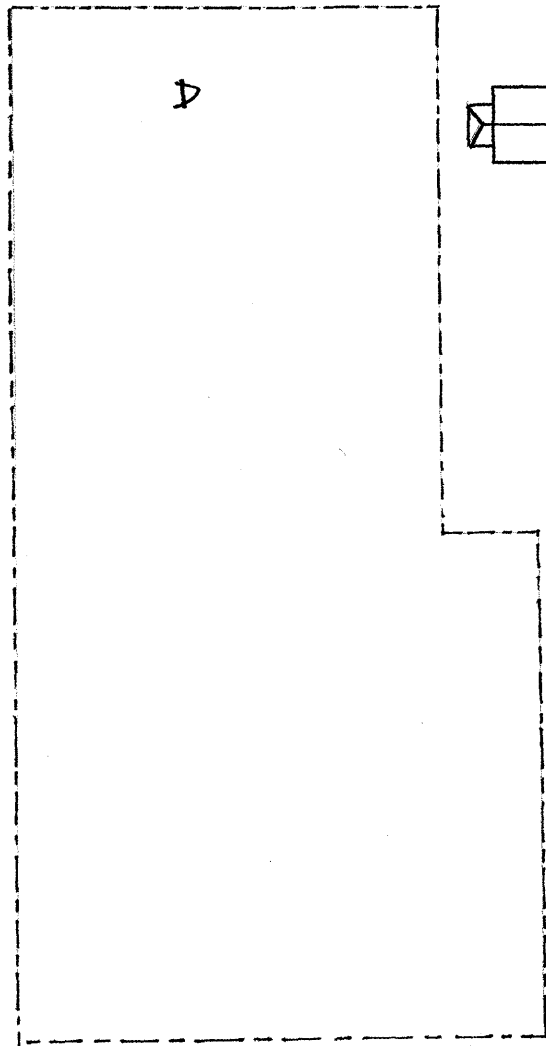
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Verbal Boundary Description ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2
CONTINUATION SHEET

The nominated property consists of three acres in the shape of an inverted L. The western boundary is the cemetery's west fence which is 400 feet long. The boundary then follows the fence at the cemetery's south for approximately 150 feet, and then proceeds northward for 215 feet. Next, the boundary angles to the east, running to the immediate rear of the frame church, and proceeds eastward for approximately 175 feet. At this point the boundary proceeds north and continues for 200 feet to the road forming the northern extent of section 9, township 4 north, range 13 east. The road serves as the nominated property's northern extent back to the starting point.



ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH COMPLEX (NH00-32)
NEMAHA COUNTY, NEBRASKA

SITE LOCATION MAP
NO SCALE

- A 1868 STONE CHURCH
- B 1903 FRAME CHURCH
- C 1925 PARSONAGE
- D FENCED CEMETERY

