

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUN 19 1986

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Joseph R. Brown House Ruins

and/or common Joseph R. Brown House Ruins

2. Location

street & number County Highway 15 N/A not for publication

city, town Sacred Heart Township -X vicinity of Sacred Heart

state Minnesota code 22 county Renville code 129

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name State of Minnesota (see continuation sheet)

street & number N/A

city, town St. Paul N/A vicinity of state Minnesota

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Renville County Courthouse

street & number Depue Avenue

city, town Olivia state Minnesota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Minnesota Statewide Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1984-85 federal state county local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office, Fort Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota 55111

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u> N/A </u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Joseph R. Brown House Ruins are located on the north side of County Road 15 (also known as the Sioux Trail) in Section 8 of Sacred Heart Township, Renville County. The site is situated on the north side of the Minnesota River on former Dakota Indian reservation land. When it was completed, the house was located between the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies (on the south side of the river) and about 36 miles west of Fort Ridgely. The house remains stand about 200 yards below the top of the river bluff, about 1/4 mile from the river itself, with a commanding view of the river valley. Also on the site was a 9' x 9' root cellar north of the house and a stable (which also housed some hired workers) northeast of the house, both of which had granite foundations. A well located near the house operated a fountain built in the yard to the south, which was much larger before the present county road was built south of the site.

The Brown House, or "Brown's Castle" as it was called, was a three and a half story, nineteen room stone mansion built in 1861 by a crew under the direction of Leopold Wohler. The house, which measured 48' wide x 28' deep, was built into a hillside with a first story main entrance on the south facade and an entrance on the north facade opening into the second story. Although no known photographs exist of the site, accounts by family members and others indicate that the house was Federal or Greek Revival-inspired with a gabled roof. The south (main) facade was spanned by a large three story woodframe porch with covered first and second story porches and an open third story balcony.

The Brown House is the earliest house in Minnesota known to be constructed of quarried granite and was built of pinkish granite blocks cut near the site. Lime for the stonework was made in a kiln about one mile north of the house. The interior walls were constructed of 8" x 4" x 2" bricks made at the government brickyards near the Upper Agency and laid 12 inches thick. The interior walls were finished with two to three coats of lime plaster which was strengthened with animal hair and tinted different colors in many of the nineteen rooms. Most of the lumber for the sills and joists came from New Ulm, although some may have been cut at the sawmill at the Upper Agency. The house is believed to have had 31 windows.

The interior of the first floor of the house had a central 8 foot wide hall (on an north-south axis), two large 18' x 14' rooms on the south side (presumably kitchen and dining room) and four smaller 8' x 8' rooms along the north wall (presumably pantries and storerooms). The second and third stories housed parlors, sitting rooms, and bedrooms. The attic story contained a billiard table and Joseph Brown's desk. The Brown House was heated with stoves, rather than fireplaces, and was elaborately furnished with upholstered oak furniture, heavy Damask curtains, bronze and crystal chandeliers, a piano, and modern cooking and serving equipment. Many of the furnishings were purchased in New York City, shipped by rail to St. Paul, and hauled to the house in wagons. Among the Browns' possessions in the house were dishes and pottery made in England and a Singer sewing machine manufactured between 1858 and 1861.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

**United States Department of the Interior
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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Joseph R. Brown House Ruins, Sacred Heart Township, Renville

County, MN

Continuation sheet

Owner of Property

Item number 4

Page 1

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date entered

Ms. Sandra J. Hale, Commissioner
Department of Administration
200 State Administration Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

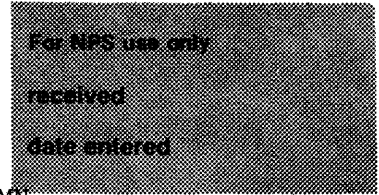
Joseph N. Alexander, Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, Minnesota 55146

Don Davison, Director, Park and Recreation
Department of Natural Resources
Box 39
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, Minnesota 55146

Charles Mitchell, Regional Park Supervisor
Box 756
Highway 15 South
New Ulm, Minnesota 56073

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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Inventory—Nomination Form**



Sacred Heart Township, Renville County, MN

Continuation sheet J. R. Brown House Ruins

Item number 7

Page 1

Item #7 (Description) continued:

At the outbreak of the Dakota War in August of 1862 the house was gutted by fire and nearly all furnishings were destroyed or stolen. In 1865 the stable was converted to a house and occupied until 1876. During the next 75 years the stone comprising much of the walls and foundations of the house, stable, and root cellar was removed from the site by local farmers. In 1938 when the site was first excavated by Richard R. Sackett and the Division of State Parks, the house foundations, the base of the interior walls, and the porch column bases were visible but most stone wall sections had collapsed. In 1939 after Sackett's dig, the Division of State Parks stabilized the ruins by clearing the base of the foundation and covering it with an 8 inch layer of crushed rock, removing a large section of the original walls which had become unsafe, removing the granite porch supports, and laying a single row of bricks to indicate the location of interior walls. The upper portions of the foundation were then stabilized with granite blocks newly quarried about a mile from the site. During the 1939 project the site was landscaped and the stable remains were covered or removed.

Today the outer walls of the house are clearly visible in granite blocks (both original and from the 1939 stabilization) which form a structure whose dimensions are 47' 4" (south wall) by 27' 6" (east wall). The north wall of the house stands about 12' tall from the earth in the center of the original interior, and projects about 3' above the north embankment into which the house was built. The south wall is presently about 3' tall and the side walls vary between 4' and 5' tall. The southeast corner stands about 4 1/2' tall. Nothing remains of the root cellar, originally located about 50 north of the house. A permanent marker which contains a cast metal sketch suggesting the original exterior appearance of the house, was installed in 1959 on the approximate original site of the stable northeast of the house. A well, encircled by granite blocks, is situated 14 feet from the southeast corner of the house.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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Joseph R. Brown House Ruins, Sacred Heart Township, (vicinity of
Sacred Heart) Minnesota

Continuation sheet

Resource Count

Item number

7

Page

2

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The Joseph R. Brown House Nomination contains 1 contributing Site
House Ruins

The nomination contains 2 non-contributing objects

hand water pump
plaque

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 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 type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1861-1862 **Builder/Architect** Leopold Wohler, head builder

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The ruins of the Joseph R. Brown House, built in 1861, are historically significant as the remains of the home of Joseph R. Brown, one of the most important figures in the early history of the state; as a site with strong historical links to nineteenth century Indian-White relations in Minnesota, activities at the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies, and events which precipitated and marked the beginning of the Dakota War of 1862; and as the remains of a site which is a rare representative of the early settlement of the upper Minnesota River Valley, which was one of the largest and most unusual buildings constructed in outstate Minnesota at the time, and which provides an important glimpse at a unique portion of early life on the Minnesota frontier.

Joseph R. Brown, a fur trader, lumberman, politician, Indian agent, newspaper editor, land speculator, and inventor who was a contemporary of Henry Sibley and Alexander Ramsey, was one of the earliest settlers to what is now Minnesota and one of the handful of people recognized as having a tremendous impact on the early settlement and organization of the state. Brown is credited with platting the first townsite in Minnesota (circa 1836, now part of Stillwater) and building the first house there, rafting the first logs down the St. Croix River to a lumber mill near Stillwater (1837), laying out the first wagon roads from Fort Snelling to Prairie du Chein through southeastern Minnesota and Fort Snelling to Lac qui Parle through southwestern Minnesota; and producing the first crop on a farm in the state (1829, near Minnehaha Falls). Few people in the earliest period of Minnesota's settlement were better known or engaged in such diverse activities as Brown.

Brown was born in Maryland in 1805 and grew up in Pennsylvania. He was apprenticed to a newspaper printer at age 13 but soon joined the army, coming to Minnesota in 1819 as a drummer boy with the first troops assigned to build Fort Snelling. He remained a soldier at Fort Snelling until 1825 when he began a long career of trading with Dakota Indians, first with a trading post in a cabin just outside the fort. From circa 1825-1835 Brown was an independent trader associated with the American Fur Company headed by Henry Sibley, and was stationed in isolated posts at "Land's End" on the Minnesota River, the mouth of the Chippewa River near Montevideo, Big Stone Lake, Lake Traverse (circa 1835), Gray Cloud Island (circa 1838) where he also operated a farm, and Couteau des Prairies.

In 1835 at Lake Traverse he married Susan Frenier, the daughter of a French-Canadian father and Dakota/Scotch mother who had been raised near Lake Traverse by her Dakota mother and stepfather. Through most of the 1840's the couple lived on the St. Croix River at a townsite which Brown platted and named "Dakotah". The town became the county seat of St. Croix County, Wisconsin Territory, in 1840 and later became an addition to the city of Stillwater. While living in Dakotah, Brown served in the Wisconsin territorial legislature from 1840-42 and served as the justice of peace for St. Croix County. He was a central figure in 1846-1849 actions to establish the Minnesota Territory.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"G.G. Allanson Writes of Indian Outbreak." Traverse County Star, April 12, 1923.
Carley, Kenneth. The Sioux Uprising of 1862. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1961.
Folwell, William W. "A visit to Farther-and-Gay Castle." Minnesota Historical Society Collections, June, 1931.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 3 acres

Quadrangle name Iverson Lake

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	5	3	1	6	0	0	0	4	9	5	7	6	3	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H

Zone			Easting					Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary of the Joseph R. Brown House Ruins nomination is shown as the red line on the accompanying map entitled "Joseph R. Brown House Ruins, 1971" and drawn at a scale of 50 feet to the inch.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger/Contract Historian

State Historic Preservation Office

organization Minnesota Historical Society

date July 1985

street & number Fort Snelling History Center

telephone (612) 726-1171

city or town St. Paul

state Minnesota 55111

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state 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

Russell W. Fridley

title

Russell W. Fridley
State Historic Preservation Officer

date

6/12/86

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Charles D. Shull

date

8-3-86

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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Sacred Heart Township, Renville County, MN

Continuation sheet J. R. Brown House Ruins Item number 8 Page 1

Item #8 (Significance) continued:

In 1849 Brown served on the first central committee of the newly organized Democratic Party in Minnesota. In the 1850's he served as secretary of the Territorial Council, chief clerk of the House of Representatives and a member of both the State house and senate. Brown moved to St. Paul and in 1853-1854 edited the Minnesota Pioneer. In 1855 he platted and began to promote the town of Henderson on the Minnesota River which in 1855 became the fourth town in Minnesota to be incorporated (after St. Paul, Stillwater, and St. Anthony). Brown lived in Henderson and published a newspaper there from 1856-57. In 1857 he served as chief of Henry Sibley's successful campaign for election as the state's first governor (the election was held several months before statehood was achieved) and later played an important role in formulating the state constitution.

In 1857 Brown was appointed by Sibley to serve as United States Indian Agent for the Sioux, a federal political appointment. Between 1857 and 1861 the family lived at the Upper Sioux Agency (south of present day Granite Falls), and Brown was responsible for activities at both the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies (located 30 miles apart on reservation land on the south side of the Minnesota) which had been established in 1851 after the signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux (which Brown witnessed and may have helped negotiate). After many years of living, trading, and forming a marriage alliance with the Dakota, Brown was well suited to the job of Indian Agent and was liked and respected by many Indians. He supported and implemented the plan to help the Dakota assimilate culturally by living in houses and raising crops near the Lower Agency. In 1858 he led a delegation of Dakota leaders to Washington on a visit which resulted in the signing of the 1858 treaty in which the Dakota forfeited their reservation land on the north side of the Minnesota River, a move which Brown apparently believed was inevitable but would be profitable for the Sioux. Brown remained Indian Agent until 1861 when he was replaced by a Republican appointee, Thomas Galbraith, a man who had little experience with the Dakota and was unfamiliar and unsympathetic with their problems. Many historians believe that the removal of Brown from the position of Indian agent was a major factor in the increased tension which eventually exploded in the outbreak of the Dakota War.

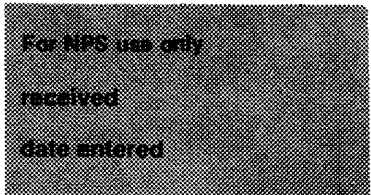
Brown constructed his stone mansion (sometimes called "Brown's Castle") after losing his agency position in 1861. The site which he chose for the house was on the north bank of the Minnesota (on land ceded in the 1858 treaty), 7 miles southeast of the Upper Agency, 23 miles northwest of the Lower Agency, and about 36 miles west of Fort Ridgely. The Browns' only neighbors were a few white settlers and traders living in isolated cabins and the Dakota, who lived in about six reservation settlements on the south bank of the river.

The Brown House, a 3 1/2 story, 19 room mansion located high on the river bluff and built of granite quarried on the site, was unlike any structure built in outstate Minnesota at the time. Its size and opulence far surpassed the stone, brick, and woodframe agency buildings and the log cabins and frame shacks built by traders and settlers along the upper Minnesota valley in the 1850's and 1860's. The house was soon widely known as a stopping place on the river, and was often visited by travellers, officials, missionaries, and settlers. Although Brown was no longer Agent, he continued his involvement with Indians, and meetings and social gatherings of Dakota were apparently held at the house. Joseph and Susan Brown lived in the house with their twelve children,

CONTINUED

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Continuation sheet J. R. Brown House Ruins Sacred Heart Township, Renville County, MN
Item number 8

Page 2

Item #8 (Significance) continued:

several Indian and white employees including maids, a nanny, a gardener/coachmen, hired hands, and an overseer, and attended Episcopal services at the Lower Agency mission church. The family reportedly held parties and balls attended by houseguests, officers from Fort Ridgely, agency employees, and traders, providing glamour and social interest on the isolated frontier. Their estate was nicknamed by a visitor "Farther-and-Gay Castle" after Fotheringhay Castle in England.

After the house had been completed only about one year and while Brown was in New York City soliciting financial backing for his newest invention (a steam powered wagon), the Dakota War broke out, resulting in the destruction of Brown's castle. On August 18, 1862, the first day of violence, two of Brown's children visited the Upper Agency and were warned of danger. The next morning 27 people including Susan Brown, her 12 children, hired help, and neighbors, fled on wagons toward Fort Ridgely. Six miles from the Brown House the group was stopped by a war party. Susan Brown reportedly stood on a wagon and defended the group by threatening the Indians with the vengeance of her Sisseton Sioux relatives. The Dakota allowed the men to escape and took Susan Brown and the other women and children to Little Crow's camp where they were held until the mass release of war prisoners on September 26, 1862 at "Camp Release" west of Montevideo.

Although the Brown family escaped injury, their house was set on fire and all furnishings and personal possessions destroyed or stolen. Joseph Brown returned immediately from New York and joined the volunteer force fighting the war. He was leader of the burial party which was ambushed on September 2 in the thirty hour Battle of Birch Coulee and fought in the final decisive Battle of Wood Lake on September 23, 1862.

After the war the Brown family moved to what became known as Browns Valley in Traverse County where Brown served as commander of scouts and special military agent on the Minnesota-Dakota border and ran a trading post and inn. At the age of 65 he died unexpected in New York City in November of 1870, while on a trip to promote his steam wagon. Susan Brown and her family continued to live at Browns Valley.

The Brown property on the Minnesota River remained abandoned from 1862 until 1865 when it was homesteaded by Lotus F. Green. Green lived on the site from 1865 to 1876 in the Brown stable which he converted to a house. Early settlers began to gradually dismantle the walls and foundations of Brown House and carry the stone away for foundations for their barns and houses. In 1937 a three acre site including the Brown House ruins was purchased by the State of Minnesota for use as a park.

The site was first investigated archeologically in June of 1938 when a delegation from the Division of State Parks conducted a dig whose findings are described in "Preliminary Archaeological Report, Joseph R. Brown Memorial State Park, Sacred Heart" (1938) by expedition leader Richard R. Sackett. The crew, which consisted of personnel from the Minnesota Historical Society and workers from the Works Progress Administration, was assigned to collect information for a possible reconstruction of the house proposed by the state parks division.

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Sacred Heart Township, Renville County, MN

Continuation sheet J. R. Brown House Ruins Item number 8, 9

Page 3

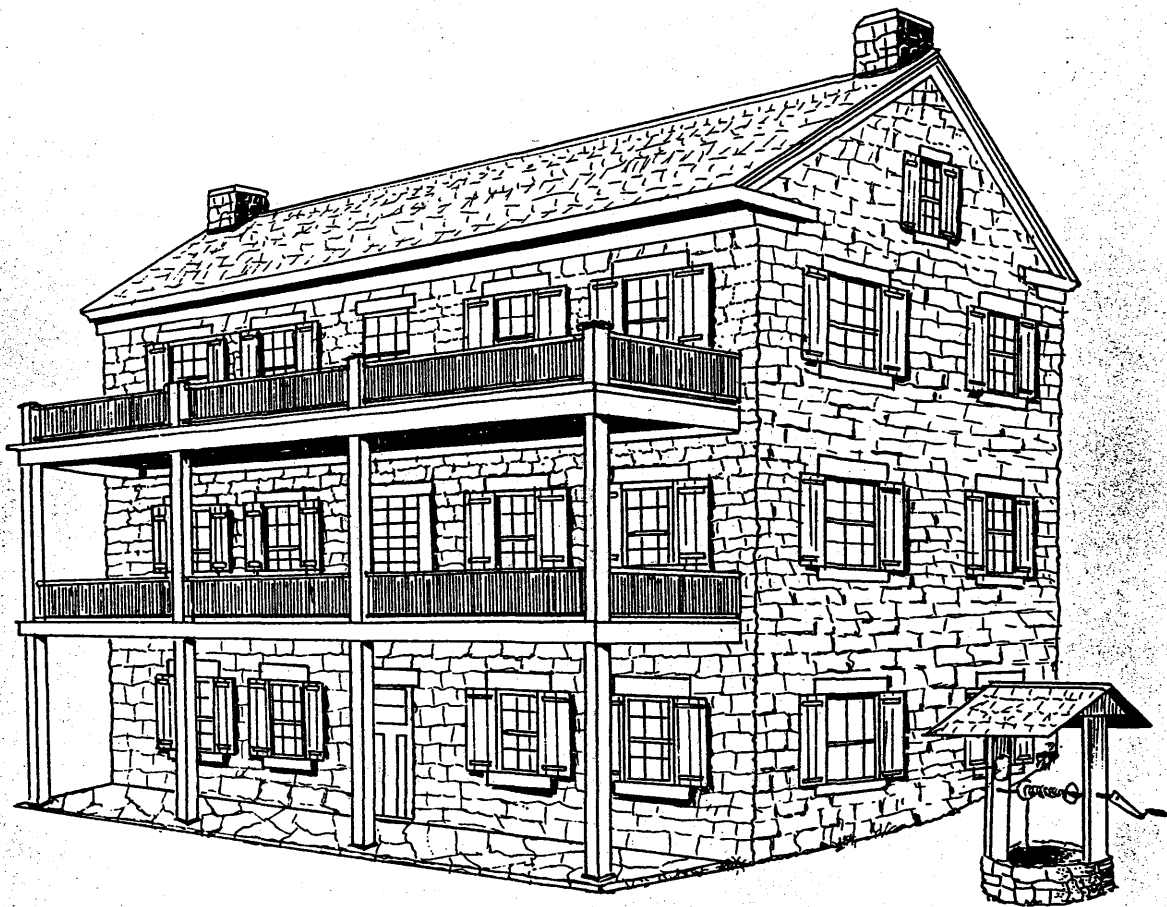
Item #8 (Significance) continued:

After Sackett's dig the Division of State Parks landscaped the area in 1939, and stabilized and filled in the foundations of the house. In 1959 a permanent marker and picnic tables were placed at the site. The site was again excavated, this time by the Minnesota Historical Society, in 1968. The 1968 findings and a review of the 1938 findings are described in The Joseph R. Brown House: Final Report on Archaeological Excavations (1939) by Carla G. Lindeman and David W. Nystuen. The site now serves as a wayside park and the house ruins are open to the public.

The Brown House site was included in an eight month historic sites survey of Renville County conducted recently by the State Historic Preservation Office. The survey staff determined that, although the house has been largely destroyed, the site remains one of the most significant pre-Dakota War sites in west central and southwestern Minnesota and a site which has important historical associations with Dakota Indian activity and early settlement along the Minnesota River. No other site directly associated with Joseph R. Brown has been listed on the National Register. The Brown House is one of western Minnesota's primary sites representing the "Agricultural Development and River Settlement" context unit of the Resource Protection Planning Process (RP3) and is also associated with the "Reservations and the Indian Community" context unit. (The RP3 is a document under preparation by the State Historic Preservation Office to assist in the study and assessment of the state's historic sites.)

Item #9 (Bibliography) continued:

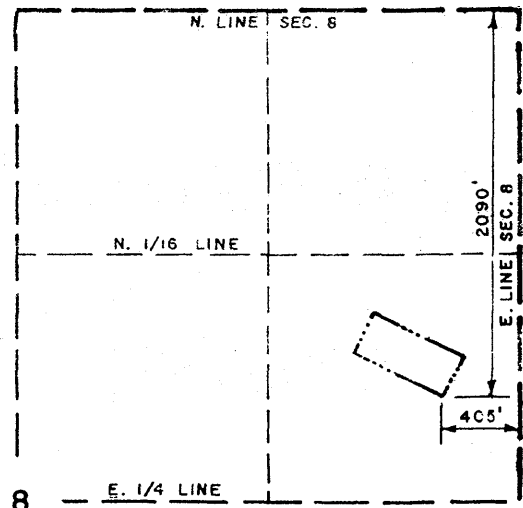
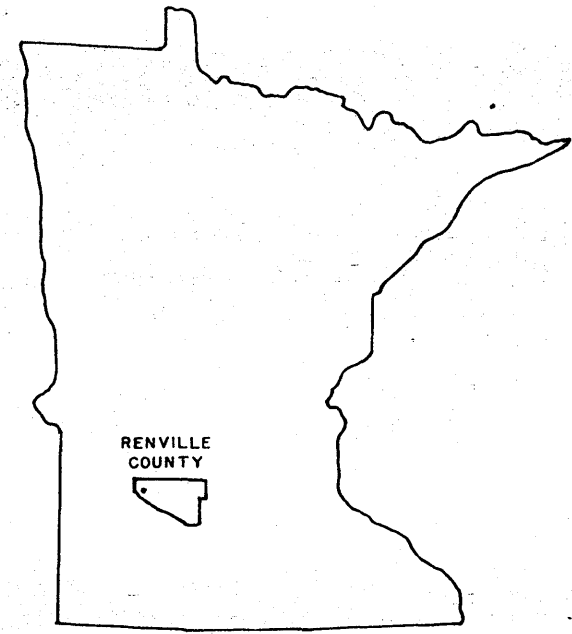
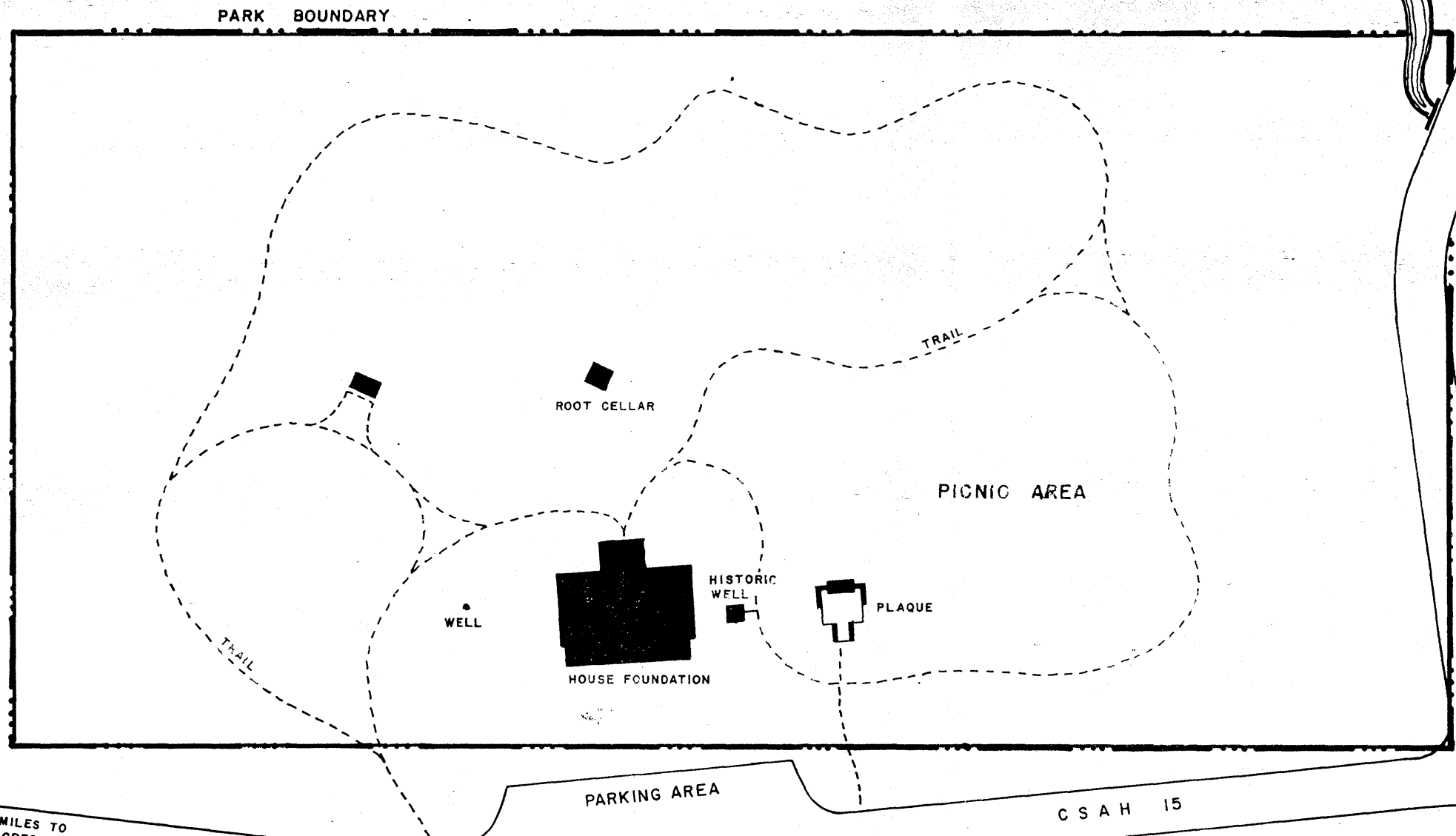
- Newcombe, Barbara T. "'A Portion of the American People': The Sioux Sign a Treaty in Washington in 1858." Minnesota History, Fall 1976.
- Holmquist, June D. and Jean A. Brookins. Minnesota's Major Historic Sites: A Guide. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1972.
- Lindeman, Carla G. and David W. Nystuen. The Joseph R. Brown House: Final Report on Archaeological Excavations. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1969.



Artist Rendering of Joseph R. Brown House

Picture Credit:

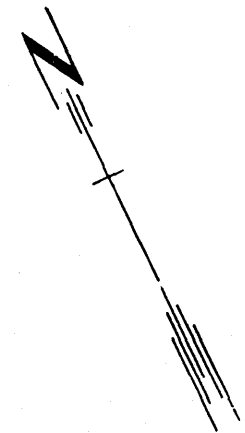
Lindeman, Carla G. and David W. Nystuen. THE JOSEPH R. BROWN HOUSE: FINAL REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS. St. Paul: Minnesota. Minnesota Historical Society 1969.



REFERENCE MAP
SCALE: 1" = 1000'

Joseph R. Brown House Ruins
SCALE: 1" = 50'
STATUTORY BOUNDARY 3 ACRES
Drawn 1963-Revised 1971
NOTE:
NO PRIVATE LAND WITHIN
STATUTORY BOUNDARY

KEY
— EXISTING DEVELOPMENT



MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
STATE PARK SITE

JOSEPH R. BROWN
STATE WAYSIDE
RENVILLE CO. - NEAR SACRED HEART

SEC. 8	T. 114 N.	R. 37 W.	5TH P. M.
DRAWN DAD 8-28-63	BUREAU OF ENGINEERING		SURVEY
CHECKED JD 9-10-63			DATUM
REVISED LDS 8-17-71	 3-12-63 CHIEF ENGINEER		
REQ.	SHEET	FILE	
60-35	4	00500001	

← 6 MILES TO
SACRED HEART

CSAH 15