

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

DIVISION OF NATIONAL REGISTER PROGRAMS NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Seitaniemi, Alex, Housebarn other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Off Township Road 797 city, town Tower (Waasa Township) state Minnesota code MN county St. Louis code 137 zip code 55732

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private/public ownership and building/site/structure/object categories.

Name of related multiple property listing: Rural Finnish Log Buildings of St. Louis Co., MN Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart Date 1/25/90 Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE:

animal facility

agricultural outbuilding

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Log

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Log

Weatherboard

roof Metal

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Alex Seitaniemi Housebarn, an extremely rare and important cultural resource, is located in the northwest part of Waasa Township at the end of a long dead end gravel road. Except for a ca.1924 wood frame dwelling and sauna (1961) the housebarn is the only major building on the property. It is surrounded by level, open terrain on the south, east, and west sides, and a second-growth, mixed deciduous and coniferous forest to the north.

The early twentieth century two-story housebarn was constructed in two phases between ca.1907-ca.1913. Built ca.1907 of hewn tamarack logs joined by full dovetail corner notches, the 23'9" x 42' west portion of the structure was the original homestead of Alex Seitaniemi and his family. It consists of a two-story, gable-fronted house and contains on the first floor an undivided, 17'6"-wide living room, dining room, kitchen, and stairway. An enclosed corner staircase to the immediate right of the south-facing entrance leads to the upper level bedroom, which is also unpartitioned. The second floor room has twin 1/1 double hung windows on the facade, and another 1/1 double hung sash on the west wall. The ceiling of the multi-purpose first floor room has 7"-wide lapped boards covering the hewn floor joists. Located in the southwest corner is a decorative cupboard that was used to hold special religious and household items; this space is known as "God's corner" or, in Finnish, suurtsuppa. The interior walls originally were covered with a thin layer of building paper, although some of it has been removed.

The first floor entrance is flanked to the west by one 1/1 double hung window, while a similar opening pierces the west gable. Historic photographs indicate that a small frame root cellar entry was attached to the area adjacent to the first floor gable end window; it was removed at an undetermined date. A simple, low cover just above ground now stands in its place.

The attached barn, or second bay, is separated from the house by a common wall that is unbroken and made of hewn logs. According to the builder's son, this space originally sheltered several horses and one or two cows, with hay stored in the loft above and tossed down along the north wall where the animals were fed. Entry to the barn formerly was through a door identical to the house entrance; this was altered with a sliding track door in 1951. Just inside the entry to the right was an enclosed staircase and pantry for storing oats, but these were removed at an unknown date. A hand pump for water is located to the immediate left of the door. There is a wood plank floor and a small door on the east wall.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage: European

Period of Significance

ca.1907-1939

Significant Dates

ca.1907

ca.1913

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Seitaniemi, Alex, architect and builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Seitaniemi Housebarn is historically significant under National Register Criterion A because it is associated with the settlement and agricultural development of rural St. Louis County by Finnish immigrants around the turn of the century. It is also architecturally significant under Criterion C as an outstanding example of a building that embodies distinctive and traditional Fenno-Scandian log construction methods, and because it is the only known Finnish housebarn in Minnesota and one of just two such building types in the state. This rare building represents an aberration of the second associated property type (Houses) but is included here because its primary function was to provide shelter for both humans and animals. The Seitaniemi housebarn is representative of the transformation of northeastern Minnesota's cutover region into arable land by Finnish immigrants who had just arrived in the country or recently left jobs in the mining or timber industries (see associated historic contexts, The Iron Range, 1880s-1930s and Northern Minnesota Lumbering, 1870s-1930s). As an excellent illustration of a folk building executed in log, the housebarn also represents the third historic context, Finnish Log Architecture, 1880s-1930s. While the overall size of the Seitaniemi Housebarn signals a departure from the popular two-room plan, the house section nevertheless conforms to the one-room plan used by other settlers in the area. The finely-crafted log walls exhibit the traditional north European construction technique and are secured by full dovetail corner joints. The rare and unusual form, a fine collection of hand-made folk artifacts (including several vara and two broadaxes) and ownership by a direct descendant bolster the significance of the property.

The housebarn was designed and built by its original owner, Alex Seitaniemi. Little is known about him except that he emigrated from Sodankyla, a village in northern Finland in what is now part of Lapland. Seitaniemi worked for a short time in Ely, Minnesota and then held a job with the Tower Lumber Co., from which he purchased his 80-acre parcel of land in Section 4 of Waasa Township. A railroad line ran near the property to the east, so it is possible that Seitaniemi supplemented his income through some type of employment associated with the railroad. It is known that he sold pulpwood to the cooperative store in Embarrass.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See the Historic Contexts Bibliography and the following sources:

- Baker, T. Lindsay. "Silesion Polish Folk Architecture in Texas." In Built in Texas, ed. Francis Abernathy (Waco: E-Heart Press, 1979), 133.
- Koop, Michael and Stephen Ludwig. German-Russian Folk Architecture in Southeastern South Dakota. (Vermillion, S.D.: State Historical Preservation Center, 1984).
- Marshall, Howard W. "The Pelster Housebarn: Endurance of Germanic Architecture on the Midwestern Frontier." Material Culture 18/2 (Summer 1986): 65-104.
- Murphy, David. "Bohemian-American Log Technology in Northeastern Nebraska." Unpublished paper delivered to the Vernacular Architecture Forum, Madison, WI, 1983.
- Tishler, William and Christopher S. Witmer. "The Housebarns of East-Central Wisconsin." In Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II, ed. Camille Wells (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 102-110.

See continuation sheet

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property Less than one

UTM References

A

1	5	5	6	4	7	0	0
Zone		Easting			Northing		

C

Zone		Easting			Northing		

B

Zone		Easting			Northing		

D

Zone		Easting			Northing		

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Seitaniemi Housebarn is a rectangular parcel measuring 50 x 107 feet, whose northwest corner is 15 feet directly northwest of the northwest corner of the foundation of the house and whose southeast corner is 15 feet directly southeast of the southeast corner of the foundation of the barn.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes just the housebarn and excludes a) the ca.1924 house because it is not built of log, and b) the sauna because it does not meet the minimum 50 year age requirement.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Michael Koop/Preservation Consultant	date	January 1989
organization	N/A	telephone	612-623-8356
street & number	615 Jackson St. NE	state	MN
city or town	Minneapolis	zip code	55413

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Seitaniemi, Alex, Housebarn, St. Louis County, MN

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At some time around 1913, a 49'10"-long, two-bay addition was attached to the east side of the housebarn. The first bay (closest to the original building) is about 24'8" long and the same width as the housebarn. It is made of log on the lower floor and frame above, stands two stories high, features a gabled facade, and has on the lower level a wide gap in the wall as well an opening where the door to an outhouse formerly stood. The back (north) wall originally featured a pair of upright posts and two spaces where wagons could be driven to collect manure. In about 1963 vertical planks were placed over the posts and a small door and window were installed. The upper hay loft is accessible on both the front and back sides by earth ramps which lead to hinged double doors.

The final bay is a 25'2" x 33'4" poplar and tamarack log cattle barn attached to the east end to create an "L"-shape for the entire building. It too has a gable facade with a central door flanked by two 1/1 double hung windows. Identical openings pierce the north wall. A small frame structure was originally attached to the southeast corner to shelter sheep, but it was removed at an unknown date. The interior of the cattle barn is whitewashed and has eight stalls on the west side and five along the east wall. There is a well in the southeast corner. Wood plank floors are supported by three logs. Hewn logs jointed at the corners by full dovetail notches extend from the fieldstone foundation up to the eaves, where drop siding covers the upper gable walls. The gable roof of the entire building is covered with both corrugated metal and rolled asphalt.

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Seitaniemi, Alex Housebarn, St. Louis County, MN

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According to Alex's bachelor son, Bill (one of three children), the family grew typical staples and crops common to St. Louis County Finns including hay, oats, and potatoes. In a good year their soil yielded 200 bushels of potatoes. Surplus cream from the 12-14 cattle was sold to the local cooperative store.

The origin of Alex Seitaniemi's design for constructing a single building that combines the dwelling, animal shelter, and storage area for crops under a common roof is unknown. Numerous types of housebarns can be found in Europe, and the concept of a multi-purpose building has been used for centuries in the British Isles and throughout the Continent including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Russia, Scandinavia, and Switzerland. While housebarns continued to be an important part of the European cultural landscape, New World settlers did not maintain this traditional form of shelter. Due, in part, to their traditional arrangement of farmsteads in Finland, and an abundance of land, homesteaders chose instead to separate the house and barn and build a variety of smaller structures. But for Alex Seitaniemi, the need to protect his family, livestock, and crops from northern Minnesota's harsh climate and predatory animals may have influenced his decision to erect such a functional building.

By locating the family's living space and bedroom next to the animals, the children and parents were able to take advantage of radiant heat from the cattle and horses in the adjacent pen. Hay stored above the livestock in the mow also served as an effective insulator against bitterly cold winter temperatures.

Despite its widespread use as a building tradition on the Continent, few housebarns were constructed in the New World. Of the fifteen or twenty housebarns known to have been built in America, all of them are located in the Upper Midwest and Great Plains states of Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin. Interestingly, nearly all of these buildings were constructed by German or Czech-Bohemian immigrants. The Seitaniemi Housebarn is one of just three housebarns in the United States known to have been built by a Finn (the other two originally stood in Michigan's Upper Peninsula).

The same high quality design and workmanship evident in other Finnish log buildings is executed in the Seitaniemi housebarn. The dovetailed walls are extremely smooth and tight, indicating the expertise of the builder and his familiarity with woodworking tools. The housebarn retains excellent integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association because only one other major building stands on the property, and the adjoining agricultural land remains cleared of trees.