

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received APR 9 1984  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Phelps Mill District

and/or common Maine Roller Mill, Phelps Community

2. Location

street & number <sup>SR</sup> County Road 45 N/A not for publication

city, town ~~Maine Township~~ (Phelps)  vicinity of Underwood

state Minnesota code 22 county Otter Tail code 111

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name --multiple ownership-- --see continuation sheet--

street & number N/A

city, town N/A N/A vicinity of state N/A

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Otter Tail County Courthouse -- Registrar of Deeds

street & number Court Street at Junius Ave.

city, town Fergus Falls state Minnesota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Statewide Survey of  
title Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date September, 1982  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Minnesota Historical Society-Ft. Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota

## 7. Description

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

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Phelps Mill District consists of the core buildings of the crossroads community of Phelps, set in a deep valley where the Otter Tail River narrows and provides a place for the mill dam and pond. The community complex consists of the water-powered Phelps Mill, the Phelps Store, and the miller's house built by William E. Thomas. These three buildings are located at the corners of the crossroads -- the mill at the northwest corner, the Thomas House high on a hill due east of the mill, and the store southeast of the mill.

Phelps Mill consists of two wood frame mills joined together. The flour mill building, 36 by 30 feet and four stories tall, was built first, followed in 1895 by the second mill, a three-story 25 by 36 foot addition designed to grind buckwheat, rye, and feed. A 1908 concrete and rubble dam, replacing an 1887 wood dam, provided water to the two turbines which are still visible in their twin houses. William E. Thomas owned the mill, designed to produce 60 to 75 barrels of flour per day. The building is framed with hand-hewn timbers and covered with clapboard siding. Rectangular window moldings embellish the six-over-six windows. Wood shingles cover the gambrel roof. The buckwheat and rye mill addition has similar windows and a flat, tarred roof that slopes to the west. The turbine houses are two individual one story additions on the west elevation. Later additions to the mill structure include a shed roof that extends the full length of the east side and a four story chimney. A one-story office was added to the south side. The mill still contains almost all the original equipment, including roller mills, middlings purifiers, dust collectors, and bolting, sifting, and cleaning machinery.

The original portion of the Phelps Store is a 1½-story structure dating from 1891. The 20 by 36 foot gable-fronted building has a central front door flanked by two simple, double-hung windows. Two smaller windows are on the second floor. All front-facade windows have solid wood shutters. Window openings on the north side are of different sizes and asymmetrically placed. The gable roof slopes down to the upper windows. One story additions have added to the size of the store. The principal street-side addition forms a low wing off the south side of the original store. This wing has a single door and a window. A narrow open porch extends across the front of the store. Its slightly sloping roof is supported by turned posts, between which are arched facing boards just below the eave. Two of these posts support glass-ball lamps. The interior has been restored to a country-

(see continuation sheet)

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1889, 1891, 1902 **Builder/Architect** unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Phelps Mill District is significant as a representative agricultural, commercial, and industrial center in Otter Tail County during the last decade of the nineteenth century. While other mills in the county have been extensively modernized or demolished, or have deteriorated through disuse, the Phelps Mill has remained intact. Preservation by the Otter Tail County Board and interpretation by the county historical society, provides a site for the interpretation of flour milling and wheat farming in the region. The William E. Thomas House, built by the mill's founder, the Phelps Store, and the mill itself form the nucleus of the essentially rural community of Phelps. Such agricultural service centers were once common in central Minnesota, but most have disappeared with the advent of the automobile and the shift away from local milling.

The Thomas House is well-preserved due to its continuance occupancy since 1903. It is one of the more substantial houses in the area and reflects Thomas' success as the owner and operator of Phelps Mill. The Phelps Store, first opened in 1891, is again functioning as a store -- now serving the summer tourists to the mill and park. The Phelps Mill District, then, is an unusually well-preserved example of milling communities once found throughout the state.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- "Phelps Mill," NR nomination form, 1975.  
Bergantine, Rosanne. Phelps: A Peek Into Its Past, 1970, pp. 1-25.  
"Phelps Mill", Fergus Falls Daily Journal, May 20, 1965.  
"Phelps Mill," Minneapolis Tribune, July 10, 1955.  
Frame, Robert M., III. Millers to the World, Minnesota Historical Society, 1977, p. 123.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property app. 9  
Quadrangle name Phelps Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>4</u>	<u>2</u> <u>8</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u>	<u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u> <u>9</u> <u>9</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u>	B						
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing			
C				D						
E				F						
G				H						

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The nominated property includes all That portion of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , Sec. 35, T134N, R41W, that lies north of the outlet of Leon Lake.

### 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 Thomas Harvey, Contract Historian  
organization N/A date 19 September 1983  
street & number 1916 Drew Ave. S. telephone (612) 920-6917  
city or town Minneapolis state Minnesota

## 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 date 3/28/84  
title State Historic Preservation Officer

### For NPS use only

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

Melores Byers Entered in the National Register date 5/10/84  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Continuation sheet Phelps Mill District

Item number 4

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4. Ownership of Properties

Phelps Mill: Otter Tail County Board  
Otter Tail County Courthouse  
Junius Ave. at Court Street  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537

Phelps Store: Carol E. Emerson  
Rt. #1  
Richville, MN 56576

William E. Thomas House: A.R. and Rosalie Bergantine  
529 Ann Street  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537

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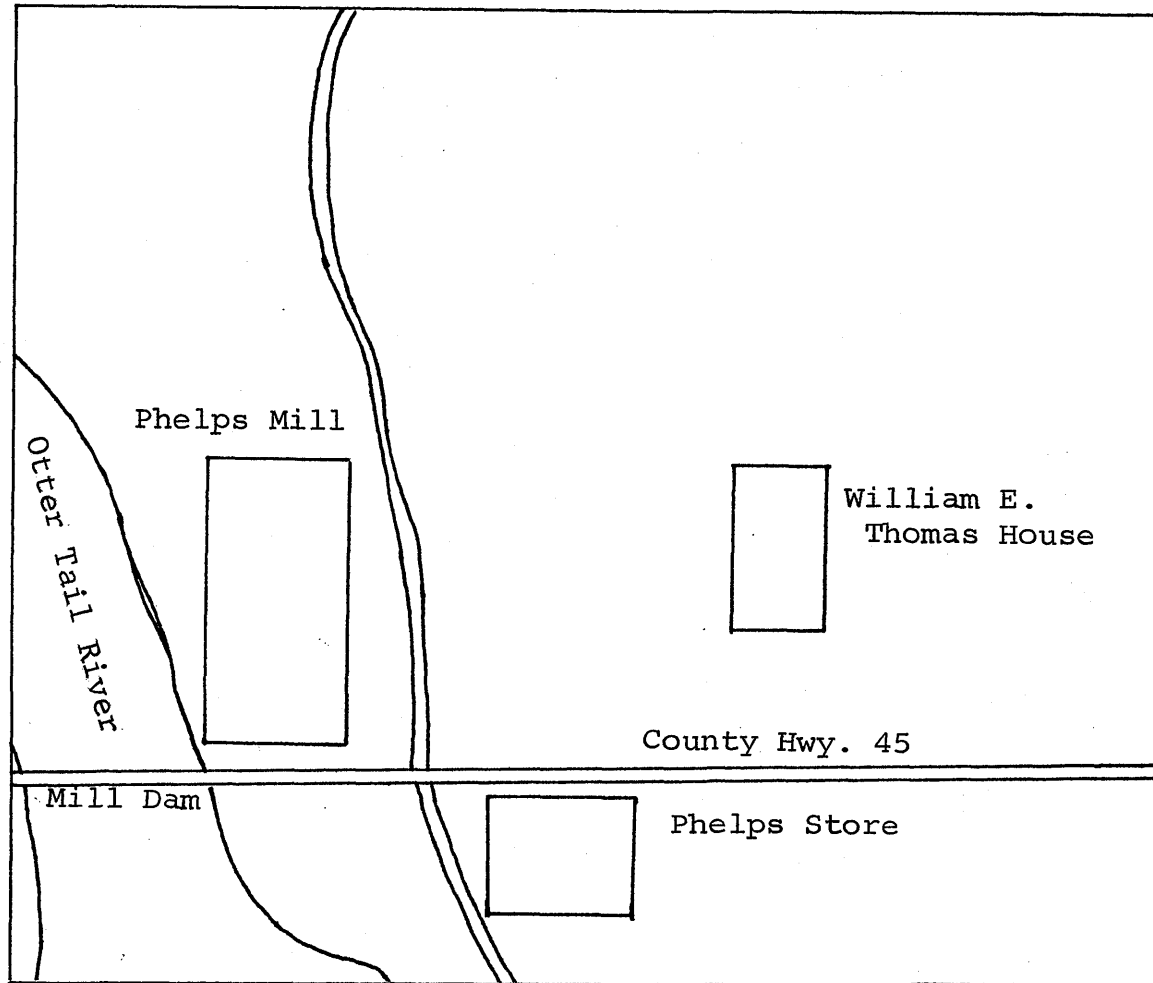
Continuation sheet Phelps Mill District Item number 7

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store atmosphere by its present owners.

The William E. Thomas House, built for the founder and owner of Phelps Mill in 1902, is a simple builder's version of the Italianate style. Built by local craftsmen, the house lacks many of the ornate decorative features of fancier houses, but it was nevertheless noted by a contemporary journalist as "one of the finest buildings in the county." The house sits on a stone foundation and is built on an irregular, essentially long and narrow plan. Sided with white clapboard, the house is two stories with a complex, steeply hipped roof. Two-story projecting bays on the east and west sides have open gable roofs with sunburst symbols. The east bay also has a first-floor bay window. A small front porch with simple columns covers the front entry. There are rear porches on both sides of the dwelling. All the windows are large, rectangular, and double-sash. The rear portion of the house was planned with a bunkhouse to house the unmarried mill workers. A small captain's walk on the roof can be reached by a ladder. Interior finishing contains bird's-eye maple woodwork, an oak stairway and bannister, and pine floors.

Phelps Mill District  
Maine Township  
Otter Tail County  
Minnesota



\_\_\_\_\_ District Boundary