

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION and CULTURE/fair

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION and CULTURE/fair

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: WPA Public Architecture

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD/weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Mahanomen County Fairgrounds Historic District consists of a 40-acre parcel of land with nine buildings, six of which contribute to the integrity of the property, an oval racetrack, and an artistic stone entrance gate. Located on the northwestern edge of Mahanomen (the county seat), the Fairgrounds are the product of a 1936 Works Progress Administration project, one of several that were undertaken in the county in the mid-1930s.

Facing east, the main entrance to the Fairgrounds is identified by two attractive curvilinear, rough-faced ashlar walls capped with concrete terminated at each end by stone columns. Adjacent to the wall is a square ticket office (building #1) with four window openings and a wooden door to the west. It is also made of rough-faced ashlar and has a hipped-roof covered with wood shingles. To the southeast of the ticket office two stone columns mark a secondary entrance. On the grounds are four wood frame buildings that date from when the site was developed. Three other wood frame buildings were added between 1962-1982. An oval track forms the north boundary of the property (a grandstand formerly stood along the south edge of the track, but was destroyed by fire in the late summer of 1987). Other buildings included in this historic district are:

2) 4-H Building. Built in 1936, this one-story, 40' x 80' rectangular-shaped structure has a hipped roof with asphalt shingles and double doors with transoms set in a gabled wall dormer on the north, east and west elevations. The north and south walls are broken by four pairs of 8/8 double hung sash windows; two pairs of 8/8 windows on each wall have been covered with lap siding. A tall ashlar stone chimney rises on the outside of the south wall. The 4-H building is a contributing element to the property.

3) About 60' west of the 4-H building is a 65' x 135' barrel roofed structure covered with drop siding. It was built in 1962 and is a noncontributing element to the property.

4) Immediately south of #3 is a small 15' x 30' gable-roofed structure with drop siding and corner boards. It has an opening in the west gable end. The building is used for displaying and judging poultry. It is a contributing element to the property. It was built in 1936.

5) About 60' south of #4 is another small 16' x 24' wood frame building sheathed with drop siding and corner boards. Used as a bathroom, it has a gable roof with asphalt shingles and doors in each gable. It is a contributing element to the property. It was also built in 1936.

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**United States Department of the Interior
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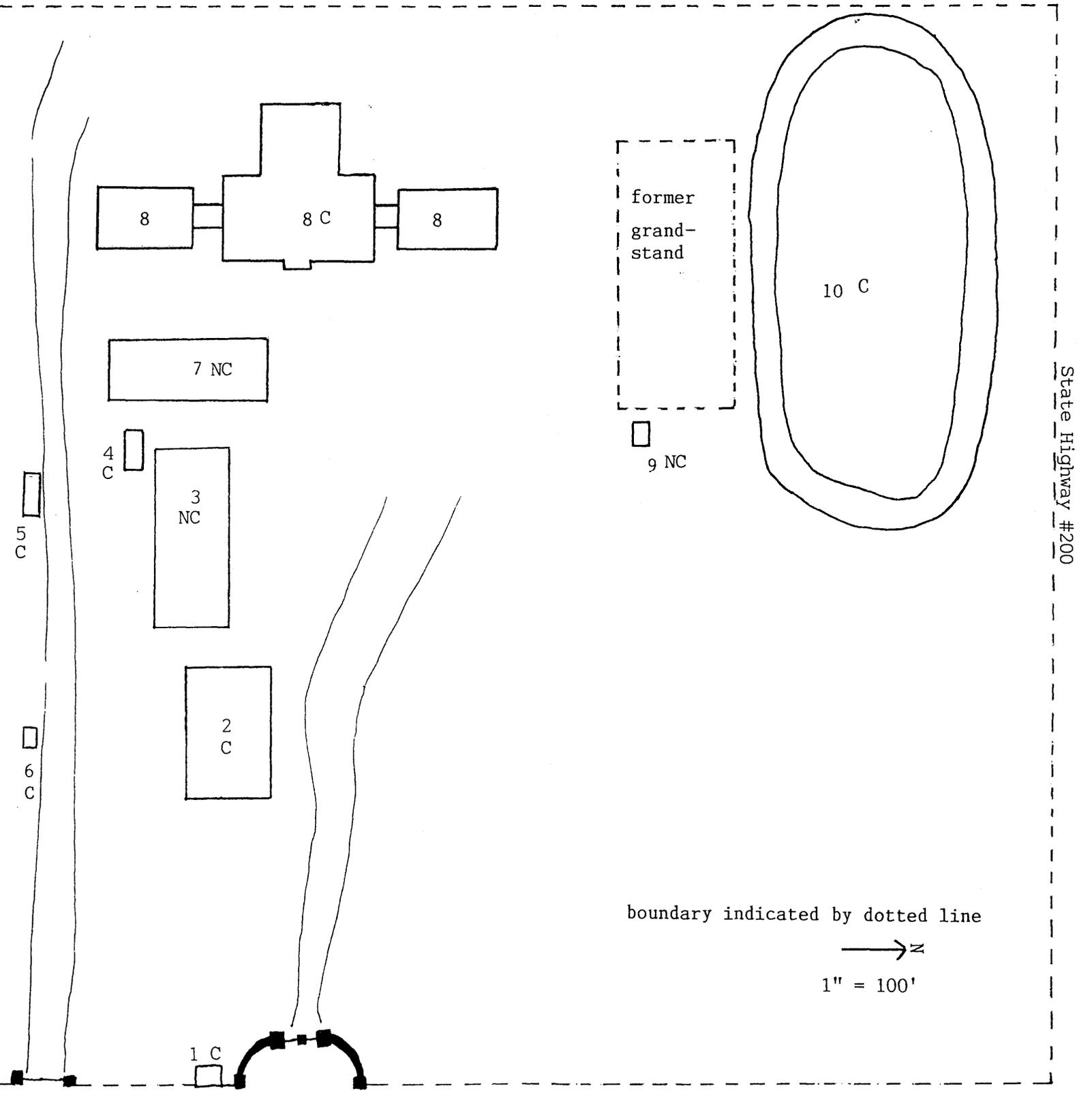
- 6) Approximately 100' south of the 4-H Building is another diminutive wood frame bathroom constructed in 1936. It has a gable roof with asphalt shingles, drop siding, corner boards, and a door which opens to the west.
- 7) Located about 35' west of Building #3 is a 45' x 114' barrel-roofed wood frame building covered with T-111 siding. Constructed in 1962, it is used to store and display machinery and is a noncontributing element on the property.
- 8) About 70' west of Building #6 is the Livestock Pavilion (1936), a three-part, hipped-roof building connected by covered walkways that is the focal point of the fairgrounds. The entire structure is sheathed with drop siding and corner boards and has exposed rafter tips. The southernmost section measures about 48' x 70' and features boards near the eaves that are hinged to open inward; these cover long rectangular openings for ventilation and light. A 21'-long passage connects this part with the 115' x 120' main pavilion which is "T"-shaped and has three intersecting hipped roofs surmounted by hipped clerestories. Six louvered ventilators formerly capped the clerestories but were removed at an undetermined date. A gable projection with eave returns is centered in the east wall; it has two wooden doors on a sliding track which replaced the original doors and fanlight at an unknown date. Square windows with wooden interior hinged covers surround the entire building on the first and second floors. Another covered passage links the middle pavilion with the section to the north that is identical in size and design to the one on the south end. The pavilion is considered a contributing element.
- 9) Adjacent to the south side of the track is a wood frame, gable-roofed bathroom covered with metal siding. Built in 1982, it is a noncontributing element.
- 10) Dating from 1936, the track is a large oval shaped with a dirt track and grass interior surrounded by a simple board railing. It is a contributing site.

All of the contributing buildings are constructed on concrete foundations, painted white, and are in sound condition.

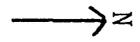
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Mahnomen County Fairgrounds Historic District, Mahnomen, MN
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boundary indicated by dotted line



1" = 100'

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)

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1936-1938

Significant Dates

1936

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Carter, George H., architect

Nelson, Carl, builder

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

The Mahnommen County Fairgrounds Historic District is significant in American history for the role it has played in providing a central location for residents in and around Mahnommen County to attend the annual agricultural exposition, an event of great commercial, educational and social importance to rural Minnesotan's since the 19th century. The site is also architecturally significant as a representation of the success of the Works Progress Administration, a federally-organized relief program that provided useful jobs for the nation's unemployed and produced unique buildings for public use.

Agricultural fairs were first held in Minnesota in the mid-1850s and were especially significant for farmers at the turn of the century when there were numerous advances in agriculture. These fairs functioned as harvest celebrations for rural residents and were important social events for farmers such as those in and around Mahnommen County who were relatively isolated during the summer months because of inadequate roads and a busy summer work schedule. Fair exhibits created by county agricultural societies, stock breeders, and manufacturers and distributors of seeds, machinery and equipment were extremely useful for farmers seeking information about modern farming techniques and current agricultural research. Produce, livestock, canning, grain, and horticulture displays and competitions permitted residents to compare and review the results of their growing season. Annual fairs often assisted with organizing fundraisers for local civic and charitable organizations, and served as political forums for the discussion of farm issues. Special "domestic" exhibits and competitions were designed for women, while clubs such as 4-H provided children with the opportunity to display their agricultural skills. Fairs also had a focus on entertainment, organizing carnivals, games, horse and auto races, and similar events throughout the summer months.

The Mahnommen County Fairgrounds was a direct result of the Works Progress Administration, a program administered by the U.S. government that offered aid to the unemployed through work projects. Buildings standing on the Fairgrounds were constructed in 1936 as part of an improvement project that originated with the W.P.A. and included erecting a stone gateway and fence, constructing several buildings, enlarging an existing grandstand, removing non-serviceable buildings, and

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Mahnomon County Fairgrounds Historic District Mahnomon, MN

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adding a water system for fire protection. Plans for the work began in January 1936 with an agreement between the Mahnomon County Fair Board and the W.P.A. in which the county provided \$2,500, and the government hired and funded relief clients to do the construction using \$34,500 that had been allocated for the 7th District in which Mahnomon was located. After the county commissioner refused to become involved in the proposal, \$1,500 was raised through a subscription campaign, with the balance provided by the Fair Board. By the end of February 1936 the Fair Board had announced the selection of Moorhead architect George H. Carter to design the buildings with Carl Nelson, a Mahnomon builder, serving as construction foreman. Twenty-two men originally worked on the project, more than one-tenth the number of W.P.A. employees in the county in 1936.

The Mahnomon County Fairgrounds is the only agricultural fair throughout the north-western part of the state, and except for the Traverse County Fairgrounds (N.R.) in western Minnesota, has perhaps the best collection of fair-associated buildings in the region. Collectively these utilitarian buildings represent the importance of agriculture in Mahnomon and area counties, while at the same time displaying characteristics promulgated by the W.P.A. The diminutive ticket office, for example, exhibits high quality, labor intensive masonry craftsmanship; identical features are repeated in the entrance gate and wall, also made with indigenous rock-faced stone. The wood frame 4-H building and livestock pavilion are distinguished by their symmetrical design and grand scale. The Mahnomon Pioneer reported in 1936 that the pavilion "is commanding a great deal of attention from fair visitors. Its spaciousness and arrangement is drawing general praise, and we daresay that no other fair association in the Northwest has a building that will compare with it" (22 May 1936).

Over its 50-year period of service the Fairgrounds have been used for a wide variety of events. Today, the grounds continue to be a popular site during the annual County Fair, as well as for 4-H activities, regular softball tournaments, and stock car racing which is held weekly on the oval track during the summer. Despite minor alterations and the construction of a few newer buildings, the Mahnomon County Fairgrounds continues to retain its visual appeal and historic integrity, and serves the public in a variety of important ways.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Mahnomen Pioneer 3 January 1936; 28 February 1936; 22 May 1936; 11 December 1936
Neely, Wayne C. The Agricultural Fair. New York: Columbia University Press, 1935.
United States, Works Progress Administration, Minnesota. Accomplishments Minnesota: 1935-1939. St. Paul, MN.: Works Progress Administration of Minnesota, 1939.

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

Acreage of property 40 acres

UTM References

A

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

B

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

C

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

D

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Zone | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | | |

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points: A 15 274730 5245020, B 15 274730 5245380, C 15 275120 5245350, D 15 275100 5245000.

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Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all of the acreage of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 3 of Township 144 North, Range 42 West in Mahnomen County that has historically been associated with the fairgrounds.

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11. Form Prepared By

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