

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

APR 28 1975

DATE ENTERED

MAY 30 1975

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Vasa

AND/OR COMMON

Vasa Historic District

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Parts of Section 15 &amp; 22

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Red Wing, Minn.  
Vasa Township

— VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Minnesota

CODE

27

COUNTY

Goodhue

CODE

049

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY** DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT**OWNERSHIP** PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION** IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS** OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE** YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO**PRESENT USE** AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCES RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Multiple

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Vasa Township — VICINITY OF

STATE

Minnesota

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds -- Goodhue County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Red Wing

STATE

Minnesota

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Statewide Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1973

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Minnesota Historical Society - Building 25, Fort Snelling

CITY, TOWN

St. Paul

STATE

Minnesota

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _EXCELLENT to Fair	<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		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Vasa Historic District is located on the Minnesota prairie just at the very edge of the Cannon River valley which is one of the state's larger tributaries to the Mississippi. The community which has begun to recede into a ghost town is still in fairly good condition with most buildings in fair to excellent shape. The community is also fairly defined with little modern intrusion. The major changes in the past fifteen years has been the relocation of State Hwy. 19 along the southern edge of the main body of town, the construction of a new elementary school at its western edge and the building of a county garage at the intersection of County Road 7 and new Hwy. 19. In most other cases, the buildings remain unaltered, appearing much as they did fifty years ago. The only major loss was the removal of the large general store near the present museum in the 1950s.

Vasa is visually representative of a small rural agricultural community with the church being the primary visual focus and containing a creamery, a few stores and a variety of nineteenth century residential architectural styles. The homes were built during the major economic phases in the state; the late 1860s, the mid 1870s, and the mid 1880s and 90s, and show good examples of each period, especially the earlier years.

The Vasa Historic District encompasses those acres which make up either the existing community or are immediately adjacent to the community and are vitally and historically tied to its development.

# 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		<u>Immigration &amp; Settlement</u>

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Vasa is the most intact, unchanged of the original Swedish colonies in Minnesota and remains one of the most representative of an immigrant people from which Minnesota derives so much of its national cultural image. Founded as "Mattsons Settlement" in 1853 as a loosely grouped collection of Swedish farmers, the colony received its name from its leader Hans Mattson a native of Skane Province, Sweden. Mattson later became the Swedish Emmigrant Agent and Secretary of State for Minnesota, as well as Consul General to India. And Rev. Sam Ronnegard of Sweden, calls Mattson's colony "the most Swedish colony in America" in his book I Roda Vingen's Spar, (In the Indian Chief's Footsteps).

Vasa, however, did not begin to assume a distinct image until the arrival in 1855 of Rev. Eric Norelius, a major pioneer religious leader. Pastor Norelius, a member of the Norelius family which helped found the other early and possibly more well known Swedish settlements of the St. Croix river valley, is attributed to having founded all of the more than a dozen early Swedish Lutheran congregations of southeastern Minnesota. He later became a major force in the establishment in 1858 of the Minnesota Conference of the Lutheran Church -- Augustana Synod, serving as its first Secretary, and Vasa's assistant pastor, Rev. Johan Peter Carlson Boren, its first president. Norelius later was instrumental in attracting the Synod's third national conference, the first in Minnesota to Vasa in 1862. The latter provoked a rather amusing incident as most of the delegates came from more "civilized" parts of the midwest and were unconditioned to the basic conditions of the Minnesota frontier. One of the more important delegates was put up in the attic sleeping quarters of what was considered to be one of the finer residences available. As the minister awoke in the morning, he hit his head on a slab of pork hanging from a rafter and became quite provoked. As Pastor Norelius noted in his diary, "The pioneers thought this was a great joke on the 'gentleman preacher' for they thought it was wonderful that things had improved to the point where one could sit up in bed and get hit by a ham." Such were the early conditions in the Swedish settlement, but Vasa soon developed into the center for social, economic and religious affairs of the surrounding Swedish immigrant farmers. The national conference also returned to Vasa in 1875. Pastor Norelius also founded the first Swedish newspaper in Minnesota "The Minnesota Postem" and one of its first colleges Gustavus Adolphus now located at St. Peter. He was knighted by King Oscar of Sweden after the turn of century.

As the surrounding countryside prospered or struggled so did the Vasa settlement until the 1950s when Vasa as so many small midwestern agricultural communities died a slow economic death. The old general store which was the site of one of the state farmers cooperatives, was closed, the post office - the only one in Minnesota not on a rail line - discontinued, and the creamery were recently, phased out, with the community reverting solely to its original role; religious center for the  
(see continuation sheet)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Vasa's Vision and Victory of a Century: 1855-1955; pub. by The Vasa Lutheran Church, 1955.  
History of Goodhue County, Minnesota, C.A. Rasmussen, 1935.  
History of Goodhue County, Minnesota, Franklyn Curtiss Wedge, pub. by H.C. Cooper, Jr. & Co., Chicago, 1909.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 100 acres

UTM OK  
HL

UTM REFERENCES

NW	A	1,5	5,2,1,6,5,0	4,9,2,8,3,5,0	NE	B	1,5	5,2,3,1,5,0	4,9,2,8,3,5,0
	ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING
SE	C	1,5	5,2,3,1,2,0	4,9,2,6,9,2,0	SW	D	1,5	5,2,1,6,5,0	4,9,2,6,9,2,0
	ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

see continuation sheet - page 4

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

Thomas Lutz - Historic Sites Survey and Planning

ORGANIZATION

Minnesota Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

Building 25, Fort Snelling

CITY OR TOWN

St. Paul

DATE

28 March 1975

TELEPHONE

612-726-1171

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Russell W. Fridley  
State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

3/28/75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*R.A. Mortensen*  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

5/30/75

ATTEST: *Charles A. ...*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5.30.75

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CONTINUATION SHEET Vasa ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

township. It should be noted that, according to local sources, the community remained exclusively Swedish with descendants from the original settlers, until the late 1920s.

The Vasa Historic District which consists of the Norelius homestead, the original forty acre site purchased for the first permanent church, the old Vasa Orphanage Farm, also includes the western residential area platted but unrecorded which includes most of the residences still extant. A more detailed history of the individual buildings is as follows.

1. W.F. Peterson Farmstead: Built at an undetermined date, probably ca. 1870, the farm which includes a farmhouse and barn, is significant for two reasons. First, it is the site of the first Vasa Lutheran Church, and the original Eric Norelius cabin. Second, it has one of two unique cabins found only in Vasa and which according to local old Swedish residents are representative examples of Swedish vernacular rural architecture. Specific history beyond this is unknown to date but under investigation.
2. The Eric Norelius House: Built ca. 1870, the house served as the permanent home of Norelius who besides being the major force in the establishment of the community also served six terms as pastor of the Lutheran church between 1856 and his death in 1916.
3. The Vasa Swedish Lutheran Church: Built in 1869 and consecrated in 1870, the church is the third to serve the congregation. Built on a high knoll, it is the focal point of the settlement from all directions and it sits beside the church yard (to the west) on the original forty acres purchased to build the first permanent edifice. It is an excellent and superbly maintained example of Gothic church architecture. The church which was one of the most prominent edifices in the synod and once housed its second largest congregation. It was built and designed by D.C. Hill of Red Wing, Minnesota.
4. The Vasa Lutheran Church Chapel: Built in 1928, the chapel was constructed to serve as a Sunday school/parish hall as well as auxiliary religious meeting house.
5. The Parsonage: Built in 1869, at the same time and from the same locally fired red brick as the church, the parsonage with its hipped roof and broadside orientation is a surprisingly different architectural expression from the church. According to local sources, the building reflects those houses in Sweden of the entrepreneurial class and likely reflects the late English or American Georgian style. It should also be noted that the symmetrical broadside orientation is an architectural concept carried throughout the nineteenth century auxiliary building constructed by the congregation likely reflecting the influence of one master carpenter in all buildings. More of this will be discussed regarding the Caretaker's House and the Vasa Orphanage which follow.

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6. The Pavillion: Built in 1903 to provide a stage of events for the church's fifty year anniversary in 1905, it later became the scene of many local mid-summer band concerts and festivals as well as numerous political speeches by local and state dignitaries. It is one of a few original tower "bandstands" still remaining in the state.
7. The Caretaker's House: Built at an unknown date, probably ca. 1880, the building is significant for its late Greek Revival architectural style, and is an exact duplicate of the second and third Vasa orphanage buildings constructed during the same period at the edge of town. It was first built as a girls' dormitory for the Vasa school, started in the old church when the present church was completed.
8. Vasa Museum (Old Vasa Swedish Lutheran Church): Built in 1861 as the first permanent church for the congregation, it served as the 1862 and 1875 site of the national Augustana Synod conferences. When the present church was constructed, it was moved from that site to its present location and converted into a school. Both a lower and a high school, one of the first private boarding schools in the state, utilized the building until it was converted into a museum interpreting Swedish immigration in the area. It is now one of the finest private museums existing in the state. Both the old church and the adjacent Caretaker's House while basically Greek Revival in character have distinctly Sweden stylistic overtones and are probably two of the finer examples of Swedish architecture remaining in the state.
9. The Town Hall: Built ca. 1875, the town hall is a good extant example of Italianate bracketed architecture and continues to serve as the political center of both the community and the surrounding township. It should be noted that many of the benches inside survive from the old church and were locally made by Swedish craftsmen.
10. Swedish Homestead: While the specific history of the building is unknown, it should be noted that this house like the W.F. Peterson House (#1), is according to local sources, an excellent, rare example of Swedish vernacular architecture. Its construction date should also be ca. 1870.
11. The Swedish Methodist Church: Built 1879 in the pointed Gothic style, rare to Minnesota, the church represents the minority religious group in the area. Although no longer used for services it is still maintained by the congregation for special purposes. The Methodists although not as strong in numbers as the Lutherans in the Swedish groups, usually settled closely near by and were also instrumental in the settling of the area. The old parsonage is adjacent to the east.
12. The Vasa Childrens' Home: Built in 1899 as the fourth facility to function in this capacity at this location, the building which now serves as a private farmhouse is a well preserved example of neo-classical architecture. The childrens' home started in 1865 when Eric Norelius brought four orphan children

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to live at Vasa, housing them in the old church basement. The good deed soon became an institution with the addition of many more children generating the construction of the first permanent facility at this same site in 1869. As the institution continued to grow a second and third home was built which were architecturally nearly identical to the present Caretaker's House; the second in 1876 and the third in 1879. A surrounding two hundred and forty-five acres of farm land was added to the complex. The home is still in operation but was relocated to a site near Red Wing in 1926. The Vasa Childrens' Home, the first private childrens' home in the state, along with the private high school are the two major institutions to originate in Vasa.

While little is still historically known about the various residences of Vasa, and much is still undergoing research, seven residences (#13-19) are specifically mentioned for their intrinsic architectural or ethnic value.

13 &

14. Built ca. 1868, the two houses are two of the three oldest known houses in Vasa and are good examples of the fast disappearing collection of Gothic rural architecture in Minnesota. Especially noteworthy on #13 is the finely detailed and rare Tudor window trim.

15 thru

19. Built during the mid to late 1870s, these houses are good examples of vernacular Swedish cottage architecture. Initially constructed as a two room cottage with a sleeping loft above, these Swedish settlements throughout the state and are only unique to this ethnic group.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Vasa

ITEM NUMBER 10

PAGE 4

Boundary Description:

Starting at a point eighteen hundred feet south of the intersection of the centerlines of County Road 7 and new State Hwy. 19, thence easterly two hundred and twenty (220) feet along a line perpendicular to the centerline of County Road 7, thence northerly to the intersection of the centerline of State Highway 19 along a line parallel to County Road 7, thence easterly along a line coinciding for a distance with the centerline of State Highway 19 until its intersection with a line parallel with and three hundred and fifty (350) feet east of the eastern edge of Section 22, thence northerly along said line parallel with and three hundred and fifty (350) feet east of the eastern edge of Section 22 to its intersection with the centerline of State Highway 19, thence westerly to the intersection of old State Highway 19 and a road parallel to and thirteen hundred (1300) feet west of the east edge of Section 15, thence northerly along the centerline of said road to the intersection of a line parallel with and six hundred and fifty (650) north of the centerline of old State Highway 19, thence westerly along said line to the intersection of a line parallel with and one hundred (100) feet east of the centerline of a road parallel with and thirteen hundred (1300) east of the west edge of Section 15, thence northerly along said line to the intersection of a line parallel with and fifty (50) feet north of the north elevation of the old Vasa Children's Home, thence westerly along said line two hundred (200) feet to its intersection with a line parallel with and twelve hundred (1200) feet east of the west edge of Section 15, thence southerly along side line approximately three hundred and fifty (350) feet to the intersection of a gravel road, thence easterly and southerly along the centerline of said road to the intersection of the centerline of County Road 7, thence continuing southerly along the centerline of County Road 7 to the point of beginning. All in Section 15 and 22, Vasa Township, Goodhue County, Minnesota.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

for Keeper Melvin Lynn  
1/19/89

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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**Note: These changes apply to  
Vasa in Goodhue County, Minnesota.**

**REFERENCE NUMBER:** 75000983

**STATE:** MINNESOTA

**COUNTY:** Goodhue

**RESOURCE NAME (HISTORIC):** Vasa Historic District

**CITY:**

**VICINITY OF:** Red Wing

**ADDRESS:** off Mn. Hwy. 19

**CERTIFICATION DATE:**

**REMOVED DATE:**

**COMMENTS:**

*Nina M. Archabal*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Nina M. Archabal**  
**State Historic Preservation Officer**

**JUN 17 1988**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**