

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only  
received MAR 2 1982  
date entered APR 6 1982

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

**1. Name** Houston County Multiple Resource Area

historic Historic Resources of Houston County (Partial Inventory)

and/or common \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number The County Limits of Houston County, Minnesota N/A not for publication

city, town N/A \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district First

state Minnesota code 22 county Houston code 055

**3. Classification** -- Multiple Resources - see individual inventory forms

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name Multiple Ownership -- see individual inventory forms

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. Recorders Office, Houston County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Caledonia \_\_\_\_\_ state Minnesota

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

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

date 1980 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Minnesota Historical Society -- 240 Summit Avenue-Hill House

city, town St. Paul \_\_\_\_\_ state Minnesota

---

## 7. Description -- see individual inventory forms

---

<b>Condition</b>	N/A	<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input 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	N/A

---

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

See Area Description

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	MAR 2 1982
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1982

Historic Resources of Houston County, Minnesota

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

---

This Multiple Resource Area Nomination is based on a survey of standing structures conducted in Houston County by the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office as part of a long-range statewide survey of historic resources. The properties included in the nomination represent those which illustrate significant aspects of the history of the county and which have been deemed eligible for nomination to the National Register at the conclusion of the survey. Additional information and new perspectives for evaluation of specific types of historic properties are continually being gained as the statewide survey progresses, and it is quite possible that additional Houston County properties will be nominated in the future. These may be presented individually or as parts of thematic groups when the entire survey is completed. For this reason, this Multiple Resource Area Nomination should not be construed as representing all properties in Houston County eligible for nomination.

(The above disclaimer is based on an agreement between Charles Herrington, HCRS, and Russell Fridley, Minnesota SHPO, August 31, 1979)

HOUSTON COUNTY

Standing Structures

The basis of the survey for this nomination is an inventory of structures which are indicative of various aspects of Houston County's history. Structures were identified and inventoried during a county-wide survey conducted during the summer of 1980.

Selection of structures for the inventory included both field reconnaissance of pre-identified sites and isolation of sites on a purely visual basis. Pre-identification of sites was limited to a small number of the most significant locations (those unique on a county wide scale, or significantly linked with some aspect of county history). County histories, individual community histories, and photographs from both the state historical society and private collections were researched for site-specific information. General references to common buildings were not noted.

All city streets were walked or driven. All rural non-farm structures, pre-identified sites, and locally suggested buildings were visited. The roads connecting these dispersed sites provided a strong sampling of the rural landscape. Pre-identified sites were inventoried regardless of integrity. Other buildings with unusual integrity or unique features were also inventoried. In general, structures built before 1940 were considered for an inventory.

Follow-up information (both localized specific and generalized contextual) on some sites was gathered to help establish significance.

In each region of the county, at least one and in most cases several local contacts were made through the county historical society and by random inquiry. These were most often helpful in locating information on selected properties, but also in pointing out additional locations for inventory.

From the inventory of approximately 257 sites, 9 properties (and groups of properties) were selected for nomination to the National Register, mostly on the basis of their significance within the county. Information and photographs on all sites are recorded on inventory forms for a permanent record.

Survey Method

MAR 2 1982

## HOUSTON COUNTY

Houston County is in the extreme southeastern corner of Minnesota. The Mississippi River forms its eastern boundary and separates it from Wisconsin. Iowa is on the south. Neighboring Minnesota counties are Winona on the north, and Fillmore on the west. The approximate land area is 565 square miles.

### Early Settlement

Three separate streams of pioneers merged in the early settlement of Houston County. One stream came over the prairies of Iowa. Another came across the river from Wisconsin. Still another poured from the steamboat landing at Brownsville.

Some of the early settlers along the Mississippi River were attracted by the possibilities of getting out timber and fire wood for the settlements farther down the stream; some saw business possibilities in steamboat landings and village sites; some looked to the future of the plentiful waterpowers along the streams; and a few opened stores. With these minor exceptions, however, the pioneers came to Houston County to open farms.

The first settlement was made in the extreme southeastern part of the county, on the Mississippi River, in 1847. No survey had been made, and these settlers, like a number of others who shortly afterward settled farther east, did not know that they were outside of Iowa. Wilmington, Caledonia, and Winnebago Townships, in the southern part of the county were settled in 1851 and the adjoining townships of Spring Grove and Black Hammer in 1852. Crooked Creek on the Mississippi, was also settled in 1852, and settlers spread up the creek to Mayville in 1855. The first settlement in LaCrescent, in the northeast corner of the county on a Mississippi River slough, was made in 1851, and the Pine Creek Settlers in the same township arrived in 1852. In the Root River valley, Hokah was settled in 1851, Mound Prairie, Houston, and Yucatan in 1852, and Money Creek and Sheldon in 1853. The first settlers in Brownsville arrived in 1848, and the settlement spread into Union in 1853.

People from the older states of English descent were the first settlers in most of the townships. They were soon outnumbered by people of foreign birth or background, although in some communities Eastern traditions continued to set the pattern of life for many years.

### Transportation

Steamboat traffic on the upper Mississippi River, past the shores of the Houston County area, began in 1823. After the creation of Minnesota as a Territory in 1849, the boat traffic increased. Five steamboats were engaged in upper Mississippi River traffic in 1850, and by 1858 there was a fleet of 64. The business grew until after the building of the railroads in the State. There were good steamboat landings at Brownsville, at Lansing a few miles south in Iowa, and at LaCrosse on the east side of the river. A local steamboat was operated for many years between Brownsville and La Crosse, and a ferry was operated between LaCrescent and LaCrosse. A ferry was also operated for many years across the Root River at Houston. The first steamboat on the Root River was put in operation in 1857.

A Military post road along the west bank of the Mississippi River from Fort Snelling to the Iowa line was surveyed in 1850. Two years later a regular mail route was established over this road between St. Paul and Lansing, Iowa. In the spring of 1853 a pioneer who had taken a claim in the southern part of Crooked Creek Township followed an Indian trail from his claim to Brownsville village. Along the way, both going and returning, he made the trail more passable. This trail later became the Crooked Creek-Brownsville Road. Early in 1854, the board of county commissioners of Fillmore County ordered a road laid out between Minneowa (Homer) on the Mississippi, in what is now Winona County, and the farm of John S. Looney in Looney Valley in what is now Houston Township, Houston County.

A favorite route of travel, opened by pioneers of the early 1850s on their way to lands further west, led up the Root River Valley.

The first roads ordered laid out by the first board of county commissioners at its first meeting on May 26, 1854, extended westward from Brownsville, one to the forks of the Root River at Houston and one by way of Caledonia to the county line and thence connecting with the road running north from Decorah, Iowa. This was the "Norwegian Ridge road." It forked at Caledonia, one route extending due westward, and the other veering to the southwest and leaving the county near Riceford. County roads increased rapidly in number. Within the next few years a network of State roads connected with all the important settlements of southern Minnesota and with the principal highways of Iowa and Wisconsin. A stage coach line was opened in 1857 from LaCrescent to Mankato and from LaCrosse by way of LaCrescent to Chatfield. In the following year a line was opened from Brownsville westward toward Blue Earth.

Virtually all the significant settlements in the county are associated with this early river and road transportation network, including Caledonia, the county seat (platted 1854-55 and incorporated 1870), Houston (platted 1855 and incorporated 1874), Spring Grove (platted 1855), LaCreseant (platted 1856), Hokah (platted 1855 and incorporated 1871), and Brownsville (platted 1855 and incorporated 1858).

The Southern Minnesota Railway Company built a line up the Root River Valley to Houston in 1866 and continued it to Rushford the following year. The Chicago, Dubuque and Minnesota built a line from Winona southward into Iowa in 1872. A branch was built to LaCrosse in 1872. The Caledonia and Mississippi Railroad built a narrow gauge line from Reno to Caledonia, and on to Preston, in 1879. Standard gauge tracks were laid in the fall of 1901.

#### Agriculture and Manufactures

Agriculture is the only important industry in Houston County. In common with that of the other farm communities of the corn belt, agriculture in the county has gone through several periods: pioneer, expansion, experimentation, and readjustment. In pioneer days all farming was carried on for subsistence, very little surplus products being sold. Then came the rapid expansion of farming with wheat as the principal crop, but with corn and oats also of some importance. During the years of profitable wheat raising, Brownsville on the Mississippi was a very important shipping center. Wheat was hauled there by ox team from farms 40 or 50 miles inland,

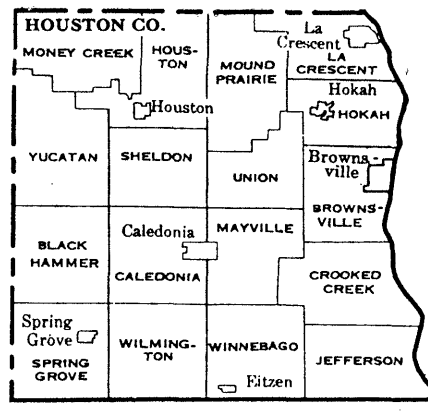
and large warehouses and granaries crowded the waterfront. The period was comparatively short, however, and practically all visible evidence of such activity has long since disappeared. Wheat growing was followed in the 1880s and after by hog raising, dairying, and production of cereal crops.

The water power sites of Houston County were early dotted with mills. Sawmills came first, gristmills next, and then extensive flouring mills. There were also early cooper shops, breweries, wagon and carriage factories, and furniture works, as well as a tannery, shingle, woolen, and broom factories, and a sorghum syrup condenser. There was an extensive railroad shop at Hokah. Quarrying and brick making furnished material for a number of early buildings. Lime was burned in sufficient quantities for local use. Shafts were been sunk at various times for lead, but only negligible quantities of ore were obtained.

### Architecture and Construction

Architecture in nineteenth century Houston County involved some interesting vernacular stone construction. Wood frame building, however, was more common for both village and rural houses. Brick masonry was employed to a degree around the turn-of-the-century and, of course, stone was used for major public buildings such as the county courthouse and jail. In general, noteworthy examples of important architectural styles either were not produced or have not survived with any integrity.

(This brief summary of Houston County's development is adapted from W.P.A. Minnesota Historical Records Survey, Inventory of the County Archives of Minnesota: No. 28, Houston County, St. Paul, 1941.)



## 8. Significance -- See individual inventory forms

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				N/A
<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/ humanitarian	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	
N/A		<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

**Specific dates** N/A **Builder/Architect** N/A

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

See Area Significance



# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED  
UMT NOT VERIFIED

# 10. Geographical Data -- See individual inventory forms

Acreeage of nominated property           N/A          

Quadrangle name           N/A          

Quadrangle scale           N/A          

### UMT References

A          
Zone Easting Northing

B          
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

### Verbal boundary description and justification

N/A

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

state           N/A           code            county            code           

state           N/A           code            county            code           

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title           Robert M. Frame III, Ph.D.  
Architectural Historian and Research Historian          

organization           Minnesota Historical Society           date           July 1981          

street & number           240 Summit Avenue-Hill House           telephone           612-296-9074          

city or town           St. Paul,           state           Minnesota          

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:           See individual inventory forms          

N/A  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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature           Russell W. Fridley          

title           State Historic Preservation Officer           date           2/3/82          

For HCRS use only  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
          See Continuation sheet for listings           date             
Keeper of the National Register  
Attest:            date             
Chief of Registration

## HOUSTON COUNTY

Located along the Mississippi River in the southeastern corner of Minnesota, Houston County experienced some of the earliest settlement and development in the state's history. The proximity of Wisconsin and Iowa led both to early government land surveys and to early settlement from across the river. Also, the river itself -- "the great water highway" -- provided the earliest transportation route in the area, with the first steamboat on the Mississippi, the "Virginia," passing the future location of Houston County on its way to Fort Snelling in 1823. The early river traffic was followed closely by the development of a network of roads within the county. This combination of water and road transportation generated in the 1850s virtually all of the significant settlements in Houston County, unlike most other counties where early settlement was followed by a later wave of townsite development based on the establishment of a railroad network.

Brownsville on the Mississippi was, in 1848, one of the county's first settlements. This very early development is represented by the Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church (c1850s, Brownsville; placed on National Register in 1970), reputed to be the community's first public building and one of its earliest wood-frame structures.

Like all of southeast Minnesota, Houston County farmers from the 1850s through to the 1880s grew extensive crops of wheat. Local flour and grist mills were constructed everywhere in this area of abundant water-power, designed to mill the wheat for local farmers and communities. This wheat growing and milling era is well-represented by two buildings, Schech's Mill (1876, Caledonia twp.; placed on the National Register in 1978) and the Charles Johnson Mill (1877, Winnebago Twp.). While Schech's Mill represents the larger commercial waterpowered mills serving cities such as nearby Caledonia, the Johnson Mill represents the many small mills which did custom toll grinding for farmers. Erected in the mid-1870s, however, both mills reflect the rapid technological change and mill building and rebuilding which occurred in these years.

The Johnson Mill is situated in the Winnebago Valley, midway between the two centers of population in southern Houston County: New Albin, Iowa, on the Mississippi River on the east and Eitzen and the general area known as Portland Prairie on the west. The Portland Prairie area is represented by the Portland Prairie Methodist Church (1876, Winnebago Twp.), Eitzen Stone Barn (1870s-80s, Eitzen), and Bunge Store (1890, Eitzen). Situated on the open prairie, the Portland Prairie Church served the western part of the Winnebago Valley and particularly a Yankee-born congregation. The Eitzen buildings, on the other hand, reflect the

German immigrant population of the area. In fact, Christian Bunge who owned the community's prominent store, provided the name in honor of his native Eitzen in Germany. The store and barn were both built by another German immigrant, Christian Krueger, who erected the barn for Johann Frederick Schroeder. Together, the store and barn are illustrative of the interrelated commercial and agricultural development which occurred throughout the county.

The later success of the early settlers can be seen in the Daniel Cameron House (1871, LaCrescent). Coming from Wisconsin, Cameron had arrived in what was to become LaCrescent with his brother, Peter, the village's first settler. Daniel found success in a farm on the south edge of the community, now part of the city's residential area. In the mid-1860s, Daniel served in the Minnesota Senate, and shortly thereafter he built his house, one of the most prominent in LaCrescent.

It was the county seat, Caledonia, however, which prospered most of all and this commercial and financial development is well represented in the Sprague Houses (1900-1905, Caledonia). Ara David Sprague was a pivotal figure in the history of Caledonia and Houston County, establishing the area's major bank and becoming the largest landowner in the county. Two of his sons, Ellsworth Ara and Robert David, not only carried on their father's business ventures, but built their houses side-by-side in the city. These many commercial interests in Caledonia, as well as the advantages of road and rail transportation, encouraged the establishment of hotels, represented by the Williams Hotel (c1870s, Caledonia). Owned by Spafford Williams, the hotel originally was designed to include a large room specifically for the display of travelling salesmen's samples.

As the county seat, Caledonia was the location for major public structures, the most important and most visually striking being the County Courthouse, Jail, and Municipal Garage (1875, 1883, 1939, Caledonia), but also including the County Poor Home (1893, Caledonia Twp.). Together, this group indicates the concern with providing fundamental government services for county citizens.

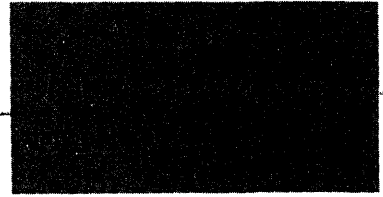
Architecturally, the Courthouse and Jail are the most significant structures in Houston County, being important examples of both the county's stone construction and their respective styles, Romanesque and Italianate. Equally interesting although less monumental is the Portland Prairie Church, a basic rural wood-frame church with a handsome Eastlake facade. The Daniel Cameron House, designed in the Italianate style, is the major county example of domestic architecture, while the Williams Hotel is a well-preserved commercial Queen Anne structure. Very early church architecture of the board-and-batten variety is seen in Brownsville's Emanuel Church.

HOUSTON COUNTY BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andreas, A.T. Illustrated Historical Atlas of Minnesota. Chicago, 1874.
- Arnold, Henry V. Portland Prairie in Present Times. Larimore, N.D., 1919.
- Bits O' the Past of the Eitzen Community. No place, 1976.
- Curtiss-Wedge, Franklyn, ed. History of Houston County, Minnesota. Winona, 1919.
- Frame, Robert M. III. Millers to the World: Minnesota's Nineteenth Century Water Powered Flour Mills. St. Paul, 1977.
- Gebhard, David, and Tom Martinson. Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota. Minneapolis, 1977.
- History of Houston County. . . . Minneapolis, 1882.
- Plat Book of Houston County, Minnesota. Red Wing, Minn. and Philadelphia, 1878.
- Standard Atlas of Houston County, Minnesota. Chicago, 1896.
- W.P.A. Minnesota Historical Records Survey. Inventory of the County Archives of Minnesota: No. 28, Houston County. St. Paul, 1941.
- Witt, Mason A. Historical Notes of Interest, Houston and Area. No place, 1974.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Houston County Multiple Resource Area  
State MN

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

- |     |   |                                     |        |                                 |
|-----|---|-------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| 1.  | Houston County Courthouse, Jail<br><del>and Municipal Garage</del>  | Jail<br><b>Substantive Review</b>   | Keeper | <u>Robert Ann Boyd 3/18/83</u>  |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |
| 2.  | Sprague, Ellsworth Ara and Robert<br>David, Houses  | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/6/82</u>     |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |
| 3.  | Williams, Spafford, Hotel<br>(Barnes House)   | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/6/82</u>     |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |
| 4.  | Houston County Poor Home  | <b>Substantive Review</b>           | Keeper | <u>William H. Braham 4.6.82</u> |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | <u>Linda McClelland 4/5/82</u>  |
| 5.  | Bunge, Christian, Jr., Store  | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/6/82</u>     |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |
| 6.  | Eitzen Stone Barn   | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/6/82</u>     |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |
| 7.  | Johnson, Charles, Flour Mill<br>(Upper Mill)  | <b>Substantive Review</b>           | Keeper | <u>William H. Braham 4.6.82</u> |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | <u>Linda McClelland 4/5/82</u>  |
| 8.  | Portland Prairie Methodist<br>Episcopal Church  | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/6/82</u>     |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |
| 9.  | Cameron, Daniel, House  | Entered in the<br>National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/6/82</u>     |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |
| 10. | Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church<br>(previously listed 6/2/70)<br>Schech's Mill<br>(previously listed 1/31/78) |                                     | Keeper | _____                           |
|     |   |                                     | Attest | _____                           |