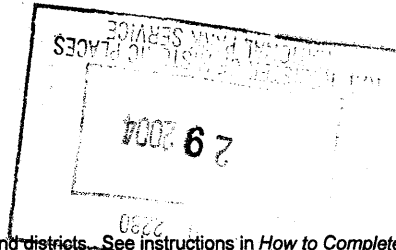


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name People's Union Church

other names/site number Scambler Union United Church of Christ

2. Location

street & number 48566 205th Avenue not for publication N/A

city or town Scambler Township, Pelican Rapids vicinity

state Minnesota code MN county Otter Tail code 111 zip code 56572

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Nina M. Archabal 6/22/04

Signature of certifying official Nina M. Archabal, Date
Director and State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

for
Signature of the Keeper Edson H. Beall Date of Action 8/11/04

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
		sites
		structure
		objects
2		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD

roof WOOD

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1915-1943

Significant Dates

1915

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Tandy, Douglas

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Name of repository:

Otter Tail County Museum, Fergus Falls,

MN

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property one acre

Cormorant, Minn.
1973

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1.	<u>1</u> <u>4</u>	<u>7</u> <u>2</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>8</u>	<u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>8</u> <u>5</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2.			
3.			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4.			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>Denis P. Gardner</u>		
organization	<u>N/A</u>	date	<u>May 2004</u>
street and number	<u>5309 Vera Cruz Avenue North</u>	telephone	<u>533-3966</u>
city or town	<u>Crystal</u>	state	<u>Minnesota</u>
		zip code	<u>55429</u>

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name	_____		
street & number	_____	telephone	_____
city or town	_____	state	_____
		zip code	_____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

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Description

Situated on a one-acre parcel just east of Tamarack Lake and amidst rolling agricultural fields occasionally interrupted by rows and clusters of deciduous trees, People's Union Church is a modest, one-story house of worship. A component of Scambler Township in Otter Tail County in west-central Minnesota, the church edges 205th Avenue, a north-south gravel road intersecting Minnesota Highway 34 approximately two miles west of U.S. Highway 59. The building has marked its grassy plot roughly seven miles north of Pelican Rapids for eighty-eight years.¹

People's Union Church was designed by Douglas Tandy. Tandy created a generally L-shaped structure with a steeply-pitched gable roof pierced at the ridge by a brick chimney. Supported upon a poured concrete foundation, the roughly thirty- by forty-foot, wood-framed, clapboard-covered building's dominant feature is a square bell tower tucked into the corner created by the intersecting walls at the west facade. The tower climbs several feet above the church's wood-shingled roof, tapering near its top. Accented with flared eaves, the tower's steeply-pitched pyramidal roof ascends to a finial. Poured-concrete stairs embraced by simple, wood railings rise to a landing at the foot of the wood-paneled, double-door main entrance marking the base of the tower. A small, wood-sash, semicircular-arched window is located within the tower wall just above the entrance. The tower's south wall holds a larger one-over-one, wood sash window topped with a fanlight. The bell at the top of the tower is hidden behind small, arched, louvered vents in the south and west walls.

The west facade, just north of the main entrance, holds a simplified Palladian window formed of three one-over-one wood sashes. The fanlight crowning the window's central section matches that of the window in the south wall of the tower. The two basement windows below the Palladian window are two-over-two, wood sashes covered with storms, although the storms are not original. This basement window design is common to all sides of the building. The church's north side features three one-over-one, wood-sash windows capped with fanlights. Again, the fanlights match the style at other sides of the building. Another modest Palladian window is located within the wall of the church's south side and is identical to that of the west facade. The building's east rear is the least adorned wall, although a wood-sash oculus window shielded with a non-original metal awning punctuates the wall near the widely-overhanging eave of the small, hip roof that covers the rear component of the church. A rectangular, one-over-one, wood sash window is located just south of the oculus. A tiny addition dressed with wood, clapboard siding shields the wood rear entrance door at the extreme south end of the wall. The gable-roofed structure has wood shingles and a metal ridge roll. The east wall of the addition holds an opening covered with an aluminum storm door. A petite, shed-roofed addition covered in wood-fiber

¹ This architectural description is based on a site visit by the author on June 9, 2003.

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siding is contiguous with the wall's north end and protects the church's well. The addition has asphalt shingles and a small, wood entrance door at its east side.

The main level of the church's interior is dominated by a small sanctuary filled with wood pews. The humble chancel with wood altar and pulpit is located at the sanctuary's east end. The sanctuary has plaster walls with wood baseboards, wood floors, and a ceiling sheathed with dark wainscoting. The multiple colors of the fanlights and oculus window are barely visible from the exterior but much more apparent from the interior. Almost resembling leaded glass, the windows are actually coated in multicolored contact paper, a clever decorative facade for a congregation of limited financial means. Although not an original characteristic of the church, the multicolor coating on the windows, especially the oculus, visually enhances the sanctuary's unpretentious setting. The austere sanctuary is decorated with a large quilt hanging on the north wall. The quilt is made of numerous blocks fashioned by members of the congregation in 1987-1988. The blocks display religious symbols and quotations, as well as the names of church members. The blocks surround a central panel which holds an image of the church building. The names of church founders are located near the top of the quilt, as are the names of the many pastors that have served the church throughout its history. A similar, although smaller, quilt hangs on the south wall.

The sanctuary is accessed through a wide opening covered with wood-paneled, double doors that hide the small vestibule in the base of the bell tower, while the sacristy, which is but a wood landing, is entered through either of two openings covered with wood-paneled doors in the southeast corner of the sanctuary. Wood stairs lead from the sacristy down to a landing just inside the rear entrance. Another flight of wood stairs descends from the landing into the basement. The unadorned basement has a poured-concrete floor and is somewhat obstructed by square, timber columns supporting wood floor beams, which in turn brace wood floor joists that hold the sanctuary floor. A furnace, refrigerator, sink, counter, two ovens/stoves, and several tables and chairs fill the basement.

A small, two-stall, wood-framed privy is situated roughly thirty feet northeast of the church. The building has wood, tongue-and-groove siding and a gable roof with wood shingles and a metal ridge roll. A wood-paneled door covers the opening to each stall.

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Statement of Significance

I. Introduction

People's Union Church in Scambler Township in Otter Tail County is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance in the area of social history.² Constructed in 1915, it was welcomed by area residents who previously worshiped in local farmhouses and schoolhouses or were forced to travel several miles to a formal church. Reflecting historical patterns identified in the Minnesota statewide context "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940," People's Union Church is unusual—a non-denominational religious gathering place founded and administered by women.

II. Otter Tail: An Unconventional County

Otter Tail County was established in 1858, the same year Minnesota became a state. The county was not formally organized until ten years later, however, a circumstance resulting from settlement disruption during the early 1860s. The county's moniker was hardly original. Otter Tail Lake lent its name to the Otter Tail River, and the two inspired the county's appellation, as well as the name for the township embracing the eastern half of the lake. Otter Tail City, a once promising settlement at the eastern end of the lake, was also christened for the water body punctuating the center of the county, as was Ottetail, a village incorporated along the route of the Minneapolis, Saint Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railway in 1904. Ottetail was founded roughly one mile east of the remnants of Otter Tail City, which squandered its promise in the 1870s and perished the following decade. In truth, all of these entities trace their designations to the nomenclature of the Ojibwe, who believed the large sandbar edging the Otter Tail River where it joins Otter Tail Lake resembled an otter's tail.³

The unusual People's Union Church raised in Scambler Township in Otter Tail County in 1915 was probably not that unique to county residents. Almost from its inception, Otter Tail County was different from most counties, attracting many with fiercely independent minds or atypical priorities. Early settlers were chiefly British, German, Swedish, and Finnish, but the largest contingent was Norwegian, an ethnic group historically recognized for challenging status quo. With allies from other ethnic groups, Norwegians in Otter Tail County would indeed defy the

² The moniker "People's Union Church" was adopted at a special meeting of the Union Aid Society of the Townships of Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican on September 21, 1915. For further information see "Minutes, Union Aid Society of the Townships of Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican," in "O. T. H. S. Archives, Church Record Books, Location: III c. 10, Scambler Union/Congregational," available at Otter Tail County Museum, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

³ Warren Upham, *Minnesota Place Names: A Geographical Encyclopedia* (Saint Paul, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 419, 426.

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establishment, but the earliest indication that the county would be dissimilar from most came with the arrival of Major George B. Clitherall. Clitherall was a southern Democrat and land speculator who appeared in Otter Tail City almost immediately after the county was formed. Clitherall became the first registrar of the land office, while his business partner, William Sawyer, was the first receiver. It was rumored that Clitherall and Sawyer had a larger agenda, which involved populating Otter Tail County with southern sympathizers. Although rumor is a poor substitute for fact, the reality that Clitherall, and presumably Sawyer, headed south and joined the Confederacy soon after the Civil War began lends credence to the rumor.⁴

It is uncertain if Clitherall ever returned to Otter Tail County, but he died in Mobile, Alabama, in 1890. Like the major, others in Otter Tail County were somewhat nonconformist, believing more in their own interests and the interests of their immediate neighbors than in the aspirations of the whole. During the county's early decades this rarely meant looking outward for threats to way of life. Rather, residents concentrated on forces within county boundaries. In the early 1870s, this was most evident during the battle over the county seat, as opposing groups attempted to tug the center of power into their part of the county.⁵

Otter Tail City, a somewhat misleading moniker since the community never blossomed into a city, was made the county seat when Otter Tail County was founded. It was probably the obvious choice because it was likely the most active settlement in the area. Functioning as a trading post along the Red River Trail, Otter Tail City was comprised of only five log cabins in 1858. Even so, the prestige of being a county seat probably convinced residents they had a prosperous future. The community did not long enjoy its recognition before the Dakota at the Lower Sioux Agency on the Minnesota River in southwestern Minnesota rebelled against federal authority and attacked settlements and farmsteads. The unrest drove settlers east toward safety, virtually emptying much of western Minnesota, including Otter Tail County. While the uprising lasted only about a month, it was several years before many settlers returned to their homes. This event, coupled with the Civil War, explains why it took until 1868 for Otter Tail County to develop a government infrastructure capable of managing the county.⁶

As fears abated and settlers returned to Otter Tail County, those in Otter Tail City likely believed the community would rapidly evolve into a bastion of free enterprise. There was good reason for

⁴ While Clitherall may never have returned to Otter Tail County, he clearly left an impression, for Clitherall Lake in the south-central part of the county was named in his honor. The township embracing the water body's west two-thirds was named for the lake, as was the community of Clitherall at the lake's northeast end. For further information see Upham, 421, as well as John W. Mason, ed., *History of Otter Tail County, Minnesota*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen and Company, Inc., 1916), 96.

⁵ A detailed account of the battle over the county seat is found in Mason, 94-108. For other source see Upham, 421.

⁶ The Dakota Conflict is thoroughly treated in Kenneth Carley's *The Dakota War of 1862* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976). For other source see Mason, 109.

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optimism. In 1870, the Northern Pacific Railway (NP) began laying its line from Carlton, just south of Duluth, west to the Pacific Ocean. It would take the railroad thirteen years to accomplish the feat, but the line would reach the upper Dakota Territory within two years. The NP initially planned to pass through Otter Tail City on its way to Fargo. The steam-powered offering would have transformed the community into a boomtown. That is what Elon Galusha Holmes expected. Holmes, a resident of Saint Paul, was so convinced the NP would build through Otter Tail City that he left his job in a mercantile exchange and moved to the town, where he established a store and newspaper. In fact, between 1871 and 1872, the store Holmes erected was employed as the Otter Tail County Courthouse. In 1872, however, Holmes abandoned Otter Tail City for Detroit (renamed Detroit Lakes in 1926), about thirty miles north in Becker County. Holmes left because the NP opted to go through Detroit Lakes rather than Otter Tail City. The railroad's change in plan is attributed to the stubbornness of Thomas Cathcart, a prominent citizen in Otter Tail City who refused to allow the railroad to construct its line across his property. Since Cathcart, like many in Otter Tail City, would have substantially benefited from a rail line, his refusal to permit one is befuddling. Regrettably, county histories do not provide an answer for his action. Maybe Cathcart simply did not want to be bothered with a rail line and its accompanying bustle—maybe he was just one of Otter Tail County's independent minded.⁷

Whatever Cathcart's reasoning, his decision sunk Otter Tail City. By the early 1870s, Fergus Falls in the southwest corner of the county was rapidly growing and its citizens believed it should be a county seat. But since the center of government was already in Otter Tail City, those in Fergus Falls and its surroundings pushed state legislators for a new county with Fergus Falls as the seat of power. It appeared that advocates for a new county might get their way, but the effort proved unnecessary after Cathcart disallowed the railroad in Otter Tail City. In October 1872, after the Saint Paul and Pacific Railway (later Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway, which ultimately became the principal constituent of the Great Northern Railway) announced it would build through Fergus Falls, Otter Tail County residents voted to transfer the county seat from Otter Tail City to Fergus Falls. The same legislative act that made the vote

⁷ Elon Galusha Holmes found his fortune in Detroit Lakes. The entrepreneur re-established his newspaper, naming it the *Detroit Record*. He also platted additions to the city, became president of the Bank of Detroit, provided lumber and ties to the NP, founded the light company, and constructed a major commercial building, the Holmes Block. Holmes helped create the elegant Hotel Minnesota as well, and when it burned down, he erected the substantial Graystone Hotel. Additionally, Holmes became a member of the county board and, later, Becker County's first senator. The Holmes Block was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001, two years after the Graystone Hotel. For further information see Denis Gardner and Charlene K. Roise, "Holmes Block," March 2001, as well as Denis Gardner and Charlene K. Roise, "Graystone Hotel," January 1999, both National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms available at State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), Saint Paul. For other sources see Denis Gardner and Charlene K. Roise, "Northern Pacific Bridge No. 95," July 2000, Historic American Engineering Record documentation completed for United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE), available at USACOE, Saint Paul, 6-7; Mason, 121-122.

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necessary also included adding range forty-four in neighboring Wilkin County to Otter Tail County.⁸

The vote to move the county seat to Fergus Falls was not welcomed by those in and around Otter Tail City, of course, and many continued to argue transferring power was unwarranted. As people in the area finally accepted that the county seat was lost, some moved to separate the community, as well as the eastern third of the county, from Otter Tail County and attach it to neighboring Wadena County. It is uncertain if this action was driven by spite or if some believed that Otter Tail City would make a suitable governmental center for Wadena County. In any event, the subsequent vote determined to leave county boundaries as they were. For years many continued to threaten a fight for separation, but ill-feelings eventually faded, as did Otter Tail City, which was a ghost town by 1885.⁹

III. A County of Churches

Unlike the county seat, the location of religious gathering places within Otter Tail County stirred little debate. There was not much reason to argue since residents built so many churches of various denominations that almost everyone had access to a spiritual center in line with their personal convictions, although, for some, their house of worship was several miles distant. By 1916, the county was a cornucopia of congregations. Indeed, Scandinavians alone had formed over a hundred. It appears the first religious services were held in Otter Tail City sometime prior to 1860, roughly a half century before People's Union Church in Scambler Township was even a thought. These early services seem to have followed Episcopal tradition, although they were sporadic and no church building was ever constructed. While Lutheranism eventually dominated the county, the first formally organized congregation was Mormon. Around 1865, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was founded in Clitherall. This church soon was followed by a Catholic congregation just north of Otter Tail Lake in what would become Rush Lake Township. Not surprisingly, the church was established by a group of German immigrants. From the early part of the nineteenth century until the turn of the twentieth century, about five million Germans came to America, settling mostly in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, and Texas.

⁸ Removing range forty-four from Wilkin County and attaching it to Otter Tail County led to an interesting legal case decided by the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1896. Lars O. Honerud, who lived on a parcel in Wilkin County that was transferred to Otter Tail County in 1872, refused to sell his land and pay delinquent taxes to Otter Tail County. Honerud argued he was not a citizen of Otter Tail County since residents of Wilkin County never voted to transfer range forty-four. The Minnesota Supreme Court dismissed Honerud's claim, writing that even though Wilkin County was established by 1872 it was not formally organized with a governing body, therefore no vote was necessary and the state legislature acted legally when it attached range forty-four to Otter Tail County. Further information on this case is found in Mason, 105-106. For other source also see Mason, 100-104.

⁹ Mason, 107-108; Upham, 426.

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Although Protestantism was common among German immigrants, Catholicism was just as common.¹⁰

Scandinavian immigration to America followed close behind the German migration. While Germans brought strong Lutheran and Roman Catholic beliefs, Scandinavians almost exclusively carried Lutheran traditions as they settled in the Midwest, from Michigan to Montana. Of course, not all Norwegians and Finns were Lutheran, but the Swedes were somewhat more religiously diverse, frequently founding Swedish Baptist and Swedish Methodist congregations. Still, Lutheranism remained the dominant faith among Scandinavian immigrants as a whole. Lutheranism blossomed as Germans and Scandinavians established numerous denominations, varying mainly by language group and the emphasis given particular Lutheran beliefs. America was home to more than a hundred distinct Lutheran governing bodies at one time, but through much of the twentieth century groups merged as members became more Americanized and language barriers fell. Eventually, the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America became the leading Lutheran oversight organizations.¹¹

Lutheranism was the predominant religious force in Otter Tail County by the 1880s, reflecting the county's large Scandinavian and German populations. Swedes made up a significant segment of the population and were scattered through much of the county, with the heaviest concentrations in the central, southeast, and south-central sections. In contrast, Finns comprised a relatively small part of the population. Norwegians far outnumbered any other ethnic group and made virtually the entire county their home. Germans were well represented and were mostly dispersed around the county's core. Those of British descent, including British-Canadians, roughly equaled the number of Swedes.¹²

Even though Lutheranism was the most popular religion in Otter Tail County by the 1880s, other faiths were represented as well. Almost all of the faiths had a constituency with a specific ethnic lineage. For example, the First Presbyterian Church of Fergus Falls (1872) had a membership with chiefly a British ancestry, while the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Elizabeth (1877) and the Swedish Baptist Church of Fergus Falls (1870) were frequented, obviously, by Swedes. Norwegians had Our Saviors Evangelical Lutheran Church (1872) in Fergus Falls and the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church (1886) in aptly named Norwegian Grove Township.

¹⁰ Hildegard Binder Johnson, "The Germans," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 153; Mason, 363.

¹¹ J. Gordon Melton, *American Religions: An Illustrated History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2000), 176-178; John G. Rice, "The Swedes," in *They Chose Minnesota*, 265.

¹² Sarah P. Rubinstein, "The British: English, Scots, Welsh, and British Canadians," 113, Carlton C. Qualey and Jon A. Gjerde, "The Norwegians," 223, 226, Timo Riippa, "The Finns and Swede-Finns," 300, Rice, "The Swedes," 251, 257, Johnson, "The Germans," 156, 159, all in *They Chose Minnesota*; Mason, 370, 372-373, 375, 379, 383, 387, 389, 404.

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A house of worship for Finns was available at the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Congregation of Otto Township (1879), and Germans visited the German Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Congregation (1882) in Friberg Township, as well as the Church of Our Lady of Victory (1881), a Catholic congregation in Fergus Falls. Certainly, there were many more churches than these in Otter Tail County in the 1880s, and their numbers only increased over the next few decades.¹³

IV. A Different Kind of Church

In April 1909, as a group of women from Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican Townships in the extreme northwest corner of Otter Tail County came together for a birthday celebration at Minnette Page's home in Dunn Township, conversation turned to the idea of building a non-denominational church managed by local women. It is uncertain whether the concept initially blossomed at the birthday party or had been germinating for some time. Even though Otter Tail County was filled with churches, the women realized they needed a more centrally located religious center in their area. One, and maybe as many as three, churches were situated in the southwest corner of Scambler Township at this time, and at least another was located in central Dunn Township, which bordered Scambler Township to the east. Several churches were located in Pelican Rapids in south-central Pelican Township, about four miles south of the Pelican Township-Scambler Township border. Clearly, there were a significant number of churches in this relatively small geographic area, and it would seem that anyone in the far northwest corner of Otter Tail County could easily reach a place of worship catering to their particular religious doctrine. But modern concepts of distance do not mesh with notions of distance in early-twentieth-century America, in large measure because most were not yet motoring about in automobiles (Ford Motor Company was not founded until 1903, and the company's assembly line practice, which ultimately made vehicles affordable to the larger population, was not adopted until 1913). Instead, most traveled from one point to another by horse and buggy and, in some instances, oxen and cart. While horse and buggy was faster than oxen and cart, five, six, or seven miles was still a considerable distance.¹⁴ For those living in eastern Scambler, western Dunn, and northern Pelican Townships in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their religious gathering place alternated between homes and a few small, local school buildings, such as Dunn School, about one-and-a-half miles southeast of the present People's Union Church building.¹⁵

¹³ An extensive survey of early churches in Otter Tail County is found in Mason, 363-409.

¹⁴ *Standard Atlas of Otter Tail County, Minnesota* (Chicago: George A. Ogle and Company, 1912), 86, 94-95; *Plat Book of Otter Tail County, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: Warner and Foote, 1884), 62; Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, comps., "Scambler Church," 2002, compilation of sources covering People's Union Church, copy available at SHPO, MHS, Saint Paul, 50; Mason, 385.

¹⁵ Dunn School was organized in 1876, but it was another four years before a humble school building was constructed. The wood-framed structure was erected in the northwest corner of section 30 of Dunn Township, almost right on the Dunn Township-Scambler Township border. The now abandoned building is still standing, but

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According to the few current members of People's Union Church, a non-denominational church was chosen because "the women wanted everyone to be included."¹⁶ The comment is supported by a more elaborative article in the *Pelican Rapids Press* penned when the church building was erected:

A few years ago the people north of town felt that it was essential to their well-being to build a church in their midst. Some of the people were members of one church and some of another, but no particular denomination was strong enough to erect a church alone, so all agreed to unite and build one together.¹⁷

More interesting is the concept of women funding construction and managing the church. Historical records abound with stories of those that founded institutions of one kind or another, from commercial buildings to banks to government structures to churches. But almost always the leading personalities are men, specifically white men—often affluent white men. Breaking this historical pattern is what makes People's Union Church so intriguing. While women's organizations are frequently part of religious congregations, it is rare to find a women's group that builds and then oversees a church. So what made this group in the northwest corner of Otter Tail County take on such a task? Regrettably, the historical record is largely silent. One thing seems apparent; the women in eastern Scambler, western Dunn, and northern Pelican Townships in the early twentieth century believed they could do a better job building and administering a church than could men. In fact, men in the area already had their chance. It was mostly men that founded the Union Church of Christ in Scambler in the mid-1870s. The congregation never built a formal church building, and by 1885 the organization had folded. Interestingly, though, one of the three deacons that served the congregation was a woman, Mrs. T. B. Cornish.¹⁸ The idea that women, at least in this instance, were better equipped to manage a church is reinforced by current members of People's Union Church:

The women felt they could do a better job than the men did at keeping such a variety of religions and people together in forming this union. It was felt that they "the women" could and would keep disagreements out of the church sector.¹⁹

While local histories do not provide an answer, it seems naïve to believe that some of the women celebrating at Minnette Page's home in April 1909 were not influenced by the woman suffrage movement, a struggle that formally began in 1848 with a woman's rights convention in Seneca

just barely. Further information on the school is located in "School District No. 65," in "Dunn Township" files, available at the Otter Tail County Museum, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

¹⁶ Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 131.

¹⁷ "Church Dedicated," *Pelican Rapids Press*, September 30, 1915.

¹⁸ Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

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Falls, New York. In 1869, Sarah Burger Stearns and Mary Jackman Colburn founded small suffrage organizations in Rochester and Champlin, Minnesota. Twelve years later, the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association was born in Hastings. This movement to enfranchise women was formidable by the early 1900s. By 1919, there were roughly 30,000 suffragettes belonging to various societies in Minnesota. The following year, women finally won the right to vote. Since People's Union Church was planned and executed at the time the suffrage movement was reaching its peak, it seems likely some of the founders were absorbing well-deserved empowerment.²⁰

V. The Union Aid Society of the Towns of Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican

In May 1909, a month after the birthday celebration, twelve women met at the home of Delia Rider in Scambler Township and formed a society for building a church. These women included Jennie Dunn, Anna May Tolbert, Minnette Page, Annella Hoadley, Delia Rider, Minnie Bronk, Dolly Randall, Mrs. Addie Peck, Mrs. Oliver Moses, Mrs. Charles Tucker, Mrs. Sam Dunn, and Mrs. John Dunn. The list accentuates one of history's failings—its lean toward men. Even obituaries of founding members of the society often do not note a first name.²¹ Of course, in the early twentieth century it was not uncommon for many women to use their husband's first name in place of their own. In truth, many women in the society formed at Delia Rider's residence followed this tradition.

The organization established by the women of Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican Townships would eventually be called the Union Aid Society of the Towns of Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican, but it is uncertain if this label was adopted at the outset.²² The society was known as the Union Aid Society at least by May 1912, when it appears the group first began recording minutes. In May of that year, the women met at the home of one of the members and adopted a constitution for the "Union Aid Society." Some of the articles included:

The object of this society shall be to raise money for building a church building.

Any person may become a member by paying \$1.00 to its treasury and by subscribing to this constitution.

²⁰ Heidi Bauer, ed., *The Privilege for Which We Struggled* (Saint Paul: Upper Midwest Women's History Center, 1999), 1, 3, 5.

²¹ Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 7, 50, 73-94.

²² *Ibid.*, 62.

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The membership shall be divided into two classes; namely;--active and honorary; active members shall attend all meetings when possible. Gentlemen shall be honorary members. Active members only, shall have the right to hold office.²³

At this time, the organization consisted of thirty-seven active members and nine honorary members.²⁴ The following year the Union Aid Society of the Towns of Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican incorporated "for the purpose of promotion of religious, moral, social, educational, and benevolent interests, etc." The society viewed incorporation as a legitimizing factor—an official record of their existence. The original incorporation was for thirty years, although after it expired in 1943 the society reincorporated. It remains incorporated today.²⁵

Well before incorporation the women were raising money to build the church. Indeed, fund-raising began soon after the society's birth. Capital accumulated through ice cream socials, chicken pot pie suppers, picnics, auctions, quilt and bake sales, and more. One of the more interesting tactics was called "passing the penny hose," whereby those at society meetings would place what pennies they had in their pockets into a sock passed among them. This approach was likely used at other gatherings as well.²⁶

By 1913, the society was seeking a central location for a church building. The following year they narrowed the search to seven sites. At a special Union Aid Society meeting held on March 26, 1914, seventy-one residents in Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican Townships voted for a location among the seven options. An acre donated by Sam and Delia Rider in the northwest quarter of section twenty-four in Scambler Township, just east of Tamarack Lake, was chosen.²⁷

VI. Scambler Township

Scambler Township was organized in late summer 1871, roughly a year after Pelican Township. The townships were some of the earliest of Otter Tail County's sixty-two townships to be established.²⁸ Scambler Township was named for one of its first settlers, Robert Scambler, who

²³ "Minutes, Union Aid Society," May 2, 1912.

²⁴ Membership in the Union Aid Society was never very large, but the organization's influence was limited to a small geographical area. In December 1913, active membership totaled forty-three. This total was one of the highest over the society's long history. For source see "Minutes, Union Aid Society," various dates.

²⁵ Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 54-62, 133.

²⁶ While the Union Aid Society sought money for a church building, the organization was also donating money to organizations like the Red Cross. For sources see Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 8; "Minutes, Union Aid Society," May 2, 1912.

²⁷ "Minutes, Union Aid Society," April 2, 1914.

²⁸ Clitherall in south-central Otter Tail County was the first organized township (1868), while Dead Lake near the center of the county was the last (1897). For information on all sixty-two townships see Mason, 165-273.

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moved into the area in 1868, married a Native American, and built a farmstead near Pelican Lake in the northeast corner of the township. The fertile soil of the township soon attracted many others, which explains its early organization. A tiny community of about a dozen buildings developed near Pelican Lake and was named for the water body. The embryonic settlement failed to evolve, however, and it had vanished by the early 1900s. Today, Scambler Township still does not have a village or city.²⁹

In 1958, O. T. Berg, a longtime resident of Scambler Township, penned a brief history of his early experiences in the area:

Well, I am one of the pioneers that came from Norway and came to Minnesota 67 years ago. I was then 6 years old and am now 73. Have lived in Minnesota in [Scambler Township] all that time. . . . I helped to break up virgin soil with oxen. We had four oxen on the breaking plow and at noon we took off the yokes and let them eat for an hour while we went for dinner. . . . I lived 11 miles north of Pelican Rapids and we drove into town for many years with oxen. . . . The pioneers in this community were mostly bachelors and when girls came over from Norway, they were married in a few months to the homesteaders. . . . We had Scotchmen, Englishmen, Germans, Swedes and Norwegians.³⁰

While a fine land for farming, early Scambler Township was somewhat peculiar. For instance, lobbyists in Scambler Township in the mid-1870s somehow managed to convince the state legislature to pass an act making it unlawful for pigs to run free. The act is so curious because it did not apply to any other part of Minnesota except Scambler Township and those townships that bordered it.³¹ Scambler Township was also home to the *Prairie Leaflet*, a late-1870s newspaper. Although the publication lasted but a few years, its roar must have been heard all over the county. The newspaper highlighted local happenings, but specialized in attacking intemperance as a particularly rancid pollutant of Christian life:

The liquor traffic smites society with a curse fouler than even the deadliest plague. It seduces youth; it wrecks manhood. It reaches forward to blast the generations yet unborn. It engenders pauperism. It peoples jails. It multiplies murders. It defies both God and man. Oh, I sometimes think it must be that it possesses personality, purposes, vital force. Sometimes I seem to see it, alive,

²⁹ Mason, 203-204.

³⁰ Berg's history is found in "O. T. Berg Writes of Early Days in Scambler," *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*, July 10, 1958.

³¹ Mason, 159, 161.

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horrible, malignant, mighty, omnipresent! Ought it not to be repressed? How presumably idiotic were any other thought. . . .³²

The *Prairie Leaflet* fit well within a county peopled by many who challenged the norm—a county that in 1890 stunned the Otter Tail County governing establishment by forming a new political party led by Norwegian-Americans and their allies, tossing smug Republicans from office after fifteen years of political domination.³³

VII. Building People's Union Church

Published in 1916, the extensive *History of Otter Tail County, Minnesota* notes: "The People's Union church of Scambler is undoubtedly the most unique church in Otter Tail County."³⁴ In fact, its founding and management by women make it one of the more unusual churches in the state. Moreover, the church's "open" policy amplifies its distinctiveness. In a 1987 letter written by eighty-five-year-old Mrs. Jessie Rasmussen, the former member of the congregation explains that the church was "to be of spiritual value regardless of color, race, creed or nationalities, and anyone present was always welcome to participate of the communion service."³⁵ But even though the church was atypical, it seems appropriate that it was located within a county with a somewhat atypical history. As example, Otter Tail County has four townships named for women: Elizabeth, Dora, Edna, and Lida. Interestingly, all of the townships are in the northwest quarter of the county. Although speculation, it is possible early settlers in this part of the county held women somewhat higher than in other sections of the county.

The women from eastern Scambler, western Dunn, and northern Pelican Townships that planned People's Union Church were obviously respected. Their efforts, after all, convinced seventy-one local citizens to come to a special meeting of the Union Aid Society in late March 1914 and vote for a site for the church building the women were erecting. In June of the previous year, after reviewing the plan of several churches, the women agreed that the modest-dimensioned Zion Lutheran Church of Dunn Township was about the right size for their church. Although the women approved of the square footage of Zion Church, they did not adopt its rectangular configuration. Instead, they selected the generally L-shaped plan completed by local man Douglas Tandy sometime prior to late May 1914.³⁶

³² *Prairie Leaflet*, August 1880.

³³ Lowell J. Soike dedicates an entire chapter to the political upheaval in Otter Tail County in the 1880s and 1890s in his work *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent, 1880-1924* (Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1991), 84-115.

³⁴ Mason, 385.

³⁵ Mrs. Rasmussen's letter is found in Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 46.

³⁶ "Minutes, Union Aid Society," June 19, 1913, as well as May 25, 1914; "Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church," in "Dunn Township" files, available at the Otter Tail County Museum, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

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Tandy was an interesting gentleman. The brother of Minnette Page, he became an alderman in Red Wing in southeast Minnesota in the early 1890s. The alderman was a staunch advocate for the High Bridge, a roughly 520-foot-long crossing completed in early 1895 linking Red Wing with Wisconsin across the Mississippi River.³⁷ He also pushed for the first concrete sidewalks in the city. Tandy left Red Wing sometime after the bridge was opened and traveled home to Otter Tail County. It is uncertain precisely how long he stayed in the county, but after he designed People's Union Church he moved to Nevada, where he founded a newspaper and the Big Little Jumbo Silver Mine. Eventually, he became speaker of the Nevada State Legislature.³⁸

In his typescript autobiography Stephen R. Page, Tandy's nephew, mentions his uncle's role in the construction of People's Union Church. He also notes various efforts to finance and erect the building:

Uncle Doug . . . laid out plans to build the union church in the country near us. The ladies aid . . . started raising money by making fancy work and having auction sales, food sales, etc. to use as a fund to build that church. I do not remember the year they started to build the church but one of the farmers, Sam Ryder [sic], donated an acre of land on the corner of 2 roads. The men came to the rescue of the ladies, and everyone got behind the effort, and cleared trees, graded the lot, and did the carpenter work of the church and soon a beautiful new building was completed with a basement

³⁷ Specifically, the almost \$70,000 High Bridge was formed of two deck-truss approaches and a pinned, Parker through-truss main span. Several trestle approaches curled north on the Wisconsin side of the bridge. The crossing's superstructure was completed by the Toledo Bridge Company of Toledo, Ohio, while D. D. Smith of Minneapolis finished the masonry piers. The High Bridge was replaced with the current through truss, a Warren variant, in 1960, with President Dwight David Eisenhower leading the dedicatory celebration. Originally called the Hiawatha Bridge, it was eventually renamed the Eisenhower Memorial Bridge. For further information on each bridge see Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, ed., *History of Goodhue County, Minnesota* (Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr., and Company, 1909), 590, and C. A. Rasmussen, *A History of the City of Red Wing, Minnesota* (n.p., 1933), 147-148, as well as Madeline Angell, *Red Wing, Minnesota: Saga of a River Town* (Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1977), 195, 392-393.

³⁸ Tandy was also a music lover, frequently directing singing groups in the Otter Tail County area. He attempted to teach his nephew, Stephan R. Page, how to play the organ. Page later recalled that Tandy "had a piece of wood he would use to hit me on the fingers [when] I got on the wrong keys, and after a few weeks of this I just quit." Curiously, Tandy's departure from Otter Tail County was stealthy. Many years after he left for Nevada, Robert Tolbert, apparently an Otter Tail County resident, told a story of the former alderman's disappearance. It seems that Tandy and another local man, John Voss, went camping. When Voss left the campsite to hunt deer, Tandy gathered his belongings and apparently headed west. No one knew what happened to him until he arrived in Otter Tail County twenty years later and explained his life in Nevada. For further information on Tandy see Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 69, 71-72.

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Even though local men realized the Union Aid Society was a capable organization, the chauvinism of some, even if it was only slight, apparently showed—lending assistance to the women who founded People's Union Church was hardly rescuing—rightfully, it was expected.

Construction of the church basement began in spring 1915. The roughly thirty- by forty-foot, wood-framed, gable-roofed building with bell tower was mostly complete by the dedicatory celebration on September 26. Earlier in the month, the doors and ceiling still needed finishing and walls required lathing and plastering. Although the building fund had been winnowed by about \$900, leaving very little for remaining work, the women were committed to raising additional funds to finish the doors and walls in time for the dedication ceremony. Although it is uncertain if they managed this, the women increased their building fund to about \$185 by September 21, possibly providing enough money and leaving enough time to complete the work before September 26. Curiously, the church's rear exit was not part of the original construction, leaving only the main entrance at the west facade as access into or out of the building. The privy northeast of the church was probably also erected in 1915.³⁹

The dedicatory celebration was led by T. A. Hawkes, a pastor from the Congregational parish in Pelican Rapids who would also be the first spiritual head of People's Union Church. Hawkes was joined by Reverend Butterdahl of Zion Lutheran Church of Dunn Township. The *Pelican Rapids Press* noted that so many people attended the gathering that the church was overflowing. Services included the "Lord's Prayer," as well as the hymn "Take Time to be Holy." This was followed with prayers and readings by Pastor Hawkes and Reverend Butterdahl, anthems by the Pelican Rapids Choir, and further hymns and prayers. The event culminated with the church's consecration and the benediction.⁴⁰ One local newspaper covering the services bragged about this special house of worship:

Otter Tail County has the only church in the state erected and paid for by a society of women not allied with any sect or denomination. This edifice rears its spire not in a thriving little city but in the center of a farming community. The doors of this church are open to any denomination desiring to make use of it.⁴¹

Other faiths would indeed use the People's Union Church building, but it appears that this was mainly for meetings, fairs, and the like.⁴²

³⁹ "Minutes, Union Aid Society," June 19, August 5, September 21, and September 26, 1915.

⁴⁰ Ibid., September 26, 1915; "Church Dedicated."

⁴¹ "Country Women Build a Church for Use of All Denominations," September 1915, newspaper article in Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 103.

⁴² Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 132.

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VIII. The Union Aid Society: Administering the Church and Aiding the Needy

How regular services were presented at People's Union Church is unclear. Current members addressed an inquiry about this in 2002: "We don't really know [what services were like], but we think they were standard services and that it depended on the style of the minister."⁴³ It appears, then, that church services in the first years of People's Union Church may have leaned toward Congregationalism, although it is unlikely this offended traditional Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists or anyone else in the congregation reared within a particular faith because all had what was most important to them—a church of their own.

The Union Aid Society regularly paid the Congregational minister from Pelican Rapids for his services, but People's Union Church remained outside the sphere of any religious governing body. While the pastor had his role in the church, it seems it was chiefly to lead weekly services. Certainly, the pastor appeared at other gatherings and was afforded all the respect due a man of his position, but the practical leaders of People's Union Church was the Union Aid Society. At the beginning of each fiscal year the group elected a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer from among its active members. Moreover, each year the women chose a chaplain to lead the group in spiritual exercises at the monthly meetings and other gatherings.⁴⁴

As for the monthly meetings, they were mainly a compilation of prayer session, discussion of fund raising and benevolent efforts, and dialogue on church maintenance and event planning. For instance, at the meeting on August 16, 1916, the group was called to order by the president and then sang "Blest be the Tie That Binds." This was followed by a scripture reading and the "Lord's Prayer." Two months later, after prayer, song, and scripture reading, the members addressed the need for wood for the church's wood stove, agreeing to purchase two cord of oak and two cord of poplar for \$13. The group also discussed grading around the church before winter set in. At the November meeting the society planned a chicken pot pie dinner in the church's basement. The dinner increased the society's operating fund by almost \$50. Some of the society's benevolent works included aid to Indian missions and disabled children, donations and presents to orphans and children in state hospitals, as well as financial support for flood and war victims.⁴⁵

In many ways the Union Aid Society was like most ladies' aids societies. Actually, the Union Aid Society administering People's Union Church is often referenced in the historical record as the Ladies' Aid Society. About 1910, Mary Nelson Wee wrote *The Prayer Life of our Women's Societies*, explaining:

⁴³ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁴ "Minutes, Union Aid Society," various dates.

⁴⁵ Ibid., August 16, October 5, and November 2, 1916; Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 115.

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By ladies' aids we mean societies that contribute to all the different branches of home and charity work—who aid in paying pastors salaries, the church debt, etc. . . . We furnish church basements and kitchens, we send flowers to the hospitals, we help to keep our institutions of charity, we help to send pastors and workers to the inner mission fields, we establish schools in foreign lands and give large sums of money to help bring the Gospel . . . across the sea.⁴⁶

This is what the Union Aid Society of the Towns of Scambler, Dunn, and Pelican has done for the last nine decades. Still, the Union Aid Society is different from most ladies' aids. While ladies' aids often substantially contribute to the functioning of churches, the Union Aid Society actually built and managed its church.

IX. Celebration and Change

Over the years, People's Union Church has been used for a variety of functions, including weddings, receptions, anniversaries, church suppers, farewell gatherings, and more. For a time, it was even the regular meeting place for the local Farmer's Club, as well as the 4-H Club. Obviously, it has always been employed for church services, and each year it hosts a Christmas pageant. In 1940, the congregation celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a supper and program at the church closely mirroring the 1915 dedication. Although seven of the founding members of the Union Aid Society were still living, only three were present. Dolly Randall, Anna May Tolbert, and Mrs. Charles Tucker were all given a seat of honor at the gathering. Seventeen years later, the congregation celebrated a founder's day at the church. Although Dolly Randall was still alive, she was unable to attend. The importance of the church's heritage to the local community was demonstrated when members of the Union Aid Society dressed in period clothing and portrayed the twelve founders as they labored to form the society and erect the church.⁴⁷

The church has been slightly altered over the decades. The building's rear entrance was put in about 1932. It was not covered with the current small, wood-framed, gable-roofed addition until spring 1960. The church's well appears to have been in place for some time, although a plumbing line to the sink in the basement was not installed until around late 1938. It is uncertain when the tiny, shed-roofed addition was erected over the well. The basement was at least partly updated in the early 1980s, when new cupboards and a new furnace were put in place. The current storms covering basement windows were installed around 1985 or 1986. The decorative

⁴⁶ Mary Nelson Wee, *The Prayer Life of our Women's Societies* (n.p., ca. 1910), 6-7.

⁴⁷ "Scambler Union Church Observes Founders Day," *Pelican Rapids Press*, September 23, 1957; Bertha Rhea Martin, "Farm Women Own Church," ca. 1939, as well as "Union Church Celebrates 25th Anniversary," November 1940, both newspaper articles in Charles F. Martin Jr. et al, 104-105; "Minutes, Union Aid Society," various dates.

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quilts inside the sanctuary were hung in 1988 in celebration of the Union Aid Society's seventy-fifth anniversary. By this time, however, People's Union Church was no longer entirely independent.⁴⁸

With an increasingly mobile society, rural People's Union Church was unable to maintain satisfactory membership and merged with First Congregational United Church of Christ in Pelican Rapids. The merger occurred sometime in the 1960s, but it appears to have happened quietly since the historical record makes little reference to the event. It seems the only discussion of merger at this time is found in the Union Aid Society's minutes of April 1962, but even this dialogue is limited. Now known as Scambler Union United Church of Christ, the church is open for regular services only from late spring until fall. During the remainder of the year the congregation attends the church in Pelican Rapids. The current pastor at both churches is Joan Fumetti.⁴⁹

The Union Aid Society continues to plan events, discuss and promote benevolent works, and maintain the church their forerunners bequeathed. Regrettably, membership in the society is only a fraction the size of previous years. Understanding the unique heritage of their church, in May 2000, members of the society contacted the State Historic Preservation Office to discover the potential for adding People's Union Church to the National Register of Historic Places. This nomination is in response to that inquiry.⁵⁰

X. Conclusion

Appropriately, People's Union Church was established within a county with a heritage of unusual independence and, sometimes, curious actions. Raised at a time when women were relegated to secondary status, the worshiping center is intriguing because it was founded and administered by women. The dearth of information on women is one of history's monumental gaffes, so it is refreshing to find a collection of women that pushed their way into local annals. Still, information on the founders of People's Union Church in local obituaries and histories is sparse. The product of a group of history's underrepresented, and situated amidst a farming community that longed for a church of its own, People's Union Church is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

⁴⁸ "Minutes, Union Aid Society," February 4, 1932; September 1, 1938; March 3 and April 6, 1960; May 1982; August and October 1985; August 1986; May 1988.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, April 1962; "Celebrating Our Future," 1999, booklet produced by the congregations of First Congregational United Church of Christ and Scambler Union United Church of Christ, copy available at People's Union Church, Scambler Township, Otter Tail County; interview with Charles F. Martin Jr., Mazie Wick, and Marion "Kit" Hoadley, current members of the Union Aid Society, by the author, June 9, 2003.

⁵⁰ Martin, Wick, and Hoadley interview; James Wick, member of People's Union Church, letter to Susan Roth, National Register Historian, May 29, 2000, available at SHPO, MHS, Saint Paul.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property commences at a point thirty-three feet north and thirty-three feet east of the southwest corner of the northwest quarter of section twenty-four (24), township numbered one hundred and thirty-seven north (137) of range forty-three (43), running thense north twelve rods (12), thense east thirteen and one-third rods ($13 \frac{1}{3}$), thense south twelve rods (12), thense west thirteen and one-third rods ($13 \frac{1}{3}$) to place of beginning, containing one acre.⁵¹

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the acreage historically associated with the property.

⁵¹ This boundary description is drawn from Deed Record 119, May 27, 1914. A copy of the deed is in the possession of Charles F. Martin Jr., Pelican Rapids, Minnesota.

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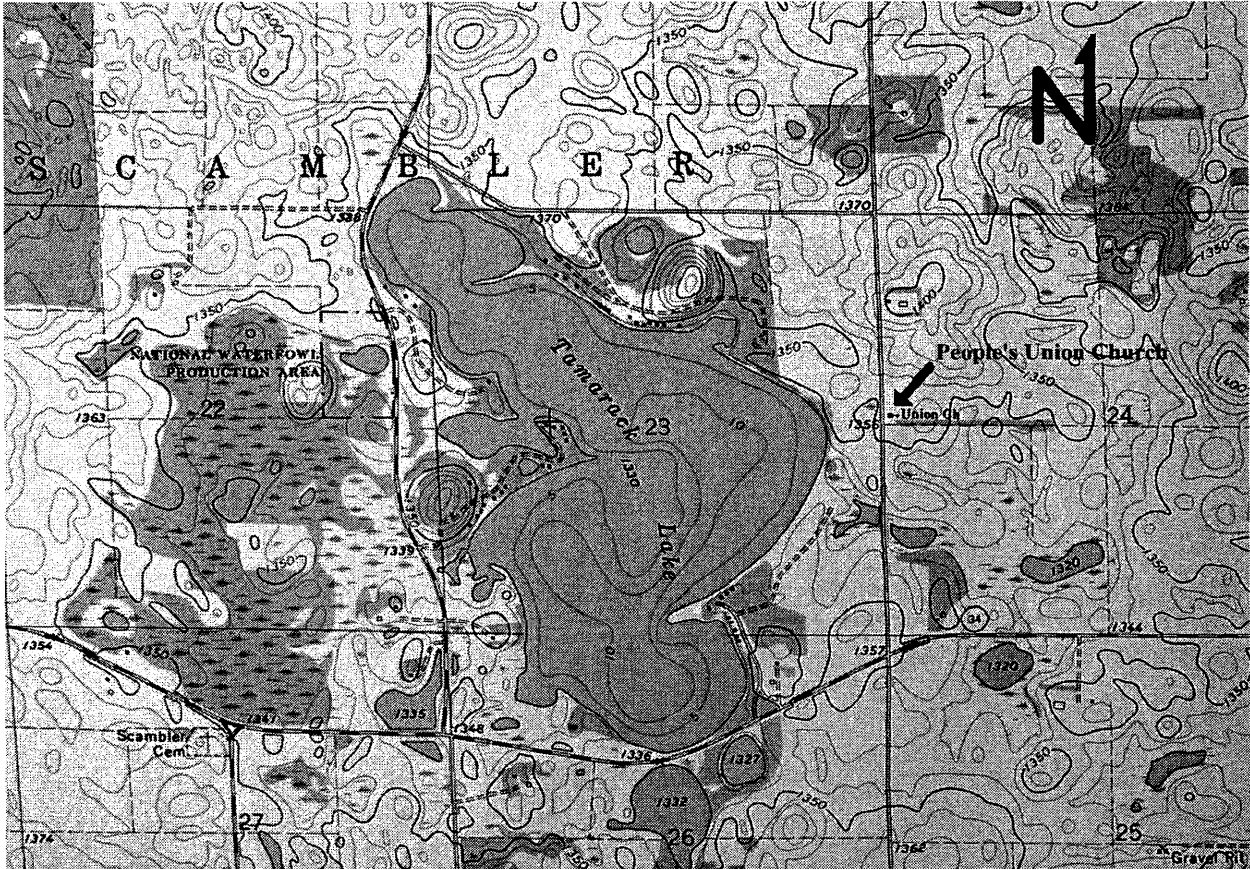
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Site map showing location of People's Union Church (adapted from USGS map "Cormorant, Minnesota, Quadrangle," 1973).

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Aerial photograph showing relationship between People's Union Church and surroundings (adapted from 1957 aerial of Otter Tail County, available at Borchert Map Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis).

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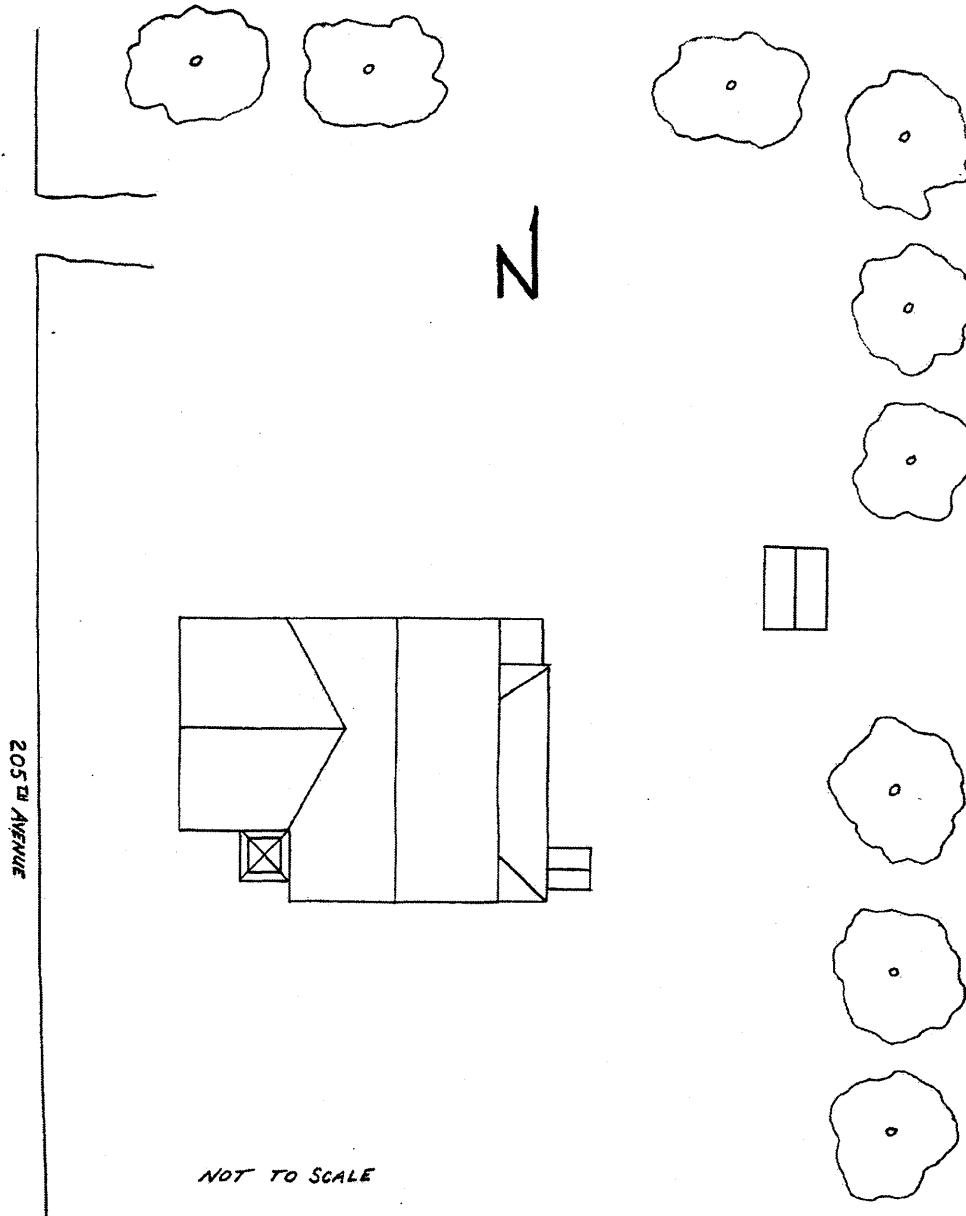
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Sketch of People's Union Church site. Privy to northeast of church building.