

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/ meeting hall and clubhouse

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ auditorium and music facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/ meeting hall and clubhouse

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ auditorium and music facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

no style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Poured Concrete

walls Fired Brick

roof Asphalt Shingles

other Concrete Sills (formed)

Wood window frames

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Serbian Home, also known as the Serbian Hall, is a modest ethnic-related structure constructed in 1923-1924 by Anthony Mleccko in a style similar to other ethnic halls in the immediate area. It is located at 404 3rd Avenue South, South St. Paul, Dakota County, Minnesota. At the time the structure was built, the surrounding area was in transition from a farming area to a multi-ethnic residential neighborhood. Other ethnic-related structures in the immediate vicinity included boarding houses and two ethnic halls within a four-block radius.¹

The Serbian Home is a rectangular-shaped framed one and one-half story building with a raised basement. It has a pitched roof pierced by one chimney in the southwest quadrant. The building's foundation is comprised of 12" poured concrete and its outer walls and chimney are faced with dark red/brown fired brick. The brick is set horizontally, with the exception of several vertically-set bands.

The structure's original front facade had a front-gabled form with parapets extending from the top. Because of water damage, when a new asphalt roof was added, the northeast and northwest parapets were removed and the roofline extended from the peak of the gables. At the top of all brick on both front and rear facades is a strip of concrete, the same material the windowsills are constructed of. The rear facade also has a gable and parapets. At the intersection of the outerwalls and rafters is an overhang supported with simple wooden brackets. Three triangle dormers with painted wooden horizontal louvers extend from the north side of the roof, and two more from the eastern two-thirds section of the south roof. Two flush-steel exit doors open from the north facade.

The front facade has a raised centered outside porch with a tile floor. Nine steps, flanked with concrete-topped brick walls, lead up to the porch. A concrete slab, stamped with the words "Serbian Home," tops the porch entrance. The porch roof is flat, with a flagpole set in its middle.

All the structure's windows are wood-framed. Clusters of three top-arched windows, the middle the tallest, are centered over the porch in the peak of the gable. The rest of the windows are rectangular and double hung, and include the following: two pairs on each side of the porch, three pairs in the structure's balcony level, four pairs on the north and south facades, and a single in the building's rear. Each

See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage and Social History

Period of Significance

1923-1940

Significant Dates

1923

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Mleczeko, Anthony, Builder

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

The Serbian Home, commonly called the Serbian Hall, was constructed in 1923 by Anthony Mleczeko for the members of South St. Paul's Serbian community;¹ it was dedicated in 1924. It is significant under the statewide historic contexts of Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940, and Urban Centers, 1870-1940, and under National Register Criterion A, in the areas of Serbian ethnic heritage and social history, as an important center for Serbians who had recently emigrated from their homeland in the Balkan Peninsula and were seeking connections to their Southern European past. The Serbs came to South St. Paul to work in its meat packing houses, which were important in the development of the surrounding urban area, as well as in the development of the state's railroad and agricultural industries. The Serbian Home was the official home of the South St. Paul St. Sava chapter of the Serb National Federation, a fraternal society established to serve the thousands of Serbs around the country. Throughout America, such Serbian fraternal societies, as well as those established by the members of other immigrant groups, played key roles in helping America's newcomers in their new lives, and to help them preserve their ties to their native country's social and cultural life. The structures that housed such ethnic fraternal societies, such as the Serbian Home, are historically significant as centers of ethnic communities within America. Additionally, such structures symbolize the impact that the immigration of diverse peoples from all over the world has had on American history. Other fraternal organizations, such as the Masons and Elks, also built halls, but this research has only focused on ethnic-related structures.

The Serbian Home represents the South St. Paul settlement of Serbian natives in America during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Serbs are usually considered part of a larger group known as the South Slavs or Yugoslavs. Economic and political conditions encouraged South Slavs, made up of such cultural groups as the Croatians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbians, and Slovenes, to come to America from the late-nineteenth century until the period after World War II. It is difficult to know how many South Slavs immigrated to the United States, because many scholars believe these groups were underrecorded, and, additionally, many of the immigrants ended up

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Primary Sources:

Newspaper clippings, photographs, and other documents and site-related artifacts in a collection in the possession of Theodore Trkla, on behalf of Historical Ethnic Landmark Preservation Committee, South St. Paul, Minnesota.

Secondary Sources:

Robert P. Gakovich and Milan M. Radovich, compilers, and Joseph D. Dwyer, editor, Serbs in the United States and Canada: A Comprehensive Bibliography (Minneapolis: Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 1976).

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A

1	5
---	---

4	9	7	0	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	9	6	9	9	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

C

--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B

--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Zone Easting Northing

D

--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property occupies:

Lots 29 and 30 (each 40 x 120'), Block 11, Riverside Park Addition to the City of South St. Paul, on the southwest corner of 4th Street and 3rd Avenue.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lots that have historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Patricia L. Dooley
organization N/A date 4/20/91
street & number 1065 West Montana telephone (612)489-9345
city or town St. Paul state MN zip code 55117

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Serbian Home, South St. Paul, Dakota Co., MN

Section number 7 Page 1

window on the main and balcony levels has nine lights in its upper sash, and one in its bottom frame. The structure's south and north walls have at their east ends a surface outlined as if it was originally designed to be a window, but was instead filled in with brick. The basement is opened by windows about half the height of the windows on the main and balcony levels.

The interior of the structure is in good condition. On the main level, there is a large hardwood dance floor with an overlooking 16' x 43' balcony on the front end. Under the balcony is the front foyer, which includes a ticket booth recessed into the building's office, located at the southeast corner. Men's and women's restrooms are located opposite the office and ticket booth. There is a stairway to the basement in the structure's northeast corner. The inside walls are surfaced with plaster and painted. Stencils decorate the surface at the intersection of the wall and ceiling, but have been painted over. Six paintings, five depicting Serbs in traditional dress, and one a musical instrument, decorate the main floor wall surfaces.

On the structure's west end is a stage with a 3' x 3' prompter cage and floor stagelights with removable wooden covers. Three dressing rooms flank the stage, and there is a set of enclosed steps leading to the stage from the main floor at the room's northwest corner.

The basement consists primarily of a room with a tile dance floor, although it also has a furnace/boiler room at the southwest corner; a kitchen at the west end; a 45' carpeted and mirrored bar; a raised band stage built into the basement's southeast corner; and a safe and storage area. The interior basement walls, with the exception of the area below the porch, are plastered and faced with wood panel. The paneling and bar-related facilities were added since the structure was built.

The structure has always been utilized as an ethnic community social and educational hall. It is simple and utilitarian, resembling other ethnic halls in the immediate vicinity.²

Notes:

1. The transition of the neighborhood can be seen, for example, by comparing 1939 and 1951 Sanborn Insurance Co. of South St. Paul.

2. See pictures of the nearby Polish (page 260) and Croatian (page 273) halls in Lois A. Glewwe, editor, South St. Paul Centennial, 1887-1987: The History of South St. Paul, Minnesota (South St. Paul, Minnesota: South St. Paul Area Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society, 1987).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Serbian Home, South St. Paul, Dakota Co., MN

Section number 8 Page 1

returning to their home lands either permanently, or for shorter durations. The greatest concentration of South Slavs arrived in America before World War I, peaking in 1907 with 82,393 arrivals.²

A part of this South Slavic immigration, most Serbs who migrated to America came in three waves: the first major group came between roughly 1890 and 1914; the second between the First and Second World Wars; and a third, but smaller, group came after the Second World War.³ Exact data on the number of Serbs who immigrated to America is difficult to obtain, since, as a group, they have often been lumped together with Croatians, Slovenians, and other Eastern European newcomers from the country that is today known as Yugoslavia.

Minnesota's first Serbs came to Stearns County, Minnesota to farm its rich agricultural land as early as 1856, several decades before the first wave of Serbian immigration, which started in about 1890.⁴ But most Serbs who ultimately settled in Minnesota arrived later among those who came in the three waves outlined above. Historians have compiled data which suggests that, in 1910, there were 19,829 speakers of South Slavic languages in Minnesota,⁵ almost 6% of the nation's total population of South Slavs. Of this group, 7,901 were speakers of Serbo-Croatian languages, two language groups often related by scholars because of their similarities.⁶

Three major geographical concentrations of South Slavs, which included the Serbs, ultimately developed in Minnesota: the first and smallest in Stearns county, the second in the northeast part of the state, and the third at South St. Paul. The last two such settlements related to specific industries: those who settled in the northeast part of the state came to work in the iron mines, and those who came to South St. Paul came to work at that town's stockyards.⁷ South St. Paul developed as a major livestock exchange and meat-packing center in the late decades of the nineteenth century, when the St. Paul Union Stockyards Company opened in 1887, and Swift and Company followed in 1897. The 1910 census indicates that about 60 Serbs lived in South St. Paul that year, a number of them in the town's boarding houses, which had been opened in response to the influx of foreign-born workers.⁸ South St. Paul's thriving meat-packing and slaughtering industry likewise attracted other Slavs including Croatians and Bulgars, as well as Romanian, Hungarian, Polish, and Irish immigrants, among others.

When these groups arrived in America, they typically established businesses, churches, and fraternal organizations, to help them in their new lives, and to provide them with links to their homelands.⁹ Among the most important were boarding houses, already mentioned above, established to house and feed the newcomers; stores, as well as neighborhood saloons, which became important ethnic social centers; ethnic-related churches, built to provide spiritual sustenance to the newcomers; and, beneficial and fraternal societies. The various groups also established their own newspapers, the Serbs' leading newspaper in this country being the American Srbobran. South St. Paul was to become a town with a rich diversity of ethnic-related businesses, organizations, and activities, many of which are still evident today.¹⁰

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Serbian Home, South St. Paul, Dakota Co., MN

Section number 8 Page 2

Fraternal and benefit societies were among the most important institutions created by the various immigrant groups. Benefit societies were established to provide insurance plans to the immigrants, and fraternal societies offered its members a place to come together to discuss matters related to all of the major components of their lives, including labor and politics. Additionally, fraternal halls provided places for education and socialization.

South St. Paul's Serbs established the St. Sava Serbian Benevolent Society in 1909, which later became a chapter of the Serb National Federation, an organization whose headquarters was in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. At first, the group's members met in their homes,¹¹ but they later started raising funds for a building of their own. Not until 1923 was the group able to begin construction of their new hall, which was to have an office for the Serb National Federation benefit society, a library, kitchen, auditorium, and stage. Activities for both young and old were held at the hall, including among other things wedding dances, parties, church services, plays, and classes for both young and old, including instructions in the Serbian language, dance, and music. The hall's basement bar, added later, also served as a place where members of the Serbian community routinely gathered to share casual conversation, and to play cards and bingo, among other things.¹²

The Serbian Home was just one of a number of other ethnic-related halls built by the members of various South St. Paul ethnic groups. For example, South St. Paul's Polish and Croatian communities built halls to house their fraternal society's activities. The Croatian Hall was built at 445 Second Avenue South, and is extant on its site. The Polish Hall, which was to become the home of Lodge No. 1033 of the Polish National Alliance, was built in 1911 at 622 First Avenue South, but was torn down in 1962. Other ethnic and community halls were also built in South St. Paul.

The Serbian Home was used by the community most heavily from its dedication in 1924 until the early 1960s. It serves as a significant symbol of Serbian immigration and adjustment to America. Additionally, because of the role the community's Serbs played as laborers in South St. Paul's meat packing industry, the structure has important connections to the state's and region's urban, railroad, and agricultural development.

Notes:

1. South St. Paul Daily Reporter, 11 and 25 June, 1923.
2. June Drenning Holmquist, editor, They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1984), chapter 20, "The South Slavs: Bulgarians, Croatians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Slovenes," 382-404, includes an excellent summary of the history of the settlement of the South Slavs in Minnesota. These population figures are taken from this chapter; see particularly page 381 for data.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Serbian Home, South St. Paul, Dakota Co., MN

Section number 8 Page 3

3. Robert P. Gakovich and Milan M. Radovich, compilers, and Joseph D. Dwyer, editor, Serbs in the United States and Canada: A Comprehensive Bibliography (Minneapolis: Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, 1976).

4. See Table 20.3, "Yugoslavs in Minnesota by County, 1920-70," in They Chose Minnesota, page 384, which indicates there were 102 foreign-born Yugoslavs in Stearns County, Minnesota, in 1920. Pages 385-386 describe Slovenian immigration to Stearns County, Minnesota, in the period 1856-1870s.

5. Ibid, page 381.

6. Despite the linking of the Serbian and Croatian languages by some scholars, these two groups have had a long history of unfriendliness which extends back to their homelands based on religious differences, among other things.

7. See Table 20, Ibid, pages 384-384, for data which shows that the South Slavs became concentrated in northern Minnesota counties and the Twin Cities.

8. This number is an estimate, since precise data is difficult to obtain; see Ibid, page 396. Several additional sources of information on South St. Paul's Serbian community include the following: Zivka Scheglowski, "Serbs in South St. Paul and Minneapolis," 15, course paper, 1972, University of Minnesota, copy in Minnesota Ethnic History Project Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, Division of Archives and Manuscripts; Lois A. Glewwe, editor, South St. Paul Centennial, 1887-1987: The History of South St. Paul, Minnesota (South St. Paul, Minnesota: South St. Paul Area Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society, 1987), especially pages 266-271; Bruce Schmall, The Courageous Struggle: Serbian Immigrant 1911 to American Citizen 1945 (Minneapolis: Bruce Schmall, 1987).

9. They Chose Minnesota provides a description of the role these various institutions and businesses played in the lives of the members of the South Slavic ethnic groups which came to the state. See especially pages 386-391.

10. See page 249 of South St. Paul's local history, South St. Paul Centennial, which includes a chapter entitled "A People of All Nations." This chapter includes special sections on the town's Irish, Polish, South Slovenian, including Croatians and Serbians, Austrian, and Roman settlements.

11. Ibid, page 266.

12. Ibid, pages 267-271, includes a description of some of the activities that were held at the Serbian Home, as well as stories about some of the Serbians who immigrated to the town and utilized the hall.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Serbian Home, South St. Paul, Dakota Co., MN

Section number 9 Page 1

Lois A. Glewwe, editor, South St. Paul Centennial, 1887-1987: The History of South St. Paul, Minnesota (South St. Paul, Minnesota: South St. Paul Area Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society, 1987), pages 266-271.

June Drenning Holmquist, editor, They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of The State's Ethnic Groups (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1984), chapter 20, "The South Slavs: Bulgarians, Croatians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Slovenes," pages 381-404.

Zivka Scheglowski, "Serbs in South St. Paul and Minneapolis," 15, course paper, 1972, University of Minnesota, copy in Minnesota Ethnic History Project Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, Division of Archives and Manuscripts.

Bruce Schmall, The Courageous Struggle: Serbian Immigrant 1911 to American Citizen 1945 (Minneapolis: Bruce Schmall, 198?).