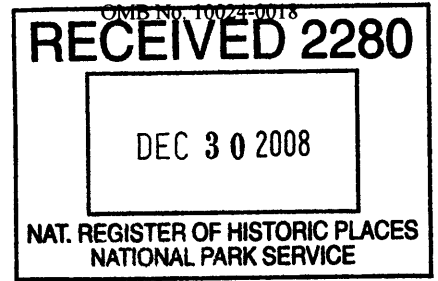


022



**United States Department of 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

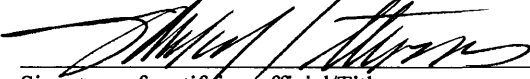
historic name Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1383 and 1405 Thelen Farm Trail **N/A** **not for publication**
city or town Town of St. Joseph **N/A** **vicinity**
state Wisconsin **code** WI **county** St. Croix **code** 109 **zip code** 54082

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.)


Signature of certifying official/Title

12/23/08
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

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 commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Name of Property

St. Croix County
County and State

Wisconsin

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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.
____ See continuation sheet.
____ removed from the National
Register.
____ other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall

2-12-09

[Signature]

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

| Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as as apply) | Category of Property (Check only one box) | Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count) | |
|---|---|---|-----------------|
| | | contributing | noncontributing |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | | |
| public-local | district | 3 | 1 buildings |
| public-State | structure | | sites |
| public-Federal | site | 2 | structures |
| | object | | objects |
| | | 5 | 1 Total |

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources
is previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/animal facility, storage,
processing

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation STONE

walls WEATHERBOARD

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

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 the 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 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)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1885 – 1917

Significant Dates

1885

1917

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Jackson, Augustus

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Name of Property

St. Croix County
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

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

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- 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:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 4.8 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 517739 4991004
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

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 | Emily Pettis, John Lauber, and Shannon Dolan, Architectural Historians | date | October 2007 |
| organization | Mead & Hunt, Inc. | telephone | 608-273-6380 |
| street & number | 6501 Watts Road | zip code | 53719 |
| city or town | Madison | state | WI |

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Name of Property

St. Croix County
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A US Geological Survey 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 SHPO or FPO)

*See Historic Boundary Map for ownership information

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------|----|------------------|----------------|
| Name/title | Keith Relyea | | | | |
| organization | | | | date | September 2007 |
| street&number | 1405 Thelen Farm Trail | | | telephone | 715-549-6716 |
| city or town | Houlton | state | WI | zip code | 54082 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------|----|------------------|----------------|
| Name/title | Mike Johnson | | | | |
| organization | | | | date | September 2007 |
| street&number | 1383 Thelen Farm Trail | | | telephone | 715-549-6661 |
| city or town | Houlton | state | WI | zip code | 54082 |

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 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 Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

Description

The John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen House and associated farm buildings are located at 1383 and 1405 Thelen Farm Trail, 0.25 miles north of County Trunk Highway (CTH) E, one mile east of State Trunk Highway (STH) 35, in St. Croix County, Wisconsin and approximately 25 miles east of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. The property is located in Section 23 in the Town of St. Joseph, approximately one mile east of the unincorporated community of Houlton, on the western edge of a wooded slope. The property includes a two-story farmhouse, four agricultural outbuildings and structures, and a number of intact landscape features.

The Thelen House faces west and is set into the hillside overlooking Thelen Farm Trail, which originally served as a driveway providing access to CTH E from the farmstead. The driveway was reconstructed as a paved Town Road in 2004 to provide access to the modern Settler's Glen Subdivision located east of the farmstead. A gravel driveway provides access to the farmstead from Thelen Farm Trail. A remnant of what is believed to have been a stagecoach road follows a portion of the existing driveway. The stagecoach road is overgrown and covered with grass with ruts providing evidence of the original roadbed.¹

Farmhouse

1885, 1910

Contributing

The Thelen family built the frame farmhouse in 1885.² It rests on a cut stone foundation and is clad in narrow clapboards. In its form, the original massing is consistent with a two-story cube with a one-and-one-half-story ell projecting from the east (rear) elevation. The two-story portion is capped by a truncated hip roof covered in asphalt shingles that features decorative Italianate-style brackets below the eaves, a simple cornice, and an interior brick chimney. The one-and-one-half-story ell is capped by a gable roof clad in asphalt shingles and displays an interior brick chimney. A one-story gable summer kitchen was added to the east elevation c.1910. This summer kitchen may have served as a milk house for a brief period, until the permanent milk house was constructed near the barn.³ The majority of windows on the house are two-over-two, double-hung sash with the original wood surrounds.

Four wood steps lead up to each side of the full-length porch that spans the front (west) facade. The raised porch displays modest decorative details, such as turned posts, a turned balustrade, and lattice skirting. The front door is located at the northwest corner of the symmetrical facade. The original wood panel door with

¹ Neither the stagecoach road remnant, nor the other landscape features are included in the resource count.

² Receipt issued by August Johnson to J.N. Thelen, 11 September 1885. Thelen family papers, collection of Keith Relyea.

³ Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 2

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

fixed arch windows features the original wood surround and transom. Two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows with simple wood surrounds are located to the right (south) of the front door. Three, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows are evenly spaced across the second story. These windows feature wood surrounds that terminate just below the cornice.

A one-and-one-half-story frame ell is centered on the east (rear) elevation. It is rectangular in plan and includes a kitchen and pantry on the first story and a bedroom on the second. The side gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles and features a simple cornice and interior brick chimney. Although a c.1910 one-story summer kitchen has been added at the southeast corner of the ell, three windows on the rear elevation remain intact. A single, two-over-two, double-hung sash window is located on the first story and two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows are located on the second story. The summer kitchen is square in plan with a gable roof covered in asphalt shingles. The rear elevation features a band of four multi-light casement windows.

The north (side) elevation is asymmetrical due to the location of the interior staircase, which affects window placement. A one-story box bay with two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows is located on the first story and three, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows are located directly above the bay. A three-over-one, double-hung sash window was added next to the bay c.1930, when a bathroom was added on the first story. The ell features a single, two-over-two, double-hung sash window. Directly above this window, a single-pane casement window is tucked below the cornice. An original wood panel door with two rectangular fixed-panes and a single-pane screen door are located east of the first-story window and provide access to the interior. The summer kitchen features a wood panel door at the northwest corner and a single two-over-two, double-hung sash window east of the door.

The fenestration on the south (side) elevation is symmetrical and exhibits three, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows on both the first and second stories. A metal trellis covered with vines shelters the exterior cellar door. The ell features a small recessed shed roof porch supported by square posts resting on a concrete pad. A wood panel door with two fixed windows provides access to the interior. A single two-over-two, double-hung sash window is located to the west of the door. A second two-over-two, double-hung sash window is located east of the porch. The summer kitchen features an original wood panel entrance door and screen door with a simple wood surround and a two-over-two, double-hung sash window.

Interior

The interior of the John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen Farmhouse retains a high degree of integrity in terms of its floor plan and interior finishes. Decorative details and embellishments include original woodwork, such as the molding and window and door surrounds. Walls throughout the house are plaster, typically painted, and the floors are the original wood.

United States Department of the Interior
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Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 3

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

Rooms on the first floor were intended to receive guests or for utilitarian use, while rooms on the second floor were private, consisting largely of bedrooms. The formal rooms include the foyer, living room, dining room, and den. The utilitarian rooms include the kitchen, pantry, and summer kitchen/milk house located at the rear of the house and a small bathroom tucked below the stairs.

The primary entrance is a wood panel door with paired arched windows on the front facade, located within the porch. The door opens into a small foyer with stairs leading up to the second story and an entrance to the living room.

The living room is located at the southwest corner of the house and is accessed from the foyer through two wood panel doors. It is rectangular in plan and features the original wood floor and base molding, which have been painted white. In addition, the living room retains the original picture molding, which wraps around the room and is located approximately 2 feet below the ceiling-wall juncture. Two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows are located on west wall and a single two-over-two, double-hung sash window is located on the south wall. All three windows display the original wood surrounds and have been painted white.

The dining room is located to the east of the living room and is accessed through a pair of wood panel pocket doors. The spacious room has a rectangular plan; two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows on the south wall; and the original wood floor. Wainscoting extends around the bottom half of the room and floral wallpaper covers the top half. A small bathroom and den are located north of the dining room and the kitchen is located to the east.

The bathroom is located at the northwest corner of the dining room in an alcove directly below the stairs to the second story. The small room was added c.1930 and includes a claw foot tub, porcelain wall sink, toilet, and a single three-over-one, double-hung sash window. Due to its location under the stairs, the ceiling is sloped.

Directly east of the bathroom is the den, which is accessed by a wood panel door on the north side of the dining room. The small room features a square plan; two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows; and original wood floor.

The kitchen is located on the first story of the ell, east of the dining room. Although the kitchen was renovated in 1995 and has replacement cabinets and a service island with a sink, it retains the original footprint, wood floors, wainscoting, and window and door surrounds. A two-over-two, double-hung sash window and two-pane wood panel door are located on the north wall. Similar to the north wall, the south wall features a two-over-two, double-hung sash window and two-pane wood panel door; however, a small pantry is located east of the

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Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 4

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

door. A two-over-two, double-hung sash window is located at the northeast corner of the kitchen. A staircase located at the northwest corner of the kitchen provides access to the second-story bedroom. A second staircase, located near the opposite corner of the west wall, leads to the basement. The entrance to the summer kitchen is located at the southeast corner of the kitchen.

The pantry is located at the southeast corner of the kitchen. The small rectangular room retains the original woodwork, including built-in cabinets with glass doors, drawers, countertops, wainscoting, and wood floor. A single two-over-two, double-hung sash window with a wood surround is located on the south wall and provides natural light for the space. Simple floral wallpaper covers the exposed walls.

The summer kitchen, located on the east elevation of both the kitchen and pantry, was constructed c.1910.⁴ The room is accessed from the kitchen through a single wood panel door that opens into the small rectangular space. Although it currently functions as a sitting room, the room maintains the original wood floor; two-over-two, double-hung sash windows on the north and south walls; and two-pane wood panel door with a screen door on the south wall that opens to the outside. A band of square four-light casement windows has been added to the east wall.

The second story originally consisted of five bedrooms; however, one of the smaller bedrooms was converted into a bathroom c.1995. The formal staircase leading to the second story from the foyer follows an L-plan and displays the original newel post and turned balusters. A hallway at the top of the stairs provides access to two bedrooms to the west and two bedrooms and a bathroom to the east. A second staircase, accessed from the kitchen, opens into the bedroom located directly above the kitchen. The floors throughout the second story are the original wood; however, in some rooms they have been painted.

A small bedroom located at the west end of the hallway currently functions as an office. The space retains the original wood floor, base molding, and two-over-two, double-hung sash window on the west wall. Another larger bedroom can be accessed by an open doorway at the southeast corner of this bedroom or by a wood panel door from the hallway. This bedroom also maintains the original wood floor and base molding. Two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows on the west wall and one on the south wall provide sufficient natural light for the space.

A large bathroom is located at the opposite end of the hallway from the aforementioned bedrooms. The room served as a bedroom until c.1995, when it was converted to its current use. Despite the addition of modern

⁴ Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007.

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Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

amenities, such as a double sink, bathtub, and toilet, the room maintains several of its original attributes, including its original footprint; two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows on the west wall; and wood floor and base molding, which have been painted.

A third bedroom is located at the east end of the hallway, south of the bathroom. Although it currently functions as a sitting room, the footprint, wood floor, base molding, and two-over-two, double-hung sash windows on the south wall remain intact. A doorway located at the northeast corner of the room provides access to the bedroom located above the kitchen, which is much larger than the other bedrooms and features a sloped ceiling. This bedroom features a wood floor consistent with the flooring throughout the house. Two, two-over-two, double-hung sash windows are located on the east wall. A narrow staircase leading to the kitchen is located at the northwest corner of the room. It is believed that this bedroom, with limited access, was used by farm hands during the historic period.⁵

The basement, accessed from the kitchen and exterior cellar door, has a concrete floor with stone and brick walls.

Barn and silo (1 building, 1 structure) 1917 Contributing

A gambrel roof "Jamesway" barn with a rectangular plan and raised concrete block foundation is located southeast of the house.⁶ The barn is of wood frame construction and is sheathed in a combination of clapboard and drop siding. The roof is covered with corrugated metal and features two metal ridge ventilators and a hay hood. Thelen family records indicate that the barn was constructed in 1917, utilizing plans prepared by the Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin-based James Manufacturing Company.⁷

Overall, the exterior of the barn remains intact. Although some of the windows on the north, west, and south elevations have been covered with wood, they retain the size of the original openings. Entrances to the main level of the barn are a combination of single and double wood doors. An opening for the hayloft is located on the north elevation.

⁵ Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007.

⁶ The brand name "Jamesway" was used by the James Manufacturing Company of Ft. Atkinson, Wisconsin. Established in 1906, the company manufactured equipment and fittings for dairy barns, including stanchions, automatic watering systems, and manure handling systems. In order to promote the use of their products, the company also produced standard and custom plans for dairy barns, utilizing Jamesway equipment. "Jamesway Company History" <<http://star.com/history.html>> accessed 24 September 2007.

⁷ Thelen Family records, in possession of Keith Relyea.

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Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 6

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

A slip-cast concrete silo, erected in the same year as the barn, is attached to the northeast corner of the barn by a poured concrete hyphen. The silo cap has been removed and the identical silo that stood at the northwest corner of the barn has been demolished.

Windmill

c.1883

Contributing

A steel windmill tower stands on a wooded hilltop at the rear of the house. The tower legs straddle a water pump and cistern. Erected in 1883, the windmill originally stood adjacent to the small open porch on the south elevation of the house. During the 1920s, a cistern was built on a hillside and the windmill was moved to that location.⁸ Although the metal lattice tower remains intact, the wind turbine is no longer present.

Smokehouse

c.1873

Contributing

A c.1873 limestone smokehouse is located northeast of the house. The roof of this small rectangular building was damaged by a fire in the 1960s and subsequently replaced with the current gable frame roof covered with corrugated metal. A simple hinged wood door provides access to the interior of the structure.

Shed

2007

Noncontributing

A modern, small gable roof shed is located at the east end of the garden.

Outbuilding remnants

During the 1970s, several historic outbuildings that were in serious disrepair and no longer in use were demolished.⁹ Some remnants of these outbuildings are still visible. The limestone foundation of a nonextant horse barn is located southwest of the house, near the edge of the driveway. The concrete remnants of a large chicken house enclose a garden bed located southeast of the farmhouse. The concrete privy foundation is located near the northeast corner of the farmhouse. A granary, combination machine shed/granary, implement shed, milk house, and woodshed were also removed from the property. These elements are not included in the resource count.

⁸ Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007.

⁹ Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007.

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

Statement of Significance

The John and Hermina Thelen House is locally significant under National Register *Criterion C: Architecture*. The simple, but well-crafted farmhouse demonstrates the prosperity achieved by one of the county's pioneer farm families; it is a late vernacular adaptation of the Italianate style, built by a local carpenter and is one of the finest historic period houses in the township. The associated property retains a barn, silo, smokehouse, and windmill. The smokehouse and windmill date from the era when St. Croix County was emerging as Wisconsin's most prolific wheat-producing area. The 1917 Jamesway barn and slip-cast concrete silo date from the evolution from wheat to diversified farming and the incorporation of technologies developed by scientific agriculturists to meet changing agricultural needs. The house was constructed during the transition between the two prevalent forms of farming. Its construction and continued high level of care reflects the prosperity of the wheat farming era and the continued economic success of the family as it diversified its farming operation.

The period of significance for the John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen House begins with the construction of the house in 1885 and extends through 1917, when the barn and silo were completed. The associated farm buildings help to define the home's historic setting.

Early Development of Agriculture in St. Croix County and the Town of St. Joseph

Established by the Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin Territory in 1840, St. Croix County originally encompassed a large parcel of land flanking the St. Croix River from its confluence with the Mississippi River north to Lake Superior and the Canadian border. The county seat was established at Stillwater, a lumber town located on the west side of the St. Croix River near the south end of the county. When Wisconsin became a state in 1848, Stillwater and the land west of the river became part of the newly formed Minnesota Territory. St. Croix County attained its current borders in 1852, when the Wisconsin Legislature subdivided the area into St. Croix, Polk, and Pierce counties. The city of Hudson became the St. Croix County seat.¹⁰

The earliest arrivals in the St. Croix Valley came to exploit the area's abundant timber resources. The first signs of development in the area were the large log booms that congested the river and sawmills that proliferated along its banks. Logging and lumbering remained the dominant industries in the valley into the 1850s. By 1855 a newspaper editor from nearby St. Anthony (Minneapolis) was urging newcomers to the valley to consider another way of earning a livelihood. "We must look to the soil ... support more than to pine logs. Not that the pine region is exhausted ... but we can never be prosperous and independent until our

¹⁰ Rev. Edward D. Neill, and J. Fletcher Williams, *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley Including the Explorers and Pioneers of Minnesota and Outlines of the History of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Co., 1881), 220.

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Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 2

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

luxuriant valleys, prairies, and meadow lands are cultivated.” By the end of the decade the savannahs above the river were dotted with small farmsteads, and farming was emerging as another important industry in the St. Croix Valley.¹¹

In 1858 the St. Croix County Board of Commissioners voted to establish the Town of St. Joseph. Located on the east bank of the St. Croix River and bounded by the Towns of Somerset, Hudson, and Richmond, the newly formed Town of St. Joseph encompassed 20,904 acres. The topography was described as “undulating and hilly,” with numerous lakes in the eastern portion, and several tributaries that drained into the St. Croix River. The unincorporated community of Houlton developed on the Town’s western edge, connected to Stillwater, Minnesota, by a wagon bridge. The Town’s development was largely the result of the area’s agricultural activities. A 1909 history of St. Croix County indicated that horses and cattle were the most numerous livestock animals, and oats, hay, and rye constituted the largest crops in total acreage in the Town.¹²

“Fields of Billowing Wheat”

The New England immigrants who settled western Wisconsin in the 1850s, were, according to agricultural historian Joseph Schafer “by habit and tradition primarily wheat growers. They had a lively appreciation of the ease with which wealth in the form of wheat could be extracted from the ... soils of Wisconsin’s prairies.”¹³

As agriculture took root in Wisconsin during the mid-nineteenth century, wheat became the dominant crop. Wheat cultivation required little prior knowledge of farming, virtually no capital, and no specialized buildings, making it an ideal crop for pioneer farmers. An individual could break the soil and plant 25 to 50 acres during the first season and open a similar amount of additional land in subsequent years. Furthermore, wheat was in high demand. A season’s harvest could be hauled to a nearby mill, ground into flour and exchanged for cash the pioneer farmer needed to purchase items that could not be grown or manufactured on the farm.¹⁴

¹¹ James Taylor Dunn, *The St. Croix: Midwest Border River* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1971) 53.

¹² Rev. Edward D. Neill, and J. Fletcher Williams, 224; Augustus B. Easton, *History of the St. Croix Valley, Vol. II* (Chicago: H.C. Cooper, Jr., & Co., 1909), 951.

¹³ Joseph Schafer, *A History of Agriculture in Wisconsin* (Madison, Wisc.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1922), 84.

¹⁴ Barbara Wyatt, ed. *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. II* (Madison, Wisc.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986), 2-1; Joseph Schafer, 85.

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 3

Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
Town of St. Joseph, St. Croix County, Wisconsin

The ease of wheat cultivation encouraged novice farmers to plant it season after season on the same ground. This repeated monocropping eventually depleted the soil, a problem that farmers solved by putting more land into production or moving to undisturbed land further west. As a result, the epicenter of wheat culture followed the frontier as the line of settlement in Wisconsin moved steadily from the southeast to the northwest. As more and more land was put into production, the state's output of the grain increased rapidly. By 1860 Wisconsin was the nation's second largest producer of wheat, and by 1870 St. Croix County was the largest wheat producing county in Wisconsin.

Diversification

While wheat production in St. Croix County was on the rise during the 1870s, production in eastern Wisconsin had declined precipitously as years of sowing and reaping stripped vital nutrients from the soil. As the awareness of this situation grew during the latter third of the nineteenth century, the Wisconsin Agricultural Society, a group of scientific farmers from the recently established University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture, and the editors of state farm journals, such as *Wisconsin Farmer* and *Hoard's Dairyman*, began to promote diversification. They encouraged farmers to restore the fertility of their soil by planting a diverse array of crops in rotation; by husbanding an assortment of animals to provide milk, meat, eggs, wool, and motive power; and by using animal byproducts to restore nutrients to the soil. These practices required new specialized structures, including barns to shelter animals and store hay; silos to help maintain the production of dairy cattle throughout the year; milk houses to house newly developed cream separators; and corncribs and granaries to store feed crops. The new practices and equipment were intended to transform farms into self-sustaining enterprises.

As with the development of wheat culture, diversification in Wisconsin spread from east to west. In 1879 St. Croix County focused almost entirely on wheat production. By 1898 diversified agriculture was gaining acceptance in the county. "Intelligent farmers," observed one area agriculturalist, "were already aware of the fact that the continual cropping of lands with grain and hay to be sold and carried away instead of being consumed at home was rapidly depleting the soil . . . and a good many were turning to livestock . . . as a relief from the ruinous practices of the past."¹⁵

This move to diversification led to the establishment of the first cheese factory in the Town of St. Joseph in 1880 as a number of area farmers expanded their operations to include dairying. By the early 1900s diversified farming was a well-established practice in the area. St. Croix County farmers were maintaining horses, cattle,

¹⁵ "A Brief Summary of St. Croix County from 1840 to 1898," *Hudson Star and Times*, 11 March 1898.

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sheep, hogs, and poultry, and growing corn, oats, barley, and other small grains for feed rather than for sale as a cash crop.¹⁶

Golden Age of Agriculture

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, diversification, new scientific agricultural methods, and favorable economic conditions helped farmers in Wisconsin, and the rest of the nation, achieve unprecedented prosperity. Improved farming techniques and equipment developed by University of Wisconsin agriculturalists and engineers increased crop and livestock yields just as the rising demand for agricultural products caused commodity prices to increase. As the amount of undeveloped agricultural land diminished, the value of established farms increased. World War I further improved conditions as European farmers were forced to cease production and American produce was needed to fill the gap. This era, following the struggles of pioneer farmers to carve out a living from unbroken soil and preceding the agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s, is widely regarded by agricultural historians as the "Golden Age of Agriculture." During this period, farmers achieved economic parity with the prices they received for their products in equilibrium with the prices they paid for manufactured items.¹⁷

As fortunes improved during this period, it was common for farmers to invest a portion of their profits in state-of-the-art facilities, incorporating improved farming technology and equipment developed and promulgated by agricultural engineers, Farmer's Institutes, and University of Wisconsin agricultural extension programs. By 1920 a typical Wisconsin farmstead included a comfortable farmhouse, a large multipurpose barn with a silo and milk house, facilities for hogs and poultry, and storage areas for corn and other small grains. Many of these facilities were built according to standard plans and contained equipment that was designed and mass-produced in industrial settings.

Like the rest of the state and nation, St. Croix County farmers experienced this "Golden Age of Agriculture." One chronicler from this period described the county as "one of the wealthiest agricultural counties of the northwest," noting that "poverty within its borders is almost unknown." Many St. Croix County farmers

¹⁶ "A Brief Summary of St. Croix County from 1840 to 1898." *Cows, Creameries and Cheese Factories* (River Falls, Wisc.: St. Croix County Association for Home and Community Education, History Project Committee, 1995), 124-125; W.E. Webster, *St. Croix County Wisconsin: The Many Advantages Offered Farmers and Others Looking for Cheap Homes in a Desirable Locality* (Hudson, Wisc.: N.p., 1912), 5-6; Joseph Schafer, 100.

¹⁷ Susan Granger and Scott Kelly, *Historic Context Study of Minnesota Farmsteads, 1820-1960: Vol. I* (Prepared for the Minnesota Department of Transportation, 30 June 2005), 3.44.

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exhibited their confidence in the future of agriculture by making substantial investments in new buildings and equipment.¹⁸

The golden age came to an end during the 1920s and 1930s when St. Croix County farmers were ravaged by economic depression and bad weather. Commodity prices plummeted and years of drought decimated the productivity of both fields and livestock. Like farmers across America, those in St. Croix County were forced to curtail capital investment in their facilities and rely on an increasing number of federal farm subsidies. After World War II, returning GIs left the family farm, spurred by a broadened view of the world and new programs, such as the GI bill, that allowed them to pursue non-farming careers. As the number of farmers decreased, farms were combined and consolidated. With manual labor in short supply, the remaining farmers relied increasingly on costly machinery. As farms became increasingly reliant on capital, it became difficult for farmers to practice diversified agriculture. St. Croix County farmers followed this national trend away from diversification toward more specialized production of commodities for cash.

Agriculture in St. Croix County has focused on dairying into the present. The county's proximity to Minneapolis and St. Paul allows area farmers to supply dairy products to the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Milk continues to be an important source of income for farmers in the county.¹⁹

History of the Thelen Farmstead

In 1857 John Nicholas Thelen and his brother, Bernard, left their home in Germany's Rhine valley and set sail for the United States. They made their way to St. Paul and joined a brother who emigrated earlier. Together the brothers began working as laborers in the Stillwater area, accepting odd jobs, operating a ferry, hiring on as farm workers, and working as stevedores on steamboats.²⁰

¹⁸ Augustus B. Easton, *History of the St. Croix Valley, Vol. II* (Chicago: H.C. Cooper, Jr., & Co., 1909), 698.

¹⁹ *Cows, Creameries and Cheese Factories*, 16; History of St. Croix County, St. Croix County Government <www.co.saint-croix.wi.us/general_info.htm> accessed 10 September 2007.

²⁰ Edward Thelen, *John Nicholas Thelen and Hermina Thelen, His Wife: Their Lives, Their Times and Their Family as I Recollect and as it Was Told to Me*, December 1953 (Unpublished manuscript in the possession of Keith Relyea), 2-3; Barbara Kooiman, "John Nicholas Thelen Farmstead, Determination of Eligibility Form," (Prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, District 6, November 1999), 7.

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In November 1863, John married Hermina Streeter, a German immigrant whose family arrived in Milwaukee and moved west to St. Croix County. The couple set up housekeeping on an 80-acre tract the couple purchased from Bernard just prior to their wedding. At the time of purchase, the parcel contained a log cabin that served as a stopping point for travelers on the adjacent stagecoach road. John and Hermina moved into the cabin and began to convert the surrounding land into a farm. The land had to be cleared and prepared for planting. The couple removed trees and stumps and cut and burned brush to make way for the breaking plow, pulled by a team of oxen. Boulders and stones turned up by the plow were collected and moved to the sides of the fields.²¹

Although the Thelens maintained a limited number of cows, pigs, and chickens, their primary crop, like that of other early residents of St. Croix County, was wheat, which was hauled by oxen to an area mill and ground into flour. The crop was sown by hand, recalled son Edward, "When ripe, [it was] cut by means of a cradle, a scythe arrangement. Dad would cradle all day and then at night he would tie the bundles. There was no twine. With a quick twist of his hands, he would take wisps of the straw, twist the heads into a knot and thus the bundle was tied. Imagine doing ... this to a whole field of grain! ... It was years later that the cradle was supplanted by the reaper."²²

To supplement the family's farm income, John provided mortgages to other settlers, occasionally acquiring additional acreage when would-be farmers were unable to make their payments. During this period of prosperity, the Thelens improved the farm by building a small smokehouse, horse barn, and granary, digging a well, and erecting a windmill. In addition to improvements during this period, the family established a small cemetery north of the farmhouse.

In 1885 the family took on a more ambitious project. After occupying the primitive log cabin for nearly 30 years, they erected a permanent home that reflected their growing prosperity. Augustus Jackson, a carpenter and builder from Stillwater, was retained to complete the work.²³

The family selected a building site located on a hillside overlooking the farm fields. A circular drive was created that wound around the house, as well as a series of terraces that extended off the west (front) elevation

²¹ Edward Thelen, 10-11.

²² Edward Thelen, 8.

²³ Edward Thelen, 8, 13; Receipt issued by August Johnson to J.N. Thelen, 11 September 1885.

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of the farmhouse. Hundreds of Balsam firs and white pines were dug up from the banks of the Willow and Apple rivers and carried to the farmstead for replanting on the terraces.²⁴

The result of all this activity was a handsome wood-frame vernacular interpretation of the Italianate style. Abundant in Wisconsin and popular between 1850 and 1880, Italianate houses are characterized by boxy massing, wide eave overhangs, ornate brackets, bay windows, and open porches. Windows are typically tall and narrow and capped with hoodmolds or pediments. High style versions were often built with stone or brick and featured cupolas, towers, or balconies with elaborate detailing. More modest vernacular adaptations, like the Thelen Farmhouse, incorporate the massing and proportions of the style, but may be wood frame with simplified ornamentation. These modest versions are characteristically found in Wisconsin's countryside and small communities.²⁵ In its form, massing, materials, and level of decoration, the Thelen House is similar to other Italianate style houses found throughout St. Croix County.

By 1897 John Thelen had amassed 280 acres, making him one of the largest landowners in Town of St. Joseph. Most of this land extended to the north and east of the farmstead.²⁶ During this period, the Thelen family adopted a more diversified approach to agriculture. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the family made changes to transition from wheat farming to diversified farming. A one-story addition was added to the rear of the farmhouse. Likely completed c.1910, the addition provided sanitary space for a cream separator and other equipment for a small, but growing, dairy operation.²⁷

After John Thelen's death in 1909, the land passed to his daughter Lucy, a progressive farmer in her own right, who erected a modern "Jamesway" barn and two concrete silos, completing the structures in 1917. Built at the apex of the "Golden Age of Agriculture," the completion of these structures formally signified the farmstead's transition from a pioneer wheat farm to a modern diversified enterprise. According to current property owner Keith Relyea, at this time a number of other significant changes were made to better adapt the farm for dairy production. The original log cabin was demolished and a new gable roof milk house was erected in its place.

²⁴ Edward Thelen, 27.

²⁵ Wyatt, Barbara, 2-6.

²⁶ Barbara Kooiman, 7; Edward Thelen, 8.

²⁷ Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007. It is likely that this addition was converted to a summer kitchen c.1920 after a freestanding milk house was erected.

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A cistern was constructed atop a hill behind the house and the 1883 windmill was moved to this location to pump water to a new reservoir. A water line was also extended from the cistern to the milk house to provide cool water for storing milk and cream and cleaning the equipment. It is likely that the chicken house was added at about this time.²⁸

During World War II, the family raised pigs and maintained a victory garden. However, the bulk of cropland was leased to a neighboring farmer. The property remained in the family until 1968, when it was sold to Henry and Marilyn Lentz, who had previously rented the land. At that time, the property included the existing buildings, as well as a horse barn, granary, combination machine shed/granary, implement shed, woodshed, chicken house, and milk house. In 1980 the Thelen farmhouse and much of the original farmstead was purchased by Keith Relyea, who currently owns the property. Relyea removed the chicken house, horse barn, combination machine shed/granary, implement shed, woodshed, and milk house. The granary was demolished c.2004 to make way for a northward extension of Thelen Farm Trail, which services the Settler's Glen Subdivision. In 1986 Mike Johnson purchased a 3.6 acre parcel in Section 23, which includes the barn and silo.²⁹

Architecture

The Thelen House is locally significant as an example of a farmhouse with Italianate detailing. The boxy massing of the house is capped by a hipped roof with overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets. The home's tall two over two windows and a front door with paired arched windows are typical of the style. Within the context of the town of St. Joseph, the Thelen House is one of the more substantial and architecturally distinctive houses retaining excellent integrity to its period of construction. Overall, the Thelen House reflects the three bay with hipped roof, wood construction Italianate style houses found throughout the county. The community of Hudson, located approximately eight miles south of the Thelen farm has several examples of the style. The more high style examples within the community are distinguished by large and elaborate brackets and/or elaborated door surrounds; however, overall most have the same form and massing as the Thelen House. Few high style examples are located in the rural areas of the county, and the Thelen House reflects the more

²⁸ Edward Thelen, 20; Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007.

²⁹ Mike Johnson purchased a 20.1 acre parcel from Leo Germain in 1986, which included the 3.6 acres at the south end of the historic boundary. Barbara Kooiman, 7; Edward Thelen, 32; Mead & Hunt, Inc., Interview with property owner, Keith Relyea, 7 September 2007; Mike Johnson, letter to Terry Pederson, Division of Transportation Systems Development, 7 November 2007.

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vernacular nature of the rural Italianate. Within this context, the Thelen House stands out as one of the best and most intact examples.

The house exhibits a high level of integrity both inside and out, retaining its original wood siding; decorative wood brackets below the eaves; and wide front porch with the original columns, balustrades, and corner brackets. Fenestration is unchanged, except for the addition of a small bathroom window on the north side and a bank of four small windows on the east elevation of the summer kitchen. The original window bay on the north side remains in place. Windows retain their simple moldings and hoods, as well as their original sash with vertical muntins, brass locking hardware, and matching storm windows. The interior plan and finishes remain highly intact, including the original lath-and-plaster walls, pantry cabinets, oak stairway and balustrade, wood floors, and brass hardware. The kitchen has been modernized with the addition of new cabinets and a work island, but the original space has not been altered. A small bathroom has been added on the main level, and a bedroom on the second level has been converted to a large bathroom.

The 1917 barn remains largely as built, with no modern additions. The original siding materials, doors, windows, and metal ventilators remain in place. A slip-cast concrete silo that was originally attached to the west side of the structure has been removed, but the other silo remains in place on the east side. The barn and concrete silo demonstrate the final phase in the family's tenure, providing a tangible reminder of the period during which the Thelen family operated as a prosperous, fully diversified farm. These and the other remaining agricultural outbuildings reflect the setting and context in which the house was constructed and its role as the main building within a larger and evolving farmstead. In conclusion, the Thelen house is significant as an example of the late adaptation of the Italianate style for a farmhouse in a rural part of the state.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen House is a rectangle measuring approximately 395 feet by 525 feet whose long center axis is oriented north-south. Beginning at the northwest corner, at the junction of the east right-of-way line at Thelen Farm Trail and the south line of Lot 34 in the adjacent Settler's Glen Subdivision, the boundary proceeds east approximately 395 feet. From here, the boundary turns and continues south for approximately 525 feet. From here, the boundary turns and proceeds approximately 395 feet along the south line of Section 23. The boundary then turns north and proceeds north along the east right-of-way line of Thelen Farm Trail approximately 525 feet, returning to the starting point.

Boundary Justification

The boundary was drawn to encompass the remaining contributing buildings and structures historically associated with the John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen House and provides an appropriate setting.

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Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
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**Thelen, John Nicholas and Hermina, House
1383 and 1405 Thelen Farm Trail
Town of St. Joseph
St. Croix County, Wisconsin
Photographer: Mead & Hunt, Inc., June 2007
Negatives in the collection of the Wisconsin Historical Society**

Photograph 1 of 11
Farmhouse, view facing southeast

Photograph 2 of 11
Farmhouse, view facing northeast

Photograph 3 of 11
Farmhouse, view facing southwest

Photograph 4 of 11
Barn, view facing northeast

Photograph 5 of 11
Barn and silo, view facing south

Photograph 6 of 11
Silo, view facing west

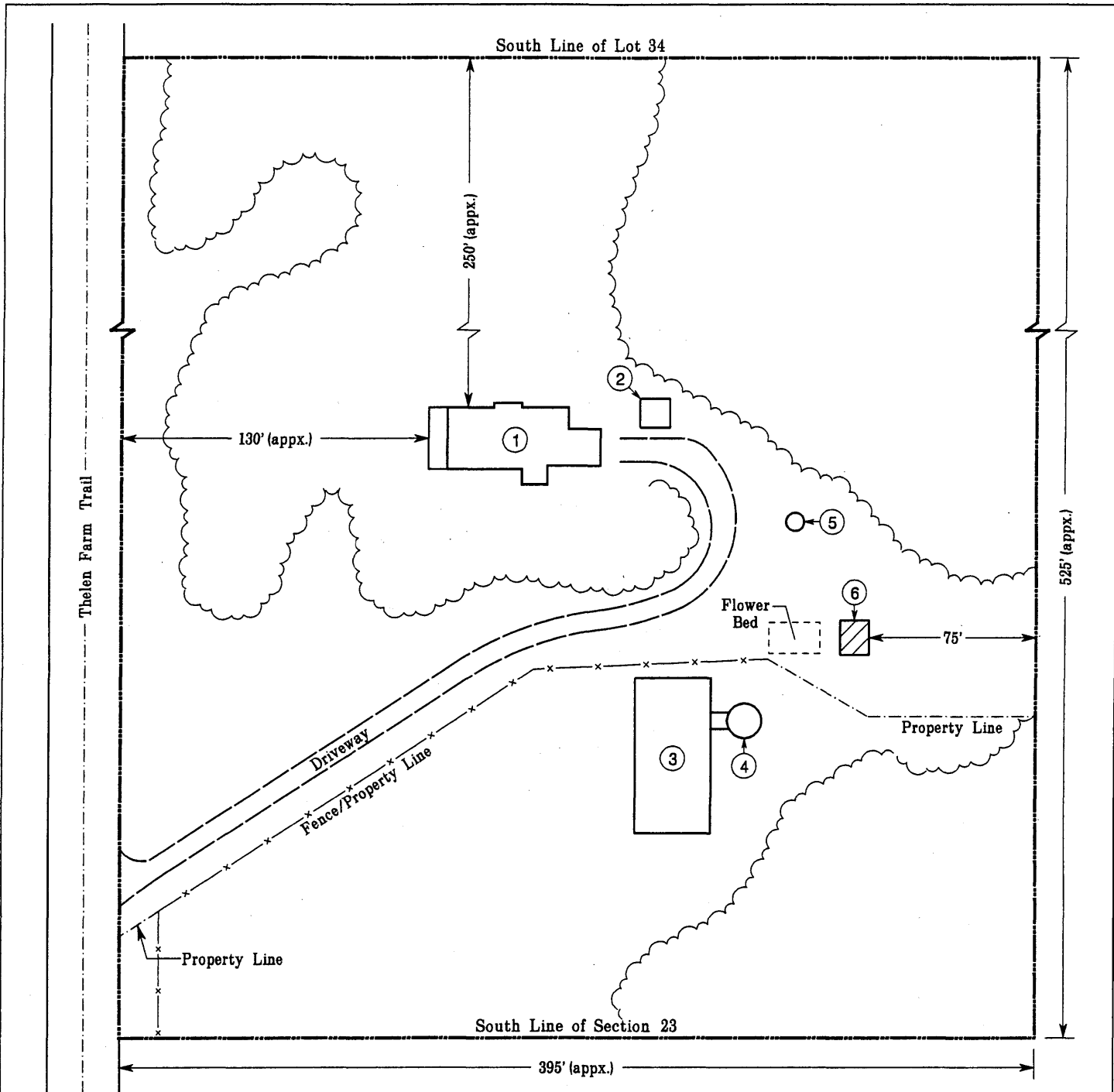
Photograph 7 of 11
Smokehouse, view facing southwest

Photograph 8 of 11
Farmhouse interior, front staircase

Photograph 9 of 11
Farmhouse interior, living room

Photograph 10 of 11
Farmhouse interior, dining room and living room

Photograph 11 of 11
Farmhouse interior, kitchen



- ① — Farmhouse
- ② — Smokehouse
- ③ — Barn
- ④ — Silo
- ⑤ — Windmill
- ⑥ — Modern Shed

Key:

- Historic Boundary
- Contributing
- ▨ Noncontributing


 N
 Approximate
 Scale: 1" = 60'

FIGURE 1:
John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen House
1383 and 1405 Thelen Farm Trail
 Town of St. Joseph
 St. Croix County, Wisconsin

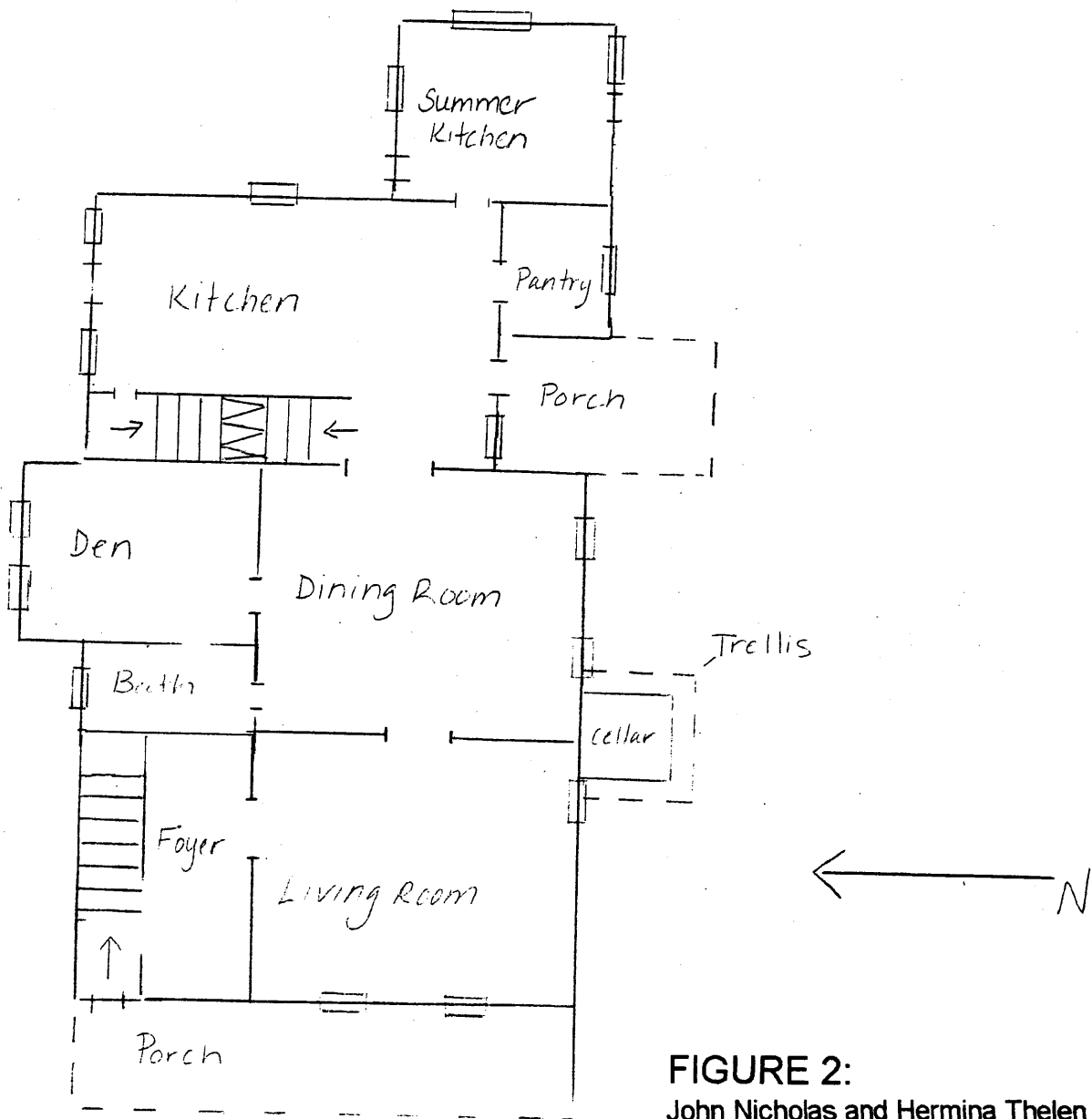


FIGURE 2:
 John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen House
 1383 and 1405 Thelen Farm Trail
 Town of St. Joseph
 St. Croix County, Wisconsin
FIRST STORY FLOOR PLAN

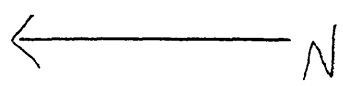
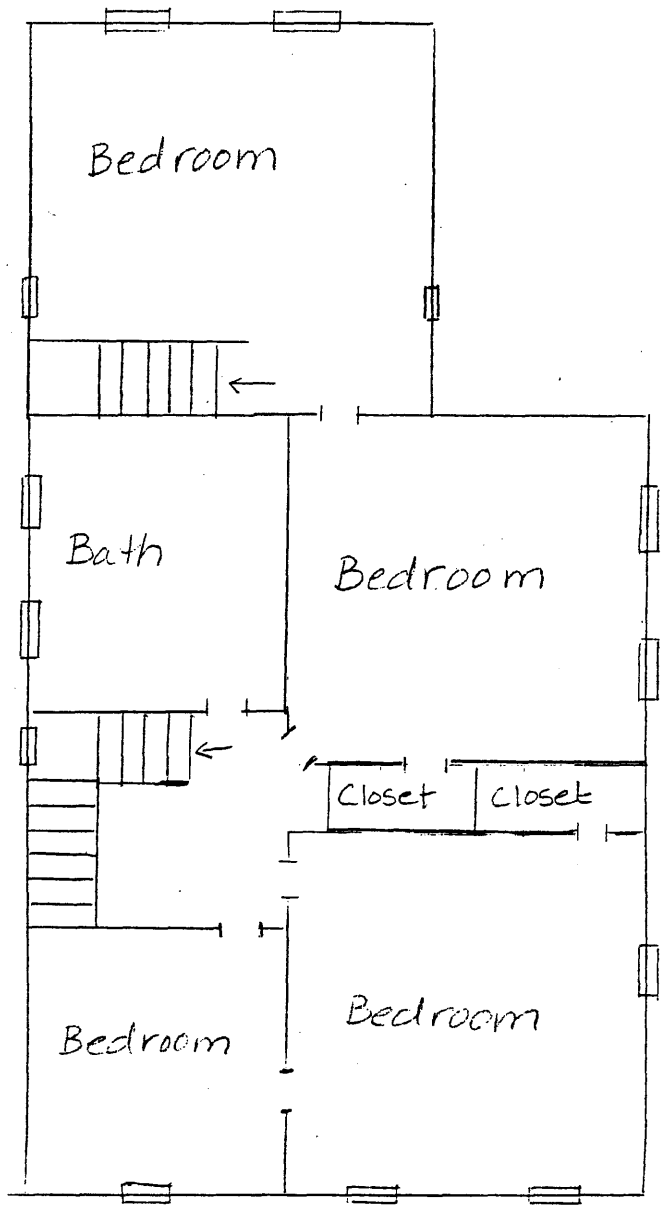


FIGURE 3:
John Nicholas and Hermina Thelen House
1383 and 1405 Thelen Farm Trail
Town of St. Joseph
St. Croix County, Wisconsin
SECOND STORY FLOOR PLAN