

001 100-10118
DATE RECORDED

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received JUL 23 1985
date entered AUG 23 1985

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

1. Name

historic Thomas F. Cowing House

and/or common Frederick E. and Dorathea Inwards House

2. Location

street & number 316 Jefferson Street N/A not for publication

city, town Alexandria N/A vicinity of congressional district

state Minnesota code 22 county Douglas code 041

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Frederick E. and Dorathea Inwards

street & number 316 Jefferson Street

city, town Alexandria N/A vicinity of state Minnesota 56308

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Douglas County Courthouse

street & number 320 7th Ave. W.

city, town Alexandria state Minnesota 56308

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Minnesota Statewide Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983-1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office
Fort Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota 55111

7. Description

| | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved | date <u>N/A</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Thomas F. and Abbie Cowing House, built circa 1875 and located at 316 Jefferson Street in Alexandria, is situated in a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood east of the city's main business district. It is surrounded by post-World War I houses, with a gas station and a fast food restaurant nearby. The house is located one-half block south of Third Avenue, a commercial thoroughfare which is the remnant of a road improved in 1859 to link St. Cloud with Fort Abercrombie near Breckenridge, Minnesota. The house originally stood on a large tract of land isolated from any nearby houses. An outhouse and small gable roofed barn originally stood behind the house.

The Cowing House is a rare example of an Andrew Jackson Downing-inspired "Gothic cottage", and exhibits typical Gothic Revival features such as complex outline, steeply pitched gabled roof, and lacy bargeboard ornamentation. The house is a two story, three bay, woodframe structure on a stone foundation. The exterior is covered with shiplap siding. The house has a T-shaped plan, with the main facade defined by a central gable and flanked by two gabled wall dormers. There are two gabled dormers on the south facade and one on the north facade. The dormers and gable ends of the north and south facades are decorated with ornate bargeboards in an eyelet motif; these bargeboards have been removed from the main facade. A circa 1876 photograph of the house shows that each dormer and gable end was once topped by a tall cut-out wooden finial.

The Cowing House originally had three open porches, one on the main facade and one on each of the north and south facades. The south porch and the door opening onto it were removed sometime after 1948. The two remaining porches have hipped roofs supported by square columns with chamfered corners, trellis-like fretwork, and elongated entablature capitals. The main facade of the house originally had a small decorative balcony with geometric wooden balustrade resting on the porch roof beneath the central gable. The house has a rectangular entrance with a new single leaf door. The windows are basically rectangular in shape, but have canted upper corners emphasized with architraves. The window frames have dog-eared sides and support l/l sashes. The south facade of the house has a narrow polygonal bay window with a panelled base and curving polygonal roof. The north facade has a one story summer kitchen wing, either original to the design or a very early addition, and an unobtrusive attached rear garage, circa 1950, which is not visible from the main facade. The rear facade has a one story sun room addition, circa 1920.

The interior of the Cowing House is somewhat intact, with a central hall plan featuring a curving stairway to the second story with a hand-carved balustrade and newel post. The parlor has a brick fireplace, probably added after the turn of the century. Interior woodwork consists of simple architrave moldings around windows and doors, and a wide segmental arch between the parlor and dining room.

The Cowing House is in excellent condition and is remarkably intact. The aforementioned alterations, the replacement of the original wood shingled roof with asphalt shingles, and the addition of two interior chimneys have changed the original character very little. The house has been meticulously maintained, retains its original storm windows, and has been painted very recently.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> law | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> literature | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> military | <input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> invention | | |

Specific dates Circa 1875 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (In one paragraph)

The Thomas F. and Abbie Cowing House, built circa 1875 and located at 316 Jefferson Street in Alexandria, is architecturally significant as an excellent and remarkably intact example of a Gothic Revival cottage, a housing style uncommon in Minnesota and extremely unusual in rural western Minnesota. The Cowing House is one of the oldest buildings still standing in Alexandria which retains its original design, and is historically significant as the home of Thomas F. Cowing and, later, Gustave A. Kortsch, two men important to the early history of business and politics in Alexandria.

The Cowing House was built one half block south of the St. Cloud-Fort Abercrombie Road, a route which predated the founding of Alexandria and served as part of the Red River oxcart trail system. The road linked St. Cloud on the Mississippi River and Fort Abercrombie, established in 1857 on the Red River near Breckenridge. The road was improved by the State in 1859 and became a heavily travelled stagecoach route. As a response to the conflicts of the Dakota War of 1862, Fort Alexandria was established on the north side of this road in the winter of 1862-63.

Thomas F. Cowing (1841-1916) was born in England and immigrated to the United States with his parents in 1850. The family lived in Wisconsin until circa 1862 when Thomas Cowing, Sr., and his wife moved to Alexandria to open a stagecoach hotel. Cowing's eldest son George and William E. Hicks, the proprietor of Alexandria, built the first sawmill in the county in 1868. Several of the other Cowing children eventually became prominent businessmen and civic leaders in Alexandria and nearby communities. Thomas F. Cowing served in the Civil War with the Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry and joined his parents in Alexandria in 1865 where he opened the village's second store, a general merchandise and farm implement business. Sometime between 1865 and 1867 he married New York-born Abbie Frances Bennett of Alexandria, with whom he raised five children. Cowing entered local politics and became Douglas County's first sheriff and first treasurer in 1866. He served as Alexandria's second postmaster circa 1870-74 and was elected a village judge in 1877, village trustee in 1879, and president of the village council in 1880.

Thomas F. and Abbie Cowing purchased the site on which their house still stands (originally a six lot tract) in 1874, six years after Alexandria was platted. The site they chose was located about one quarter mile southeast of Fort Alexandria and adjacent to the St. Cloud-Fort Abercrombie Road. They probably built their house in 1875, the year they mortgaged the property for \$3,000.

The house the Cowings built is an excellent example of a Gothic Revival cottage, a style first promoted in the 1840's on the East Coast by landscape architect and critic Andrew Jackson Downing. The Gothic Revival was popularized when Downing, Gervase Wheeler, and others published plans and designs for Gothic Revival houses in architectural pattern books which were widely distributed in the 1850's and 1860's. Despite the style's popularity, however, Gothic cottages were rare in western Minnesota where concentrated settlement did not occur until the late 1870's and 1880's, a time when the Queen Anne and other styles were more in vogue. (see continuation sheet)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Alexandria Citizen News, March 8, 1928.

Deed and Mortgage records, Douglas County Courthouse, Alexandria.

Quist, John W. Unpublished research on Cowing family, 1979, Douglas County Historical Society.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property _____ Less than one

Quadrangle name Alexandria East Quad.

Quadrangle scale 7.5

UMT References

A

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| Zone | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 9, Block 9, Original Townsite of Alexandria.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger/Field Assistant

organization State Historic Preservation Office
Minnesota Historical Society

date January 1984

street & number Fort Snelling History Center

telephone (612) 726-1171

city or town St. Paul

state Minnesota 55111

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Russell W. Fridley

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 7/1/85

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 8/23/85

for Jane M. Samson
Keeper of the National Register

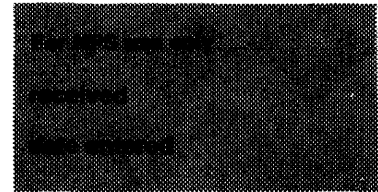
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

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



Thomas F. & Abbie Cowing House, Alexandria, Douglas County, MN

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

Item #8 Continued:

The Cowings lived in their new house until 1885 when they moved to Fergus Falls in nearby Ottertail County because Thomas had been appointed registrar of the U. S. land office there. He became a lawyer while living in Fergus Falls and remained there until the family moved to Oregon in 1889. Cowing worked as an attorney in Oregon until his death.

The Cowings sold their house in Alexandria to Gustave A. and Elizabeth Kortsch in 1889. Gustave Kortsch (1850-1928) was a German immigrant who lived in Milwaukee until 1867 when he moved to Copper Falls, Michigan. He married Elizabeth Thomas in Copper Falls in 1870. The couple joined Gustave's parents in rural Douglas County in 1870 and moved to Alexandria in 1876 where Kortsch opened a general store. With the help of several partners, Kortsch transformed his store into a successful department store business. He operated the business alone from circa 1890 to 1914 when it was sold to the Herberger-Wettleson Company, another local department store firm. Kortsch became a prominent businessman, town promoter, and local politician. He helped found the Douglas County Bank in 1885 and served as president of the bank from 1913-1919. In 1909 he was elected mayor of Alexandria. He served as president of the Alexandria Businessmen's Club, helped organize the Alexandria Commercial Club, served on the building committee of the Alexandria Public Library when the Carnegie library was built in 1903, served as chief of the volunteer fire department, and worked as fuel administrator for Douglas County during World War I. As a community benefactor Kortsch purchased land and created a public park at "Inspiration Peak" outside of Alexandria, and in the 1920's joined nine other citizens in the purchase of the Kensington Runestone as a preservation effort. Kortsch's obituary reports that the city flag was flown at half-mast the day of his funeral in 1928 and that most of the town's businesses were closed.

Following Gustave Kortsch's death, Elizabeth J. Kortsch owned the house until her death in 1934 when it was inherited and occupied by her daughter and son-in-law, Louise C. and Julian L. Fitzgerald. The house was sold to the present owners, Frederick E. and Dorathea Inwards, in 1948.