

WILLA CATHER THEMATIC GROUP:

WTOO-24 82 - 4918

- 1. NAME: St. Stephenie Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Church
"Dane Church"
- 2. LOCATION: NE¼, NE¼, 31, 3, 11; 8 miles northwest of Red Cloud in the southwest corner of Batin township.
- 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY: Andrew Hansen; Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial & Educational Foundation
ADDRESS: Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970

7. DESCRIPTION: This modest, frame, vernacular Gothic Revival structure (photos #8, 9) is a rebuilding of the original Dane Church which was either partially or totally destroyed by a tornado in 1927. Built or re-built along identical lines to the original, the church features three-bay side facades with lancet arched windows set in the center of each bay. The entrance tower, now covered by an extension of the main gable, is slightly larger in floor plan than the original which extended above the gable roof and was surmounted by an inset belfry. The present belfry is slightly smaller than the original and features pointed-arched openings on each side with a pyramidal roof. A double-door entry on the east with halved transom replicates that of the earlier building. A three-sided apse on the west with lancet windows in each side is a feature distinct from the earlier building which was apse-less and featured a mural of "Christ in the Garden" painted by a Czech immigrant named Ondrak.

The modest interior represents somewhat of a simplification of the original except for the round-arched opening to the apse. A flat, pressed-metal ceiling is highlighted with a simple stenciled border below the cornice.

8. SIGNIFICANCE: Dane Church is significant to the major theme of Cather's writings in a very general sense, that is, as one of the few, remaining, small, frame country churches in Webster County which were referred to time and again in her writings. Additionally this church's association with Scandinavian immigrants corresponds well with Cather's overwhelming interest and love for the European settlers of the area.

While the present church dates from the period following Cather's experience with the vicinity, its near replication of the original, its representativeness, and its cultural associations all contribute justification for its inclusion as a part of this nomination.

Cather was familiar with the church and was particularly fond of the mural which formerly enhanced the wall behind the altar.

"It was years later that Willa met another artist in Red Cloud. During one of her visits home, she and her father went to see the little Danish church which Yance Sorgensen, a Norwegian immigrant farmer, had built and decorated. He had hired a Czech named Ondrak to paint a picture above the altar. Ondrak had gone to art school at Prague and Munich, much against the wishes of his pharmacist father who wanted his son to follow him in the business. Eventually Ondrak drifted to America where he called himself a decorator. He had done some rather crude murals on the upper interior walls in some homes, but like many of his countrymen, he supported himself as a housepainter. His speech was broken, he walked with a limp, his clothes

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