

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Theme: T Contemplative Society  
Subtheme: Intellectual Currents

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Thorstein Veblen Farmstead

AND/OR COMMON

same

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER NE of Nerstrand off MN 246  
Section 12

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Nerstrand

X VICINITY OF

Nerstrand

First

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Minnesota

27

Rice

131

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

**OWNERSHIP**

**STATUS**

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_DISTRICT

\_\_PUBLIC

X OCCUPIED

X AGRICULTURE

\_\_MUSEUM

X BUILDING(S)

X PRIVATE

\_\_UNOCCUPIED

\_\_COMMERCIAL

\_\_PARK

\_\_STRUCTURE

\_\_BOTH

\_\_WORK IN PROGRESS

\_\_EDUCATIONAL

X PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_SITE

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

**ACCESSIBLE**

\_\_ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_RELIGIOUS

\_\_OBJECT

\_\_IN PROCESS

X YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_GOVERNMENT

\_\_SCIENTIFIC

\_\_BEING CONSIDERED

\_\_YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_INDUSTRIAL

\_\_TRANSPORTATION

\_\_NO

\_\_MILITARY

\_\_OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Veblen Preservation Project, Inc.  
Mary Penick, President

STREET & NUMBER

Carleton College

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Northfield

VICINITY OF

Minnesota 55057

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds - Rice County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Faribault

Minnesota

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Statewide Historic Sites Survey, National Register of Historic Places

DATE

1971

X FEDERAL \_\_STATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Minnesota Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Bldg. 25 Fort Snelling

St. Paul

Minnesota

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input 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 _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

### Summary

The Veblen Farmstead consists of 10 acres of farmland and four structures: a two story frame house, a chicken coup, a frame granary, and a frame and masonry barn with attendant machine and milking sheds. The farmstead retains the rural environment and setting of the Veblen period. Of the structures, the house and granary have not been significantly altered. Several additions have been made to the barn. They consist of a cement block addition at rear of the original barn with wooden and metal sheds attached to the addition. The two silos are also non-original. The chicken coup is a modern intrusion. The Veblen Preservation Project is in the process of preparing historic structure reports on the historic resources in anticipation of the restoration of the farm to the Veblen period.

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Thomas H. Veblen, Thornstein Veblen's father, moved to Rice County, Minnesota in 1865. In the middle of the 1870s he constructed the house now found on the property. According to the National Register of Historic Places Nomination form:

The house is a rather graciously proportioned two story frame structure. A Mansard angled porch roof spans the front of the house. The porch is divided into five equal sections, of which four are open, and the fifth, on the extreme right is framed in. The Mansard is covered with cedar shingles in a pattern composed of top and bottom horizontal belting courses separated by a band of diamond shaped shingles. This porch roof is supported by a single header running under, and thirteen inches in from the eave. This and a second header are spaced 7½" apart by a row of turned spindles with three half round belts around their centers. The columns are lathe turned with spare tops and bottoms. Band sawn column fans are placed in the angles formed by columns and lower header. Height from porch floor to the under side of the porch roof is 97 inches. Apparently two doors provided entrance to the house from the porch. One was entirely covered by building paper and battens and cannot be visually verified. Portions of the ornamental porch trim, including one column, are missing. The house, front and back, is characterized by an imbalanced fenestration. One of the two original chimneys has been torn down and a modern chimney of cement slab bricks has been erected at the north end of the house. The gable ends of the attic space are lighted by wide based triangular windows with horizontally mounted diamond panes. A stoop or ell structure with mansard roof has been erected on the west corner of the south facade.

The granary was built in the 1880s. It is a simple two story frame building measuring circa 25' x 30'.

The third original Veblen building is the two story, gabled roofed barn. Designed on the three bay concept, with vertical board and batten siding, it too was built sometime in the 1880s.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

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SPECIFIC DATES 1862-1910 BUILDER/ARCHITECT n/a

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

Thorstein Bunde Veblen, economist, social scientist, and culture critic, has often been called one of America's most creative and original thinkers. His work, that is contained in 11 books and over 150 articles and reviews, influenced all the social sciences and especially economics and sociology. Always the lonely thinker, the enigmatic and eccentric Veblen not only satirized prevailing institutions, dogmas, and values, he also contributed to the decline of the prevailing static, formalistic ways of thinking about economics and social development and helped pioneer the rise of a dynamical conception of a world in a perpetual process of evolution from one state to another. His social criticism and his social engineering prescription for change influenced the reform movements of his period and contributed to the social, economic, and political reforms associated with the Progressive Era and the New Deal. The Veblen Farmstead illustrates both the decisive influence of Veblen's parents and the social and cultural Norwegian environment in which he was raised on the development of an individual who had a major impact on the development of American social thought.

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### History

#### Veblen's Life

Thorstein Bunde Veblen was born July 30, 1857 on a frontier farm in Wisconsin. He was the fourth son and sixth child of an immigrant Norwegian family that had come to the United States ten years previously.\*

When Veblen was eight, the family moved to Minnesota to take up a 290 acre farm. Life on the Minnesota farm was austere; clothes were handmade, coffee and sugar were luxuries, and hard work was the rule.

\* Because the property nominated for National Historic Landmark status is a boyhood home, the influence of Veblen's Norwegian background on his work will be dealt with below, when the significance of his association with the farmstead is discussed.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 10

UTM REFERENCES

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See continuation sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James W. Sheire, Historian

ORGANIZATION

National Register of Historic Places

DATE

May 21, 1981

STREET & NUMBER

440 G Street NW.

TELEPHONE

343-6401

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 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

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCERS use only

received

date entered

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History

To his family Veblen as a boy and young man seemed to contradict the family values. He played tricks on any and all and made fun of his Norwegian elementary school teachers. Above all, he disliked farm work and preferred to sneak away to an attic and read. According to his older brother, he was precocious, maturing mentally at an early age, but also given to pretending to know answers, when he did not.

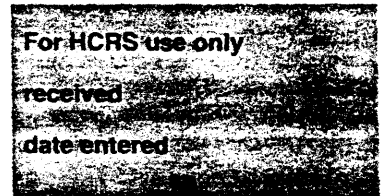
When Veblen was 17, his now prosperous father decided that, like his older siblings, he should attend better schools. His father and mother hoped that he would become a minister. One day while Veblen was working in a field, his father called him to the buggy, where Thornstein found his bags packed. He did not know his destination until the youth and his father arrived at Carleton College in nearby Northfield, Minnesota.

The curriculum at Carleton, at the time a Congregational school in the New England tradition, stressed the classics, religion, and moral philosophy. Instruction emphasized the God given nature of laissez-faire capitalism and the status quo, upheld the virtue of common sense, and railed against skeptical thinking. Mathematics and the natural and physical sciences were neglected. Not surprisingly, Veblen, the budding iconoclast, found this atmosphere stultifying. Bored by most of the teaching, Veblen turned to independent reading and acquired his own education. Among his favorite authors during his undergraduate days were Kant, Hume, Rousseau, and Spencer. He was, however, attracted to John Bates Clark (who would later become a distinguished economist). It was Clark who first aroused Veblen's interest in economics. In his last year Veblen scandalized the pious Carleton community in a senior address on a "Plea for Cannibalism" and in a paper titled "Apology for a Toper." The two treatises rationalized the eating of human flesh and justified the consumption of the harder spirits. His Carleton mentors were probably glad and relieved, when the young eccentric graduated in 1880.

Veblen left Carleton hoping to pursue an academic career. His first job, at Moonona Academy in Wisconsin, lasted a year. The school closed. Veblen then decided to follow his brother Andrew (father of the famous mathematician Oswald Veblen) to John Hopkins to study philosophy. At John Hopkins Thornstein studied Hegel and took further courses in economics. His favorite course was Charles Sanders Pierce's lectures in logic. Having impressed his teachers, Veblen decided to try for a scholarship. When he was turned down (as was John Dewey at the same time), he decided to transfer to Yale. At Yale Veblen steeped himself in Kant and continued to read widely. Above all he was drawn to the famous figure of William Graham Sumner, the conservative social Darwinist who was trying to reform the religious oriented curriculum through the introduction of courses in modern science. Although Veblen's irreverence had by this time become habitual, he was an outstanding student and in 1884 Yale awarded him a PhD in philosophy. However, like others then and now, Veblen soon learned that his high degree and outstanding intellect did not lead directly to a job. Although he went into the world armed with glowing letters of recommendation from his teachers, he was unable to find employment. Bitter, disappointed, and dispirited he returned to the family farm in Minnesota.

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History

Back Home Veblen explained to his ever tolerant and loyal family that he was ill and needed care. The family suspected laziness. For the next four years he walked in the woods, tinkered with inventions, and read anything and everything; political commentaries, anthropology, botanical studies, Norwegian myths and sagas, economics, sociology, and even Norwegian hymn books. "He read and loafed wrote a brother, "and the next day he loafed and read."

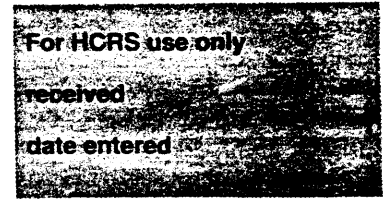
In 1888 Veblen decided to marry. His choice was Ellen Rolfe, the niece of the President of Carleton College, whom he had met during his undergraduate years. Ellen's family frowned on the union, but accepted the reality. To get the young couple started Ellen's prosperous uncle gave them a farm in Iowa, but then Thorstein had never shown any inclination to become a man of the soil. Although Veblen possessed personal connections to supplement his academic letters of recommendation, he was again unable to find a teaching position. He was even turned down for a job as a railroad bookkeeper. Fortunately, Ellen shared Thorstein's intellectual interests and maintained an unshakable faith in his ability. The couple spent hours discussing their readings and were especially fascinated by Edward Bellamy's recently published utopia "Looking Backward." The book, Ellen said, became a turning point in their lives. Stimulated by the book, by his wife's prodings not to give up interest and hope, and by the populist unrest of the period, Veblen decided to go back to school and pursue economics as a discipline. After seven years of seemingly premature retirement, he, now 34, returned to graduate school at Cornell.

At Cornell Veblen came under the wing of the economist J. Laurence Laughlin, who obtained a fellowship for him. Encouraged by this support Veblen began to meditate on his vast reading and, of crucial importance, he took up the pen. His first work consisted of theoretical articles in the new "The Quarterly Journal of Economics." The papers established his credentials as a serious economist. When in 1892 Rockefeller's newly founded University of Chicago called Laughlin to head the economics department, Laughlin invited Veblen to go with him as an instructor. At the age of 35 Veblen finally had his first paying job.

Veblen spent fourteen years at the University of Chicago. During this period he published the book that established his reputation as one of American's most imaginative social critics. "The Theory of the Leisure Class" appeared in 1899. The book, with its wickedly satirical and pungent observations of all that was sacred, caused an overnight sensation among the progressive intelligensia. "Veblenism" became a fashionable conversation subject and expressions like "conspicuous consumption" entered the language. "The Theory of Business Enterprise" was also published during Veblen's Chicago years. The work did not arouse the same enthusiasm as "The Leisure Class." Because it was detailed, highly abstract and lacked the biting satire of the earlier book, it did not appeal to either radical reformers who favored socialism nor to conservatives looking for refutations of Marxism. During his Chicago years Veblen also established his reputation as a poor teacher and as a libertine. Veblen's lectures were rambling and at times almost incoherent. He cared little for the reactions of his students and was totally indifferent to such mundane academic

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History

Veblen's Life

requirements as attendance and grades. Veblen simply had no talent for teaching. His attraction to the opposite sex, and its attraction to him, made him notorious. In 1904 his wife had finally had enough and reported one of his liaisons to university authorities. Although they valued the prestige a man of Veblen's reputation brought to the school, they could no longer ignore his unconcealed womanizing. When the administration brought pressure to bear on Veblen to conform to academic propriety, he resigned. (At a faculty reception at one of the schools where Veblen taught, one of his colleagues is supposed to have told him that the faculty was worried about his philander reputation. Veblen is reported to have suavely surveyed the faculty wives present and then said to the concerned gentleman, that the faculty had nothing to worry about.)

Veblen's next stop was Stanford. At Stanford he did not change his erring ways. After three years of indignant toleration, the school authorities asked him to resign. Veblen then applied to a number of schools, only to receive vague and uncommittng replies. In 1911 H. J. Davenport, an admiring former student, finally helped him obtain a position at the University of Missouri. In the same year his wife, from whom he had separated, divorced him.

For Veblen Columbia, Missouri was an exile. He lived in Davenport's basement as a recluse and is supposed to have entered and exited the building through a window. By 1914 he had, however, again found female companionship and in that year he married Anne Fessenden, a fellow divorcee with two daughters. He apparently did not seek intellectual companionship, but rather somebody who would and could take care of his everyday needs.

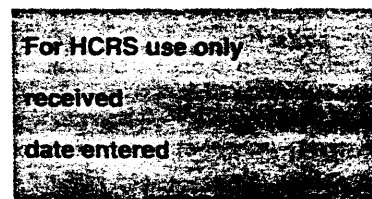
Veblen may have been miserable at Columbia amid the Rotarians and Shriners, but his seven year stay there was highly productive. In 1914 he published "The Instinct of Workmanship." Veblen considered this work, in which he brought to bear his readings in psychology and anthropology in a theory of work as an inherently instinctual good in man, his single most important book. The was followed by "Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution" in 1915. This book examined Germany's participation in WWI and decided that the Huns' aggression was the result of a feudal system untempered by democracy. Being about a timely subject, the book was widely read.

When the United States entered the war in 1917, Veblen offered his services to the nation. Moving to Washington he wrote several reports on the manpower shortage for the Food Administration. In general his reports and papers for this and other agencies went unread and he was shifted from bureau to bureau.

When the war was over Veblen moved to New York to write for "Dial," the "little magazine" of the liberal intelligensia that has become a legend in American intellectual history. His articles, which called for the liquidation of the business system, were widely discussed.

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Veblen's Life

However, when the "Dial's" interest shifted away from political and economic issues, turning instead to the literature of "naturalism" and "realism," Veblen found himself no longer fashionable. Ever the working writer he in 1918 published "An Inquiry into the Nature of Peace" and a vitriolic critique of academic life in general and the University of Chicago in particular with the disarming title of "The Higher Learning in America."

His final works, "The Vested Interest and the Common Man" and "The Place of Science in Modern Civilization" (1919), "The Engineers and the Price System" (1921), and "Absentee Ownership" (1923) were either restatements of previous positions or collections of essays. In all Veblen authored eleven books and over 150 articles and reviews.

The recently established New School for Social Research, a refuge for revolutionary social critics that had on its faculty such celebrated challengers of the established order as Harold Laski and Charles Beard, offered Veblen a position. The chair was funded by a former student. At the beginning Veblen's lectures were full, but, as had happened at his former schools, he continued to mumble and his enrollments steadily dwindled.

By the mid-1920s Veblen was tired. He was nearly 70 and his intellectual powers were beginning to diminish. Earlier his second wife, who had indeed taken good care of him, suffered a mental breakdown and had to be committed. His first wife Ellen died in 1926. When in 1926 members of the American Economic Association circulated a petition proposing him for the Association's presidency Veblen showed no interest. "They didn't offer it to me when I needed it," he is supposed to have grumpily replied. Severing his last ties to academia, Veblen moved back to California to Pala Alto to live in a cabin he had purchased while teaching at Stanford. Living in semi-isolation he continued to meditate and reflect, but his thoughts seemed to have turned away from contemporary problems. A neighbor who visited him shortly before his death quoted him as saying that he heard members of his family, long since dead, speak to him in Norwegian as exactly and as clearly as if they were right next to him. Veblen died on August 3, 1929. His last will and testament stipulated that, "No tombstone, slab, epitaph, effigy, tablet, inscription, monument of any kind or nature be set up in my memory or name at any place or at any time." The stranger and eternal outsider ordered that his body be burned and his ashes dumped in the sea.

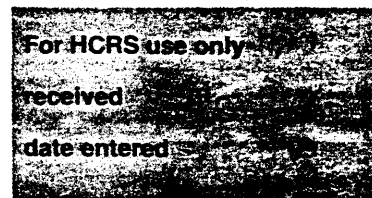
Veblen's Thought

John P. Diggins, one of many who over the years has taken up the task of explaining and interpreting what Thorstein Veblen "really" thought and said, writes, "Veblen continues to elude us, and this is as true of his mind as of his personality...His ambiguous thoughts and writings remain a challenge to the student of intellectual history." Looking for assistance, Diggins turns to one of Veblen's more attentive students.



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Veblen's explanations were seldom simple. His major thesis often seemed to be a result of long reflection. His supporting data frequently offered a remarkable evidence of wide erudition. But his argument was not straight forward proof. He devised twists and turns in the discussion, which threw the unwary off their stride, and brought up the rash doctrinaire with a surprising jolt. If a type of thinking can be symbolized by another form of activity, Veblen's course might be compared with the running of a fox - swift get away, clever doubling, use of heavy cover, sharp holding-in.<sup>1</sup>

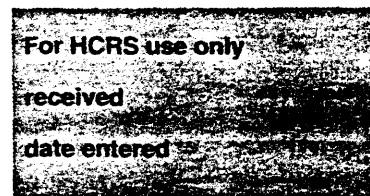
Another student remembered a similar experience that throws light on the problem of defining Veblen's ideas. As was his habit Veblen one day expounded at great length on a subject, as if he believed completely in the truth of what he was saying. He then turned around and ridiculed everything he had previously said. After the lecture the thoroughly perplexed student asked Veblen, whether he in fact believed in anything. Veblen is reported to have replied, "Yes, but don't tell anyone." It is, then, precisely the shrouded nature of Veblen's thought that intrigued his readers during his lifetime and that continues to fascinate and frustrate his contemporary interpreters.

Veblen's first wife claimed that their reading of Bellamy's "Looking Backward" marked a turning point in Veblen's intellectual interests and development. Thanks to that book he turned from philosophy to the study of economics. If his writings have a central motif that runs through the body of his work, it was his attempt to analyze from various perspectives the development and functioning of the modern economic order. Vastly oversimplified, Veblen's major thesis or theory seems to have been that in ancient times man lived in harmony with himself. From his study of history, anthropology, psychology, and Norwegian sagas Veblen believed such a time was the Scandanavian family unit of the pre-Christian Viking period.<sup>2</sup> In this paradise farmers, hunters, and craftsman traded the fruits of their labors and lived in peace and justice. Exploitation and enslavement were unknown, because, and here he drew on his interpretation of instinct psychology, each man followed his natural instinct to work and produce in the most efficient manner consistent with the state of his technology. Utopia fell and enslavement followed when the social and economic order evolved out of the barter economy and into the stage of the business and monetary system. The middleman, the embodiment of the pecuniary interests who buys from the producer and sells to others producers, but who himself produces nothing, evolved through history creating institutions, values, and an ideology that solidified his domination and enslavement of others. Although in no way a social Darwinist, Veblen learned his theory of evolution from William Graham Sumner. Modern day capitalism was for Veblen the latest stage of the evolutionary process.

In contemporary capitalism the pecuniary interests thwart the workers, the farmers, and, above all, the engineers in their instinctive desire to produce goods and services in the most economical, efficient, and technologically productive manner. "Predatory barbarians" are not interested in making things that benefit mankind, rather they desire only to make money. Money allows them to purchase what they want in wasteful abundance without having

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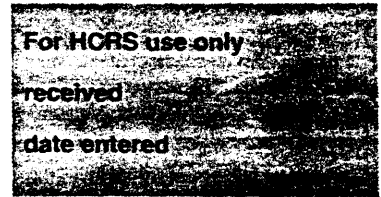
to produce anything themselves. Money also allows them to buy capital goods as absentee owners. They secure their control by creating institutions for the domination of others. The modern corporation assures their control of the productive process, because they "own" the capital plant and its technology through their ownership of shares in the corporation. This control allows them to manipulate prices so that prices in no way reflect the true costs or utility of products, but rather the economic requirements of making a profit. The basic principles of the corporation extend throughout the economy. Bankers lend money on credit to make still more money from interest. Middlemen, the wholesalers and distributors, determine the prices paid to farmers, the real producers, and in turn make money when they sell at a price higher than what they pay. Absentee owners buy real estate and make money from resale and rent.

But control of the economy is not enough. The pecuniary interests must secure their control over the working, creative interests by securing the latter's participation in and commitment to the existing order. This they accomplish by persuading the working interests that the businessman's social values and status are superior to those of the worker. For Veblen this was perhaps the ultimate distortion of the economic order. Business, that did not work and produced nothing, had succeeded in establishing a social value system and an ideology within which not working enjoyed the highest social status and esteem. Creative work, man's true instinct, was not the goal, rather the creative should aspire to the pretige and status of the non-working pecuniary class. Veblen meant his famous "Theory of the Leisure Class" to be not only a biting work of social satire and cultural criticism, he also viewed it as a serious study in psychological persuasion by the pecuniary class. By indulging in conspicuous consumption, by living in huge houses, wearing fashionable clothes, eating exotic foods, driving big cars, employing servants, establishing restrictive clubs, and the like, the pecuniary class not only indulged in unconscionable waste, it also psychologically reinforced its domination by creating social standards, values, and tastes that others strove to emulate. (Veblen, like many who have followed him, viewed advertising as psychological conditioning to conspicuous consumption and social ennui.) The pecuniary interests also controlled organized religion, which, as Veblen was convinced since his days at Carleton preached that the existing order enjoyed God's blessing. It controlled government and the laws by making sure that those who shared the businessman's interests and ideology were elected and appointed. And so it went through all the institutions.

Veblen's prescription for change centered on the engineer and scientist. He was an early advocate of social planning and social engineering. The pecuniary class could not control science and technology, the machine process itself, without the support and active participation of those who created the technology and who knew how to make it work. Veblen hoped that the engineers would take control. At the same time he was pessimistic that it would ever happen. The pecuniary interests had effectively ensnared or coopted the engineer by paying him enough so that he too could indulge in conspicuous consumption and in other ways participate in the same social order and value system as the businessman. Although Veblen's thought has much in common with Marx, especially Marx's theory of surplus value and his conception of the alienation of the worker, Veblen was never a socialist or a revolutionary. The influence of Hegal's idealism on Marx's

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History

dialectical materialism ran counter to Veblen's positivism. Yet toward the end of his life Veblen is reported to have said that he saw communism as the only hope of the future. (And it could be noted that Lincoln Steffens, a fellow aging reformer, said something similar when he returned from the Soviet Union with the observation that he had seen it, and it worked.)

Veblen's Influence

"Veblen's was perhaps the most considerable and creative body of social thought that America has produced," his "Dictionary of American Biography" biographer stated. "In economic theory his influence was crucial in the weakening of the hold of neo-classical theory and introducing a more realistic "institutional school." But his most powerful effect was not on academic theory but on economic opinion and policy. He was in no small measure responsible for the trend toward social control in a age dominated by business enterprise."<sup>3</sup> This judgement of Veblen's influence was written in 1936, only seven years after his death. It has stood the test of time. Today not only economics but also sociology, indeed, the social sciences in general, claim Veblen as one of their intellectual fathers. John Kenneth Galbraith's well known "Affluent Society," with its criticism of immediate consumption at the expense of social investment, is but one contemporary example of Veblen's continuing influence. It was, however, in the area of theory or methodology that Veblen exercised his greatest academic influence. As Charles Friday, among others, points out, Veblen rejected a static theory of resources allocation and economic development. Rather, his was a theory of economic development that put into a meaningful relationship the political, social, and economic events that shape evolutionary change over time. It was Veblen's theory that, "...made his work of lasting importance."<sup>4</sup>

Veblen was also a major influence on the social reform movement of the Progressive Era. Like such men as Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Brook and Henry Adams, and, later, Theodore Dreiser and Lincoln Steffens, Veblen revolted against the spirit and fruits of the Gilded Age with its machine civilization, exploitive laissez faire capitalism, ethical paralysis, and vulgar bourgeois values. When he lambasted the business interests and satirized the persuasive influence of a business ideology that permeated all of society's institutions and values, the progressive movement claimed him as one of its own. In pointing to the possibility and potential of democratic social control and social engineering, Veblen helped lay the intellectual groundwork for the Fair Deal and New Deal's attempts to regulate and legislate a more efficient and just social and economic order.

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History

Veblen was, then, a major influence on the thought and politics of his time. But he remained ever the alienated stranger, the perpetual outsider. "He did not choose the modern world of industrial capitalism, it chose him." Diggins writes, "and in it he remained the cerebral immigrant whose escape lay in serious inquiry, the obligation of the intellectual, and mordant humor, the refuge of the non-conformist."<sup>5</sup>

The Veblen Farmstead

Veblen's Norwegian background, his coming of age on his parent's Minnesota farm, and his many returns there in mature adulthood, have been described by almost all those familiar with him as being the **single** most important influence on the development of his thought.

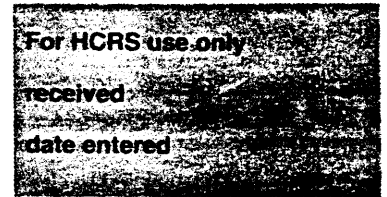
Veblen's parents arrived in this country in 1847 accompanied by harsh memories of the old country. Lawyers had tricked his paternal grandfather out of the family land by the clever manipulation of Norway's land laws. He became a tenant farmer, a drastic and degrading reduction in status. His maternal grandfather had been similarly cheated. He died a young man leaving Veblen's mother an orphan at five. His parents thus brought with them an age old Norwegian animosity against urban living. Joseph Dorfman, Veblen's major biographer, states, "This situation was ground into the very substance of Thorstein Veblen's thinking."<sup>6</sup> Veblen's later hatred of waste, his hostility to absentee ownership, his disdain for town merchants, and his distrust of the market economy of the city with its treacherous credit system were all products of Veblen's youth on the farm.

In addition to parental influence, coming of age in a tightly knit Norwegian community that clung to its language, religion, customs, and traditions contributed greatly to Veblen's cultural isolation from main stream American culture. "The cultural isolation he experienced as a boy," a Veblen student writes, "surely exacerbated his personal aloofness and helps explain why he was able to detect aspects of American life which eluded most Americans. His feeling of being an outsider also probably heightened the skeptical, iconoclastic turn of mind which he shared with his father. He once said that he got all of his basic ideas from his father."<sup>7</sup>

The Veblen Farmstead is a cultural resource that reflects and illustrates the decisive influence of his background on Veblen's later thought.

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1. John P. Diggins, The Bard of Savagery, Thornstein Veblen and Modern Social Theory, (New York, 1978), p. 39.
2. Carlton C. Qualey, ed., "Thornstein Veblen", (New York, 1968), p. 21.
3. "Thornstein Veblen," Dictionary of American Biography, (New York, 1936), vol. 19
4. Charles B. Friday, "Veblen on the Future of American Capitalism," in Qualey, Thornstein Veblen, p. 17.
5. Diggins, p. 41.
6. Joseph Dorfman, Thornstein Veblen and His America, (New York 1934), vol. 1, p. 7.
7. Paul F. Boller, Jr. American Thought in Transition: The Impact of Evolutionary Naturalism, 1865-1900. (Chicago, 1969), p. 180.

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Boundary

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at point A circa 600' from the center point of section 12, T. 110 N., R. 19 W. (Wheeling Township, Rice County, Minnesota), proceed in a straight line in an easterly direction circa 600' to point B, thence in a straight line in a southerly direction circa 600' to point C, thence in a straight line in a westerly direction circa 600' to point d, thence in a straight line in a northerly direction circa 600' to point A, the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The boundary, that forms a square around the Veblen Farmstead buildings, encompasses 10 acres and the structures associated with Thornstein Veblen's years of life on his father's farm. The boundary corresponds with the acreage owned by the Veblen Preservation Project, Inc., and encompasses sufficient land to illustrate the rural-farm setting and environment of the Veblen years. The entire area is rural and there are no immediate development plans that would adversely effect the Veblen property.