NPS Form 10-900
(7-81)

OMB NO. 1024-0018
EXP. 10/31/84

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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   Christ Church

and/or common   Christ Church

2. Location

street & number   310 13th Street N.   N/A not for publication

city, town   Benson   N/A vicinity of   ~~congressional district~~

state Minnesota   code   22   county   Swift   code   151

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
X building(s)	X private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	X religious
___ object	N/A in process	X yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name   Christ Church

street & number   310 13th Street N.

city, town   Benson   N/A vicinity of   state Minnesota 56215

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.   Swift County Courthouse

street & number   Idaho Avenue and 14th St. N.

city, town   Benson   state   Minnesota 56215

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date   1983-84   ___ federal X state ___ county ___ local

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

city, town   St. Paul   state Minnesota 55111

7. Description

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Christ Church, built in 1879, is located at 310 13th Street N. on the southeast corner on 13th Street and Idaho Avenue in Benson, Minnesota. The church was originally located across the street to the north on a site it shared with an 1882 rectory and a circa 1915 parish hall. It was moved to its present site in 1966. The church stands in a residential neighborhood 1 1/2 blocks north of Benson's main commercial street. The site is surrounded by a small parking lot to the south, Pilgrim Congregational Church (1923) to the west, a 1967 apartment building set back on a full city block to the north, and a one block square city park to the northwest.

Christ Church is a good example of the Early Gothic Revival, a style popular for the design of Protestant Episcopal Churches in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. The architect who designed the church is not known, but church vestry minutes state that the plan for the church was presented to the vestry by the rector, Reverend D. T. Booth. It is likely that the design was based on plans devised by an East Coast architect such as Richard Upjohn whose designs for Gothic-inspired churches has been published widely and promoted by national leaders of the Episcopal Church. The church was built by local carpenters at an estimated cost of $1650.

Christ Church is a small woodframe building which measures 20' wide by 56' long. The church has an asymmetrical, picturesque design featuring board and batten siding painted gray, steeply pitched gabled roofs, and pointed arched stained and leaded glass windows, all hallmarks of the early version of the Gothic Revival style. It has a three bay nave, a small gabled roof apse, and intersecting transepts. At the east end of the nave stands a 56' tall square entrance tower with a pointed arched entrance containing a narrow double leaf door with a leaded glass transom. The second story of the tower has a flared base and pointed arched windows on the north and east sides, and a tall, pyramidal, shingled spire which has a flared base cut by four pointed arched openings exposing the belfry. The spire is topped by a metal covered cross.

The nave of the church has narrow pointed arched stained glass windows along the side walls. The east end of the nave has a pointed arched leaded glass window high in the gable end. The west end of the apse has a large tripartite pointed arched stained glass window flanked by smaller pointed arched leaded glass windows on the west walls of the two transepts. The north transept, housing the sacristy, is entered by a single leaf door within a pointed arched opening located on the east side. The south transept, added in 1966 to serve as the pastor's entrance and study, is identical in design to the north transept but has a new rectangular door opening and a rectangular 1/1 window on the south side.

The interior of Christ Church is simple in design. The nave has a pointed arched vaulted ceiling covered with horizontal tongue and groove panelling painted white. A large pointed arched opening marks the entrance to the chancel. The church retains original wooden pews with open trefoil motifs, and its original altar, bishop's chair, baptistry, communion rail, and other furnishings.

Christ Church has undergone several alterations. The church was originally located across the street to the north and was situated on an east-west axis with the entrance tower at the west end of the building and apse pointing to the east. In 1966 the congregation sold the property to the Housing and Redevelopment Authority and the church was moved across the street to the south and turned 180 degrees when it was placed on the new foundation. The moving and remodelling of the church was based on designs (see continuation sheet)

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1879   **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Christ Church, built in 1879 and located in Benson, Minnesota, is historically significant as an example of the ambitious but somewhat unsuccessful missionary efforts of Bishop Henry Whipple and the Protestant Episcopal church in rural Minnesota, as an institution which symbolizes the English and Yankee background of a portion of Benson's early population, and as the oldest church building standing in Benson and a building which provides a link to the city's earliest period of settlement. Architecturally, Christ Church is significant as a good example of an early version of the Gothic Revival, a style used extensively for the design of nineteenth century Episcopal churches in the United States but found rarely in western Minnesota.

Christ Church was a product of the early growth experienced by the Protestant Episcopal church in Minnesota under the direction of Henry Whipple, who became the state's first Episcopal bishop in 1859. In an effort to spread his faith to those on the frontier, Whipple mobilized a team of missionary pastors who worked to form parishes and prayer groups in even remote parts of the state. He also travelled widely himself, visiting each mission at least once a year to hold services and baptize new members. In the fifty years before 1907 the church grew from a collection of about ten parishes and missions to a total of 138 small congregations scattered throughout Minnesota. Although this early missionary movement was successful at first, many of Whipple's rural congregations did not grow sufficiently to sustain a healthy membership or maintain a resident pastor. In communities heavily populated by Scandinavians and other immigrant groups, English and Yankee Episcopalians were a minority and many congregations did not gain new members beyond their original founders and their families. By the mid-twentieth century, membership in the Episcopal church in Minnesota had become almost an urban phenomenon.

Informal Episcopal services were first held in Benson in 1873, three years after the town was platted, by missionary pastor Daniel T. Booth. In that year Whipple had assigned to Booth a large territory in western Minnesota that encompassed at least seven counties extending north, west and south from Willmar, Minnesota. From 1873-1882 Booth travelled 20,000 miles by horseback, holding regular services in about twelve communities and visiting many others. During this time permanent congregations were founded at Benson and five other towns in Booth's district. The mission in Benson was comprised largely of families of English and old American background and included some of Benson's earliest and wealthiest businessmen and several of the town's first civic leaders. The owners of a hardware and lumber business, a railroad station agent, a physician, an attorney, and the owners of a hotel were among the early church members. The mission was the second English-speaking church congregation organized in the Benson area which was populated mostly by Scandinavian Lutherans and later Irish and European Catholics. Services were first held in private homes, in the county courthouse, and in a local school building.

In 1876, after three years of mission status, a group of sixteen church members received permission from Whipple to officially organize an independent congregation. Christ Church was incorporated January 1, 1877 at a public meeting at which the first two wardens and six vestrymen were elected. In 1877 the congregation began (see continuation sheet)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Benson Times, scattered issues, 1879-1880.

Christ Church, Benson. Original church records and conversations with
     Sanford H. Hudson, church historian.

Neill, Edward D. *History of the Minnesota Valley*. Minneapolis:
     North Star Publishing Co., 1882   (see continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property ___Less than one___

Quadrangle name ___Benson Quad.___   Quadrangle scale ___7.5___

UMT References

A | 1 5 | | 2 9 6 2 8 0 | | 5 0 2 1 1 0 0 |
   Zone   Easting   Northing

B Zone   Easting   Northing

C   **D**   **E**   **F**   **G**   **H**

Verbal boundary description and justification

North 13' of Lot 17 and Lots 18, 19, and 20, Block 22, Original Townsite of Benson.

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   February 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   _X_ 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   Russell W. Fridley
State Historic Preservation Officer   date   6/27/85

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

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Inventory—Nomination Form

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date entered

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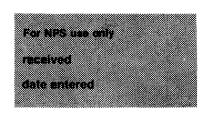
7. by architect Charles Frost of Willmar, Minnesota. At this time the south transept was added
to the structure, the door in the north transept was moved from the north to the east side,
the pointed arched window in the east end of the nave was moved up into the gable end, and
the building was reshingled with asphalt shingles. The most significant change was the
additon of a one story woodframe parish hall on the east end of the nave. The parish hall
addition houses a dining room, kitchen, and restrooms and is covered with board and batten
siding which is painted gray to match the church. It has a truncated hipped roof and
rectangular windows. A small stained glass bullseye window depicting a white dove was moved
from the east end of the nave and installed in the new addition adjacent to the entrance tower.
Interior alterations to the church have included repainting the nave and installing new wood
panelled wainscoting and hidden florescent lighting, and panelling the interior of the
entrance tower. Despite these alterations, Christ Church retains its original character and
remains a delightful example of the Gothic Revival style. The church is in good condition,
although the exterior needs repainting.

8. a subscription to raise funds to erect a church building and in January, 1879, the church
vestry voted to accept architectural plans presented by the pastor. The architect of the
church is not known, but is likely that the design was inspired by East Coast architect
Richard Upjohn's 1852 book, Upjohn's Rural Architecture, Designs, Working Drawings and Other
Specifications fora Wooden Church and Other Rural Structures. Christ Church was designed in
the early Gothic Revival style, a style which had been actively promoted by national leaders
of the Episcopal Church (and undoubtedly Bishop Whipple) as being the most suitable for the
construction of Episcopal churches across the country. Good examples of this early version
of the style are rare in western Minnesota communities where most contemporary Prostestant
churches were designed in a less sophisticated version of the Gothic Revival. Small Gothic
Revival Episcopal churches exist in a few communities in west central Minnesota, but they
are not as intact as Church in Benson.

     Christ Church was constructed by church members and local carpenters. Preparation of
the building site began in the spring of 1879 and in June of that year two railroad carloads
of brick for the foundation arrived in Benson. Lumber was purchased from local dealers and
fifty kegs of nails were donated by a company in Pennsylvania. The building was well underway
in July of 1879 when a tornado struck Benson and blew down the upper portion of the structure.
Work progressed, however, and in September stained glass costing $300 from a Chicago firm was
installed. Many of the interior furnishings were donated by church members. The first
service was held in the new building in late September or early October of 1879 and thereafter
Reverend Booth conducted services there twice a month. Bishop Whipple visited the church
periodically to hold services and confirm new members.

     Although the Christ Church congregation was never very large, the church maintained a
stable existence. Throughout most of its history, the church served an important social
function in the community and was the site of lectures, concerts, and social events, many
organized by an active Ladies' Guild. In 1882 local contractor George Camden built a
parsonage north of the church at the southeast corner of 13th Street N. and Nevada Avenue.
In 1935 the congregation bought a woodframe school building (built circa 1915) and moved
it onto the site between the church and parsonage. (see continuation sheet)

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8. The church rose in membership, reaching a peak in the 1920's and 1930's when it served 85-100 members, including many from surrounding communities.

   In 1966 the congregation sold the church property to the Housing and Redevelopment Authority which was planning to clear the block on which the church buildings stood and build a highrise apartment complex on the site (completed in 1967). Following plans devised by architect Charles Frost of Willmar, the eighty-seven year old church was moved to its present site across the street to the south and renovated. The parish hall was sold to the local chapter of Masons and now stands at 1106 13th St. N. The parsonage was moved to 802 11th St. N. where it serves as a private residence.

   In later years Christ Church faced the decline in membership that was shared by most rural Episcopal churches in the state. Only through the committment of local members and the church diocese has the church in Benson remained open. It now has a membership of about four families who attend services once a month held by a pastor from Paynesville. The parish dining hall is used daily for a senior citizens' lunch program.

9. Shepard, E.L. The Second Fifty Years: The Diocese of Minnesota and the Diocese of Duluth
   From 1907 to 1957. Minneapolis: The Diocese of Minnesota, 1972.

   Tanner, George C. Fifty Years of Church Work in The Diocese of Minnesota. (St. Paul?):
   Committee of Publication, 1909.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

for Keeper _____

1/9/89

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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Note: These changes apply to
Christ Church in Swift County,
Minnesota.

REFERENCE NUMBER: 85001761

STATE: MINNESOTA

COUNTY: Swift

RESOURCE NAME (HISTORIC): Christ Church (Episcopal)

CITY:

VICINITY OF:

ADDRESS:

CERTIFICATION DATE:

REMOVED DATE:

COMMENTS:

Nina M. Archabal
_____
Nina M. Archabal
State Historic Preservation Officer

JUN 17 1988
_____
Date