

MINNESOTA HISTORIC PROPERTIES INVENTORY FORM

MAR 2 1982

HISTORIC NAME: Valley Grove

COUNTY: Rice

*Nerstrand vic*

CURRENT NAME:

CITY/TWP.: Wheeling Township

LEGAL DESC.:

See continuation sheet

ADDRESS:

County Road 29 off Minnesota Highway 246

CLASSIFICATION:	CONDITION:	SIGNIFICANCE:	THEME/S:
Buildings <u>X</u>	Excellent _____	Local <u>X</u>	Primary <u>Settlement</u>
Structure _____	Good <u>X</u>	State _____	Secondary <u>Architecture</u>
Object _____	Fair _____	National _____	Others <u>Religion</u>
District _____	Deteriorated _____		

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X Restricted \_\_\_\_\_  
 VISIBLE FROM THE ROAD: Yes X No \_\_\_\_\_  
 OCCUPIED: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No X

PRESENT USE:  
 Vacant

DATE CONSTRUCTED: 1862/1894

ORIGINAL USE: Church

ORIGINAL OWNER: Valley Grove Lutheran Congregation

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown

OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Valley Grove Grace Cemetery Association; c/o William Vesledahl, President; Nerstrand, Mn.

ACREAGE: Less than one acre \_\_\_\_\_  
 approx. 1.9 acres

LOCAL CONTACT/ORG.: Rice County Historical Society, P.O. Box 5, Faribault, MN 55021

UTM REFERENCE:  
 Nerstrand Quad.

FORM PREPARED BY: Britta Bloomberg

15 / 491979 / 4911820

DATE: February 1981

DESCRIPTION:

Valley Grove consists of two Lutheran churches situated in a rural hilltop cemetery off County Road 29 one mile west of Minnesota Highway 246. The pair are located about seventy-five feet apart and face each other, with access through a metal gate bearing the name "Valley Grove". The unusual juxtaposition of two nineteenth century churches on a hilltop make the site particularly picturesque and dramatic.

The first church to house the Valley Grove congregation (or Tyske Grove as it was then called) was the stone church constructed in 1862. The building faces west and is located east of the frame church. Stone for the building was quarried locally. The church is a simple rectangular building capped by a gable roof with a square tower with pyramidal roof at the front (west) end and a brick chimney near the rear. The simplicity and massing of the design are reminiscent of the Greek Revival style. Four regularly spaced windows are located on the north and south facades. The windows are rectilinear and double hung, nine over nine lights with stone sills; markings over the windows suggest that they were originally arched. Fenestration on the front (west) facade consists of a central doorway surmounted by a window with six over nine lights; a small, octagonal window is centered in the gable end. A single entry is located off center on the rear (east) facade. The original function of the building ceased when the adjacent frame church was constructed in 1894. The stone building remained in use as a guild hall; its interior has been remodeled to serve its more recent function.

Contrasting the stark simplicity of the stone church is the 1894 white frame Gothic church, which faces east. (In 1894, the congregation divided, and the second congregation built an identical church in Nerstrand, just two miles away; this building is extant but altered extensively.) The frame church is basilican in plan with entry through the projecting bell tower. The pointed arches, pinnacles and high steeple are characteristic features of the Gothic style. The four evenly spaced pointed arched windows on the north and south sides are double hung with four-over-four lights. The muntins in the upper sash form twin arches within the arch of the window, giving the impression of tracery. The tower features double doors with a transom light set in a triangular pediment surmounted by a pointed arched window, and an open belfry sheltering a bell rises above the roofline and terminates in a steeply pitched octagonal roof capped by a metal spire and cross. Shingled pent roofs separate the entry, tower window, and belfry. The roof of the building is sheathed with wooden shingles. The interior retains excellent integrity. Services terminated at Valley Grove in 1972 when the congregation disbanded due to declining membership.

(see continuation sheet)

Description - continued

The two buildings are maintained by separate preservation groups. The stone church is protected by a trust established for its preservation and is maintained by the Valley Grove - Grace Cemetery Association. The Society for the Preservation of the Valley Grove Church maintains the frame structure.

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SIGNIFICANCE:

Valley Grove is primarily significant as a highly dramatic rural church scene in which the juxtaposition of two church buildings constructed by a single congregation represent two phases of rural ecclesiastical architecture. The buildings are also significant as the focus of the dispersed community of Norwegian farmers who settled and farmed parts of eastern Rice County. The Valley Grove parish dates back to the 1850s when area residents began meeting in homes for worship. In 1862 they built the small stone church for a meeting place, and named the congregation "Tyske Grove." (The name was changed to Valley Grove in 1870.) The scale and simplicity of design of the stone church are characteristic of an early generation of church structures constructed by rural immigrant populations. These buildings often replaced log structures or other temporary quarters and were usually replaced by larger more ostentatious structures as the need arose. By 1894 the Valley Grove congregation had outgrown the small stone church. Members who lived in the town of Nerstrand agitated for a church in town and in 1894 identical frame Gothic churches were constructed at the rural site of Valley Grove and in Nerstrand. The earlier stone building was not demolished to make room for the new building but retained as a guild hall; the Gothic buildings constructed are more typical of what has become considered as traditional ecclesiastical architecture in rural Minnesota. The two churches (Valley Grove and Nerstrand) remained one congregation until they reorganized in 1949. In 1972, the Valley Grove congregation disbanded to join the Grace Lutheran congregation in Nerstrand. Although the buildings at Valley Grove are no longer in use, they reflect the solidarity of the rural Norwegian community that built them and settled the area.

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Begin at the northeast corner of the NE SE Sec. 4, T110 R19; commence Wly. 115.5 ft.; thence Sly. 429 ft.; thence Wly 108 ft.; thence Sly 264 ft.; thence Ely 220 ft.; thence Nly. 620 ft. to point of beginning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

History of the Nerstrand Community, Nerstrand Women's Club, 1949.

Norlie, O.M., Norsk Lutherske Menigheter: America 1843-1916, Minneapolis: 1918.

St. Paul Dispatch, May 17, 1970.