

MINNESOTA HISTORIC PROPERTIES INVENTORY FORM

MAY 20 1980

JUL 28 1980

HISTORIC NAME: Gail, James P., Octagon Farmhouse

COUNTY: Blue Earth

CURRENT NAME:

CITY/TWP.: Garden City Township

LEGAL DESC.: That part of T107N, R28W, Section 13 described as follows: beginning at the center point of the SW $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{2}$ of Section 13, thence southerly 100 feet, thence westerly 300 feet, thence northerly 300 feet to the south edge of Township Road, thence easterly 300 feet, thence southerly 200 feet to point of beginning.

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

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: Yes _____ No X Restricted _____

PRESENT USE:

VISIBLE FROM THE ROAD: Yes X No _____

Residence

OCCUPIED: Yes X No _____

DATE CONSTRUCTED: c.1855-1859

ORIGINAL USE: Residence

ORIGINAL OWNER: James P. Gail

ARCHITECT/BUILDER:

OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Duane Munter
RFD
Garden City, Minnesota 56034

ACREAGE: Less than one acre X

LOCAL CONTACT/ORG.: Blue Earth County Historical Society,
606 South Broad Street, Mankato, MN 56001

UTM REFERENCE:
Lake Crystal Quad, 7.5
15 / 409020 / 4879730

FORM PREPARED BY: Dennis Gimmestad

DATE: January 1980

DESCRIPTION:

The Gail Octagon Farmhouse is situated a short distance from the Watonwan River in Section 13 of Garden City Township. The site is relatively isolated due to the fact that the adjacent township road comes to a dead end at the nearby river.

The small one-story octagonal house is of brick construction with an eight-planed conical roof culminating in a chimney. According to the present owners, each of the eight walls were originally pierced by a single opening; five contained single arched 8/8 windows, and the other three contained full Greek Revival doorways with sidelights and transoms.

Two of the original door openings have been replaced with windows; the third Greek Revival doorway remains intact although not visible from the exterior. Two additions to the house have been appended without apparent extensive damage. The southern section (c.1930s) altered an original window opening to accommodate a connecting doorway; the northern addition (c.1977) is attached to the original section but the fenestration (Greek Revival doorway) has been left intact. Despite the alteration of the house, the distinctive shape as well as the simple detailing is plainly visible, and the building has been well-maintained.

A short distance southeast of the house near the banks of the Watonwan River is a small grave marker surrounded by an iron fence. The grave is marked as that of John Tefft, born 1769, and "drowned in a sinking steamer on Lake Pepin on his 90th birthday." Tefft was the father-in-law of James P. Gail, the builder of the house.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Gail Octagon Farmhouse in Garden City Township is significant as a rare rural Minnesota example of a 19th century building fad and as a structure associated with the initial phase of Euro-American settlement of the area. James Plinus Gail was born in the Lake George-Cayuga area of New York State in 1806. He settled on land in Blue Earth County in the mid-1850s, and, according to family accounts, constructed an octagonal farmhouse sometime between 1855 and 1859, manufacturing the brick for the structure on the site. Gail's activities in Garden City Township during the 1860s characterize many aspects of the first decades of settlement in the area. In addition to developing a frontier farming operation, he entered into the townsite speculation activity of the period and platted the city of Lowell on a portion of his farm. The town was characteristic of the numerous paper towns

(see continuation sheet)

MAY 20 1980

Gail, James P., Octagon Farmhouse

Blue Earth County
Garden City Township

of the county platted during this period and was never extensively developed. In addition, a riverside site on Gail's farm was used for the development of one of the custom flour mills of the period, although it was operated by Dustin, Holliday, and Johnson rather than by Gail himself. Many of the few Minnesota examples of the octagonal building phenomena are grander, urban structures in the eastern areas of the state. The single story, small scale, and simple design of the Gail House make it a distinctive rural product of the fad. Despite the fact that it has been somewhat obscured by two additions, the scale and form are readily apparent, and its structural uniqueness, as well as its broad historical links with an initial settlement phase of the area, make the Gail House an important structure in Blue Earth County.

Bibliography

Atlas Blue Earth County Minnesota. Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota: Perfection Press, 1967(?). (Article on next to last page).

Gebhard, David, and Tom Martinson. A Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977. p. 277.

History of the Minnesota Valley. Comp. by George E. Warner and Charles M. Foote. Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Co., 1882. p. 590.

Hughes, Thomas. History of Blue Earth County, and Biographies of Its Leading Citizens. Chicago: Middle West Publishing Company, 1909(?). pp. 160, 247-48.

Osborne, Carolyn. Letter to Dennis Gimmetad, December 6, 1979. (In Minnesota SHPO files.)