

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED DEC 11 1979
DATE ENTERED JAN 29 1980

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

Washington Prairie Methodist Church

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

SE of Decorah

STREET & NUMBER

Route 1, Section 12, Springfield Township NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Decorah

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2

STATE

Iowa

VICINITY OF
CODE

COUNTY

Winneshiek

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Norwegian-American Museum

STREET & NUMBER

502 West Water Street

CITY, TOWN

Decorah

VICINITY OF

STATE

Iowa

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder's Office, Winneshiek County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Decorah

STATE

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Washington Prairie Methodist Church, on the exterior, is approximately 40 x 28 feet. The height at the roof peak is 27 feet 4 inches, and at the corners 17 feet 6 inches. The walls are of soft limestone and are approximately 1 foot 6 inches thick. The interior is 37 feet in length and 25 feet wide. The attic is about 10 feet 6 inches high at roof peak. The attic is nailed together with sawn lumber. The roof itself is not of truss construction but built on the common rafter system. Cedar shingles similar to the originals can be found on the roof.

The building's only entrance, located on a gable wall, faces to the southeast. At equal distances on the northeastern and southwestern walls are located three gothic windows with patterned-etched clear glass panes. The northwest wall is of solid limestone. The exterior wood trim is painted in two tones of gray.

The Church interior consists of one large room with two aisles leading to the pulpit which is centrally located at the far end of the room. A small open floor space is located immediately within the doorway. There are three rows of church pews consisting of nine pews along the outer walls and eight in the central section. Located on a raised platform, the pulpit, altar table, glass chalice and one chair (of the three original chairs) are surrounded by a semi-circular railing. Two pews, facing the pulpit, are located on either side of the platform. Darkly stained wainscot surrounds the lower section of the room with off-white painted plaster on the upper section of the walls and ceiling. The interior of the entrance double doors, pulpit and pews are painted and wood grained. Hanging from the ceiling towards the center of the room, two cast iron chandeliers hold four kerosene lamps each. The reed organ is located near the platform in the northwest corner. Near the outer walls, two wood stoves were located about a third of the way into the room. Only one stove similar and appropriate for the time period has been located and installed in the Church. Early ingrain carpeting covers the floor around the altar area. Modern woven carpet of early type covers the aisles.

In 1972 the Church and cemetery were restored by the Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa. Utilizing photographs, written sources, oral interviews and historical archaeology, necessary data was collected for the refurbishing of the interior and exterior of the structure. Exterior refurbishing consisted of re-shingling the roof, pointing up the stone and repairing and painting the woodwork. Patterned after early photographs, wood steps leading to the entrance were reconstructed.

The refurbishing of the interior consisted of cleaning and slightly touching up artificially grained woodwork, repairing plaster walls and ceiling, and replacing missing materials from the Church. No guesswork was involved because at least one example of every type of object was still extant. From fragments of etched glass, a pattern was prepared for reproducing by the original method a number of the acid etched window panes. Remnants of ingrain carpeting enabled researchers to locate carpeting in similar colors and of the same time period. Missing parts of the chandeliers, none of which was without preserved counterparts, were reproduced. Collected data and descriptions were used as the basis for selecting the stove. One original altar chair remained.

Note: Window openings in the side walls appear to have been reworked from an original shape featuring the segmental arch. Portions of this wider arch form have been filled in to accommodate pointed-arch windows.

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

SPECIFIC DATES

1863 - 1868

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

local residents

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Washington Prairie Methodist Church has two-fold significance, historical and architectural. Historically it is considered the mother church of Methodism in Norway. The founder of the congregation, Ole Peter Petersen, returned to Norway in 1853 and founded the first Methodist congregation in that country. The members of the immigrant congregation continued to meet in homes for another ten years and then constructed with their own hands and from the surface limestone in the area the church which is now preserved by the Norwegian-American Museum. Ole Petersen later returned to the United States and continued to have periodic affiliation with the historic congregation in Iowa. From the same congregation came also Asle Knudsen, one of the great Methodist preachers of the pioneer period. The esteem in which the Methodists of Scandinavia hold the pioneer church at Washington Prairie was exemplified by the fact that the Bishop of the North European Methodist Conference journeyed from Stockholm to participate in the rededication of the building in 1972 when it was placed under the auspices of the Norwegian-American Museum.

The architectural significance of the Church lies largely in its exceptionally original condition. Having been used only quarterly from about 1888 to about 1920, when the Church was officially closed, it never underwent the modernization which has occurred in most early religious structures. Neither did it fall into total decay. A small group of late worshippers gave the roof a new coat of shingles at about the time the building was abandoned. They also placed tin shutters over the windows. Though the doors had been left open so rodents had taken over and vandals had broken the windows, nothing of the permanent inventar had been destroyed. A structural problem had developed over the entrance arch from the settling of the side walls, but it could be repaired by dismantling and resetting the stones in only a small section of the wall. Most of the major loose inventar--organ, lamps, altar table, chalice, etc.--had been stored in the boiler room of a church in the city of Decorah. All was made available to the Museum when it brought the Church back to its original state in the early 1970's.

The Washington Prairie Methodist Church is an exceptional document of indigenous stone architecture in the Upper Midwest as well as being a historic monument of international interest.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Andersen, Arlow W. THE SALT OF THE EARTH, Nashville, Tennessee, Parthenon Press, 1962.
 STANDARD HISTORICAL ATLAS OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY, IOWA. Davenport, Iowa, Anderson and Goodwin Counties, 1905.
 Bucke, Emory S. THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN METHODISM. New York, Abingdon Press, 1964.

UTM NOT VERIFIED

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Map: La Crosse, Wisconsin Scale: 1:250,000

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.3 acres

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,5 6,0,2,0,0,0 4,7,8,7,8,0,0
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 2, SW of NW of Section 12, Springfield Township, Twp. 97, R. 8.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Steven L. Johnson, Curatorial Assistant

ORGANIZATION

c/o Norwegian-American Museum

DATE

February 5, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

502 West Water Street

TELEPHONE

319 + 382-9681

CITY OR TOWN

Decorah

STATE

Iowa

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

Adrian S. Anderson

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE December 3, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Carol O'Shull

DATE

1-29-80

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

William H. Braithwaite

DATE

1-17-80

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER