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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name J.A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop

other names/site number Johnson and Son Blacksmith Shop

2. Location

street & number Main Ave. W. and 2nd St. W.  not for publication N/A

city or town Rothsay  vicinity N/A

state Minnesota code MN county Wilkin code 167 zip code 56579

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally.  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 1-2-96  
Signature of certifying official/Title Ian R. Stewart Date  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] Signature of the Keeper  
Edson H. Beall  
Entered in the  
National Register

Date of Action 2/23/96

J.A. Johnson-Blacksmith Shop  
Name of Property

Wilkin County, Minnesota  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: blacksmith shop

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture: museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

No style

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Weatherboard

Asphalt

roof Shingle

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is: N/A

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

**Period of Significance**

1912-1945

**Significant Dates**

1912, 1915

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Wilkin County Historical Society

J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop  
Name of Property

Wilkin County, Minnesota  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre

**UTM References** Rothsay, Minn. 1981  
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 4	7 0 8 5 9 0	5 1 5 0 2 0 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**  
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**  
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Susan Granger and Kay Grossman  
organization Gemini Research date Sept. 25, 1995  
street & number 15 East Ninth Street telephone (612) 589-3846  
city or town Morris state MN zip code 56267

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

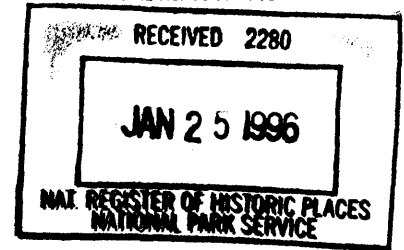
name \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet



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J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop  
Rothsay, Wilkin County, Minnesota

## 7. DESCRIPTION

The J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop is located on Main Avenue West on the edge of the business district in Rothsay, Minnesota, a small community of about 440 people in northeastern Wilkin County. The building is located mid-block and is set back approximately 25 feet from Main Avenue, a paved street. In front of the shop is a short, poured concrete driveway which slants slightly as it runs from Main Avenue to the main entrance. There is a poured concrete public sidewalk in front of the building and small areas of grassy lawn surrounding it. There are a few deciduous trees near the sides and rear of the shop. The building is surrounded by vacant lots, modern commercial structures, a small house, and the Rothsay public school building which is located north of the rear of the shop.

The Johnson Blacksmith shop, built in 1903, is a basically intact, one and one-half story, gable-roofed woodframe building with a false front. There was originally a wooden cornice with ornate, widely-spaced brackets at the top of the main facade. The name of the shop was originally painted on the clapboard beneath the cornice. The building was faced with clapboard siding which was covered with the current asbestos shingle siding around 1940. It measures 24 feet wide by 60 feet long and has a poured concrete foundation and a wood shingled roof. There is a central brick chimney for the heating stove and a large double brick chimney near the western side wall for the forge. A small shed-roofed six-foot by ten-foot addition was added to the eastern facade around the late-1930s.

The main (southern) facade has a ten-foot-wide by eight-foot-high entrance with three wooden doors. This entrance was widened by approximately three feet around the 1920s to accommodate larger machinery. The outer two doors in the opening are original and the central door was added when the opening was enlarged. There is also a five-foot-wide by eight-foot-tall entrance at the center of the rear facade which has two original inward-swinging wooden doors.

The building has 15 rectangular window openings with 4/4 sash set into simple wooden frames. The majority of light in the shop was provided by these windows and by the two large entrance doors which were generally left open during working hours. Much of the large equipment inside is located directly under the windows to make use of available light, and there are only a few lighting fixtures with single bulbs to supply artificial light. The windows are now boarded over.

The interior of the blacksmith shop is also basically intact and consists of a single room on each of two floors. (See accompanying sketch of interior.) The main shop area is on the first level. The front half of the shop has a

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poured concrete floor and the rear half has a wooden plank floor. The floor surrounding the forge at the western wall is dirt. The walls are covered with wooden plank siding and the ceiling is open-beamed, except in the office where the ceiling is also covered with wooden planks.

At the southwestern corner of the main level is a small office which retains an original drop-leaf pigeon-hole desk. North of the office is the original acetylene generator used for making acetylene gas for welding. Located nearby are welding masks and other welding supplies.

North of the welding area, along the western wall, is the double forge with its two flanking anvils and two tempering barrels. The forge is intact and is constructed of fire brick with two brick interior sidewall chimneys. The hand crank for the blower is intact, but the manual blower was replaced with an electric blower when the shop was converted to electricity around the 1920s. The two anvils, probably London pattern anvils, stand four to five feet east of the forge. The anvils are intact. Hanging on the wall south of the forge are torches and forging tools including many sizes of tongs, smithing hammers, and chisels. Along the western wall north of the forge is a double-screw vice, a cutting machine, a small grindstone, and a metal grinder. At the northwestern corner of the first floor is a stairway which leads up through a trapdoor to the second story.

West of the rear entrance on the northern (rear) wall is a large rack of tools. East of the entrance is a platform scale used to weigh metal and iron. In the northeastern corner of the shop is the woodworking area with a woodrack, workbench, and tools. Along the eastern wall is a door which leads to the small addition which contains a toilet and sink. South of the door on the eastern wall is a large steel rack which held raw steel.

The horseshoeing area is located in the southeastern corner of the building near the main entrance. An intact kit for shoeing horses is located near the entrance. Along at least ten of the ceiling rafters are rows of nails on which over 200 horseshoes of various sizes were hung. A heating stove is located in the center of the shop northwest of the horseshoeing area.

Most of the large smithing equipment is located down the center of the shop, beginning with the trip hammer located next to the forge at the southern end, and ending with the large grindstone which is standing at the center rear of the shop. The original equipment is intact, and includes a trip hammer (brand name "Little Giant") which was used to shape plow shares, a power steel rolling machine which put the edge on the plow shares, a wooden spoke cutter which cut the holes into the wooden wagon rims where the spokes were fastened, a metal bending machine which shaped the round metal wagon rims, a power hack saw, a thread cutting machine, a Barnes drill press, and a large grindstone and polisher. The hub hole, located in the middle of the floor

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east of the metal bending machine, is also intact. The hub of a wagon wheel was placed in this hole so that the wheel could be easily spun as the blacksmith pounded a round metal rim onto the wheel. Also intact is a carriage bolt maker with brand name "Green River #3."

The large machines in the center of the shop were powered by an intact central lineshaft and a series of pulleys and canvas belts, all connected to a single power source located on the second floor of the shop. This lineshaft power system could run eight different pieces of equipment and was possibly based on one of Thomas Edison's designs. The seven horsepower electric motor (originally gasoline-powered) is located on the second floor near the eastern wall.

The second story, where the motor is located, is one large room which is entered through a wooden trapdoor at the northwestern corner. There is another trapdoor located in the center of the room which has a block and tackle pulley system used to haul items up to the second story. The second story has a wooden plank floor and walls, and open rafters on the ceiling. A large tablesaw, which was used to make pulls for wagons and trailers, is also located on the second floor.

The Johnson Blacksmith Shop is in fair condition and has been recently reroofed with new wooden shingles. The blacksmithing tools, forge, and equipment are intact and in good condition.

## 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A (significance to the broad patterns of our history) in the area of Commerce. Built in 1903 as a blacksmith shop, the building and its contents are significant as a rare, intact example of the type of blacksmith shops which were common in small midwestern agricultural communities in the early to mid-20th century. The property is significant within the statewide historic context entitled "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940."

The J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop is one of the most intact early 20th century blacksmith shops standing in Minnesota, and contains an unusually most intact collection of smithing tools and equipment. The shop is an example of the most common type of blacksmith shop built in Minnesota, the one and one-half story woodframe shop with gabled roof and a false front. About one-half of the approximately 37 blacksmith shops documented in the Minnesota Statewide Historic Properties Inventory represent this type. Most of the rest are woodframe shops which have gabled roofs with no false front, or flat or shed roofs. Most blacksmith shops built in small Minnesota

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Rothsay, Wilkin County, Minnesota

communities were woodframe although a few were constructed of brick, hollow clay tile, concrete block, or stone. The majority were covered in clapboard, shiplap, or rough plank siding. Many of those which remain standing are in poor condition. Many have been converted to garages or warehouses or stand vacant. Two blacksmith shops in the state are listed on the National Register. They are the City Blacksmith Shop (built circa 1898) in Lamberton (listed on the NRHP on August 11, 1980) and the Bally Blacksmith Shop (built in 1911) in Grand Marais (listed on the NRHP on August 13, 1986).

J. Arndt Johnson began to work at the blacksmith shop in 1912 and purchased the business in 1915. The original owners were John Helgeson and Emil Krogh who established a partnership in 1903. Unfortunately, little is known about Krogh and Helgeson. Helgeson's family were among the first settlers to the Rothsay area, homesteading in Oscar Township. Krogh later sold his share to his partner and Helgeson became the sole owner (Wigdahl 1982, 132).

It is believed that J. Arndt Johnson's grandparents were also among the first Norwegian families to settle in the Rothsay area around 1871. The majority of pioneer settlers near Rothsay were Norwegian Lutherans who began moving into the area in the late 1860s. A number of the first settlers had immigrated from Norway around 1969 and had come to Rothsay via southeastern Minnesota counties such as Fillmore, Olmsted, and Houston, or via Wisconsin or Iowa. These first Norwegians were joined by Swedish and some Danish immigrants (Wigdahl 1982, 37-38).

J. Arndt Johnson's grandparents were Martin and Anna Heggen. Martin, who was born in Gran, Norway in 1842, came to America in 1869, settled in Fillmore County, and a few years later moved with his family to Rothsay. Martin was a carpenter and he built the first general store in Rothsay, the A. B. Pedersen general store. J. Arndt's mother, Christine Heggen, was born in Fillmore County in 1870 and married Hans Christian Johnson in 1888 in Rothsay. Hans Christian Johnson was born in 1860 in Ostre Toten, Norway. He came to America in 1882 and settled in Rothsay. J. (Johannes) Arndt Johnson was born in 1889 and raised on his parent's farm near Rothsay. He married Ida Erickson in 1914 and the couple had nine children.

The village of Rothsay was platted along the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railroad (later the Great Northern) in 1879. The St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba completed a line from Fergus Falls to Barnesville in the fall of that year. Rothsay was named by a Manitoba Railroad official after his hometown in Scotland. As the settlers around Rothsay broke the fertile Red River Valley soil and established farms, the village became a small agricultural trade center. By 1880, Rothsay had two stores, four saloons, one hotel, one blacksmith shop, a section house, and several dwellings.



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In his book Plains Country Towns, geographer John C. Hudson explains the role of the blacksmith in fledgling rural communities:

Blacksmiths were, second to general stores, the most common business in the inland towns. It took little capital to begin a blacksmith shop, and many would-be farmers with training and skill in smithing were able to conduct the business as a sideline. Many of them forged farm tools of various sorts and, if they also possessed woodworking skills, manufactured farm implements. The blacksmith offered a general store of another sort: often a jack-of-all-trades, his skills could be applied to a variety of problems brought to him (Hudson 1985, 34).

Blacksmith shops were among the first businesses which were started in the town of Rothsay. The first two blacksmith shops were established by Amund Boe and Pete Dahl in 1879 and the early 1880s. Dahl was joined by G. H. Strommen Hanson, who later opened his own shop. John Helgeson and Emil Krogh opened their shop in 1903. Dahl's shop was later purchased by Ole O. Tweten, and in 1912 by Alfred Brenden. Ole Tweten's brother, John O. Tweten, operated another shop just over the county line in Otter Tail County (Wigdahl 1982, 33-34).

J. Arndt Johnson entered this competitive arena at the age of 23 when he became an apprentice to John Helgeson in 1912 in the current building. Three years later he bought the business. During Johnson's first years as owner, Rothsay's business district included four general stores (Juvrud's, Brusven's, Haga's, and Teterud's), T. K. Brye's department store (formerly A. B. Pedersen's general store), Weyhrauch candy store, Bratlien's confectionery, Ekeren Drug, August Larson's cafe, Rudh and Jorve implement businesses, Jorgen Dihle's harness shop, Jens Martinson's butcher shop, the Enterprise newspaper, two lumber yards, Moen's and Bowman's hotels, three grain elevators, a Ford garage run by Theodore Helgeson, Oscar Lunder's hardware store, the First State Bank, the Farmers State Bank, a movie theater, Stordock livery stable, and two blacksmith shops. Local historian Gary Wigdahl wrote in 1982, "Arndt Johnson, who retired just in recent years, may have been the last of these earlier businessmen to step down" (Wigdahl 1982, 151-152).

During the early years Johnson provided a wide range of blacksmithing services including shoeing horses, sharpening plow shares, making carriage bolts, and repairing drills, diggers, wagon wheels, and spokes. Before he began, however, Arndt forged most of his own blacksmithing tools. The majority of the tongs, hammers, chisels, and other tools currently hanging near the forge in the shop were fashioned and forged by Johnson. He also designed and built many of the other pieces of equipment standing in the shop.

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The bulk of Johnson's work in the early years was shoeing horses and sharpening plow shares. The southeastern corner of the shop near the main entrance was the horseshoeing area. Customers brought their horses into the shop where they were tied into the corner. Arndt's horseshoe kit was fully supplied with farrier tools, and the rafters above were lined with hundreds of shoes in an assortment of sizes and styles. There were studded horseshoes for winter travel and smooth shoes for summer wear. "W. A. Redmann speaks of Johnson's expertise in handling the bangtails of those days: 'Arndt seemed to almost hypnotize horses and he could handle the wildest broncos you ever saw'" (Dickey 1971).

The shaping and sharpening of plow shares was also a daily activity within the Johnson Blacksmith Shop. Generally 40 shares were sharpened daily, which meant swinging a hammer for ten hours (Dickey 1971). In the early days, all plow shares were heated in the forge and then hammered on the anvil, or sharpened on the power steel rolling machine. Eventually Johnson obtained a trip hammer, which reduced the amount of hand hammering. The Wahpeton-Breckenridge Daily News reported in 1992:

The hot forge was the central point of activity in the shop, with homemade tongs of every size and shape hanging from its side. One of the main chores within the early shop was the sharpening of plow shares. The first ones were heated in the forge and hammered by hand. As the years progressed, the shop installed a trip hammer . . . which you could hear all over town (Lemmon 1992).

The brick double forge in the Johnson shop was fired up first thing in the morning and ran all day long. (In later years, when welding with acetylene torches replaced forge work, the forge would be fired up perhaps once a day.) The forge is basically a hollow, rectangular box, approximately waist high, with a chimney. The interior is filled with rubble covered with a fire bed of coal. The empty bags of smithy coal still stand near the forge. The forge was originally fanned with a manual blower. The hand crank of the original blower is intact, although the manual blower was replaced with an electric blower around the 1920s. Approximately four feet in front of the forge on either side stand two anvils. The proximity of a blacksmith's anvils to his forge is described by archaeologist John D. Light: "It is unlikely that a smith would have wanted his anvil more than about four or five feet from his forge because he had to 'strike while the iron was hot,' and since he would have spent much of his time on his feet, economy of movement was important. For this reason the quenching tub should also have been in the immediate vicinity of the anvil and forge" (Light 1984, 57). Johnson's quenching tubs, or tempering barrels, are still located adjacent to the forge and anvils.

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Johnson's need for economy of movement--as well as his ingenuity--is also evident in the arrangement of the large equipment in the center of the shop. The machinery is arranged by function, with tools and supplies close by. Many machines were controlled by pull cords. "I never had to move to start or stop any machine in this line," Johnson explained in 1971 (Dickey 1971). Johnson was an avid reader and enjoyed reading about Thomas Edison's inventions. It is probable that the unique power source in the blacksmith shop was modeled after Thomas Edison's power source in his laboratory in Fort Meyer, Florida. A central electric motor on the second floor of the shop ran a lineshaft that powered eight different pieces of equipment. Each machine had its own switch and they could run simultaneously or separately. Originally the motor was gasoline powered, but when electricity was installed in Rothsay around the 1920s, Arndt converted his shop to electric power.

J. Arndt's creativity was also exhibited when he developed what is referred to locally as "the first snowmobile." The first rural mail route operating out of the Rothsay post office began in 1904. Eventually there were four rural routes and two star routes dispatched from the Rothsay post office. Each rural carrier maintained two teams of horses. J. Arndt serviced the rural mailmen's delivery wagons and shod their horses. Eventually the rural carriers used motorized vehicles, but winter delivery remained an obstacle. In 1936 a rural mail carrier asked Johnson to develop a vehicle that he could drive through the snow drifts. "The end result employed a Model A engine, Model T dual rear axle with the driveshaft of a Model T truck connecting it to a Model A transmission. Johnson put big airplane balloon tires on the front and made tracks for driving it. Then he put a set of runners on front that rode three-quarters of an inch above the tires and there was not anything that rig couldn't run through. Another feature of the runners was that they could be raised several inches above the ground" (Dickey 1971). The vehicle also had six forward speeds and two for reverse. The rural mail carrier used this vehicle every winter through 1957.

As farming practices and technology improved, the skills of the rural blacksmith evolved and Johnson adapted his business to modern technology. The tractor age began in 1924 when the all-purpose Farmall tractor was introduced by the International Harvester Company. At first, farmers simply hitched their gang plows, discs, harrows, planters--equipment once pulled by either two- or four-horse teams--to the tractors. But that was inefficient, and by the mid-1930s, a variety of plows, planters, cultivators and other equipment designed for tractor power was available (Fite 1989, 280). As horses were replaced by engines, horseshoeing no longer was a marketable service. However, the new tractors wheels were steel, and the blacksmith was kept busy repairing them. The advent of the rubber tire in the 1930s again decreased the blacksmith's trade. Just when Johnson thought he would have to adapt his business, World War II rationing began and rubber tires became rare. Once the war was over, however, Arndt and his son Walter, who had by

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then joined the business, began offering the service of putting rubber tires on steel tractor wheels.

Blacksmiths like the Johnsons were an essential part of every farming community. Arndt Johnson served farmers by sharpening plow shares, repairing planters, fixing wagons and carts, and welding sickles, balers, and mowers. He replaced axles, sharpened picks, chisels, and crowbars, repaired radiators, thawed frozen water pipes, and designed and fabricated custom-made tools. Blacksmiths worked long hours during planting and harvest, often making emergency repairs to machinery that was needed immediately back out in the fields. In addition to working for farmers, blacksmiths kept virtually all other types of machinery and equipment in a rural community repaired and running. Businesses as diverse as creameries, grain elevators, implement dealers, truck operators, auto mechanics, school districts, and construction companies were customers of the blacksmith shop.

Two of J. Arndt's sons, Walter and Henry, worked in the blacksmith shop with their father. Henry was employed there for a short time. Walter began working in the shop after returning home from active duty in World War II and worked there for 41 years. Under the ownership of J. Arndt and Walter Johnson, the blacksmith shop in Rothsay was operated by the Johnson family for 74 years, first under the name J. A. Johnson and then as Johnson and Son. J. Arndt himself worked in the shop for approximately 66 years until his death in 1978. At the time of his death Johnson had been in business longer than any other merchant in Rothsay (Wigdahl 1982, 132). Walter, who took over the business from Arndt, worked as a blacksmith from 1945 until 1986, retiring one year before his death.

After Walter Johnson's death, the Johnson family donated the shop to the Wilkin County Historical Society. Today much of the Johnson Blacksmith Shop is intact, including the equipment, forge, and tools. From all appearances, it looks as though Walter Johnson turned the key in the lock and went home for lunch. Calendars dated November, 1986--the month the shop was closed--hang on the walls, as does the original sign that J. Arndt printed and displayed through decades of service. The quote on the sign is from the poem "Evangeline" and reads: "For since the birth of time throughout all ages and nations has the craft of the blacksmith been held in repute by the people."

## 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 10 J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop  
Rothsay, Wilkin County, Minnesota

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## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

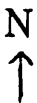
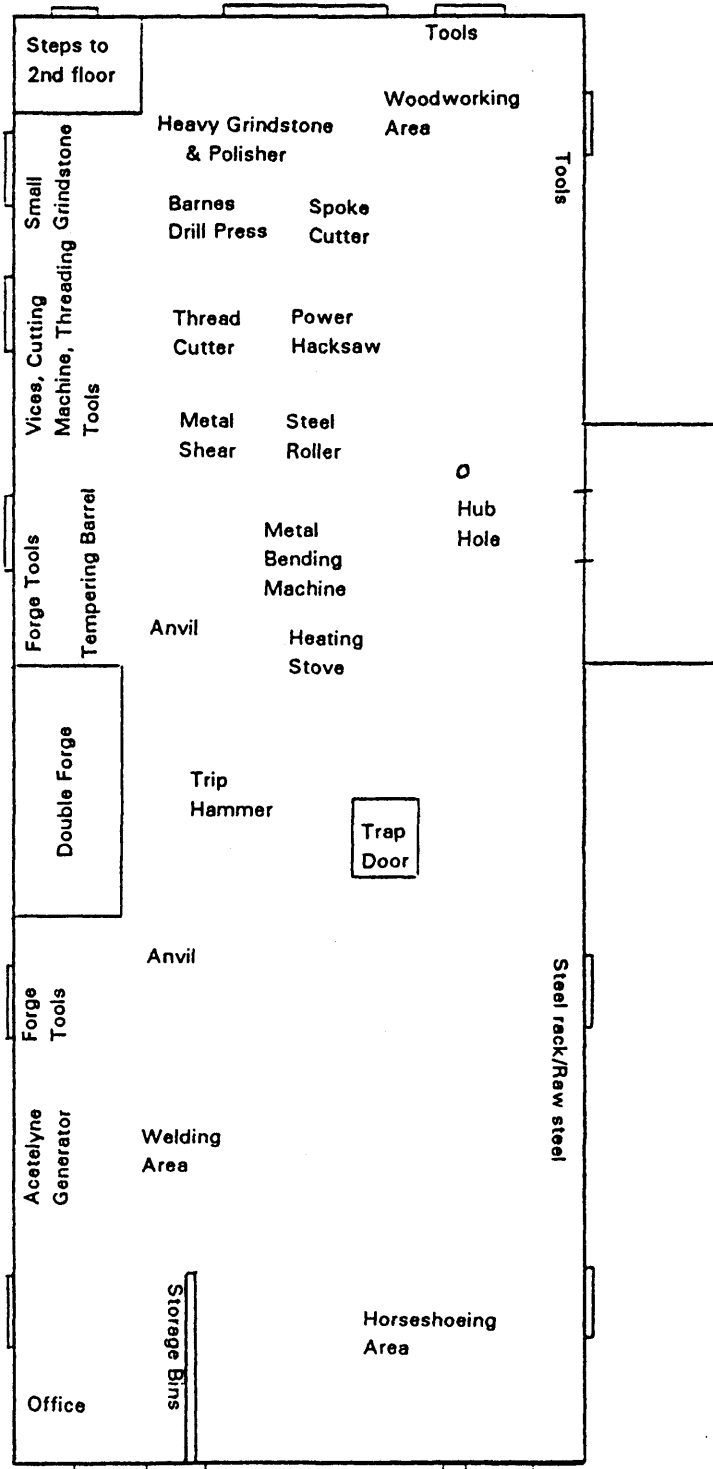
### Verbal Boundary Description:

Lots 7 and 8 of Block 2 of the Village of Rothsay.

### Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the nominated property includes the parcel historically associated with the J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop.

J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop  
Rothsay, Wilkin County

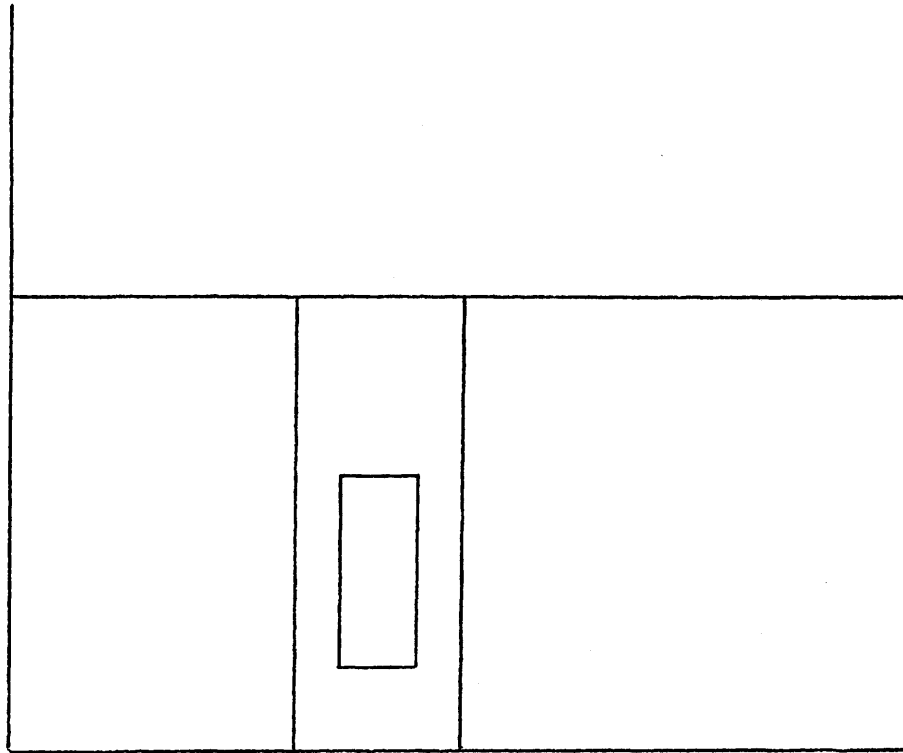


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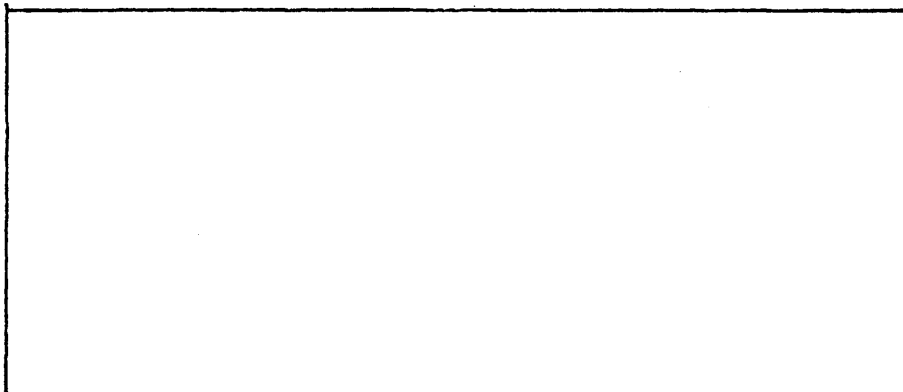
Prep by Gemini Research 1995

J. A. Johnson Blacksmith Shop  
Rothsay, Wilkin County

Second St. W.



Main Avenue W.



N  
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Not to scale

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