

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCPS use only  
received JAN 8 1980  
date entered MAR 18 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name** Rock County Multiple Resource Area (Partial Inventory)

Historic Resources of Rock County  
historic (Partial Inventory - Historic Properties)

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number The County Limits of Rock County, Minnesota  not for publication

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district 6th

state Minnesota code 22 county Rock code 133

**3. Classification** -- Multiple Resources

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Multiple Ownership - see inventory forms

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorders Office -- Rock County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Luverne state Minnesota

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Statewide Survey of Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Minnesota Historical Society -- 240 Summit Avenue-Hill House

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota

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## 7. Description

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see individual inventory forms

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

See Area Description

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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RECEIVED JAN 8 1980
DATE ENTERED

Historic Resources of Rock County

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 1 PAGE 1

This Multiple Resource Area Nomination is based on a survey of standing structures conducted in Rock County by the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office as part of a long-range statewide survey of historic resources. The properties included in the nomination represent those which illustrate significant aspects of the history of the county and which have been deemed eligible for nomination at the conclusion of the survey. Additional information and new perspectives for evaluation of specific types of historic and prehistoric properties are continually being gained as the statewide survey progresses, and it is quite possible that additional Rock County properties will be nominated in the future. These may be presented individually or as parts of thematic groups when the entire survey is completed. For this reason, this Multiple Resource Area Nomination should not be construed as representing all properties in Rock County eligible for nomination.

(The above disclaimer is based on an agreement between Charles Harrington, HCRS, and Russell Fridley, Minnesota SHPO, August 31, 1979).

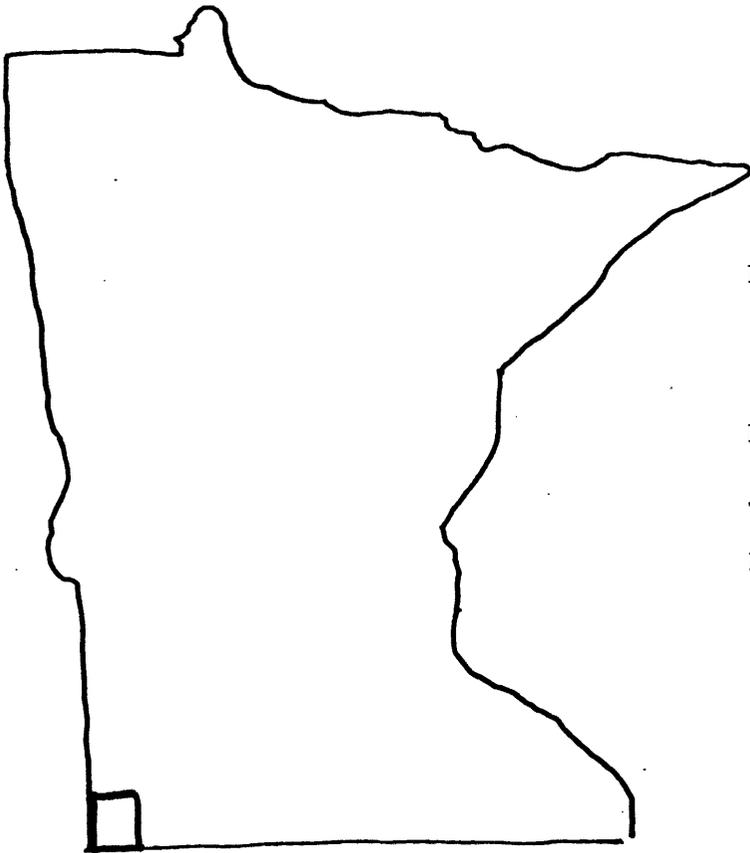
NAME: Historic Resources of Rock County

LOCATION: The county limits of Rock County

CLASSIFICATION: Multiple Resources

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: Multiple (see inventory forms)

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONS: Recorder's Office  
Rock County Courthouse  
Luverne, Minnesota

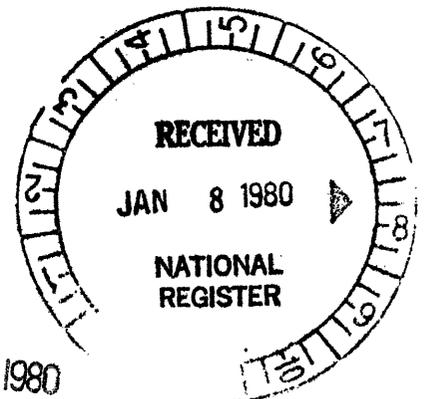


Map 1

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS:

The following county properties  
have been previously listed in  
the National Register:

- Rock County Courthouse and Jail,  
Luverne
- Jasper Stone Company and Quarry,  
Jasper
- R.B. Hinkly House, Luverne



MAR 18 1980

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## SURVEY METHOD

### Standing Structures

The standing structure survey was conducted during the spring and summer of 1978 in conjunction with similar surveys in adjacent Nobles and Pipestone Counties. A geographer with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office conducted the survey. Assistance on the Rock County historical context and on inventoried properties was provided by historians on the S.H.P.O. staff.

Some potentially significant structures were identified prior to field work. Narrative materials and maps (listed in the bibliography), the Rock County Historical Society, and many local residents provided information. Only a few, less than 25, properties were pre-identified.

Field work provided the majority of inventoried and nominated structures. Broad themes in county history led to the identification of significant types of buildings, and a visual survey led to specific choices of buildings. National Register nominations were selected from the inventory on the basis of local significance and integrity. The buildings with the most available historical documentation did not always prove to be the most significant in the county.

Rock County lacks a spectacular or unusual history. It is not unlike other Midwestern counties. Broad, general themes in history and development dominate local history. Only in rare cases were local persons or events the key factors in assessing significance. Integrity became quite important with the nominations. Nominated properties shared thematic importance and visual integrity at the least. A few nominations stand on local historical significance.

All city and town streets were walked or driven during the survey. Limits of time and expense required that the rural survey be limited to a sample of roads. All rural non-farm structures, pre-identified sites, and locally suggested buildings, were visited. The roads connecting these dispersed sites provided a strong sampling of the rural landscape.

Properties inventoried, but not nominated, were photographed and recorded and are on file at the Minnesota Historical Society.

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AREA DESCRIPTION

Physical

Rock County borders Iowa and South Dakota in the southwestern corner of Minnesota in the prairie part of the state. (Map 1) Rich loess soils provide some of the best farm lands in Minnesota. The most outstanding physiographic features of the generally smooth to undulating surface are quartzite outcrops, steep escarpments bordering glacial outwash stream beds, and the Rock River that runs north-south through the central part of the county. Blue Mound State Park, a large outcrop of Sioux quartzite, rises 200 feet above the land surface, providing the greatest local relief in that part of the state. Tallgrass prairie once covered the county. Trees were found only along stream beds.

Historical Development

Rock County settlement lagged behind other regions of the state. The first effective, permanent settlement was at the site of Luverne, on the Rock River, in 1867. When the county was organized in 1870, the population was only 138. County organization, completion of the government land survey in 1871, and railroad construction late in the decade, led to more rapid settlement. After a few years of stagnation due to drought and grasshopper plagues, Rock County grew rapidly. By 1880 county population was 3,667. The growth boom continued until 1900. Since then growth has leveled off. In 1970 the population was 11,346.

Population growth and distribution reflects the density of development. The rural areas and most of the smaller villages have declined slightly from their peak years. Luverne, the county seat, has continued to grow and increasingly gains over the rest of the county in its share of the county population.

Railroads spearheaded settlement in Rock County. Railroads provided transportation to markets to the east. Two railroads, the Southern Minnesota and the Sioux City and St. Paul, were granted alternate odd-numbered sections in all of the county except portions of two southwestern townships and some previously settled land along the Rock River. The grants were made by the state as inducements to track construction. These massive landholdings and the lack of previous settlement allowed the railroads to become the major townsite planners and settlements promoters. (Map 2).

The Worthington and Sioux Falls branch of the Sioux City and St. Paul, built from Worthington to Sioux Falls from 1876 to 1878, was the first railroad in Rock County. At that time Luverne, platted by P.J. Kniss in 1872, was the only town in the county. The railroad passed through Luverne and platted the town of Beaver Creek (1877) on land donated for that purpose. In 1880, the Doon branch of the SC & SP was completed from Luverne into Iowa. Ash Creek (1883) was platted by James B. Close, acting

for a large landholder connected with the railroad. Kanaranzi (1885) was platted by the Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls, and Northwestern Land and Town Lot Company, associated with the Burlington, Cedar Rapids, and Northern Railroad, which ran a line through the county in 1886. From 1888 to 1889 several small branch lines crossed corners of the county - the Sioux City and Northern, the Cherokee and Dakota, and the Willmar and Sioux Falls. Railroad townsite companies platted Steen (1888), Hills (1889), and Manley (1889). A private developer laid out Bruce (1888). The last rail line to enter the county was an addition to the B, CR, & N, built in 1900. Kenneth was platted by the railroad that same year. Two towns platted by individuals post-date construction of the railroads on which they are located: Magnolia (1891) and Hardwick (1892). There have been no "inland" towns in Rock County, nor any "paper towns" filed in the courthouse.

While town creation was always rail oriented and most often railroad controlled, town growth was a result of the developing agricultural economy and town functions as agricultural service centers. Population change, both urban and rural, has largely been a result of agricultural prosperity and development. Rock County is on the western edge of the Corn Belt. Crops have changed since the early settlement. Wheat, the only crop that offered an appreciable cash return, was the principal crop in the early years. In 1877 Winchell, the state geologist, reported that "the main material product of these counties is now, and will always remain, wheat, of which they will produce as much to the acre as any county in the state." But by 1910 corn had replaced wheat as the leading crop. It remains the major crop today, with soybeans second. Wheat has disappeared. By 1940 the trend was set when the W.P.A. guide noted that Luverne was "made prosperous by creamery, livestock, and grain cooperatives." Today over 70% of the farm income is derived from the sale of livestock and livestock products. Western feeder cattle make up a large portion of that income.

### Cultural Landscape

Man has dramatically altered the original prairie landscape. The dominant features of the cultural landscape are the township and range survey system, farms and farmsteads, towns, and the transportation system.

Survey system - The township and range survey system forms tangible patterns on the land. The mile-square grid survey was antecedent to Rock County settlement. The survey was developed to tie land to a national grid, to ease ownership descriptions, and to facilitate settlement. The system was well suited to the relatively flat terrain of Rock County. The survey grid forms an overall context and frame for other cultural features. Farm and field sizes, road locations, town siting, and the county political boundaries, are all oriented to the grid.

Farms - Agriculture is the primary activity whether measured by land use or income. The 305,500 acres in 1,105 farms, comprise 98% of the land area. Average farm size is 276 acres. The modal farm type by income is livestock operation. These are feedlot operations and are confined to small areas of the farms. Most of the farm land is cropped.

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Fields and farms are large; farmsteads are small and compact. All are set into the compass oriented survey system. Tree windbreaks protect the farmsteads on the north and west sides. The treeless prairie has become a series of L-shaped woodlots that often obscure the farmstead buildings. Technological advances in farm machinery have led to larger farms, increased specialization, and farmstead abandonment. Old farmhouses are left empty or whole farmsteads are bulldozed to clear more land for crops.

Towns - Of Rock County's eleven platted townsites, Bruce has disappeared altogether, Manley is only a crossroads store, and Ash Creek is a single street of residences. The other eight towns have the look of urban places. All have north-south oriented grids, fitting into the township and range survey network, and clearly defined limits. The small-town plats reflect the importance of railroads in the town settlement of the county. Main streets, distinguished by narrow commercial lots and wide streets, form T-junctions with the railroads, intersecting at the depot location. The cardinal direction oriented grids and the angled location of railroads often form trapezoidal lots along the tracks. (Map 3) Depot grounds, wide railroad rights-of-way, line the tracks for the length of the original town plats.

Towns were most often platted within quarter-section lines; section line roads rarely passed through the towns. Today one sees H-shaped towns with main streets connecting the railroad and highway. Commercial lots disappear within a few blocks of the track. Building patterns still reflect the depot oriented development of Main Street. Commercial buildings often fade out even before the commercial lots. Two town plats do not follow the T-pattern. Luverne's railroads are relegated to the outer edges of the original town. Magnolia, platted late in the county's history of town establishment (1891), has the oldest style of town plan. Commercial lots face the tracks from both sides. Actual town development, however, followed the T-plan. Commercial establishments line a street between the depot and the highway, and only do so on one side of the tracks.

The smaller villages serve as agricultural trade centers and shipping points. Grain elevators, small businesses, and modest residences form Rock County's urban landscape. Industrial and storage facilities, grain elevators, lumber yards and farm equipment lots line the tracks. Most commercial establishments line Main Streets. Improved transportation and the increased use of cars and trucks have led some businesses to locate on emerging highway strips within the towns. Residences, churches, and schools are located away from Main Street on side streets.

Luverne, the county seat, is by far the most important town. In addition to agricultural services, it provides full retail shopping and county government functions. Interstate Highway 90, passing south of Luverne, has given rise to a major strip development of motels, restaurants, and service stations.

Rural, dispersed businesses are virtually non-existent. The separation of town and country is quite distinct.

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Transportation - Farms and towns are connected by a system of state, county, and township roads. The road network, almost without exception, follows the section lines. Roads form a neat one-mile square grid. Nearly all section lines have roads. Direct town-to-town road connections are rare; those that do exist follow rail lines. The survey system road network is a dominant feature of the landscape, whether viewed from the air or from ground level. Survey offsets create T-junctions for most roads at the northern and southern county boundaries. No correctional offsets were necessary on east-west roads. Hence the road network makes some political boundaries more evident than others.

The railroads do not follow cardinal directions. Often established to connect cities outside the county boundaries and predating Rock County towns, the rail lines follow the shortest distances and easiest grades. Rail abandonments have changed the system connections but have done little to alter town morphology or function. Most rural abandoned tracks have been obliterated for fields.

### Architectural Description

Rock County buildings reflect past investments in construction, changing fashions, and available building materials. The earliest settlement structures, built of sod, dugout, and log construction, have virtually disappeared. A dugout on Section 28, Battle Plain Township, has been shored up over the years, but little integrity remains. These early types of buildings were never very numerous. The railroad brought with it lumber shipments from the eastern forests of Minnesota.

Frame buildings are dominant. Two of the earliest extant structures, the Worthington and Sioux Falls Freight Depot (1876) and the Close Brothers Tenant House (1883) are of simple frame design. Most buildings reflect contemporary fashions and modest investments. A great number of farm and town residences are "Corn Belt cubes," two-story, square houses with pyramidal roofs. Many town residences are plain bungalows. These simple styles are significant in the county but are so numerous as to preclude selection of particular examples. Luverne has a number of houses that approach "high styles:" a couple of Second Empire houses, the Neo-Colonial J.W. Gerber home (1901), and some quasi-Queen Anne houses. The Maplewood Chapel (1895) is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival style.

Most pre-1940 farm buildings are frame. Barns, granaries, corn cribs, and machine sheds are usually of wood construction. Modern farm buildings - metal sheds, corn drying bins, and silos - are scattered throughout the typical farmstead. One of the most striking features are the bright blue Harvestore silos rising above the windbreaks.

Major investments in construction are reflected in the masonry buildings of the county. A few rare farmhouses are built of brick, like the Nuffer Farmhouse (1890). The P.J. Kniss house in Luverne (1879) is of brick Italian Villa style. The earliest substantial commercial buildings,

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built in the 1880s, were of brick. From the early 1890s to about 1905 locally quarried Sioux quartzite was used in commercial and community structures, and for an occasional house. Quartzite was quarried at several locations. The two largest operations were at Blue Mound, just north of Luverne, and in Jasper, at the Jasper Stone Company and Quarry (1890-present) in the northwestern corner of the county. Winchell noted in 1877 that the rocks "will serve as a building material, but are rather hard even for that, and it may be found more economical to bring in by railroad the building stones of the eastern counties." Little outside stone was imported; the First National Bank of Beaver Creek (1917) is one example. Local quartzite was used as a building material, but its use stopped in the first decade of the 20th century. Buildings of quartzite include the R.B. Hinkly house (1892), the Rock County Courthouse (1887-1890), and Holy Trinity Church (1891). Brick construction has continued to the present.

Commercial districts vary from town to town. Many of the smaller town's Main Streets have mixed frame and masonry construction; the bank is often brick or stone and the other buildings are frame. Fire has destroyed many frame structures. The unfilled spaces leave major gaps in streetscapes. Luverne is the only town with a fully-developed Main Street commercial district. Most buildings are two-story, masonry construction. Dates of construction vary widely, and street level facades have been drastically altered.

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## 8. Significance

see individual inventory forms

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<b>Period</b>	<b>Areas of Significance—Check and justify below</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input 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		

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**Specific dates**

**Builder/Architect**

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**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

See Area Significance

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

see attached sheets

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

# 10. Geographical Data see individual inventory forms

Acreege of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UMT References

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Thomas Harvey, Research Associate

organization Minnesota Historical Society

date November 1978

street & number 240 Summit Avenue-Hill House

telephone 612 - 296-9072

city or town St. Paul

state Minnesota

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ local see individual inventory forms

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Russell W. Fridley*

Russell W. Fridley

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 12/18/79

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*W. Ray Luce*  
for Keeper of the National Register

date 3/18/80

Attest: *Kristin O'Connell*  
Chief of Registration

date 3/3/80

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## AREA SIGNIFICANCE

### Historical and Architectural Significance

Rock County's historical significance is based on its development as an agricultural county in the southwestern Minnesota prairies. Railroads, rural settlement, and town service centers are the key factors of this development.

The railroad landgrants included most of the odd-numbered sections in the county. Railroads sold their land or turned the sales operation over to land companies. The major speculator in southwest Minnesota lands was the Close Brothers Land Company. (Map 4) They eventually controlled nearly 150,000 acres of land in five counties. The Close Brothers Tenant House (1883) represents the role of the developer of railroad lands in promoting county settlement.

Several railroad officers and directors gained personal control over large acreages of railroad land. The Rock County Farming Company (1876), an incorporated operation of Horace Thompson, Russell Blakeley, and E.F. Warner, St. Paul capitalists associated with the Sioux City and St. Paul Railroad, was one of the largest bonanza farms in the state.

Railroads functioned as important transportation links. The Worthington and Sioux Falls line reached the county first and built the W & S F Freight Depot (1876). In 1913 the same line, then part of the Omaha line, built the combination freight-and-passenger Omaha Depot just across the tracks from the freight depot. Together these depots represent rail transportation in the county.

Homesteaders settled most of the non-railroad lands. The Nuffer Farmstead (1880) is owned by descendents of that farm's homesteader, Jacob Frederick Nuffer. The farmstead has evolved over the years and reflects changes from the 1890 farmhouse to the 1978 machine shed.

Towns completed the settlement network. Here were the centers of commerce, industry, religion, and education. The Kniss House (1879) is a high point in Rock County architectural style. Kniss, one of the first settlers, platted the townsite of Luverne and was the leading entrepreneur of the county.

Banks, perhaps the most important structures in the smaller towns, often purchased the choicest commercial lots. They are usually the most significant building on Main Street. The First National Bank of Beaver Creek (1917) is the best example in the county.

Town merchants were often well-to-do in the county context, and their residences reflect their affluence, for example the J.W. Gerber House (1901) built by a hardware dealer.

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The Kenneth School (1901) and the Carnegie Library (1904) represent education in Rock County. Most rural schools have been razed. The Kenneth School, located in a small town, is the only remaining two-story frame schoolhouse. The Carnegie Library reflects some of Rock County's ties to the rest of the country.

Two buildings associated with religious activity are included in the nomination: Holy Trinity Church (1891) and Maplewood Chapel (1895). Both have architectural merit in addition to their community significance.

Small town theaters often epitomize "Main Street." The Palace Theater (1915) still functions as a movie house. The interior design is particularly notable.

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APPENDIX 1

Preservation Activity

Preservation activity in Rock County is focused in the county seat. The Rock County Historical Society owns the R.B. Hinkly house, which serves as a museum and has been previously listed on the National Register. The Society is active in encouraging the continued preservation of the Rock County Courthouse and Jail, the Palace Theater, and the Close Brothers Tenant House. Owners of several other properties have expressed strong interests in preservation of their buildings, in particular Maplewood Chapel, the First National Bank of Beaver Creek, and the P.J. Kniss House.

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APPENDIX II

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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MAP 2. Rail Construction and Town Plat Dates, Rock County, Minn.

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