

MAR 11 1982

HISTORIC NAME: Ethnic Hamlet Churches: Stearns County	COUNTY: Stearns
CURRENT NAME: Catholic Settlement	CITY/TWP.: Multiple
LEGAL DESC.: Multiple (see attached structure inventory for individual buildings)	ADDRESS: Multiple
CLASSIFICATION: Buildings <u>X</u> Structure _____ Object _____ District _____	CONDITION: Excellent <u>X</u> Good _____ Fair _____ Deteriorated _____
	SIGNIFICANCE: Local <u>SP</u> State <u>X</u> National _____
	THEME/S: Primary <u>Settlement</u> Secondary <u>Religion</u> Others <u>Architecture</u>
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC: Yes <u>X</u> No _____ Restricted _____	PRESENT USE:
VISIBLE FROM THE ROAD: Yes <u>X</u> No _____	Churches & rectories
OCCUPIED: Yes <u>X</u> No _____	
DATE CONSTRUCTED: Multiple	ORIGINAL USE: Churches & rectories
ORIGINAL OWNER: see individual forms	ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown
OWNER'S NAME AND ADDRESS: Multiple	ACREAGE: Less than one acre <u>N/A</u> see individual forms
LOCAL CONTACT/ORG.: N/A	UTM REFERENCE: See individual forms
FORM PREPARED BY: Thomas Harvey	
DATE: October, 1980	

DESCRIPTION:

The Stearns County landscape strongly reflects the extent of Catholic settlement, with churches as the dominant feature. Over twenty parishes are centered on church-oriented hamlets. Small towns have at least one Catholic church, and more if there are multiple ethnic groups. The church-centered complex quite often has an associated school, rectory, or local convent. Nursing homes and hospitals are found in several locations. St. John's Abbey and St. Benedict's Convent both have colleges. Place names, cemeteries, and religious shrines add to the Catholic landscape. Thirty-six percent of Minnesota's "saint" place names are found in Stearns County; eleven communities are named for saints.

Catholic settlement is best illustrated in the hamlet church. Brick towers and tall steeples tower above small clusters of settlement. Hamlet functions are few; the church is the primary reason for existence. Major investments went into the buildings, and the substantial, well-designed churches are the architectural highlights of much of Stearns County. The five hamlet churches (and three associated rectories) in this nomination possess significant integrity and represent the diversity and early evolution of the ethnic Catholic settlement history of the county. The individual structures are described on the attached structure inventory. The churches retain much of their original integrity. Ornate altars, murals, and decorative painting adorn the interiors. Only the interior of the St. Joseph Church has been modernized.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Stearns County has one of the heaviest rural Catholic populations in Anglo-America. The county is nearly three-quarters Catholic. Several ethnic groups contributed to the early settlement of Stearns County. The significance of those settlers is seen in the churches they built and the hamlets they established. Five churches in particular reflect ethnic-religious settlement history and architectural design. The German churches in St. Joseph and St. Augusta, the Slovenian church in St. Stephen, and St. Anna's Polish Church, were established by the principal ethnic Catholic settlement groups. The church at Arban shows a stage in Catholic settlement history - the frame church most often replaced with a more substantial and permanent brick or stone building.

(see continuation sheet)

MAR 11 1982

"The Catholic Church engaged in organized colonization along the frontier to much greater degree than any other church. It was quite customary for settlers of the Catholic faith to ask the bishop of the state where they proposed to settle or their own priest to recommend suitable locations. Naturally the Catholic Church was anxious to direct the stream of its adherents seeking homesteads to places where a church was already established or where the concentration of Catholic settlers would soon warrant a church and a priest."¹

As early as 1852 a missionary to the Chippewa Indians was advocating Catholic settlement of central Minnesota. Father Pierz published articles in German Catholic newspapers encouraging immigration to the area, and often conducted the first services in the developing settlements. As the Catholic population increased, a group of Benedictines moved from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, to Stearns County in 1856. Benedictine sisters followed and established St. Benedict's Convent in 1857. Germans dominated county settlement but Polish, Irish, and Slovenian settlers also established churches. Pockets of Slovenian and Polish populations are still seen amidst the principal German population.

The first parish churches in Stearns County were most often temporary log structures soon replaced with frame buildings. It was expected that brick or stone churches would replace the frame churches. Consecration required "assured permanence of construction." The Church of the Sacred Heart is significant as a frame Catholic church in a truly rural setting that reflects an early stage in Catholic settlement and landscape development. Unlike every other Catholic church in Stearns County, the Arban church has no surrounding clustered settlement.

The German migration dominated ethnic settlement in Stearns County. German parishes are the oldest, some dating from 1855, and the most numerous. There are seventeen German, church-centered hamlets. The Church of St. Joseph, built in 1869, is the oldest Catholic church in the county and in 1871 became the first consecrated Catholic church in the state. The original log church of the St. Augusta parish was built in 1856 at a newly platted townsite that failed to develop. In 1873 the present Church of St. Mary Help of Christians was built a few miles south near the St. Augusta railroad station, showing adaptation to the changing transportation network.

Polish settlers located in western Brockway and Holding townships. The hamlets of Opole and St. Anna are centers of Polish settlement. The Church of the Immaculate Conception in St. Anna is the older of the hamlet churches. Both parishes date from the late 1880s. The church was built in 1902.

Stearns County is reported to have the first rural Slovenian settlement in the United States. Two hamlets, St. Stephen and St. Anthony, were established by Slovenian Catholics. The St. Stephen Church replaced a thirty-four year old log and frame structure in 1904. The rectory was built in 1894. St. Anthony was settled by Slovenians who first passed through St. Stephen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

¹ Hildegard Binder Johnson, "Factors Influencing the Distribution of the German Pioneer Population in Minnesota," Agricultural History, 19 (1945), p. 54.

Ingolf Vogeler, "The Roman Catholic Culture Region of Central Minnesota," Pioneer America, 8:2 (1976).

Anthony T. Rozycki, "The Evolution of Hamlets in Stearns County," unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dept. of Geography, University of Minnesota, 1977.