

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

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

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

For HCPS use only

received APR 15 1980

date entered JUL 17 1980

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

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

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number The County Limits of Wilkin County, Minnesota not for publication

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district 7th

state Minnesota code 22 county Wilkin code 167

**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, Wilkin County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Breckenridge state Minnesota

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Statewide Survey of Historic Resources

has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

date 1979 federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local ☐

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

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JUL 14 1980

DATE ENTERED JUL 17 1980

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

This Multiple Resource Area Nomination is based on a survey of standing structures conducted in Wilkin 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 properties and continually being gained as the statewide survey progresses, and it is quite possible that additional Wilkin 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 Wilkin County eligible for nomination.

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

## WILKIN COUNTY

The standing structure survey was conducted during the spring and summer of 1979 in conjunction with a survey of adjacent Clay County. A geographer with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office conducted the survey. Assistance on the Wilkin County historical context and on inventoried properties was provided by historians and architectural historians on the SHPO staff.

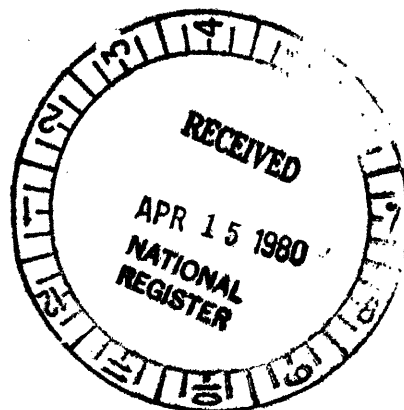
County and regional histories, narrative materials, maps, and archival sources were consulted to identify potentially significant structures. The Wilkin County Historical Society and county residents provided additional information.

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.

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.

Survey Method



JUL 17 1980

APR 15 1980  
JUL 17 1980Physical Description

Wilkin County borders North Dakota in west central Minnesota. The Otter Tail River, running east-west through the county, and the Bois de Sioux River, running north-south along the county's western boundary, join at Breckenridge to form the Red River. The lands bordering the river are exceedingly flat and formed as the bed of Glacial Lake Agassiz. The rich, deep soil is highly productive. Toward the eastern third of the county, the flat plain gives way to rolling uplands. Aside from the rivers forming the western boundary and the striking flatness of the land, there are no outstanding physiographic features in the county. The original vegetation was high grass prairie broken by trees found along streams. Wilkin County is in a transition zone between the forests of eastern Minnesota and the vast prairies of North Dakota.

Historical Development

Though significant permanent settlement in Wilkin County post-dates 1870, prior to the 1870s the county was an important link in early transportation routes linking St. Paul with Canadian Red River settlements. The Red River served as an important waterway for central North American fur operations, both from Canada and, after the establishment of Ft. Snelling at the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers in 1819, from the United States. Oxcart transportation formed the link between the Red River and the Mississippi River. By 1858 over 600 vehicles traveled the trails each year.

In 1857 a group of speculators surveyed several townsites along the river, including the town of Breckenridge. In the same year the United States Army established Fort Abercrombie on the west bank of the river near McCauleyville. Early settlement at Breckenridge and McCauleyville virtually disappeared with the Sioux Uprisings of 1862.

Breckenridge began as a stagecoach and oxcart station and in 1871 it became the western terminus of the St. Paul and Pacific railroad. The city plat was refiled in 1872, and division point status for the town assured success. The developing rail network in Wilkin County played a vital role in other settlement as well. Railroads furnished the transportation facilities that allowed agricultural development, encouraged settlement, and established several townsites. Three major railroads, all emanating from the Twin Cities, cross the county. The St. Paul and Pacific, later to be part of the Great Northern, established the first line in the county and later extended its lines to the northern Red River Valley. The Northern Pacific and Soo lines later built tracks crossing Wilkin County from east to west. Both the Great

Northern and Soo lines platted townsites in Wilkin County. Figure 1 shows the rail construction and original town plat dates for Wilkin County. The Great Northern, and to a lesser extent the Northern Pacific, received large land grants in Wilkin County. Both companies promoted rural settlement to sell off their land holdings and were active past the turn of the century.

Agriculture has been the key economic factor in Wilkin County history. Though rail lines entered the county in the early 1870s, the area was in a depression until late in the decade. Early settlers took advantage of the Homestead Act to establish farms on government lands. Few were interested in purchasing railroad lands. Financial problems for the railroads and the extensive land grants led to the establishment of large bonanza farms. Railroad stockholders established large-scale, specialized wheat farming operations that attracted national attention. The bonanza farm era continued into the 1880s along with a boom in family farm homesteading. By 1891 less than 1,500 acres of unappropriated government land remained.

After the 1880s, as land speculators and bonanza operators sold their holdings and swamps were drained, agricultural development was rapid. Within about thirty years the present-day pattern of Wilkin County agriculture was set. The early emphasis on wheat has given way to diversified farming. Crops have changed since the first decades of the 20th century. Sugarbeets and sunflowers are now far more important than flax and potatoes, but the diversified pattern remains.

The growth in Wilkin County population reflects the development of the county. An unofficial census of 1860 showed only 40 residents. By 1870, still before the railroads, only 295 people resided in the county. With the expansion of the rail network, growth was rapid. The 1880 population of 1906 grew to 4,346 by 1890 and to 8,080 by 1900. In 1910 the population reached to just over 9,000 and has fluctuated between 9,000 and 11,000 since. Slightly under half of the 1970 county population of 9,389 resided in Breckenridge, the county seat.

### Cultural Landscape

In developing the agricultural potential of Wilkin County, man has dramatically altered the natural landscape. The tall grass prairie has been nearly completely plowed under to create cropland. Extensive swampy areas have been artificially drained to create usable land. Agriculture is central to the Wilkin County economy. In 1976, the 815 farms occupied over 98% of the land area. Average farm size was 573 acres. Large scale, diversified agriculture is common. Wilkin County ranked fourth in the state's production of sunflowers, sixth in barley, and seventh in wheat and sugarbeets. Farmsteads dominate the rural, agricultural landscape. The farmsteads are small and compact, and protected by tree windbreaks on their north and west sides. Long shelter belts protect some fields. Few abandoned farmsteads are standing; they are soon removed to clear more land for crops.

Several of Wilkin County's fifteen identifiable "central places" have disappeared. The former rail side settlements of Manston and Childs show no signs of earlier existence. Lawndale and Everdell are reduced to a handful of buildings. The other towns range from the old river settlement of McCauleyville; to Brushvale and its trackside elevator; to Breckenridge, the county seat and a major Great Northern rail division point.

The smaller towns, all located on railroad tracks, serve as agricultural trade centers and shipping points. Industrial and storage facilities, grain elevators, lumber yards, and farm equipment lots, line the tracks. Commercial establishments located along the central main street. Residences, churches, and schools are located away from the business street on side streets.

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### Historical Significance

Wilkin County's historical significance is in its role as a transportation corridor and its development as an agricultural county in Minnesota. The earliest transportation role of the county was on and along the Red River. The north-south orientation of the oxcart trails linking St. Paul and Canadian settlements gave way to stage connections, with Campbell and Breckenridge serving as important stage stops. The St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, passing through Campbell and on to Breckenridge reinforced the north-south transportation focus of Wilkin County.

Significant permanent settlement and agricultural development began with the expanding rail network. Between 1871 and 1887 the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and Soo Line Railroads had built several lines crossing the county. The railroads and free government land opened the area to agricultural settlement. Walter J. Peet homesteaded the Peet Farm (1902) in 1881. He farmed and taught school in nearby Dakota Territory before building the present farmhouse in 1902. Wilkin County settlers were primarily of eastern American origin, but significant numbers of Germans and Scandinavians also settled in the area. Stiklestad Church (1898) was the center of a Norwegian settlement.

The agricultural patterns of Wilkin County were established between 1880 and 1925. The early wheat farms gave way to diversified family farms. The David N. Peet Farm (1902) represents the turn-of-the-century family farm with its farmhouse, barn, windmill and wood-stave silo. Wilkin County is well known for a corporate experiment in diversified farming dating from the early 1920s. Femco Farm #2 (1922) was one of five of Frederic E. Murphy's farms. The Femco Farms lasted until 1940 and became internationally famous for their Holstein dairy cows.

The towns of Wilkin County developed as centers for government, commerce, education, and farm service functions. Trackside grain elevators and stockyards served the area farmers and provided a vital link to markets. Stores served both town and county residents. Social services and certain medical and commercial functions are reflected in the Rothsay IOOF Hall (1899), a building that housed a succession of offices as well as a fraternal organization. The Wolverton Public School (1906/1917) shows community emphasis on education, a growing population to be served that necessitated an added wing, and the decline in demand that led to consolidation and closing in 1978. Government functions were often centered in towns, from places as small as Tenney with its Fire Hall (1904) to Breckenridge, the county seat, and the Wilkin County Courthouse (1929).

Area Significance

## WILKIN COUNTY

### Architectural Significance

Rural buildings in Wilkin County reflect changing tastes, agricultural development, and economic success. Prior to the railroads, building materials were limited to log and sod. Early subsistence structures have virtually disappeared. With agricultural success, farmers replaced claim shanties with substantial farmhouse like the house on the Peet Farm (1902). Lumber brought in on the railroads allowed construction of the silo and barn on the Peet Farm. Farm structures reflect the multiple function of diversified farms. Femco Farm #2 has dairy, sheep, and horse barns, a machine shed, silos, and minor outbuildings as well as the farmhouse.

High style architecture is atypical of Wilkin County. Residences, both rural and in towns, are usually modest and unadorned. Local builder-vernacular uses of popular styles are found. Public and commercial buildings are generally of more architectural significance than are residences. Brick construction, seldom used in houses, is found in the IOOF Hall (1899) in Rothsay and in the Wolverton Public School (1906/1917). Though of simple metal-sided, frame construction, the diminutive Tenney Fire Hall (1904) is a visual landmark in the small town. Religious buildings often reflect great pride in design and care in upkeep. The Stiklesstad Church (1898), an apsidal, frame building retains its original integrity. The pattern of arched windows, green trim, and the tower and steeple is striking.

The architectural monument of Wilkin County is the County Courthouse (1929). Constructed of Bedford limestone, the Beaux Arts/City Beautiful building sits on a full city block and is surrounded by spacious lawns. An interior dome has a geometric-patterned stained glass skylight. Murals depicting early Wilkin County settlement decorate second floor walls.



## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached bibliography

UTM NOT VERIFIED

## 10. Geographical Data -- see individual inventory forms

Acreage of nominated property

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle name

Quadrangle scale

UMT References

A          
Zone Easting Northing

B          
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

The county limits of Wilkin County

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

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Thomas Harvey/Research Associate

organization Minnesota Historical Society

date December 1979

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

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

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date

3-12-80

For HCERS use only

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

date

7/17/80

Keeper of the National Register

Attest

Kristin J. O'Connell

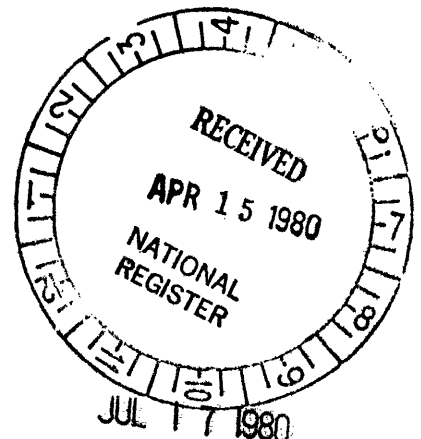
date

7/14/80

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- Towns platted by private proprietors
- Towns platted by railroads and their affiliates
- ◇ Unplatted towns

1. Breckenridge (1872)
2. Campbell (1872)
3. Doran (1872)
4. Rothsay (1887)
5. Tenney (1887)
6. Kent (1889)
7. McCauleyville (1894)
8. Foxhome (1897)
9. Wolverton (1899)
10. Everdell (1899)
11. Nashua (1899)
12. Lawndale (1903)
13. Brushvale (1906)
14. Childs
15. Manston

- A. St. Paul and Pacific (1871)
- B. Red River and Manitoba (1877)
- C. St. Paul and Pacific, St. Vincent Extension (1879)
- D. Northern Pacific Fergus and Black Hills (1882)
- E. Moorhead and Southeastern (1887)
- F. Minneapolis and Pacific (1887)

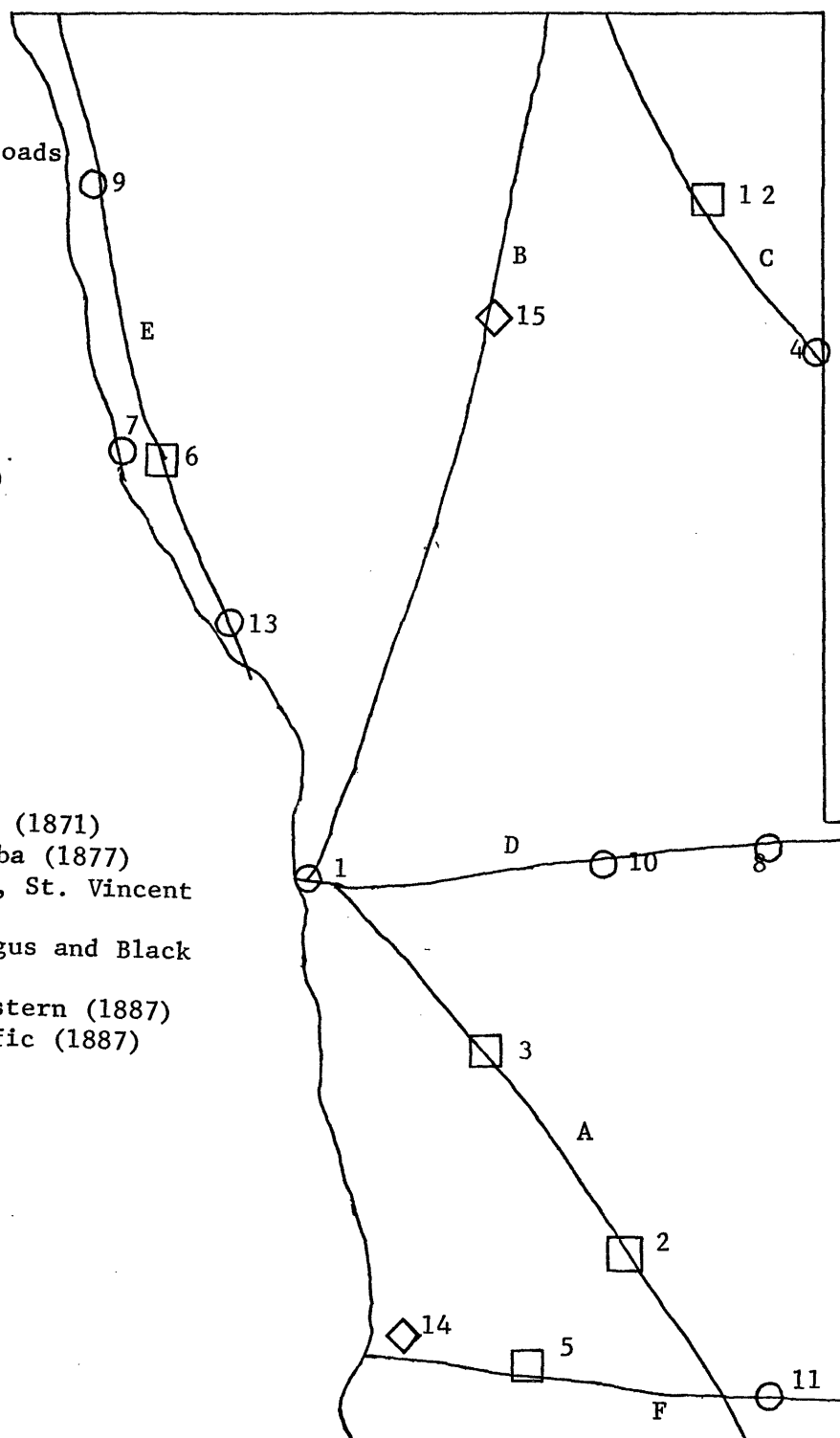
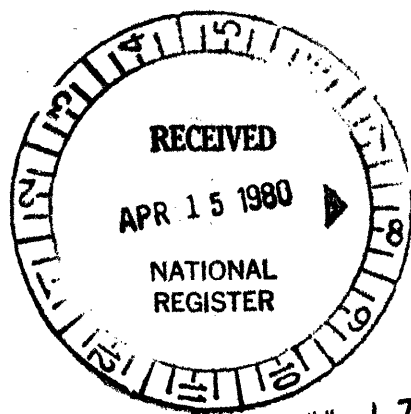


FIGURE 1. Railroad Construction and Town Plat Dates, Wilkin County, Minnesota.