

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form

APR 04 1989

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

Red Brick Houses in Wabasha, Minnesota Associated with Merchant-Tradesmen

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

Early Agriculture and River Settlement in Minnesota, 1840s-1870s  
Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction in Minnesota, 1870s-1920s

**C. Geographical Data**

Corporate limits of the City of Wabasha

See continuation sheet

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Nina M. Archabal 2/15/89  
Signature of certifying official Nina M. Archabal Date  
Minnesota State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Beth Boland 5/15/89  
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register Date

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## E. Statement of Historic Contexts

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Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

This multiple property document form includes a variety of red brick dwellings in the southeastern Minnesota community of Wabasha. Nineteenth century brick houses form a distinct and coherent architectural type in Wabasha. Built between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the Craftsman movement, the houses were the most elaborate and expensive residences to be erected in a city devoid of the usual proliferation of Victorian exuberance in wood construction. In appearance, they range from the severe simplicity of mid-century classicism appropriate to the state historic context of Early Agriculture and River Settlement, to the ornamental excesses of the fully developed Italianate style captured in the state historic context of Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction. Yet their appearance also reflects an array of shared traits and social contexts: built of regional stone and brick, dressed with locally crafted stone and metal detail, and owned by prominent local merchant-tradesmen, they stand as a cohesive but evolving heritage of Wabasha's first two generations of commercial success.

The first historic context with visible remains in Wabasha is Early Agriculture and River Settlement. This context is set in southeastern Minnesota along the Mississippi River, from which settlement spread westward. It is marked by subsistence farming evolving into cash-based, single-crop (wheat) production and the sudden development of townsites directly on the river. Wabasha was among the first of these towns to be settled, having already achieved a population of over one hundred by the time of its initial platting in 1854. The town rapidly emerged as a supply and distribution center over a multi-county area, including parts of Wisconsin. Although the town owed its markets to the developing lumber and wheat economies, its central figures for the most part remained curiously detached from the land and agriculture-based speculation and investment that created quick wealth in the nearby communities of Lake City and Reads Landing. Instead, the town attracted and developed a remarkable stock of merchant-tradesmen in such diverse areas as clothing, tinsmithy, and hostelry. It was this class, and not financiers, commission agents, or grain merchants that built the distinctive group of red brick houses in Wabasha.

Most of the brick houses were not built until the railroad era was well underway, perhaps in part because their owners were engaged in businesses that accumulated profits more slowly than the speculators and financiers. As a result, the majority of the properties fall within the state historic context of Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction. This context was marked by the development of common systems of production, transportation, and processing of agricultural commodities; the emergence of small towns along the rail lines; and the increasing centralization of commerce and wealth into major urban centers. Wabasha profited most among its competitors from the introduction of rail transport, because the bridging of the Mississippi occurred immediately above its own quay in 1882. Yet its population remained stable, and it continued to be dominated in the milling and flour distribution industry by Lake City and Red Wing to the north. The town finally managed to establish a stable bank in 1881, and its first building and loan association in 1883. Characteristically, a local builder, D.H. Evans, was an incorporator of each, while the remaining incorporators were for the most part fellow tradesmen and merchants.

The ease of access to high quality limestone outcroppings throughout the county, together with the presence of large shale clay deposits along the riverways, created an inexhaustible supply of materials for masonry building. By 1859, only a year after the town had been incorporated, Wabasha had a two-story stone

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schoolhouse. But brick production awaited a second phase of technological development, and tended to follow a north-to-south line of progress. Red Wing was the unquestioned center of brick manufacture on the Upper Mississippi in the 1850s, Lake City began to compete locally in the late 1860s, while Wabasha did not come into the picture until the next decade and never approached the production figures of the other two cities. So its brick houses appear to have exploited a regional supply without necessarily drawing on strictly local production materials. The driving force appears to have been more a matter of individual preference or local taste than of material accessibility, for Lake City continued to use nearly all of its brick for commercial building, and Red Wing, whose brick manufacturers doubled as contractors, continued to build more lavish wood than brick residences.

In keeping with the Anglo-American heritage of the men who paid for them, the first brick houses in Wabasha were in the unadorned classical mode shared by the Greek Revival and Federal Period styles. Greek Revival in particular was the overwhelmingly predominant style in Minnesota until the very last years before the introduction of railroads. It was well-suited to the needs of Americans who had come west to have around them some tangible symbol of the education and culture which had not yet developed in the fledgling communities.

With the construction of railroads, the influx of recent stylistic trends in the east became widespread, even as the means of implementing the material demands of the new styles became more accessible. After 1874, brick houses constructed in Wabasha plainly belong to the second historic context, Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction. The most significant of the lot also grew out of a surprisingly small ethnic and familial base. Most of the original owners were of German stock, and the central figure was Lucas Kuehn. Kuehn had emigrated in 1852 from Baden, Germany, the same year as fellow Badener Lorenz Ginthner; the two also settled in Wabasha in 1855. Shortly thereafter, Kuehn married a Ginthner. Moreover, between the times of construction of the Kuehn and Ginthner Houses (1878 and 1882, respectively), Lucas Kuehn set up his two daughters and their two German husbands (now leading members of his mercantile firm) in houses neighboring and very similar to his own. All of these houses, like Ginthner's, were built with a sidehall in the front wing and featured exuberant, Italianate style ornamentation. The 1888 Julius Schmidt House varies the pattern by reverting to an "L"-shaped plan and introducing tinneled steel as an ornamental material, but once again the owner was of German stock and the style of choice was Italianate.

Upwards of twenty additional brick houses survive from the 19th century in Wabasha. Many of these may be candidates for expansion of the multiple property listing, especially into late Victorian eclecticism. Due to the addition of modern exterior siding or other forms of excessive modification, others are of secondary importance. But as an aggregation, their very existence confirms a major theme of the listing: Wabasha brick residences form a distinctive, and for a small Minnesota town, rare architectural heritage. Their frequent occurrence in older residential districts makes a profound cumulative impact on the appearance of the city, particularly when coupled with the absence until 1909 of comparable frame houses.

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The builders and architects of Wabasha's brick houses left few traces. The city itself may have provided much of the contracting and brick-laying personnel, though both Lake City and Red Wing builders frequently came into town for public or commercial projects. William B. Lutz was the pioneer mason in Wabasha. He arrived from St. Louis in 1855 and was likely responsible for a large number of stone and very early brick buildings. However, Lutz left for Lake City in 1864, and his work fell largely on the shoulders of his apprentice, the Pennsylvanian J.H. Evans. Evans trained both of his sons as bricklayers while they were in their teens, he became the most prominent contractor in the city, and was a major force in the formation of Wabasha's first bank and building and loan association. However, as Wabasha itself neither produced nor attracted any architects until the 20th century, it is likely that prominent outsiders, such as Ewin Alexander in Lake City or Charles Maybury in Winona had a hand in the more elaborately planned and detailed houses.

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## F. Associated Property Types

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I. Name of Property Type Red Brick Residences

### II. Description

The property type is principally identified by its exterior building material, a standard molded brick of red to orange-red cast. All of the properties are also one-and-a-half or two stories in height, with two stories the rule. Four of the six rest on corner lots, while the other two fill irregular or expanded lots in the middle of the block. This is consistent with their role as the most important class of residences in the city. Each property is also associated with a prominent Wabasha merchant or tradesman.

Stylistically, the type shows considerable variation over time, from Greek Revival and Federal style through the Italianate style to the mix of stylistic traits characteristic of late Victorian period building practice.

### III. Significance

Wabasha's brick houses are significant expressions of the emergence of a strong and distinctive merchant class in the early history of the city. Those built within the Early Agriculture and River Settlement context clearly relate to that context in style as well as building materials. The brick houses of this period are quite conservative, following closely the dictates of Eastern styles of the pre-Civil War era. They are also devoid of vernacularization, literary and historical associations being a more important standard of this period than free expression in building matters. The sudden transition to the Italianate style perfectly suits the transformation of Wabasha within the historic context of Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction. The elaborate cornicework and window trimmings called for by the newly-introduced style were for the first time readily available. Brick shipment also became an easy matter, permitting local builders to erect double walls with brick from as far away as Milwaukee and St. Louis with very little additional expense. Details such as their watertables and windowhoods show striking similarities in design and planning schemes, yet vary

IV. Registration Requirements enough to prevent the identification of a single builder's mark.

1. The building must have red brick walls, stand one-and-one-half or two stories in height, and be used as a single-family dwelling at the time of construction.
2. The building must have been erected for a Wabasha merchant or tradesman (the lines being blurred in such cases as merchant-tailors).
3. The building must rest on its original foundation, the plan or walls of its principal architectural elements must be substantially intact, and the building must retain its original roofline and cornice profile.
4. The brick must not be coated or covered in a way that is irreversible or alters its masonry character, e.g., with stucco.
5. All masonry detailing must be intact.
6. Architectural detailing must be substantially intact for the house to be a good example of a style or mode of building.
7. The building must possess enough architectural character and/or historic significance to qualify for consideration for the National Register of Historic Places.

See continuation sheet

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See continuation sheet for additional property types

## G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

The multiple property listing for red brick houses in Wabasha associated with merchant-tradesmen initially includes properties constructed before 1890. It is based on the Wabasha County inventory of historic properties, which included a street by street survey of the city of Wabasha and a County Assessor's records search for dates of construction and original owners of all nineteenth century brick houses deemed eligible for potential listing in the National Register. The names generated by this search were checked against city, county, and state directories, county histories, and other sources of biographical information to discover patterns of ownership and relationships between owners, and to assess the historical significance of the owners identified.

The historic contexts were identified in the statewide planning process and were selected for their relevance to the themes, time frame, and historical associations of nineteenth century residential brick construction in Wabasha. The requirements for integrity were derived from an analysis and evaluation of existing properties, particularly those that form the initial core of the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet

## H. Major Bibliographical References

Curtiss-Wedge, Franklin, et al. History of Wabasha County. Winona, MN.: H.C. Cooper, 1920.

Directory of Wabasha County, Minnesota, 1896-1897. Wabasha: Interstate Directory Company.

Gazetteer and Directory of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Branches... Detroit: Polk, Murphy and Co., 1875.

History of Wabasha County... Chicago: H.H. Hill and Co., 1884.

Minnesota Gazetteer and Business Directory. St. Paul: Groff and Bailey, 1865.

Mitchell, H.C. Geographical and Statistical Sketch of...Wabasha County. Rochester, MN.: Federal Union Book and Job Printing House, 1870.

Wabasha County Assessor's Records, City of Wabasha, 1862, 1900.

Wabasha Herald Annual, 1889. Wabasha: O.F. Collier and Co., 1889.

WPA Writer's Project, County Annals: Wabasha County. Unpublished, 1939.  See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency

- Local government  
 University  
 Other

Specify repository: SHPO vertical files; Wabasha County Courthouse vaults.

## I. Form Prepared By

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