

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

APR 18 1988
MAY 19 1988

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

1. Name

historic Gran Evangelical Lutheran Church

and/or common Gran Church

2. Location

street & number County Road 92 and County Highway 20

N/A not for publication

city, town Popple Township

vicinity of Bagley

state Minnesota

code 22

county Clearwater

code 029

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Congregation, Our Savior's Lutheran Church

street & number C/O Pastor Robert Lawson

city, town Lengby

N/A vicinity of

state Minnesota 56651

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder's Office, Clearwater County Court House

street & number North Main Street, Box 307

city, town Bagley

state Minnesota 56621

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Clearwater County Historic Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date August 1986

federal state county local

depository for survey records Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office - Minnesota Historical Soc.

city, town St. Paul

state Minnesota

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Occupying a wooded site on a farm road in Popple Township, Gran Lutheran Church is a rectangular, log-framed, gable-roofed structure with a rubble fieldstone foundation, an exterior rubble fieldstone chimney on the east elevation, and a wood-shingle roof. The principal (north) facade displays a double, wood door with a boarded transom. There are boarded window openings on the other elevations. Hand-sawn and squared, the logs are chinked with cement and joined at the corners in a dovetail notch. The structure measures about 20 feet in width (east to west) and about 25 feet in length (north to south).

There have been two minor alterations: in 1937, the stone chimney was rebuilt (it bears an inscription with this date), and in the 1970s, the original, wood door was replaced with the present entrance.

This property consists of one contributing building.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1897 **Builder/Architect** Ole Eneberg

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

During the early twentieth century, American church reformers frequently criticized the establishment of small rural churches on the grounds that such institutions resulted primarily from interdenominational rivalry, which "overchurched" an area with poorly maintained buildings and ill-trained, part-time ministers.¹ Such criticism has little relevance for Gran Lutheran Church. When the building was constructed in 1897, it was quite literally the only church in a newly settled region. Its founding pastor, Rev. G. P. Nesseth, was a college-educated, seminary-trained minister who remained with his congregation until his death in 1937. Currently maintained as a community historic site, Gran Lutheran Church is historically significant for its vital role in the settlement of Clearwater County and in the religious life of the area's Norwegian-immigrant community.

After the Civil War, lumber companies moved into the north-central region of Minnesota to harvest the area's rich pine lands. By the early 1890s, timber crews had reached the Clearwater County area, which then comprised the western part of Beltrami County. Homesteaders entered the region simultaneously with loggers, either clearing and selling their own timber so they could begin farming, or purchasing "cutover" land from lumber companies. During most of the 1890s, lumbering and agricultural settlement proceeded slowly, hampered by the lack of rail transportation. In 1898, however, the Great Northern Railway built a main line across the northern part of the region, and the resulting increase in settlement and logging led to the formation of Clearwater County as a separate entity in 1902.²

The earliest center of homesteading and lumbering was Popple Township, situated in the north-western corner of the county. The first permanent settlers were largely Norwegian immigrants, who, in 1895-1896, banded together to form the region's first church congregation, which they named Gran Lutheran Evangelical Church. Their pastor was Rev. G. P. Nesseth, an ordained Lutheran minister of Norwegian stock who had come to the newly opened pine region to undertake missionary work. Rev. Nesseth and his flock were members of the Norwegian Lutheran Evangelical Church of America (commonly known as the "Norwegian Synod"), which emphasized the retention of traditional Norwegian culture, language, and liturgy. Like many of the Synod's ministers, Rev. Nesseth had been educated at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and had then attended the Synod's seminary in the Twin Cities. During his first two years in the Clearwater County area, Rev. Nesseth held services in the homes of congregation members. In April 1897, however, the Gran congregation decided to build the region's first church. The membership donated logs, land, labor, and about \$20 in cash for the building, which was completed in July of the same year. Ole Eneberg, a church member, supervised construction. Gradually expanding its membership to Lutherans of other ethnic backgrounds, the Gran congregation continued to use their log-framed church until 1953, when the membership merged with another local congregation to form Our Savior's Lutheran Church in the nearby community of Ebro. Although the building has been vacant for three decades, it is maintained as a community historic site. In 1973, the Clearwater County Historical Society placed a plaque on the building commemorating its historical importance as "the first church built in Clearwater County."³

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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

Gran Evangelical Lutheran Church, Popple Township, vicinity of Bagley, Minnesota

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Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 1

NOTES

1. See James H. Madison, "Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950," Journal of American History , (13 December 1986), 645-668.
2. The Gran Church is associated with two statewide "historic contexts": "Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction, 1870s-1920s" and "Northern Minnesota Lumbering, 1870s -1930s." For further elaboration, see Minnesota History in Sites and Structures. Historic Context Outlines: The Post-Contact Period Contexts (St. Paul: Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, 1985), pp. 10-15. See also Barbara Hightower and Jeffrey A. Hess, "Clearwater County Historic Properties Survey," unpublished report prepared for Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, 1986.
3. The early settlement of Popple Township and Clearwater County is discussed in Ralph A. Larson, The Story of Clearwater County, 1902 -1952 (Bagley, MN: Farmers Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 4-9. The information on Rev. Nesseth's training, the history of the Gran congregation, and the building of the Gran Church is primarily derived from the author's interview with Nesseth's daughters, Mrs. Tom Jackson and Valborg Nesseth, January 18, 1987. Valborg Nesseth has also prepared a brief, untitled history of Gran Church, which she based on church records and her father's personal papers, both of which are in her possession. On Luther College and the Norwegian Synod, see Joseph M. Shaw, History of St. Olaf College, 1874-1974 (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf Press, 1974), p. 18.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Hess, Jeffrey A. Interview with Mrs. Tom Jackson and Valborg Nesseth, January 18, 1987.
Larson, Ralph A. The Story of Clearwater County, 1902-1952. Bagley, MN: Farmers Publishing Company, n.d.
Nesseth, Valborg. History of Gran Church, n.d., unpublished, in Gran Church File, Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.5 acres

Quadrangle name Bagley Quadrangle

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	5	3	1	3	0	3	0	5	2	6	8	3	3	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet, Section 10, page 1

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeffrey A. Hess

organization Jeffrey A. Hess, Historical Consultant

date January 28, 1987

street & number 305 Grain Exchange Building

telephone (612) 338-1987

city or town Minneapolis

state Minnesota 55415

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Nina M. Archabal

Nina M. Archabal

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 4/8/88

For NPS use only

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

~~Entered in the~~
~~National Register~~

date

5-19-88

Andrew Byrne
for Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Gran Evangelical Lutheran Church, Popple Township, Vicinity of Bagley, Minnesota

Section number 10 Page 1 Verbal boundary description and justification

Beginning at the northeast corner of the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section number twenty-two, township one hundred forty-seven north of range thirty-eight west, running thence west on Section line fifteen rods, thence south parallel to forty line east thereof, sixteen rods, thence east parallel to section line north thereof, to forty line, thence north on forty line to point of beginning. The boundary includes the entire one and one half acre parcel that has historically been associated with the property.