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NPS Form 10-900 (Rev. 8/86) Wisconsin Word Processor Format (1331D) (Approved 3/87)

DIVISION OF NATIONAL REGISTER PROGRAMS NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. 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. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries. Use letter quality printer in 12 pitch, using an 85 space line and a 10 space left margin. Use only archival paper (20 pound, acid free paper with a 2% alkaline reserve).

1. Name of Property

historic name Skumrud, Nils, House other names/site number Thrune, Lloyd and Ruth, Cabin

2. Location

street & number 200 feet east of the intersection of State Trunk highway 162 and highways 14 & 61 n/a Not for Publication city, town Coon Valley X vicinity state Wisconsin code WI county Vernon code 123 zip code 54623

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, No. of Resources within Property. Rows include private/public-State/Federal, building(s)/district/site/structure/object, and contributing/noncontributing buildings/sites/structures/objects.

Name of related multiple property listing: none

No. of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register none

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

[Handwritten Signature]

2/21/90
Date

Signature of certifying official
State Historic Preservation Officer-WI
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

**Entered in the
National Register**

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet

 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register.

 removed from the National Register.

 other, (explain:)

[Handwritten Signature] 7/11/90
Date

Signature of the Keeper

Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/ single dwelling

Recreation and Culture/ Museum

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7. Description

| Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions) | Materials (enter categories from instructions) |
|--|---|
| Other: Single-pen log house | foundation <u>limestone</u> walls <u>log</u> roof <u>shingle</u> other <u>wood</u> |

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Skumsrud house is located in the upper half of the valley formed by Coon Creek, in Vernon County, Wisconsin. The region is dominated by narrow valleys, called "coulees" locally, steep hillsides, and broad ridge-tops, features common to the "driftless" area (The western uplands of the unglaciated area of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa). The house is situated on its original site on the valley floor, facing east. The west and south walls are near the top of a curving bank which slopes down fifty years to a creek, a tributary of Coon Creek. Trees line this bank. There are no associated historic buildings extant. The setting (in association with the creek) is typical of frontier farm houses. Possible associated structures have been replaced at this site by the buildings of a modern farmstead (house and outbuildings). The Skumsrud house is located approximately three miles west of the town of Coon Valley, through which Coon Creek runs. Coon Valley was platted in 1859 and served as the market, religious, and administrative center for surrounding farms, including the Skumsrud place: a function the town still serves today (pop. 748).

The Skumsrud house is a small, detached one and one-half story building (13'9" x 18'9"). The building incorporates several important Scandinavian folk architectural characteristics, typical of pioneer efforts in this country, including hewn log walls (logs are 8-10" square), gable end walls built completely of logs, purlins (8 in number--a purlin is a timber placed horizontally to support rafters), plus a ridge pole of tamarack. Constructed in 1853, the house has joinery characteristics typical of early Scandinavian log dwellings, including hewed visible wall surfaces and full dovetail corner notches. The log walls are chinked with wood strips and mortar.

The east wall features a centered doorway. The south gable end includes a doorway situated near the east corner and a small gable peak door, which provided exterior access to the loft. The west wall includes a centered double-hung wood window with six over six panes. The north gable end also has a centered window of this type. These windows are original. The foundation is mortared limestone. The roof is covered with wooden shingles. The chimney is mortared red brick. The interior and exterior walls have been given coatings of calcimine as a decorative and protective finish.

X See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: nationally statewide X locally

Applicable National Register Criteria X A B X C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

| Areas of Significance | Period of Significance | Significant Dates |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Architecture | 1853 | 1853 (1) |
| Ethnic Heritage - European | 1853-1886 | |
| Exploration/Settlement | 1853-1869 | |

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Skomsrud, Nils /builder (2)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Skumsrud House is locally significant under criterion C as representative of a particular method of ethnically-derived folk construction commonly used by 19th century Scandinavian immigrants to Wisconsin. This hand-hewn log, one-room house is a typical example of a simply constructed permanent dwelling type commonly built during Wisconsin's white settlement era.³ Built in 1853 by Nils Skumsrud, this house is locally significant under criterion A for Exploration/Settlement as the oldest known extant dwelling in the county and is representative of the earliest pioneering efforts in this portion of Wisconsin.⁴ It is also locally significant under criterion A as a reflection of Norwegian ethnic heritage. Norwegians settlers became one of the most significant components of the state population.⁵

Historic Context: Immigration and Settlement

According to Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, the state of Wisconsin was a primary destination for Norwegian immigrants to the United States and an important center of Norwegian-American life during the period of 1836 to 1935. In 1860 Norwegians made up 15.9% of Wisconsin's immigrant population. By 1870, one-fourth of this ethnic population resided in western Wisconsin in an area stretching north from Crawford to St. Croix counties. By the turn of the century 25% of Norwegian immigrants to the United States lived in Wisconsin.⁶

The primary reason for this migration was economic. Overpopulation and an accompanying lack of natural resources combined with socio-religious upheaval placed enormous pressure on the population of Scandinavian countries. Reports of abundant land and economic resources led to a mass movement of Norwegians to the

 X See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Previous documentation on file (NPS): X See continuation sheet

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

State Historic preservation office previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Specify repository: Norskedalen

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one

UTM References

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|----------|------------------|--------------------|
| A | <u>1/5</u> | <u>6/5/8/2/0/0</u> | <u>4/8/3/9/8/5/0</u> | B | <u>/</u> | <u>/ / / / /</u> | <u>/ / / / / /</u> |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| C | <u>/</u> | <u>/ / / / /</u> | <u>/ / / / / /</u> | D | <u>/</u> | <u>/ / / / /</u> | <u>/ / / / / /</u> |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is in section 12 (14N, 6W) of Vernon County, Wisconsin. The boundary is fifteen feet around the building (see map).

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The Skumsrud house is located on the former Thrune farm which contains a complex of turn of the century farm buildings. Since there are no other contributing buildings, sites, or grounds on this property, the Skumsrud house is being nominated as a singular significant resource.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Charles R. Lee, Assistant Professor of History

organization University of Wisconsin-La Crosse date July 26, 1989

street & number Department of History telephone (608) 785-8350

city or town La Crosse state Wisconsin zip code 54601

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vic. Coon Valley, Vernon Co., WI

The interior of the house features four exposed chamfered ceiling beams, three large pegs situated in the north wall, at the east corner, that provide access steps to the loft, and a pine floor. A small wood-burning stove sits in the northeast corner of the one room, which functioned as living area during the day and sleeping quarters at night. The loft was a sleeping loft, with access gained either through the exterior gable end door or through an interior opening when an end portion of one of the ceiling planks was removed at the top of the peg-stairs. The pegs, which are removable, provide unique interior access to the loft, and make space available for use that would otherwise be taken by a corner staircase.

There have been minimal alterations made to the house. At an unknown date, the loft and roof were raised and one additional course of logs was added. A pre-1928 photograph shows a small shed roof overhang above the east-facing door and stoop and a frame addition extending to the south (added after the original construction).¹ Both subsequently have been removed. At an unknown date electric service was added to the house and two ceiling light fixtures were installed. (Probably at this time, since the electric wires entered the house at the north gable end just above the interior access way to the loft, the hatch-type access to the loft was sealed shut from above.) The bottom log on the east wall, which was rotten, was replaced in 1987 with a log that was cut to match the original.

These alterations reflect the care given the house over the years by the Thrune family, and do not compromise the basic integrity of the structure. Raising the roof altered slightly the appearance of the house, without changing its function in the least. The shed roof overhang and frame addition were not a part of the house originally. Other changes are insignificant. And finally, the replacement of the one rotten log was done with care and is not easily distinguished from any of the other logs. In sum, these alterations are minor and have not changed the basic vital facts: this was a one-room pioneer family house. Its function and appearance as such are clear and evident.

(1) Hjalmar R. Holand, Coon Valley, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1928), English translation reprint, La Crosse, WI: Litho-Graphics, 1976, p. 20.

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United States. The Koshkonong colony of eastern Dane County established in the early 1840s was largest and most prosperous of the early Wisconsin settlements. As the number of immigrants increased, Koshkonong settlers spread to other areas of the state including an area of Vernon County commonly known as "Coon Prairie." Even Gullord, the first Norwegian settler, reached Coon Prairie in 1848 and was followed by a large contingent of Norwegians which came to number approximately 13,000. Norwegian showed a marked tendency to settle in tight and distinctly Norwegian groupings and have retained a high degree of ethnic and cultural identity to this day.⁷

Coon Valley, an area immediately adjacent to Coon Prairie, was settled in 1849 and known as "Helgedalen" for many years after the first settler there (Helge Gulbrandson). It was later renamed Coon Valley in recognition of the many racoons found in the area. Gulbrandson and his wife, Agnette, were the only inhabitants of the valley for their first year. The area was known for its fertile river valleys and was extensively settled by Norwegian immigrants, the largest portions of which originated in Biri and Telemark. According to the account of Hans Hjelmstad who settled in Coon Valley in 1851, by 1854 almost all of the most desirable land was settled.⁸

The town of Hamburg was formed from a portion of the earlier Bergen township. The first formal religious services conducted in 1854. In 1858 the township was formally organized and the first elections held. The first church was constructed of log and dedicated in 1859. The nearby community of Coon Valley formed in the early 1860s and was centered on the Coon River around a sawmill erected in that same year. In 1863 the first store was established and by 1865 the town got its post office.⁹ A woolen mill erected adjacent to the sawmill in 1868 gave impetus to the growth of the village. 210 dwellings housing a population of 1,208 people were recorded in the township of Coon in the 1870 Census.¹⁰ The Coon Prairie area lays claim to being the "most densely settled Norwegian area in the state."¹¹

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Ethnic Heritage - European

The history of persons having a common Norwegian ethnic identity is represented by the Skumsrud house. Between 1845 and 1870 Wisconsin became one of the leading destinations for Scandinavian, specifically Norwegian, immigrants. Vernon County established its claim to having the most concentrated Norwegian/American population in the state during this period. Most of these immigrants to the county arrived from communities settled earlier in the southeast and central regions of the state. Vernon County was one of a string of six counties, from Dane to Dunn that came to have a very heavy concentration of Norwegian immigrants. Wisconsin, by 1900, counted only one other ethnic group with more members than the Norwegians. Vernon County, to this day, retains this ethnic identification.¹²

Norwegians were a significant ethnic population which exerted a strong force on the cultural development of those areas of Wisconsin, such as Coon Valley, where they settled in large numbers. The Skumsrud house, with its Scandinavian features, is material evidence of the type of migration that populated the area and makes an important contribution to our understanding of Norwegian culture and lifeways in the early statehood period of Wisconsin.

Exploration/Settlement

The investigation of unknown or little known communities or regions and the earliest development of new regions by European immigrants is also furthered by the Skumsrud house. The house is an impressively intact structure which can provide insight into the early settlement lifestyles and material culture. As an artifact, it can help to document the retention and assimilation of Norwegian traditions and practises in the New World.

As stated earlier, Coon Valley settlement began in 1849. By 1854, almost a decade before the Homestead Act, settlement was well underway. The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed settlers to obtain legal title to up to 160 acres of free land by settling on and cultivating the property. In the first year of application, 27 applications for title were filed in the Town of Hamburg, suggesting the presence of large numbers of "squatters" on the land. Thereafter applications numbered an average of 4 per year until 1869 at which time the number dropped significantly, indicating that by this point the township was largely settled.¹³

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Holand characterized this early settlement life in his book Coon Valley written in 1928. "Pioneer life was a modest life built on poverty and self-denial...Land was, of course, cheap, but money was almost impossible to get in the first years."¹⁴ Necessary cash for the purchase of material goods was generally obtained by men spending the winter months working in the pineries of the Black River Falls area.

Settlers often had to build crude, temporary shelters to provide minimal protection from the elements while the more immediate tasks of clearing land and planting a subsistence crop were undertaken. These shelters were often dug-outs, tents, or brush-covered lean-tos. Temporary lodging was generally replaced within a few months or possibly the next year with more substantial and permanent log houses.

Holand described these first permanent dwellings:

"People lived in small log cabins which usually consisted of only one room with a loft above. In one corner of the room was a bed made of some boards and laths nailed to the wall. In the other corner was a stove. There were in addition, a homemade table and some benches, plus a cupboard where food was kept."¹⁵

Although few details are known of their lives, the story of Nils and Elline Skumsrud is exemplary of this early settlement life. Nils Skumsrud was born in Biri, Norway in 1817 and came to America in 1849 with his wife Elline Nilson (who soon died of cholera) and one son. In 1852 he settled on eighty acres of land in Vernon County. Skumsrud built his single-pen log house in 1853. On July 5, 1853 Skumsrud married Elline Martinsdatter.¹⁶ Together, they had five children, which was the typical family size in Coon Valley.¹⁷ Nils Skumsrud died in 1886.¹⁸

Arriving in Wisconsin too early to homestead his land, Skumsrud was a member of the earliest wave of European immigrants to this area. The first white settler in the Coon Valley vicinity arrived in 1849. Skumsrud's second marriage was the first to be performed in Coon Valley. He was present at the organization of the nearby Town of Coon in 1859. In that same year, the first school in the valley opened for classes.¹⁹

The Skumsrud house is a key remnant of this era and the pioneering work of the community. The size of his holdings, the house he built, and the history of his life contribute significantly to an understanding of this place and time.

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Architecture

The Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin notes that early settlers took advantage of the abundance of timber in Wisconsin's native forests to construct small log cabins. Log construction allowed immigrants to easily use timber harvested in the process of clearing lands for agricultural production. Many immigrant groups, in particular the Germans, Finns, French and Scandinavians, had strong ethnic traditions of building in wood.²⁰ These traditions are not only evident in the choice of building materials, but also in the construction techniques, or details employed in the building process. The Plan lists resources representing identifiable Norwegian building traditions as a high priority for National Register listing.

Norwegian log construction typically incorporated dovetail-notched corner joints, mortar chinking, a heavy ridge pole, purlins, and a relatively low roof pitch.²¹ Norwegians preferred single room one-and-a-half story structures as their first permanent dwellings.²²

Skumrud combined folk construction methods with Scandinavian design features to build a permanent home for his family. The house he built was typical in construction material, method, and size. The house is constructed of hewn logs, with full-dovetail corner joints and full log gable peaks typical of Scandinavian (Norwegian) methods.²³ Full-dovetailing is the most difficult method of corner-notching and is generally associated with these and Scandinavian immigrants. It demonstrates a high degree of native skill in working with wood. This method of construction tends to be rigid and long lived and points to the builder's intent to erect permanent and long-lasting dwelling.

Similar joinery is to be found on other extant buildings in the region, such as the Norwegian type two-bay and sval house types. Tishler's 1988 architectural survey of Coon Valley documented 53 extant examples of log construction. Town of Coon homestead records (the "proof forms" completed and filed subsequent to the 1862 Homestead Act which listed existing buildings) for the period 1863-1870 include descriptions of sixty-three dwellings. These applications specify size, construction materials, number of stories, roofing materials, number of doors and windows, flooring materials, and other improvements undertaken in the settlement or

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"homesteading" of the property. These descriptions allow conclusions to be drawn concerning the typicality and significance of the Skumsrud house. Of the sixty-three dwellings, house dimensions ranged from a small cabin of 12' x 12' to the somewhat larger 18' x 18'. Ten houses measured 14' x 16'. Seven measured 16' x 18'. Six measured 12' x 14'. The floor space of these homes ranged from less than 150 square feet to over 350 square feet, with over half of the homes falling within the range of 150-300 square feet. The Skumsrud house measuring 13'9" x 18' and including 234 square feet of floor space, while distinct, is representative of pioneer housing. Its size falls well within the range of typical houses.²⁴

Thirty-three of the sixty-three houses were one-and-a-half stories, as is the Skumsrud house. Twenty-nine were shingled with wooden shingles. Forty-five had board floors. Forty-four had one door. Thirty houses had three or more windows. In every one of these respects, except for the number of doors, the Skumsrud house proves structurally representative of pioneer, owner-built houses in the area.²⁵

It is thought to be the only log, one-room house remaining on its original site in the county. Perrin notes that most of the very early log houses have disappeared and there are few remaining examples which are sufficiently unaltered to permit an evaluation of the original design, materials, and workmanship.²⁶ Most typically, early log houses have been moved to new locations, altered significantly, incorporated into larger dwellings or outbuildings, or have been inadequately preserved.

A research report, "Early Buildings, Farmsteads and Landscapes in the Coon Valley Norwegian Settlement of Wisconsin," prepared by William Tishler documented eight extant single-pen log houses in Coon Valley including the Skumsrud House.²⁷ Of this sample, at least two date from the turn of the century, one is sided in clapboard, another is enveloped in a larger house, at least two are moved from their original sites and most are in an altered or deteriorated condition.

The Skumsrud house is the most intact and well-preserved house of this type in the area. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of Norwegian ethnic log construction including full-dovetail corner-notching, log construction to the gable peaks, log purlins and a 1/2 story loft. Once plentiful, houses of this type are rare today. The Skumsrud House is an excellent reminder of the single-pen house construction of early Norwegian settlers in western Wisconsin.

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The period of significance for architecture is taken from the date of construction. The period of significance for Ethnic Heritage relates to the period of Nils Skumsrud's tenancy in the house. The period of significance for Settlement ends with 1869. Based on homestead records, Coon Valley was largely settled by this time.

Ownership

The Skumsrud property was acquired by the Thrune family, whose most recent twentieth-century members, Lloyd and Ruth, built a modern farmstead while maintaining the Skumsrud house. The Thrune farm was transferred to Norskedalen by bequest in 1987. Norskedalen, a nature and ethnic heritage center located near Coon Valley, has been developed by the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Foundation, Inc. Norskedalen has collected a number of historic structures from the Coon Valley area, some of which are reconstructed as an historic farmstead. Its plans for the Skumsrud house include preservation and use in educational programming on its original site. (Norskedalen, Coon Valley, WI. 54623)

Archeological Potential

Because of the scarcity of settlement period cabins extant on their original sites, the Skumsrud House holds great potential for buried cultural remains which may help to understand and interpret Norwegian immigrant life and culture. Its historic archeological potential, however, remains unassessed.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Hjalmar R. Holand, Coon Valley, (Minneapolis: Upper Coon Valley Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1928), p. 20.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Richard W. E. Perrin, Historic Wisconsin Buildings: A Survey of Pioneer Architecture 1835- 1870, (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, n.d.), p. .
- 4 William Tishler, "Early Buildings, Farmsteads and Landscapes in the Coon Valley Norwegian Settlement of Wisconsin," (unpublished manuscript report in possession of Norskedalen, 1986).
- 5 Richard J. Fapso, Norwegians in Wisconsin, (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison: 1982, p. 39.
- 6 Barbara Wyatt, Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol 2, (Madison: State Historical Society, 1986), Settlement p.5-1.
- 7 Ibid, pp. 5-2 to 5-3.
- 8 Holand, p. 17-19.
- 9 Holand, p. 50.
- 10 History of Vernon County, Wisconsin, (Springfield, IL: Union Publishing Company, 1884), pp. 774-776.
- 11 Fapso. p. 27.
- 12 Ibid, p. 39.
- 13 Tishler, p. 21.
- 14 Holand, p. 38.

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FOOTNOTES CON'T

- 15 Ibid, pp. 36-37.
- 16 Holand, p. 177.
- 17 Norwegians in Coon Valley averaged 5.2 people per household according to homestead records for Coon township. Tishler, p. 30.
- 18 Holand, p. 177.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Wyatt, Settlement, pp. 5-4 to 5-5.
- 21 Henning, p. Henning, Darrell D., "Norwegians" in Upton, Dell, ed. America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America. (Washington, D. C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1986), p. 149.
- 22 Ibid, p. 150.
- 23 Barbara Wyatt, Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol 2, (Madison: State Historical Society, 1986), Architecture p. 4-2 to 4-3 .
- 24 Tishler, pp. 24-28.
- 25 Ibid
- 26 Perrin, Richard W. E. Historic Wisconsin Buildings: A Survey of Pioneer Architecture 1835- 1870. Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, n.d., p. 8.)

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PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

The following information applies to all photographs:

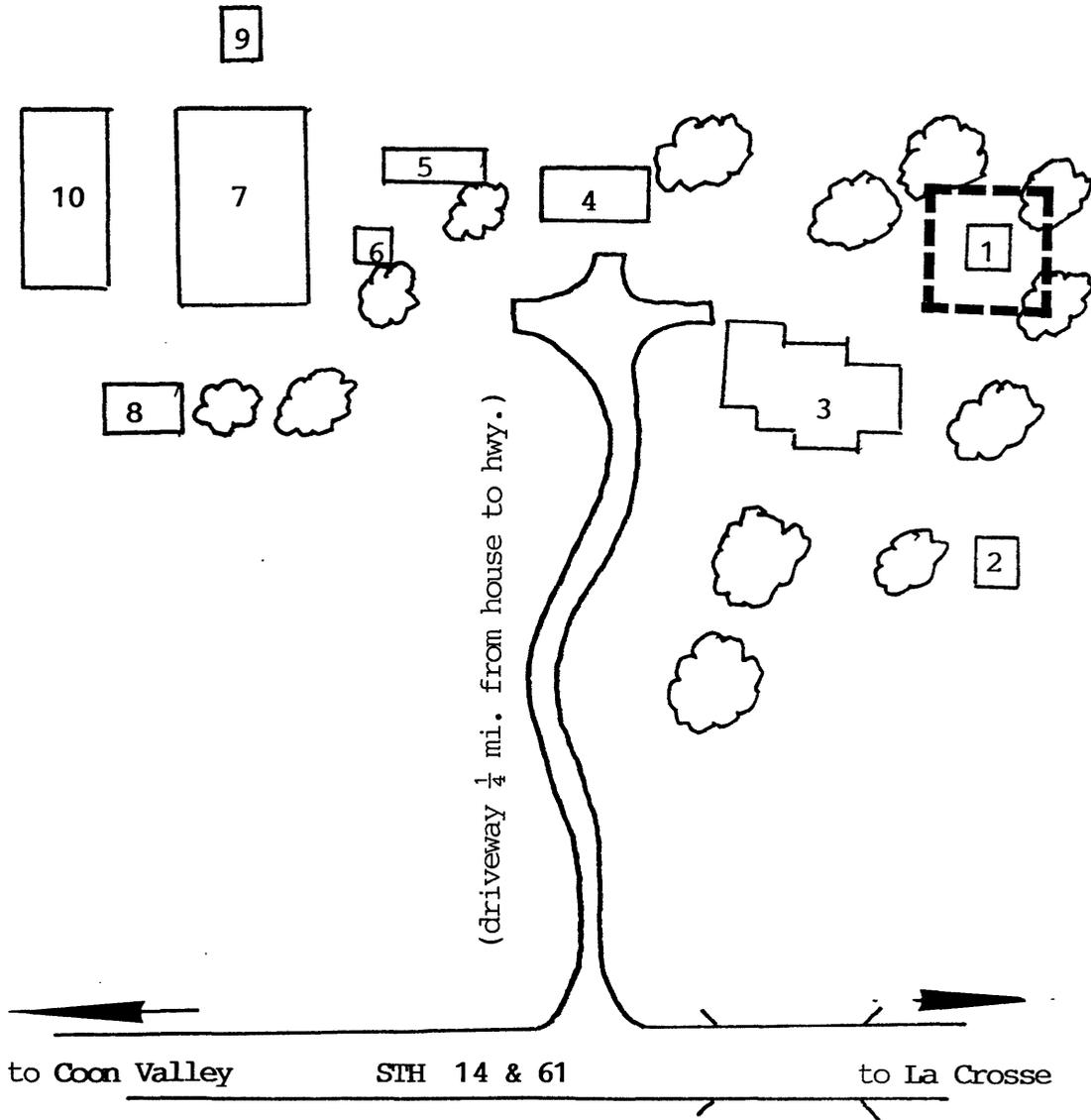
Nils Skumsrud House
vicinity of Coon Valley, Vernon County, WI
Charles Lee, photographer- September 1989
Negatives at State Historical Society of Wisconsin

- 1 of 8 View of East Facade
- 2 of 8 View of South gable end
- 3 of 8 Interior view, loft floor and rafters
- 4 of 8 Interior view, north wall
- 5 of 8 Interior detail, peg stairs
- 6 of 8 Interior view, northeast corner
- 7 of 8 Exterior detail, exterior corner notching
- 8 of 8 Exterior detail, log wall detail

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SKUMSRUD, NILS, HOUSE
vicinity Coon Valley, Vernon County, WI

MAP # 1



KEY

1. Nils Skumrud House
2. Granary (moved to site & restored)
3. Residence
4. Garage
5. Chicken Coop/Shed
6. Milk House/Shed
7. Barn
8. Shop
9. Granary
10. Tobacco Shed

--- Boundary of nominated property

NOT TO SCALE