



945

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Trondhjem Norwegian Lutheran Church

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 8501 Garfield Avenue  not for publication

city or town Webster and Wheatland Townships Lonsdale  vicinity

state Minnesota code MN county Rice code 131 zip code 55046

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
  
[Signature] 7/17/01  
Signature of certifying official/Title Ian K. Stewart Date  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
State of Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:  
 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): \_\_\_\_\_  
  
Signature of the Keeper Entered in the National Register Date of Action 9/9/01

Trondhjem Norwegian Lutheran Church  
Name of Property

Rice County, MN  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious Facility

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Social/Meeting Hall  
Recreation and Culture/Museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19th CENTURY/Greek Revival  
LATE VICTORIAN/Second Gothic Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granite  
walls Cement/Fiberglass  
Vinyl (1972 fellowship hall)  
roof Asphalt  
other Concrete

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage/European

Social History

Period of Significance

1899-1951

Significant Dates

1899

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
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:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Trondhjem Community Preservation Society

Trondhjem Norwegian Lutheran Church  
Name of Property

Rice County, MN  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ca. 2 acres

Lonsdale, Minn.  
1960, photorevised 1979

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	15	4 6 8 0 0 0	4 9 2 3 3 0 0
Zone		Easting	Northing
2			

3			
Zone		Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title David C. Anderson

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date April 2, 2001

street & number 169 Lundy Bridge Drive telephone (319) 382-3079

city or town Waukon state Iowa zip code 52172

#### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

#### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name See Continuation Sheet p. 12

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section   7   Page   1  

---

**DESCRIPTION**

The Trondhjem Norwegian Lutheran Church and Cemetery are located in Webster and Wheatland Townships in northern Rice County of central Minnesota. This is predominately farming country but includes increasing numbers of housing subdivisions occupied by people employed in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area about 33 miles to the north.

The church and its associated cemetery are on a high point of land on either side of a gravel road (Garfield Road) about one mile southeast of Lonsdale, the closest town. Garfield Road is on the line dividing Webster Township – where the church stands – from Wheatland Township where the cemetery is located.

The church includes a nearly square (36 by 34 feet) space with a bell tower and entrance vestibule on the southwest corner, a 16 foot square chancel on the east side, and a 58 by 28 foot single-story low-pitch gable roof fellowship hall that was attached to the north side of the chancel in 1972. Except for a small utility space at the junction of the chancel and nave, the church has no basement and rests on a fieldstone foundation. The fellowship hall is on a concrete block foundation.

The main body of the church was built in 1899 on an irregular plan that includes full height gabled projecting bays with short cornice returns on the north, south and west sides and a lower hipped roof chancel on the east end. This can be regarded as a vestigial cruciform plan since the three bays extend only about two feet from the central space. According to various church histories, the current edifice replaced the original Trondhjem Church (1878) which, except for the chancel, was taken down to permit the current, somewhat larger building to be erected in its place. It is said that the chancel was incorporated into the new building.<sup>1</sup>

There is a cupola at the apex of the nave, and this has a steep roof with flared eaves echoing that of the larger corner tower, where the original church bell still hangs.

All windows but one, the belfry louvers, and the front entrance are in pointed arch frames. The windows are in a double-hung 5/4 pattern with clear glass. The single exception is an oculus on the west side attic space that originally included a large eye painted on glass. It has been removed for restoration.

On the exterior the church is painted white with dark window muntins and tower louvers. The addition has vinyl siding, and the remainder of the church is clad in replacement cement/fiberglass (“Hardiplank”) lap siding with wood trim including corner boards with quirk molds. The replacement siding is nearly identical in appearance to the original.

The building is an eclectic mix of several stylistic and typological representations that include Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and Medieval Norwegian elements. The central cruciform plan of the primary space with the short tower at the apex suggests the early (pre-1300) Norwegian stave church.<sup>2</sup> The vestigial cruciform plan and corner tower resulted in a structure with some 24 corners in plan which, according to local legend, was done to give the building extra strength to withstand the high winds common at its elevated location.<sup>3</sup>

The church is undergoing restoration on the interior, and at present pressed metal ceilings in both nave and chancel have been revealed, as has the original plaster wall in many locations. The metal ceiling was installed over the original painted plaster surface sometime after 1899, but the date is not known.

The floor is hard (yellow) pine, and the entry vestibule walls are partially clad in bead board. The pews, communion rail and altar are original furnishings. The altar is of wood construction painted in white and gold, and it includes an oil-on-canvas painting of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane by Julius Holm dated 1911.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section 7, 8 Page 2

Historic photos in the Trondhjem Community Preservation Society Collection indicate that the church is essentially original in exterior appearance except for the missing eye and a steel door in the tower.

Because of its location, extending north from the back of the church, and its low profile, the single-story fellowship hall does not impair the historic integrity of the original church. The hall was attached to the church without significant impact and with no modifications to the church interior.

The property is now owned by the Trondhjem Community Preservation Society which acquired it after the Trondhjem congregation built a new church one mile north on Hwy. 19. This group uses the facility for meetings, and a collection of artifacts, historic photos, clothing, and other memorabilia relating to the Trondhjem community is on display in the fellowship hall.

The Trondhjem Cemetery, which was secured by the congregation in 1876, contains burials dating from 1877. It includes several large cedar and other evergreen trees, but the original fence and gate have been removed. The cemetery is still in use, and in 1998 it was enlarged from its original dimensions of 226 by 146 feet. The historic cemetery contains 275 burials, and the new segment is not included in this nomination.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>According to Merle Fossum, as related to him by his grandfather, the chancel was detached from the 1878 church, turned, and attached to the new church. A written statement to this effect, dated 1/27/01, was sent to the author and this is now in the SHPO file for this property. The elder Fossum was a son of Amund Fossum, a charter member of the Trondhjem congregation.

<sup>2</sup>Examples on pages 42 and 79 in Hauglid illustrate these features.

<sup>3</sup>This legend is in the church histories (see Bibliography). No information could be found about the 1899 building except numerous references to a long controversy over whether the first church should be repaired and enlarged or replaced.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

The Trondhjem Lutheran Church is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as a property associated with significant local events in the areas of European ethnic heritage and social history. The history of the church and associated cemetery reflect patterns of Norwegian-American settlement in Minnesota and in Rice County. The church represents an effort to maintain an ethnic heritage through language retention, worship, education, and church-sponsored social activities. Located on the highest point of land for miles around, it signaled the presence of an ethnic group that was dispersed across the landscape on individual farmsteads. The church is also the visible representation of the erstwhile Trondhjem community, which was also given tangible form in Trondhjem Village, an unincorporated hamlet about one mile north of the church, of which no trace remains today. This property is also significant within the Minnesota statewide context, "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940."

Euro-American settlement in Minnesota began in 1851 when native American (Dakota) tribes ceded most of the land they occupied in southern Minnesota to the U.S. Government via the treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux. Settlement first occurred in the newly founded cities and adjacent areas along the Mississippi and other major rivers, since these were the most important transportation routes before the advent of railroads.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section 8 Page 3

The cities of St. Anthony (later Minneapolis) and St. Paul grew rapidly in the 1850s and 1860s, and one of the state's first railroads, the Minnesota Central, ran a line south from Minneapolis to Faribault, seat of Rice County, in 1864. This railroad was later to be extended into northern Iowa to McGregor on the Mississippi (1867) and on to Milwaukee and Chicago. This resulted in the rapid growth of towns and cities directly on the line, such as Faribault, Northfield and Owatonna, but also encouraged settlement on lands nearby which could be developed for farming. This would have been the closest railroad to the Trondhjem community until 1901, when the Milwaukee Road ran a line from Farmington (in neighboring Dakota County) and established the town of Lonsdale, about 1-1/4 miles northwest of Trondhjem Village.

#### Norwegian Settlement in Minnesota

Norwegian immigration to North America began in 1825 and continued for about 100 years. Minnesota received more of the 850,000 who came to the United States than any other state, and they became Minnesota's largest ethnic group. As a proportion of the population, the emigration rate for Norway was exceeded only by that of Ireland.

The period of largest emigration from Norway began in the mid-1860s and continued into the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the largest number coming in 1882 (28,500).<sup>1</sup> The emigrants were mostly farm dwellers who had become superfluous due to a rising birth rate and farm consolidation. Another factor was religious dissent and, to many, America offered the best opportunity to preserve a lifestyle pursued over many generations, to own and control land, and to practice the religions of their choice.<sup>2</sup> In Minnesota as elsewhere in the Midwest, Norwegians settled primarily in rural areas. Where they located depended upon when they arrived and which lands were available.

The first settlements developed beginning in the early 1850s in the southeastern counties of Fillmore and Houston, followed by others in Goodhue, Olmstead, Dakota and Rice counties.<sup>3</sup> As railroads penetrated southwestern, central, and finally northwestern Minnesota, Norwegians made their way to these areas also, with majority populations in many townships and in scattered pockets elsewhere in the state as well by 1905.<sup>4</sup> The majority remained farmers, and they settled in every major agricultural sector in Minnesota.

Initially the Norwegians came directly from Norway, and a number of these followed the general settlement frontier, selling their first farms and moving to undeveloped but potentially good farmland as it became available. The last major agricultural region in Minnesota to be settled was the Red River Valley, comprising parts of several counties bordering North Dakota. This took place after 1870, and Norwegians became the largest ethnic group there and a major group in the last areas of the state where Euro-Americans replaced the Indians during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: in Red Lake and Pennington counties east of the Red River Valley and in the "cutover" sections of several counties bordering Canada. By this time most of these individuals had been born in Minnesota of Norwegian or mixed Scandinavian parentage, since the final wave of mass emigration had taken place between 1900 and 1914.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans

The Lutheran church played a key role in the sustenance and growth of Norwegian immigrant communities in the rural Midwest. Religion and church institutions were important in the same ways for other ethnic groups, although the story is perhaps more complicated for the Norwegians. Whereas in Norway there was a single state sanctioned and supported Lutheran church (it remains today), when they emigrated they managed to split into several synods. There were also other Protestant sects (Quakers, Baptists, Mormons and others) among the Norwegian-Americans, but they were fewer in number and were located mostly among Norwegians who settled in cities.<sup>6</sup>

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section   8   Page   4  

A theological contentiousness was typical for the Norwegians among the Scandinavian immigrants, and it is reflected in the history of Trondhjem congregation. It is evident in the memoir of Pastor Elias Aas, who served the congregation between 1889 and 1904 (see Bibliography) and in the meeting notes. These record individual cases of members leaving, being suspended, and joining the congregation for reasons of faith and behavior. The Trondhjem congregation belonged to four different synods between 1876 and 1960. No matter what the synodical affiliation might have been, the church provided important social and cultural support to the immigrants, who in some cases came to occupy land only recently vacated by native Americans or entered established communities where religious practice and language were alien expressions.

Exact figures are not available, but most Norwegian settlers in the rural Midwest were and remain at least nominally Lutheran. And even among the non-Lutherans and non-believers in any given area, the church was an important social and cultural institution. According to Jon Gjerde and Carlton Qualey,

Once built, the church quickly became the heart of the community . . . so that if one did not come to worship God one might come for other purposes, such as trading horses, . . . or hearing the latest news.<sup>7</sup>

As with other immigrant groups, preservation of social values and cultural heritage was achieved in worship and via many church-sponsored social activities. And even though public schools were established in their midst and supported by them, it was typical for the Norwegians to set up parochial schools, which usually were operated as a supplement to the public ones. Norwegian was spoken in these schools, especially among the more conservative Norwegian Synod congregations, and religion was the primary subject matter, although secular subjects were sometimes included.<sup>8</sup>

Initially parochial school was held for two months each summer at Trondhjem, and later this was replaced by a "Vacation Bible School" held for one week after public school let out in June. This was described as providing a "program of music, prayer, study and fun for all."<sup>9</sup>

The most important general cultural service provided by the church was to maintain the Norwegian language, an integral part of the immigrants' religion and identity. For many years after their establishment, Norwegian congregations used Norwegian exclusively in both church and parochial school. This was because church leaders felt that using the Norwegian language expressed a love of the Fatherland and that religion was manifest in the language. Preservation of language was also a manifestation of the tendency in rural areas for ethnic groups to deliberately separate themselves from the larger social context in order to more fully realize their own particular identity in a "context of freedom."<sup>10</sup>

The best sources for tracing the general move away from Norwegian to English are the Lutheran congregation records. In 1925 English exceeded Norwegian for the first time, though in rural parishes this shift took longer. By 1942 it was 90% of the Norwegians using English in church.<sup>11</sup> In the Trondhjem congregation English was first used in the worship services in 1927, alternating with Norwegian every other Sunday until 1940 when English was used exclusively. Congregation records were kept in Norwegian until 1939.<sup>12</sup>

Typical for all the Norwegian-American Lutheran churches was their support of auxiliary organizations for the different gender and age groups in the congregation. These included Ladies' Aid, Girls' Aid, Young People's Societies, and others. They served as opportunities for social activities and raised money by staging musical performances, craft and bake sales and the like for local church needs plus foreign and home missions. Home mission activity included providing financial and other support to new congregations that were not large enough to be fully self-sufficient. The earliest records available for the Trondhjem Ladies' Aid (*Kvindeforening*) date to 1885, and a Youth Group there pursued a variety of social activities over the years. Norwegian Lutheran churches, including



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section   8   Page   5  

Trondhjem, also had at least one congregation choir, and these were important creative and social outlets for many members as well as a means for preserving ethnic heritage.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the temperance issue must be included in this discussion of the church and the ways that Norwegians transferred, perpetuated and transformed their ethnic heritage in America. This issue also illustrates their penchant for division and contention, a feature of not only their religious life but also their politics. In Norway, the use of alcohol was common and it was associated with harvest activities as well as weddings, funerals, Christmas and other celebrations, including specifically religious ceremonies like confirmations.

Excessive drinking was condemned by all the American synods, but some, including the Free Church and Hauge Synods, campaigned for total abstinence, the Haugians having brought this view over from Norway, and it coincided and eventually merged with the American movement after about 1880. Norwegian-American temperance societies (*Afholdsforeningen*) were established at local and regional levels, and when the International Order of Good Templars became the leading international group, it had a substantial Norwegian-American membership.<sup>14</sup>

That temperance was important and controversial within the Trondhjem congregation and elsewhere in Webster Township is clear from the church meeting notes and in historical accounts, not to mention in the autobiography of Pastor Aas. The hamlet of Berg, 3½ miles east of Trondhjem, became known as "Little Chicago" when a saloon was opened there.<sup>15</sup> The hamlet was known as Berg in 1915, but today Little Chicago is still on the map. Trondhjem had a church-sponsored temperance group that held regular meetings, but the records are not extant.

#### Trondhjem Church and Trondhjem Village

Norwegians were not always the first settlers on lands that became available in those areas of Minnesota where they eventually reached high concentrations. This was true in Webster Township, where settlement began in 1855 mostly by Americans from Ohio. The township was organized in 1858 and got its name from one such, Ferris Webster.<sup>16</sup> The first Norwegians came in 1862 and in 1866, and their numbers grew rapidly thereafter, becoming between 50 and 75% of the population by 1905 after which they declined in proportion to other groups. They occupied other townships in Rice County including small parts of adjacent Wheatland, Erin and Forest Townships and were part of a larger concentration that included northeast Rice, southwest Dakota, and southeast Scott counties.<sup>17</sup>

Other European ethnic groups in the area were Czechs (the largest group in Wheatland Township and located also in western Webster), Germans, who had a Lutheran church in northwest Webster, and a scattering of Swedes, Danes and Irish plus a remnant of the Americans from Ohio and other eastern states.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the Norwegians came from near the city of Trondheim (current spelling) in Sør-Trøndelag province and from the Solor district of Hedmark province which lies just south of Sør-Trøndelag and east of Oslo. There is also a congregation with the name Solor with most of its membership in the northeast corner of Webster Township, and these congregations illustrate the Norwegians' general tendency to settle in groups with origins in specific locations in the home country. Trondhjem and Solor are the only Norwegian Lutheran congregations in Webster and Wheatland Townships, and both were established in 1876 but belonged to different synods. The present Solor Church dates from 1920, and of 13 other Rice County Norwegian Lutheran churches listed in Norlie's 1915 compilation, at most two are known to be extant.<sup>19</sup>

The Trondhjem congregation was dispersed over an area of about four miles north to south and six miles east to west. There are references in church records to the east and west districts, and the church is located in the midst of the west district, which includes most of Section 36 and nearby areas in Wheatland Township. The east district

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section   8   Page   6  

---

comprised several sections west, north and south of the hamlet of Berg (later Little Chicago). There were also members in the northeast corner of Erin and northwest corner of Forest Townships.<sup>20</sup>

Within 20 years of having built their first church in 1878, the subject of its replacement was being discussed. The issues were apparently both inadequate size and a need for repair of the original. It took over a year to decide on building a new church versus repair and enlargement of the original. There is nothing in the records about a plan or how much the project cost.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, since some portions of the eastern district were up to six miles from the church, the congregation allowed a number of members to build "a prayer house/chapel" to be located near Berg. This was a joint project with the Solor Norwegian Lutheran congregation which had members in the same area. This facility, shown on plat maps as a church, was used for religious school, prayer meetings, and other functions, and it became known as "*Dagens Temple*," literally meaning "Day Temple."<sup>22</sup> It is no longer extant.

The settlement pattern of Norwegians in rural Minnesota did not include a deliberate creation of villages and towns. Hamlets like Trondhjem grew up at a crossroads or other convenient locations in settled farmland that was not necessarily ethnically homogeneous. Norwegian Lutheran churches would be located in the midst of heavy Norwegian settlement, of course, but there were other considerations as well. The church and an associated cemetery would preferably be on an official road, someone would have to agree to give or sell land to the congregation, and ideally the edifice would occupy a high point in the landscape so as to be visible for miles around.

Given the distribution of Norwegian settlement in Webster and Wheatland Townships, locating the church in Trondhjem Village would have put it at a greater distance from more people than where it is. The functions of church and village differed, and the business patrons and mail recipients were not 100% Norwegian Lutheran, given the ethnic diversity in Wheatland and northern Webster Townships. This is quite different from what happened at places like Veseli in Wheatland Township, where the Roman Catholic church laid out a village with a church in its midst as a focus to attract settlement to the area.

Although local histories suggest that Trondhjem Village existed already in the late 1860s, its official origin dates to 1890 when a post office was established in the home of Peter Anderson at the center of Section 30.<sup>23</sup> By 1900 there was a group of five buildings clustered north and south of the road (at present Hwy. 19), and these included a blacksmith shop, three stores (one of them included the post office), and a "Cream Station." A public school was located one mile east.<sup>24</sup> A Rice County business directory from 1895 also lists a shoemaker in Trondhjem, and a feed mill had also been built in 1897 at the cream station.<sup>25</sup> The cream station was technically a skimming station or skimery, and by 1904 it had become part of the Webster Cooperative Dairy Association which operated several such facilities to which farmers brought their milk to have the cream separated and sent to a creamery for manufacture into butter.

The church and village were key elements in the wider Trondhjem community, and four of the five business owners listed in the 1895 directory were among the charter members of the Trondhjem congregation. Trondhjem "Village" was never platted and is what today would be called an unincorporated hamlet, which were numerous in rural areas in the pre-automobile era along with one-room public schools.

### **The Railroad and the Decline of the Trondhjem Community**

A railroad from St. Paul to Faribault and Northfield had been in place since 1865 (the Minnesota Central), and Northfield, about 12 miles east of Trondhjem, was the closest rail connection for Webster and Wheatland Townships until 1903 when the Milwaukee Road ran a line into the area from Farmington in neighboring Dakota County. It went through Webster Village, bypassed Trondhjem, and through the town of Lonsdale, 1½ miles west of Trondhjem, which had been platted in 1902 by the railroad's land company. Webster and Lonsdale grew and Trondhjem declined, although in early 1905, the *Northfield News* proclaimed,

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section  8  Page  7

---

The new town of Trondjem (sic) lies in a valley surrounded by high hills, a very pretty place for a town it is. It has a fine up to date cream skimming station, fire proof. Over seventy patrons come with cream every morning, making the place very lively for a time each day. . . . A number of houses are around Trondjem, mostly farmers. About a quarter of a mile from town is a small country school house and a school near the Trondjem church which is about a mile away. A small creek runs through the town that adds to its beauty. The people are mostly Norwegians and as a general rule are all well to do farmers.<sup>26</sup>

By 1909 Trondhjem had lost two stores and the blacksmith shop and the post office had been replaced with mail service on a Rural Free Delivery (RFD) route from Lonsdale. The skimming station was maintained for several years, but by around 1923 Trondhjem was little more than a place name. At present none of the original buildings are extant.

The Norwegian presence also declined, as did the Trondhjem congregation, although it remains active today, having built a new church one mile north of the historic church on Hwy. 19 in 1988. Between 1876 to 1954, the congregation reached its peak in numbers at around the turn of the century. No year-by-year census figures are available, but from 90 "souls" in 1876 the figure rose to 153 and remained in that area, declining in 1913 to 140 and to 111 two years later. It declined further in 1939 to 65 and to 55 in 1954.<sup>27</sup> The departing Norwegians were replaced mainly by Czechs.

The decline of Trondhjem Village can be attributed to its being bypassed by the railroad and the development of better roads and motorized vehicles. The reasons for the departure of many Norwegian-American farm families are less clear cut, but two factors are mentioned in passing by Pastor Aas in his autobiography. As he put it,

As the farms were small and families large, the farmers (in the Trondhjem congregation) were in very straitened circumstances, and especially when the chinch (sic) bug destroyed their wheat two years in succession as this was the crop on which they depended almost entirely. This, however, proved to be a blessing in disguise as it made the farmer turn to diversified farming.<sup>28</sup>

The decline in wheat farming and a turn to diversified agriculture was general in south central and southeast Minnesota after 1880. The large families were a holdover from customs in Norway, and since it was also customary to provide farms for all their offspring, declining infant mortality made it impossible to continue this tradition at home. Norwegians seeking farmland in the Midwest tended to arrive in family units, and in areas like Rice County which was no longer a frontier, they faced competition from other groups – most notably Czechs – in Webster and Wheatland Townships for land as the families grew.

Beginning in about 1870, the settlement and wheat frontier had moved north and west to the Red River Valley region that includes northwest Minnesota, eastern North Dakota, and southern Manitoba. Records kept in the Trondhjem community demonstrate that this is where most of the departees went, seeking new land for their burgeoning families and new opportunities in a frontier setting.<sup>29</sup> Norwegian-Americans became the largest ethnic group in the Red River Valley.

### Summary

The Trondhjem Church and Cemetery are at present among the few reminders of the Norwegian pioneers in Webster Township and Rice County. The church and village were recognized by the wider community as evidence of the Norwegian presence. In a report in the *Northfield News* from December 24, 1904 we read:

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section   8   Page   8  

---

About half a mile from Lonsdale is located what is known as the Trondjem (sic) Norwegian church. It stands on a hill one hundred feet high. It is a fine structure, painted white and has two steeples, one large and the other a smaller one. It has a large round stained glass window in front of the all seeing eye. The church stands like a lone sentinel. No matter which way you go, you will see the church loom up before you for miles. . . . The architectural design of the church is fine. It would be a credit to any town or city. . . .

As indicated in the Description (Section 7), the church is an eclectic mix of Greek Revival and Gothic Revival stylistic influences, but that association can also be drawn with elements of the Norwegian stave church, which type has achieved iconic status in Norway and among Norwegian-Americans. This local expression of Norwegian ethnic heritage has been noted by visitors from Norway and by American scholars of Norwegian-American immigrant culture, and Trondhjem's altar including an oil painting is also typical for Norwegian-American churches.<sup>30</sup>

The church and the several businesses located in Trondhjem Village were vital to the material, social and cultural survival of the farm families that lived on scattered farmsteads for miles around. The church was important for more than religious worship, and through its auxiliary groups that included musical events and Sunday and summer school activities, the church maintained a sense of identity by preserving the native tongue, something that was most important to the first generation of immigrants but which persisted until 1940 as the official language of church services and records.

Among the traditions brought here by these pioneers that were preserved the longest was the annual Christmas celebration at the church, where a tree was decorated and lit with candles. This event is reported in local news reports ("Trondhjem Doings") and in the church records over the years, and it remains one of the strongest memories of the mostly third generation descendants of the pioneers who are working to preserve this property today.

The history of the church and its congregation, their involvement in the international temperance movement and the tendency of Norwegian-Americans to follow the frontier in the settlement of the Midwest and West all illustrate the Norwegian-American story in general and also relate to the larger patterns of Euro-American settlement in Minnesota.

#### Notes

For complete bibliographic information for the items cited in Notes, see Section 9, Bibliography.

<sup>1</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Qualey and Semmingsen are the main sources relied upon here concerning Norwegian immigrant history.

<sup>3</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., Table 11.1 and Map 11.4.

<sup>5</sup>Lovoll, pp. 36-37.

<sup>6</sup>See Blegen and Fevold for discussions on religion among the Norwegian-Americans.

<sup>7</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 220.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., p. 228.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section 8 Page 9

---

<sup>9</sup>*The History of Trondhjem Lutheran Church* (1976), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Blegen, p. 253. Quotation in Munch, pp. 64-65.

<sup>11</sup>Nelson, pp. 242-251.

<sup>12</sup>Trondhjem Lutheran Church – Lonsdale, Minnesota. *One-Hundredth Anniversary* (1976).

<sup>13</sup>ibid. O. M. Norlie's compilation of data on Norwegian Lutheran churches in North America includes material on these church-sponsored groups. For Trondhjem, see Vol. I, pp. 534-535.

<sup>14</sup>In 1914 there were 50 Norwegian I.O.G.T. lodges in the U.S. Lovoll discusses the temperance movement in the Norwegian-American communities on pp. 152-155.

<sup>15</sup>*Rice County Families*, pp. 603-604.

<sup>16</sup>Neill, pp. 536-538. An undated, unpublished plat map from ca. 1860 in the Office of Rice County Auditor shows the first property owners.

<sup>17</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, Map 11.3.

<sup>18</sup>This is shown on the published plat maps for these townships from 1900 and 1915.

<sup>19</sup>Norlie, p. 534. Minnesota SHPO Architecture/History File. Qualey and Gjerde, p. 221.

<sup>20</sup>Using Trondhjem Ladies' Aid membership records, Joyce Pflaum has plotted the distribution of congregation members on plat maps. A copy is in the SHPO file for this property.

<sup>21</sup>Only the dimensions of the new church are specified, namely that it be four feet wider and six feet longer than the old. See meeting notes dated March 25, 1899.

<sup>22</sup>Aas, p. 213. Meeting notes dated January 18, 1898.

<sup>23</sup>Curtiss-Wedge, p. 534.

<sup>24</sup>These properties are shown on the Webster plat map for 1900. In 1897 a feed mill had also been built at the cream station (*Northfield News*, Dec. 18, 1897).

<sup>25</sup>*Rice County Directory*. St. Paul, 1895, p. 256. With a total of five buildings and seven "active functional units," Trondhjem fits Trewartha's definition of the unincorporated hamlet. See Trewartha, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup>*Northfield News*. Jan. 7, 1905. The schoolhouse referred to (District 107) lies just south of the church and is still extant.

<sup>27</sup>These figures are drawn from Norlie, p. 535 and the May 31, 1976 edition of the *Northfield Times*, "Trondhjem Church Centennial June 13-20."

<sup>28</sup>Aas, p. 146.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section 8, 9 Page 10

<sup>29</sup>An unpublished manuscript by Leif and Lee Fossum written to supplement the 1976 centennial publication includes individual histories of several families that eventually left the congregation. They also went to Alberta, Canada and to other locations in northern Minnesota where land was still available for homestead claims. See also Swanberg, p. 294.

<sup>30</sup>Comments by visitors from Norway were related to the author by Joyce Fossum on Oct. 20, 2000. The stave church elements were brought to my attention in an interview on 12-12-00 with Darrell Henning, Chief Curator of the Norwegian-American museum in Decorah Iowa (Vesterheim) and an authority of Norwegian-American architecture. The altar painting was done by Julius Holm, who was born in Norway and based in Minneapolis. He represents one type of Norwegian-American folk artist, the "would-be professional" who was not primarily an artist but who created a limited number of art works including altar paintings. See Anderson, pp. 209-214.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aas, Elias. *The Pioneer Pastor*. Minneapolis: Free Church Press, ND.

Anderson, Kristin M. "Altars in the Norwegian-American Church: An Opportunity for Folk Expression." (in Marion John Nelson. *Material Culture and People's Art Among the Norwegians in America*. Northfield (MN), 1994.

Blegen, Theodore C. *Norwegian Migration to America. The American Transition*. Northfield (MN), 1940.

Curtiss-Wedge, F. *History of Rice and Steel Counties*. Chicago, 1910. Volume I.

Fevold, Eugene L. "The Norwegian Immigrant and His Church." *Norwegian-American Studies* (1967), pp. 3-16.

Fossum, Leif A. and Lee L. Fossum. "The History of the Trondhjem Lutheran Church, Rice Co., Minnesota." Unpublished ms. in the Trondhjem Comm. Preservation Soc. Collection.

Hauglid, Roar. *Norwegian Stave Churches*. Oslo, 1970.

Lovoll, Odd S. *The Promise of America*. Minneapolis, 1999.

Munch, Peter. "The Church as Complementary Identity." (in Erik Frus (ed.). *The Scandinavian Presence in North America*. New York, 1976.

Neill, E. D. *History of Rice County*. Minneapolis, 1882.

Nelson, E. C. *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*. Minneapolis, 1960. Volume II (1890-1959).

Norlie, O. M. *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter i Amerika 1843-1916*. Minneapolis, 1918. Two Volumes.

*Northfield News*. Dec. 18, 1897, Jan. 7, 1905, Dec. 24, 1904, Feb. 4, 1911.

*Northfield Times*. May 31, 1976.

Pflaum, Joyce Fossum. Interview 10-30-00. Correspondence 12-11-00.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section 9, 10 Page 11

---

*Plat Book of Rice County, Minnesota, 1900.*

Qualey, Carlton. *Norwegian Settlement in the U.S.* New York, 1970.

Qualey, Carlton and John A. Gjerde. "The Norwegians." (in) June Holmquist (ed.). *They Chose Minnesota*. St. Paul, 1978.

Rice County, Minnesota. Auditor. Records.

----- Recorder. Records.

*Rice County Directory*. St. Paul: R. L. Polk & Co. (1895).

*Rice County Families. Their History and Heritage*. Marceline (MO), 1982.

*Rice County Minnesota Atlas*. St. Paul, 1915.

Semmingsen, Ingrid. *Norway to America*. Minneapolis, 1978.

Swanberg, L. E. *Then and Now. A History of Rice County, Faribault and Communities*. Faribault, 1976.

*The History of Trondhjem Lutheran Church*. Unpublished ms. in the TCPS Collection. ND.

*Thronhjem's Norwegian Lutheran Church*. Lonsdale, 2000. A translation by Norman Vinnes of congregation and Annual Meeting Minutes from 1876 to 1896.

Trewartha, Glenn T. "The Unincorporated Hamlet." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. Volume 33, #1 (March 1943), pp. 33-81.

*Trondhjem Lutheran Church. Lonsdale, Minnesota. One-Hundredth Anniversary* (1976).

Trondhjem Community Preservation Society (TCPS). Lonsdale, Minnesota. Collection.

## GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### Verbal Boundary Description

The church and cemetery are contiguous but separate parcels lying on either side of the line dividing Wheatland and Webster Townships, and they will be described individually:

Church – The north 23 rods of the west 10 rods of the NW¼ of the SW¼ of Section 31, Twp. 112 North, Range 21 West in Rice County, Minnesota.

Cemetery – The north 12½ rods of the east 8¾ rods of the NE¼ of the SE¼ of Section 36, Twp. 112, Range 22 West in Rice County, Minnesota.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trondhjem Norwegian  
Lutheran Church  
Rice County, Minnesota

Section   10   Page   12  

---

**Boundary Justification**

The church boundary includes the original parcel associated with the 1899 church plus additional land to the north acquired in 1971 to accommodate the fellowship hall addition to the 1899 edifice.

The cemetery boundary includes the original cemetery only and not the land added on the west side in 1998 to accommodate future burials.

**Property Owner**

Church: Trondhjem Community Preservation Society, Inc.  
P.O. Box 259  
Lonsdale, MN 55046

Cemetery: Trondhjem Cemetery Association, Inc.  
Contact: Sherwin Hansen  
8901 Bryant  
Bloomington, MN 55420  
671-888-1122