

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

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

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

For HCRS use only

received

MAR 10 1982

date entered

APR 16 1982

1. Name Aitkin County Multiple Resource Area

historic Historic Resources of Aitkin County (Partial Inventory)

and/or common

2. Location

street & number The County Limits of Aitkin County, Minnesota N/A not for publication

city, town N/A vicinity of N/A congressional district 7th

state Minnesota code 22 county Aitkin code 001

3. Classification -- see individual inventory forms

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

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership -- see individual inventory forms

street & number

city, town _____ vicinity of _____ state _____

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds -- Aitkin County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Aitkin state Minnesota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Statewide Survey of Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1980 federal state county local

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

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota

7. Description -- see individual inventory forms

Condition	N/A	Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed	N/A	N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

See Area Description

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	MAR 15 1982
DATE ENTERED	

Historic Resources of Aitkin County

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

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This Multiple Resource Area Nomination is based on a survey of standing structures conducted in Aitkin County by the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office as part of a long-range statewide survey of historic resources. The properties included in the nomination represent those which illustrate significant aspects of the history of the county and which have been deemed eligible for nomination to the National Register at the conclusion of the survey. Additional information and new perspectives for evaluation of specific types of historic properties are continually being gained as the statewide survey progresses, and it is quite possible that additional Aitkin County properties will be nominated in the future. These may be presented individually or as parts of thematic groups when the entire survey is completed. For this reason, this Multiple Resource Area Nomination should not be construed as representing all properties in Aitkin County eligible for nomination.

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

MAR 15 1982

Aitkin County

Standing Structures

The basis of the survey for this nomination is an inventory of structures which are indicative of various aspects of the county's history. Structures were identified and inventoried during a county wide survey conducted during the Summer of 1980.

Selection of structures for the inventory included both field reconnaissance of pre-identified sites and isolation of sites on a purely visual basis. Pre-identification of sites was limited to a small number of the most significant locations (those unique on a county wide scale, or significantly linked with some aspect of county history.) County histories, individual community histories, and photographs from both the state society and private collections were researched for site-specific information. General references to common buildings were not noted.

Township maps from the 1916 and 1979 County Atlases were copied for field use. Plat maps on file in the county recorder's office were researched for original plat information (proprietors, survey and filing dates) and for addition dates. The filing dates for the various platted areas were noted on current highway department city maps. This collection of maps was useful in gaining a localized sense of development for areas of the county.

All city streets were walked or driven. All rural non-farm structures, pre-identified sites, and locally suggested buildings were visited. The roads connecting these dispersed sites provided a strong sampling of the rural landscape. Pre-identified sites were inventoried regardless of integrity. Other buildings with unusual integrity or unique features were also inventoried. In general, structures built before 1940 were considered for an inventory.

Follow-up information (both localized specific and generalized contextual) on some sites was gathered to help establish significance.

In each region of the county, at least one and in most cases several local contacts were made through the county historical society and by random inquiry. These were most often helpful in locating information on selected properties, but also in pointing out additional locations for inventory.

From the inventory of 270 sites, 9 individual structures were selected for nomination to the National Register, mostly on the basis of their significance within the county. Information and photographs on all sites are recorded on inventory forms for a permanent record.

Survey Method

MAR 15 1982

AITKIN COUNTY

Area Description

Aitkin County encompasses an area of 1994 square miles in north-central Minnesota. Aitkin, the county seat and largest community, is 110 miles north and slightly west of the Twin Cities. All county boundaries follow the straight lines of the government survey system.

The land surface is nearly level or moderately undulating with belts of morainic hills in the northwest and southwest. Extensive peat bogs are located throughout east-central Aitkin County. The county is drained chiefly by the Mississippi River and its tributaries, of which the Willow, Sandy, and Rice Rivers are the most significant. The Mississippi meanders through the county in a southwesterly direction. Only the extreme north-eastern corner drained by the St. Louis River and the southeastern area drained toward the St. Croix River are outside the Mississippi River drainage basin. Numerous small and several sizable lakes are found in the county with the greatest concentration in the hilly lake region south of Aitkin. Mille Lacs (only a small portion of which lies in Aitkin County), Sandy, and Rice Lakes are the largest.

Aitkin County's native vegetation consisted of extensive stands of towering White and Norway pine in the western third north of the city of Aitkin, the southeast corner, and the McGregor-Lakes Region. Mixed deciduous and evergreen trees prevailed throughout the remainder of the county. Dense stands of tamarack grew in the swamps comprising approximately 40% of the total land area. Today, the county remains heavily forested. Aspen and birch have replaced a large portion of the original pineries. Small farms occupy the narrow Mississippi alluvial plain and are scattered throughout the forested areas. Over three quarters of the total land area is publicly owned; four state forests contain a large portion of the public domain.

Aitkin County has a rich heritage of Indian inhabitation and Euro-American exploration. The region was an area of bitter confrontation between the Ojibway and Dacotah peoples for over a century prior to permanent white settlement. The Ojibway, armed with French firearms, eventually forced the Dakotah to withdraw to the south and west in the 1700s. The Dakotah, however, made frequent revengeful forays into the region by way of the Mississippi River into the mid-1800s. Explorers and early fur traders also utilized the Mississippi as a highway in traversing the region. The Savanna Portage, a five mile portage in east-central Aitkin County, was a crucial link in the transportation network; it was the main route between the Great Lakes and the Upper Mississippi River.

The earliest sustained interaction between native inhabitants and Euro-Americans occurred in the late eighteenth century in the Sandy Lake area. Sandy Lake became an important trading center for both British and American fur traders beginning in 1794 with the establishment of a Northwest Company post on the lake's west shore.

The Ojibway ceded the land now comprising Aitkin County in treaties of 1837 and 1855. The Territorial Legislature created Aitkin County in 1857; townships were surveyed between 1858 and 1874.

Construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad through the center of the county in 1870-71 brought dramatic changes to the wilderness. Aitkin, a station point at the railroad's nearest proximity to the Mississippi River, became the county's first permanent white settlement. The railroad's arrival also stimulated development of the previously insignificant logging industry which, in turn, resulted in substantial river commerce on the Upper Mississippi between Aitkin and Grand Rapids. Aitkin, as the northernmost settlement on the Mississippi River, became the supply base for all logging operations on the northern reaches of the Mississippi. Supplies were shipped by rail and then transported by steamboat to the camps or Grand Rapids. Aitkin continued to serve as the principal supply base for logging operations on the Upper Mississippi until 1890 when the Duluth and Winnipeg Railroad connected Grand Rapids with Duluth.

Logging operations in Aitkin County peaked between 1880 and 1910. All but a small fraction of locally sawn logs were destined for mills outside the county. Production declined sharply after 1910, and by 1920 all major logging concerns had ceased operations in the McGregor-Lakes Region, the last of the county's major pine areas to be logged. Small loggers, however, continued to log isolated stands of prime timber and lesser grades of timber for cutting at local portable mills.

For several years after the county's organization in 1872, the fledgling supply base of Aitkin and the numerous logging camps comprised the entire white population. In 1880 only 366 individuals, the vast majority of whom were loggers, resided in the county; many of this population were of Canadian origin. One hundred thirty-six people lived in Aitkin and a few at Kimberly Station several miles east of Aitkin. Thirteen farms, primarily located on the Mississippi alluvial plain in the vicinity of Aitkin, had been developed.

The following decades witnessed the gradual expansion of agricultural land use and a tremendous influx of Scandinavian immigrants. By the turn-of-the-century, the county's population had swelled to 6743 and the number of farms had increased to 768. Over 4500 settlers were concentrated in Aitkin (1719) and the ten southwestern townships between Lake Mille Lacs and the Mississippi River. The vast majority of the county's large Scandinavian population, of which Swedes were predominant, settled in this hilly lake region. Outside of Aitkin and the southwestern townships, settlement was limited to the Mississippi alluvial plain; the area adjacent to the Northern Pacific Railroad, including several small service communities along the line; a small wilderness outpost at Libby near the government dam at Sandy Lake; and scattered farmsteads on the Aitkin-Grand Rapids road through western Aitkin County.

Completion of the county's rail network in 1908-10 provided additional impetus for settlement and industrial development. The Soo Line constructed three lines through the county in 1908-09 -- the major line from Moose River to Plummer entered the county directly east of Aitkin and proceeded in a northwesterly direction leaving the county in the extreme northwest corner, a second line from Brooten to Moose Lake crossed the southeast corner, and the third line connected the Cuyuna Iron Range west of Aitkin with the railroad's major line through the county. The Tri-State Land Company, a subsidiary of the Soo Line, platted nine communities along the lines and promoted settlement of lands adjacent to the railroad.

The Mississippi and Hill City Railroad, completed in 1910, had a tremendous impact on Hill City, a small community in northwestern Aitkin County previously lacking a transportation link to major markets. The National Woodenware Company, a subsidiary of the large Chicago packing firm Armour & Co., established the largest mill complex in Aitkin County history in Hill City the same year. The mill, which manufactured woodenware required in the packing industry, caused the community to flourish; and its population rose to over 1000. The community declined steadily following the mill's closing in 1928.

Agricultural expansion in the twentieth century coincided with logging's rapid decline, construction of rail lines, and artificial drainage of the county's swamplands. Farm figures illustrate the shift to agriculture in the early twentieth century; between 1900 and 1925 the number of Aitkin County farms more than tripled to over 2500. Farmers initially relied on the potato but have since shifted to dairying.

The Great Depression's impact on Aitkin County was particularly noticeable in those areas settled during the two previous decades. Indebted farmers abandoned their farmsteads, recently organized townships dissolved, and the small agricultural service centers on the Soo lines declined. Many of the latter communities have since disappeared; others are little more than ghost towns.

Aitkin County has experienced a steady population decline in recent years, falling from a high of 17,865 in 1940 to 11,403 in 1970. All communities excepting McGregor and most rural townships have lost population since 1940. More recent positive developments include a revitalized logging industry centered around production of veneer products and the county's development as a leading turkey producing center.

The architecture of the county follows the typical building pattern of other counties in the cutover region. Initial Euro-American buildings were of log construction. Log homestead cabins and barns are visible throughout the county; many are located on abandoned farmsteads and are deteriorating due to age and the lack of proper maintenance. Many log houses exist today as the core of larger structures sheathed in clapboard. Log structures were replaced in later years by simple frame structures of modest proportions. Wood is the dominant construction material for both residential and agricultural structures. Early commercial buildings were also of frame construction. Many, however, have been replaced with masonry structures after either being destroyed by fire or razed. Destroyed commercial structures have not been replaced in the smaller communities which have experienced declining populations since the 1930s.

8. Significance -- see individual inventory forms

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

Specific dates	N/A	Builder/Architect	N/A
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Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

See Area Significance

9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached sheets

10. Geographical Data -- see individual inventory forms

Acreeage of nominated property N/A
Quadrangle name N/A Quadrangle scale N/A

UMT References

UTM NOT VERIFIED

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Verbal boundary description and justification

N/A see individual inventory forms

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

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code
state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mark E. Haidet, Research Historian-Survey

organization Minnesota Historical Society date June 1981

street & number 240 Summit Avenue-Hill House telephone 612-296-9075

city or town St. Paul state Minnesota

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is: See individual inventory forms
N/A national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Russell W. Fridley
title State Historic Preservation Officer date 2/10/82

For HCRS use only

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

see continuation sheet for details date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

MAR 15 1982

Area Significance

Aitkin County's historical significance lies principally in its rich logging past (1870-1930) and subsequent settlement of the cutover region. Much of the county's development has revolved around its two major transportation routes -- the Mississippi River and the Northern Pacific Railroad constructed in 1870-71. Aitkin, located at the junction of these two transportation routes, has developed as the center of all major activity since the county's organization in 1872. Several nominated structures reflect Aitkin's significance not only as the center of early logging activity and the county's transportation network, but also its position as the center of commercial, governmental, and educational activity.

Indians, explorers, and early fur traders used the Mississippi River as a highway in traversing the region. The Savanna Portage (Balsam Township, placed on the National Register in 1973) was the main route between the Great Lakes and the Upper Mississippi River. While the Mississippi had long been used as a regional highway, it was the Northern Pacific Railroad which stimulated county development in the late nineteenth century. The railroad's arrival resulted in the county's first permanent settlement (Aitkin) and provided the supply link required for large scale logging operations on the Upper Mississippi River. Aitkin soon established itself as the leading supply base for logging operations on the Upper Mississippi and, later, as the region's foremost agricultural service center. The Northern Pacific Depot (1915-16, Aitkin) symbolizes both the railroad's crucial role in county development and Aitkin's influential regional position near the turn-of-the-century.

Aitkin's leading mercantile establishment supplying the basic material needs of loggers and early settlers was Potter & Co., later known as the Potter-Casey Company. The Potter-Casey Company Building (1902, Aitkin), one of the largest early commercial structures in Aitkin which retains a significant degree of physical integrity, and the architecturally distinctive Patrick Casey House (1901, Aitkin), the home of one of the firm's partners, represent the firm's significant role during the county's formative years.

Logging was the dominant theme in Aitkin County history between 1870 and 1910. During this period of intense logging activity, numerous seasonal camps and several farm camps were operated in the forested regions. The Sandy River Lumber Company Horse Barn (c.1896, Clark Township) is a rare surviving structural link to the actual logging process. A vital component of a farm camp, the barn was used for the summering of horses and the storage of hay by one of the largest firms logging in the McGregor-Lakes Region.

The National Woodenware Company Superintendent's Residence (1910, Hill City) is associated with the last major timber production operation in Aitkin County. The National Woodenware Company operated the largest mill complex in Aitkin County history from 1910 to 1928 and exercised considerable influence in Hill City's development as the largest population center outside Aitkin.

Agricultural settlement coincided with the disappearance of the forests and completion of the county's transportation network. Initial agricultural settlement occurred in the hilly lake region south of Aitkin during the 1880s and 1890s. Scandinavian immigrants, primarily Swedes, comprised the vast majority of the area's settlers. The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Church (1897, Nordland Township) is the most identifiable structure associated with this substantial Swedish settlement.

Completion of the county's rail network in the early twentieth century stimulated agricultural settlement of previously unoccupied regions. Settlements in the vicinity of the new lines flourished initially but collapsed in the Depression. Today, many of these areas are public forestland. The Arthyde Stone House (c.1923, T45,R22) reflects the region's sudden rise and decline.

Two additional Aitkin County nominations are representative of Aitkin's central role in county development in the twentieth century. The Aitkin County Courthouse and Jail (1929/1915, Aitkin), and the Aitkin Public Library (1911, Aitkin) illustrate the community's leadership in governmental and educational activities. The Courthouse and Jail have housed most county governmental offices since 1929.

Architecturally distinctive structures include the Queen Anne-Classical Patrick Casey House (1901, Aitkin), by local builder N.J. Holden; the Beaux Arts Aitkin County Courthouse (1929, Aitkin), by the St. Paul firm Toltz, King, and Day; and the Aitkin Public Library (1911, Aitkin), by Madison (Wisconsin) architects Claude and Stark.

Aitkin County Registrar of Deeds Records.

Census Records, Federal and State.

Greer, Clifford U. Twelve Poses West: A History of the McGregor Lakes Region. McGregor, MN: O. L. Johnson, 1967.

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Kirsch, Alice M. McGregor, Minnesota. (Historical sketch of the community's development). No date.

Klee, A.C. and Dorothy Ratcliffe Lindquist, eds. The Story of Mud River: A Chronicle of Aitkin, Minnesota, 1871-1971. Aitkin, MN: Aitkin Area Centennial Executive Committee, 1971.

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Lemen, Robert N. III. The Rabey Line: Being an Account of the Life and Death of a Short-Line Railroad in the Minnesota Northwoods, 1970.

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Plat Book of the State of Minnesota. Rockford, Illinois: W.W. Hixson & Co., 1916.

Sheeks, Kenneth W. Selected Aspects of the Economic History of Aitkin County, Minnesota: Introducing Less Well Known People and Events. A paper presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of Minnesota to fulfill a requirement for the Master of Arts Degree, 1966.

Summary Listing of Historical Sites in Aitkin County. Compiled listing of historical sites on file in the Minnesota SHPO files, 1969.

Upham, Warren. Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance. 2nd rev. ed. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1969.

Walters, Charles K. The History of McGrath, Minnesota, 1977.

Williams, J. Fletcher, N.H. Winchell, Edward D. Neill, and Charles S. Bryant. History of the Upper Mississippi Valley. Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Company, 1881.

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Also see bibliographies on individual inventory sheets

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Aitkin County Multiple Resource Area
State MN

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | Arthyde Stone House | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/16/82</u> |
| | | | Attest | _____ |
| 2. | Sandy River Lumber Company Horse Barn | Substantive Review | Keeper | <u>pet</u> |
| | | | Attest | _____ |
| 3. | Potter-Casey Company Building | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/16/82</u> |
| | | | Attest | _____ |
| 4. | Aitkin Public Library | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/16/82</u> |
| | | | Attest | _____ |
| 5. | National Woodenware Company
Superintendent's House | Substantive Review | Keeper | <u>William H. Brauman 4-16-82</u> |
| | | | Attest | <u>Lula McClelland 4-15-82</u> |
| 6. | Swedish Evangelical Lutheran
Bethlehem Church | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/16/82</u> |
| | | | Attest | _____ |
| 7. | Casey, Patrick, House | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/16/82</u> |
| | | | Attest | _____ |
| 8. | Aitkin County Courthouse and Jail | Substantive Review | Keeper | <u>William H. Brauman 4-16-82</u> |
| | | | Attest | <u>Lula McClelland 4-16-82</u> |
| 9. | Northern Pacific Depot | Entered in the
National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers 4/16/82</u> |
| | | | Attest | _____ |
| 10. | | | Keeper | _____ |
| | | | Attest | _____ |