



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
Melvin Carter, Mayor

*25 West Fourth Street, Ste. 1400
Saint Paul, MN 55102*

*Telephone: 651-266-6700
Facsimile: 651-266-6549*

DATE: January 11, 2019

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee

SUBJECT: Muskego Church, 2375 Como Avenue West - Consider recommendation of updated local heritage preservation site designation study for new proposed boundary.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Muskego Church, a pioneer-era log building, is located on the Upper Campus of Luther Seminary in the Saint Anthony Park neighborhood of Saint Paul. Constructed in 1843, the church is reportedly the "first structure built by Norse immigrants in America dedicated exclusively to the ministries of Word and Sacrament." It was originally located at the Muskego settlement near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1904, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church purchased, disassembled, and relocated the log church to its seminary in Saint Anthony Park. After reassembly on the eastern hillside of the campus, the church was encased with wood siding, which remained in place until approximately 1970. Muskego Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated a local landmark by the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) in 1978. Because the National Register nomination did not provide a boundary for the property, as was common at the time of designation, the footprint of the building is the de facto boundary for National Register considerations. The local designation boundary for the property, however, is identified as Lot 1, Block 1, Mann's Addition to Saint Anthony Park North, the lot that encompasses the Upper Campus of the Seminary. The purpose of the HPC action under review by the Planning Commission is to modify (reduce) the local designation boundary for the Muskego Church site. This has no impact to the National Register listing.

BACKGROUND

Muskego Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated a local heritage preservation site by the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) in 1978. The National Register nomination did not provide a boundary for the property, and the HPC study defined the boundary as "Lot 1, Block 1, Mann's Addition to St. Anthony Park North," the site encompassing the entire Luther Seminary Upper Campus. This delineation does not accurately correspond to Muskego Church and is being refined as part of the Section 106 mitigation for the Zvago Cooperative at Saint Anthony Park, a senior cooperative residence, which will be built south of Muskego Church. This updated local

designation study also includes a reevaluation of the property and its period of significance using current National Register standards.

The intent of the boundary was to follow existing property lines as much as possible and that the historic site legal boundary only serves to define the extent of the Muskego Church historic site (see Attachment 2, Page 18); it will have no effect on legal property boundaries as currently defined.

The new legal description for the property will be:

That part of Block 1, Mann's Addition to St. Anthony Park North, according to the recorded plat thereof, Ramsey County, Minnesota and the vacated alley lying within said Block 1, described as follows:

Commencing at the most Southerly corner of Lot 32, Block 2, said Mann's Addition to St. Anthony Park North; thence North 50 degrees 47 minutes 20 seconds East, assumed bearing, along the Southeasterly line of said Blocks 1 and 2 and their extensions, a distance of 543.87 feet; thence North 40 degrees 00 minutes 00 seconds West a distance of 111.17 feet; thence on a bearing of West a distance of 20.07 feet; thence on a bearing of North a distance of 6.00 feet to the point of beginning; thence on a bearing of West a distance of 23.00 feet; thence on a bearing of South a distance of 6.00 feet; thence on a bearing of West a distance of 35.16 feet; thence North 40 degrees 02 minutes 03 seconds West a distance of 39.98 feet; thence on a bearing of North a distance of 68.31 feet to the westerly extension of the north line of Lot 1, said Block 1; thence South 88 degrees 15 minutes 10 seconds East, along said westerly extension, a distance of 115.75 feet to the northwest corner of the West 132.98 feet of said Lot 1; thence South 2 degrees 40 minutes 43 seconds West, along the west line of said West 132.98 feet to the southwest corner of the North 53.99 feet of the West 132.98 feet of said Lot 1; thence South 39 degrees 33 minutes 39 seconds West a distance of 45.99 feet to the point of beginning.

The Heritage Preservation Commission was a consulting party to the St. Anthony Park/Zvago Senior Housing Project. The project has a HUD insured mortgage and was determined to have an adverse impact on the National Register Eligible Luther Seminary Historic District. As part of the mitigation for the loss of the three houses and landscape at Luther Seminary, the designation study was updated by Hess, Roise and Company for Muskego Church which is locally designated and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The significant change to the designation study is the boundary.

PLANNING COMMISSION ROLE

A Planning Commission recommendation regarding proposed new heritage preservation site designations is required per Legislative Code 73.05 (b) (emphasis added):

The heritage preservation commission shall advise the city planning commission of the proposed designation of a heritage preservation site, including boundaries, and a program for the preservation of a heritage preservation site, and secure from the city planning commission its recommendation with respect to the relationship of the proposed heritage preservation designation to the comprehensive plan of the City of Saint Paul, its opinion as

to the effect of the proposed designation upon the surrounding neighborhood, and its opinion and recommendation as to any other planning consideration which may be relevant to the proposed designation, together with its recommendation of approval, rejection or modification of the proposed designation. Said recommendation shall become part of the official record concerning the proposed designation and shall be submitted by the heritage preservation commission along with its recommendation concerning the proposed designation to the city council. The heritage preservation commission may make such modifications, changes and alterations concerning the proposed designations as it deems necessary in consideration of the recommendations of the city planning commission.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONFORMANCE

The proposed designation is in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan, including the following specific provisions of the Historic Preservation Chapter:

Strategy 3: Identify, Evaluate and Designate Historic Resources

3.11. Make the designation of significant historic resources as heritage preservation sites a priority for the City Council.

3.12. Designate historic resources, such as buildings, structures, objects, archaeological sites, historic districts, and landscapes as Saint Paul heritage preservation sites or historic districts.

Strategy 6: Preserve Areas with Unique Architectural, Urban and Spatial Characteristics that Enhance the Character of the Built Environment

6.1. Determine the character-defining features of each neighborhood that should be preserved; incorporate these features into area plans and master plans for new development

Strategy 7: Provide Opportunities for Education and Outreach

7.2. Identify and mark significant historic resources.

EFFECT ON SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

Historic properties can help define the character of their neighborhoods, create a strong sense of place, enhance the quality of life of residents, and serve as a catalyst for investment in surrounding properties, both residential and commercial. The modification of the boundary for the site will have no negative effect on the surrounding neighborhood and will allow for new investment into the area.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee recommend that the Planning Commission support the updated designation study with new proposed boundary of Muskego Church, a designated Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site.

Attachments:

1. Muskego Church Boundary Change Staff Report
2. Muskego Church Updated Local Designation Study 2375 Como Avenue West, Saint Paul
3. Planning Commission Resolution

CITY OF SAINT PAUL
HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

LOCATION/ADDRESS: 2375 Como Avenue West, Muskego Church
HISTORIC NAME(S): Muskego Church
INVENTORY #: RA-SPC-0737
OWNER: Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary
DATE OF HPC PUBLIC HEARING: November 1, 2018
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot 1, Block 1, Mann's Addition to St. Anthony Park North
WARD: 4 PLANNING DISTRICT: 12 – Saint Anthony Park
STAFF INVESTIGATION AND REPORT: George Gause

- A. PURPOSE:** To consider recommendation to City Council on the updated designation study with new proposed boundary of Muskego Church a designated Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site.
- B. SITE DESCRIPTION:** Muskego Church, a pioneer-era log building, is located on the Upper Campus of Luther Seminary in the Saint Anthony Park neighborhood of Saint Paul. Constructed in 1843, the church is reportedly the "first structure built by Norse immigrants in America dedicated exclusively to the ministries of Word and Sacrament." It was originally located at the Muskego settlement near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1904, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church purchased, disassembled, and relocated the log church to its seminary in Saint Anthony Park. After reassembly on the eastern hillside of the campus, the church was encased with wood siding, which remained in place until approximately 1970. Muskego Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated a local landmark by the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) in 1978. Because the National Register nomination did not provide a boundary for the property, as was common at the time of designation, the footprint of the building is the de facto boundary for National Register considerations. The local designation boundary for the property, however, is identified as Lot 1, Block 1, Mann's Addition to Saint Anthony Park North, the lot that encompasses the Upper Campus of the Seminary.
- C. CODE CITATIONS:**
1. Section 73.05 (a) of the City's Legislative Code states, in considering the designation of any area, place, building, structure or similar object in the City of Saint Paul as a heritage preservation site; the commission shall apply the following criteria with respect to such designation:
 - (1) Its character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of Saint Paul, State of Minnesota, or the United States.
 - (2) Its location as a site of a significant historic event.
 - (3) Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City of Saint Paul.
 - (4) Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural or engineering type or specimen.
 - (5) Its identification as the work of an architect, engineer, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the City of Saint Paul.
 - (6) Its embodiment of elements of architectural or engineering design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural or engineering innovation.
 - (7) Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City of Saint Paul.

2. Section 73.05 (e) states for *Finding and recommendations*, the heritage preservation commission shall determine if the proposed heritage preservation site(s) is eligible for designation as determined by the criteria specified in paragraph (a) of this section, and if the heritage preservation commission recommends to the city council that the site(s) be designated as a heritage preservation site, the commission shall transmit to the city council with its recommendation its proposed program for the preservation of the site.

D. BACKGROUND:

Muskego Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated a local heritage preservation site by the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) in 1978. The National Register nomination did not provide a boundary for the property, and the HPC study defined the boundary as "Lot 1, Block 1, Mann's Addition to St. Anthony Park North," the site encompassing the entire Luther Seminary Upper Campus. This delineation does not accurately correspond to Muskego Church and is currently being refined as part of the Section 106 mitigation for the Zvago Cooperative at Saint Anthony Park, a senior cooperative residence, which is being built south of Muskego Church. This updated local designation study includes a reevaluation of the property and its period of significance using current National Register standards.

The intent of the boundary was to follow existing property lines as much as possible and that the historic site legal boundary only serves to define the extent of the Muskego Church historic site; it will have no effect on legal property boundaries as currently defined.

The new legal description for the property will be:

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The Heritage Preservation Commission was a consulting party to the St. Anthony Park/Zvago Senior Housing Project. The project has a HUD insured mortgage and was determined to have an adverse

impact on the National Register Eligible Luther Seminary Historic District. As part of the mitigation for the loss of the three houses and landscape at Luther Seminary, the designation study was updated by Hess, Roise and Company for Muskego Church which is locally designated and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The significant change to the designation study is the boundary.

FINDINGS:

1. On October 24, 1978, the Muskego Church at 2375 Como Avenue was designated a heritage preservation site under Ordinance No. Ord. No. 16470, C.F. 271887. The Heritage Preservation Commission shall protect the architectural character of heritage preservation sites through review and approval or denial of applications for city permits for exterior work within designated heritage preservation sites §73.04. (4).
2. The building was constructed in 1843 outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was purchased by Luther Seminary in 1904, and was moved and reassembled at its current location in the same year.
3. The updated boundary will correspond to just the designated Muskego Church site and will not extend to the entire campus which was clearly not the intent of the original designations.
4. The revised boundary will continue the properties significant under criteria (2) and (7) of Section 73.05 (a) of the Legislative Code.

E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the above findings, staff recommends that the updated designation study with new boundary for Muskego Church at 2375 Como Avenue be accepted by the HPC and the HPC recommend the amended property boundary to City Council consideration.



**MUSKEGO CHURCH
UPDATED LOCAL DESIGNATION STUDY
2375 COMO AVENUE WEST, SAINT PAUL**

**PREPARED BY:
JESSICA BERGLIN AND CHARLENE ROISE
HESS, ROISE AND COMPANY
100 NORTH FIRST STREET
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55422**

DECEMBER 2017

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Property Name: Muskego Church
Address: 2375 Como Avenue West, Saint Paul
Owner: Luther Seminary

Site Status: Listed in National Register of Historic Places, 1975
Designated a Local Heritage Preservation Site, 1978

Muskego Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated a local heritage preservation site by the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) in 1978. The National Register nomination did not provide a boundary for the property, and the HPC study defined the boundary as “Lot 1, Block 1, Mann’s Addition to St. Anthony Park North,” the site encompassing the entire Luther Seminary Upper Campus. This delineation does not accurately correspond to Muskego Church and is being refined as part of the Section 106 mitigation for the Zvago Cooperative at Saint Anthony Park, a senior cooperative residence, which will be built south of Muskego Church. This updated local designation study also includes a reevaluation of the property and its period of significance using current National Register standards.

PROPERTY DATA

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources: 1

Function or Use: Historic: RELIGION/religious facility
Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

Architectural Classification: OTHER/log construction

Materials: WOOD/log

Applicable National Register Criteria:

- 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.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations:

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance: A: RELIGION, ETHNIC HERITAGE/OTHER – Norwegian
C: ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance: 1844–1970

Significant Dates: 1904

Significant Person: N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: N/A

DESCRIPTION¹

Summary

Norway Lutheran Church, commonly known as Muskego Church, is located at 2375 Como Avenue West on the campus of Luther Seminary in the Saint Anthony Park neighborhood of Saint Paul, Minnesota. Completed in 1844, the log church was originally built near Muskego, Wisconsin, where it was positioned “atop an eminence called ‘Indian Hill,’” according to *Minnesota History*. The site was a Native American burial ground before it became a churchyard and pioneer cemetery for the Muskego settlement. The two-story church was constructed using red oak logs, which were adzed and hand-planed to a thickness of approximately six inches. Historian John Hackett reported that the hand-hewn logs were so tight that “only the interlocking ends of the logs were chinked with clay.”²

The early congregation outgrew the church in 1869 and disassembled the property, relocating it to the bottom of the hillside to clear the site for a larger brick structure. The log building was subsequently purchased by a local farmer and used as a barn until 1904, when it was bought by the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, simply known as the United Church. The pioneer church was then dismantled again and “shipped piece by piece” to the United Church Seminary—a precursor to Luther Seminary—in Saint Paul, where it was reassembled “on a slight rise of ground reminiscent of its original location,” according to *Minnesota History*. Its exterior log walls were furred with two-by-fours and covered with clapboard siding for protection, but the interior recreated its early configuration. The son of Peter Jacobson—the first chairman of the Muskego congregation—oversaw the reassembly in Saint Paul according to a 1968 manuscript by Ernest Sihler, archivist for the American Lutheran Church. “He had worshipped in the church from 1844–1869 so remembered well how it looked as a church.” A 2015 historic structure report also cites a 1903 etching of the property, the recollections of Muskego Church’s early pastor, Reverend H. A. Stub, and a black walnut pillar that was salvaged from the interior as the basis of the 1904 work.³

The exterior cladding was removed in 1970, when seminary personnel discovered that it was damaging the logs rather than protecting them. With the siding removed, Muskego Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 as a significant example of pioneer log construction and as the “first Norwegian Lutheran Church built in the United States.” It was designated a local heritage preservation site by the Saint Paul HPC in 1978 for the same reasons.⁴

¹ Much of this report has been excerpted from Jessica Berglin and Charlene Roise, “Norway Lutheran Church (Muskego Church),” National Register of Historic Places nomination amendment, December 2017.

² “Muskego Church,” *Minnesota History* 38 (March 1963): 231; John J. Hackett, “Muskego Church,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, November 1974, 7:1.

³ “Muskego Church,” 231; Robert Claybaugh, Will Stark, and Jay Schmidt, “Historic Structures Report, Norway Lutheran Church (Muskego) for Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota,” report prepared by Claybaugh Preservation Architecture, Stark Preservation Planning, and Barn Repair Specialists, March 2015, n.p.; Ernest W. Sihler, “The Story of the Muskego Church,” May 1968, Muskego Church files, Luther Seminary Archives, Gullixson Hall, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota (hereafter Seminary Archives).

⁴ Gary Johnson, “Muskego Church,” Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission Site Nomination Form, April 28, 1978, on file with the Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission, City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and

Narrative Description

Muskego Church sits atop the eastern hillside of Luther Seminary's Upper Campus, the historic nucleus of the institution formerly known as the United Church Seminary. The two-story log building is oriented in an east-west alignment, with the west (front) facade facing the seminary's great lawn (Photograph 1). A straight flight of concrete stairs runs in front of the church, and a concrete sidewalk curves around the building's north and east (rear) sides. These features were added to the site by the late 1920s. Norway pine trees, which were planted in the 1930s, encircle the property (Photographs 3 and 4).

Muskego Church rests on a limestone foundation. It measures approximately forty feet long and is divided into two sections: the nave to the west and the chancel to the east. Both sections have wood-shingled, gabled roofs, but the chancel's roof is lower than the nave's by approximately two feet. The chancel is also slightly narrower than the nave (Photograph 2).

The walls are formed by hand-hewn red oak logs, which are saddle-notched at the joints (Photograph 5). Roman numerals were incised into the logs when the church was relocated to Saint Paul in 1904. Chinking between the logs is a composition of Portland cement, latex grout, hydrated lime, and washed sand; the present chinking dates to 1994, when the property underwent an extensive restoration. Walls in the east and west gabled ends are clad with unpainted, wood, lap siding. Eight-over-eight, wood-sash windows are on the north and south walls of the church. The windows on the second story are vertically aligned over those on the first. The existing windows were installed in 1904 to replicate the church's original appearance. Wood-plank doors with large strap hinges are in historic entrances on the east and west walls, with double doors filling the primary (west) entrance to the nave. They are black walnut to match historic descriptions of the property and were installed during a 1994 restoration campaign.

The interior of Muskego Church was recreated after its 1904 relocation to Saint Paul. A letter published in 1906 in *The First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration (1821–1840)* offered the following description of the original interior: "It was built of oak logs hewed on both sides, six inches thick, and matched after the Norwegian fashion of building houses. On the inside the logs were dressed perfectly smooth and then fitted so close together that no mortar was used between them. Double doors in the front were made of black walnut. . . . Galleries were built across the front and along both sides to about the middle of the church. These galleries were supported by six heavy columns turned out of solid walnut." Another account reported that there were "two rows of three windows on either side" and "seven pews on one side and eight on the other, having a seating capacity of ninety. The gallery had a seating capacity of at least one hundred. When making use of the aisle and the part of the chancel it was possible to crowd up to two hundred and fifty people into the church." According to Paul Daniels, current archivist and curator for Luther Seminary, male congregants sat on the right side of the aisle, while women and children filled the pews on the left side and in the U-shaped gallery (Photograph 7), which is accessed by steep wood stairs in the northwest corner of the nave. The gallery is currently inaccessible due to structural deterioration, but it includes a wood floor supported by wood joists.

Economic Development, Saint Paul, Minn.; Hackett, "Muskego Church," 8:1; Claybaugh et. al., "Norway Lutheran Church (Muskego)," n.p.; "Welcome to Old Muskego Church on the Luther Theological Seminary Campus," undated pamphlet, Muskego Church files, Seminary Archives.

Wood planks form the gallery railings. Modern track lights have been installed on the wood joists beneath the gallery and along the outside walls of the upper level.⁵

The church's log walls were not the only references to Norwegian models. The high pulpit (Photograph 6), raised approximately seven feet above the floor and placed in the center of the chancel, followed "the pattern of the churches in Norway" and enabled the pastor "to see the people in the gallery," as Sihler reported. Placing the altar beneath the pulpit also followed Norwegian customs according to Daniels, who noted that the arrangement not only conserved space in a limited building footprint, but also reflected a "theological perspective" for a community that emphasized the "spoken word over sacrament."⁶

The pulpit and altar dominate the chancel, the floor of which is one step higher than the nave. Wood stairs are in the northeast corner of the chancel, just to the left of the altar, to access the pulpit. The wood structure forms a screen wall behind the altar, and the upper portion curves around the lectern. Four turned, black walnut, columns are along the wall on the lower level. The outer two are topped with rounded finials. A Hardanger embroidery panel hangs in the center of the wall beneath the lectern. It features common Christian iconography such as the cross, a chalice, and a dove. The embroidery was hung as part of the 1994 restoration; a painting of the Last Supper was in this location previously but was removed because it had become deteriorated over time. The embroidery panel is framed with wood painted in a traditional Norwegian rosemåling pattern. The predominant colors in the rosemåling are ochre and oxblood, which were typical of the nineteenth century according to Daniels. A five-sided altar railing with turned spindles and a raised kneeler surrounds the altar, which is constructed with stained plywood and covered in a white altar cloth. A wood-plank door is on the east wall of the church, immediately behind the altar. Daniels reported that this door would have been used by the preacher to enter the church from the parsonage, which would have been near the rear of the church on its original site.⁷

Wood-framed boxes on either side of the chancel provided seating for the pastor and the klokker, who led liturgical music and read Bible passages during worship services. The pastor sat along the north wall, closer to the pulpit stairs, while the klokker sat on the opposite side. The chancel also includes a moveable baptismal font and a traditional Norwegian kubbestol—a barrel-shaped chair formed from a log. The baptismal font features a white porcelain bowl set into a pedestal made of turned wood. The kubbestol and the baptismal font date to the mid-nineteenth century, although they were placed in Muskego Church in 1904. Both would have been common in Norwegian Lutheran churches during Muskego's original era of construction according to Daniels.⁸

⁵ Sihler, "The Story of Muskego Church," 3; Letter from Hans Ellertson to Rasmus B. Anderson, quoted in Rasmus B. Anderson, *The First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration (1821–1840): Its Causes and Results* (Madison, Wisc.: privately published, 1906), 419–420; Nils Nilsen Rønning, *The Saga of Old Muskego* (Waterford, Wisc.: Old Muskego Memorial, 1943), 24.

⁶ Sihler, "The Story of Muskego Church," 3; Paul Daniels (Head of Arts and Archives, Luther Seminary), in discussion with Jessica Berglin, October 2017.

⁷ Paul Daniels discussion, October 2017.

⁸ Ibid.

The church's stained beadboard-paneled ceiling is another feature dating to 1904. Sihler's manuscript reported that Norwegian churches traditionally featured vaulted ceilings. Daniels remarked, however, that the dropped ceiling was installed to conceal the rafters, which were in severe disarray, likely the result of the building's function as a barn for over thirty years and the two relocations.⁹

These minor deviations do not detract from the property's integrity or significance as an "excellent example of pioneer craftsmanship," as the 1978 local designation study states. The log walls are the primary elements that remain from the property's original 1844 construction. These survived the church's relocation to Saint Paul in 1904 and have been repaired since that time. Muskego Church's new position on the seminary's eastern hillside was carefully selected to evoke its original hilltop setting in Wisconsin. The church's period of significance includes the relocation to Saint Paul, where it has been for over 100 years, so its integrity of location and setting are intact. Much of the interior was rebuilt in 1904 following the guidance of original congregation members and an early pastor who presided over the church, as well as physical architectural evidence. Although the material dates to 1904, workers faithfully recreated the design and workmanship of the early Norwegian pioneers. These considerations underscore the property's integrity of feeling and association as a monument to Norwegian cultural heritage.

⁹ Ibid.; Sihler, "The Story of Muskego Church," 3.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

Muskego Church was designated a local heritage preservation site by the Saint Paul HPC in 1978 as “the first house of worship of an organized congregation of Norwegian immigrants in America.” The designation also called the building an “excellent example of pioneer craftsmanship.” The guidelines for evaluating historic properties have been refined since the 1970s, so this document serves as an amendment to the earlier study. As identified in the original report, Muskego Church is significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Religion and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Because arguments of “first,” “oldest,” and “earliest” are difficult to document according to current National Register standards, however, properties are often evaluated for other historical associations. In addition to its religious and architectural significance, Muskego Church is representative of the settlement of Norwegians and the proliferation of Norwegian culture in the United States, making it eligible under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage.¹⁰

Within these contexts, the period of significance for Muskego Church begins in 1844, the year the church was completed, and ends in 1970, the year the exterior of the church was returned to its original appearance. This timeframe captures Muskego Church’s original construction, its relocation and reassembly in Saint Paul in 1904, and the removal of its siding to expose “the attractiveness of the red oak” log walls, as the 1978 local designation study notes.

Muskego Church meets National Register Criterion Consideration A for religious properties because of its architectural significance and its importance as a site of Norwegian cultural heritage. Because Muskego Church was relocated during its period of significance, Criterion Consideration B for moved properties does not apply. Additionally, Criterion Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the last fifty years does not apply because the period of significance overlaps the fifty-year period by a few years.

Narrative Statement of Significance¹¹

The Pioneer Church

Completed in 1844, Muskego Church is recognized by many historians as the first church built by Norwegian immigrants in the United States. Because it was not dedicated until March 1845, though, after the dedication of two other Norwegian Lutheran churches in the vicinity of Koshkonong, Wisconsin, some accounts regard the latter pair as “the first two Norwegian Lutheran church edifices on American soil.” Further complicating the matter, other scholars consider a log meetinghouse constructed around 1840 in the Fox River Valley near Norway, Illinois, to be “the oldest Norwegian Lutheran church in the country.” Built by Elling Eielsen, a

¹⁰ Johnson, “Muskego Church.”

¹¹ Parts of this section have been excerpted from Jessica Berglin and Charlene Roise, “An Assessment of Significance: Luther Theological Seminary Upper Campus,” report prepared by Hess, Roise and Company, January 2017.

prominent lay preacher in the Haugean tradition, the two-story log cabin, called the “preacher’s place,” contained a space for worship as well as Eielsen’s residence.¹²

Writing in 1906, Norwegian-American scholar Rasmus Bjørn Anderson attempted to clarify which of these properties came first: “The Muskego church was begun in the spring of 1844. It was used by Rev. C. L. Clausen in the autumn of 1844, but was not dedicated before March 1845. It would be stating the matter accurately to say that the first church begun and *built* by the Norwegian immigrants in this century was the Muskego church; but that the two churches on Koshkonong were the first to be *dedicated*. In this statement, I do not take into account the meetinghouse built by Elling Eielsen in the Fox River settlement in 1842”—or 1840 in some accounts.¹³

Historians David Johnson and Christopher Stratton provide another explanation in their National Register nomination for Hauge Lutheran Church, which was built around 1847 to replace Eielsen’s meetinghouse after it was destroyed in a fire. According to the authors: “The arguments regarding which is the first Norwegian Lutheran church in the country appear to be over whether one considers Eielsen a minister before he was ordained and whether one considers the meetinghouse to be a church. Some sources consider the Muskego Church, originally located near Muskego, Wisconsin, founded by Claus Clausen to be the first church. Others consider that to be the country’s first Norwegian Lutheran Church based on the state-church practice.” Johnson and Stratton also remarked that it is not uncommon to have conflicting accounts regarding dates of construction for these early churches “since the dates of the physical buildings can become mistaken for the dates the congregations were established.” This reality makes it even more difficult to document which of these Norwegian Lutheran churches was first established.¹⁴

Regardless, Muskego Church is a monument to the pioneer era of Norwegian settlement in the United States. It is the only one remaining from this period because Eielsen’s meetinghouse burned down and the early Koshkonong churches were replaced with larger structures. Muskego Church was originally constructed to serve a colony of immigrants near Muskego, Wisconsin, in the southeastern part of the state. The earliest group left their home country in the spring of 1839 and arrived in Milwaukee later that year. Many fled “to escape from the clerical-dominated Lutheran Church that was supported by the Norwegian government,” according to historian Terry Shoptaugh. Ernest Sihler, archivist for the American Lutheran Church, reported that they “intended to go to a place in northern Illinois where there were some Norwegians, but land agents in Milwaukee persuaded them to go to Muskego,” approximately twenty miles southwest of the city. Although “the countryside looked inviting,” life on the frontier was difficult: “They bought land and settled as best they could, only to find the next spring that much of the land was

¹² Anderson, *Norwegian Immigration (1821–1840)*, 426–427; David Johnson and Christopher Stratton, “Hauge Lutheran Church,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, September 2015, 8:18–19.

¹³ Anderson, *Norwegian Immigration (1821–1840)*, 426–427; Johnson and Stratton, “Hauge Lutheran Church,” 8:18–19. Johnson and Stratton report that Eielsen’s log meetinghouse was built by 1840.

¹⁴ Johnson and Stratton, “Hauge Lutheran Church,” 8:18–19.

swampy and could not be cultivated. Some moved out; others moved to higher land. There was much fever and sickness and there were many deaths.”¹⁵

Despite these hardships, life in America held great opportunity for the immigrants, and the Muskego colony steadily grew with new arrivals throughout the mid-nineteenth century. The settlers brought their native cultural and religious traditions to their new country. Although they did not have a pastor or a formal place of worship in the early years, “the Christian laymen did the best they could” and “gathered for devotions and prayer” in the haymow of a community member’s barn. The congregation’s first pastor, Claus Lauritz Clausen, arrived in 1843 after a series of chance encounters in Norway. Clausen, a Dane, was on a walking tour of Norway to restore his ailing health when he met Tollef (Tollef in some accounts) Bache, the father of Soren Bache, a member of the Muskego settlement. The group in America had written to Tollef, whom Sihler described as a “God fearing business man [*sic*] living not too far from Oslo,” for his help in securing a teacher from Norway. The twenty-something Clausen was studying to enter foreign mission work when he met Tollef on his hiatus. As the two visited, Tollef “brought out the letter he had received from the Norwegian settlers in America. He suggested to Clausen that maybe God wanted him to go to America to help his countrymen rather than to the foreign mission field. Clausen deliberated and prayed and came to the conclusion that this was a call from God.”¹⁶

The Dane and his young bride arrived in Wisconsin in the summer of 1843. Although the Muskego members initially hoped he would become a school teacher for their children, “when they learned of Clausen’s preparation for becoming a foreign missionary as well as his other schooling, they wished to have him as their pastor.” Clausen was congenial to the idea, but was not an ordained minister. At that time, pastors were sent directly from Norway because “there was no theological faculty available to examine” ministerial candidates in the new land. A willing Lutheran pastor could perform an ordination, however, and the Muskego congregation found a sympathetic ear in Pastor Krause, a German Lutheran minister near Milwaukee. Pastor Krause “spent several hours examining” Clausen and concluded that he “had the knowledge and convictions to serve as a Lutheran pastor.” Krause ordained Clausen on October 18, 1843, in the Muskego congregation’s humble haymow sanctuary.¹⁷

With a pastor in place, members shifted their attention to erecting a proper church edifice. Once again, the Muskego congregants turned to friends and family in Norway for assistance and raised \$430 for the cause. Plans were begun in December 1843, with construction commencing in early 1844 and completed later that year. The church was dedicated on March 13, 1845. Members were highly engaged in the construction process, contributing “much volunteer labor” to help reduce construction costs. Red oak logs were “hailed up to Indian Hill, a former Indian burial ground, where they were squared, notched, and fitted. This work was according to the method of building log houses in Norway.” Peter Jacobson was credited with being the church’s builder in the 1975 National Register nomination, although Sihler simply called him “the first chairman of

¹⁵ Ibid., Terry Shoptaugh, “Norwegian Buildings at Heg Park,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, December 1979, 8:1; Sihler, “Story of the Muskego Church,” 1, “History,” Western Koshkonong Lutheran Church, <http://westernkoshkonong.org/history/> (November 27, 2017).

¹⁶ Sihler, “Story of Muskego Church,” 1–2; Theodore Blegan, *Norwegian Migration to America: The American Transition* (Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1940), 137–138.

¹⁷ Sihler, “Story of Muskego Church,” 2; Blegan, *Norwegian Migration to America*, 138–139.

the congregation and active in the building of the church.” A 1942 manuscript from an unknown author, part of the collections from the Luther Seminary archives, offers another account of the church’s original construction story: “In the spring of 1844 the congregation began constructing a church on Indian Hill. Each farm was to cut logs and bring them to the Church site. Halvor Nelson Lohner had charge of the construction of the church. Ole Haagason shingled the church. His wife Kari carried the shingles up the ladder for him.”¹⁸

Despite the differing accounts, these sources illustrate how building Muskego Church was a community effort and a momentous occasion for the settlers. A later newspaper article called the church “an unpretentious building,” but one “which was pointed to with pride and the threshold of which was crossed with bared heads and reverent hearts.” Although it was built using humble materials, it followed Norwegian models of construction. As *The First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration* reported: “It was built of oak logs hewed on both sides, six inches thick, and matched after the Norwegian fashion of building houses. On the inside the logs were dressed perfectly smooth and then fitted so close together that no mortar was used between them. Double doors in the front were made of black walnut. The pulpit was also made of walnut and was about seven feet from the floor. Galleries were built across the front and along both sides to about the middle of the church. These galleries were supported by six heavy columns turned out of solid walnut.”¹⁹

The congregation used the log church until it outgrew the structure in 1869. By that point, membership had reached over two hundred people. A larger brick church, Norway Evangelical Lutheran Church (NRHP, 1980), was dedicated in 1870. To make way for the new house of worship, Muskego Church was relocated to the “old Jacobsen [Jacobson in other accounts] farm to be used as a barn and storage shed,” where it stood for over thirty years.²⁰

A 1966 manuscript from E. Clifford Nelson, a religious scholar and long-time professor at Saint Olaf College, chronicles how the log church came under the United Church’s ownership and was transferred to its seminary in Saint Paul. Nelson examined Hjalmar Rued Holand’s 1908 *De Norske Settlemeters Historie*, in which Holand claimed he “visited Muskego in 1897 and was so disturbed to find the church being used as a pig sty that he wrote a letter to *Skandinaven* advising its restoration.” Nelson explained, however, that he “examined every issue of *Skandinaven* for 1897 and found no letter from Holand.” Instead, he uncovered “a letter from a young American Ibsen-enthusiast, Sebastian Selkirk, from Indianapolis, Indiana, who had bicycled through the Norwegian settlements in southern Wisconsin . . . and came across the old Muskego Church being used as a pig sty (grisehus).” Nelson further reported: “[Selkirk] expresses the hope that Norwegian leaders will not continue to permit this indignity but will see to its restoration.”²¹

¹⁸ Sihler, “Story of Muskego Church,” 4; Hackett, “Muskego Church,” 8:1; “The Muskego Church,” typed manuscript with handwritten revisions, 1942, Muskego Church files, Seminary Archives.

¹⁹ Hackett, “Muskego Church,” 8:1; Anderson, *Norwegian Immigration (1821–1840)*, 419–420.

²⁰ “History—Norway Evangelical Lutheran Church . . . A Unique Heritage,” Norway Lutheran Church, <http://www.norwaylutheranchurch.org/home/about/history> (November 7, 2017); Shoptaugh, “Norwegian Buildings at Heg Park,” 8:1–2.

²¹ E. Clifford Nelson, “Data on Restoration and Moving of Muskego Church,” 1966 manuscript, Muskego Church files, Seminary Archives, 1–2.

Nelson also reviewed the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, housed at Saint Olaf College, to determine “that by 1900 the church had been bought . . . for the United Church. However, a representative of the Norwegian Synod went to Muskego and offered H. Jacobson, the owner, double the sum. But Pastor Wilhelm Rasmussen of Muskego immediately drew up a contract which H. Jacobson signed.” Although the church had been sold, there was no money to ship it to Saint Paul, so church leaders embarked on a campaign to raise enough funds for the relocation. According to Nelson’s manuscript: “At the convention of the United Church in 1902 Pastor L. M. Biorn spoke about the restoration of the church. The minutes of the United Church report that a resolution was passed urging pastors to collect the necessary funds. Rasmussen spoke to the ministerium and was made chairman of the Muskego Church committee which was given power to act once they had the money. . . . Contributions were slow in coming in. Several letters in *Lutheraneren* in summer and fall of 1904 have pleas to send in money for the project. \$2,000.00 was needed.” The campaign was apparently successful and the building was moved by the end of the year.²²

New Century, New Home

Muskego Church’s 1904 relocation and reassembly at the United Church Seminary was widely celebrated among Norwegian Lutherans, who had been fragmented by religious differences since arriving in the United States. The seminary was a fitting new location for the property because the United Church, established by a merger of multiple synods in 1890, represented the largest group of Norwegian Lutherans in the country. Membership totaled approximately 152,200, surpassing the combined numbers for the Norwegian Synod and Hauge’s Synod, the two major church bodies that opposed unification in 1890. The Norwegian Synod, founded in 1853, was characterized by its doctrinal conservatism and traditional orthodoxy. In contrast, Hauge’s Synod, founded in 1846, was lay-oriented with a greater concern for fostering members’ personal religious experiences than maintaining formal worship practices and clerical authority. The United Church represented a middle ground between the two groups and was “committed to the principle of inclusivism . . . and a moderate confessionism, according to *Lutherans in North America*. “Included within it were those who prized both doctrine and piety, both churchliness and lay activity, both order and freedom.” All three synods were merged in 1917 to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church America, and their affiliated seminaries were united on the Saint Anthony Park campus. The institution became the preeminent theological school for training Norwegian Lutheran pastors in the country.²³

The United Church began considering plans for its divinity school in the mid-1890s after severing organizational ties with the Lutheran Free Church, which was connected to Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis. As architectural historian Kristin Anderson reported, the United Church operated its seminary “in an undistinguished business block on busy Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis’s Seward neighborhood” for a few years before deciding on the Saint Anthony Park site. “Recent extensions of the Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company’s streetcar lines on Como

²² Ibid.

²³ Eugene Fevold, “Merger Developments—Americanization,” in *Lutherans in North America*, ed. E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 335–341.

Avenue made the . . . neighborhood accessible and convenient, and plans to buy and build there were approved in June 1900 and announced in August.”²⁴

The main seminary building, now called Bockman Hall (NRHP, 1985), opened in 1902. It was designed by notable Norwegian-American architects Diedrik Omeyer and Martin Thori, whose firm was based in Saint Paul. The three-story, temple-front building was estimated to cost \$75,000 according to building permits. As historian David Lanegran remarked, it “was set at the top of a hill in a traditional landscape design used for liberal arts colleges and theological seminaries in the Midwest. . . . In the early days the seminary was housed entirely in one building; there were classrooms, a chapel, faculty apartments and rooms for students, janitor and kitchen staff.” The seminary soon outgrew its centralized footprint and added detached faculty housing, beginning with the president’s house in 1904. The addition of Muskego Church to the campus that same year was marked by great fanfare. A newspaper headline exclaimed “First Church Is Here.” The same article extolled: “Side by side members of the convention will behold the first structure erected by the Norwegian Lutherans in America and the grandest and most expensive structure erected by the Norwegian Lutherans in America.”²⁵

At the seminary’s campus, Muskego Church was situated east of the main building, atop a hillside behind the president’s house. It was oriented to the west to overlook the seminary’s great lawn and to recall its original hilltop setting in Wisconsin. According to Sihler, the son of Peter Jacobson oversaw the 1904 project. “He had worshipped in the church from 1844–1869 so remembered well how it looked as a church.” A historic structure report for the property also cited a 1903 etching of the property, the recollections of Muskego Church’s early pastor, Reverend H. A. Stub, and a black walnut pillar that was salvaged from the original church as the basis of the interior work. When the church was rebuilt, clapboard siding was applied to the exterior log walls because church leaders hoped this would protect the logs from decay. This condition was documented in 1934, when the property was included in the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS No. MN-29-24).²⁶

Cladding the walls had the opposite effect on the log walls and actually expedited their deterioration. As a result, the siding was removed in 1970, and the logs have been exposed ever since. By the last half of the twentieth century, Muskego Church was used primarily for ceremonial purposes and tours. In the seminary’s early years, however, it functioned in an educational role, offering students a pulpit and an altar where they could rehearse sermons and practice liturgical rituals. These uses were discontinued by the mid-twentieth century, when the

²⁴ Patricia Murphy, “United Church Seminary,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, July 1984, 8:1; “Mann’s Addition to St. Anthony Park North,” 1892, on file at Ramsey County Property Records, Plato Building, Saint Paul, Minnesota; Ramsey County Property Records, Documents 250754 (dated August 4, 1900) and 251717 (dated August 20, 1900); Kristin Anderson, “Petition Requesting an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the Zvago St. Anthony Park Cooperative, St. Paul, Minnesota,” report submitted to the Environmental Quality Board, August 2016, 17.

²⁵ David Lanegran, *St. Anthony Park: Portrait of a Community* (Saint Paul: District 12 Community Council and Saint Anthony Park Association, 1987), 55; Saint Paul Building Permit Nos. 37685 (dated September 25, 1900) and 42987 (dated August 1, 1904); “First Church Is Here,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 18, 1905.

²⁶ Hackett, “Muskego Church,” 7:1; “Muskego Church,” 231; Claybaugh et. al., “Norway Lutheran Church (Muskego),” n.p.; Sihler, “Story of the Muskego Church,” 4; E. D. Corwin, “Log Chapel, Saint Paul, Ramsey County, MN,” Historic American Buildings Survey No. MN 29-24, 1934.

seminary expanded its footprint to the north on the site of an existing Episcopalian preparatory school. Several new buildings were part of the acquisition, including classroom and chapel spaces, diminishing the need to use Muskego Church for these purposes. When the property was listed in the National Register in 1975, the nomination reported that “presently the Church is open for tours year round, upon request. It is occasionally used for services during the summer months.”²⁷

Muskego Church underwent an extensive restoration campaign in 1994. Charles Nelson, historical architect with the Minnesota Historical Society, oversaw the work, which was performed primarily by volunteers from Norway Evangelical Lutheran Church, the third-generation Norwegian-Lutheran church in Muskego’s original Wisconsin community. The restoration largely focused on removing concrete chinking from the logs and reching them with a more suitable composition as well as repairing and replacing rotted logs. Rain gutters and sealant were applied to minimize water penetration, although moisture continues to be a threat to the building. In 2015, a historic structure report was completed, outlining priorities for future roof repair and log replacement due to persistent water infiltration. The work will ensure this nearly two-hundred-year-old monument to Norwegian culture will endure for future generations.²⁸

²⁷ Hackett, “Muskego Church,” 8:1.

²⁸ Muskego Church files, Seminary Archives; Claybaugh et. al., “Norway Lutheran Church (Muskego),” n.p.

CURRENT PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs were taken by Jessica Berglin on October 23, 2017.



Photograph 1: West (front) facade, looking east.



Photograph 2: West and south facades, looking northeast.



Photograph 3: East (rear) and south facades, looking northwest.



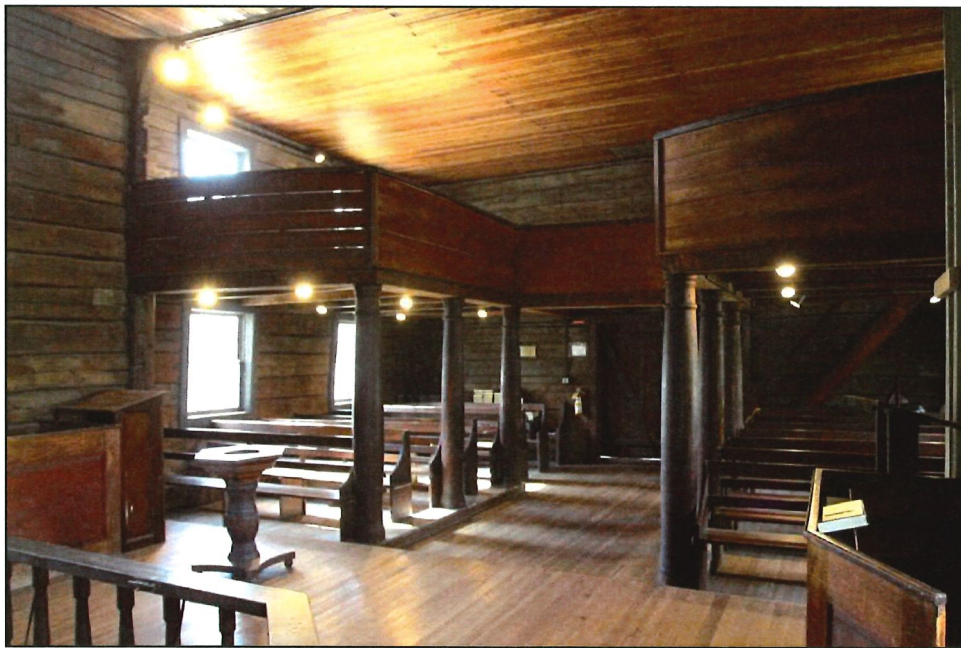
Photograph 4: West and north facades, looking southeast.



Photograph 5: Detail of log notching at northwest corner, looking southeast.



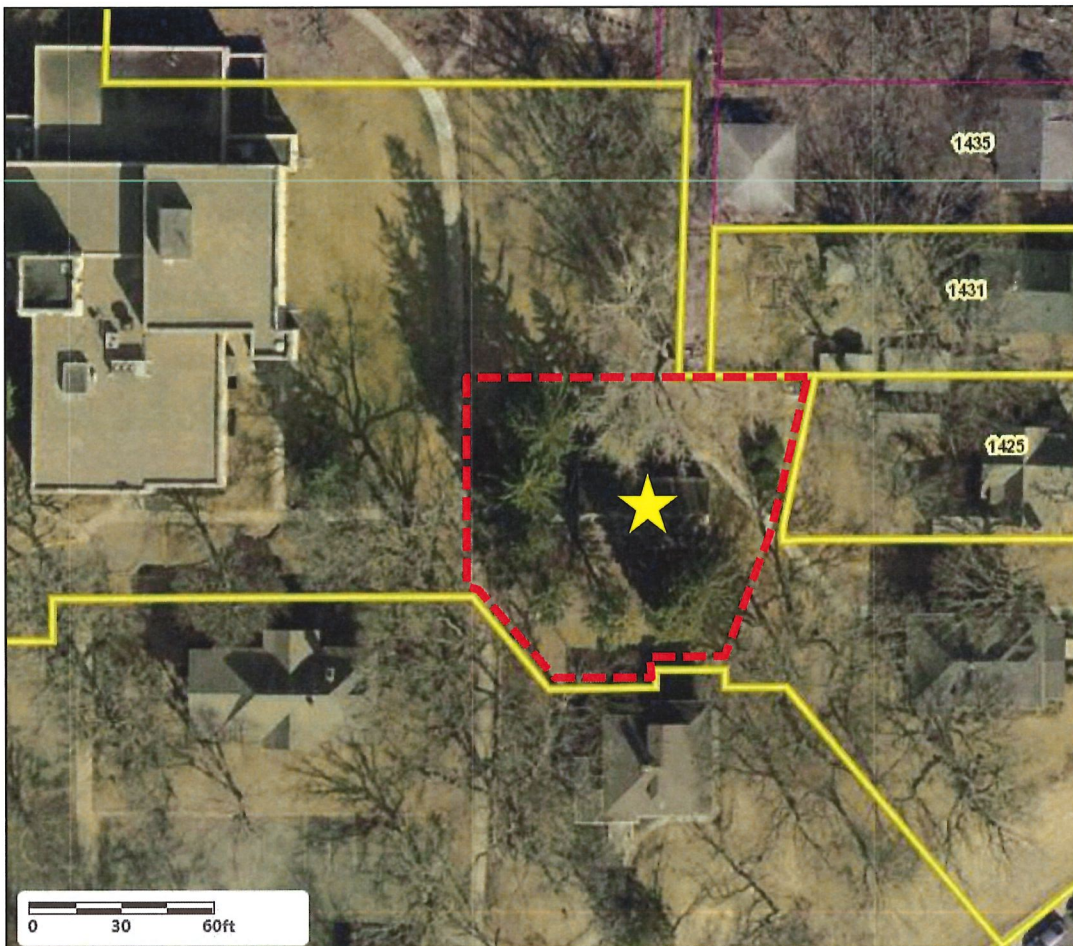
Photograph 6: Chancel with high pulpit and altar, looking east.



Photograph 7: Nave with lofted gallery, looking southwest.

PROPERTY BOUNDARY

The property boundary is shown as the dashed line on the map below. This boundary encompasses all of the property historically associated with Muskego Church as well as landscape features that were added to the site during Muskego Church's period of significance. This demarcation aligns with the updated National Register boundary.



 Property Boundary

 North

**Muskego Church on the
Luther Seminary Upper Campus**

*Muskego Church is identified by the yellow star in the map above.
(Map from Ramsey County Interactive Property Map:
<https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/property/maps-surveys/interactive-map-gis>)*

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city of saint paul
planning commission resolution
file number _____
date _____

**MUSKEGO CHURCH HERITAGE PRESERVATION SITE
BOUNDARY MODIFICATION**

WHEREAS, under Chapter 73 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code, one of the Heritage Preservation Commission’s tasks is to identify potential historic sites; and

WHEREAS, the Heritage Preservation Commission has identified Muskego Church at 2375 Como Avenue West as a Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site; and

WHEREAS, the Muskego Church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, as required by Legislative Code 73.05(b), the Heritage Preservation Commission requested the Planning Commission review the proposed designation and comment on the following: 1) the relationship of the proposed designation to the Comprehensive Plan; 2) the effect of the proposed designation on the surrounding neighborhood; and 3) any other planning considerations, along with a recommendation for approval, rejection, or modification of the proposed designation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Saint Paul Planning Commission finds the following regarding the proposed Muskego Church designation:

- 1. Relationship of the proposed designation to the Comprehensive Plan.** The proposed boundary modification of Muskego Church Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site is generally consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, the Historic Preservation Chapter calls for designation and protection of historic resources, Strategies HP 3.11, 3.12, 6.1, and 7.2.

moved by _____
seconded by _____
in favor _____
against _____

2. Effect of the proposed designation on the surrounding neighborhood.

Historic properties can help define the character of their neighborhoods, create a strong sense of place, enhance the quality of life of residents, and serve as a catalyst for investment in surrounding properties, both residential and commercial. The modification of the boundary for the site will have no negative effect on the surrounding neighborhood and will allow for new investment into the area.

3. Other planning considerations and recommendation for approval, rejection, or modification. There are no further considerations or modifications recommended.

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Saint Paul Planning Commission finds the updated designation study with new proposed boundary of Muskego Church, a designated Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Site consistent with the comprehensive plan and supports the boundary modification of the site.