

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Ness Lutheran Church and Cemetery

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 24040 580th Avenue

City or town: Litchfield State: MN County: Meeker

Not For Publication: N/A

Vicinity: N/A

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ☐ removed from the National Register
- ☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

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Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) ☐
District ☒
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	objects
<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION / Religious Facility

FUNERARY / cemetery

RECREATION AND CULTURE / monument/marker

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/ meeting hall

FUNERARY / cemetery

RECREATION AND CULTURE / monument/marker

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS / Carpenter Gothic

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation: MASONRY / concrete block

Walls: WOOD / lap siding

Roof: WOOD / Shingle

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Ness Lutheran Church and Cemetery (Ness Church and Cemetery) is located at 24040 580th Ave Litchfield Minnesota, a small town approximately 80 miles west of St. Paul. The property consists of approximately 2 acres of a larger 42-acre parcel owned by Ness Lutheran Church. The remaining 40 acres are used for agricultural purposes.

The nominated property sits to the east of 58th Avenue and is separated from the street by a paved parking area. The property is generally mown lawn with mature trees at the northern edge, around the church, and within the cemetery. Ness Lutheran Church is a single-story simplified basilica plan church with a bell tower. Its form is an intact example of the Norwegian American Lutheran church design. Ness Church is encircled by a dirt drive and accessed by a paved walkway from the parking lot. Ness Memorial Cemetery is located to the south of the church. There are two historic outhouses directly east of the church.

North of the church, a state monument erected in 1878, marks the mass grave for the first five white victims of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Farther north, near the western boundary of the nominated property, is the Ole Ness farmhouse – the original worship site for the congregation. Because the farmhouse was moved to the property after the period of significance it is considered noncontributing to the district. In total, the property consists of 1 contributing building, 2 contributing structures, 1 contributing site, 1 contributing object, 1 noncontributing building, and 2 noncontributing objects.

Ness Lutheran Church and Cemetery retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance during the period of significance from 1857-1964.

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Narrative Description

Ness Lutheran Church

Church Exterior

Ness Church is a single-story simplified basilica plan church with a bell tower centered on the primary elevation and two additions that contain south and east entrances at the southern corners. The building has a steeply pitched side-gable roof with wood shingles, painted narrow lapped wood siding, and a visible concrete block foundation that has been painted. The gothic-arch windows replaced original square windows in 1920.¹ The bell tower is capped with an octagonal spire.

Primary (west) Façade

The primary elevation of Ness Church faces west toward 580th Avenue. The main features of the facade are the bell tower and primary entrance, which are both centered on the elevation. The primary entrance is raised above grade and accessible by a run of concrete steps. The entrance is composed of a pair of wood panel doors with a transom window above. Above the door and centered in the protruding tower, is an attenuated, divided-light, wood-frame, hung window with gothic arch. At roughly the height of the ridge of the sanctuary roof, the bell tower features a narrow-hipped roof that marks the transition to the actual belfry. Rectangular openings at each side of the belfry are currently filled with painted louvers. Lap siding continues on the chamfered corners of the belfry. Each of the eight belfry planes is topped with a gable echoing the gothic arched windows. The belltower is capped with an octagonal spire capped with a cross constructed of wood covered with galvanized steel.

To the north of the primary entrance there is a divided-light, wood-frame, hung window with gothic arch with decorative trim at the sanctuary level. At the basement level is a rectangular window set into the foundation. At the southern corner of the façade the 1947 stair addition wraps the corner of the church. Its west wall holds a single, rectangular, double-hung, wood window.

Church South Elevation

The south elevation of the Ness Church has multiple masses. The sanctuary central mass has three, divided light, gothic-arch, wood frame windows equally spaced along elevation. At the basement level three, wood-frame, rectangular windows are located within the concrete block foundation wall and aligned vertically with the sanctuary level windows. The chancel, east of and recessed slightly from the sanctuary, and has a single window at the first floor and two basement windows below. These windows match those on the sanctuary in design and size.

¹ Charles Ness, 8.

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The western stair addition wraps the southwest corner of the sanctuary and contains a pedestrian door and security light.

The eastern stair addition connects to the chancel and boasts a hipped roof. This addition was extended further east in 2005. The extension has a shed roof and a poured concrete foundation. There is a rectangular window on the west side of the addition.

Church East Elevation

The east elevation of the chancel has no openings at the first level and two windows at the basement level. The chamfered northeast corner holds a rectangular, double-hung, wood window with decorative hood. There is a pedestrian entrance and two square windows in the eastern stair addition.

Church North Elevation

At the level of the sanctuary three, divided light, gothic-arched wood framed windows are equally spaced along the north elevation. At the basement level three, wood-framed, divided-light windows are located within the concrete block foundation wall and aligned vertically with the sanctuary level windows. A brick chimney rises above the roofline at the juncture of the sanctuary and chancel. The chancel holds a single window at the sanctuary level that matches those on the sanctuary in design and size.

Church Interior

The interior of the Ness Lutheran Church includes the first level narthex at the west end of the building with the sanctuary extending to the east. The chancel is located beyond the sanctuary. In 1947 a basement was constructed under the existing church along with two stair additions that allow interior access to the fellowship hall and kitchen below.

Narthex

The Narthex is a small vestibule with access to the sanctuary and the western basement stair addition. The room has a wood floor and non-historic, press-tin panel wall and ceiling covering. The addition is a double-height volume. The concrete block foundation is visible and painted below walls covered in vinyl wallpaper. The floor is carpeted. There is a hinged wood door that likely covers an original exterior window opening. It is unclear if the window remains extant. The stairs have a wooden handrail and are carpeted.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is located to the east of the narthex. The ceiling and walls of the sanctuary are finished with non-historic, painted, pressed-tin panels and decorative border installed circa 2000 replicating the 1927 wall material. The sanctuary is a double-height space with a balcony at the west end and the

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chancel at the east. The sanctuary is arranged with two rows of pews and a wide central aisle that provides a straight visual and circulatory line from the entrance to the altar. The ceiling forms a gothic arch with a slight curve as it meets the wall.

A balcony is located at the west end of the sanctuary and accessed by stairs on both the north and south walls. The edge of the balcony is defined by a railing of wood spindles. The organ (donated 1999) and access to the bell tower are located on the balcony. The original bell, installed in 1898, remains in working order.²

The chancel is located at the east end of the sanctuary. The chancel is raised above the nave by a single step. Centered above the altar, the ceiling drops lower to form a gothic arch with rounded corners that frames the altar and gives the impression of an apse. The elaborate altar artwork entitled "See Jesus Receiving the Sinner" was commissioned in 1896 and completed by Sarah Ragland, a well-known Minneapolis artist, in 1898. A kneeler and wood railing are located between the chancel steps and the altar, separating the altar from the congregation. A raised pulpit and baptismal font are found to the north of the altar.

To either side of the altar a single, wood swing door provides access to a space used as a vestry and kitchen until the new kitchen was installed in the basement in 1954. It presently acts as storage space. Like the sanctuary, the walls and ceiling are finished with non-historic painted-tin panels. The floor is painted wood.

Like the western addition, the eastern addition was constructed in 1947 to access the basement. It was expanded in 2005 to accommodate new restrooms. Stairs run from the chancel to a landing that holds the exterior entrance and the restroom. Stairs continue to the basement. Floors are carpet and vinyl tile with painted concrete block and drywall.

Fellowship Hall and Kitchen

The basement is organized with the fellowship hall at the west end of the building and the kitchen and service spaces to the east. The lower level was remodeled in 1954.

The fellowship hall is an open space with garden level windows at the north, south, west and east exterior walls. A single row of square, wood-paneled columns extend east to west across the center of the space. The fellowship hall is finished with carpeted floors, vertical wood-panel walls, and a dropped ceiling. These materials date to a circa 1999 remodeling. The underside of the sanctuary floor is visible under the drop ceiling. The floor joists are hand-hued timber logs with rough axe marks and joinery. Non-historic drop ceilings were intentionally omitted from sections of the fellowship hall ceiling to allow visitors to view the original construction.

A partial wall with a serving counter separates the fellowship hall and the kitchen. The kitchen has a linoleum floor and finished ceiling.

² Charles Ness, "The Ness Lutheran Church," *125th Anniversary Celebration of the Ness Church Building, Litchfield, MN*, 8.

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Outhouses

East of the church, near the property line are two identical outhouses. Each structure has a side-gabled roof with metal ridge cap, narrow lapboard siding with corner boards, and rests on a concrete slab. Entrances to the outhouses face north and south, away from each other. The northern structure has a small square window in its west elevation and while the window on the southern structure faces east.

Cemetery

The cemetery is approximately 0.75 acres and holds roughly 367 interments that date from 1858 to 2021. Markers are varied and generally consist of standing granite headstones as well as flat markers. Graves are generally in evenly spaced north/south rows. A separate area on the east edge of the property is identified as a columbarium. In addition to the families of the founding members, the cemetery includes grave sites of Veterans of the Civil war, WWI, WWII, and Korea who are identified on a plaque just inside the west fence. Grave markers for Civil War Veterans were replaced in 2022.

Ole Ness Farmhouse

The Ole Ness farmhouse is story and a half, rectangular building with a side-gable. The building has a steeply pitched roof with asphalt shingles, vertical board and batten siding, and a visible concrete foundation that has been painted. Small pieces of the siding have been removed and plexiglass has been incorporated so that visitors can see the construction methods used for the building.

The single door on the western façade is accessed by a two steps. A single non-historic, double-hung, wood window is found on either side of the door. The south and north elevations have a single, six-pane window in the gable. The eastern elevation has a single, non-historic pedestrian entrance accessed by a ramp.

The interior of the home has a central space dividing 3 smaller rooms by wood walls. There are no doors. Interior finishes at the first level are wood plank boards with remnants of wallpaper. The second story loft is accessed by an original run of stairs along the central wall of the house. A single row of historic timber posts supports exposed timber joists, which support the planks of the roof. Floors and the knee walls of the loft are wood.

It is unknown when the farmhouse was originally built. The upper story was used by the church for worship between 1862 and 1874. The building was moved onto the nominated property in 2001. The farmhouse is noncontributing.

Mass Grave and Ness Monument

A large granite obelisk northeast of the church was dedicated in 1878. The obelisk memorializes the first white victims of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. This 15-foot-tall granite marker stands at the north side of the church and is surrounded by concrete bollards and chain. The State Monument marks the mass grave of the five settlers killed at the Baker cabin at Acton in 1862 and is referred to as the Ness Monument.

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In 1878, the State of Minnesota erected Ness monument under the direction of the Meeker County Old Settlers Association. The monument is a 15-foot-tall obelisk constructed of granite. The tapered pillar has four faces set above a contoured plinth. Each side of the square pedestal of the monument is inscribed. A 7.5-x-7.5-foot, base of the monument consists of a single granite block. The text of the monument is as follows:

On the south side of the monument in sunken letters: "IN MEMORY OF THE FIRST FIVE VICTIMS OF THE GREAT INDIAN MASSACRE OF AUGUST 1862. AND BURIED HERE IN ONE GRAVE"

On the east side in sunken letters: "ROBINSON JONES, VIRANUS WEBSTER, HOWARD BAKER, ANN BAKER, CLARA WILSON"

On the north side in sunken letters: "ERECTED BY THE STATE IN 1878 UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE MEEKER COUNTY OLD SETTLERS ASSOCIATION."

On the west side in sunken letters: "FIRST BLOOD."

Gate

A non-historic chain-link fence and gate separate the parking lot from the Ness Lutheran Church property. The gate, constructed in 2000 consists of granite piers supporting tapered, metal obelisks and paired gates with metal pickets. Suspended between the obelisks is metal sign that reads "Ness Historic '1858' Church." The sign is topped with three metal crosses. The gate is noncontributing.

Historic Marker

To the south of the gate a marker erected in 1970. The historic marker identifies the site and the map provides burial site information. Erected by the Minnesota Historical Society the marker is constructed using ashlar blocks of local limestone. The inscription on the bronze plaque provides a brief history of the pioneers of the area as well as a church and cemetery history. The historic marker is noncontributing.

Integrity

The Ness Lutheran Church and Cemetery was a place of internment and worship for the Norwegian-American immigrant community and continuously functioned in that capacity from 1857-1964. The property continues to be surrounded by agricultural land and accessed by a rural road. It is owned by the Ness Lutheran Church and maintained by the associated Preservation Foundation and Ness Memorial Cemetery Association. Both groups consist of a volunteer Board of Directors from the community, many of whom are descendants of original settlers. The groups host events and tours of the property focused on early settlement and church history.

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The contributing buildings have not been moved and the property retains its church yard, cemetery, and proximity to the community of Litchfield. As such the district maintain integrity of location, feeling, and association. The design of the building exhibits important characteristics of a building typology that was common among Norwegian-American Lutheran churches of its era, including its simple massing with easily identifiable sanctuary and belltower/steeple, and its distinctive sanctuary design with a wide central aisle, balcony, and dramatic ceiling detailing.

At the exterior, the building retains its narrow-lapped wood siding. The concrete foundation was poured in 1947 when the congregation built a fellowship hall below the church and two additions were added, all within the period of significance. At the interior, the sanctuary maintains its original volume and configuration. New finishes were installed throughout the building, diminishing its integrity of material.

The cemetery continues to accept internments and its layout and circulation have not been altered. Likewise, the mass grave and Ness Monument remain as they have historically with little to no substantive change. All contributing resources retain integrity of design, workmanship, and material.

The addition of the Ole Ness Farmhouse, while recent, does not negatively affect the integrity of the property because of its association with settlement and religious practices during the period of significance.

Ness Lutheran Church and Cemetery retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance from the proposed period of significance – 1857 to 1964.

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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.)

- ☒ 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.

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ETHNIC HERITAGE: EUROPEAN NORWEGIAN

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

Period of Significance

1857 – 1964

Significant Dates

1862

1874

1878

1948

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Ness Lutheran Church and Cemetery (Ness Church and Cemetery) is historically significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Exploration/Settlement and Ethnic History: European Norwegian. The district is important for its ability to represent an important aspect of the Norwegian Lutheran immigrant experience. The construction of the church was the direct result of Norwegian immigrant settlement in the Meeker county, specifically near Litchfield. The descendants of the original founders continue to use the church and cemetery as a place of gathering and celebration, as well as a final resting place. During its active years the church “planed” more than 20 other Norwegian Lutheran

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congregations. The Ness Monument marks the first five white victims of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, one of the most significant and pivotal moments in early Meeker County history.

Trinity Lutheran Church is also architecturally significant under National Register Criterion C as a distinctive local example of the Norwegian Lutheran Church style. It remains Litchfield's best example of the style from the period and is an important representation of the church buildings constructed by Norwegian immigrants the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The period of significance for the Ness Church and Cemetery begins in 1857 with the first internment on the property and ends in 1964 when the congregation formally disbanded and the care of the district was given to a volunteer board the Ness Memorial Cemetery Association. The district is considered locally significant.

The Ness Church and Cemetery meets Criteria Consideration A (Religious Properties) because it derives its significance from both its historical and architectural importance. The property is not required to meet Criterion Consideration D: Cemeteries because the cemetery is being nominated alongside the church as part of a larger district.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Ness/Litchfield and Meeker County

Meeker County, Minnesota, was established in 1856 and named after Franklin Meeker, a prominent figure in the area's early development. The county's settlement began in earnest in the 1850s, driven by the promise of fertile land and abundant natural resources.

The first Norwegian farmers arrived in the spring of 1856 from Rock County Wisconsin with oxen teams and prairie schooners. These included Ole H. Ness (after whom the township was originally named), Henrik H. Thoen, Ole H. Thoen, Gunuld Olson, A. N. Fosen, and N. D. Kolberg. In 1857 others immigrated directly from Norway, primarily from Nesbyn (also written Neas) in the district of Hallingdal. They included Nils Danielson, Opsahl, Kittel Haraldson Rauk, Ole Amundson, Gilbert Jackson, Aslak Olson and Nils Hanson. Ellef Olson, Iver Jackson and Anders Olson arrived in 1858. Together, they organized the St. Johannes' Lutheran Congregation which was served by the Reverend Peter Carlson of Carver County.³

The arrival of Norwegian settlers significantly shaped the county's cultural landscape. Many of these immigrants were drawn by the Homestead Act, seeking opportunities for farming and community building. They brought with them their traditions, language, and a strong sense of community, establishing thriving farms and churches that became central to local life. Immigration to the county was slow until the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad, later called St. Paul and Pacific and then the Great Northern, started coming through the area in 1869. What is now Litchfield Township had been called Ness Township from 1858 until the incorporation of the town of Litchfield in 1869. The Town of Litchfield became the county seat and a hub of commerce and governance. The platting of Litchfield and other communities facilitated further settlement, with railroads enhancing access to markets and

³ Charles Ness, "The Ness Lutheran Church" *125th Anniversary Celebration of the Ness Church Building, Litchfield MN*, 1.

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resources. As agriculture flourished, so did the county's economy, leading to diverse growth in both population and industry.

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Meeker County continued to develop, with agriculture remaining a cornerstone. Today, it reflects a rich tapestry of history, marked by its early settlers' resilience and the enduring influence of its Norwegian heritage.

Founding of Ness Church

The St. Johannes' Lutheran Congregation met initially in homes. In October of 1861 the all-male, 25-member congregation reorganized as the Ness Norwegian Lutheran Congregation of Meeker County and began meeting in the upper granary level of the Ole Ness farmhouse.⁴ Ness Church used this facility from 1862-1874 when the church was built. "In 1864 the congregation purchased 40 acres of land from Hendrick Halverson for \$100.00. The property already included a Ness cemetery, which had the first internment in 1857."⁵

The church was built in the Carpenter Gothic Style influenced by examples from Naes community in Norway and from other local churches such as Richard Upjohn's Episcopal church in Litchfield. The church building has no known architect but was, instead, designed and constructed by members of the congregation. The interior was completed in late 1868 under the direction of the first dedicated pastor T. H Dahl. A parsonage and a barn were built for Reverend Dahl in the summer of 1870. It is unclear when those structures were demolished but they were located on what is now the parking lot.⁶

Ness Church was part of the Norwegian Synod from 1861–1868; a member of the Augustana Synod from 1868-1970; a member of the Konferentsen from 1870-1890. In 1890 Ness Church became part of the United Church and of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America after the union in 1917. The synod name changed in 1946 to The Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The congregation voted to disband in 1964 after 110 years serving the community. This decision followed the loss of members due to consolidation of small farms and farmers moving to larger urban areas. When the congregation disbanded, the church and its contents were left to the Ness Memorial Cemetery Association. Subsequently two separate Board of Directors were formed to oversee the cemetery and the church buildings separately.

The site was recognized as a historic site by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1970. The original worship site, the Ole Ness farmhouse is maintained as a museum. The church sanctuary is used periodically for weddings, funerals, and special events. The church basement contains historical artifacts and a modern kitchen used for social occasions.

⁴ The family living space was on the first floor with bedroom, kitchen, and living room. The second floor was additionally used for storage of seeds and crops.

⁵ Untitled church history in "Churches-Ness" file. Meeker County Museum.

⁶ Ness, Charles. "The Ness Lutheran Church." *125th Anniversary Celebration of the Ness Church Building, Litchfield, MN*, 5.

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Ness Church Planting

In the Norwegian Lutheran tradition “church planting” is defined as “establishing a new gathering of believers around Word and Sacrament with the intent of forming a sustainable congregation.”⁷ When Norwegian farmers moved to Litchfield in 1858, they organized what would become Ness Church and worked to “plant” Norwegian Lutheran Churches in the surrounding areas. These new congregations would meet in houses and would be visited by shared clergy and members of the mother church. Traditionally, this pattern continued until the house churches grew large enough to connect as denominational organizations and construct their own facilities. Church schools and sometimes parochial schools were an important part of the growth sequence. Youth groups often sponsored fund raisers for building projects. Ladies Aid organizations provided social and service opportunities for women.

As the first church in Meeker County, Ness Church became the mother church for roughly 25 congregations (Figure 1). In 1868, 3 house churches were in fellowship; Ness, Arndahl and Trondhjem. Under the leadership of Johannes Hoifjeld (1916-1920) the parish divided into three congregations: Atwater, Arndahl and Ness. Nine house churches were formed by these congregations before the Ness Church was built in 1874. Planting continued thru 1920, ending with the founding of Zion Lutheran in Litchfield. Churches founded in partnership with Ness included the following:

Year	Name	City
1868	Amdahl	
1868	First Lutheran	Grove City
1868	Immanuel Lutheran	Atwater
1868	Thronhjelm Swedish Lutheran	Swede Grove
1869	Beckville	Beckville
1871	Elling	
1873	Atwater Norwegian Synod	Atwater
1873	First Lutheran	Litchfield
1873	Immanuel Lutheran	Grove City
1885	Norwegian Lutheran	Litchfield
1886	Greenleaf	
1889	St Paul	
1891	Bethany	
1891	Corvuso	
1891	Immanuel Lutheran	Litchfield
1892	First Lutheran	Cosmos
1893	First Lutheran	Cosmos
1893	Immanuel Lutheran	Rosendale
1894	Bethlehem Lutheran	Cosmos
1894	Ostmark	

⁷“Church Planting,” The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

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1910		Forest City
1911	Lutheran Free	
1912	Mission Covenant	
1915	Bethlehem Lutheran	Atwater
1920	Zion Lutheran	Litchfield

Ness Church Design

*Norwegian Lutheran Church Architecture*⁸

Architectural historian Jens Christian Eldal explains that early Norwegian Lutheran churches in the United States tended to fall into two distinctive typologies – octagonal or the simplified basilica plan used at Ness Church.⁹ Printed discussion of the simplified basilica typology is present as far back as 1863, when the journal *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, published an article about the recently constructed Holden Church in Goodhue County, Minnesota noting that a “proper plan in our old, Norwegian ecclesiastical style” had finally been realized in the United States.¹⁰ The journal also published a floorplan for the building, with the intention of providing a building pattern for other congregations.

Eldal argues that the building type in question deviated from “standard” American church architecture, which he equates with the New England meetinghouse, in significant ways.¹¹ Norwegian American Lutheran churches:

- When viewed in plan, the chancel, sacristy, and steeple were “distinguishable parts ‘added’ to the main building.” This was an aesthetic choice, but also practical as it allowed for additive construction practices as small congregations raised capital funds over time.
- At the interior, the nave was organized with a wide central aisle rather than with two smaller side aisles. This choice was “not merely as a matter of taste, but also for the traditional Norwegian practice of catechization, in which youngsters stood in the aisle for recitation with the pastor.”
- The altar served as a focal point at the end of the central aisle, with the pulpit and baptismal fonts positioned to either side. The altar was generally surrounded by a railing and kneelers.
- The choir was generally narrower than the nave, with a small sacristy at one side. Often an arch, truss, or other detail at the ceiling was used to mark the transition from the nave to the choir.
- Balconies were often present and the rear and sides of the nave.

⁸ This section of text was taken, with permission, in its entirety, from the *Grog Lutheran Church National Register of Historic Places Property Evaluation* (Halvorsen et. al. April 2024) MN SHPO.

⁹ Jens Christian Eldal, “American, Norwegian, or Lutheran? Main Features of Early Norwegian-American Church Architecture in the Upper Midwest, 1850-1870” *Norwegian-American Studies*, Volume 36, 2011, 3-44. Quoted in Halvorsen et. al.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

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- Often, church exteriors exhibited elements of the Gothic Revival style.

Ness Church exhibits most of the characteristics described by Edal, making it a distinctive local example of the style. Exceptions include the sacristy is in a separate room behind the chancel, and the baptismal fount, which has been moved to the north side of the chancel to provide space for the piano next to the choir.

Environmental Influences

While following the common characteristics of the Norwegian ecclesiastical architectural style, it is likely that the Ness Church builders were also inspired by the architecture of churches familiar to them both in Norway and at home. The Nesbyne Kirke, constructed in 1862 was designed by architect George Bull and was the largest church in the district of Hallingdal. Known as “Hallinghal Cathedral” it is likely that those immigrating after 1862 would be familiar with the substantial building.¹² Ness Church shares many visual qualities with Nesbyne Kirke, including the simplified basilica plan with prominent bell tower entrance as well as interior arrangement and alter features. The two congregations, Ness Church and Nesbyne Kirke, have continued their close relationship to present day. When members of Ness Church visited Norway in 2020 the *Ness Parish Newspaper* (*Nes menighetblad*) included a two-page article about the ninth “edition of the Nes church” in the USA. The article, “Ness Kirke i USA,” discussed the history of Ness Church and included photographs.¹³ In addition to cultural influences it is likely that founding members were aware of Trinity Episcopal Church in nearby Litchfield (NRIS 75000996), which is attributed to Richard Upjohn. Upjohn (1802-1878) was one of the “most influential architects in the United States, especially in the area of church design.”¹⁴ Born in England, Upjohn championed the Gothic Revival style for ecclesiastical buildings. His most notable design in the style is Trinity Church in New York. He also published a book in 1852, *Upjohn's rural architecture: Designs, working drawings and specifications for a wooden church, and other rural structures*, which was widely available and influenced countless numbers of architects and builders.

U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, Ness Monument, and Reconciliation

The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 occurred in Minnesota during the start of the U.S. Civil War, just four years after statehood. While hostilities only lasted six weeks, the war’s devastating effects on Dakota communities and Euro-American settlers echo through Minnesota history to the present day. Similarly, the violence of 1862 did not come out of nowhere, although it may have seemed that way to settlers establishing farms in what appeared to them to be vacant land. Instead, it was kindled over decades of compounding land and resource dispossession, broken federal treaty promises, and an increasing desperation to simply survive as the U.S. government imposed increasingly drastic changes on the Dakota’s traditional culture and way of life.

¹² “Nesbyne Kirke,” *Visit Norway*.

¹³ “Ness Kirke i USA” *Nes Menighetsblad*, Volume 76 , NR. 1, February 2020. 4-5.

¹⁴ Minnesota Statutes, section 138.585. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/138.585>

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Minnesota is the heart of the Dakota Nation's ancestral homeland. As attested by oral history and archaeology, their roots in the state extend back thousands of years. In the Dakota language, *Mni Sota* refers to clear waters and the reflection of the sky and is the name for the Minnesota River that was adopted for the Minnesota Territory in 1849. It is just one of many Dakota language placenames that remain in current use.¹⁵ The Oceti Šakowij Oyate, the People of the Seven Council Fires sometimes known in English as the Sioux Nation, include the eastern Dakota bands of the Bdewakantunwan, Sisistunwan, Wahpekute, and Wahpetunwan. To the west on the Great Plains are the Lakota (Ihanktonwan and Ihanktonwanina) and the Nakota (Tetonwan). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gradual displacement of tribes from the east coast brought the Ojibwe into Minnesota, eventually pushing the Dakota bands out of the northern forests. In 1805, in a treaty negotiated by Zebulon Pike but later not ratified by Congress, the Dakota ceded land for construction of Fort Snelling. Much larger areas were ceded in subsequent treaties, until in the 1850s the Dakota were confined to a thin strip of land along the Minnesota River.¹⁶

Faced with starvation from loss of traditional hunting lands and promised annuities that did not arrive, some foraged for food off the reservation and this led to the initial violence on August 17, 1862, as four Dakotas sought liquor and stole some eggs near Acton, about four miles southwest of Ness Church in Meeker County. The situation escalated as the group moved to Baker farm, culminating in the murder of five people: Robinson and Ann Jones, their 15-year-old adopted daughter Clara Wilson, along with Viranus Webster – a settler newly arrived from Wisconsin – and Howard Baker.¹⁷ Two survivors of the attack sought help and word spread among the settlers. The five dead were buried in a single grave at Ness Cemetery which was first used in 1858.

After learning of what had happened and knowing that retribution would come, some Dakota leaders under Taoyateduta (Little Crow), opted to initiate the war with attacks the next day at Lower Sioux Agency and elsewhere along the Minnesota River. Over the next few weeks, attacks occurred in quick succession on military and civilian targets, including Fort Ridgely, the town of New Ulm, and numerous settler homesteads. Troops to combat the Dakota were mobilized at Fort Snelling under the command of Henry Sibley, former fur trader and first Governor of the State of Minnesota. The pace of engagements slowed as September progressed and the two forces faced off, and the final battle resulted in the defeat of the Dakota at Wood Lake. From the start, the war had been divisive within the Dakota communities. A sizable faction opposed to the violence and instead assisted the displaced settlers and mixed families as they could. The Peace Party facilitated the return of captured settlers at Camp Release on September 26, 1862. Many of the Dakota combatants fled north to Canada, or west into the Great Plains where conflict between the U.S. military and Native tribes continued for decades.

The captured Dakota were held in temporary prisons at Lower Sioux Agency, where hurried military trials convicted 303 to death. Review of the sentences by President Lincoln reduced the number nearly

¹⁵Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota*, Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul, 2012

¹⁶ Roy Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial*; Mary Lethert Wingerd, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota*.

¹⁷ Kenneth Carley *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota's Other Civil War*, 7-9; Roy Meyer *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial*, 115-116.

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tenfold to 38, but still culminated in the largest mass execution in U.S. history, in Mankato on December 26, 1862. Two others, Little Six and Medicine Bottle, were later imprisoned and executed at Fort Snelling in 1865. Taoyateduta secretly returned to Minnesota the year after the war, and was killed near Hutchinson (about twenty miles from Ness Church) by a settler seeking to collect the bounty on Dakota scalps. His identity was discovered and confirmed later. Portions of his body including the skull and scalp were displayed at the Minnesota Historical Society until the early twentieth century, and eventually returned to relatives for burial in 1971.¹⁸ The war was devastating for Dakota communities, leading to exile from their ancestral homeland through forced relocation after periods of captivity in Mankato and Fort Snelling in Minnesota, and later in Davenport, Iowa.

In the late nineteenth century, state monuments were placed at locations significant in the U.S.-Dakota War, including the Ness Cemetery in 1878 (Minnesota Chapter 138.581 subd. 4). Other locations are represented in historic sites, archaeological remains, commemorative monuments, and in listings in the National Register of Historic Places. Of the 23 monuments constructed, many took the form of stone obelisks and about half of them were constructed within cemeteries. These monuments were administered by the State Auditor's office until 1925 when they were placed under the jurisdiction of the newly created Department of Conservation.¹⁹ The Ness monument was unveiled September 13, 1878, at 2 pm. Governor Alexander Ramsey and more than a thousand spectators are said to have attended the unveiling.²⁰

Some Dakotas returned to Minnesota in the early twentieth century, forming the federally recognized communities at Upper Sioux, Lower Sioux, Shakopee, and Prairie Island. With the sesquicentennial of the war in 2012, reconciliation and healing events were held in Minnesota, including the *Dakota Iyuhennapi Wanji* "We Gather Together As One" conference in which descendants of some families in the Dakota diaspora returned to Minnesota for the first time. It is significant that the reconciliation ceremony occurred at Ness Cemetery during that time. "Reverend Alan Kitto, Dakota sundancer and pipe carrier, led the healing ceremony, which included a Four Direction Song honoring the west, north, east and south, and a Round Dance for Unity, led by the four Dakota sundancers."²¹ More than 300 participants participated in the Wiping of the Tears ritual.

¹⁸ Gary Clayton Anderson, *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul. 1986; Anderson *Massacre in Minnesota: The Dakota War of 1862, the Most Violent Ethnic Conflict in American History*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. 2019.

¹⁹ Gemini Research, *Camp Release State Memorial Wayside*, Inventory_form: LP-CAM-003. On file at the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, St. Paul, 1998, 4.

²⁰ Untitled church history in "Churches-Ness" file.

²¹ Jenny Berg, "Healing a painful history," *Litchfield Independent Review*.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Churches-Ness vertical file. Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall, Litchfield, MN.

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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 # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): ME-LTT-00005

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.1

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: Longitude:

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15 Easting: 373738 Northing: 4994732

2. Zone: 15 Easting: 373799 Northing: 4994732

3. Zone: 15 Easting: 373741 Northing: 4994876

4. Zone: 15 Easting : 373801 Northing: 4994868

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The 2.1 acres in the southwest corner of Meeker County parcel 14-024300 that corresponds to the map in figure 1.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary encompasses the property that was historically associated with the church and cemetery.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Alson Toavs
organization: Ness Church Preservation Foundation/Ness cemetery Association.
street & number: 350 Main St N Unit 244
city or town: Stillwater state: Minnesota zip code 55082
e-mail: atoavs@msn.com
telephone: (612) 812-5773
date: December 9, 2024

12. Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Mchancel:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3200x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered, and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and does not need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Ness Lutheran Church and Cemetery
City or Vicinity: Litchfield
County: Meeker State: Minnesota
Photographer: SHPO staff Ginny Way, David Mather, or Katie Manthey Mimbach
Date Photographed: October 23, 2024

- 1 of 24. Ness Church and Cemetery, view of southern half of site. Camera facing north.
- 2 of 24. Ness Church and Cemetery, view of northern half of site. Camera facing northeast.
- 3 of 24. Ness Church primate façade, camera facing east.
- 4 of 24. Ness Church south elevation, camera facing north.

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- 5 of 24. Ness Church east and north elevations, camera facing southwest.
- 6 of 24. Ness Church interior sanctuary, camera facing east.
- 7 of 24. Ness Church interior alter and kneeler detail, camera facing east.
- 8 of 24. Ness Church interior sanctuary and balcony, camera facing northwest.
- 9 of 24. Ness Church interior windows and balcony stair, camera facing southwest.
- 10 of 24. Ness Church interior balcony, camera facing southwest.
- 11 of 24. Ness Church interior rear room, camera facing north.
- 12 of 24. Ness Church interior southwest stair addition, camera facing southeast.
- 13 of 24. Ness Church interior basement, camera facing southeast.
- 14 of 24. Ness Church interior basement, camera facing northwest.
- 15 of 24. Ness Church interior basement structural detail, camera facing up.
- 16 of 24. Ness Cemetery, camera facing southeast.
- 17 of 24. Outhouses, camera facing northeast.
- 18 of 24. Memorial and mass grave, camera facing northeast.
- 19 of 24. Memorial and mass grave, camera facing southwest.
- 20 of 24. Ole Ness Farmhouse west façade and south elevation, camera facing northeast.
- 21 of 24. Ole Ness Farmhouse south and east elevations, camera facing northwest.
- 22 of 24. Ole Ness Farmhouse interior main room, camera facing west.
- 23 of 24. Ole Ness Farmhouse original worship space, camera facing north.
- 24 or 24. Ness Church and Cemetery Gate, camera facing southeast.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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 (32 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct, or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering, and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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Figure 1: Ness Church and Cemetery NRHP boundary map indicated in red.
Background photo courtesy of Google.

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Figure 2: Photo Key, Exterior. Map courtesy of MnSHIP

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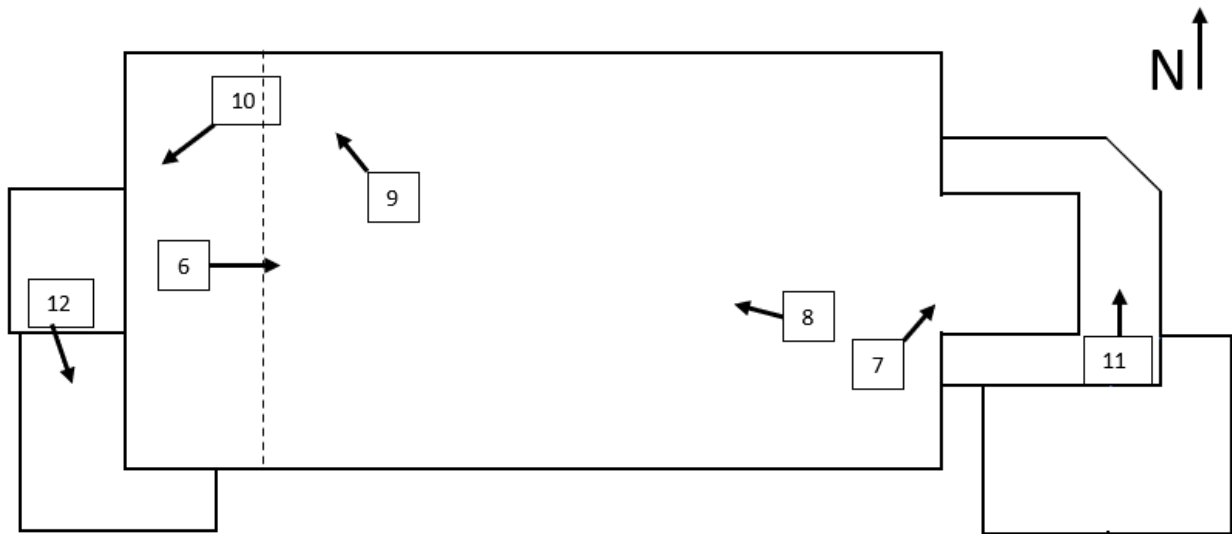


Figure 3: Photo Key, Interior Ness Church, interior sanctuary level

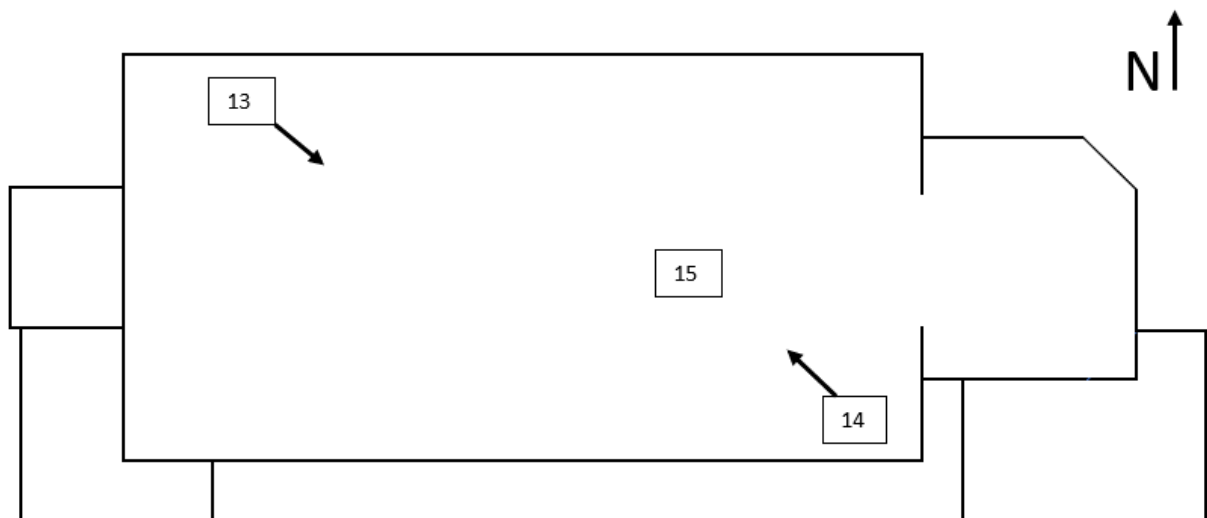


Figure 4: Photo Key, Ness Church, interior basement level.

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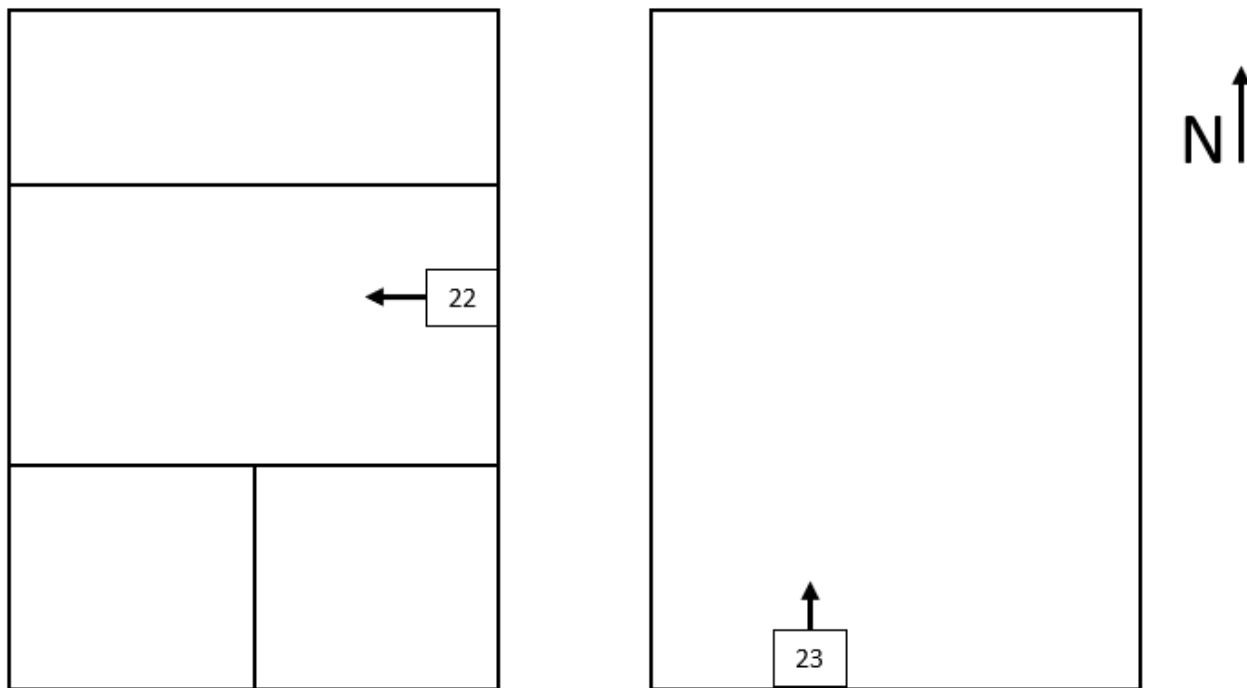


Figure 5: Photo Key, Ole Ness Farmhouse, interior first floor (left) second floor (right)

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Figure 6: Ness Memorial, 1909, Photo curtesy of Ness church Facebook page

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Figure 7: Ness Church September 11, 1942. Photo Courtesy of Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall.

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Figure 8: Aerial Photo of Ness Church and Cemetery, 1970, Photo courtesy of Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall.

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Figure 9: Children at altar, Ness Church, Unknown date, Courtesy of Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall, Accession number 22-99-394.

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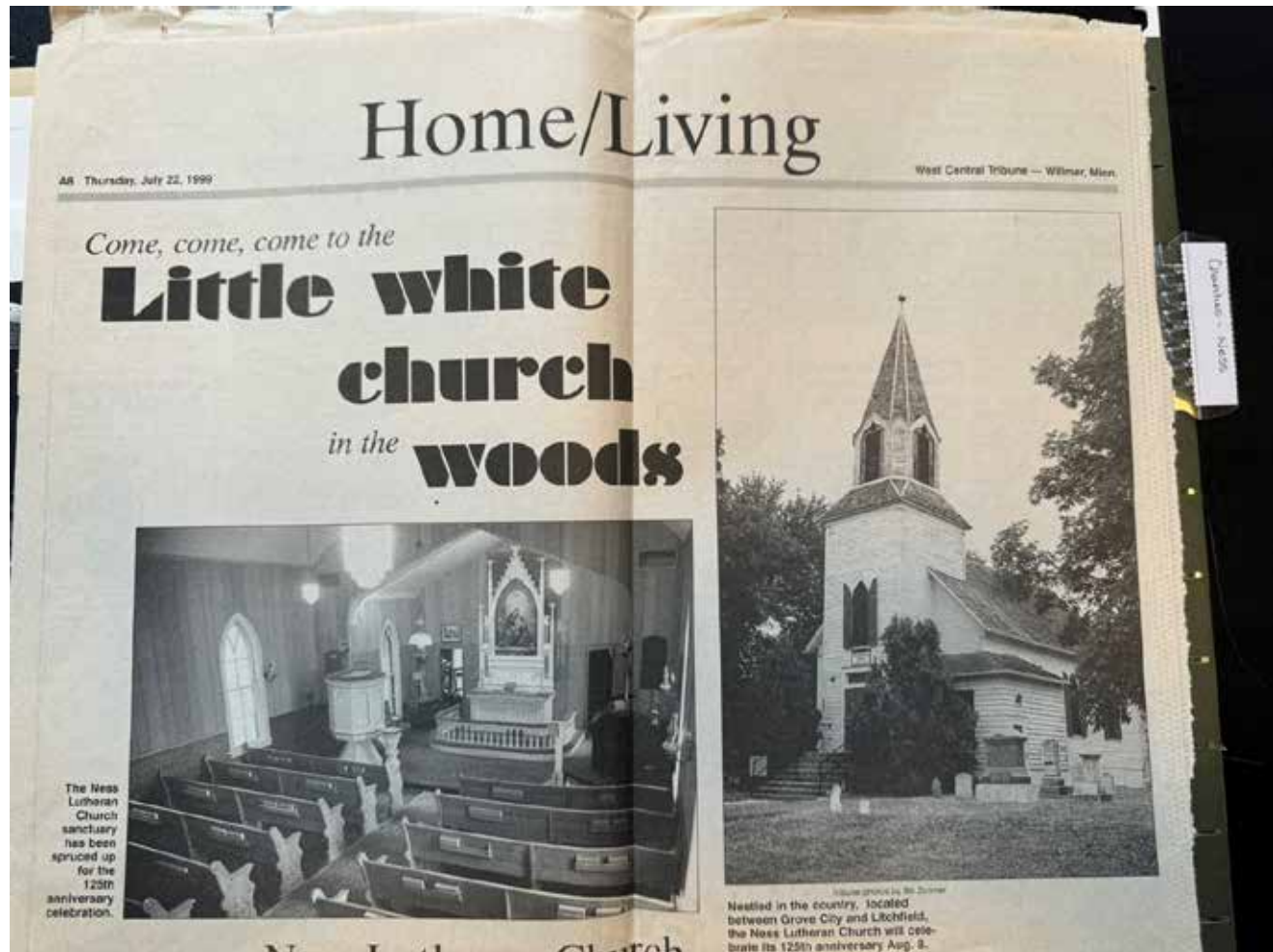


Figure 10: *West Central Tribune* article. July 22, 1999. Curtsey of Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall.

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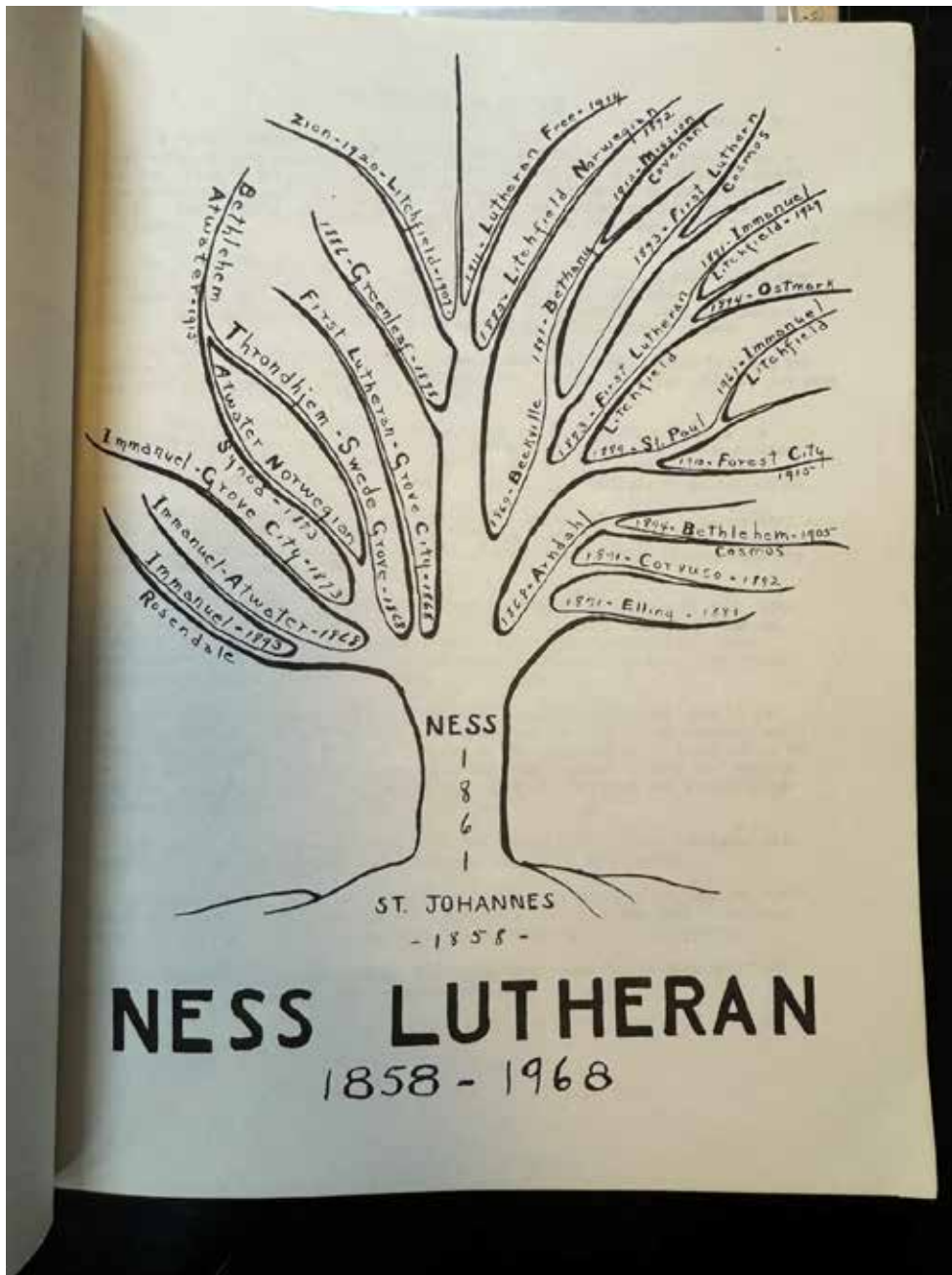
Section number Figures Page 10

Figure 11: Ness Church "planting" illustration. "Minnesota Historical Society Monument Dedication Service" pamphlet. September 13, 1970. Curtesy of Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall.

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Figure 12: Laying a Wreath Ceremony, 2012, photograph curtesy of Alson Toavs



Figure 13: The Circle Dance of Unity, 2012, photograph curtesy of Alson Toavs

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Figure 14: The Wiping of Tears, 2012, photograph courtesy of Alson Toavs

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Figure 15: Nesbyne Kirke, District of Hallingdal, Norway. Constructed in 1862. Photo Courtesy of Visit Norway (<https://www.visitnorway.com/places-to-go/eastern-norway/hallingdal/listings-hallingdal/nesbyen-kirke/183219/>)

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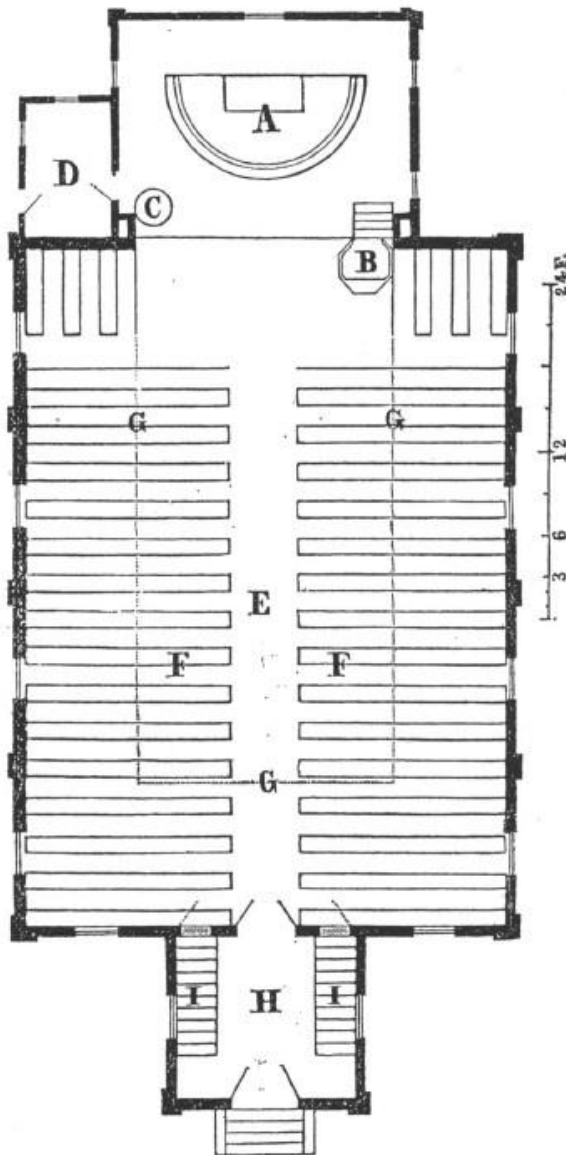


Figure 16: "Floor plan of Holden Church, Kenyon, Minnesota (demolished), circulated in Kirkelig Maanedstidende, 1863. Via Jens Christian Eldal, 'American, Norwegian, or Lutheran?' Main Features of Early Norwegian-American Church Architecture in the Upper Midwest, 1850-1870" *Norwegian-American Studies*, Volume 36, 2011, 5." Plan and caption taken from Tamara Halvorsen and Laurel Fritz's *Grog Lutheran Church National Register of Historic Places Evaluation*.