

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 PropertyHistoric name: Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of EmbarrassOther names/site number: Embarrass Apostolic Lutheran Church

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. LocationStreet & number: 5103 Highway 21City or town: EmbarrassState: MinnesotaCounty: St. Louis

Not For Publication: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 ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

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

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

structures

objects

2

0

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

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE, WOOD, METAL: Steel, ASPHALT, BRICK

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

Located on its original wooded site just west of the traditional commercial center of Embarrass, an unincorporated community in northeastern St. Louis County, Minnesota, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is a vernacular, gable-fronted, wood-framed building with a concrete foundation. It is comprised of the original 26' by 40' gable-roofed church (1907) with a 24' by 12' gable-roofed addition and an 8' by 10' gable-roofed portico at its south end (ca. 1930), plus 8' by 10' gable-roofed additions on its east and north sides (ca. 1945, 1950). Designed and constructed by its members over an approximately forty-year period, the church is notably unpretentious in the simplicity of its form and building materials, as well as its minimal decoration. It retains very good overall integrity from its period of significance (1907-1969).

Narrative Description

The Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is situated in northeastern St. Louis County, Minnesota, approximately seventy miles north of Duluth, twenty-five miles southwest of Ely, and just west of the traditional commercial center of the unincorporated community of Embarrass. The church's L-shaped, 1.8-acre, wooded site is just off County Road 21, east of

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County Road 330 (Koski Road) and west of County Road 627 (Sauna Road). Site boundaries are CR-21 on the south and, just beyond the tree line on the other sides of the property, the shared boundaries of adjacent properties to the west and northeast.

SITE FEATURES

The church is situated in a grassy clearing in the western half of the site, with its front façade facing CR-21. It is accessed via a curved gravel driveway that skirts a line of trees along the highway to connect the site's southwest and southeast corners (photo 1). Nestled in the trees northwest of the church is its disused historic outhouse. The outhouse is a two-room wood frame building with a concrete foundation, historic asphalt shingle siding, two doors (now boarded up) at its south side, a window on both its east and its west sides, and a metal roof. Its interior is unavailable for inspection (photo 2). Designed and constructed by church members during the period of significance and historically associated with the church building and the activities that took place there, it is a contributing resource.

EXTERIOR BUILDING FEATURES

The conservative nature of the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran denomination is reflected in this church's simplicity of design and construction, as well as its almost complete lack of ornamentation. The building is comprised of the 26' by 40' original church building, constructed in 1907, a 24' by 12' sanctuary addition and entrance portico constructed at its south end in ca. 1930, an 8' by 10' stairwell addition constructed at its east side in ca. 1945, and an 8' by 10' storage addition constructed at its north end in ca. 1950 (figures 1 and 2). Metal siding applied to the 1907 portion of the building before ca. 1930 clearly differentiates it from the ca. 1930 sanctuary and portico addition, as does its slightly greater width.



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Figure 1. *Additions, on west façade*



Figure 2. *Additions, on south & east façades*

The church building has a rectangular form, overall, and has gable roofs. It is accessible through two entrances: the double-leaf main entrance at the center of its south façade, covered by the portico, and a doorway in the stairwell addition's east façade. Except under the ca. 1950 storage addition, which has a post-on-ground foundation, its raised, poured-concrete foundation is visible on all sides. Historic pressed metal siding conceals the original wood lap siding of the 1907 section of the building; historic wood lap siding is exposed on its three additions. Except for a contemporary basement egress window installed on the building's east side, windows appear to be historic, are made of wood, and are either single-hung or fixed. Non-historic corrugated metal roofing covers the original 1907 church building and its ca. 1930 addition, as well as the east stairwell addition; asphalt shingles cover the portico roof, as well as that of the north addition. All of these are served by period-appropriate, non-historic steel gutters and downspouts. A brick chimney pierces the metal roof in the northwest quadrant of the building.

South Façade

The building's south-facing front façade (photo 3) is comprised of the south façades of the original 1907 church building and the ca. 1945 stairwell addition. At its west end is the symmetrical front façade of the original 1907 church building. This has a pair of two-over-two, single-hung windows on each side of its gable-roofed central entrance portico, a small two-pane fixed window in the portico gable, and a pair of three-over-one single-hung windows above the portico. Concrete steps at the portico's south side serve a landing under the portico, at the main entrance's non-historic double doors. Wooden handrails on both sides of the steps

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attach to the portico's support posts and the building's exterior wall, and have typical top and bottom rails with square wood balusters. A dentil trim on south, east, and west sides of the portico roof is the building's only purely decorative feature.

East of the original 1907 church building's façade, and well set back from it, the south side of the ca. 1945 stairwell addition has a single-hung, one-over-one window just east of its center.

West Façade

The building's asymmetrical west façade is comprised of the west sides of the ca. 1950 storage addition, the original 1907 church building, and the ca. 1930 sanctuary and portico addition (photo 4). At the north end of its basement level, under the original 1907 church building, are two hopper-style, two-light windows with screens and steel window wells; at its south end is a small opening to a crawl space beneath the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition, covered with a wire mesh screen. On the ground floor, three single-hung, two-over-two window are evenly spaced across the west wall of the 1907 building. Neither the storage addition nor the sanctuary addition is fenestrated on its west side.

North Façade

The building's asymmetrical north façade is comprised of the north sides of the ca. 1945 stairwell addition, the original 1907 church building, and the ca. 1950 storage addition. At its basement level, in the original 1907 church building, are two hopper-style, two-light windows with window screens and metal awnings (photo 5). On the first floor, the stairwell addition at the east end of this façade has no fenestration. Three, three-over-one, single-hung windows grouped and centered at the first floor of the original 1907 church building's north façade, which is clad with unpainted historic pressed-metal siding, covered with the signatures of newly confirmed church members of the past (photo 6). The storage addition, accessed from the church interior, is at the west end of the façade. A six-light fixed window is centered beneath its low-pitched roof gable (photo 7).

East Façade

The building's east façade (photos 8 and 5) is comprised of the east walls of the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition, the original 1907 church building, the ca. 1945 stairwell addition, and the ca. 1950 storage addition. This façade has a small crawl space opening with a wire mesh screen on the basement level of its south end, under the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition, and one non-historic contemporary egress window in a steel window well at the center of the original 1907 church building. On the first floor, there are two single-hung, two-over-two windows symmetrically arranged on the original 1907 church building's east side, a historic door at the

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north end of the ca. 1945 stairwell addition's east side, and a crawl space access door at the south end of the ca. 1950 storage addition's east side.

INTERIOR BUILDING FEATURES

The building's interior plan dates to the period of significance. Its open, rectangular basement is accessed through the ca. 1950 stairwell addition; its open, rectangular main floor sanctuary is accessible at its south side, through the building's primary entrance, and at its northwest corner, through the ca. 1950 stairwell addition (figure 3). Likewise, most of its interior finishes and fixtures, and all of its furnishings, are historic.

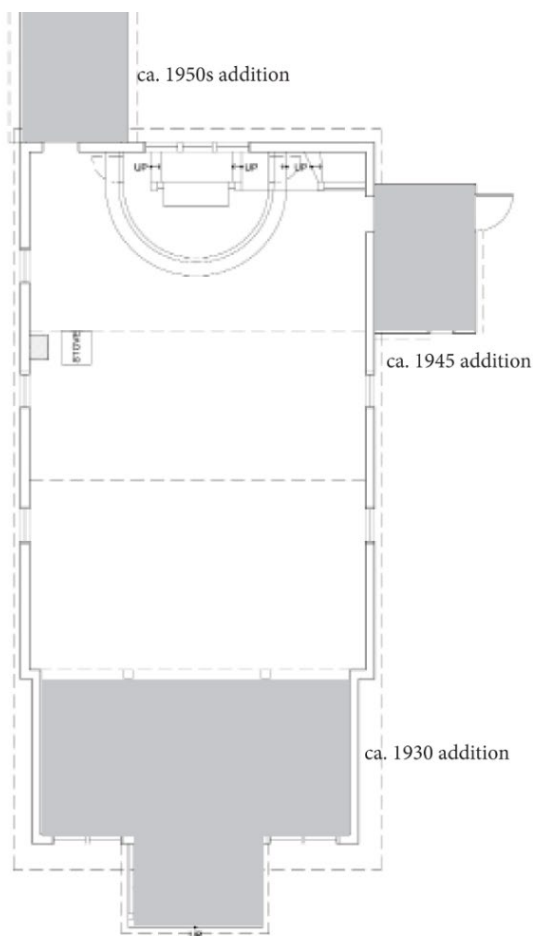


Figure 3. Additions, on main floor plan

Basement

There is a 26' by 40' basement under the original 1907 section of the building (photos 9 and 10) and a crawl space under the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition. The basement consists of a single room with a poured concrete floor and walls, and four load-bearing, historic steel posts arrayed

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from north to south at its center. It has four, historic, three-light, hopper-style windows—two at the west and two at the north—and a non-historic contemporary egress window at the east.

The ceiling is covered with non-historic pine paneling. In a few areas where this has been removed, some floor joists from the room above and some wood planks from the historic ceiling are visible. It appears that most of the historic wood plank ceiling may still be extant.

A historic wood-burning heater is located along the west wall and vents out the chimney. One metal ceiling grate at this location allows heat to rise to the main floor. North of this, in the northwest corner of the room, is a full mid-twentieth century kitchen with cabinets, an electric stove, a refrigerator, and a sink.¹

Stairwell Addition

In the northeast corner of the basement is the door to the ca. 1945 stairwell addition, which provides access to the outdoors and to the sanctuary above. The addition encloses a weathered, historic concrete stairway that runs from the basement to its exterior door, where it joins a quarter-turn wood stairway that connects to a landing outside the sanctuary's northeast door (photos 11 and 12). While the west wall, once part of the building's east façade, is covered with the pressed-metal siding seen outside the original 1907 church building, the stairwell addition's other walls are covered with painted fiberboard that dates to the period of significance.

Main Floor

The main floor consists of two rooms: the 1,320 square foot sanctuary (comprised of the 1907 church interior and the ground floor interior of the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition at its south end), plus the interior of the ca. 1950 storage addition at the northwest corner of the building. The sanctuary's wood plank flooring, wainscoting, fiberboard wall and ceiling paneling, light fixtures, raised seating areas, and furnishings all appear to be historic.

Sanctuary

The north end of this room, which was the interior of the original 1907 church building, has a high, rounded ceiling that reaches the full height of the building (photo 13). To its south, the dropped ceiling of the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition is low enough to create an unfinished partial second story, or attic, that is believed to have been conceived as a balcony with additional

¹ Since the church was never connected to a water supply, public or private, members hauled water to social functions there (Carl Lamppa, interview with Jane Bisel and Steve Williams, September 21, 2020).

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seating for church services.² Two historic wood support columns are at the juncture of the original 1907 church building and the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition (photos 14 and 15).

A carpet runs from the building's main entrance to the dais at this room's north wall. Bead board wainscotting on the east, north and west walls of the 1907 portion of the room has quarter-round base molding and a wainscot cap. Above the wainscotting, the walls and the ceiling are covered with a fiberboard insulating sheeting that dates to the period of significance. To the south, the fiberboard walls of the ca. 1930 addition have a broad bullnose baseboard. Although they do not have wainscotting, they have been painted to emulate the walls at the north end of the room.

At the north end of this room's west wall is the parged brick chimney and an oil stove. The stove is installed over a protective metal sheet and supplied by a line that runs north, along the wall base, to the ca. 1950 storage addition. Its flue vents through the wall of the chimney, about three feet above a patch that suggests the earlier use of a different heating system.

Centered on the sanctuary's north wall is a semi-circular, carpeted dais that supports the speakers' seating area at its center. A painted wood railing with turned balusters surrounds the dais and seating area, which consists of a raised platform with two chairs and two built-in cabinets (photo 16). Gates at the perimeter rail's east and west sides allow access to carpeted steps, screened by low partition walls of painted bead board with square end posts, that lead to the seating area.

The raised song-leaders' seating area (photo 17) is in the northeast corner of the sanctuary, near the door to the ca. 1945 stairwell addition. It is accessed by steps and screened with a low partition wall identical to those of the speakers' seating area. The partition wall's end post supports a number board on a pole; another number board is attached to the wall behind this seating area.

Storage Addition

A door on the north wall of the sanctuary provides entry to the ca. 1950 storage addition (photo 18). The plywood floor of this room is painted, and its walls are covered with fiberboard. On the west side of the room is the fuel storage tank that serves the sanctuary's heater. The painted ceiling has exposed two-by-four rafters and pine roof decking planks.

² Marlin Bjornrud, statement to Jane Bisel, Paul Knuti, Michael Lovato, Ron Sutton, and Stevenson Williams, August 4, 2020.

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Attic

Accessed through a ceiling panel at the southwest corner of the ca. 1930 sanctuary addition (photo 15), the attic is unfinished—allowing part of the original 1907 church's south façade, as well as the sanctuary addition's structural framing, to be observed (photo 19).

INTEGRITY

The Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is still located on its original site in rural Embarrass Township, and it is surrounded by woods and fields much as it was during its period of significance. Thus, it retains excellent integrity of *location* and *setting*.

Minimally altered since the 1950s, the building retains its historic design and exhibits the almost complete lack of ornamentation that is characteristic of churches of this denomination. In addition, it retains many distinctive, character-defining design features—such as its original gabled rectangular form, the shape and symmetrical organization of its windows, and the barrel-vaulted ceiling of its sanctuary. Thus, the building retains very good integrity of *design* and *workmanship*.

Notwithstanding the loss of its original south façade to the ca. 1930 addition, well within the period of significance, the continuing presence of the building's historic wood plank flooring, wood wainscoting, benches, speakers' seating area, dais, song-leader's seating area, windows, kitchen, and exterior wood and metal siding indicates very good integrity of *materials*.

Finally, given the very high level of the other aspects of integrity, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass retains excellent integrity of *feeling* and *association*, and very good overall integrity.

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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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION

ETHNIC HERITAGE-EUROPEAN: Finnish

EXPLORATION / SETTLEMENT

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Period of Significance

1907-1969

Significant Dates

1907

ca. 1930

ca. 1945

ca. 1950

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.)

As one of only a few early twentieth-century Finnish Apostolic Lutheran church buildings known to remain on Minnesota's Iron Range, and one that retains very good historic integrity, this property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, in the areas of Religion, Ethnic Heritage, and Exploration/Settlement. It supports two Minnesota statewide historical contexts, "The Iron Range, Minnesota 1880s–1930s" and "Northern Minnesota Lumbering 1870–1930s."

The property is locally significant in the area of Religion for its association with Finnish Apostolic Lutheranism, an independent Finnish-American pietistic religious denomination established in the late nineteenth century. Founded by early Finnish immigrants to the United States who had been part of a religious revival movement within the Nordic state churches, Finnish Apostolic

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Lutheranism was the first ethnically Finnish religious denomination founded in the United States and the largest one in Minnesota through at least the mid-twentieth century. It was especially prevalent in northwestern Minnesota's Iron Range. The property also has local significance in the area of Exploration and Settlement, due to its founding families' roles in establishing the Iron Range Finnish settlement of Embarrass Township and developing its business community, as well as for their association with the area's mining and logging industries. As a relatively rare example of the early churches constructed and used by members of a Finnish-American immigrant religious community that actively supported the retention of Finnish culture and religious traditions through successive generations, this property also is locally significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage.

Insofar as the significance of this property results from its association with broad patterns in the religious, ethnic, and settlement histories of the Finnish-American immigrant, it meets Criteria Consideration A. Its period of significance extends from the church's 1907 construction to 1969, after which time its congregation began to lose cohesion and the church no longer served as a religious and cultural center for a community of Finnish Apostolic Lutherans in Embarrass Township and its surrounding region.

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

Within the significance areas of Religion, Exploration/Settlement, and Ethnic Heritage, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is associated with several specific historic themes: the spread of Nordic Laestadianism, Finnish settlement of the Minnesota Iron Range, and Finnish cultural institutions of the Minnesota Iron Range. The narrative below will outline each of these and situate the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass within them before detailing the history of the church's use and physical development.

RELIGION: THE SPREAD OF NORDIC LAESTADIANISM

The Finnish Apostolic Lutheran faith is based on the teachings of Lars Levi Laestadius, an ordained minister of the Swedish National Lutheran Church who worked in Swedish Lapland between 1825 and 1861. Adapting the practices of this state church to reflect his own spirituality and respond to the social isolation, poverty, alcoholism, and violence he witnessed around him, Laestadius attracted a considerable following among the many ethnic Finns who predominated in this sparsely populated area, which they had settled in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when both Finnish Lapland and Finland had been parts of Sweden.

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Based on his own experience of ecstatic spiritual “awakening,” Laestadius taught that faith in the redemptive power of Jesus’ sacrifice, coupled with heartfelt repentance for one’s sins, would bring salvation from hopelessness and suffering. His passionate sermons brought listeners to states of ecstasy where they experienced visions, fell into trances, or cried and acted out in spontaneous rejoicing (*liikutukset*). These powerful experiences were often life-changing, insofar as they were viewed as initiating those who had them into a community of “believers” whose “living faith” was more authentic than that of “unbelievers” who had not yet been awakened. Within a short time, the emphasis on “awakening” as the initiation to true religious faith led Laestadian worshippers to reject the spiritual leadership of the mainstream Lutheran State Church and “un-awakened” members of its clergy. This anti-clerical bias led to the introduction of open confession, and a laying on of hands and granting of absolution by members of the congregation, rather than by a clergy member, as an accepted part of the Laestadian religious service that later would be practiced in North American Finnish Apostolic Lutheran churches.

During Laestadius’ lifetime, Laestadianism was a recognized revival movement within the Lutheran state churches of Sweden, Finland, and Norway. It was widespread in the northern regions of these countries, where poor economic conditions and ill-defined borders facilitated the spread of Laestadian Finns. During the 1860s, it became the most important religious movement among Finnish settlers in northern Norway and began to expand southwards through the rest of Finland and into North America, where the lack of a state church necessitated that the movement be organized as a religious denomination in its own right.³

As government-supported institutions, the Nordic state churches provide virtually all citizens with essential public services, such as certification and maintenance of civil records, public education, and the performance of legal marriages and burials. When ethnic Finnish immigrants brought Laestadian religious traditions with them to the United States, they found no similar infrastructure within which they could operate, no possibility of affiliating with established American Christian churches whose beliefs and practices they repudiated, and no chance of receiving services from the taxpayer-supported state churches of their homelands. After a failed attempt to affiliate with some Scandinavian Lutheran denominations in the United States, they organized an independent American religious denomination based on Laestadian religious practices in 1872. Given that the Church’s congregations aspired to a close adherence to Laestadian principles and practices, they maintained strong ties to the Laestadian community

³ Pekka Raittila, “Laestadianism in North America Until 1885,” in Aila Foltz and Miriam Yliniemi, *et al.*, eds., *A Godly Heritage: Historical View of the Laestadian Revival and Development of the Apostolic Lutheran Church in America* (self-published, 2005), 183.

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in Finland, whose representatives provided inspiration and guidance at least into the late twentieth century.⁴

Laestadian Religious Practice in the United States

Lacking the overarching administrative structure of a state church, Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregations adopted an organizational model in which each congregation elected its leaders—a governing board, a minister, and one or more song-leaders—annually. Following the Laestadian tradition, their services consisted of Bible readings; frequent, unaccompanied hymn-singing under the guidance of song leaders; spontaneous, impassioned sermons by non-ordained preachers who often served multiple congregations; and a strong focus on impromptu personal declarations of faith and repentance. Religious symbols were not displayed, vestments were not worn, and the rituals of kneeling and standing common to many other Christian denominations were not practiced.⁵

As they had in their home communities, early Finnish Apostolic Lutherans worshipped privately, first in homes or schools and later in simple church buildings they raised themselves. Emulating the meetinghouses of rural Finnish Laestadians, these buildings reflected the austerity and spiritual priorities of the Nordic Laestadian tradition. In keeping with the traditional Laestadian rejection of worldly display, they lacked typical symbolic features of other Christian churches of their era—such as stained-glass windows, bell towers, steeples, and crosses.⁶ Equally reflective of Laestadian values and traditions, their plain, one-room interiors were furnished with rows of simple, handmade benches or pews, split by a central aisle that led to a raised seating area, or dais. Following the Laestadian tradition, the aisle originally served to separate male worshippers from women and children, and the raised seating area provided chairs or benches for the one or two speakers and song leaders (*lukhari*) who led the church service. A table replaced the altar, lectern, and pulpit typically used in the services of other Christian denominations, reflecting the fundamental principle of equality between the spiritual

⁴ Kukkonen, Walter J., "The Influence of the Revival Movements of Finland on the Finnish Lutheran Churches in America," in Ralph J. Jalkanen, ed., *The Faith of the Finns: Historical Perspectives on the Finnish Lutheran Church in America* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1972), 102.

⁵ Marvin G. Lamppa, "Embers of Revival: Laestadian Schisms in Northeast Minnesota, 1900–1940" (Manuscript, 1979), 1–2, and 7; Elmer Yliniemi, "The Impact of Immigration History on Apostolic Lutheranism," in Foltz and Yliniemi, *et al.*, eds., *A Godly Heritage*, 159.

⁶ Examples have been documented in Cokato, Minnesota (1876), Frederick, South Dakota (ca. 1884), and Adams, Oregon (1884), all of which are one-story, rectangular, gable-fronted wood-frame buildings with front vestibule additions. See Elmer Yliniemi, "The Impact of Immigration History," 160–161, for the Cokato, Minnesota church; "Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church" (National Register of Historic Places registration form, Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, 1984) for the Frederick, South Dakota church; and Willard Pell and Robert Kononen, "Greasewood Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church" (National Register of Historic Places registration form, Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, 1988) for the Adams, Oregon church.

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leadership and the congregation, and the rejection of worldly display and ritual. On the table, a low book stand was furnished to hold the church's typically large Finnish-language Bible. The presence of a church Bible and the role of the song leaders were both vestiges of Laestadian practice in an era when Bibles and song books would not commonly have been owned by individuals.⁷

As in their home country, early members of this fundamentalist Christian community abstained from alcohol and the practice of contraception, and discouraged the pursuit of "worldly" diversions such as dancing, popular music, whistling, card games, or the performing arts. In the tradition of Laestadianism, they looked instead to their religious fellowship for social activities, spiritual support, and a sense of community that transcended family ties and geography.⁸ Thus, a clear and acutely felt line of demarcation between the "believers" in their own exclusive and self-sufficient religious fellowship and the "non-believers" outside of it slowed the assimilation of Finnish Apostolic Lutherans into mainstream American culture and discouraged intermarriage with those outside a narrowly-defined faith community. Together with the continuing Laestadian tradition of touring lay preachers and the regular habit of some Finnish Apostolic Lutherans to attend services in multiple locations, Finnish-language religious newspapers served to bond members of many Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregations and to keep them apprised of events in Laestadian groups worldwide.⁹

Especially since Finnish Apostolic Lutheran churches are not governed by a central authority and are not led by ordained ministers trained in a uniform interpretation of Biblical scripture, doctrinal differences between them have led to the formation of various sub-divisions within the denomination. Many of these have arisen from a fundamental division between "legalists," who stress public confession and the absolution of sins, and "evangelicals," who believe that salvation is inherent in a heartfelt personal belief in the Christian gospel. The practices of public confession, repentance, and absolution are rare in services led by members of this group, who otherwise observe long-established Laestadian worship traditions.¹⁰

John Pollari and Isaac Lamppa, a founding member of the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass, were prominent early leaders of Finnish Apostolic Lutheranism's "evangelical" wing. These charismatic Finnish-American preachers had immigrated to the United States in the 1890s and had settled, respectively, in northwestern Wisconsin and in Embarrass Township. They began to go their own way in preaching a less restrictive, less "legalistic," doctrine in the

⁷ Elmer Yliniemi, "The Impact of Immigration History," 159-161, 169.

⁸ Raittila, "Laestadianism in North America," 184.

⁹ Marvin G. Lamppa, "Embers of Revival," 19; Kirk Saranppa, interview with Jane Bisel, March 29, 2021.

¹⁰ Marvin G. Lamppa, "Embers of Revival," 20-24.

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late 1910s—when the growing influence of “worldly” American culture began to amplify doctrinal differences between Finnish Apostolic Lutheran leaders with differing degrees of tolerance. From the 1920s through the 1940s, as membership in Finnish Apostolic Lutheranism’s most conservative congregations dwindled and about half of the Iron Range’s Apostolic Lutheran churches dissolved, support for the less restrictive movement represented by Pollari and Lamppa grew in Wisconsin and Minnesota.¹¹ Further division within this movement itself followed a 1929 dispute that isolated Lamppa, by then its most lenient preacher, from Pollari and other evangelical leaders (thenceforth known as “Pollarites”).

Continuing doctrinal differences, splits, and shifting alliances between the 1930s and the 1970s created distinct factions nationwide, all of which identified themselves as the true Apostolic Lutheran church and only some of which retained the word “Finnish” in their names. The scope of beliefs spanned an ideological continuum from the conservative Old Apostolic Lutheran Church and Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, through the centrist First Apostolic Lutheran Church and Laestadian Lutheran Church, to the evangelical “Independent” or “Finnish” Apostolic Lutheran Church that was carried forward by later evangelical “Pollarites” such as Sam Kovala, Arthur Romberg, Alex Pesonen, Walter Isaacs, and Matt Reed after the Second World War. All of these Apostolic Lutheran groups are based on Laestadian religious traditions brought to North America by ethnic Finnish immigrants and are active in the twenty-first century.¹² A loosely-affiliated network of “Independent” and “Finnish” congregations, which once included the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Congregation of Embarrass, was historically widespread on the Minnesota Iron Range, where it traces its American roots to settlement of this area by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Finnish immigrants.

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT: FINNISH SETTLEMENT OF THE MINNESOTA IRON RANGE

After six centuries as part of Sweden, Finland existed as a semi-autonomous grand duchy of Russia from 1809 until 1917, when it achieved its independence. With limited good farmland, a rapidly growing population, and repeated subdivision of existing farms by successive generations of heirs, rural households were decreasingly able to support themselves as the nineteenth century progressed. By the mid-1860s, poor weather and a severe famine drove many in the northern provinces to seek employment in Sweden or Norway. Finding equally adverse conditions for farming and harsh working conditions in Sweden’s forestry industry and

¹¹ Marvin G. Lamppa, “Embers of Revival,” 25. Of the seventeen Iron Range Finnish Apostolic Lutheran churches identified as active in 1926, only those in Embarrass, Florenton, Gilbert, Hibbing, Hutter, Peyla, Pike, Soudan, and Virginia were extant in 1941 (see Minnesota Historical Records Survey Project, *Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Minnesota*, St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Records Survey, 1942, 315–322).

¹² Jouko Talonen, “Laestadianism/Apostolic Lutheranism in North America Today,” in Foltz and Yliniemi, *et al.*, eds., *A Godly Heritage*, 106, 209.

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Arctic Norway's mines and fisheries, many responded to the inducements of recruiters sent from Michigan's copper mines and reports of abundant farmland available in the United States. These economic factors, coupled with political repression by the Russian government, fears of conscription into the Russian army, and a growing nationalist movement, led an estimated three hundred thousand Finnish immigrants to enter the United States between 1864 and 1920, the peak era of Finnish migration. Minnesota saw three distinct waves of Finnish settlement: Finnish pioneers who homesteaded the south-central part of the state in the mid-1860s, those who settled its west-central region in the 1870s, and a larger group that was attracted to northeastern Minnesota after commercial iron mining began there in 1884.¹³ Until 1899, most of these people came from rural northern Finland and adjacent areas in arctic Sweden and Norway, where Laestadianism was well-established among the Finnish population.¹⁴

As the Finnish immigration boom drew to a close, Finnish-born residents were among the largest immigrant groups in Minnesota, and the largest in the Minnesota Iron Range, a five-county region that extends roughly two hundred miles northeast from east-central Minnesota to the Canadian border.¹⁵ As the only part of Minnesota with a significant mining industry, the region is distinctive within the state for its unique settlement history and pattern of development—as well as its populist, pro-labor political leanings and a culture that reflects the diverse ethnicities of its early immigrant settlers. Given its rocky, wooded terrain and lack of transportation infrastructure, significant European settlement in this area was not seen until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—decades after European and American pioneers had settled other parts of the state—when numerous jobs became available for male laborers in the emerging mining industry. The ethnic origins of these people evolved away from an initial preponderance of northern Europeans to include many southern and eastern Europeans after the early 1900s, ultimately ensuring the Iron Range's status as the most ethnically-diverse Minnesota region outside the Twin Cities.¹⁶

¹³ Timo Riipa, "The Finns and Swede-Finns," *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, June Drenning Holmquist, ed. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 296.

¹⁴ Elmer Yliniemi, "The Impact of Immigration History," 165; Raittila, "Laestadianism in North America," 183; Timo Riippa, "The Finns and Swede-Finns," *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, June Drenning Holmquist, ed. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 308.

¹⁵ The region is comprised of three mining districts, or "ranges": the Vermilion Range (1884-1964) and the Mesabi Range (1892-present) in northeastern Minnesota's St. Louis, Itasca and Lake counties, and the Cuyuna Range (1907-1982) in east-central Minnesota's Crow Wing County.

¹⁶ Arnold R. Alanen, "Years of Change on the Iron Range," *Minnesota in a Century of Change*, Clifford E. Clark, Jr., ed. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 170.

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The majority of early Iron Range residents lived in small towns developed near the mines by the large Eastern American steel corporations who owned them, or in camps or unincorporated communities nearby. Although these settlements featured few planned amenities, such as parks, their independent shops and service providers—many of whom were American-born—supported mine operations by providing essential goods and services for their workers.¹⁷ Divisions between ethnic groups were strong, due in large part to the lack of a common language, and were reinforced by workplace policies that favored English-speaking workers. A more cohesive regional identity developed over time, particularly as workers of different ethnicities formed trade unions in a shared effort to improve labor inequities.

Most Finnish Iron Range settlers, some of whom had migrated through Finnish settlements in northern Michigan and Wisconsin, came to the Iron Range as experienced workers and found ready employment in the region's mining and logging industries.¹⁸ Harsh working conditions in the mines and logging camps soon prompted a substantial number of these people to seek "cutover" land left by the timber industry, leaving established settlements to pursue a more autonomous lifestyle. Although some were able to purchase surplus railroad land, many others followed the less expensive route of homesteading—which required filing a claim with the U.S. General Land Office, living on the property for at least five years, making improvements, and, for non-citizens, filing for U.S. citizenship. Despite the poor quality of land in the region and the difficulty of converting it to agricultural use, the opportunity for enterprising families to live and work independently of corporate control was compelling and consequential, as the dispersion of Finnish workers away from established mining towns led to the establishment of productive farms, and the development of transportation, commercial, civil and social infrastructure in the region.

Settlement of Embarrass Township

Although it had long been inhabited by the Dakota, and subsequently by the Ojibwe, the first non-Native residents of St. Louis County's modern-day Embarrass Township were itinerant fur traders and trappers who supplied the fur industry throughout the nineteenth century. Shortly after the first survey of the county's northern townships in 1882, land speculation and limited settlement by immigrants of mixed ethnicities began as the logging industry took hold. With the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad's 1884 completion of a track connecting the Soudan mine to Lake Superior, through the future site of Embarrass, came more settlement and construction of

¹⁷ Alanen, "Years of Change," 175.

¹⁸ Alanen, *Finns in Minnesota* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 1–2; Riippa, "The Finns and Swede-Finns," 296 and 303–304; Hans R. Wasastjerna, ed., *History of the Finns in Minnesota*, Toivo Rosvall, trans. (Duluth, MN: Minnesota Finnish-American Historical Society, 1957), 538.

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a one-room log schoolhouse.¹⁹ When the railroad built a depot alongside the Embarrass River in 1892, naming the stop “Embarrass River,” the very sparsely populated settlement had a name and a focus for future commercial development, although it still lacked the infrastructure needed to support community life. These features—including roads, stores, local government offices, social halls, churches, and a cemetery—would develop in the early twentieth century, with an influx of Finnish immigrant pioneers from established Iron Range towns.

The lure of land ownership and achievable opportunities to establish self-sufficient family farms brought the first Finnish settlers into what would become Embarrass Township. The earliest of these was Alexander Palo, a Finnish Apostolic Lutheran mine worker from the nearby mining town of Virginia who filed his claim for a tract of land in 1898. More Finnish settlers, including other members of the Virginia Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregation, came shortly after Palo had established himself with his wife and six children in 1900. This increased the township’s population from 49 to 296 inhabitants—ninety percent of whom were families of first-generation Finnish immigrants—by the time Embarrass Township was organized in 1905.²⁰ The preponderance of these people initially was engaged in logging—whether they were homesteaders clearing land for farming and marketing the timber, professional lumberjacks or timber dealers, or farmers working in the lumber camps during winter months.

Among these early pioneers were members of at least eleven founding families of the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass who worked to construct county roads in the otherwise unserved settlement before the township was formed.²¹ Members of these families ultimately comprised most of the initial members of Embarrass Township’s board of supervisors, its first tax assessor, its first township clerk, and leaders of its early school board and business community. As head of the school board, Alex Palo supervised construction of Embarrass’ first “modern” frame schoolhouse in 1902. Three years later, he joined fellow Finnish Apostolic Lutherans John Paivarinta, John Paivarinta Jr., and Frank Stohl as a founding

¹⁹ “History of Embarrass,” *The Ember* (May 1958), 4; Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass, 1905–2005* (Embarrass, MN: Town of Embarrass/Sisu Heritage, Inc., 2005), 61.

²⁰ Arnold Alanen, “Embarrass Rural Finnish Log District,” *A Field Guide to the Architecture and Landscapes of Northeastern Minnesota* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Landscape Architecture, 2000).

²¹ The families of Mathias Hannula, Isaac Lamppa, Oscar Levander, John Nelimark, Sam Norha, John Paivarinta, Alex Palo, John Pyllka, Joseph Salmi, Frank Stohl, and Thomas Worlin were among the congregation’s founders (Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Congregation of Embarrass, Articles of Incorporation, April 15, 1906; WPA Church Survey, survey sheet for the Embarrass Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church, January 1941). Their members were regularly listed as county road contractors by *The Duluth Evening Herald* (see March 17, 1903; February 14, 1905; February 18, 1908; February 28, 1910; February 17, 1913; and February 27, 1917 issues).

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officer of Embarrass Township.²² Congregation members Isaac Lamppa and Mathias Hannula were early Embarrass merchants and dealers in forest and agricultural products who had a lasting impact on the area's business community. Lamppa operated a variety store, a lumber exchange, a shipping agency, and a farm implement dealership; Hannula operated several logging camps, as well as a boarding house that catered to railroad workers and lumberjacks, and took over the township's early trading post and post office in 1905. He had made his store the leading lumber, food, and farm produce distributor in the township by 1923, when he sold it to fellow congregation members Isaac Lamppa Jr. and Axel Lamppa. With Isaac Jr. as postmaster and subsequent generations of Axel's family managing the store, this was the largest privately-owned business in the township and a multi-purpose regional shopping destination until 1995. It remained under family ownership, with a more limited product line, into the twenty-first century.²³

Within a decade of the township's organization, members of the congregation's founding families were also among the founders and managers of several cooperative associations. The son of founding members John and Katherine Paivarinta was the first full-time manager of the largest and most durable of these, the Embarrass Farmers' Mercantile Association (1909-1963), which attracted members from across the region and operated branches in two other townships.²⁴ Next were the Embarrass Farmers' Cooperative Telephone Association (1914-1963) and the Embarrass Farmer's Cooperative Creamery Association (1915-1950s), which counted founding Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass members John Nelimark, Axel Palo, Mathias Hannula, Oscar Levander and John Pyllka among their officers and directors. Both of these also operated across the region, with the telephone cooperative serving five surrounding townships from its Embarrass exchange and the creamery buying raw milk from 200 farmers in four townships to process and re-sell it as milk, cream, cheese, and ice cream.²⁵ The Embarrass cooperatives, which also included cooperative lumber and flour mills between 1917 and 1925, provided employment for many area residents and complemented privately-

²² *Duluth Evening Herald*, August 26, 1902, 5; Eino Norha, "History of Embarrass Township," Vera Parin, Esther Norha, and Toivo Waisanen, trans. (manuscript, 1960), 3, 6, 8, 9, 13, 17; Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass*, 5, 15; Richard Lamppa, "History of Embarrass Township," *Range History: The Mesabi Perspective* 11:2 (December 1986).

²³ Richard Lamppa, "History of Embarrass Township," Wasastjerna, *History of the Finns*, 554-555; Embarrass; Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass, 1905-2005* (Embarrass, MN: Town of Embarrass/Sisu Heritage, Inc., 2005), 79-80.

²⁴ Richard Lamppa, "History of Embarrass Township," Wasastjerna, *History of the Finns*, 542. The Mercantile cooperative's branches were located in Tower and Vermillion Lake.

²⁵ *Duluth Herald*, April 9, 1914, 27; *Tower Weekly News*, October 9, 1914, 8 and June 25, 1915, 6 (telephone cooperative); *Duluth Herald*, April 24, 1915, 4; *Tower Weekly News*, April 2, 1915, 1; *Eveleth News*, January 12, 1928, 10 (creamery).

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owned local businesses in making Embarrass a regional commercial center. Insofar as they offered a locally-based commercial experience based on a characteristically Finnish model, these cooperatives also helped to perpetuate the Finnish cultural identity of area residents. As well, by offering fair prices and a ready exchange for local farm products and lumber, they helped to sustain members through the Great Depression, when wholesale prices for agricultural goods declined and many stores would no longer purchase goods from local farmers.²⁶

ETHNIC HERITAGE: FINNISH CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE MINNESOTA IRON RANGE

Cultural bias and lack of a common language limited fraternization between Iron Range residents of different ethnicities. As a result, first-generation immigrants across the Iron Range tended to form relatively tight-knit ethnic cultural communities that encouraged intermarriage and retention of native languages and cultural practices.²⁷ Heritage-affirming institutions specific to the Iron Range's Finnish immigrant community included labor unions and political groups, social halls, public saunas, commercial cooperative associations, temperance societies, and churches. However, given the strongly held, divergent beliefs that divided politically active "Hall Finns" (or "Red Finns") from religiously active "Church Finns," along with the fact that farmers often were excluded from membership in socialist workers' organizations,²⁸ supporters of some such groups did not mix. This was especially true for the Finnish Apostolic Lutherans, whose faith perpetuated a distinctive religious tradition with historic ties to their Nordic homeland and discouraged them from partaking in many typical aspects of American life.

Most Finnish immigrants had been nominal members of the Lutheran state church in Finland, which conveyed rights to legal marriage and burial and ensured that official records of birth, marriage, and death would be recorded. Although many of them were not active church-goers after leaving Finland, Finnish churches were a feature of every Finnish settlement and played an important continuing role in maintaining social relationships and a sense of community for the Finnish-Americans who attended them.²⁹ Most religiously active Finnish-Americans belonged to one of three branches of the Lutheran Church: the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (the "Suomi Synod") and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (the "National Church"). Because the earliest Finnish immigrants to North America were from heavily Laestadian northern Scandinavia, the Finnish Apostolic

²⁶ Wasastjerna, *History of the Finns*, 542.

²⁷ David LaVigne, "Immigration to the Iron Range, 1880-1930" (MNopedia, <https://www.mnopedia.org/immigration-iron-range-1880-1930>, accessed October 24, 2022).

²⁸ Wasastjerna, *History of the Finns*, 543.

²⁹ Riippa, "The Finns and Swede-Finns," 306.

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Lutheran Church (founded in 1872) was the first of these, followed by the Suomi Synod (founded in 1890) and the National Church (founded in 1898).

Given the preponderance of Laestadians among early Finnish immigrants to the United States, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church was the largest Finnish cultural community in the nation during the late nineteenth century.³⁰ Even by 1926, with the rate of Finnish immigration declining and some of the existing population of first- and second-generation Finnish-Americans being somewhat assimilated into the dominant American culture, membership in Minnesota's Finnish Apostolic Lutheran churches nearly equaled that of the other two Finnish-American denominations combined, and many such churches were located in the Iron Range.³¹ By the mid-1960s, both the Suomi Synod and the National Church had been absorbed into mainstream American Lutheranism and had ceased to exist, leaving the branches of the original Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church as the only specifically Finnish-American religious groups to survive into the twenty-first century.³²

Finnish Churches and Heritage-Affirming Organizations of Embarrass

By 1907, Embarrass Township had two Finnish Lutheran church buildings: a National Church known as the Community Lutheran Church, built in 1905, and the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass. The National Church's membership peaked at approximately 150 people in 1923 and fell to a low of eleven people before it closed in the early 1940s.³³ The Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass, constructed in 1907 by a congregation that had been active since 1901,³⁴ was used for religious services until 2010. With forty-three adult members reported at inception and an estimated weekly attendance of 125 to 200 at its peak in the 1960s, this church served a loosely defined community of worshippers from the "evangelical" wing of the Apostolic Lutheran denomination. Some of these were regular attendees from the nearby area and others came from as far away as Wisconsin and Michigan to attend baptisms, weddings, funerals, and holiday services with local family and friends, or to participate in

³⁰ Elmer Yliniemi, "The Impact of Immigration History," 168.

³¹ Alanen, *Finns in Minnesota*, 47; Lillian H. Esala (*Directory of Churches of the Vermilion and Mesabi Iron Ranges of Northeast Minnesota, 1884–1983*, Gilbert, MN: Iron Range Historical Society, 1983).

³² In 1963, the Suomi Synod merged into the Lutheran Church of America (LCA), which in turn was absorbed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in 1988. The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran National Church of America became the National Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1946 and merged into the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (now part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) in 1964. Apostolic Lutheran branches existing after 2004 were the Old Apostolic Lutheran Church, the Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, the Laestadian Lutheran Church, the First Apostolic Lutheran Church, the Pollarite "Finnish" or "Independent" Apostolic Lutheran Church, and the Grace Apostles Lutheran Church (Talonen, "Laestadianism/Apostolic Lutheranism," 196).

³³ Richard Lamppa, "Churches" (manuscript, 1966).

³⁴ WPA Church Survey, survey sheet, January 1941.

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services led by a favored speaker.³⁵ The township's third religious institution, established in 1923, was a Suomi Synod church called the Embarrass Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. This congregation had an average membership of between forty and sixty people and merged into a mainstream American Lutheran denomination in 1963.³⁶ For those who were not church-goers, the Embarrass Socialist Hall (ca. 1914-1934), with a smaller membership of twenty to thirty people, and Oras Hall (1916-ca. 1930s), an athletic event center, were the township's primary social and cultural centers.³⁷

Otherwise, the township's small commercial center served the Finnish immigrant community with a post office, Finnish-owned stores, and the characteristically Finnish cooperative associations. As a small rural township, Embarrass never developed much of the other cultural infrastructure that sustained Finnish immigrants in larger Iron Range towns. Especially since there was no local Finnish-language newspaper, religiously observant members of its Finnish immigrant community—particularly those affiliated with the socially conservative, insular Finnish Apostolic Lutheran faith—relied heavily on church activities to provide social engagement and a sense of community that went beyond their own families.

Although Finnish-Americans constituted most of the township's residents until well after 1940,³⁸ the predominance of Finnish-born residents and Finnish cultural traditions in Embarrass Township generally waned during a post-World War II population boom that doubled its population between 1950 and 1970, as the escalation of taconite mining brought people of many nationalities into the area.³⁹ With increased ethnic diversity and the gradual assimilation of later-generation Finnish-Americans into mainstream American culture, the few local institutions that still served first-generation Finnish immigrants in their native language existed alongside newer ones that had no ties to Finnish culture.⁴⁰ With the loss of the National

³⁵ WPA Church Survey, survey sheet, January 1941; Patricia Heikilla, interview with Jane Bisel and Steve Williams, August 20, 2020; Kirk Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2021.

³⁶ Membership data from Wasastjerna, *History of the Finns*, 543. After the Suomi Synod church's 1963 merger into the Lutheran Church of America, it was absorbed into another mainstream American denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, in 1988. It is known today as Hope Lutheran Church and located across CR-21 from the Finnish Apostolic Church of Embarrass on what is now called "Church Hill" (Eino Norha, "History of Embarrass Township," 15; Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass*, 73).

³⁷ Wasastjerna, *History of the Finns*, 543; Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass*, 92; Gudmundson and Winckler, *Testaments in Wood*, 26–27.

³⁸ Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass*, 7, 79; Gudmundson and Winckler, *Testaments in Wood*, 26–27; Wasastjerna, *History of the Finns*, 545.

³⁹ Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass*, 43.

⁴⁰ Among these were a succession of new religious organizations, including the Non-Segregation Church (1942–1950s), the Evangelical Free Church (1979–present), the Jesus is Lord Church (1980–1990s), and the Embarrass Christian Pioneer Fellowship (1999–present).

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in the early 1940s and the Suomi Synod Church in 1963, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass became not only the area's oldest church, but the only one whose congregation still specifically identified as Finnish and had strong ties to a distinctly Finnish religious tradition and the township's early history.

THE HISTORY OF THE FINNISH APOSTOLIC LUTHERAN CHURCH OF EMBARRASS

The early Finnish Apostolic Lutheran settlers of Embarrass Township conducted religious services in their homes as soon as they established themselves. With construction of the township's first schoolhouse in 1902 and the Community Lutheran Church building in 1905, these were the congregation's regular meeting places until 1907.⁴¹ Founding members included several families who had been active in the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregation of Virginia, an established mining town to the west. These included the households of Virginia Finnish Apostolic Lutheran leaders Frank Stohl, the Virginia congregation's first chairman, and Isaac Lamppa, a Virginia Finnish Apostolic Lutheran speaker who would go on to lead the Embarrass congregation and, ultimately, achieve a broader North American following. Also, among these families were those of Sam Norha, John Palo, and John Pyllka, a Virginia Finnish Apostolic Lutheran speaker who was legally designated as the first minister of the newly incorporated Finnish Apostolic Church of Embarrass.⁴²

The Early Decades, 1907–1947

By the time the congregation constructed its church in 1907, Isaac Lamppa had a following among Iron Range Finnish Apostolic Lutherans. Although he was travelling further afield within a few years, preaching to congregations in the United States and Canada, his influence was limited to the Minnesota Iron Range after his 1929 split with John Pollari. He retained a loyal group of followers ("*lamppalaiset*")⁴³ in the region and continued to live, work, and preach to the Embarrass congregation and other independent "evangelical" Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregations in the area until his death in 1943.⁴⁴ During Lamppa's lifetime, in keeping with Laestadian tradition and the practices of other Finnish Apostolic Lutheran churches, the Embarrass congregation also brought well-known Finnish and Finnish-American Apostolic

⁴¹ Marvin G. Lamppa, "Embers of Revival," 18; WPA Church Survey, survey sheet, January 1941.

⁴² Richard Lamppa, "Churches."

⁴³ Uuras Saarnivaara, *History of the Laestadian or Apostolic Movement in America* (Ironwood, MI, National Publishing, 1947), 50; Warren H. Hepokoski, "The Laestadian Movement: Disputes and Divisions 1861–2000" (self-published, 2002), <http://users.erols.com/ewheaton/disputes/disputes-main.htm>, accessed October 26, 2022.

⁴⁴ Marvin G. Lamppa, "Embers of Revival," 11–12, 15, and 18; WPA Church Survey, survey sheet, January 1941.

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Lutheran speakers from Michigan, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Finland to preach at the church.

The church's activities and the vitality of its congregation were constant during its first four decades, which included the Depression and the social changes experienced in the broader community after World War II. In addition to regular religious services, the congregation is known to have used the church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, and religious education classes during this time. It witnessed its first weddings in 1910, when visiting speaker John Pollari blessed the unions of two couples from the congregation.⁴⁵ Also in that year, it began to host an annual summer confirmation class that drew youth from smaller congregations throughout the surrounding area for almost six decades (figures 5, 6, 8 and 10).⁴⁶ The only known record of the congregation's membership from this period, a list of families compiled by a member of the 1929 confirmation class, suggests that the church had a strong local following of approximately 172 Embarrass and Waasa township residents over thirteen years of age.⁴⁷ By contrast, Virginia's Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregation drew its approximately 200 members from a general population more than ten times the size of these townships combined.⁴⁸

The church's first four decades also saw significant building improvements. Little more than a year after construction of the original church building, the congregation purchased a one-acre lot that included it from congregation members Sam and Maria Norha.⁴⁹ Although no construction records have been located for the church's three additions, an August 1948 aerial photograph (figure 4) attests to construction of the south and east additions before that date. Given the membership calculated for the congregation in ca. 1930, it is likely that enlargement of the sanctuary would have been necessary by that time and that easy access to the basement would have facilitated its use by the larger congregation. Other significant improvements of this period included the installation of the current metal siding on the church's original section at some time prior to construction of the additions, as well as the introduction of electric

⁴⁵ Eino Norha, "History of Embarrass Township," 15–16.

⁴⁶ WPA Church Survey, survey sheet, January 1941; Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2021.

⁴⁷ Mauri Kinnunen, email messages to Jane Bisel, March 16 and 18, 2021. The twelve surnames listed represent as many as twenty-nine of the households enumerated in these townships by the 1930 census.

⁴⁸ This comparison is based on a combined 1930 population of 1,021 for Embarrass and Waasa townships, a 1930 population of 11,963 for the town of Virginia, and the ca. 1925 Virginia congregation size reported by Marvin Lamppa (U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population 1:548*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942; Marvin Lamppa, "Embers of Revival," 15).

⁴⁹ Sam Norha and Marija Norha to the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass, Warranty Deed, July 14, 1911, St. Louis County Register of Deeds, record no. 352, filed July 18, 1911.

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power, replacement of the church's kerosene lighting, and interior and exterior painting in 1947.⁵⁰

The Postwar Era, 1948–1968

Despite the many social and demographic changes taking place in Embarrass Township and elsewhere at the time, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass seems to have retained considerable vitality during the two decades that followed World War II, when other local institutions with ties to Finnish culture were beginning to decline. A member of the broader Iron Range Apostolic Lutheran community who attended services there during this period recalls about 100 to 125 people typically present for regular services, and up to the church's maximum capacity of about 200 for weddings and funerals.⁵¹ Two others whose families were active in the Embarrass congregation for several generations particularly remember the 1960s as a vital time for the church and its congregation. One of them recalls services as being extremely well-attended, to the extent that some participants needed to park in neighboring fields and sit on borrowed sauna benches at the rear of the sanctuary, or in its aisles.⁵² The congregation's 1964 purchase of a .79-acre lot east of the church from the Norha family is consistent with this scenario.⁵³

Although they were increasingly bilingual, church services of the postwar era were much the same as they had been in earlier times, insofar as they continued to follow Laestadian traditions such as leadership by non-ordained preachers, lack of ritual and religious symbolism, and spontaneous and highly emotional declarations of faith and repentance by all participants. Hymns were sung in both Finnish and English, with the aid of hymnals in each language, and were led by song leaders whose raised seating area faced the congregation at the northeast corner of the sanctuary. Two speakers addressed the congregation, one speaking in Finnish and the other in English, and often changed their respective languages from one service to the next. The church offered services on Saturday evenings and Sundays at noon during the late 1940s and the 1950s, but by the early 1960s it was offering three two-hour Sunday services—morning, afternoon, and evening—as well as a Wednesday evening service, a week of daily services preceding both Christmas and Easter, and an additional Saturday evening service on Labor Day weekend. Throughout the period, many people lingered after services to enjoy

⁵⁰ Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2021.

⁵¹ Heikilla, interview, August 20, 2020.

⁵² Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2021; Jeff Iisakka, conversation with Jane Bisel, June 7, 2021.

⁵³ Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Congregation of Embarrass, Board of Trustees, "A Resolution," unpublished document, May 16, 1954; Ellen Norha to the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass, Warranty Deed, August 28, 1964, St. Louis County, Minnesota Register of Deeds, document no. 40906, filed September 9, 1964.

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spontaneous hymn singing in the sanctuary, as well as a meal or refreshments in the basement or on the lawn.⁵⁴ During this era, the congregation regularly invited a variety of well-known speakers from the evangelical “Pollarite” sector of the broader Finnish Apostolic Lutheran community to lead its services, attracting worshippers from as far away as Michigan and Wisconsin. Such visitors often stayed overnight with local family or friends to attend more services.⁵⁵ Summer confirmation classes continued to draw youth from other Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregations in the region, some of whom stayed with local friends or family, even when their own churches offered confirmation classes. Although a family’s choice to have its children confirmed in Embarrass may have been driven by other factors, a historic family tie to the church likely was an important one.⁵⁶

Changes and improvements to the church building that are believed to have taken place near the onset of this era, in ca. 1949–1954, are replacement of the sanctuary’s original woodstove with the current oil stove, concurrent construction of the north addition for fuel oil storage, and installation of the sanctuary’s fiberboard interior paneling. Also in the 1950s, the congregation installed a full kitchen in the northwest corner of the basement and amended its articles of incorporation to designate the church as the official location of its annual meeting.⁵⁷

The Final Decades, 1969–2017

Throughout the United States, the decades after World War II saw the decline of small farms as agriculture and food distribution became increasingly industrialized. With improved roads and increasing automobile ownership, greater assimilation of younger residents into the dominant American culture, and abundant jobs in construction and mining elsewhere in the region, many Embarrass Township residents left to pursue employment and education opportunities elsewhere. By 1970, when the local school was consolidated into a larger district facility, the Embarrass cooperatives had been closed and decreasing train ridership had prompted the Duluth, Missabe and Iron Range Railroad to discontinue passenger service and raze the Embarrass depot. After marked contraction of the U.S. steel industry during the 1980s triggered widespread unemployment and a forty percent decline in Embarrass’ population,

⁵⁴ Heikilla, interview, August 20, 2020; Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2020; Virginia Johnson, interview with Jane Bisel, May 21, 2021.

⁵⁵ Heikilla, interview, August 20, 2020, and email messages to Jane Bisel, August 22 and 25, 2020.

⁵⁶ Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2021.

⁵⁷ Heikilla, interview, August 20, 2020; Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2021; Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Congregation of Embarrass, Board of Trustees, “A Resolution.”

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from a peak of 1,154 residents in 1980 to only 691 in 2000, the community also lost its rail freight service in 1993.⁵⁸

Adding to the effect of these local conditions, nationwide social change and ongoing divisions within the Apostolic Lutheran denomination began to strain the congregation after the mid-1960s. Many of the congregation's young men did not return to Embarrass after military service in Vietnam, other young people left to join the national counterculture movement of that time or to pursue opportunities elsewhere, and the aftermath of a 1962 rift between Matt Reed and other Minnesota speakers who served the congregation began to factionalize its remaining members, some of whom left to join other congregations. With its membership dwindling and losing cohesion, the congregation could not sustain its previous level of activity after 1969, when it offered its last summer confirmation class.⁵⁹

Those who continued to worship in the building during the 1970s and beyond did so as part of several smaller groups who met independently of each other, as further disagreements followed the dispute with Reverend Reed. Although the services of this period followed the Laestadian traditions of simplicity, lay leadership, spontaneous sermons and testimonials of faith, and the singing of traditional hymns and songs under the leadership of a song leader, they were conducted in English by the 1980s and were limited to the summer months from about 2000 to 2010. Since then, occasional funerals of former active members have been the only religious services held in the building.⁶⁰ Finally, on January 31, 2017, the remaining members of the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Congregation of Embarrass conveyed the church building and its approximately 1.8-acre lot to Sisu Heritage, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of Embarrass Township's heritage and vitality.⁶¹ Currently, this building is one of only three early twentieth-century Finnish Apostolic Lutheran church buildings known to remain on the Minnesota Iron Range and, of them, appears to have the highest degree of historic integrity.⁶²

⁵⁸ Embarrass Centennial History Book Committee, ed., *Impressions of Embarrass*, 9, 61, 79; Gudmundson and Winckler, *Testaments in Wood*, 27. U.S. Census Bureau, *1990 Census of Population and Housing, Population and Housing Unit Counts*, 1990 CPH-2-25 (Minnesota), "Table 8: Population and Housing Units, 1970 to 1990" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 46; U.S. Census Bureau, *Minnesota: 2010, Population and Housing Unit Counts*, CPH-2-25, "Table 8: Population and Housing Units, 1990 to 2010" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012), 48.

⁵⁹ Heikilla, interview, August 20, 2020; Saranpaa, interview, March 29, 2021; Johnson, interview, May 21, 2021.

⁶⁰ Johnson, interview, May 21, 2021; Carl Lamppa, interview, September 21, 2020.

⁶¹ Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Congregation of Embarrass Co. to Sisu Heritage, Inc., Quit Claim Deed, January 31, 2017, Minnesota Register of Deeds, document no. 01304921, filed February 28, 2017.

⁶² The other identified church buildings are at 222 Second Street North in Virginia, Minnesota, and at 7398 Sparta Circle Drive in Eveleth, Minnesota.

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During the last period of the building's original use as a religious facility, changes and improvements were limited to replacement of the basement's early cooking and heating stove with the current wood stove in the 1970s, installation of its present wood ceiling paneling in the same decade, and replacement of the front doors in the 1980s.⁶³ More recently, under Sisu Heritage's management, the building has received a new roof and gutters, an electrical upgrade, and structural reinforcement of the sanctuary floor and the east wall of its foundation.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

From 1907 through 2010, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass served members of a distinctly Finnish-American Christian religious denomination that traces its roots to the pietistic nineteenth-century Laestadian revival movement within the Nordic state churches. Prevalent in Finnish immigrant communities of the Upper Midwest from the late nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century, Finnish Apostolic Lutheranism was the most popular religious denomination among religiously-observant Finnish-Americans of the Minnesota Iron Range, where numerous small churches once existed. However, after a twenty-year period of decline that hit the denomination's most conservative congregations particularly hard, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass was one of only a handful of Finnish Apostolic Lutheran churches active on the Iron Range after the early 1940s. Given its continuing ability to attract popular "speakers" (lay preachers) from its own moderate "evangelical" branch of the denomination, it drew Finnish-American families from other Iron Range Finnish Apostolic Lutheran congregations, and even some from neighboring states, to attend traditional religious services and participate in communion classes through the end of the 1960s. Thus, its period of significance extends from its 1907 construction to 1969, when dwindling membership and a lack of ideological unity diminished its ability to function as before.

Because it is associated with the spread of Laestadianism in the Minnesota Iron Range, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is significant in the area of Religion. Its worshippers were part of a religious tradition that originated as a nineteenth century revival movement within the Nordic state churches and became a religious denomination, in its own right, when ethnically Finnish Laestadian immigrants brought their religious beliefs and customs with them to the United States. These people's Laestadian religious practices were conspicuously different from those of other American Christian churches, including the Finnish Lutheran churches attended by other religiously observant members of the Finnish immigrant

⁶³ Saranppa, interview, March 29, 2021.

⁶⁴ Heikilla, interview, August 20, 2020; Carl Lamppa, interview, September 21, 2020.

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community. The Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church's large sanctuary, simple wooden benches divided by a central aisle, speakers' dais, and song-starters' seating area reflect these practices, and its simplicity and lack of ornamentation convey the standard of austerity traditionally dictated by the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran faith.

The Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is significant in the area of Exploration/Settlement for its association with a group of first-generation Finnish-American immigrants who settled Embarrass Township and actively contributed to its development. The church's founding members, most of whom exemplify the numerous Iron Range Finnish immigrants who left the established mining towns of Minnesota's Iron Range to farm and log on raw "cutover" land left by the timber industry, are noteworthy in the history of Embarrass Township and its region for their leading roles in the development of the township's business community and the furtherance of its local economy, as well as for their contributions to the ongoing vitality of the regional mining and logging industries.

As a representation of an American religious denomination founded by Finnish immigrants whose religious faith was part of the nineteenth-century Laestadian revival movement in the Nordic state churches, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage. Established early in the peak era of Finnish migration to the United States, this denomination had a meaningful following among church-going Finnish-Americans in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Its insularity, prolonged adherence to the Finnish language and Laestadian traditions, and rejection of various features of the American lifestyle helped to perpetuate an early-nineteenth century Nordic tradition into twentieth century America.

For these reasons, the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, with local significance in the areas of religion, settlement, and ethnic heritage. Insofar as its significance results from association with broad patterns in the religious, ethnic, and settlement histories of the Finnish-American immigrant, it meets Criteria Consideration A. It is minimally altered since the end of the period of significance in 1969. With subsequent use and ongoing care, it retains very good overall integrity and is now one of very few remaining examples of the small Finnish Apostolic Lutheran churches that once were common to Finnish immigrant communities throughout the Minnesota Iron Range.

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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: Sisu Heritage, Inc.

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): SL-EMB-166

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.8 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 47.658989 | Longitude: -92.223891 |
| Latitude: | Longitude: |
| Latitude: | Longitude: |
| Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |

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

St. Louis County parcel ID numbers 330-0010-3410 and 330-0010-3411. Beginning at the southwest corner of Section 23, Township 60, Range 15, the southern boundary runs 488 feet east, along CR-21, to reach the southeast corner of the property. From there, the eastern boundary runs 86 feet north, then 198 feet west, then 122 feet north to reach its northeast corner. From there, the northern border runs 290 feet west to reach its northwest corner, and the western boundary runs 208 feet south to complete the perimeter.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These boundaries include the property owned and used by the church's congregation during the period of significance.

10. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jane Bisel & Stevenson Williams, Principals, Blue Planet Museum Consulting, LLC
Michael Lovato, Senior Historical Architect, LHB, Inc.

organization: LHB, Inc.

street & number: 701 North Washington Avenue, Suite 200

city or town: Minneapolis state: MN zip code: 55401

e-mail: jane@blueplanet-consulting.com

telephone: 507-280-6888

date: February 24, 2023

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** 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 1600x1200 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 doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

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Photo Log

Name of Property: Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church of Embarrass

City or Vicinity: Embarrass

County: St. Louis

State: Minnesota

Photographer: Stevenson G. Williams

Date Photographed: September 30, 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 19. Driveway from CR-21, looking northwest
- 2 of 19. Outhouse, looking west
- 3 of 19. South façade, looking north
- 4 of 19. West façade, looking east
- 5 of 19. North façade, looking southwest
- 6 of 19. North façade, signature detail, looking south
- 7 of 19. North façade, north addition, looking south
- 8 of 19. East façade, looking west
- 9 of 19. Basement, looking southeast
- 10 of 19. Basement, looking northwest
- 11 of 19. Stairwell addition, looking north from first floor landing
- 12 of 19. Stairwell addition, looking northwest from first floor landing
- 13 of 19. Sanctuary, looking north
- 14 of 19. Sanctuary, looking south
- 15 of 19. Sanctuary addition, looking west
- 16 of 19. Dais and speakers' seating, looking west
- 17 of 19. Song leaders' seating, looking northeast
- 18 of 19. Storage addition, looking north
- 19 of 19. Attic, looking northeast

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 (16 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.

Historic Photos



Figure 4. 1948 aerial photo (detail of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Photo ID: slc_045_048), https://maps2.dnr.state.mn.us/airphotos/projects/slc/y1948/slc_045_048.jpg, accessed October 27, 2022



Figure 5. Embarrass confirmation class with Reverend Lamppa (location unknown), ca. 1914



Figure 6. Embarrass confirmation class (location and leader unknown), 1916



Figure 7. Congregation outing with Reverend Lamppa (center), ca. 1925



Figure 8. *Confirmation class at the church's entrance with Reverends Romberg and Reed, 1946*



Figure 9. *Wedding party at the church's dais, 1951*



Figure 10. *Confirmation class at the church's dais with Reverend Reed, ca. 1955*

Topographical Map of Property Location

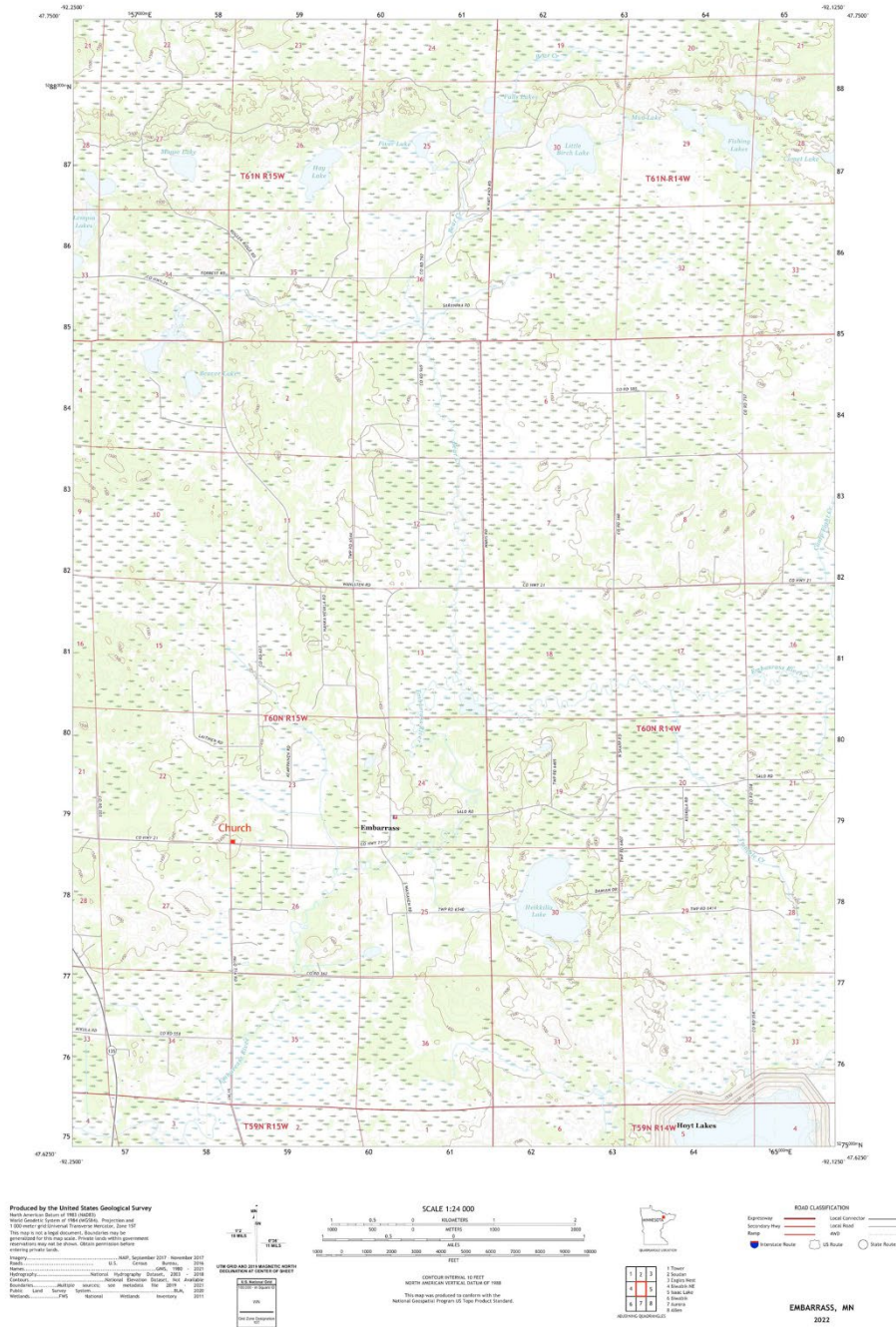


Figure 11. Property location, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, Embarrass Quadrangle (MN-St. Louis County) 7.5 minute series, 2022

Aerial Map of Property Location

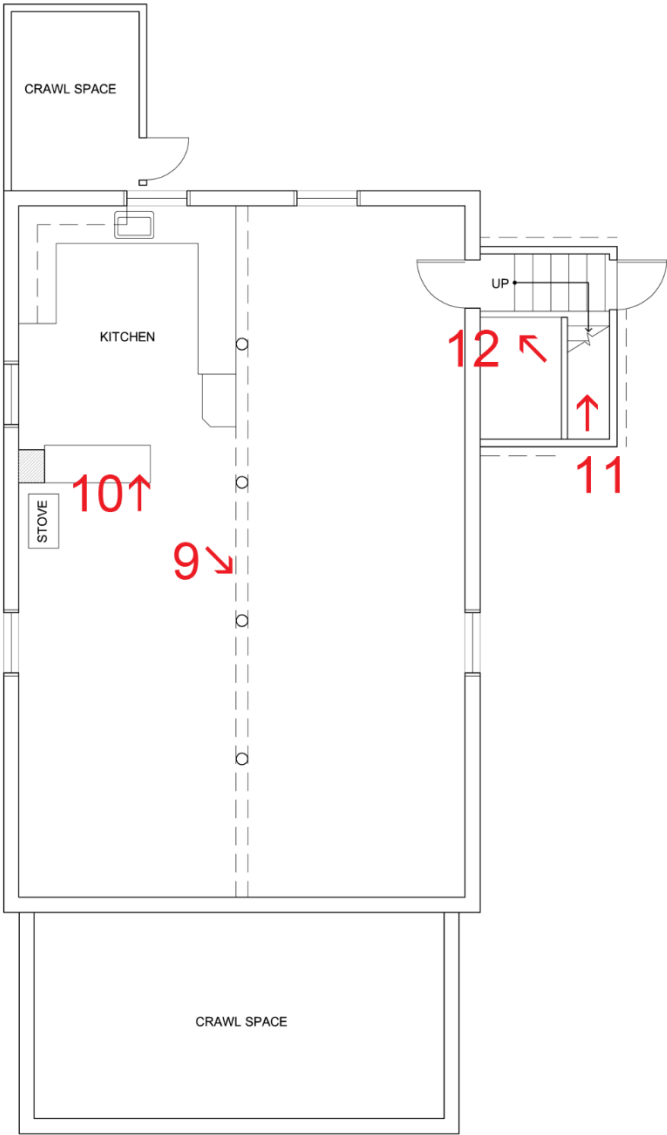


Figure 12. Aerial map of property location (Google Earth)

Exterior Photo Key

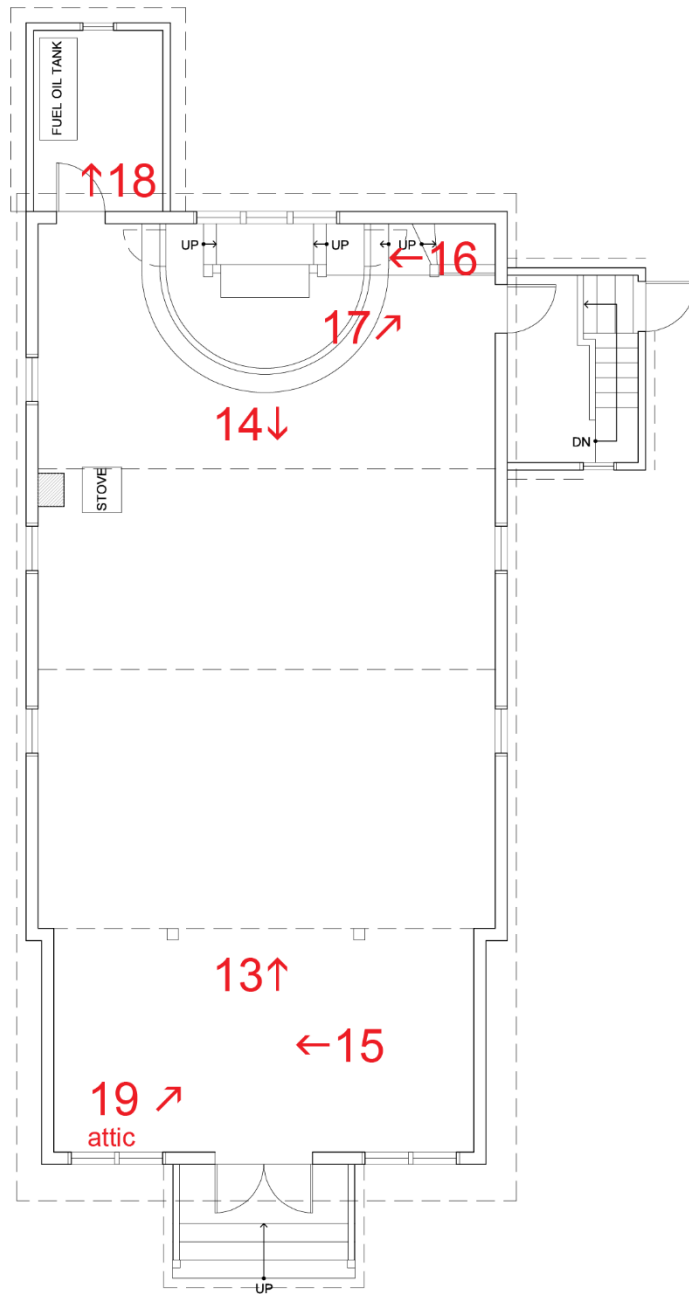


Interior Photo Keys



BASEMENT PLAN





FIRST FLOOR PLAN

