

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: Grong Lutheran Church

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

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

2. Location

Street & number: 10240 Highway 32 South

City or town: Parke Township State: MN County: Clay

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

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)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
District	<input type="checkbox"/>
Site	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Object	<input type="checkbox"/>

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

FUNERARY/cemetery

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Carpenter Gothic

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: _____

Foundation: Concrete Block

Walls: Wood

Roof: Asphalt

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 Grong Lutheran Church is located in unincorporated Rollag, Minnesota on the east side of Minnesota State Highway 32. Rollag is located in Parke Township, Clay County, roughly 40 miles east/southeast of the Fargo, ND / Moorhead, MN urban center. Grong Lutheran Church is a single-story simplified basilica plan church with a bell tower centered on the primary elevation and a small addition at the rear; the building is an intact example of a building typology typical of churches constructed by early Norwegian-American Lutheran congregations. As a small church funded and constructed by congregants, Grong Lutheran Church underwent multiple construction campaigns during its first fifty years.

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Narrative Description

Setting

The Grong Lutheran Church is located in unincorporated Rollag, Minnesota on the east side of Minnesota State Highway 32. Rollag is located in Parke Township, Clay County, roughly 40 miles east/southeast of the Fargo, ND / Moorhead, MN urban center (Figure 1).

The Grong Lutheran Church's roughly rectangular site is ringed with mature trees (Figures 2 and 3). The church is located on the western end of the property, where a gap in the trees frames a view of the building. The church is set back from the edge of the property by a narrow band of gravel that serves as parking, and a concrete walk that leads to the front doors. A grass churchyard and the church cemetery extend north, south, and east of the building.

Plan and Massing

Grong Lutheran Church is a single-story simplified basilica plan church with a bell tower centered on the primary elevation and a small addition at the rear (Photo 0003). The building has a steeply pitched front gable roof with asphalt shingles, painted narrow lapped wood siding, and a visible quarry-faced style concrete block foundation that has been painted. The bell tower is capped with an octagonal spire.

Construction History

As a small church funded and constructed by congregants, Grong Lutheran Church underwent multiple construction campaigns during its first fifty years. The initial phase of construction lasted from 1881-1882, resulting in the sanctuary and primary entrance. In 1891-1892, the bell tower was added, and the church was raised four feet. In 1927, a basement was dug out. A small staircase addition and the primary entrance portico were also added at this time and the first level west elevation windows were removed. Interior updates were made in the 1950s including "covering the walls with celetex [sic] and stained plywood, new stained windows, two front rooms added to the sacristy and a new pulpit" and remodeling the lower level. Wood wall paneling was installed in the front entrance and stairway in 1972. A small rear addition housing bathrooms, storage, and a secondary exit was added in 1979.

It should be noted that photographs of the altar area dating to c.1900-1910 and August 1950 show that the configuration of space at the front of the church did change over time, with the smaller choir that we see today in place by August 1950 (Figure 4).

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Exterior - Bell Tower and Primary (West) Elevation

The primary elevation of the Grong Lutheran Church faces west toward Minnesota State Highway 32, which is the primary road running through Rollag. The main features of the primary elevation are the bell tower and primary entrance, which are both centered on the elevation (Photo 0002). 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 beneath a portico. The portico has a front-gabled roof and a round arched detail framing the entrance. Above the ridge of the portico roof, a pair of divided-light, wood-frame, hung windows with round-arched lintels are centered on the bell tower. 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 (Photo 0004). Paired openings at each side of the belfry are currently filled with painted wood grates. The belltower is capped with a four-sided hipped roof that transitions into an octagonal spire capped with a cross constructed of wood covered with galvanized steel.

Exterior - Secondary (North and South) Elevations

The secondary north and south elevations of the Grong Lutheran Church are substantially similar to each other (Photos 0001, 0003, 0007). At the level of the sanctuary, four divided-light, round-arched, wood-framed windows are equally spaced along both elevations. Each window has a fixed upper sash and a narrow hopper at the base. At the lower garden level, four wood-framed, divided-light windows are located within the concrete block foundation wall and aligned vertically with the sanctuary level windows. At the south elevation, a small addition off the south side of the bell tower houses the stair connection to the lower level (Photos 0002, 0004).

Exterior - Rear (East) Elevation and 1979 Rear Addition

The rear elevation of the sanctuary portion of the church is composed of uninterrupted painted narrow-lapped wood siding (Photos 0005, 0006). A small addition that was added in 1979 extends out from the original building. The addition houses a secondary exit, a small storage space and restrooms. The addition has a smooth-faced concrete block foundation and wide lapped siding. A single, contemporary swing door is located at the south end of the east elevation. Small rectangular windows are located at the south and east elevations of the addition.

Interior – Organization

The interior of the Grong Lutheran Church includes the first level narthex at the west end of the building with the sanctuary extending to the east. A balcony is located at the west end of the sanctuary. The lower garden level includes the fellowship hall, kitchen, restrooms, and mechanical spaces.

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Interior – First Level - Narthex

The narthex is located at the west end of the church, within the footprint of the belltower addition. The space is rectangular with a carpeted floor, 1970s wood paneling on the walls, and a dropped 2'x4' acoustical tile ceiling (Photo 0009). The space is organized with the double doors of the primary entrance at the west and a pair of equally sized double doors opening to the sanctuary at the east (Photo 0010). At the west side is a door that opens to a stair that provides access to the sanctuary balcony and the belfry.

Interior – First Level - Sanctuary

The sanctuary is located to the east of the narthex. The ceiling and walls of the sanctuary are all finished with Celotex tiles that were installed in 1950.¹ The sanctuary is a double-height space with a balcony at the west end and the 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 space and the altar (Photos 0011, 0013). The current pews were installed in 1957. Along with the central aisle, the ceiling is a primary organizational element of the space and features a series of three ornamental vaults extending from west to east across the sanctuary (Photos 0012, 0014). The central vault is taller than the other two.

The chancel is located at the east end of the sanctuary. The chancel is raised above the nave by a pair of steps. Aligning with the top of the steps, the ceiling drops lower to form a flat arch with rounded corners that frames the altar and gives the impression of an apse. Photos of this portion of the church dating to c. 1900-1910 and August 1950 (Figure 4) indicate that the current spatial organization of the chancel is not original and was achieved by August 1950. The altar artwork was painted by local artisan Mina Martinson and installed c. 1906. A kneeler and wood railing are located between the chancel steps and the altar, separating the altar from the congregation.

To either side of the apse a single wood swing door provides access to a small sacristy and storage room.

¹ While researching the history of the congregation, Jamin Krause discussed the decision to remodel the church with lifelong congregant Irving Softing. Softing, who helped with the remodel, explained that the Celotex was intended to modernize the look of the sanctuary and was also an attempt to provide some insulation for the building. Throughout the building, the Celotex tiles are installed with nails and affixed directly to previous finish materials or substructure. Historic (likely original) beadboard is extant on the sanctuary walls beneath the Celotex. The triple-vaulted sanctuary ceiling was originally finished with stamped tin, which was removed during the Celotex installation process. Jamin Krause, Grong Lutheran Church, email to Todd Grover, April 2, 2024.

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A balcony is located at the west end of the sanctuary (Photos 0014, 0015). The edge of the balcony is defined by a railing of wood spindles and supported by a pair of carved wood posts. Three rows of pews are located on the balcony. The balcony pews date to 1891.

Interior – Lower Level - Fellowship Hall and Kitchen

The lower level is organized with the fellowship hall at the west end of the building, and the kitchen and services spaces to the east (Photo 0016). The lower level was remodeled in 1954. The fellowship hall is an open space with garden level windows at the north and south exterior walls. Two rows of square wood paneled columns enclosing steel posts extend east to west across the space. The fellowship hall is finished with carpeted floors, Celotex wall covering, and a dropped 2' by 4' acoustical tile ceiling. A partial wall with a serving counter separates the fellowship hall and the kitchen. The kitchen has a linoleum floor and exposed systems at the ceiling.

Interior - Belfry

The interior of the belfry is finished with a galvanized steel over wood plank floor, painted wood plank ceiling, and painted lapped wood siding. The church's original 1891 bell is centered in the space (Photo 0017).

Integrity

The Grong Lutheran Church was constructed as a Lutheran church to serve a Norwegian-American immigrant community and has continuously functioned as a Lutheran church since its original construction. The building has not been moved and the site retains its church yard, cemetery, and proximity to the small community of Rollag. The design of the building exhibits important characteristics of a building typology that was common among Norwegian-American Lutheran churches of this vintage, including its Carpenter Gothic exterior, simple massing with easily identifiable sanctuary and belltower/steeple, and its distinctive sanctuary design with a wide central aisle, balcony, and dramatic ceiling detailing. The spatial arrangement of the chancel has been altered over time but retains the typical elements of a chancel that is narrower than the nave and an altar that is centered on the nave. Later alterations, including those in 1927, circa 1950s, and 1979 did not alter character defining features of the building.

At the exterior, the building retains its narrow-lapped wood siding. Concrete block at the foundation has been painted, and the sanctuary windows were replaced during the 1950s. A small addition was added to the rear elevation in 1979. At the interior, new finishes were installed throughout the building during the 1950s. Original finishes of the sanctuary are unknown. Overall, the building retains the feeling of an early Norwegian-American Lutheran

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Church and retains its association as such. The Grong Lutheran Church retains sufficient levels of all seven aspects of integrity to convey its history from the proposed period of significance – 1882 and 1892.

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

Period of Significance

1882

1892

Significant Dates

1882, 1891-1892

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 Grong Lutheran Church, located at 10240 Highway 32 South in the unincorporated settlement of Rollag, Minnesota, is locally significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The significance of the property derives from its architectural and artistic distinction, thus it meets Criteria Consideration A. Grong Lutheran Church is an intact example of a building typology unique to churches constructed by early Norwegian-American Lutheran congregations. The properties level of significance is local, and its periods of significance (1882 and 1892) aligns with the dates of its construction campaigns, 1881-1882, 1891-1892.

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

Norwegian Immigration and the Norwegian Lutheran Church

Between 1825 and 1928, more than 850,000 people emigrated from Norway to the United States, with most of these immigrants settling in the Upper Midwest.² Early emigration was largely motivated by an increasing Norwegian population and “limited opportunities in [Norway’s] agricultural, fishing, and lumbering economy.”³ In the 1860s, emigration increased dramatically “when a combination of overpopulation, food shortages, mechanization, and changing market structures led to farm foreclosures...[and] poor crops, coupled with the disappearance of the fickle spring herring run from the Norwegian coasts, resulted in actual starvation.”⁴ Some displaced agricultural workers found work in “slowly industrializing Norwegian cities,” while others considered emigration as “information about America and the rich farmlands of its Midwest” reached Norway.⁵ By the beginning of the twentieth century, “roughly half of Norway’s population had left for America.”⁶

The first wave of Norwegian immigrants to the United States settled in Illinois, by way of New York. By the 1830s, Norwegian immigrants were settling in southeastern Wisconsin. Immigrants would write letters to friends and family in Norway and while “some were negative in their accounts of the everyday conditions of American life, many enthusiastically described the abundance of land, the higher wages, and other wonders.”⁷ The so-called “America letters” “not only determined patterns of emigration from the homeland, they also influenced Norwegian patterns of settlement in the United States,” with people from the same regions settling near each other in the U.S.⁸ By the 1850s, Norwegian settlement in the Midwest shifted from southeastern Wisconsin to the Minnesota territory (Figures 5, 6).⁹ Writing of Minnesota specifically, historian Theodore C. Blegen notes:

² June Drenning Holmquist, Ed. *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 220; Eugene L. Fevold, “The Norwegian Immigrant and His Church,” *Norwegian-American Studies*, Vol 23 (1967), 3.; Dennis K. Herbranson and Maxine Lee Shulstad. *Rollag From Norway to Minnesota: The Numedal Valley Immigrants and Their Families*. (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 2009), 6.

³ Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota*, 220.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 221.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

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The numbers of Scandinavians, recruited from internal migrations from other states of the Middle West and from the rising tide of Scandinavian immigration after the Civil War, went well past 200,000 by 1890. The concentration of the Scandinavians in the richest farming areas of Minnesota and in urban centers gave a certain Scandinavian flavor to the state. This was accentuated by the retention of the Languages... and by the pioneer churches, notably Lutheran... The Lutheran churches did not, like the Catholics, sponsor great colonization projects, but their missionaries and preachers... were never far behind the rims of settlement.¹⁰

Minnesota's Norwegian immigrants brought their Lutheran faith with them to their new settlements. The Church of Norway, an evangelical Lutheran denomination, became the state church of Norway in the 11th century, with the King of Norway serving as the head of the Church. As immigrants formed new congregations in the United States, they did not necessarily replicate the beliefs and practices of the Church of Norway. Rather, "the absence of a state church compelled [immigrants] to make spiritual choices and to provide the materials resources those required" to practice according to their chosen affiliation and convictions.¹¹ Consequently, Norwegian Lutheran congregations in the United States had a "propensity for division [which] gave rise to the proverbial wisdom that two church buildings at an intersection were likely to be the outcome of a dispute among Norwegian Lutherans."¹²

The Norwegian Lutheran Church was "the most visible manifestation of the bridges between the Norwegian and Norwegian-American cultures... Still dotting the rural Minnesota landscape, these white spires once marked the undisputed social and religious centers of the rural communities."¹³ This is the case in Rollag, Minnesota.

Norwegian Settlement in Rollag and Parke Township

Rollag is an unincorporated settlement in Parke Township, Clay County, Minnesota. It is the only settlement in a township that is otherwise composed of farmland, lakes, and natural public lands.

The 1870 United States Census attributed the total population of 92 people to Clay County; roughly one third of the population was noted as "white" and two thirds as "French/Native American."¹⁴ At this time, the State of Minnesota was actively seeking to increase the Euro-American population in this part of the state:

¹⁰Theodore C. Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 310-311.

¹¹ St. Olaf College, "Norwegian-American Lutheranism" in "Locating Lutheranism," online exhibit, <https://pages.stolaf.edu/locluth/norwegian-american-lutheranism-exhibit/>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Holmquist, *They Chose Minnesota*, 224.

¹⁴ Dora Josephine Gunderson, "Settlement of Clay County, 1870-1900," Phd Diss., University of Minnesota, 1929, 26.

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The state realized that the country must be advertised if it were to attract settlers. Much was being done at just this time by the various northwestern states to secure settlers¹⁵. The special activity undertaken by the State Board of Immigration in Minnesota to advertise the region ... was the sending of a Norwegian journalist, Paul Hjelm-Hansen, to the Red River Valley on a trip of inspection. The object was the advertising of the region by means of letters which he should write, especially for Scandinavian newspapers. The trip was made in 1869.¹⁶

Hjelm-Hansen's letters were widely distributed in the Norwegian language press and are credited with encouraging Norwegians and Norwegian-Americans to relocate to locations throughout the Red River Valley, including Clay County and Parke Township.

In 1871 a Northern Pacific Railroad route arrived in Moorhead at the western edge of Clay County. A depot was also constructed in Hawley, located one township north and one township west from what is now Parke Township.¹⁷ Early Euro American settlers attracted by the rail access were primarily "Yankee" emigrants whose ancestors had first come to the East Coast from the British Isles. But by the late 1870s, Norwegian immigrants were also settling the area around Parke Township "due to the fact that cheap land in southern Wisconsin and Minnesota was no longer available to newcomers."¹⁸

The 1875 Minnesota state census counted 1,451 individuals in Clay County, distributed among six townships, including 162 people in Hawley township and 190 people in Parke Township. 355 people of Norwegian birth were living in the county, 61 of them in Parke Township.¹⁹ In her thesis for the University of Minnesota, Dora Josephine Gunderson concluded:

The statistics presented above permit the general statement that the foreign-born population in 1875 was predominantly Norwegian, this element constituting one-fourth of the total... There was a definite tendency on the part of the members of the various racial groups to settle in the communities in which their countrymen had previously located.²⁰

¹⁵ Theodore C. Blegen, "Minnesota's Campaign for Immigrants" in Yearbook of the Swedish Historical Society of America, 11:3-83 (1926) and "The Competition of the Northwestern States for Immigrants" in Wisconsin Magazine of History 3:3-29 (September, 1919).

¹⁶ Gunderson, "Settlement of Clay County," 10-11.

¹⁷ Herbranson, *Rollag: From Norway to Minnesota*, 6

¹⁸ Herbranson, *Rollag: From Norway to Minnesota*, 9.

¹⁹ Gunderson, "Settlement of Clay County," 42-45.

²⁰ Ibid.

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Following the pattern of ethnic division noted by Gunderson, by 1895 there were 15,154 individuals living in Clay County and 38% of those were Norwegian. 403 people lived in Parke Township; 98% of them were Norwegian.²¹ Many of the Norwegian settlers who made Rollag their home traced their ancestry to the remote Numedal Valley and the parish of Rollag – with roughly three dozen families from that region relocating to Rollag, Minnesota during the late nineteenth century.²²

In 1917, the village of Rollag had two Lutheran churches, a grocery store, a blacksmith shop, a school, and a post office.²³ The township population was 571 people in 1920 and 450 people in 1950.²⁴ In her thesis paper documenting the settlement of Clay County, Gunderson argues that the presence of churches in small communities such as Rollag was both integral to the health of the community and one of the reasons that the various townships in Clay County developed with distinct ethnic identities:

There were several organs or factors which tended to keep alive [the population's] racial consciousness. One of these was the foreign-language newspapers which circulated in the county. ...The church was also an important institution in this respect not alone for its religion but, from the standpoint of settlement at least, more for its social influence. In spite of the fact that the Scandinavians and the Germans were very largely members of the Lutheran church, there was very little, if any, cooperations between them. This was inevitable since their native language was the language of their church. In the rural districts especially, the church controlled not only the religious life of the people but also their social life to a large extent. The church was the social center and consequently social intercourse was largely limited to the members of the individual churches.²⁵

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Erick Hanson emigrated to the United States from Norway in 1870 and “took up a homestead of one hundred and sixty acres” in Tansem township in Clay County, Minnesota in 1871. Hanson

²¹ Gunderson, “Settlement of Clay County,” 55-58.

²² Herbranson, *Rollag: From Norway to Minnesota*, Preface.

²³ Ibid. The second Lutheran church – Rollag Lutheran Church is also extant (see Figure 11). The building is located at 10501 Highway 32 South - roughly a quarter mile south of Grong Lutheran Church. Rollag Lutheran Church was constructed in 1910 following a fire at an earlier iteration of the church. Large additions to the primary (east) elevation and south elevation have diminished the building's integrity with regard to the early Norwegian-American Lutheran church typology discussed in this nomination.

²⁴ United States Census Bureau. 1920 Census: Volume 1. Population, Number and Distribution, Table 53, 471.

<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1921/dec/vol-01-population.html> and United States Census Bureau. 1950 Census, Minnesota, Clay County, Enumeration District 14-49, <https://1950census.archives.gov/search/?county=Clay&page=2&state=MN>.

²⁵ Gunderson, “Settlement of Clay County,” 65. Future research may indicate that either Grong Lutheran Church or Rollag Lutheran Church is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: European Norwegian. Both congregations remain active as of July 2025.

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“helped organize Tansem township and the first church of the township was organized in his home, meetings were held there and in other homes in the vicinity for some time; then in the schoolhouse and finally [in 1881] a church edifice was erected at Rollag – the Grong church.”²⁶ First organized in 1872, the Grong church was “the first church in Clay County”²⁷ and served the area Lutherans.²⁸

By 1877, the leadership of the Grong Lutheran Church determined that it was time for the congregation to identify property where it could construct a church and plat a cemetery, and “on 31st December 1877, the committee reported that they had been offered a piece of land owned by Jim Haavik...”²⁹ The congregation purchased the two acres in Rollag for twenty dollars and turned their efforts toward raising funds to construct a church.³⁰

The initial construction campaign for Grong Lutheran Church took place from 1881 to 1882. The original building included the sanctuary with a small entry vestibule at the west end of the building (Figure 7).

In 1891, the congregation was ready to improve the church building and decided to raise the sidewall height by four feet, construct the bell tower and add the balcony to the sanctuary. Construction was completed in 1892, and the church bell was installed that same year (Figure 8). The building alterations were consistent with the common design elements of Norwegian-American Lutheran churches of the time. The new bell tower and steeple form a distinct entry addition to the building, and the added height gives a nod to the commonly used Gothic Revival architectural language.

In 1927, a final major construction campaign was undertaken, with a basement being dug out under the church, providing much needed gathering space and a kitchen. The new cornerstone was laid on October 23, 1927, and the basement dedicated on November 11, 1927. Additional alterations undertaken at this time include construction of small stairwell addition to the south of the primary entrance, and removal of the ground level windows at the west elevation (Figure 9).

In the 1950s, the interior of the Grong Lutheran Church was updated, including remodeling the lower level, installation of Celotex covering for the walls and ceiling of the sanctuary, new

²⁶ John Turner and C.K. Semling, *History of Clay and Norman Counties, Minnesota* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Company, 1918), 574.

²⁷ Turner and Semling, *History of Clay and Norman Counties*, 892.

²⁸ Herbranson, *Rollag: From Norway to Minnesota*, 268.

²⁹ Jamin Krause and 150th Anniversary Committee, “Grong Lutheran Church 150th Anniversary” published by the Grong Lutheran Church congregation, 7.

³⁰ Ibid.

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amber glass window sash in the sanctuary, and “two new front rooms were added to the sacristy.” Grong Lutheran Church remains an active congregation today.

Norwegian Lutheran Church Architecture

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 Grong.³¹ 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.³² The journal also published a floorplan for the building, with the intention of providing a building pattern for other congregations (Figure 10).

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.³³ 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.

³¹ 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.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

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- 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.³⁴
- Balconies were often present and the rear and sides of the nave.
- Often, church exteriors exhibited elements of the Gothic Revival style.

Grong Lutheran Church exhibits the characteristics of the typology as described by Eldal in his 2011 article in the journal of *Norwegian American Studies*. The church is readily identifiable as an early Norwegian-American Lutheran Church.

Conclusion

The Grong Lutheran Church is a significant example of Norwegian-Lutheran ecclesiastical architecture in Rollag, Parke Township, Minnesota. The building embodies the design principles typical of churches built in the late nineteenth century by Norwegian-Lutheran immigrant congregations. The building regains sufficient integrity to embody its significance.

³⁴ In ecclesiastical architectural terminology, a chancel is “that part of the east end of a church in which the main altar is placed; reserved for clergy and choir” while the choir is “the part of a church where divine service is sung, usually part of the chancel.” In smaller churches, the terms “chancel” and “choir” are often used interchangeably. It is unclear if Eldal is conflating the terms. While Grong Lutheran Church has a small chancel without a distinct choir, the overall chancel space does narrow and is marked by an arch, as Eldal describes.

Definitions via John Fleming, Hugh Honour, and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, ed 5, (London: Penguin, 1999).

Grong Lutheran Church
Name of Property

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Archives of the Grong Lutheran Church, including:

Photographs
Anniversary Bulletins
Newspaper Clippings

Blegen, Theodore C. *Minnesota: A History of the State*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975).

Blegen, Theodore C. "Minnesota's Campaign for Immigrants" in Yearbook of the Swedish Historical Society of America, 11:3-83 (1926).

Blegen, Theodore C. "The Competition of the Northwestern States for Immigrants" in Wisconsin Magazine of History 3:3-29 (September, 1919).

Eldal, Jens Christian. "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.

Grong Lutheran Church Confirmation Class, ca. 1900-1910. Photograph. Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County.
https://hcsmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/Photo?search_criteria=grong&onlyimages=false

Gunderson, Dora Josephine, "Settlement of Clay County, 1870-1900," Phd Diss., University of Minnesota, 1929.

Herbranson, Dennis K., *Rollag: From Norway to Minnesota, the Numedal Valley Immigrants and Their Families* (Murphys, CA: Gateway Press, 2009).

Holmquist, June Drenning, Ed. *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 220; Eugene L. Fevold, "The Norwegian Immigrant and His Church," *Norwegian-American Studies*, Vol 23 (1967).

Krause, Jamin and 150th Anniversary Committee, "Grong Lutheran Church 150th Anniversary" published by the Grong Lutheran Church congregation. 2022.

Kraus, Jamin. Email to Todd Grover, MacDonald and Mack Architects. April 2, 2024.

Kraus, Jamin. Photograph. August 1950.

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St. Olaf College, "Norwegian-American Lutheranism" in "Locating Lutheranism," online exhibit, <https://pages.stolaf.edu/locluth/norwegian-american-lutheranism-exhibit/>

Turner, John and C.K. Semling, *History of Clay and Norman Counties, Minnesota* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Company, 1918).

United States Census Bureau. 1920 Census: Volume 1. Population, Number and Distribution, Table 53. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1921/dec/vol-01-population.html>

United States Census Bureau. 1950 Census, Minnesota, Clay County, Enumeration District 14-49, <https://1950census.archives.gov/search/?county=Clay&page=2&state=MN>.

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: Grong Lutheran Church

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): CY-PRK-00004

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.25

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: _____

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15 Easting: 252675 Northing: 5181735

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

The property boundary includes one tax parcel - PID 240272302. The parcel has the following legal description:

Part of west half of northwest quarter of Section 27 Township 138 Range 044.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The legal parcel encompasses the footprint of the property - including the church building and its associated church yard and cemetery - during its period of significance.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Laurel Fritz and Tamara Halvorsen, Principals
organization: Pigeon Consulting
street & number: 2395 University Avenue West, Suite 206
city or town: Saint Paul state: MN zip code: 55114
e-mail: laurel@pigeonconsulting.com
telephone: 651-340-5665
date: 5/21/25

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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.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Grong Lutheran Church

City or Vicinity: Rollag, Parke Township

County: Clay

State: MN

Photographer: Laurel Fritz

Date Photographed: October 2023

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

1 of 17. Exterior, west and south elevations, camera facing northeast.

2 of 17. Exterior, west elevation including primary entrance and bell tower, camera facing east.

3 of 17. Exterior, south elevation, camera facing north.

4 of 17. Exterior, bell tower, south elevation, camera facing north.

5 of 17. Exterior, south and east elevations, camera facing northwest.

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- 6 of 17. Exterior, east elevation, camera facing west.
- 7 of 17. Exterior, north and west elevations, camera facing south/southeast.
- 8 of 17. Exterior and site, east and north elevations viewed from across cemetery, camera facing west/southwest.
- 9 of 17. Interior, ground level, view of narthex and primary entrance, camera facing west.
- 10 of 17. Interior, ground level, view into sanctuary from narthex, camera facing east.
- 11 of 17. Interior, view of sanctuary, camera facing east.
- 12 of 17. Interior, sanctuary, view of chancel and altar from balcony, camera facing east.
- 13 of 17. Interior, view of sanctuary, camera facing northeast.
- 14 of 17. Interior, view of sanctuary, camera facing south.
- 15 of 17. Interior, view of sanctuary and balcony, camera facing northwest.
- 16 of 17. Interior, lower level, fellowship hall and kitchen, camera facing east.
- 17 of 17. Interior, belfry, camera facing southwest.

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.

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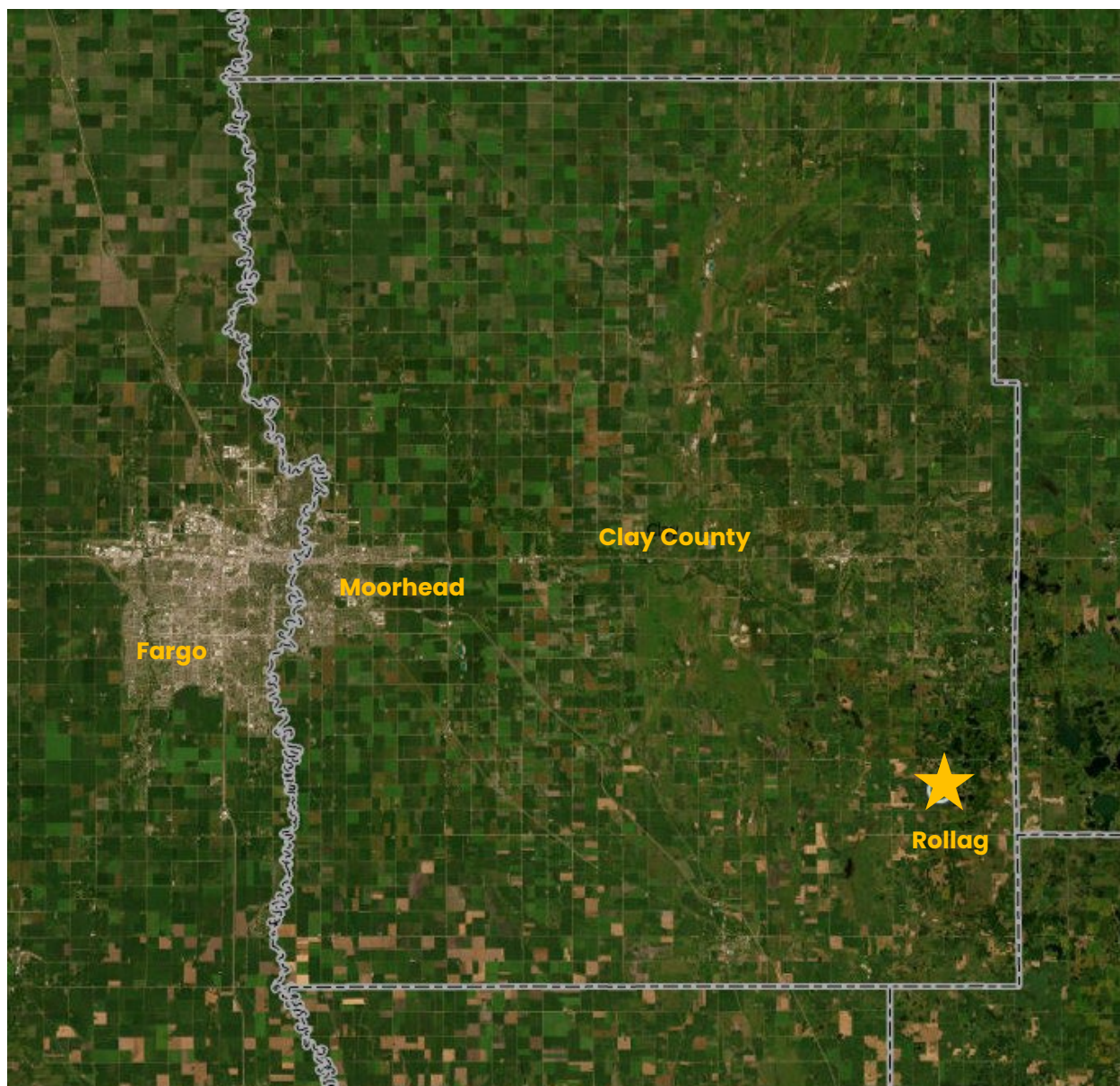


Figure 1: Grong Lutheran Church in context of Clay County, Minnesota. Church site marked by gold star. Background map courtesy of Clay County Property Map.

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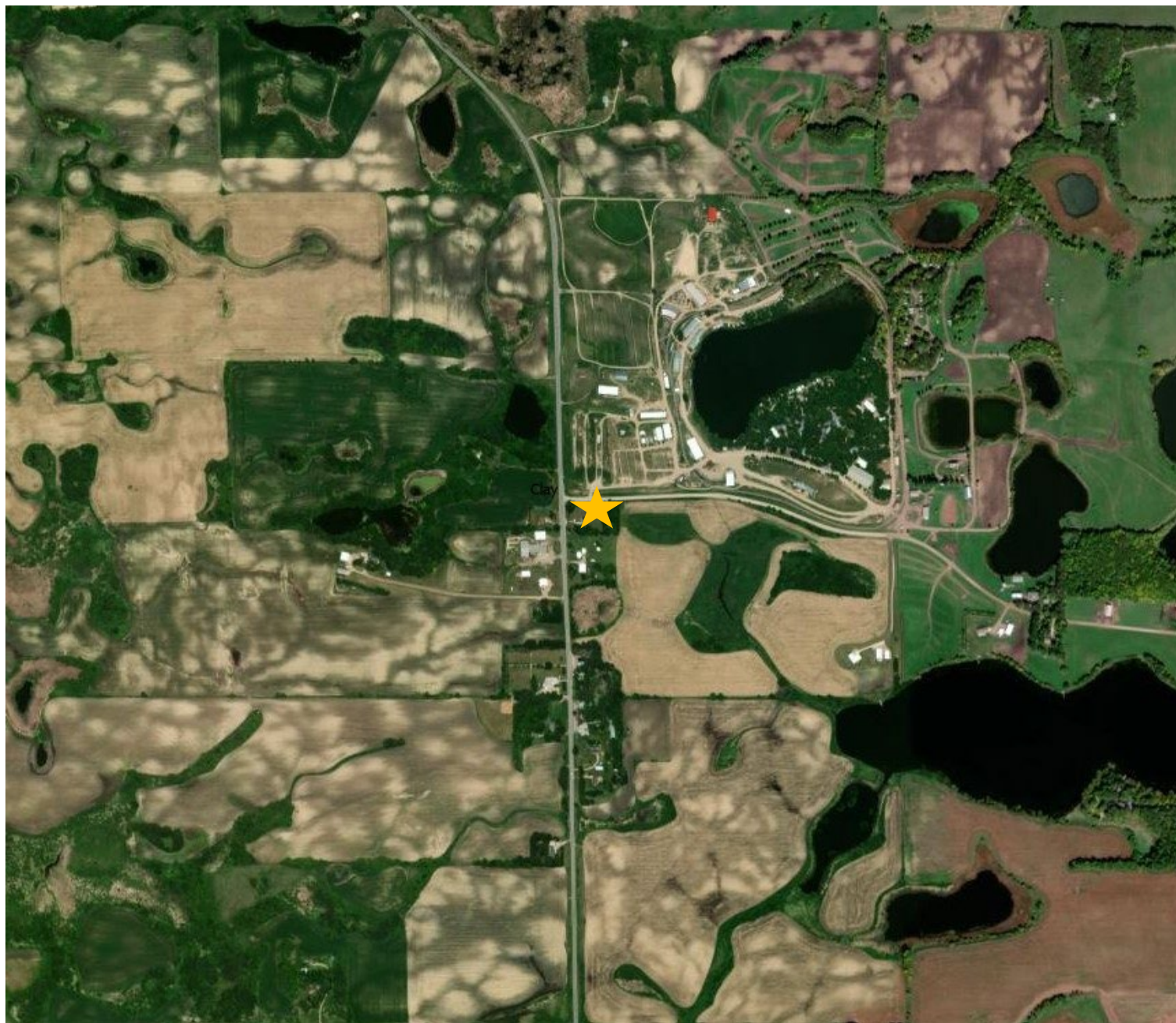


Figure 2: Grong Lutheran Church in context of Rollag, Minnesota. Church site marked by gold star. Background map courtesy of Clay County Property Map.

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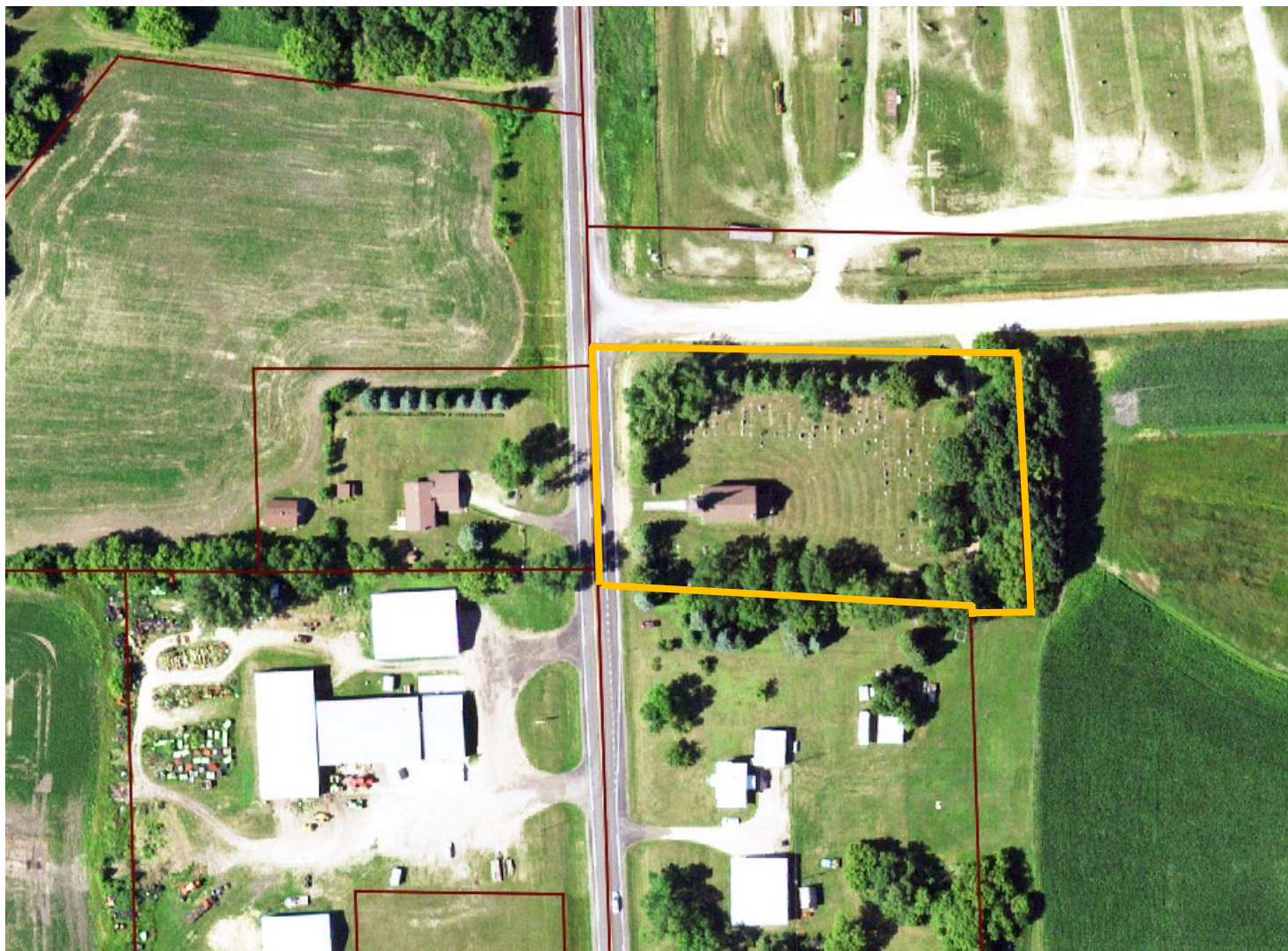


Figure 3: Grong Lutheran Church approximate property boundary outlined in gold. Background map courtesy of Clay County Property Map.

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Figure 4:

Photos showing changes to the chancel of Grong Lutheran Church.

Top image c. 1900-1910 and bottom image August 1950. The chancel appears narrower in 1950 than in c. 1900-1910.

Top image courtesy Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County; Bottom image courtesy of Jamin Krause.

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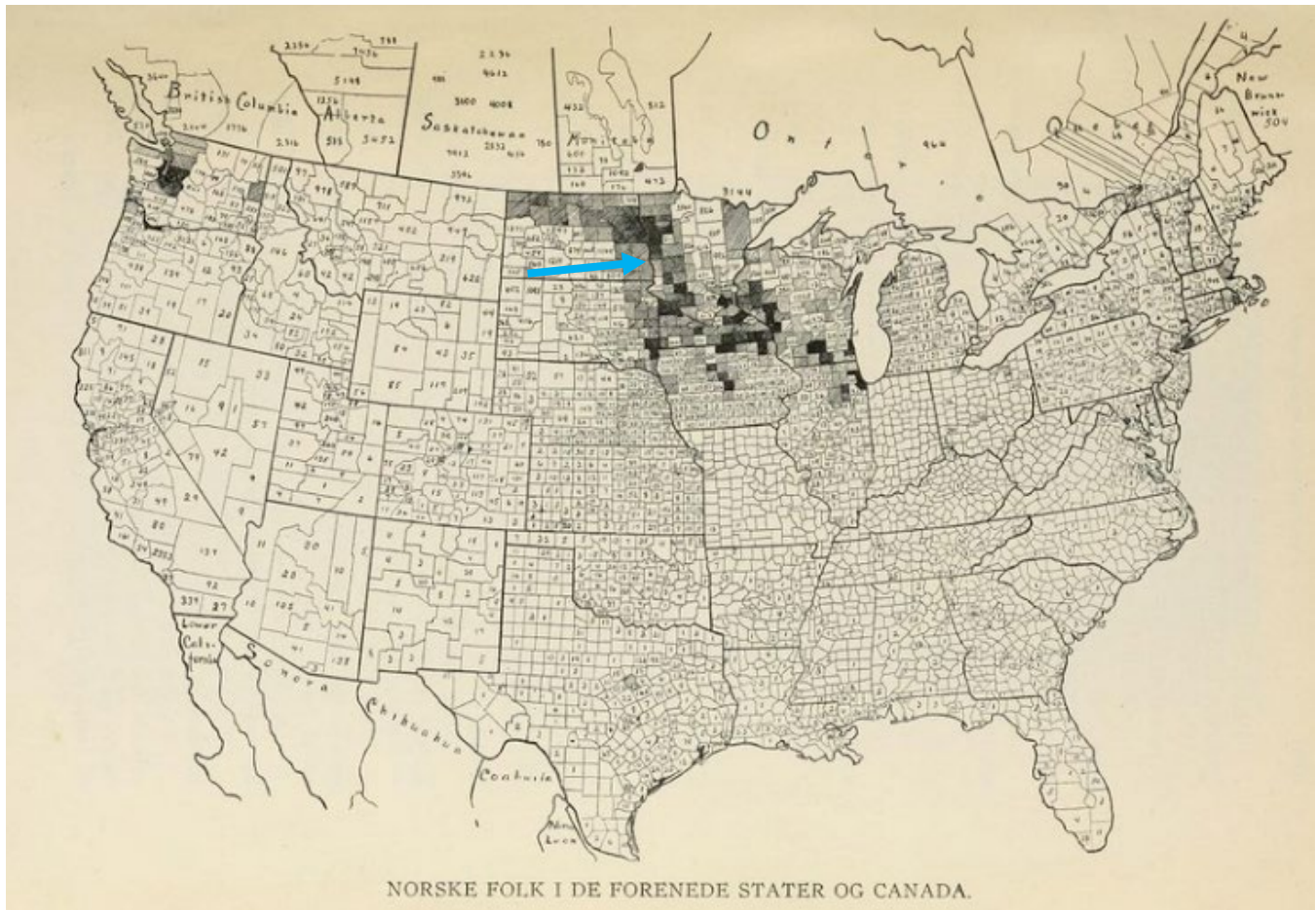


Figure 5: O.M. Norlie's map of "Norwegian Population in the United States and Canada" from Norsk Luterske Menigheter i Amerika from St. Olaf's "Locating Lutheranism" exhibit.¹

Darker colors represent higher populations of Norwegian immigrants. Clay County, Minnesota is identified by the blue arrow.

¹ <https://pages.stolaf.edu/locluth/norwegian-american-lutheranism-exhibit/>

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Figure 6: O.M. Norlie's map of Norwegian-Lutheran Congregations in Minnesota from Norsk Luterske Menigheter i Amerika from St. Olaf's "Locating Lutheranism" exhibit.¹ Clay County is identified by the blue arrow.

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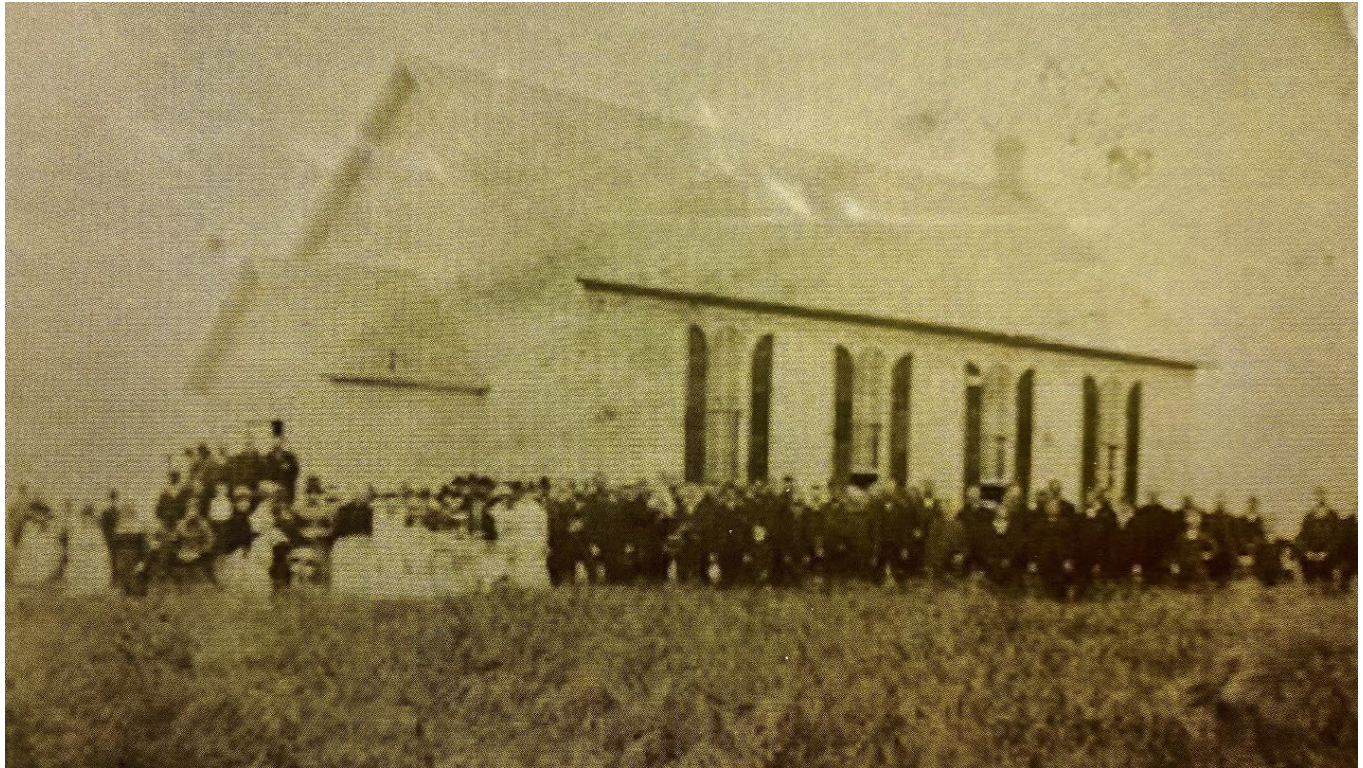


Figure 7: Grong Lutheran Church c. 1881-1892. Photo courtesy Grong Lutheran Church.

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Figure 8: Grong Lutheran Church c. 1892. Photo courtesy Grong Lutheran Church.

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Figure 9: Grong Lutheran Church 1950. Photo courtesy Grong Lutheran Church.

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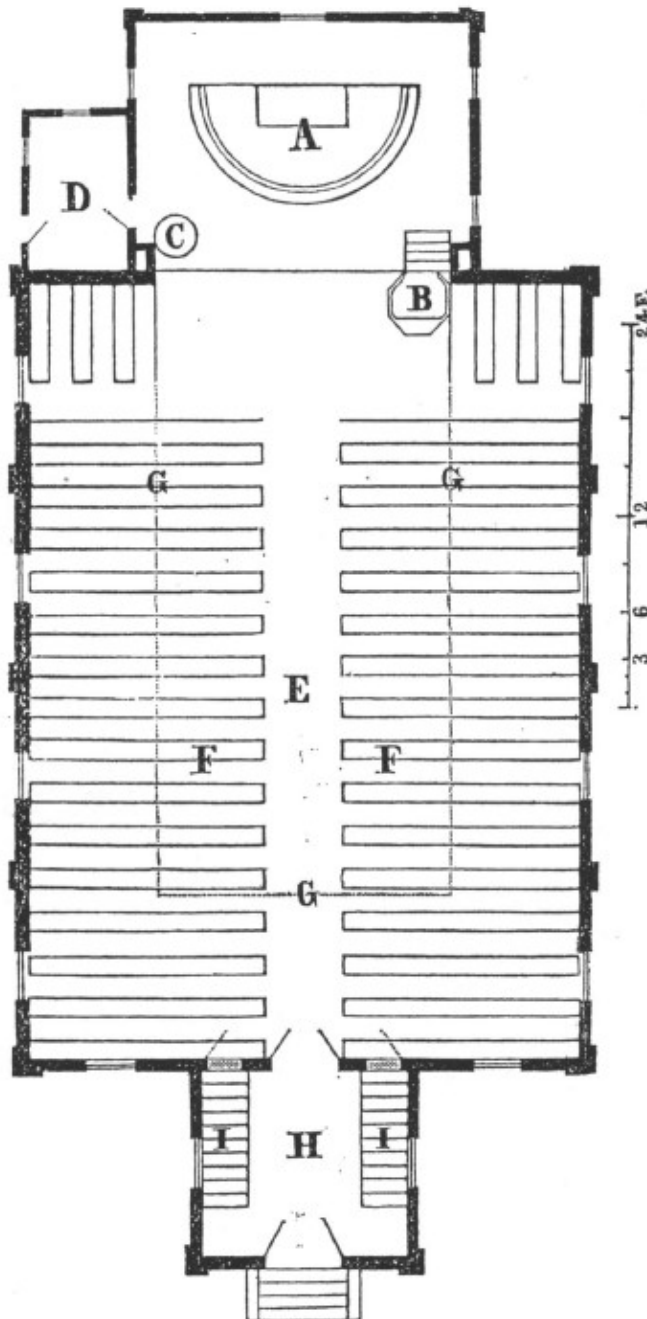
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Figure 10:

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.

Letter labels on the floor plan are original to the Kirkelig Maanedstidende publication – the Eldal article does not provide a key.

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Figure 11: Rollag Lutheran Church, constructed circa 1910, education addition 1963 (left of image), other additions undated. The additions to Rollag Lutheran Church have obscured its original massing. Aerial image via Rollag Lutheran Church facebook page.

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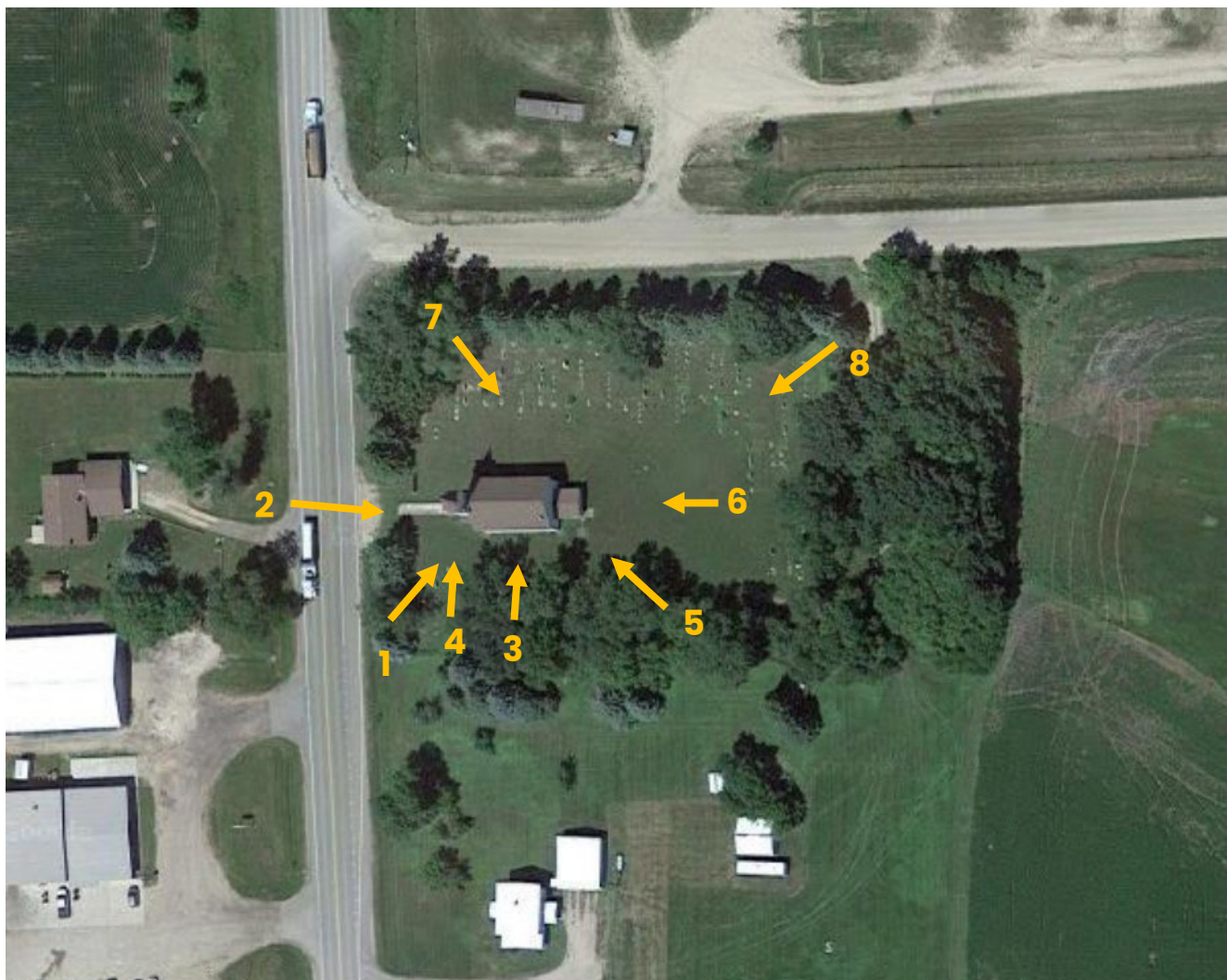


Figure 12: Grong Lutheran Church
Exterior Photo Key

Background Image via Google Maps



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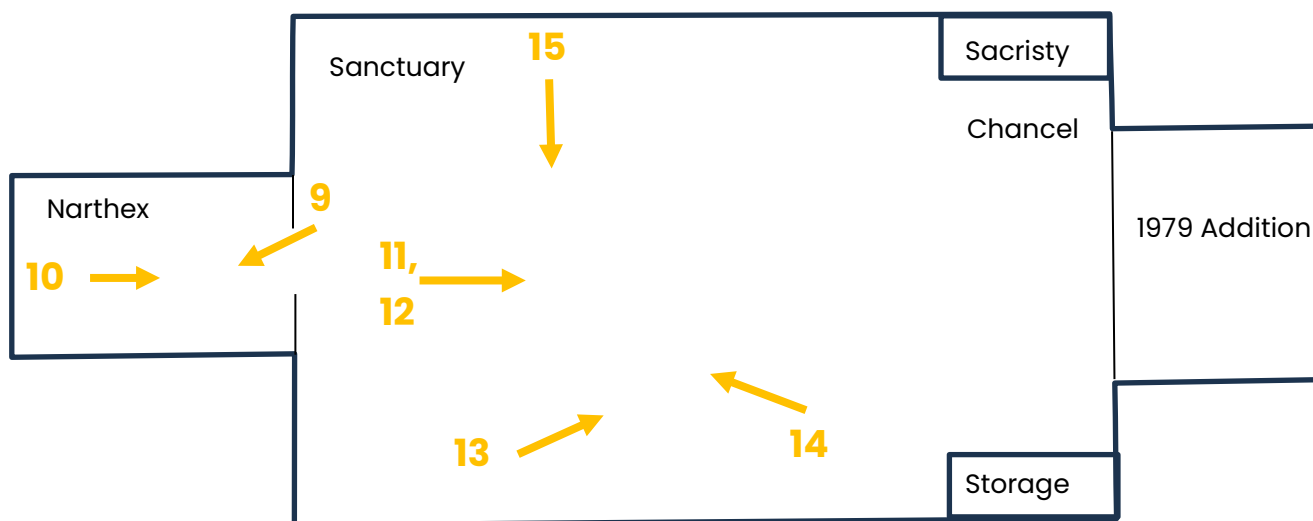


Figure 13: Grong Lutheran Church
First Level Photo Key

Sketch map not to scale.



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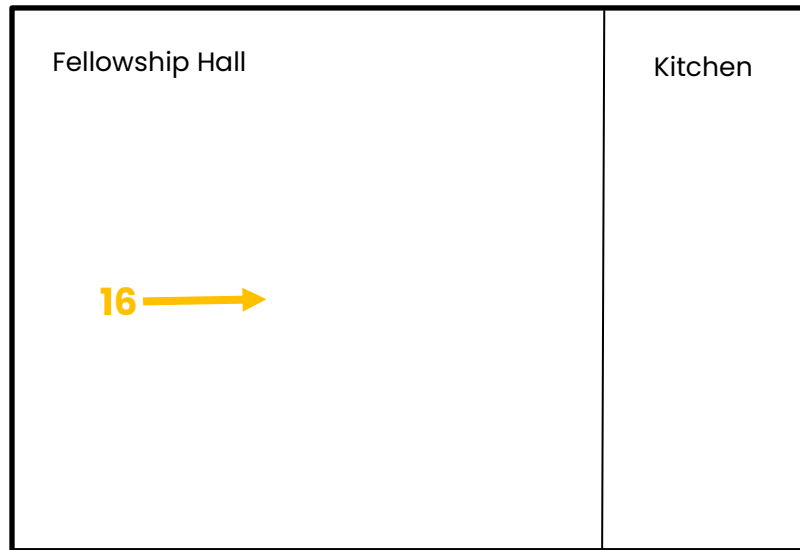


Figure 14: Grong Lutheran Church
Lower Level Photo Key

Sketch map not to scale.

