

City of Afton, Minnesota  
**Heritage Preservation Commission**  
**LOCAL PROPERTY DESIGNATION**

**DRAFT**

**NAME OF PROPERTY:**

*Historic Name:* Afton Congregational Church  
*Other Names:* Afton Historical Museum  
*SHPO Inventory No.:* WA-AFC-012  
*Parcel No:* 22.028.20.11.0004

**LOCATION:**

*Street & No.:* 3165 St. Croix Trail South  
*City/Town:* Afton  
*State, County, Zip:* Minnesota, Washington County, 55001

**PROPERTY OWNER:**

*Owner Name:* City of Afton  
*Owner Phone/Cell:* (651) 436-5090  
*Street & No.:* 3033 St Croix Trail S  
*City/State/Zip:* Afton, Minnesota 55001

**CLASSIFICATION:**

<i>Ownership of Property</i>	<i>Category of Property:</i>	<i>Number of Resources within Property</i>	
		<i>Contributing</i>	<i>Noncontributing</i>
X private	X building(s)	1	1
public	district		buildings
	site		sites
	structure		structures
	object		objects
		1	1 <b>TOTAL</b>

*Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places:* 0      *Open to the Public:* Yes

**FUNCTION or USE:**

*Historic Functions:* Ecclesiastical  
*Current Functions:* Museum

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**SIGNIFICANCE:**

*Historic significance:* Associated with activities, processes, events, trends or persons of importance to the community, state or nation.

*Narrative Statement:*

The history of the present day Afton Historical Museum dates back to the construction of the building as the Congregational Church in 1868. Eight years earlier, on March 30, 1860, a Congregational Church society was organized, meeting in Reverend Simon Putnam's home and the schoolhouse until September, 1868 when the church was built. When it was dedicated that same year, the building was debt-free, as the congregation had begun successfully raising funds since 1867. Simon Putnam was the church's first pastor.

Simon Putnam was born on November 17, 1821 in Sutton, Massachusetts. He married Julia Bacon and had a son, Myron, born in Hopkinton, Massachusetts on April 29, 1845. (Martens 2014) By 1857 the Putnams were listed as living in Afton. Simon Putnam was Afton's first school superintendent and taught in his home until a school was built. Both Simon and his son volunteered to fight in the Civil War (though Myron's age kept him from soldiering, he was issued a drum as a musician.) Disease took a large number of men during the war and both Simon and Myron contracted illnesses that shortened their lives. Myron died at age 18 and Simon at 43, shortly after returning from battle. They are both buried in Mount Hope Cemetery.

The Congregational Church building was occupied by Methodists as well. The American Methodists had been holding their own services in the Congregational Church, incorporating themselves into the Methodist Episcopal Society of Afton in 1896. Meanwhile, in 1854, the Swedish Methodists had organized at Mounds Prairie, a farming district along the Afton and Woodbury township line. A schism of sorts occurred in this congregation, over conflicts regarding the church title and cemetery property, and so money was raised by some congregants to erect a separate (Swedish) church, which was built in 1886 in the village of Afton. (All that remains today of the Mounds Prairie church is the cemetery.)

In 1904, having lost ground due to deaths and outstanding financial obligations, the Congregationalists sold the church building to the American Methodists. The American and Swedish Methodists merged in 1914, utilizing first the Swedish church for their new congregation. The two groups became estranged in 1919 when the newly merged membership split apart over whether to use the Swedish language in some services (favored by the older members) or to conduct services entirely in English (endorsed by the younger members.) In that year the American Methodists returned to the Congregational Church they had previously occupied. Just a few years later however (1926) the Methodist leadership decided that it was time for all Methodists to come together permanently; thus the American Methodists sold the old Congregational church building to the Woodmen of America for less than \$1000 in order to rejoin their former Swedish brethren. (Other groups included in this purchase were the American Legion and the Afton Men's Club.) In 1926, after severe flooding and mudslides, the building was moved onto a new raised basement on the adjacent lot to the south.

For unknown reasons shortly thereafter the Citizens State Bank foreclosed on the church mortgage. The village subsequently purchased the building, putting it to use as a hall. A new mortgage for the Afton Memorial Hall Association was issued in 1928. The building was used to stage plays and other entertainments. (Robb) It was

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also utilized as a Town Hall from circa 1926-1982. Vice-presidential candidate Walter Mondale cast his vote in the 1976 presidential election in this hall.

In June, 1988 the Afton Historical Museum held its grand opening in the former Afton Congregational Church building. (Robb)

*Architectural significance:* Possessing distinctive characteristics of a style, place period, method or materials of construction, builder or architect.

*Architectural Classification:* Wood-frame Church

*Materials Used:*

*Foundation:* Rough-faced concrete block (1926)

*Walls:* Wood frame, clapboard

*Roof:* Asphalt shingles

*Narrative Description:*

The Afton Congregational Church has a simple, front-gabled Greek Revival form.

The building retains the majority of its character-defining features. These include the main roof profile, the front entry with an open gabled roof above and a sheathing of narrow lap wood siding. The sets of three windows on the north and south-facing elevation retain their original window openings and nine-over-nine double-hung windows.

Modifications to the original design appear in the raised basement built of rough-faced concrete block, the opening of the original front porch enclosure, access doors added along the south-facing elevation, the removal of a back brick chimney, and an expansion to the building's east-facing elevation.

A small, mid-century, one-car garage sits on the property to the south of the main building. The garage is used by the city to store maintenance equipment.

**SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT:** The Afton Congregational Church was symbolically very important to the community of Afton since its early construction in 1868. Its first pastor was the Reverent Simon Putnam both a religious leader and educator. Although the church building has been moved one lot to the south after flood and mud slide damage in the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the church building retains most of its original late 1860s appearance.

**OTHER ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

<i>Related Historic Contexts:</i> Townsite Development in Washington County 1839-1955 Immigration and Ethnicity in Washington County ca. 1838-1920 Early Agriculture and River Settlement 1840-1870 Railroads and agriculture Development 1870-1940	<i>Significant Person(s):</i> Rev. Simon Putnam
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<p><b>Period of Significance:</b>          1868 with the construction of the church to 1926 when the building ceased to support church services.</p>	<p><b>Cultural Affiliation:</b></p>
<p><b>Significant Dates:</b>          1868, date of construction.</p>	<p><b>Architect/Builder(s):</b>          Unknown</p>

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:**

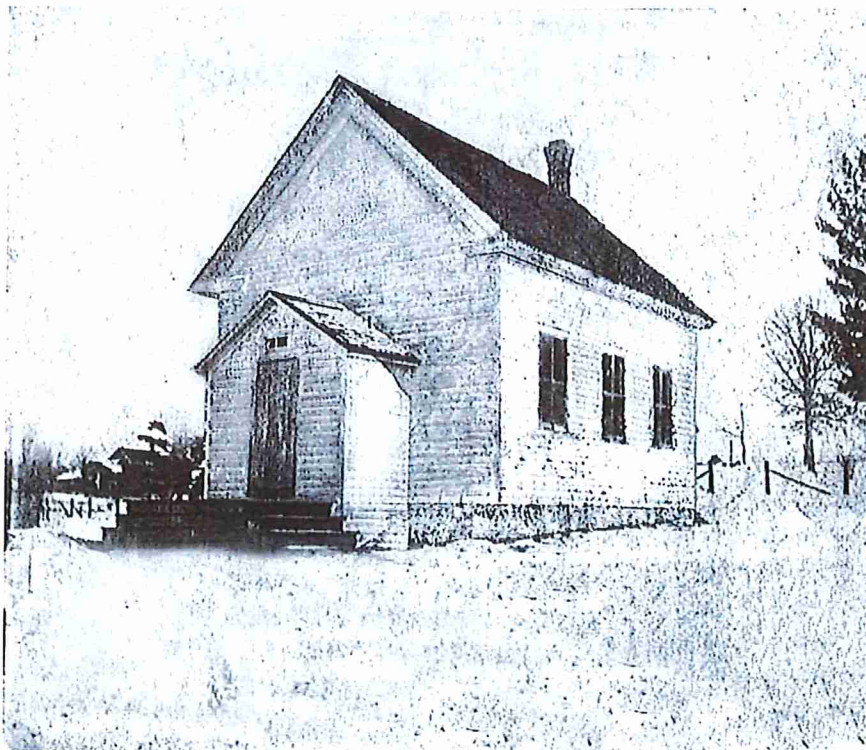
**Acreeage of Property:** 0.347

**Legal Description of Property:** LOTS 1-3 008 BEING S 100 FT SUBDIVISIONNAME AFTON LOT 1 BLOCK 8 SUBDIVISIONCD 19040THN PROCEEDING SLY ALG C/L SD R/W DIST 150FT & THERE TERM SUBDIVISIONNAME AFTON LOT 1 BLOCK 5 SUBDIVISION 19040

**Boundary Justification:** Washington County tax records, Afton Village boundaries

**PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION:**

**Historical Photograph:**



*The Afton Congregational Church as it appeared in 1868.*

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*Current Photographs:*



*The Afton Congregational Church housed the Congregational and American Methodist congregations, and later was a meeting place for fraternal organizations, such as Modern Woodmen of America and the American Legion and Auxiliary,*



*Looking east across St. Croix Trail South, formerly Washington Street, to the current Afton Historical Museum.*

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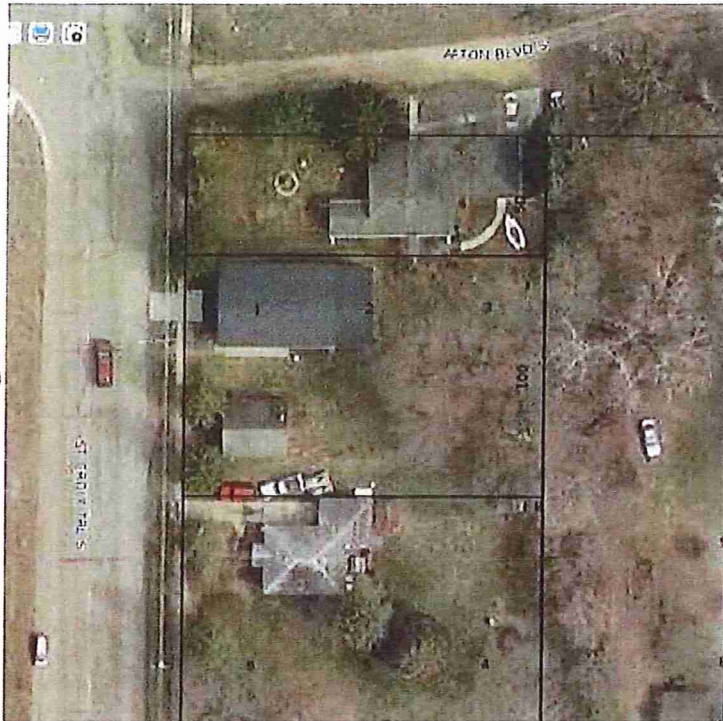
*Looking to the south-southeast at the north-facing elevation with the later, lower-roofed addition to the back of the original simple rectilinear structure.*



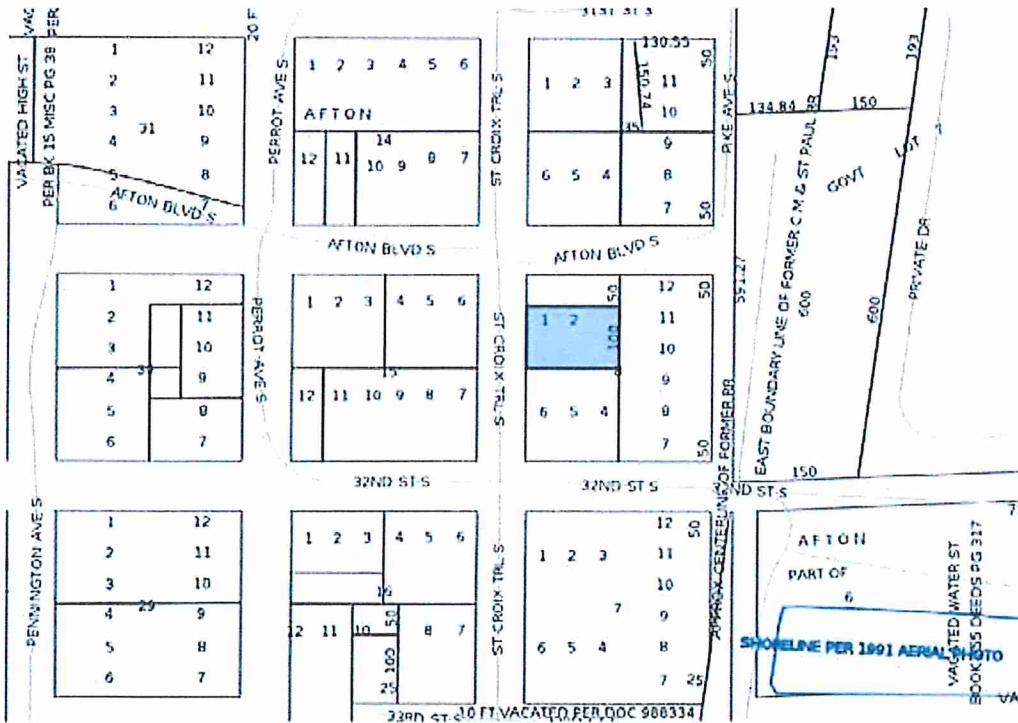
*The south-facing elevation displays the side entrances to the basement and the back addition.*

**AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND MAP(S) OF THE PROPERTY:**

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*Aerial photograph of the Afton Historical Museum and the noncontributing city utility garage to the south.*



*Parcel Map for the Afton Congregational Church/Afton Historical Museum.*

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES:**

City of Afton, Minnesota  
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***Published:***

Blondo, Steven. Minnesota Architecture-History Inventory Form City of Afton Flood Protection and Sanitary Sewer Improvements, Afton, Washington County, Minnesota. 2015.

Grant, Evelyn Bolles. History of Valley Creek and Surrounding Afton Township. Article written for Valley Creek Women's Club, January 1963.

Martens, Ken. *The Perilous St. Croix River Valley Frontier*. Charleston: History Press, 2014.

Neill, Edward D. *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley*. North Star Publishing Company, 1881.

Robb, Edwin G. *Afton Remembered*. Afton Historical Society Press: Afton. 1996.

Zellie, Carole. Washington County Historic Contexts. 1999.

***Unpublished:***

Afton Historical Museum. Various archived materials. Fall/Winter 2015-2016.

**FORM PREPARED BY:**

Name/Title: Thomas R. Zahn & Associates LLC  
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State, County, Zip: Minnesota, Ramsey County, 55104  
Telephone No.: 651-221-9765  
Date Prepared: March 30, 2016

**STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER COMMENT:**

Review and comment by the State Historic Preservation Officer pursuant to Minnesota Statute \_\_\_\_\_; Subd. \_\_\_\_.

Date Submitted to SHPO: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of SHPO Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

**AFTON CITY COUNCIL REVIEW / APPROVAL:**

Designation of property pursuant to: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Action: \_\_\_\_\_