

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

**NAME OF PROPERTY:**

*Historic Name:* N/A  
*Other Names:* Steamboat Park  
*SHPO Inventory Number:* Site 21WA0116  
*Parcel Number:* 2202820140006 and 2202820140009

**LOCATION:**

*Street & No.:* 3419 Saint Croix Trail S  
*City/Town:* Afton  
*State, County, Zip:* Minnesota, Washington County, 55001

**PROPERTY OWNER:**

*Owner Name:* Nickerson Paul D & Rebecca (2202820140006) and  
City of Afton (2202820140009)

*Owner Phone/Cell:*

*Street & No.:* 1422 Settlers Way  
*City/State/Zip:* Houlton WI 54082

**CLASSIFICATION:**

Ownership of Property	Category of Property:	Number Contributing Resources:	of Noncontributing Resources:	Property:
	building(s)			
x private	district		0	building sites
x public	x site	1	0	structures
	structure		0	objects
	object		0	<b>TOTAL</b>
				1

*Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register of Historic Places:* 0

*Open to the Public:* Yes (Steamboat Park)

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FUNCTION or USE:

Historic Functions: UNKNOWN

Current Functions: LANDSCAPE/park

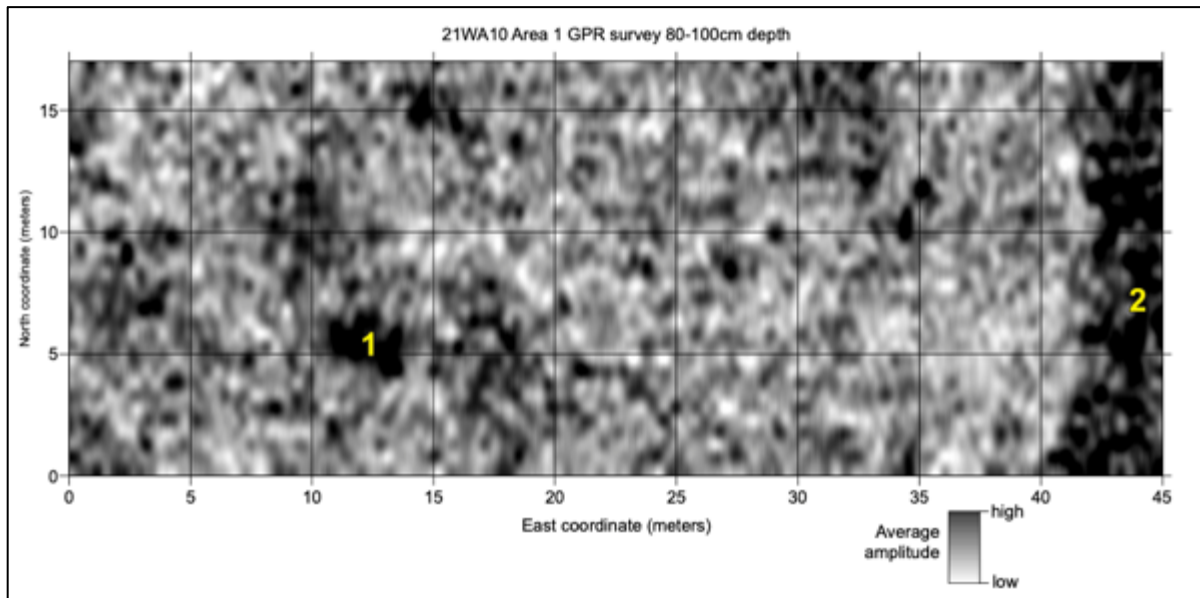
**SIGNIFICANCE:**

***Historic Significance:*** Site 21WA0116 in the Old Village area of Afton, Minnesota is an intact historic archaeological site with a high potential to contribute to our understanding of Afton's past, particularly its early industries and lifestyles.

***Narrative Statement:***

Site 21WA0116 is a historic archaeological site discovered by Archaeo-Physics, LLC and Blondo Consulting, LLC in the spring of 2016 as part of a cultural resources survey for the City of Afton Downtown Improvements Project (Blondo et.al., 2016). The site is in a developed area between the shores of the St. Croix River and St. Croix Trail. The site was first glimpsed through a geophysical analysis of the area when ground penetrating radar picked up on a rectangular anomaly that reached a depth of approximately 160 centimeters below surface (cmbs) (Figure 1). Preliminary subsurface testing of the area conducted under a phase I license recovered 1,393 artifacts and revealed that the anomaly consisted of an ashy feature (Feature 1) with a high concentration of artifacts, some of which were burnt. A second feature was found during construction monitoring, which consisted of a linear segment of highly organic soil running parallel to St. Croix Trail as if it were a portion of an older road or ditch (Blondo and Wolf, 2016).

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*Figure 1: Geophysical testing showing an anomaly (labeled “1” and found to be the ashy feature) at a depth between 80-100 cmbs.*

The site lies within Minnesota SHPO Archaeological Region 4: Central Deciduous Region described by Dr. Scott Anfinson (1990) as a patchwork of moraines, till plains, and out wash plains. The Minnesota DNR (2021) classifies this area as the St. Paul-Baldwin Plains and Moraines Subsection of the Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province. The subsection is a moraine complex and outwash plains associated with the Superior lobe. Oak and aspen savanna were the primary vegetation communities before settlement with Maple-basswood in steep ravines or stream areas that reduced fire risk. Soils in this area are commonly formed by forested vegetation (aka Alfisols). Typically, the soils are a mix of loams with areas of sandy outwash soils (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2021).

The site can be found specifically within what is referred to as the Old Village Area of Afton, the St. Croix River lies 700 feet east of the site and the site’s west border incorporates a small portion of St. Croix Trail. The majority of the site is found on a grassy lot with sporadic tree coverage that is part of Steamboat Park. Along the site’s northern edge is Selma’s Ice Cream Parlor (an early 1900’s building eligible for the NRHP) and the site’s southern edge meets the parking lot to Steamboat Park. As mentioned, the surrounding area makes up the Old Village Area. The Afton

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Historical Society has marked out 38 points of historical interest within this area as shown in their walking tour pamphlet (Afton Historical Society, 2001).

Site investigations that took place in 2016 included a geophysical survey, systematic shovel tests, and two excavation units. A geophysical survey using electrical resistance and ground penetrating radar (GPR) was incorporated into this study when a proposed lift station location came into the proximity of site 21WA0010 (Rattlesnake Mound) during the City of Afton Downtown Improvements Project. The geophysical survey revealed several anomalies within the grassy lot of Steamboat Park, but these anomalies did not correspond with the mound site and were suspected to be historic disturbances. One area in particular (what would become Feature 1) showed up on GPR with a strong and consistent reflectance from 60 through 160 cmbs in a rectangular shape. Blondo Consulting then began a subsurface investigation of the anomalies with shovel testing and two one-meter by one-meter excavation units. Historic artifacts were recovered through the shovel tests and test units, thus confirming the historic association. In total, this investigation recovered 1,393 artifacts, but the majority were recovered from Test Unit 1. Test Unit 1 was placed directly within the assumed historic feature. Soils encountered during excavation included sandy loam topsoil of 10YR 2/1 on the Munsell color chart to a depth of 40 cmbs followed by a mottled silty sand of 10YR 2/2. At 60 cmbs, an ashy layer with a dense concentration of historic artifacts was encountered (Feature 1), thus confirming the presence of a subsurface feature. Furthermore, building materials such as nails, and concrete fragments were found along with melted glass and burned ceramics. The depth and shape of the feature, and artifacts present suggest a structure, such as a cellar, existed in this location. The well-defined soil layers demonstrate that in the area no major disturbances had occurred.

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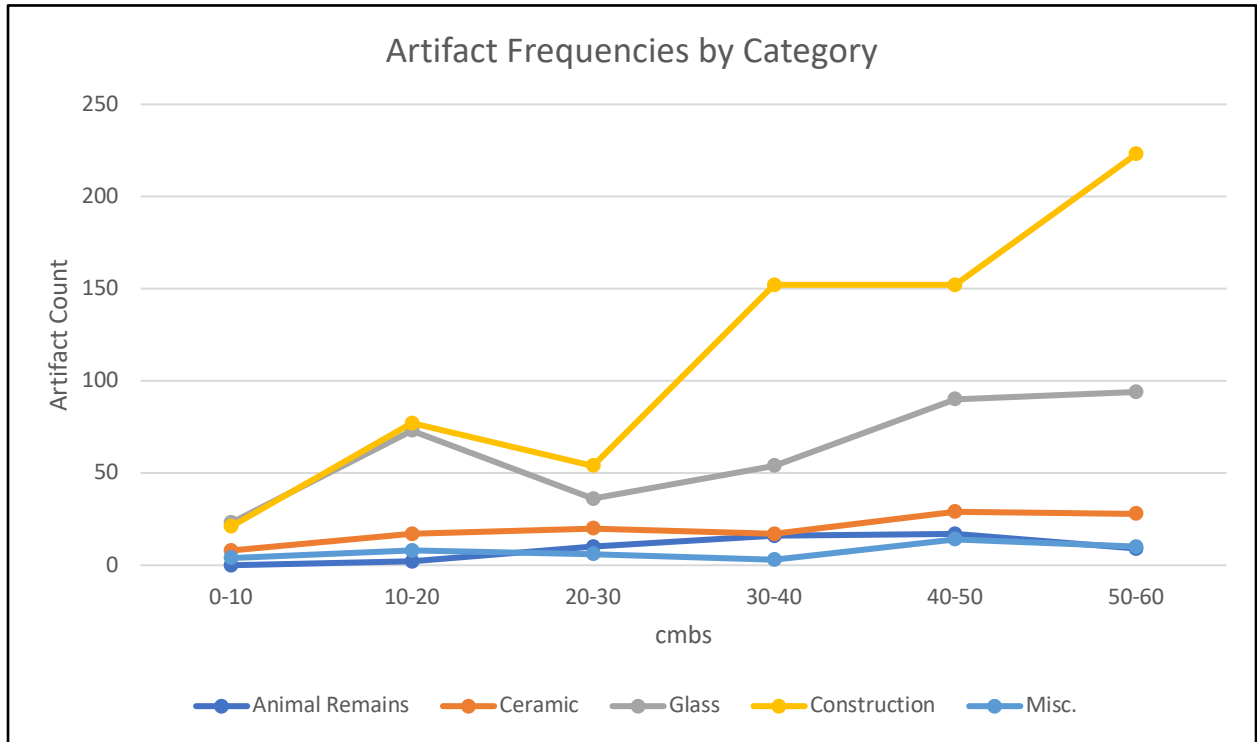


Figure 2. Artifact Frequencies Distribution by Category

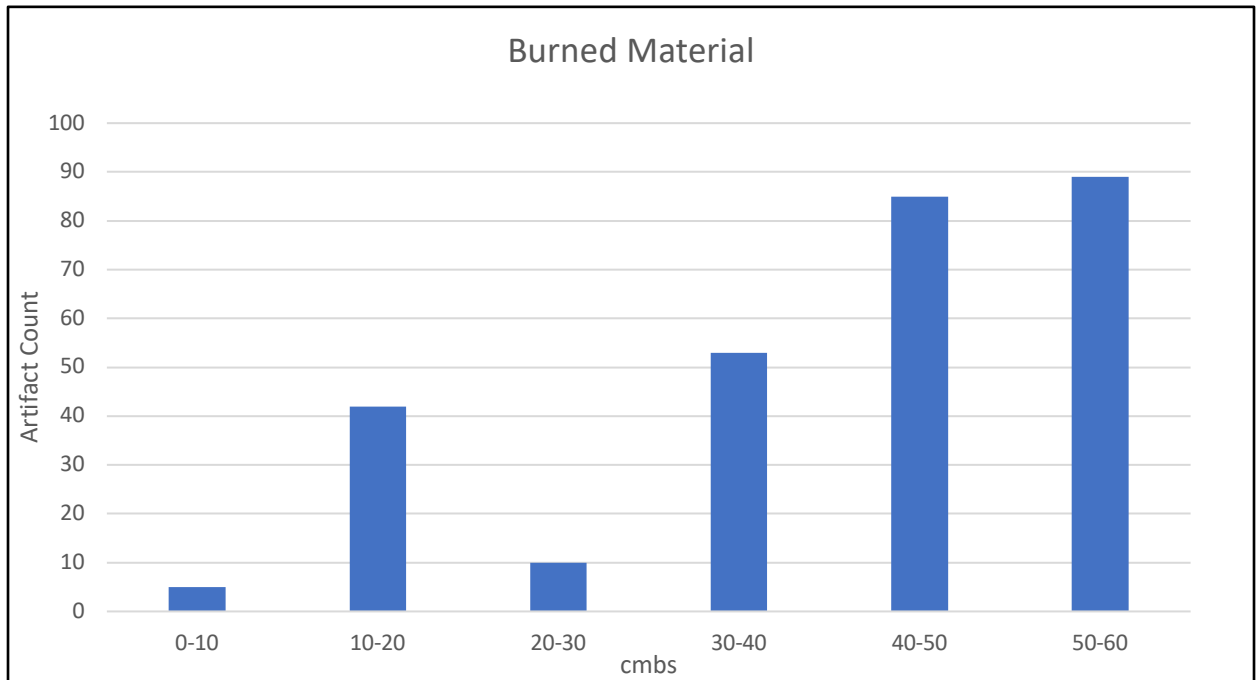


Figure 3. Frequency of Burned Material by Depth

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Therefore, with the discovery of an intact feature including a high concentration of artifacts, it was determined that the site is eligible for a local historic property designation, and the excavation was halted so that a more thorough investigation could be conducted at a later time. The excavation unit was then lined with a tarp and reburied. Also noted, four pre-contact flakes were also recovered within the site boundaries, but these came from areas disturbed by historic activity and lack proper context.

Ultimately, ground disturbing activities proposed in the area as part of the City of Afton Downtown Improvements Project were relocated, and monitoring was recommended (Blondo and Wolf, 2016). While monitoring construction work along the western edge of the site, along St. Croix Trail, a second feature consisting of a highly organic soil lens containing historic age artifacts was observed and was added to the site boundary (Wolf and Blondo, 2019). Based on the feature's linear orientation along the existing St. Croix Trail, the feature is believed to be a portion of the historic throughfare such as a road ditch.

The 1,393 artifacts encountered thus far indicate an occupation between 1870 and 1900, but the distribution of artifacts continued to rise down to 60 cmbs suggesting additional artifacts will be found at a greater depth. The exact function of the site is unknown at this time, but local histories suggest it may be associated with historic sawmills or a store. Therefore, the site is recommended for a local historic property designation based on its intact quality and high potential to yield pertinent information as to the City of Afton's early history.

***Narrative Description:***

After the long history of native inhabitants in the St. Croix Valley, the area began to be settled by French fur traders and trappers looking for beaver, fox, and buffalo. Through this came French Canadian voyager Gaspare Bruce who settled the City of Afton in 1837 (WCHS, 2015). Other French families, who sustained themselves through small gardens, would follow Bruce, but it was not until 1839 that Joseph Haskell and James S. Norris broke ground for the first farmlands (Collins et al, 1977). Then, in 1841 French Canadian Alexander McHattie settled 120 acres of land where the current "Historic Village" of Afton now stands (WCHS, 2015). Between 1847 and 1850, the

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likes of James Getchell, Francis Oldham, W. H. Guernsey and F. M. Cox would join the settlement (Collins et al, 1977).

Yet, up until 1848, the early settlers had no legal right to the land. Formal purchases came about when President Polk issued a proclamation allowing for 436,737 acres of land in the St. Croix Valley to be offered up for sale. However, only 3,326 acres were sold at that time for \$1.27 per acre (Bolles-Grant, 1963). R. Haskell, Joseph Haskell, H.L. Thomas and Charles Getchell platted the town in 1855, but it was not officially organized until 1859 (Collins et al, 1977). At this time the town was mostly populated by French and New Englanders, but during an economic upturn following the Civil War, many Swedish and German immigrants came to Afton (Bolles-Grant, 1963; Hayes, 1975).

Commerce in Afton's early history included the B.P. Squire's general store, the J. P. Furber warehouse and elevator, and the ferry service also run by Furber (Collins et al, 1977). In 1843, Lemuel Bolles (the town's first postmaster) erected a grist mill in Afton, although it changed hands several times, Emil Much became the final owner in 1875 and renamed it "Reliance Mill" (Bolles-Grant 1963). The Lowrey brothers operated a sawmill in 1854, but this only lasted a year. Then Thomas and Sons of Indiana built a sawmill in 1855, but after three seasons, they sold to the federal government who dismantled it. Next in the lumber business was Tilton and Newman who erected a mill in 1857 and Charles and James Getchell who opened a steam powered planing and shingle mill that same year (Collins et al, 1977). The Haskells who originally platted the town and Charles Getchell have both been associated with site 21WA0116 through various deeds starting in 1855.

**SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT:**

The City of Afton has a strong sense of community history as shown through its local historical society, and the city's preservation/representation of its Old Village. Perhaps nothing shows this more than Afton's Historic Walking Tour (Figure 4) which boasts 38 historic locations including Selma's Ice Cream Parlor which stands just north of site 21WA0116 and was purportedly used as drill grounds during the Civil War, and the Charles Getchell's grocery store (also known as Slater store) located just west of the site (Afton Historical Society, 2001). Listing site 21WA0116 as a

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local historic property would fit nicely with Afton’s existing points of interest and further archaeological investigations would provide an opportunity for a more enriching experience as this community continues to celebrate its history.

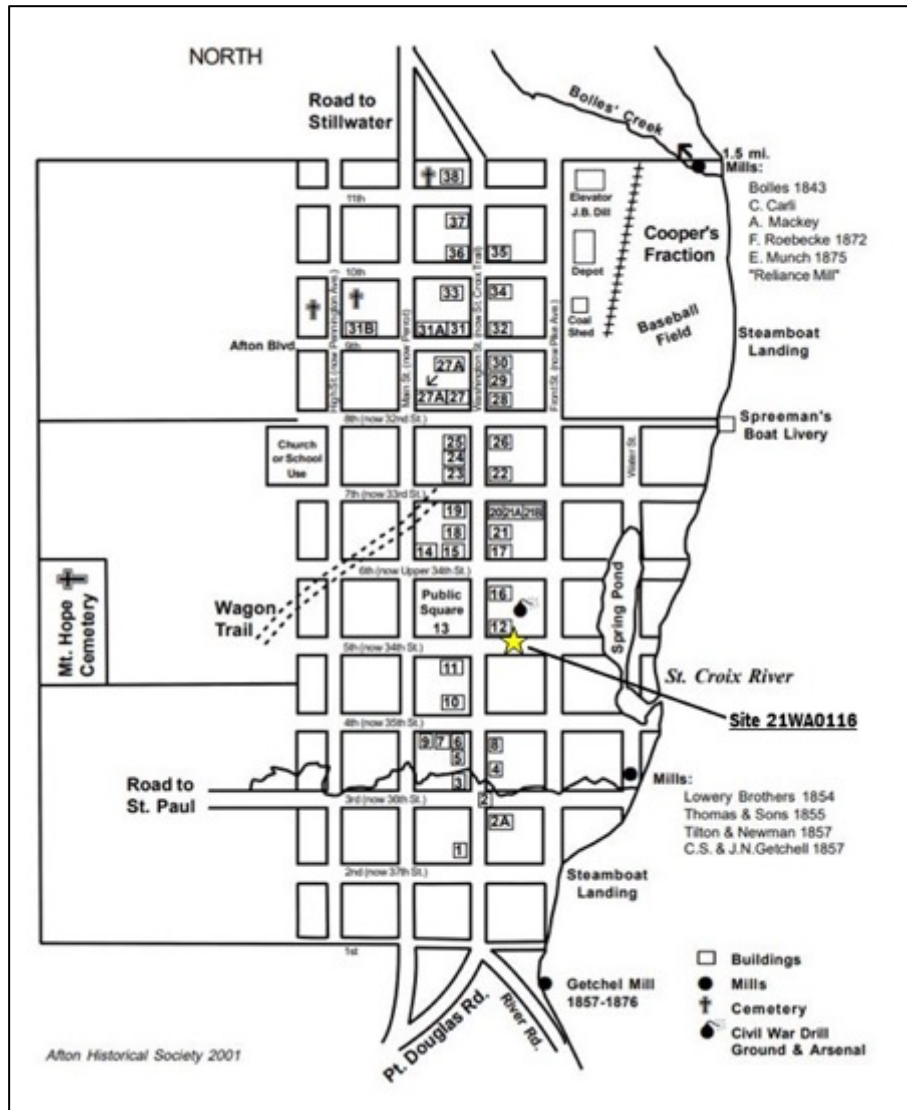


Figure 4: Afton Walking Tour Brochure with site location added. Note location 11 (Getchell store) and 12 (Selma's Ice Cream Parlor).

Currently, site 21WA0116 is believed to be associated with the town’s lumber industry, or early commercial businesses. Edwin G. Robb’s *Afton Remembered* notes that the Tolton and Newman Sawmill once stood at the site’s general location. Charles S. Getchell (1822-1890), who, along with his brother, operated the Getchell Sawmill, owned the property prior to September 1856 when it passed to Belinda Goodwin (Collins et al, 1977). Charles’s claim to the land might also connect



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it to his store, which the Afton Walking Tour has mapped just west of the site, across St. Croix Trail. Hiram Haskell (1813-1895), who was listed as a merchant in the 1870 U.S. Census, also made his claim on the property and transferred it to Belinda Goodwin in 1866. Both businessmen had their hand in the City of Afton's early commerce. However, given the 1870 to 1900 date range of the artifacts collected, Peter B. Johnson (1834-1916) is another likely candidate for site association as he owned the property between 1872 and 1916. Peter was listed as a farmer in the 1890 Federal Census and then a carpenter in the 1900 Federal Census; and with the high concentration of nails recovered from the excavations, a carpenter's shop could be possible.

<b>Table 1: Site 21WA0116 Landowners</b>		
<b>Grantor</b>	<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Date of Instrument</b>
Ralzeman Haskell	Jesse M. Stone and Erastus S. Edgerton	1855-05-31
Ralsaman Haskell	John M. Castner	1855-06-04
Ralzeman Haskell	Jesse M. Stone and Erastus S. Edgerton	1855-06-29
Jesse M. Stone	Joel H. Johnson	1856-04-03
Joseph Haskell	Russel N. Pray	1856-09-19
Charles S. Getchell	Belinda Goodwin	1856-10-10
Henry J. Haskell (Guardian)	Frederick Haskell	1862-08-20
Russell N. Pray	Charles G. Holmes	1862-10-25
do.	do	1863-10-26
Henry J. Haskell (Guardian)	Frederick Haskell	1864-08-20
Meredith H. Thomas, et al	Belinda Goodwin	1865-11-30
do (Meredith H. Thomas et al)	Charles G. Holmes	1865-11-30
Charles G. Holmes	G. G. Forsberg	1866-02-20
do. (Hiram Haskell, Commissioner)	Belinda Goodwin	1866-03-27
C. G. Forsberg	Peter Johnson	1872-11-04
Belinda Goodwin	Peter B. Johnson	1885-03-30
Peter B. Johnson	Frederick Johnson	1916-03-18
Frederick Johnson	Roy G. Johnson	1929-04-29
Roy G. Johnson	Frederick and Isa Johnson	1929-04-29
Isa Johnson	Roy F. Johnson	1942-10-26
Commissioner of Revenue	Frederick Johnson, decid.	1958-10-22

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<b>Table 1: Site 21WA0116 Landowners</b>		
<b>Grantor</b>	<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Date of Instrument</b>
Village of Afton	Public	1960-09-15
Roy F. Johnson	William R. and Bertha E. Salugack(?)	1966-09-26

Through the connections listed above, Site 21WA0116 has a high likelihood of improving our knowledge of Afton’s history. There is more to learn about the site, but the multitude of artifacts recovered from the partial excavation demonstrate this likelihood. The artifact distribution shows that the artifact count was increasing with depth which demonstrates an incredible amount of information left within the site. The intact features also show that the site is in good condition for recovering meaningful information. Furthermore, seeing that the site is within an area that embraces its past, a sense of history can still be felt and site 21WA0116 should be included within that.

**OTHER ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

<p><b><i>Related Historic Context:</i></b>            Early Agriculture and River Settlement 1840-1870            St. Croix Triangle Lumbering 1830s-1900s            Railroads and Agriculture Development 1870-1940</p>	<p><b><i>Significant Person(s):</i></b>            Charles S. Getchell            Hiram Haskell            Peter B. Johnson</p>
<p><b><i>Period of Significance:</i></b>            1870 to 1900</p>	<p><b><i>Cultural Affiliation:</i></b>            Euro-American</p>
<p><b><i>Significant Dates:</i></b></p>	<p><b><i>Architect/Builder(s)</i></b></p>
<p><b><i>Contributing Resources (within Period of Significance)</i></b>            Site 21WA0116</p>	
<p><b><i>Non-Contributing Resources (outside of the Period of Significance)</i></b></p>	

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:**

***Acreage of Property:*** approximately 0.26 Acres

***Legal Description of Property:*** SE ¼ NE ¼ Section 22 Township 28N Range 20W

***Boundary of Jurisdiction:*** Washington County tax records.

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**PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION:**

*Current Photographs:*



*Overview of site 21WA0116 looking north towards Selma's Ice Cream Parlor from the parking lot of Steamboat Park. Excavations were conducted within the grassy area while the linear feature associated with the Saint Croix Tail are off picture to the west.*

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*Overview of site 21WA0116 looking east from Saint Croix Trail South. Selma's Ice Cream Parlor seen to the left of the frame. Steamboat Park sign seen to the right.*



*Overview of site 21WA0116 looking east from Saint Croix Trail South with Steamboat Park sign and parking lot included*

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*Plan view of Test Unit 1 with the top of frame aligned to the north. Ashy feature observed at 60 cms.*



*Profile view of Test Unit 1 focused on the south wall.*

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*Closing Test Unit 1 with a tarp placed at the bottom.*

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**AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH(S) AND SITE MAP(S) OF THE PROPERTY:**



*Aerial view of the recorded site boundary with excavation locations  
and monitoring area shown in Area A.*

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**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES:**

- Afton Historical Society (2001) *Historic Afton Walking Tour* [Brochure]
- Blondo, Steven and Kelly Wolf, and Laura Koski (2016) *A Phase II Archaeological Assessment and Evaluation of 21WA10, Afton, Washington County, Minnesota*
- Blondo, Steven and Kelly Wolf (2016) An Update on the Archaeological Assessment of the City of Afton Downtown Improvements Project, Proposed Lift Station Area
- Blondo, Steven (2016). *Field Notes: City of Afton Downtown Improvements Project, Washington County, MN*. Blondo Consulting, LLC.
- Bolles-Grant, Evelyn (1963) *History of Valley Creek and Surrounding Afton Township. Minnesota Historical Society collections: Valley Creek and Surrounding Afton Township; F612.W49A3.G7.*
- Collins, Sue; Anna Engquist, Betty Roney; Gail Seifert; Louise Johnson; Maynard Johnson, and Hayes, Elma R. (1975) *Afton-Lakeland: 200 Years of Change*. Elma R. Hayes: Hudson
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (2021) *St. Paul-Baldwin Plains and Moraines Subsection* Minnesota Department of Natural Resources St. Paul-Baldwin Plains and Moraines Subsection | Minnesota DNR (state.mn.us)
- Robb, Edwin G. (1996) *Afton Remembered*. Afton Historical Society Press: Afton.
- Washington County Historical Society (WCHS) (2015) *Washington County History Guide: Afton History, Part of Washington County Communities*. Website Accessed 26 October 2015 <http://projects.wchsmn.org/communities/afton/>
- Willard Rosenfelt  
(1977) *Washington: A History of the Minnesota County*. The Croixside Press: Stillwater.
- Wolf, Kelly and Steven Blondo (2019) A Monitoring Report for 21WA0010, the Rattlesnake Mound Group, City of Afton Flood Protection and Sanitary Sewer Improvements, Afton, Washington County, Minnesota



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**FORM PREPARED BY:**

Name/Title: Andrew Domine, staff archaeologist at Blondo Consulting, LLC  
Street & No.: 3838 Sand Hill Rd.  
City/Town: Kettle River  
State, County, Zip: Minnesota, Carlton County, 55757  
Telephone No.: 920-750-4796  
Date Prepared: June 10, 2021

**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: \_\_\_\_\_