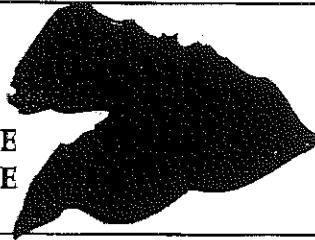


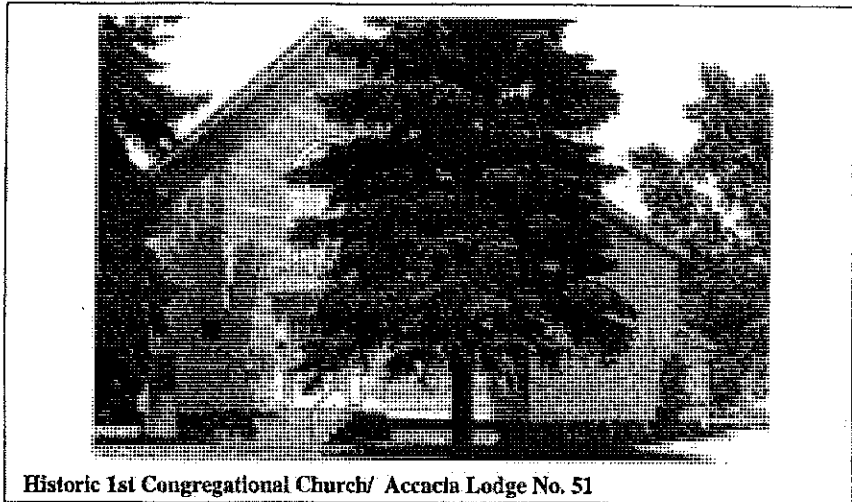
HERITAGE
SITE FILE



1ST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Since most of the pioneers immigrating to Cottage Grove came from New England (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts), it follows that the first religious services held were Protestant. In the 1840s and '50s, circuit-riding Methodist and Congregationalist clergymen began preaching in the homes of Cottage Grove's leading settlers. One of these was Rev. William F. Boutwell, the famous missionary to the Chippewa in northern Minnesota. After 1855, public worship services were held in the Cottage Grove Lyceum Hall. The same year, the Methodists built a church which stood on Old Cottage Grove's Main Street until about 1890.

The historic Congregational Church was organized at a meeting held on Nov. 26, 1858, in the home of Theodore Furber, the Rev. Bordlet Hall presiding. For the next eight years, the congregation met in the Lyceum Hall. The



Historic 1st Congregational Church/ Accacia Lodge No. 51

minutes of the church reveal that in 1868 James S. Norris, Cottage Grove's leading pioneer, donated a lot on the road from Grey Cloud to Afton. A building committee was appointed and began to solicit subscriptions. There were about 50 personal subscribers to the building fund, including such notable figures as Theodore, John P., and Samuel W. Furber; John Bailey; George Crippen; Oliver Dalrymple; Robert and John McChesney; and Robert Watson. A

stone church was considered (several church members owned limestone quarries), but the final plan called for a frame building patterned after the meeting houses of New England. Officially designated the First Congregational Church of Cottage Grove, the building cost \$4,070, and was completed under the supervision of Thomas Nixon, a Yankee master carpenter. The church was dedicated on Dec. 29, 1868.

As the 1881 county history observed, "The history of this church, like many others, has had its sunshine and shade, but shade could not hinder its steady growth." Rev. Edwin Hart was called as the first pastor and served until 1878. After overcoming financial problems, in 1883 the church purchased a village lot and erected a parsonage. (Sold by the church in the 1960s, it is still standing, though slightly altered, at 7245 Lamar Ave.) A Ladies Aid was organized (in 1903) in time for the church's 50th anniversary, which was celebrated on Dec. 27-29, 1908, with considerable fanfare. Old settler John P. Furber, one of

FACTS TO FILE

1ST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

- ▲ **Heritage Resource Name:** First Congregational Church of Cottage Grove, since 1968 commonly known as the Accacia Lodge
- ▲ **Location:** 11094 70th Street South, in Old Cottage Grove
- ▲ **Architectural Style:** Greek Revival
- ▲ **Significant Dates:** 1868, date of construction; 1963, merger with United Church of Christ; 1968, building sold to Masonic Lodge

the leaders of the congregation since 1858, penned a history of the church, dated May 21, 1918, which survives in manuscript among the church archives.

Architecture buffs, especially those interested in historic buildings, are attracted to the First Congregational Church because of its interesting blend of Greek Revival and Italian Renaissance-inspired details. Like its New England counterparts, Cottage Grove's Congregational Church has a low-pitched gabled roof with abbreviated cornice returns and a wide band of trim running beneath the roof. The walls are clad in narrow beveled clapboard siding, milled from white pine. The entry originally had carved double doors framed with a single wooden entablature and pilasters, intended to evoke an image of a classical Grecian temple. (The doors have been removed, but are in storage.) The original windows reflected the Italian Renaissance tradition: tall and narrow, they have arched crowns elaborated with dentils (small square wooden blocks).

Old photographs show a tall steeple rising above an octagonal belfry. Unfortunately, this feature has not been preserved. According to church records, in 1916 the

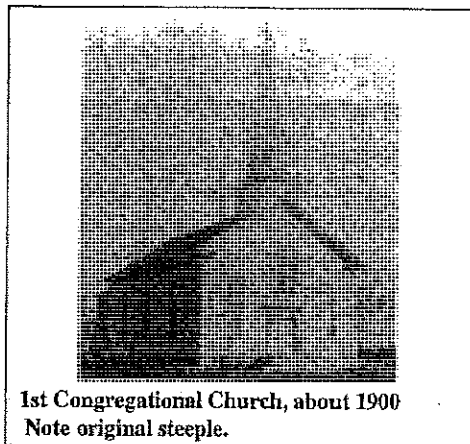
church received a fine bell from the Plymouth Congregational Church in St. Paul, which was being razed. The original steeple appears to have been removed at this time so that a new bell tower could be built. The replacement bell tower has also been removed. In 1947-48, the building was enlarged by the addition of a basement and a rear annex, and indoor plumbing was installed in 1956.

In 1963, five years after celebrating its centennial, First Congregational Church merged with St. Matthew's Evangelical and Reformed Church, and became part of the United Church of Christ. (St. Matthew's was a venerable Old Cottage Grove house of worship, established in 1874. The Gothic Revival Style church, built in 1887, was moved to the Old Cottage Grove Community Club site in 1953 to make way for the present United Church of Christ. It was recently moved yet again to a rural lot north of Old Cottage Grove, where it has been converted to a house.)

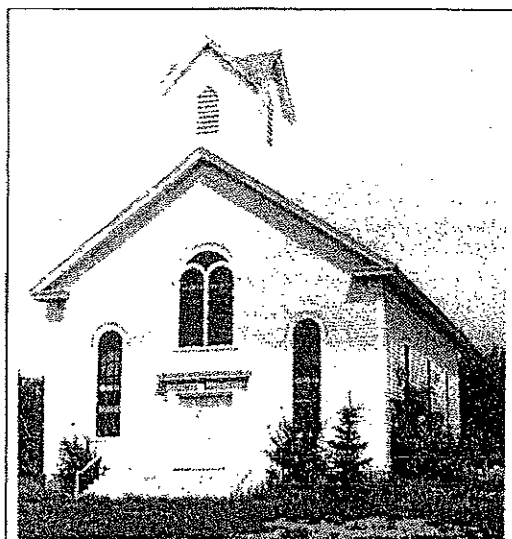
In 1968, the vacant Congregational Church building was sold to the Accacia Lodge, and the Masons set about converting it to their

needs. It was a good match: Accacia Lodge No. 51 was a Cottage Grove institution only slightly younger than the Congregational Church. Formed in 1865, the Lodge met in rented rooms until 1890, when it erected a two-story hall on Main Street.

Despite changes to its appearance, the old church has retained much of its historic character as a legacy from Cottage Grove's pioneer past. It was placed on the City Register of Historic Sites & Landmarks in April, 1987.



1st Congregational Church, about 1900
Note original steeple.



1st Congregational Church, about 1920
Note bell tower.

KEY WORDS & TERMS



Entablature. In classical architecture, the upper part of a column or pilaster.

Greek Revival. A popular mid-nineteenth-century architectural style based on classical Greek and Roman ideas. Characteristic features include low-pitched roofs with pedimented gables, cornice lines emphasized with wide bands of trim to resemble classical entablature, and decorative window crowns.

Pilaster. A square piece of horizontal molded frame designed to resemble a classical column.



HERITAGE SITE FILES

This is one in a series of Heritage Site Files prepared by the Heritage Education Project, a cooperative effort of the Cottage Grove Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation and the Newport Heritage Preservation Commission. The support of the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, and Minnesota Historical Society is gratefully acknowledged.

For more information on historic preservation and heritage resources in the City of Cottage Grove, contact:
City Historic Preservation Officer
7516 80th St. S.
Cottage Grove, Minnesota 55016

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CITY OF COTTAGE GROVE
CITY REGISTER OF HISTORIC SITES AND LANDMARKS
PRESERVATION PLANNING REPORT

1. NAME

Common: Accacia Lodge No. 51
Historic: First Congregational Church

2. LOCATION

Address: 11094 70th Street South
Legal Description: On file

3. OWNER

Name: Accacia Lodge/contact Ralph McHattie
Address: 9165 Military Road, Cottage Grove, MN 55016
Telephone: (612) 459-2025

4. DOCUMENTATION

Historic Site File Number: 012
SHPO Number: WA-CGC-003
Historic Context: Early American Settlement
Resolution: 87-47

5. DESCRIPTION

The First Congregational Church/Accacia Lodge occupies a large lot on County Road 20 (70th Street) at the head of Lamar Avenue, the old Main Street. It is a slightly altered Greek Revival Style frame building measuring 34 by 46 feet, with a 34 by 10 foot rear addition. The structure is oriented north-south, with a rectangular plan, and is sided in narrow lap clapboard. The original wood roof and stone foundation have been replaced with asphalt shingles and concrete block.

The street (south) facade is quintessentially Greek Revival, with its matched set of double doors flanked by pilasters with Doric bases and capitals, bridged by a simple architrave; gabled, overhanging roof with simple wide eave moldings; and rounded full-arched Italianate windows with dentilled crenelation on the molding. Three semi-circular windows punctuate each side of the original hall. The rear addition, which is devoid of stylistic detail, has simple rectangular windows. The church originally had a tall steeple with octagonal bellfry, large arched vents, and lapboard siding. All of the tall, narrow windows have been infilled with wood and small square windows; however, the molded frames of the original windows remain intact. Other alterations include the replacement of the front steps, which originally

approached the door from either side and now projects straight out.

6. CULTURAL RESOURCE VALUE/SIGNIFICANCE

The First Congregational Church was organized in 1858 by the Rev. Bordlett Hall of the American Home Missionary Society. In 1868 the present structure was built by Thomas Nixon on land donated by original settler James Sullivan Norris. Original cost of construction was \$4,070.

In 1953, the First Congregational merged with the St. Matthew's Evangelical and Reformed Church to form the United Church of Christ, with a new house of worship at 7008 Lamar Avenue. The former Congregational Church building was sold to the Accacia Lodge of Masons, which had been meeting in the village since 1864.

Gebhard and Martinson called the building an "important example of the Greek Revival in Minnesota." The property's cultural resource value stems from its association with the early settlement of Cottage Grove and the evolution of the village at East Cottage Grove. Although alterations have been made to the original structure, they are generally reversible, and the integrity of the building remains intact. Its siting affords an opportunity to appreciate the delicate and inspired balance of its architectural elements.

7. RECOMMENDED TREATMENT

The preferred preservation treatment for the First Congregational Church is preservation of the existing form and integrity of the building, with rehabilitation to make possible an efficient contemporary use.

8. SIGNIFICANT ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

The property exhibits a number of architectural characteristics associated with the Greek Revival Style. These include the rectangular plan, pedimented gable roof of low pitch, corner boards, elaborate front door surround with simple entablature, pilasters and symmetrical window and door placement. The tall, arched Italianate windows (infilled) and matched paneled front doors are also significant. Distinctive environmental features of the property include trees, walkway and set-backs from 70th Street and adjacent homes.

9. PERMIT REVIEW GUIDELINES

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines are the required basis for permit review decisions for historic sites and landmarks in the City of Cottage Grove.

Structural repairs should recognize the special problems inherent in the structural systems of historic buildings, especially where there are visible signs of deflection or cracking. Structural problems cannot be left untreated.

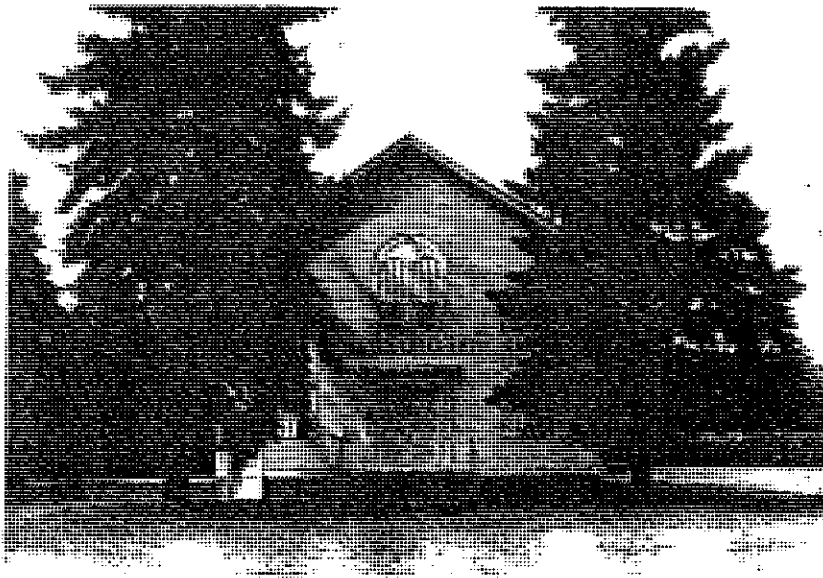
Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated wood siding and trim with new material that matches the old in size, shape, texture and appearance.

Preserve the original roof shape and prohibit the addition of inappropriate features..

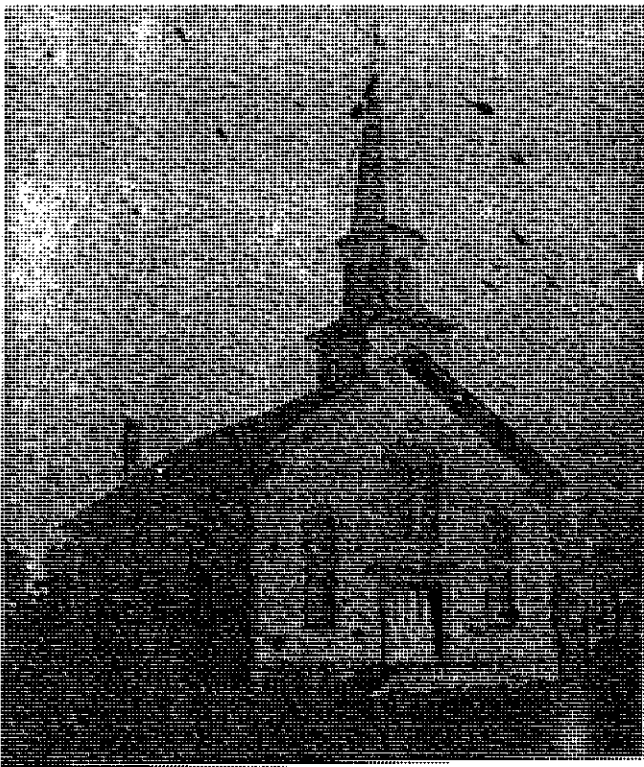
Retain existing window and door openings on the 1866 church building and preserve original window sash and doors. New windows and doors should be as unobtrusive as possible and should be removable without damaging original fabric.

Keep adjacent new construction to a minimum, making them compatible in scale, materials and texture to the historic building. Retain existing building set-backs. Remove utility poles, painted signs and other "street furniture" that detracts from the distinguishing historic character of the site.

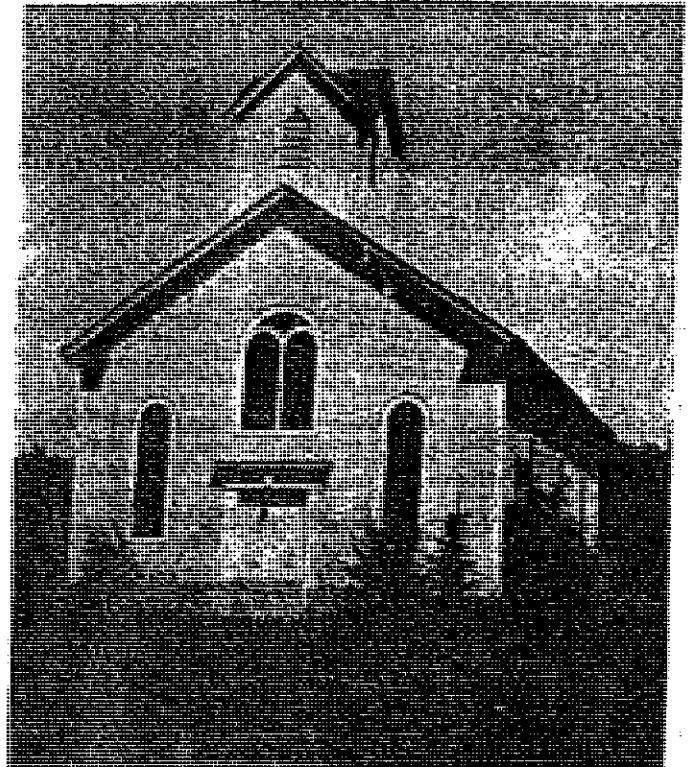
Prepared by Robert C. Vogel
25 May 1988



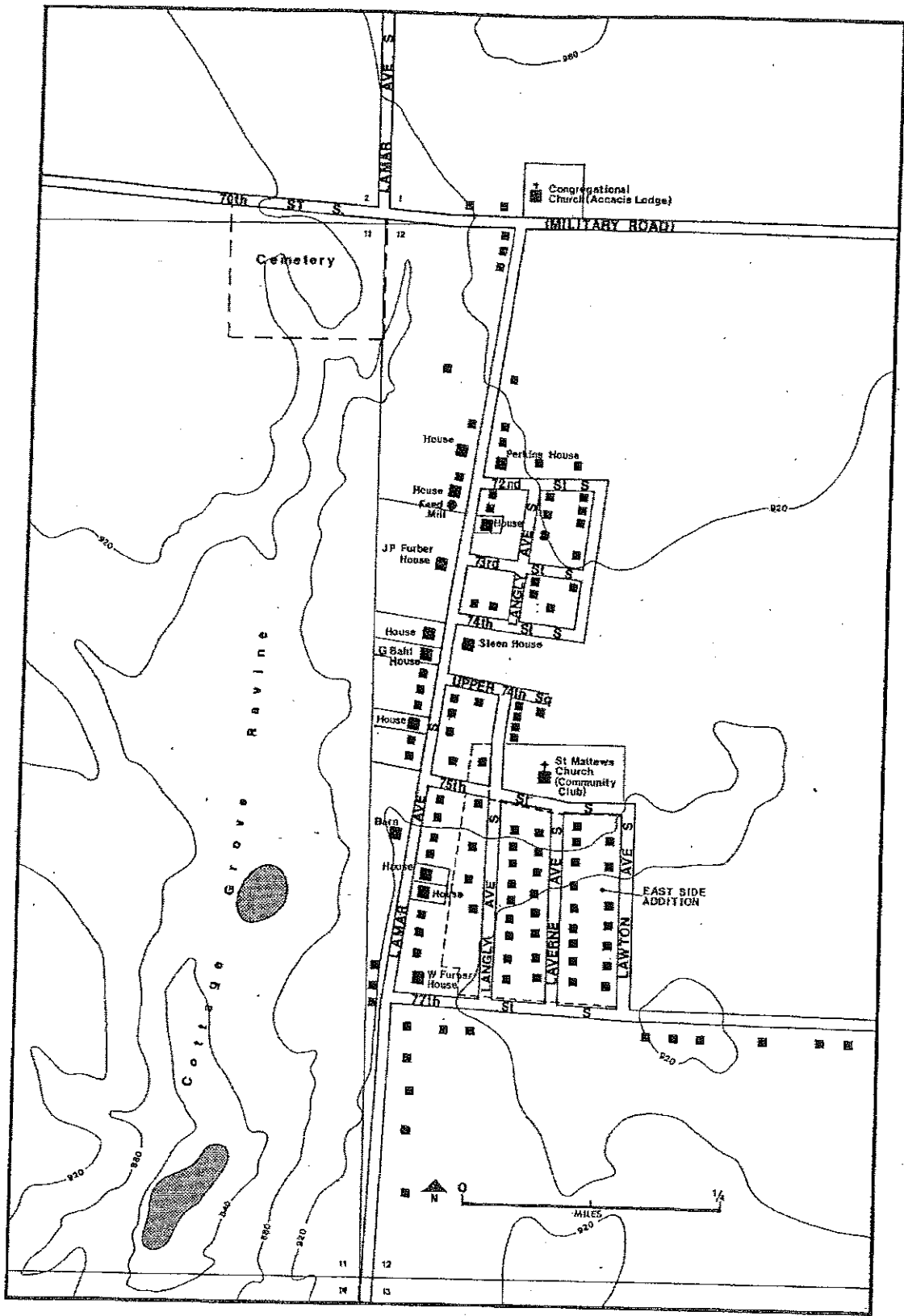
Historic 1st Congregational Church/Accacia Lodge No. 51

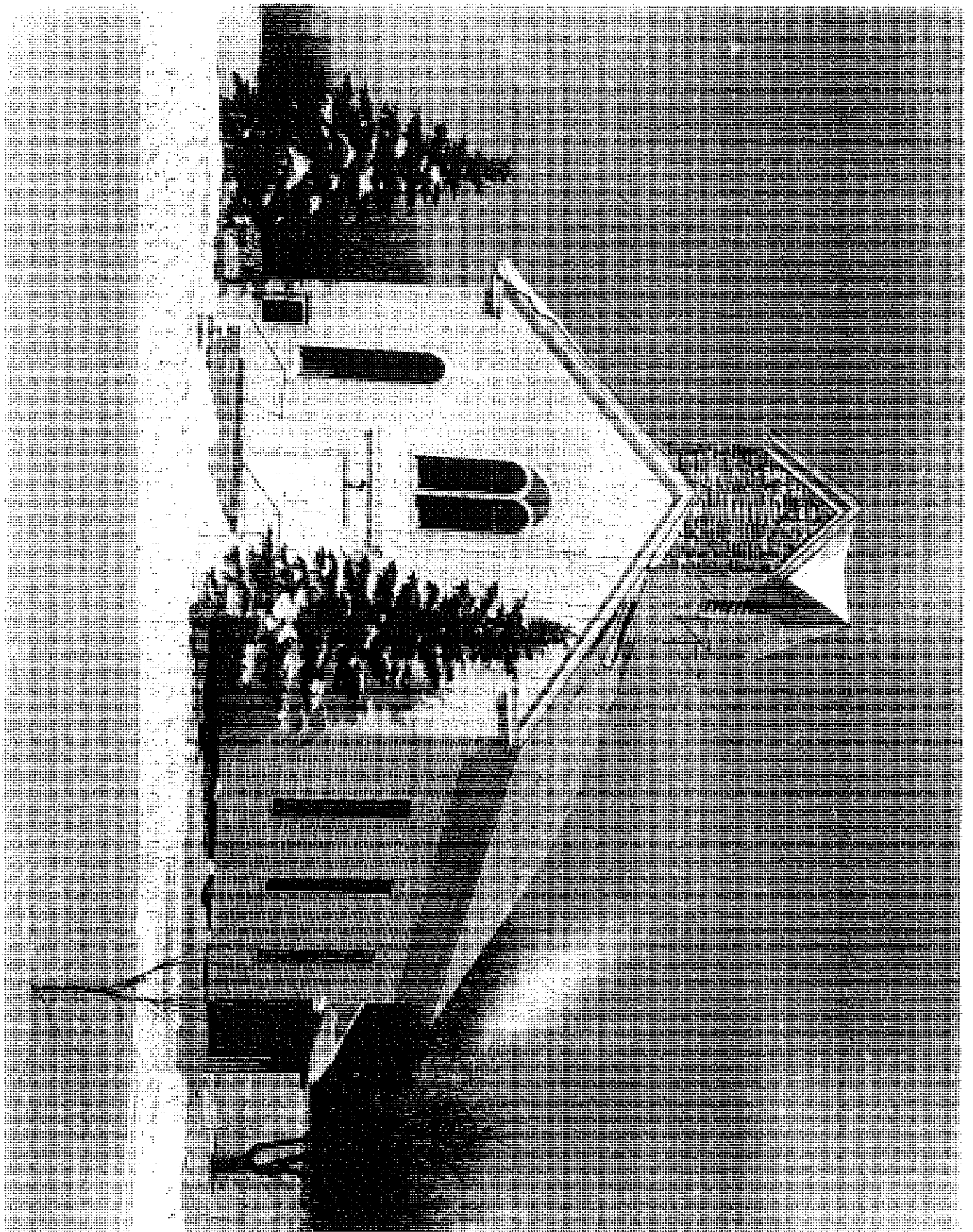


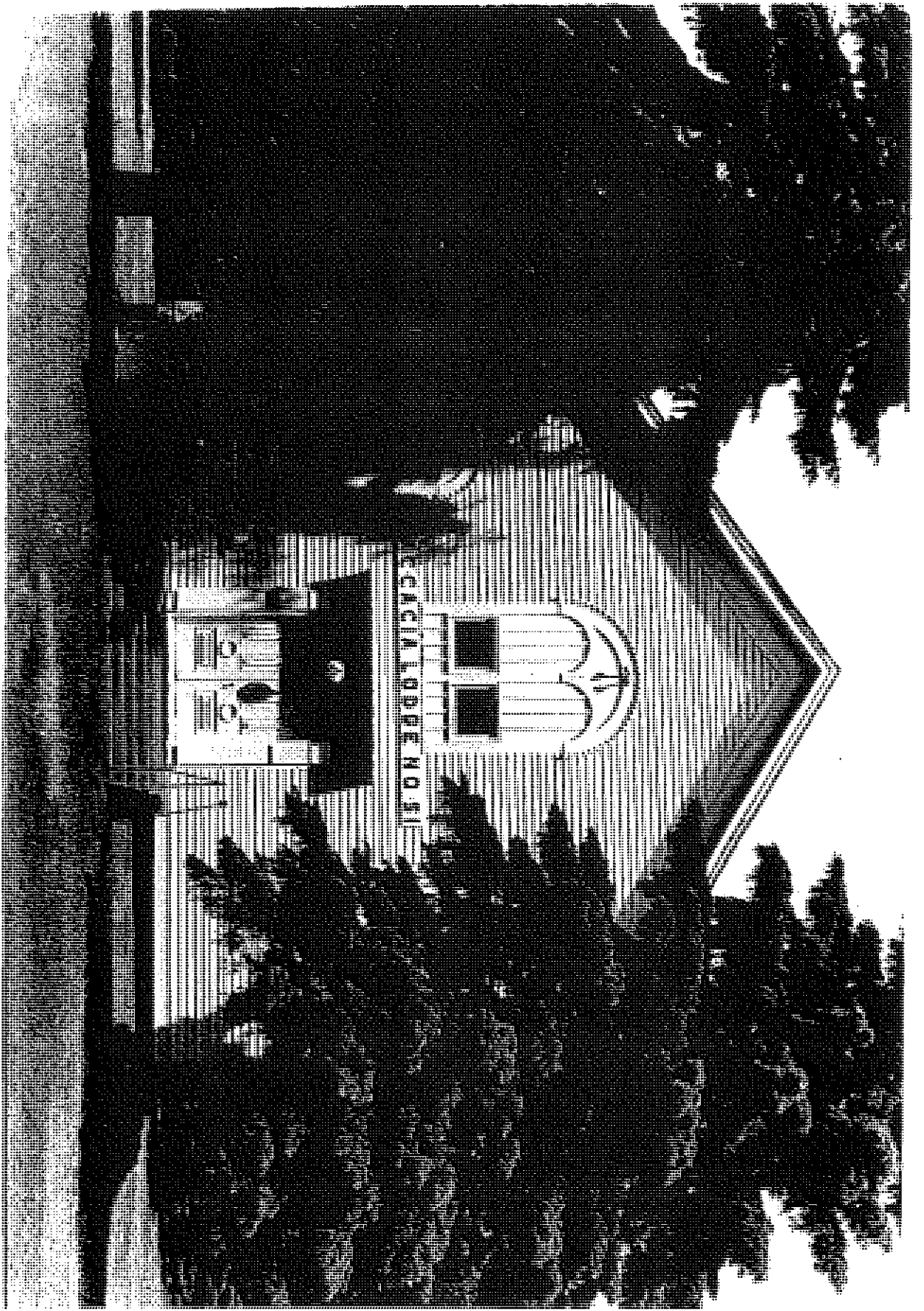
1st Congregational Church
late-19th century
(note original steeple)



1st Congregational Church
c. 1900
(note bell tower)







Group part of waning tradition

Dwindling membership in the Masons may force Cottage Grove's Accacia Lodge to close its doors.

MARY DIVINE STAFF WRITER

When a waxing moon grabs Gene Dunne's attention, he immediately wonders what day of the week it is.

If it's a Wednesday, he had better be on his way to his monthly Masons meeting at Accacia Lodge No. 51 in Old Cottage Grove.

"We're a moon lodge — one of the last lodges in the country that still relies on the moon cycle," he says. "Over 100 years ago, when the farmers came in with horse and buggies ... they would meet on moonlit nights because they could see better. We still meet on the Wednesday night closest to the full moon. So sometimes if I look up and see the moon almost full, I think, 'Oh, my gosh, did I miss lodge?'"

Dunne, who this year is leading the lodge as its Worshipful Master, says the lodge — which was built in 1868 as a First Congregational Church — may soon be sold. During its many moons of life, the wooden building's sky-blue paint has begun to peel and the roof has started to leak.

"The problem is we have dwindled down to 47 members — from a high of about 150 members," says Dunne, who is retired and was a Mason in Colorado Springs and San Diego for 35 years before moving here in 1991.

The fraternal organization is facing old age, as are many lodges across Minnesota and the United States. The youngest members of Accacia Lodge are in their 40s, Dunne says. The average age of Masons in Minnesota is 88, state lodge officials say.

"Our membership is definitely down," says Douglas Campbell, grand secretary of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota in St. Paul. It's the same at every lodge in the country, with few exceptions.

Campbell says the Masons peaked in Minnesota in 1961 with a membership roster topping 70,000. There are now about 23,300 members officially. But he says the numbers are still dropping.

"Why we can't attract younger



Gene Dunne, worshipful master of the Accacia Lodge, at the group's building in Old Cottage Grove, says the Masons' membership is dwindling, and he and other Masons are considering a merger with a lodge in Newport. In 1961 there were about 70,000 members in Minnesota. Now there are about 23,300 members officially. The problem is reported to be the same at most lodges in the country.

ACCACIA LODGE

The South Washington County Heritage Society will present a program on the history of Accacia Lodge No. 51 at 10:30 a.m. Sept. 12. The lecture, which will be held at the lodge at 21094 70th St., is open to the public. For more information, call 459-3233.

members is something we talk about a lot," says Campbell, who is 45. "Part of it has to do with the fact that Baby Boomers were not joiners. We lost a big chunk of a big generation that in the past would have followed their fathers and grandfathers into lodges."

Young men — the Masons only admit men — don't seem to have time to join organizations like the Masons, says Dunne, "but I've got a grandson I'm hoping will join."

Ralph McHattie, the lodge's treasurer, says "there's just so many other things going on now" that potential new members don't seem to have time to participate.

McHattie comes from a long line of Masons. His father, George McHattie, and grandfather, James A. McHattie, were both members and past Worshipful Masters of Accacia Lodge.

In the lodge's original ledger, kept in a cupboard in the lodge's kitchen, James A. McHattie is listed as having joined Accacia Lodge at age 23. His birthplace — Scotland — and his occupation — farmer — are recorded in beautiful cursive writing.

Ralph McHattie, 77, joined the lodge when he was 25. He still farms at his family farm just a few miles from the lodge, although he's lost a few of the 1,000 acres for the new golf course in Cottage Grove. He remembers when the two towering pine trees were planted in front of the lodge.

"Those trees were given to the church," he says. "I was just a little kid ... and I remember that there was a storm that night. They apparently did a good job (planting them) because they're still there."

The Greek Revival-style church was built by professional church builder Thomas Nixon for \$4,070 on land donated by James Morris, Cottage Grove's first permanent settler, says Historic Preservation Officer Robert Vogel.

The former church — now, without its steeple — has been the site of Accacia Lodge since 1969; the lodge itself is the oldest social institution in Cottage Grove — begun in 1865, Vogel says.

Operating the building now costs about \$2,400 a year. With only 47 members meeting there once a month, McHattie wonders if it's worth it.

"It just isn't feasible to keep it going," he says. "It's going to cost everything we've got to keep the building going. If we meet once a month, it isn't worth it."

McHattie says he thinks the lodge will eventually merge with the Newport Lodge No. 118, which is in St. Paul Park. "Newport is doing pretty good," he says. "In town, a lot of them get together, but we're out here in the boonies."

Wally Nelson, the lodge's secretary, says lodge members are still trying to decide what to do with the building. Adds Nelson, 97, a farmer in Afton: "It's astounding how the costs of operating a place like that have grown."

On the wall in the lodge's kitchen hangs a cartoon of a lodge meeting, drawn by a former St. Paul newspaper cartoonist, Nelson says. In the cartoon, the lodge's secretary is caught napping.

"That was my father, Lincoln Nelson, sleeping," says Nelson, who lives just about four miles from the lodge. "I was 10 years old then. He used to tell me he could still take minutes of the

meetings even though he was sleeping."

The lodge holds two main fundraisers each year, a pancake breakfast and an oyster stew supper. The money is used primarily for scholarships for high school students in the area.

"The old Yankees who (settled in Cottage Grove) brought the oyster tradition with them," Nelson says. "The thing is, those Yankees aren't around in the neighborhood anymore — they moved on to bigger and better things."

Nelson says he stayed in the area and joined the Masons because of "family tradition more than anything."

"I think it's good for the individual, too," he says. "I think he gets a lot out of it if he participates. And it's been fun, too. A lot of old-timers were excellent storytellers. My dad used to come home and laugh, laugh, laugh."

Nelson, Dunne and McHattie say they don't know what might happen with the building if the lodge members do indeed decide to sell the property this fall. Lodge members plan to vote at their Sept. 9 meeting.

Dunne, the Worshipful Master, thinks it might be good for the building to return to its roots.

"We had come up with the idea that maybe a new church just starting out would be interested because it was a church before we got it," he says. "I think it would be a nice building for a new church."

Mary Divine covers Washington County for the Pioneer Press. She can be reached at (651)228-5443 or mdv@pioneerpress.com.

6 Looking Back

Historic Accacia Lodge started as Congregational Church



First Congregational Church, ca. 1800.

by Robert C. Vogel
City Historic Preservation Officer

In previous "Looking Back" articles, we have commented on the large proportion of New Englanders among Cottage Grove's early settlers, while observing that these pioneers brought with them to Minnesota a very distinctive political and social philosophy which is reflected in a number of historic sites which survive from the mid-1800's. The holy enterprise of minding other people's business was practically a Yankee folkway, and much of the old settler's social life revolved around his church, so it should come as no surprise that the most distinctive architectural relic of Cottage Grove's New England heritage is the historic First Congregational Church, the building now occupied by Accacia Lodge No. 51, located on County Road 20 (70th Street) at its intersection with Lamar Avenue.

Physical security and subsistence were the pioneers' primary concerns, of course, and the first Sunday services were held in private homes and ministered by circuit riding preachers, but within a few years of Cottage Grove's founding in 1843 several community churches were organized. The Methodists raised the first church in East Cottage Grove in 1855 (it was

torn down around 1890), but it was not until 1858 that the dominant Protestant denominations (namely the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians) undertook to organize a church here.

Because missionaries from both churches cultivated the Minnesota frontier under the auspices of the American Home Missionary Society, they had agreed to respect each other's "priority rights" and not establish competing churches in the same community. The new Cottage Grove church was assigned to the Rev. Richard Bordlett Hall, a Congregationalist.

The First Congregational Church of Cottage Grove was officially organized on Dec. 29, 1858. For the first decade, until the congregation could erect a separate meeting house, the members of the congregation met in the Lyceum Hall. The building we see today was constructed in 1868 at a cost of \$4,070 under the supervision of master carpenter Thomas Nixon, and served the community for nearly a century.

In 1953, the Congregational Church merged with its neighbor, the St. Matthew's Evangelical and Reformed Church, and built a new house of worship at 7008 Lamar Ave.

(The new Cottage Grove United Church of Christ actually occupies the site of the old St. Matthew's Church building, which was moved to 75th Street and Langley Avenue, where it forms part of the Cottage Grove Community Club.)

The church was subsequently sold to the Accacia Lodge of Masons, a local organization nearly as old as the church itself, who modified the building to suit their needs.

Architecturally, the first Congregational Church was patterned after the meeting houses common to the New England

countryside, the home of most of the congregation. It was constructed of seasoned white pine lumber fastened with wrought iron nails, had clapboard siding and a split oak shingle roof, and measured roughly 34 by 46 feet.

The south face or facade of the former church was and still is quintessentially Greek Revival, with a pedimented gable roof, wide eave moldings, narrow clapboard siding, pilasters with Doric capitals and bases, archivitrave, and elaborate door and window surrounds.

The label "Greek Revival" is somewhat confusing, in that the architectural inspiration for such buildings was the Roman temple; the Grecian tag is probably more reflective of contemporary Americans' sympathy for the rebel side in the Greek war for independence (1821-30) than their interest in classical scholarship. The style originated and grew in popularity in the decades before the Civil War, moving with the settlers from the older states as they spread out over the Midwest.

Old photographs show the church with a steeply tapering steeple rising above an octagonal belfry. We don't know when the steeple was removed, but it must have been around the turn of the century, and the belltower was dismantled in the early 1960's when the building was transformed into a Masonic lodge.

All of the window openings have been partially filled with wood; the original tall, arched Italianate style windows have been replaced with small square windows, but the graceful molded window frames remain intact.

The basement and rear annex were added in 1948; indoor plumbing was installed in 1956. The beautiful double paneled doors were removed a few years ago, and are now in storage awaiting restoration.

(Continued on Page 7)

Accacia Lodge

(Continued from Page 6)

Other alterations include the front steps, which used to approach the doorway from either side, not straight on.

The Historic First Congregational Church/Accacia Lodge was placed on the City Register of Historic Sites and Landmarks in April, 1987.