

200 Lewis Avenue North (HOUSE)
Lewis Avenue North Historic District
City of Watertown
Carver County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-130

HABS
MINN
10-WATO,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

200 LEWIS AVENUE NORTH (HOUSE)

Location: 200 Lewis Avenue North
Watertown, Carver County, Minnesota

Quad: Watertown, Minnesota

Date of Erection: Circa 1860

Architect: Unknown

Significance: 108, 112 and 200 Lewis Avenue North are three residential buildings on a low-lying strip of land between the south branch of the Crow River, to the east and Lewis Avenue, to the west. These structures form the surviving core of the initial settlement of Watertown. They are relatively rare examples of Minnesota's mid-nineteenth century, vernacular, residential architecture. Additionally, local sources indicate that 200 Lewis Avenue North provided a stopping point for stagecoach traffic.

Project Statement: In May 1988, the City of Watertown received a Small Cities Block Grant for Flood Plain Redevelopment. The redevelopment plan called for the removal of twelve properties, including 108, 112 and 200 Lewis Avenue North. Due to long-term damage from flooding and poor maintenance, renovation of the properties was considered unlikely given structural and financial considerations.

HABS documentation was thus initiated by an agreement between the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, the Minnesota Department of Trade, the Carver County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, the City of Watertown, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Historians: Charlene K. Roise and Robert M. Hybben; Hess, Roise and Company, Minneapolis; September 1990.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The City of Watertown is one of the oldest settlements in Minnesota's south-central region. Located on the south branch of the Crow River in northern Carver County, Watertown emerged during the period of intense settlement that followed the Federal government's purchase of central and southern Minnesota from the Dakota Indians in 1851. Although initial settlement in Carver County occurred near its southern border, along the Minnesota River, settlers moved away from the river following opening of the interior by the Preemption Law of 1854.¹ Alexander Moore and David Bickford, two Minneapolis businessmen, first explored the Watertown area in early 1856 and returned home full of praise for its timber supply and fertile soil.² The area, originally dubbed Rapid Water, also received a glowing review in the 26 April 1856 Saint Anthony Express:

Huge trees consisting of almost every species of timber known in the northwest, surrounds the town site. The main south fork of Crow River, passes through the centre of the town. For miles east, west, north and south there is not a foot of land but can be cultivated. This is not all. Except the water power in this city [Saint Anthony], Rapid Water contains the next best in the Territory. Crow River at this point, is about eight rods wide, and sufficient water at all seasons of the year flows down to move all the machinery that can be erected on the width of the river.

Moore and Bickford may have also been attracted to the area by a planned Territorial road between Saint Anthony and the Pacific Ocean, which would pass near the Watertown area.³ According to Minnesota's principal historian of overland travel, Arthur J. Larsen, the road was "dear to American hearts.... There were no [other] roads to the Pacific; there were only routes."⁴ Additionally, the Saint Anthony Express bragged that "all roads" from Minneapolis, Monticello, Saint Cloud, and Sauk Rapids to the Minnesota River would have to pass through the townsite. "With all of these advantages," the

¹ Ted Lofstrom and Lynne Van Brocklin-Spaeth, Carver County: A Guide to its Historic and Prehistoric Places (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1978), 23.

² Isaac I. Lewis Memoirs, Carver County Historical Society, Waconia, Minnesota, 110.

³ Paul S. Maravelas, "Report to the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Carver County on the Historical Significance of Four Properties in Watertown, Minnesota: Block 48, Lot 5; Block 49, Lot 1; Block 49, Lots 2 & 3; Block 58, Lot 1," August 15, 1988, 1.

⁴ Arthur J. Larsen, The Development of the Minnesota Road System (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966), 92.

paper asserted, "no one can for a moment doubt but Rapid Water will be a place."⁵

Convinced of the area's potential, Moore and Bickford drew up shares to the townsite with eight other Minneapolis investors that spring. Two of the shareholders, Caleb and Isaac Lewis, a father-and-son mercantile team, took a strong interest in the town, placing it, as one source has indicated, "under their special charge."⁶ The shareholders appointed Isaac Lewis secretary of the company and sent him to the townsite to erect a small number of cabins. Later that summer, he also supervised construction of a road from Minneapolis to the townsite. A weekly mail route opened over the road in early October.⁷

Within two years, the settlement grew into a small village. Aided by a \$1000 company grant, Isaac Lewis convinced Moore to move his portable saw mill to the area in the fall of 1856, enabling the townsite to have a hotel and several houses before the arrival of winter. The following February, after the Watertown Company agreed to build a bridge over the Crow, Lewis awarded the construction contract to his brother Eli, newly-arrived from Wisconsin. The Lewis family kept up their financial dealings throughout the year, even as the effects of the 1857 depression settled into Minnesota. Isaac later wrote: "Towards Fall, times began to pinch and rather than sell my real estate at reduced figures, I kept on borrowing money and mortgaging property We all thought the hard times only temporary and still refused to sell." Eli, in particular, "branched out extensively," purchasing his brother's store in 1857 and a hotel from Maine-born emigrant Nicolas Rogers in 1858. The Lewis brothers also bought Moore's lumber mill in 1858 and expanded it into a grain mill.⁸ That fall, the Lewis family also secured a title to the Watertown land. According to Isaac Lewis' memoirs, he placed the land in his father's name:

The manner in which we obtained title to the 640 acres was by Pre-emption, and half breed Indian scrip -- Acting for the Company, I bought of H.H. Sibley . . . at Mendota, 320 acres of scrip at \$5 per acre, which I laid out one half of the town site in the name of Caleb Lewis. Father pre-empted [sic] on quarter section and Jabez Tucz, another. We gave Tucz the money to pre-empt with and then paid him \$150 for making

⁵ 26 April 1856.

⁶ "Historical Sketch of the Village of Watertown, " Carver County News, 2 September 1897.

⁷ U.S., Congress, House, Contracts for Carrying Mail, Executive Documents 96, 35th Cong., 1st sess., Serial Set 957, 427; Lewis, 110-111.

⁸ Lewis, 113, 117; Maravelas, 14.

deeds of his land to Caleb Lewis. . . . This threw the title to the whole Town site in Father's name.⁹

Nicolas Rogers purchased lot 5 of block 48 from Caleb Lewis for \$100 on 29 September 1858.¹⁰ Judging from its architectural detailing and general massing, it seems plausible that Rogers ordered the house at 200 Lewis Avenue North built that fall, with lumber from the Lewis mill. Notably, a knowledgeable local history source has indicated that the house served as a stop for local stagecoach traffic.¹¹ After selling his hotel to Eli Lewis, Rogers may have transferred his operations to the new building.

Stage stops formed a vital part of Minnesota's staging industry. As their name indicates, stagecoaches traveled in stages, usually about fifteen miles in length. At the end of each stage, a coach stopped to change horses and, at certain times, allowed the passengers to eat or rest. Although changing horses provided for quick transportation, it also created the need for stage stops along travel routes. Generally, these stops fell into two types: swing stations and home stations. A swing station, whether a small shack erected by the company or a private residence contracted out, provided only a change of horses and was often in a sparsely populated area. Home stations, on the other hand, were usually established at more settled locations and offered a broader range of services. They typically provided food and an overnight resting place for travelers, and often contained a ticket booth and post office. Many hotels in towns operated as home stations, although private residences provided the same service on occasion. Since Watertown was a rapidly growing community, albeit a young one, 200 Lewis Avenue North probably functioned as a home station.¹²

Stagecoaches had already established themselves as Minnesota's primary means of overland transportation when Rogers built 200 Lewis Avenue North. As far back as 1849, a stage vehicle carried passengers between Saint Paul and Prairie de Chien, Wisconsin. After ratification of the Second Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1853, the stages followed settlers into Minnesota's southeast, between the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. Although most early stage lines tended to follow the rivers, for example, connecting Saint Paul and Mankato, 1856 stage lines connected Saint Paul to Dubuque, Iowa, and

⁹ Lewis, 112.

¹⁰ Carver County Deed Records, Book C, 321.

¹¹ Roger A. Stubbs, letter to Paul Maravelas, 11 February 1989.

¹² Robert Hybben and Jeffrey A. Hess, "Multiple Property Documentation Form for the Overland Staging Industry in Minnesota, 1849-1880," prepared for the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, July 1990, 15.

Superior, Wisconsin. In addition, stage lines operated through such inland towns as Rochester and Saint Peter.¹³ As historian Arthur Larsen has succinctly stated, "the landlocked interior had to have a means for the conveyance of travelers, and to fill this need the stagecoach appeared upon the Minnesota scene." By 1858, with the opening of a stage line between Saint Cloud and the Red River Valley, stagecoaches reached into every settled portion of Minnesota.¹⁴

Stagecoaches first appeared in northern Carver County during the last half of the 1850s. One early account states that the first mails to Watertown came via "carriage". That is not surprising. In general, as Larsen has indicated, "the volume of mail was much greater than could be accommodated on the back of a horse."¹⁵ By using coaches and wagons to carry mail, drivers often had enough room to provide passenger service. As a result, much of what is known about early stage routes comes from government mail contracts. In 1858, a mail line between Minneapolis and Hutchinson traveled via Watertown. Notably, Ira Kingsley, Eli Lewis' father-in-law and later the owner of land adjacent to 200 Lewis Avenue North, also bid on this route. In addition, Peter W. Savage operated a mail route from Glencoe to Watertown in 1860. Savage bid on many government mail routes during the late 1850s and early 1860s, and by 1862 operated important lines between Minneapolis and Saint Paul; Saint Anthony and Saint Cloud; and Shakopee and Glencoe.¹⁶

Watertown undoubtedly benefitted from the appearance of the stagecoaches. As one historian of Minnesota's staging industry has noted, stagecoaches played an enormous role in determining a townsite's success or failure:

Not only did the stagecoaches and stage wagons bring thousands of settlers into the territory, but the stages provided a life line connecting the island villages, through which they passed, with the

¹³ Ibid., 7-12.

¹⁴ Larsen, 170; Hybben and Hess, 15.

¹⁵ Early Watertown, "Waconia Advocate", 1 February 1982; Larsen, 169.

¹⁶ Register of Star Route Contracts: 1862-1866," National Archives, Washington, D.C.; U.S., Congress, House, Offers and Contracts: Minnesota: 1860-1862, Executive Document 137, 37th Congr., 2d sess., Serial Set 1164, 48; U.S. Congress, House, Offers and Contracts: Minnesota: 1862-1866, Executive Document 82, 37th Cong., 3d sess., serial Set 1164, 645-47, 656.

outside world. A village that was not located on some line of communication -- a navigable river or a stage route -- could not hope to survive.¹⁷

Stagecoaches remained Minnesota's dominant form of overland transportation until the arrival of the railroads. The first railroad appeared in Carver County in 1871, through Carver and Chaska in the county's southern portion.¹⁸ By 1880, the railroads had largely supplanted the stagecoaches as Minnesota's principal means of overland travel. The surviving stage routes acted as feeder lines, ferrying passengers and goods, to the more important railroad depots. A daily stage, for example, ran between Watertown and Delano, terminus of the Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad, in 1882.¹⁹

When stagecoach service finally ended in Watertown following World War I, 200 Lewis Avenue North apparently reverted to a solely private residence. As Watertown grew, especially during the 1950s, the house became further removed from the town's center of activity. According to one Carver County history, the increased traffic on State Highway 7 to the south diverted the town's commercial and residential center "away from the historic urban center towards the highways."²⁰

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

One of the town's original settlers, Alexander Moore, arrived with a portable saw mill in 1856, and soon began producing lumber for construction. Isaac Ives Lewis, founder of the town, and his brother, Eli, purchased the mill in 1858. It is likely, therefore, that timber for 200 Lewis was produced by the local mill. The building is a simple, gable-roofed box which does not strongly mimic high architectural styles popular in the mid-nineteenth century. It is, rather, a utilitarian house displaying materials and construction techniques standard at the place and time of its construction.

Victorian ornamentation on porch brackets and posts indicates that the porch dates from the last decades of the 1800s. Probably at this same time, the

¹⁷ Stagecoach Business in Pioneer Minnesota, "Gopher Historian 22 (Spring 1968): 1-5

¹⁸ R.I. Holcombe and William H. Bingham, ed., Compendium of Carver and Hennepin Counties Minnesota (Chicago: Henry Taylor & Co., 1915), 228.

¹⁹ Hybben and Hess, 16-17; History of the Minnesota Valley, including the Explorers and Pioneers of Carver County (Waconia, Minnesota: Carver County Historical Society, 1986), 33.

²⁰ Maravelas, 6; Lofstrom and VanBrocklin-Spaeth, 27.

front door was added to the 1½ story section where a central window had been previously located. A room was added to the northwest, just behind the wing, in the first half of the twentieth century. The building has been used as rental housing for a number of years and has not been well maintained. Lack of ventilation in the basement has led to structural deterioration, particularly of the floor systems. As a result, floors feel quite unstable. Unsympathetic modernizations, ranging from acoustical tile ceiling panels to plumbing fixtures, have damaged original building materials.

Exterior

Overall dimensions: 1½ story section, 26 feet 7 inches by 19 feet 3 inches; 1 story wing, 12 feet 5 inches by 11 feet; northeast addition, 12 feet 5 inches by 8 feet 3 inches; porch, 44 feet (north-south) by 24 feet 3 inches (east-west) by 5 feet (depth of porch).

Foundations: Fieldstone; concrete under northeast room addition.

Walls: Clapboard, with plain cornerboards.

Structural system, framing: Balloon frame.

Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: An open porch runs along the west and south walls. For most of its length, the porch is a shallow-sloped roof projecting from the wall of the 1½ story section; at the north end, it is an extension of the wing roof. The underside of the roof is finished with planking. Octagonal columns and ornamental brackets support the outer edge of the roof along the west side; on the south, these have been replaced by square posts. All supports rest on a concrete slab.

Chimneys: A square, brick chimney rises from the middle of the gable of the 1½ story section; a similar chimney is located inside the north wall of the wing. Both have lost bricks and been patched with cement.

Openings:

Doorways and doors: The front (west) porch provides access to two entrances. The southernmost doorway was originally the location of a window, but was probably enlarged into a doorway when the porch was added. It has a low, triangular pediment and frames a four-panel door, the panels proportioned vertically and arranged two over two. The door retains a box lock and porcelain doorknobs. The northernmost door, surrounded by a plain, rectangular frame, is also panelled. A modern door exits from the

northern wall of the room addition. On the east side, doors of a hatch leading to the cellar have been removed.

Windows and shutters: Windows in the original structure are 2-over-2 sash, with simple, rectangular frames; a square-section board projects slightly along the top of the lintel. Aluminum combination screen/storm windows have been added to some openings. Windows in the addition are four-square, fixed frame.

Roof:

Shape, covering: Both sections are gabled and covered with composition shingles.

Cornice, eaves: A plain board follows the line of the gable beneath the slightly projecting eaves. Roof rafters are enclosed, except beneath the north gable end where the covering is no longer in place and flat, irregular roof boards are visible. There are modern gutters and downspouts.

Interior

Floor plans: The first floor of the 1½ story section contains three rooms. The southwest room, entered from the southernmost front door, has a door on the east wall which leads into a room in the building's southeast corner, and a door in the north wall connecting to a room which extends from the building's front to back. The north end of the southeast room is partitioned off for a bathroom and a closet. The latter is under the stairwell entered from the north room. A door on the north wall of the northern room leads to the single, original room in the one-story wing. From this room a door on the west wall exits to the front porch, and a door on the east wall opens into the room added to the building's northeast corner. The second floor is divided into four rooms tucked beneath the gable roof.

Stairways: A steep stairway, enclosed at the bottom, climbs to the second floor from the southeast corner of the northern room in the 1½ story section. It does a tight, 90-degree turn near the top and empties directly into the southeast room of the second floor. A trap door in the floor of the southeastern room provides access to the basement, as does an exterior cellar door on the east wall, the shed covering of which has been removed.

Flooring: Wide plank flooring, much of which has been covered with carpeting.

Wall and ceiling finishes: Walls and ceilings are of smooth plaster on lath, much of which has deteriorated. Many walls are covered by wallpaper or paneling. Exposed lath in the attic was cut by circular saw blades. Most ceilings are covered with acoustical tile or wallpaper.

Openings:

Doorways and doors: An original 2-over-2 panel door still divides the two southernmost rooms on the first floor, but original doors have otherwise been removed throughout the house.

Windows: Windows are 2-over-2 sash. Surrounds are flat, painted boards with a slightly projecting sill.

Decorative features and trim: The two south rooms in the 1½ story section and the attic have wood baseboards topped with rounded molding. The northern room and wing are lined by a low, wooden wainscot. All woodwork has many layers of paint.

Hardware: Most door and window hardware is covered with paint. A box lock with porcelain doorknobs remains on the first floor door described above, but virtually all the rest of the original hardware has been replaced by modern versions.

Mechanical equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: A gravity heating system is powered by a wood/coal-burning stove located in the basement. There is no air conditioning, and no provision for ventilation other than windows and doors.

Lighting: Wiring has been jerry-rigged; light fixtures are modern.

Plumbing: Plumbing appears to be a twentieth-century addition; some fixtures have been removed.

Site

General setting and orientation: The lot slopes in an easterly direction away from Lewis Avenue to the bank of the Crow River. The site is about one block north of the intersection of Lewis Avenue and Territorial Street. Just to the east of this junction Territorial Street bridges the Crow River, the only river crossing in this small town. The downtown commercial district begins at this intersection and extends south along Lewis. The city has a park along the bank of the Crow River north of the Property.

Historic landscape design: Unknown.

Outbuildings: A 1½ story barn with a gable roof is situated north of the house. Gable ends are perpendicular to Lewis Avenue. Two garage doors flank a smaller door on the front (west). The sloping lot permits direct access to the basement on the back (east) side. The building is covered with composition siding; the roof has modern shingles. The barn's twentieth-century construction dates it after the period of significance for 200 Lewis Avenue.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Early Views: Nineteenth-century photograph of Watertown and nineteenth-century photograph of 200 Lewis, both in the possession of Jim Cornell, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Chaska, Minnesota. Carver County Recorder's Office. Carver County Deed Records.

Hybben, Robert, and Hess, Jeffrey A. "Multiple Property Documentation Form for the Overland Staging Industry in Minnesota, 1849-1880." Prepared for the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, July 1990.

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Miller-Dunwiddie-Associates. "Historic Structures Report: Residence at 112 Lewis Avenue North (Lot 1, Box 49), Watertown, Minnesota." Prepared for Dorie Finn, 1640 Shadywood Road, Wayzata, Minnesota, 31 May 1989.

Minnesota Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office. MHS Referral file Number 88-0397. Memorandum from Charles Nelson to Ted Lofstrom, 18 November 1988.

Stubbs, Roger A. to Maravelas, Paul. Letter, 11 February 1989.

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b. Secondary and published sources:

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"Glencoe County." Saint Anthony Express, 26 April 1856.

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- c. Site visits by Charlene K. Roise, historian, Hess, Roise and Company, 22 and 30 August 1990; and by Robert M. Hybben, historian, Hess, Roise and Company, 22 August 1990.

APPENDIX A

Original and Subsequent Owners -- 200 Lewis Avenue North

- 29 September 1858
Quit Claim Deed, Caleb Lewis to N.K. Rogers, Book C, p. 21.
- 3 February 1860
Warranty Deed, N.K. Rogers to John Johnson, Book C, o. 337.
- 21 November 1860
Warranty Deed, John Johnson to Timothy Bluck, Book D, p. 54.
- 9 November 1869
Warranty Deed, Daniel E. Means to David Vollmer, Book 41, p. 454.
- 25 October 1870
Warranty Deed, David Vollmer and wife to Wilhelm Drepler, Book M, p. 128.
- 25 January 1872
Warranty Deed, Wilhelm Drepler and wife to Albert Renewanz, Book M, p. 367.
- 29 July 1872
Warranty Deed, Albert Renewanz and wife to Peter Sochtman, Book O, p. 68.
- 8 October 1883
Warranty Deed, Peter Sathman to S.M. Olson, Book Z, p. 634.
- 18 April 1884
Warranty Deed, S.M. Olson and wife to Charles Wenzel, Book 3, p. 157.
- 10 October 1893
Warranty Deed, Francisco Wenzel and husband to John Steege, Book 9, p. 953.
- 16 September 1947
Decree of Descent, John Steege, deceased, to wife Marie Steege and children Clara Deis, Else Harloff, Agnes Steege, Walter Steege, Viola Wheeler, Book V, p. 188.

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25 March 1948

Marie Steege, Clara Deis, Else Harloff, Walter Steege, and Viola Wheeler
to Agnes Steege, Book 9, p. 567.

3 October 1974

Warranty Deed, Agnes Steege to Robert S. Braun, Book 119, p. 424.

5 September 1979

Robert S. Braun, deceased, to wife Rosie H. Braun, Book 152, p. 527.

17 August 1990

Warranty Deed, Rosie H. Braun to City of Watertown, Document 17156.

[Source: Abstract for 200 Lewis Avenue North, City Hall, Watertown,
Minnesota.]