

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Background

At the request of the Will County Land Use Department, acting as liaison for the Will County Historic Preservation Commission, Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) has prepared this summary report of the intensive survey of farmsteads in Manhattan Township in Will County, Illinois. A previous survey of farmsteads in Will County was performed in 1988. Beginning in 1999, WJE has prepared intensive surveys of individual townships in Will County. Previous townships surveyed included Plainfield, Wheatland, and Lockport (completed November 2000), DuPage (November 2001), Homer (November 2002), New Lenox (August 2003), and Green Garden (July 2004). It is intended that Frankfort Township will be the next township to be surveyed.

The objectives of the study are to provide comprehensive information on all historic rural structures located in the area; to assess the eligibility of rural districts or individual buildings for designation as local landmarks or nomination to the National Register of Historic Places; to inventory the existing structures in the area for future study; to provide background on significant architectural styles and rural structure types common to the area; and to provide background history of the development of the area. The present study has been developed to meet the requirements and standards of the Certified Local Government program.

Survey Methodology

Survey Team

The survey team from WJE consisted of Kenneth Itle, Craig Droba, Renae Brossman, Jean Tamisin, and Deborah Slaton. Mr. Itle served as Project Manager and developed the summary report and performed some field survey work. Mr. Droba, Ms. Brossman, Ms. Tamisin, and Mr. Itle performed field survey work. Ms. Slaton was the reviewer of the summary report.

Background Research

Work on the rural survey began in August 2005. Background research was performed at the State of Illinois Library, Springfield; the University of Illinois Libraries, the Joliet Public Library, and the Manhattan Public Library. In addition, extensive historic research materials compiled for previous Will County rural survey reports were available.

Field Survey

A project initiation meeting was held to discuss the project approach and scope. Field survey work proceeded in August, September, and October 2005. The field survey work began with a reconnaissance survey to identify existing farmstead sites. Following the identification of sites, an intensive survey was performed of each site. The survey team first approached the primary residence on the site to request permission of the homeowner/tenant to conduct the survey on the farmstead site. At sites where no one was home, or where owner permission was not provided, the site was surveyed from the public right-of-way. Typically each structure on the site was photographed individually using a digital camera. A sketch plan of the farmstead was prepared. Written notes for each building included a listing of exterior materials, overall condition, and estimated decade of construction based on structural type and style. Any history information provided by the owner, such as dates of construction or names of original owners, were also noted.

Database and Base Map Preparation

Mapping for the survey was prepared using ArcGIS.¹ Baseline mapping showing roads, railways, streams, township boundaries, etc., as well as 2005 aerial photography of the survey area, was downloaded from the Illinois Natural Resources Geospatial Data Clearinghouse internet site.² Individual points were added to the baseline map at the location of each farmstead site surveyed. Each point represents a particular record in the Microsoft Access database. The database contains all field survey information; historical information specific to each property, such as names of previous owners based on historic atlases and plat maps; and the assessment of historic significance. On the database forms, the “notes” field typically contains other miscellaneous observations of the project team from the field work. Occasionally, this field contains verbal information for the resident or another source; these are so noted.

Prior to inserting the digital photographs into the database, the photograph files were converted from color .jpg files to reduced-size black-and-white .bmp files. The Microsoft Access database was used to generate the property lists included in this summary report, as well as the individual survey forms. The ArcGIS software was used to generate the maps of the survey area included in the appendix.

Presentations

A presentation of the draft survey results was made to the Will County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) on 7 June 2006. The final summary report incorporates comments provided by the HPC members.

Report and Submittals

The summary report was prepared using Microsoft Word. Will County was provided with the following final materials under separate cover: printed copies of the final summary report; printed copies of the individual property survey forms; digital photographs as original color .jpg files; ArcGIS mapping files; Microsoft Access database file; survey sheets as .pdf file; and report text as Microsoft Word file and .pdf file.

Survey Gaps and Future Research

The present study is not meant to be a definitive review of the history of each property surveyed; rather, based on historic research and field survey, the relative significance of each property has been assessed. In the future, as new development or renovation work may affect particular properties, the history and significance of the particular property should be researched in detail, using the present survey as a starting point.

The present study focused on architectural features of the survey region. Other studies could be undertaken to assess the archaeological potential of the survey region; to identify and assess cultural landscape features such as fence rows, hedges, and earthworks; to study historic transportation infrastructure and routes in detail; or to study particular architectural themes, such as limestone masonry construction, in greater detail.

¹ GIS stands for geographic information system, a computerized methodology for organizing data geographically.

² <http://www.isgs.uiuc.edu/nsdihome/>