

August 2003

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of the Will County Land Use Department (Will County), acting as liaison for the Will County Historic Preservation Commission (Historic Preservation Commission), Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) has prepared the following report of the intensive survey of existing farmsteads in unincorporated New Lenox Township in Will County, Illinois. The survey of New Lenox Township was performed between November 2002 and April 2003, and includes 36 square miles with 90 farmsteads and agriculturally related sites containing 471 individual structures. This intensive survey was performed to update the previous survey of the township performed in 1988, which had identified 101 farmsteads and other agriculturally-related sites with approximately 441 individual structures.<sup>1</sup>

Of the 76 farmsteads and agriculturally-related sites identified in the current survey, 6 have buildings that are individually eligible for Will County Historic Landmark designation (locally significant), and 6 have buildings that have potential for Will County Historic Landmark eligibility if certain historic features were restored. In addition, at least 4 sites have buildings with potential for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places properties (nationally and locally significant), and this number could increase if individual buildings are restored at the sites with potential for Will County Historic Landmark designation. Two multiple property sites, the settlements of Marley and Spencer, have potential for multiple property designation as Will County Historic Landmarks. (Marley contains at least 16 individual structures that contribute to its overall significance, and Spencer has 8 individual structures that contribute to its overall significance.) A total of 62 sites have buildings that have sufficient integrity to contribute to a potential Will County or National Register rural heritage historic district; and 19 sites lack sufficient integrity for historical or architectural significance. Approximately half of the remaining farmsteads in the township are actively engaged in some form of agricultural production, and a few are utilized as liveries. However, although many farmsteads in New Lenox Township survive, they are under increasing threat from development.

Northern Will County was settled by pioneer farmers of European origin beginning in the late 1820s. The first farming settlers arrived in the New Lenox Township region between 1829 and 1833. The area had two natural features that made it attractive to early settlers: Hickory Creek, which offered a source of fresh water for farm animals, and the abundant woodlands bordering the creek. Two subsequent historical developments led to an increase in settlement. First, the region became more accessible after the Treaty of Chicago of 1833 expelled the remaining Native Americans to land west of the Mississippi. Second, the Illinois and Michigan Canal, begun in 1836 and completed in 1848, increased transportation and trade in the region. The towns of Spencer and New Lenox were founded in 1856 and 1858, respectively. Farmers in New Lenox Township had access to no less than three separate railroad lines by the late 1800s.

The Rural Structures Survey of unincorporated Will County performed in 1988 identified approximately 21,000 structures, 343 of which were noted to be potentially significant. The 1988 survey documented sites with photographs and survey data on standard Illinois Historic Preservation Agency format cards. WJE has previously performed an intensive survey of Wheatland, Plainfield, Lockport, Du Page, and Homer Townships, with a final reports issued in November 2000, November 2001, and November 2002.<sup>2</sup> These previous surveys covered 180 square miles of land, 330 farmsteads and agriculturally-related sites,

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<sup>1</sup> The reconnaissance survey performed in 1988 likely did not record all of the structures present at that time, due to the cursory nature of the survey method when compared with the present survey. What is more significant in comparing the 1988 survey with the survey described in this report is that the number of sites in New Lenox Township has dropped by approximately 76 percent.

<sup>2</sup> Reports have been distributed to libraries and the respective area governmental offices. Portions of many of the township reports are also accessible via the internet at [www.willcountylanduse.com/hpc](http://www.willcountylanduse.com/hpc). To obtain a copy of the completed reports, please contact the Will County Historic Preservationist at (815) 727-8430.

and 1,434 individual structures. Because of the numerous changes that have occurred in the years since the first rural survey in 1988, the Will County Historic Preservation Commission recognized the need to reassess the agricultural heritage in the region. Northern Will County in particular is one of the fastest developing areas of the state, and for this reason it was selected as the first area in the county to be reassessed.

The Will County Rural Historic Structural Survey described in this report was conducted on an intensive level, reconfirming the data gathered in the 1988 survey, and also including additional information such as sketch site plans and identification of more detailed building features. (The intensive level of the survey was possible because only one township was included in the present survey, as opposed to the entire county for the 1988 survey.) Survey work was conducted on farmstead and agriculturally related sites on unincorporated land, although a limited number of significant sites on incorporated land were included as well. Access to each site was sought from property owners to allow for closer examination of structures documented in the survey. This also allowed for photographs taken at close range to be included in the survey data. Rural structures constructed before the early 1950s were documented, as a minimum age of 50 years is the basic criteria for elements to be considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). Each of the structures was documented on a separate survey form. Database software was used to organize written survey data for each structure and each farmstead site. Mapping software using geographic information system (GIS) technology was used to plot a graphic database showing the location of each farmstead.

Chapters I and II provide the context in which the surveyed farmsteads were established, grew, and in many cases have been divided into separate properties. Chapter I, bound separately as the Context History, covers the geological, historical, and architectural contexts of northern Will County agriculture. Chapter II, bound in this volume, discusses the historical context of New Lenox Township and focuses on a select number of historically and/or architecturally significant farmsteads. Chapter III describes the survey results, and includes a discussion of the National Register and local Will County criteria for determination of historical and architectural significance; a listing of the significant farmsteads in the survey region and potential individual or group designation; tabulation of individual building types; and recommendations for future survey work. Chapter IV contains a description of the survey methodology. A bibliography of research sources and appendices, including historic and current maps of the survey region, are contained at the end of the report.

## FEDERAL ASSISTANCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The activity which is the subject of the "Rural Historic Structural Survey of New Lenox Township, August 2002" had been financed in part with federal funds from the Department of the Interior, administered by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Department of the Interior or the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.



*Illustrated above is the view north from a farmstead on Delaney Road in Section 34 of New Lenox Township.*