



Mark and Dawn McGinley Collection

# Selected Historic Sites In Scandia

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Prepared by  
**BLUESTEM**  
HERITAGE GROUP





The feed mill and service station.

# Table of Contents

<b>Project Background</b> . . . . .	<b>4</b>	<b>Historic Places in Greater Scandia</b> . . . . .	<b>16</b>
<b>Research Process</b> . . . . .	<b>4</b>	11. Swedish Settlers Monument (1900, 1902) . . . . .	16
<b>Selection Criteria</b> . . . . .	<b>5</b>	12. Hay Lake School (1866-1963) . . . . .	17
<b>Broader History</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>	13. Johannes and Lisa Erickson Log House (1868-1904) . . . . .	18
<b>Historic Places in Center of Scandia</b> . . . . .	<b>8</b>	14. Knapp's Cave . . . . .	19
1. Marine Country Church (Gammelkyra) (1856-1860), First Scandia School (1860-1896) . . . . .	8	15. Soo Line Cedar Bend Swing Bridge (1887-present) . . . . .	19
2. Elim Lutheran Church (1854-present) . . . . .	9	16. Log House Landing (Pre-contact period-present) . . . . .	20
3. Präst Hus (Elim Pastor's House) (1868-1885) . . . . .	10	17. Vasa/Copas Burial Mounds . . . . .	21
4. Elim Cemetery (1860-present) . . . . .	11	18. Otis/Copas School House (1874-1945) . . . . .	21
5. Historic Swedish Methodist Church and Cemetery (~1884-1915) . . . . .	11	19. Copas Depot Ghost Town (1904-1963) . . . . .	22
6. Scandia Mercantile (1879-present) . . . . .	12	20. Point Douglas to Superior Military Road (Highway 95) . . . . .	23
7. Scandia Cooperative Creamery (1893-~1960) . . . . .	13	21. O'brien State Park Burial Mound and Woodland Period Village . . . . .	24
8. Shalander Store (1930-1946) . . . . .	14	22. Schwartz/Kuno/Big Lake Marine Store (1902-present) . . . . .	24
9. Water Tower Barn (1895-2014) . . . . .	15	23. Camp Lakamaga (1930-present) . . . . .	25
10. Scandia State Bank (1930-1937) . . . . .	15	<b>Sites Not Included</b> . . . . .	<b>26</b>
		<b>Bibliography</b> . . . . .	<b>27</b>
		<b>End Notes</b> . . . . .	<b>30</b>

# Project Background

Scandia has a deep history, reaching back centuries to its role as a location for Native American villages, burial grounds, and as a trade and transportation corridor. It is also home to the earliest Swedish settlement in Minnesota. Over the years, local residents have preserved and maintained numerous historic resources, and Scandia is home to the popular Gammelgården Museum, which tells the story of local Swedish Lutherans.

History and heritage tourism have been part of the local culture and economy since 1900. Over the years, various efforts have been made to develop thoughtful approaches to preserving and promoting the region's history and historic resources. The St. Croix Scenic Byway and the National Park Service's St. Croix National Scenic Riverway both promote the history and scenery of the broader area.

At the more local scale, in 2008, the Scandia Comprehensive Plan identified the importance of heritage tourism. In 2019, the updated Comprehensive plan listed "maintain and promote the City's cultural character and history" as the first of its four overarching goals. A 2019 "Tourism Development Opportunities" study by the University of Minnesota Extension Tourism Center developed specific recommendations to promote heritage tourism, including the creation of historic tours and trails. That same year, the DNR acquired easements to expand the Gateway Trail from William O'Brien State Park to Scandia.

In 2018, the Scandia Heritage Alliance was formed to help preserve, protect, and educate the public about the heritage, arts, cultural resources, and natural resources in the Scandia area. In 2020, the Alliance was awarded a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage grant to research the history of this area in order to support a future outdoor heritage trail. This research report is a product of that grant.

The goals of this report are to identify local historic sites that would be appropriate for inclusion in a future heritage trails, and to conduct initial research on those sites.

## Research Process

This research project was conducted during the Covid Pandemic, which limited the opportunities for on-site research or community meetings. Fortunately, digitized collections allowed for significant remote research. When historic archives open up again, additional research should be done to confirm or expand these findings.

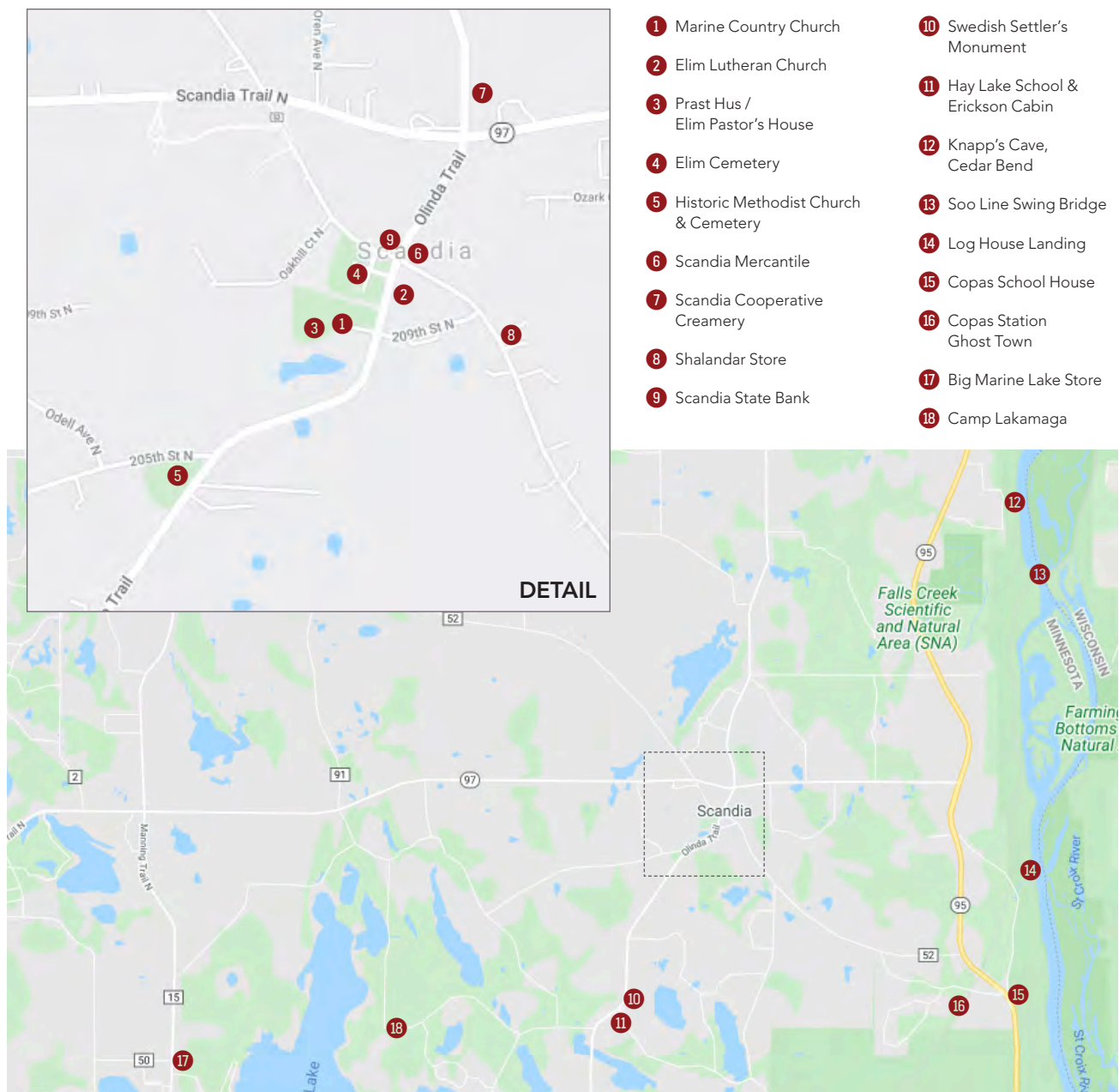
In-person research was conducted at the Washington County Historical Society, the Gammelgården Museum, and the Mark and Dawn McGinley Collection (private). Remote research was conducted through the following sites: the Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Digital Reflections, newspapers.com, the Library of Congress, the John Borchert Library at the University of Minnesota, Gustavus Adolphus College and Lutheran Church Archives, the American Swedish Institute, the National Parks Service, the Washington County Property Records and Tax Department, the National Registry of Historic Places, and ancestry.com. A wide variety of books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles were reviewed. Telephone interviews were conducted with the State Archeology office and local collector and historian Mark McGinley. A request for local stories and photos was made on the Scandia Facebook page.

This history was reviewed by the Heritage Alliance Committee. Thanks to the committee members for their guidance and feedback; Jamie O'Connor, Deborah Smith, Sarah Porubcansky, Lynne Moratzka, Christina Maetsky, Jim Lindberg, and Pam Smith.

# Selection Criteria

The Scandia region has a rich history, dating back thousands of years. In order to best identify which sites to study, the committee identified criteria for inclusion in this effort. The criteria were:

1. **Publicly accessible.** All sites are open to the public.
2. **Physically evident.** All sites included have physically visible characteristics such as structures, ruins, or historic landforms.
3. **Within the 1800 to 1950 era of significance.** The bulk of the sites fall within the 1850-1900 era, but additional interesting sites on the shoulders of that timeframe are included.
4. **Location on existing or future bike, pedestrian, or boating path.** Sites should be adjacent to existing or potential trails.



# Broader History

The first known inhabitants of the area now known as Scandia were Native Americans. For centuries, they lived and travelled along the St. Croix, establishing villages and developing far-flung trading relationships.<sup>1</sup> By the early 1800s, the valley was home to both the Dakota and the Ojibwe. The upper St. Croix River Valley was controlled by the Ojibwe, who were culturally connected to Lake Superior. The lower St. Croix was controlled by the Dakota, who hunted bison on both side of the river. Glimpses of the natural beauty and rich biodiversity of the valley can be observed at William O'Brien State Park, Crystal Springs Scientific and Natural Area, and Falls Creek Scientific and Natural Area.

During the fur trade era, the area became a contested zone between the two groups and conflicts were frequent. When a trading post and a mission were established near Pine City in the upper St. Croix River Valley, the Ojibwe were drawn farther east, but the Dakota pushed them back. In the 1825 Prairie du Chien Treaty, a boundary line was established between the Ojibwe and Dakota. This line passes through what is now the upper edge of Scandia. In 1837, the U.S. government negotiated a treaty with the Dakota and the Ojibwe that ceded the land between the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers to the United States. U.S. Indian agents bungled the payments to the Ojibwe, and then forced many of them to the area near Mille Lacs. Despite this, Ojibwe remained in the Valley through the 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, settlers began to arrive and stake claims on the unsurveyed land on the western side of the St. Croix River. Marine Mills (now Marine on St. Croix) was founded in 1838, and Stillwater was settled in 1842. By 1839, the Marine Lumber Company was in operation, and the timber industry was stretching north up the St. Croix River Valley. The arrival of thousands of settlers quickly depleted the local game within the valley. The Dakota adjusted their hunting practices and shifted west. The treaty of 1851 pushed the Dakota further west, ultimately to a small tract along the Minnesota River. Even after this, Dakota would come into the valley for hunting in January and February.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1840s, settlers began to spread out from Stillwater, Marine, and Taylors Falls. The area became home to several small communities. Most of these early settlers were initially from the East Coast, and then from Europe. These settlers were often farmers. The lumber industry provided additional income for some migrants, who could sign on with winter logging crews after the harvest.<sup>4</sup> Logging remained a central industry until the 1910s.

By 1847, Benjamin Otis and his wife Anna Little Wolf were living in the area near the Log House Landing, along with John Columbus.<sup>5</sup> Soon after, Anna died and Benjamin moved on. The landing was a convenient place for settlers to access the area, and a small settlement developed there. In 1854, John Columbus and John Copas established a small log cabin store.<sup>6</sup> In 1856, the town of Otisville was platted here, and a second store, school, hotel, post office, saloon and steam mill were soon established.<sup>7</sup> The panic of 1857 squelched the town's growth. A general store, first owned by Charles Ekdahl, remained for decades. By the 1930s, signs of Otisville were long gone.

In 1849, Benjamin Otis and his second wife Mrs. Jane Ann Church were living in a different home a bit to the south, and using their house as a travelers' hotel.<sup>8</sup> In 1856, Benjamin and Jane Otis and John Columbus platted out the town of Vasa at this location.<sup>9</sup> The small community included a sawmill, store, post office, two hotels, and a saloon. Unfortunately, the small community was also unable to survive the Panic of 1857. Most of the stores closed and were carted away. In 1859, the town was renamed Otis. For decades, there was little new in the community. The arrival of a railroad and depot in 1886 seemed to finally bring security. In 1904, the town was renamed to Copas.<sup>10</sup> The town grew with the addition of a lumber company, potato warehouse, and grain elevator. The town faltered after the lumber mill closed and was mostly gone by the 1930s.<sup>11</sup>

Other small communities lying within Scandia have included Goose Lake, Hay Lake, Bone (or Bonny) Lake, Fish Lake, Big Marine Lake, Sand Lake, Long Lake, Horseshoe Lake, Moody Lake, and Keewahtin Lake.

Most successful of all the communities was the hamlet of Scandia. In 1850, the first three Swedish settlers arrived at what became (central) Scandia. Carl Fernstrom, Oscar Roos, and August Sandahl came ashore at what is now the Log House Landing. They climbed up the banks and travelled east to the edge of Hay Lake, where the Swedish trio built a house and began farming. Though they stayed just a year, their efforts marked the beginning of a Swedish immigrant wave.<sup>12</sup>

In May 1854, local Swedish immigrants gathered at the home of Daniel Nilson to organize a Lutheran congregation. Services were held in the home until the first Elim Church was built in 1856.<sup>13</sup> A small village center soon grew up around the church. In 1879, Frank Lake established a store, initially known as the Farmers' Store, and later as the Scandia Mercantile Company. A bank, post office, butcher shop, barbershop, blacksmith, school, feed mill and store, telephone cooperative, and dairy cooperative were all established. Despite the lack of a railroad line, the community continued to thrive.<sup>14</sup> In 1893, New Scandia Township was formed.

By the 1950s, the area around Scandia began to change. Suburban expansion, highway development, farm mechanization, and other economic changes shifted the character of the community.<sup>15</sup> As farmers retired and farms consolidated or disappeared, Scandia became a bedroom community. The religious and ethnic homogeneity began to dissipate.

Today, Scandia remains proud of its heritage of community activism. In 2007, the City of Scandia was incorporated. The Scandia Heritage Alliance was formed in 2016 to promote Scandia's history and heritage and draw visitors. The group hopes to connect the popular Gateway bicycle and hiking trail to the city's historic areas.



The 1901 plat map shows what buildings and businesses were in Scandia at that time.

# Historic Places in Center of Scandia

## 1. Marine Country Church (Gammelkyra) (1856-1860), First Scandia School (1860-1896)

Gammelgården Museum, 20880 Olinda Trail, Scandia

Scandia's Elim Lutheran Church has its roots in this modest log structure. The congregation was first formed in May 1854, when local immigrants gathered in the home of Daniel and Margareta Nilson to formally organize a church with the guidance of Rev. Erland Carlsson from Chicago. Over the next two years, the group worshipped in the Nilson home and were visited by three different pastors.<sup>16</sup>

In 1856, the congregation worked together to build this 20-by-30-foot structure. The church was erected on land donated by Johannes Abrahamson, on the west side of Sand Lake, and constructed from nearby trees. The congregation called it the "Marine Church" until a sister Lutheran Church in Marine Mills was established in 1872. At that point, the congregation changed this Scandia church's name to the "The Marine Country Church." In 1894, the church was renamed "Swedish Evangelical Elim Lutheran Church." Today, the church is known as Elim Lutheran Church.

The rapidly growing congregation soon outgrew this 1856 church building. In 1860, it was donated to the school district, and a new church building constructed. From 1860 to 1866, students attended the school in its Sand Lake location. In 1866, the building was disassembled and relocated to near Hay Lake. It continued being used as a schoolhouse until 1896.

After that, the structure was moved to a nearby farm and used for hay storage. It was moved to the Gammelgården site in the 1970s and carefully restored in 1996.<sup>17</sup> The building is the oldest Lutheran church building in the state of Minnesota.



*Scandia's first official church building was transferred to Gammelgården and restored. It is presently open to tours.*

## 2. Elim Lutheran Church (1854-present)

20971 Olinda Trail, Scandia

The Elim Congregation dates to 1854, when local Swedish immigrants first gathered to worship in the home of Daniel and Margareta Nilson near Hay Lake. In 1856, the congregation erected its first building, a 20-by-30-foot log structure near Sand Lake. (This structure is now located at Gammelgården.) Over the years, four more versions of the church were erected. In 1861, a second, 50-by-36-foot log church was built where the Elim Cemetery now sits. The third, more solid, church went up in 1874 at the present church location, but was destroyed by a tornado on September 9, 1884. A fourth church, brick veneered and with an organ, burned to the ground after being struck by lightning in May 1907. The next church, a brick and masonry structure with turrets and arched fenestrations was destroyed by fire in 1930.

In 1930, the church was rebuilt again. This newest church includes items salvaged from the previous church, including pews, the altar, the pulpit, and the statue of Christ. A Parish Hall was also constructed in 1930. An addition was built in 1965, which included classrooms, kitchen, and fellowship hall. Another 1999 addition added a new fellowship hall, classrooms, and preschool space.<sup>18</sup>



*Elim Lutheran Church has weathered numerous disasters. The present building dates to 1930 and is the sixth church building.*

### 3. Präst Hus (Elim Pastor's House) (1868-1885)

Gammelgården Museum, 20880 Olinda Trail, Scandia

The Elim congregation built this first parsonage in 1868 on 40 acres of land beside the Church (now the present location of Elim Cemetery). Pastor L. O. Lindh was the first to live in the house. His salary was \$400 per year and included use of the farm. He remained until 1879 when Pastor Eric Hedin (also written as Hedeem) took over the congregation.<sup>19</sup> Pastor Hedin suffered two tragedies while living in the house: in 1884, his young son died, and in 1885, his wife Clara died.<sup>20</sup> Hedin blamed their illnesses on the location of the house which was below the cemetery. He urged the congregation to build a new parsonage east of the third church, which they did in 1883 at a cost of \$3,000.<sup>21</sup>

The first parsonage was sold in 1885 to Peter Mangus Nelson and his wife Lovisa Marie Petersdotter Nelson.<sup>22</sup> There they raised their children, Josephine, Axel, and Annie. Annie lived in the house until 1970, when at age 88 she sold the property back to the Elim congregation for \$7,500. For many years the Präst Hus was referred to as "Annie Johnson's house."

The Präst Hus is the oldest existing Lutheran parsonage in Minnesota. The house originally had a barn behind it, a woodshed-workshop, a corncrib, and a windmill. The building is now owned by the Elim Lutheran Church and operated as a museum site at the Gammelgården.



*The Präst Hus was originally built in 1868 to house the Elim church's pastor and his family. In 1885, it was sold to the Nelson family, who lived here for decades. In 1970, it was returned to the Church, which now maintains it as a museum.*

## 4. Elim Cemetery (1860-present)

SW Corner of Olinda Trail and Oakhill Road

Prior to the acquisition of this parcel of land in 1860, at least three cemeteries were used by the Elim congregation. One was on the west side of Sand Lake not far from the first church building.<sup>23</sup> The congregation currently manages two separate cemeteries. This northern, larger one has been in use since the early 1860s, and was the site of the second Elim church.



*The Elim Cemetery was established in 1860.*

## 5. Historic Swedish Methodist Church and Cemetery (~1884-1915)

Olinda Trail and 205th Street North

The historic Swedish Methodist Cemetery, approximately a half a mile south of Scandia, is the last physical evidence of a historic Swedish Methodist congregation. This congregation initially built their church on the east end of Long Lake, then a second one between Hay Lake and Sand Lake. In the early 1890s, they built a third new church at this location, and established a cemetery. The church was active until 1915. In 1917, the property was sold to Elim Lutheran Church, and the church building was demolished in 1920. Today, the cemetery is managed and used by the Elim Lutheran Church.<sup>24</sup>

## 6. Scandia Store (1879-present)

14758 Oakhill Road, Scandia

The Scandia Store has been an essential fixture in the community for nearly 140 years. In 1879, Frank Lake, a travelling peddler, established a store in Scandia, initially “a little more than a shack.”<sup>25</sup> In 1883, tax records show that partners John J. Slattengren and Frank Lake built a two-story general store at the corner of Olinda Trail and Oakhill Road.<sup>26</sup> First called the Farmers’ Store, its name changed to Scandia Mercantile Company in 1910. Over the years, Lake built several additions and outbuildings. The store complex eventually included sheds, storage areas, a barn, and a Water Tower Barn.<sup>27</sup>

The mercantile carried a vast variety of goods. Groceries, meats, produce, dry goods (clothing as well as yard goods), dishes, novelties, candy, tobacco, religious items, hardware, plumbing equipment, paints, veterinary supplies, guns, and sporting goods were available for purchase. Farm machinery and home appliances were available by special order. In the early days of the store, one could even purchase a coffin for as little as thirty dollars. For many years the local post office was located within the store building.<sup>28</sup>

In 1930, a reorganization took place and the store became a corporation with shares selling for \$100 to community members. In 1963 the Engquist family purchased the stock and fixtures. The Scandia Store has had numerous renovations and various owners since then.<sup>29</sup>



The Scandia Mercantile dates to 1879.

## 7. Scandia Cooperative Creamery (1893-~1960)

21279 Olinda Trail North, Scandia

The Scandia Cooperative Creamery was established in 1893, and opened its first creamery building here in 1894 on land donated by P. G. Hawkinson and John Bengston. Frank Lake, owner of the local mercantile, worked with Frank Morrison to organize sixty local farmers to establish the creamery. The two men visited creameries in Albert Lea to research cooperative dairies. The creamery began operating on June 12, 1894.<sup>30</sup>

The cooperative was a success, and relied on the shared efforts of the members. The farmer-members took turns collecting milk from the local farms and transporting it to the creamery. In 1901, they established a skimming station at Big Lake.<sup>31</sup> The cooperative built a new creamery building in 1913 on its existing location, which still stands.<sup>32</sup>

By the 1950s, agricultural changes, food safety regulations and economic pressures were forcing dairy farmers to consolidate, expand, or close. The creamery remained open until 1960, and closed soon after.<sup>33</sup>



The Scandia Creamery was established in 1893, and a creamery building was built in 1894, the year this photo was taken. A second building was erected in 1913 and still stands.

## 8. Shalander Store (1930-1946)

14808 Oakhill Road, Scandia

This property was formally the site of the John Rydquist-Larson store, which operated from 1890 to around 1911. At that time, the store was purchased by C.A. Benson, who added a butchery line of fresh and salted meats to the offerings.<sup>34</sup>

In 1930, Hjalmer and Myrtle Shalander purchased the property and store. Unfortunately, the building burned down that year. The Shalanders then purchased and moved the old hardware store from nearby Copas onto the site, and transformed it into a dry goods store. The Copas hardware store had been built around 1904 by the Copas Lumber Company.<sup>35</sup>

As soon as Prohibition ended in 1933, it appears the Shalanders divided the business into two: groceries on one side and a beer tavern on the other.<sup>36</sup> In 1933 or 1934, gangster John Dillinger and two companions came into the bar for beers.<sup>37</sup> Dillinger and his fellow criminals were known to live in a cabin on the south shore of East Bay on nearby Big Marine Lake.<sup>38</sup>

In 1946, the Shalanders sold the business. Since 1957, the building has served as a restaurant and bar under the name of Meister's.



Meister's Bar and Grill is housed in a building that was moved in 1930 from in nearby Copas.

## 9. Water Tower Barn (1895-2014)

[Future location: City Hall Park]

In 1895, Frank Lake constructed the Water Tower Barn. It housed an elevated water tank and supported a windmill. Animals were housed under the tower. Analysis of the construction materials and methods suggest that a smaller, timber-framed barn was first moved to the site, and new, consistently dimensioned framing was added to enlarge the building. It is believed that the building also served as a livery for horses.<sup>39</sup>

In 1969, the Hill Top Water Company formed and purchased the property and building from the Scandia mercantile. The Water Company dug a new well in 1972. In 2014, the Water Company dismantled and removed the building. The disassembled building is now owned by Paul and Susan Rodsjo.

## 10. Scandia State Bank (1930-1937)

21060 Olinda Trail

Banking in Scandia has a complex history. In 1907, the *State Bank of New Scandia* was established. The bank's officers included James Mellin, Frank Lake, and Hjalmer Johnson. A newspaper announcement mentioned that a new building was equipped with a burglar-proof vault.<sup>40</sup>

In 1919, a second bank was opened – this one named the *Farmer's State Bank of Scandia*. Peter Ekdahl and H.W. Swanson were officers of this second bank.

In 1929, under pressure from the State bank commissioner, the two banks merged, and the new entity was named the *Scandia State Bank*.<sup>41</sup> The following year, a new building was built at 21060 Olinda Trail. Unfortunately, the bank did not survive the Great Depression. The bank was closed in 1933 and its assets liquidated in 1936.<sup>42</sup> It has been expanded and housed a variety of businesses since then.<sup>43</sup>



Nancy O'Brien Wagner

The Scandia State Bank building still has its historic character.

# Historic Places in Greater Scandia

## 11. Swedish Settlers Monument (1900, 1902)

NE Intersection of Olinda Trail and Old Marine Trail North

This monument, first erected in 1900, marks the site of the first Swedish settlement in the State of Minnesota. On Oct. 18, 1850, three Swedes – Oscar Roos, Carl Fernstrom, and August Sandahl – arrived at this place. Together they built a log cabin, staked out 40 acres of land, and spent the winter hunting, fishing, and trapping. The following spring, additional Swedish immigrants arrived, including Magnus England and Daniel Nilson, both married, whose families followed them that fall. Nilson purchased the log cabin from the original settlers who soon departed the area.

The first monument was a temporary structure of wood covered with cheesecloth and wallpaper erected for the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first Swedes in Minnesota, which took place on October 18, 1900. A cornerstone was laid at this time by Rev. M. Wahlstrom of St. Paul. The monument was erected on the farm of Christian Wiberg. The permanent monument was unveiled at a dedication ceremony in 1902 by Rev. E. Norelius, president of the Augustana Synod. Made of Minnesota granite, the monument was built by P.N. Peterson Monument Works of St. Paul at a cost of \$500. Minnesota Governor S. R. Van Sant was one of the speakers, saying, "This monument which has been raised to the memory of the Swedish pioneers may crumble and pass away, but the deeds of the Swedish people will live in the pages of Minnesota's history."



In 1902, a granite obelisk was erected to mark the location of the first Swedish settlement in Minnesota.

## 12. Hay Lake School (1866-1963)

14020 195th St N, Scandia

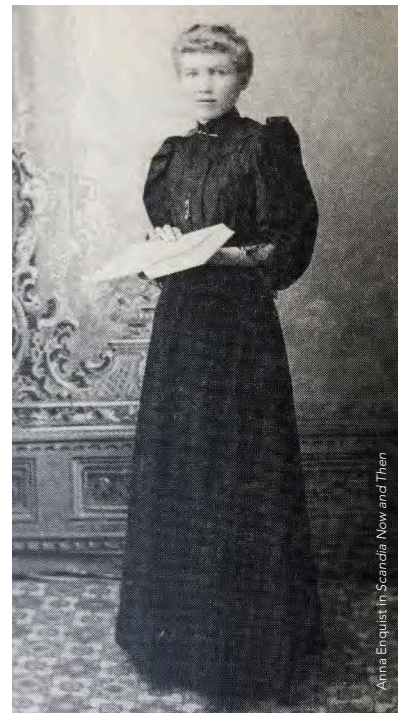
Rural School District #2 was organized in Washington County in 1855.<sup>44</sup> School was held for many years in private homes. In 1860, the school district purchased a small log building from the Lutheran Church (the first church building). The building served as a school house in its original location until 1866, when the log structure was dismantled and moved to this location near Hay Lake.

In 1896, a new brick schoolhouse was constructed here to replace the earlier log school. (The old log building has been re-located to the Gammelgarden complex.) Miss Routina Leander was the last teacher in the log schoolhouse and the first in the brick one. The 1896 brick building was used by the Washington County Rural School system until 1963.

Like many rural schoolhouses, Hay Lake School was a community center. In addition to serving as a school, the building was the setting for PTA meetings and social events. From 1963 to 1970, the school sat empty and boarded up. In 1970, local citizens, including many alumni of Hay Lake School, cleaned up the building and started giving tours. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 1, 1970. In 1974, the Washington County Historical Society began offering formal tours, and in 1978, the Society purchased the building from the Forest Lake School District.<sup>45</sup>



The Hay Lake school as it appeared in 1898! This school building served students from 1896 to 1963. Today it is owned and operated by the Washington County Historical Society.



Routina Leander was the teacher at Hay Lake from 1894-1897.<sup>46</sup>

## 13. Johannes and Lisa Erickson Log House (1868-1904)

14020 195th Street, Scandia

Johannes Erickson and Lisa Svensdotter and their children emigrated to the United States in 1866. When the family arrived in Minnesota, they purchased land from Daniel Nilson, on which they built a temporary shed to house their family. In 1868, Johannes and his thirteen-year-old son Alfred, with help from some of the neighbors, constructed this more permanent log house. The house is a gambrel-roofed log cabin, a rare surviving example of a style brought to Minnesota by Swedish immigrants from Dalsland and Småland. The home's interior had Swedish newspapers as wallpaper and there was an open staircase leading to the loft sleeping area.

The Ericksons had two more children while living in the house. In 1873, their daughter Hulda was playing barefoot in a cornfield and stepped on some sharp corn stubble. Her foot became infected and she died a few days later. Johannes never took to life in Minnesota and returned to Sweden in April 1889. He died two days after arriving home. His wife continued to live in the log house for another seven years until her death in 1896.

In 1904, their son Alfred built a new home and the original log home became at times a granary, garage, and playhouse. In 1974, then-owner Vernon Jellum sold the log house to the Washington County Historical Society. In 1975, the log house was moved 1.5 miles to its present location beside the Hay Lake School.<sup>47</sup> It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 17, 1976.



*The Erickson Log House was built in 1868.*

## 14. Knapp's Cave

Near Cedar Bend on the St. Croix River

Knapp's Cave is the largest natural cave in the St. Croix River Valley and has a long history. Archaeological evidence from the Woodland period shows that it was used by Native Americans. It was named after Captain Oscar Knapp, a steamboat captain who lived in nearby Osceola, Wisconsin. The cave was rumored to be used by thieves to hide their ill-gotten goods in the 1850s.<sup>48</sup>

## 15. Soo Line Cedar Bend Swing Bridge (1887-present)

South of Cedar Bend on the St. Croix River

In 1887, the Minneapolis, Saulte Ste. Marie and Atlantic Railway expanded a railroad from Stillwater toward Osceola, Wisconsin. The railroad crossed the river near Cedar Bend, where a swing span was constructed to allow for river traffic. The bridge has been altered, and the swing span has been fixed in place. It now owned by the Canadian National Railway.<sup>49</sup>



*The arrival of the railroad brought commerce and success to places like Marine Mills and Copas, while its absence caused Scandia and Otisville to falter.*

## 16. Log House Landing (Pre-contact period-present)

### Historic Otisville

What is now known as Log House Landing was used by Native Americans who travelled along the St. Croix River. When settlers began to arrive in the 1850s, they also used the landing. Large steamers would dock there.<sup>50</sup> During the 1850s, the town of Otisville was platted up on the higher area. The small community was established, but the panic of 1857 stopped its growth. A small collection of businesses and homes remained, and it remained a popular stop for boats and steamboats.

During the late 1880s, Charles Ekdahl opened a general store. For a while, there was also a grain elevator and potato warehouse. At the Log House landing, Henry Otis often welcomed visitors to his house. In the late 1880s, Otis sold his log house and moved to live on a cabin on an island in the river.<sup>51</sup>

The landing was frequently used by local residents. One resident, Ed Summersby, recalls family summers spent in the 1930s in a vacation house built in 1912 by George Edmund Ingersoll:

“In those days there was no boat launching ramp, just some wooden steps leading partway down the bank toward the shore from the sandy parking area that was large enough for a few cars, and provided, as I recall, a stone fireplace grill and a double outhouse, also constructed of stone. . . . In my youth, along the shore of the Landing were groups of wooden boats, some with outboard motors, some not, that belonged to assorted local Scandia residents, mostly farmers and fishermen and others without riverfront property, who trusted implicitly that their boats were perfectly safe left unattended for long intervals, simply pulled up on shore and tied to a tree. In fact, in those days no one even thought of locking their boats; you just assumed they would stay where you left them.”<sup>52</sup>

In 1935, the Ingersoll family donated the landing and a strip of adjacent land to Scandia for use as a public park. During the 1930s, the WPA built a stone fireplace on the bank of the St. Croix River, which still stands.<sup>53</sup> Sometime in the early 1940s, a boat-launch ramp was constructed at the landing, gouged steeply out of the riverbank.<sup>54</sup> The St. Croix was designated a Wild and Scenic River in 1968. The addition of the ramp and rising interest in the river led to increased traffic at the landing and, eventually, erosion.<sup>55</sup>

In the 2010s, local residents grew increasingly concerned about the state of the landing. The erosion and maintenance issues were significant, but the proposals for paving the landing were expensive. Local residents were also concerned about any improvements increasing traffic beyond the capacity of the space. In 2017, the city council voted to leave the landing road untouched.<sup>56</sup>



*The original 1930s fireplace is still standing, though in need of repair*

## 17. Vasa/Copas Burial Mounds

Historic Vasa/Copas

Previous to settlement, there were as many as 27 burial mounds in the area. Most of them have been destroyed.<sup>57</sup> Near the historic Copas School House, a burial mound holds the remains of Native Americans. Early settlers Caroline Reid and Hiram Otis (d. 1854) were also buried there.<sup>58</sup> Recent archaeological digs have uncovered evidence of Native Americans from the Archaic, Late Woodland and Late Pre-Contact periods.<sup>59</sup>

## 18. Otis/Copas School House (1874-1945)

19707 St. Croix Trail North, Historic Vasa/Copas

The Otis School was founded in 1874. Its first teacher was Andrew Holm and there were 25 pupils. The building had one large room for classes with a cloakroom in the front into which hung a rope attached to the bell in the bell tower. Inside the classroom was a large iron stove. Outside were a woodshed, a water pump, two toilets, and some swings and seesaws for recess. Children walked or biked to school and brought their lunches from home. In addition to textbooks provided by the school district, the Washington County Library in Stillwater often provided books on loan.<sup>60</sup> The Otis area became known as Copas in 1904, and the school became known as the Copas School.<sup>61</sup>



Mark and Dawn McGinley Collection

Students attended the Copas School from 1874 to 1945. Today, is it home to a gift shop.

Miss Ila Rose Jarchow taught at Copas School from 1940 to 1942. Her initial salary was \$50 per month; this was increased to \$60 the following year with the addition of janitorial duties. A verse by Miss Jarchow entitled "Oh for the Life of a Pioneer!" appeared in the *St. Paul Dispatch* in 1944. It begins:

"A Country schoolm'am on winter's day,  
Made the fire and read a play;  
Washed the boards, devised a trick  
To teach eight grades arithmetic."

In the school's final year — 1944-1945 — there were only eight pupils. The following year the district began to transport children by cars to the Goose Lake School. The school house sat idle until it was purchased for use as an antique shop. It housed a music studio until the current owners Nick Mundt and Mallory Kunz purchased it to open Bluebell Mercantile in 2017.<sup>62</sup>

## 19. Copas Depot Ghost Town (1904-1963)

### Historic Vasa/Copas

In 1886, the Soo Line built a depot just west of what had been known as Vasa.<sup>63</sup> The depot attracted development, and in 1904, Frank Lake and John A. "Olly" Hawkinson established a new town called Copas alongside the depot.<sup>64</sup> Lake and Hawkinson initially built a lumberyard, feed and planing mill and grain elevator. Eventually, there was a wide variety of businesses, including the J. R. Beggs Company Warehouse, the Martin S. Nelson Harness Shop, stockyards and holding corrals, a telegraph office, a post office, shoe repair, Robert A. Swenson threshers, Elmer J. Lindgren grain and seeds, and the Benson & Elmquist Store.<sup>65</sup>

By 1920, the population of Copas was estimated to be seventy-five.<sup>66</sup> Copas was an active railroad station through the 1930s. Once passenger service was cancelled, the town died. In 1963, the Copas Depot was removed.



A small commercial strip developed alongside the Copas Depot. Note the railroad tracks on the left side of the photo.

## 20. Point Douglas to Superior Military Road (Highway 95)

Mostly follows Highway 95, Quinnell Ave was a segment<sup>67</sup>

Previous to settlement, the Native Americans developed trail systems between major points. Along the west side of the St. Croix, a trail existed. When the first settlers arrived, they used and expanded the road.

The road was first surveyed in 1851. Construction began in 1853, and continued under federal funding through to 1858.

Although intended as a highway for troop movement, the route from Hastings, Minnesota to Superior, Wisconsin, was one of the first roads in Minnesota Territory and attracted a flood of civilian and commercial traffic. Many of these travelers came by stagecoach, an early form of transportation. Stage coaches ran regularly until 1870.

The quality of the road was poor, the road meandered to avoid large trees and swampy areas, and crossed over streams on narrow bridges. In the summer, the roads were dusty and bumpy. Stagecoach fares ranged from three to fifteen cents per mile and the coaches traveled between four and twelve miles per hour. Until 1934, when it received its first coat of blacktop, the road was entirely dirt or gravel.<sup>68</sup>



*The Point Douglas to Superior Road was rough – but it served as a critical route for development in the Valley.*

## 21. O'Brien State Park Burial Mound and Woodland Period Village

A burial mound remains in of William O'Brien State Park. In 1885 it measured 40 feet wide by 80 feet long by three feet high; it is much smaller today due to repeated plowing and cultivation over the years.<sup>69</sup> Within the Park, archaeologists have discovered evidence of a Woodland period village, too.<sup>70</sup>

## 22. Schwartz/Kuno/Big Lake Store (1902-present)

19261 Manning Trail North, Scandia

In 1902, George and Ella Kuno sold two acres to Gustav Ekblad who leased the land to German-born Oscar Schwartz who built and operated a general store on the property. Unfortunately, Schwartz purportedly didn't get along well with his Swedish-American neighbors. He soon went bankrupt and the store stood vacant for a few years.

In 1909, the Kunos purchased the store and lot back from Gustaf Ekblad and rejoined it with their farmlands. Initially, George had intended to use the lumber from the store to build his family a farmhouse but he changed his mind. Instead, he borrowed \$500 from his cousin and reopened the store.

George and Ella Kuno lived upstairs from the store. George continued to work the farm while Ella managed the store. George was very personable and was known as an excellent salesman. His son Donald recalled a time when a customer needed a cook stove so George sold Ella's stove from their own home.

The Kunos sold dry goods and clothing as well as groceries. They purchased eggs and fresh vegetables from local farmers, and steer and pig hides during butchering season, which George salted and resold to leather buyers. The skimming station closed around 1920 when farmers started buying their own hand-operated cream separators. Farmers then brought their cream to the store and George hauled it to the Scandia Creamery. In the 1920s, George converted a shack in the back of the store to an ice house that stored ice harvested from Big Marine Lake in the winter.

In 1946 George and Ella sold the store to Ray Kuno, the son of his cousin. Ray and Myrna Kuno operated the store until 1972. Since then, the store has had a series of owners, and has remained a popular and successful business. The store was featured in a scene from 1994's "Grumpier Old Men." The store currently operates as the Big Marine Lake Store and is owned by Vicki Croce, David Herbert, and Pat Reichers.



*In 1920, the Kuno family lived in the second floor of the store.*

## 23. Camp Lakamaga (1930-present)

12303 Lakamaga Trail North, Scandia

In 1926, local Boy Scouts started camping at the location of the old Rask Farm on the south side of Big Marine Lake. In 1930, the Girl Scouts purchased the land and began to develop the site. Early buildings included a Dining Hall and the Edgewood Infirmary.<sup>71</sup> For the first decade, the campers slept in tents. In the 1940s, platform tent sites were erected, greatly improving the experience.<sup>72</sup> The camp remains an active Girl Scout camp.



*In the 1930s, the Girl Scouts developed a campsite on the shores of Big Marine Lake.*

# Sites Not Included

Within Scandia are numerous sites that are historic, but do not meet the criteria for inclusion in this effort. The Scandia Heritage Alliance may wish to research these at a future time:

- Jim Lindberg's Settler's Cabin on Parish
- Frank Lake House (now Greg Benson's family), 21120 Olinda Trail
- Crabtree's Garden Gate, 19713 Quinnell Ave N (Pioneer Era? See Enquist. Tax records say built 1960)
- Landmark Surveying Office, 21070 Olinda Trail (built 1948)
- Scandia Family Dental and Auto, 21080 Olinda Trail
- Edward Jones Office, 21084 Olinda Trail
- Crimson Aesthetics Office, 21090 Olinda Trail (Historic Phone Company building? remodeled 2010)
- Scandia Auto
- Real Estate Office, 21098 Olinda Trail
- Susan Dicken's Property, 14760 Oakhill Road
- John Westfall Property, Oakhill Road
- Scandia Veteran's Memorial (2018)
- Unmarked Sand Lake Cemetery - associated with the first location of the Elim church.<sup>73</sup>
- Unmarked Methodist Cemetery - associated with the second location of the Methodist church, on the highest knoll in the pasture between Hay Lake and Sand Lake.<sup>74</sup>
- "Better Place Forest"
- Otis-Peterson-Ames House, 19580 St. Croix Trail No. (1850s-present), Stagecoach Inn, Historic Vasa/Copas<sup>75</sup>
- John Copas House (1857-1894), Historic Vasa/Copas, National Register, #80002176<sup>76</sup>
- Dakota Village at Big Lake<sup>77</sup>
- Erickson Garage
- Scandia Feed Mill
- John Mattson/George Berglund Store
- Olsen's Blacksmith/First Town Hall/2nd Fire Hall
- Frank Lake's First House across the street
- Vasa Store, Whore House, Saloon, Cornell Craft Boatworks, Restaurant
- Ekdahl Store, Otisville

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By Nancy O'Brien Wagner and Elizabeth Lorenz-Meyer

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- First published in 1974, this book is now in its [5th] printing. Author and Scandia native Anna Engquist (who passed away in 1989) was known as the official town historian. She served as president of the Washington County Historical Society and was instrumental in the Historical Society's Hay Lake School and Johannes Erickson Log House Museums. This book grew out of a tourist brochure of area historical sites prepared by the Scandia Civic Club. The book covers the history of Scandia from when it was inhabited by Native Americans, through early white settlement, and the establishment of cultural institutions. For the 2007 edition, an index was added as well as a few pages to bring the book up to date.

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# End Notes

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- <sup>5</sup> Morse-Kahn, 106-107.
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- <sup>8</sup> Deborah Morse-Kahn, *The Historic St Croix Valley; A Guided Tour*, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010, 108. J. Fletcher Williams, *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley*, 1881, 472.
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- <sup>12</sup> Engquist, Anna. *Scandia — Then and Now*. Washington County Historical Society, 1974, 2007, 9-10.
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- <sup>14</sup> Engquist, 71-97.
- <sup>15</sup> Engquist, 69.
- <sup>16</sup> Johnson, Dick and Paul Wahlquist. *Pioneers of the Big Lake Community: Washington County, Minnesota*. Washington County Historical Society, 2001, 28, Engquist, 47-48.
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- <sup>24</sup> Engquist, 54-55.
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- <sup>26</sup> Two Pines Resources, "The Hilltop Water Company's Tower Barn: Preliminary Assessment of Historical Significance, 2013, 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Engquist, 72.
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- <sup>56</sup> "Divided city council in Scandia decides future of Log House Landing ramp," *St Croix 360* May 14, 2017.
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- <sup>61</sup> Dunn, 36-37.
- <sup>62</sup> "Copas schoolhouse reinvented as Bluebell Mercantile," *Country Messenger* January 24, 2017.
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