

## National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church is a small, gable-roofed, clapboard-sided, one-story, rectangular structure consisting of a log-framed nave with a wood-framed narthex centered on the south facade and a wood-framed vestry attached to the north facade. A diminutive alter section connects the principal portion of the nave to the vestry. The nave is surmounted on its south end by a square-shaped belfry with peaked roof. The church is roofed with wood shingles and contains six-over-six, double-hung wood sash. The nave features an open interior plan with exposed log framing, hand-hewn pews, a small balcony on the south end, and an altar on the north end. The structure rests on a concrete-block foundation.

There are no plans or illustrations documenting the building's original construction. According to an 1895 newspaper article, the building was originally of "hewed lumber," measuring "25 x 30 feet with a lean-to 8 x 14." 1 In 1903, the lean-to was replaced by the present vestry. 2 At this time, the building may also have been covered with wood siding, which appears in a photograph taken about 1915. The same photograph shows a clapboard-sided narthex, which was subsequently removed. The present narthex, of similar design, was constructed in 1963. 3 The structure was placed on a concrete-block foundation in 1970. 4

### NOTES

1 Cook County Herald, May 11, 1895.

2 P. J. Lydon, "Notes on the History of the Diocese of Duluth," *Acta et Dicta*, 5 (July 1918), 281; Willis H. Raff, Research Report on St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, p.1, unpublished, 1984, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church File, Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society.

3 Raff, p.1.

4 Ade Toftey, "Grand Marais Plans Bright Future for Old Indian Church," *Duluth News-Tribune*, May 17, 1970; Olga Soderburg, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, n.p, unpublished, n.d., Cook County Historical Society.

### SIGNIFICANCE

Builder/Architect Frank Wishcop (1895)

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church is historically significant for two major reasons. First, it is one of the state's few surviving, nineteenth-century, Indian missions. Second, it is the only remaining structure of Chippewa City, a nineteenth-century Indian settlement on the upper North Shore of Lake Superior.

About 1855, itinerant Jesuit priests from Fort William, Ontario, initiated missionary work among the Chippewa Indians of the Grand Marais area. 1 The center of Indian population was Chippewa City, located about one mile northeast of Grand Marais. By 1885, the community numbered about 75 families. 2 In 1895, the Jesuits placed their ministry on a more permanent footing by establishing St.

Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Chippewa City. The building, which served as both religious and social center for the Catholic community, was constructed by a local carpenter, Frank Wishcop, under the general supervision of Father Joseph Specht, S. J. Like his predecessors, Specht was an itinerant Canadian cleric. During his visits to the Grand Marais area, he frequently made his residence at the new church --a practice continued by his successors until the establishment of a permanent vicarage in Grand Marais in 1933. 3

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church remained a Jesuit mission until 1907, when it became the responsibility of Benedictine priests from St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota. Although Chippewa City was largely destroyed by a forest fire in 1907, St. Francis Xavier Church continued to serve the area's Catholic community until 1936, when all of its religious functions were transferred to the recently constructed St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Grand Marais. 4 The building has remained vacant to the present time.

#### NOTES

1 P. J. Lydon, "Notes on the History of the Diocese of Duluth," *Acta et Dicta*, 5 (July 1918), 281.

2 Willis H. Raff, *Pioneers in the Wilderness* (Grand Marais, MN: Cook County Historical Society), p. 52; *St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church*, p.1, unpublished, 1975, Cook County Historical Society.

3 "Old Indian Worker Dead," *Virginia Daily Enterprise*, March 3, 1915; Raff, *Pioneers*, p.52; *St. Francis Xavier Church*, pp.3-6.

4 Lydon, 281; *St. Francis Xavier Church*, pp.5-7.