



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Grimm Farmstead, Carver Co., Minnesota A Case Study in Reuse

Location	off Co. Hwy. 11, Laketown Twp. (Carver Co.)
Date of Study	August 1994
Date of Construction	House, 1876
Owner	Three Rivers Park District
Cost of Study	\$10,000
Sponsors	Suburban Hennepin Regional Parks (now Three Rivers Park District) State Historic Preservation Office
Projected Rehab Costs	\$55,000-425,000
Actual Rehab Costs	Approximately \$540,000
Past Use	Farmstead
Current Use	Public ownership; park setting Restored, limited access for interpretation in Carver Park Reserve



Photos: Nate Bailly, SHPO Intern

Background

The Wendelin and Juliana Grimm Farmstead is a nationally significant cultural resource. Located on a 160-acre tract of land within the Carver Park Reserve, the 1876 brick farmhouse stands as evidence of Grimm's agricultural legacy.

In 1859 Wendelin Grimm planted on this farm a strain of alfalfa brought from Germany that was known for its ability to withstand harsh climates. In successive years Grimm collected the seeds of plants that survived the winter and replanted them, eventually creating a strain of alfalfa that could reliably survive frigid Minnesota winters. Known as Grimm alfalfa, it played a significant role in the development of American agriculture.

Over time, Grimm's farmhouse and the surrounding landscape changed markedly from their days as a working farm. Trees sprouted from pastureland and the long-neglected house slowly decayed. In 1994, the property's owner, Hennepin Suburban Regional Park (now Three Rivers Park District), took steps to rescue this significant resource and agreed to a reuse study facilitated by the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office to assess the property and develop recommendations for its eventual reuse.

The Reuse Study: Process and Conclusions

Funding for the \$10,000 reuse study came through the State Historic Preservation Office with funds from the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR). The reuse team consisted of an architect, a natural resources management director, historical architect, historic farm site manager, economic consultant, archeologist, landscape architect, and a project coordinator appointed by the Minnesota Historical Society. The three-day consultation began at the Carver Park Reserve with a workshop, tours, interviews and a discussion of options. At a concluding conference at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, the team reviewed options and made recommendations.

The final report, published by the team and reviewed by Hennepin Parks, included multiple options for the reuse of the Grimm farmstead. These options, ranked from simplest to most complex, all concern programming for the site. They range from basic identification of the farmstead to development of a fully operational farm using traditional tools and methods, complete with the introduction of farm animals and reconstruction of outbuildings.

The reuse team recommended that the following actions be taken by Hennepin Parks:

- Restore the farmhouse with a focus on the Grimm Alfalfa developed there.
- Form a nonprofit entity to solicit grants and donations toward the rehabilitation of the house.
- Initiate partnerships with the Carver County Historical Society and other agricultural organizations to form a broader base of community support and public funding.

Current Use

Soon after the reuse study was completed, Hennepin Parks received \$45,000 in two grants for Phase 1: emergency stabilization of the farmhouse. Windows and doors were made



vandal-proof, the roof was replaced, and immediately surrounding land graded for proper drainage. With help of a matching grant from the Minnesota Historical Society, an additional \$80,000 was raised to finish the exterior, including restacking of deteriorated foundation sections. A concrete floor was later installed in the basement. Unanticipated work on the foundation led to higher-than-expected renovation costs; much of the money came from the Minnesota Legislature, with matching funds from the park district. The exterior work was completed at a cost of approximately \$320,000.

Phase II took place in 1998-99 and focused on the building's interior. Lobbyists with the park district worked hard to obtain \$150,000 from the legislature in addition to a \$35,000 matching grant from MHS, and brought the budget to \$220,000. Interior work included paint matching, wood graining, and installation of a propane furnace.

Restoration of the house was completed in October 2001. It remains closed to visitors while furnishings are being acquired. But there is access to the farm by gravel road, and visitors are welcome to stroll the grounds. A plaque containing a short history of the farmstead is currently the only interpretive element on the premises.

More comprehensive interpretation of the site has been slowed by competing interests. Both the nearby Gale's Woods Interpretive Farm and Murphy's Landing, recently acquired by Three Rivers Park District, have diverted attention and funding from the Grimm Farmstead. As a result, the agricultural interpretation of the farm called for in the reuse study may not be realized for some time. Nevertheless, stabilization and restoration of the farmhouse and the maintenance of surrounding land have removed the immediate threat to the site. More importantly, the park district has embraced renewed vision for its value and future use. Further interpretation awaits additional resources.

