

Michigan SHPO Architectural District/Complex Identification Form



District Overview and Location

District/Complex Historic Name	Armas Abrahamson Farm			
Current/Common Name	Grand Marais Maintenance Area (tract 05-121)			
Roughly bounded by streets	County Road H-58			
City, State, Zip Code(s)	Grand Marais, MI 49839			
County	Alger			
Total Acres in the District	Building complex on approximately 1 acre of 20-acre tract of abandoned farmland			
Ownership	Private ☐	Public-Local ☐	Public-State ☐	Public-Federal ☒

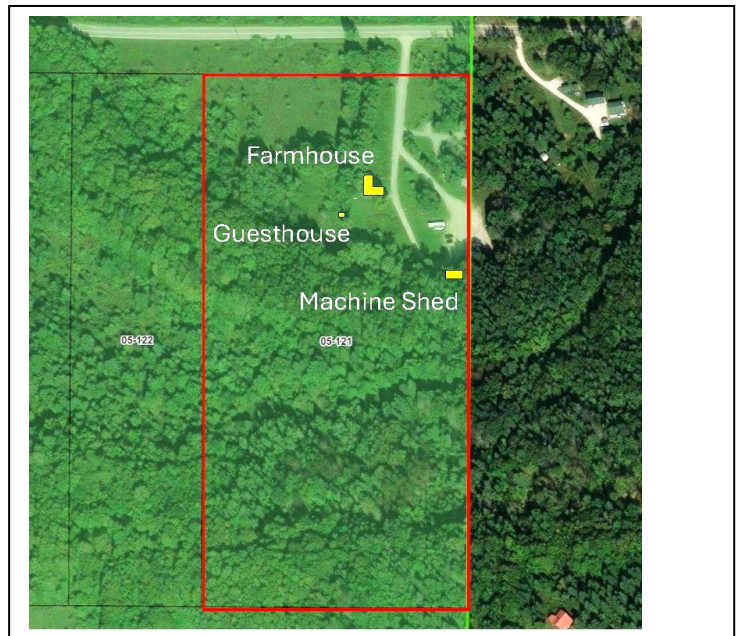
District/Complex Type

(Insert map or aerial photo with boundaries below.)

Commercial ☐	Rural/Farm ☒
Residential ☐	Other ☐
Industrial ☐	

District/Complex Information

Total Number of Resources	3
Contributing Resources	0
Non-Contributing Resources	3
Significant Dates	1900, 1946
For complexes provide a list of resources:	
Farmhouse Guest house / shed Machine shed	



National Register Eligibility

Is the district listed in the National Register?	Yes ☐	No ☒	If yes, provide:	Date Listed:	NRIS #:
<i>If not already listed, complete the information below:</i>					
Eligible Under:	Criterion A ☐	Criterion B ☐	Criterion C ☐	Criterion D ☐	
Criteria Considerations:	a. ☐	b. ☐	c. ☐	d. ☐	e. ☐
Not Eligible ☒					
Area(s) of Significance	NA				
Period(s) Significance	1946-1971				
Integrity – Does the district/complex possess integrity in all or some of the 7 aspects?					
General Integrity:	Intact ☐	Altered ☒	Moved ☐	Date(s):	
Location ☒	Design ☐	Materials ☐	Workmanship ☐	Setting ☐	Feeling ☐
Condition of District?	Good ☐	Fair ☐	Poor ☒		
Threats to Resource?					

Survey Date	04/13/2026	Recorded By	Dan Jackson, NPS MWR Architectural Historian
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For SHPO Use Only	SHPO Concurrence?: Y / N	Date:
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Narrative District/Complex Description

Provide a detailed description of the district/complex, including general character of the district/complex, types of buildings and structures including outbuildings and bridges, and the qualities distinguishing the district/complex from its surroundings. This is required for all districts/complexes.

Armas Abrahamson Farm

The former Armas Abrahamson Farm is located along the south side of County Road H-58 (Sable Lake Road), approximately one half mile west of Grand Marais, Michigan, and lies within Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, on the eastern park boundary. The farmstead complex, now part of the Grand Marais Maintenance Area, occupies the northeastern portion of a 20-acre tract and covers an area of roughly three acres. It is accessed by an unpaved entrance drive that extends south about one-fifth of a mile from CR H-58, passes the farmhouse residence and loops through the maintenance area. Three buildings remaining from the original farm include the farmhouse, guest house/storage shed, and machine shop. The original barn, brooder house, and tractor shed were demolished after the NPS acquired the property. All other buildings within the complex were later added by the NPS to facilitate park operations. The remainder of the 20-acre property is characterized by a fallow agricultural field to the west and low forested ridges to the south.

Armas Abrahamson Farmhouse

The farmhouse, located toward the southwestern end of the entrance drive, is a one-story wood frame, cross-gable building with an irregular L-shape plan. The roof features gray asphalt shingles, exterior walls are clad in white aluminum siding, and basement level walls are cement block on a concrete slab foundation. A brick chimney and vent stack protrude from the roof toward the south end of the main wing. The main wing measures 40'4" x 25'3" and the east wing measures 18' x 14'3".

Original construction of the farmhouse may have begun circa 1900-1945, during Alex Abrahamson's ownership. However, based upon a 1968 property appraisal and Armas Abrahamson's written account, construction of the building in its present form was initiated in 1946 and continued up until 1968. Since gaining ownership in 1971, the National Park Service has left the farmhouse largely unaltered from the Abrahamson period of ownership.

Armas Abrahamson Guest House/Storage Shed

The guest house/storage shed located about 60' south of the farmhouse, is a one-room 14' x 18' wood frame, front-gable building with asphalt shingle roofing and exposed rafter tails. The walls are sheathed with horizontal board siding covered in tarpaper and feature four fixed six-light windows on the north, south, and east elevations. The entrance door is offset on the east (front) elevation. The foundation consists of cement block piers and stacked timber.

Construction of the former guest house dates to circa 1940-1946, based on park building records. Under National Park Service ownership, the building was modified for use as a workshop and storage shed, before falling into disuse. Aside from general deterioration, a widened entrance doorway is the primary National Park Service alteration.

Armas Abrahamson Machine Shop

The Armas Abrahamson Machine Shop, located about 270' southeast of the farmhouse, is a two-room 42' x 20' wood frame, front gable building with a standing seam metal roof. The walls are sheathed with cedar shake siding and a concrete slab foundation. Features added by the National Park Service include two pedestrian doors, three windows, an overhead garage door, a concrete floor, plumbing, electricity, and an attached steel lattice radio tower. The National Park Service utilizes the building as a maintenance shop.

Construction of the machine shop dates to as early as 1935, according to park building records, and as late as 1956, according to the 1968 property appraisal. The accumulated alterations since undertaken by the National Park Service have almost completely changed the character of building from its appearance under Abrahamson ownership.

National Park Service Buildings

The National Park Service began using the former farmstead complex as a maintenance area shortly after the 1971 acquisition and, over the next few decades, added several outbuildings to support operations. The National Park Service buildings are linearly arranged along the east side of the entrance drive and parking area, across from the farmhouse.

The Grand Marais Maintenance Tool Storage Shed, built 1960 and later moved to the maintenance area by the National Park Service, is located immediately east of the machine shop and measures 45 square feet. The front gable metal building measures approximately 6' x 8' and features metal panel roofing and metal siding. A wood

entrance door is on the west gable end, with a four-light casement window on the north, east, and south elevations.

A small pit toilet building is to the north of the tool storage shed. It is a modern prefabricated fiberglass structure large enough to accommodate one person. It is windowless, with an entrance door.

The Grand Marais Maintenance Breakroom/Office Building is to the north of the pit toilet. It is a 182-square-foot mobile trailer moved to the location in 1990.

The Grand Marais Maintenance Cold Storage Building #63, built 1972, is to the north of the breakroom/office building. It is a 480-square-foot, wood frame, front gable building with metal roofing and siding. An overhead garage door is on the west gable end and a pedestrian entrance and window are on the north elevation. The foundation is concrete slab.

A fueling station, added in 1985, is to the north side of the cold storage building. It includes a 49-square-foot metal fuel storage building, built 2001, which is flat-roofed, windowless, and has a metal entrance door on the north elevation. Both the fueling station and fuel storage building sit on a large concrete pad. Metal post bollards, painted yellow, are installed along the north and west edges of the concrete pad to protect the fueling station from potential vehicular impacts.

Finally, there is an open-ended drive-through carport on the north side of the parking area. Raised-seam metal panels mounted to a metal framework form two side walls and a roof, supported by a cement block foundation. Installed in recent years, it is used to shelter equipment.

History of the District/Complex

Provide information on previous owners, land use, construction and alteration dates in a narrative format. This is required for all intensive level surveys and recommended for other identification efforts.

Property History

The Armas Abrahamson property was a small early-to-mid-twentieth century multi-generational family farm. At the time of NPS purchase in 1971, it was owned by Armas and Evelyn Abrahamson. Armas was the grandson of Finnish immigrants, Alex and Louisa Abrahamson, who arrived in Grand Marais, Michigan in 1897. Alex and Louisa had five children. The oldest was Axel Abrahamson, the father of Armas.

A late nineteenth century and early twentieth century logging boom in Michigan's Upper Peninsula attracted thousands of immigrants to Grand Marais. The Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, one of the area's most prominent logging companies, published and widely distributed land offers advertising "fertile farmland" at "low prices and on easy terms" in order to entice workers to the area. In 1902, Cleveland Cliffs published a one-page flyer written in Finnish that announced 250,000 acres of hardwood for sale. The land was advertised as being the best farming lands in the state on which "a man [...] has a chance to build a homestead for himself and his family" (Wheatcraft 2001). In 1898, Alex Abrahamson purchased a parcel of land in the section of Grand Marais called Finn Town from the Grand Marais Mill Company (Alger County Courthouse Deed Book H).

According to an early Alger County plat map, Alex Abrahamson also jointly owned a piece of property with a man named Mattson; it was located west of Grand Marais in Section 1 and contained 40 acres. It is believed that the two men divided the property evenly since the same parcel of land that later became the Armas Abrahamson property contained 20 acres. Oral records indicate that Alec built a house on the property around 1900 and lived there with his family (Winslow 1991). In 1931, Alex sold the twenty-acre plot to his grandson Armas with the stipulation that he and his second wife Katriina could retain possession of the property until their deaths.

Armas Abrahamson was born and raised on his father's property (now the site of the Grand Sable Visitor Center), about a mile to the southwest. He later moved to southern Michigan where he met and married Evelyn Cumper. In 1946, Armas and Evelyn moved back to Grand Marais and started a family, raising two children. They took possession of Alec's property that year, and undertook gradual improvements to the farm. The Abrahamsons raised crops and kept stock such as cattle and chicken. Their farm was self-sufficient but not commercial (Winslow, 1991). Armas' primary occupation was with the Alger County Road Commission, where he worked for thirty years. In the 1950 census, he identified his profession as "truck driver."

On October 15, 1966, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore was established under Public Law 89-668, paving the way for the National Park Service to begin acquiring title to properties within the legislated boundary. The Abrahamsons were among a collection of unwilling sellers, leading to condemnation proceedings that resulted in a

final judgement on February 24, 1971. The federal government paid the Abrahamsons \$31,000 for fee simple title to Tract 24-105 (United States Court for the Western District of Michigan, Northern Division, 1971).

From the early 1970s and continuing to the present, federal ownership changed property use and altered the landscape. The National Park Service continued using the farmhouse for residential purposes, primarily as seasonal employee housing. However, agricultural activities ended. The surrounding fields were left fallow, gradually succeeding to wildland. A large gambrel barn east of the house, brooder house east of the barn, and tractor shed to the south were all removed. The former farmstead complex was converted into a maintenance area. Of the two remaining outbuildings, a small one-room guesthouse became a storage shed while the machine shop was converted to a maintenance building with a mounted radio tower. The entrance drive was widened and gravel parking area added. Additional maintenance buildings and a fueling station were placed along the gravel parking area on the east side of the entrance drive. As of 2026, the former Abrahamson property, now known as the Grand Marais Maintenance Area, remains in use by the National Park Service for employee housing and maintenance support.

Statement of Significance/Recommendation of Eligibility

Provide a detailed explanation of the district/complex's eligibility for the National Register, including an evaluation under the four criteria, discussion of the seven aspects of integrity, and recommendations about eligibility. This is required for all districts/complexes.

Introduction

Modern settlement and development of Michigan's Upper Peninsula began in the late 1800s, as mining and logging companies recruited workers with the promise of a living wage and affordable land. This converged with a period of adverse social and economic conditions in Finland and led to a wave of Finnish immigrants to the Upper Peninsula from the 1860s into the early 1900s, who primarily came to work in the copper mines (Loukinen 1996). The Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, one of the area's largest landowners, subsequently attracted many of the Finnish immigrants to purchase land tracts within and around the area that would become Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. Armas Abrahamson's grandparents traveled to America, settled in the Upper Peninsula, and purchased the 20 acres of farmland that Armas later inherited, as part of this larger trend.

Although the Abrahamson family connection to the farmstead was established with Alex's purchase in 1900 and occupancy until his death in 1946, the extent of development during that time is undocumented. Based on the findings of the 1968 property appraisal and Armas Abrahamson's own recollections (Abrahamson 1968; Winslow 1991), by the time the National Park Service took possession, the character of the property was shaped by improvements he made over a 20-year period. As such, the period of significance used to evaluate historic significance and aspects of integrity is the time span of Armas Abrahamson's ownership, from 1946 to 1971.

Criterion A

To qualify under Criterion A, a property must not only be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history but also retain historic integrity, sufficient to convey the association. Considering that the Abrahamsons immigrated and settled as part of a larger Finnish-American community, potentially applicable themes include agriculture, ethnic heritage, and social history. However, by the time Armas Abrahamson took ownership, he was two generations removed from the initial settlement. There is no imprint upon the landscape or remaining structures that convey traditions of any particular ethnic heritage and much of the agricultural association is no longer evident. The property is not significant under Criterion A.

Criterion B

To qualify under Criterion B, a property must be associated with a historically significant individual. No individuals whose activities would be considered important within a local, state, or national context are directly associated with the Armas Abrahamson Farm. The property is not significant under Criterion B.

Criterion C

To qualify under Criterion C, a property must embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; possess high artistic value; or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. Of the three remaining buildings – the farmhouse, guest house/storage shed, and machine shop – there are no notable features that convey significant architectural design or distinctive construction. The farmhouse is an amalgamation of additions and renovations with no particular adherence to design principles or a specific period of construction. The guest house/storage shed is a rudimentary utilitarian building. The machine shop has been so heavily modified by the National Park Service that the siding is the only recognizable feature from the historic period. The property is not significant under Criterion C.

Criterion D

To qualify under Criterion D, the property must have physical material with important information to contribute to the understanding of human history or prehistory. There are no known archeological sites or features associated with the Armas Abrahamson Farm. The maintenance area overlays much of the space previously occupied by the barn and other features, and surface traces of former buildings and activities have largely been removed. National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center archeologists surveyed and conducted shovel testing in the yard south of the house in 2016, and, aside from a cistern foundation, noted no archeological sites or other features of historical interest (Schilling 2016). In 2023, Midwest Archeological Center archeologists conducted shovel testing along the driveway and encountered no cultural materials (Barnett 2023). Nothing encountered in either limited survey indicated a likelihood that historic or precontact cultural sites may be present. The property is not significant under Criterion D.

Aspects of Integrity

To retain historic integrity, a property should generally possess a majority of seven aspects.

Location

The property is located on a rural county road about a half-mile east of the town of Grand Marais and half-mile south of Lake Superior, consistent with Armas Abrahamson's 1946-1971 period of occupation. Prominent landscape features remaining from this period – including the farmhouse, guest house/storage shed, machine shop, and entrance drive – all remain in their original locations, although the drive has been extended to include a loop and parking area on the south end. While the barn and other outbuildings have been removed, the property retains integrity of location.

Design

Photographs from 1968 show a farmstead complex with the northwest quadrant including domestic features such as the house, guest house, a yard, and vegetable garden. Agricultural outbuildings and fenced spaces composed the area south, southeast, and east of the house. This complex was surrounded by an open expanse of hayfields and a forested area of hillside to the south. The layout, historically organized to divide the landscape into areas supporting domestic activities, keeping livestock, and growing crops, has been lost to the development of the maintenance area and gradual reforestation of formerly open fields. The overall integrity of design is diminished.

Setting

As in relation to design, photographs from 1968 depict a pastoral setting, with the farmstead complex surrounded by open, cultivated fields. Views between the county road and the house were unimpeded. The ridge to the south was covered in meadow, with only a pocket of forested slope. Under National Park Service ownership, most of the farm's outbuildings have been removed and replaced with a collection of modern maintenance buildings. The forest has spread to cover the ridge to the south and is gradually overtaking fields to the west. A row of mature trees line the entrance drive, likely planted by the park to screen views into the maintenance area from passing traffic. The overall integrity of setting is diminished.

Materials

Of the three remaining farm buildings – the farmhouse, guest house/storage shed, and machine shop – exterior materials dating to the Abrahamson period of ownership are generally retained. A portion of the farmhouse roof was originally wood shingle and later converted to asphalt shingle. The machine shop had a roof that was entirely wood shingle and later converted to metal panel. The primary material change to the guest house/storage shed exterior has been the change from wood panel to plywood door. Material evidence of the nonextant buildings – barn, tractor shed, and brooder house – has been completely removed. The overall integrity of materials is diminished.

Workmanship

As in relation to materials, the three remaining farm buildings exhibit varying levels of original workmanship. The machine shop retains the least integrity due to substantial alterations, with the wood shingle siding the last reminder of its historic appearance. While the farmhouse and guest house/storage shed largely retain the same workmanship evidenced in 1968 documentation, there is nothing distinctive in their constructions that reveal aesthetics particular to a certain region or ethnic tradition. The overall integrity of workmanship is diminished.

Feeling

The changes to the property's design, setting, materials, and workmanship have collectively reduced the visible characteristics that would convey the sense of a midcentury family farmstead. The overall integrity of feeling is diminished.

Association

Due to the alterations and loss of physical features to convey the character of a midcentury family farmstead and overall agricultural setting, the integrity of association is diminished.

Conclusion

The Armas Abrahamson Farm does not meet any of the criteria for evaluating significance and lacks historic integrity, retaining location only. Based on this evaluation, the property is recommended to be ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

References

List references used to research and evaluate the district/complex.

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Loukinen, Michael M. Cultural Tracks: Finnish Americans in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Northern Michigan University Press, 1996.

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