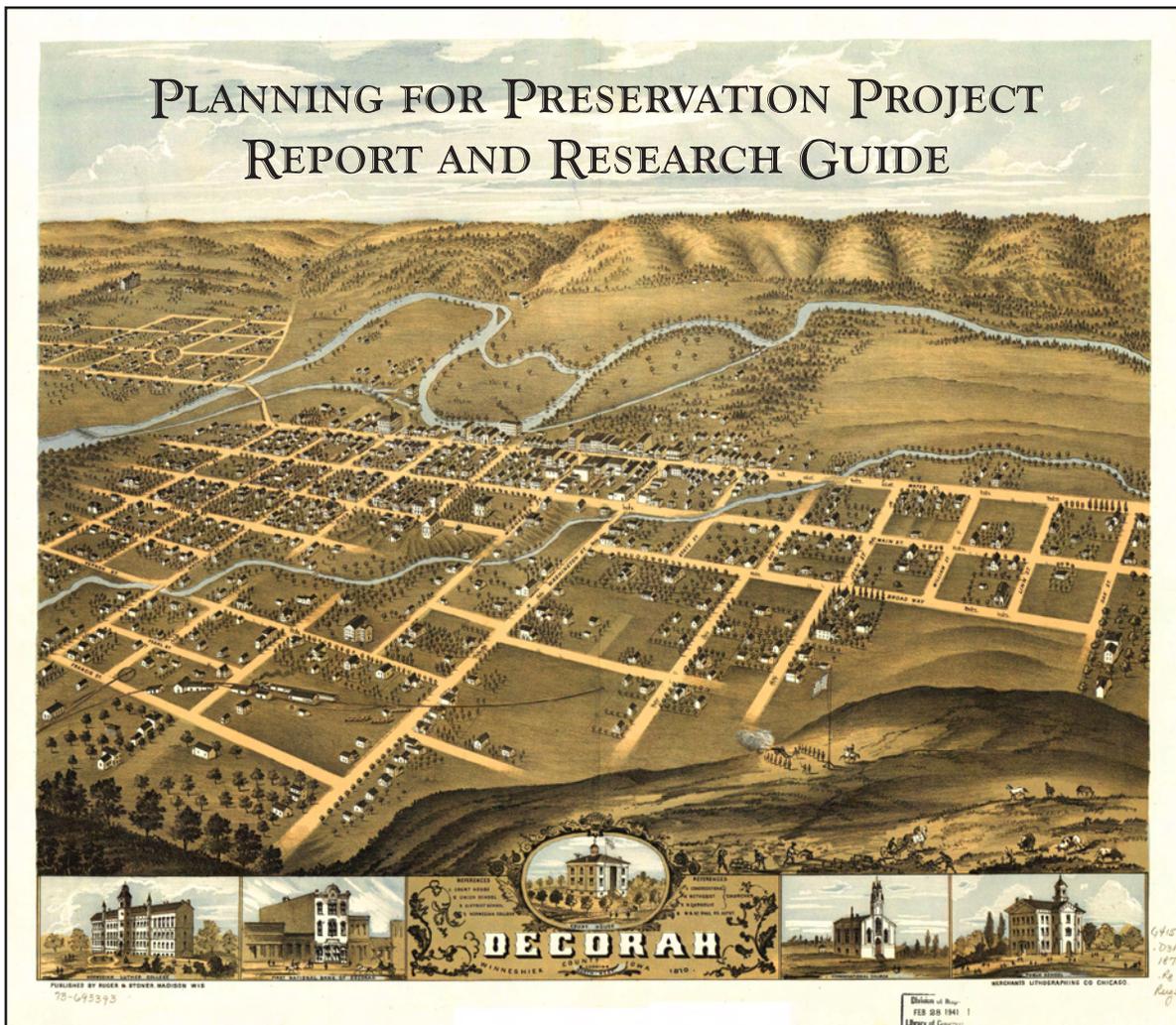


**City of Decorah  
Winneshiek County, Iowa**



Certified Local Government Grants Project 2009.12  
HADB No. 96-011

Submitted to  
Decorah Historic Preservation Commission  
and the  
State Historical Society of Iowa

by  
David C. Anderson, Ph.D.

August 2010

City of Decorah, Winneshiek County, Iowa

**Planning for Preservation  
Project Report and Research Guide**

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HADB No. 96-011

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August 2010

On the cover:  
1870 Map of Decorah  
Courtesy of the Porter House Museum, Decorah  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>	5
<b>Introduction and Acknowledgments</b>	6
<b>Goals and Objectives</b>	6
<b>Summary of Project Activities</b>	8
<b>Maps</b>	10
<b>Historic Contexts</b>	18
Decorah's Natural Setting	20
Prehistoric Native Americans in Northeast Iowa	35
Native Americans and Euro-American Contact	43
Historic American Indians in the Decorah Area	46
Early Euro-American Settlement in Decorah, 1849-1857	50
Transportation, 1840-1960	54
Commerce and Industry, 1840-1960	60
Education, 1853-1960	65
Immigrant Ethnic Groups in Decorah's History	69
Governmental and Other Public Services	71
Patterns of Architectural Development, 1849-1960	73
<b>Archival Sources and Repositories</b>	80
<b>Bibliography</b>	81
<b>Recommendations</b>	88
<b>Summary Conclusions</b>	90
<b>Appendix A:</b> Previously Inventoried and National Register-Listed Properties	93
<b>Appendix B:</b> Additional Information and Resources	94

## **ABSTRACT**

The Decorah Planning for Preservation project provided broad historic preservation training to the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission and other interested individuals who attended its meetings. Other goals included providing a better understanding of the Commission's potential role within the community and its role in historic preservation activities in the City. In addition, information was provided on various preservation activities including reconnaissance and intensive level surveys, property evaluation for National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility, inventory development, and local registration of historic properties. The training segment of the project covered methods of research and the range of sources available to researchers and their relative importance and reliability. The Commission members and interested volunteers completed Iowa Site Inventory Forms on six properties. The key importance of the NRHP in the preservation process was discussed at length, as were the many difficulties faced in achieving the goals of historic preservation at the present time.

## INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following project was conducted by the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) under a grant-in-aid agreement with the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) through a Certified Local Government (CIG) Planning for Preservation grant. The project was conducted with the aid of HPC members and local volunteers. The Principal Investigator (consultant) for the project was David C. Anderson of Waukon, Iowa. Project administration was provided by Lyle Otte, and the HPC members were Laurann Gilbertson, Kyril Henderson (current chair), Paul Hexom, Gregg Narber, Lise Hedstrom, and Susan Jacobsen. Volunteers included Janelle Pavlovec, David Wadsworth, Adrienne Coffeen, and Dave Pahlas. Deb Hagensick, Secretary to the City Clerk, provided word processing and office assistance.

Indispensable assistance was also provided by Rachel Vagts and other Preus Library staff, Luther College; Loraine Borrowski, Decorah Public Library; Mildred Kjome, Winneshiek County Genealogy Association; and volunteer staff of the Winneshiek County Historical Society (WCHS) Archive.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Planning for Preservation program is specifically geared to assist recently certified or inactive commissions in receiving basic training and guidance in preservation planning, survey, and inventory development as well as experience in project development, management, and completion. (State Historical Society of Iowa. 2007: 8) Such projects also introduce HPCs to working with a professional historic preservation consultant. By design, Planning for Preservation projects are limited in both scope and budget and do not ordinarily include a survey component. According to *Archeology and Historic Preservation: U. S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines*, p.3,

Preservation planning is based on the following principles:

Important historic properties cannot be replaced if they are destroyed. Preservation planning provides for conservative use of these properties, preserving them in place and avoiding harm when possible and altering or destroying them only when necessary.

If planning for the preservation of historic properties is to have positive effects, it must begin before the identification of all significant properties has been completed. To make responsible decisions about historic properties, existing information must be used to the maximum extent and new information must be acquired as needed.

Preservation planning includes public participation. The planning process should provide a forum for open discussion of preservation issues. Public involvement is most meaningful when it is used to assist in defining values of properties and preservation planning issues, rather than when it is limited to review of decisions already made. Early and continuing public participation is essential to the broad acceptance of preservation planning decisions.

Preservation Planning has been defined as “planning for continued identification and evaluation of historic properties and for their protection and enhancement.” (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1985:61) The ultimate goal of any local preservation plan should be to preserve and protect the significant cultural resources of the community or county in question. However, in order to achieve that goal, the HPC, and the community, must have an understanding of what those resources are and their significance. While a property need only be 50 years of age to be considered potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), a property no matter its age or significance must retain sufficient integrity to be considered potentially eligible. The way to determine eligibility is to inventory and evaluate the community’s historic properties. Once an inventory is complete, then recommendations concerning individual, district, or multiple property nominations can be made. It is also through the inventory and evaluation process that the HPC will come to understand what is important in their community, and thus worth their attention and support. It may seem to be a strange preservation principle, but not every building or every site is worth saving. Preservation efforts should be focused on those properties that are worth preserving for generations to come and that represent an important context in the community’s history. Hard decisions often have to be made, and other public needs may take precedent over the preservation of a particular resource. There are steps, however, that can be taken to avoid the complete loss of historic properties including relocation, recordation, and, in the case of archaeological sites, data recovery.

The primary goal of the Planning for Preservation project was to provide broad historic preservation training to the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission and other interested citizens, with additional objectives including public education on identifying historic properties and explaining why they are important and providing a broad understanding of the Commission’s role within the community and what it might accomplish in historic preservation in Decorah. By providing information on activities including reconnaissance and intensive level surveys, property evaluations, inventory development, and local and federal registration of historic properties, Commission members and interested parties will be better equipped to engage in the preservation process in a community context.

## Summary of Project Activities

Submitted by Lyle Otte, Project Coordinator

Four types of activities were carried out during the Planning for Preservation Grant Project. Meetings were held at least once a month and often at length, one lasting an entire afternoon. The project consultant, David Anderson, organized and led them all.

Training of the public and the Decorah HPC took the most time. Beginning in July 2009 and ending in March 2010 training sessions were held with public attendance ranging from 6 to 16 participants. The topics included the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation, the Iowa Site Inventory process, and sources for historical research. Instruction was given in the use of the Winneshiek County Historical Society's archive, the Decorah Genealogy Association collection, Luther College, and the Winneshiek County Recorder's office resources.

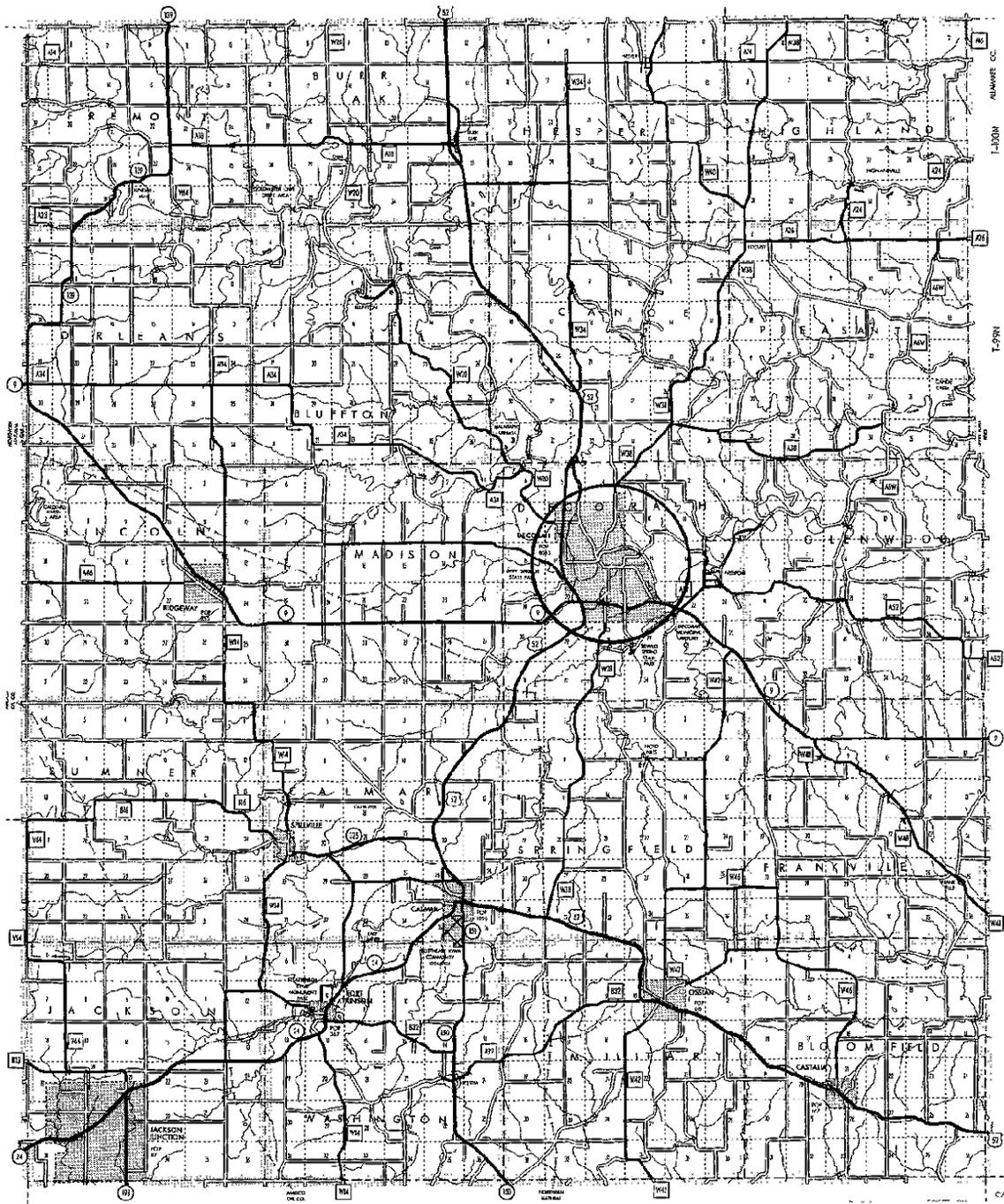
Participants were introduced to the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps available online. An introduction to the NRHP nomination process and the concepts of historical significance and historic integrity as outlined in the National Register program was provided, along with information about what it means for properties to be listed and the kinds of protection this provides.

A limited "windshield survey" of much of Decorah's east side was completed by the consultant and two Commission members. Using a copy of the 1886 plat map of Decorah, fifteen potential historically significant sites were identified and photographed. The Commission's prioritized list of **2010 Goals and Activities** was prepared as follows:

1. Compile and maintain an historic site inventory.
2. Develop an educational program to inform the public about the importance of historic preservation. We will produce educational materials, including a website, tours, pamphlets, programs, and events at historic properties and sites. ( The first of these was held on May 15 at the Easton-Cooley House in the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District.)
3. Provide training workshops in rehabilitation of historic sites.
4. Work with people and departments of city and county governments, which may affect historically significant sites.
5. Compile a list of human resources that are able to provide expertise to the public concerning historic site preservation.

6. Compile a list of resources of information on historically significant places and properties.
7. Develop a list of local landmarks.
8. Apply for CLG grants and other grants for historic preservation projects.
9. Cooperate with public and private partners on educational programs and projects.
10. Participate in annual training for commission members.
11. Establish a system to encourage individuals and groups to initiate historic site surveys.
12. Interview people who have knowledge relating to historically significant sites.
13. Maintain an archive of documents in the City Hall related to the Commission's activities and place copies of these documents in the Winneshiek County Historical Society's Archive.
14. Review this list of goals and activities annually.





**Figure 2.** Winneshiek County. Location of Decorah. Source: Iowa DOT.

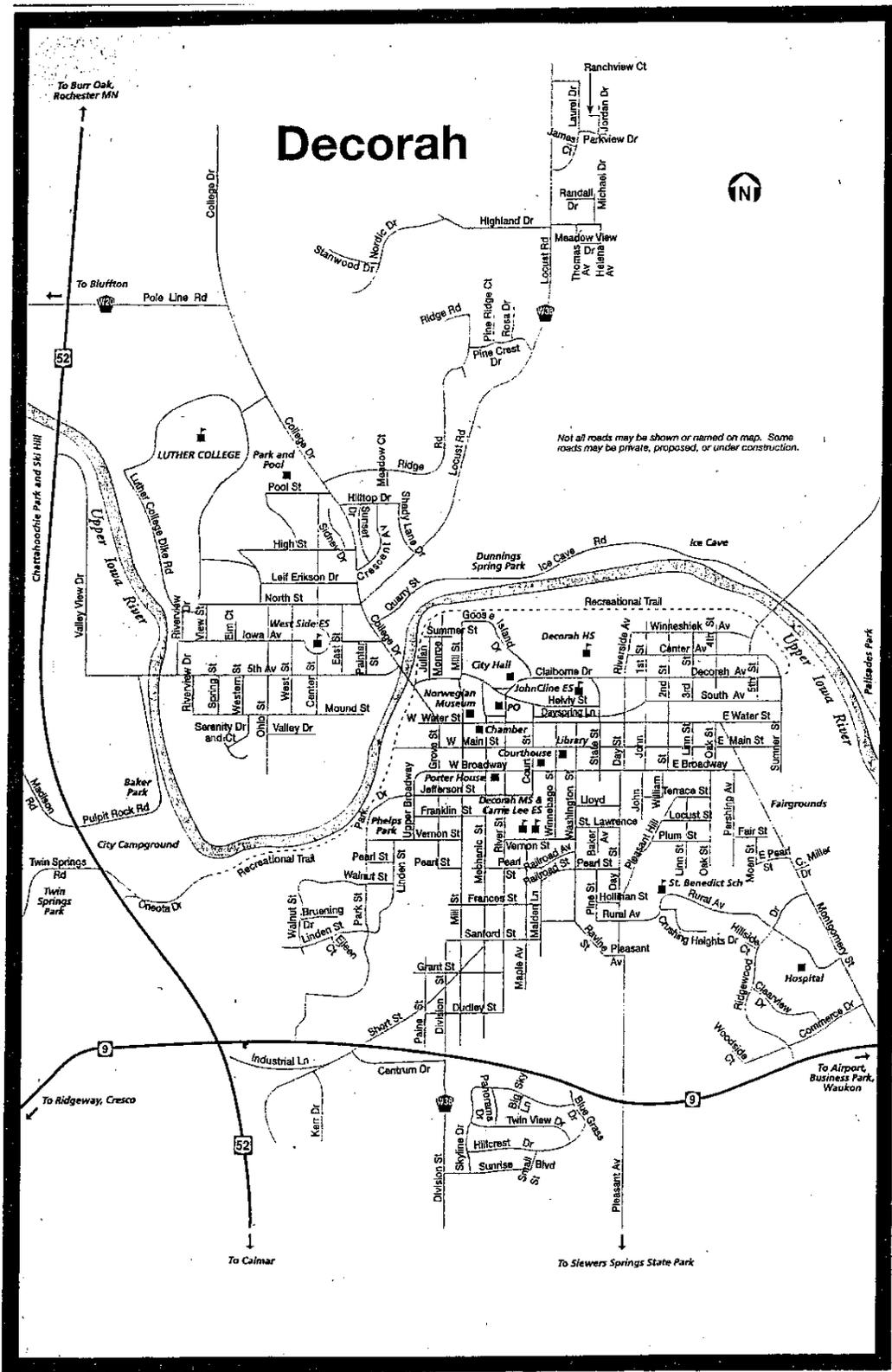
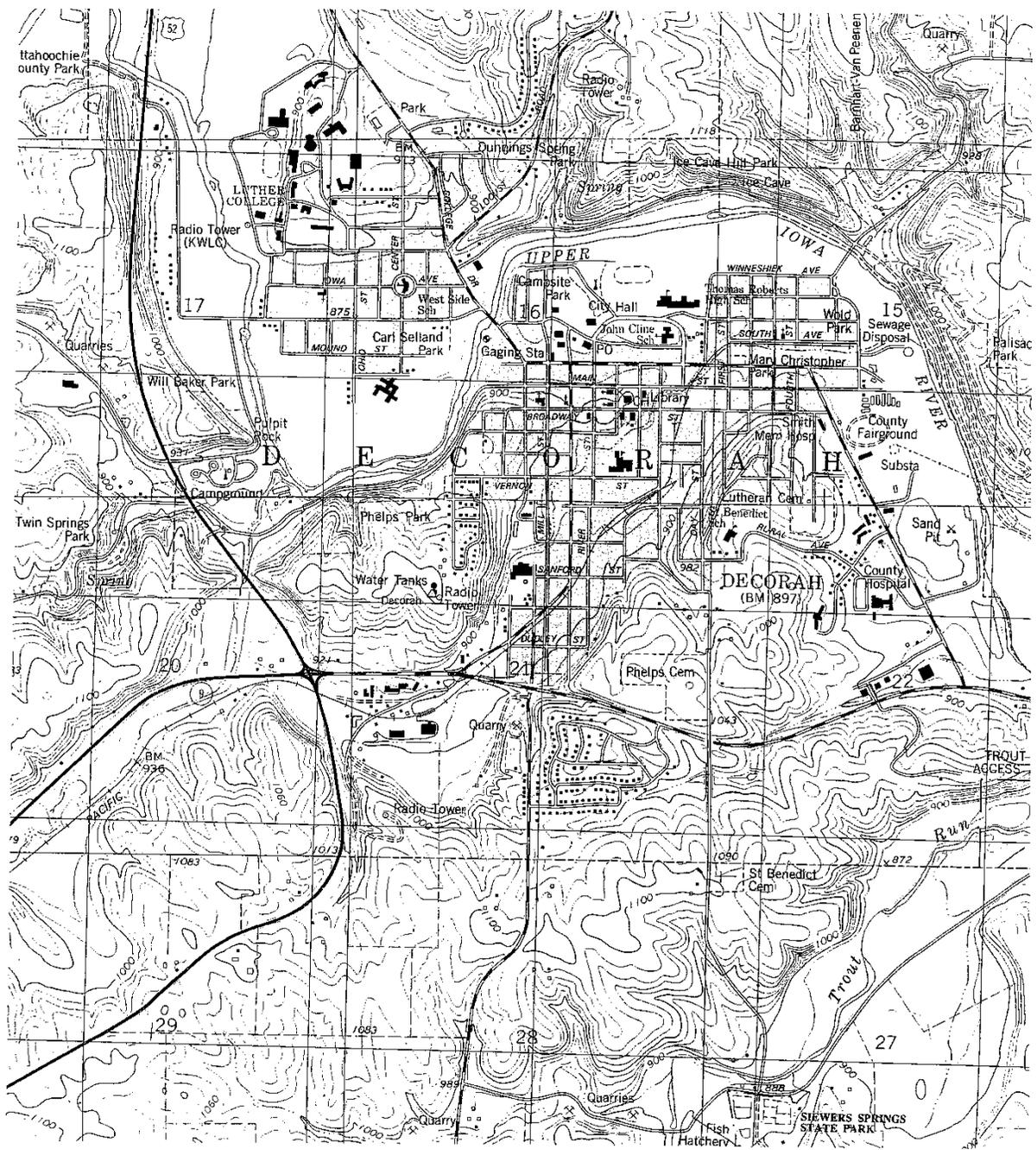
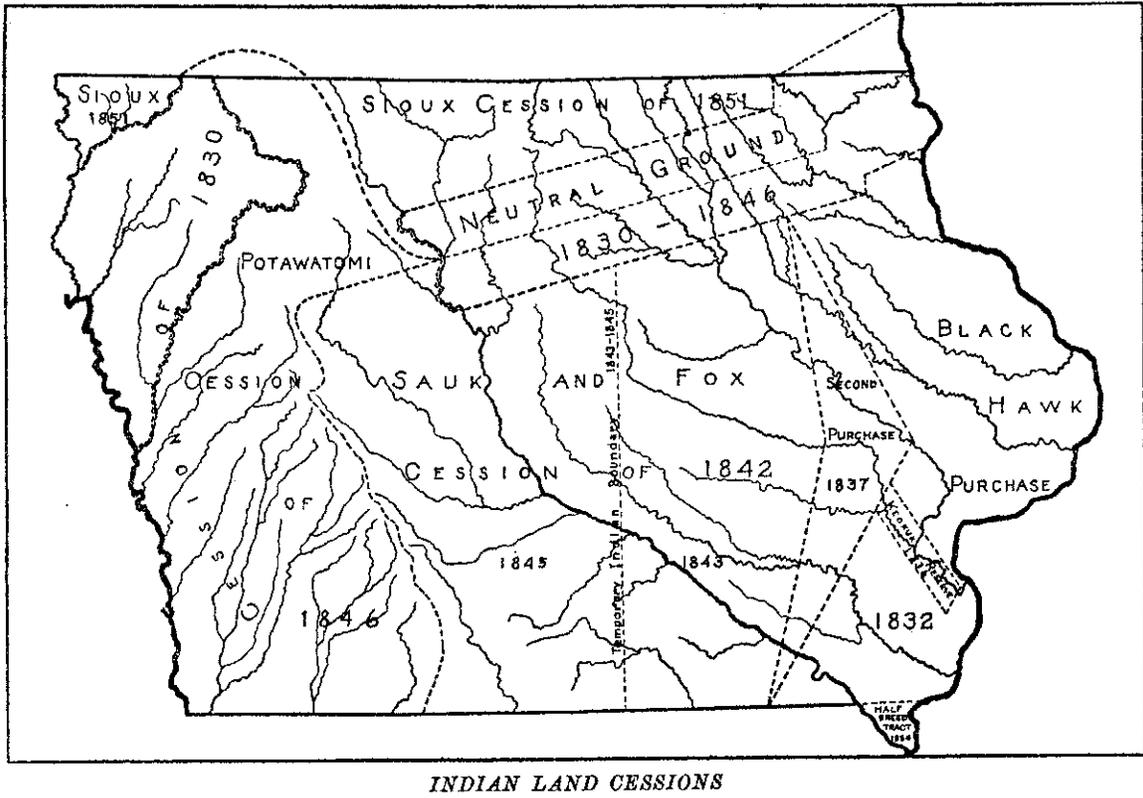


Figure 3. Street Map of Decorah.



**Figure 4.** Topographic Map of Decorah Area. Decorah Quadrangle (excerpt). No Scale. 1981. U. S. Geological Survey 7.5 Minute Series.



**Figure 5.** Indian Land Cessions in Iowa.  
 Source: Lokken, Roscoe. *Iowa Public Land Disposal*, Iowa City, 1942.

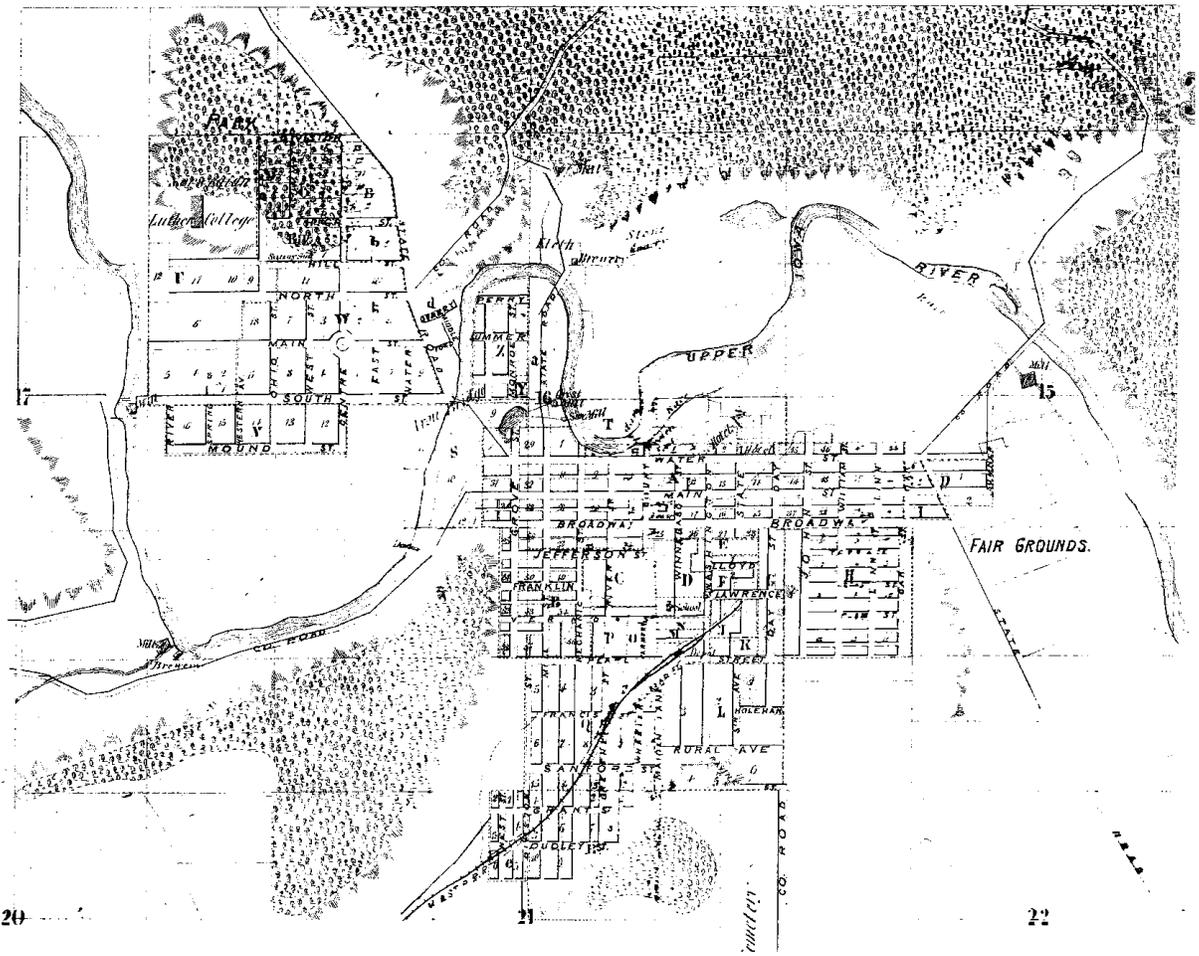
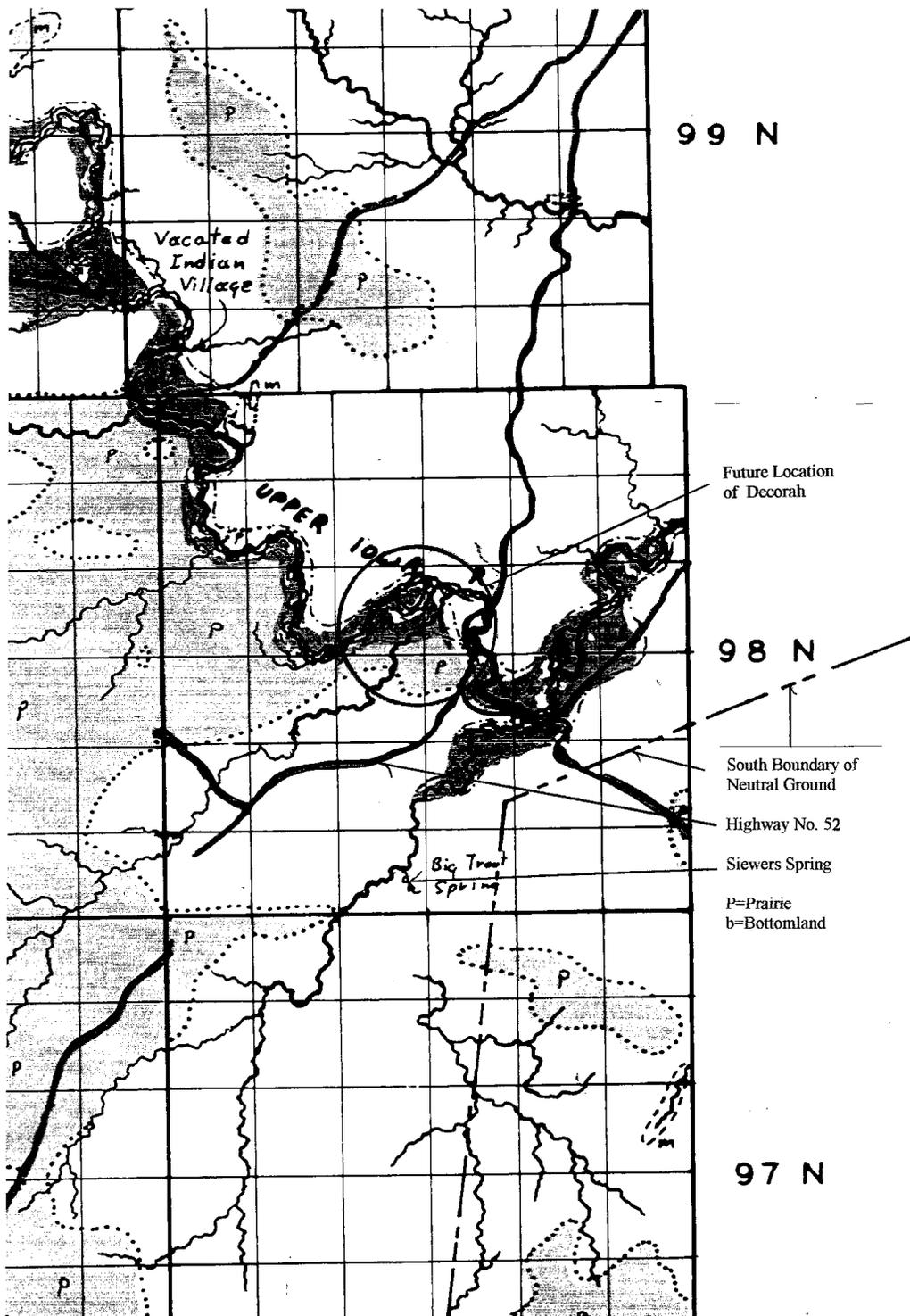


Figure 6. Plan of the City of Decorah, 1875. Source: Andreas, 103.



**Figure 7.** General Land Office Plat of Twp. 98 North, Range 8 West. Source: Trygg. Blank areas were wooded at the time of the survey, ca. 1849.

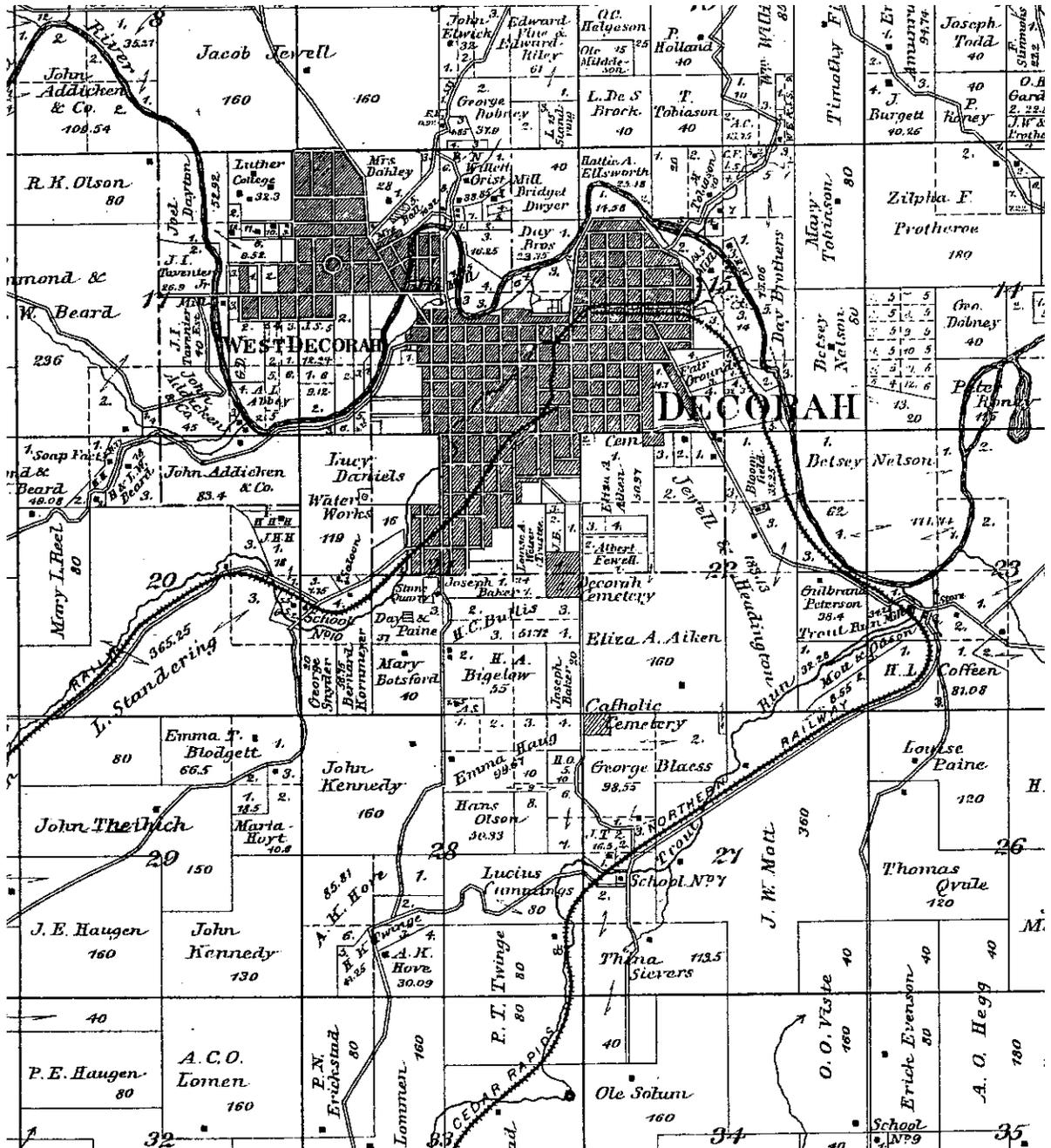


Figure 8. Plat of Decorah Township, 1886. (Excerpt). Source: Warner & Foote.  
Siewers Spring is in the SE 1/4 of the NE 1/4 of Section 33.

## HISTORIC CONTEXTS

The historic contexts developed for the current project are based on the *United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Preservation Planning*. (United States Department of the Interior, 1983).

### Introduction

The historic context is an organizational tool that groups information about related historic properties based on a theme, geographic area, and chronological period. A single historic context describes one or more aspects of the historic development of an area, considering history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture, and identifies the significant patterns that individual historic properties represent.

The historic context is a cornerstone of the preservation planning process, of which the goal is to identify, evaluate, register and be aware of the full range of properties representing each context. The idea is that major decisions concerning the treatment and disposition of historic properties are most reliably made in the context of other, related properties.

Because historic contexts are organized by theme, place, and time, they link historic properties to important historic trends. In this way they provide a framework for determining the significance of a property and its eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Knowledge of historic contexts allows us to understand a historic property as a product of its time and place and as an illustration of aspects of our heritage. It is also important to understand the idea of *level of significance*. Thus, it is within the larger picture of a community's history that *local* significance becomes apparent. Similarly, state and national significance become clear only when the property is seen in relationship to state and nationwide contexts. Significance is a keyword in our definition of "historic" and it is useful to understand the idea of *level of significance*, especially in nominating properties to the National Register. (*National Register Bulletin 16A*, 4)

Historic contexts, as theoretical constructs, are linked to actual properties through the concept of *property type*, a grouping of individual properties based on shared physical or associative characteristics. Examples can include everything from parks to roads and houses. Property types link the ideas incorporated in the theoretical historic context with actual properties that illustrate those ideas.

In the text that follows, lists of associated property types and known extant specific local properties follow each context narrative along with **preservation planning goals** for the properties in each historic context.

Preservation goals should be oriented toward the greatest possible protection of properties in the historic context and they should be based on the principle that properties should be preserved in

place if possible, through affirmative treatments like rehabilitation, stabilization, or restoration. Some of these goals will be related to information needs previously identified for the historic context that can be addressed by research and/or survey projects. Strategies for achieving these goals must follow a process of prioritization that should be initiated by the Historic Preservation Commission, but it will require involvement of the broader community as well. The following is a list of the contexts and subcontexts developed for this project followed by a detailed discussion of each in the order shown:

## **DECORAH'S NATURAL SETTING**

### **PREHISTORIC NATIVE AMERICANS IN NORTHEAST IOWA**

10,000 BC – 1700 AD  
Paleo-Indian Period 8500 BC – 7500 BC  
Archaic Period 7500 BC – 40 BC (Eastern Iowa)  
Woodland Period 400 BC – 1150 AD  
Oneota Tradition 1150 – 1700

### **NATIVE AMERICANS AND EURO-AMERICAN CONTACT**

### **HISTORIC AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE DECORAH AREA**

### **EARLY EURO-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT IN DECORAH, 1849-1857**

### **TRANSPORTATION, 1840-1960**

Roads and Rivers  
Streets  
Railroads  
Motor Vehicles and Highways

### **COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, 1858 – 1960**

Agriculture Associated Properties  
Other Associated Properties

### **EDUCATION, 1853 – 1960**

### **IMMIGRANT ETHNIC GROUPS IN DECORAH'S HISTORY**

### **GOVERNMENTAL AND OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES**

### **PATTERNS OF ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT, 1849 – 1960**

## DECORAH'S NATURAL SETTING

The natural environment is a factor in all of Decorah's historic contexts to some degree, though it figures perhaps most directly in the city's history of recreation and tourism.

There are indeed very few elements of the natural environment that have not been impacted by human activity. Today's landscape is the result of this interaction, and nature itself can be regarded as a historical concept, at least as outlined by geology and evolutionary biology.

As geology is a science which studies and illustrates the history of the earth and its early life-forms and describes natural features that have characterized any given place over time, it is reasonable to put this subject at the beginning of any historical study. And it is self-evident that geological factors are basic to the kinds and locations of activities pursued by man from the earliest days of his/her presence.

It is in the geology of a place that people have always found the resources which enable them to survive, subsist and prosper—water, soil, stone, and minerals. The geology of a place remains an important component of its character, no matter what the history of man has been over the course of his/her relatively brief presence.

Discounting for the time being the impact of Homo sapiens, the geological features of present-day Decorah have been much the same since well before the advent of European-Americans. The last great geological events here occurred in connection with the last (Wisconsinan) of several glacial periods which came to an end between 10,000 and 14,000 years ago.

The landscape of the Decorah area is part of a large area in southeast Minnesota, northeast Iowa, and the southwest Wisconsin which until recently was referred to as the "Driftless Area," that is, not covered by any of the several glaciers that advanced into the Midwest or by the material they left behind. (drift) A better term is "Paleozoic Plateau" because bedrock here is Paleozoic in age and has been cut into by erosion which began most likely during the earliest glacial period and in fact continues today. There is very little glacial drift to be found in this region, but this may only mean that it has been eroded away.

The dramatic topography of the Paleozoic Plateau also indicates a lack of the leveling effect of glacial action. The erosion of bedrock here was carried out mostly by the water carried by the Upper Iowa and its tributaries during periods of glacial melting. One important result of this has been the exposure of several Paleozoic Era formations of limestone and sandstone, the oldest of which may have been deposited at the bottom of warm water seas as long as 500 million years ago. These rock formations have provided the resources of sand, road rock, rip-rap, and building stone.

Although northeast Iowa was not covered by ice during the last major advance, the region was affected during the Wisconsinan period in that a fine yellowish silt (loess) was carried here by “persistent winds, driven by marked temperature contrasts between ice-covered and ice-free areas. (Prior, 25) This is a major component of the upland soils in the area. Deposits of much older drift are still being discovered here, and there were several pre-Wisconsinan glacial and interglacial stages in the Pleistocene Epoch, ranging in time as far back as 1.654 million years ago. These deposits in northeast Iowa are now referred to as pre-Illinoian, a stage which began about 500,000 years ago or before. Most of these old deposits have been eroded as has much of the bedrock in drainage patterns.

The term Paleozoic means “ancient life,” and during this era, from roughly 600 to 300 million years before the present, many forms of water and land-based plants and animals (except for the mammals) developed. We know this from the fossilized seabed deposits left by the immense seas that covered most of North America at one time or another during the periods of advance and retreat during this era, over a very long period of time. The Paleozoic Era is divided into seven periods and two of these include the bedrock of the Paleozoic Plateau, the Cambrian, mainly sandstone, and the Ordovician comprising limestone, dolostone (limestone with a large proportion of magnesium carbonate mineral composition), sandstone, and shale. Excerpts from Prior’s *Landforms of Iowa* follow:

The entire sequence of Paleozoic rocks tilts gently toward the southwest, extending into deep basins in Kansas and Oklahoma. Ancient erosional processes in Iowa, including the work of Pre-Illinoian glaciers, beveled these inclined layers so that progressively older bedrock units appear at the land surface toward the northeast corner of the state. (Prior, 86-87)

...

Durable limestone, dolomite and sandstone formations stand out as cliffs, pinnacles, ledges, and bluffs high on the landscape or as waterfalls and rapids breaking the stream flow along valley floors. Shale, a less resistant rock, usually produces smoother, more regular landscape slopes. The different erosional characteristics of various strata result in terrain that mirrors the composition of the bedrock formations across the landscape. ( ibid.)

Prior continues,

If Iowa’s landscape had to be divided into only two regions, one would be northeastern Iowa and the other would include everything else. The rugged, deeply carved terrain seen in the Paleozoic Plateau is so unlike the remainder of the state that the contrast is unmistakable. Samuel Calvin, one of Iowa’s best known nineteenth-century geologists, spoke of these unexpectedly scenic landscapes as the “Switzerland of Iowa.” (Prior, 84)

The scenic values (qualities) of Decorah as well as much of its history and present day character are the result of the fact that a river runs through it. The Upper Iowa River in the city has cut its channel through up to 200 feet of Ordovician Period limestone, dolomite and shale including portions of the Galena, Decorah, and Platteville formations. For a stratigraphic diagram, see Knudson's *Guide to the Upper Iowa* (1971), p. 36. The youngest stone, from the Galena formation, is the material making up the tall bluffs to the north of the city and also to the southwest near the city campground. The rough texture of this stone, its light color and the diurnal and seasonal changes in light and weather, plus the contrast provided by the hardwood forests above and below that also change in color and texture through each year, is a visual feast available from most locations and out the windows of many residential properties in the city's core.

The Galena formation rests on the Decorah formation, which is exposed along the north side of the river near Ice Cave and elsewhere in the city. It was named after Decorah because its exposure here is particularly good. The Galena is a relatively hard (but subject to weather-induced deterioration) and light in color, the Decorah is dark, soft, and weathers rapidly, and it also contains shale ("green shale") and clay. The contact between them is notable in being the location of many springs in the area, since rainwater seeps through the Galena until it gets to the relatively impermeable Decorah and can flow laterally into the river valleys and road cuts. The consistent mineral of this stone, calcium carbonate, is highly soluble in water. This factor plus the fractured nature of the Galena in this area has produced a number of caves and surface depressions (sinkholes) in addition to springs.

This geologic condition is known as Karst topography, and it is the reason behind many of the region's interesting landforms and unusual biological habitats, as well as its high vulnerability to groundwater contamination. (Prior, 91-92)

Several of the many springs in and near Decorah run even during periods of drought and were harnessed for power by the earliest Euro-American settlers in the area. Perhaps the most dramatic of these sites is now a city park (Dunning's Spring) off Ice Cave Road north of the river. Nearby is the Ice Cave State Preserve, part of the city park system and a very unusual example of a cave produced in Karst topography. (Knudson, op. cit, 39 and Calvin, 142-146)

Knudson: This is the largest ice cave in North America east of the Black Hills. Ice begins to form in the lowest portion of the cave in March and usually remains until August or September. This cave was the object of scientific discussion in Europe and America until 1898 when a series of observations by Alois Kovarik led to an explanation of ice caves which is generally accepted today. (See also Calvin 142-146)

This makes ice cave historically important as well, and there are man-made caves in this area off Ice Cave Road that were dug for cold storage, beginning in 1857 for a brewery, and later by the Ice Cave Creamery. These and other early manufacturing enterprises are discussed below.

Stone from the geological formations exposed (available) in the Decorah vicinity have been used in various ways for building and decorative purposes from the 1850s into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while in more recent times the stone quarries here mainly provide crushed rock used to maintain the road system of Winneshiek and neighboring counties.

That the local limestone was an important building material is evident in the many retaining walls, building foundations, and even a few entire buildings. The suitability of the local stone varies, however, as to its location in the formation. Of the three formations available in Decorah, the Platteville supplied the best building stone and also a limited amount of decorative stone known as “Decorah Marble” a fossiliferous limestone at the top of the formation. However, early settlers used stone from the Galena formation at or just above ground level because of its accessibility. This stone is also notable for its thin and easily separable bedding planes but it deteriorates relatively rapidly when exposed to weathering.

Within the Platteville there are two layers that were regarded as being good for building purposes. The oldest, today known as the Pecatonica member of the Platteville is really a dolomite (highly magnesium, yellowish or buff in color). The thickest beds of this deposit, in Calvin’s time near Freeport, comprised

a series of layers varying from four to eight feet in thickness (at the top of the formation), evenly bedded and bluish in color, fine grained, hard and compact, capable of withstanding the disintegrating effects of atmosphere or alterations of temperature. The layers range in thickness from six to eight inches and are comparatively free from joints (lateral cracks).  
(Calvin, 83)

These features plus its fossiliferous composition made it highly desirable since some of it at least was hard enough to accept a polished finish. There are several locations off Ice Cave and Quarry Road where this material was quarried. (Calvin, 83, Housker and Larson). According to Calvin large fragments of the species *Endoceras Proteiforme* Hall (a shellfish) had been found in or near Decorah from this layer of the Platteville, from two to three feet long. These beds are mostly made up of finely crushed brachiopod shells, well-cemented and quite beautiful even in their unpolished state. The Decorah Marble Works was set up at Dunning’s Spring in 1871, after stone working machinery had replaced that of flour milling. Since this was an early industry in Decorah, along with flour milling, brewing, and butter making, this will be discussed in another context.

The charm and historical value of contemporary news accounts, along with the hazards of their use, can be illustrated by a clipping from the *Decorah Republican* in 1878 (otherwise undated):

## **“Decorah’s New Industry”**

We last week briefly referred to the magnificent monument gotten out by Mr. Michael Steyer from his quarry on the west side of the river, below Klein’s Brewery, which is the only one of that particular kind in this part of country. It is what has been aptly termed fossil marble, and is easily susceptible, as will be seen by the monument, of being highly and beautifully finished and takes and retains a delicate and exquisite polish.

There are four veins in his quarry, from 12 to 18 inches in thickness. He is preparing to put in a new engine and machinery in the spring that will be capable of sawing out twenty-four slabs at once, and the quarry will be run to its full capacity.

The fossil marble is of two shades, one a gray, and the other brown, with a red tinge. It is of a finer grain than Scotch granite, and has not grit, as in Italian marble. Mr. Steyer has ascertained by experiment that it is capable of receiving a much finer polish than either of the other varieties mentioned. You can see delineated in this marble, shells, fishes, roots, leaves, birds, and quite a number of other curiosities.

When quarried or allowed to remain exposed to the sun it becomes tough, and the weather has no effect on either the stone or the polish.

We are glad to be thus able to chronicle a new industry being developed in Decorah, thanks to the enterprise of Mr. Steyer, who is an experienced man in the business. (Article from the *Decorah Republican* dated 1878 in the Henry P. Field Collection, WCHS Archive)

It should be noted that Decorah Marble is not a true marble, and that the “curiosities” other than shells were probably materials encapsulated in the tufa, a type of stone that forms when the calcium carbonate-rich water evaporates. This material can also be found in local caves and below the mill flume at Dunning’s Spring.

In addition to the Decorah Marble Works there were two stone masons who operated quarries in this location (off Ice Cave and Quarry St.). Both cut stone for various uses and built bridges and presumably other structures and made headstones and monuments. Michael Steyer came to Decorah from Germany in 1867 and is known for his bridge over Twin Spring’s Creek (1876). Patrick Gallagher opened a stone-cutting shop on Washington Street just south of the Dry Run Bridge, whose business also included bridge construction. (*Decorah Republican*, 1/27/1871)

Stone was quarried at several locations along Ice Cave Road and from Quarry Street where it joins College Drive today. At the east end of Ice Cave Road next to Twin Bridges there was a large quarry (Halloran) where several beds of the Platteville and overlying Decorah Formations

were clearly visible. (Calvin, Fig. 6) From here Quarry Hill Road heads northeast to a large and expanding quarry owned by the Bruening Company that also owns two other quarries south of the city limits. One of these was opened within the last 20 to 30 years and has not as yet been extensively worked. This is located just east of the junction of Montgomery Street and State Highway 9, and the Galena, Decorah, and Platteville formations (in part) are visible from the highway. There are also small abandoned quarries within the city which should be considered historic sites, two of which can be found off Maiden Lane in a residential district north of Phelps cemetery.

Another term for the local landscape is “erosional,” in particular for locations like Decorah situated in direct proximity to rivers and major tributaries that have drained the area for millennia, carrying and depositing sediment and creating alluvial deposits made up of clay, silt, sand and gravel. This process continues and these deposits can form fans for plains of large size and depth. The area between Water Street and the river is such a landform that has included a dike to protect the city from flooding since 1951. Geomorphological study of such landforms has revealed that they can contain many layers of alluvium deposited over millennia and are divisible into pre- and post –settlement categories. The clearing of upland forests for agriculture and even hillsides and slopes for fuel wood in the early settlement period produced accelerated flooding and alluvial deposition. Despite the many changes made to the landscape in this part of Decorah, there may be pre-historic Native American sites and artifacts deeply (more than one meter) buried in this landform. Most of west Decorah is on alluvium as are, most likely, other sections of the city. (Stanley, 1995, Fig. 14)

The alluvial terrace elevated above existing rivers was a preferred location for habitation since it is usually level ground and close to water often with good views. This was true for the earliest peoples and those of the Euro-American settlement as well.

What is true for the local limestone as exploitable resource holds also for the extensive deposits of clean gravel, sand, and clay from the earliest days of settlement. The largest sand and gravel extraction zone is in southwest Decorah, between the river and Montgomery Street, with a smaller, partially excavated deposit just beyond the city to the northwest. This created a pond and the area is now known as Chattahoochee Park. (Davis, 23) This is a public area, whereas “Carlson’s Pond” is not, even though it has served as a dumping ground as the sand and gravel has been removed, for among other things, the rubble from the demolition of buildings, many of historical significance, paving bricks, and more. In archaeological parlance this is in fact as large historic “midden” and it should be treated accordingly.

Much of Decorah, including the originally separate (until 1902) city of west Decorah is situated on alluvial terrace landforms, with the underlying bedrock at varying depths below the surface. There is evidence that Native Americans had placed mounds and habitation sites on these relatively level landforms, and the pioneer early American settlers utilized these features for their own purposes. The lands in immediate proximity to the river (flood plain) were not developed

until after about 1950 when the river was moved north and a protective dike was installed (“Recreational Trail” on map). The first plat of Decorah (1856) is a rectangular grid oriented to the cardinal points of the compass with Water Street at the top set as close to a large meander of the river as thought prudent in order to harness the water power.

From the northeast corner of Winnebago and Main Streets and extending in a southwesterly direction, the land rises in elevation up to Upper Broadway and Phelps Park. Placing the Winneshiek County courthouse, jail, and a Civil War monument at this location (Courthouse Square) gives these civic monuments a strong visual emphasis. West Broadway Street extends west from this location 5 blocks to Upper Broadway and Phelps Park, constituting the city’s first elite residential district and Decorah’s first and only National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Historic District. Comprising c. 40 acres, it is mostly residential, but it also includes the aforementioned public buildings and several churches. Listed in 1976, more than 2/3 of the buildings had been erected by 1910. Since then a residential subdivision has been platted off Park Street to the south and west on still higher ground.

Another way the character of Decorah was affected historically by its natural setting was by the large clay deposits in the city that was mined for brick production, Calvin noted (in 1906) that two brick yards operated in Decorah, and these made practically all the clay products manufactured in the county. The raw material used was loess. This clay is worked as it is taken from the pit. The brick are sand molded and dried on the yard. About 500,000 are made annually. (p.138). One of these pits was on the Luther College campus and a brick kiln from about 1870 is located in Phelps Park. According to Davis, the kiln was operated until 1920 and used clay from a deposit behind the Whalen Cabin at 605 Park Street. It was “restored” in 1984 (p.38).

It is apparent that locally produced common brick was an important building material in Decorah during the period when the Schulze kiln was operating. David T. Nelson, in his history of Luther College, reports that “Bricks made on the college campus furnished most of the building material” for the First Lutheran Church (1876) on West Broadway as well as for the first Main Building (1864) and other buildings. (Nelson, 94) “Using clay deposits on the campus, the site of the kiln was c. 50 feet east of the north wing of New Main; there, in the spring of 1863, the oak woods and the hazel brush began to fall before the ax, and brick making began.” (Nelson, 58)

Most of the brick produced by local manufacturing would have been “common brick” which includes various grades (depending on hardness and uniformity). This is all brick made for structural use, without scoring or other treatment of the exposed surface to create a certain texture (face brick). Common brick is graded into hard, medium, and soft. Hard brick is often known as red brick, but caution is in order here because the color may be a result of the composition of the clay. “Salmon brick” is another term for soft brick which may be restricted to interior use, i.e., within a wall. With common bricks burned in the old-style up-draft kiln like the Henry Schulz kiln in Phelps Park, the relative hardness of brick corresponds to its position in the kiln, thus

“front brick” would be hard since it was closest to the heat while the softer grades were known as “back brick.” (Lowndes, 4-5) Red or hard brick was usually the largest part of any given firing. According to Calvin, loess clay was used for all the brick making in Winneshiek County. (Calvin, 138)

Brick and stone construction require mortar, and lime for this was made locally as evidenced by the remains of the Birdsall Lime Kiln (1877) near Freeport. Suitable grades of limestone were heated (“burned”) to reduce the  $\text{CaCO}_3$  to  $\text{CaO}$  (“burnt lime” or “quicklime”) which, when mixed with water and sand, would produce mortar. It is also known that this kiln produced “slaked lime” for a paper mill that operated in Freeport.

### **Flora and Fauna**

A composite map of United States Land Surveyors’ Original Plats and Field Notes (1964) compiled by J. William Trygg (Sheet 2 Iowa Series) shows Decorah to be a mix of bottomland, timber, and prairie with prairie predominating west to the Turkey River with wooded zones (openings) but mainly wooded to the north, south and east. (See Figure 7)

In a larger geographic context the Decorah area is within an ecotone (zone of transition) between the predominately prairie grasslands (ecosystem) to the west and the eastern hardwood forest to the east.

During the many stages of the Ice Age (Pleistocene Epoch: 1,650,000 – 12,500 years ago) there were dramatic swings in climate and vegetation. As the ice retreated at the end of the most recent stage (Wisconsinan), about 12-14,000 years ago, the flora and fauna were similar to that of certain present day arctic environments, a boreal forest dominated by spruce with tundra in immediate proximity to the receding ice. This landscape sustained populations of now extinct large mammals including the woolly mammoth, mastodon, and giant ground sloth, of which remains have been found in Northeast Iowa. As the climate warmed the forest changed to a dominant oak–hickory mix, but because of the variety of growing environments from river bottoms to uplands to steep slopes and valleys, these forests came to include many varieties of soft and hardwood species and other vegetation including survivors from the late glacial period such as balsam fir, white pine, and an uncommon low-growing shrub, *Taxus Canadensis* (yew), and the Horsetails (Scouring Rush) and others including flora that survive in local microclimates similar enough to those in which these organisms evolved.

In prehistoric and early historic times the woodlands supported a diverse range of wildlife including white-tailed deer, turkey, grouse, and others still present, but also wolf, black bear, and otter. The river bottoms, wooded slopes and uplands harbored a much greater variety and number of wildlife than we see today (except for deer) and this sustained the Native Americans and early

Euro-American settlers, though the trade in furs had already unbalanced certain fur-bearing animals and game species.

The woodlands and prairie openings of Winneshiek County offered a wide range of renewable plant and animal resources to prehistoric hunting and gathering societies. The rugged relief, varied slopes, stream valleys and karst topography offered Native Americans sheltered habitation sites, including rock shelters and protected alluvial terraces with extensive views (prospects). The Upper Iowa River offered an accessible trade and communication route. (Ambrosino, 20-21)

These resources were made use of in many ways apart from the context of recreation and tourism, of course, as will be discussed more fully below, but within this context the impact of man on natural features have been relatively benign. In the case of Decorah's natural settings many of its features have in fact been enhanced by the interaction with man, in particular with reference to the city's park system, to be discussed below.

However, it is known that pre-historic and historic man both had lasting impact on landscapes as well as individual flora and fauna. It has been suggested, for example, that Native Americans may have hunted certain animal species to extinction or near extinction, for example the mastodon and others, e.g., the beaver, the last in response to European demand for its fur. It is known that they also used fire to both control large animals as an aid to hunting and to clear land and promote desirable vegetation and/or habitat.

Of course, none of these activities can be compared in scale to the impact of Euro-Americans when they arrived here to take up ownership of the land and its resources beginning in 1849. The arrival of European colonists in East and Southern North America introduced non-native plants and a few animals, a process that is ongoing with consequences into the present. An excess population of white-tailed deer threatens the wildflower population of wooded areas and the aggressive habit and shade tolerance of the recently arrived garlic mustard have had devastating effects in some locations in this area.

B. Shimek's listings of native and introduced plants at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a useful reference, indicating the relative proportion of native and introduced species at a specific point in time, against which further changes can be measured in the century intervening. The work in question is "The Plants of Winneshiek County," published in the *Iowa Geological Survey*. Volume XVI, pp. 147-211 (1906). The first two sentences are worth quoting as a summary description of the natural setting of Decorah:

Winneshiek County presents a flora of unusual richness. Both because of its geographic position and its varied surface features it offers conditions which have made possible the development of a variety of plants scarcely equaled in any other county of the state.

Further on Shimek discusses what he calls “The Forest Problem”, namely its destruction by Euro-Americans:

Originally not less than one-fourth of the surface of Winneshiek County was covered with forest. The forest prevented erosion; it retained moisture which made easier the disintegration of both organic and inorganic materials; it annually contributed its leaves to the accumulating soil;...So man thought that he saw alluring promise in the richness of the soil, and this coupled with the prospect of immediate gain from its products, led him to remove the forest. But an awakening has already come and men realize that with the removal of the riches of the forest they also lose the richness of the soil, for the rains and melting snows quickly strip it from the hillsides...Few counties in the state have suffered more than Winneshiek in this respect. (151)

And thus the first 50 years of our occupation of the Decorah area resulted in a clearing of much of the forest cover in both the uplands but also on steep slopes bordering the Upper Iowa and other streams. Historic photos of landscapes within the Decorah area and in other hilly locations in northeast Iowa show hillsides denuded of their original forest cover particularly in or near cities. This activity was also driven in part by a demand for firewood, especially strong along and near the banks of the Mississippi and its tributaries, where steamboat traffic created a strong demand for this resource.

So while an awakening might have come by the time Shimek wrote the above, it was only after the dust storms of the 1930s and during the Great Depression that the federal government began offering technical assistance and financial incentives to farmers to conserve the soil. Agencies including the U.S. Soil Conservation Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) were dedicated to developing and conserving the nation’s natural resources. A CCC camp was set up on the fairgrounds in Decorah and work projects were carried out in Phelps Park and elsewhere in Decorah as well as in the neighboring counties.

Soil erosion remains a problem here and it affects many historic resources including units within the City’s park system. The efforts to conserve soil and water have in some instances created historic resources, at times within already existing historic properties (e.g. in Phelps Park). Factors affecting these properties and resources at the present time include a long term increasing annual precipitation trend and increasing use of and traffic within the City’s park system, as the rest of the world discovers this remarkable recreational resource.

## **Tourism**

The natural setting of Decorah and the adjacent territory in particular in, on and near the Upper Iowa for several miles up- and downstream from the city, has been the focus of recreational activity for decades before the first city park was created in 1911. The scenery and abundant

wildlife here have been enjoyed by tourists and the native population for decades via fishing, boating, hiking, camping, and picnicking, as documented by historic photos and written accounts, collections of postcards, and historic photos.

A very early account of the aesthetic appeal of the Upper Iowa River valley and Decorah is from the diary of Elisabeth Koren, the 21- year old wife of Rev. U. V. Koren, the pioneer pastor of the first Norwegian Lutheran rural communities in northeast Iowa. She was not a tourist and the Korens eventually moved to Decorah, but her response to the river valley and the small town's setting within it was consistent with the views of later visitors. On a trip to Ingebret Haugen's house (the former trading post of Henry Rice) on Christmas Day, 1853, they saw the "Little (Upper) Iowa River, along the banks of which, as everywhere along the rivers here, it was very beautiful." They also saw Decorah, which "has a pretty location." Among several early guidebooks to Iowa are two by Nathan H. Parker, where Decorah is not only "one of the most advantageously located interior towns in the State," but "situated on the Iowa River, and in the heart of a beautiful and fertile section of country." (Parker (1856), 115)

In 1890, well before Decorah's first city park was established, Sumner Matteson (see Bibliography), had written and illustrated with photographs a small book where on page one he informs the reader, "Why Decorah is becoming a pleasure resort: The conditions are favorable. It is accessible. It is healthful and picturesque. It is romantically situated in a winding valley . . ." and so on.

And in the Iowa volume of the Works Progress Administration sponsored American Guide Series written by the Federal Writers' Project (1938), Decorah is "on the banks (sic) of the Upper Iowa River, in the center of a region rich in historic features and geological phenomena." (Federal Writers' Project, 346)

These guidebooks were designed as a series of road tours and included information on the natural and cultural history of the locations included in each tour itinerary. The section on Decorah includes descriptions of "Dunning Springs," "Decorah Ice Cave," where a \$.15 admission charge was levied, and "Twin Springs State Game Preserve," now known as Twin Springs State Park. Important cultural facilities are also included : Luther College, the Norwegian-American Historical Museum (admission \$.10), the Decorah Women's College, and the Swimming Pool, where the bath house may have been under construction, along with a summary of the city's history.

### **Decorah's Municipal Park System**

The high quality and large number of Decorah parks is remarkable. At present they number 13 and comprise about 500 acres. While administered by the city's Parks and Recreation Department, several of them are in whole or in part outside the city limits and are also either State

Parks or State Preserves administered by the Iowa DNR. A number of them memorialize individuals who gave land or money for parks and/or are regarded as important for their contributions to conservation or important in the city's history in one way or another.

They may also include historic structures and landscapes as well as intact archaeological sites and artifacts from prehistoric and historic time periods. Fortunately there is a useful history of the city's parks available to researchers. Fred Biermann's *History of Decorah's Park System* (1956), an unpublished manuscript, is available at the Luther College Library. Biermann served on the Park Commission from 1922 to 1968, and he based his book on the records of the Park Commission and City Council proceedings.

Decorah's first park was 12 acres of the present Phelps Park, acquired in 1911 when the Park Commission was also created. Biermann credits Severt Larsen, a Decorah merchant who was one of the first three commissioners, with being the leading person in what soon became a local park movement that continues into the present. It is possible that this was inspired by the national "City Beautiful Movement" then underway, and the subject deserves study, since urban parks were an important feature of this program.

"The original 12 acres of Phelps Park were acquired from the late Professor Milton Updegraff and paid for largely with public subscriptions. The acquisition was due largely to the persistence and zeal of the late Severt Larsen. The Park Commission acquired more land southwestward from the original 12 acres. Then C. J. Weiser donated some acres on the hillside above and below Dug Road." (Biermann, 6) At this point the total area of what was known as the "City Park" included 43 acres.

Biermann writes:

The development of the 'City Park' was mostly due to Severt Larsen --- the band stand, the scenic walk, the "look-outs", the rock wall along the drive above Dug Road. He caused the planting of numerous elms and basswoods in the most used part of City Park. This is fortunate for the present day, because nearly all the oaks, excepting white oaks, which covered the area when acquired, now have succumbed to civilization, as they usually do. These plantings of Mr. Larsen now comprise a large fraction of the big trees there." (ibid.)

The City gave one acre on the north side of the park and the final 12 acres added to the park were purchased with money from the estate of Mr. and Mrs. George Phelps. Mr. Phelps, who arrived in Decorah in 1854, had made a small fortune as a land speculator, in the grain trade, and in lending money. He and his second wife left Decorah and moved to England in the late 1870's where George died in 1907. In 1922 the city was offered a cash bequest of \$9,400 and an annuity by the Phelps estate under the condition that the City Park be re-named Phelps Park. The Park

Commission voted 2 to 1 in favor, with Severt Larsen in opposition, and he left the Park Board in protest.

The Park Commission used this money to good effect; among other things it was used to purchase 65 of the 78 acres of Palisades Park and about 30 acres of the Twin Springs Park. (Biermann, p.7) Biermann himself was an important supporter of parks and conservation in and outside the Decorah area. His opinion about Phelps when he wrote his history was quite positive, surmising that “George Phelps has contributed more money to public enterprises in Decorah than any other man.” ( ibid.)

Other individuals in Decorah have gone on the record with a different assessment of Mr. Phelps. Beginning in the early 1850’s people came to Decorah in large numbers looking to purchase land suitable for farming. In 1855 a U.S. Government land office was established here and there were nine banks in business. (Alexander, 123) Individuals as well as banks lent money to beginning farmers. These loans could be secured by mortgages and the annual interest rates were between 25 and 40%. (Woodward, p.31) Someone named F.A. Lloyd wrote a poem about Phelps at some point during his heyday in Decorah:

Here lies old forty-four percent  
The more he made, the more he lent,  
The more he made, the more he craved.  
Good God: Can such a soul be saved?  
(Woodward, 31)

Unfortunately, all but one of the local guidebooks tells a different story about Phelps Park, and this erroneous version has become the conventional wisdom, or legend. The earliest example of this found in research for the current project dates to 1970, in a news item from that year recently reprinted announcing the swearing into office of two new park commissioners, Don Gray and Jack Anundsen:

“The Decorah public park system got its start in 1910 with a gift of 15 acres from the Phelps family.” (“Echoes from the Past 1970”) *Decorah Journal*, January 1, 2010)

George Knudson got it right in one of his books, *Decorah Trails and Trolls* (1976) as did Lucille Price in her Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District NRHP nomination (1976), and both added information about several of the man-made historic features of the park that were in place before the city received the Phelps money in 1922.

None of this can detract from the importance of the Phelps bequest to the city park system and the Phelps Cemetery, but the importance of Severt Larsen in the history of Decorah’s parks has been somewhat overlooked. He also left \$1,000 to the Park Commission for a fountain of his own design that was “updated” in 1974. (Price)

Several other bequests and donations of land and money have also been important to the park system, the most recent being from the Van Peenen family, an area of about 100 acres on the north edge of Ice Cave Park.

At present the Parks and Recreation Department is working on extending a trail network that will include historic bridges and art works commissioned by an art committee and paid for by local businesses and individuals in exchange for “naming rights.” The precedent for this in Decorah is of course the conditions accompanying the Phelps bequest in 1922. Not all the named parks in the city system are examples of this pattern, however, just as each park has its own natural features and history.

### **Context Summary**

The natural setting of Decorah is a factor in all other historic and prehistoric contexts. The full range of associated property types remains to be investigated. The natural history is an obvious factor in the character of the multifaceted resources it contains, but the hand of man has been active in both exploiting and enhancing them so that social, cultural, and even political history is embodied here as well.

Luther College offers a model of this interrelationship. The history of the Luther campus can be said to begin in 1865 with the dedication of the first building erected there, the Main Building, although the initial 32 acre parcel had been purchased in 1860 and brick had already been made there for a building next to the St. Cloud Hotel that the Norwegian Synod had purchased in 1864. (Nelson) Over time the plans have been drawn up and buildings built, all of it related to the natural setting. Most notable perhaps was the plan submitted by Chicago landscape architect Jens Jensen in 1910. (See Davis, 99) Jensen’s plan included the creation of the “college green,” an unbuilt upon space between the student union and Preus Library with other new construction flanking this large space that, besides grass and walkways, includes several large oaks that are native and may have been there before the first building was erected. Several large boulders from the glacial drift excavated for Preus Library have been integrated into the landscaping around the library. There are also historically significant buildings on the campus (the earliest dates from 1867, Campus House) but a comprehensive history of the college with emphasis on the architecture and landscape features remains to be written.

### **Known Representative Properties**

Listed here are sites, structures and landscapes. “NRHP” means that the property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Other materials significant in this context include artifacts, historic photographs, and source material listed and annotated (see Bibliography).

Ice Cave – This is both a city park and an Iowa DNR Preserve. NRHP

Pulpit Rock – NRHP

Decorah’s City Park System – All the parks in this system should be considered potentially significant historically, with the exception of those dedicated specifically for organized athletic activity. Of demonstrated importance because of the human activity and past and present structural remains they include, mainly related to tourism and recreation and geology, are:

Siewer’s Spring State Park

Dunning’s Spring

Twin Springs Park – Includes remains of a fish hatchery and landscape features designed by a landscape architect who worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

Phelps Park (NRHP)

Dugway Trail (formerly Oneota Drive) - Recreational trail from the west end of Main Street to Twin Springs Road.

Quarries off Ice Cave Road at several locations, Dunning’s Spring, Bruening quarry at Montgomery Street and Highway No. 9.

There are several published guidebooks featuring the natural setting of Decorah that are not only important resources for historians but that also can be considered as historic artifacts. Those discovered during the course of the current project are listed in the Bibliography and include *Iowa. The Hawkeye State* (1938), Jewell, and Matteson. The same is true for historic photographs, of which the Hamlet Peterson Collection at Luther College is only one.

### **Preservation Planning Goals**

Many of the properties associated with this context may not generally be considered historic or cultural resources. Therefore, the first step in the preservation process is to identify and locate these properties/sites, after which the public can be made aware of their significance.

Decorah’s city parks are off limits to residential or commercial development, but these activities on their borders or even at considerable distances can adversely affect these properties in the case of communication towers, wind power generators, rock mining, and road construction.

Given the great popularity of the city's parks, as well as the steep topography in many of them, foot and bicycle traffic can impact their natural character and even destabilize soil and plant cover leading to increased erosion. In some of our national parks and wilderness areas such problems have been addressed by limiting access to them, a remedy of last resort.

### **Specific Recommendations**

The land included in Dunning's Spring Park, Ice Cave Park and Preserve, and the adjacent areas needs to be mapped with the boundaries and important natural and man-made features marked. These would include caves, sinkholes, abandoned quarries, rock exposures, and features of historic interest such as building foundation remnants, rock walls, and the like. The Ice Cave Flour Mill foundation remnants in Wold Park, and the fish rearing ponds, mill race remnants, and rest room at Twin Springs Park should be preserved. As Decorah's oldest park and the one with the most man-made historic structures, Phelps Park should be assessed for its repair and restoration needs, especially with respect to the displacement of the stonework.

### **PREHISTORIC NATIVE AMERICANS IN NORTHEAST IOWA, 10,000 BC – 1700 AD**

Paleo-Indian Period 8500 BC – 7500 BC

Archaic Period 7500 – 400 BC (Eastern Iowa)

Woodland Period 400 BC – 1150 AD

Oneota Tradition 1150 – 1700

The major sources of information in summarizing the prehistoric Native American contexts below are Ambrosino 1992, Stanley 1995, Stanley and Bond 2003, and Rogers 2007.

#### **Paleo – Indian Period**

It has long been assumed that the first humans to inhabit North and South America came from Asia over a land bridge that existed because of an existing ice sheet and low sea water levels due to the slowly receding Wisconsinan glacier. The evidence of these peoples in northeast Iowa is sparse, consisting of isolated finds of spear points of a particular kind known as fluted lancolate (a narrow pointed leaf shape with a large flake along the center axis to facilitate the attachment of a wooden shaft). These points and other distinctive tools associated with hunting, killing, and processing game including certain quite large animals, e.g., mammoth, mastodon, bison and others, suggest that the Paleo-Indians subsisted mainly on animal products. The evidence of this association is quite direct in that buried skeletal remains of these creatures have been found with spear points embedded in them.

There is also evidence from Wisconsin that the Paleo-Indians and their large animal prey followed the retreating ice northward and that this may have occurred in Iowa also, since diagnostic point types have been found above Saylorville Lake in central Iowa, a location well north of the terminal moraine of the Wisconsinan ice front. (Ambrosino, 23)

It is likely that Paleo-Indian culture groups were widely distributed across what is now the continental United States, which is indicated by the names of two of the most common projectile point types associated derived from Folsom, and Clovis, New Mexico, the locations where the first finds were made.

On upland ridges where Paleo-Indian sites are most common, there is a blanket of loess which, if thick enough, may insulate some sites beneath the plow zone. Severe erosion has brought most of these sites to the surface, as people who collect on the valley bluff lines have discovered. Intact Paleo- Indian sites are most likely to exist along valley margins where colluvial deposits of Late Pleistocene age have been preserved on Savanna terraces and within (alluvial) fans. (Ambrosino, 24)

### **Archaic Period**

Recognition of the Early Archaic Period (7500-4500 BC) is based mostly on a typological identification of projectile points which, like the Paleo-Indian spear points, in Iowa have been dated and given names from sites elsewhere in the continental United States. Early Archaic points have also been found in upland locations in Northeast Iowa. (Ambrosino 24)

The Late Paleo-Indian and Early Archaic periods can be regarded as transitional culturally but also in terms of climate.

Around 10,000 years ago, the region's climate began to warm, resulting in a retreat of the coniferous forests and the growth of a mixed coniferous-hardwood forest. Grasses and other types of vegetation began to flourish, affording a wider range of food for both man and other animals. Archaic tradition people in the Upper Mississippi Valley region became "foragers," as much as hunters, meaning that they procured a wide variety of animals, birds, fish, and plants that were not available to earlier peoples. (Stoltman 207-213) As the vegetation became more diverse, so did the numbers and types of animals in the region.

It was during the transition from a colder to a warmer climate that the mammoth, mastodon, and giant bison became extinct. It is uncertain whether it was the change in climate and vegetation that made life untenable for these megafauna and made these mammals more vulnerable to diseases, or if humans contributed to their disappearance by overhunting, or if it was a combination of both. Once these large mammals were gone, humans had to find other ways of surviving. As their focus shifted, humans began to hunt more bison, elk, and deer. They became

more productive hunters using less effort and time to hunt an animal, the majority of which could be used in some useful manner for food and clothing. (Rogers, 5)

Towards the end of the Archaic period, the population had increased as well as interaction between groups. Subsistence strategies became very similar over broad areas as a result. There was also an increase in territoriality, localized differences in artifact types and styles, and development of trading networks. Settlement patterns became more sedentary setting, the stage for the Woodland period to follow where increased sedentism was coupled with the rise of early agriculture. Late Archaic peoples began burying their dead in large ossuaries, which are communal cemeteries containing multiple burials. The burials were flexed and often turned on their sides. (ibid.)

In general, Archaic period stone tools are typified by side-notched and expanding –base projectile points and knives, side-notched scrapers, drills, and a variety of pecked and ground stone tools such as axes, abraders, and manos and mutates. Ground stone tools were used for chopping, crushing, and grinding. A distinctive type of ground stone tool called a banner stone has been identified on Archaic sites. Banner stones appear to have been used as weights on atlatls, or spear-throwers, to provide leverage and enable greater force and accuracy in the throw. Other tools included bone awls, needles, scrapers, and fish hooks, with some items hammered from raw copper obtained in the Great Lakes area. The stone and bone tools would have been used to butcher meat and dress hides that were then used for shelters and as clothing. Archaic people probably also used traps and snares to capture small animals, but these items would have been made from materials – bone, wood, fiber – that rarely survive in the archaeological record. (ibid.)

The basic social unit during the Archaic period was probably a small group of a few families, much as it had been in earlier times, with larger groups coming together to cooperate in the hunting of game such as bison. While the smaller groups were still mobile, they tended to stay in one region where they were familiar with the resources and their availability. They would migrate around within this region on a seasonal basis taking advantage of the various resources as they came to maturity. Base camps likely served as areas to store items and would have been a camp site that was returned to on a regular basis. (ibid.)

Archaic period housing consisted of temporary structures used during hunting and collecting forays similar to those suspected for the Paleoindians – wood or bone frames over which animal hides were stretched. However, in the winter we know that in Iowa and much of the Midwest, Archaic peoples took shelter in natural rock overhangs, called rockshelters, and caves where the natural cavity would provide some measure of insulation and protection from the harsh elements. (ibid.)

Several rockshelters have been identified in northeast Iowa in Allamakee and Winneshiek Counties but none have been shown to include an Archaic component. This is a complicated issue because rockshelters were used by peoples of the several Native American traditions that

succeeded them and have also been disturbed by relic hunters. Individual projectile points and other artifacts from the Archaic period have been found in Northeast Iowa.

### **Woodland Period**

Evidence of the next oldest Native American tradition, the Woodland, was wide spread when Euro-Americans first arrived in the upper Mississippi Valley region. This was in the form of burial mounds, easily seen and in various size and shapes. They may be conical, linear, or effigy in shape; that is, laid out in the form of birds and animals as seen from above. Besides mounds, the other property type not found in earlier Native American Traditions is pottery. The Woodland Period, encompassing about 1500 years has been divided into early, middle and late sub-periods and it includes several major social and technological changes that includes the introduction of the bow and arrow, pottery and the domestication and cultivation of plants. It is thought that the climate was much like our own and that the primary division between prairie to the west of Northeast Iowa and hardwood forest extending to the east was established during this time period. A “mound culture” had been identified in the eastern U.S (in Ohio, particularly) centuries before settlement began in northeast Iowa, so many settlers here arrived with some awareness of mound building but with no fact-based understanding of who had built them. (Silverberg)

It has been suggested that it was during the Woodland period that native populations achieved their highest density in Iowa and achieved a standard of living and refined their adaptation to the environment in a way that would never be seen again by Native Americans. (Rogers, 6)

Woodland mounds have been excavated near the Mississippi in Allamakee and Clayton Counties and their way of life, as suggested in the artifacts recovered, was mostly dependent on the abundant wildlife in the Mississippi Valley and adjacent areas including the valleys of the Upper Iowa and other tributaries in Northeast Iowa. By “wildlife” is meant not just animals but vegetables, fruits and seeds, including wild rice which was harvested in late summer and stored in ceramic vessels. Middle Woodland people engaged in trading networks and built large groups of conical and linear mounds as well as effigy mounds in the form of birds and the large animals they would have been familiar with. Most of these mounds contained human burials and artifacts, and most of them were looted and/or destroyed, primarily by farming activities but also and more recently by urban development. It is important to realize that these mound groups were not residential sites but rather mortuary complexes that functioned in ways not completely understood. The work of Clark Mallam, the late professor of anthropology at Luther College, was devoted to understanding the meaning of the effigy and other mounds and it needs to be kept in mind that later Native Americans also built mounds and often buried their dead in those dating from the Woodland Period. They became part of Euro-American settlement ideology as well in the many cases where pioneer cemeteries were established in the midst of a mound group with burials being made in existing mounds. Indeed, a small municipal cemetery in Harper’s Ferry, (Allamakee County) with the city’s founder, David Harper, buried in the center of a large mound,

is about all that survives from what was regarded as the largest mound group west of the Mississippi when it was surveyed by Theodore H. Lewis in 1892 after farming activities had already obliterated many of the mounds. Including more than 900 mounds, this was known as the Harper's Ferry "Great Group."

The Effigy Mounds National Monument, with units in both Clayton and Allamakee County, includes the largest collection of both effigy and other mounds in the Upper Mississippi Valley, but two State Preserves are note worthy as well. One is the Fish Farm Preserve on the Mississippi in Allamakee County, which is only a small remnant of a larger group with many sites that once included a cave with petroglyphs. The Slinde Mound Group (named after the original landowner) is on a terrace above the Upper Iowa just east of the Winneshiek County line in Allamakee County. There are many private and public collections of Woodland Period artifacts, including the Ellison Orr Collection, a small part of which is held at the Effigy Mounds Monument Visitor Center.

There were mounds in and near Decorah noted by some of the first Euro-American settlers and others who arrived here in the 1840's (see the Early Settlement Context, below). Sites and artifacts from the late Woodland and Oneota Periods have been identified in Decorah elsewhere in Northeast Iowa. In his Decorah Visitor's Guide published in 1996, the late Professor Robert H. Davis reported that archeological excavations carried out just below Palisades Park during the summer of 1994 yielded evidence of human settlement as early as 500 AD. Articles from the sites, located between the Upper Iowa River and Ice Cave Road on one side, and rock formations like the cliffs which rise to form Palisades Park on another, suggest two distinct periods of occupation. The first dates from around 500 and the second from approximately 1200. Late Woodland and Oneota are the names assigned to the material culture of these early Decorah groups. (Davis, 1)

And in 2003 a habitation site "preliminarily determined" to be from the late Woodland Period was identified near the Tavener Bridge about 33 feet below the surface. (Bond and Stanley)

### **Oneota Period**

The transition from the Late Woodland to the Oneota traditions in Northeast Iowa and in southwest Wisconsin and elsewhere in the Upper Mississippi Valley is complicated and the reader is referred to Theler and Boszhardt (Chapters 10 and 11) for a discussion of the important issues. Dale R. Henning has summarized some of the issues associated with the topic this way:

"Study of the Oneota tradition has evolved in many ways since it was first named in the early twentieth century and the interpretations of its age and interactions are topics of discussion, even argument, among archaeologists to this day." (Henning)

Through the years, archaeologists have accepted this term to refer to several post-Woodland groups that appeared in Iowa about AD 1,000 and persisted in some areas into the Proto-Historic and early historic periods. However, archaeologists have no idea by what name or names the “Oneota” referred to themselves. Archaeologists consider the Oneota as ancestral to several known historic tribes including the Ioway, Oto, Missouri, and Winnebago. (Rogers, 7)

“Oneota” was the name given by Native Americans to the Upper Iowa River and recorded as such by the geologist W. J. McGee in his report, “The Pleistocene History of Northeast Iowa,” published in 1891 in the Eleventh Annual Report of the U.S. Geological Survey. The name was also given to the limestone bedrock formation so dramatically exposed at the upper levels of the lower reaches of the Upper Iowa valley in Allamakee County. It was later given to a distinct Native American culture complex (tradition) at a location known as the Hartley-Lane terrace by Charles Reuben Keyes after extensive research in the Upper Iowa Valley by Keyes and Ellison Orr during the early 1930’s in projects funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This area includes a two acre State Preserve identified in 1964 as a late Woodland fortified village (Hartley Fort). For more on the term Oneota, see Alex, 185, who suggests that it was mistakenly recorded in reference to the *Oneida* Indians in New York State by H. R. Schoolcraft.

The Oneota lived throughout the Midwest in villages of single or multiple family dwellings. They subsisted by hunting and gathering and by cultivating certain plants including maize (corn), squash, beans, and amaranth. In addition to hunting the local large animals including deer and elk, they made seasonal treks west to hunt bison.

George Kundson’s comments on “Oneota Villages” are evocative:

If we could paddle down the Upper Iowa with the clock turned back to Oneota times we would probably come upon a village every few miles. Most of these would be small, with a dozen huts built on a flat sandy terrace above the high water level. There would be a few dozen acres of cropland on the terraces and the rich land of the river floodplain. Although clear of brush, many of the trees would not be removed, but simply killed by cutting the bark to girdle the trunk. Women and children would plant and cultivate the fields with a hoe made from a large buffalo bone. Corn, squash, pumpkins and beans which few in the fields would be harvested by the women and carried back to the village along with nuts, berries, roots and clams. Corn was often stored in pits several feet deep which were sometimes used for cooking and usually ended up as trash pits of much interest to later archeologists. (Knudson, *A Guide to the Upper Iowa River* (1971), 44)

The Oneota did not build mounds in which to bury their dead, although sometimes they used mounds built by previous Woodland groups for this purpose. More typically, they would bury their dead in extended positions much as Europeans and Euro-Americans bury their dead. Burials often included pottery, chert flakes, bone whistles, copper and brass bracelets and beads.

Ceremonial items often found on Oneota sites include pipes, inscribed tablets, and effigies carved out of the soft red stone known as catlinite. (Rogers, 8)

Artifacts commonly found on Oneota sites in eastern Iowa include shell-tempered pottery vessels having globular shapes and incised with distinctive geometric patterns; small unnotched, triangular arrow points, drills, and small thumbnail end scrapers often fashioned from white Burlington chert; abraders made from sandstone; ground stone manos and metals used for grinding corn and crushing nuts; pipes and other items fashioned from catlinite; and bone tools including bison scapula hoes and deer mandible sickles, both used for agriculture. Their village sites are often marked by numerous deep, bell-shaped pits used for storage of foodstuffs and post-hole patterns forming oval, square or long, rectangular-shaped houses. (Rogers, *ibid.*)

Knudson's words and the available archaeological evidence suggests that the many terraces in and near Decorah are likely locations for Woodland mounds and/or Oneota villages. Geomorphological surveys to map the alluvial stratigraphy would be a vital component of further research.

European fur trade items have been found at Oneota sites, and the impact of European settlement activities in Eastern North America were affecting Native America life ways before the French fur traders arrived here. It is possible, for example, that the Upper Iowa Oneota moved here from the La Crosse, Wisconsin area in the mid-1600's, where they had been living for about 300 years, for reasons of a cultural crisis that may have included population devastation from European diseases spreading here along trading networks ahead of direct contact between the Indians and Europeans. (Theler and Boszhardt, 176-180)

### **Known Representative Properties**

There is an unknown number of private collections of prehistoric artifacts owned by individuals living in or near Decorah and some of this material may have been found in the city. The largest local repository of such material is in the Luther College Archaeology Laboratory in Koren Hall. This includes material obtained during Cultural Resource Management (CRM) surveys in Northeast Iowa as well as donations to the college from various sources. Of particular importance is the collection of Gavin Sampson a collector and dealer in antiquities that active in the 1950's and 1960's in Northeast Iowa. There may be a dozen or more known archaeological sites within a mile or so of Decorah, but because of the restricted nature of the archeological site reports of projects relevant to the present project, it would serve little purpose to provide a list of site numbers with no locational or other meaningful information.

## **Preservation Planning Goals**

The principal goal is to protect existing resources associated with the several distinct prehistoric Native American traditions that may have left remains in the Decorah area. This cannot be accomplished without more information and analysis of existing data directed toward creating predictive models of where any property types associated with these traditions are most likely to be found.

The general public and local government entities including the Planning and Zoning Commission, city engineer, and Parks and Recreation Department need to be made aware of the likelihood of encountering buried prehistoric sites in Decorah. Burial sites are protected under Iowa law and undertakings (projects) that include excavation and are in part or wholly funded or sanctioned by federal agencies or by entities chartered by federal agencies (e.g. banks) must be reviewed for potential adverse impact on prehistoric sites that might be eligible for listing on the NRHP.

A useful tool that has been used by local governments in Iowa and elsewhere is a local ordinance requiring **all proposed undertakings involving disturbance of subsoil to be reviewed prior to their initiation**, not only those meeting the federal requirements just outlined. Enough is already known, at least by professional archaeologists, to make such reviews useful. But again, the first step in preserving prehistoric sites is to make public aware of what is already known, followed by the creation of predictive models and limited fieldwork to test them.

## **Specific Recommendations**

Some geomorphological mapping of Decorah has been done (Stanley 1995, Fig. 14), and an archaeological overview and research guide was completed in 1992 (Ambrosino 1992). This contains a long list of recommendations for research projects but few of any have been carried out. For example, with regard to prehistoric mounds alone, the lack of recorded mound sites in Winneshiek County is quite troubling given the fact that Clayton County has 976 recorded mound sites and Allamakee County has 94 recorded mound sites. While both Clayton County and Allamakee County are located in closer proximity to the Mississippi River, one would, nevertheless, expect a high occurrence of mound sites in Winneshiek county than is currently recorded. (Ambrosino, 68)

Reports of early settlers in Decorah refer to mounds existing here at certain locations, and the name given to Mound Street in a residential area near the river is thought to indicate that one or more mounds were present at one time.

Verifying evidence of this kind should be included in any future archaeological research project. The city CLG could sponsor such projects on its own or join with the county CLG in sponsoring county-wide surveys.

## **NATIVE AMERICANS AND EURO-AMERICAN CONTACT, 1640-1848**

The period up to about 1700 is sometimes referred to “proto-historic” in Iowa and it refers to the time when European influence in the form of trade goods began coming into Iowa but before actual contact between these peoples had occurred. In northeast Iowa direct contact between Native Americans (the Ioways) and Europeans (French Canadians) occurred shortly after the exploratory voyage of Marquette and Joliet to the Upper Mississippi in 1673. The French had established missions and fur trading posts on the Great Lakes, including at Green Bay on Lake Michigan and on Mackinac Island. The portage route from Green Bay up the Fox and down the Wisconsin Rivers to the Mississippi was vital to the French commercial interests in the American Midwest. In 1685 Nicolas Perrot followed the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers route and turned north upon reaching the Mississippi. He made direct contact with Iowa Indians, but whether this was at their village at the mouth of the Upper Iowa or at Trempealeau on the east bank of the river is unclear. They had been identified as buffalo hunters and thus good prospects for engaging in the fur trade after having made an appearance at the French mission in Green Bay. (Theler and Boszhardt, 176) In any case the French succeeded in establishing posts at Trempealeau on Lake Pepin and at Prairie du Chien in 1737. (Scanlan, 27) The French enjoyed several decades of profitable trade in lands west of the Mississippi including those adjacent to the Upper Iowa River and beyond although no sites associated with this trade have as yet been identified. We have already noted the presence of trade goods in Oneota burials well before any white men arrived here.

Native Americans then in Iowa were either living here full-time or coming into Iowa in a seasonal pattern of hunting and gathering. In Northeast Iowa these included the Ioway, Oto, and Eastern Dakota.

While the French were doing well in their relations with Indians west of the Mississippi, they had faced difficulties in maintaining control of their trading routes on the Great Lakes and even in the St. Lawrence River region. An extended period of hostilities between the Iroquois Confederacy and tribes allied with the French resulted in several tribes living in what is now Michigan to leave, fleeing across Lake Michigan to Wisconsin where conflict with the Iroquois continued. These tribes included Kickapoo, Sauk, Meskwaki (Fox) and Potawatomie, and it would not be long before some of them would move or be moved to what is now Iowa.

The pattern of events in Northeast Iowa from at least the mid-1700's to the beginning of early white settlement is very complicated, with many local events having national significance and being related to an international pattern. It is possibly best characterized as a period of unremitting conflict until the young United States of America finally defeated the old French and British colonial powers and removed or neutralized the Native Americans.

The history of this period included a continuation of major conflicts between the major European colonial powers, acted out in North America and in Europe itself. It also included the American Revolution and the establishment of the United States of America entering the scene in competition with the Europeans for the control of the fur trade and the territory itself. The new nation pursued an expansionist agenda seeking to populate the lands west and north of the Ohio River as far as the Mississippi. After defeating the British, in the War of 1812, only the disease-ridden and demoralized Native Americans stood in the way of total control of most of North American north and east of Mexico and south of Canada, the French having been defeated by the British in 1763, the Spanish having retreated to the southwest, and the United States having purchased the territory west of the Mississippi known as Spanish Louisiana from France in 1803 (the “Louisiana Purchase”).

The United States established a series of forts early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to maintain control and create a military presence: Fort Armstrong (Rock Island), Fort Crawford (Prairie du Chien), and Fort Snelling, near the future location of St. Paul, Minnesota at the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers.

Intertribal conflicts between the Dakota and Sauk-Fox led federal authorities to create a boundary between them (the “Neutral Line”), agreed to by a treaty negotiated at Prairie du Chien in 1825. This line began at the mouth of the Upper Iowa and extended west and a few degrees south to the upper fork of the Des Moines River. This was not effective, perhaps because it was not surveyed until seven years later, so in 1830 another council was held at Prairie du Chien, and this time the Sauk-Fox and Dakota were each prevailed upon to cede to the United States a 20 mile wide strip of land, the Dakota north and the Sauk-Fox south of the line, creating the “Neutral Zone,” now generally known as the “Neutral Ground.” The survey to mark the boundary of this 40 mile wide tract began in 1832 by locating the neutral line, in an expedition under the direction of Captain Nathan Boone, son of the American icon Daniel Boone. (Abernethy 243-289) The southern boundary starts at Paint Rock (or “Painted Rock”) an important Indian landmark in southern Allamakee County. All of Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties are in the Neutral Zone. (See Figure 5)

Another important landmark in Allamakee County was the “Old Mission” created under a provision of the Black Hawk Purchase treaty of 1832 (see below). The Yellow River Mission, located 6 miles upstream from the Mississippi about 10 miles from Fort Crawford, was opened in 1835 and was dedicated to teach Winnebago children English, convert them to Christianity, and introduce them to Euro-American farming methods. By the time it was closed in 1840 it had 79 pupils enrolled. (Petersen, 76) It was replaced by the Turkey River Subagency Mission near Ft. Atkinson. In Treaties from 1829 and 1832, the Winnebagos had ceded all their land south of the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers and agreed to move to the Neutral Ground. Most of them did not move, however, until after another treaty was signed in 1838 that totally disposed them of all their remaining territory in Wisconsin. It included a provision that they were to remain 20 miles west of the Mississippi except for hunting and fishing.

In order to enforce these requirements a large military outpost, Fort Atkinson, was built on the Turkey River (1840-42) in what later became Winneshiek County. The Yellow River Mission was closed and replaced by one near the new Fort. A military road was built from the Mississippi near the Yellow River across from (old) Fort Crawford and Prairie du Chien to supply Fort Atkinson and the new mission. This road later became an important and heavily traveled means of access into Winneshiek County and points west and north of there, once the Neutral Ground was opened for settlement in 1848. The first railroad west of the Mississippi into this territory, the McGregor Western, also followed this route.

It is important to take note of an event in 1832 that had a major impact on the history of eastern Iowa. This was the Black Hawk War, and while it was waged in northeast Illinois and west-central Wisconsin, its final battle took place on and adjacent to the Mississippi River across from the mouth of the Upper Iowa River.

In April 1832 a band of about 600 Sauk Indians, whose traditional territory was located in northeast Illinois (granted statehood in 1818) in and around a place called Saukenuk, decided to return from where they had been forced to settle in eastern Iowa in 1831 following pressure from Euro-American settlers and lead mining interests that had the support of the United States Government. The leader of this effort was the Sauk Chief Black Hawk, and it became one of the legendary “last stands” of the Native Americans against encroaching Euro-American civilization. The federal military from nearby Forts Armstrong and Crawford plus the Illinois state militia reacted immediately, and Black Hawk led his band north into what became Wisconsin in 1848. This was a heroic and futile campaign that lasted only three months, but it involved several well-known American national political figures including Abraham Lincoln, Zachary Taylor, and Jefferson Davis. Several books have been written about it as well, including Black Hawk’s autobiography and a book by John Wakefield, an army Colonel who served as a physician in the war and built a residence and stage stop on the Lansing-Decorah road (State Highway No. 9) in Allamakee County in 1851. Wakefield departed three years later and the property became known as the Landmark Inn.

The decisive battle took place near the mouth of the Bad Axe River in Wisconsin, across from the mouth of the Upper Iowa, where the Indians were attempting to cross the Mississippi. Several place names in the area memorialize this event including Black Hawk Bluff near New Albin and Victory, Wisconsin. According to one of the many and often conflicting accounts of this war, a band of nearly 1,000 Indians had been reduced to 39 when the last battle ended at Bad Axe. (Trask, 288)

What followed were the Black Hawk Purchases of 1832 and 1837. (See Fig. 5) The first and largest of them, “required of the Sacs and Foxes as indemnity for the expenses of the Black Hawk War.” (Abernethy, 250) This area was technically opened for settlement in 1833, but it was delayed and limited to individuals seeking mineral leases for lead mining operations in Dubuque

County until 1838, after an additional “purchase” (cession) was obtained from the Sauk-Fox and the territory had been surveyed and subdivided into townships as had been stipulated by in the Land Ordinance of 1785. Iowa achieved territorial status in 1838 and statehood in 1846. The Black Hawk War accelerated white settlement of Iowa, and the Treaty of 1832 also provided for the establishment of the Winnebago Mission on the Yellow River.

Among the consequences for northeast Iowa, Winneshiek County, and other lands within the Neutral Ground including all of Allamakee and Chickasaw Counties and parts of Bremer, Clayton, Fayette and Howard Counties in Iowa and part of Houston County in Minnesota, was a ten-year lag in settlement activity. When it did occur, beginning in 1848, there was a pent up demand for land and land rush conditions occurred in some locations. There are some as yet incompletely defined differences in the architectural features of commercial, residential, and agricultural properties between those areas that were in the Neutral Ground and the neighboring zones. Ten years was long enough for changes in fashion and in the cultural hearth origins of the settlers to produce these contrasts.

## **HISTORIC AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE DECORAH AREA**

### **From the Neutral Ground Period to Euro-American Settlement, 1840-1848**

Most of the material in this context is based on contexts developed in Peterson (2001).

Following the Treaties of 1830, 1829, and 1832 and the Black Hawk Purchase, a small number of Winnebagos had moved into southeast Allamakee County near the Yellow River. The Neutral Ground had been cut roughly in half by that time at its west end, and in the Treaty of 1837 the Winnebagos were prohibited from permanent residence within 20 miles of the Mississippi. They were also granted an annual payment of \$10,000 for 27 years, with the understanding that the Neutral Ground was to be a temporary home for them. A large scale transfer operation took place beginning in 1840, the same year that construction of a large military facility began on the Turkey River 15 miles southwest of Decorah (Fort Atkinson, named after General Henry Atkinson, a leading figure in the Black Hawk War). The primary mission of this outpost was to prevent the Winnebago from returning to Wisconsin. (Peterson, E-4) A Winnebago Subagency (mission) was established four miles southeast of the fort as the “Old Mission” on the Yellow River was closed. Several archaeological and archival studies have been undertaken concerning Fort Atkinson and the Subagency, and the resulting documentation is summarized in Peterson (2001).

While in the Neutral Ground the Winnebago pursued somewhat the same lifestyle as before, subsistence horticulture plus hunting, fishing, and gathering. Trade with Euro-America included guns and knives plus glass, ceramic, and metal containers in addition to blankets, cloth, and decorative items.

Trade in furs for these items was being replaced by purchase with money distributed annually (“annuities”). While archaeologists have identified actual and possible Winnebago Village sites from the Neutral Ground period of occupancy, no Winnebago villages have been excavated in Iowa. There is evidence of two possible Winnebago villages near Decorah in the Trout Run area (Peterson, E 14-15) and an abandoned village in the southwest corner of Canoe Township about 4 miles northwest of Decorah is shown on the GLO composite map (Trygg). Several Indian trails are shown converging in Decorah and legend has it (as reported by A.K. Bailey (1915): “The remains of the largest village of the Winnebago Indians were still in existence” when Decorah’s first family (the Days) arrived in 1849.

A census of the Winnebago in the Neutral Ground taken in 1842 indicated that 2183 individuals were living in 13 villages, with an average of 168 people per village. (Peterson, E12-13)

A description of Winnebago housing structures including accounts from the Neutral Ground indicate that the basic framework of their buildings, whether round, elliptical, or rectangular in plan, was erected with poles set into the ground. The walls and roof segments would then be covered with elm bark, skins, and when available, canvas. (Peterson, E 9-10) This suggests that post moulds, found at suspected village sites, could provide important documentation.

An important aspect of the United States Government’s long standing objective of converting Native Americans to Christianity and from hunter-gathering to sedentary agricultures was to teach them how to farm, and in the Neutral Ground setting to do whatever was necessary to keep them from returning to their former homelands in Wisconsin. To promote agriculture Euro-American style the government had ground plowed in locations near the Winnebago villages.

One of the suspected potential village sites near Decorah mentioned above is reported to be associated with one of the Winnebago Decorahs. The lodge on a site about one mile upstream from the mouth of Trout Run was described by Dr. Frederic Andros, the Turkey River Subagency physician, as “the mansion of one of the sons of Chief Decorah.” (Peterson E-15). Another contemporary report mentions a 50-acre plowed field to be used by the Winnebago at the confluence of Trout Run and the Upper Iowa, described as land owned by Peter Roney, the first Euro-American to take ownership of the parcel. According to A. Jacobson, this had been plowed in 1842 by the Norwegian that had first visited Winneshiek County that year and was employed by the United States Government to haul supplies from Fort Crawford to Fort Atkinson but “was also employed in breaking up pieces of bottom land on the Upper Iowa River.”

Besides villages and structural remains, property types associated with this context include trails and roads between villages, hunting and processing sites, and river crossings, many of which having been established by earlier Native Americans and even large foraging animals including deer, elk and bison.

Trading posts are another important property type in the former Neutral Ground, and estimates place their number at about 40. These operations were supposed to be licensed and the trade regulated, with alcohol being prohibited. Of the legal traders in the Neutral Ground, Henry M. Rice had the most capital at his disposal (\$15,000). (Peterson, E-24) His post is shown in the southeast quarter of Section 30 of Decorah Township. ([ortho.gis.iastate.edu](http://ortho.gis.iastate.edu)) The location of Rice's post has not been studied, but it may have archaeological significance. It is also historically significant for its association with Rice, a significant person in our past, and "with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history" (NRHP Criterion A). The building was reportedly purchased in 1849 by an early Norwegian settler and became a gathering point for the Norwegian Lutherans who began moving to the Washington Prairie area. (Koren, 104) There are two photos of this building from the 1920's in the Winneshiek County Historical Society Archive that indicate it was a single-story rectangular structure with two doorways on one side in a vernacular Greek Revival style.

The Treaty of 1846 stipulated that the Winnebagos were to move to a reservation in Minnesota. In June 1848 this took place, and the Winnebagos reluctantly moved from the Neutral Ground under escort of (a) combination of military forces and contracted volunteers, who were paid according to the number of Winnebagos that were taken to Minnesota. Once again, Winnebagos decried the 1846 treaty as invalid. They did not want to move further from their Wisconsin homelands and did not care to live between more warring tribes, this time the Sioux and Chippewa. (Hovde, 32) A caravan of 115 government wagons and about 50 privately owned wagons transported the majority of the Winnebagos to Wabasha, Minnesota. There the wagons and people were transferred to barges and steamboats. At Saint Paul, they disembarked and proceeded to the reservation. (Peterson, E-3)

The contract for this operation went to Henry Rice, who then stayed in Minnesota, had a county named for him, and became a United States Senator. A year later, in June, 1849, the Samuel Day family arrived in Decorah and laid claim to about the eastern half of what the city of Decorah occupies today. At first they lived in a log cabin near a spring just north of the present-day Winneshiek Hotel. Construction of an embankment to support Heivly Street has altered the original landscape, but where the spring once flowed out of it was designated and marked as a historic site in 1978. With school buildings and grounds crowding in from the north and a retaining wall, a busy street, parking lot, and commercial zone to the south, the site is an unexpected remnant that can serve as a reminder of how much has changed in the area since 1849. By 1855 Mr. Day had erected a wood frame hotel on Water Street on the site now occupied by the Hotel Winneshiek. In the process of preparing the site in the 1850's a number of "Indian graves" were leveled. (Sparks 88, 94) There are other accounts of this kind from the 1850's suggesting that Decorah, including West Decorah, had been occupied by Winnebagos before their removal and by earlier Indians as well. It seems clear that the Winnebagos did not build mounds as part of their burial customs, but they were known to have interred their remains in existing mound structures. Hexom's summaries of early settler reports indicate that he understood that all mounds are not repositories of human remains.

On the banks of the Upper Iowa River many Indian graves were found. The bodies were buried in a sitting position, with the head sometimes above ground. A forked stick put up like a post at each end of the grave held a ridge pole on which leaned thin boards placed slanting to each side of the grave. Thus each grave presented the appearance of a gable of a small house.

On Mr. J. I. Tavener's land in West Decorah are three mounds, or artificial hillocks, now nearly obliterated by cultivation. These mounds are circular in form and, before being worn down by the plow, were low, broad, round-topped cones from two and one-half to three feet high in the center. The largest of the group was about forty feet in diameter. Conical mounds are, as a rule, depositories of the dead. As yet, no bones have been exhumed from any of these mounds, so that it is not known at present what purpose they served; but it seems probable that they were burial mounds.

The early settlers furnished evidence of the existence of many Indian graves throughout the county, notably where the city of Decorah is located. These graves are now almost imperceptible." (Hexom, Chapter titled "Manners and Customs")

Mr. Tavener's (also known as Taverner, Tavenier, and Tavenir) land is on the west end of West Decorah where he operated a grist and flour mill and where a bridge over the Upper Iowa is located. Mound Street is also in West Decorah, running east-west and abutting the former Tavener property. Local historian Henry Field affirmed the existence of mounds between this bridge and the Decorah Greenhouse and reported that mounds existed where the old Decorah hospital is located (now the Smith Building) on Montgomery Street between East Main and Broadway Streets. (Field) And when Winnebago Street was first being graded a grave was discovered. This was assumed to be Chief Waukon-Decorah, the namesake of the city. The remains were temporarily buried for about six months and later moved to the nearby Courthouse Square only to be dug up and interred again due to reconstruction of the retaining walls in 1876. Presumably they continue to "repose in the Court House Square, near the northeast corner." (Hexom) And there are also reports similar to and including that of William Painter:

"William Painter ate watermelons that grew on a patch of ground at the lower end of town in the street near Mr. Keyes's carpenter shop, from seeds scattered by the Indians at a dance and feast held there." (Sparks 96)

According to Hexom, Decorah got its name when Winneshiek County was organized in 1851, more than two years before the town plat was recorded. Hexom's chapter "Genealogy and History of The Decorah Family" discusses the origin of the name, which was used by or with reference to several different Winnebago tribal chiefs.

In any case, it serves as a permanent reminder of the identity of the Euro-American predecessors now that their physical cultural remains are no longer evident.

### **Associated Property types**

Burials	Artifacts
Habitations	Fur trade posts
Resource procurement sites	Roads and trails
Villages	Trading posts
Agricultural fields	Trade goods

### **Known Representative Properties**

Parts of State Highway 52 between Calmar and Decorah are shown as a trail or primitive road on the GLO plat for Decorah Township  
Henry Rice Trading Post – Southeast quarter of Section 30, Decorah Township

### **Preservation Planning Goals**

Expand the goals outlined for the Prehistoric Native American context to include the Neutral Ground and early settlement periods. Archaeological investigations to confirm the location and nature of sites known from early anecdotal reports are recommended. These include a possible Winnebago village and plowed field within the Decorah City limits near the mouth of Trout Run (Southwest quarter of Section 23).

### **EARLY EURO-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT IN DECORAH, 1849-1857**

The Winnebago Indians were removed from the Neutral Ground in 1848 and the General Land Office survey had been completed by the time the William Day family arrived at what was to become the city of Decorah in June, 1849. They were joined later the same year by the William Painter family. The ending date of Decorah's early settlement period was selected in part because the town's status as county seat was affirmed that year after a serious challenge by neighboring Freeport to relocate it there failed. A nationwide financial panic (economic depression) had taken hold in 1857, and this induced a pause in the rapid economic and population growth of the town. The list of important developments taking place in these first eight years is long. There are several local accounts of the history of Decorah's early years, but they are all based on Alexander (1882) and Sparks (1877).

The first Euro-American settlers in Winneshiek County had come to the Fort Atkinson area in connection with operations at the fort and the nearby Indian Agency (Turkey River Subagency). Others arrived there to claim land in 1848. Winneshiek County was officially established and voted the county seat in April 1851, fraudulently, perhaps, since another place called Moneek, located on the Yellow River in Section 1 of Bloomfield Township, was not able to record any votes since no poll book was delivered on Election Day. (Alexander, 56) This town, located about 15 miles southeast of Decorah, was surveyed and platted in 1852, making it “the oldest town in the county”. (Alexander, 59) It was more than a “paper town” but little of it remains today.

Samuel Day and William Painter obtained title to roughly the east and west halves of Decorah, and Painter set up the first grist mill at what is now known as Dunning’s Spring. This was the first source of water power to be developed in the area and it was followed by a sawmill set up next to a mill race fed by a dam on the Upper Iowa. This was the project of another early settler in Decorah arriving in 1851, Phillip Morse. By 1853 he had built a wood frame house for his son Henry. It is still standing at 109 North Mill Street and it is thought to be the oldest property of this kind in the city. (Iowa Site Inventory Number 96-00637) Meanwhile, Mr. Painter had sold his first mill to Eli C. Dunning and built a flour mill, this one drawing its power from the same source as Morse’s sawmill. By about 1860 he had enlarged this to create the Painter-Bernatz mill, still standing and located within the Vesterheim Norwegian-American museum complex (Sparks, 90). Putting capital into mill construction was a logical investment since everyone knew that the land within which Decorah was situated would soon be occupied by farmers. After water power came timber and stone as the primary local resources, since farmers, city dwellers and business operations all needed shelter.

A blacksmith named John Ammon who arrived in 1853 had set up a shop within a year that was later expanded into a machine shop and became part of the Ammon, Scott & company located in what is now the Torgerson Education Center of the Vesterheim Museum complex. (Hippen and Johnson, 37-38) Another important institution dating from the early settlement period was a local newspaper, the *Chronicle*. This became the *Republic* in 1860 and later the *Decorah Republican*. Decorah and West Decorah were surveyed and platted in 1853, facilitating and making orderly the sale of building parcels. In 1856 the first atlas map of the two towns was published by H.K. Averill, Jr. This has long been a rare item locally with only a single original copy known to exist. The blocks and lots are numbered and the buildings standing at the time are shown. This map is a baseline with which all later subsequent maps and atlases can be compared to discover growth patterns and geographic changes. It also includes lists of subscribers and business abstracts. Decorah voted to incorporate as a village in 1857. West Decorah was separately incorporated in 1879 and annexed by Decorah in 1902.

Another important event from the middle 1850’s was the establishment of a United States government land office in the city in December 1855. The high demand for farm land in the area and development of Decorah as a commercial center was both demonstrated and accelerated by

the land office, even though it operated for less than a full year. Having a land office in the midst of a burgeoning settlement zone was an immense benefit given the transportation difficulties of the time. An amazing, if altogether true, and entertaining account of its operation can be found in Sparks. ( 94-95) One detail of this account involves the young Leonard Standing, who later became a banker, farmer and great uncle to John Beard, the current (2010) District 16 Representative in the Iowa State Legislature.

There were 9 banks in operation in 1856 but only two survived the 1857 panic. (Woodward, 5 Alexander,123). These were the Weiser and Filbert and Easton and Cooley banks, later becoming the Winneshiek County State Bank (the “Weiser Bank”) and the National Bank of Decorah, respectively. The Weiser Bank was the County’s largest and flourished until January 19, 1932 when it closed its doors, never to reopen. This was a major local event, made necessary when the “Continental Commercial Bank” called in their loans on the Weiser Bank. (Woodward, 26)

The commercial and industrial growth of Decorah was assured by the large immigration to the former Neutral Ground by individuals of diverse ethnic stock and origin. Winneshiek County had been organized in 1851, and in September of the next year a property tax was levied. The list included 446 property owners who had legal title to their land. It did not include others who were living on claims that had not as yet been registered. Reviewing the names it is obvious that Norwegians, especially in the Washington Prairie settlement area, were already numerous. Most of the names are old-stock American, and many of these were individual speculators and would be selling their land, perhaps after certain “improvements” had been made to increase its value. (Sparks, 18-25) Besides Norwegians, there would be substantial numbers of Germans, Czech (Bohemians), and Irish settling in Winneshiek County. An English “colony” began forming in and near Decorah in the 1860’s.

The early commercial and political leadership in the county was Anglo-American, including individuals who had moved here following the frontier from nearby locations in the Midwest, e.g., Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio or from further east, in particular New York. The Day family, in coming from Virginia, was unusual.

The European immigrants seeking land often had to take out loans since hard cash (gold) was needed to purchase land from the United States Government. Hence the large number of banks in Decorah, and there were individual money lenders active here as well. In addition, anyone who had served in the United States military beginning with the American Revolution may have been eligible for a land warrant (or certificate) that could be sold for cash or used to acquire land in areas that were open for settlement.

After 1847 and into the 1850s, Iowa led all other states where public land was available, and by far the most land grants in Iowa took place in 1855 (2.22 million acres) and 1856 (3 million acres) (Oberly, Table 13 & Table 14). 856,000 acres were obtained with these warrants in

Decorah when a land office was located here (Oberly, Table 15). For those individuals in Winneshiek County who had to borrow money to pay for their land, the Decorah banks and money lenders charged “usuric” interest rates, between 25% and 40%. (Woodward. 30-31) This was not unusual in Iowa frontier settings, despite state usury laws limiting interest charges to 10%. (Swierenga, 117) These laws were circumvented by “bond for deed arrangements,” where prospective farmers would sign contracts with local bankers or money lenders for a specific parcel which would be purchased by said bankers at the going rate (\$1.25/acre) using gold or land warrants, which themselves, or as certificates, were bought and sold and constituted legal tender. The contract stipulated payment of the bond within one or two years with a charge of up to 50% per year. (Swierenga, 151)

25 to 39% of Winneshiek County had been sold by 1848; in 1852 the figure was 90-97%, and in 1854 it was 98-100%. The term *speculation* was the term used to describe the motive of many land buyers at the time, but real estate was the primary form of American *investment* until corporate stock became the dominant attraction for surplus capital in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The earliest description of early Decorah and the one all the chroniclers and historians rely on and quote in their accounts is that of the Reverend Ephraim Adams. His “The First Things of Decorah” was originally delivered as an address on Thanksgiving Day in 1867:

“Decorah in 1851: Let us see what we have: Three log cabins, one hotel, a lawyer and two merchants with other families and persons that might be named, though the census would not be large; the water power beginning to be improved; regular preaching once a month by two different denominations and a county seat.

And then in 1854,

“Our three cabins of ‘51 have increased to quite a little village of fifteen or twenty buildings, counting hotels, stores, stables, shops and buildings of all kinds mostly scattered along Water Street. The population was about one hundred.” (Davis, 2-3)

And from Reverend Adams’ concluding paragraph,

In 1857, just nine brief years from the first settlement made in Decorah, a wonderful transformation had taken place. The whites, armed as they were with the advantages of a superior civilization, made strides in progression that were wonderful. The beautiful valley, first seen by the Days, had changed from an Indian paradise to an Israelite’s Garden of Eden. The beautiful carpet of green which the land had so long worn in its wild and natural state had been upturned by the science of agriculture, and made productive with a luxurious growth of vegetation unknown to it before. Everywhere the change was marked. In place of the Indian teepee the valley was dotted with the homes of the white man. Hardly a trace of the red man remained. The umbrageous woodland

along the banks of the Iowa, in which Nature's child had his home had disappeared. The rushing waters of the Iowa had been bridled, and made to do service in grinding the farmer's grist. In short, the metamorphose(sic) was complete. Where but a few years before Indian trails had been, were now to be seen the busy streets of a prosperous town." (Sparks, 97)

### **Associated Property Types**

Many of the properties associated with the early settlement context also relate to later commercial, industrial, and residential developments, and some of the early industries operated well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Examples include two banks and one of the water-powered flour mills. One residential property from 1853 is known and has been documented. The 1856 Averill Atlas of Decorah and West Decorah shows several commercial enterprises on Water Street and numerous residential properties in the city.

### **Preservation Planning Goals**

The likelihood of finding extant commercial properties dating to the 1850's with historic integrity is remote, in part because most of these were of log or wood frame construction. Those of stone or brick are more likely to be still extant. That some of the earliest structures may be included within existing properties, as in the case of John Ammons' blacksmith shop, must also be kept in mind. Residential properties are more likely to have survived with at least a degree of historic integrity. A research project dedicated to locating them using the 1856 map and records in the County Recorder's and Auditor's records as a starting point is recommended.

## **TRANSPORTATION, 1840-1960**

### **Roads and Rivers**

Before a railroad was built from Milwaukee to the east bank of the Mississippi in 1857, Decorah's access to the wider world was provided by oxcart, stagecoach, and steamboat. There was also a road from Saint Paul to Dubuque with access from Decorah. The first steamboat into the upper Mississippi reached Saint Paul in 1823. The major river ports available to the Northeast Iowa region were Lansing and McGregor, and the latter could be reached via the Old Military Road, which had been built in 1840 to supply Fort Atkinson. From Decorah this could be reached at Postville by traveling through Frankville on what is present day State Highway 9 and W-48 (the "Frankville Cutoff"). Lansing could be reached by taking the Old Stage Road which linked up with the Lansing Ridge Road in Allamakee County, the entire route being known as the Lansing-Decorah Road. Both ports had grain handling and storage facilities, and white

pine logs and lumber had been shipped downstream in rafts from Minnesota and Wisconsin since the 1830's to serve the building needs of settlers in northern Illinois and eastern Iowa south of the Neutral Ground. (Wozniak, 414-415) Lansing had a lumber yard and a saw mill in operation by 1851. (Hancock, 419) A network of county roads developed quickly as land was taken up and farming began. However, since travel was often difficult on these roads, farmers located closer to the Mississippi than Decorah may have found it expeditious to haul their produce directly to either Lansing or McGregor or to other smaller ports (e.g., Clayton in Clayton County) or to a gristmill in their own neighborhood.

Long established roads often have historic properties in their corridor, and Quarry Hill Road is noted on the GLO map for Decorah Township (See fig. 7) and all later maps. This is outside the Decorah City limits but a windshield survey of east Decorah in the current project indicated that this road corridor most likely includes properties dating from the as early as the 1850s.

While the network of rural roads in Winneshiek County was probably in place by the time of the Civil War, most of them had not been "improved," especially with regard to their traveled surface. The crushed rock (gravel) roadways we drive on today took a long time to become standard, and they are a vast change from the dirt roads that were relatively more easily traveled upon by horse-powered vehicles than their motorized counterparts. However, the dirt roads were subject to variable weather conditions and the impetus for "all-weather" roads came mostly from the efforts of motor vehicle owners who supported the "good roads movement" along with bicycle enthusiasts in less rural parts of the country than the Midwest.

## **Streets**

An effort to improve city streets was a parallel phenomenon, and the term "pavement" in towns and cities originally meant streets surfaced with wood or stone block or bricks. Sidewalks, usually of wood plank construction and elevated slightly above the street level, preceded paving. There were also other methods of stabilizing earthen streets surfaces that turned to mud after precipitation and to dust during dry periods. Wooden sidewalks are long gone, but some brick paving on Decorah streets survives, and it should be regarded as an historic resource.

According to local historian A.K. Bailey, "In 1902 a system of permanent paving was begun. Eight blocks of it – it being from the west end of Water Street to Dry Run Bridge, with two blocks on two side streets (being Court and Winnebago) were laid with Galesburg brick. In the following year four additional blocks on Washington Street were similarly paved, and in 1903-1904 another portion of the same street that had been troublesome and vexatious." (A.K. Bailey)

At present some of this is exposed on Court Street, and some on Main Street is obviously covered over with asphalt. Concrete eventually came to replace paving bricks and wood planking for sidewalks, and the automobile, and other vehicles it is only fair to add, now so completely

dominate transportation that sidewalks are usually omitted from housing and commercial developments. Therefore, concrete sidewalks installed in Decorah before 1960, and that would include most of them, should be considered historic resources, in particular those installed by R.O. Jagerson, contractor, an important local personality who died in 1985.

As the architecture critic Paul Goldberger has written, the streets in a city may be at least as important as the buildings and other factors including sidewalks in defining the character of cities and whether we find them attractive or not. (Goldberger, 222) It follows that any proposals to widen or otherwise change them in either commercial or residential areas should be carefully considered, since, for among other reasons, wider streets inevitably lead to more car and truck traffic to the disadvantage of bikers and pedestrians.

## **Railroads**

What Decorah did not have in its early settlement years was a railroad. The Milwaukee and Mississippi Railway had reached Prairie du Chien across from McGregor in 1857, but the economic panic that year delayed its movement west into northeast Iowa until 1863. This railroad reached Calmar in 1864 and a branch line was extended to Decorah in 1869.

One account was recorded by an Englishman, Mr. H.H. Horn:

It was a red letter day for Decorah when the railroad was completed and cars ran into the town. We had seen evidences of its near completion when my wife and I first made our debut in the spring of 1869, but it was not until the middle of September of the same year that the last rail was laid. Great were the rejoicings, numerous were the speeches, the operators of the town having the opportunity of their lives to display their ability, or, to shoot off their mouths, as the more irreverent put it. It turned out, however, that the results of the advent were not quite up to what had been so vividly portrayed. It seemed to produce no immediate influx, or increase in the population, though undoubtedly certain material advantages did accrue. True, there was a slight rise in the prices paid for agricultural products, but the railroad took care that the increase should not be so great as to shock the farmers. (Horn, 66)

Moving farm produce to market was, along with passenger traffic, the railroad's most important business. In 1873 the following quantities of agricultural goods were shipped from Decorah: 490,000 bushels of grain, 27,000 barrels of flour, 4,000 barrels of pork and beef, 414 tons of dressed hogs and lard and 76 tons of wool and hides. (Knudson (1971), 22)

The absence of a railroad connection in its early days had consequences of historical significance for Decorah. Once railroads did penetrate the city, locating them was problematic and relatively expensive as compared to putting in the railroad and then building up the town around it. Simply

relocating important industrial operations that would be some of the railroad's best customers was usually not feasible once the street pattern was in place and built upon. Railroads need not only tracks and depots, but also space for service facilities that include coal and water storage, maintenance and repair shops, turntables and warehouses. The first railroad into Decorah, the Milwaukee Road, had built a major service center to provide most of these needs in Calmar, about nine miles south of Decorah. The first depot was (and remains) located between Railroad Street and Railroad Avenue in south Decorah. In 1888 it built a line north to a new passenger depot one-half block north of Water Street in addition to spurs to certain major manufacturing operations including the Ice Cave Mill and the Ingvolstad Lumber Company.

The Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railway (the Rock Island Railway after 1903) arrived in Decorah in 1884 on a route from Postville, entering Decorah on its southeast corner where relatively little development had taken place. It built a combination passenger/freight depot (two stories with living quarters on the second floor), plus a coaling station, water tank, turntable and engine house, all of which being located in what is now Mary Christopher Park. (Romelton) It ran a spur to the Ice Cave Creamery (later the Decorah Creamery Company), the Winneshiek Co-op facilities that included a grain elevator, and the Decorah Produce Company (most recently Wapsie Produce, Inc.) There was also a 20-rail car capacity stockyard on this line north of the fairgrounds.

One of the first "dividends" of the arrival of a second railroad was a fall in freight charges of about 16%. (Bailey (1913), 318)

Service was discontinued to Decorah by the Rock Island in 1963 with only the depot remaining. The Milwaukee Road pulled out in 1978. Both railroads had other earlier established depots and warehouses in Winneshiek County, so the impact of these railroads on Decorah was on the whole less than if a railroad had been available in the city from its earliest days. It probably meant that the Decorah community remained relatively self-sufficient in manufacturing and grew more slowly and steadily after the initial land rush.

However, once established, these railroads were vital to the economic health of Decorah, at least until after World War II when cars and trucks were growing in numbers and would shortly be the only source of freight and passenger transportation in Decorah and elsewhere. Railroads were never full-service means of transportation for the more ambitious local industrial concerns because there was not enough space for their growth.

The Ammon, Scott & Company, beginning as John Ammon's blacksmith shop in 1853, expanded into a machine shop and foundry, later manufactured farm implements, and took over the Painter flour mill in 1870 after the railroad had arrived. It went bankrupt in 1879 perhaps because farm equipment could also be shipped to Decorah by rail and provide competition to the local manufacturers. In any case no major new industry moved into the building until 1887, when the Decorah Wind Mill Company was organized. This too came to an end after about 10 years when

it was sold to a competitor in Illinois. (Hippen and Johnson) The *Decorah Republican* blamed its departure on inadequate transportation facilities. (8-25-1899) Because Water Street, Decorah's main commercial zone, had been laid out so close to the river, there was no room to lay tracks for a railroad and no room for businesses to expand. Not only that, the area was flood-prone until the river was moved and a flood control system was completed in 1951.

### **Motor Vehicles and Highways**

The first automobiles made their appearance in Decorah around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and initially served not only to enhance mobility locally, but also complement the railroad's ability to move goods and people regionally and across the country.

After the Second World War, national transportation policy began to favor the development of motor vehicles, highways, and air travel. When the railroads began to abandon lines in the Midwest, Decorah was less affected than many communities of equal size and smaller, perhaps because it had remained more self-sufficient.

The automobile age came to full maturity with the advent of the interstate highway system, with construction beginning in the 1950's. The goal was to connect all the major cities of the United States with multi-lane corridors. But as with the railroads earlier, proximity to this network could be crucial in whether any given town or city would grow or decline economically and in population. The impact in Decorah of the growth in importance of highway transportation has been beneficial economically despite the fact that Decorah is not proximate to any segment of the interstate system.

A considerable amount of this benefit has been and continues to be based on the highway construction and maintenance industry located in Decorah. Its history has not yet been written, but it has recently become concentrated into a single locally-owned corporation, Bruening Rock Products, Inc. Its products include asphalt overlay (blacktop), concrete manufacture using local sand and gravel deposits, and rock crushing and application on the many miles of gravel roads in the northeast Iowa region.

The principal highways serving Decorah, State Highway No. 9 and United States Highway No. 52 have been widened and straightened. While the latter originally ran through the center of the city on Mechanic Street and College Drive, it was relocated west of the city in the 1960's. No. 9 was run in a straight line west from Trout Run and the Old Stage Road to intersect with No. 52 west of the city, also in the early 1960's.

These highway projects have facilitated the operation of post-war industrial enterprises in Decorah such as Deco Products Company (1960) and Camcar-Extron, which originated in Decorah in 1969. This is now a subsidiary of Acument Global Technologies. Industrial parks in

Freeport and east of the city off Highway 9 and major shopping centers have also benefited from Decorah's crossroad location on these routes.

### **Associated Property Types**

Historic road segments  
Bridges and bridge remains (abutments, piers, etc.)  
Railroad tracks, rail beds and corridors  
Railroad depots and other facilities  
Livery barns and carriage houses  
Inns and stage stops  
Historic pavements

### **Known Historic Properties**

Two Milwaukee Road depots and one Rock Island depot  
Michael Steyer Bridge over Twin Springs Creek (1875, NRHP)  
Railroad track segments at various locations in Decorah  
Old Highway No.9 pavement and a bowstring arch bridge (NRHP) in Trout Run Park  
Quarry Hill Road from Ice Cave to Whitetail Roads  
Tavener Bridge remains (see Vogel)  
Warren Steel Truss Bridge over Dry Run cut on Oneota Drive  
Open spandrel reinforced concrete Bridge over Dry Run cut on Highway No. 52  
Weiser Carriage House, 608 West Broadway (NRHP)  
Stone inn and stage stop on Old Highway 52 (College Drive), Adrian Strand, owner  
Brick street pavements  
Concrete sidewalks

### **Preservation Planning Goals**

Freight and passenger depots associated with both railroads that operated in Decorah are known to exist. Corridors and isolated track segments and possibly bridges are also still in place. An inventory of existing railroad associated properties is recommended. The Milwaukee Road's first depot in Decorah, located between Railroad Avenue and Railroad Street, is extant and needs to be researched and documented.

Brick pavement on Court and Main Streets is still extant but much of it is covered with asphalt. All other streets known to have been paved with brick need to be identified, and any attempt to replace this pavement with modern materials or to cover it with asphalt should be resisted. This

type of historic property should be treated like other historic structures, namely be repaired when necessary rather than replaced. The Steyer Bridge is still in use and needs to be monitored and given high priority for preservation. Accordingly, no ice control chemicals should be used on it and weight limits should be set to prohibit heavy truck traffic from using it. In Trout Run Park between Montgomery Street and the Old Stage Road, an older segment of Highway No. 9 pavement is preserved along with an historic bowstring arch bridge (NRHP) that originally spanned the Upper Iowa River in nearby Freeport.

Carriage houses and horse barns in Decorah should be located and documented.

Automobile service stations dating to before 1960 with historic integrity need to be identified and documented.

Quarry Hill Road, an extension of 5<sup>th</sup> St. from Winneshiek Avenue across Twin Bridges, north to Whitetail road should be the subject of an intensive level survey. There is a potential for historic and prehistoric archaeological remains here as well, especially at the intersection of Ice Cave and Quarry Hill Roads and east along Ice Cave Road.

## **COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, 1858-1960**

Decorah's history has been linked to farming in Winneshiek County from the earliest days of settlement. This relationship persists, although it has changed as farming has changed with perhaps the most rapid changes occurring since 1960, thus outside the scope of this project.

A summary of the commercial and industrial activity in the 1860's is provided in Alexander (125).

Decorah's rapid growth and prosperity into the early 1870's was based largely on wheat farming and processing and land sales. Problems with wheat farming had begun to develop after about 1875, most notably the flourishing of the chinch bug, and farmers began to raise more livestock, most importantly dairy cattle, from which the primary cash "crop" was cream. Northeast Iowa became the most important dairy region of the state. In chronological terms, wheat and wheat flour were the first important export products followed by cream and butter, and eventually Grade A whole milk. During the high point of what could be called the "wheat boom" (1850 -1875) there were six water powered mills producing flour and other products in Decorah, including the immediate surrounding area. The most important of these in terms of output were the Painter-Bernatz mill (also owned by Henry Heively and the Ammon Scott & Company at various times), and the Ice Cave mill located in Wold Park on Decorah's east end. Part of the concrete foundation of this structure survives; it was powered by water diverted from a dam on the Upper Iowa near Ice Cave on the north side of the river, hence the name. Water power was also used to process local natural resources, namely timber and stone. When farmers were encouraged to raise

sheep, especially during the Civil War when southern cotton was not available, water- powered woolen mills were set up, one at Siewers Spring south of Decorah and another in Decorah (1867, NRHP)

Dunning’s Spring was initially used to power a flour mill, but it served other manufacturing operations as well, as researched and documented by Mary Housker Klimesh. (see Bibliography) These included a brewery (later a soda pop plant) and a creamery (1882-1897). Most interesting perhaps was the Decorah Marble Works, a company that quarried, cut and polished a limestone (discussed on pp.19-21), hard enough to be polished and used for table tops, fireplace mantels, and the like. This began operations in 1871 and closed down briefly ten years later, but was reopened under new owners and continued in operation until 1897. The building was taken down in 1907 (the same structure that housed the flour mill earlier) The Andreas Atlas for the State of Iowa reports (1875) that the Decorah Marble Works generated a net income of \$20,000 in 1874. Luther students under the direction of George Knudson and James Hippen also researched this and other stone works in and near Dunning’s Spring and elsewhere further east on Ice Cave Road. (Larson et al.)

The mill at Siewers Spring had been manufacturing wood products including chairs prior to becoming a woolen mill. This structure is long gone, and an Iowa Department of Natural Resources occupies the site that since the 1930s has included a fish hatchery.

The U. S. Industrial Census for 1860 lists one brewery and a distillery that produced 160 barrels of whiskey, both owned by David Addicken. Also listed are two flour mills (Dunning’s and Heivly’s), two agricultural implement manufactures, two wagon and carriage works, one each cabinet maker, bakery, and candy maker, three harness and saddle makers, one tannery, and three sheet metal manufactures. Another source reports that in 1870 there were one each soap and cracker factories, and a stone-cutting and monument shop that may still be in operation on Washington Street. (Hansen, 18)

There were also numerous commercial enterprises operating in Decorah in 1870, including banks, bakeries, physicians, and others. A “Bird’s-Eye” map of Decorah from 1870 is an important source for understanding the city’s built environment of that time. The only known original lithographic copy of this map hangs in the Decorah’s Porter House Museum. The 1875 Andreas Atlas Business Directory lists additional commercial and industrial firms plus professionals such as physicians, but one had to pay to be listed.

A summary of the population figures for Decorah shows that its growth was slow and not continuous. Figures include West Decorah. (Davis, 1)

1860 – 1219	1910 - 3592
1870 – 2110	1920 - 4039
1880 – 2951	1930 - 4581

1890 – 2801	1940 - 5303
1900 – 3246	1950 – 6060

The Decorah City Directory of 1896 appears to emphasize commerce rather than manufacturing so there are four marble dealers along with service professionals including physicians and one architect, W.S. Bucknell. The ongoing importance of agriculture is reflected in the five “farm implement dealers” and *not* manufacturers, plus 3 windmill and pump dealers (at least one was the Decorah Wind Mill Company) and six hotels (See Davis, 5 for a complete list of the businesses listed). Actually, the Decorah Wind Mill Company sold out in 1898.

Another water powered factory had been set up at Twin Springs in 1880, replacing a flour mill in the area where a grist mill had formerly operated. (Biermann, 8) The Gaston Scale Company operated until 1897 and later the building was used in J.C. Beard’s farming operation. It remained extant until recently when it was demolished by the Parks and Recreation Department except for a small section of its southeast corner.

There were other manufacturing concerns in Decorah but none was spectacularly successful. They included a boatworks (in the Water Street block), a bicycle factory and the Tatro Radio Company in the 1930’s, located in the Old Armory Building. It employed about 400 workers for a time, until the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) made battery powered radios largely obsolete.

Except for wheat, wheat flour, butter and, for short periods, a few other factory-produced goods, most products of Decorah’s manufacturing were purchased locally. The views of local historian Ansel K. Bailey, writing in 1905 seems to have been accurate, and they are useful in understanding Decorah’s history:

“The City has never enjoyed a boom; its growth has been steady and normal, advancing only as fast as the necessities of the surrounding country demanded.” (Combined Plats and Atlases of Winneshiek County, 1998, Section II, p.5).

### **Modern Industry and Agriculture**

Today, one of these “necessities of the surrounding country” is road building, maintenance, and improvement. In Winneshiek County and elsewhere in Northeast Iowa, it is for roads and bridges, along with public schools, where most local tax monies are spent along with state and federal Department of Transportation funds allocated as grants in amounts that vary from year to year.

The materials used in the road construction activities over a large area beyond Decorah are mined in and near the city. The environmental impact of this kind of extractive operation is variable,

depending on several factors including the scale of operations. Limestone has been an important resource in Decorah from very early on for building and ornamental purposes, but the amount used was miniscule compared to what is being extracted and processed today, largely for rural road maintenance. In addition, there is an ongoing need to upgrade roads and bridges to accommodate increasing traffic loads due to changes in farming technology and practice over the years, especially since World War II.

Although the advent of motor vehicles already before World War II led to a demand for county rural road improvements, this continues, even while the number of farms and farmers declines.

It is in the nature of modern agriculture that calls itself an industry and has become increasingly extractive of soil in a process many consider akin to mining, to use increasingly large and heavy machines to move ever larger loads of feed, fuel, grain, and manure.

Another dimension of how “necessities” of the surrounding country are resulting in more traffic in the Decorah area is the movement of people to rural areas near the city, either to individual residential properties (10 acres or less) or to multiple unit subdivisions. Not only do these properties need access roads, but pavement is preferred to gravel, especially when schooling and work may require multiple trips to town each day.

And while Decorah has still not had a “boom,” it has become a regional economic growth center, with a Super Wal-Mart, Luther College, Bruening Rock Products, Inc. and several other smaller commercial and industrial enterprises succeeding by drawing in business from the five county northeast Iowa region and from neighboring areas in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

### **Associated Property Types**

#### **1. Agriculture Associated Properties:**

- Mills (flour, wool, lumber and stone production)
- Grain storage (warehouse and elevators)
- Feed mills
- Seed companies
- Creameries, cheese plants and dairies
- Meat processing and storage plants
- Hatcheries and egg plants
- Nurseries and greenhouses
- Farm implement manufacturing plants
- Fairgrounds

## 2. Other Associated Properties:

- Blacksmith shops, foundries, machine shops
- Commercial storefronts, retail outlets
- Photography studios
- Professional offices
- Breweries and other beverages manufacturing
- Wagon and carriage works
- Furniture, millwork manufacture
- Dance halls (usually above commercial storefronts)

### **Known Representative Properties** (in addition to those noted in the text above)

- Decorah Greenhouse
- Addicken Brewery, later Quandahl Egg Plant
- East Water Street commercial properties (Wapsie Produce, Winneshiek Co-op)
- Decorah Hatchery, 406 West Water Street
- Decorah Fairgrounds (Montgomery Street)
- Winneshiek County State Bank (Bank of the West at present)
- Citizen's Savings Bank ("Bank Block", Hacker Nelson)
- First National Bank, 108 West Water Street (currently Hammel's Jewelry)

### **Preservation Planning Goals**

Many more properties could be added to the above lists, but what is needed is a survey to identify the borders of a potential historic commercial district (or districts) in Decorah. It is clear enough at this point that the several blocks of East and West Water Street running from Mill Street on the west to Second Street on the east comprise a potential commercial district, and from Second Street to Sumner Street an agriculture-associated commercial district. Washington, Winnebago, and Court Streets running south from Water to Main Street would also be included in this commercial district. Nearly all of the properties in this potential district have undergone change (remodeling) over the years at the ground floor level. On the other hand, the upper floors of many and the back sides of nearly all on Water St. appear to have been changed very little on the exterior. Much research has already been done on many of these properties (Knudson, 1971, 1976, Davis and Seegmiller), in terms of their histories. As to their architectural features, they must be assessed for their historic integrity so as to identify the contributing properties among them.

While certain agriculture-related processing and shipping operations with long histories in Decorah (Winneshiek Co-op Creamery, Wapsie Produce, and the Decorah Hatchery) have recently gone out of business, mining, highway construction, education, and large scale commercial operations (i.e. Walmart) are thriving and growing. Decorah's potential historic commercial district (Water Street) may appear to be bustling with activity and economically healthy, but a closer look will reveal empty storefronts and a rapid turnover of tenants. The potential adverse impact of these phenomena on the city's historic landscape and its built environment must be recognized and addressed by the Planning and Zoning Commission and other governmental bodies with input from the Historic Preservation Commission.

### **EDUCATION, 1853-1960**

Taking up the reflections of Ansel K. Bailey from where we left them summarizing the Commerce and Industry context, "Strenuous efforts were made for many years to build up manufacturing enterprises, but for various reasons most of these were unsuccessful, although large sums of money were expended in the effort. In the meanwhile, without especial (sic) effort, there grew up an unusual success. The city became an educational center." (ibid.) He was referring mainly to Luther College, which arrived in Decorah in 1862. This will be pursued further below.

The first public school in Decorah was built at the corner of Vernon and Winnebago Streets in 1853. This was replaced on the same parcel in 1867 by a three-story brick structure that was demolished in 1896 and replaced by the East Side School a year later. Many of the bricks in the 1867 edifice were used in the new building. Decorah's first high school was erected in 1922 next to the East Side School and enlarged in 1935. There was also an early elementary school in West Decorah, located on a circular lot at Iowa Avenue and Center Streets that was replaced by the current West Side School in 1939 with later additions. New high and elementary schools were erected after the completion of Decorah's flood control project in 1951 that made land available for such construction by moving the river and protecting it with a system of dikes. These are the John Cline Elementary and the Thomas Roberts High School, and neither has architectural distinction.

The former high school, now the Carrie Lee Elementary School, is historically significant in that it embodies some of the leading ideas of school design of the 1920's, in particular with a strong emphasis on "fireproof" construction, and because of its provision of an auditorium intended not only for school use but also as a community resource. This was designed by the Davenport, Iowa firm of Temple and Burrows. Classrooms were added along with a gymnasium in 1935 from designs by Decorah architect Charles Altfillisch.

Since the Carrie Lee Elementary School was formerly joined to the East Side School with a corridor, and both properties were listed on the NRHP. When the East Side School was

demolished in 2008, the former high school was removed from the Register. Some renovation of the property has been done but it may still be eligible for listing and could be re-nominated. The West Side Elementary School may also be eligible for NRHP listing. This building and the Carrie Lee Elementary School were funded by the Public Works Administration (PWA), one of the New Deal programs of the 1930's.

In addition to Luther College, there were three other private educational facilities in Decorah that were important. One was the Breckenridge Academy, also known as the Decorah Institute. It was opened in 1874 by John Breckenridge and served as a prep school for admission to college for many male youth. Decorah public schools offered no education beyond the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level when Breckenridge opened his academy. The wood-frame Decorah Institute was located next to the Congregational Church on Broadway Street on the space now occupied by the Congregational Center.

A private business school was also located in Decorah between 1888 and 1922. The Valder Business College was established and administered by Charles Valder, who had taught in the public schools and at Luther College for 13 years. (Seegmiller, 53) It initially was housed on the second floor of the building located at 121 East Water Street and later moved into a building at the northeast corner of Washington and Main Streets. (Valder College File, WCHS Archive)

“Academy” was the name often given to private schools that offered post-eight grade education and these included parochial (Catholic) schools. The first institutions of this kind in Decorah were the wood frame parochial school and the Academy of the Immaculate Conception. (still extant)

## **Luther College**

In 1859 the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (also known as the “Norwegian Synod”) founded Luther College at what is now Onalaska, Wisconsin, but it did not function as such until 1861, when the decision to locate it in Decorah was made, where a 32 acre parcel of land had been obtained by Reverend U. V. Koren. Since suitable accommodation for the teaching staff of two could not be obtained in Decorah, the first year of the college's operation took place in a vacant parsonage near Holmen, Wisconsin. (Nelson) In the summer of 1862 the students and teaching staff (two professors) moved into the Saint Cloud Hotel (at the northwest corner of Main and Winnebago Streets) and the Griswold House at the northeast corner of Center Street and Leif Erikson Drive in West Decorah. The Synod purchased both buildings to serve until the first building could be erected on their 32 acre site. This was Old Main, completed in 1865 and destroyed by fire in 1889. Meanwhile in 1863, the college had purchased the lot west of the Saint Cloud Hotel and put up a building (of brick made on the Luther campus) to serve as a dormitory, the enrollment having risen to 51 that year. Bricks made on the campus were used for the first building erected there and for other structures in the city as well (e.g. in the First Lutheran

Church, 1876). Where the kiln and clay deposits were located has not been determined. The oldest building still extant on the Luther campus, Campus House (1867), was first used as a parsonage.

There are additional historic buildings on and near the Luther campus including Koren, dating from 1921 and listed on the NRHP. The Main Campus which is still essentially the original 32 acre parcel, has over the years become but a small part of the Luther College property that now includes several hundred acres. The historic Ashmore-Jewell Farm (now the Luther Farm Park), also listed on the NRHP. The Main Campus itself is historically significant. It is the result of several plans drawn up over time concerning the arrangement of buildings, street, walkways and landscape features. Perhaps the most important was prepared by landscape architect Jens Jensen in 1910. (See Christianson) The three important guidebooks (Knudson, Davis) include lengthy and detailed material on the landscape, buildings and history of Luther College. Sources for further study include the holdings of the college archive in Preus Library.

After 1861 the social, economic, and architectural history of Decorah and Luther College are so closely interrelated as to be inseparable at critical points in time. This is an important story that can only be mentioned here, but to look more closely at this interdependence would reveal that, for example, the closure in 1932 of Decorah's oldest and largest bank, the Winneshiek County Savings Bank, known as the "Weiser Bank," very nearly led to the closure or bankruptcy of Luther College. A positive consequence of this period of crisis during the Great Depression was that Luther became co-educational, but only after an initiative by local citizens led to the creation of the Decorah College for Women in 1935, a fully accredited four-year liberal arts institution. Changes to Luther's Articles of Incorporation made it a coeducational college in 1936. (Nelson, 265-268)

Luther College has long been the largest employer in the city and a stabilizing factor in the local economy. In the larger education context, it was noted in the Decorah City Directory (1896) that not only Luther but also Valder Business College and the Decorah Institute "are the cause of an influx of desirable inhabitants which swells the population to between 5 and 6,000 inhabitants" ten months of the year which, without them in 1896, was 4,261. Luther College was also important in the local publishing and printing industry. The Arlington Hotel on Water Street was first built as a hotel in 1877 with the idea it would flourish in connection with the arrival of the first railroad in Decorah. It is at the opposite end of Water Street from where the "downtown station" was later located and thus it failed as a hotel. In 1882 it became a dormitory for 250 students of the Decorah Institute, and later still it was owned by the Norwegian Lutheran Publishing House until 1932 when this firm merged with the Augsburg Publishing House in Minneapolis. The Norwegian-American Historical Museum had been created in 1925 and became part of Luther College. Most of this collection was moved to the vacant Arlington House in 1932 where it remains to the present day. (Nelson, 225-226)

Another important figure and story relates to this as well. Mr. Brynild Anundsen came to the United States from Norway in 1864 and moved to Decorah in 1867. He brought printing equipment with him and earned a living doing printing jobs for Luther College. In 1874 he founded the *Decorah-Posten*, a Norwegian language newspaper that was issued twice weekly and attained a circulation of 42,000 in 1905, which was the largest circulation of any Norwegian-language paper published in the United States at the time. (A.K. Bailey) Anundsen died in 1913 but his descendents kept the paper going until 1972 published by the Anundsen Publishing Company which now owns the two local papers, the *Decorah Journal* and the *Public Opinion*. Properties associated with this firm include a building and printing plant on Washington Street and the B. Anundsen residence at Main and Montgomery Streets.

### **Associated Property Types**

Parochial and public schools  
Colleges  
Academies

### **Known Representative Properties**

Valder Business College properties on Water and Washington Streets  
Saint Cloud Hotel and its neighbor to the west  
Vesterheim main building  
Saint Benedict's Academy of the Immaculate Conception  
Several properties on the Luther College campus

### **Preservation Planning Goals**

Encourage protection of extant properties by informing the public of their importance. A preservation plan for Luther College is recommended, but this could only be effective if it is developed in consultation with appropriate representatives of the college administration.

Other than what has already been discussed, there are additional historically important features, including but not limited to buildings, on and off the Luther campus that need to be inventoried and evaluated. The guidebooks by Knudson, Davis, and David T. Nelson's history of Luther College are the basic preliminary sources for further research and documentation.

## **IMMIGRANT ETHNIC GROUPS IN DECORAH'S HISTORY**

The very first settlers in Decorah, those who set up the first banks and other businesses and industry and established the basic street plan including the Courthouse Square and obtained title to the land now occupied by the city, were Old Stock Americans, pioneers from the New England States plus New York and Pennsylvania, and/or “second generation” pioneers from the Old Northwest, a region that included the already established states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. English, Irish, German, Czech (Bohemian) and Norwegian immigrants later established a presence in Decorah business circles and in local government.

The Old Stock Americans and English were the groups that left the most enduring legacy, although until an architectural survey of Decorah's residential properties is done, an understanding of their impact on the built environment cannot be achieved. The contribution of most of the non-Norwegian ethnic groups remains to be investigated. Old Stock Americans may not usually be considered ethnic groups, but certain social and religious institutions have been associated with them, for example, the Episcopal Church, the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) and the Masonic Order.

All the important ethnic groups in Winneshiek County but the English were primarily from rural areas in their countries of origin and settled in rural Winneshiek County. Any project to develop contexts for these groups would need to be county-wide in geographic scope.

A context focused on Norwegian-American ethnicity (ethnic groups) would include Luther College and overlap with the education context so far as Decorah is concerned. But its primary manifestation would be in the countryside, on the farms and within whatever community institutions, structures, and properties grew up in association with rural life. An architectural component of this immigrant culture was documented in the Washington Prairie settlement of Winneshiek County in about 1990 by Steven Johnson and others along with a delineation of the geographic scope of that community. A number of buildings were moved to the Vesterheim Museum, and an entire farmstead has been listed on the NRHP (the Jacobson Farm).

### **Decorah's “English Colony”**

It is not accurate to speak of the English who came to Decorah as members of a colony, a point made by Mr. R.F.B. Portman in his short but useful booklet, *Decorah's English Colony of 1876, A Biographical Sketch*, privately published in 1931. The term probably stems from a book titled “*An English Colony in Iowa*, also published in 1931, by H. Harcourt Horn. This is a statewide survey with Chapter VII devoted to Decorah. Most of the individuals of this group began arriving after the Civil War, although the first of these born-in-England immigrants arrived in 1850, Captain John H. Simpson. (Sparks, 50) This man and many of those who began arriving more than a decade later had acquired military title during a career in the English colonial service.

A better known name with English origin in Decorah history is Baker, and four brothers located in Decorah including Colonel W.T. Baker in 1866, who was a leading investor in the Decorah Woolen Mill (NRHP). Some of these English immigrants were also motivated to purchase land and establish farms. Among this group were H.H. Horn and Captain A.J. Ashmore, the first owner-proprietor of the Ashmore-Jewell Farm (NRHP) now owned by Luther College. According to Portman, the members of this English colony were wealthy and well-educated but lacking in business experience, since engaging in business was considered “taboo” for members of their social class. As Portman put it, “to actually own land is the Ultima Thule of every Englishman.” This would seem to have been true for certain late 20<sup>th</sup> century (1970’s) English immigrants to the Decorah area as well, but their contributions lie outside the chronological scope of the present project. The 19<sup>th</sup> century English engaged in several industrial, financial, and commercial activities with which there may be extant associated property types. They invested heavily in these enterprises and the figure of \$1.5 million is cited by Portman. It is uncertain what period of time this figure represents, but he makes clear that it does not include personal outlays, residential properties, etc.

Writing in 1931, Portman claims to be the last of the 1876 colony still living in the area, which didn’t last because, “There was no organization, no clan. Each one was apparently for himself, and as usual there were plenty of sharpers looking for suckers.”

### **Associated Property Types**

Parochial Schools  
Colleges and Academies  
Churches  
Convents  
Cemeteries  
Farms and Associated Structures  
Residential Properties

### **Known Representative Properties**

Grace Episcopal Church  
Ashmore-Jewell Farm (Farm Park, NRHP)  
H. H. Horn House (northwest of Decorah, NRHP)  
Universalist Unitarian Society (Decorah Elk’s Club)  
E.J. Curtin House, 614 West Water Street (representing Irish-Americans in Decorah)

## **Preservation Planning Goals**

For several reasons, many people reflexively associate Decorah with Norwegian-Americans. The contributions of others, especially in the post-early settlement periods, need to be explored. This has not been done in the current project and further development of this context is necessary before it can be accomplished. Moreover, an exploration of the religious beliefs and practices of the ethnic groups in Decorah must be included in any fully developed context based on ethnicity, since religion has always included important social and cultural dimensions that are factors shaping architectural expression.

## **GOVERNMENTAL AND OTHER PUBLIC SERVICES**

This context overlaps the Commerce, Education, Transportation, and Natural Setting (parks) contexts, plus the Early Euro-American Settlement in Decorah context.

In 1855 the federal land office at Decorah provided a huge amount of business in connection with settlement and the development of farming in the area, and the consequences have been long lasting. When the city's status as the seat of Winneshiek County government was affirmed in 1857, work proceeded on the construction of a courthouse on Courthouse Square. This building was replaced by the current edifice in 1904 at the same location. Other historic properties on the site are the former County Jail (1878) and a heating plant/sheriff's office. (1910, 1969) All these properties are included in the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District, listed on the NRHP in 1976.

An as yet undeveloped sub-context would relate to the large body of work done during the 1930's under the auspices of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Administration's New Deal. Many of the alphabet soup of federal agencies created by this administration (the PWA, FYA, FERA, WPA, CWA and CCC) sponsored construction projects in Decorah, and there was a Civilian Conservation Corps camp on the Decorah Fairgrounds, from which work crews went out to projects beyond the city limits. Major beneficiaries of these programs in Decorah were the public school system and the city parks. This could also be conceived as a component of a larger context such as "Decorah (or Winneshiek County) during the Great Depression," that would also consider the impact of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Rural Electrification Administration. (REA)

A major public works project from the later 1940's supervised and funded by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, drastically changed Decorah's topography in important ways. This was the Dry Run Flood Control Project. It involved changing the course of both the Upper Iowa River and Dry Run Creek, a tributary stream that runs through the city but no longer carries water from areas southwest of Decorah through the city.

The most dramatic features of this system are a drainage channel cut through a “hogback” or limestone ridge over which an open spandrel reinforced concrete bridge carries Highway No.52 running north-south at the western edge of Decorah. There is also an extensive system of dikes that has allowed the Upper Iowa flood plain north of Water Street to be developed since it is no longer prone to flooding. This area now includes mostly public buildings including a city hall and jail, firehouse, National Guard armory and both elementary and high schools, all of which dating from after 1951 when the project was completed. A paragraph from Davis’ Decorah Visitor’s Guide identifies some of the most important individuals involved:

Proposals for a flood control program, especially one concentrating on Dry Run Creek, were drawn up as early as 1920-1921. At the urging of Mayor Richard Bucknell (1865-1938), A.R. Coffeen (1889-1968) drew up plans for diverting Dry Run through the Hog’s Back Ridge southwest of town and for straightening out the creek in town. City engineer, A.N. Hanson, supported the Coffeen proposals, which incorporated earlier work by F. E. Cratsenberg, but they were ultimately rejected as being too expensive. Credit for resurrecting the plans 25 years later and working with the United States Army Corps of Engineers to get them implemented must be given to Charles Altfillisch (1892-1978), a prominent architect who served as the city engineer for 17 years, and to Mayor George A. Baker.” (Davis, 6)

The effort to take measures to control flooding in the city actually goes back further in time, to a citizens’ petition in 1906. (Faldet, 226 )

## **KNOWN REPRESENTATIVE PROPERTIES**

1. New Deal Associated Structures:
  - The Decorah Municipal Swimming Pool (currently being nominated to the NRHP)
  - West Side and Carrie Lee Schools
  - Grandstand and Community Building (?), Decorah Fairgrounds
2. The following city parks are known to include features that are associated with New Deal programs:
  - Phelps
  - Palisades
  - Twin Springs
  - Ice Cave
  - Dunning’s Spring
3. Other
  - Siewers Spring (Iowa DNR Fish Hatchery), ½ mile south of Decorah City limits
  - Decorah Post Office (1912, now the Decorah Public Library)

Decorah Hospital (1914-plus later additions). Now the “Smith Building,” it houses various public agency offices.

Decorah Electric Light Company (Iowa Site No. 96-00647)

## **PRESERVATION PLANNING GOALS**

Two major preservation strategies can be pursued here: Maintain and restore those features (and others of historic importance) in the city parks that were funded by one or more of the New Deal programs. The other is to design a research project that would **reveal the full scope of the New Deal legacy in Decorah**. An important aspect of both strategies would be to gain access to primary source material from the National Archives in order to discover what was done in Decorah and how the buildings and structures appeared in their original form. This material plus other documentation from local and state repositories would also be useful in cases where restoration of original structures is contemplated.

## **PATTERNS OF ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT, 1849-1960**

This context relates primarily to residential properties including structures subsidiary to housing (garages, summer kitchens, carriage houses, root cellars, fences, gates, and cisterns) and agriculture-related properties (barns, stables) in parts of the city that remained devoted to farming until recent times. Except for the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District there has been no systematic survey of the city’s housing stock and neighborhoods.

In a Master of Arts thesis by Pamela Jo Buresh, “19<sup>th</sup> century Home Architecture of Decorah, Iowa” (University of Iowa, 1982), the author revisits 40 of the residential properties featured in a picture book first published in 1890. (Spurr) She makes an historic integrity assessment of each property and assigns it to one of four stylistic categories provided by Margaret Keyes in her Ph-D thesis, “19<sup>th</sup> Century Home Architecture of Iowa City” (Iowa City, 1965), namely Gothic Revival, Anglo-Italian (Italianate), Franco-American (Second Empire), and Neo-Jacobian (Queen Anne). The Greek Revival was acknowledged but no houses were matched up with it. One of her important findings would be corroborated by a windshield survey of Decorah today, namely that “most houses did not exhibit a “pure” style, but rather were eclectic, combining stylistic details and formal elements from more than one style. Moreover, “Vernacular interpretations were evident in most of the houses.” (Buresh, 109) Presumably by “vernacular” she meant local builders’ interpretations and/or simplifications of the stylistic features characteristic of her stylistic categories.

This use of the term “vernacular” is being superseded by a formal typology based on forms which are the result of decades or centuries of evolution and have become constituents of every carpenter/builder’s vocabulary and are considered at least common, if not the norm, at any given

point in time and place. This rich subject cannot be pursued here, but it would have to be an element in any survey of domestic architecture in Decorah. Vernacular can sometimes be synonymous with “folk” and has been used as a term of denigration by individuals basing their judgments on the designs of professional architects, thus “folk Victorian” or carpenter Queen Anne.

Ms. Buersh seems to have been somewhat disappointed in finding few “great fashionable homes” such as the original Second Empire C.J. Weiser residence (destroyed by fire before 1920) and the A.C. Baker House (1897) at Prospect Place.

A limited windshield survey carried out during the present project indicated two potential districts comprising most of the length of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in west Decorah, and Pleasant Hill, a subdivision dating from about 1920. Further research would probably identify others. A comprehensive survey is needed because many important residential properties are located in mixed patterns that include commercial, railroad associated, and education associated properties.

## **Research Design**

Enough is already known about Decorah to conclude that more can be learned about patterns of architectural development here by researching its history with the following major themes in mind, approached individually or in correlation, as appropriate:

- Topography
- Chronology
- Materials
- Architects and builders

Other themes that may serve a heuristic purpose are stylistic and structural typologies, fashion, and social stratification.

For example, we would expect to find a correlation between houses in the “Original Decorah” plat from 1856 and Greek Revival stylistic elements, since this style had been fashionable in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the states from which Decorah’s first settlers came, and it existed in both folk or vernacular house types and as large architect designed houses.

## **Topography**

The topographic factor in Decorah’s history relates also to other local contexts, e.g. The Natural Setting. The most important reference sources for understanding topography in the city’s built environment are the atlas maps from 1856, 1870, 1886 and the United States Geological Survey

7.5 Minute Series Decorah Quadrangle topographic map published in 1981. This is a vital resource with many applications because it is the only map available that shows topographic relief. It also includes cultural information, place names, roads, streets, buildings and vegetation. Based on aerial photos, these maps are both accurate and comprehensive.

The historical importance of the boundaries, buildings and topographic features of Decorah's only NRHP historic district is laid out in the significance narrative of the nomination form:

The Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District is largely composed of private residences. Public or quasi-public property bounds the district on both ends; at the east end stands the courthouse Square and two churches while Phelps Park serves as a green buffer at the southwest end. As one travels westward from the Winnebago Street boundary on the east, the district's route is gradually and constantly ascending in elevation; as the district turns south, it follows the bluff line of the Upper Iowa River continuing to ascend through Phelps Park to the crest of this prominent Decorah hill. In addition, Broadway Street is elevated markedly above the paralleling streets thus adding to its prominence as an area "set apart". (Price and Svendsen)

This pattern would remind anyone familiar with European cities and villages dating to the Middle Ages, where the palace of the local baron, duke or other power- holder who once ruled the territory is on the highest landform, often but not always at the center. These would have been fortified and difficult to enter, features that could either provide haven for the villagers living below in case of enemy attack, or be a defensive space for the royal family and guards in case their subjects staged a rebellion. Well- known examples are found in the lower Rhine Valley, and the (old) city of Edinburgh, Scotland represents this pattern as well.

This special geographic location had a major effect on the area early in its development, causing a speedy populating of these blocks of Original Decorah. Due to the elevation, Broadway was immune to the annual floods of the Upper Iowa River and their tumultuous effect on the lower lying sections of town. Judging by the district's history of very prominent residents, past and present, the elevated location became linked with a distinguishing social stratus. (Price and Svendsen)

It is significant, perhaps, that a public park (the "City Park" until 1922) occupies the summit of the Broadway-Phelps District, and that the principal institutional power- holder (county government) anchors the district at its lower end. Even here, at the historic core of the city, the court house and old jail tower above the streets, and there are many steps to climb to reach these buildings from Main or Winnebago Streets.

At the opposite corner of Decorah from Phelps Park to the northeast is the residential zone known as "the flat," a subdivision with much of its territory in a flood plain next to the Upper Iowa. This was the "Park Addition" in the 1886 plat, but by 1905 the blocks between Riverside and

Winneshiek Avenues had been removed since flooding made residential development there untenable. The remainder of Park Addition, from Winneshiek Avenue south to Dry Run Creek and the Rock Island and Milwaukee Railroad tracks was flood-prone until the Dry Run Flood control systems was installed in 1951.

Areas furthest to the south and closest to the tracks were the least flood-prone, and this plus proximity to the railroad may have influenced the styles and size of residential properties. There may also be railroad-associated properties there in addition to the two stations that have been converted for residential and professional office use.

Other subdivision developments on elevated locations are Pleasant Hill (1920 and later) and, more recently, the Bruening Subdivision south and west of Phelps Park and higher in elevation than the park. At 1,100 feet above sea level, it is equaled in elevation only by an area north of Dunning's Spring Park. Both locations also support clusters of communications towers that constitute a major visual distraction on the city skyline. Such incompatible intrusions into historic landscapes may no longer be allowed under provisions of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended and FCC Regulations (47 C.F.R. Part 1, Appendices B and C).

And what is perhaps the most lavish mansion in the city, the A. T. Baker residence (1897), is located on a 14-acre site overlooking the city at the end of its own street, Prospect Place, north of Phelps Cemetery. (Buresh, 57-59)

## **Chronology**

Patterns of housing development can be located on the series of plat maps, dates of subdivisions and by correlations with fashions in architectural style during specific periods. Using the 1856 and 1870 maps listed above plus city building permit records, Carl Hansen was able to plot the population figures and subdivision dates, and the physical growth and distribution of residential structures through the 1960's. (Hansen) He notes a major change in residential housing patterns after 1960 when building contractors entered the housing business and began laying out subdivisions in addition to building houses. The topographical limitations of Decorah's setting became a major factor after World War II and new housing was located increasingly distant from the boundaries of Original Decorah. This pattern continues and most new housing is now being constructed beyond the city limits. And yet, even now when it would seem that all buildable space in the city is occupied, additional parcels are declared acceptable for individual "homes" or condominium units, often to the detriment of historic properties and landscapes.

## **Materials**

We have already noted Decorah's favorable location in the midst of suitable limestone formations and clay for brick manufacture as well as timber and water power for sawing that timber into lumber. All of these building materials can be found in the city's residential architecture. Based on information gathered to date there are fewer stone houses than might be expected. Stone from the Platteville formation was used in the foundations and basements of many buildings, in retaining walls and for decorative use. There is one small house at 401 East Water Street and an unusual structure on Mound Street in West Decorah next to the Decorah Greenhouse, the George C. Winship property, purportedly dating to 1855. Set into a slope facing south it has walls of stone and an attic story of wood construction. Whether this was built as a residence or for other purposes is not clear.

There may also be log dwellings among the earliest dwellings in Decorah, despite the documented presence of a sawmill dating to 1852, across Mill Street from the Morse House, thought to be the oldest frame house in the city. An unusual type of construction of which there is at least one example in Decorah is stove wood, where stove length logs are laid up in beds of mortar to form the exterior walls of a building. This is the Norris Miller House (1856) that is now part of the Vesterheim complex.

(Gebhard and Mansheim, 378) This was discovered in West Decorah during the process of its demolition, so there may well be additional properties of this kind in the city.

Textured or molded concrete block construction is also an historically important building material, both structural and decorative in its application. This material was made in small factories or by individuals using small hand-operated molds that were available from Sears, Roebuck & Co. and perhaps other sources from the 1920s to the 1950s. The texture was often crafted to resemble cut stone, a much more expensive material, or the exterior face could be embedded with crushed stone of various kinds to create a certain color and texture. An example of the latter is the Kyril Henderson House at 905 Vernon St.

And then there are the steel Lustron Houses with exterior surfaces of baked enamel. These were made in converted airplane factories following World War II, shipped out in special trucks, and assembled on site. None are known to exist in Decorah.

## **Major Architects and Builders**

Charles Altfillisch

The most important architect to have worked in Decorah is Charles Altfillisch. (1892-1978). He obtained a B.S. in engineering at Iowa State University and studied architectural design at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. He came to Decorah in 1919 and in 1921 joined A.N. Hanson,

the city engineer, to form the partnership of Altfillisch and Hanson (1921-1931). Upon Hanson's death in 1931 Altfillisch became the city engineer and held this position until 1948. He persuaded Decorah to set up a planning and zoning commission and was crucial in the design and implementation of many public works projects in Decorah and elsewhere, including sewer and water treatment systems.

Altfillisch began adding designers and draughtsmen to his firm in the 1930's and 1940's, especially after World War II. The firm was prolific and designed public and private buildings throughout the five counties of Northeast Iowa and beyond. The designs for Luther College include Brandt Hall (a dormitory for women), the Main Building, and Valders Hall of Science. The Decorah Municipal Swimming Pool (1938) is perhaps the most stylish and well preserved of the firm's many designs in Decorah. The firm was sold to architect Donald Gray, whose work dates mostly to after 1960.

The Luther College archive has plans and other materials relating to Altfillisch and Gray's work there, and the Winneshiek County Historical Society Archive has a large collection of the same kind of documentation relating to the work of these architects elsewhere.

#### A.R. Coffeen

A.R. ("Roy") Coffeen (1889-1968) attended the Valder Business College in Decorah and received a B.S. in Chemical Engineering at Iowa State University. He began working as a construction contractor in 1913, completing the first Decorah hospital (the "Smith Building") in 1914, a facility designed by the architect E. Hill Turnock and still standing but with several additions. He also designed numerous residential properties and commercial buildings including banks in neighboring communities (e.g., Highlandville, 1918). This combination of engineering, design and construction abilities was not unusual for individuals not trained as architects or engineers. Coffeen's career, however, included a remarkably diverse scope of project types. For several years his business was headquartered in a brick building at 906 South Mill Street that had been erected by the city as part of its waterworks. (The Coffeen Building, Iowa Site No. 96-00485) It is currently used by a local theatre group. A complete record of his work between 1914 and 1923 and from 1925 to 1927 is in the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission Archive, Decorah City Hall. (Coffeen File)

Other architects known to have designed buildings in Decorah but for whom there is little documentation include H.O. Ball (c. 1866-1880's), who advertised himself as "Architect and Contractor" with an office above a hardware store on Water Street. (WCHS Archive) He is known to have provided plans and specifications for the Ellsworth-Porter House on West Broadway (NRHP, 1975) and the Cooley-Whitney House (1867) on Grove Street (NRHP, 1980) and for a commercial building on Winnebago Street. No architects are listed in the Andreas Atlas Business Directory (1875), so perhaps he left town shortly after 1867.

Better known and working during a later period was W. S. Bucknell (1856-1947). Based on material in the WCHS Archive drawn from local newspaper accounts, he produced mainly residential designs, and four of the 40 houses included in the Buresh survey are attributed to Bucknell. His large house at 210-213 Winnebago Street reportedly built in 1855 by David Reed (“Reed’s Castle”) was documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in 1934, along with the Painter-Bernatz Flour Mill. (Shank, 1979) He was listed as: Bucknell, W.S. Architect 309 Winnebago Street in the 1896 city directory.

Very little is known at present about E. Hill Turnock, who was the designer of the first Decorah hospital (1914) and also the second E.J. Weiser House (1920), on the site now occupied by the First Lutheran Church parking lot. (Coffeen File) The first Weiser House dated from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and matched the still extant Carriage House in style (Second Empire). None of these properties are to be confused with the C.J. Weiser Jr. House at 609 West Broadway (1922) designed by Charles Altfillisch and built by A.R. Coffeen. (Price and Svendsen, Section 7, p.6) Architects based in Minneapolis and St. Paul did important work in Decorah during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These include the Orff & Joralemon firm (East Side School and Congregational Church), Emanuel Masqueray, and Edwin Lundie (St. Benedict Catholic Church). (Davis, 24)

Building contractors active in the Decorah area before 1960 also include John H. Austad (old Aase Haugen Home and County Home Caretaker’s House) and Norman Berge, who built several of Altfillisch’s residential properties.

Two stonemasons are on record as having been active in the Decorah area in the 1860’s and 1870’s: Michael Steyer came from Germany to visit his brother Joseph who owned an opera house. He purchased a quarry in 1876 and cut stone for monuments and tombstones. He built the stone arch bridge over Twin Springs Creek that bears his name in 1875 (NRHP) and is thought to have built other bridges in the state. (WCHS Archive)

Patrick Gallagher had spent 8 years working in the Decorah area as of about 1871. He leased the quarry at Dunning’s Spring and had a stone cutting shop on Washington Street. According to news items from the *Decorah Republican*, he also built bridges in the area. (WCHS Archive)

### **Known Representative Properties**

Several have been used in the above text as illustrations. See Appendix A for a list of NRHP-listed historic sites in Decorah. Also, the Decorah HPC Archive in City Hall contains a list compiled by Commission members of potentially significant residential properties in the city

## **Preservation Planning Goals**

For several reasons a large segment of the citizenry of Decorah has an appreciation for the importance of historic architecture and local history as elements of the city's character. To many, the late Victorian houses of West and Upper Broadway Streets represent what historic preservation should be concerned with, and there is in fact a considerable diversity of style, size, period of construction, and property type represented in this District.

Nevertheless, broadening public understanding of the scope of what can be included in the concept of "historically significant" remains a pressing need if preservation is to move forward, with the recognition that any building, structure, or place can be historically and even architecturally significant and worth preserving, whether architect-designed or not, and even if ugly according to some esthetic standards. Historic properties are being lost or damaged every day due to ignorance of what they are and what they can tell us about who we are. We can expect that most of the varieties of stylistic expression and building types from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Midwest will also be represented in Decorah. A comprehensive survey of the city's housing stock with the goal of not only identifying individual properties of historical and/or architectural interest, but also to identify districts that embody the themes outlined above or others that may turn up during the survey project, would provide a basis for preservation planning.

A survey project to locate and evaluate the work of architect Charles Altfillisch and contractor A.R. Coffeen is also recommended, since existing records list projects by client name with no location information. In 1993 a Winneshiek County CLG-sponsored grant proposal was submitted to accomplish this for Altfillisch, but it was not funded. Such a project could be limited to Decorah or be extended to Winneshiek county or to the five county region where both men were active.

## **Archival Sources and Repositories**

In addition to the mostly published material listed in the project Bibliography, county, Decorah Township, and city records plus Sanborn Fire Insurance maps make detailed research possible on any parcel in Decorah. The offices of County Assessor, Recorder, and Auditor contain relatively recent records (c. 1904 to the present), but in some cases the Winneshiek County Historical Society Archive, housed in the old jail on Courthouse Square and in the basement of the Decorah Public Library, contains original records dating to the earliest period of Decorah history, e.g., the original ledgers containing the Assessor's records from 1849 onward. A collection of city directories is housed in the Winneshiek County Genealogical Association repository (Public Library basement) plus an obituary index and files on many individuals who lived in Decorah. The City Clerk (City Hall) has maps and other records including a record of building permits from 1931 to the present.

Other institutional repositories include the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, and Luther College (Preus Library). There is also a large body of historic photos in private collections apart from those in various published sources. All the listed repositories include photographs (prints and postcards) that are invaluable for evaluating the historic integrity of individual properties or landscapes. They can also serve as guides in historic repair and restoration projects.

Important repositories that were not accessed during the current project are those administered by the Office of State Archaeologist in Iowa City, and the State Historical Society in both Iowa City and Des Moines. These include libraries and archives at both locations and files held at the State Historic Preservation Office in the Historical Building in Des Moines.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

All the historic contexts developed for this project include recommendations for survey/documentation projects in their **Preservation Planning Goals** sections. Among them are several large-scale survey and documentation projects to locate and identify individual properties and historic districts eligible for NRHP listing. The locations of potential commercial districts are essentially known (see p. 56), but this is not the case for potential residential districts. Therefore, a comprehensive survey of the city's residential properties should be given a high priority, since little research has been done beyond that associated with the Broadway-Phelps Park NRHP nomination.

Two projects that could be geographically limited to Decorah but should include Winneshiek County relate to the area's (1) New Deal legacy, and (2) its archaeological resources. These would also provide an opportunity for the city and county CLG to work together. A third project of this kind would be to identify and evaluate the work of Charles Altfillisch and A.R. Coffeen in Winneshiek County.

Late in 2009, early on in the course of the HPC activities, it became apparent that a number of historic properties in the Decorah area were endangered for one reason or another. It was thought that by training the commission members and other volunteers who were attending our meetings to complete Iowa Site Inventory forms for some of these properties would both draw attention to them as historic resources in the community and later enable commission members to help owners of historically significant residential and commercial properties fill out site forms as a first step in determining NRHP eligibility. After working with the site inventory forms for several weeks the idea emerged that perhaps a briefer and streamlined version of the form including photographic guidelines would be more useful locally as a first step in the assessment and documentation process. It will be up to the commission to move ahead on this in a future project in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Another need that emerged is for access to historic photos of buildings in Decorah, in particular commercial buildings, as aids in assessing historic integrity and to guide property owners who wish to repair or restore such properties. There is a vast quantity of historic photos in Decorah, some of the in published form, but most of them are located in public repositories and in private

collections. The Commission has initiated a project to scan this material and make it available for general use, but it is so far in a conceptual stage only.

Another potential resource, currently housed in the Winneshiek County Historical Society Archive, is a large quantity of tape recordings of important and knowledgeable people in Decorah discussing various topics relating to the city's history and built environment. This material is approaching 50 years of age or more and deteriorating. It needs to be transcribed, and this is a project that could involve all of the local historical associations and Luther College, which has an archivist on staff and a museum studies program.

Toward the end of the period established for completion of the work products associated with the current project, HPC members were asked by the consultant to produce a prioritized list of future goals for the Commission (see p. 5). There are several practical issues that must be overcome if the Commission or any individual researchers are to function effectively and economically in Decorah. The largest and most important repository of material relating to Decorah's history is the Winneshiek County Historical Society Archive, housed in the old County jail. This also includes material generated by the Winneshiek County Historic Preservation Commission and records of many other governmental bodies, including some related to City government such as the Parks and Recreation Department records. This archive also contains historic photos and negatives plus research notes, rare books, historic building plans, and newspaper clippings, plus research notes and reports. This facility is operated by volunteers affiliated with the County Historical Society and it is currently open to the public one day per week. There is also a collection of material housed in the Porter House Museum that needs to be inventoried and made available to researchers. This and the collection housed in the jail is not cataloged electronically in a way that permits access to the database off site. Whatever material the relatively young City HPC generates will be placed in City Hall, thus creating another, separate repository. Related to these archival and institutional separations are those between the responsible organizations. There is no routine means of communication and information sharing among the groups about their activities and collections, thus little likelihood that the groups would share resources or collaborate on projects or grant proposals. On the contrary, they are operating in competition for the limited resources available for historic preservation activities.

An alternative would be for these groups to hire a full-time professional collections manager, with Winneshiek County and the City of Decorah sharing the cost. There may be other funding sources available as well. In any case, the highest priority for future CLG grant projects must be given to solving these archival conservation and accessibility problems. **The next project grant application should be for funds and expertise to aid in setting up the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission archive in City Hall.** This project could be coordinated with the proposed scanning of historic photo project mentioned above, and the Commission may wish to seek assistance from the State Historical Society's Technical Advisory Network (TAN) in setting up its archive.

The City HPC also lacks communication with other community groups that have related interests, such as the Chamber of Commerce, the City Parks and Recreation Department, Decorah Betterment, and the City's recently established Sustainability Committee. The HPC has recently established a liaison with the City Planning and Zoning Board, and it should do the same with the Board of Adjustment and the City Council. Whether individuals choose to personally act as channels of communication between the HPC and other organizations or whether some simple procedure is set up to share copies of the official minutes of their meetings, any steps made to improve communication would benefit everyone.

“Improvements” on any scale, whether to an individual residence, a city, or beyond, often result in the destruction of or damage to important natural and cultural resources. This is often overlooked, whether because of ignorance or expedience, and it can create a lasting sense of loss in the community. There are ways to protect endangered resources, whether they are in private or public ownership, and to mitigate the adverse impact of certain activities on historic landscapes and properties (see Appendix B). For example, interested parties within the community can often contribute useful ideas on mitigation and salvage procedures if timely notification is provided by requiring demolition as well as building permits (required since 1931 in Decorah) and posting notices of them in the local media.

Although it is based in a city larger than Decorah and with a very different history, the Butte, Montana Citizens for Preservation and Revitalization can offer a useful organizational and action model in dealing with these issues. This group won the Vernacular Architecture Forum's Advocacy Award in 2008.

## **SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS**

Writing in 1956 Fred Biermann boasted that

“Decorah may well be proud of her seven parks of 298 acres, beautiful views, many springs, two and one half miles of Iowa river front, scenic walks, several miles of scenic drives, almost unlimited picnic grounds, and good fishing for small mouth black bass, catfish, and trout. I doubt that any other city in Iowa has so many miles of good saddle paths, scenic, and free of congested traffic. (Biermann, 1)

Today the acreage is closer to 500 with 13 parks (not including athletic fields) in the system. At the same time the Trout Run Trail, a \$7 million “recreational loop” is nearing completion that will tie several trail segments together, creating a dedicated walking and bicycle corridor connecting all the city's recreational resources. On the whole this project has had a low impact on Decorah's natural setting, and it includes features that enhance the esthetic and natural character of the area. Three major art works were commissioned for it, and a historic bridge and

highway segment have been highlighted. And yet, the final segment of this system will have an adverse impact on both the landscape and the historic cut into a hogback that was made beginning in 1950 to divert floodwaters in Dry Run Creek away from the heart of the city. And in the 1960s it was widened to accommodate Hwy. No. 52, which was moved out of the city center. The cut has been a landmark since that time and its dramatic and powerful character will be diminished by this latest action, for which the justifications are not at all as compelling as those that led to both the first and second phases of landscape modification at that location.

One might ask if recreation and tourism are more or less important today than in the past here in Decorah. It's not clear that anyone knows, but clearly the focus of activity has changed over the years, in particular regarding how some of the parks are used. At present there is a pronounced emphasis on physical fitness and some of the trails are of increasing interest to mountain bikers and mountain bike racing. Beyond this, an important factor behind changes in recreational activity relate to the changes made to the river bottomland, and the moving and straightening of the river channel that was part of the Flood Control Project completed in 1951. Old photos and maps portray a rich bottomland with swamps and backwaters, seasonal ponds, islands, and partial channels. One postcard shows a line of boathouses on one bank. The three dams on the river created large ponds suitable for boating, fishing, swimming, and annual ice harvest. And to those whose interest and values are mainly pecuniary, this was mostly a wasteland except for the water power it provided.

The meandering course of Dry Run Creek through town must have been a recreational asset with particular attraction to children, what with the water and wildlife and the many street and railroad bridges, at least until flood time when the excitement this brought on would be mixed with fear and loathing by parents and property owners.

Thus, the very factor that most attracted the first Euro-American settlers to the area, its potential water power, was countered by the destructive potential of flooding, which worsened the longer we were here at least until the 1930s when soil conservation measures were taken. As of right now this perennial hazard seems to be under control, since even the record high waters of 2008 were mostly contained. What the future holds in this regard is uncertain, but it is certain that annual rates of precipitation have been rising in the Midwest for at least 30 years. Straightening the river and installing dikes increases the flooding downstream from Decorah, but now the shape of the channel's path better embraces Decorah and West Decorah, "curving around the town like arms, making it a safe place to have babies," according to the Hmong people from Laos, as recorded by Gerry Schwarz who was involved in helping these people temporarily settle here in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This is a cautionary tale, perhaps, for anyone who presumes to know all the reasons why Decorah is a great place.

Decorah's historic sites and structures are surely a contributing factor for many, whether in its skyline of bluffs, church steeples, the courthouse and, until recently, the twin towers of an historic school. A recent enhancement of the city's historic architecture, in the opinion of the present

writer, was the burial of power lines under what is now called Day Spring Lane, making possible an unobstructed view of the backside of Water Street, so to speak, where the play of color, texture, light and shadow are not only a visual delight but in some cases reveal more of the historic character of these buildings than their fronts do, at least on the ground level where most of them have been remodeled many times. Another important action, taken several years ago, was to close the west end of Main St. to vehicles and make it into the Oneota Trail.

Looking ahead, Decorah's natural setting and its historic resources face certain hazards, the most serious being that sites may be adversely affected or destroyed because of ignorance of what they are. But similar results can follow from an excessive enhancement of certain qualities, whether observed or imagined, of historic or natural places by introducing artificial or other inappropriate elements as additions or modifications. Painting or covering with stucco the exterior of brick buildings, or replacing original windows with energy efficient models that do not match them are examples relating to individual buildings, while permitting industrial operations including large animal confinements near the city and allowing heavy vehicular traffic in historic districts are examples of actions that will adversely affect historic, natural, and scenic resources of all kinds.

The main objective of this Planning for Preservation Project and the report and research guide in hand has been to add to what we know about why Decorah is a great place and to suggest some possibilities for how to keep it that way.

## APPENDIX A

### Previously Inventoried and NRHP-listed Properties:

**Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District (1976)**

West Broadway from Winnebago St. to Park Drive

**Ellsworth-Porter House (1975).** Also known as the Porter House Museum

401 West Broadway

**Cooley-Whitney House (1980)**

305 Grove St.

**Decorah Ice Cave (1978)**

Ice Cave Road

**Decorah Woolen Mill (2001)**

107 Court St.

**Freeport Bowstring Arch Bridge (1984)**

This was moved from its original location in neighboring Freeport to its present location off Highway No. 9 and Trout Run Creek.

**Koren Library (1984)**

Luther College Campus

**Luther College Farm (1979).** Also known as the Ashmore-Jewell Barn.

**Miller, Norris House (1976).** Located on the Vesterheim Museum grounds, this is also known as the **The Stovewood House.**

**Painter-Bernatz Mill (1974)**

200 North Mill St. (Vesterheim Museum grounds)

**Steyer Bridge (1983)**

Twin Springs Road over Twin Springs Creek

**Steyer Opera House (1980)**

102-104 West Water Street

NOTE: for information on the NRHP program in Iowa visit:

<http://www.iowahistory.org/preservation>

## APPENDIX B

### Additional Information and Resources:

Included here are potential funding sources for historic preservation projects, Certified Local Government program information and training opportunities for Historic Preservation Commissions. These include workshops and conferences sponsored by the SHPO, Preservation Iowa (a non-governmental preservation organization), and online resources. Also included is a list of publications and four pages of basic information on the NRHP program.

The City Ordinance (No. 1102) establishing the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission and listing its purpose and powers is also included as is Chapter 457A of the Iowa Code on conservation easements, since such easements can be a tool for conserving not only natural but also cultural resources, that is, “archaeological and historical resources.” (Chapter 457.2)

### Certified Local Government

The National Historic Preservation Act established a nationwide program to encourage preservation and wise use of our historic resources. Among other things the Act established the National Register of Historic Places, created State Historic Preservation Officers, and created the Certified Local Government (CLG) program to support local governments' historic preservation programs.

The CLG Program's **Purpose** and Objectives:

- Encourage historic preservation at the local level through local governmental sponsorship;
- Encourage local governments to follow the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards & Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation* in their historic preservation programs;
- Provide training and technical assistance through the State's historic preservation office;
- Provide funding to underwrite various historic preservation activities.
- Create a federal, state, and local governmental partnership in historic preservation

- Each state's historic preservation office administers a Certified Local Government Program on behalf of the National Park Service.

In Iowa, the Certified Local Government program is one of the historic preservation offerings of the Community Programs Bureau, State Historical Society of Iowa.

**For More Information about Iowa's CLG Program, Contact:**

Paula Mohr  
CLG Program Coordinator  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
600 East Locust Street  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0290  
515/281-6826  
[paula.mohr@iowa.gov](mailto:paula.mohr@iowa.gov)

### **Local Historic Preservation Programs**

Local historic preservation programs deal with the built environment and encourage preservation of historic properties. Historic properties include buildings from homes to factories, structures from bridges to transmission towers, objects from gardens to statutes, archaeological sites from prehistoric to historic or districts (a concentration of buildings, structures, objects and/or archaeological sites). Historic properties have documented significance and a high degree of integrity.

Ideally, a local historic preservation program has a dual focus. First, it has an on-going process for identifying, evaluating, and recognizing historic properties within city/county limits. This is essential for determining what properties should be preserved and providing evidence of their significance.

Second, the program has an on-going process for managing and protecting historic properties. This means planning, considering historic preservation in land use, public improvement, and development decisions. It also involves reviewing and commenting on plans for projects that will affect historic properties, such as the widening a road through a historic district, making a historic property accessible, rehabilitating a historic property, or placing a development on land containing significant archaeological sites. It involves providing technical assistance on appropriate ways to rehabilitate and use historic properties. Finally, it involves educating local officials and all parts of the city/county on historic preservation. It involves assisting the city/county in developing incentives and regulations to encourage and insure that historic

properties are preserved.

### **CLG Program Purpose and Goals**

Local historic preservation programs:

- Provide technical assistance through the State's historic preservation office to Certified Local Governments
- Provide participating Certified Local Governments with funding to underwrite various historic preservation activities in their communities.

### **Certifying a Local Preservation Program**

Local government sets up a local preservation program and signs a CLG agreement with the State of Iowa, agreeing to develop and administer its local historic preservation program so that it complies with national and state preservation goals and standards.

### **Local Government Connection**

What is the connection between the historic preservation program, the historic preservation commission, and city/county government? Your local historic preservation program was established by official action on the part of your local government. Through passage of local legislation, a historic preservation ordinance, mayors and city councils or county boards of supervisors commit to a policy of supporting historic preservation and establish a local historic preservation program.

The commission is part of local government. Commissioners are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the mayor and city council or county board of supervisors. The commission is responsible for reporting regularly on their activities and projects to the mayor and city council or county board of supervisors. Any grants for which the commission applies must be approved by the mayor and city council or county board of supervisors. If the grant is awarded, the award is to the city/county and is administered by the city/county's financial officer, for example the city clerk or county auditor. Donations to the commission may be tax-deductible because they are given to the city/county.

Ideally, the mayor and city council or county board of supervisors should assist the historic preservation commission by providing an annual appropriation, by appointing a council member to serve as liaison between the commission and city council or county board of supervisors and by assigning a staff member to help implement commission directives and take care of commission correspondence and files. In addition, the city should provide a meeting space, filing space and technical support in terms of office supplies, copying services, postage, phone privileges.

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In Iowa, there are two steps to establishing a local historic preservation program, first the local government must pass a historic preservation ordinance, if a city, or a local historic preservation resolution, if a county. Second, the Mayor or Chairman of the Board of Supervisors appoints a historic preservation commission to develop and administer the program.

#### **Meeting Certified Local Government Requirements**

To participate in the CLG program, a local government must have a local historic preservation program that complies with CLG program requirements. To qualify or obtain "certified status", the local government must demonstrate that its local historic preservation program meets certain standards. Briefly, these are as follows:

1. Operates under a historic preservation ordinance (city) or resolution (county).
2. There is a historic preservation commission to oversee the program.
3. Preservation commissioners must meet certain criteria to be appointed to commission.
4. There is a commitment to preserve the full range of properties from archaeological sites to districts.
5. Preservation activities include identifying, evaluating and registering historic properties.
6. Local government will maintain a file/inventory of properties.
7. Preservation program encourages nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.
8. Will conduct public review and comment on National Register of Historic places

nominations of properties within jurisdiction.

9. Public is encouraged to participate in all aspects of the preservation program.

10. Local government will enforce all appropriate state and local ordinances for designating and protecting historic properties.

11. There is no discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, and/or national origin in any of the local government's activities in implementing its preservation program.

### **Why Participate in the CLG Program? Some Benefits**

For the local government, its staff and Historic Preservation Commission, there are some direct benefits. There is free historic preservation training and technical assistance from the State's historic preservation staff. Participating cities and counties receive a start-up preservation reference library for use in developing and administering the program. Cities and Counties in the CLG program will qualify for REAP Historic Resource Development Program grants for rehabilitating city or county owned properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Finally, cities and counties qualify for a small, competitive, matching grant program that is open only CLG program participants. These grants can be used to underwrite all historic preservation activities except rehabilitation—that is supported by the REAP HRDP grant program.

In Iowa, cities and counties have used their local historic preservation programs as a tool to help promote downtown revitalization or to protect or stabilize and revive nineteenth and early twentieth century neighborhoods. Good examples are Albia, Ames, Bloomfield, Bonaparte, Burlington, Clinton, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Hampton, Iowa City, Iowa Falls, Mount Vernon, Oskaloosa, Ottumwa, Sigourney, Sioux City and Waterloo.

A strong local historic preservation program provides an authentic foundation for heritage tourism. Visit Adams, Clinton, Crawford, Harrison, Henry, Jackson, Madison, Linn and Shelby Counties as well as the Amana Colonies, Keokuk, Kimballton, Lake City, Fort Madison, Perry to sample Iowa history in three dimensions. Often the local historic preservation program is used to leverage preservation of an outstanding community landmark such as the depots in Atlantic, Carroll, Cherokee, Creston, Council Bluffs or the Courthouses in Davis and Woodbury Counties. Preservation of natural and historic resources is a natural partnership as exemplified by the local historic preservation program focus in Allamakee, Dallas, Clayton, and Lyon Counties where archaeological site preservation has been a primary concern.

## **The CLG Commissions' Role**

The historic preservation commission plays a number of roles. Under the ordinance or resolution it is an advisory body to local elected officials, city or county staff, other city/county commissions and to those who live and own property in the city or county. The historic preservation commission alerts and advises on the appropriate course of action to take regarding the management and preservation of historic properties. Under the Certified Local Government Agreement, the City not the historic preservation commission is responsible for fulfilling the terms of the Agreement. However, the commission reminds the local government of its obligations.

It is important have a commission spokesperson. Generally this is the Chairman or a commission member who is an effective public speaker. Whenever the commission deals with elected officials, the press, or makes public presentations, the commission spokesperson should do the presentation. This is especially true in cases when the commission is fortunate enough to be assisted by a city or county staff person. The staff person and the commission spokesperson have different roles and responsibilities within the local preservation program. Thus, to retain this distinction and maintain commission autonomy and identity, a commission member should serve as spokesperson.

The historic preservation commission may undertake historic preservation activities directly or delegate responsibility. If the commission is assisted by a staff person, the commission needs to find out how much time the staff person can give to commission work as well as establishing the activities that the commission will undertake directly and those that will be undertaken by the staff person or other personnel, departments, or commissions within the local government. If the commission chooses to undertake a preservation activity, it may recruit volunteers to assist in the effort and even appoint a volunteer as project director. Several commissions have advisory committees, composed of non-commission members, who assist in particular activities.

The historic preservation commission plays an advocacy role, encouraging the city or county to adopt policies, regulations and other measures that will encourage preservation and use of historic properties. When a historic property is threatened with demolition or inappropriate rehabilitation, the historic preservation commission may approach the property owner and advocate for appropriate treatment by outlining alternative courses of action and information about financial incentives.

The commission has an educational function. Broadly, the commission needs to educate the entire community about its preservation program, the benefits and opportunities that it offers. Specifically, the commission educates local governmental officials, staff and other commissions about their responsibilities under the Certified local Government Agreement, The commission educates and provides technical assistance to owners of properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Remember, the local government through the commission and as a participant in the CLG program, has access to two grant programs to help defray the cost of preservation activities. The CLG grant program is open only to participants in the CLG program and may be used for planning, survey/evaluation, registration, public education, and pre-development projects. The REAP HRDP grant program is open to all Iowa residents. These grants can be used to underwrite planning, survey/evaluation, registration, public education, predevelopment and rehabilitation projects.

### **Survey and Evaluation**

For the commission to fulfill any of its responsibilities, the commission must be able to locate the community's historic properties. This is done through survey and evaluation, two steps to distinguish old properties from significant ones which merit preservation.

Survey and evaluation are on-going activities because each year another group of properties becomes 50 years old and eligible for National Register listing. Consequently, the commission needs to work with the local government to set up a procedure to allow for on-going survey and evaluation. The on-going survey-evaluation process can be fairly simple involving an annual request to the public to research their properties and instructing the public on where they can get forms, instruction and additional information. The local government can commit to a policy of completing Iowa Site Inventory forms whenever it works on a publicly or privately owned property. The city could distribute Iowa Site Inventory forms to applicants for building permits, requesting and requiring them to complete the form. The city/county and commission could commit to a multi-year survey/evaluation program in an effort to cover larger areas in a relatively short period of time.

### **Historic Property Inventory**

The commission should work with the local government to develop its historic property inventory. This will entail obtaining copies of survey/evaluation project reports, National Register nominations, Iowa Site or OSA forms for properties within the local government's limits. In many cases, the local government will have much of this information; however, it may be filed in a number of different places.

### **Registration**

Under its ordinance/resolution and the CLG Agreement, the local government and the commission are to encourage nominating eligible properties to the National Register of Historic Places. Again there are many ways this can be accomplished through informational mailings notifying owners of the opportunity; through informational and training workshops on preparing a nomination; through distribution of information on the National Register and the nomination forms. The commission should make sure that the local government keeps a current list of owner's names.

Whenever a property in the local government's jurisdiction is nominated to the National Register

of Historic Places, the commission and the chief elected official (Mayor or Chairman of the Board of Supervisors) will be asked to review the nomination. The State's national register coordinator will send a letter and form to the commission chair or contact, notifying them of the review and providing instruction on its conduct. When the commission reviews and comments on the nomination, their review should focus on whether the nomination contains an adequate description of the property, places it within a context, and makes a solid case for its significance and integrity within the context. If there are factual errors in the nomination, the commission may correct these. The commission may also provide additional information that will strengthen the nomination.

At some point in time, the commission may recommend to the local government that it develop its own listing of historic places. This is called local designation. The local government can choose to designate single properties, typically called landmarks, and/or historic districts. If the local government wishes to designate historic districts, then it must follow the Code of Iowa, Section 303.20 et. Seq. In setting up the designation system. As a participant in the CLG program, the local government is asked to consult with the State and submit all ordinance revisions, nomination forms, and design guidelines to the State for review and comment when setting up a system for local designation.

### **Management, Protection and Preservation**

The commission will want to become familiar with the local government's comprehensive land use plan. If there is no such animal, recommend that one be developed which contains a historic preservation component. If there is a plan, review it, develop a historic preservation component for it and an implementation procedure.

The commission will want to look at local government policies, regulations, practices and incentive programs to determine how these effect historic properties. If the local government lacks a policy, regulation or incentive program, the commission might research these, develop recommendations and encourage the local government to adopt the recommendations. If the local government engages in practices that harm historic properties such as demolition of unsurveyed/unevaluated properties, the commission might make recommendation for an alternative practice that would allow for potential preservation if the property was found to be significant. Some of the local government's regulations may make it difficult to preserve historic properties, e.g. building code, parking, zoning. Again, the commission can investigate the impact of these regulations, research alternatives that would encourage preservation, and make recommendation to the local government. Finally, the commission should investigate the incentive programs that the local government uses to encourage development and revitalization. Often these focus on new construction and do not encourage recycling or adaptive reuse of historic properties. The commission could research and propose special amendments to these incentives that would make use of historic properties attractive and financially viable. Working with the private sector (realtors, developers, the chamber of commerce, the economic development corporation, banks and contractors) is important. Often the private sector resists historic preservation efforts because misconceptions about its purpose, focus and cost. The

commission could initiate educational programming on the economic benefits of historic preservation to neighborhood and downtown revitalization efforts. The commission could explore ways of training contractors in appropriate rehabilitation techniques and supporting their use of those techniques through incentive programs. Working with realtors and financial institutions to encourage the marketing of historic properties and the provision of loans for their purchase or rehabilitation is another step the commission might take.

The commission can also work with the owners of historic properties offering the use of the commission library, directing owner's to appropriate consultants, incentive programs, state staff who can assist. Using the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation's *Land Owner's Options*, the commission can explain the various ways that a private property owner can insure preservation of his/her historic property.

Finally, the commission can help the community enjoy and appreciate its rich, historic built environment. Establishing an annual event during Historic Preservation Week in May focuses attention on the local historic preservation program, individual efforts and properties. An awards program also gives public recognition and positive feedback and reinforcement. Getting the public schools to utilize the historic preservation component in the Prairie Voices Curriculum brings the youth of the community into the historic preservation program as does encouraging service projects. Developing walk tours, informative publications (these can be based on National Register nominations), events at historic properties—all serve to bring community residents into the historic preservation program.

## **CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

### ***Publications Relating to CLG***

#### **Please Visit the HPS Free Bookshelf for information on ordering the following publications**

All publications are offered in single issue free of charge, subject to availability, from the Heritage Preservation Services Information Desk, National Center for Cultural Resources, 1201 Eye St., NW, 2255, Washington, D.C. 20005. Or phone: (202) 513-7270, FAX: (202) 513-7270 , e-mail [nps\\_hps-info@nps.gov](mailto:nps_hps-info@nps.gov)

## **Standards and Guidelines**

The Standards and Guidelines, prepared under the authority of sections 101(f)(g) and (h) and section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. They are intended to provide basic principles and useful advice about a variety of archeological and historic preservation activities and methods, from planning to treatment.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation Planning and Guidelines for Preservation Planning.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Identification and Guidelines for Identification.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Evaluation and Guidelines for Evaluation.

**The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR 68)** . 1995. Leaflet.

The Secretary of the Interior's Historic Preservation Professional Qualification Standards and Guidelines. (*The Professional Qualification Standards, define minimum education and experience required to perform identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities*).

## **Historic Preservation Planning**

Planning guidance has been developed to address general questions about the process of planning.

Gyrisco, Thomas H. Veech, Stephen A. Morris, Patricia L. Parker, and Jonathan P. Rak. Useful information on strategies for protecting archeological sites that can be used in local communities when there is no federal involvement in a project. Targeted to professional and avocational archeologists, local preservation commissions, planners, and developers. 133 pages. 1993. The 2000 update of this book is on-line at " Strategies for Protecting Archeological Sites on Private Lands."

**Preservation Planning: Ensuring a Future for Our Past.** Thematic issue of CRM magazine. Available on-line.

**Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning (formerly National Register Bulletin 24).** Anne Derry, H. Ward Jandl, Carol D. Shull, and Jan Thorman; revised by Patricia L. Parker. Guidance for communities, organizations, federal and state agencies, and individuals undertaking surveys of historic resources and incorporating survey results into planning. 112 pages. 1985. Available on-line.

**History on the Line: Testimony in the Cause of Preservation.** Richard W. Longstreth. Selection of testimony delivered before the Historic Preservation Review Board and other public officials in the District of Columbia between 1986 and 1996. The book can easily serve as a guide and model for preparing testimony on significance issues before government review boards throughout the country. 114 pages. 1998.

**Cultural Resources Partnership Notes** is a series of short booklets that provide information on historic preservation planning, related planning and land-use topics, and preservation strategies for federal agencies, Indian tribes, states, and local governments. This series incorporates and updates many of the titles included in the original *Local Preservation* series, and new titles will be added. Titles currently available include:

*Issues Paper: Conservation Districts.* Two short essays by Robert E. Stipe and by Carole Zellie (1993; revised 1998)

*Local Preservation Reference Shelf*<. An annotated historic preservation bibliography by the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (1999)

*Subdivision and Historic Preservation.* Stephen A. Morris (1992; revised 1998)

*Zoning and Historic Preservation.* Stephen A. Morris (1989; revised 1998)

## Local Programs

The following publications were developed for certified local governments (CLGs), local historic preservation commissions, and the general public.

**Preserving Your Community's Heritage Through the Certified Local Government Program.** 16 pages. A popular program brochure, uses illustrations and graphics to explain various aspects of the CLGs to a broad audience. 2004.

### **Questions and Answers About CLG Grants from SHPOs: An Introductory Guide.**

Useful program information for a general audience. 8 pages. 1995. (Note that the contents of this brochure are displayed in the Frequently Asked Questions section of CLG page. Hard copies may be ordered if needed.) Definition of Survey and Evaluation (taken from 2007 CLG Manual accessed at <http://www.iowahistory.org>)

**Survey/Identification** involves researching and documenting properties in order to get information on how the property was created, when it was created, how it was used, who was associated with it and to describe the physical appearance of the property, map it, photograph it. Survey/identification should be undertaken in phases with each phase focusing on a geographic area, or a particular historic context/theme, or a particular property type or an area that is experiencing change. The city or county can apply for CLG grant funds to underwrite survey/identification. In addition, the local government can encourage property owners, volunteer or service organizations, and school groups to assist in survey and evaluation. Perhaps the most effective way of identifying historic properties is to set up an on-going

system to research and record properties and develop historic contexts for the city or county. Research, recordation and context development provide the information needed in order to complete the next step evaluation.

**Evaluation** is a sorting process whereby properties determined to have historic importance, significance, or determined to lack historic importance, not significant. Typically, evaluation is done by applying the significance, age, and integrity criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Applying these three criteria results in a document containing a detailed analysis of why the property is or is not significant. Evaluation serves to focus attention on those properties that are historically significant and merit formal recognition through registration. Evaluation provides a way of locating properties that merit preservation, protection and appropriate maintenance.

**Registration** is formal recognition of a property's historic significance by placing it on a municipal or county register of historic places and/or by nominating the property to the federal government's register of historic places, the National Register of Historic Places. The historic preservation commission plays a key role in the registration process. In the case of National Register nominations, the commission can initiate and fund the process with CLG grants. In addition, as a CLG participant the Commission and chief elected officials will be called upon to review and comment on all National Register nominations of properties within its jurisdiction. The historic preservation commission, chief elected official of the city or county, and a historic preservation professional will comment on all National Register nominations within the local government's jurisdiction. The State National Register Coordinator provides the local government with the appropriate form and guidance on completing it. If the commission lacks an appropriate preservation professional, State Preservation Office staff can perform the professional review for the Local Government.

### **Property Inventory**

The foundation of the commission's activities is its inventory—the local file of information about "identified, evaluated, and registered" properties in the city or county. This file serves as a reference for any type of planning, be it rehabilitation of a building or developing a road-widening project. The inventory informs about the location of properties, their type and, most important, their significance. It indicates which parts of a city or county have been surveyed and evaluated and for what kinds of properties. The inventory is developed through survey, evaluation, and registration projects. It is a file that consists of completed site forms with information about individual properties, survey and evaluation project reports, multiple property documents describing historic contexts, National Register of Historic Places nomination forms and local historic landmark and district nomination forms as well as maps, photographs, blueprints and other data relating to properties in the city or county.

The State maintains a state-wide inventory of historic properties that includes National Register nominations. The commission or a representative of the city or county is welcome to come to Des Moines and reproduce the State's inventory of properties in the city or county.

## National Register of Historic Places

State Historical Society of Iowa



### National Register of Historic Places: Owner Information

#### Key Points about the National Register Process for Property Owners

- Listing in the National Register honors the property by recognizing its importance to its community, State, or the Nation.
- Many property owners propose National Register nominations.
- Under Federal law, private property owners can do anything they wish with their National Register-listed property, provided that no Federal license, permit, or funding is involved.
- Owners have no obligation to open their properties to the public, to restore them, or even to maintain them, if they choose not to do so.
- To ensure public participation in the nomination process, property owners and local officials are notified of proposed nominations to the National Register and provided the opportunity to comment. In addition, once a nomination is submitted to the National Park Service another public comment period is published in the Federal Register.
- Private property owners may object to the proposed nomination of their property to the National Register. If a majority of private property owners objects to a nomination, then the property cannot be listed in the National Register.
- Federal agencies whose projects affect a listed property must give the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation an opportunity to comment on the project and its effects on the property.
- The powers of the SHPO staff are limited in protecting National Register properties, to reviewing those projects which are funded, wholly or in part, by the federal government and which impact, directly or indirectly, listed or eligible properties. National Register status does not mean that a property cannot be destroyed by a highway, by Urban Renewal, or some other project. It does mean that before a federal agency can be involved in any way with such a project, i.e. by

historical importance; or

**b.** A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or

**c.** A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life; or

**d.** A cemetery which derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or

**e.** A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or

**f.** A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or

**g.** A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

## **HOW OLD DOES A PROPERTY HAVE TO BE FOR LISTING?**

Generally, properties eligible for listing in the National Register are at least 50 years old. Properties less than 50 years of age must be exceptionally important to be considered eligible for listing.

## **HOW LONG DOES THE NOMINATION PROCESS TAKE?**

The process varies from State to State depending on State workload, planning, and registration priorities, and the schedule of the review board. The process takes a minimum of 90 days to fulfill all of the review and notification requirements provided that a complete and fully documented nomination form has been completed for the property. Upon submission to the National Park Service, a decision on whether to list the property is made within 45 days.

a majority of private property owners has not objected to listing. During the National Register's evaluation of nomination documentation, another opportunity for public comment is provided by the publication of pending nominations in the Federal Register.

Several state historic preservation office web sites also offer more information on National Register listed properties in their state. The depth of information available varies from state to state, but ranges from basic locational information to searchable databases with downloadable narrative descriptions and photos.

## WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR LISTING?

The National Register's standards for evaluating the significance of properties were developed to recognize the accomplishments of all peoples who have made a significant contribution to our country's history and heritage. The criteria are designed to guide State and local governments, Federal agencies, and others in evaluating potential entries in the National Register. Find help evaluating and documenting the significance of the range of diverse historic places recognized in the National Register with the National Register bulletin series.

### **Criteria for Evaluation**

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A.** That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B.** That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C.** That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D.** That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### **Criteria Considerations**

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- a.** A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or

historical importance; or

**b.** A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or

**c.** A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life; or

**d.** A cemetery which derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or

**e.** A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or

**f.** A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or

**g.** A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

## **HOW OLD DOES A PROPERTY HAVE TO BE FOR LISTING?**

Generally, properties eligible for listing in the National Register are at least 50 years old. Properties less than 50 years of age must be exceptionally important to be considered eligible for listing.

## **HOW LONG DOES THE NOMINATION PROCESS TAKE?**

The process varies from State to State depending on State workload, planning, and registration priorities, and the schedule of the review board. The process takes a minimum of 90 days to fulfill all of the review and notification requirements provided that a complete and fully documented nomination form has been completed for the property. Upon submission to the National Park Service, a decision on whether to list the property is made within 45 days.

**City of Decorah Ordinance Creating the Historic Preservation Commission**

**ORDINANCE NO. 1102**

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF THE CITY BY ESTABLISHING A HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION FOR THE CITY OF DECORAH, IOWA .

BE IT ORDAINED by the City Council of the City of Decorah , Iowa, as follows :

1 . That Title 2 of the Municipal Code of the City is hereby amended by adding thereto as Chapter 2.54 the following :

**CHAPTER 2.54  
DECORAH HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

- Section 2 . 54 . 010 Purpose.
- Section 2 . 54 . 020 Definitions
- Section 2 . 54 . 030 Decorah Historic Preservation Commission
- Section 2 . 54 . 040 Powers and Responsibilities of the Commission.

**SECTION 2.54.010: PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Section is to :

- A. Promote the educational , cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the recognition, enhancement and perpetuation of sites and districts of historical and cultural significance .
- B. Safeguard the City's historic, aesthetic and cultural heritage by preserving sites and districts of historic and cultural significance.
- C. Stabilize and improve property values.
- D. Foster pride in the legacy of beauty and achievements of the past .
- E . Protect and enhance the City's attractions to tourists and visitors and the support and stimulus to business thereby provided.
- F . Strengthen the economy of the City.
- G. Promote the use of sites and districts of historic and cultural significance as places for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the City.

## SECTION 2.54.020: DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Chapter the following terms shall have the following meanings:

- A. Commission. The Decorah Historic Preservation Commission as established by this Ordinance.
  
- B. Historic District. An area which contains a significant portion of archaeological sites, buildings, structures and / or other improvements which, considered as a whole, possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and
  - 1. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
  - 2. Is associated with events that have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of our local, state or national history; or
  - 3. Possesses a coherent and distinctive visual character or integrity based upon similarity of scale, design, color or setting, workmanship , materials or combinations thereof , which is deemed to add significantly to the value and attractiveness of properties within such area; or
  - 4. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
  - 5. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.
  
- C. Historic Site. An archaeological site, structure or building which,
  - 1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; o r
  - 2. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
  - 3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represents a work of a master , or that possesses high artistic values , or that represents a significant and distinguished entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
  - 4. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**SECTION 2.54.030: DECORAH HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

- A. The Commission shall initially consist of seven members who shall be residents of the City .
- B. Members of the Commission shall be appointed by the Mayor with the advice and consent of the City Council. Members shall demonstrate a positive interest in historic preservation, possessing interest or expertise in architecture, architectural history, historic preservation, city planning, building rehabilitation, conservation in general or real estate.
- C. The original appointment of the members of the Commission shall be three for two years and four for three years from January 1 following the year of such appointment or until their successor is appointed to serve for the term of three years.
- D. Vacancies occurring in the Commission, other than expiration of term of office, shall be only for the unexpired portion of the term of the member replaced.
- E. Members may serve for more than one term, and each member shall serve until the appointment of a successor.
- F. Vacancies shall be filled by the City according to the original selection as aforesaid.
- G. Members shall serve without compensation.
- H. A simple majority of the Commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.
- I. The Commission shall elect a Chairman who shall preside over all Commission meetings and elect a Secretary who shall be responsible for maintaining written records of the Commission's proceedings.
- J. The Commission shall meet at least three (3) times a year.

**Section 2.54.040 Powers of the Commission.**

- A. The Commission may conduct studies for the identification and designation of historic districts and sites meeting the definitions established by this Ordinance. The Commission may proceed at its own initiative or upon a petition from any person, group or association. The Commission shall maintain records of all studies and inventories for public use.
- B. The Commission may make a recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer for the listing of a historic district or site in the National Register of Historic Places and may conduct a public hearing thereon.

- C. The Commission may investigate and recommend to the City Council the adoption of ordinances designating historic sites and historic districts if they qualify as defined herein; and
- D. Other Powers . In addition to those duties and powers specified above, the Commission may, with City Council approval:
  1. Accept unconditional gifts and donations of real and personal property, including money, for the purpose of historic preservation.
  2. Make recommendations to the City Council to acquire by purchase , bequest or donation, fee and lesser interests in historic properties , including properties adjacent to or associated with historic properties.
  3. Make recommendations to the City Council to preservation, restoration, maintenance and operation of historic properties under the ownership and control of the City.
  4. Make recommendations to the City Council to lease, sell or otherwise transfer or dispose of historic properties subject to rights of public access and other covenants and in a manner that will preserve the property.
  5. Make recommendations to the City Council as to contracts with the State or the Federal Government or other organizations.
  6. Cooperate with the federal, state and local governments in the pursuance of the objectives of historic preservation.
  7. Provide information for the purpose historic preservation to the governing body.
  8. Promote and conduct an educational and interpretive program on historic properties within its jurisdiction.
- E. The Commission shall be governed by the administrative personnel, accounting or budgetary policies of the City.

Repealed. All Ordinances or parts of Ordinances in conflict with the provisions of this Ordinance are hereby repealed.

Severability Clause. If any section, provision or part of this Ordinance shall be unconstitutional, such adjudication adjudged shall not invalid affect or the validity of the Ordinance as a whole, or any section, provision or part thereof not adjudged invalid or unconstitutional.

When Effective. This Ordinance shall be in effect upon its passage, approval and publication as provided by law.

## Iowa Code Chapter 457A: Conservation Easements

### **457A.1 ACQUISITION BY OTHER THAN CONDEMNATION.**

The department of natural resources, soil and water conservation districts as provided in chapter 161A, the historical division of the department of cultural affairs, the state archaeologist appointed by the state board of regents pursuant to section 263B.1, any county conservation board, and any city or agency of a city may acquire by purchase, gift, contract, or other voluntary means, but not by eminent domain, conservation easements in land to preserve scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, riparian lands, wetlands, or forests; promote outdoor recreation, agriculture, soil or water conservation, or open space; or otherwise conserve for the benefit of the public the natural beauty, natural and cultural resources, and public recreation facilities of the state.

#### **Section History: Early For**

[C71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, § 111D.1; 82 Acts, ch 1199, § 58, 96]

#### **Section History: Recent Form**

86 Acts, ch 1245, § 1873

C93, § 457A.1

2002 Acts, ch 1012, §1; 2003 Acts, ch 128, §1

Referred to in § 457A.2, 457A.5

### **457A.2 DEFINITIONS.**

1. "*Conservation easement*" means an easement in, servitude upon, restriction upon the use of, or other interest in land owned by another, created for any of the purposes set forth in section 457A.1. A conservation easement shall be transferable to any other public body authorized to acquire conservation easements. A conservation easement shall be perpetual unless expressly limited to a lesser term, or unless released by the holder, or unless a change of circumstances renders the easement no longer beneficial to the public. A comparative economic test shall not be used to determine whether a conservation easement is beneficial to the public. A conservation easement shall be enforceable during the term of the easement notwithstanding sections 614.24 through 614.38.
2. "*Natural and cultural resources*" includes, but is not limited to, archaeological and historical resources.

#### **Section History: Early Form**

[C71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, § 111D.2]

#### **Section History: Recent Form**

86 Acts, ch 1245, § 1874

C93, § 457A.2

2002 Acts, ch 1012, §2; 2003 Acts, ch 44, §70

Referred to in § 457A.8, 462B.1

### **457A.3 RECORDING.**

Conservation easements shall be recorded as other instruments affecting real estate are recorded, and each public body acquiring one or more conservation easements shall maintain a current inventory thereof. Unrecorded and uninventoried conservation easements shall be deemed abandoned.

**Section History: Early Form**

[C71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, § 111D.3]

**Section History: Recent Form**

C93, § 457A.3

**457A.4 STATEMENT OF EXTENT.**

A conservation easement shall clearly state its extent and purpose.

**Section History: Early Form**

[C71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, § 111D.4]

**Section History: Recent Form**

C93, § 457A.4

**457A.5 RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**

The powers accorded by this chapter shall be in addition to, and not in derogation of, all powers provided by law with respect to the public bodies named in section 457A.1.

**Section History: Early Form**

[C71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, § 111D.5]

**Section History: Recent Form**

C93, § 457A.5

**457A.6 AND 457A.7** Reserved.

**457A.8 PRIVATELY HELD EASEMENTS.**

A conservation easement may be held by a private, nonprofit organization for public benefit if the instrument granting the easement or the bylaws of the organization provide that the easement will be transferred either to a public body or another private, nonprofit organization upon the dissolution of the private, nonprofit organization. A conservation easement meeting these requirements acquired after July 1, 1984 is transferable and perpetual as provided in section 457A.2.

**Section History: Recent Form**

84 Acts, Ch 1115, § 1

C85, § 111D.8

C93, § 457A.8