

*Site sent to Paula Mohr 7-20-10*

**Site Inventory Form**  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
(November 2005)

State Inventory No. 96-00646  New  Supplemental  
 Part of a district with known boundaries (enter inventory no.)  
Relationship:  Contributing  Noncontributing  
 Contributes to a potential district with yet unknown boundaries  
National Register Status: (any that apply)  Listed  De-listed  NHL  DOE  
9-Digit SHPO Review & Compliance (R&C) Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Non-Extant (enter year) \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Fred Biermann House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number 408 South Mechanic Street

city or town Decorah  vicinity, county Winneshiek

Legal Description: (If Rural) Township Name \_\_\_\_\_ Township No. \_\_\_\_\_ Range No. \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_ Quarter of Quarter \_\_\_\_\_

(If Urban) Subdivision \_\_\_\_\_ Irregular Subdivision \_\_\_\_\_ Block(s) See Continuation Sheet Lot(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification [Skip this Section]**

**4. National Park Service Certification [Skip this Section]**

**5. Classification**

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

If Non-Eligible Property

Enter number of:

— buildings  
— sites  
— structures  
— objects  
— Total

If Eligible Property, enter number of:

Contributing Noncontributing  
1 — buildings  
— — sites  
— — structures  
— — objects  
1 — Total

Name of related project report or multiple property study (Enter "N/A" if the property is not part of a multiple property examination).

Title  
N/A

Historical Architectural Data Base Number

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

01A01 Residence

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

01A01 Residence

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

05B Italianate

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation See Continuation Sheet

walls (visible material) See Continuation Sheet

roof See Continuation Sheet

other See Continuation Sheet

Narrative Description ( SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" representing your opinion of eligibility after applying relevant National Register criteria)

- Yes  No  More Research Recommended
- Yes  No  More Research Recommended
- Yes  No  More Research Recommended
- Yes  No  More Research Recommended

- A Property is associated with significant events.
- B Property is associated with the lives of significant persons.
- C Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.
- D Property yields significant information in archaeology or history.

County Winneshiek  
City Decorah

Address 408 South Mechanic Street

Site Number  
District Number

**Criteria Considerations**

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B Removed from its original location.
- C A birthplace or grave.
- D A cemetery
- E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F A commemorative property.
- G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

08 Conservation  
26 Politics/Government

**Significant Dates**

Construction date  
1881  check if circa or estimated date  
Other dates, including renovation  
1997 or 1998 Attached Garage

**Significant Person**

(Complete if National Register Criterion B is marked above)  
Biermann, Frederick Elliott

**Architect/Builder**

Architect  
Unknown  
Builder  
Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance** ( SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Bibliography  See continuation sheet for citations of the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form

**10. Geographic Data**

UTM References (OPTIONAL)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	_____	_____	2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet for additional UTM references or comments

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Janelle Pavlovec and Lyle Otte  
organization Decorah Historic Preservation Commission  
street & number 400 Claiborne Drive  
city or town Decorah state Iowa date January 14, 2010  
telephone 563-382-3651 zip code 52101

**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION** (Submit the following items with the completed form)

**FOR ALL PROPERTIES**

- Map:** showing the property's location in a town/city or township.
- Site plan:** showing position of buildings and structures on the site in relation to public road(s).
- Photographs:** representative black and white photos. If the photos are taken as part of a survey for which the Society is to be curator of the negatives or color slides, a photo/catalog sheet needs to be included with the negatives/slides and the following needs to be provided below on this particular inventory site:

Roll/slide sheet #	_____	Frame/slot #	_____	Date Taken	_____
Roll/slide sheet #	_____	Frame/slot #	_____	Date Taken	_____
Roll/slide sheet #	_____	Frame/slot #	_____	Date Taken	_____

- See continuation sheet or attached *photo & slide catalog sheet* for list of photo roll or slide entries.
- Photos/illustrations without negatives are also in this site inventory file.

**FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF PROPERTIES, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING AS WELL**

- Farmstead & District:** (List of structures and buildings, known or estimated year built, and contributing or noncontributing status)
- Barn:**
  - A sketch of the frame/truss configuration in the form of drawing a typical middle bent of the barn.
  - A photograph of the loft showing the frame configuration along one side.
  - A sketch floor plan of the interior space arrangements along with the barn's exterior dimensions in feet.

**State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Use Only Below This Line**

Concur with above survey opinion on National Register eligibility:  Yes  No  More Research Recommended  
 This is a locally designated property or part of a locally designated district.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluated by (name/title): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
Related District Number

Page 1

Fred Biermann House	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
408 South Mechanic Street	Decorah
Address	City

**2. Location** Irregular Subdivision Lot 19 1/2 of SW 1/4 of SE 1/4 of Section 16 Township 98 North 8 West of 5 PM

**7. Description** Foundation 04 Stone Walls 03 Brick, 05F Soffits 05F STEEL  
Roof 09 Asbestos (main roof), 05F (front porch and back porch),  
Added Room "Iowa Roof"  
Other 10A Concrete (front porch)

**Narrative Description**

Currently, the front view from Mechanic Street includes cement porch posts made to appear like stone blocks. They sit on a cement porch floor on the ground. Three wide columns support the front porch roof and the porch covers the entire width of the house. The front porch was added sometime between 1914 and 1922. A kitchen was also added on the back of the house during this period. The house is made of red brick. To the right of the porch on the east side of the house is an addition also of red brick. It was known as "Fred's Dining Room" by people in town, but now used as a bedroom. It was added during Fred Biermann's residency. Two windows under the porch roof are to the right of the double doors into the house. The double doors are original with the house. The windows and doors in the front are rounded at the top and have projecting brick hoods over them. The second floor above the porch has three windows across the house. The windows are also rounded and have four panes of glass in each window. The main roof is a hipped roof clad with asbestos. On the north side of the house is a double garage attached to the house. It was build in 1997 or 1998 by the current owner. Also visible from the front of the house is a formerly screened porch of two stories on the back of the house. The current owner said he replaced the screen with windows in about the year 2000.

**Narrative Statement of the Significance**

The Fred Biermann house is a significant property in the history of Decorah because Congressman Fred Biermann is an important person in the history of Decorah, Iowa and the United States. He lived in the house from the time he was placed with his maternal aunt, Mary Christopher, following the death of his mother in 1888. Biermann died in 1968 and still lived in the house. He had been a newspaper owner and editor, a World War I soldier, a United States postmaster, a United States Congressman, an Iowa Democratic Party leader, a leader in the local conservation movement and a United States Marshal. Biermann and his house are significant in our history.

The Italianate house was built approximately 1881 for Biermann's grandfather, Jens Christopher. Mary Christopher, Jens' daughter, inherited the house where she raised Fred. She sold it to Fred in 1928. Except for the six years he was in Washington, DC as a US Representative and the two years he was in France as an officer in the US Army, the house was his home. Since his death, Gavin Sampson and Russell Brown have owned the house but made very few changes in the original building. An attached garage was built in 1997 or 98 by Brown, but all other additions were done by Biermann when he lived there. The house maintains most of its original appearance.

Biermann was well educated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at Columbia and Harvard Universities. He purchased one of the local newspapers (The Decorah Journal) in 1911 and served as its editor and publisher for twenty years. President Woodrow Wilson appointed him postmaster in 1913. He was elected to the Decorah Parks Commission in 1922 and served on it till 1968. He enlisted in the US Army at the beginning of World War I and served as an officer in France. In 1932 he defeated Congressman Gilbert Haugen in the fall election and took part in the New Deal legislation passed

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
 State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
 Related District Number

Page 2

Fred Biermann House	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
408 South Mechanic Street	Decorah
Address	City

during the next six years. Following his defeat in the election of 1938 by another Decorah resident, H. O. Talle, Biermann was appointed the U.S. Marshal for the northern district of Iowa. He was in charge of the federal law enforcement agency until 1953. His political career paralleled his career in the conservation movement.

At the time Biermann joined the Decorah Park Commission, it oversaw a total of six acres of park land. Biermann became the chairman of the Commission in 1940 and led a large expansion of the park system. He personally donated some of the land for the parks including Dunning Springs, Palisades, Day Spring, and Mary Christopher Parks. Biermann was very significant in the history of conservation and recreation in the city of Decorah.

Clearly, Fred Biermann and his house are very important in the history of Decorah. The house is important because it is a good example of late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses and because Fred Biermann spent most of his life in the house.

**Bibliography**

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 Biermann, Fred. History of Decorah's Park System. 1956  
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 Winneshiek County, Land Record Number 146.  
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[WWW.Politicalgraveyard.com](http://WWW.Politicalgraveyard.com), Fred Biermann.  
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[WWW.Clerk.House.gov/member\\_info/election1932](http://WWW.Clerk.House.gov/member_info/election1932)

*This is not correct since the 1st city park was established in 1911 (12 acres). The total acreage in 1940 is not clear, but the largest expansion occurred after 1922 when Biermann was appointed (PAGE 1 OF HIS HISTORY OF DECORAH'S PARK SYSTEM) and the city got the Phelps money, also in 1922. See ALSO PAGES 2 AND 7 OF HIS HISTORY.*



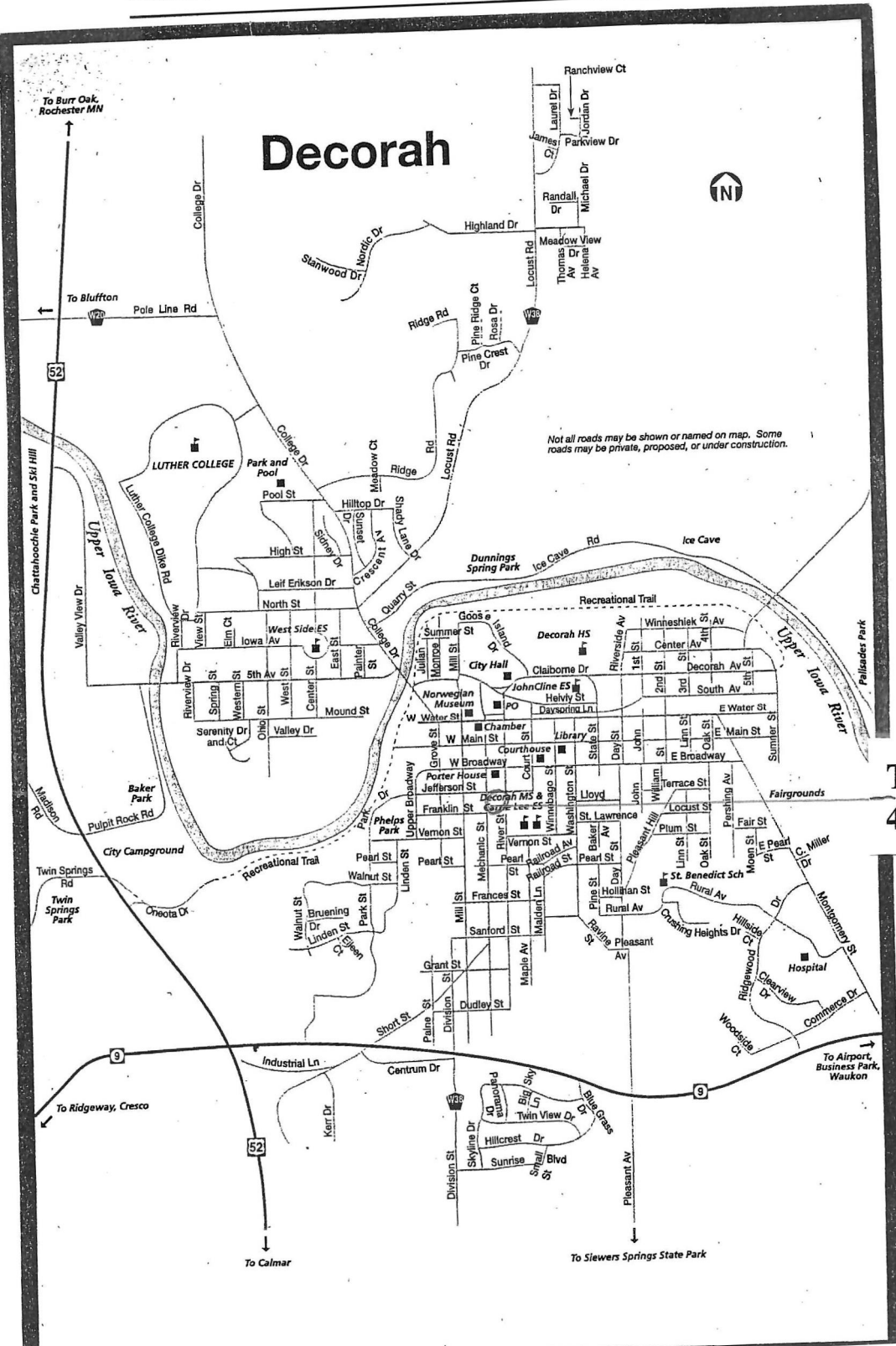
Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
 State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
 Related District Number

Page 3

Fred Biermann House  
 Name of Property  
 408 South Mechanic Street  
 Address

Winneshiiek  
 County  
 Decorah  
 City



**The Fred Biermann House**  
**408 South Mechanic Street**

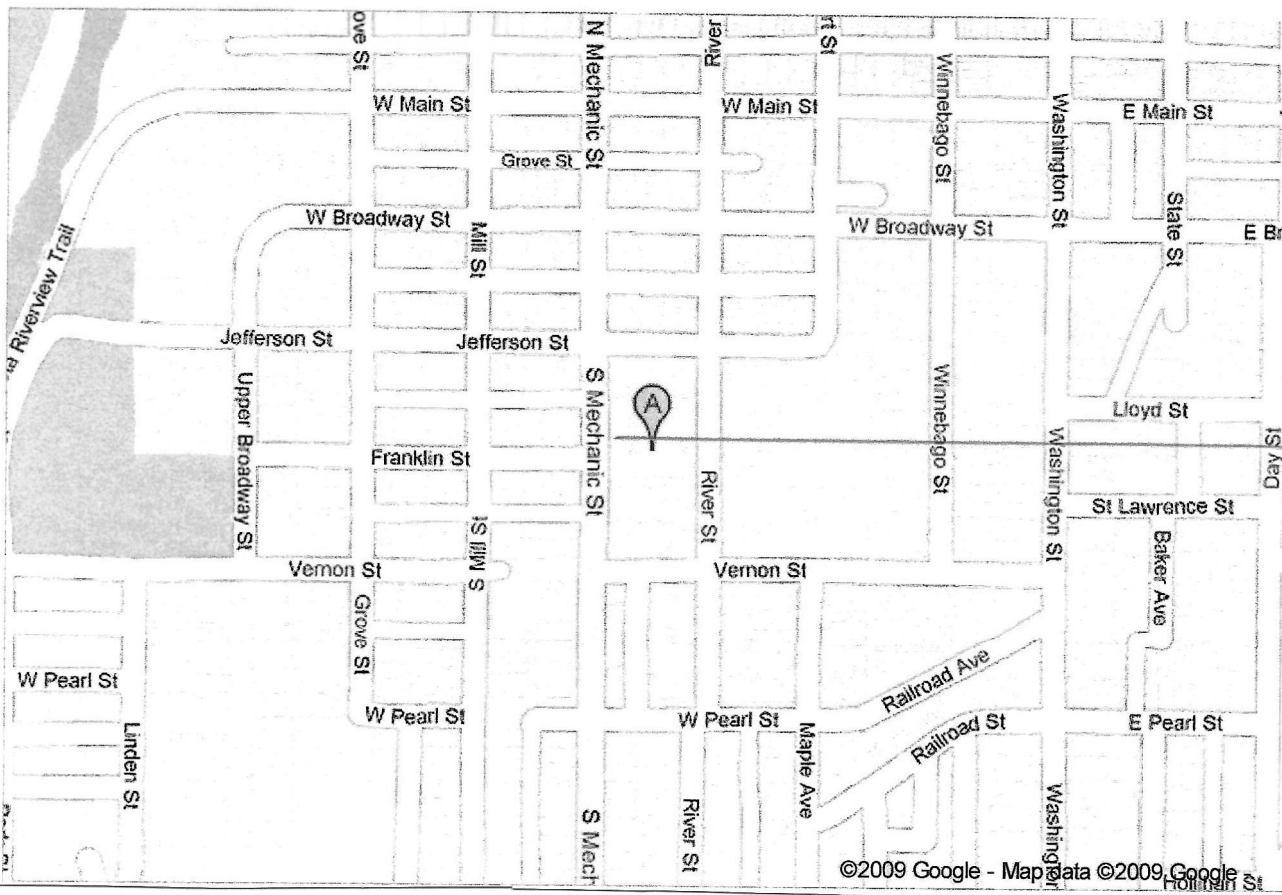
Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
Related District Number

Page 4

Fred Biermann House	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
408 South Mechanic Street	Decorah
Address	City

Google maps



**The Fred Biermann House**  
**408 South Mechanic Street**

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
Related District Number

Page 5

Fred Biermann House  
Name of Property  
408 South Mechanic Street  
Address

Winneshiek  
County  
Decorah  
City

West Side (Mechanic Street View) *Photographer Facing East*



North Side *Photographer Facing South*



Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
Related District Number

Page 6

Fred Biermann House  
Name of Property  
408 South Mechanic Street  
Address

Winneshiek  
County  
Decorah  
City

South Side *Photographer Sacying North*



East Side *Photographer Sacying West*



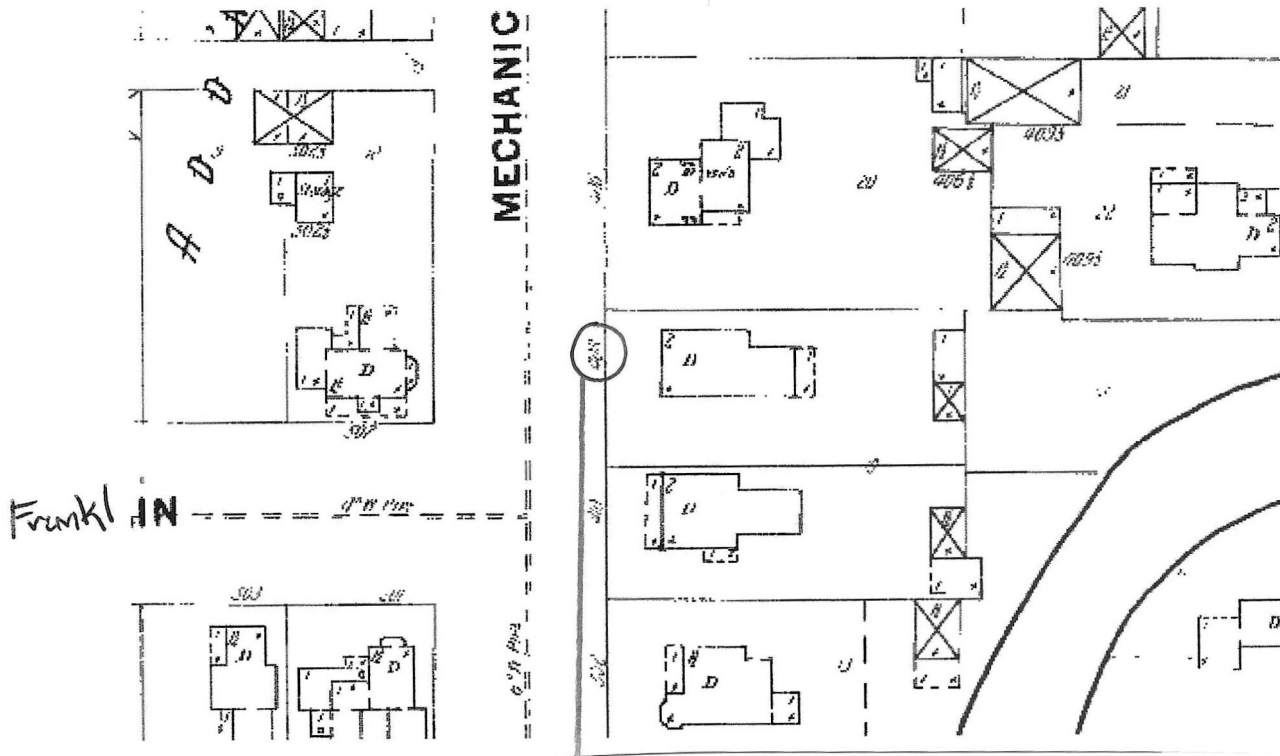
Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
 State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
 Related District Number

Page 7

Fred Biermann House  
 Name of Property  
 408 South Mechanic Street  
 Address

Winneshiek  
 County  
 Decorah  
 City



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1902

Sheet 7

State Library of Iowa

**The Fred Biermann House**  
**408 South Mechanic Street**

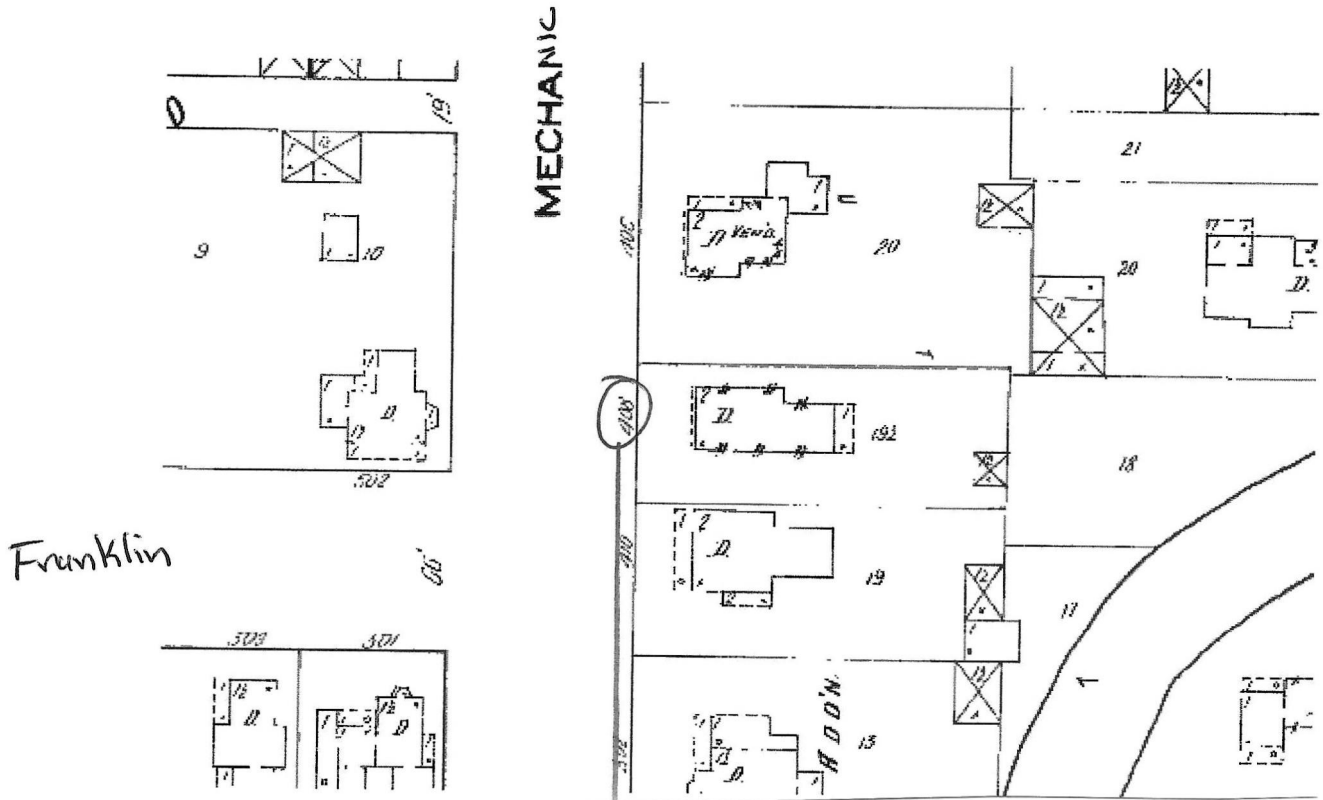


Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
 State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
 Related District Number

Page 8

Fred Biermann House	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
408 South Mechanic Street	Decorah
Address	City



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1914

Sheet 4

State Library of Iowa

**The Fred Biermann House**  
**408 South Mechanic Street**

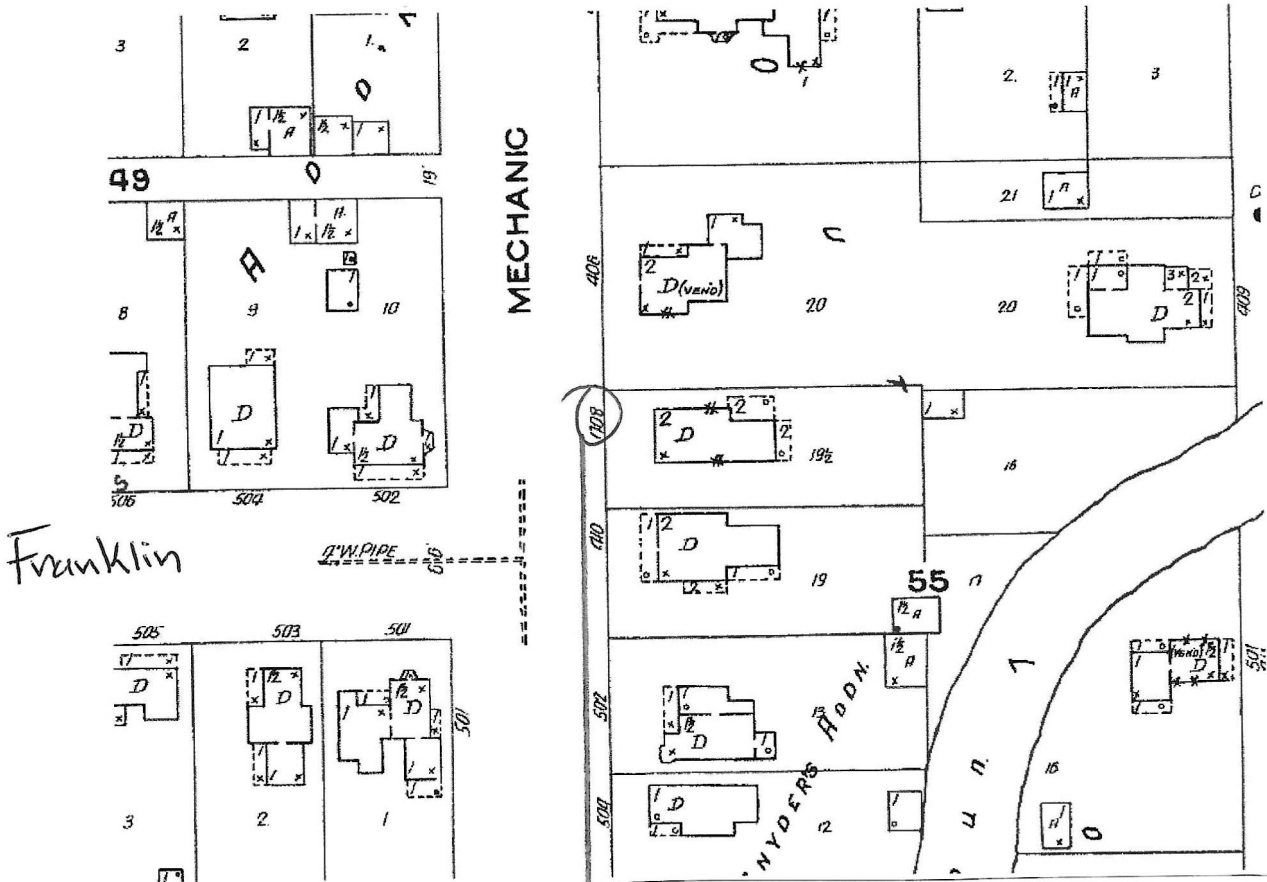
Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
 State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
 Related District Number

Page 9

Fred Biermann House  
 Name of Property  
 408 South Mechanic Street  
 Address

Winneshiak  
 County  
 Decorah  
 City



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1927

Sheet 7

State Library of Iowa

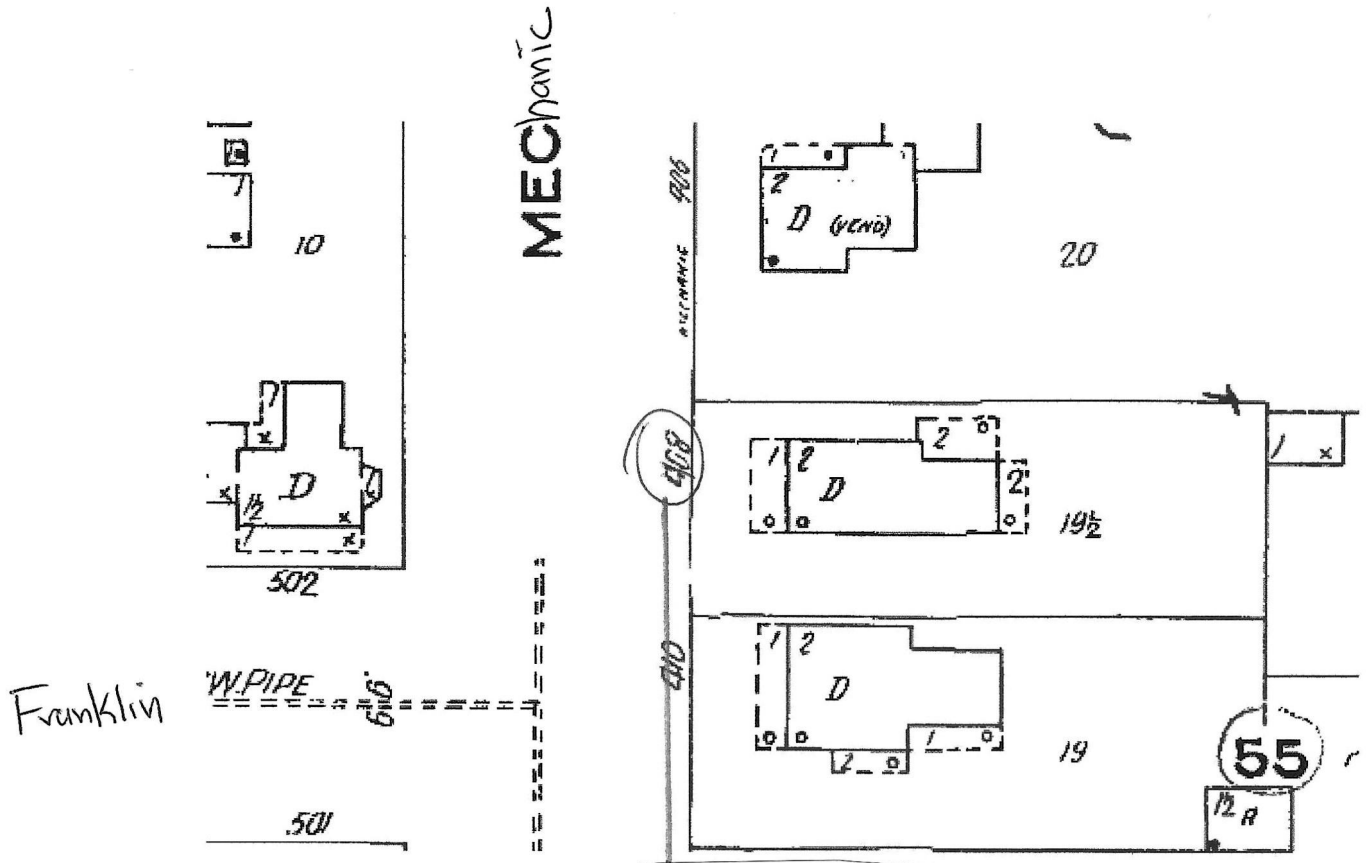
**The Fred Biermann House**  
**408 South Mechanic Street**

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs  
 State Historical Society of Iowa  
**Iowa Site Inventory Form**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Site Number  
 Related District Number

Page 10

Fred Biermann House	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
408 South Mechanic Street	Decorah
Address	City



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1927-48

Sheet 7

State Library of Iowa

**The Fred Biermann House**  
**408 South Mechanic Street**

Fred Berman House, Perovsk







Ford Brewman House, Denmark





Fred Brown's House, Dixon





Fred Brownson House, Detroit