REPORT TO THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY NETWORK

EVALUATING THE NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBLITY OF

409 E. MAIN ST. DECORAH, IA

Field inspected on July 3, 2018

By

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on behalf of

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Property Owner
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September 13, 2018

Iowa Site Inventory Form

State Historic Preservation Office
(January 2016)

State Inventory Number: 96-0076 ☒ New ☐ Supplemental
9-Digit SHPO Review & Compliance (R&C) Number: _____
☐ Non-extant Year: _____

***Read the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions carefully**, to ensure accuracy and completeness before completing this form. The instructions are available on our website.*

- **Property Name**

A) Historic name: Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house

B) Other names: Thompson, Julia & Knute (aka Knudt, Knut), house

- **Location**

A) Street address: 409 E. Main St.
B) City or town: Decorah (☐ Vicinity) County: Winneshiek
C) Legal description:
Rural: Township Name: _____ Township No.: _____ Range No.: _____ Section: _____ Qtr: _____ of Qtr: _____
Urban: Subdivision: O.T. Block(s): 38 Lot(s): 1

- **Classification**

A) Property category: *Check only one*
☒ Building(s)
☐ District
☐ Site
☐ Structure
☐ Object

B) Number of resources (within property):

If eligible property, enter number of: Contributing		Noncontributing	*If non-eligible property, enter number of:*
1	Buildings	1	__ Buildings
__	Sites	__	__ Sites
__	Structures	__	__ Structures
1	Objects		Objects
2	**Total**	1	__ **Total**

C) For properties listed in the National Register:
National Register status: ☐ Listed ☐ De-listed ☐ NHL ☐ NPS DOE

D) For properties within a historic district:
☐ Property contributes to a National Register or local certified historic district.
☐ Property contributes to a potential historic district, based on professional historic/architectural survey and evaluation.
☐ Property *does not* contribute to the historic district in which it is located.

Historic district name: _____ Historic district site inventory number: _____

E) Name of related project report or multiple property study, *if applicable:*
MPD title _____ *Historical Architectural Data Base #* _____

- **Function or Use** *Enter categories (codes and terms) from the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions*

A) Historic functions	**B) Current functions**
01A DOMESTIC/single dwelling	70 VACANT/NOT IN USE
01C05 Garage	70 VACANT/NOT IN USE
13H03 LANDSCAPE/tree	13H03 LANDSCAPE/tree

- **Description** *Enter categories (codes and terms) from the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions*

A) Architectural classification
09A04 I-House
_____
_____
_____

B) Materials
Foundation (visible exterior): 04/STONE, 10A
Walls (visible exterior): 02A WOOD/weatherboard
Roof: 08 ASPHALT
Other: _____

C) Narrative description ☒ *SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED*

Site Number: 96-0076 Address: 409 E. Main St. City: Decorah County: Winneshiek

- **Statement of Significance**

A) Applicable National Register Criteria: *Mark your opinion of eligibility after applying relevant National Register criteria*

Criterion A: Property is associated with significant events.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ More research recommended
Criterion B: Property is associated with the lives of significant persons.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ More research recommended
Criterion C: Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ More research recommended
Criterion D: Property yields significant information in archaeology/history.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ More research recommended

B) Special criteria considerations: *Mark any special considerations; leave blank if none*

☐ 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: Property less than 50 years of page or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

C) Areas of significance
Enter categories from instructions
02 ARCHITECTURE

D) Period(s) of significance

E) Significant dates
Construction date
1869 ☒ *check if circa or estimated date*
Other dates, including renovations
1874 ca., early 20th century

F) Significant person
Complete if Criterion B is marked above

G) Cultural affiliation
Complete if Criterion D is marked above

H) Architect/Builder
Architect
Builder/contractor

I) Narrative statement of significance ☒ *SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED*

- **Bibliography** ☒ *See continuation sheets for the list research sources used in preparing this form*
- **Geographic Data** *Optional UTM references* ☐ *See continuation sheet for additional UTM or comments*

	Zone	Easting	Northing	NAD		Zone	Easting	Northing	NAD
1					2				
3					4				

- **Form Preparation**

Name and Title: Jan Olive Full PhD Date: August 2018
Organization/firm: Tallgrass-Full LLC E-mail: tallgrass.jofull@gmail.com
Street address: _____ Telephone: 319-331-3454
City or Town: Iowa City State: IA Zip code: 52240

- **ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION** *Submit the following items with the completed form*

A) ***For all properties, attach the following,*** *as specified in the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions:*

1. Map of property's location within the community.
2. Glossy color 4x6 photos labeled on back with property/building name, address, date taken, view shown, and unique photo number.
3. Photo key showing each photo number on a map and/or floor plan, using arrows next top each photo number to indicate the location and directional view of each photograph.
4. Site plan of buildings/structures on site, identifying boundaries, public roads, and building/structure footprints.

B) ***For State Historic Tax Credit Part 1 Applications, historic districts and farmsteads, and barns:***
See lists of special requirements and attachments in the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions.

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

The SHPO has reviewed the Site Inventory and concurs 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: _____

SHPO authorized signature: _____ *Date:* _____

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
409 E. Main St.	Decorah
Address	City

Lat/Long: 43.303087, -91.781227

Narrative Description:

I-House:

***Exterior**:* This post-Civil War era **I-house** (two rooms down, two rooms in height, one room deep) sits on a level corner lot at the intersection of East Main and Williams Streets, in the eastern part of the Original Town of Decorah. It is wood-frame with narrow clapboard siding and an asphalt-shingled roof. Its basement foundation is stone, but the exterior course has been replaced by rock-face concrete block. This house was scheduled for demolition prior to the current owner acquiring it earlier in 2018. In preparation for its demolition, the aluminum siding had been removed as were a number of interior features, primarily some of the wall plaster and wood trim around ground-floor windows and doors, as well as dining room built-in cupboards. The present owner, a builder who specializes in, among other things, historic-window restorations, plans to rehabilitate the house for resale, using tax credits if available.

The north *façade* is asymmetrical, with the entrance door offset to the west/right (as you face the building) under a shallow-hip porch roof with turned supporting posts. To the east/left are two evenly spaced windows on the ground floor and two more directly above on the second floor. These windows may or may not date to the original c. 1869 construction, but they are two-over-two sashes and, if not original, likely date to at least the 1870s or 1880s. The second story above the entrance porch is blank; inside is a closet and there is no evidence there ever was a window over the porch.

The *east side elevation* consists of the two-story main I-house block, a large two-story rear wing or appendage, and a one-story side porch that runs from the back wall of the main block to just short of the end wall of the rear wing. The gable-end wall of the main I-house block has one window on the second floor directly over the single window on the ground floor. These windows are centered on the wall and are similar to the two-over-two façade windows. The rear wing, also two-stories, has three openings above the roof of the porch. Nearest the back wall of the main block is a door that opens onto the roof of the one-story porch, though it may have been added for ventilation or to access an earlier porch (a c. 1884 photo doesn't seem to show this door, though because of the angle the photo is not conclusive). Beyond that to the south are two-widely spaced two-over-two windows. The one-story porch has an entrance door toward the north end and windows sitting on clapboarded knee-walls all around.

The *rear south elevation* consists of the gabled end wall of the two-story rear wing and, to the west, the end wall of a narrow one-story west side addition (or extension). There are four windows on this gable end wall, two up over two down. The west side windows have the two-over-two sashes, the east side two do not. The upper floor east side window was an early alteration based on the c. 1884 photo that clearly shows this wall. A small stable building in the foreground of this photo obscures the ground floor of the I-house, but the east side window on the ground floor is narrower than the other three. Finally, an entrance door leading to the basement stairs is located in the narrow rear wall of the west side extension.

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The *west side* of the house consists of the two-story main I-house block with its two-story rear wing and, stretching from the back wall of the main block to flush with the south end wall of the rear wing, the narrow side addition. The addition has a single window near the south end (clearly modern) and a three-part window near the north end. The three-part window is not of the two-over-two variety but is probably contemporaneous with the addition's construction. Over the addition is a single two-over-two window positioned above and more less centered on the addition. This side addition was more likely an effort to expand interior space in the rear wing rather than being a converted porch. It is only 5 feet wide and, further, the former exterior west wall of the 2-story rear addition has been removed, which widened the dining room and kitchen and provided relocated access to the basement. The gabled, two-story end wall of the main I-house block has no windows; inside is the staircase to the second floor. Siding here, as well as the 1902 Sanborn fire insurance map and the c.1884 photo suggest there was a larger single-story west side addition at one point.

Siding all around is butt-joined to vertical corner boards. Second-story windows on the I-house and the rear wing are positioned close to the roof edge, under overhangs that are not very deep. Chimneys have been removed but physical evidence in the attics plus the c. 1884 photo indicate there were two chimneys in the I-house at the ridge, located not on the gable ends, nor in the center, but about half way between the center and the end walls. The rear wing chimney was more or less centered between the main block on the north to the wing's south end wall. Square-headed cut nails were observed under the siding during the field inspection in July, 2018.

Interior: Refer to the floor plans included elsewhere. I-house: Entering the house from the primary entrance on Main Street, one walks into a wide but short hallway. A very steep and narrow staircase on the right winds around and up to the second floor. (The former stairway to the basement was under these stairs.) To the left is a door to the larger room that takes up the rest of the I-house's ground floor. A doorway from the hall and a double door in the large room both lead south into the rear wing. Going upstairs from the front hall leads to a large room, presumably a bedroom, the same size as below. Headroom in this bedroom is cropped slightly by the roofline above. Doors to the south wing are located at the top of the stairs and in the center of the south wall of the large bedroom.

The rear wing's headroom is also clipped a bit by the slope of the roof. The wing's footprint includes a single large room up and down immediately behind the main I-house block. Downstairs this room was apparently used as a dining room; upstairs it was a bedroom. Behind this first large room on the downstairs is a kitchen to the southwest and in the southeast corner, another bedroom. In between is a bathroom, a closet, and the landing for the stairway to the basement (which is three rooms, two under the I-house and one under the rear addition). An exterior door with an adjacent two-over-two window lead from the large room in the rear wing to the east side porch. The wall is opened between the southeast corner bedroom and the south end of the porch.

Upstairs in the rear wing, to the south of the large bedroom is another much smaller one in the southeast corner and a bathroom in the southwest corner. Closets separate the large bedroom from the smaller one and bathroom.

Interior finishes in the lower level include dark-stained woodwork and a door, but much it was removed in preparation for the thwarted demolition. Upstairs, the woodwork is painted and arranged in a simple post and lintel form. Floors on both levels consist of some wood flooring, but also plywood. Both were

covered by carpet in most places. The three entrance doors are newer with newer storm doors on the outside. The eastside, second-floor door that opens onto the roof of the porch is probably from the turn of the last century. Walls are plastered or were laid bare down to the studs. Areas of very old wallpaper still exist here and there.

Construction details: Framing is especially visible in the rear wing because of the plaster removal and is interesting, consisting of a variety of dimensions, some rather robust, some of more modern dimensions. This suggests both a conservative approach to the adoption of balloon-framing by builders who were perhaps more accustomed to heavy timber framing, and/or the use of whatever materials were available at the time. Already mentioned are the square-head cut nails, which were observed in the southeast corner plate of the rear addition. Also, there is scarf joinery in the rear wing of the house, a traditional timber-frame technique but also used where there are not lumber members long enough to fit the need. The small attics of both the main I-house block and the rear wing are revealing of the age of the house as well as the progression of its construction. At the juncture of the rear wing to the I-house, there are still dusty wood shingles on the I-house's rear slope, shingles that have been covered up since the wing was added. Patches in the roof where original chimneys were are visible from the attics. Additionally, the sheathing in both attics that lays across the roof rafters consists of large, wide planks with raw bark edges and vertical, pit-saw marks. This lumber, as well as much of it in other exposed areas, appears to be oak, an abundant native in this forested northeast corner of the state. Since the railroad did not arrive in town until 1869, the presence of so much native lumber may mean the house was built shortly after Archa and Mary Dennis bought the lot in 1868, or just that lumber from the steam-powered lumber mills along the Mississippi to the east was still not readily available in Decorah in 1869.

Alterations: In addition to the alterations already mentioned (the early addition of the rear wing, the east side porch, and the west side expansion, as well as the recent removal of interior woodwork and doors), the overall building was renovated in the first decades of the twentieth century, perhaps around 1915 or 1920. Features of the building that date to this renovation include the rock-face cast-concrete block exterior foundation, probably the east porch and the west extension, and definitely the ground-floor dark-stained woodwork. The aluminum siding, which was removed pending the building's demolition, was probably applied in 1950 by Ida Thompson, based on the recordation in the abstract of a $1,200 mortgage loan from the Decorah Building and Loan Association.

Garage, 1964

In place of a 19th century stable on the alley at the south end of Lot 1, now stands a wood-frame, 2-stall garage. It has a steeply pitched roof, vertical siding on its gables, and horizontal siding on the side walls. One garage door has two windows, the other appears to be a newer metal door. Both are overhead doors. An asphalt drive leads east, parallel to the alley, to Williams St. The building lacks significance and is altered and considered noncontributing.

Landscape: European Larch

Just off the southeast corner of the house is a very large European Larch (*Larix decidua*) planted in the yard a bit closer to the sidewalk than the house. It is visible in the c. 1884 historic photo and is about equal in height to the second-story windows at that time. In 1981, 37 years ago, when it was registered as an official "big tree of Iowa" by the state DNR, it was 82' tall and scored the number 2 in the championship status. European Larches are long-lived plants, living up to about 250 years. Its average

height is 70' to 75'. Because it drops its "leaves", it is not a true evergreen, but is commonly planted as an ornamental. If the tree was about 10 years old in c. 1884, or a bit older, it was likely planted by one of the first three property owners. A.J. Downing, a fellow New Yorker of the first owners, the Dennises, wrote of the larch in his 1849 *Landscape Gardening and Rural Architecture*:

> For picturesque beauty, the Larch is almost unrivalled. Unlike most other trees which must grow old, uncouth, and misshapen before than can attain that expression, this is singularly so, as soon almost as it begins to assume the stature of a tree…it has the expression of boldness and picturesqueness peculiar to itself…
>
> Like all highly expressive and characteristic trees, much more care is necessary in introducing the Larch into artificial scenery judiciously, than round-headed trees…it should be introduced sparingly, and always for some special purpose….to strengthen the already picturesque character of a scene, or to give life and variety to one naturally tame and uninteresting."(238-240)

The Main Street larch tree is a remnant of the historic landscape associated with the I-house and probably its builder. It is a contributing object (http://www.extension.iastate.gov; www.iowadnr.gov; Everett, *The New York Botanical Garden Illustrated Encyclopedia of Horticulture,* vol. 6 [1981], 1932).

Statement of Significance:

Summary: The Dennis I-house is a survivor of a folk architecture form that had its origins primarily in eastern United States and, before that, in the British Isles. While the folk form has been studied by geographers for decades, and theoretically is named after houses with an Iowa (among other states) connection, a deeper dive into the research fails to support this attribution. The lack of adequate studies in Iowa or even east of the Mississippi River makes the extent of its presence in the state hard to assess other than anecdotally. But as a traditional building form, it is likely a dwindling category of Iowa architecture, especially in rural areas where geographers feel it was most often built across the eastern and southern United States. There is an urgency to documenting I-houses in Iowa and the Dennis house, built by New York transplants, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C because it is a good example of the form and is evidence of the migration route of I-houses from the New England source area to west of the Mississippi. The house's eligibility is enhanced by a historic landscape feature, a huge European larch tree, that may have been planted by the Dennis family directly or indirectly influenced by another, earlier New Yorker, namely A.J. Downing.

Background of 409 Main St.
That the I-house was built around 1869 is based on abstract entries that put the sale of the lot at a low price in 1868 and a more than four times as much in 1870, when it was next sold to a young Norwegian couple. The age of the rear addition is less certain but based on census data and other historic records for the owners, it seems likely the Thompsons, a family that grew to include seven children, bought the house in 1874 and were responsible for adding the rear wing soon thereafter, as construction materials in both are similar. The two-story I-house would have accommodated the "empty nest" couple who built it in c. 1869, or the childless young couple who owned it between 1870 and 1874, but it would not have served a large household for very long.

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Archa and Mary Dennis, Yankees from New York and in their mid-40s in the 1860s, were certainly responsible for the I-house's construction. They acquired Lot 1 in April 1868 for $95 from Elizabeth Day, matron of Decorah's acknowledged founding family. Federal census records indicate while Archa and Mary still lived in New York in 1850 with their 17-year old son, Dexter, but by 1860 they were living in Decorah without Dexter, by then 22. Archa Dennis was employed as a "carman" (1860) or "drayman" (1870), essentially a driver of horse-drawn wagons for commercial purposes. Little is known about Archa; he doesn't feature in any of the three local histories published in 1877, 1882, or 1913. Anecdotal stories, however, handed down and recorded by modern local historians include a colorful twist to his commercial duties. Apparently, Elizabeth Day was a large woman who had difficulty moving about town without the special, exceptionally low wagon built for her by Archa (Elizabeth Lorentzen citing Gillmer and Eleanor Seegmiller's 1998 local history in an email to David Wadsworth, April 17, 2018). True or not, this story does suggest Archa's skills at building or fabricating things. He was, apparently, handy.

The "why" of building the I-house on Lot 1 and selling it two short years later is probably explained by three interrelated historical events. One, Decorah served as the government land office in the 1850s, resulting in an influx of people to town and the speculation fever that accompanies these offices (Sparks [1877]: 94, 112). The Dennises could be pretty confident of a profit from a house built on speculation. Two, in 1861 the Norwegian Synod decided to build a college in Decorah, making the town an attractive place for recently immigrated Norwegians and enhancing the potential for more people in town (Alexander [1882]: 246). And three, even better economic times were promised by the town's first railroad, which arrived in 1869 after several years of watchful waiting by Decorah residents (Bailey [1913]: 100).

In 1870, after constructing their I-house – a familiar house form in their native state – Archa and Mary Dennis sold Lot 1 with its improvements for $400 to Erick M. Olson and his wife Ingebor. They paid $200 cash and mortgaged the rest, paying it off a year later. The Olsons were young immigrants from Norway who had no children, and only owned the house until 1874, when they sold the it to Julia and Knute Thompson, who put the deed in Julia's name only.

Knute Thompson as noted in all three early local histories was Decorah's elected sheriff from 1869 through 1873 (Bailey, 89). He was also recorded in the 1870 census as a farmer-sheriff, owning $3,900 worth of real estate. In 1880, he was listed as an insurance agent. Knute, who had immigrated in 1854 and married in 1861, died in 1906, but his widow continued to occupy the I-house. Julia was 90 when the census taker came around in 1930. She and two of her daughters, both in their sixties, still lived in the house. Title was transferred to the youngest daughter, Ida Thompson in that year. Single all her life, Ida Thompson was "secretary and treasurer" of the Decorah Ice Cave Creamery in 1930. She was reelected to this office in 1931 (Mason City *Globe-Gazette*, 1/23/1931). Almost certainly she served the as an officer of the company because she held some sort of paid administrative position at the creamery. The creamery was established in 1880 and two years later was reported to be the largest creamery in the state (Faldet, 132). Ida Thompson continued to live in the house until 1950.

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The Study and Distribution of the I-house as a Folk Form

For purposes of this discussion, the I-house is a *folk* building type, neither vernacular[1] or academic architecture. Folk architecture is at one end of the continuum – common structures largely constructed by hand, with locally available materials, from spatial designs imbedded in the memory of masons and carpenters, using techniques passed down generationally. Persistence over time and, to a lesser degree, space are its hallmarks. A three-bay, side-entry English barn framed with native timbers shaped with an adz, for example, is a folk form.

Academic architecture is the opposite, involving unique designs fashioned by trained architects who draw inspiration from their own wellspring of creativity as well as the architecture of past ages. Sometimes called polite or high-style architecture, it focuses as much on aesthetics as function. Frank Lloyd Wright is a well-known architect of such original designs.

Vernacular architecture is somewhere in between, not purely a creation of memory and heritage, but also not original in design. Vernacular buildings still constitute common architecture but are heavily influenced by their surroundings, including pattern books, magazines, and style writers. Popular vernacular forms spread quickly by modernized written and oral communications and fast transportation methods such as the railroads in the 19th century. Architects, draftspersons, and builders all participate in repeating vernacular designs intended to shelter indefinite numbers of individuals and families. The small one-story houses covered by pyramid roofs, located in railroad towns across the nation, is one example; the suburban spec house constructed by a local developer is a more modern one.

While folk and vernacular forms rarely transform into academic designs[2], architect creativity often inspires a vernacular following. Folk forms eventually fade out as technology, environment, and economics change, making the form less functional or even possible sometimes.[3] But the eventual disappearance of a folk house such as the I-house has not been well studied. Rather, some studies suggest the two-story I-house simply morphed into a more vernacular one-and-a-half-story house form somewhere west of the Mississippi River. This process of the change itself has not been well explored either. A review of the essential literature on I-houses suggests the original research on this form has been heavily used and, occasionally, misused or misinterpreted by later researchers. It also confirms the virtual absence of original research into I-houses *built* in Iowa.

The generally-accepted definition of the folk form comes first from Fred B. Kniffen, a cultural geographer who spent the majority of his career at Louisiana State University. In 1936, Kniffen conducted a study of nearly 15,000 rural Louisiana houses.[4] Nine folk types were identified among the 15,000 examples, using field methods that primarily included driving public roads and filling out field records. Two “Mid-West” or “Mid-Western” forms were among the nine types, one of which had

[1] The terms “vernacular” and “folk” are used interchangeably by some to refer to popular architecture that is not designed by trained professionals.

[2] One exception would be the Japanese folk forms that inspired some of Frank Lloyd Wright’s designs.

[3] Heavy-timber beams of heartwood white pine, for example, would rarely be available to a modern builder of a new wooden barn.

[4] “Louisiana House Types,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 26 (1936) 4:179-193. A PDF copy of this article was graciously provided to the author by Allen LeBlanc, Coordinator of Research & Instruction Services, LSU Libraries, Louisiana State University, on 9/4/2018.

numerically insignificant numbers.[5] I-houses, on the other hand, *were* represented in significant numbers, and were encountered, according to Kniffen, only in one area of the state: "The theretofore sparsely populated prairies of southwestern Louisiana [which] received an influx of settlers from northern states during the last quarter of the 19th century; the cultural imprint is highly reminiscent of the Mid-West" (179). Kniffen described the Mid-West type (Fig. 1) as follows:

> 5. Mid-Western.—The genetic implication of this name is justified in fact. Its morphologic distinction rests in its two storeys, a feature strikingly foreign to the simpler folk house types native to Louisiana. United by this common feature are two different structures showing similar areal extent. The first, and numerically much more important, is the "i" (Indiana-Illinois-Iowa) [fn 4] house (Fig. 8). It possesses the features of sideward-facing gables and one-room depth, in addition to its two storeys (185).

Kniffen's footnote 4 reads: "It is not to imply that this house type is restricted to, or originated in, the three states named." (Kniffen's fieldwork from this study *may* be in the LSU archives but selections from the collection boxes provided by Jennifer V. Mitchell, head of archival processing at LSU special collections, failed to easily identify the 1930s architectural study papers. Rather, his early 1950s fieldwork on folk architecture – which may form the basis for a later 1965 journal article – is available in this unprocessed collection.)

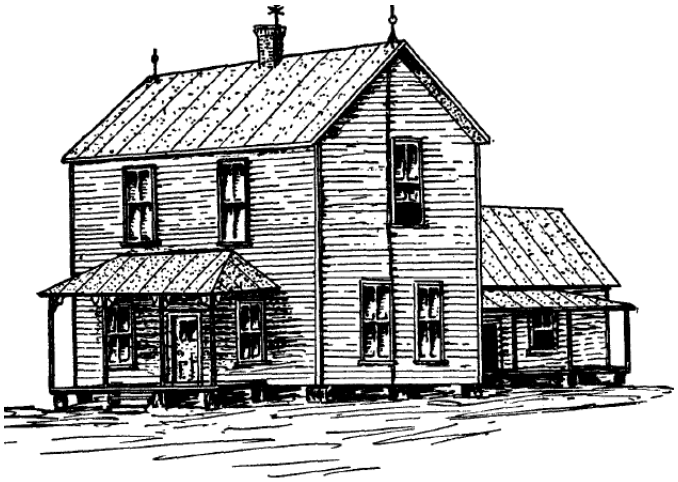

FIG. 8.—Mid-West or "i" type.

Figure 1 Kniffen's sole illustration of the I-house in 1936 has a single interior chimney (later refined as Noble's Type 4, see below at a later page), a rear appendage, and a side-wall second-story window about equal in height to the lower edge of the roof.

The assertion of a north-to-south migration route from Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana was not supported with any source in the journal article. A relatively thorough scan of the 1880 federal census for the eight townships in the region that Kniffen associated with the Midwestern I-house failed to produce any Iowa

[5] Kniffen's description of this second Midwestern form sounds suspiciously like the American Foursquare but is not illustrated (185). Unfortunately, there is no numeric breakdown of how many of the 15,000 houses fell within each type category so there is no way to independently judge or understand Kniffen's concept of numeric significance.

nativity and only rarely an Illinois or Indiana nativity, certainly nothing in the way of a cluster or colony of Midwesterners.[6] Further, his 1936 article is not specific as to how many I-houses were among the 15,000 total sample. As a result, researchers must simply take Kniffen's word that there was (1) north to south migration of settlers from Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana to the deep South from circa 1875 to 1900, and that (2) these Northerners built I-houses in quantifiably significant numbers. We cannot judge his 1936 conclusions further.

In 1965, Kniffen again wrote about I-houses in another article in the Annals of the Association of American Geographers. In "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," reprinted in Upton & Vlach's *Common Places* (1986) and widely cited by later researchers, Kniffen reported on his expanded fieldwork since the 1930s, for which he had traveled "through the whole eastern United States from the Gulf to the Lakes and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi" (4). In other words, all places *east* of the Mississippi River. The only "i" state mentioned was Indiana where, he noted, I-houses first appeared in the northern tier of counties and then persisted south to become what he called the Upland South cultural region. East-west distribution, he said, ranged from southern Michigan through Upstate New York to New England (4). Again, this is all east of the Mississippi with no mention of any I-house research within the state of Iowa proper. Kniffen's map (below) of folk houses' "source areas and routes of diffusion" leads from New England to northeast Iowa and southeast Minnesota but there is no supporting research for this incursion across the Mississippi; and his map shows no north-south migration that would link Iowa to his 1936 study or his original assertion that I-houses were intimately linked through migration patterns to Iowa, as well as Illinois and Indiana.

[6] The two parishes involved are Calcasieu Parish and, to the east, Jefferson Davis Parish which was carved from the former in the early 20th century. Near the dividing line of the two parishes is the small town called Iowa and farther west is another one called Vinton. The explanation, as it turns out, is as remarkable as unexpected (at least to a University of Iowa grad) and explains the presence but not the extent of Iowa farmers in southwest Louisiana. Whether this group of Iowa farmers justified Kniffen's attribution of the I-house as representative of Illinois, Iowa, and Indiana folk architecture remains debatable. More a function of capitalistic- than cultural-migration, would-be rice farmers from a variety of states as well as recent immigrants from Norway, Scotland, and other northern European countries were enticed south by the sales tactics of an aggressive land company, the North America Land and Timber Company. Michigan lawyer, J.B. Watkins, together with English financial backers, had formed the company in the 1880s, purchasing vast swaths of land in Louisiana and Texas along the railroad lines, a million acres in southwest Louisiana alone. While Watkins remained the overseer of the immense operation, often staying in London, the company hired agents in Texas, Louisiana, Kansas and where ever it owned land, to actually sell it. In Louisiana, the president of the Iowa Agricultural College in Ames (now called Iowa State University) was hired – a New Yorker by birth named Seaman A. Knapp. Knapp, an academic who was reportedly fascinated by farming, moved to Lake Charles in 1885. To encourage sales, he created demonstration farms and traveled to Japan looking for the best rice varieties for Louisiana. In 1889, Knapp left the original company to form his own land sales company, the Southern Real Estate Company. He was instrumental in forming the towns of Iowa and Vinton, formed a successful bank in Lake Charles, and eventually worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His demonstration farms are said to be the origin of the current system of university-related agricultural extension offices. Clare D'Artois Leeper, *Cities and Towns of Louisiana* (1960, reprinted 2012); D'Artois Leeper, *Louisiana Places: A Collection of Columns from the Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate, 1960-1974* (1976); "Seaman Knapp Helped Found Town of Iowa," *Lake Charles American Press,* 8/15/1965; "Seaman A. Knapp: Agricultural Pioneer," *Lake Charles American Press*, 1/29/1989; Wayne Delavan, "North American Land and Timber company Limited – Some Notes on its Beginnings," *Journal of the Arkansas Academy of Science* 17 (1963) 14:68-77. [Louisiana source material courtesy of Armajean G. Declouet, SW LA Genealogical & Historical Library, Lake Charles.]

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
409 E. Main St.	Decorah
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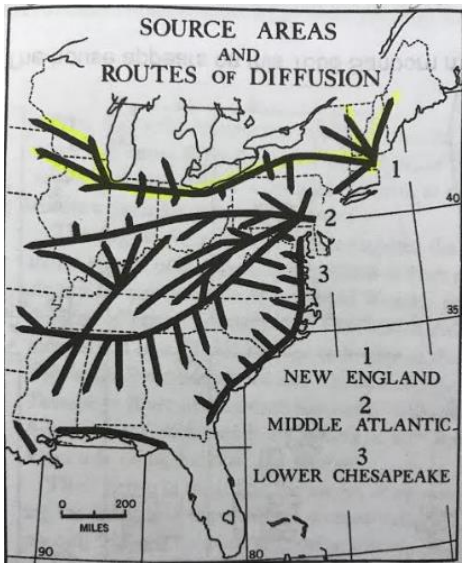

Figure 2 Kniffen's 1965 eastern U.S. map reflects primarily east to west migration patterns, with spurs both north and south. The New England source area leads more or less directly to northeast Iowa, but the basis for this is not discussed.

In another section of his 1965 article, Kniffen states "the I-house was first recognized in Indiana in 1930 as constituting a link with the Middle Atlantic source area. It was recognized again in the middle thirties in Louisiana (fig. 4) in the form of a house introduced into the southwestern part of the state in the late nineteenth century by settlers from *Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri*"(not Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana)(7).

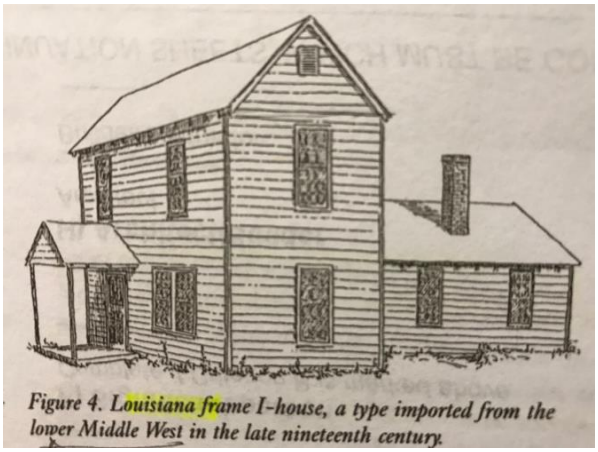

Figure 3 This illustration of an I-house is from Kniffen's 1965 article wherein he defined the lower Middle West as the souce area for the Louisiana I-houses observed in 1936 and during later fieldwork. Iowa may be Midwest, but clearly not a lower Middle West state. If anything, it is a central Midwest state.[7]

[7] "James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (University Press of Kansas, 1989).

Kniffen's Louisiana I-house, as he understood it in 1965, had been redefined as originating in the "lower Middle West" states of Kentucky, Illinois,[8] and Missouri, rather than the "I" states he claimed in 1936. In fact, the only mention of this trio of Midwestern states was relegated to a *footnote reference,* which stated: "The I-house was first so named in 1936 in recognition of the Indiana, Illinois, or Iowa origin of many of its builders in prairie Louisiana. The *I* seems a not inappropriate symbol in view of the tall, shallow house form it designates" (footnote 9, page 26). Kniffen's theory of the I-house's origins, literally, seems all over the map. One thing seems certain, though, he did not claim in these journal articles to have seen or researched *any* Iowa architecture fitting his definition of an I-house.

I-House Defined

Since Kniffen's creation of the name in 1936, the definition of an I-house has remained relatively constant in the research by scholars looking at east-of-the-Mississippi examples. Kniffen, himself, in 1965 reiterated the definition as: "…these qualities all I-houses unfailingly had in common: gables to the side, at least two rooms in length, one room deep, and two full stories in height" (8). Henry Glassie, who considered Kniffen his mentor, maintained this definition, saying: "the English immigrants usually erected I-houses—two story dwellings, one room deep, two or more rooms long." And, "the new house was a type that Fred Kniffen named the I-house, achieving immortality by contributing a word to the common language. Two stories high, but only one room deep, the I-house is tall and slender in profile, like the letter."[9]

University of Tennessee geographer John B. Rehder stuck to this basic definition, calling the I-house ubiquitous with a distribution that extended "very widely across the United States…from Pennsylvania to northern Florida, to southwestern Louisiana and Texas, and *all over the Midwest*. The house appears occasionally in Utah, Washington, Oregon, and even California"[emphasis added].[10] Sources cited by Rehder for this broad geographic distribution included Kniffen's 1965 work; Terry Jordan's 1985 *American Log Buildings* (30-31), which compared American Midland log cabins with European antecedents; Henry Glassie's 1968 study of southern I-houses in *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of Eastern United States* (64-69); and Richard Francaviglia's 1979 *The Mormon Landscape: Creation and Perception of a Unique Image in the American West* (no page number cited), but no upper or central Midwestern research.

Following Kniffen's 1965 journal article, regional studies of folk architecture have been conducted in Missouri and Kentucky by Howard Wight Marshall (1981), and William Lynwood Montell and Michael Lynn Morse (1976),[11] respectively. Both studies adopted Kniffen's definition of I-houses but sometimes illustrated them with houses of a bit less than *full* two-story height, something Kniffen himself did (refer back to Fig. 1). For example, on page 63 of Marshall's *Folk Architecture in Little Dixie* is an angled view of a house with the second-floor window high enough in the gable end to have an interior room clipped by the ceiling/roof angle. While it is sometimes hard to be sure from an exterior photo about this headroom issue on the second floor or whether a house is truly only two rooms on the first floor,

[8] Certainly downstate Illinois is considered by many to be more southern in culture than midwestern.

[9] *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (1968), 49; *Vernacular Architecture* (2000), 117.

[10] In Allen G. Noble, *To Build in a New Land* (1990), 110.

[11] Marshall, *Folk Architecture in Little Dixie* (1981); Montell and Morse, *Kentucky Folk Architecture* (University Press of Kentucky, 1976).

placement of gable-wall windows is usually the best indicator of an I-house form. A high roof with an attic window or vent is a good indicator of full headroom on the second floor. Around the corner on the façade, a wide frieze board above the second-story windows also suggests full headroom inside. A lower attic-less roof with the second-floor gable-end window about equal to the roof's lower edge fits Kniffen's definition of an I-house (Fig. 1). At some point, though, as that upper floor window nears the gable peak, the house becomes a story-and-a-half and fails to be an I-house because it fails Kniffen's definition. The smaller house is an adaptation to new circumstances and evidence of the fade-out of the true folk form Kniffen defined.

Rear appendages, placement of chimneys, front door position, the presence or absence of a central hall, and the number of windows across the façade or side wall are not defining characteristics according to the researchers thus far discussed herein. "The I house is two rooms wide, two rooms high, and one room deep. Beyond this constant feature there are no definitive characteristics of the I house, since there is no 'official' form of the I house."[12] Various subtypes of I-houses have been identified since 1965, most notably by geographer Allen G. Noble.[13] His typology includes four categories that emphasize chimney placement. Type 1 I-houses are those with a central hall with gable-end chimneys, encountered from Virginia to Indiana; Type 2 has a central hall with two central chimneys and "most widely distributed across Appalachia ; Type 3 has no central hall, rooms of unequal size, two gable-end chimneys, and often with a long one-story porch, "most often encountered in the piedmont or tidewater areas of southeastern United States;" and finally, Type 4 facades are usually unbalanced with a single central chimney. The offset door opens into a small hallway with a narrow stairway occupying about half the hallway area. "Type four houses are found from Virginia to Missouri and *seem to be most common in the Midwest*" [emphasis added] (55). Type 4 is the form closest to the Dennis I-house in Decorah.

Summarizing, the I-house folk type was initially defined by Fred Kniffen in the 1930s and his definition has been maintained by later researchers. The folk pathway of east to west migration most relevant to Iowa starts in the New England cultural hearth, leads through northern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois but, essentially, ends at the Mississippi River. One must presume the pathway continued into Iowa and, perhaps, beyond. And finally, there is a dearth of published I-house analysis based on Iowa fieldwork, though Allen Noble probably observed them in the state and there clearly *are* I-houses in Iowa.

Sources for Research on I-Houses in Iowa

Beyond anecdotal observations, of which there are many,[14] the state's expansive architectural database has 3,447 entries listed as I-houses. Three counties did not have any I-houses recorded

[12] Montell and Morse, 32.

[13] *Wood, Brick, and Stone: The North American Landscape*, vol. 1 (University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). Noble accepted the assertion of Midwest dispersion of the I-house, saying "The I house spread far and wide throughout southeast United States, north to Pennsylvania, and westward across the entire Middle West, at least as far as central Nebraska, apparently citing Fred Kniffen as his source for this (52-53). His illustrating photos are from Kentucky, Indiana, Virginia, and Missouri, with none from Illinois or Iowa. However, he does illustrate what he calls the Cornbelt cube with houses in Iowa and Nebraska, evidence of his fieldwork in those states (124-125).

[14] An emailed query sent on September 6, 2018, to experienced professional consultants in the state resulted in a number of I-house identifications, including the Phil Stong house (author of the novel *State Fair,* 1932), 19829 205th St. in rural VanBuren County, and the Daniel Nelson house 3 miles north of Oskaloosa in rural Mashaska County. One consultant felt southeast Iowa would have I-houses because it was settled earlier than other parts of the state and by more southerners;

(Cherokee, Mills, and Winnebago). Two counties had more than 200 I-houses (Johnson and Dubuque). The map below (Fig. 4) suggests that most recorded I-houses fall within a wedge shape of counties from the northeast to the southeast along the Mississippi River into the interior to about the capital city of Des Moines in central Iowa. However, a number of issues complicate the ability to draw conclusions from the database:

(1) Houses are entered into the database for a variety of reasons, ranging from regulatory requirements [Section 106, Section 4(f)] to preservation projects. These reasons have nothing to do with geographic locations;
(2) Site inventory forms may be completed and submitted by, literally, anyone including persons with no architectural training, resulting in a strong possibility of misidentification of the type; and,
(3) Site forms are generally accepted without correction and entered into the database as received. Even if the SHPO's professional staff disagrees with the site form's architectural classification, the disagreement does not appear in the database.

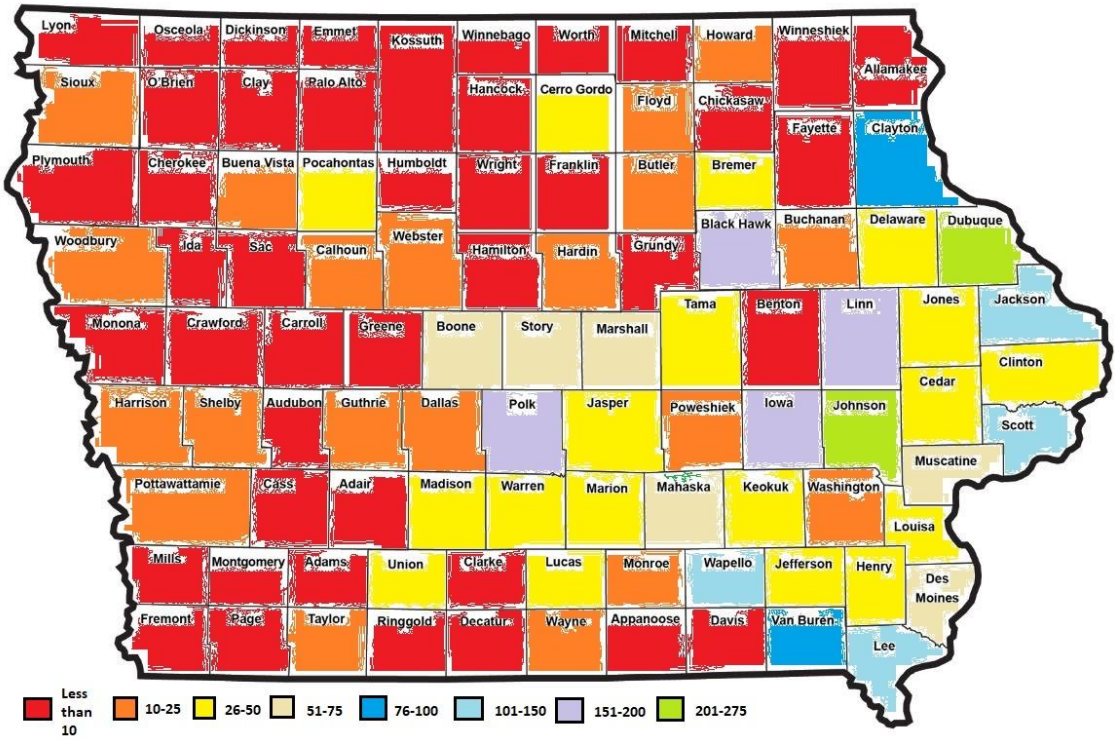

Figure 4 Map of Iowa showing the number of I-houses by county recorded in the Iowa architectural database, 2018.

another consultant felt I-houses were generally not found in northwest and north-central Iowa, both being areas that settled later than the rest of the state. Iowa City, in east-central Iowa, has a number of easily recognizable I-houses dating from the 1850s to the 1870s. See for example 1232 E. College St., an I-house that was built just off the rural road to Muscatine. HABS documentation offers another southeast Iowa I-house, the "Hancock House" in Bentonsport (see Shank's *The Iowa Catalog*, 1979).

Still, one conclusion that seems inescapable is that the most I-houses are recorded in the areas of densest population, eastern Iowa to Des Moines. Also the highest numbers of recorded locations are found in the earliest settled area of the state, along the Mississippi River, by migrants from the east or south. The map is also consistent with the anecdotal observations of Iowa consultants (see fn. 14). On the other hand, the southern tier of counties and those adjacent to the Missouri River, where one might expect an early inflow of southern migrants, have the lowest numbers of recorded I-houses. In order to make more valid any conclusions drawn from the database, each site form on each I-house would need to be examined to determine if the classification is accurate.

Other forms of primary sources can offer additional, if spotty, evidence of I-houses in Iowa, among them the 1875 Andreas atlas of Iowa. The I-houses in Andreas are often no longer extant and rarely identifiable as to location, but there are a handful of line drawings that clearly fall within the folk type (Fig. 5 for example) and add to the body of knowledge on Iowa I-houses.

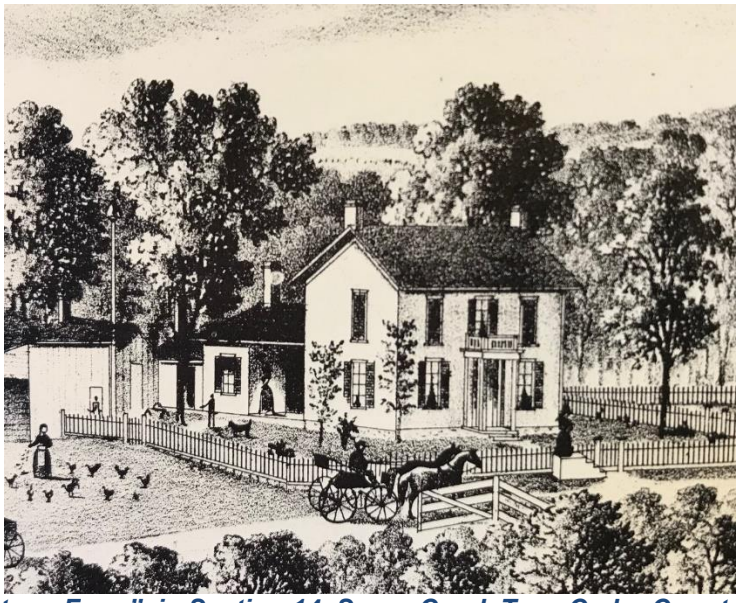

Figure 5 "Limestone Farm" in Section 14, Sugar Creek Twp. Cedar County (Andreas, 1875)

Finally, one scholarly journal article on Iowa I-houses stands out, Fred E. Peterson's "Tradition and Change in Nineteenth-Century Iowa Farmhouse," published in 1993 (*Annals of Iowa,* 52 [1993] 3: 251-281). Peterson studied the state's I-houses, basing his conclusions on rural surveys conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as images he found in Andreas' 1875 atlas, county histories, and the photo collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City. He "located more than five hundred I-houses and photographed more than fifty" (fn. 1 at page 251). He accepted Kniffen's definition and confirmed that the "pioneers who brought the I-house type to Iowa migrated from Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, and Ohio as well as New England, New York, and Pennsylvania" (253-254). But he also argued these pioneers "inevitably modified" the "traditional form inherited from previous generations," even while they "did not alter the essential characteristics of the traditional form" (254). For example, the presence of a rear kitchen wing was a variable according to Kniffen and Glassie, but in Iowa Peterson claimed it is "has become a constant" (fn. 2, page 252).

Balloon-framing technology, in particular, "resulted in changes in scale and proportion that affected the external appearance of the house" (261). Even after the 1830s when balloon framing using mass-produced nails came into use in the Midwest, some builders cautiously combined the older timber-frame or heavy box-frame with light weight balloon-frame construction (255-256).

Peterson did, however, abandon Kniffen's definition of an I-house by including in his study of 500 buildings an unknown number of "smaller versions of the I-house," which he said appeared in the 1860s. These smaller houses were 1½ stories in height with second-story gable windows high in the gable, near the ridge. Despite Peterson's assertion that these 1 ½ story houses were still I-houses, they actually are evidence that the traditional folk form has been changed through technology to a more vernacular form. Because there are no distribution maps for the examples Peterson found and no numerical breakdown of how many examples fit the I-house category versus the smaller 1-½-story vernacular category, the study's main relevance is its documentation that Iowa was one location where the I-house folk form began to be abandoned. Traditional builders and their techniques were fading out in Iowa in favor of dimension lumber and wire-cut nails, brought in by the railroads, and the balloon-framing techniques that made good use of them.

Conclusion

The I-house as a folk form with origins in New England clearly appeared in Iowa in the 19th century, transported by easterners through northern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and by southerners from Missouri and Kentucky, as well as from southern Illinois and Indiana. Whether or not Iowa was one of three "I" states that served as the *source region* for I-houses in southwestern Louisiana remains debatable for lack of any field evidence that links actual buildings to their actual builders' origins. Further the original claim was later modified by its progenitor to recognize a more precise source region focused on Missouri, Kentucky and Indiana. Based on his additional (likely 1950s) fieldwork, Kniffen introduced a second theory of why the form is called an "I-house" – because it refers to the form's tall narrow profile. Despite this subtle correction of the earlier Louisiana 1930s research, the misidentification of the origins of the I-house continues in the scholarly literature. Documented I-houses in Iowa are necessary to add to the body of information on the density and origins of the folk form in the state, and geographers with published work on I-houses agree that the need to document them is urgent.

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Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
409 E. Main St.	Decorah
Address	City

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Name of Property	County
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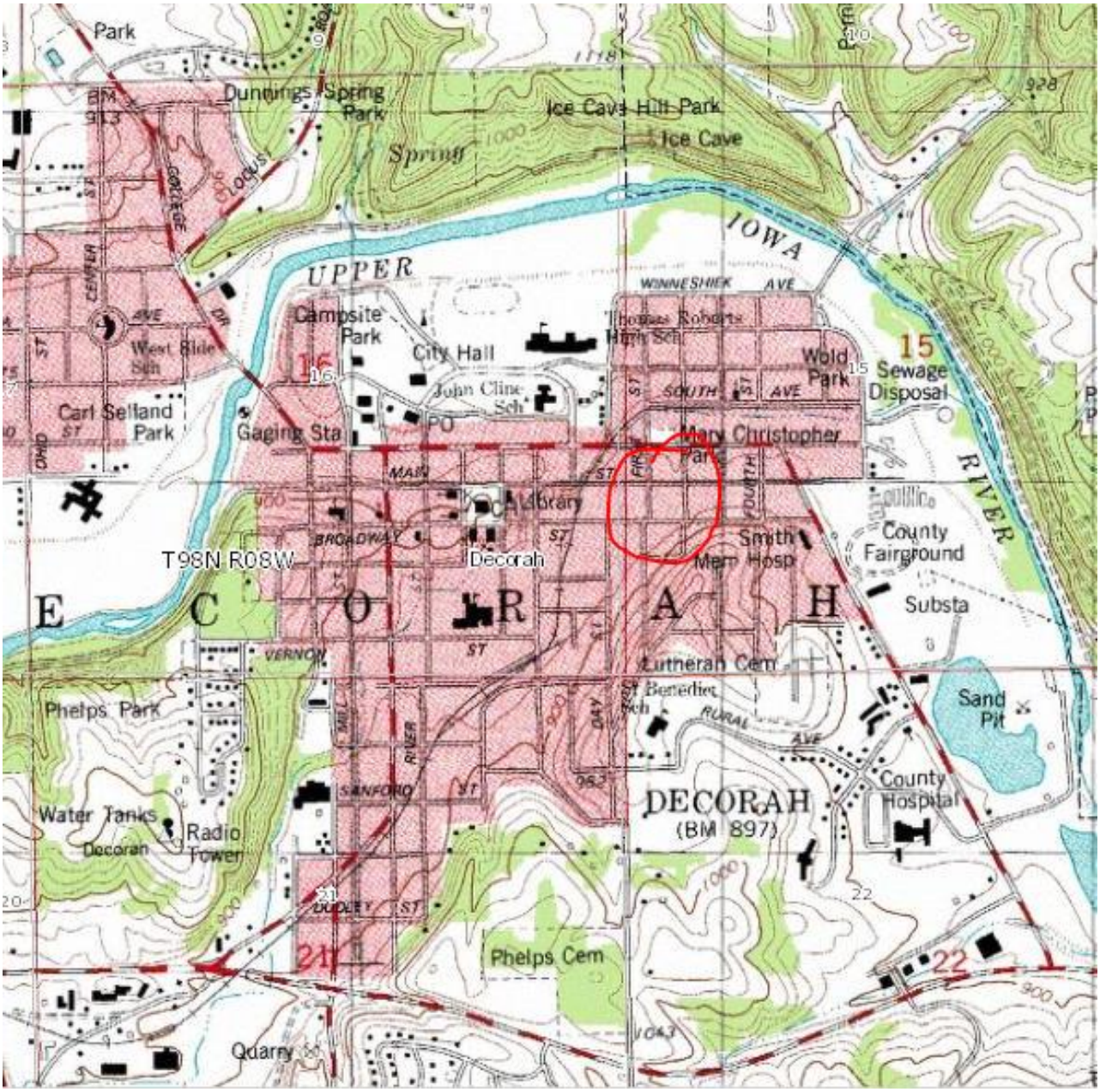
Address	City

Additional Documentation:
MAPS, PLANS, and PHOTOGRAPHS



Decorah with general location of 409 E. Main circles. Source: USGS 24K topographic maps, accessed at http://ortho.gis.iastate.edu/ on 7/23/2018

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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North ^

The lot and its buildings. Note the bare branches of the European larch in the left center of the lot. Winneshiek County Assessor, accessed at https://beacon.schneidercorp.com/ 7/23/2018

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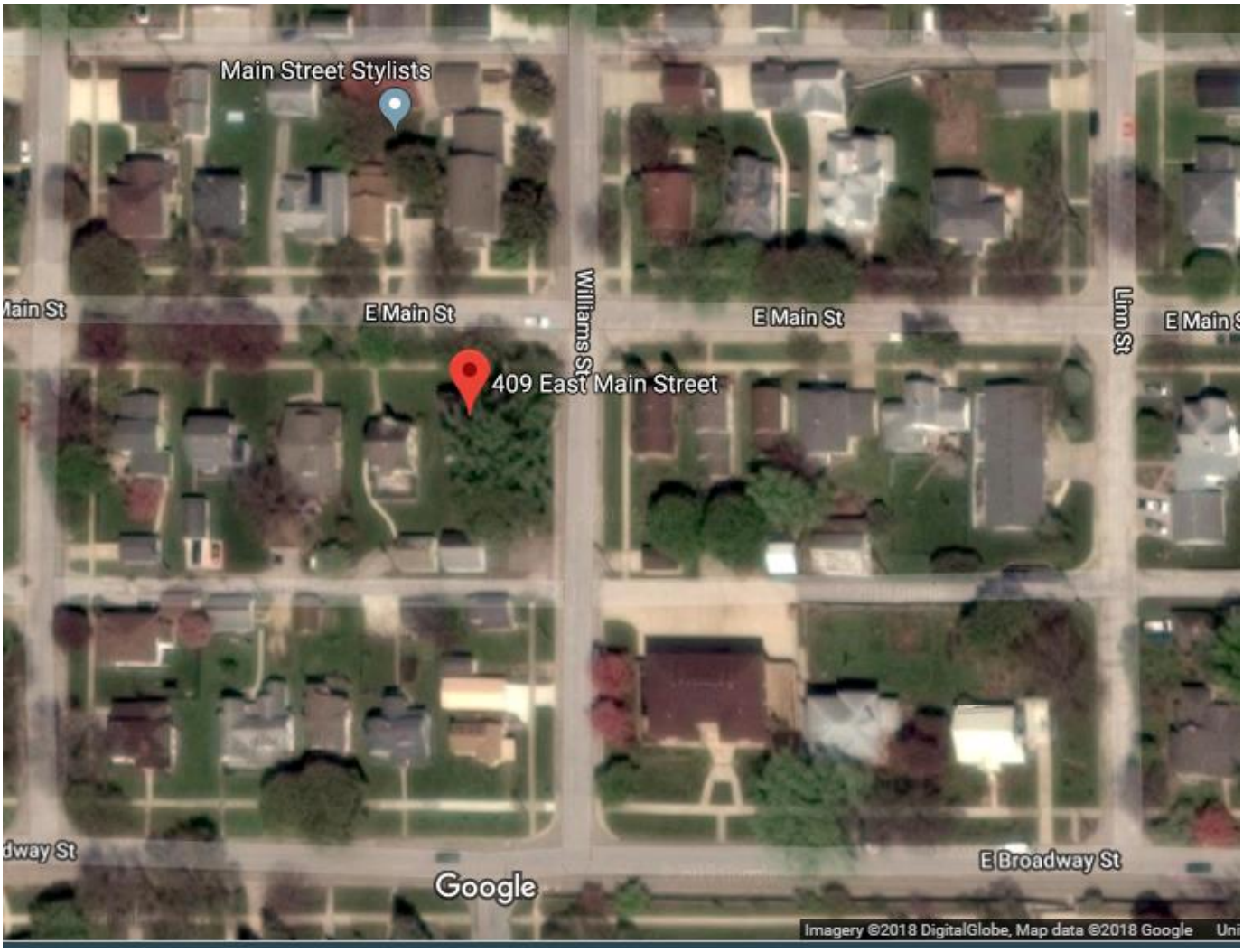

North ^
The lot is mostly obscured by the mature European Larch. Google.com/ on 7/23/2018

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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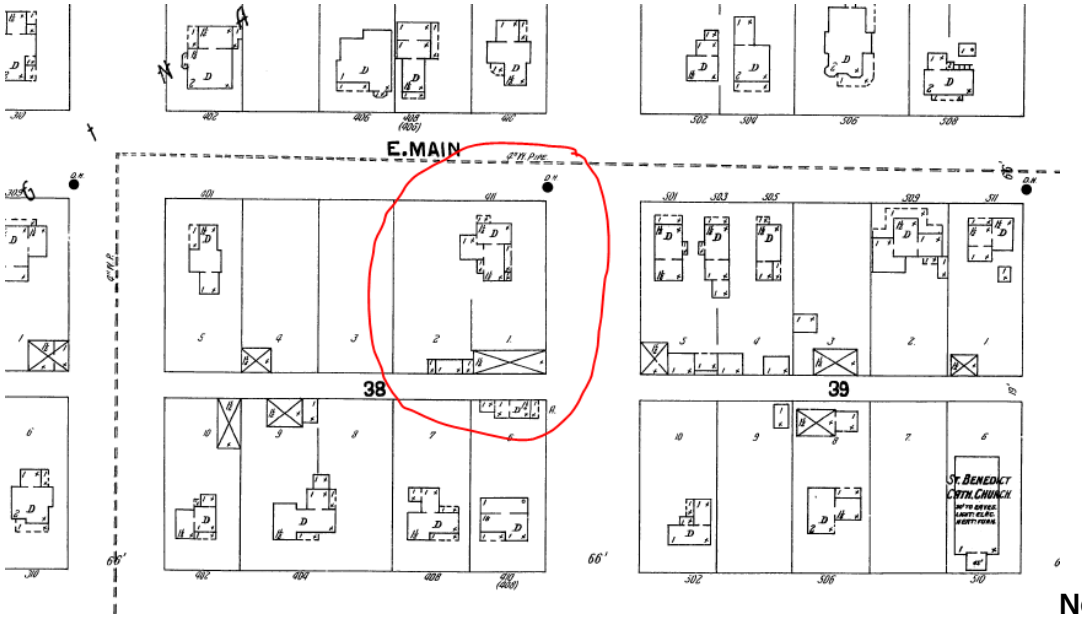

North ^

1902 Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance map. This is the first instance of Block 38 shown on the Sanborns, when the block was already well developed. The subject building's footprint spilled over onto Lot 2.

PHOTOGRAPHS (by Jan Olive Full, July 2018, unless otherwise indicated)

North façade and east elevation (David Wadsworth photo, 2018)

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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East elevation following removal of the aluminum siding from the side porch

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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East elevation and side porch showing the stud walls added when the porch was converted to interior space. (David Wadsworth photo, 2-18)

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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East elevation and south rear wall. The infill housing next door (Lot 2) is a Tudor Revival-style house built in 1930 (Assessor).

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South end wall and angled view of west side wall. The I-house roof is visible in the upper left area of the photo.

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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I-house north façade and west gable end, with rear wing and expansion addition. The shadow lines on the blank west wall of the I-house may relate to water drainage downspouts rather than any structure attached to the house as there is little evidence of any attachment.

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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409 E. Main's garage in back yard along the alley, 1964. One of the overhead doors has been replaced with a solid metal door. This building occupies part of the location of a large stable or barn seen in the 1902 Sanborn above. The size of the nonextant stable behind a traditional residence is curious but may indicate a past owner used the building for some sort of commercial function. Google.com on 8/20/2018.

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The European larch (*Larix decidua*) off the rear, southeast corner of the house. The larch is a deciduous conifer and is "readily distinguished from most conifers by the loss of their leaves in winter…" When they reach "old age" they "become somewhat irregular in outline." European larches are long-lived, upwards of several hundred years. The larch in 409 E. Main's yard is irregular in shape and was identified by the state's DNR's "big tree" program in 1981. Everett, *New York Botanical Garden Illustrated*l Vol. 6 Id-Ma. 1981: 1931-1932.

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
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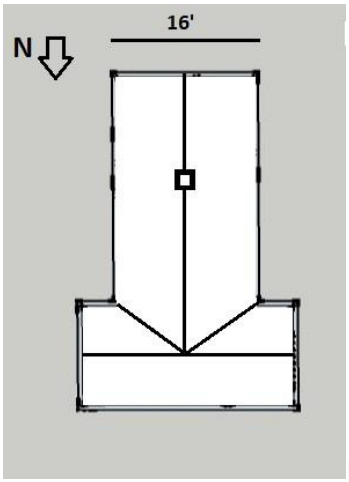
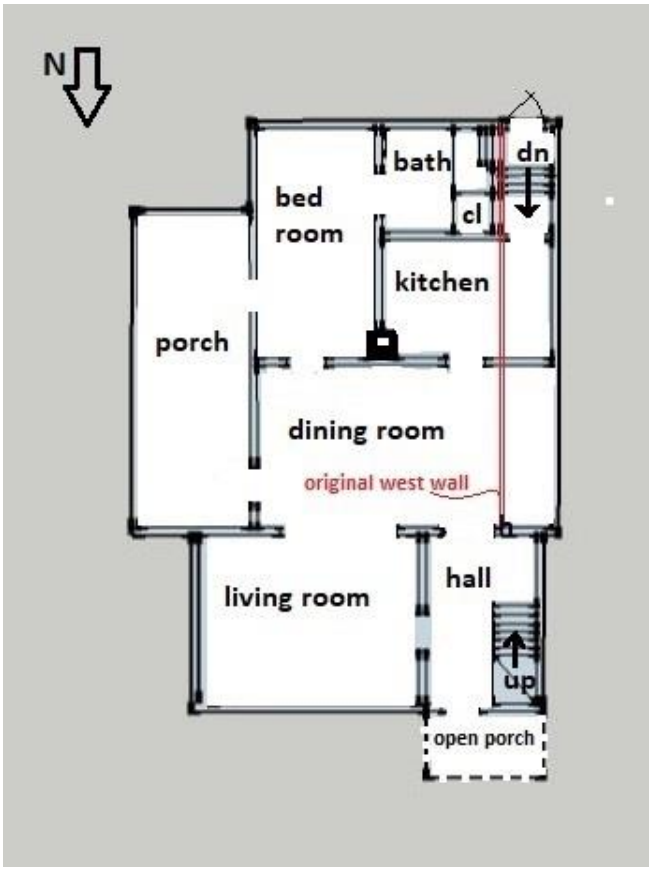
Address	City

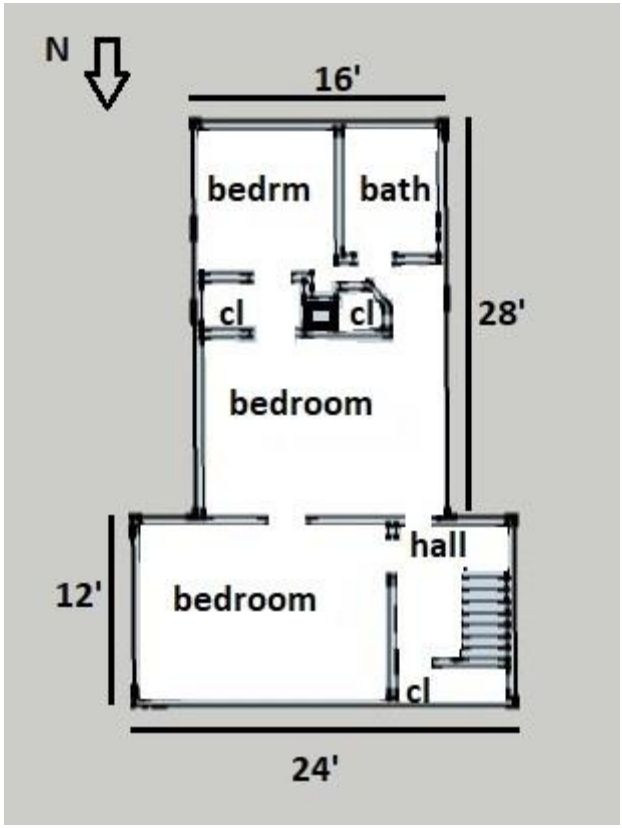
Plans (based on drawings provided by David Wadsworth, August 2018)



Roof plan of I-house and its rear wing

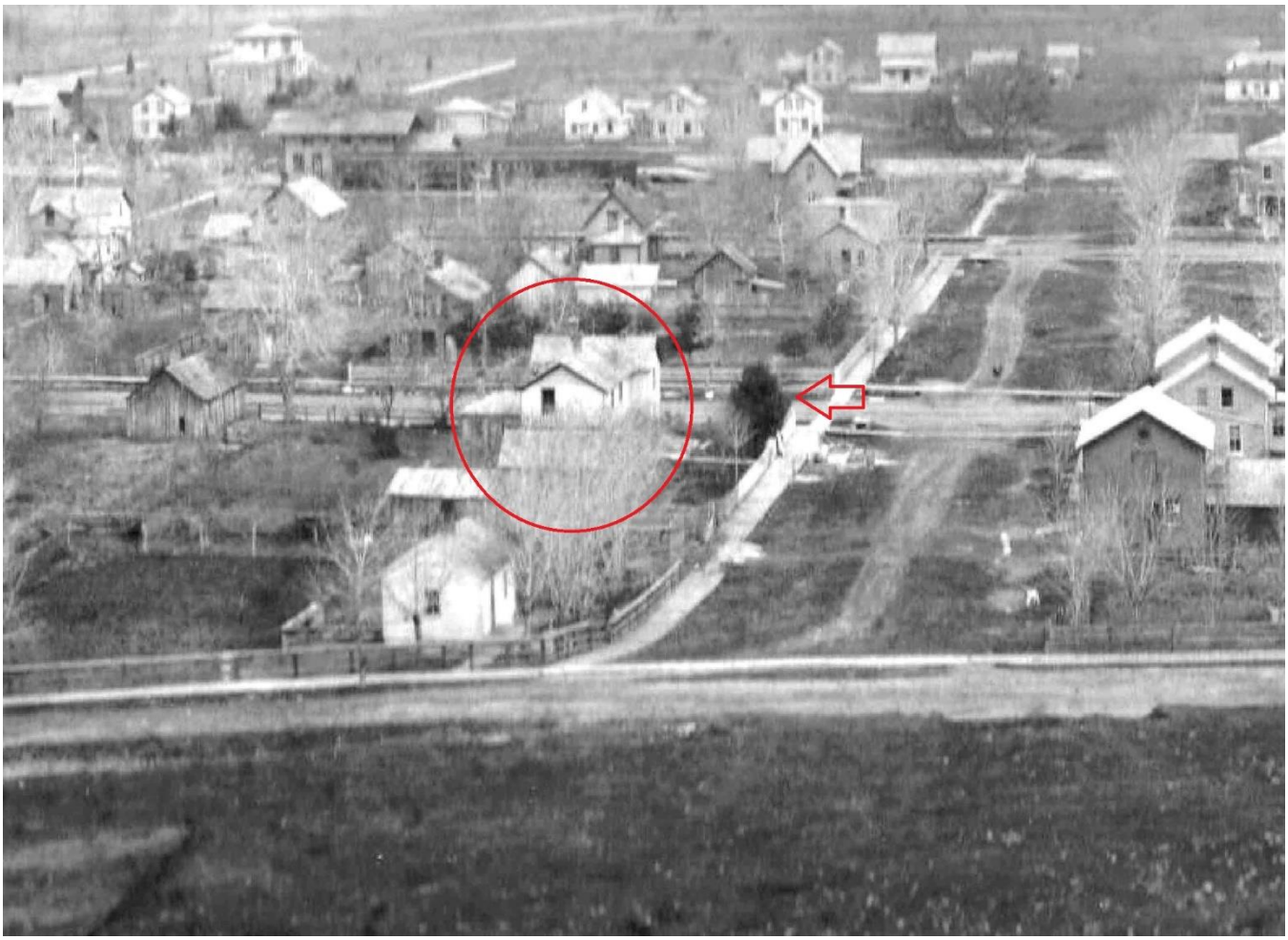


First Floor



Second Floor

Dennis, Archa & Mary, I-house	Winneshiek
Name of Property	County
409 E. Main St.	Decorah
Address	City



Undated but c. 1884 (or a bit later) photo of the Main and Water Streets area in the east side of the original town plat of Decorah. This photo looks north. The south and part of the east side of the subject house is circled in red. The European larch is identified by the red arrow. Courtesy of Elizabeth Lorentzen.