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NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**United States Department of the Interior**
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn

Other names/site number: Egbert T. Smith House, Henry Felkner House

## 2. Location

street & number: 1193 Highway 6 — NA not for publication

city or town: West Liberty — x vicinity

State: Iowa code: IA county: Muscatine code: 70 zip code: 52776-9105

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination __ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets __ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant __ nationally __ statewide X locally. ( __ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date: 10 FEB 2016

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property __ meets __ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( __ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register.
__ See continuation sheet

__ determined eligible for the National Register.
__ See continuation sheet

__ determined not eligible for the National Register.

__ removed from the National Register.

__ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper: for Alexis Abernathy — Date of Action: 4/5/16

## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- x private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**
(Check only one box

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

**Number of Resources within Property**
(Do not incl. previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Non-Contributing | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | buildings |
| 1 | | sites |
| 2 | | structures |
| 2 | | objects |
| 6 | 1 | Total |

**Name of related multiple property listing:**
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

NA

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

NA

## 6. Functions or Use

**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Hotel
Stage Coach Stop
Domestic/Single Dwelling
Commerce/Trade/Restaurant

**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late-Federal
Early Classical Revival

**Materials**
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
walls Weatherboard
roof Steel
other

**Narrative Description**
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

The house is in worn but original condition with some structural issues. It has had very few alterations and its integrity is very high. The historic district is composed of the present property boundary. This includes the residence, the burial ground along the lane (site), two wells (structures), and two stage mounting mounds in the front. Addtionally, two nonextant buildings, consisting of the 1839 tavern and blacksmith forge, are present within the side and rear yard respectively. A natual feature consisting of the old spring, which was the original attraction to the site location as a watering hole, is still present

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property
for National Register listing.)

x **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

__ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

__ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

__ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

__ **A** owed 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION
COMMERCE
COMMUNICATION

### Period of Significance

1842 to 1855

### Significant Dates

1842
1855

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

NA

### Cultural Affiliation

### Architect/Builder

Smith, Egbert T.
Cole, Mr.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property.) **SEE CONTINUATION SHEET**

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.) **SEE CONTINUATION SHEET**

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
__ previously listed in the National Register
__ previously determined eligible by the National Register
__ designated a National Historic Landmark
#_____
__ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record#_____

### Primary location of additional data:

x State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State agency
__ Federal agency
__ Local government
__ University
__ Other

**Name of repository:**
State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 4.48 ac.

**UTM References**
(Place additional UTM References on a continuation sheet.)

| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 15 | 639 191 | 4 605 164 |
| 2 | 15 | 639 191 | 4 605 262 |
| 3 | 15 | 639 328 | 4 606 262 |
| 4 | 15 | 639 328 | 4 605 085 |

**Verbal Boundary Description**
(Describe the boundaries of the property.) Boundary determined by fenceline around current property line. See Continuation Sheet.

**Boundary Justification**
(Explain why the boundaries were selected.) Coach Inn location and remaining Smith Farmstead area.. See Continuation Sheet.

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Marlin R. Ingalls/Architectural Historian
organization Consultant date 2/2/2016
street & number 515 E. Davenport St. telephone 319/361-6634
city or town Iowa City state Iowa zip code 52245

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

## Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Laura and Elliot Christian
street & number 1193 Highway 6 telephone 319 627-2002
city or town West Liberty state Iowa zip code 52776-9105

# 7. Narrative Description

## Introduction

In 1839 the newly surveyed area of the Second Black Hawk Purchase was opened for settlement in the Territory of Iowa. In that same year Iowa City was designated the capitol of the Territory of Iowa. The Beers and St. John Company, who were livery operators in the formative community of Bloomington (later changed to Muscatine), were awarded the federal mail contract between Iowa City and Bloomington. In 1839 Bloomington was the closest point between Iowa City and the Mississippi River and a mail route and road was a logical connection between the two. The road between the two became an important transportation route.

Beers and St. John, along with Egbert T. Smith the builder and owner, established a small inn and tavern along the route in 1839 to provide for travelers. The resource operated as both an inn and tavern on the Muscatine to Iowa City road. This business was expanded when Beers and St. John were awarded a second federal mail contract in 1841. At that time the construction of a larger inn was undertaken. This inn was finished in 1842 and operated as a stage coach inn until 1851 under Egbert T. Smith. In 1854 Smith sold the property and returned briefly in 1855 to settle the property mortgage and to sell the rest of his land holdings.

During the time from 1839 to 1854 an inn was in operation. The earlier (1839) inn/tavern became an attached wing and kitchen to the larger inn completed in 1842. At that time the site contained the original 1839 inn/tavern, the large 1842 building, a forge, and a barn, which functioned as a swing station for the coaching operation. A swing station is a place where horses and drivers could be switched along the routes. These swing stations were set up every ten to fifteen miles along the coaching routes to provide fresh teams of horses.

Located just west of the village of West Liberty, in the far western part of Muscatine County, the site was an important transportation node at a crossing point of two important staging routes. These were the routes from Iowa City to Muscatine and from Iowa City to the city of Davenport, also on the Mississippi River. The inn was in operation until around 1855 when two events occurred. The first was the death of Smith's wife in 1851. The second event was the coming of the railroad to Iowa City in 1855.

This nomination concerns the inn completed in 1842. Its basic plan copied Egbert T. Smith's previous colonial home located on Long Island, New York. The siding, windows and door, and interior millwork were constructed and shipped from Cincinnati, Ohio in 1841. Traveling down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi by steamboat it arrived in 1841 and was finished by 1842. The inn is framed of hewn heavy timbers. A large central Rumford chimney, copied from New York antecedents, supports the interior framing (Buckley 2003). The wall studs were whip-sawn on site and the brick and stone used in its construction were hand-made or quarried nearby. The inn is two and one-half stories in height and once had an octagonal cupola in the center of the roof crest. The exterior siding is of cypress. Stylistically the inn melds a colonial end-gabled form with late-federal and classical stylistic elements.

The inn is significant under Criterion A for its relationship to early stage coaching and staging inns in Iowa during its territorial and early statehood eras. The inn is one of the last known rural frame inns related to Iowa's first period of staging history (1836–1845). All of the original outbuildings are nonextant and only the inn and surrounding property are the focus of this nomination. For a more complete context outlining the area's early settlement, important individuals, federal mail routes and roads, stage coaching periods in Iowa, architecture, stage inns, and other elements see the Appendix.

## 8. Statement of Significance

The Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn is locally significant under Criterion A as a relatively unaltered rural example of an early stage coach inn. Its period of significance dates from 1842, when occupation and construction started, until 1855 when Smith sold the property. It is one of Iowa's last remaining, rural, heavy timber framed, First Period (1838–1845) stage coach inns. It also relates to and overlaps Iowa's Second Period of stage coach hotels and inns (1846–1863). During its period of significance (1842–1855) the site was the focus of local and regional communication, transportation, and commerce. The inn is the only building remaining from that period on the property. Its context is related to its construction and occupation by Egbert T. Smith specifically for use as a stage inn and tavern built expressly for the purpose of providing a staging inn for the Beers and St. John Company, which had won the federal mail contract in 1842 for the Bloomington (Muscatine) to Iowa City Route.

The inn maintains a high degree of the seven aspects of integrity. Its location is original. Its late-Federal design is unchanged. The setting is the same size and retains its landscaping. The materials consisting of brick, stone, and wood are original. The hewn timbers, handmade bricks, and quarried stone as well as the fine woodwork shows its workmanship. The feeling of a territorial era stagecoach inn is present in it floor plan, large chimney, exterior coach mounting mounds, wells and other features. Its association with the old stage route (U.S. 6) and its entry lane location are unchanged. With the arrival of the railroad in Iowa City in 1855, passing just two miles to its north, the site's use as a stage coach inn and staging point ended and marks the end of its period of significance under Criterion A.

The significance of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn lies in its relationship to Iowa's first period of stage coaching (1836–1845). Coach inns from this period, especially from the first years relating to the 1830s and early 1840s, are very rare in the state. Also, the size, quality, and integrity of the resource for the period are remarkable. The entrepreneurial spirit of Egbert T. Smith, William St. John, and Robert Stewart reflect both the formative nature of the state and also its relatedness to the mail route and staging movement from the East. For additional context information see Appendix 1.

### Egbert T. Smith

Egbert T. Smith arrived in Muscatine County in 1838. He was born in 1796 at Long Island, New York. When Egbert T. Smith moved to Muscatine County he located on an established site 1½ miles west of the village of West Liberty, ten miles from the center of the new capital in Iowa City, and on the highest spot with spring water between Iowa City and Bloomington (Muscatine). He was directly on the Bloomington to Iowa City Road and near an intersection of two important roads. These were the westward road to Iowa City and the eastern road to Davenport with connections to West Branch and Springdale and northward to Dubuque. There he built first a saltbox inn/tavern in 1839 and soon a house of a type common in parts of the East at the time but uncommon in Iowa. At age 44 Egbert T. Smith's stylistic tastes and economic position were probably fairly well established before arriving in Iowa.

In the 1879 *History of Muscatine, Iowa*, by Western Historical Company related:

> To add to the evolutional aspect of the period, about this time Egbert T. Smith appeared on the scene and bought lands in Sections 4, 5, 7, and 8, after which he returned to Ohio and had much of the material for a commodious house there prepared ready to put together, and shipped down the Ohio river and up the Mississippi to Bloomington, and from there hauled it by ox teams to the place of erection. Parts of the frame were cut from native timber and sawn by hand with whip saws. The stones for the foundation were hauled

> from a quarry of Upper Silurian lime stone on the headwaters of the Wapsie in section 2-79-4,…known in local history as the "Hickory Grove Quarry." To accomplish this, a road had to be opened and the sloughs and streams bridged. It was a laborious process [Western Historical 1879:227].
>
> The year 1840 the writer does not remember but two who made a permanent settlement in this vicinity. There may have been others, perhaps were, but we can only bring to mind Egbert T. Smith and E. T. S. Schenk, who were both well and favorably known [Western Historical 1879:228].

The 1840 Federal Census (Figure 1) shows Egbert T. Smith as being located in Wapsinonoc Township (Federal Census 1840). It shows that there was one male age 15 to 20, six males age 20 to 30, and two males age 40 to 50. This shows a total of nine males in residence. This was prior to construction of the large house so all must have been lodged in the 1839 tavern/inn. The male group age 25 to 30 was the largest in the township at that time. At least two of the children were Smith's.

There were three females in 1840. There was one age 5 to 10, one age 10 to 15, and one age 40 to 50. The two females under 15 years of age were Egbert T. Smith's children. The over 40 year old female was his wife. She is thought to have died in 1851, of unknown causes, shortly before Smith sold the property to David Junkins and left for good.

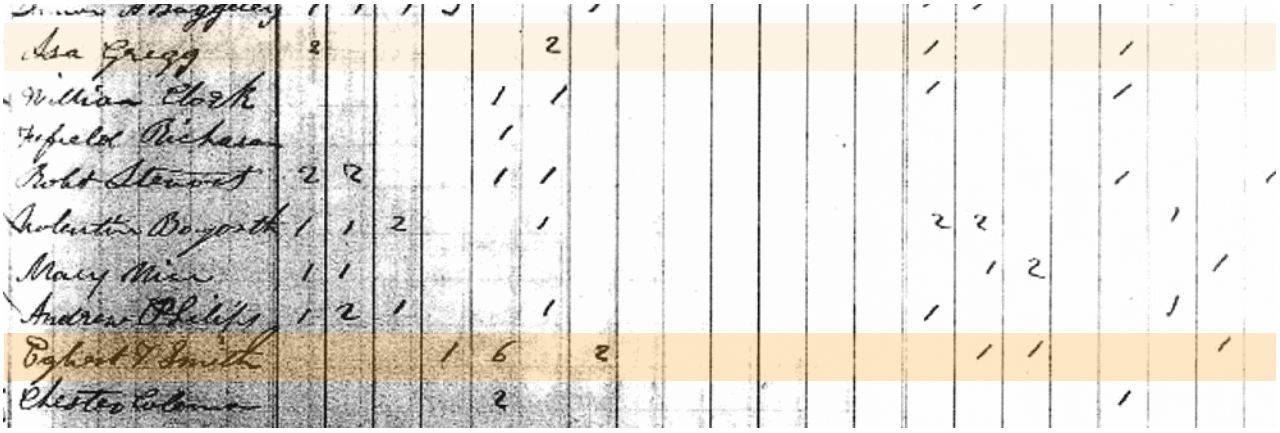


*Figure 2. Egbert T. Smith and Asa Greg recorded on the 1840 Muscatine County, Wapsinonoc Township census (Federal Census 1840).*

On the October 17, 1850 census he is noted as being 54 years old and farmer born in New York (Federal Census 1850). His wife Sarah (age 48) was with him at that time. His oldest son John (age 23) was a steam engineer. Also listed are his daughter Sarah (age 20), second son Woodhull (age 18) listed as a farmer, and Edmund L. (age 13). All three were born in Ohio. His seven year old daughter Jennette A. was born in Iowa. In addition there were two non family males. Lucias Hatch (age 25) was the oldest and noted as a farmer from Pennsylvania. Lastly, Oliver Cambride (sic) was from Indiana was 14.

During the time he operated the inn and tavern his total land holdings amounted to over 1,200 acres (Figure 2). His property was worth $7,000. These were very large and valuable land holding during a time when most settlers struggled to raise the $1.25 an acre fee for less than 40 acres.

In the 1840s through 1860s streams of covered wagons were headed for Iowa to settle. Ferries across the Mississippi were jammed with people waiting their turns to be ferried across to Iowa at Keokuk,

Burlington, Bloomington (Muscatine), Rock Island (the busiest), and Dubuque. The same was true at smaller rivers. It was not uncommon for many covered wagons to be encamped on the east bank of the Iowa River (Iowa Avenue) waiting their turn on the ferry the next day.

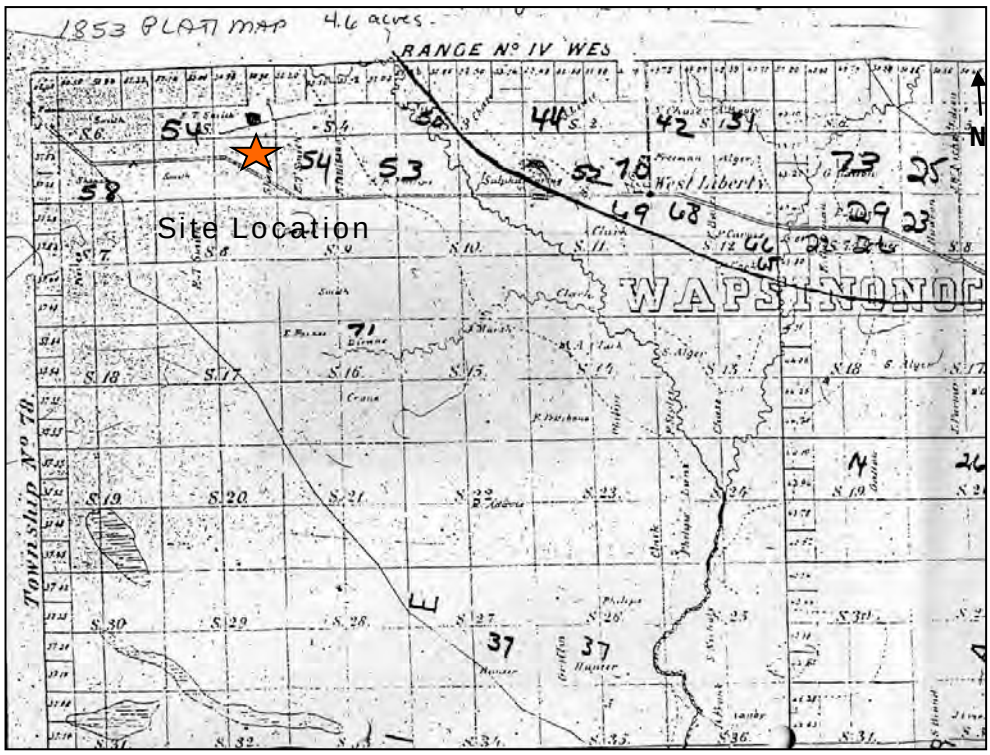


*Figure 3. The 1853 plat map of Wapsinonoc Township based on the 1838 GLO showing the road to Iowa City from West Liberty and the location of Egbert T. Smith's (#54) properties along it in Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 (copy of original in possession of owners, Laura and Elliot Christian).*

The *Diary of Alice Shutes* is an example of a personal account of a covered wagon trip from Marseilles in central Ohio to Carroll County in western Iowa (Iowa City Press Citizen 1990:1C). It relates the journey of a family that passed by the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn on the Muscatine to Iowa City road. It relates the preparation, journey, and hardships entailed and would have been similar to the time when Smith was in residence. They may have watered their livestock at the site. The trip started May 6, 1862.

> …Pa had been studying reports of where the flooding on the Mississippi River had been the most serious to decide which ferry to use. He finally decided to use the ferry at Muscatine. The Rock Island ferry was advertised much more and a busier one, but Pa thought there would not be as long a wait at Muscatine.
>
> Alice noted that they arrive the night before and stayed in the ferry camp. Pa had arranged for crossing the next day at 11 am. Uncle Harley was disappointed the ferry was not powered on a tread mill. It was powered by steam and seemed exciting to everyone. The horses were unhitched, blindfolded, led on the ferry and tied. The covered wagon and surrey were rolled on and blocked. No one stayed in them. All stood for the eight-minute ride to the Iowa shore.

> Having the mighty Mississippi behind them seemed a relief to all. That same day they continued to the west out of Muscatine and crossed the Cedar River, also on a ferry….on their way the following day at 4 am for a big day, *passing through West Liberty* and getting all the way to Iowa City [Iowa City Press Citizen 1990:1C] [italics added].

In 1887 Ruth Irish spent a summer at the old inn. On the back of a 1917 photograph is an account written by R. J. Preston, son of Dr. C. H. Preston (Figure 3) (Preston-Irish Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, 1917). The photo was probably also taken by R. J. Preston and it briefly recounts the story of the inn. It also ties the history of old stage inn to both Henry Felkner and William Irish. Both were very early settlers in Johnson County, Iowa and Henry Felkner had a strong friendship with John Gilbert who ran the Indian trading post at the site of Napoleon, which was the first post office in Johnson County in 1839. Napoleon was located about five miles south of the future site of Iowa City and it was from this location that the site for the new capital of Iowa was chosen.

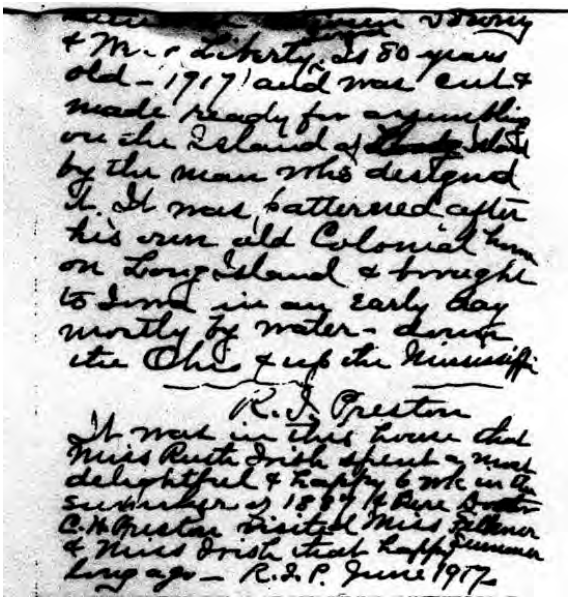


*Figure 4. Index card from Preston-Irish Collection (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City). It reads "Situated between Downey and W. Liberty, is 80 years old–1917' & was cut and made ready for assembling on the Island of Long Island by the man who designed it. It was patterned after his own old Colonial home on Long Island and brought to Iowa in an early day mostly by water-down the Ohio and up the Mississippi.—R. J. Preston--It was in this house that Miss Ruth Irish spent a most delightful and happy 6 wk in the summer of 1887 and here Doctor C. H. Preston visited Miss Felkner and Miss Irish that happy summer long ago—R.J.P., June 1917."*

In the 1870s a Mr. Jas. Schench had been Smith's neighbor to the east in the 1840s and 1850s while the inn was operating. He had arrived in the township in the late 1830s. In the following about Mr. Egbert T. Smith and his inn he relates that the house was designed after Smith's father's place on Long Island, that the millwork was shipped from Cincinnati, Ohio, and what an unusual and fine building it was. Also, that the heavy timber framing was done by a Mr. Cole, who was a local cabinet maker. He related

Situated in the midst of a fine grove on the prairie, but near the edge of the woodland, on the old stage route from Davenport to Iowa City, and some four miles west of West liberty, stands a large brown farm house built in 1840 by Mr. Egbert Smith, one of the pioneers of this country. The house was an exact counterpart of the homestead of Mr. Smith's father on Long Island, and was drafted in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the lumber all cut, dressed and fitted there, leaving only the frame work to be done in Iowa.

This we were informed of by Mr. Jas. Schench, was done by a Mr. Cole, a cabinet maker by trade, who took the timber from the stump, hewed, dressed, and framed it with all the exactness of an old time bureau. The siding was of 1-inch lumber, the doors are heavy, and the old house stands without repair in any respect, every door swinging true and plumb. In the center of the house was built four old-fashioned fireplaces, two above and two below [*Western Historical* 1879].

Another description of Egbert T. Smith's Stage Coach Inn titled "The Old Tavern," was written by Inez Kirkpatrick in her book *Stagecoach Routes of Iowa* (1975). She relates:

…To add to the evolutionary aspect of the period, about this time Egbert T. Smith appeared on the scene and bought lands in Section 4 and 5-78-4, after which he returned to Ohio and had much of the material for the commodious house there prepared ready to put together, and shipped down the Ohio River and Up the Mississippi to Bloomington, and from there hauled it by ox teams to the place of erection. Parts of the frame were cut from native timber and sawn by hand with whipsaws. The stone for the foundation were hauled from a quarry of Upper Silurian limestone on the head water to the Wapsi in Section 2-79-4, better known as the "Hickory Grove quarry". To accomplish this, a road had to be opened and the sloughs and streams bridged. It was a laborious process...

An old stagecoach stop, three miles west of West Liberty, built in 1841…The house was always popular and kept in good repair. This is the location that was popular in the days of the covered wagon, and the road of today was once an Indian Trail, made modern with the sharp corners rounded and hollows filled, while the old home is much the same.

Built in 1841, on land deeded from the government, when John Tyler was president, it is located on a 196 acre farm. …Being an inn in its day, it housed many a newcomer and weary traveler, in its three stories. From the first floor to the third on the north side, there is an open stairway, winding from the first to the third floor. The stair rails and casing are of cherry wood. There remain four large fireplaces in the house, two on the first and two on the second. Too, there were two large chimneys. The dining room, now the kitchen, took more than 50 yards of rag carpet to cover the floor.

In 1854 more than 25 men, women, and children spent the winter in this house, just as it stands today, with the exception that what is now the garage was then used as the kitchen. This was the only house around, but the newcomers who wintered there in 1854 were building other homes nearby. One was the Wiggins place, farther west. That same winter six deaths occurred at the inn.

A large cupola with windows in its eight sides, served as a look out, was a place to hang lanterns in the early day, in recent years this was removed because it was attracting too many pigeons. Many initials covered its interior.

…Under the siding, the old inn is bricked up more than halfway. These bricks were burned about where the windmill stands on the Amos Shite farm, just west of the creek bridge on the highway west of town. The clay there was the best to be found. The joints, rafters and framework were all hand-hewn out of timber near the home, as was also the frame for the barn on the farm…The windows and doors and siding were purchased in Cincinnati, Ohio, and sent down the Ohio River, up the Mississippi to Muscatine (then Bloomington) and across the county by oxen…This small, salt-box type structure was once attached to the house, where the porch is now. It served as a kitchen, with a large fireplace, and is now used as a garage [Kirkpatrick 1979:8].

The six deaths noted in the quotation above that occurred in 1854 are located in the front of the house along the entry lane near the highway (Figure 4). As related by the former owner, Mary Smith (2008, personal communication), the deaths occurred during the blizzard of 1854 when some 21 people were staying at the house. Some were stranded and others were local settlers whose homes were unfinished as yet. In the evening a family of five (husband, wife, and three children) were brought to the inn in very poor condition. As related by the owner, all were sick when they arrive and because the inn was full they were lodged on the unheated third floor. On the following morning they were found frozen, having all died in the night. They were buried out near the road with the expectation that some family member would eventually claim them, but never did. The occupant of the sixth grave is unknown at present.

As a last note on Egbert T. Smith and his temperament the following account was taken from "Mosher's Log Cabin History, Pike and Springdale Townships," and is titled "The First Windmill." It relates:

> As has been stated, about the years 1840-41 attempts had been made to harness the Wapsie and utilize its power in sawing lumber, but with no great success, for the stream was capricious and willful. But about that time, Egbert T. Smith conceived a far more Quixotean feat. He would harness an Iowa Zephyr and utilize its power for his own purpose. In this he but proved himself a veritable "tenderfoot" for no one who was used to the winter's blizzards or summer's squalls would have had the temerity to attempt such a thing. But Smith was sanguine and had the means to exploit his daring conception [Mosher 1903:63].
>
> He erected a huge tower of massive timbers on which he placed a wind wheel, the like of which has never before or since been seen. When it was completed he attached a saw and thought to compete with the water mill farther down the creek. He had now completed his part of the contract and "whistled for the wind" to do its part. But the wind would only work its own wild will. It laughed at Smith's temerity; it roared at his audacity; it whispered its displeasure; it shrieked at his interference; it howled, it sulked, it bucked, it balked; it shook his machine in its frenzy; it would not be tamed and work his saw, and he acknowledged in language more forceful than elegant his defeat by an Iowa zephyr [Mosher 1903:63].

## Egbert T. Smith and the Beers and St. John Stage Company

There was a strong connection between Egbert T. Smith, William St. John, the Beers and St. John Stage Company, and Robert Stewart. The Abstract of Title shows that Robert Stewart was acting as an agent for Egbert T. Smith for the first land purchase in 1839 (document in possession of owners, Laura and Christian Elliot). In that same year and on the same date Robert Stewart passed the land to Egbert T. Smith who then took possession. The first inn and tavern, which later became the kitchen wing of the main house, was built for or by Smith to house his family and serve as a stage stop, inn, and tavern while the main house was being built between 1841 and 1842. The house's millwork was shipped from Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1840, arrived in 1841, and took over a year to erect. While inspired by Smith's old Long Island home it was not shipped from there as some have mistakenly suggested.

In a1990 latter to Mary Smith, the former owner, her friend Suzanne E. Wilson relates:

> First of all it wasn't just coincidence that the first three land transaction happened almost at the same time. Wm. St. John was from Bloomington (now Muscatine) and had a livery stable there for several years. He had taken on a partner-Peter Beers-who just happened to be a veteran stage line manager from the east coast. The firm of Beers and St. John planned to operate a lucrative, but very competitive stage line when the contracts were awarded in 1842.

> They had purchased this land for the express purpose of using it as a convenient stop on the way from Bloomington to Iowa City and from Davenport to Iowa City. I believe that Robert Stewart really acted as Egbert T. Smith's agent in this transaction…[Wilson 1990a].

The involvement of Egbert T. Smith in the staging business after 1854 is unknown as he had left the state. In June of 1854 Egbert T. Smith had already sold out much of his holdings to John Junkin. It seems that after the death of his wife in1851 he quickly made arrangements to sell the property and left.

He returned briefly in 1855 to clear the debt with Junkins and never returned. It is not known if John Junkin continued operating the inn and tavern but he lived there until the 1870s at which time he sold to Henry Felkner. Coinciding with Smith's departure was the arrival into Iowa City of the railroad in 1855. Two miles away it must have had serious impact on stage traffic between Iowa City and Muscatine.

The 1840 census does not note occupations. John Junkin is noted on the 1860 census as a farmer from Pennsylvania with eight children (United State Federal Census 1860). Six were born in Pennsylvania but the youngest, age three, was born in Iowa. A laborer from Indiana is also noted. As Junkin's ownership is later than the period of significance his relationship to the site, along with other owners, does not relate to the inn's significance as one of Iowa's very few surviving First Period rural stage route inns and taverns. Smith's chronology of ownership and business dealing is outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

Chronology of Ownership of Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn: 1842 to 1855

| | |
|---|---|
| 1839 | William St. John applied for two patents, 311 and 312, totaling 160 acres according to the Homestead Act of 1820. The legal description is: the West half of the SouthWest quarter of Section Four, and the East half of the SouthEast quarter of Section Five in Township 78N of Range 4 West of the Fifth Principal meridian (Abstract of Title).<br><br>St. John was a livery owner from Bloomington (Muscatine) who joined with Peter Beers, an experienced stage operator from the East, to develop stage routes from Bloomington. Quoting from Inez Kirkpatrick's book on stagecoach trails in Iowa: "The line was divided into four sections: Keokuk to Burlington, Burlington to Bloomington, Bloomington to Davenport, and Davenport to Dubuque. There was a fifth line from Bloomington to Iowa City. From the prices charged passengers, and from certain services offered, it seemed evident that the two men hoped to drive off all competition and establish themselves as the leading stage company. Mr. St. John was later associated with the firm of Ogilvie and St. John, and died in Morrison, Illinois where he had lived for nine years until his death in April, 1874. |
| 1839 | Robert Stewart purchased this land for $400 cash, the deed is dated October 16, 1839 (Abstract of Title) |
| 1839 | Note the date of the next transaction is the same. Mr. Stewart was a member of the County Board of Commissioners at this time. |
| 1839–1840 | Egbert T. Smith purchased this land and acquired quite large holdings in just a few years. He was a very likeable man and quite an inventor. He liked to do everything first class and this shows in the details in the house. He brought the fine finish wood and windows and doors for the house from the East. |
| 1855 | John Junkin purchased the house and some land from Egbert T. Smith, who had already gone to the gold fields of California. Jacob Butler was acting as E. Smith's attorney and that is why his name appears on some of the legal documents. |

## Peter Beers and William St. John

In 1835, a survey of a plat that was to be Bloomington noted William St. John as a "Proprietor" there. In September, 1836, William St. John was among the first seventeen people living in Bloomington (Western Historical 1879:634–653). In 1838 he is noted on the census with his wife Elisa. In early 1839 he owned a fractional part of the southwest quarter of Section 35, known as St. John's Division. By 1841 he is noted as "Street Commissioner" for the city (Iowa Genealogy Web 2016).

That same year he is noted as one of the opportunists who sensed the possibilities of the situation. Having arrived at Bloomington in 1835 as a hustling young livery stable proprietor, by 1841 he informed the public that "he was ready to transport passengers in any direction without regard to mail routes or stage hours." A hotel owner in Bloomington had purchased an "excellent nine-passenger four horse Troy-built Coach" by May of 1841. But no regular stage other than these semi-occasional or for-hire ones operated between Bloomington and Iowa City, and this was lamented by the state legislators whose term was opening in Iowa City, in December of 1841 (Colton 1960a:177).

In 1842 Beers and St. John obtained one of the quadrennial mail contract subsidy for the second time. Their contract ran from Muscatine to Iowa City, Burlington, and Davenport. Peter Beers was one of several mail contract bidders but was able to get the three routes noted above. He was a successful mail contractor in Ohio and Indiana, who filed bids for nine of the fourteen state mail contracts placed in Iowa. A former partner in the successful J & P Voorhees Company, which handled the Indiana end of the Ohio Stage Company's system, and he was also active in Iowa, Michigan, and Kentucky (Nowland 1870:359; Colton 1960a:179).

In 1840 a 'Peter Beers' is noted as living in Sangamon, Illinois, but he is never noted on any Iowa census (FamilySearch 2016). Founded in 1829, Sangamon is now a small unincorporated town located in Oakely Township (T16N-R3E), just northwest of the City of Decatur, Macon County, Illinois. Located on the upper Sangamon River this early town was near the Indiana border and in the 1840s was on an Illinois stage mail route between Decatur and Springfield, and probably had connection across the Wabash River to the east to Indianapolis.

In early fall of 1842 the co-partnership between Peter Beers and Wm. St. John effectively competed (180). St. John was a recently married stable proprietor at Bloomington, the stage experience and knowledge of the veteran Peter Beers. They were ready for business over the entire existing network of Iowa state routes by September, 1842—from Dubuque to Keokuk, Muscatine to Iowa City and Burlington to Mt. Pleasant. This partnership sought to drive its rival out of business with they charged. By 1844 the Beers & St. John partnership showed signs of cracking and their extended lines and cut rates made them a serious threat to rivals but left them with an extremely narrow profit margin. This may have contributed to the partnership dissolving early in 1844. Peter Beers continued the business for another year before sell the stock and equipment to Wm. Holcomb, from Illinois. Other operators took over other Beers and St. Johns mail route contract (Colton 1960a:183).

Lawsuits between Peter Beers for the use of W. James & H. E. Bridges vs. Wm. H. Holcomb, Fleak vs. Beers, George Cromwell vs. Beers & St. John, James Wilson vs. Peter Beers, and Peter Beers vs. Wm. St John. After 1845 Iowa stage contracts were mostly handled, by the Frink Walker & Company and later John Frink & Co. They consolidated the stage operation in Iowa where Wilson, Hinton, and Beers & St. John had failed (Colton 1960a:186).

# Architecture

*Introduction*

The Mississippi was no effective barrier to the westward migration of Anglo-Americans and the traditions of building they brought with them. In Iowa many of the surviving early buildings are witness to the popularity of the Greek Revival-style tradition far from it origins in the East. All through the Midwest prior to the Civil War people were building farmhouses that were, as far as the materials and the crude workmanship available permitted, like the quiet, classical farmhouses of New York and Ohio or even of the Eastern seaboard. As time went on and the towns became more established larger houses of greater sophistication followed. In many of them the older "Federal" and "Classical/Greek Revival" traditions continued through the 1850s and into and beyond the Civil War years into the 1880s (Hamlin 1964:310).

Influences of buildings in neighboring states to the east can be detected in many of the houses in Iowa. As settlers migrated into the new lands west of the Mississippi River, they brought with them clear impressions of the houses in which they formerly had lived. As soon as they staked out their claims, and when their economic condition permitted, they erected new residences which often had strong similarities to their previous houses. In Iowa, the individual Federal, Early Classical Revival, and Greek Revival-style houses in the first half of the Nineteenth century did not follow all the traditional concepts in styling but was the result of vernacular interpretations. Such vernacular structures and their variations in Iowa occurred because of both the economic considerations of the population and their execution in rural settings as Iowa's frontier moved westward across the state over time.

*Pioneer Buildings*. Early buildings or structures in the area were of two basic types. They were either very primitive rural claim cabins or sod houses set away from the river and built from materials on-hand or they were fairly fine New England type cottages and even mansions mostly set on or near the river. No doubt much of the early construction had economic considerations. Those with money built well while those without lived in small single room cabins or soddies. Large rural residences were uncommon.

Early millwork and hardware were available along the Mississippi River shipped from Cincinnati and St. Louis. Some was brought from Illinois. After the 1830s large lumber and planning mills were established in several riverside communities in Iowa. Some hewn-timber framed houses from the 1830s were large, two storied, and sheathed with locally cut clapboards. With Muscatine, a port of entry, so near the 1839 tavern/inn at the site looked like a comfortable New England saltbox. Brick making was started in West Liberty around 1837 and in Muscatine even earlier. Quarried stone was also available and lumber was being rafter down the Mississippi two numerous Iowa mills. Muscatine had very early mills.

The quote below relates the crude fixtures and construction of early homes. It also relates that the primitive conditions in the county were quickly disappearing. Hewn log walls, catted chimney stacks, puncheon floors, and plank roof homesteads quickly moved westward with the settlement. Rural hewn timber or log houses were built in the area into the 1850s. It was a time when an axe and some skill could construct a basic dwelling in a short time with the only costs being the windows and hardware.

> No more dwellings were erected solely of logs. Board floors above and below; cased windows and doors, and board doors appeared and brick chimneys began to take the place of the rude stick and mud piles that had hitherto been used. Occasionally a log house was weather-boarded outside and lathed and plastered within, making them quite like a frame dwelling in appearance and quite comfortable [Mosher 1903:59].

Compared with the buildings of the pioneer period, those of the pre-Civil War period were larger and more complex in their planning and construction. Traditional practices in building design and construction were more usual. Less usual were buildings in the architectural styles of the period. For these buildings there was often a designer who might have a skilled builder or an architect (Shank 1979:10, 189). The Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn was constructed during the time when the Late Federal, Early Classical Revival, and Greek Revival styles were competing in Iowa. The popularity of these styles in Iowa prior to the Civil War also illustrates and interplays with how regional variations in the East could be transplanted complete to frontier Iowa communities. It also overlaps with Iowa's Federal phase (1830–1880) and exhibits elements of both styles (Environmental Planning and Research 1977:5–7). It seems likely that the majority of rural First Period inns and taverns would have been built quickly and roughly.

While the Greek Revival-style was often the first academic style built following the log cabin of the early settlers, and was the most common, the very earliest houses may have Federal or Classical Revival elements (McAlester 1986:179–195). Often, the small homes dispensed with pillars and porticoes and retained simple stylistic expression in the cornice under the eaves, portal treatments, and the building's plan. There was little detailed ornamentation except for rectangular transoms over the doorways and a simple block above the windows. Post-Civil War houses are much more numerous in the area. The Smith house stylistically, interior and exterior, exhibits less Greek Revival-style with its strongly expressed cornices and wide eaves, than the close eave overhang, colonial plan, and more refined expression of Federal and Early Classical Revival stylistic elements.

For Egbert T. Smith's house (Figure 5), abundant stands of oak timber for framing were in the woods surrounding the property. All that was needed for its construction was millwork for the siding, windows and doors (sans glazing) and the hardware, and these were ordered and shipped from Cincinnati. This was because the availability of these materials in the quantity and quality required could not be easily filled by local sources at the time and because the connections between Muscatine and Cincinnati were very close at the time. The materials shipped were not for a simple frontier settlement cabin but a large, complex, Eastern-style building of the late-Federal era replicating a Long Island colonial home.

*Figure 5. The Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn in 1911 (State Historical Society of Iowa Library, Iowa City, 1917). The 1839 tavern wing is visible still attached to the eastern (right) side.*

*Architecture, Materials, and Construction of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn*

The inn once consisted of a two and a half storied main house with full cellar and the earlier connected story and a half kitchen/tavern (Figures 5–7, 20–31). This amounted to nearly 6,000 sq. ft. of space. As noted previously the siding, windows, doors, and probably the flooring and plaster was shipped from Cincinnati, Ohio, and arrived in Muscatine in 1841. The original timber stands surrounding the location served as the materials for the inn's heavy hewn timber framing, accordion lath, and sawn planks. Most of the lath was mill cut with limited accordion lath used. The tens of thousands of bricks for the walls, chimney, and wells were made a couple miles to the east on the western edge of original West Liberty. The massive foundation stones were quarried and transported about two miles. Pine shingles "from the Alleghenies" shipped on steamers were available in Muscatine (*Bloomington Herald 1842a*).

The heavy timber framing is of white oak. The vertical studs, rafters, and corner braces are hewn on two sides and whip sawn on the others. The original cedar shakes are still present under the current roof. Two hand-dug brick-lined wells are associated with the site. One, approximately four feet across, is located on the eastern side of the inn where the original tavern once stood. A similarly sized and constructed well is reputedly located to the rear. A third well that is eight feet across and seventy feet deep was located about 150 yards northeast of the inn where the large original barn once sat.

This barn may have sat along a north-south running road or trail that connected the Iowa City to Muscatine Road with sections of the Davenport to Iowa City Road that ran along the north side of the Cedar River. It is possible that the entry lane to the site, which extended past the inn and blacksmith's forge to the barn and beyond, was part of this lost early road. It may have been a seasonal road as it forded the Wapsinonoc Creek. It may also have been part of the stone quarry road used to bring the foundation stones to the site. It appears to have been abandoned in the 1880s. Remnants of this road are still visible in the 1930s aerial when the barn was still standing (see also Figure 22:bottom).

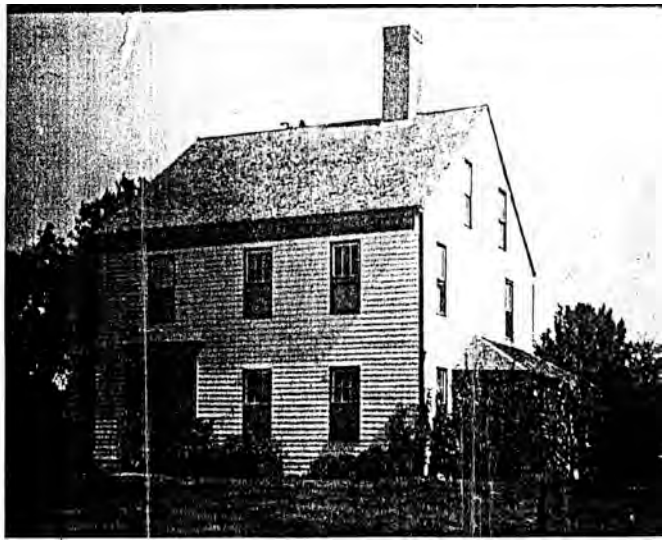

*Figure 6. The Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn ca. 1950. Note that the tavern has been detached and moved, the chimney has not yet been reduced in height, and that the cupola is gone (photo in possession of owners).*

Egbert T. Smith was noted for having fine tastes and even the first building erected on the site in 1839 to serve as an inn and tavern had fine millwork, plastered ceilings and walls, and a central brick chimney with large hearth (Figures 5, 6, 19B) (see also Figures 10, 11, 20–21). It presaged the style and construction of the main house in many ways. It was heavy timber framed and corner braced with vertical hewn and whip-sawn studs. The tavern's centered door was topped by a transom light and flanked by two wooden shuttered windows. Along with the saltbox roofline this was a common vernacular house form east of the Mississippi River in the late 1830s. Like the main house the clapboard siding was of cypress and its millwork had also been shipped from Cincinnati. The windows and doors were heavily shuttered, which was not surprising as the house was only a few miles from the Indian lands. The walls were full of bricks set between the studs as nogging. Nogging is defined as "brickwork carried up in panels between timber quarters; the filling of brickwork between members of a frame wall or partition" (Harris 1983:374). In a more complex construction method then usually seen the bricks were set six bricks high upon wooden shelves set between the stud spaces and up to the top of the second floor. Even the spaces within the corner braces were similarly treated.

In a letter dated to 1990, Suzanne E. Wilson discusses the original 1839 salt-box roofed home, inn, kitchen, and tavern:

> …The salt-box structure that is still standing in the yard, and was once butted up against the house, was in reality the original cabin that was used as the stopover tavern and hotel and it was here the family of Smiths lived while the big house was being built [Suzanne Wilson 1990b].

West Liberty Centennial Celebration
1838-1938

This small, salt-box type structure was once attached to the house, where the porch is now. It served as a kitchen, with a large fireplace, which is now used as a garage. Mrs. Jensen says when the summer is hot and dry, the grass dries out over the old kitchen foundation, showing its outline.

*Figure 7. The 1839 tavern and inn on the Iowa City to Muscatine Road. This building was put up during the time that Beers and St. John were operating a horse mail route (West Liberty Centennial Celebration 1938). It was blown over in 1998.*

*Architectural Styling*. As noted previously the design of the coach inn built by Egbert T. Smith was based on a colonial era center chimney house he had previously owned on Long Island, New York. As no picture of that dwelling is available for comparison it is not known how closely this house compared to that one. However, it is probable that the framing, construction method, and floor plan are very similar. Much of the interior and exterior millwork is known to have been assembled and shipped from Cincinnati to Muscatine according to Smith's orders between 1840 and 1841. Some elements are more refined than others. There appears to be a melding of stylistic elements in the house. It lacks a formal front porch.

When looking at the building one aspect which stands out is its lack of Greek Revival-style detailing. It lacks almost all such stylistic elements commonly associated with Greek Revival-style houses in Iowa. These include returned cornices, pedimented or entablature topped porches, wide under-eave cornice boards trimmed with dentils or modillions. It has no frieze line windows, wide corner pilasters, pedimented windows, or low pitched roof. While the entry has columns it has the large and distinct column bases associated with Roman columns, as Greek columns had no bases.

Its late Federal era attributes relate to the Adams (Adamsesque) and Classical Revival styles consist of its narrow under-eave frieze line, shallow unadorned cornices, thin corner boards with capitols, gable-end quarter-fan windows, central octagonal cupola (nonextant), and some interior millwork. It also consists of a central mass with a side wing (flanker). Its windows are double-hung with six-over-six lights and have slip sills. Most Greek Revival-style houses in Iowa have lug sills. A full height porch or portico would have been ill advised in Iowa's climate and they are uncommon except in the far southeastern counties.

The exterior millwork consists mostly of the doors, windows, and cypress siding. The most architectural aspect of the exterior is the entrance on the front (south) façade. It is unpedimented with a multi-paned full transom having recessed lights with columns in front (McAlester 1986:180), and a unique three-panel door. The entire entryway exhibits classical composition. The doors design falls within both the Greek Revival-style variants of the Midwest and the Classical Revival formalism of the early 19$^{th}$ century. The tall and thin window muntins are late-Federal era Adamsesque in profile (McAlester 1986:158) and are found in Iowa houses through the 1850s.

The roof's pitch is steep in order to provide room in the attic level. The roof's steep pitch and center chimney are common features of late, open, side-gable roofed Georgian and late-Federal center chimney houses of the New England area. These were built locally there into the 1830s (McAlester 1986:114, 182). The west gable end presents one-quarter section fan lights, flanking a central window, more commonly seen on late-Federal era Adams-style buildings. Adams-style houses were built locally in northeastern Missouri and southeastern Iowa through the 1840s. The eastern gable has a simple pair of double-hung windows which are often seen in 1850s to 1880s Greek Revival-style houses in eastern Iowa. The difference in design between the east and west gable ends illustrates the merging of styles in the building.

The eave overhang is very close and this is uncommon on Greek Revival-styled houses but is much more common on late-Federal (Adams-style) houses. Under the narrow-rake eave there is a thin entablature or frieze-line board. Again, this is not as wide or developed as seen on Greek Revival-styled houses in the area. The house originally had an octagonal cupola similar to that on Iowa's Old Capital and may have exhibited more refined elements. The hardware, especially the door locks and knobs and window sash catches, are similar to 1820s hardware used to the east.

The interior also shows a melding of late-Federal, Adamsesque, and Classical Revival millwork styles. The two-and-one-half story cherry staircase has a late-Federal styled newel post, baluster, and spindles. It exhibits and refined simplicity in its execution. The main entryway is flanked by closets that have

Greek Revival-like moldings. Of the four fireplace mantels three have simple while the classical-derived moldings of the fireplace surround in the formal parlor has a finer classical execution. Their moldings have similarities to those seen in the 1839 saltbox roofed inn/tavern. Two of the first floor rooms have chair rails with beveled paneling beneath. This type of paneling has been observed in other 1840s to 1850s Greek Revival-styled houses in the area.

In a sense the house is a mixture of styles with late-Georgian in the massing, framing, and central chimney plan. The late-Federal is present in the fan-shaped attic vents, lack of eave overhang, interior staircase, and portal arrangement. The Classical Revival elements are most visible in the entryway, reduced sized entablature board beneath the eaves, and a fireplace surround.

*The Rumford Chimney*. The inn contains a Rumford chimney (Buckley 2003). Built of hand-made brick and originally nearly 30 feet tall it is still in use today. Venting through the ridge crest its location is slightly off center as the original cupola was centered in the ridge crest. The stack has four fireplaces that conform to the designs shown in Rumford's original plates. Designed in the late 1790s they were considered state of the art. Such chimneys were constructed into the 1850s. The stack was truncated in the mid-20$^{th}$ century.

*The Old Saltbox and the Surveyor's Shack*. It has been site lore that the rear of the saltbox was the original surveyor's hut for the survey of Muscatine and Johnson Counties starting in 1836 (Mary Smith 1992, personal communication). So an earlier lean-to building may have been incorporated into the rear of the first inn's structure when it was built. The owner related that the greater part was living area and the northern ten feet or so under the saltbox once contained the land surveyor's shack and open horse stalls. It is possible that Egbert T. Smith and family may have stayed there while this first inn was being built. The nonextant forge located just north of the first inn's original location faced the northern side of the first inn.

In 1836 Sections 4 and 5, where the site is located, were as yet unsurveyed. The GLO map was approved in 1838 but the county had been under survey for two years. Early Wapsinonoc Township settlers related that they followed the surveyor's trails to reach and establish their claims. Also, the area was a kind of a "no-man's land" until 1839 due to its proximity to the Indian lands.

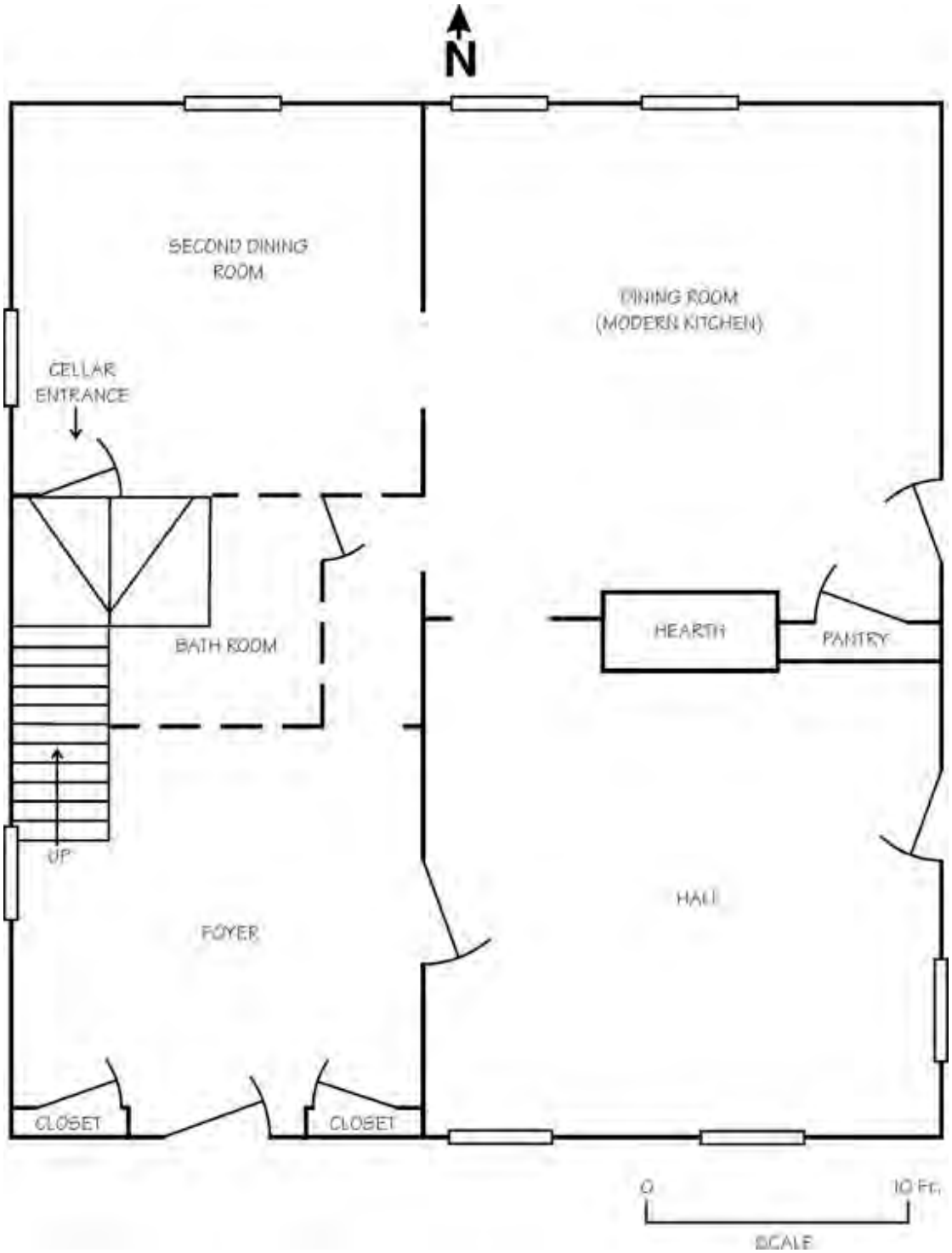


*Figure 8. First floor plan of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn.*

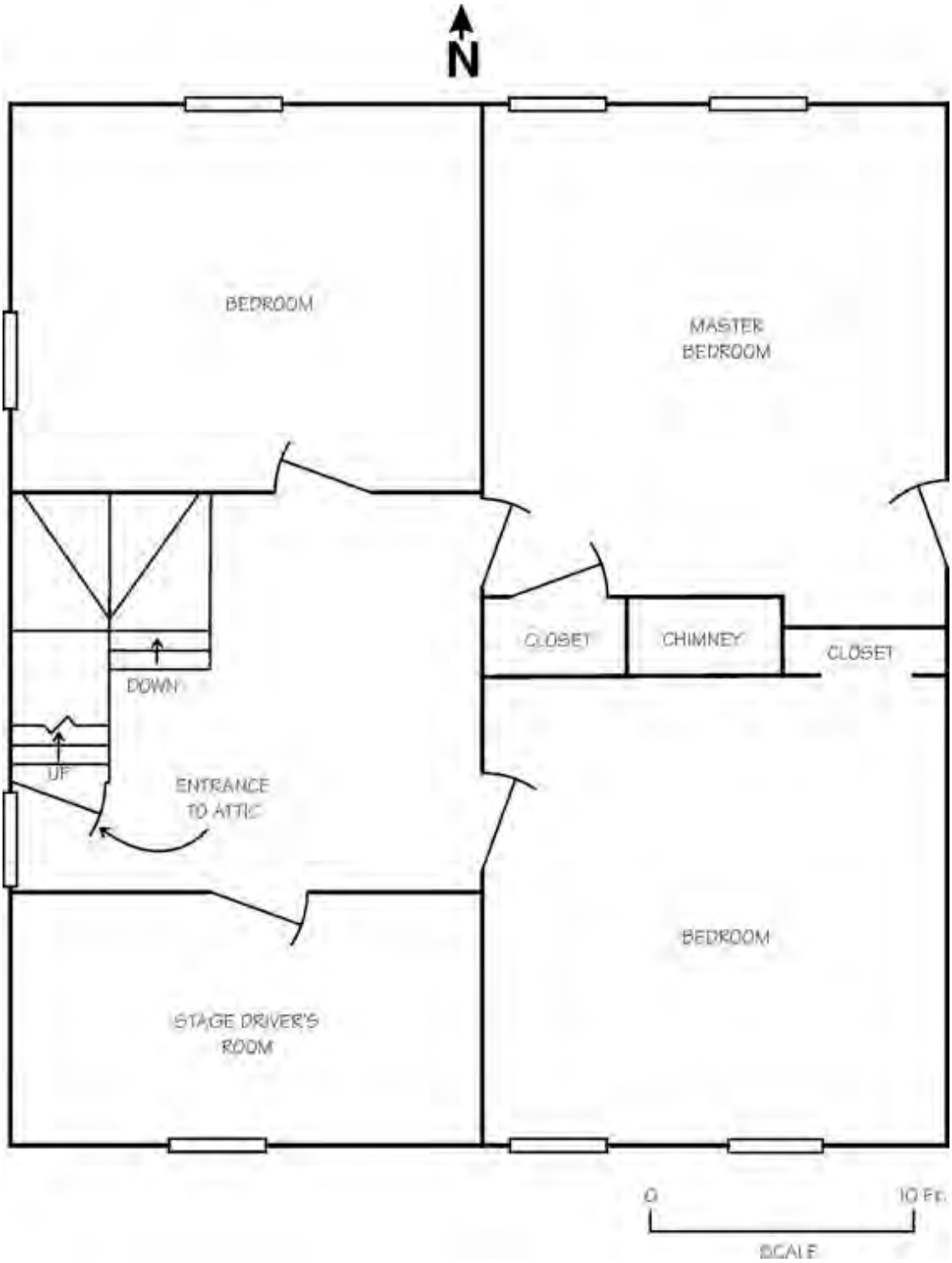


*Figure 9. Second floor plan of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn.*

*Figure 10. Top. View of western and southern sides of the inn. Note fan gable windows and central chimney. Bottom. View of eastern and southern sides of the inn. Note double-hung gable windows. Photo 1992 by author.*

*Figure 11. Top. The northern and western sides of the inn. Bottom. The northern and eastern sides with later porch addition. Photos 1992 by author.*

*Figure 12. The nonextant 1839 tavern/inn located at angle west of house. Top. View looking north. Bottom. The western and southern sides of same (see Figure 15:top). Photos 1992 by author.*

*Figure 13. Top. View of lean-to or salt-box roof line on northern side of 1839 inn/tavern. The northwest corner was the reputed location of 1836 to 1838 surveyor's shack. The open part to the left in the picture was where the horses were kept. Bottom. Detail of recess paneled door, cypress siding, whip-sawn and hewn over-full-dimension studs, and soft-paste brick nogging. Photos 1992 by author.*

*Figure 14. Top. Interior view of north wall of the nonextant 1839 stage inn/tavern. Bottom. Detail of tavern's hewn and whip-sawn framing with nogging removed. Photos 1992 by author.*

*Figure 15. Top. View down entry lane towards south façade. Bottom. Aerial view of Beers and St. John Coach Inn showing orientation of building and general site layout. Photos 1992 and 2006 by author.*

*Figure 16. Top. Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn looking northwards from entry of off Iowa 6. Note long curving lane. Bottom. Closer view of same. Photos 1996 by author.*

*Figure 17. Top. View of the western side. Note fixed half-fan windows flanking double-hung central light. Bottom. Formal entry with Classical entablature with transom and side lights framing a multi-paneled door. Note bases to columns along with simple caps supporting flat entablature. Photos 1992 by author.*

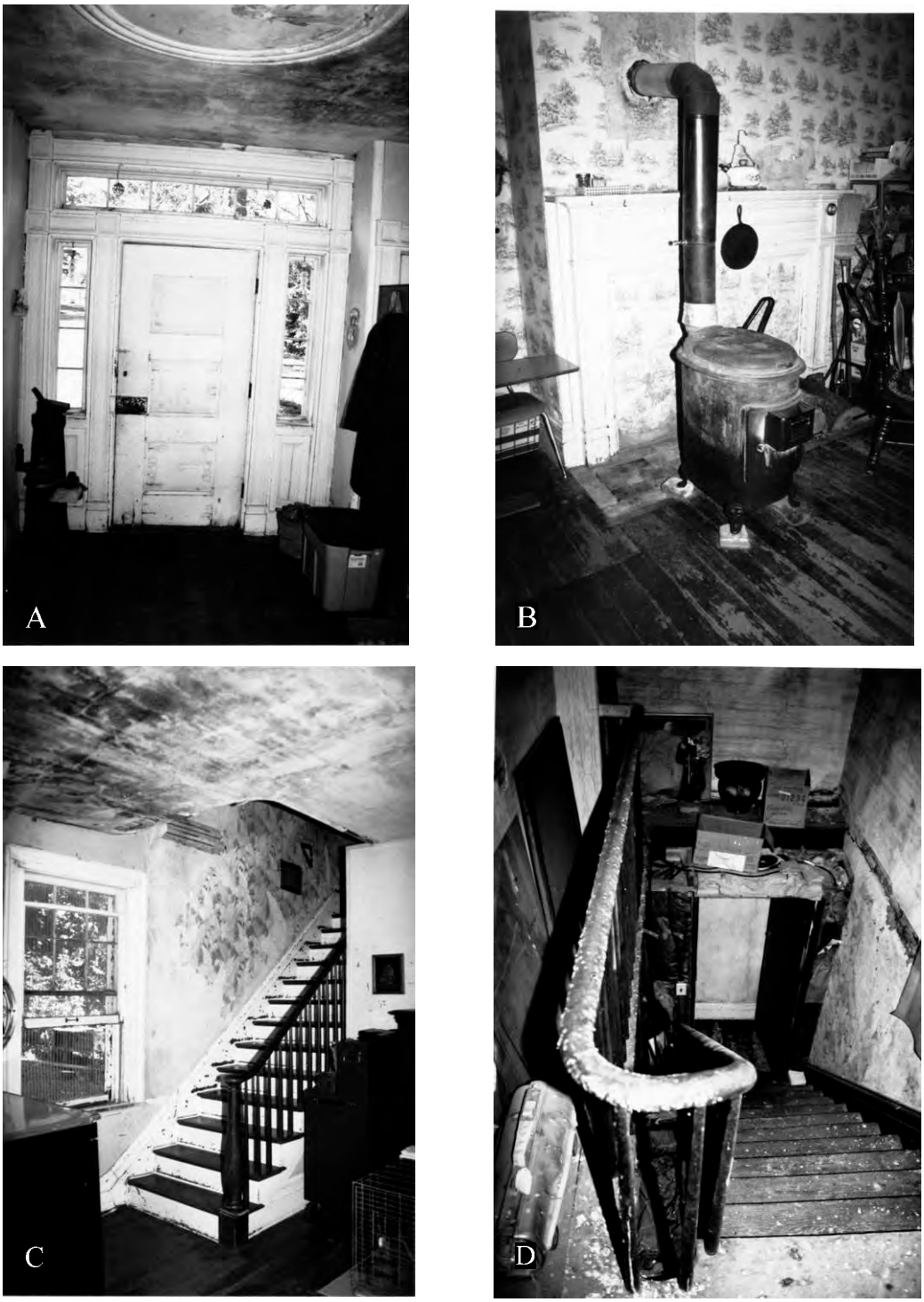


*Figure 18. A. Interior view of Classical-style entryway. Note ceiling medallion. B. Fireplace and flooring. C. Federal-style cherry staircase. D. Stairs to third floor. Photos 1992 by author.*

*Figure 19. A. Massive foundation stones and hewn timber floor joists. B. View of corbelled arch in brick chimney base. C. View of third floor framing and ladder to former cupola loft. Photos 1992 by author.*

*Figure 20. A. View of front entry looking southwest. B. Detail of paneling beneath first floor windows. C. Interior of bedroom. D. View of bedroom fireplace, millwork, and adjoin closet. Photos by owners 12/29/2014.*

*Figure 21. A. Detail of bedroom floor hearth, fireplace surround, and millwork. B. Detail of first floor fireplace surround. C. Second floor stair hall. D. Detail of stair rail to third floor. E. Detail of first floor window and millwork. Detail of second floor stair hall. Photos by owners 12/29/2014.*

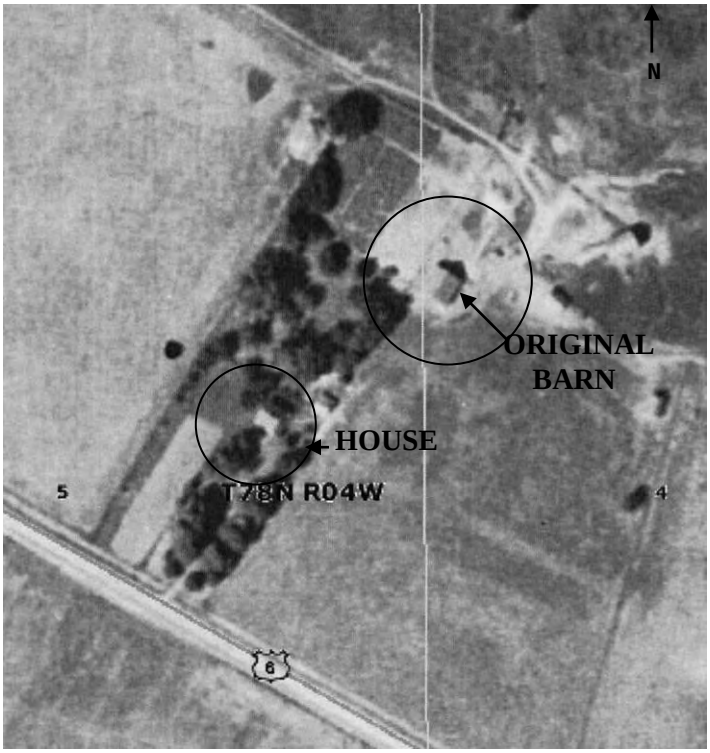


*Figure 22. Top. A 1990s aerial view of farmstead (GISU 2007a). Bottom. A 1930s aerial view showing full farmstead with original barn and outbuildings (GISU 2007b). Note location of original barn.*

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1917 View of the Beers and St. John Coach Inn near West Liberty, Iowa. Photo and note by R. J. Preston. From the Preston-Irish Collection. Collection on file, State Historical Society of Iowa Library, Iowa City, Iowa.

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# 10. Locational Information

## Boundary Description

Current Deed Taken from Abstract of Title: Commencing at a point 572 feet West and 1247.8 feet South of the East Quarter corner of Section 5, in Township 78 North, of Range 4 West of the 5th Principal Meridian, situated in Muscatine County, Iowa; thence South 354.2 feet to center line of Highway; thence South 59° 02 ½" East 509.8 feet along centerline of Highway; thence North 616.3 feet; thence West 437.3 feet to point of beginning. The North line of the NW½ of the SW½ of Section 4, Township 78 North of Range 4 West of the 5th Principal Meridian is assumed to run due East and West. Tract is subject to existing road and contains 4.48 acres exclusive of road.

## District Boundary Justification

The present site of the Beers and St. John Coach Inn has been has been reduced over the years as parcels of the original farmstead and accompanying land holding has been reduced. A large part of the original farmstead lay north of the site's current boundary line and contained a large timber frame barn, 10' diameter brick lined well, and other outbuildings. This part of the farmstead was sold off in the 1930s and the outbuildings removed.

The site's current boundaries, as noted in the Legal Description above, are contained within the extant fence line around the property (Figure 1). The eastern, northern, and western boundaries are oriented to the cardinal directions. The property's southern boundary is set by the diagonally running U.S. 6, which overlies the original stage road that ran past the site.

These four corners of the property define the site and have the following UTM coordinates. These are:

1. SW corner: Zone 15, E639191, N4605164
2. NW corner: Zone 15, E639191, N4605262
3. NE corner: Zone 15, E639328, N4605262
4. SE corner: Zone 15, E639328, E4605085

## Archeological Significance

Future research may reveal potential archaeological significance. In this respect the six graves in the yard are notable as well as the locations of the 1839 inn/tavern, the old forge, and the two wells shown Figure 1. The areas on the southern and eastern sides of the house had especially heavy activity. In addition, the garden area in the rear yard is full of cultural materials from the old forge as well as various small outbuildings, privies, and refuse areas. Prehistoric and early historic cultural materials have been recovered by the owners from the western yard near the spring and in the surround fields. In total the entire property has a high potential for intact subsurface archaeological features

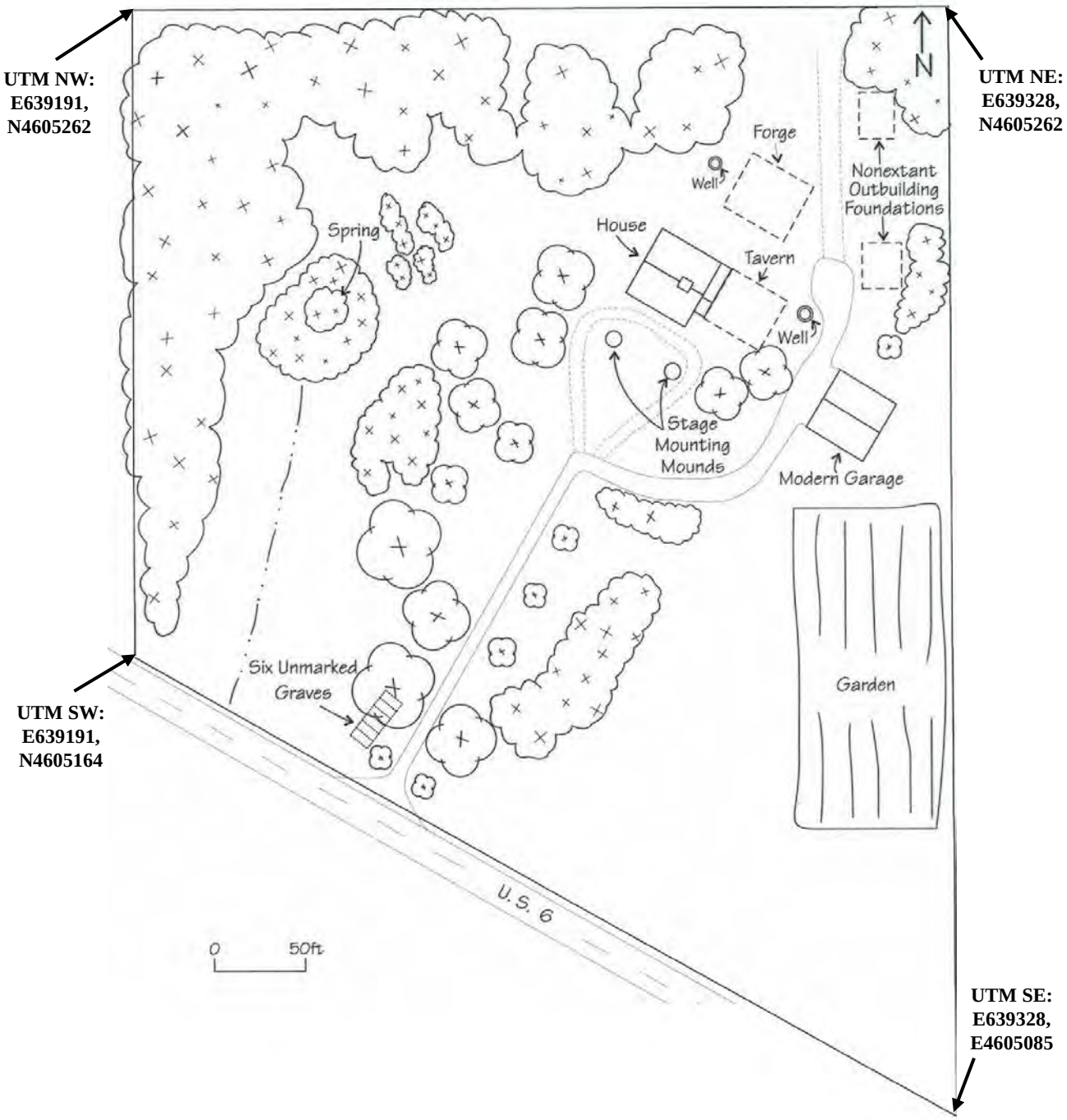


*Figure 1. Site plan of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn showing orientation of property with*

The Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn sits within a 4.48 acre parcel located within the SE¼, SE¼, NE¼ of Section 5, Wapsinonoc Township (T78N-R4W), Muscatine County, Iowa. The property is situated three miles (4.83 km) west of the town of West Liberty along current Iowa 6 (Figure 1). The current site fence line boundaries are the site limits (see page 3).

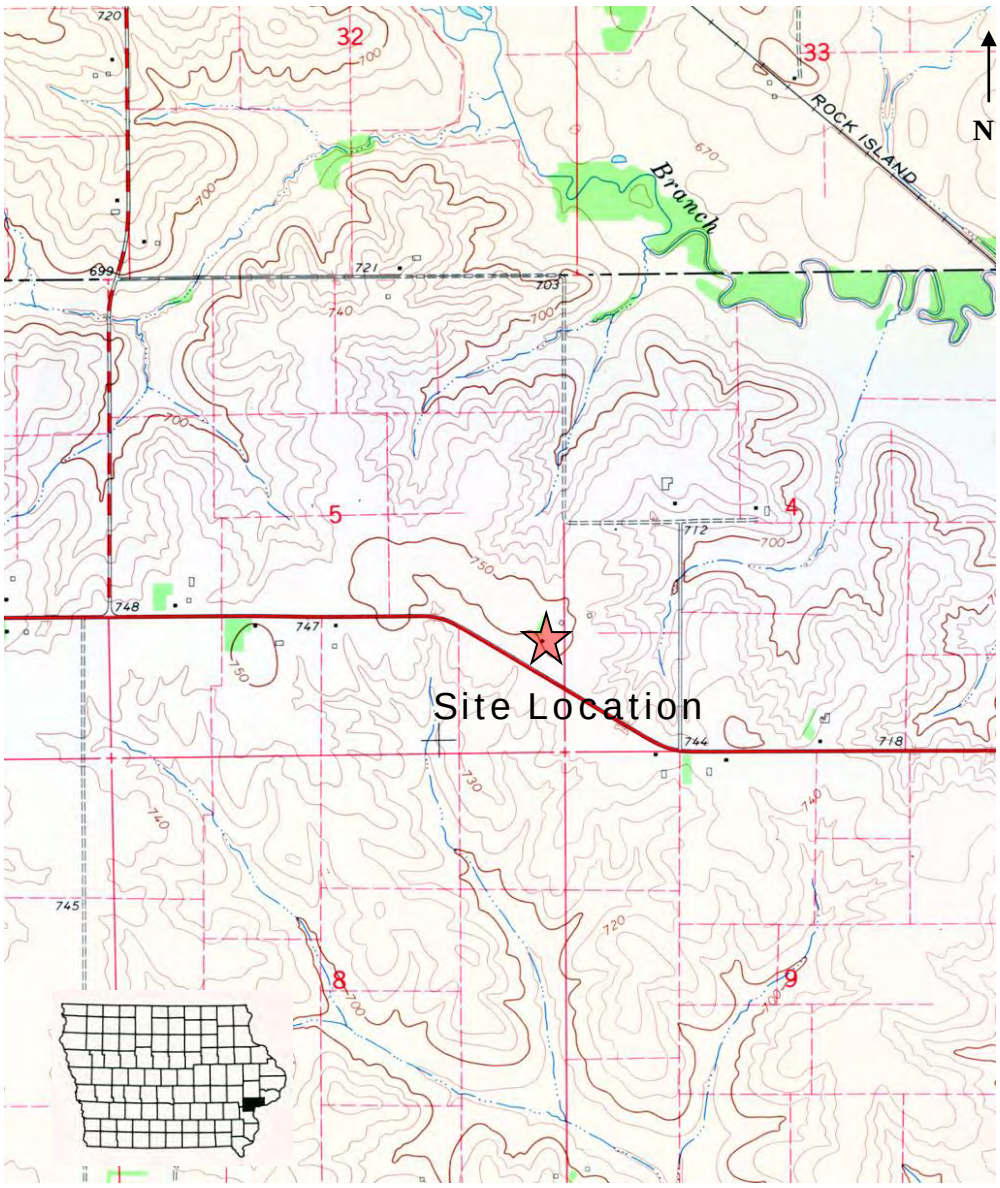


*Figure 23. Map showing location of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn in Section 5, Wapsinonoc Township (T78N-R4W), Muscatine County, Iowa (U.S.G.S. West Liberty 1965, 7.5' map). Scale 1:25,000. UTMs: Zone 15, E639,285.76, N4,605,219.76 (1983 NAO).*

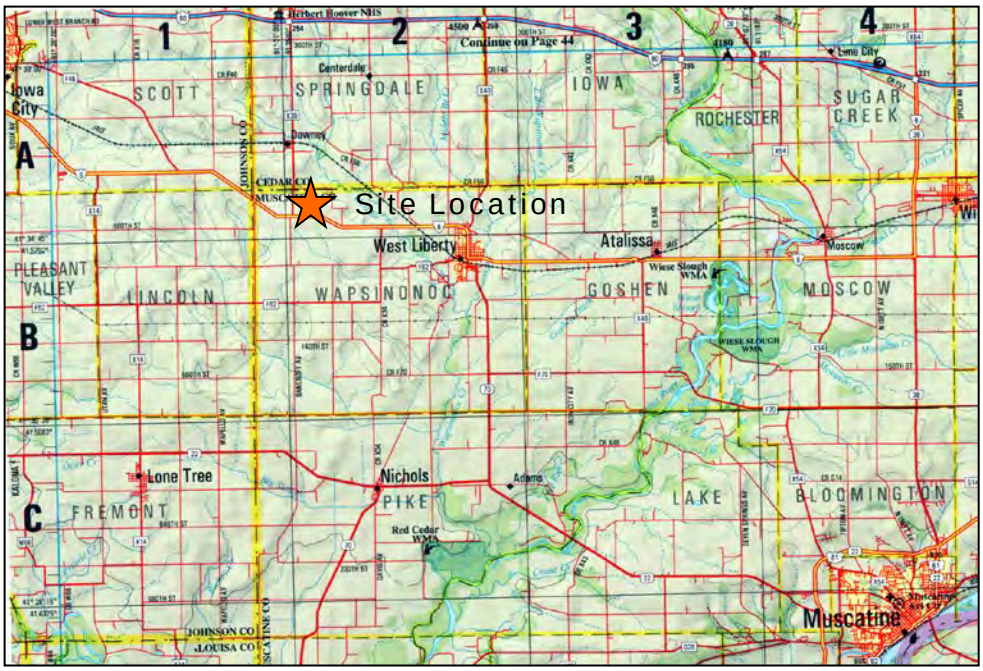


*Figure 24. Map showing location of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn in Section 5, Wapsinonoc Township (T78N-R4W), Muscatine County, Iowa (DeLorme 2004:54).*

## Legal Description

Current Deed Taken from Abstract of Title

Commencing at a point 572 feet West and 1247.8 feet South of the East Quarter corner of Section 5, in Township 78 North, of Range 4 West of the 5th Principal Meridian, situated in Muscatine County, Iowa; thence South 354.2 feet to center line of Highway; thence South 59° 02 ½" East 509.8 feet along centerline of Highway; thence North 616.3 feet; thence West 437.3 feet to point of beginning. The North line of the NW½ of the SW½ of Section 4, Township 78 North of Range 4 West of the 5th Principal Meridian is assumed to run due East and West. Tract is subject to existing road and contains 4.48 acres exclusive of road.

Original Patent Taken from Abstract of Title:

The East half of the south East Quarter of Section Five, Township Seventy-eight North, Range Four West of the 5th Principle Meridian, was entered by William St. John, Date may 20th, 1839, Certificate #312, Book of Original Entries, page 304. United States of America, by the President, John Tyler, By R. Tyler, Secretary—to William St John. Patent–Dated November 10th 1841–Filed February 8th, 1911–Recorded Book 2 of Special Forms, page 467. Grants: The East half of the south East Quarter of Section five in Township seventy-eight North of Range four West of the fifth Principal Meridian, in the District of Lands Subject to sale at Du Buque, Iowa Territory, containing eighty acres.

# APPENDIX

## Historical Overview

The significance of the role played by the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn to the emergence of Iowa's stage coaching lines on the statewide, regional, and local levels for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places is to be elucidated. On the statewide level the site's significance in regards to the statewide development of Iowa's first phase horse mail routes, stage coaching trails, comparison to other Iowa staging inns and hotels, and its role in Iowa's overall development and westward expansion related to stage coaching will be explored. Regionally, its role in city-to-city passenger routes, mail traffic, local settlement and development, western migration patterns, and other historical aspects and contexts are to be evaluated. Locally, the role the site played in local development, such as it influence on Muscatine and other local settlements, specific stage mail routes from Muscatine, to Iowa City, Davenport, and Des Moines, including the associated passenger communication and transportation routes are to be considered. The site also relates to communication, transportation, commerce, and settlement in Iowa.

To be evaluated are the effects from which evolved staging related resource types such as inns, hotels, and taverns for traveler's lodging and comfort; offices and stations for the staging enterprises relating to different types of staging building such as main station and swing stations. Lastly both team watering spots and road difficulties are discussed with a view towards local conditions during the period of significance. For the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn the period of significance relates to the First Period of Iowa's stage coaching evolution. Stage coaching in Iowa has connections to major historical trends. It also has connections to other surviving area, regional, and statewide resources that will be explored to establish and evaluate the historic contexts associated with the resource and also for an explanation of the historical significance of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn itself.

Supplemental research and investigation for this nomination includes oral histories with the landowner, local historians, and knowledgeable individuals. In addition, archival research included a review of available primary and secondary documents from published and unpublished sources. Information such as the congressional stage routes, the stage agent's land patents, owner's abstract of title, land grantee/grantor record holdings at the Muscatine County Court House, photos and files found at the Iowa State Historical Library in Iowa City, personal records of the owners, and other relevant books and newspaper articles were reviewed for this nomination. Historical photographs from archival sources were used to complement historical dialog within the nomination.

### *Introduction*

By the 1830s the western side of the Mississippi had been a busy place for decades already as French and Spanish possessions. Prior to 1832 the eastern part of Iowa along the Mississippi was not open to settlement as it was Indian lands ceded to the Sauk and Meskwaki tribes. The only exception to this was the Half-Breed Tract, ceded in 1824, which consisted only of southern Keokuk County, the southeastern most county in Iowa. With the First Blackhawk Cession in 1832, eastern Iowa was opened for settlement as part of Michigan. It was the Iowa District of the Wisconsin Territory from 1836 to 1838 and the Iowa Territory from 1838 to 1847. This area included what was to become Muscatine County with the formative river town of Bloomington that was platted in 1842. An earlier fur trade post and frontier

community next to the Native American reserve (Keokuk's Village) was onsite until 1836. In 1848 the city of Bloomington was renamed Muscatine due to a postal confusion with Bloomington, Illinois.

During the early 1830s an exodus of settlers from the east had begun to stream across the Mississippi from Illinois where they had eagerly been waiting. During this same period the capital of the Iowa Territory was located in Burlington, Iowa, which is south of Muscatine. Politically the new Iowa Territory was still rather rough in both its early headquarters and in its organization. During the early 1830s a force of United States Dragoons, based at forts around the state, maintained the peace. The earliest official roads in the state were military roads. Communication was hampered by the lack of roads and part of the first legislature's job was to develop a transportation system but even these small efforts were confined to the eastern-most part of the state.

With the Second Blackhawk Cession of 1837 the location of a new territorial capital in the recently acquired Indian Land was proposed. So it was that a committee was chosen to select a spot for the new capital in the newly organized Johnson County. Meeting in 1839 at Gilbert's trading post in Napoleon on the Iowa River, they proceeded northward a few miles until encountering a natural amphitheater with high bluffs and limestone outcroppings. This was chosen as the future site of the proposed new capital location to be named Iowa City. With the approval of the location for the new capital, the formative town of Iowa City grew up around the chosen site. From this time until 1853, when the capital of Iowa was moved to Des Moines to be both at the geographic center of the state and to follow the western movement of settlement, Iowa City was the political and economic focus of the forces set to break and harness the Iowa landscape.

Concurrently, during the early 1830s the formative city of Muscatine became an important entry point to Iowa for settlers and goods. Although not as important as Dubuque, Davenport, or Burlington the proximity of Muscatine to the new territorial capital prompted many ferries across the Mississippi to locate there. In fact, the location of the ferries to Muscatine was in part chosen simply because the bend of the Mississippi on which it was located was the closest point to Iowa City. Clearly the connections between the two cities were very close and mail routes to the new capital were an imperative.

According to one author the road between Muscatine and Iowa City originally was an Indian trail (Kirkpatrick 1975:24). In all probability a road between the river side trading post and Meskwaki village in Muscatine on the Mississippi and Gilbert's trading post at Napoleon on the Iowa River was already long in use. Early foot and horse traffic between Muscatine and Iowa City eventually widened the Indian footpath. When the stage lines were beginning in Iowa in the early 1830s they operated under the most primitive of conditions.

In the mid to late 1830s stage coach operators, especially from Illinois, were already organizing stage companies in Iowa. With the survey of Muscatine County approved in 1838 and Johnson County in 1839 the Muscatine to Iowa City Road was destined to become an artery both to the new state capital and to points westward from the Mississippi River. Between 1836 and 1860 Muscatine was also a major shipping point for lumber and grain. In addition, large millwork factories were established there early on. After crossing the Mississippi to Muscatine, or through one of the other eastern Iowa gateway cities, people would often stop in Iowa City in order to visit the land office after it was moved there in 1839 from Burlington, Iowa's first territorial capital.

*Muscatine County Early Settlement*

Muscatine County was named for the Muscoutin Indians, which are thought to have occupied an island just south of the original city. It may also be derived from a Meskwaki term meaning "prairie" (Vogel

1982:152). Muscatine County is located in the southeastern part of Iowa along the Mississippi River. It was created under the government control of the Michigan Territory in 1832, from Des Moines County, Iowa Territory. At that time Iowa contained only two counties. Des Moines was to the south and Dubuque was to the north. With its division into a separate county the seat was then located along the Mississippi river in the nascent river side community of Bloomington. The villages and formative cities of Muscatine and Johnson counties had important connections with New England, New York, Illinois, and Ohio Quakers who were also stage operators and businessmen.

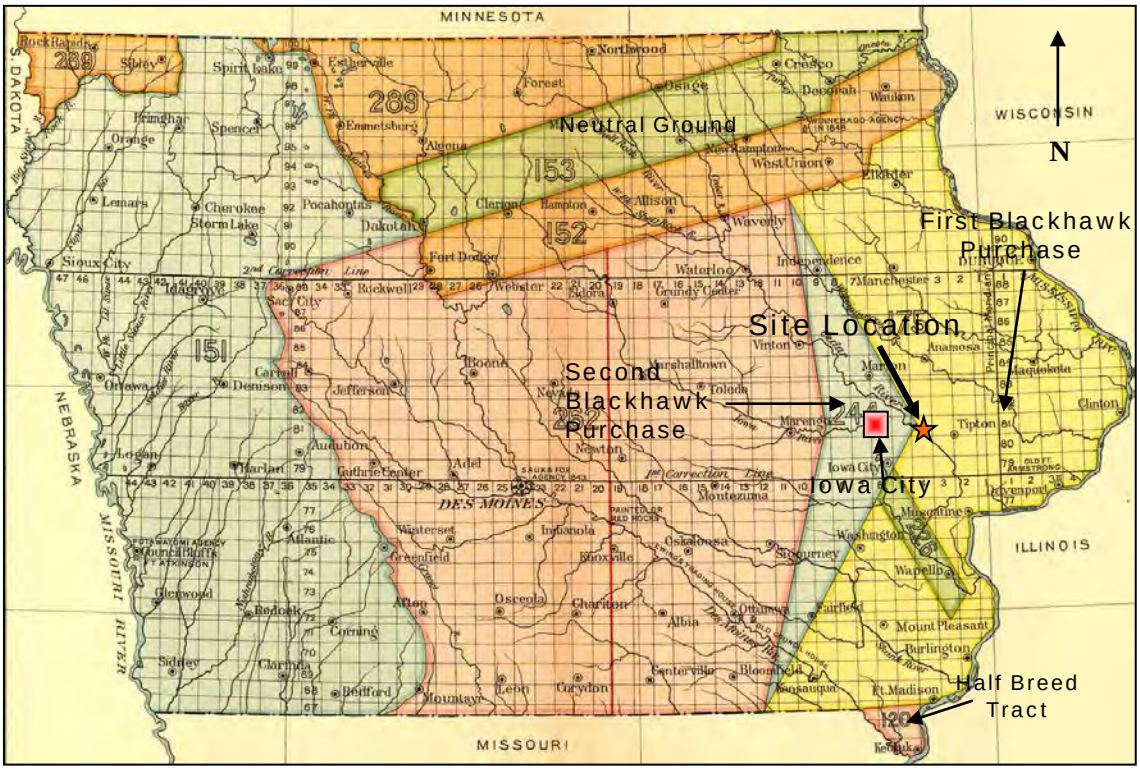


*Figure 25. Iowa in 1838 showing First and Second Blackhawk Purchases (1832–1838), the 1818 Neutral Zone to the north, and the 1824 Half-Breed Tract (Royce 1898:plate 131).*

*Regional Settlement.* Three cities were critical to the founding of the site and its overall staging history. Of these two are on the Mississippi and the other was inland. On the Mississippi were Davenport and Muscatine (formerly Bloomington). Both were within the First Blackhawk Purchase of 1832 (Figure 25). Davenport was already a major city on the northern Mississippi in the 1830s after having been established across from the military post Ft. Armstrong (1820s) on Rock Island, Illinois. Davenport's location across from old Ft. Armstrong and Rock Island gave it earlier roots than Muscatine. Both Davenport and Muscatine were important ports of entry in Iowa for the immigrants coming from the east looking for new lands and opportunity. The inland city was Iowa City, surveyed in 1839 as the part of the Second Blackhawk Purchase of 1836 and the second territorial capital of Iowa after Burlington. Also historically connected was Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, which had had a long association with the area

during the French Colonial era, and as a Spanish possession, until the Louisiana Purchase. It had important early Fur Trade history. Galena, Rock Island, and Nauvoo, Illinois were important respectively for their lead mining, military fort, and as one of the largest and most prosperous cities in western Illinois at the time. St. Louis had also been long engaged with Dubuque and Prairie du Chien since the late 1700s. A number of the area's earliest roads or trails connected these early eastern Iowa trading cities.

*Local Settlement*. The "Blackhawk Purchase" of 1837 made by treaty with the Sauk and Meskwaki had included the territory of what became Muscatine County. The western edge of the "Blackhawk Purchase" line was just to its north and the triangle-shaped purchase's apex was at Iowa City (Figure 25). Every thing west of that line was Indian lands—the frontier. In a pattern well established to the east cabins, clearings, settlements, and villages sprang up overnight and all at once American frontier life was in full flower in the long anticipated lands on the western banks of the Mississippi. With river navigation by steamers and keel boats and ferries connecting to Illinois an increasing tide of settlers into Muscatine County quickly boomed.

The Euro-American settlement of the area was begun during a period of some financial depression as the monetary crash of 1837 was still being felt (Donnel 1978:24). The very first improvements were necessarily very limited. Half-faced claim cabins, soddies, dugouts, and rough houses were quickly built but the quick and easy access to lumber and clay quickly altered their construction to frame, brick, and stone. In Muscatine County the country frontier house lasted only a few years. Differing from the more western settlement of the state where immigrants were mostly very poor and lumber and other necessities were in short supply the settlement of Muscatine had the access of the Mississippi as a port, natural stands of timber, good clay and stone deposits, and a huge influx of eager settlers and businessmen with cash. Overseeing it all was a rather wealthy class of Eastern investors. Egbert T. Smith, William St. John, and Robert Stewart were of this group. In many ways they were members of an elite social class. All three were involved in the location, purchase, and operation of the inn or stage lines. In many ways they were members of the elite and so were their tastes, which were of the more advanced or selective nature, and which reflected in their stage line and hotel operations.

Families coming to Muscatine County often traveled mostly in companies and settled in diffuse neighborhoods which were usually designated by the name of some leading member, or from their original locality. Local villages of importance to the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn evolving during this period were West Liberty, Springdale, West Branch, and Atalissa (formerly Overman's Ferry). The first three started as predominately Quaker communities. A fourth nearby village was Carthage. Now nonextant it had a post office from around 1855 to 1865 and was located near the Muscatine/Johnson/Cedar County line on the old West Branch Road.

Many of Muscatine County's settlers were from eastern states with a great many from Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania. These settlers tended to preserve timber tracts after clearing farms. The woodlands were regarded as the most important element of the farm and were considered indispensable, so there was less widespread cutting of inland forests as had occurred in other more southern Iowa counties (Ingalls 1998:3–4; Union Historical 1881:259). Timber stands were extensive in Muscatine County. Stands of black walnut were the most common quality trees. Even the reduced groves depicted in the Andreas Atlas map of Muscatine County (1875) are still of considerable extent (Andreas 1970:65). Besides the points where timber along the Mississippi River widened to four or five miles, small detached groves were also attractive settlement sites and the timber framing of the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn came from one of these detached local groves (Figure 26).

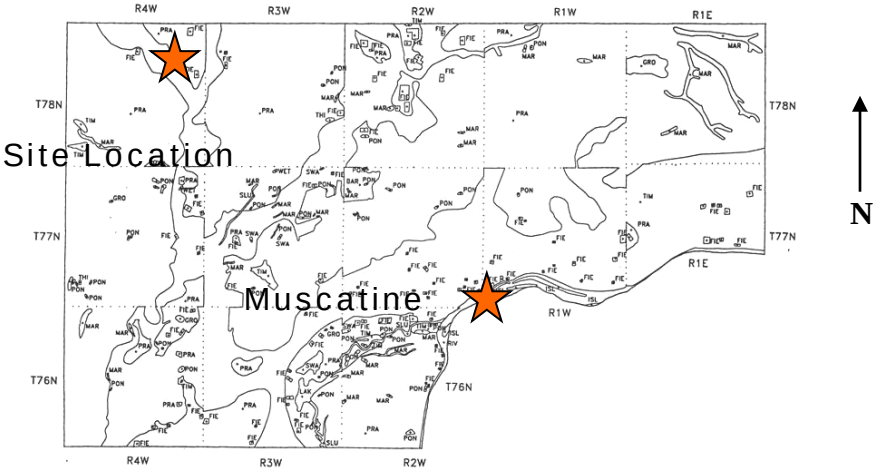


*Figure 26. Map of Muscatine County vegetation in 1837. Note hardwood timber adjacent to site location along Wapsinonoc Creek in the northwestern corner of the county (T78N-R4W) (Anderson 1996).*

*Wapsinonoc Township*. Settlement quickly pushed westward through Wapsinonoc Township (Figure 25) connecting with first Gilbert's Trading Post near Napoleon in the future Johnson County by 1836, and into Iowa City by 1839. It took nine acres to meet one's own need for corn in a year. Early subsistence crops were dug out of a few acres wrested from the prairie and planted in sod corn, potatoes, and turnips. Egbert T. Smith needed to provide provisions for countless guests, travelers, and fodder for livestock.

Asa Gregg was a pioneer of the township in 1837. He was a native of Belmont County, Ohio, born 1806. In 1837 he located in Wapsinonoc Township, where he bought a claim. He had one of the first mail route contracts in 1838 (see Congressional Mail Contracts below). He also had the first school in the township on his claim in a frame building. He provides the reminiscences below concerning the early settlement of the township.

> This was called the Wapsinonoc settlement, that being the Indian name of the stream. The first settlement was made in the fall of 1836, and during the winter following several families came in. In the spring of 1837 there was quite immigration into Iowa, or, as it was then called, the Black Hawk Purchase. At this early date the settlement had neither roads nor bridges. Provisions were brought from Illinois or by the rifle.
>
> At the time last mentioned the land was not surveyed into sections, but during that season the government surveyors came along and sectionized it, and their trails on the section lines on the prairie were plainly visible until after the land sale in the fall of 1838. At that time Wapsinonoc Township consisted of all Muscatine County that lay west of the Cedar River (Richman 1911:222).

Large stands of hardwoods were located along the drainages (Figure 26). Good timber is shown stretching along the Wapsinonoc Creek drainage through Sections 4 and 5. This was the source for much of the framing material for the tavern and inn. Hewn oak lumber was rafted to Muscatine by the early 1840s (Bloomington Herald 1842a:3). The township has rather high flat divides between the drainages and the early homesteads and fields are shown along the prairie-timber margins atop the divides. These site locations followed a general settlement pattern across the region at the time. A perched watertable provided springs at locations atop these ridges and an important one was located on the Egbert T. Smith property that still runs today. The roads and trails ran atop these ridges and stock watered at the springs.

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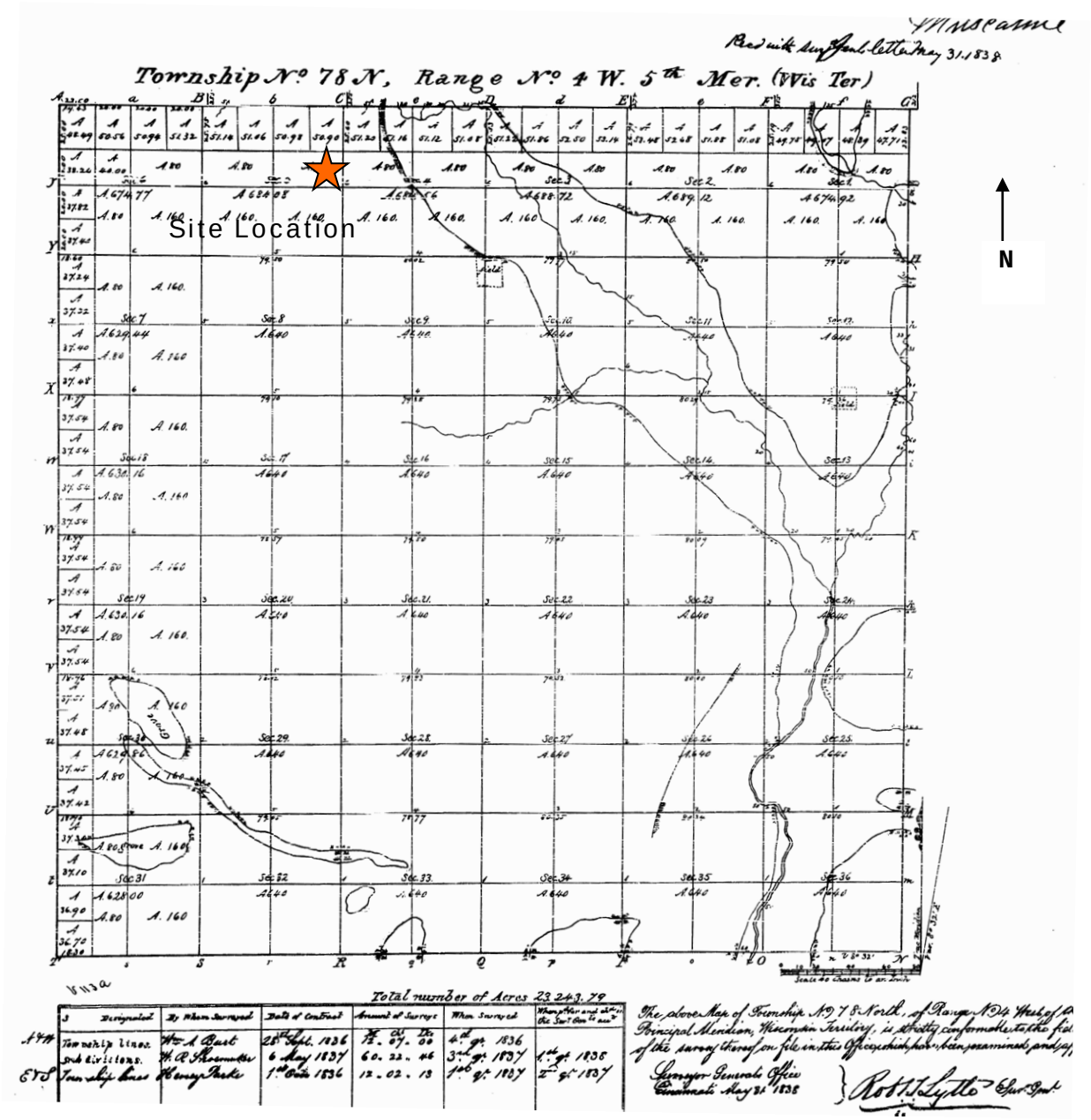


*Figure 27. The 1838 plat of Wapsinonoc Township (T78N-R4W), Muscatine County, Wisconsin Territory. Recorded and approved in Cincinnati, Ohio. The 1839 tavern was being sited next to the 1836 surveyor's (1836–1838) shack in the SE¼, SE¼, NE¼ of Section 5 at this time (General Land Office 1838).*

*West Liberty*. The original town of West Liberty was located a little northwest of the present downtown area. It was laid out in 1838. A post office was established at that same time (Patera and Gallager 1986:137). A few years later a new town was laid out and surveyed early in 1856. A number of houses, also the post office and store building were moved to the new town plat. The town was incorporated in 1868. There was a Society of Friends in West Liberty. They held services in 1858 but did not organize until 1860 (Western Historical 1879:228).

*Post Offices*. The establishment of post-offices was essential to the stage coach traffic as the mail traffic subsidized the routes. The Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn was planned for the Iowa City–Muscatine Route. Its location was partly chosen to meet both the first mail contracts or horse mail and the Congressional Mail Contracts for stage mail were bid upon in 1841 and awarded in September of 1842. Bloomington established its post office in 1837 but it was discontinued in 1849 when it was changed to Muscatine. Both Moscow (1837) and West Liberty (1838) received post offices at early dates. Overman's Ferry's office lasted from 1844 to 1856 and was formerly called Poweshiek. Carthage had a post office from 1853 to 1865. Iowa City, as the new capital, was the reason for the route, was established in Nov. of 1839. It had briefly been at Gilbert's Trading Post in Napoleon, just south of Iowa City. It lasted from March 2, 1839 to November 13, 1839 when it was discontinued and moved to Iowa City (Patera and Gallager 1989:101). The first mail route to Johnson County was to Napoleon. Egbert T. Smith had interaction with John Gilbert who ran the trading post. Nearby post offices that were established after the territorial period include Atalissa (formerly Overman's Ferry) in 1856. To the north in Cedar County, West Branch was established in 1854 and Springdale in 1857. Springdale was a very early town on the Cedar River (Patera and Gallager 1986:136, 227, 222, 219).

## The Stage Coaching Movement in Iowa

### *Introduction*

For the purposes of this nomination the stage coaching era in Iowa can be divided into three periods. The first period, from prior to 1838 to 1845, involves the expansion of eastern mail contractors, especially from Illinois and Ohio into Iowa (Figure 26) (Colton 1939, 1940, 1942, 1960a, 1960b; Beitz 1961; Kirkpatrick 1975). This was the era of the introduction of horse mail, small contractors, the introduction and expansion of routes into western Iowa, and the introduction of amendments of postal laws. The second period, from around 1845 to 1865 follows the brief expansion of horse-mail and federal postal contracts, consolidation and expulsion of small independent contractors or companies by large eastern organizations (Figures 25–29) such as the Western Stage Company, and the early advance of the railroad. The third period, from 1865 to post-1880 concerns the introduction and westward expansion of the railroads, the end of the domination of the Western Stage Company in 1870, and the introduction of freight and express companies.

### *Roads and Travel*

In the 1830s and 1840s, authority to build roads and bridges were vested in local and township authorities. These individuals oversaw the cost of construction and decided which of the many points needing it should be bridged. Such roads as there were followed Indian and game trails along rivers, upland ridges, and across vast prairies. The streams offered the most continuous hazards, and in the absence of bridges, stage drivers had to ferry, ford, or swim their horses across the water (Beitz 1961:21).

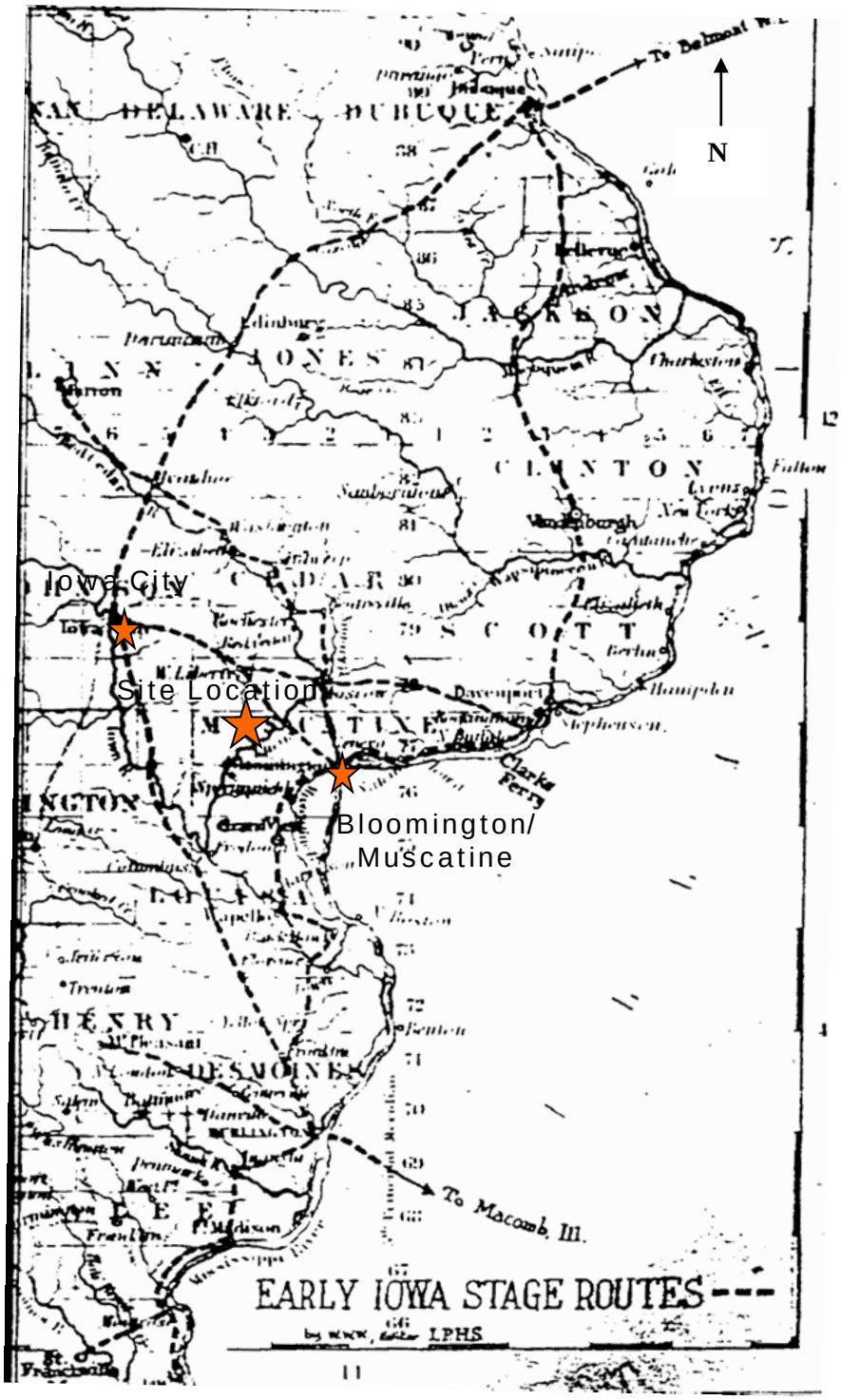


*Figure 28. Early Iowa Stage Routes in 1839 (Colton 1939:cover).*

Early roads in Iowa were either military roads or old trails along the rivers. Three early roads dominated eastern Iowa in the 1830 and 1840s. The river road along the Mississippi River based on early explorer's trails connected the riverside cities. The Agency Road was a military road that ran from Burlington, the first territorial capital to the Indian Agency near Ottumwa. The Old Military Road (a.k.a. Dillon's Furrow Road) was surveyed in 1839 to connect Dubuque with Iowa City, the new capital. It was soon extended to the Missouri border. Various Dragoon trails connected the military posts and forts and they became roads over time. The road from Muscatine to Iowa City was clearly built to connect the river to the new inland capital (Figure 28).

For the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn it was the Postmaster General who held the power to establish postal roads and the inn depended on the stage traffic resulting from these routes. He could establish or increase the service of mail to a given community, and certify the appointment of postmasters. This made his department one of the most potent in the federal government. Hundreds if not thousands of new communities were springing up and a post office was an important matter.

The building and feeding of the corruption afforded by such opportunities was not lost on ambitious men (Colton 1960:420). It was no accident that the custom developed within political parties to approving an active political head to the cabinet post of Postmaster General. Egbert T. Smith and William St. John clearly anticipated the postal contracts in Iowa when they situated the inn.

Difficult conditions prevailed throughout the days of the stage coach. They included frequent miring in the mud, holdups by bandits, Indian attacks, races through prairie fires, and such accidents as "upsets" and "turnovers". In an upset, "the coach fell and remained in one spot, though the passengers might be pitched head-long to the ground. In a "turnover" accident the coach kept on moving, rolling or bounding over a bank or a declivity" (Beitz 1961:21).

The following quotation gives a good idea of the optimistic opinions of travelers concerning eastern Iowa's early roads. To promote settlement the poor condition of roads was seldom discussed in the early days.

> The natural surface of the ground is the only road yet to be found in the Iowa district. And such is the nature of the soil that in dry weather we need no other. The country being so very open and free from mountains, artificial roads are little required. A few trees taken out of the way where the routes much traveled traverse the narrow woods and a few bridges thrown over the deeper creeks, is all the work necessary to give good roads in any direction...
>
> A post route has been established from St. Louis to Dubuque, passing up the west side of the Mississippi, and it is quite probable that by the 1st of September next, post coaches, drawn by four horses, will be running regularly through that route.
>
> It may appear to some unacquainted with the character of your western people and not apprised of the rapid growth of this county, that some of my description and predictions are fanciful, but if there be error in them, it is rather that the truth is not fully expressed than that it is transcended [Richman 1911:31].

While every section of the United States had special handicaps to travel in the first half of the nineteenth century, three common obstacles, shared by all, had to be overcome before a stage coach system could be extended; 1) bad roads; slow, uncomfortable, 2) poorly designed vehicles and, 3) a lack of a population which could support better roads and better staging (Colton 1940:175). Stage coaches first came to Iowa as a means of transporting a growing volume of mail, not to satisfy a need for public travel. In the late 1830s Iowa was not able to finance a system of public transportation by private means alone. Stage coach service was the result of a union of public demands, arising out of the settler's desire

for fast, dependable delivery of mail (Colton 1960a:162; Ingalls 1998:1).

The expansion of population over the Appalachians and the introduction of leather springs to "Concord" coaches in 1830 were major events which occurred before stage coaches could be brought to Iowa. Also, the steamboat delayed the introduction of the coach in the far west for public travel. The rivers were impediments to westward settlement. This was especially true of the Mississippi River as no public traffic bridges crossed it until after 1857. For a long time the rivers were almost the sole means of public travel and it was decidedly cheaper as well. In Iowa's and the west's early days greater importance was attached to river navigation problems than to roads. The southern and eastern parts of Iowa, closer to the more populated parts of Illinois and Missouri, derived greater benefits from traffic on the Mississippi than the northern part (Colton 1960a:157). The river towns became the hubs of prospective stage routes in order to capitalize on their commercial dominance of the territory (Colton 1960a:174). River town facilities would help attract immigrants and travelers. Business and trade followed development of better communication. By the time the first stage ran on regular schedules in Iowa in 1837, the coach was the accepted and expected mode of conveyance in the older communities in Illinois and Missouri (Colton 1940:176–179).

In 1837 the general condition of the roads in Illinois, Missouri, and most places in the East were comparable to those in Iowa. This is well indicated by the warning of the *Iowa News*, of Dubuque, which in December of that year, cautioned its readers not to attempt the stage journey from Galena to St. Louis "unless prepared to walk half the distance and carry a fence rail the rest of the way" (Colton1940:19). In addition, it must be remembered that muddy roads made slow traveling, and though travel time was not quite so important as it is today, even one-hundred fifty years ago the fourteen days required one spring to make the usual three day long stage journey from Keokuk to Ft. Des Moines (II) in 1849 must have seemed irritatingly slow (Colton 1940:181). Poor roads were not confined to Iowa. In 1868 the United States Commissioner of Agriculture declared that good roads "were the exception in all the States" (May 1965:65). It would be quite erroneous, however, to conceive that either getting stuck in the mud, or the grave danger of such a "fix", was the constant threat hanging over the heads of would-be stage passengers. Many trips were made without even the remotest threat of such a danger (Colton 1940:183).

## Stage Coaching in Iowa: 1836–1880

The settlers of Iowa were long familiar with the stage coach, having known or experienced it many years before they came to this territory. Some part of their journey, or most, was accomplished by stage. Considering the fact that stages made daily trips, sometimes in "sections" of the main routes, and customarily one to three times weekly over the lesser routes, the number of accidents, bogged coaches, and other incidents were not exceptionally large, considering the conditions the stage coaches were obliged to meet (Colton 1939:120). Stage travel was expensive–if one could get it. Since stage coach operation was a business enterprise and demanded a profit to maintain it, not every town and village in Iowa could support a stage service. Moreover, many a village that did enjoy this distinction did so solely because it was on the road between other and larger centers (Van Der Zee 1905:175–225; Colton 1940:192; Ingalls 1998:3).

The course of stage coach operation in Iowa was influenced by several conditions and events which affected its evolution. The first of these was that when Iowa was opened to settlement in the first third of the 19th century, it enjoyed the advantage of having neighboring states to the east and south that had already passed the raw frontier period. The very introduction and the later spread of stage systems in

Iowa owed much to the relatively easy access the settlers had to information and experience with stages in Illinois and Missouri (Figure 29). A result of having older settlements nearby when the territory was opened in 1833 was the pioneer period for much of Iowa was sharply abbreviated.

With the latest developments in manufactured good, services, and ideas available from communities across the Mississippi and south of the Des Moines River, true frontier life in Iowa was comparatively brief in duration. For the stage coach this meant that the period of time from the introduction of the first stage into Iowa to the successful operation of a fleet of Concord and Troy coaches was much shorter than would ordinarily have been the case in a frontier region. However, of greater general importance than having earlier established states on its eastern and southern borders, was the flood of developments and improvements in communication which reached Iowa while it was still in its early development stage. The introduction of the railroad was enmeshed within a whole social, cultural, agricultural, and political life of the state and the degree of its influence was undeniably great and hastened the transition from frontier settlement to a stable community (Colton 1939:3–5).

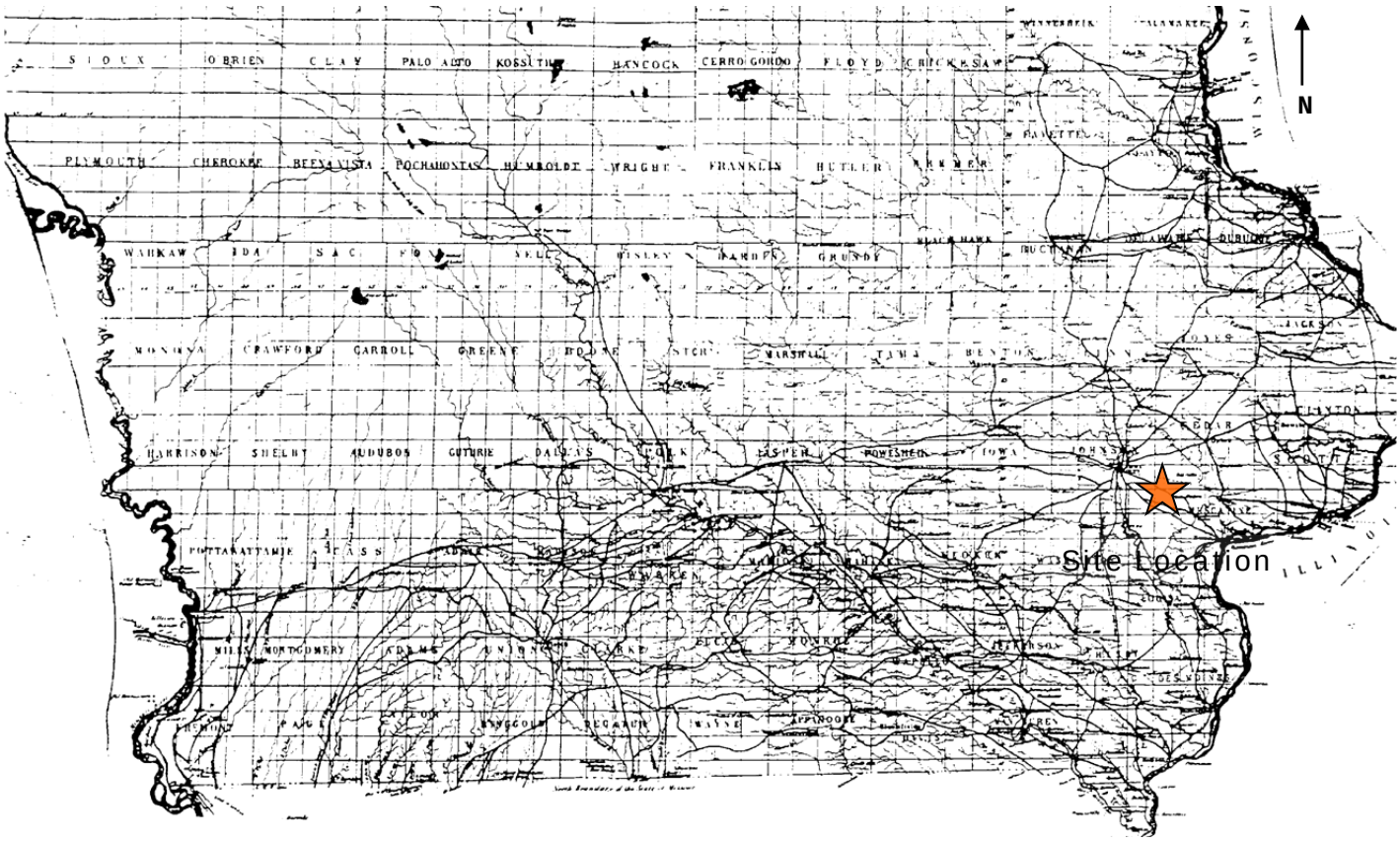


*Figure 29. Stage coach trails in Iowa 1851 (Henn and Williams 1851). As capital of the state and the location of the headquarters of the Western Stage Company, Iowa City sat at the center of a number of routes.*

*Chronology of Iowa Stage Coaching*

The chronology of stage coaching in Iowa is important the development of its contexts. According to Kenneth Colton staging operations in Iowa can be divided into three time periods (Table 2) (Colton 1939:185–186). The First Period runs from 1836 to 1845. This was the most formative period with the introduction of horse-mail routes in the beginning and then shifting to stage routes a couple years later. The first period routes run along the Mississippi River and connected the territory's far eastern cities (Figure 28). The Second Period ran from 1846 until 1863. This period saw intense competition for mail contracts, stage lines pushed west towards Ft. Des Moines (II), and daily routes were established (Figure 29). The Third Period lasted from 1864 until 1875 although staging operations in far northwestern Iowa persisted until after 1880. The shortness of the third period was a product of the arrival of the railroad in Iowa. After the initial east-west lines were built trunk, stub, and feeder lines began connecting even the smallest communities to the system. Figure 30 shows such lines in eastern Iowa and Iowa City's and Muscatine's connections to the larger system.

**Table 2**

**Three Time Periods in Iowa's Stage Coach Operations**

| | |
|---|---|
| **First Period** | |
| 1836 | First stage unsuccessfully operates out of Dubuque for a short time (Colton 1939:8). |
| 1837 | The first of four regular federal stage coach lines beginning in Burlington, the first territorial capital of Iowa, were initiated. The first regular trip took place when the Chicago-Galena (Illinois) route was extended to Dubuque, with the newly added coaches carrying mail to Iowa (Beitz 1961:23). The second was a once weekly route charted from Burlington to Gibson's Ferry, Ft. Madison, Ft. Des Moines (I) (Montrose) and on to St. Francisville, Missouri. Other routes radiated from Burlington. These included once weekly routes from Burlington to West Mount Pleasant and from Burlington to Davenport along the banks of the Mississippi; and a twice weekly coach from Burlington to Macomb, Illinois (Beitz 1961:23). |
| 1838 | Mail coaches joined the Dubuque and Galena post offices (Beitz 1961:24). Starting in 1838 federal horse-mail contracts began pushing the local contractors aside. By 1842 this trend had pushed the local contractor out and introduced large scale operators (Kirkpatrick 1975:18). |
| 1840 | The first line from Muscatine to Iowa City was operated by Frink and Walker running a two-horse coach (Colton 1960a:179; Beitz 1961:24). Beers and St. John also began staging operations between Muscatine (Bloomington) and Iowa City. |
| 1841 | William Wilson of Ft. Madison started the Wilson Lines of daily stages between Burlington and Keokuk (Beitz 1961:24). The southern part of Iowa continued to develop its stage coach services. Ft. Madison was connected with main stage lines in southern Illinois. A private non-subsidized daily stage coach service between Burlington and Keokuk was started (Colton 1960a:177). |
| 1842 | In this year there were 12 stage routes and 15 proprietors in Iowa. Only six of 12 operated only between Iowa towns. The Dubuque to Davenport line was first won by Frink and Company (Colton 1960b:402). By 1846 large scale promoters such as Frink and Walker operated stages from Ft. Des Moines (II) and Oskaloosa to the west (Kirkpatrick 1975:15). |
| 1845 | The year 1845 marks the end of the first period of Iowa's stage coach development with the amendment of the postal laws in 1845. New postal laws adopted in that year had an important effect upon stage coach development in Iowa. The Post Office Department was henceforth required to award all mail contracts to the lowest reasonable bidders. A Dubuque to Iowa City line was started using a two-horse hack (Beitz 1961:24). |

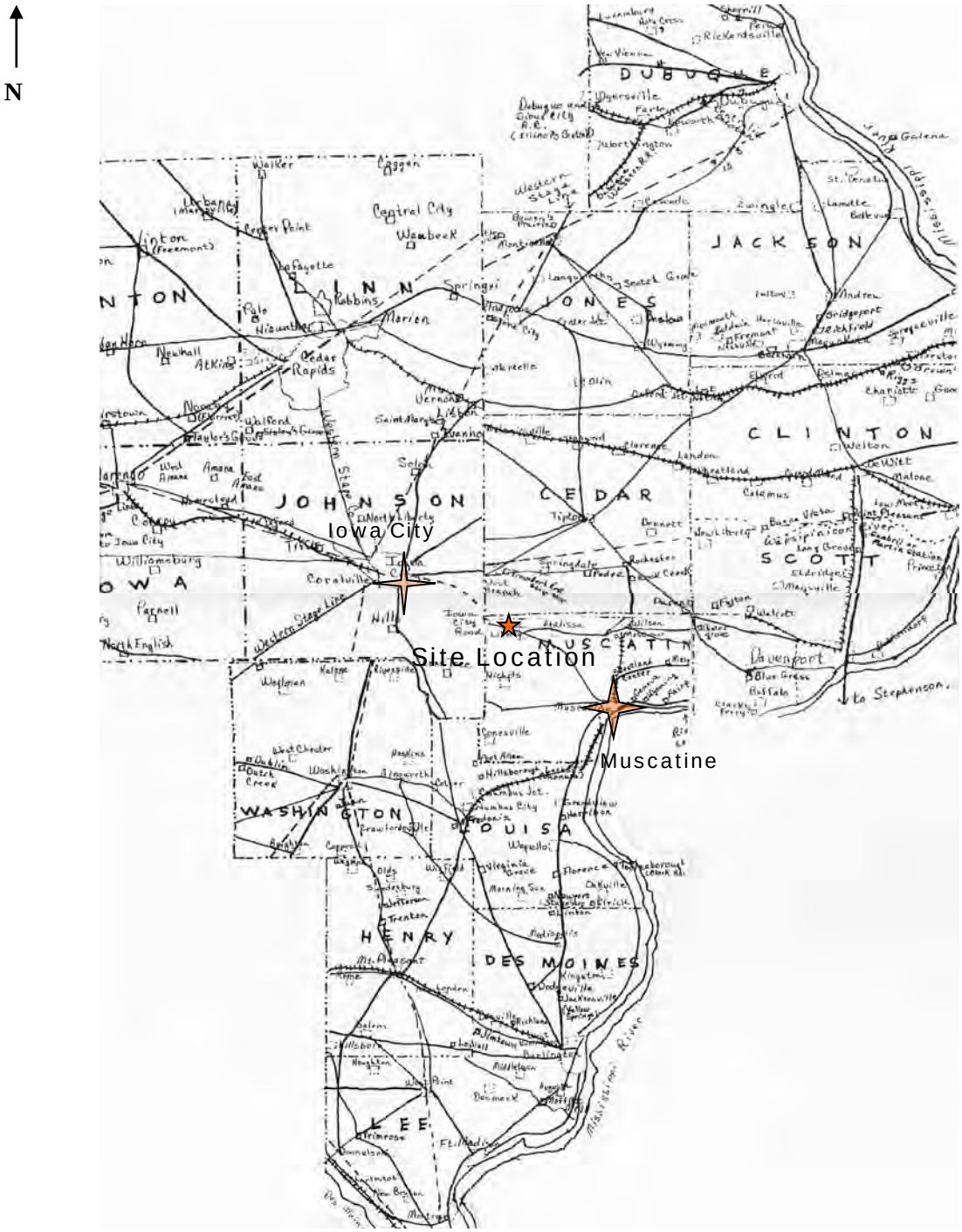


*Figure 30. Map of staging routes to Iowa City and eastern Iowa (1838–1880) (Kirkpatrick 1979).*

**Second Period**

1846 John Frink of Frink, Walker and Company, and Robert Stewart, a Burlington livery stable proprietor, began operating competing lines from Burlington to Keokuk, from Burlington to Fairfield, and from Bloomington (Muscatine) to Iowa City. Tri-weekly stages connected Ft. Des Moines (II) and Oskaloosa; there was semi-weekly service to Iowa City from Raccoon Forks (Des Moines) and also from that locality, a stage once a week to and from Kanesville (Council Bluffs) (Beitz 1961:24). In 1846 Frink and Walker has some four-horse coaches running on many eastern routes (Kirkpatrick 1976:7). Early companies of William Wilson and Beers and St. John lose monopolies (Colton 1960b:401).

1848 Strong competition between Frink and Stewart for Bloomington (Muscatine) to Iowa City route and other develops (Colton 1960b:404–405).

1849 The first stage coach arrived in Ft. Des Moines (II) on July 1, 1849. Tri-weekly Dubuque to Iowa City and Washington to Fairfield to Keokuk service (Colton 1960:405). Stewart operates tri-weekly stages between Ft. Des Moines (II) and Oskaloosa. Swearinton operates a route from (II) to Council Bluffs. Semi-weekly stages are run from Ft. Des Moines (II) to Iowa City. Tri-weekly stages were run from Ft. Des Moines (II) to Keokuk via Oskaloosa and Fairfield. Buying up or out-competing other operators Frink begins to dominate lines in the state (Colton 1960b:405–410).

1850 Frink dominates mail contract awards and controls nearly all routes but Stewart's line is still in operation (Colton 1960b:409). Daily services were provided between Keokuk and Fairfield, and Keokuk and Oskaloosa. Independent and local operators covered the territory between Dubuque and Muscatine through Andrews, Maquoketa, and Tipton: Dubuque, Anamosa, Marion, Cedar Rapid, and Iowa City; Iowa City to New London by way of Crawfordsville; and Muscatine to Tipton to Marion (Beitz 1961:25).

1851 A tri-weekly run using four-horse coaches was started between Ft. Des Moines (II) and Kanesville (Council Bluffs). A daily run was also initiated from Oskaloosa to Ft. Des Moines (II) (Beitz 1961:25). An 1851 map published by Thomas Copperthwait and Company, Philadelphia, intended to promote immigration to Iowa, gives the location of the State's roads and in general these roads were used by the stage lines (Henn and Williams 1851). In 1851 the stage lines were centered in southeast Iowa with only running from Ft. Des Mines (II) westward to Kanesville. Independent stage operators infilled many areas. Stages reached the transition point between mail and passenger service due to population growth. Frink continues to operate mail-stage while the people want stage-mail. Frink's lines are over extended and receiving hostile criticism. In response Frink replaces two-horse hacks with four-horse post coaches along river routes during winter and upgrades other routes. Burlington is connected to Macomb and Ft. Madison to La Harpe, Illinois. Stages from Dubuque, Davenport, Burlington, and Keokuk connect with Galena, Dixon, Peoria and Quincy, Illinois, respectively. The western St. Louis route is very important to Iowa connections (Colton 1960b:410–415).

1852 While the country north and west of Ft. Des Moines (II) was still sparsely settled, routes to the northeast were being enlarged. One ran through Anamosa and Cedar Rapids to Iowa City. Local livery stables furnished service between Dubuque, Guttenberg, Garnavillo, and Decorah (Beitz 1961:25). In January 1852, Ft. Des Moines (II) was still hoping for regular twice-a-week, two-horse hack service form Iowa City (Pratt 1967:602). Later in the year Frink and Company increased the Iowa City--Ft. Des Moines (II) line to a twice weekly each way along with the Iowa City to Davenport route (Colton 1960b:415–417).

1853 Northern Iowa routes are enlarged. Local livery men began running routes between Elkader and Dubuque, Guttenberg and Garnavillo, and to Decorah. Connections to Minneapolis and St. Paul from northern Iowa begin (Colton 1960b:423).

1854 First year of the new changes in the federal mail bid contracts. In this year the Western Stage Company bought out Frink and Walker ending the operations of the Frink and Walker Company (Beitz 1961:2). Its western headquarters were located at the Everett House in Ft. Des Moines (II), in July 1, 1854. A man named Smith was its first Ft. Des Moines (II) agent. A W. H. McChesney was the second owner and he died in 1858. The last owner of the Des Moines franchise was A. J. Johnson (Union Historical 1881:323). Increases in short line service continue. Frink begins losing

Illinois routes due to the advancement of railroad connections. Frink abandons all service by July in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri (Colton 1960b:423–429).

1855 First year of mail contract operations for 1854 bidders. This is a year of extensive expansion. The Ft. Dodge and Sioux City route was initiated. This was considered a dangerous trail where travelers could easily get lost or attacked by Indians. Alexander McCready plowed a furrow from Sioux City to Ft. Dodge and back to mark the track. Later U.S. 20 was laid out over the same route. In the same year the Western Stage Company's line touched at Dubuque, Independence, and Ft. Dodge, where connections were made with stages from Ft. Des Moines (II) (Beitz 1961:26). During the fall of 1855, and the following winter, a steady stream of land-seekers and fortune-hunters flowed westward into Iowa. The tri-weekly stages of the Western Stage Company were constantly filled with passengers, and the hotels at points along the Missouri River, such as Council Bluffs, were overflowing with guests (Annals of Iowa 1872:137). Many main lines added multiple coaches (Colton 1960b:429). In addition, the Iowa legislature passed an act to build a road from Panora in Guthrie County through Carroll and Crawford Counties to Sergeant Bluff, and Congress was asked to authorize a weekly mail delivery over this route. The Legislature also passed an act establishing a state road from Cedar Falls through Ft. Dodge to the mouth of the Big Sioux River in Woodbury County, and state roads from Sergeant Bluff through Ashton, Monona County, to the Little Sioux River, in Harrison County, as well as from Homer in Webster County through Ida Grove to Sergeant Bluff (Beitz 1961:26).

1856 First express delivery to Ft. Des Moines (II) (Colton 1942:14). With the movement of the capital from Iowa City, Ft. Des Moines' (II) name is changed to Des Moines.

1858 The Western Stage Company linked Sioux City and Omaha and by 1858 a tri-weekly service was running between the two cities. Coaches from each reached the other on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, crossing the Missouri River on the ferry (Beitz 1961:26).

1859 Western Stage Company routes were expanded to run from Dubuque and Iowa City, Washington and Fairfield to Keokuk, and up the Des Moines River valley to Des Moines.

1861 The Civil War begins stalling advancement of railroads across Iowa. The U.S. Government paid the Western Stage Company four dollars per man to carry 101 soldiers from Des Moines to Council Bluffs. Other troops and equipment included the entire 23rd Iowa Infantry, conveyed from Des Moines to Iowa City in three days; also the 33rd, 39th, and parts of the 2nd, 6th, 19th, and 15th regiments (Beitz 1961:26). The Civil War was a period of large profits for Iowa's stage companies.

1863 In this year daily lines began to run to Iowa City, Tipton, and Cedar Rapids (Annals of Iowa 1864a:121).

**Third Period**

1864–1880 The demise of the Western Stage Company in 1871 ends the reign of the last large staging companies in Iowa. Staging continues in advance of the railroad. Eventually express companies take over most of the passenger traffic to areas the railroad did not reach. Small private freightage and staging companies service northwestern Iowa until the early 1880s (Annals of Iowa 1964a).

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The stage company had to be able to look forward to a steady predictable demand for its services. This meant that the problem of the extension of stage coach routes into Iowa was intertwined with the problems of population. For many years Iowa was unable to meet the necessary minimum conditions which would permit successful and profitable stage coach operation. Transportation services usually follow the population, not lead them. The stage in Iowa was both a follower and leader of the population. It was difficult for them in that most paying loads were going west, and not east to pay for the return trip. The stage could play the dual role only by large subsidies from the government in the form of mail contracts. Assured by this contract, a profit from the extra passengers and freight carried helped pay for expansion. The mail contract overcame the absence of a paying load in the return route. In Iowa the stage lines followed the mail routes very closely. Because of this the thinly settled areas were pushed further

west and constantly hastening the influx of settlers and farmers. Generally, the stage followed the population except in the flood periods of immigration in Iowa such as occurred in the 1850s. Then the number of emigrants made it possible to extract a profit from the passenger service (Colton 1939:6–7).

The post office in effect had the power to make or break a pioneer community and with the thousands in Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, and later Minnesota, the means for building and feeding a political machine was not lost (Colton 1939:11: Gallagher and Patera 1986:7; Ingalls 1998:3). In the early years charters for state roads were matters of special acts of the legislature and this gives some idea of the lines of travel. Politicians were not the only ones to benefit from mail, stage, and road contracts and charters (Colton 1960b:420). Speculators saw the potential in road charters as towns sprang up along proposed routes that had not yet been approved (Kirkpatrick 1975:1). Egbert T. Smith, as inn owner, and Beers and St. John's, as livery and stage operators, were speculating that they would get the 1842 mail contract between Muscatine and Iowa City along with other routes (see First Period above and Table 1).

The pattern found repeatedly in Iowa was first, the designation of a post road; then the introduction of mail service by horse; next, a gradually growing demand, which became more and more urgent and vocal, for a stage coach conveyance. And after communities obtained mail via stage their efforts were directed toward securing even more frequent schedules, from semi-to-tri-weekly and from tri-weekly to daily deliveries. The early horse mails were slow and could only carry small amounts. In addition, the developing needs of a community produced a clamor for change from the two-horse hack mail to the four-horse coach (Colton 1960a:161).

In *The Dubuque Visitor*, May 18, 1836, a Dubuque reporter related, "The variety of times in which the mail makes its trips is only equaled by the variety of means used in its conveyances. It comes on horseback, in wagons, big and little, in carriages, occasionally in stages, and not infrequently…by steamboat" (Colton 1939:15). It wasn't until 1841 that direct mail began a semi-weekly service to Fort Madison. However, contacts for the major eastern lines had to be made at Monmouth, Carthage, Macomb, or Rushville, Illinois (Colton 1939:38; 1960b:415). Before one pictures stage coaches operating between every town and village of any size in the territory, it should be noted that in 1842 and for years to come, only a fraction of the future area of the state was open to the white settler. This meant that Iowa was to have a retreating frontier in the west, while at the same time had in the east centers which had long passed that period (Colton 1939:53).

During the 1850s and 1860s the stage coach business flourished (Figure 29) but it was gradually displaced by the railroad. The first sign of decline was the shifting of schedules and terminals to make connection with the railroads. After the Western Stage Company and competing organizations disappeared, mail and passengers continued to be transported by ordinary farm wagons between small towns in Iowa (Kirkpatrick 1975:4).

The continuous pressure upon the Post Office Department and members of Congress for new post offices, post roads, and improvements which would hasten the arrival of the news helped speed the stage on its way. Because the vast majority of Iowans had left homes in the Middle Atlantic and the majority of the remainder had come from Kentucky and Ohio, and Pennsylvania it was very expensive to mail letters (Colton 1939:6). Under 30 miles the cost in 1825 was $.06. From 30 to 80 miles the cost was $.10. From 80 to 100 miles it was $.12½ cents. In 1845, rates were changed (Colton 1949:9). Letters were sent collect and for the settler who was hard put to save enough to make the $1.25 per acre cash payment for his claim, it often happened that it was days or weeks before the letters could be redeemed from the post office.

*The Rise and Fall of Stage Coaching in Iowa*

Although it is difficult to measure their degree of influence, the rise of stage coach travel in Iowa was principally helped by three factors; the gold rush and emigrant influx of the 1850s, paradoxically the railroads, and the abnormal conditions of the Civil War. The stage coach was eventually eliminated by the railroad which finally forced the last coach across the Missouri River in the Middle 1870s (Colton 1940:198). After that time the freightage companies took with only the northwestern-most part of the state retaining any stage coach operations.

The railroads probably helped the stage coaches as much as they hurt them, at first. The impetus given to traveling by the railway cars, with their greater speed, comfort, and novelty, frequently impelled an increase in the staging facilities at the points where the rails merged in their march to the west. As the railroads pushed farther and farther westward, the initial advantages were more than swallowed up in the loss in the number of stage-miles operated. In the end it was this loss that finally swept the last stages out of Iowa (Colton 1940:199).

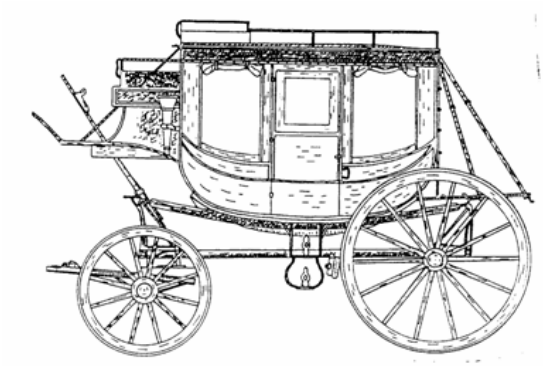
The effect of the Civil War gave the stage coach a longer lease on life upon all services for the shipment and transfer of supplies and troops. Another and more important effect of the Civil War was to arrest the westward march of the railroads across the state. It is significant that in the a few years after the end of the war the stages were closing their last days in the state (Colton 1940:199).

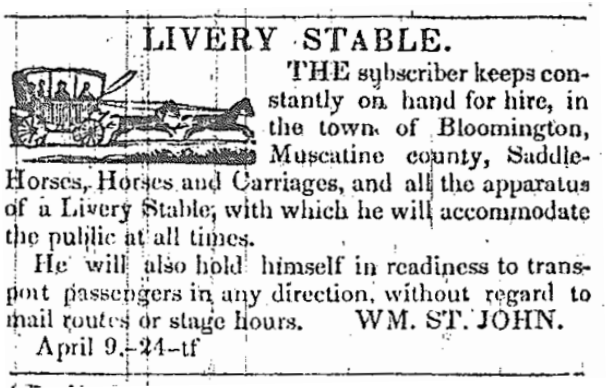
The obstacle of bad roads was never completely overcome in Iowa during the whole of the stage coach period, or for that matter for many years afterward. Towards the close of the staging era in Iowa, in the spring of 1865, due to the conditions of other roads, the regular Concord stage on the well traveled route from Ft. Des Moines (II) to Ft. Dodge had to be replaced temporarily by a light spring mud wagon. And as late as the 1870s in northwestern Iowa the common reference to the stage fare on Haskell & Cheney stages was “ten cents a mile and a fence rail!” (Colton 1940:183; Pratt 1967:58).

*Stage Coaches, Hacks, and Jerkys*

The Concord coaches, made in Concord, New Hampshire, were the best available (Figure 29). The Troy coaches were a similar competitive coach. It had an oval body flattened on top with three interior cross seats. The driver sat outside and a baggage boot was in the rear. The body of the coach was suspended upon two leather through-braces extending lengthwise up from the axle. The leather straps acted as shock absorbers. On smaller branch or feeder routes a smaller coach was used which did not compare with the Concord in size or comfort. These smaller vehicles, commonly called “hacks,” or, more derisively, “jerkys” were much more common in the state than the swifter and more comfortable nine-passenger-plus Concords or Troys (Colton 1940:187). The hacks were open with no springs and often no cover for protection from the elements.

The Concord coaches were only used on the most traveled lines. The others relied on the two-horse “hack” or “jerkys” which were much more common in the state (Colton 1940:185). The first stages used were neither of the above but were more likely the mud wagons. The mud wagons and hacks were very much like the common farm wagon with an up front seat and box rear. They had wider rims and larger wheels, and other features which would make it a better “mudder.” Mud wagons were not abandoned even after the general adoption of the hack or Concord or Troy stages, as the better coaches were withdrawn and the heavy mud wagons substituted in bad weather. In the Iowa winters the coaches, hacks, and mud wagons were retired to the sheds and open sleighs, or stage sleds, were sometimes used (Colton 1940:186–187).





LIVERY STABLE.

THE subscriber keeps constantly on hand for hire, in the town of Bloomington, Muscatine county, Saddle-Horses, Horses and Carriages, and all the apparatus of a Livery Stable, with which he will accommodate the public at all times.

He will also hold himself in readiness to transport passengers in any direction, without regard to mail routes or stage hours. WM. ST. JOHN.

April 9.–24–tf

*Figure 31. Left. Oval bodied Concord coach (Colton 1939:16). Right. Concord-like coach in an advertisement for William St. John's Livery Stable in 1842 (Bloomington Herald 1842b:4).*

In 1869 a newspaper article noted: "We have daily mails leaving the Bernhart House for some of the above points. Five of the routes have hacks on them for the conveyance of passengers" (Annals of Iowa 1864b:346). It appears that in some instances that hacks were considered a step up from the mud wagon and were advertised as responding to the personal comfort needs of the passengers. On main lines the mud wagons would be replaced by hacks, and then Concord or four-horse post coaches, if ridership warranted it. As demand expanded multiple coaches were run on routes.

Most early stage coach companies in Iowa started with the hacks. Frink and Walker's wagons were noted for having a white muslin cover. Their Concord coaches (Figure 31:left) were painted a bright red. During the late 1850s and 1860s the staging companies were at their best in terms of equipment and upkeep was good. However, towards the end of the era, with profits falling and maintenance slipping or neglected, many of the coaches were in terrible shape. Holes in the floors, broken windows, sprung doors (if it even had doors), and grim interiors were common. At the end, when the Western Stage Company sold its equipment, $1,000 coaches sold for the $10 price of the iron scrap they held.

In addition to the slow speed and often poor conditions of the coaches the passenger on the outgoing stage had to be up and ready as such hours as four, five, and six in the morning, or else have the coach threaten to leave without him. Traveling all night in the cramped quarters of a nine passenger-plus stage, with the baggage of individual travelers taking up even more room was far from comfortable, and the meals at many of the early stops that sprung up to feed the stage travelers were far from satisfactory and often obtained at exorbitant prices (Colton 1940:17; Brown 1971:253–266). To some the slow trip by stage coach offered many pleasant hours of sightseeing (Beitz 1961:22).

One is liable to overestimate the amount of travel on the undeveloped routes of the 1840s pioneer days when compared to the more developed routes of the middle 1850s and later. In general one may say that the number of stage coach travelers was less than is popularly believed. It is important to remember that staging in Iowa did not get into full swing until the late 1840s. Beginning in the 1850s when the stage was the uncontested means of overland travel there were gaps in the service offered. Then, on a few of the main east and west routes, "sections" of two or more coaches were sometimes required to carry the passengers on the same scheduled run. On many of the connecting lines to these main arteries, a tri-weekly or less service continued with two-horse hacks and not the larger four-horse post coaches (Colton 1940:198).

*Iowa Stage Companies and Federal Mail Contacts*

Many individuals and later companies competed against one another for the early horse mail and later coach mail contracts awarded by the Federal government every four years (see Table 2). In the early days competitors set up regional or local "short" lines and often ran livery or stable businesses on the side. The Ohio Stage Company (later the Western Stage Company), Frink and Walker, and many local concerns such as Hatch and Company traveled regularly over the old roads. The following is a list of stage operators operating in eastern Iowa during the First Period of stage coaching.

*William Wilson, Beers, and St. John*. These firms were the first mail route monopolists in Iowa. Beers and St. John were Muscatine livery stable operators who operated a stage company with lines running from Muscatine to Iowa City (see Figure 31B) (Table 3). They were competing against Frink and Walker in the early years (see Table 2).

*Robert Stewart and Company*. In 1846, the first time Iowa mail routes were let under the new postal law of 1845, the four-year mail contracts were largely won by Stewart, a livery stable operator from Burlington. A short partnership with John Frink initiated service from Bloomington (Muscatine) out to Keokuk, as well as two interior lines, Burlington to Fairfield and Bloomington (Muscatine) to Iowa City. Later in 1849 he operated coaches from Ft. Des Moines (II) competing with Frink. These consisted of tri-weekly runs between Fort Des Moines and Oskaloosa. Stewart operated around Fort Des Moines until 1851 and in southeast Iowa until around 1855.

*Martin O. Walker*. One of the Midwest's most important stage men he operated lines in Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa, and moved into Minnesota in 1854 (Hyben and Hess 1990:Section E:9). He operated a line out of Dubuque and eventually formed a partnership with Illinois stage man John Frink.

*Ohio Stage Company*. This was an Ohio concern run by long time and experienced operators and managers such as William Neil, Henry Moore, and W. S. Sullivant. They were a very large company operating in several eastern states and centered out of Cincinnati, Ohio. They competed with Frink for the early mail contracts in Illinois. They were reorganized in 1854 as the Western Stage Company.

**Table 3**

**Congressional Stage Contracts: 1838–1855**
**Muscatine County, Iowa**

| Contract # | Route | Provider | Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2962 | Burlington–Davenport | Morton Carver | 1838 |
| | Dubuque–West Liberty | Ansel Briggs | 13 Jan., 1839 |
| | Bloomington–Napoleon | Thomas B. Johnson | 7 Nov., 1839 |
| | Muscatine–Iowa City | Frink & Walker | 1840 |
| | Burlington-Bloomington | Beers & St. John | 30 Apr., 1842 |
| | Bloomington–Davenport | Beers & St. John | 30 Apr/, 1842 |
| | Bloomington–Iowa City | Beers & St. John | 30 Apr., 1842 |
| 2962 | Bloomington–Iowa City | William Wilson | 30 Apr., 1846 |
| | (on horse back if roads are bad and water high) | | |
| | Muscatine–Iowa City | J. Frink-R. Stewart | 1846 |
| | Muscatine–Iowa City | Western Stage Company | 1853 |
| | Davenport–Ft. Des Moines (II)– | | 1854 |
| | Council Bluffs | Western Stage Company | 1854 |
| | Keokuk–Davenport | Western Stage Company | 1855 |

*Frink and Walker Company*. John Frink operated a pioneering stage coach firm in Illinois. It was the dominant company of northern and central Illinois in the 1830s and 1840s. By the mid-1840s it was the best known of all transportation firms in Iowa and had obtained extensive mail contracts. Trying to expand into Iowa it announced fares from Dubuque for a short time in 1842 and more successfully in Burlington in 1847. Frink and Walker began seriously expanding into Iowa in 1849 and were the first to reach Fort Des Moines in that year. They dominated the 1850 mail contracts. In 1851 they ran the daily mail on daily coaches on the Oskaloosa to Fort Des Moines line. The Western Stage Company bought out Frink and Walker's stock in Iowa in 1854 (Annals of Iowa 1872:316).

The seven-year Iowa career of the Frink firm had seen much of stage-pioneering, much of hard ruthless fighting, of bad roads, and makeshift schedules; it had been years of little public praise, yet of much in service given. When it first appeared to contest the supremacy of the Iowa field with Robert Stewart in 1847, stages were unknown off the narrow river routes from Keokuk to Dubuque and the more inland lines to Iowa City and Fairfield. Under the stimulus of the Frink system stage services by 1854 were scattered over all the inhabited parts of the state. The Frink coaches had stabilized the service over the busy Dubuque-Iowa City and Iowa City–Keokuk lines; its coaches had struggled up the Des Moines River valley to Fort Des Moines in 1849, had established regular schedules on the Iowa City–Fort Des Moines line in 1852; and brought staging to Council Bluffs on the Missouri. Though with many admitted deficiencies, what staging Iowa knew over most of this area in 1854 was largely to the credit of Frink and Company (Colton 1960b:433).

*Western Stage Company*. The successor to the Frink partners in July 1854, the Western Stage Company, was itself a successor to the Ohio Stage Company. The company was composed entirely of men who had gained their experience with the Ohio Company, and were all experienced and competent stage men. The main change in the new firm over the old Ohio Company was the disappearance of its veteran stage manger Billy Neil. Much of the stock and employees who came to Iowa were former employees and equipment of the older company. Thus, with skillful management and experience, combined with good equipment, the Western Stage Company was well equipped to dominate the stage coach business in Iowa as thoroughly and as completely as John Frink and Company had in the seven years before. Although concentrating principally upon its Iowa contracts the company also still held important mail contracts across southern Illinois. By the end of the 19th Century its stages were to penetrate to Kansas to the south and to Denver on the far west (Colton 1960b:432–433).

The company was originated in 1840, and ceased to exist in Iowa on the third day of July 1870, when the last stage was dispatched from Des Moines to Indianola. The Western Stage Company was the largest in the Middle West operating over eight states, and all of Iowa. Its main station was in Iowa City. Some time in 1855 Concord coaches were substituted for jerkys, and until the railroad forced the end of the stage travel, the four-horse coach was an important item in Iowa life. In 1874 the last Western Stage Company coach was sold from their main office in Iowa City (Kirkpatrick 1975:1, 8).

The Western Stage Company had bought the mail contracts from all of the small local operators and soon had consolidated all lines and mail contracts in the state. The Western Stage Company designated rest stations every ten to fifteen miles where tired teams could be exchanged for fresh horses. On main lines they arranged to keep at certain locations oxen and wagons with wide rim wheels. The wagons were without springs and had white muslin tops, drawn by two horses. Oxen were better able than horses to cross soft ground and the wide rimmed wagons would not settle so far into the mud. In this way loads could be carried over to meet coaches or wagons on the other side of the streams (Kirkpatrick 1975:8).
The first vehicle of the Western Stage Company that left Ft. Des Moines (II) rolled away from the City

Hotel in the morning of July 1, 1854. The company had just purchased the franchise of the Frink and Walker stage line, a corporation that ran the first public wagons from Ft. Des Moines (II) (Annals of Iowa 1872:316). From Ft. Des Moines (II) their route was to Oskaloosa the first day, Fairfield the second, and the third to Keokuk, there they made close connections with rest of the country. The fare was $10 a passenger and the program provided for a tri-weekly line. In bad weather the program was frequently "more honored in breach than in observance" (Annals of Iowa 1872:316). When the Western Stage Company became owner of the route in 1854, they put on two-horse jerkys and operated two lines for Ft. Des Moines (II). One route was to Keokuk, through Marion County, and the other ran east to Davenport (Annals of Iowa 1872:316).

The Western Stage Company maintained a tri-weekly line of stages across the state, and a Mr. Frost ran a line of stages, also tri-weekly, to St. Joseph Missouri. Daily lines were established from Keokuk and Davenport, and it was not and infrequent occurrence for trains from six to twelve coaches to arrive and depart between sunrise and sunset. The busiest time was from 1861–1865. During state conventions stages started every two hours, and 30–400 men were frequently shipped in a single night (Annals of Iowa 1872:316).

*Northwestern Stage Company*. This line began staging operation around 1855, after it was already a successful express company in Minnesota. It operated in Northern and southern Minnesota until 1880 (Hyben and Hess 1990:Section E:13).

*Wells Fargo*. Incorporated in 1866, Wells Fargo took over the greatest stage coach service network in the U.S. and controlled almost all express service west of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers (Kirkpatrick 1975:10).

*Iowa Staging—Home Stations and Swing Stations*

In 1990 a thematic multiple property document was prepared to address the nomination of several sites associated with stage coaching in Minnesota (Hyben and Hess 1990). Its historic context covers the period from 1849 to 1880, uses a great deal of Iowa data, and discusses the various types of stage coaching establishments. The document breaks down the types of staging stops into two main categories. The first is the "home station." This was located about every fourth stop and had an office where passengers could purchase tickets and a hotel, tavern, or inn where they could get a meal and stay overnight, resting before the next stage of the journey. The other type of staging station they outlined was the "swing station." This was not a stage "tavern" or "hotel" or "office." The swing station was where the horses were changed, and were sited about every 10 or 15 miles apart. The Western Stage Company is noted for having their stops at these distances (Hyben and Hess 1990: Section E, p. 4). The Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn functioned as both a home station and a swing station. The swing station component was run out of the barn to the north of the inn/tavern. It is not on the current property. The barn was removed in the 1950s. However, it is not known at present if tickets were available there or only through the St. John Livery Stable in Muscatine or through Chauncy Swan's hotel in Iowa City.

Stage coach stations were located every 10 to 15 miles along the stage routes, to permit changing horses. Upon arrival at the station, the tired horses were unhitched and fresh ones, already harnessed, took their places. This change was made in a minute or two. Taverns (hotels) were located at some of the stage stops, and at important crossroads, large stations corresponding to future railroad division points, were maintained. Such a primary or main station was located in Iowa City, where the Western Stage Company's state office kept coaches, horses, and supplies and had blacksmiths and carpenters (Pratt 1967:58). Other primary stations were in the larger river communities such as Dubuque, Burlington,

Clinton, and Des Moines where other companies also maintained offices in the early 1840s. Smaller secondary centers were in such towns as Fairfield, Oskaloosa, or Ft. Dodge, and numerous other medium sized inland towns. In the early day when food and rest accommodations were scarce, travelers were likely to go hungry on a long ride. Nights, too, posed a problem, and many a coach toiled on in darkness because there was no place to stop between staging points (Beitz 1961:27).

Eventually, stage officials realized the importance of good eating and sleeping places along the way. Some were primitive, like the log cabin, while others were grand hotels. As civilization proceeded westward across Iowa the quality of the accommodations followed with it. Overnight places along major routes were able to expand and update by often using the older building as the wing or rear kitchen. Few overnight stops in the eastern third of Iowa were of the primitive type like the log cabin, they mostly were at a grand hotel in town. Some rural overnight places were in larger houses at convenient points along the routes converted for the use while others were purpose-built. Beds and meals usually cost twenty-five cents apiece, although stage passengers were sometimes charged double that amount. Later hostelries developed a high degree of comfort (Beitz 1961:27). Most overnight stops were spent along the routes converted for the use.

*The Railroad and Its Effect on Staging*

The railroad crossed the Mississippi River at Davenport in early 1855. From that point it ran westward to Iowa City, Johnson County, arriving late in 1855. Figure 32 shows rail and stage routes in 1850 and 1855, and the new rail route in 1855. There was not a rail bridge crossing the Mississippi River to Muscatine until 1891. The western pier of the Muscatine “High Bridge” is still extant. The bridge was rebuilt in 1901 after one span collapsed in 1899 (Environmental Planning and Research 1977:10).

Figure 32C shows that the rail line ran from Muscatine to Davenport and then to Iowa City. The line did not extend beyond Iowa City until after the Civil War. As a result of these rail connections staging operations east of Iowa City began to dwindle in 1855 while those westward as far as Des Moines remained strong for another two decades. Smith’s sale of the inn and property in June of 1854 appears to have anticipated the railroad’s coming and the demise of staging as the mail routes changed to the trains. It is not known if the death of his wife in 1854 was the prime factor for his selling or if he saw the end of the stage operation coming with the rail link to Davenport. It may have been both but certainly the time is important to the end of his tenure at the inn. The railroad arrived in Iowa City early in 1855.

With the coming of the railroad the rural stage coach inns were no longer as necessary in eastern Iowa. The towns, businesses, and traffic all moved towards the rail lines. Those oriented to the older river and stage roads were usually converted to private ownership and other commercial or farming activities.

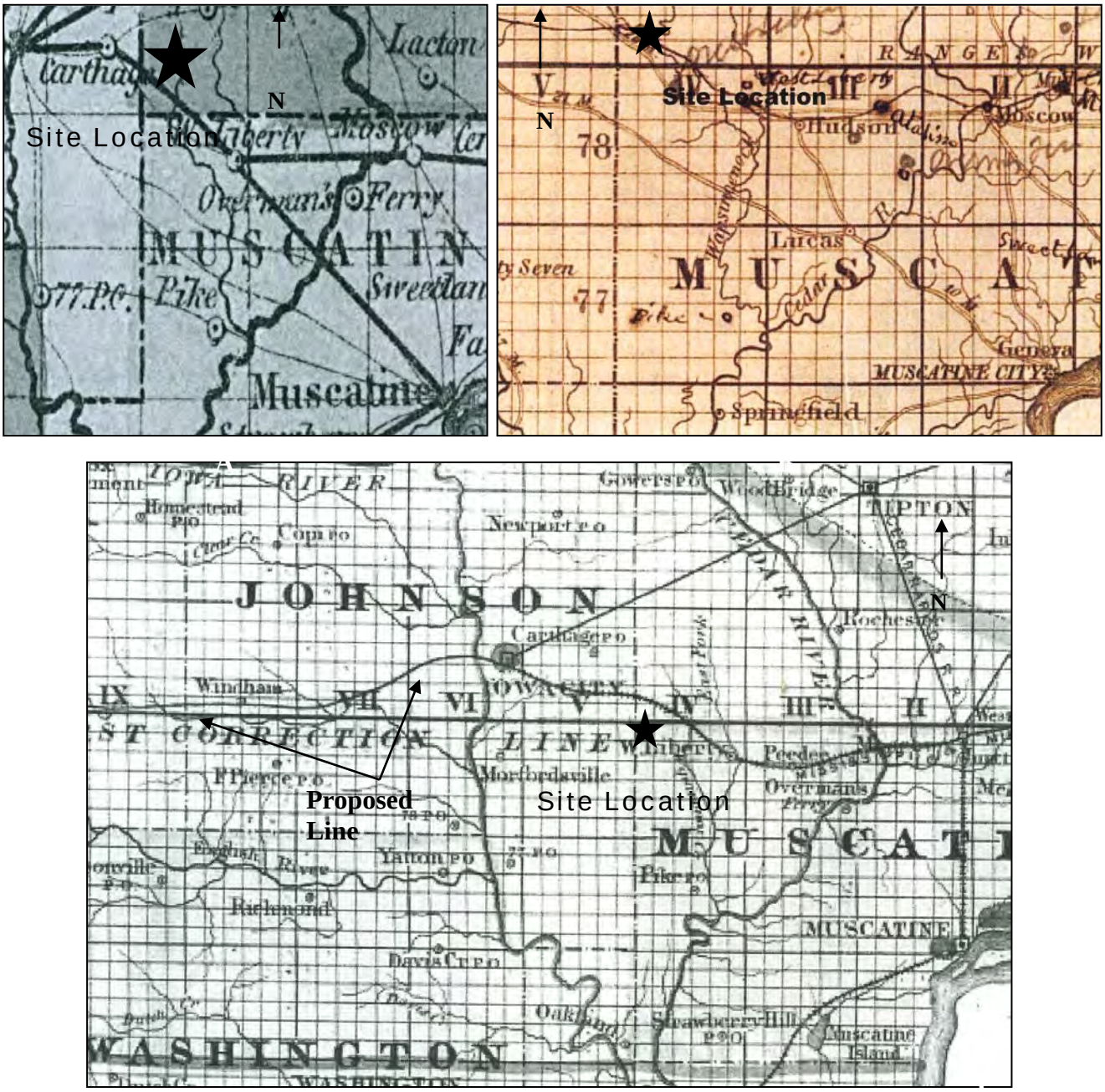



*Figure 32. A. Detail of Charlton's 1850 map of Muscatine County, Iowa, showing route from Muscatine to Iowa City. B. Detail of Parker's 1855 map showing stage route between Muscatine and Iowa City (Mendenhall 1855). Note location of Moscow, Carthage, and Overman's Ferry (later Atalissa) C. Railroad map of Muscatine and Johnson counties showing 1855 section new line from Davenport (through Tipton) to Iowa City in (Parker 1855). Note line beyond Iowa City is "proposed." No stage roads are shown.*

## Stage Coach Inns and Hotels

*First Period*

The first lodging houses such as the Miller Hotel in Muscatine were of log construction. Muscatine had inns and later hotels from the early period (Figure 33) (Table 4). They date from as early as 1833. Like the Muscatine inns and hotels the early Iowa City inns look more like houses than commercial buildings. These were Eastern-looking two story buildings, mostly wooden framed, with ranked façade portals, and central-hall plans. They were gable ended and often built of heavy hewn timber or even logs with clapboard siding. Several examples like the Miller Hotel and the Vanatta House are shown with full width porches with balconies. The earliest had central chimneys. Muscatine's American House and Pennsylvania House had chimneys at the gable ends. The earliest, like the Beers and St. John Coach Inn had central chimneys. Most had one or two storied additions out the rear. In both cities the early domestic looking inns and hotels quickly changed to square multi-storied commercial buildings made of brick. Table 4 contains a list of some of the First Period inns and hotels in Muscatine. It also notes some of the owners, dates, sizes, and other information on these early commercial houses contemporaneous with the Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn. Smith envisioned his inn and its style within this early environment.

A B C D

*Figure 33. First Period hotels in Muscatine, Iowa. A. Miller's Log Hotel, early 1830s. B. American House, 1840. C. The Pennsylvania House, 1836. D. The Vanatta Hotel, 1838 (Richman 1911:290–302).*

**Table 4**

Muscatine Iowa Period I Stage Hotels: 1836–1875

*Pennsylvania House*. In the fall of 1836 Robert Kinney is credited for putting up a sign and keeping a tavern in Muscatine. He was a native of St. Clair County, Illinois, in the great American bottom opposite St. Louis. He kept travelers and lodgers and a hospital in a hotel 16 x 30 feet, 1½ storied, divided into three room below and three above, the first frame building in the city. Later it was called the Black Horse and after 1872, the Pennsylvania House [Western Historical 1879:300].

*Vanatta Hotel*. Built in early 1837 this was the second frame hotel in Muscatine and considered the best of its kind. Vanatta had also opened a tavern. It was moved in 1869 [Western Historical 1879:300].

*American House*. In 1840 the American House was opened. It measured 45 x 72 feet and was two stories high. It was replaced by a bank in 1866 [Western Historical 1879:300].

*Clover Hotel*. In 1841 the first brick hotel was built. It had a number of names. Clover had bought it in 1854. He sold it three year later. It sold again in 1867 and in 1885 [Western Historical 1879:300].

*Palmer's Tavern*. First frame building was built in 1838 with a slope roof in front over a porch, supported by pillars. It became a tavern with a bar [Western Historical 1879:300].

*Park House*. Built in 1851. In 1852 the 26 room building was remodeled…with a 90 foot frontage…and called The Pennsylvania House [Western Historical 1879:300].

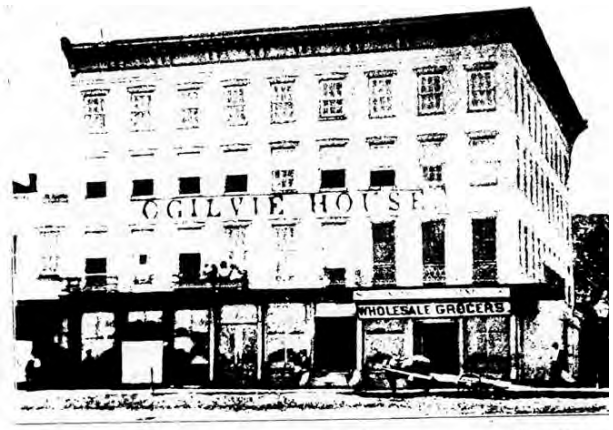
*Hotel Webster*. Erected in 1842–1843 of brick there was a rear wooden building. It was removed in 1877 for a business block. It was three stories tall with six large granite columns in the front [Western Historical 1879:300].

*Ogilvie House*. The Commercial Hotel…was formerly the Ogilvie House started in 1849 but not completed until 1851. It opened early in 1852. It changed hands in 1854 and again in 1856. It's named changed in 1875 [Western Historical 1879:300].

*Second Period Hotels*

This phase corresponds with the staging operation changes in the late 1840s (Figures 34, 34A). By 1847 the second phase of Iowa staging had begun and large, three and a few four-storied, hip-roofed, multi-room accommodations with nearly square plans became the norm. These types of hotels were built within most of the cities along the Mississippi and within a few inland towns and cities reached by the early stage routes. Several hotels of the same period in Iowa City (Figures 35B, 35C) look very much like the Muscatine examples such as the Clover House built in 1855. Some 1840s urban hotels also had cupolas atop their roofs as seen on the Egbert T. Smith Inn. These were used for ventilation and not for hanging lights for travelers to follow. One was as the East Market St. hotel in Iowa City, built in ca. 1849 (Figure 35C).

Clover House, 1855




Commercial Hotel (at first the Ogilvie House) as it appeared in 1875

*Figure 34. Left. Second Period urban hotel. The Clover House, Muscatine, Iowa, 1855 (Richman 1911:409). Right. Third Period urban hotel. The Ogilvie House or Commercial Hotel, Muscatine, Iowa, as it appeared in 1875 (Richman 1911:302).*

The rural inns of the 1830s and 1840s across eastern Iowa had similarities to those in the river towns. They grew from smaller inns and taverns of log or frame construction to large masonry examples. Some First Period inns lasted into the late 1850s. Continuing in business they overlapped the Second and even Third Period Hotels. Many urban examples were renamed through successive owners.

*Third Period Hotels*

As this period does not apply to the site's period of significance it is not covered in depth but Third Period stage hotels and inns lasted into the early 1880s in far northwestern Iowa. Urban stage hotels and inns from this era are more common then the preceding two periods. Rural examples are rare and vanishing fast.

The four story Ogilvie House in Muscatine with its wide cornice and retail lower level is a good example of a Third Period urban hotel (Figure 34B). These were built in the larger cities, such as Iowa City, but not always at inland communities, even if they were county seats. Third phase stage hotels progressed westward with the railroads. With the demise of the Western Stage Company in 1875 stage route based hotels were already quickly shifting to the railroad business. The earlier and more rural inns that were not near a rail stop began to dwindle quickly. To some extent these hotels were seen and referred to at the time orally and in the press as "caravansaries" (Western Historical 1879:298).

*Figure 35. Iowa City stage inns and hotels. A. Circa 1841 inn at 327 East Brown Street (Keyes 1971). B. A mid-1850s stage inn and tavern (lower level) at 1602 N. Dubuque Street. C. Circa 1849 urban hotel at 130 E. Market Street. D. Mid-1870s Holub Hotel at 302 E. Bloomington Street. Photos A–C by author.*

# PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs submitted with this nomination were all taken by property owners Christian and Laura Elliot on November 11, 2007. They accurately represent the condition of the historic property. Digital prints are on file in the office of Historic Preservation, State Historical Society of Iowa, 600 East Locust Street, Des Moines, IA 50319.

Name of Property: Beers and St. John Coach Inn Company
County and State: Muscatine County, Iowa
Photographer(s): Christian and Laura Elliot
Date of Photographs: November 11, 2007

Photos printed on HP Premium Plus, 4" x 6", matte finish photo paper with HP Inkjet #75 for color, and #74 for black (105 year stable inks).

# PHOTOLOG

1. View of Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn looking northwest.
2. View of west gable end looking east.
3. View of north side looking south.
4. View of north side and west gable end looking southeast.
5. View of north side and northeastern corner looking southwest.
6. View of eastern gable end looking southwest.
7. View of eastern gable end looking northwest.
8. View of eastern gable end and south façade looking northwest.
9. View of south side façade looking northwest.
10. View of principle façade on south side looking north.
11. Close up view of principal façade on south side looking northwest.
12. View of south side looking north from curve in entry lane.

**PHOTOGRAPH KEY—BEERS AND ST. JOHN COMPANY COACH INN--EXTERIOR VIEWS**

Photograph directions—1 through 12.

1. View of Beers and St. John Company Coach Inn looking northeast.

2. View of west gable end looking east.

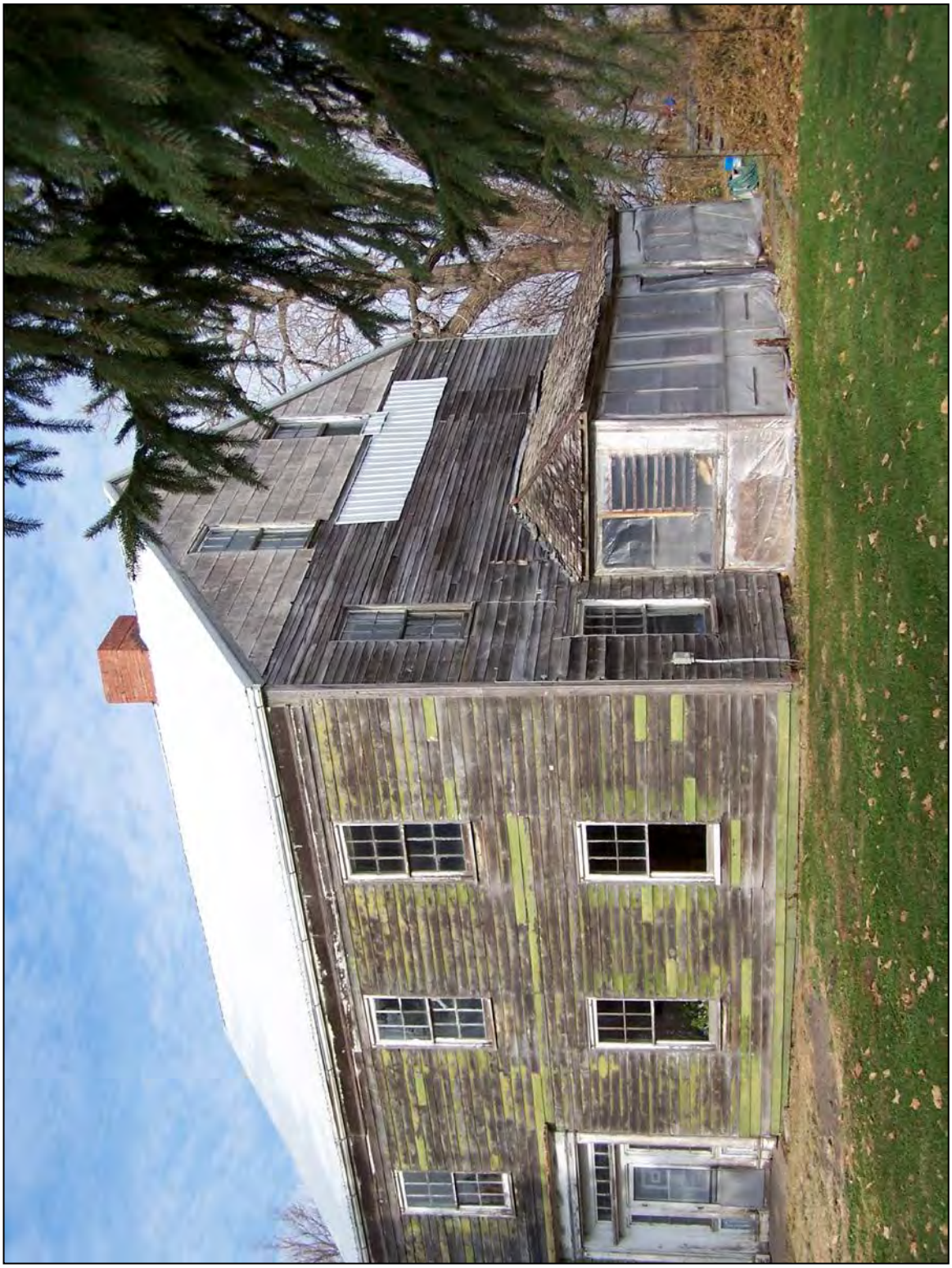
3. View of north side looking south.

4. View of north side and west gable end looking southeast.

5. View of north side and northeastern corner looking southwest.

6. View of eastern gable end looking southwest.

7. View of eastern gable end looking northwest.



8. View of eastern gable end and south facade looking northwest.

9. View of south side façade looking northwest.

10. View of principle facade on south side looking north.

11. Close up view of principal facade on south side looking northwest.

12. View of south side looking north from curve in entry lane.