



- The period of significance is 1959, which embraces the whole of the Winter Dance Party tour, including the stop at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa. The significant date is February 2, 1959, marking the tour stop at the Surf Ballroom and the date of the final performance of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P., “the Big Bopper” Richardson, which occurred just hours before the airplane accident that took their lives.
- As a venue on the Winter Dance Party tour, the Surf Ballroom is the most significant and well-preserved regional representation of the nationwide dance party tour phenomenon, which played a crucial role in advancing the impact of rock ‘n’ roll by bringing popular performers directly to the fans who idolized them and establishing touring as a legitimate business within the music industry.
- Through the continuation of the Winter Dance Party to the present day, the Surf Ballroom is not only the place where people go to honor the legacy of the three renowned performers who last played here on February 2, 1959, it is the place visitors go to experience the Winter Dance Party very much as it was experienced in 1959. It remains an important music venue where local and national performers hold live concerts in an intimate, personal setting.
- The Surf Ballroom serves as a museum and repository of musical artifacts, including numerous important items from the families of Holly, Valens, and Richardson. Visitors learn about and gain an appreciation of the history of early Rock and Roll and the national significance of the venue and its performers within that context.

Integrity:

- The Surf Ballroom retains a high degree of historic integrity, standing as the best-preserved venue among eight 1959 Winter Dance Party venues that remain extant. Of those venues, only four were ballrooms and the historic integrity of the Surf far surpasses those.
- The building façade retains all the original design elements that define its Modernistic style including the flat roofline; a sleek surface created with a buff colored face-brick with narrow mortar joints of matching color; the curving form of the façade wall; the modern font style and circle motif of the historic signage; and, the stainless-steel utilized in the box office, canopy, entrance doors, and framing. Each of these elements draws on the Modernistic tendency toward smooth, clean lines, horizontal orientation, and geometric forms.
- The interior of the Surf carries on the Modernistic influence established on the exterior with a “beach club” vibe added through its decorative elements. An historic restoration/rehabilitation following the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, completed in 1994, restored previously lost elements of the interior motif and, in subsequent years, all upkeep has maintained a commitment to retaining the building’s high degree of historic integrity. As a result, the interior of the Surf Ballroom retains the appearance of the building at the time it opened in July of 1948, as well as qualities of materials, design, workmanship, setting, and feeling.



- The historic landscaping on either side of the primary entrance was modified in the late 20th century. Historically, the landscaping consisted of a straight line of low hedge extending east and west from the entrance bay; the line of hedge delineated the sidewalk from a small area of grass located adjacent to the façade wall. The 1990s alterations introduced hard features including commemorative markers, bench seating, flagpoles, brick pavers, and replaced the shrubbery.
- A non-historic, perforated steel patio screen surrounding a 20- by 32-foot, exterior patio is located adjacent to the building's east wall. The patio was added in the 1960s to provide outside seating for the Surfside 6 Café. At that time, a fence of decorative, concrete blocks was constructed. In 2016, a steel fence replaced the block fence; the mass and size of the new structure is considerably less than the first.

Owner of Property: Surf, LTD
Mr. & Mrs. Dale and Kathy Snyder
Mr. & Mrs. David and Vickie Snyder
Mr. & Mrs. Don and Jane Snyder

Acreage of Property: 3.25 acres

Origins of Nomination: When the Surf Ballroom was listed on the National Register of Historic Places at a national level of significance, Ralph Christian, architectural historian with the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), recommended the property owners seek NHL designation. A letter of inquiry was sent to the NPS NHL program and a response from the program encouraged the preparation of a statement of significance, leading to a full nomination. A grant from the Historical Resource Development Program (HRDP) of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs provided funding for the completion of the NHL nomination.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: The owners and management of the Surf Ballroom are committed to fully educating the public about the history and significance of the building and its association with the 1959 Winter Dance Party tour, as well as its historic connection with Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P. Richardson. They will use the property's NHL status as a tool toward that education. The owners are very aware of the rare honor bestowed by NHL designation.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of):

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Advisory Board Recommendation:

