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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was prepared by Bear Creek Archeology, Inc. (BCA) under contract with the City of West Des Moines Department of Community Development. It presents the findings of an architectural/historical reconnaissance survey of that portion of the Valley Junction area bounded by 1st Street, Vine Street, 14th Street, and Railroad Avenue. This area contains approximately 850 residential and 115 commercial properties.

The goal of the project was to identify architectural and historical themes represented by buildings in the Valley Junction neighborhood and determine whether these properties have historic preservation values. The survey was not intended to document individually significant historic properties or result in designation of historic preservation sites or districts.

Six important historic property types were identified for houses and commercial buildings constructed between circa 1892 and 1948. These property type classifications were:

- Mechanic's Cottage
- Bungalow
- Suburban Cottage
- Prairie Cube
- Craftsman
- Main Street Building

The survey focused on the general distribution of historic property types, their historical and architectural values, and condition. The body of this report documents and analyzes the preservation potential of historic property types within local contexts of architectural history and development. A major finding of the survey was that while relatively few properties appear to meet the National Register criteria for significance as individual preservation sites, the residential neighborhood east of 8th Street and the old downtown district along 5th Street represent important and distinguishable historic entities that are worthy of preservation. Several major threats to the historic character of the area were identified; including deferred maintenance and neglect, poor workmanship, unsympathetic remodeling ("remuddling"), and flooding.

The report concludes with seven specific historic preservation planning recommendations and a list of suggestions for local design guidelines.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an architectural/historical reconnaissance survey of the Valley Junction neighborhood in the City of West Des Moines, Iowa. The survey was carried out between January and April 1998 by Bear Creek Archeology, Inc. (BCA), under the auspices of the City of West Des Moines Department of Community Development. The objective of this study was to define the historic character of Valley Junction on the basis of architectural styles and building types. The area surveyed encompassed approximately 850 residential and 115 commercial properties in a rectangular tract bounded by Railroad Avenue, 1st Street, Vine Street, and 14th Street, comprising the city's oldest residential and commercial neighborhoods. It is anticipated that the results of the survey will be used by city officials to develop guidelines for future development in Valley Junction as part of the city's revised comprehensive land use plan.

Historic Properties and Surveys

Because this report will be read by people with varied backgrounds, it is necessary to begin with a brief discussion of some of the basic concepts of architectural/historical survey.

In this report, *survey* refers to the process of identifying and gathering data on historic properties. Survey activities include the following:

- planning and background research
- the physical search for and recording of historic buildings
- organization and analysis of survey data
- development of inventories of historic properties within a given area

For planning purposes, a *historic property* (also called historic resource) is any building, site, structure, object, or district that is at least 50 years old. In general, historic properties that meet defined criteria of historical, architectural, archeological, or cultural significance are considered worthy of preservation and should be considered in the community development planning process.

Architectural/historical surveys can be conducted at a variety of scales. The Valley Junction survey was carried out at the *reconnaissance* level, an approach which seeks to provide a general understanding of the historic properties in a particular area and identification of historic preservation concerns. (As opposed to an intensive survey, which would have documented precisely and completely all of the individual historic properties present within the survey area.)

The *National Register of Historic Places*, authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, is the official list of historic properties of national, statewide, or local historical significance. Properties are listed in the National Register through nominations by the State Historic Preservation Officers or SHPOs (in Iowa, this is a function of the State Historical Society). The National Register Criteria for Evaluation are the authoritative guide for determining historical significance (historic preservation value).

To have *historic preservation value*, a property must be *historically significant*. Generally, architects and historians recognize three kinds of preservation values:

associative value, which is defined as the significance of a property based on its association or linkage with important events, persons, or patterns of events;

design value, the embodiment of noteworthy characteristics of architecture, material culture, or technology; and

information value, the ability of a property to yield important historical, architectural, engineering, or cultural information.

For more detailed information on historic properties and architectural/historical surveys, readers are encouraged to consult the National Register Bulletin series published by the National Park Service, particularly Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Andrus 1991), and 24, *Guidelines for Local Surveys* (Derry et al., 1985). The State Historical Society of Iowa has also prepared a handbook for communities engaged in historic preservation (Long n.d.).

Purpose and Goals of the Survey

The scope and goals of the Valley Junction survey were clearly stated in the request for proposals document distributed by the city in November, 1997:

The City of West Des Moines intends to contract for the completion of an architectural/historical inventory survey for the residential and commercial structures in Valley Junction. The purpose is to determine if the structures have historical significance, either as single units or as a group. Eventually, the City will be drafting historic guidelines for new development in this area and wants those guidelines to reflect the style of any existing historically significant structures.

The underlying reason for undertaking the survey was the recognition that:

- (a) The old houses and commercial buildings in Valley Junction represent a set of scarce, non-renewable resources, some of which may have preservation value.
- (b) Historical and architectural themes represented by old buildings give the

neighborhood its special character and unique sense of place.

- (c) In order to plan for the wise use of Valley Junction's historic resources, it will be necessary to integrate historic preservation into community development planning.

At this point, the city is not interested in identifying properties for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of a historic district.

Uses of Survey Data in Community Planning

Although the scale of the investigation was limited, the data generated by the Valley Junction survey can provide the basis for making sound community development planning decisions. Architectural and historical information should be used to develop local development guidelines aimed at maintaining and enhancing historical, cultural, aesthetic, and visual values. As part of the city's comprehensive land use plan, these development guidelines should be part of an integrated program of policies, procedures, and strategies for the preservation, protection, and use of historic properties throughout West Des Moines.

Furthermore, the information developed by the Valley Junction survey should help the city comply with federal and state historic preservation review and compliance requirements.

Report Organization

The report is divided into six sections:

- I. Introduction
- II. Background Information
- III. Research Design and Methods
- IV. Survey Results
- V. Summary and Recommendations
- VI. References Cited

Maps and other illustrations are reproduced as Figures, which follow the bibliography.

As a convenience to the reader, the author-date method of citation is used in lieu of footnotes or endnotes.

CHAPTER II BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section of the report presents relevant information on the physical, historical, and architectural context for identifying and evaluating historic properties in Valley Junction.

Geographical Context Overview

The Valley Junction survey area is located in the eastern part of the City of West Des Moines, north of the Raccoon River in southwestern Polk County, Iowa (Figure 1). Although the physical boundaries of the survey area were well defined before the survey was underway, there is no consensus regarding the historical limits of the Valley Junction neighborhood. Generally, the area is defined as the mixed residential and commercial district south and east of Grand Avenue, north of Railroad Avenue, and east of 1st Street (the eastern city limit); but there is good reason to consider only the area east of 8th and south of Vine as "old Valley Junction" and to some that term only refers to "old downtown West Des Moines," the three-block commercial district along lower 5th Street.

In terms of topography, the survey area is a flat to undulating plain where local relief is nowhere greater than ten feet. Soils are sandy, formed in glacial sand, gravel, and post-glacial alluvium, which thickly mantles the underlying bedrock of Paleozoic sedimentary strata (Prior 1991). Some buildings have been placed upon low rises, where retaining walls, terraces, and slopes serve functional purposes as well as providing visual interest. Drainage is to the south, toward the Raccoon River, and much of the area is within the floodplain. Historically, this site has attracted agriculture, transportation, and urban development; however, the river has also brought disastrous floods, most recently in 1993.

When the first wave of Euro-American settlement swept over this area in the mid-nineteenth century, tall grass prairie covered much of the future site of Valley Junction. In general, there were two types of prairie communities: a wet lowland prairie dominated by prairie cord grass and blue joint and a dry upland prairie dominated by big and little blue stem, side oats gama, and Indian grass. The prairie was interspersed with small groves of hardwoods and patches of scrub forest, with narrow galleries of floodplain forest dominated by cottonwood, willow, ash, and maple along water courses. By the time Valley Junction was platted in 1892, these natural communities had already been substantially altered by agriculture and other development, and by circa 1940 almost all of the original prairie and woodland had probably been obliterated. No traces of the natural vegetation, beyond a few native shade trees, could be discerned during the 1998 survey.

Climatic conditions have exerted a considerable influence on the built environment. In central Iowa, the mid-continental climate produces cold winters, while summers are comparatively short and warm. Precipitation is fairly well distributed through the year, reaching a peak in summer, and averages about thirty inches annually. Snow may cover

the ground for several weeks during midwinter and topsoil occasionally freezes to a depth of one or two feet in very cold weather under bare ground conditions. Northwest winds prevail in winter, but from April to October southerly winds predominate.

Historical Context Overview

The following discussion is based on county and local narrative histories (Brigham 1911; Porter 1898; Fredrickson and Post 1993), atlases and platbooks (Kenyon Co. 1914; Northwest Pub. Co. 1907), Sanborn fire insurance maps (1897, 1920, 1937), reports of previous historic resource surveys (Weichman, Weber, and Appel 1974; Wells 1987), and the Iowa Historic Site Inventory files maintained by the SHPO in Des Moines. Information was also obtained from the published reports of the federal census (population, housing), directories, and city planning documents.

Settlement of Polk County was slow at first, mainly by soldiers and traders. After American Indian sovereignty was extinguished in 1843, Euro-American squatters quickly moved into the area around the forks of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers and made claims. One of these pioneers was James C. Jordan, who established a claim within the present limits of West Des Moines in 1846. The government land survey was completed in 1846-47 and public land sales commenced in 1848. Agriculture was the main attraction to early settlers and the accessibility of good markets favored the development of general farming, livestock raising, and dairying.

Fort Des Moines, established in 1843, formed the nucleus of the future city of Des Moines, which was laid out in 1846 and became the state capital in 1857. The growth of Des Moines as a major regional center of commerce and industry was greatly stimulated by railroad development after the Civil War. In 1866, the line of the Des Moines Valley Railroad was completed from Keokuk to Des Moines, and this was followed by the arrival of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific in 1867. In 1871, the Rock Island erected a station five miles west of Des Moines, named Valley Junction, which served as a local shipping point. In 1891, the Rock Island moved its roundhouse and shop facilities from the east side of Des Moines to Valley Junction, where a new station and shops complex were completed between 1892 and 1896. The new Valley Junction passenger depot opened in June, 1892, and by 1893 there were twenty-six passenger trains making daily stops.

Railroad development spawned development of a town site, also called Valley Junction, which was platted in 1892 by the Hawkeye Investment Company, a group of private investors. The first house was put up in August 1892 and by the end of the following year there were nearly five hundred inhabitants. A small commercial district was established, with hotels, saloons, stores, banks; although it had a reputation as a rough and tumble place, there were also schools, churches, a combination city hall-jail-fire hall, a hospital, a newspaper, and other small commercial and civic enterprises common to small Midwestern towns. The town's other attractions included a mineral springs and an auto race track. Population growth was explosive: the 1900 census enumerated 1,700 residents, which ballooned to 2,573 in 1910 and 3,363 in 1920 before leveling off in the

low 4,000s in 1930/1940.

The town's prosperity was entirely dependent upon the railroad. The years between 1893 and 1918 were Valley Junction's boom period, but a vicious and prolonged railroad strike in 1922-23 plunged the community into the first of a series of crises. In 1931, at the height of the Great Depression, the Rock Island closed the Valley Junction terminal station and moved its facilities elsewhere. In the 1930s, community business leaders sought to refurbish the town's image and in 1937 the name was changed to West Des Moines. The old railroad town remained in the economic doldrums, however, until after World War II. By 1960, West Des Moines had a population of nearly twelve thousand, but the horizontal spread of postwar development away from the old town core contributed toward a general ossification of the Valley Junction area. After 1960, the rapid influx of people into rural Polk County transformed much of West Des Moines for suburban uses and Valley Junction became a blighted core neighborhood.

Architectural Context Overview

Architectural historians have developed various categories for classifying buildings based on the concept of *style*. As applied to buildings designed by trained architects or master builders, stylistic terminology refers to the principles espoused by a particular school of architects during a particular period (Poppeliers et al. 1983). In simple terms, architectural styles represent historic building fads. In Iowa, the notable late-19th and early 20th century stylistic periods were, in chronological order: Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Stick, Queen Anne, Shingle, Richardsonian Romanesque, Colonial Revival, Neoclassical, Tudor Revival, Beaux Arts, Italian Renaissance, Prairie School, Craftsman, Moderne, and Art Deco (see Gebhard and Mansheim 1993; Long 1981; Shank 1979). Alternative stylistic terminology is also used in both academic and preservation circles; for example, the Victorian style is often used as a catch-all for the Gothic, Queen Anne, Eastern Stick, and Eastlake design modes (see Blumenson 1981; McAlester and McAlester 1984; Whiffen 1969). In general, because the built environment of Valley Junction dates from after circa 1890, all of the mid-19th century romantic styles (i.e., Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italian Villa, and Octagon) were out of date before development started; indeed, the Victorian movement was all but dead in Iowa by 1900 (Plymat 1976).

The great majority of the buildings constructed in Valley Junction between the 1890s and 1940s were not styled at all, but used a pattern language based upon *vernacular* forms. As employed by architectural historians, the term vernacular refers to common, ordinary structures that were not designed by professional architects (see Dell, Upton and Vlach 1985; Jackson 1984; Wyatt 1987). Vernacular buildings are the exact opposite of high style, period buildings, and are essentially folk architecture. Of course, vernacular buildings often incorporate minor details inspired by architectural fashion, such as the skin-deep embellishment provided by Victorian gingerbread or Colonial style shutters. Examples from Valley Junction reflect several different Midwestern house and commercial building types, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Previous Historic Preservation Work Done in Valley Junction

The present investigation was by no means the first survey of historical and architectural resources in the Valley Junction area. As early as 1974, the Army Corps of Engineers sponsored a study of cultural resources effected by federally funded flood control projects along the Raccoon River (Weichman, Weber and Appel 1974). In 1980, the Central Iowa Regional Association of Local Governments (CIRALG), in cooperation with Iowa Division of Historic Preservation, carried out a historic sites survey that included West Des Moines. The CIRALG survey identified seventy-five historic properties within the city limits, the majority of them in Valley Junction, and deposited site survey forms in the state historic sites inventory. This data formed the basis of the nominations of the James C. Jordan House and the Valley Junction City Hall to the National Register of Historic Places.

More recently, in 1987, the Valley Junction '87 Committee (later renamed the Valley Junction Foundation), hired a team of consultants to study various local development issues. Their interim report, dated March 1987, included an architectural overview by architect Douglas A. Wells. Although the consultants' recommendations generally avoided historic preservation issues, Wells was able to identify the two-story, brick "Main Street" commercial building as the essential historical element of old downtown Valley Junction (Wells 1987). Historical and architectural data on a number of residential properties was collected by the city as part of its housing rehabilitation project in response to the 1993 flood. As recently as 1997, city staff and consultants surveyed and assessed the preservation potential of individual buildings affected by publicly funded projects such as the Emergency Flood Assistance Program.

CHAPTER III RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To carry out the survey, BCA developed a research design that took into account the city's planning needs, the interests of its citizens, available funding, time limitations, and the nature of the historic properties being studied. The principal objective of the survey was to gather architectural and historical information about buildings in the Valley Junction area sufficient to characterize the range of historic properties worthy of preservation. Because the survey was not intended to result in nominations to the National Register, the research design emphasized identification of historic properties in terms of architectural history themes, rather than compilation of property specific data. Specific research goals and methods are discussed below.

Background Research

Background research began before field survey and focused on the following information needs:

- What kinds of historic properties is the survey looking for?
- Where are particular kinds of historic properties likely to be found?
- What events or patterns of events shaped local development?
- What factors contributed to the preservation or loss of significant historic buildings?

The concept of historic context (i.e., an organizational framework of information based on historical theme, geographical area, and period of time) was utilized as the basis for organizing information on the history and development of Valley Junction. Historical research was oriented toward the identification of general trends, patterns, and events in local history, rather than on obtaining specific documentation on individual buildings.

Sources of background information included local, regional, and state histories, the records of the city planning department, reports of previous historic preservation surveys, general works on the architectural history of Iowa, zoning maps, plats and other historical maps, aerial photographs, fire insurance atlases, census reports, commercial directories, and the historic resource inventory of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Field Survey

The field survey was conducted at the reconnaissance level and was designed to note the general distribution of buildings representing important architectural styles, periods, and modes of construction. This kind of survey method is usually referred to as a *windshield survey* (see Derry, et al., 1985), but in this case the field investigation was conducted on foot. A record was made of each block surveyed, noting the general character of the houses in a particular area; these field notes were augmented by field forms which recorded more detailed information on the appearance and condition of individual

buildings believed to be important. A photographic record was kept of the reconnaissance, including comprehensive coverage of buildings in sample blocks and the commercial district.

It should be noted that "windshield" reconnaissance creates an unavoidable bias toward identification and evaluation of the surfaces of buildings which are visible from the public right-of-way. Some types of historic buildings are too complex for their preservation values to be assessed in this way. Many old facades are effectively masked by new siding, non-historic paint, vegetation, etc., and their historic integrity simply cannot be determined from the city street or sidewalk.

Evaluation of Historical and Architectural Values

Although limited in scope, the survey did allow for a "once over lightly" description of Valley Junction's architectural environment and the identification of representative buildings and streetscapes. Individual buildings and structures were classified by resource type, located on a standard city street map, and briefly described. The kinds of descriptive information compiled included:

- overall shape of plan
- number of stories
- structural system
- construction materials and finishes
- roof shape
- character defining elements (e.g., windows, porches, dormers)
- decorative elements
- important environmental features (topography, vegetation, landscaping)
- alterations and additions

To evaluate the preservation potential of the historic buildings observed, the survey team employed the following criteria, based upon the National Register criteria for evaluating significance. These criteria address the following general questions, which are applied to each building:

- Is the building more than fifty years old?
- Does it represent a historically significant architectural style or period?
- Does it exemplify the use of historically important materials or exhibit high quality craftsmanship?
- Does it reflect an important pattern or trend in the history of the physical development of Valley Junction?

- Is the building associated with an important local person, group, or historical event?
- Is it a rare example of a once important type of building which has almost disappeared?

In most cases, no conclusive evaluation of a property's historical significance could be made without more detailed historical and descriptive information. By the same token, no reliable assessment could be made of an individual property's structural condition.

Review and Organization of Survey Data

Survey data were recorded in archival research notes, field notes, and maps, with 35mm black and white and color slide photography, supplemented by standardized field survey forms. The latter consisted of a simple, one-page "multiple choice" checklist with general questions and architectural categories and was intended as working papers rather than an archival record of the survey.

Before the survey data were synthesized into this final report, the notes, maps, photographs, and forms were reviewed by the principal investigator for content, clarity, and accuracy. This raw data provided the basis for the final technical report. No Iowa Historic Inventory forms were completed but two sets of field photographs, "labeled", were turned over to the city.

CHAPTER IV SURVEY RESULTS

A total of 850 residential and 150 commercial properties were included in the survey area (Figure. 2). Significant concentrations of historic (more than fifty-year old) buildings were found within the eastern half of the survey area, i.e., east of 8th Street. In addition, small pockets and individual pre-1945 houses were found to occur west of 8th, particularly in the area south of Maple Street. In general, the architecture of the old houses reflects late 19th century cottage and early 20th century bungalow movements. The pattern language is almost entirely vernacular and there are few houses of style. Geographically, this historic residential neighborhood extends north of Vine Street for several blocks. The design characteristics of non-residential properties are also predominantly vernacular and are consistent with the architecture of a small provincial town. Most of the downtown buildings appear to have been constructed between circa 1893 and 1940 and as a group they form a cohesive streetscape that possesses an identity of time and place.

The following paragraphs discuss the most important architectural patterns and trends represented by historic properties in Valley Junction. Six types of historic buildings are described:

- The Mechanic's Cottage
- The Bungalow
- The Suburban Cottage
- The Prairie Cube
- The Craftsman
- The Main Street Building

The architectural attributes of buildings which do not fit within one of the above categories are also discussed, under "Other Styles and Forms." A section on "Streetscapes" has been added to address findings relating to urban landscape elements represented by groups of historic properties.

The Mechanic's Cottage

The great majority of houses constructed in Valley Junction during the 1890s and 1900s were simple utilitarian structures built of readily available milled pine lumber supplied by local lumberyards. They were based on standardized plans, including designs created explicitly for rail-work employee housing (see Berg 1893:23-27), and hastily fabricated from standardized parts by builder-speculators in rows of nearly identical dwellings. Architecturally, they were essentially devoid of style, but derived their basic form from the gable-front folk houses of New England and the Lower Mississippi Valley, indeed, some believe that the prototype was the one-story bungalowoid "shotgun shack" form, which entered the United States through Louisiana from the West Indies (McAlester and McAlester 1984:90-91; Wyatt 1987:36; see also Carney 1983). In the Midwest,

vernacular houses built in this mode prior to 1910 are often referred as examples of the Mechanic's Cottage house type.

General identifying characteristics of the mechanic's cottage are:

- wood frame construction (balloon frame)
- simple rectangular ground plan
- narrow facade
- one and one-half stories
- gable roof (oriented with its axis perpendicular to the street)
- weatherboard siding
- minimal ornamental treatment

Valley Junction contains a number of examples of a distinctive regional variant of the mechanic's cottage, called the Pyramid Cottage (Wyatt 1987:35), which is characterized by:

- four unit square ground plan
- pyramidal (equilateral hipped) roof
- one story (with attic)
- gabled or cross-gabled wall dormers

This type of vernacular dwelling has not received wide attention in the architectural literature of the Midwest, but displays a pattern of design elements believed to have diffused into Iowa from the older Middle West and Upper South regions (Kniffen 1965). It is closely associated with late 19th and early 20th century railroad worker housing. Although frequently unadorned, some feature picturesque character-defining elements such as porches and dormers, decorative fretwork, and a range of wall cladding and roofing materials.

The mechanic's cottage was proletariat housing, a simple dwelling without amenities designed to satisfy the basic needs of small working class families. The simple linear floor plan featured small, cramped rooms, poor natural lighting of interior spaces, and inefficient heating and ventilation. Over time, these small houses proved relatively expensive to maintain and prone to fires and most were razed. An unknown number of this type of dwelling were built in Valley Junction in the 1890s but few survive unaltered a century later. Most surviving specimens have been substantially rebuilt or enlarged with additions (Figures 3-6).

The Bungalow

The vernacular bungalow is the chronological successor to the mechanic's cottage in Valley Junction. Built between circa 1905 and 1940, these were builders' catalog houses designed to shelter upper proletariat and middle class families (Doucet and Weaver 1985; McAlester and McAlester 1984:454). The name was derived from the Bengalis folk house of India, which was a low, one-story thatched dwelling with a wide, sweeping porch. In early 20th century America, the bungalow design was ardently promoted by Gustav Stickley and other small house advocates. One of the most successful house forms ever introduced, bungalow construction peaked nation-wide during the 1920s, by which time the term had come to be commonly applied to any small, unpretentious house built in a rural or suburban setting (including turn of the century mechanic's cottages). Many architectural historians refer to these houses as "bungaloid" forms.

The basic diagnostic elements of the bungalow house are:

- simple rectangular ground plan
- one to one-and-one-half stories
- side-gabled or front-gabled facade
- low-pitched gable or hipped roof

Though they are not considered houses of style, in contrast to the earlier workers' cottages these bungalows are intelligently planned, reasonably well constructed, and built with durable materials. Universally constructed of wood, bungalows in Valley Junction were occasionally finished with narrow clapboards, shingle siding, or stucco, or a combination of different wall cladding materials. Porches and dormers are common. In some hip-roofed bungalows, the roof shape has been modified with a small gable or deck on the hip roof, while in others the basic four-square plan has been pushed out by extensions and re-entrants, creating a distinctively "folk Victorian" appearance. Since they were originally constructed, many of these houses have been expanded with rear additions. Ornamental treatment may include heavy wooden or masonry porch posts, decorative shingles, exposed rafter tails and roof braces, and large brick chimneys. These houses were built with modern plumbing and heating systems and represent the first popular American house form with living rooms, efficient kitchens, and built-in porches (Lancaster 1983; Mattson 1981). Bungalows represent the most numerous historic property type in Valley Junction (Figures 7-12).

The Suburban Cottage

Cottage architecture flourished in the mid-19th century, as popularized in the pattern books of Andrew, Jackson, Downing, Calvert, Vaux, and others. In the post-Victorian era, a distinctive type of vernacular cottage architecture evolved which reflected the technological innovations and changing socio-economic climate of the times (see Gowans 1986; Scully 1988). In Valley Junction, this trend is reflected in a number of houses which share the distinctive characteristics of what architectural historians have called the Suburban Cottage.

A product of the so-called Eclectic movement (McAlester and McAlester 1984:319), the suburban cottage was a modest, practical, sensible house that strove for comfort and beauty. Built by local carpenters from mass produced house plans, these houses were designed for middle class families and derived their character from a combination of different architectural modes, combining vernacular plans with eye-catching romantic and picturesque stylistic elements. Essentially vernacular houses, these structures have been sometimes misidentified as examples of Colonial Revival or Craftsman style period houses.

The identifying characteristics of the suburban cottage are:

- rectangular plan
- one-and-one half (occasionally two) stories
- medium-pitch gable roof (sometimes hipped)
- wood frame construction
- facade proportions emphasizing verticality
- weatherboard siding
- decorative details influenced by Victorian or Colonial Revival styles

Ornamental treatment of suburban cottages tends to be reserved rather than flamboyant and borrows from a range of styles. A typical house of this type will have detailed cornice lines, sometimes featuring pedimented gables forming enclosed triangles or abbreviated cornice returns. Bay windows, porches with turned posts and balusters, shutters, and small windows with leaded or stained glass are common. A distinctive feature of several suburban cottages in Valley Junction is the application of "folk Victorian" decorative treatment (see McAlester and McAlester 1984:309-310), particularly in the form of fretwork in the gables and parts of walls, especially under the gables, covered by wooden shingles arranged in coursed, staggered, or fish-scale patterns. Finally, while most house plans are based upon a simple rectangle, some have irregularities in the form of less than room-sized projections (porches or bays) and most have acquired room-sized or larger rearward additions. There are also vernacular suburban cottages which incorporate design elements borrowed from contemporary 20th century styles, including examples of Dutch Colonial Revival and Craftsman (Figures 13-19).

The Prairie Cube

The Prairie Cube, also called the American Four-Square House, was a type of vernacular cottage that enjoyed nation-wide popularity between circa 1900 and 1930 (Wyatt 1987:30). Examples from Valley Junction are relatively plain, boxy, two-story balloon frame houses. General characteristics of the type are listed on the following page:

- square plan
- two stories
- hipped or cross-gabled roof
- wide eaves

- dormers
- porches
- brick, stucco or weatherboard finishes

Constructed of wood or brick, these houses interpret the pattern language developed by Frank Lloyd Wright and other Chicago School architects (Wilson and Robinson 1977; Gebhard and Mansheim 1993:34-35; McAlester and McAlester 1984:439-440). Ornamentation tends to be a mixture of Colonial Revival and Arts and Crafts influences, and include horizontal bands of trim around the body of the house, turned wooden porch columns, exposed rafters under the eaves, and stained glass. These houses were built as the homes of Valley Junction's more affluent citizens and are located on choice lots in the old mixed residential-commercial core of the town (Figures 20-22).

The Craftsman

Bungalows based upon designs inspired by the English Arts and Crafts and the American Craftsman movements constitute the most architecturally fashionable dwellings in Valley Junction. Built from standard plans published in builders' catalogs and magazines such as Stickley's *The Craftsman* (published from 1901 until 1916) and the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the Craftsman bungalow is the archetype of the middle class suburban dwelling and was extensively used by contractors from California to Maine. Identifying features of the style include:

- simple box-like shape
- one-and-one-half stories
- clapboard, stucco or brick veneer wall cladding
- low-pitched gabled (occasionally hipped) roof
- exposed roof structural members (rafters, struts, beam ends)
- full or partial-width porches
- brick or rusticated concrete block foundations

Craftsman style bungalows are distinguishable from vernacular houses only in their emphasis on Arts and Crafts movement decorative themes (McAlester and McAlester 1984:452-463). Some of the more interesting Craftsman-inspired details observed in Valley Junction include porches supported by tapered square columns set on masonry piers; decorative (false) beams or triangular knee braces under gables; paired, ribbon (three continuous) and transomed windows; and large gabled dormers with exposed roof beams and rafter tails. Some local examples may have been pre-cut or prefabricated mail-order houses assembled by local carpenters (Gebhard and Mansheim 1993:35) but most were probably translated from builders' catalogs or pattern books (Figures 23-28).

The Main Street Building

In Valley Junction, as in other Iowa towns, the first commercial buildings were simple, box-like structures without much in the way of ornamentation. The majority of those which survive are relatively plain brick buildings of a type sometimes referred to as the Main Street Building.

General characteristics of the Main Street Building are:

- rectangular plan
- two stories
- flat or low-pitched gable roof
- low (false-front) parapet
- brick facades
- round, segmented, and straight-sided rectangular or arched windows
- street level storefronts
- upper level offices and apartments

The volume and details of the facade emphasize verticality, with most of the ornamentation concentrated in the cornice and windows. Although some may have been designed by trained architects (see Gebhard and Mansheim 1993:28), these are basically vernacular buildings embellished with skin-deep stylistic decoration that ranges from the picturesque to the classical, but the predominant mode is based upon the 19th century Italianate style, which featured decorative brackets along the cornice, masonry pilasters, articulated door and window headers, and horizontal belt courses. Commercial activity was located on the first floor, behind large glass windows, reached through a recessed entry, with the upstairs space given over to small offices, apartments, or meeting rooms. A one-story variant of the Main Street commercial building appeared in the 20th century but was generally devoid of stylistic detail (Figures 29-33).

Several wood frame commercial buildings survive in Valley Junction. In form and function, these one and two story vernacular buildings echo pre-Civil War architectural traditions. The ground plan takes the shape of a rectangular box and the facade comprises a flat wooden surface pierced for a central doorway and symmetrical rows of windows. The distinctive ornamental feature is the high "false-front" that hides the gabled roof from the street. The examples of this "boom town" store which survive lack individual distinction and tend to be in a generally poor state of preservation. In terms of the commercial district's historic character, they make only a minor contribution (Figure 34).

Other Styles and Forms

Other examples of mainstream architectural forms are represented by individual buildings within the survey area. These include the examples listed on the following page:

- Gothic Revival, seen in the former Catholic Church at 4th and Elm, a modest brick edifice built in 1914 (Figure 35).
- Beaux Arts/City Beautiful, of which the Valley Junction Telephone Exchange Building is an indifferent example (Figure 36).
- Moderne/Art Deco, which is present in the facade of the old City Hall, the school, and in the commercial block at 200-205 5th Street (Figure 37).

In the context of local architectural history, these are one-of-a-kind buildings and therefore beyond the scope of this survey. While these architectural curiosities provide an interesting physical record of the history and development of Valley Junction in areas such as government, education, commerce, and religion, none appear to represent outstanding examples of architectural styles and periods or method of construction. However, it is interesting to note that the design of the 1914 Rock Island railroad depot reflects turn of the century corporate architecture (see Berg 1893:278-446), while the former gasoline station at 201 4th Street is a rare surviving example of the first structures built in response to the automobile revolution.

There appears to have been little house building activity in the oldest part of Valley Junction between 1935 and 1948. Some examples of contractor-built Minimal Traditional dwellings in the northwestern part of the survey area may be more than fifty years old (Figure 38), but their design elements reflect nothing more than simple bungalows abstracted from the Tudor and Cape Cod industrial vernacular traditions (Gebhard and Manshiem 1993:36). During the postwar period, house design gradually departs from historical precedents, with the first California Ranch houses (a Craftsman derivative) appearing in the 1950s (McAlester and McAlester 1984:477-480). A variety of mid- to late-20th century "contemporary folk" house forms occur as in-fill construction within older neighborhoods.

Streetscapes

Groups of historic buildings and associated landscape elements sometimes comprise a specific environment that conveys a sense of time and place. Architectural historians and preservation planners sometimes refer to these multiple property assemblages as *streetscapes*.

In Valley Junction, the rectilinear street pattern is of historical interest, in that it reflects the original 1892 gridiron plat, itself an historical artifact of the rectangular land survey system. City streets tend to be narrow, straight, and tree-lined. Their alignment, width, grade, and surface material define viewsheds along blocks of houses and exert a great influence over the three-dimensional pattern of space. Other elements of the circulation system, particularly sidewalks and driveways, also contribute to historic character and have important historical associations in their own right, such as the impact of the

automobile on house plans. House setbacks are uniform throughout the residential areas, with small front yards and clusters of accessory buildings (garages and sheds) in back (Figure 39).

Landscaping on residential lots reflects local responses to both natural systems and cultural influences. Boulevard plantings consist of deciduous shade tree species and represent an essential component of historic streetscapes. Ornamental plantings in yards include both evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs, and ground cover includes grass lawns, hedges, and planting beds, which often contribute to the historic character of individual dwellings.

In the old downtown commercial district along 5th Street, the streetscape is dominated by brick facades built side by side and flush to the sidewalk. Storefronts tend to have large areas of glazing on their ground floors as well as recessed entries. The roofs of old buildings are hidden behind low brick parapet walls and commercial activity is concentrated on the ground floor. Historically, the downtown environment was a landscape of solid surfaces: brick, concrete, asphalt, and glass, with an undulating rhythm of building heights (Figure 40).

CHAPTER V SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary goal of this project was to identify architectural/historical themes represented by buildings in the Valley Junction area. The survey was not designed to compile a detailed inventory of individually significant houses and commercial buildings, nor was it intended to result directly in the designation of historic preservation sites or districts. Survey work was oriented toward the identification and description of architectural patterns and historic trends; these data were then used to develop an architectural/historical context for buildings constructed prior to circa 1948. Every effort was made to collect information that would contribute to the city's comprehensive planning process.

Conclusions

- A. The oldest parts of Valley Junction date from the 1890s, but no pre-1892 buildings are known to survive within the area covered by the survey. Most of the built environment appears to have been constructed between circa 1900 and 1930.
- B. The present study identified five important types of historic houses:
- Mechanic's Cottage
 - Bungalow
 - Suburban Cottage
 - Prairie Cube
 - Craftsman

These house types represent the most influential architectural/historical themes reflected by residential development in the Valley Junction.

- C. The largest concentration of these property types occurs within the area east of 8th Street, between Vine and Railroad Avenue. There is also a more attenuated distribution of historically interesting houses west of 8th, in the blocks south of Maple, and along Walnut Street. The streets north of Holiday Park contain a mix of contractor built houses constructed after the 1930s: while some are more than fifty years old, in general they are not historically significant, either individually or as a group.
- D. The only houses in Valley Junction representing an academic style or period architecture are an unknown number of Craftsman bungalows based on pattern book plans. Pre-1948 housing stock is dominated by vernacular pattern language characteristic of late 19th century cottage and early 20th century bungalow movements. The predominant historic house form has a simple rectangular ground plan with less than room-sized projections, although room-sized additions are not uncommon. House elevations are characteristically one-and-one-half

story facades with normal pitched gabled or hipped roofs; pyramidal hipped and cross-gabled roof configurations are also historic. Detached automobile garages are the norm. All of the major historic house types are wood frame constructions with balloon structural systems. The most common wall cladding material is horizontal weatherboards, lapped or rabbeted, followed by stucco, clapboard, particle board, and asbestos shingle siding.

- E. The vernacular brick Main Street Building constitutes the predominant modular unit of the historic commercial district. In terms of architectural form and structure, these buildings feature simple rectangular ground plans, one and two story elevations, fired brick facades, composite (brick, clay tile, or concrete block) walls, and flat roofs with parapets. Stylistic details tend to be Italianate-influenced and occur primarily in the decoration of cornices, window and door surrounds, pilasters, and belt courses.
- F. One important commercial property type, the Main Street Building, was identified in the historic downtown business district along 5th Street south of Elm. Except for scattered buildings (i.e., the Valley Junction Telephone Exchange Building at 612 Walnut), the commercial architecture outside of the traditional downtown is non-historic in character.
- G. While it is apparent that there are numerous historic buildings in Valley Junction which merit preservation, including several recently rehabilitated and restored properties, the area contains relatively few properties which individually meet the established criteria for determining historical significance (i.e., National Register eligibility). However, the survey was able to document clusters of historic buildings that represent the standards and tastes of the community during the period from circa 1892 to 1948; while their components lack individual distinction, these districts represent significant and distinguishable entities. Two historic districts were identified:
 - a Valley Junction residential historic district, comprising the area bounded by 8th, Vine, 1st, and Railroad Avenue; and
 - a Valley Junction commercial historic district, along 5th Street between Elm and Railroad Avenue.

While both districts represent a notable concentration and continuity of pre-1948 architecture, there are discontinuous areas within the residential district which have potentially higher preservation values due to the overall integrity of the historic buildings. This historical integrity is based upon the retention of historic architectural forms as well as the relationships between the individual properties.

- H. Historic properties in Valley Junction are fragile resources and there are a range of agents at work changing, damaging, and destroying old buildings. Causes of historic building degradation include human action, institutional action, and natural forces. The major human cause of building deterioration appears to have been deferred maintenance and neglect -- according to local Realtors, less than one-half of the houses in Valley Junction are well maintained. Poor workmanship and planning in the construction of additions have also been contributing factors. Unsympathetic "remuddling" of historic buildings has been a recurring problem in both residential and commercial areas. Institutional threats to historic buildings have manifested themselves in land development that is unsympathetic to the area's historic character, and a good deal of damage to historic fabric has also been carried out in the name of zoning, health and safety codes, and permitting procedures which are incompatible with historic preservation goals.
- I. Overall, the greatest enemy of historic buildings in Valley Junction has been inundation caused by flooding of the Raccoon River. It is probably safe to say that more historic buildings have been damaged as a result of overflows than by human agency. It also should be noted that old buildings are especially susceptible to weathering and damage caused by freezing and thawing (Iowa's severe mid-continental climate is particularly hard on roofs and exterior finishes). In many instances, flooding and weathering have acted in conjunction with deferred maintenance and neglect to inflict irreparable damage on historic structures.
- J. The historic buildings of Valley Junction represent a set of scarce, non-renewable community resources. Individual buildings are physical links to the community's past and possess intrinsic value as historic resources. Architecturally, as part of the modern city, these historic buildings provide environmental diversity as well as unique opportunities for urban revitalization through historic preservation. Historically, they document more than one hundred years of Valley Junction community heritage and form a unique inheritance for the citizens of West Des Moines.

Planning Recommendations

1. Historic buildings that are associated with important historic property types and retain historic integrity of those architectural features necessary to convey their historical significance are worthy of preservation and should be considered in community development planning.
2. To be considered worthy of preservation, an historic property must clearly illustrate, through its distinctive architectural characteristics, the pattern of features common to a particular historic property type (i.e., Mechanic's Cottage, Bungalow, Suburban Cottage, Prairie Cube, Craftsman, and Main Street Building). Ordinarily, historic buildings that have had major changes to their form (ground plan, elevations), structure (wall cladding, roof shape), and

character-defining architectural details (windows and doors, porches, decorative details) should not be considered worthy of preservation. Individual properties that have lost some historic details can have preservation value if they retain the majority of the features that illustrate their association with historic property types.

3. For planning purposes, the city may wish to consider creating one or more special historic conservation districts comprising groups of historic houses and commercial buildings. Individually distinctive historic buildings could serve as focal points for preservation planning in the old downtown district along 5th Street, but in residential areas certain streetscapes could be considered historically significant even if all of the houses lacked individual distinction. The primary factor to be considered is the number of non-contributing (i.e., non-significant) properties a conservancy district could contain and still convey its historic character. The information needed to determine preservation district boundaries should come from systematic, intensive surveys designed to document precisely and completely all historic properties within a given area.
4. The city should prepare and implement a historic preservation plan for Valley Junction as part of its comprehensive land use plan. The primary goal of the preservation plan should be to minimize conflicts between historic preservation and development by coordinating land use policies and zoning with preservation guidelines.
5. These guidelines should focus on additions to historic buildings, new construction, demolition, alterations to historic facades, roof alterations, and similar major work that would require a city permit. In addition, the city may wish to consider developing voluntary, non-regulatory guidelines for minor work, such as alterations to windows, siding, and trim, re-roofing, repair or replacement of porches and dormers, construction of garages, and installation of new siding. Guidelines should emphasize preservation over repair, repair over restoration, restoration over reconstruction.
6. The city should encourage the documentation and nomination of historic properties to the National Register of Historic Places. Historic property registration could be either a private or a public initiative. The Certified Local Government (CLG) program offers a useful model for an approach to historic preservation based on partnerships between federal, state, and local government agencies (see Long n.d.).
7. The city should take an active stewardship role through education, by providing property owners, developers, contractors, city officials, and the general public with information, education, and training in the conservation and rehabilitation of historic architecture.

Suggested Design Guidelines

1. The Secretary of the Interior's standards for the treatment of historic properties are the recommended basis for evaluating projects involving historic buildings. The National Park Service has published guidelines for preserving, rehabilitating, restoring, and reconstructing historic properties that pertain to both exterior and interior work (see Weeks and Grimmer 1995). These standards and guidelines would provide the underpinning for any Valley Junction design guidelines.
2. All work on historic buildings should be of a character and quality that maintains the distinguishing features of the buildings and their environment. The removal of intact historic architectural features, such as porches and dormers, should not be permitted except in cases where preservation in place is not practical or cost-effective. Adaptive reuse of historic buildings should be compatible with their historic form and architectural integrity.
3. Distinctive architectural features and examples of skilled craftsmanship should be treated with sensitivity. Exterior finishes, cornices, roof-wall junctions, porches, and dormers are areas of particular concern.
4. Alteration of historic buildings should be made with a minimum loss of historic fabric. Deteriorated or damaged architectural features such as siding, trim, porches, steps, windows, entries, and storefronts should be repaired rather than replaced whenever possible. Replacement materials should match the original in composition, design, color, texture, and appearance. Restoration work should be based upon physical or pictorial evidence whenever possible, rather than relying upon conjectural designs.
5. To the extent possible, rehabilitation of storefronts and commercial building facades should seek to remove incompatible (non-historic) layers of siding in order to recover and emphasize the original architectural features.
6. New construction and contemporary designs are appropriate in historic commercial and residential areas, provided that the new buildings respect the proportions and detailing of adjacent historic structures.
7. New construction should utilize materials which are compatible with those used in pre-1948 buildings, such as brick facades for commercial buildings and wood or stucco exterior finishes for residences, so that they will fit into the environment of historic buildings and streetscapes. New small-scale architectural elements, such as cloth awnings, flower boxes, signage, and street furniture, should be used to enhance the character of older buildings, however, care should be taken to insure that modern elements do not make a building appear to be from a different period or style than it really is.
8. The most important principle for new construction in historic areas is to maintain the scale and character of historic buildings. Generally, new homes and commercial buildings should be compatible in height, massing, setback, materials,

and rhythm with surrounding historic buildings. For example, maximum allowable building height for new building in residential neighborhoods should be limited to one and one-half stories and built in line with adjacent buildings; in the historic commercial district, no building should be higher than two stories and all facades should be built flush to the sidewalk.

9. The same care should be taken in the design of automobile garages and accessory buildings as with any other construction in relation to historic residential properties. Garages and other outbuildings should compliment rather than distract from the historic character of old houses and streetscapes.
10. The reproduction of historic building forms and details is expensive and artificial and should not be encouraged. New construction that aims at "Victorianization" of Valley Junction is inconsistent with the area's historic character. Moderne buildings that reprise the traditional forms of the Eclectic Movement, such as the Colonial Revival, Prairie, and Craftsman, are acceptable alternatives to late-20th century reproductions of Victorian architecture.
11. Trademark designs for commercial buildings should be prohibited along 5th Street and in residential conservancy areas.
12. Whenever historic buildings cannot be preserved in place, they should be relocated to new sites with compatible surroundings; or, if demolition is unavoidable, they should be carefully documented (photographs and written data) so that a body of useful information will be preserved.

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Appendix A:
Field Identification Form

Appendix B:
Photographic Log

Appendix C:
Photographs (Bound Separately)