

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAR 11 1986

date entered APR 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Henry Ambler House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 405 Broadway _____ not for publication

city, town Mt. Pleasant _____ vicinity of

state Iowa code 019 county Henry code 087

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input type="checkbox"/> public | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input type="checkbox"/> educational |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessible | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial |
| | N/A | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> other: |

4. Owner of Property

name David L. Cordes

street & number 505 W. Monroe Street

city, town Mt. Pleasant _____ vicinity of state Iowa 62641

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Recorder's Office

street & number Henry County Courthouse

city, town Mt. Pleasant _____ vicinity of state Iowa 62641

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes _____ no

date _____ federal _____ state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records

city, town _____ state _____

7. Description

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Situated in a fine old residential neighborhood in close proximity to downtown Mt. Pleasant, the Henry Ambler house is a particularly fine example of the Italian Villa style. Constructed in 1868, the structure borrows several details from each of two earlier villas which were constructed in Mt. Pleasant in 1858 and 1865 as well as presenting several features which are distinct unto itself. As such, the Ambler house displays the high stylistic ideals and tastes of an upper middle class family in that small county seat town in the late 1860's.

The Ambler house is an asymmetrical two story red brick edifice that rests on rusticated limestone blocks over cellars and a crawl space. This structure as well the other two local examples, is somewhat unusual in its overall design and massing. The three story pavillion tower is placed forward of two block-like structures of different height which are placed with the largest one slightly behind the face of the tower and the smaller block in the same plane as the rear wall of the tower. The two main blocks of the building are capped by low-pitched hip roofs with broad overhanging eaves which are supported by large paired scrolled brackets with pendant drops and modillions placed above the window openings. The one story section located at the rear has undecorated eaves and a hip roof that slopes up to the rear wall of the main portion of the house.

The most predominant feature is the three story campanile which is capped by a simple pagoda roof with a carved wooden finial placed at the center. Placed over the main entrance and the second story window above are two identical fringed hoods with cast iron cresting. The hood at the ground level is supported by engaged fluted columns which feature temple-of-winds capitals. Windows generally are of the characteristic round arched variety. They are two lighed with a center teardrop oculus and are capped by heavy hood mouldings which are constructed of brick. On the south side of the structure is a large two-story bay window which has eight round-arched windows at each level. The windows on the north side of the building at the first floor level are of the six over six variety and are representative of an earlier structure built ca. 1854 which was incorporated into this house.

Inside, the Ambler house originally consisted of a foyer, parlor, library, sitting room, dining room, master bedroom, bath, kitchen, and pantry on the first floor, four bedrooms and a trunk room on the second and a cellar area divided into four rooms, and also a crawl space which is dug to a depth of three to four feet. All of the bedrooms featured large walk-in closets and there was a coat closet and two storage closets on the first floor. The front stairs are feminine in character and turn a 270 degree spiral at the top landing. The back stairs progress from the kitchen up to the back portion of the hallway. One room in the cellar has plastered walls and ceiling and was used as a cold cellar. The main entrance features particularly fine etched plate glass in the doors and transom, with Henry Ambler's monogram centered in the pattern of the door glass. All of the arched windows featured butternut interior pocket shutters with a stationary fan shutter located in the arch. The square windows in the parlor are surrounded by pedimented casings which feature a panel with an inlayed pattern similar to the greek key design.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| ___ prehistoric | ___ archeology-prehistoric | ___ community planning | ___ landscape architecture | ___ religion |
| ___ 1400-1499 | ___ archeology-historic | ___ conservation | ___ law | ___ science |
| ___ 1500-1599 | ___ agriculture | ___ economics | ___ literature | ___ sculpture |
| ___ 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | ___ education | ___ military | ___ social/ |
| ___ 1700-1799 | ___ art | ___ engineering | ___ music | ___ humanitarian |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | ___ commerce | ___ exploration/settlement | ___ philosophy | ___ theater |
| ___ 1900- | ___ communications | ___ industry | ___ politics/government | ___ transportation |
| | | ___ invention | | ___ other (specify) |

Specific dates 1868-69 **Builder/Architect** Not Known

Criterion C: Architecture

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

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Henry Ambler, born in England in 1821, came to America with his parents when he was six months of age. In 1856 he moved to Mt. Pleasant where he established one of the most successful law practices in that part of the state. The promise of economic growth offered by the arrival of the Burlington and Missouri railroad in Mt. Pleasant that same year perhaps influenced his selection of that town as a home. Certainly the availability of a fine local college where the children could get an education did influence that choice. Immediately upon his arrival, he began purchasing many parcels of real estate and had constructed the second largest building on the town square. Ambler's endeavors were diverse and included heading the law department at Iowa Wesleyan University (the second college west of the Mississippi to have a formal course in law, where one of his students, Belle Mansfield, was the first woman admitted to the bar in the United States) and serving as President of the Iowa North Central Railroad from 1868-70, established the Mt. Pleasant Gas Light Company in 1872. The Amblers were also involved in many social activities. Such luminaries as Frederick Douglas, and Susan B. Anthony came to speak on the stage at Ambler & Penn's Union Hall. Bronson Alcott to give "one of his wondrous conversations at the home of Henry Ambler."

On April 21, 1868, Henry Ambler bought the homestead and acreage of John Craig at the corner of Saunders and Broadway for \$6,000. Immediately, construction was begun on additions and alterations which transformed the earlier structure into an Italian villa and nearly doubled its size. Most of the walls were up by June and construction was nearly complete by the following winter except for the installation of the hoods on the front of the tower.

Henry Ambler was locally known as an eloquent speaker. Both he and his wife, Louisa, took delight in entertaining large parties of guests for dinners and meetings which they did, reportedly at great frequency. Because of their social station and their economic stature (Henry Ambler's reported net worth in 1870 was the second highest in Mt. Pleasant), it seemed only fitting that they have a home in which to entertain in style. The most fashionable style of that decade, the Italian villa, seemed only appropriate for their new home. The fact that there were already two such structures in town probably dictated that in order not to be second best, a towered villa was mandatory. Italian villas were featured in plan books and other periodicals of the time and the proponents of the style elaborated on the benefits of being able to overlook the breath-taking countryside from the heights of the beveledere. This was apparently something the Amblers took seriously and wished to share with their guests, because the ceiling of the tower was decorated with ornamental wallpapers with a matching frieze border that was fit for the finest parlor.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet 9-2

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Mt. Pleasant

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

UTM References

A

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| Zone | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification

Beginning at the Northeast corner of Lot 2, Shaw & Craig's Addition, thence following the east line of said lot south 103', west 186.58', north 103', thence east along north lot line of said lot 186.58'. Includes only the ~~subject house.~~

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Form by James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator
Text by David L. Cordes, Mt. Pleasant

organization Iowa Office of Historic Preservation date February 27, 1986
Iowa State Historical Department

street & number East 12th St. and Grand Ave. telephone 515-281-4137

city or town Des Moines state Iowa 50319

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Rowell J. Soike*

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date February 28, 1986

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

James M. McPherson National Register date 4/10/86
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Description Item number 7 Page 2

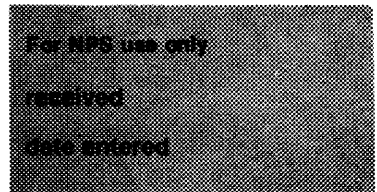
entrance features particularly fine etched plate glass in the doors and transom, with Henry Ambler's monogram centered in the pattern of the door glass. All of the arched windows featured butternut interior pocket shutters with a stationary fan shutter located in the arch. The square windows in the parlor are surrounded by pedimented casings which feature a panel with an inlaid pattern similar to the greek key design.

Exterior alterations occurred in the 1940's when the original south side porch was replaced with a larger shed type roof over a concrete slab. In 1965 the front porch was removed because of its unsafe condition. In March 1983 the second and third levels of the tower were gutted by an arson set fire. The roof and decorative brackets have been reconstructed with the original finial being reused. The interior and the windows of the tower are still awaiting restoration as are the two porches. The interior of the rest of the structure was altered in 1954 when the house was divided into five apartments. Many additional partitions were added and several ceilings were lowered. There were no changes to the original walls and doors. Fortunately, none of the alterations are irreversible.

Italianate cubes appear to have been the prevailing choice for homes of significant proportions during the mid 1800's in Mt. Pleasant. The first examples were built around 1855 and many continued to be erected until the early 1870's. Only three Italian villas were constructed in the county and all within a one block radius in Mt. Pleasant. Of these three (the subject property, the Brazelton House, 401 N. Main, NRHP 1.27.83, and Weir Funeral Home, 213 N. Main, sandblasted and given a rear garage addition). The Ambler house is the only one of these that has not had structural additions, originally being the largest in size. The three houses are so similar in design and degree of detailing that it is difficult to distinguish that one has a greater degree of significance than the others.

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Continuation sheet

Significance

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featured in plan books and other periodicals of the time and the proponents of the style elaborated on the benefits of being able to overlook the breath-taking countryside from the heights of the bevedere. This was apparently something the Amblers took seriously and wished to share with their guests, because the ceiling of the tower was decorated with ornamental wallpapers with a matching frieze border that was fit for the finest parlor.

Although it is probable that the Ambler house shared the same architect as the two previous villas, no evidence in regard to either has been found. Extensive research has been unable to find any mention of architect or builder for any of the three structures. One minor connection is known, a carpenter, Willaim H. Murphy was employed in the construction of both the Ambler house and the Sargent house (the italian villa constructed in 1865).

The Amblers owned the property until 1891 when it was sold to a neighbor, George Spahr, who lived until 1921 and his heirs retained ownership of the home until 1941. Since that time there have been six different owners.

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Bibliography

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Page 2

Manuscripts

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