

United States Department of the Interior
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National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

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INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
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This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

☒ New Submission ☐ Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa, 1860-1944

C. Form Prepared by

name/title Jan R. Nash
organization Tallgrass Historians L.C. date March 8, 1994
street & number 931 Maiden Lane telephone 319/354-6722
city or town Iowa City state Iowa zip code 52240

(Adapted from Robt. C. Vogel, "Survey of Historic Farmsteads in Lyon County IA")

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

David L. [Signature]
Signature and title of certifying official
State Historical Society of Iowa
State or Federal agency and bureau

Date 7/27/94

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

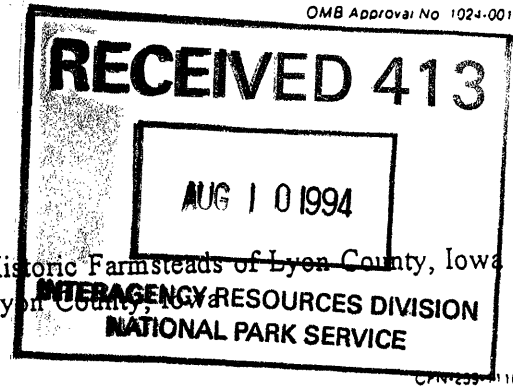
9.23.94
Date of Action

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Lyon County, Iowa
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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

1. Introduction

The Lyon County landscape presents a variegated pattern of farmsteads which document the area's agricultural heritage. Each of the major phases of the county's agricultural development produced one or more specific types of farmstead, developed to serve the needs of particular operators at particular times, and each successive phase inherited parts of the earlier farmstead landscape, to which that phase added its own building types and patterns of usage.

What exactly is meant by "farmstead"? By definition, a farmstead is the land and the buildings on a farm which provide the dwelling for the family and the structures needed for farming operations: in traditional usage, the term is not generally applied to farm fields used for tillage or pasture.¹ The composition of farmstead buildings differs from farm to farm, but in Lyon County generally, farmstead outbuildings consist of barns, sheds, granaries, cribs, silos, and other structures used to store or process agricultural products. In most cases, the barn is combined with stables, sheds, storerooms, and work areas into one large general purpose building. Accessory buildings usually include small structures such as garages, well houses, milk houses, workshops, etc. The principal influences that determine the makeup of Lyon County farmsteads are type of farming operation, size of the farm, and the income of the farmer. No one farm has all the features described.²

Historic farmsteads survive in the modern Lyon County landscape as the dominant cultural landform. Not surprisingly, the greatest number of historic farmsteads in Lyon County are found in the eastern townships, where the greatest number of family farms are found. Large numbers of abandoned

¹Sir William A. Craigie and James R. Hulbert (eds.), *A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1940), 2:937.

²For background on the physical characteristics of farms in Iowa, see Lowell Soike, "Viewing Iowa's Farmsteads," in *Take This Exit: Rediscovering the Iowa Landscape*, edited by Robert F. Sayre (Ames, 1989), 153-174. Iowa farming areas are examined in C.L. Holmes and C.W. Crickman, "Types of Farming in Iowa II," *Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 364* (Ames, 1938), 166-248; Duane C. Hawk, "Iowa Farming Types: 1850-1880," unpublished M.A. thesis (University of Iowa, 1957); and I.M. Kuzina, "The Geography of Agriculture in Iowa," *Soviet Geography* 3 (1962), 16-33. For a more general discussion, see John Fraser Hart, *The Look of the Land* (Englewood Cliffs, 1975), 67ff.

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farmsteads dot the landscape and remain a conspicuous set of cultural resources in their own right.

2. Land and Farms in Lyon County

Lyon County, in the northwest corner of Iowa (Figure 1), comprises 376,320 acres, or 588 square miles, subdivided into eighteen townships. This landed estate is the resource base upon which the county's agricultural economy functions.³ The greatest proportion of this land area possesses natural characteristics favorable for crop production: level to gently rolling topography, deep and moisture retentive soils, and sufficient ground and surface water resources. Differences in productive capacity within the county are not significant, although some small areas are less fertile because of soil conditions or slope, and some farms are able to boost productivity through increased mechanization, irrigation, or use of fertilizers. Only relatively small tracts have been removed from agricultural use through urbanization, construction of public works, or inclusion within public or private conservancy areas.

The county lies within the Iowa landform region called the Northwest Iowa Plains. This landform has topographic, climatic and geological characteristics which are important to Lyon County agriculture. Surface elevation in Iowa generally climbs north and west, from 480' in the southeast corner of the state, to 1670' in the northwest corner.⁴ As a result, altitudes are higher throughout the Northwest Iowa Plains than in any other part of the state. Lyon County is "a definite topographic step upward to the High Plains of the Dakotas."⁵ Corresponding with the higher elevation is a decrease in the annual precipitation. Southeast Iowa again claims the highest precipitation total with 34 inches per year, but rainfall decreases towards the north and west. In the northwest corner of the state, precipitation totals are reduced to less than 25 inches annually, the lowest of the state. Coinciding with the reducing precipitation, native timber also decreases noticeably from east to west and, in western Iowa, from south to north. Rural Lyon County is barren of timber, except for planted windbreaks and small

³Background information on the geography and natural resources of Lyon County is from Wayne N. Dankert and Laurence T. Hanson, *Soil Survey of Lyon County, Iowa* (Ames, 1978).

⁴A feedlot on a farm about four miles northeast of Sibley (Osceola County) is recognized as the highest point in Iowa. Osceola and Lyon are contiguous counties; Sibley is 10 miles east of the Lyon County line.

⁵Jean C. Prior, *Landforms of Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1991), 79.

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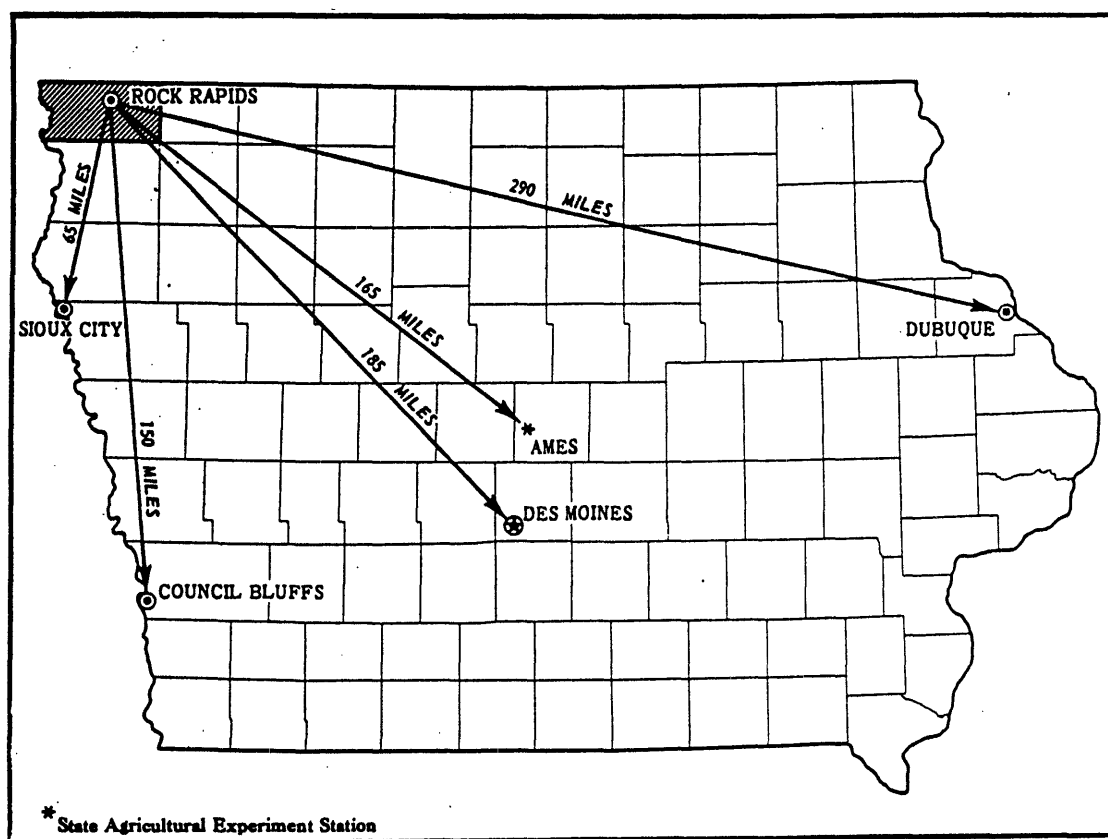


Figure 1.—Location of Lyon County in Iowa.

Source: Soil Survey of Lyon County, Iowa, 1978

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amounts in the moist drainageways. "Thus, [the Northwest Iowa Plains] landform region...is higher, drier, and less timbered than any other in the state."⁶

Lyon County's annual mean precipitation is 24 to 27 inches, with 35 to 40 inches of snowfall, conditions typical of the Great Plains region.⁷ Groundwater, drawing on aquifers which are dependent on annual rainfall, has always been a key factor in Lyon County agricultural development, especially with regard to livestock and dairy operations which require plenty of water and therefore deep wells. One pioneer woman recalled that at many locations, water was found only at great depths and was sometimes affected with a sulfurous odor and taste.⁸ In some parts of the county, surface waters were used for home use and later for irrigation; however, the only streams draining the county are the Big Sioux River and the Rock River and their tributaries.⁹

The thick glacial drift deposit of the Northwest Iowa Plains is covered with a thin layer of windblown loess. Under these lie both the state's youngest bedrock--sedimentary Cretaceous-age sandstone, limestone, chalk and shale--and its oldest, Precambrian rocks. Bedrock exposures are rare in this area of the state though, and there are so few stones outside of the stream valleys an early county history noted that a thousand acre farm "may be cultivated without so much as touching a stone with plow or hoe."¹⁰ In the extreme northwest corner of Lyon County, outcroppings of the Precambrian-age Sioux Quartzite do occur. This hard and durable rock, also known as "Sioux Falls granite," has been used extensively in road construction, as railroad ballast, and, cut into proper blocks, as foundation and building stone. It is easily identified because of its characteristic pink to reddish color.

⁶Prior, 80.

⁷See, C. Warren Thornthwaite, "Climate and Settlement in the Great Plains," in *Climate and Man: Yearbook of Agriculture 1941* (Washington, 1941), 177-187; and Glenn T. Trewartha, "Climate and Settlement of the Subhumid Lands," *ibid.*, 167-176.

⁸Pioneer Association of Lyon County, *Compendium of History Reminiscences and Biography of Lyon County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1904-05), 166. [Hereafter called *Compendium of History*.]

⁹The Big Sioux River watershed is described in William J. Petersen, *Iowa: The Rivers of Her Valleys* (Iowa City, 1941), 229-244.

¹⁰*Compendium of History*, 23.

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Before settlement, Lyon County had been a part of a large tallgrass prairie ranging from Illinois in the east, to beyond the Missouri River in the west:

[W]ild rye, slough grass, switch grass, the bluestems and others [grew] in the lush abundance of a well-watered land...Such grasses had been maintained in part by the wildfires, some set by lightning and some by Indians, that regularly swept over them. The fires destroyed the woody stems of trees (mainly oaks and hickories) that might otherwise have dominated the terrain. Settlers destroyed the prairies by plowing them up for crops, by fencing them for pasture, and by taking steps to prevent the annual fires. Once the farmers had finished their work, the tallgrass prairie was doomed to a cornered-up existence in fugitive spots where conditions allowed a few of its species to survive.¹¹

According to an early account, this natural vegetation had been obliterated in Lyon County by the turn of the century. The narrow, relatively compact wooded areas which occupied the stream valleys, and supported the growth of cottonwood, ash, black walnut, elm, and maple have been increased significantly through plantings, while virtually all of the prairie has been plowed up for cropland or improved pasture.¹² By the late 1970s, about 77 percent of the acreage in Lyon County was used for cultivated crops, with corn and soybeans being the major row crops. About 11 percent of the county was in two types of pasture, dryer upland pasture and pasture in the broad drainageways. Prairie grasses (less of the tallgrasses than originally, but still native midgrasses) still grew on the uplands, while domesticated bluegrass (called timothy in earlier times) dominated the shallow drainageways and river bottomlands.¹³

The fertile topsoil provided by the prairies is the basis for Lyon County's agriculture. Two soil types make up the majority of the county's soil, named by soil scientists after the town or other geographic feature where they were first mapped: "Moody" (41%) and "Galva-Primghar" (23%) associations.

¹¹William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 213.

¹²*Compendium of History*, 22. See W.H.Droze, "Changing the Plains Environment: The Afforestation of the Trans-Mississippi West," *Agricultural History* 51 (1977): 6-22.

¹³*Soil Survey of Lyon County, Iowa*, 44-45.

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Farms with Moody soils have nearly level fields with some strong slopes. They grow mainly row crops, but oats and hay are grown in minor amounts. Most farms with this soil type have some pasture for feeder cattle and dairy herds. Farms with Galva-Primghar soils also have nearly level fields with moderate sloping. Cultivated crops, especially corn and soybeans, are grown on these farms. Some acreage is used for alfalfa, oats, and pasture. Most farmers with this soil type feed the corn to cattle or hogs.¹⁴

3. Jurisdiction and Land Policies Affecting Lyon County

Until the 1850s, all of what is now Lyon County was part of the public domain, acquired by the United States from France by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Native American sovereignty over northwest Iowa was extinguished in 1851 by the last in a series of treaties between the United States and the Sioux nation. The Territory of Iowa was established by Congress in 1838. At that time, northwest Iowa had been visited by various traders and exploring parties, but there were no permanent European American settlements within the present limits of Lyon County until 1866. Lyon County, originally named Buncombe (the name was changed in 1862), was attached to Woodbury County for civil and judiciary purposes until 1873.¹³

Land was the magnet that attracted European American farmers to Lyon County as well as the natural resource which sustained the developing agricultural economy. Although the location of waterways and the evolving route geography of the region ordained the general direction of the waves of immigration that spread over Lyon County between the 1860s and the 1890s, it was the public land disposal policies of the federal government, more than any other factor, which shaped the pattern of settlement.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹³In addition to the previously cited *Compendium of History*, basic sources for the history of Lyon County are, in order of their utility: S.C. Hyde, *Historical Sketch of Lyon County, Iowa, and a Description of the Country and its Resources* (LeMars, 1872); the county historical sketch in A.T. Andreas, *Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago, 1875); George Monlux, "Early History of Lyon County," unpublished MS (1908-09) in Rock Rapids Public Library; N.E. Getman, "Early Lyon," newspaper articles from the *Lyon County Reporter* (1932) in the Rock Rapids Public Library; and Arthur Francis Allen (ed.), *Northwestern Iowa: Its History and Traditions, 1804-1926*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1927).

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Any review of the laws governing the alienation of the public domain in Iowa must begin with the Ordinance of 1785, which outlined the basic land tenure system in effect throughout the settlement period. This system incorporated three general concepts. First, the public domain was subdivided by rectangular rather than metes and bounds surveys into six-mile-square townships comprised of thirty-six 640-acre sections. Secondly, some public lands were reserved for allocations to veterans and for financing public education. And, finally, the alienation of the public domain to private ownership was in fee simple--title to the land was held free and clear of anybody else's interest, including the government's. Differences arose during the early decades of the nineteenth century between political factions with opposing plans for the method of transferring public domain as a means of generating revenue. Until 1841, public lands were sold in 640, 320, or 80-acre parcels, and in 1820, Congress reduced the price paid to the federal land office for an acre of land from two dollars to \$1.25, a figure which would remain in effect until 1893. Large tracts of public lands west of the Appalachians were given to military veterans, who received land bounty warrants for service in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War.

After 1850, when Congress gave its first land grant to prompt construction of the north-south Illinois Central Railroad line, large amounts of public lands were reserved for the railroads. In 1856, Congress gave the State of Iowa a huge land grant for the development of four rail lines westerly across the state. For each of the four roads, alternate (the odd numbered) sections of land for a distance of six miles from the right of way (or, in the case of lands already claimed, their equivalent elsewhere) could be either used for the railways or sold to help finance them. About 4 million acres, or roughly a ninth of the entire state's land was reserved to encourage railroad construction.

Opponents of the government's policy of selling land to private owners favored free land for settlers, including non-veterans. The free land faction won a significant victory with the passage of the first of a succession of Preemption Acts in 1841. Preemption had the effect of sanctioning "squatters' rights" in newly settled regions: by simply filing a declaration of intent to purchase up to 320 acres upon completion of a survey, a settler could secure title to unclaimed, unsurveyed public land. Truly free land became a reality in 1862, with the passage of the Homestead Act.¹⁴ The Homestead Act "made

¹⁴For the history of public land disposal in the United States applicable to the settlement history of Lyon County see: Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, 1968) and Roscoe L. Lokken, *Iowa Public Land Disposal* (Iowa City, 1942).

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the quarter section--160 acres--an American Institution."¹⁵

Public land surveys in Lyon County began in 1854 and by the following year the lines of the southern tier of townships in the county had been laid out; the rest of the county was surveyed between 1855 and 1857. Land sales commenced in 1866, although the first patent to land in the county, for a tract in Richland Township, was not recorded until 1877.¹⁶

In spite of the claims of various boomers, Lyon County never conformed to the popular myth that a poor farmer, with pluck and luck, could prosper on a quarter section of free, fertile prairie land. For one thing, most of the land in the county was not free. Speculators (such as Governor William Larrabee, who at one time owned half of one township) managed to control much of the choicest land and only about twenty thousand acres were claimed free under the Homestead Act;¹⁷ the rest went to the railroads. Land speculation was endemic to the western frontier and in Lyon County tracts obtained from the federal government for \$1.25 an acre were typically resold for four dollars an acre, with the best lands fetching between five and ten dollars an acre; more valuable, wooded tracts sold for between ten and twenty-five dollars an acre.¹⁸

The recurring frenzy of land speculation in Lyon County was synchronized with the national boom-and-bust cycles. During good times, farmers infected with the boomer psychology bought more land, often on credit, and went into debt to construct new buildings and buy implements. Indeed, viewing the newspapers and land conveyance records, it would appear that throughout much of its history, land has been one of the chief articles of trade in Lyon County. Whenever financial panics struck (as in 1871-72; 1876-79; 1894-98; 1921-25; and 1931-35), land prices plummeted, banks failed, hard currency and credit markets dried up, and overextended farmers trying to cover mortgages based on

¹⁵Hildegard Binder Johnson, *Order Upon the Land: The U.S. Rectangular Land Survey and the Upper Mississippi Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 66. See also Fred Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier, Agriculture* (Champaign: J.J. Little and Ives Co., 1945).

¹⁶*Compendium of History*, 43; Lyon County Assessor's Office, Transfer of Lands Index, Rock Rapids, Iowa.

¹⁷*Compendium of History*, 39.

¹⁸Hyde, *Historical Sketch*, 26, 39, 181; *Lyon County Press*, 20 September 1872.

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inflated land values found themselves in a terrible struggle between pride and want.¹⁹

Railroad companies received a large share of the public domain in Lyon County, allocated to them by the state to help encourage the rapid development of a regional rail network.²⁰ Speculative manipulation of railroad lands was a chronic problem in Lyon County and elsewhere during the early settlement period. The railroads also largely determined the location of towns and inflated land values.²¹ Conflicts between farmers and railroads were inevitable and produced a series of agrarian political movements, most notably the Grangers.

4. Early Settlement and Agricultural Development, 1860s-1880s

In the 1860s they had come in a trickle, mostly hunters and trappers who stayed a season or two and then pushed on. In the 1870s, the trickle became a torrent of settlers who intended to stay (Table 1). Lyon County pioneers included farmers from the Eastern and Midwestern states, colonists from the British Isles, and emigrants from Northern Europe. What linked them was a hunger for land. They had read railroad company immigrant guides, state agricultural handbooks, and newspaper stories about the millions of acres of fertile lands in western Iowa. Booming grain markets, improved farm machinery, and the availability of cheap land made it possible for people of modest means to make family farms on relatively small tracts. "If you have capital, so much the better," advised the *Lyon County Press*. "But if you have not, come nevertheless, and get a piece of land--work, be patient,

¹⁹The Middle West in general, and in Iowa in particular, has generated a substantial literature devoted to agricultural land speculation and the effects of the "boomer" psychology. Foremost among these, in addition to the studies of public land disposal cited in note 14, is Robert P. Swierenga, *Pioneers and Profits: Land Speculation on the Iowa Frontier* (Ames, 1968).

²⁰Land was also the basis of the rural educational system. The proceeds from the sale of lands in Section 16 of every township was designated for the support of public education. Under the Morrill Act of 1862, state-run agricultural and mechanical colleges also received grants to public lands in Lyon County, receipts from which were used to finance colleges and experimental farms.

²¹*Compendium of History*, 161.

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Table 1. Lyon County, Iowa, Agricultural Profile and Population

| | 1870< | 1880 | 1885 | 1895 | 1905 | 1915 | 1925 | 1930 | 1940 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Average Farm Size(acres) | < | 196 | 233 | 208 | 220 | 211 | 200 | 199 | 195 |
| GRAINS & GRASSES+ (1870 in bushels or tons, all else in acres) | | | | | | | | | |
| corn | 1,250b | 6,410 | 9,555 | 76,646 | 98,182 | 25,868 | 138,709 | 142,104 | 114,879 |
| wheat | 400b | 12,338 | 7,414 | 72,492 | 20,407 | 5,690 | 141 | 86 | 680 |
| oats | 900b | 4,036 | 9,639 | 44,208 | 58,175 | 98,772 | 104,915 | 101,581 | 84,800 |
| barley | na | 1,263 | 3,174 | 55,079 | 56,230 | 9,536 | 2,328 | 19,071 | na |
| flax | na | 7,151 | 12,596 | na | 104 | 43 | 21 | 196 | 8,644 |
| timothy | na | na | 2,002 | 1,771 | 14,467 | 8,445 | 9,520 | 2,948 | na |
| pasture | na | na | 4,283 | 27,918 | na | na | na | na | na |
| prairie grass | na | na | na | 15,692 | na | na | na | na | na |
| hay (wild & tame) | 375t | 6,558t | na | na | 11,496 | 12,086 | 25,944 | 21,453 | 29,847 |
| forage | na | na | na | na | na | 4,827 | na | 7,406 | 3,351 |
| LIVESTOCK (in animals) | | | | | | | | | |
| cattle(all) | 196 | 3,407 | 7,592 | 12,413 | 38,067 | 40,013 | 43,651 | 34,080 | 45,742 |
| milk cows | 66 | 1,245 | 1,928 | 5,301 | 11,129 | 10,867 | 13,379 | 13,217 | 15,120 |
| horse | 30 | 1,080 | 2,223 | 9,866* | 10,868 | 13,366 | 12,444 | 11,768 | 8,181 |
| hogs | 29 | 4,441 | 7,559 | 30,720 | 55,332 | 56,530 | 88,716 | 42,941 | 56,662 |
| sheep | 5 | 496 | 1,346 | 1,131 | 12,600 | 2,081 | 4,385 | 6,500 | 12,045 |

< most product figures too small to report as there were 640 improved acres in total county wide

na figures unavailable or not reported

+ prairie hay, wild hay, and prairie grass are likely the same; timothy is also called bluegrass and is the domesticated grass that followed the native prairie grasses; pasture implies but doesn't specify grass; forage likely includes a combination of grass and corn stalks and other crop stubble

* purebred draft horses of all breeds numbered 169

LYON COUNTY POPULATION:

| | | | | |
|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1850 - 0 | 1880 - 1,968 | 1910 - 14,624 | 1940 - 15,374 | 1970 - 13,340 |
| 1860 - 0 | 1890 - 8,680 | 1920 - 15,431 | 1950 - 14,697 | 1980 - 12,896 |
| 1870 - 221 | 1900 - 13,165 | 1930 - 15,293 | 1960 - 14,468 | 1990 - 11,952 |

Sources: *Census of Iowa*, 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, 1925; *Census of the United States: Agriculture, Iowa* 1870, 1880, 1930, 1940; *Iowa's Counties: Selected Population Trends, Vital Statistics, and Socioeconomic Data* (1992, Iowa State University).

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study economy, and you will be sure to carve out a good home for the future."²²

Land was not the only expense for pioneer farmers. Only steel plows could cut the dense root systems of the prairie. Successful farming in export commodities such as wheat and corn demanded heavy investment in machinery, some of it highly specialized. In a land of little rainfall, farmers had to dig wells and install windmills and pumps to draw groundwater to the surface. Indeed, wide scale agricultural development in Lyon County was possible only because of the perfection of a number of mid-nineteenth century technological innovations, such as steel plows, mechanical reapers, threshers, grain drills, combines, balers, and windmills.

Settlers approached Lyon County with determination, but with some apprehension as well. It proved difficult to apply conventional agricultural wisdom to the conditions existing in northwest Iowa in the mid-nineteenth century, and this resulted in some curious patterns of settlement. F.M. Thompson, who came to Lyon County in 1875, remembered that the first settlers "took the high dry land and for many years this prevailed, which unconsciously made it true, 'The last shall be the first' in the fertility of the soil of their farms."²³

Pioneer subsistence agriculture was diversified, centering on the cultivation of corn and garden vegetables and herding of cattle and hogs. Wheat, oats, rye, buckwheat, sorghum, and barley were introduced generally and did well. Besides small grains, pioneer farmers raised potatoes, turnips, and beans. Flax was an important pioneer crop while prairie breaking was ongoing, but production diminished rapidly after about 1885. As late as 1880, Lyon County newspapers were "urging farmers to break up more grassland and plant it to flax, which it was said, would 'break down the soil' after it was plowed."²⁴ Flax was also promoted as a good cash crop. Orchards were a part of several pioneer

²²20 September 1872.

²³*Compendium of History*, 157.

²⁴Paul C. Smith and Lucy Jo Colby, *Buncombe to 'Twenty-Two*, (Rock Rapids: Lyon County Reporter, 1975), 28. Flax was a plant that could be sown early in shallow plowed fields. Its seedling plants are resistant to light frost and can be sown together with later germinating plants. Flax plants help small seeded grasses or legumes to establish themselves. Flax had a variety of uses to the early settler. Flax fiber is basis for making linen cloth. Its seeds are rich in oil which was (and is) used as a drying agent in paints and printing ink. Linseed oil meal fed to livestock provides an excellent source of protein. Finally, flax straw, while poor animal

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farms. Cattle and hogs were brought into Lyon County early and formed the basis of rapidly increasing herds. Draft horses and mules were also raised. Usually livestock grazed in open range conditions (the prairie was ideal grazing land); prairie hay was cut for winter fodder.²⁵

a. The Close Brothers and the British Colonization Effort

The agricultural development of Lyon County hinged on immigration, and Lyon County was the scene of an ambitious colonization scheme that brought hundreds of British emigrants to northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota. In 1876, a young English gentleman named William B. Close visited the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition where he made the acquaintance of Daniel Paullin, an Illinois banker. Paullin communicated to his English friend the lore of western real estate speculation and proposed a joint venture in Iowa. Such was the beginning of Close Brothers' colonization effort in northwest Iowa. Between 1877 and 1898 the brothers--William, Frederick, John, and James--either purchased or managed 186,000 acres of land in eight northwest Iowa counties²⁶ and another 159,000 acres in five southwest Minnesota counties, a total of 345,000 acres.²⁷ In Lyon County, the Close Brothers or their corporate alter egos, the Iowa Land Company Ltd. (organized in 1881) and the Western Land Company (organized in 1882), purchased numerous scattered tracts (Figure 2) including a 19,000 acre tract near Larchwood.²⁸

forage, was sometimes used to make paper. E.S. Oplinger, et al. *Alternative Field Crops Manual: Flax* (University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1989). Between 1887 and 1891, Rock Rapids, the Lyon County seat, had an operating "tow mill" (an industrial plant for processing the flax fiber) which processed 5,000 tons of flax straw per year for upholster's tow--the shorter, less desirable flax fibers. "These mills did a flourishing business until farmers had subdued the prairie sod and quit raising flax..." *Compendium of History*, 28.

²⁵Data on pioneer agricultural production has been extracted from the *Compendium of History* and Hyde's *Historical Sketch*, op cit., and from the county data published in the annual *Report* of the Iowa Agricultural Society and local newspapers.

²⁶In addition to Lyon County, the Close brothers also operated in Cherokee, Crawford, O'Brien, Osceola, Plymouth, Sioux, and Woodbury counties.

²⁷James P. Reed, "The Role of an English Land Company in the Settlement of Northwestern Iowa and Southwestern Minnesota: A Study in Historical Geography," M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1974.

²⁸Jacob Van der Zee, *The British in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1922), 57ff.

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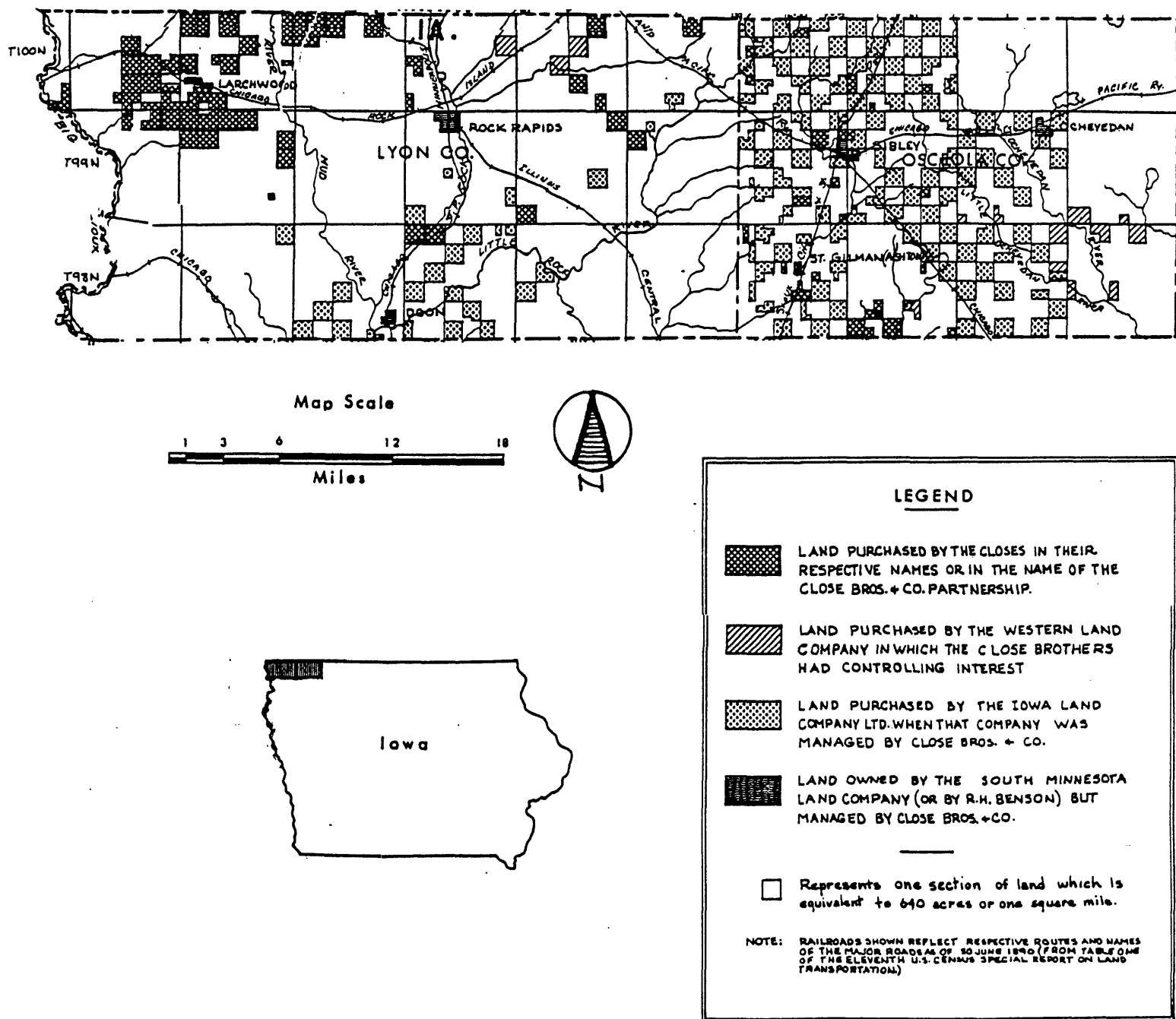
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Figure 2. Land Owned or Managed by the Close Brothers in Lyon and Osceola Counties, Iowa
Source: Reed, 1974



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In addition to large-scale real estate purchases, the Close Brothers developed a systematic policy of sale, lease, and agricultural instruction. Initially, the Close Brothers targeted the "unlanded" younger sons of British nobility, youths who had money but little practical experience in farming. An apprentice system was set up so these young men could learn American-style farming before trying it themselves. While popular, the "pupil" program did not solidify the chances of a successful British colony. Wide-scale advertising brought additional tenants for the Close Brothers' farmlands and their system of tenant farming reduced the financial risks to new settlers. "Upon acquiring land, the Close Brothers would erect a simple two-story house and a barn or stable, dig a well, plow up a few acres, and even provide seed for the first crop. In return, tenants gave them half the crop. Tenants could purchase their farms after as few as fifteen months of operation."²⁹ Sources estimate that in 1880-81 more than 1000 farms were established by the Close Brothers in northwestern Iowa.³⁰ One hundred and fifteen houses are said to have been built by the Close Brothers in Lyon County between 1881 and 1882.³¹ The Close Brothers also set up special livestock farms to promote the raising of purebred cattle, sheep, and hogs, which required a larger initial investment but also promised higher returns. While the colony eventually dissolved, by 1890 stockraising had taken hold in northwest Iowa, a shift that has been attributed to the Close Brothers's influences. "This mingling of land speculation and homemaking, of stock raising and sport, of farming and education, and of the crude frontier with the Oxford manner were all unusual in American pioneering," wrote agricultural historian Earle D. Ross. "In any case, the venture contributed to the settlement of a considerable community and left enduring influences upon the life and economy of this region."³²

b. The Search for Cash Products

A most striking feature of the agricultural history of Lyon County during the second half of the

²⁹Rebecca Conard, "Phase I Historic Resources Evaluation Highway 60: LeMars to the Minnesota Border"(unpublished report to the Iowa Department of Transportation, 1994), 24.

³⁰Curtis Harnack, *Gentlemen on the Prairie* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985), 131.

³¹Smith and Colby, *Buncombe*, 31.

³²Earle D. Ross, *Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1951), 65.

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nineteenth century was the rise of wheat as a cash crop. "We doubt if anywhere since being transported from its native plains in Central Asia, has this great cereal found a more congenial soil and climate than in Northwestern Iowa and Lyon County," claimed booster S.C Hyde in his 1878 sketch of the county.³³ He continued:

Thousands in northwestern Iowa are paying for their lands from the proceeds of soil alone. The newcomer comes in the spring, which is the best time, puts up a temporary cabin and breaks up forty or fifty acres of land the first season...A part of the land may be planted to 'sod-corn' the first year, yielding a good crop and then he finds ample time to cut and stack hay and prepare for winter. The next year the land is ready for wheat and from this time on he finds no difficulty in making his annual payments from the proceeds of this crop alone.³⁴

Yields of wheat averaged 25 to 30 bushels and sometimes reached forty bushels per acre. In 1883, one Lyon County farmer harvested 833 bushels on sixty acres.³⁵

As in all newly settled areas, the lack of well developed transportation and marketing facilities handicapped commercial agriculture in Lyon County during the first decade of settlement. With the removal of these handicaps, Lyon County wheat production skyrocketed.³⁶ By the late 1870s, wheat was the great cash crop, one so attractive that many farmers neglected other phases of farming almost entirely. As wheat production increased, local mills emerged to process and store the farmers' grain, and railroad elevators dotted the landscape. Minneapolis and Duluth, Minnesota, were the principal

³³*Historical Sketch*, 24.

³⁴*Historical Sketch*, 26.

³⁵*Compendium of History*, 25.

³⁶Preliminary surveys for the route of the Sioux City and St. Paul Railroad were made across Lyon County in the summer of 1866. By 1872, the Sioux City and St. Paul had not yet reached Lyon County, but terminated in Sibley, in Osceola County, to the east. Construction activity on the SC&SP during the mid 1870s, as well as several other main and branch lines into the 1880s, eventually saw Lyon County crisscrossed with an abundance of both north-south and east-west railroad service. In 1879 the Worthington and Sioux Falls Railroad finished its line between Laverne, Minnesota, and Doon in southern Lyon County.

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wheat markets for Lyon County farmers,³⁷ but Chicago's influence on wheat farmers throughout the Middle West cannot be overlooked either.³⁸

Lyon County farmers' reliance on wheat production peaked in 1895 when 76,646 acres were planted. However, just as eastern Iowa farmers had abandoned wheat a generation earlier, so northwestern farmers abandoned it, for a number of reasons. First, wheat rapidly exhausted soil fertility, which meant reduced yields. Second, rising land values forced farmers to shift production away from risky, single-crop enterprises toward diversity in order to maximize return on investment. Finally, over production, combined with "grain dumping" by the railroads and competition from the newly settled grain farming regions in the Dakotas steadily drove prices down. Wheat, which sold for as much as two dollars a bushel in the 1860s, fell as low as fifty cents during the 1890s and would not rise above a dollar a bushel until World War I. Lyon County grain farmers also suffered through several crop failures: grasshopper plagues from 1873 to 1882; chinch bugs in the late 1870s and early 1880s; and drought in 1886 followed by a harsh winter in 1887-1888.³⁹

Although the first generation of Lyon County farmers placed much faith in cash grain farming, they were also heavily engaged in livestock production. Initially, livestock were permitted to freely range on the unoccupied, unfenced land. However, an 1870 state law made owners responsible for restraining their animals and barbed wire, invented by Illinois resident Joseph Glidden in 1873, made it possible to erect fences in wood-scarce areas like Lyon County. The rapid increase in settlement during the 1870s (from 221 souls in 1870 to 1968 in 1880) meant the county's open range period was brief.

³⁷For historical background on the rise and fall of "King Wheat" in Iowa and the Middle West, see: Ross, *Iowa Agriculture*, 46-47 and passim; Louis B. Schmidt, "The Westward Movement of the Wheat Growing Industry in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History* 18 (1920):396-412; and Iowa State College and the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station, *A Century of Farming in Iowa, 1846-1946* (Ames, 1946), 45-53.

³⁸For a well-developed analysis of the role played by Chicago grain elevators, stock yards and lumber markets in the developing lands to its west, see William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*.

³⁹*Compendium of History*, 39; Allen, *Northwestern Iowa*, 3:223-233. See also: Esther Casjens, "Life of the Early Pioneers in the George Area," unpublished ms (1963), George Public Library.

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By 1880, the average Lyon County farm was 196 acres (a decade earlier only 604 acres in the entire county had been improved). Livestock operations, based on grazing--whether of the native prairie, or on bluegrass pasture--on this size farm could not compete with the larger cattle ranching operations developing in the Great Plains farther west. It made more economic sense to streamline livestock operations, to purchase young stock from these ranches and quickly fatten them on corn grown on the farm before sending them off to market. Lyon County's corn production shot up between the years 1885 to 1895, reflecting this growing emphasis on fattening cattle and, especially, hogs.⁴⁰

Acreage devoted to corn production increased from 9,555 in 1885 to 76,646 in 1885; likewise the number of hogs in the county rose dramatically from 7,559 in 1885 to 30,720. The pivotal decade between 1885 and 1895 saw the transformation of Lyon County from a frontier land of prairie farms to a sophisticated agricultural economy tied into broader regional markets.

Because of the higher land costs and costs associated with obtaining and transporting breeding stock, large-scale stock raising was relegated to the wealthier members of the local Lyon County farm community. Typical of these stock farmers was B.B. Richards from Dubuque who, in 1882, established a 5000 acre stock farm in the northwest part of Lyon County, running 450 steers and breaking 500 acres for wheat.⁴¹ Another prominent stockman, H.G. McMillan, arrived in Lyon County in 1882 and began to accumulate land, some of it from the Close Brothers' Western Land Company. McMillan, who served as county attorney, federal district attorney, and chairman of the Iowa Republican Party, eventually owned 5000 acres in central Lyon County. He raised pure bred Percheron draft horses, short-horns and Jersey dairy cattle, Poland-China swine and Shropshire sheep on his "Lakewood Farm" and built a complex farmstead (extant) to accommodate the needs of his

⁴⁰Prior to 1880, there seems to have been little commercial pork raising in the county. Census figures reported 29 hogs owned by the 221 residents of Lyon County in 1870; this increased dramatically to 4441 hogs kept by the 1968 residents living in the county in 1880. The character of early hog production in northwest Iowa generally stemmed primarily from the region's limited corn crop and inadequate transportation facilities. Most farmers kept some hogs because they were cheap, easy to raise, and provided the farm family, neighbors, and nearby townspeople with meat. Even though they were usually fattened on corn for a few weeks in early winter, the resulting pork was of poor quality and not suited for shipment to distant markets. The early history of hog production in Iowa is covered by Ross, *Iowa Agriculture*, 75-76 and passim; and Elvin Lee Quaife and Arthur L. Anderson, "The Hog in Iowa," *The Palimpsest* 33 (1952):193-224; and *A Century of Farming in Iowa*, 97-111

⁴¹*Compendium of History*, 27.

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capital- and labor-intensive operation. The extent of the Close brothers' influence in northwestern Iowa has not been adequately researched, but it seems likely McMillan's operation is one example of their legacy.

Applying Frederick Jackson Turner's famous thesis, the frontier ceased to exist in Lyon County sometime during the 1880s, by which time nearly all of the public domain suitable for agriculture had passed into private ownership. By 1880, 21 percent of the county's residents were foreign-born, but large scale immigration into northwest Iowa was over. The shift toward a more diversified, commercialized farming system was well underway.

5. Lyon County During the "Golden Age of Agriculture," 1890s-1910s.

The decades between 1890 and 1920 represent in many ways the most extraordinary period, a veritable golden age in American agricultural history. Farm production increased more rapidly than in any other period before the Second World War (see Table 1). During this period, farming in Lyon County became highly commercialized, as noted by Ross:

The settling up of Iowa's last frontier in the northwestern counties brought to a culmination the extensive cropping system in the state. But long before the limit of virgin lands was reached there was a definite turn toward diversification. The abuses of a dominant cash grain economy had been demonstrated in the older prairie states and the early experiences in Iowa pointed to the uncertainties of such a system. Positively, the peculiar advantages of the state for stock raising and dairying began to prevail over the primitive returns of a cash grain crop.⁴²

This rapid development of a truly modern farming system was the result of improved rail transportation and the growth of large urban markets in the Midwest, which reduced the costs of shipping livestock and created demand for corn-fed beef and pork. The overseas demand for American produce was also a factor in the creation of a "corn belt" economy in Iowa. As local farmers quickly discovered, any amount of livestock could be raised in Lyon County; the problem was

⁴²Iowa Agriculture, 72.

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how to feed them. The answer was the successor to King Wheat--corn. "At an early day, it was thought doubtful by some whether corn would be a paying crop, so far north and west, in Iowa" noted an early county history. By the late nineteenth century, however, corn was one of the best paying of all field crops raised in Lyon County, "and from then until this day the larger portion of the soil is planted to corn."⁴³

This shift in agricultural production mirrored a regional trend toward diversification and the creation of a unique "corn belt" farming system. The role of corn in this shift in farming systems has been described by Ross:

The state's major interest in the transition to a permanent economy was in the peculiar adaptability of the region to corn growing and the most profitable utilization of this dominant American cereal in fattening hogs. With the decline of wheat growing, corn became for the whole state the dependable and basic crop about which the dominant enterprises centered. In 1869 and 1879 Iowa ranked second to Illinois but in another decade took the lead. By 1889 the state also led in the production of oats which provided the most natural and adaptable supplemental grain in the rotation system.⁴⁴

The new emphasis on corn fundamentally changed farm operations. Unlike wheat, corn required deep plowing and row planting. The plant developed slowly and required intensive cultivation to control weeds. Before the introduction of the mechanical corn picker in the 1910s, the crop was harvested and husked by hand or cut for silage. After harvesting, the grain corn was stored in wooden or concrete block (later metal) cribs, where it was left to dry before shelling; shelled corn was put up in wooded bins inside granaries. Corn cut for silage was dumped into wooden or block silos, an innovation dating from the 1880s that became synonymous with dairying by the turn of the century.⁴⁵

The invention of new farm machinery and the application of steam and later internal combustion

⁴³*Compendium of History*, 24, 25.

⁴⁴*Iowa Agriculture*, 75.

⁴⁵See Louis B. Schmidt, "The Westward Movement of the Corn Growing Industry in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History* 21 (1923):112-141; and *A Century of Farming in Iowa*, 23-44.

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engine power to agriculture revolutionized Lyon County agriculture in the last decade of the nineteenth century. This technological revolution greatly facilitated the development of diversified farming throughout Iowa. According to Ross:

Farming operations of all sorts were speeded up, standardized, and in certain cases improved by the further development of machinery. The sulky plow and the gang plow facilitated that essential operation. After unsatisfactory experience with a wire self-binder in the seventies, successful twin binders using the Appleby patent were produced in quantity in the early eighties...Horsepower for threshing, fodder cutting, and similar operations was succeeded by the steam engine, either of the stationary or traction type. Aggressive competing of leading rivals led to standardization, slightly reduced price, and more favorable credit terms...The general use of machinery in essential operations brought greatly increased output with lessened labor exertion and expenditure but with a marked increase in the capital investment on the average farm.⁴⁶

In Lyon County after 1895, corn drove out wheat and a new diversified farming system based on beef, hogs, and dairy production was quickly installed.⁴⁷ By the turn of the century, fattening beef cattle and hogs on corn became the mainstay of the typical Lyon County farm operation. Most of the cattle fed were born on the ranges of the far West and shipped to Iowa by rail as feeder calves. Hog production increased more rapidly once local farmers learned that they could command more sales and better prices for their swine herds if they paid special attention to breeding and feeding. Suffolk, Poland, Chester Whites, and other breeds which fattened quickly on corn rations became popular in the 1890s.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Iowa Agriculture, 83-84.

⁴⁷Allen, *Northwestern Iowa*, 3:237-9.

⁴⁸The best study of the development of the beef cattle industry in Iowa is in James W. Whitaker, *Feedlot Empire; Beef Cattle Feeding in Illinois and Iowa, 1840-1900* (Ames, 1975); a good supplementary source is John A. Hopkins, Jr., *Economic History of the Production of Beef Cattle in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1928). See also Ross, *Iowa Agriculture*, 45-6, 71-86; and *A Century of Farming in Iowa*, 112-119.

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Dairying, which had been carried on by most Lyon County farmers at a more or less primitive scale since pioneer days, also began to make strides in the 1890s, when some operators located near existing towns discovered that they could make money in dairy farming as well as by producing grain or raising beef cattle. The number of milk cows in the county more than doubled between 1885 and 1895, and then doubled again by 1905. A complementary linkage existed between dairying and livestock raising which may explain in part its popularity. "The critical factor was [that] the whole milk yielded by dairy stock could be processed in the local creamery to garner both marketable cream for butter and skim milk to feed calves and swine." Whole milk collected from the farm was separated at the creamery using new separator technology, and the skim milk was returned to the farm to be fed to the livestock. Evidence of the increasing numbers of dairy operations in the county is seen in the organization of various local dairymen's associations and creamery cooperatives, such as the Farmers Mutual Cooperative Creamery Association of Rock Rapids, which turned out 53,738 pounds of butter in 1902.⁴⁹ By 1925, dairying had become an important industry in Lyon County.⁵⁰

The diversification of Lyon County agriculture basked in the warm glow of Victorian era optimism. "Truly we are living in the best age the world has thus far known."⁵¹ The two decades between the Panic of 1893 and the beginning of the First World War witnessed a series of revolutionary changes in the ways in which rural folk communicated with each other and the outside world: the first telephones were installed at Rock Rapids in 1895; the first automobile in the county appeared in 1909.⁵²

6. Lyon County and the Cornbelt, 1920s-1940s

Lyon County is indisputably part of the Cornbelt farming region and local agricultural heritage is

⁴⁹Aryls Kruse, *Little Rock, Iowa. 1869-1984: Those By-Gone Years* (Rock Rapids, 1984), 23; cf. Holmes and Crickman, "Types of Farming," 193.

⁵⁰For the development of dairying in Iowa, see Ross, *Iowa Agriculture*, 78-83; cf. A Century of Farming in Iowa, 120-127, 214-227.

⁵¹*Compendium of History*, 29.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 29; Kruse, *Little Rock*, 30.

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entwined with the long history, varied institutions, and changing economy of the Midwestern United States. The Cornbelt is a large, wedge-shaped humid plain, stretching eight hundred miles from Central Ohio westward into eastern Nebraska, and includes all of Iowa. The region is well named, because its flat to rolling topography, deep soils, and mid-continental climate make it ideal for intensive corn-cropping. The basic unit of production throughout the Cornbelt is the family farm and there is comparatively little variation in production systems between one part of the region and another.⁵³

Agriculture as practiced by nearly all Lyon County farmers since 1920 is based upon a system perfected during the late nineteenth century and expanded rapidly during the first decades of the twentieth century. "The early settlers in the Middle West, with surprising quickness, developed a farming system which was economically successful and ecologically sound, and an efficient infrastructure evolved to serve it," writes John Fraser Hart. "Later arrivals were not compelled to adopt a system which was already working, paying handsome rewards to its practitioners, and served by an efficient infrastructure, but most of them did so, and most of the rest lived to regret their failure to conform."⁵⁴

One of the keys to the Cornbelt farming system is crop rotation. For more than a century, Lyon County farmers have practiced a standard three-year crop rotation and they have fed most of their row crops to livestock. The relatively flat topography of northwest Iowa permitted intensive corn production with modern machinery, but corn draws heavily on soil fertility and to protect and replenish soil productivity farmers developed a crop rotation system based upon corn, small grains, and hay. This system had been developed in the older Middle West in the early nineteenth century and replaced the medieval three-field rotation (food grain, feed grain, fallow). Before the 1940s, corn was typically grown on more than half of the acreage on the average Lyon County farm, using oats and hay in rotation. Some operators planted spring wheat as a transitional crop and soybeans were added to the standard rotation in the 1950s.

⁵³John Fraser Hart, "The Middle West," op cit.; see also Edward Higbee, *The American Oasis: The Land and its Uses* (New York, 1957), 155-180.

⁵⁴Hart, "Middle West," 265.

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Technological advances produced some profound changes in Lyon County agriculture at this time. For example, the introduction of motorized transport, which in addition to radically changing marketing strategies also caused a rapid decline in the number of farm work animals (i.e. horses and mules). More than ninety percent of Iowa farmers reported having automobiles in the 1930 census, well above the national average, and by the 1940s, tractors and trucks outnumbered horses and mules. Statewide, nearly thirty percent of Iowa farms reported having one or more tractors in the 1930 census, an increase of more than two hundred percent since 1920. In 1930, the average value of implements and machinery exceeded twelve hundred dollars.⁵⁵ Time-saving inventions like the combine could cut, thresh, and clean crops in one pass. Electricity became widely available in the 1930s. The continuing shift away from cash crops, such as wheat, toward feed crops, especially corn and oats, altered farmers' needs for buildings and machinery. Animal disease prevention and treatment also greatly advanced. Improved machinery and chemical fertilizers also increased production of crops per acre and reduced the number of farm laborers required to operate farms. As a result, large numbers of workers were released from farming to find employment in the manufacturing, commercial, and service industries.⁵⁶

Technological changes made farming highly competitive and caused some kinds of farm operations to become obsolete. Farmers were no longer captives of their environment but agents of fundamental change, and economic factors quickly became more important in individual farmers' decision-making than personal characteristics or traditional norms. Subsistence style agriculture disappeared after about 1920 and Lyon County farms became more specialized as farmers discovered that a combination of two or three products offered great advantages over single-crop farming. In the area of livestock production, the interrelationships between feed crops and livestock was seen as the most profitable combination for family farm operators.

⁵⁵See, O.E. Baker, *A Graphic Summary of Farm Machinery, Facilities, Roads, and Expenditures (Based Largely on the Census of 1930 and 1935)*, U.S.D.A. (Washington, 1937), passim; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Agriculture*, 1925, 1930, and 1935. See also *Rock Rapids Reporter*, 14 November 1940.

⁵⁶For wide-ranging discussion of the changes in agriculture in the mid-twentieth century, see *Farmers in a Changing World: Yearbook of Agriculture 1940* (Washington, 1940).

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On the eve of the Second World War, nearly all of the land in the county continued to be used for farming. Corn, for a generation the dominant crop, was used for fattening hogs and cattle. Oats, hay, and pasture combined for nearly equal acreage and were also used primarily for cattle. Chickens were a minor enterprise on Lyon County farms, raised mostly for home consumption or small local markets. Sheep and lambs were also kept on a number of farms, but seldom in consistent or significant numbers. Smaller farms tended to concentrate on dairying, hogs, hay, and feed corn. Intermediate sized operations were given over mostly to small grains, cattle and hog fattening. The largest farms concentrated on livestock and tended to sell their surplus grain.⁵⁷

Change is the one constant of agriculture in Iowa and Lyon County. The most dramatic changes since the conversion of the tallgrass prairie to family farms were yet to come.

F. Associated Property Types**Description**

A single property type has been defined for farmsteads in Lyon County: **Historic Farmstead District**. Historic districts are multi-component properties, comprising groups of buildings, structures, or sites that physically and spatially comprise a specific environment characterized by their historic associations, uses, and design elements. **Historic Farmstead Districts** are preserved as standing structures, archaeological deposits, and landscapes. The farm house and barn are the principal buildings on a historic Lyon County farmstead, but the type and number of outbuildings and accessory structures will vary between farmstead subtype. Land and water are essential environmental features associated with historic farmsteads. Manipulation of these natural elements into discrete units (such as livestock pens or cultivated fields) or useful form (by wells or irrigation channels, for example) results in landscape features and structures which contribute to the historic district. Other landscape features present because of their association with the historic farmstead include planted windbreaks, woodlots, orchards and groves of trees, and garden plots. Trails, paths, graveled or crushed rock road

⁵⁷*Census of Agriculture, 1925, 1935.*

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beds, and bridges reflect the necessity of movement around and within, as well as the size of, the historic districts.

Iowa historian Lowell Soike has commented that "The one constant of Iowa farms and farming is that nothing has remained static" and, certainly, the overriding theme in the history of Lyon County farmsteads has been change. Constant change has occurred in farm building requirements as new needs surfaced. Notable changes in the size, number, composition, and use of farm buildings were caused by mechanization, shifts in crop and livestock production, increased demands for sanitation and disease control, new building materials and methods, as well as innovations in crop storage, animal housing, and product processing. Family farms in Lyon County have typically required high investment in buildings, particularly for dairying and, except for cattle, livestock operations.

Between the 1860s and 1940s, the typical Lyon County farmer saved on construction costs by doing some if not all of his own work, by remodeling and reusing existing farm buildings, and by using low-cost, locally available materials. Much farm home and barn construction was done with the help of neighbors or rural contractors. Almost all farm buildings were constructed on site using traditional methods and materials. Framing systems for the houses and barns are typically not heavy-timber but employ built-up dimension lumber. Houses are likely to be balloon-framed. The large farm buildings were set on masonry foundations, most commonly Sioux quartzite, rubble, or concrete block. Sheds, including temporary and movable structures such as poultry houses and privies, were usually placed on stones, blocks, or wooden posts. The most widely used construction material was board lumber, followed by poured concrete and concrete block. Exterior finishes were also commonly wood, mostly boards, but occasionally shakes. Sheet metal and asbestos siding appeared in the 1930s. Wooden shingles were the norm for a generation after the introduction of asphalt and composition shingles in the early 1900s. Most building materials were imported by rail and obtained from lumberyards and hardware stores. Locally procured materials included heavy oak or walnut timbers, building stone, and gravel for concrete. Many pre-1940 farm buildings are true specimens of vernacular or folk building traditions, although after about 1890 growing numbers of dwellings and outbuildings were based on designs published in agricultural journals, contractor pattern books, or bulletins issued by state agricultural colleges.

Farmstead buildings and structures were preserved and made more attractive through the use of paint. Indeed, paint color is an important element in farmstead design. White buildings look larger, while

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dark colors make large buildings appear smaller. Contrasting trim color can tie together dissimilar building shapes and create an overall visual rhythm for the farmstead. Typically, the farm house was a small building in the midst of a group of larger buildings. Lyon County farmers often emphasized the farmhouse by painting it white and the outbuildings red with white trim. Around 1920, white paint became popular for major farm buildings, sometimes accented with gray or green trim. The natural color of exposed wood being dark gray, many of the smaller, more utilitarian outbuildings on historic farmsteads were never painted--whether by preference, custom or economy--but allowed to weather.

Lyon County farmers' experience with systematic plantings of trees on farmsteads dates back to the pioneer era. The term "grove" is used locally to describe an artificial woodland on a farmstead, where landscape plantings have generally followed traditional Midwestern norms as to species selection and arrangement. Groves and windbreaks were planted to afford protection for dwellings, outbuildings, and gardens, to provide a locally available source of timber for fuel or building purposes, and for their aesthetic value. Cottonwoods were widely planted by early settlers because they developed quickly and afforded excellent shade. Many cottonwoods reach heights of a hundred feet and some are six feet in diameter at the base. American elm was also popular as a yard tree because of its symmetrical, vase-shaped crown and longevity. Green ash, another native species, also was planted in woodlots and yards. The silver maple and eastern red cedar were commonly planted as shade trees around dwellings.

Historic Farmstead District includes four variants of the property type which have been identified: *Pioneer Prairie Farmsteads, Western Livestock Farmsteads, Dairy Farmsteads, and Diversified Cornbelt Farmsteads.*

1. Pioneer Prairie Farmstead subtype

These farmsteads in Lyon County exist as historic buildings and as archaeological sites associated with nonextant farm buildings. They date from the first European American settlement of Lyon County and to the initial conversion of the tallgrass prairie into agricultural lands. These farmsteads are those of the county's first farmers, the "sod busters." Pioneer farmsteads were compact groupings of houses and outbuildings, surrounded by a few acres of plowed fields and, beyond, by open range prairie or (eventually) domesticated grassland. Some farmsteads, such as those built by the Close Brothers'

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colonists, were highly standardized; most were little more than rude collections of shacks, shanties, dugout, haysteads, and stables. Intact prairie pioneer farmsteads are rare if not virtually non-existent.

2. *Western Livestock Farmstead subtype*

Cattle and horse raising were the most important livestock enterprises in northwest Iowa before 1910, both in terms of land area and capital investment.⁵⁸ Western Livestock Farms were the largest farms in Lyon County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Lyon County stockmen raised some very large and distinctive barns to shelter their herds. Barns on cattle- and horse-raising farms (as opposed to cattle-fattening operations) had to accommodate a greater variety and age of stock: breeding stock, newborn, yearlings, and so forth. On some nineteenth century stock farms, the investment value of the farm buildings far exceeded the value of the landholding. The typical Lyon County livestock farmstead probably consisted of a farm residence, hired hands' quarters, offices, one or more livestock barns, stables, cattle pens, paddocks and corrals.

3. *Dairy Farmstead subtype*

Dairying was never the main farm enterprise on more than a handful of farms in Lyon County and the county never ranked high in the numbers of farmers who made a significant proportion of their incomes from the sale of cream or whole milk. Yet, the Dairy Farmstead represents a locally important historic property type. Census data indicate that dairying was most important in the agricultural economy of Lyon County between 1890 and 1940. The number of milk cows in the county doubled between 1895 and 1905, and the higher numbers were sustained through the 1940s (Table 1). This increase in the dairy herds in Lyon County coincides with the development of commercial creameries in Iowa. For those farmers who did not devote their entire operation to dairying, commercial creameries enabled a complementary linkage between livestock raising and dairying. Whole milk produced by the dairy herd was processed at the local creamery, and the skim milk was returned to the farm to be fed to calves and hogs. Because milk is a highly perishable

⁵⁸Livestock operations concerned primarily with hogs, sheep, or poultry were rare before about 1890 and were probably not distinguishable from the Diversified Cornbelt Farmstead.

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commodity and is expensive to transport, dairy farmsteads were characterized by a set of distinctive accessory buildings, including milk houses and cheese houses. Dairy cattle also make good use of corn, silage, and hay, therefore silos are also a distinctive feature of dairy farmsteads. The morphology of the Lyon County dairy farmstead differs little from the typical dairy farmstead in Minnesota or Wisconsin, although northwest Iowa dairy operations seem to have been rather larger in acreage and more diversified than those to the north and east. Lyon County dairy farmers also raised hogs and fattened cattle, and produced small grains and hay for cash crops. A conspicuous feature of dairy farms in Lyon County was the large, two-story basement type barn based on Wisconsin and Michigan prototypes.

4. Diversified Cornbelt Farmstead subtype

The emphasis on corn and livestock is the outstanding feature in the architecture and land use of the Diversified Cornbelt Farmstead, the dominant farmstead type in Lyon County. The diversified farmstead is characterized by the dispersed arrangement of the farm buildings. Typically, the pre-1940 farmstead contains a single-family house and a general purpose barn, surrounded by a cluster of smaller accessory buildings and sheds, each devoted to a single processing, storage, or support function. Cropping systems in use since the turn of the twentieth century have produced large quantities of corn, oats, hay, and silage which is stored in specially designed and constructed sheds, granaries, cribs, and silos for on-farm consumption of cattle and hogs. Shelter for feeder cattle which are purchased as young stock from western ranches (and need less shelter than dairy cows or horses) is provided for by resting or "loafing" space in barns, barn lean-tos, and by large free-standing open sheds. Since the 1930s, many farmers have favored separating hogs by function and age (and therefore weight) into farrowing houses and other specialized shelters.

Diversified Cornbelt Farmsteads best reflect the rural building boom of the 1890s to the 1920s in northwest Iowa and these farmsteads also exhibit the great changes in production, marketing, and land use since the late nineteenth century. Throughout the region, generations of energetic and resourceful operators have adopted new methods and technologies, including prefabricated metal buildings, outdoor hay storage, and manufactured housing which was unknown before 1930. Since the 1940s, the trend toward diversification has been accompanied by a wholesale loss of traditional wooden outbuildings, particularly barns and granaries which are obsolete and not readily adapted to new uses.

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Significance

Historic Farmstead Districts are significant under Criterion A because of their association with the development of agriculture in Lyon County and northwest Iowa from the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries. Understanding Lyon County agricultural practices contributes to an understanding of the settlement of Iowa in the nineteenth century and to the evolution of agriculture in the Middle West. Historic Farmstead Districts are most often locally significant as examples of the farm buildings and landscape features associated with Lyon County agriculture. A Historic Farmstead District may be of statewide significance if it especially well represents a type of farmstead typically found throughout the state and relates to an agricultural practice, method, or technology shared with other farmsteads statewide. Lyon County farmsteads generally will not have national significance established under the level of historical context presented in this Multiple Property Document.

Historic Farmstead Districts are significant under Criterion B if they are associated with persons who were important to the settlement and development of Lyon County's agricultural-based economy, or to the development of agricultural technologies, practices or methods employed in the county. Persons may be also important because of their relationship to farm life and farm customs in Lyon County. Locally significant farmsteads also may have statewide significance if they are linked to individuals whose influence was substantial and felt beyond the boundaries of Lyon County.

Due to the characteristic dynamic nature of farming operations and farmsteads, Criterion C significance will usually come from the Historic Farmstead District's ability as an entity (whose individual parts may lack distinction) to illustrate a farmstead subtype associated with the historic context. Such a farmstead generally will be significant under other Criteria as well. A farmstead may be significant at the local level under Criterion C alone because it is comprised of buildings, structures, or objects which exhibit especially fine style, craftsmanship or construction methods.

Archaeological literature of western Iowa does not accurately reflect the importance of farmstead sites in the historical archaeology of Euro-American occupation of the region. However a consensus exists that farmstead sites are significant, under Criterion D, along with military posts, Native American villages and other buried resources, for their association with early settlement and for their ability to yield important data applicable to studies of rural settlement, subsistence patterns, ethnicity and

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economic status. Historic Farmstead Districts may involve both abandoned farmstead sites and functioning farmsteads in Lyon County.

Registration Requirements

Generally:

Farmsteads which will meet the registration requirements will have been in use during the period of significance, 1860-1944, and should remain rural in character since very little Lyon County land is used for urban or suburban purposes. Farmsteads should retain their principal buildings (a house and a barn), the outbuildings and structures that were necessary to the particular type of farming operations, and the associated landscape objects and features that result from agricultural land use. Because farmsteads represent a ubiquitous property type in Lyon County and are still being created, changed, used, re-used, and abandoned within the agricultural process, integrity of historic farmsteads will always be a difficult issue. The spatial relationship of the historic buildings should be preserved even while new structures are built around them to accommodate grain storage and new farming methods, such as in farrow-to-finish hog operations. Wooden barns, seen by many today as obsolete, are being replaced as the largest of the farm buildings by metal-clad pole buildings used for machine storage. Where a farmstead has lost its barn, serious questions of integrity exist. On the other hand, barns and other obsolete structures may be adapted to accommodate new uses without destroying integrity and such adaptations characterize the changing farmstead in Lyon County. Where changes are accomplished without destroying the overall visual character of the building, integrity is preserved.

Pioneer Prairie Farmstead:

Pioneer Prairie Farmsteads, the rarest of historic farmsteads in Lyon County, often will not have both house and barn surviving, but nonetheless should exhibit enough of the buildings and design features of subsistence prairie farming as to preserve integrity of setting, feeling and association. In addition to the buildings and structures of the farmstead, additional components associated with Pioneer Prairie Farmsteads may include boundary demarcations reflecting the original claim to the land on which the farmstead is located, usually government-surveyed 80-acre (in areas reserved for the railroads) and 160-acre parcels claimed under the Homestead Act of 1862. Historic boundaries may be seen in

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fencelines or the layout of agricultural fields, and may exist within larger and later farm boundaries. So long as they remain visible, historic boundary demarcations may justify expanding district boundaries. The presence of small patches of "unbusted" prairie sod (usually extant because the lay of the land prohibited cultivation or even easy grazing) enhances the historic character of Pioneer Prairie Farmsteads.

Pioneer Prairie Farmsteads are significant under Criterion A if they are associated with the earliest forms of agriculture in Lyon County; under B if they are associated with Lyon County's earliest pioneers and the contribution of such pioneers to the settlement of the county and the development of agriculture is known and documented; and under Criterion C if the physical components represent distinctive pioneer or early settlement buildings or structures. Criterion D significance may exist where a farmstead is viewed solely as an archaeological subsurface site or ruin if site is preserved intact in its physical context and research potential appears high.

Western Livestock Farmstead

Western Livestock Farmsteads typically have much more acreage associated with them than the average farm in Lyon County. Their barns should be relatively larger than other farm subtypes, with interior space that is more complex and divided according to function. The presence of hired hands' housing reflects the need for human labor to move and control large numbers of cattle or horses around large grazing areas. Hired hands drove livestock on horseback and working horses need to be regularly shod. Blacksmith facilities therefore were located on these large farms. Hired hands needed to be fed, their clothes laundered. The presence of accessory buildings which reflect this larger community of farm workers on the Western Livestock Farmstead will enhance the historic character of the district and aid in preserving its integrity. Intact grazing land will also enhance the integrity of setting, feeling and association of these farms and may justify expanding the boundaries of the district to include them.

Western Livestock Farmsteads are significant under Criterion A if they operated as large livestock ranching operations; under Criterion B if they are associated with significant individuals who influenced the development agriculture in Lyon County; and under Criterion C if their physical components constitute representative property types associated with the development of such livestock

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operations. Western Livestock Farmsteads no longer in active operation, or components of active farmsteads, may have Criterion D potential where the site remains intact, undisturbed and research potential appears high.

Dairy Farmstead

Dairy Farmsteads reflect the higher need for shelter typical of dairy cattle as well as the desire to keep them healthy and content in order to keep milk production high. Silage--chopped corn--is thought to aid the digestion of dairy cows and silos are synonymous with dairy barns and dairy operations. Barn interiors should reflect the need--in the form of extant stanchions--to twice-daily milk the herd. The barn may have a milk room within it to store chilled milk, or a separate milk room attached to the side of the barn. Milk rooms often have apparatus for bringing cool well water to the milk cans waiting for processing or pick up. Dairy Farmsteads may reflect other cropping and livestock operations, as it was typical to link dairying with other hog and cattle fattening operations. The presence, in addition to the principal buildings, of intact accessory buildings devoted solely to the business of keeping a dairy herd will enhance the historic character of Dairy Farmsteads. The presence of pasture lands likewise will increase the integrity of setting, feeling and association of the Dairy Farmstead, but the emphasis should be on the physical buildings, structures and objects which reflect dairying.

Dairy Farmsteads are significant under Criterion A if they were associated with a dairy herd and dairying operations; under Criterion B if they were associated with significant individuals who influenced the development of agriculture in Lyon County; and under Criterion C if their physical components constitute representative property types associated with dairying. Dairy Farmsteads no longer in active operation, or components of active farmsteads, may have Criterion D potential where the site remains intact, undisturbed and research potential appears high.

Diversified Cornbelt Farmstead

Diversified Cornbelt Farmsteads will likely be currently functioning in their historic capacities. To meet registration requirements, the complex set of farm buildings, structures and objects on these farmsteads should in the majority date to the period of significance and be relatively intact.

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Theoretically, integrity should be highest for the Diversified Cornbelt subtype, examples of which are most numerous. Yet the agricultural trend toward diversification into corn/feeder cattle operations, combined with the frugality of most farmers, means older farm buildings from different times and exhibiting different subtype features, were commonly converted to Diversified Cornbelt use. A Diversified Cornbelt farmstead is not automatically rendered ineligible for registration because it was originally another type of farmstead. Where the complete set of buildings is a better example of a farmstead converted to Diversified Cornbelt use, rather than an example of the earlier farmstead type, then the farmstead should be registered under its converted function and significance. Integrity is enhanced by the presence of landscape features associated with cattle-feeder farming, especially corn fields.

Diversified Cornbelt Farmsteads are significant under Criterion A if they were associated with both growing feed crops and with livestock production; under Criterion B if they were associated with significant individuals who influenced the development of agriculture in Lyon County; and under Criterion C if their physical components constitute representative property types associated with crop and livestock operations, or reflect representative methods of adapting and converting existing farming buildings to Diversified Cornbelt farming operations. Farmsteads no longer in active operation, or components of active farmsteads, may have Criterion D potential where the site remains intact, undisturbed and research potential appears high.

G. Geographical Data. Lyon County.

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

1. Phase I

The Phase I study of Lyon County farmsteads was prepared by Robert C. Vogel and Associates of St. Paul, Minnesota, under contract with the Lyon County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC).

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Robert C. Vogel, a historical geographer meeting the Secretary of the Interior's professional qualification standards in history, archeology, and architectural history, served as principal investigator and author. Galen Jackson of the Lyon County HPC served as local project coordinator. Work began in July 1991 and was completed in June 1992.

As originally conceived, the project was intended to address the research and historic preservation values of farmsteads as part of the cultural heritage of Lyon County. It was expected that the study would focus on local trends in agricultural history and that up to ten selected farmsteads would be surveyed and documented at the intensive level. The project was not intended to result directly in nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.

Vogel carried out the historical research, utilizing the library and archive collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines and Iowa City; the University of Iowa, Iowa City, and the Iowa State University, Ames; the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis/St. Paul; and various public agencies in Lyon County. Research was carried out in a wide range of primary and secondary sources. To have examined all of the published materials which might have contained relevant data would have been a gigantic undertaking, and the farmstead survey was never intended to result in a comprehensive study of the history of agriculture in the county. Every effort was made to match the research effort to the scale of the project and to focus on developing and refining the historic context for Lyon County farmsteads. Bibliographic control was provided by a number of research guides and bibliographies. A considerable quantity of anecdotal information about Lyon County farmsteads was obtained through interviews and correspondence with farmers, historians, government officials, and preservationists in Lyon County and from around the Midwest.

Historic contexts were developed on the basis of background information drawn from regional histories and on agricultural production data collected by state and federal agencies. Methodological underpinnings were provided by National Register Bulletins 16, 24, and 30. The resulting historic context narrative develops themes which are in some ways unique to Lyon County but generally reflect important themes in the agricultural development of northwest Iowa, southwest Minnesota, and southeastern South Dakota. All of the context study units cover the entire county. All overlap chronologically as well and the temporal boundaries of the historic contexts were based on the

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organizational approach to regional architectural history developed by Earle D. Ross and others. Property type classifications were adapted from those developed by Lowell Soike and others for the Iowa inventory farmstead property characteristic form. Property types are primarily functional in nature, although some correspond to distinct historical periods. Every effort was made to limit the number of farmstead property types by lumping variants together rather than splitting general types of farming operations into more narrow categories. Registration requirements for each property type were based partly on predictions derived from the historic context data. Integrity consideration were also based primarily upon first-hand knowledge of the condition of the farmstead surveyed, as well as on the results of rural cultural resource surveys in other parts of Iowa and Minnesota.

The original goal of the farmstead survey was to identify between eight and ten historic farmsteads which the Lyon County HPC had reason to believe might be eligible for nomination to the National Register, and to document those properties through archival research and fieldwork. Field methods were straightforward and consisted of a systematic "windshield" reconnaissance of the entire county, followed up by closer inspection of potential historic properties identified either through field survey, archival research, or on the basis of informant interviews. The survey confirmed that the architectural, landscape history, and archaeological values of Lyon County farmsteads were significant but often difficult to evaluate.

Ten farmsteads were selected by the Lyon County HPC for intensive survey and documentation. Each property was subjected to systematic archival investigation and careful field inspection; historic buildings, structures, sites, and landscapes were evaluated by a team made up of the preservation planning consultant and volunteer members of the HPC. In evaluating farmsteads, all possible aspects of significance were considered. Survey data was carefully organized and reviewed by the consultant for accuracy.

The survey generated an inventory of ten historic farmsteads, four of which were evaluated as potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register. The other six farmsteads exhibited potential significance also but not to the extent necessary to recommend National Register nomination. After completing the field survey, Vogel filled out Iowa historic site inventory forms for each property surveyed, applying the conventional National Register criteria within the historic context, property types, and registration requirements developed for Lyon County.

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2. Phase II

Phase II of the Lyon County HPC historic farmstead project was completed in 1993-1994, with Galen Jackson again serving as local project coordinator for the Lyon County HPC. Tallgrass Historians L.C., with Jan Nash as Principal Investigator, was engaged (1) to develop the Phase I information and recommendations into a final Multiple Property Documentation submission, and (2) to draft accompanying individual nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for the four farmsteads recommended in Phase I. Ms. Nash, who holds a J.D. and an M.A. in American Studies from the University of Iowa, and Tallgrass research assistant Allison Bacon, who holds an M.A. in Public History from Wichita State University, conducted field examinations of the four farmsteads during September, 1993. They also met with the Lyon County HPC, interviewed local informants knowledgeable in the history of Lyon County agriculture and in the history of the four selected farmsteads, reviewed the holdings of the county courthouse and other public offices and agencies for pertinent materials, and reviewed the materials collected in Phase I.

Additional archival inquiry and an expanded literature search were conducted which resulted in an expansion of the Phase I historic context. Finally, a more detailed history was developed for each farmstead. The farmstead-specific research and the more exhaustive physical examination of the farmsteads permitted at the Phase II level were analyzed. As a result, one of the four farmsteads initially evaluated as potentially eligible was eliminated. This farmstead, called "Fairview" was found to lack the property type characteristics initially identified with it, and had integrity issues if viewed as a district. However, Fairview's extant barn, a large basement barn built about 1890, is potentially individually eligible under Criteria C and A. More research is needed to develop the history of the farm family responsible for building the barn, about the farm's early operation, and to explore potential ethnic influences in the barn's design. The Phase I report was recast into the Multiple Property Documentation format. Sections which were substantially expanded were: E. Statement of Historic Contexts, and F. Associate Property Types. Three farmstead nominations were prepared on National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms for submission with this multiple listing.

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MAP OF LYON COUNTY, IOWA, WITH DUNCAN/DUITSMAN FARM, BROAD VIEW RANCH, & LAKEWOOD FARM HISTORIC DISTRICTS LOCATIONS INDICATED

