

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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

For NPS use only
received **AUG 11 1982**
date entered

1. Name

historic Bruce Goldfish Fisheries

and/or common Bruce Goldfish Fisheries

2. Location *E of Thornburg, off IA 22*

street & number Off Highway 22, approx. 1 mile east of Thornburg — not for publication

city, town Thornburg *vic.* vicinity of ~~congressional district~~ 4

state Iowa code 19 county Keokuk County code 107

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name William C. and Margaret Bender

street & number R.R. 1

city, town Keswick vicinity of state Iowa

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds Office

street & number Keokuk County Courthouse

city, town Sigourney state Iowa

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N.A. federal state county local

depository for survey records N.A.

city, town N.A. state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located approximately one mile east of the village of Thornburg, the Bruce Goldfish Fisheries today consists of the E.K. Bruce, Jr. House, two cement holding tanks, a garage, a barn, and two ponds. During its heyday in the 1920's, the Bruce operations utilized nearly all of this 80 acre farm and there were as many as twenty-four ponds here as well as nine windmills, two fish houses, and a storage house.

The Bruce House is a large $1\frac{1}{2}$ -story edifice that exhibits the influence of the Queen Anne and neoclassical modes. Irregularly massed, this wood frame structure rests on concrete block foundations made to resemble stone. Its exterior walls are clad in narrow clapboards. Windows are generally of the one-over-one wood sash variety and are set in rectangular surrounds. The house is capped with a cross gabled roof originally covered with wood shingles but now featuring asbestos ones. The most notable exterior feature is the large round turret capped with a metal dome located at the southeast corner of the house. Also noteworthy are the bay windows on the east and north sides and the front porch which features a triangular pediment supported by Roman Doric columns. Inside, the house consists of a living room, parlor, dining room, kitchen, and two bedrooms on the first floor and four bedrooms on the upper floor. When the fishery was in operation, company offices were in the house, and the porch held aquariums that exhibited the varieties of fish grown here. Unoccupied for twenty years, the house is in deteriorated condition, but the present owners have plans to return it to its original condition.

Approximately 100 feet northeast of the house are two cement tanks sunk in the ground and partitioned into sections. Originally surrounded by lattice work that was covered with ivy, these tanks were used to display fish for public tours and to sort fish before shipping. Approximately 150 and 180 feet respectively from the house are the garage and barn, both of which played a role in the goldfish operations. The former is a one-story, hip-roofed structure while the latter is a gambrel-roofed, heavy timber frame edifice sheathed with clapboards. Both are believed to have been constructed after 1910. North of the house in a marshy slough that runs through the middle of the farm are the two surviving ponds. Originally, these were watered from deep wells by means of nine windmills (today only the pits remain) and could be drained by means of an elaborate underground piping system.

8. Significance

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

fisheries(1877); house(1910)

Specific dates See above **Builder/Architect** ^{**}E.K. Bruce, Jr.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Bruce Goldfish Fisheries, according to a 1930 Des Moines Register article, was the largest enterprise of its kind in the world. Although it is difficult to document such an assertion, surviving company records indicate that the Bruce operation was a major factor in the goldfish industry. Specializing in the fancy varieties of goldfish, the Bruce family for over sixty years shipped fish all over the United States and the world. Bruce goldfish were considered worthy enough by the government to be exhibited at the St. Louis, Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco Expositions. In addition to the general public, Bruce goldfish were purchased by the New York Aquarium the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, the Lincoln Park Aquarium in Chicago, and the Bureau of Fisheries in Washington, D.C.

The origins of the Bruce Fisheries can be traced back to 1845 when Elgin K. Bruce purchased a pail of goldfish from a sailor in Philadelphia and took them home with him to Pittsburg where he placed them in one of his ice ponds. Bruce, who had a large ice business in Pittsburg, soon went into the goldfish business as well, shipping most of his output to Chicago and St. Louis. At first, Bruce specialized in a common variety of goldfish known as "Mulligans;" but he soon gave these up because of stiff competition from Germany. He began to specialize in more exotic varieties, and soon developed a variety known as the "Bruce Comet;"

In 1871 while visiting relatives in Iowa, Bruce purchased eighty acres in Prairie Township in Keokuk County, and six years later, he and his family moved themselves and their business here. A pond was dug and stocked, but shortly before the first crop of some 3,000 fish were to be harvested almost all were eaten by a flock of wild ducks. Undaunted, Bruce and his sons forged ahead and with their remaining goldfish harvested a large crop in 1878. In 1879-80, the business was expanded by the addition of a second pond, and during the years that followed the size of the enterprise increased dramatically.

In 1900 E.K. Bruce, Jr. took over the reins of the firm from his father. By 1908 the Bruce Fisheries had seventeen ponds, and that year something like 110,000 fish were sold for prices ranging from \$25 each to \$5 per 100. In 1921 four more ponds were added, and by 1930, twenty-four were being utilized. The 1920's appear to have been the heyday for the Bruce Goldfish Fisheries with profits often in excess of \$4,000. While Bruce handled technical aspects of the operation and his wife the financial, the firm employed a fulltime Japanese fish culturist and a mechanic to keep all the necessary equipment in operative condition. In addition, the firm employed local persons during the harvesting season and during the warm months when the fishery attracted thousands of visitors. In addition to tropical toy fish like guppies, paradise fish, Mexican swordtails, and Jordanella Floridas, the Bruce Goldfish Fisheries were famous for their shubunkins, Bruce comets, American fantails, Japanese nymphs, and Japanese fantails.

(continued on continuation sheet)

9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 80 acres

Quadrangle name What Cheer Quadrangle

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>5</u>	<u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	<u>1</u> <u>5</u>	<u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u>	<u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>9</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>1</u> <u>9</u> <u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>2</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
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D	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u>	<u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>9</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>1</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>1</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
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Verbal boundary description and justification SW 1/2 of SW 1/4 of sec. 24, twp. 77, range 13

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

state	<u>N.A.</u>	code	county	code
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state		code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ralph J. Christian, Architectural Historian

organization Division of Historic Preservation date July 1982

street & number East 12th and Grand Avenue telephone 515/281-5111

city or town Des Moines state Iowa

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 *Philip S. Anderson*

title Director, State Historical Department date July 29, 1982

For NPS use only

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

Beth Crover
Keeper of the National Register

date 9/20/82

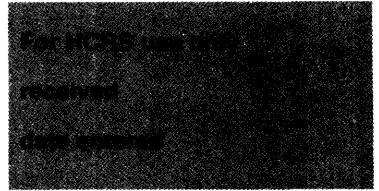
Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
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Continuation sheet Significance

Item number 8.

Page

1.

The dominant position of the Bruce Goldfish Fisheries ended rather abruptly in the 1930's. The removal of tariff protection in 1933 opened the American market to cheaper Japanese fish, and this combined with the general effects of the Depression and droughts in 1934 and 1936 caused a rapid decline in the firm's business. After E.K. Bruce, Jr.'s death in 1936, the family tried to continue operations but with little success. Although the fishery property remained in the Bruce family until 1978, goldfish operations had ceased by the early 1940's.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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Continuation sheet

Bibliography

Item number 9.

Page 1.

Bender, William C., "Thornburg, Iowa One-time Goldfish Capital of the World," unpublished and undated speech in Division of Historic Preservation files.

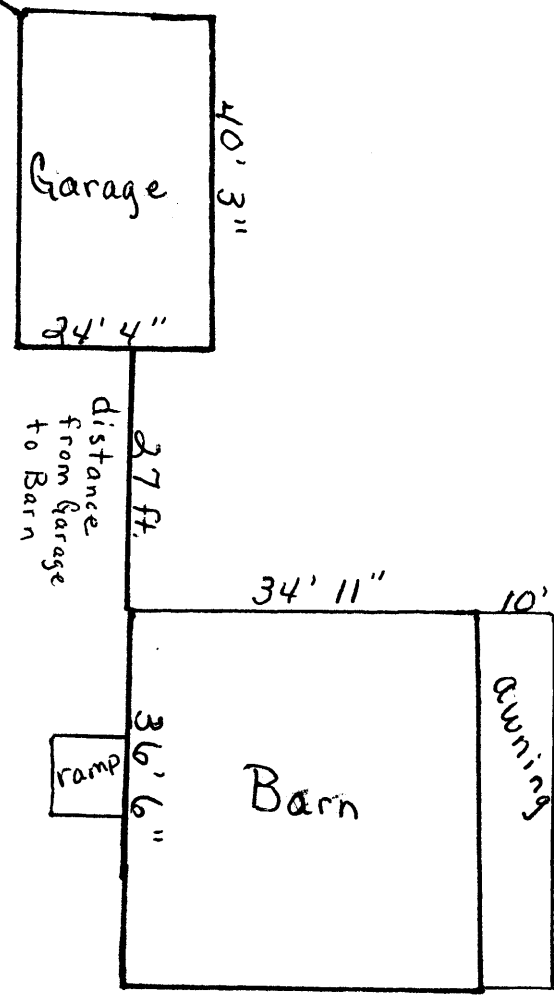
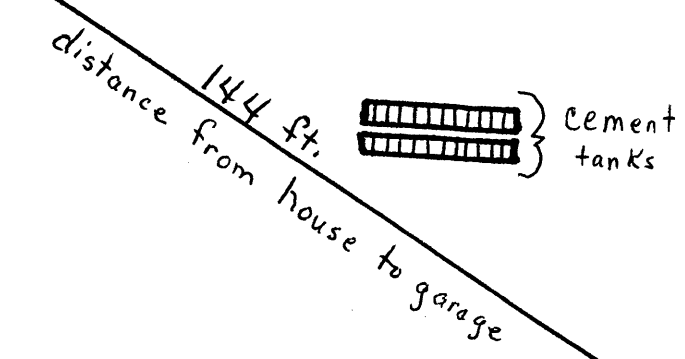
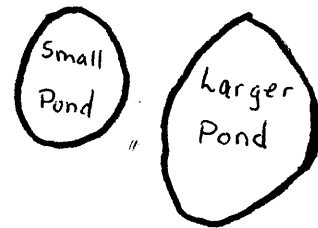
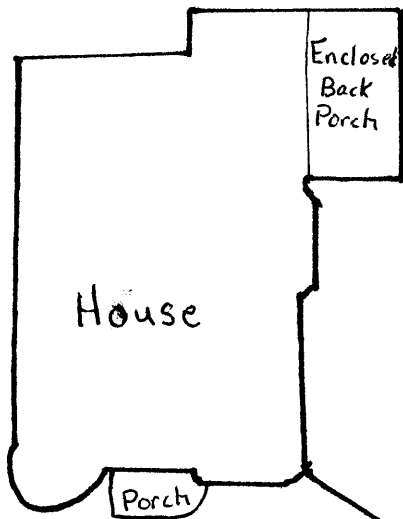
Bruce Goldfish Fisheries company records in possession of William C. Bender, Keswick, Iowa.

Des Moines Register, May 2, 1909; October 26, 1930.

Marengo Republican, September 16, 1925.

Spirit Lake Beacon, May 10, 1923.

What Cheer Patriot-Chronicle, February 27, 1936.



Building Layout

Barn + Garage Dimensions