

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Moore, Josiah B. and Sara, House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 508 East Second Street

N/A  not for publication

city or town Villisca

N/A  vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Montgomery code 137 zip code 50864

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patricia Cheskin D51100 10-22-97  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

12/1/97  
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian/Queen Anne

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Sandstone

walls Wood/Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

**Period of Significance**

1912

**Significant Dates**

1912

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	15	333870	4582720
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Molly Myers-Naumann & Brian Schultes

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 19 August 1997

street & number 2406 High Street telephone 515-280-6272

city or town Des Moines state IA zip code 50312-5206

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Darwin Linn

street & number Box 83 telephone 515-322-3749

city or town Corning state IA zip code 50841

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Josiah B. Moore House  
Montgomery/Iowa

CFN-259-1116

### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Josiah B. and Sara Moore house is a modest interpretation of the Queen Anne style of architecture popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Constructed around 1900, the wood frame, gable front and wing plan exhibits modest characteristics of the style. It stands in a residential section of Villisca just north and east of the town square. Around it one finds other single family dwellings of similar size and scale. Historically, the property has been used as a single family dwelling. Presently it is used as a museum.

The facade (south elevation) presents an informal appearance in historic photos. The porch, filling the front ell of the residence, displayed turned posts and later on classical columns. Fish scale shingles decorate the one and one half story gable as well as areas below first and second floor windows. A stylized Georgian window, surmounted by semicircular trim, appears on the second floor of the gable front. On the first floor, two double-hung windows echo the outer units of the Georgian window with clapboard fill between them.

The remaining elevations are sparsely ornamented and not very well documented upon this writing (most photos are restricted until the completion of a documentary film this year). The east elevation features two quarter circle windows in the gable end of the one story wing, surrounded by fish scale shingles. Below appear two double-hung windows symmetrically arranged. The rear (north elevation) has a second porch in the ell of the plan and one double-hung window for each floor centered in the gable end. The west elevation features two double-hung windows on the first floor. All windows were surmounted by classically inspired window caps.

Current photos reveal that the dwelling has been altered very little in the last ninety plus years. Work has been performed to remove replacement siding, to re-paint the clapboards, and to re-roof the structure. Even aluminum storm

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Josiah B. Moore House  
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### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (CONTINUED)

windows have been removed from the dwelling. The only change in the Moore house appears to be the removal of two brick chimneys. One was on the east elevation of the dwelling and the other was centrally placed within the gable front portion of the house.

Locally it is said that the Moore house was built around 1901 from plans supplied by a mail order house of unknown identity. While no confirmation of the former can be found, it seems quite possible as architectural services by mail were becoming increasingly common by the turn of the century.

It is also said, locally, that the Springer house at Third Street and 6th Avenue is an identical copy of the Moore house. This dwelling is slightly more than a block away. Farther south, at 100 East 6th Street, one can also find a dwelling that is similar to the Moore residence. Both properties have been extensively remodelled.

According to historic accounts and floor plans drawn by the current owner, the interior spatial arrangements have been well preserved. As was fashionable in the late Victorian Era, spaces in the house were clearly defined. Entries on the front porch provide direct access to both the parlor and the kitchen. Access to the first floor bedroom is gained through a door on the north wall of the parlor. A doorway allows one to pass directly from the kitchen to the parlor.

The second floor is comprised of two bedrooms of nearly equal size. No hallway exists as passage from one room to the other is gained by moving directly through them. Closets, one between the bedrooms and another placed at the head of the stairwell, may be later additions. The attic of the wing portion of the dwelling is accessed through the latter closet.

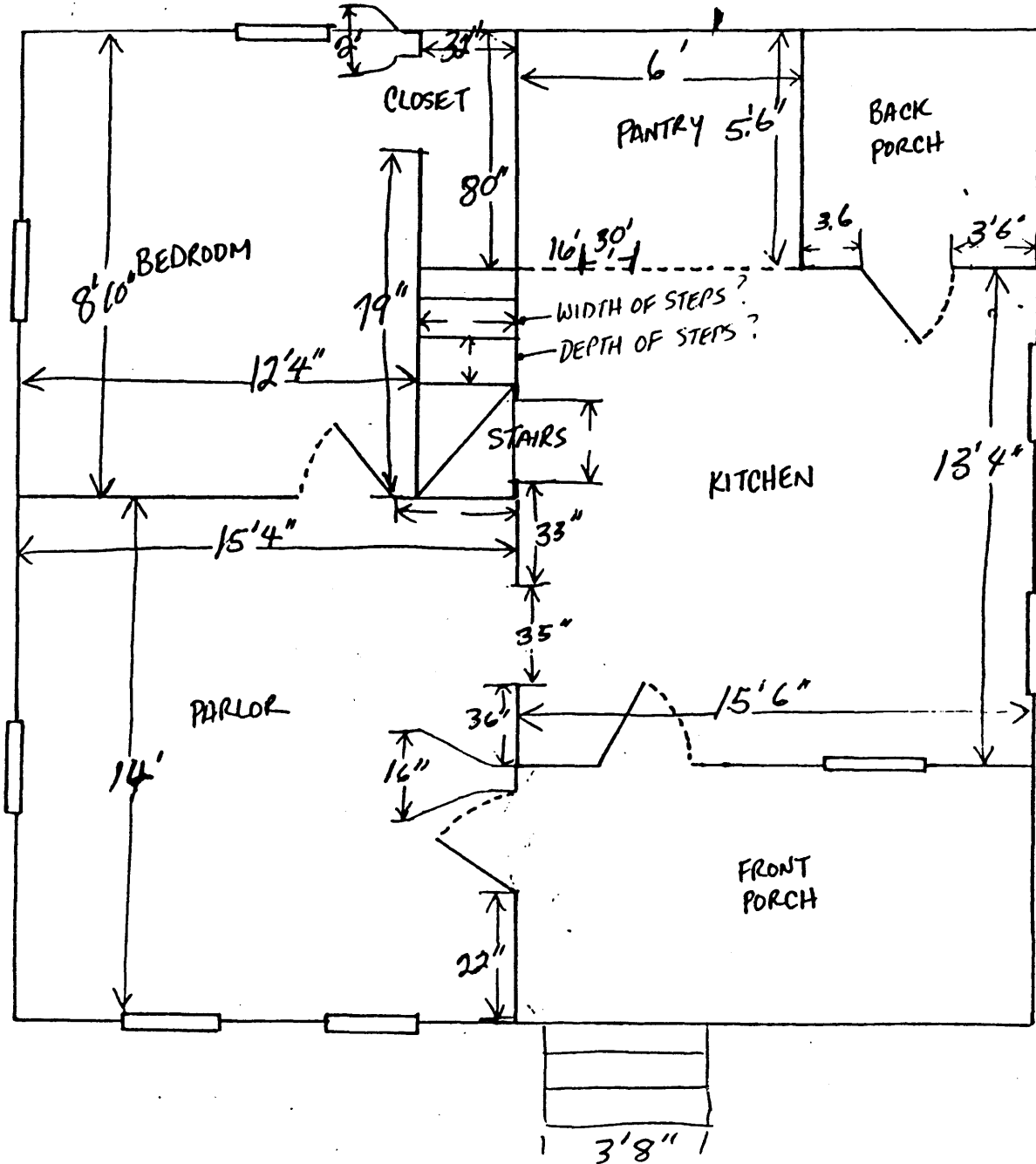
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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Josiah B. Moore House  
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First Floor Plan

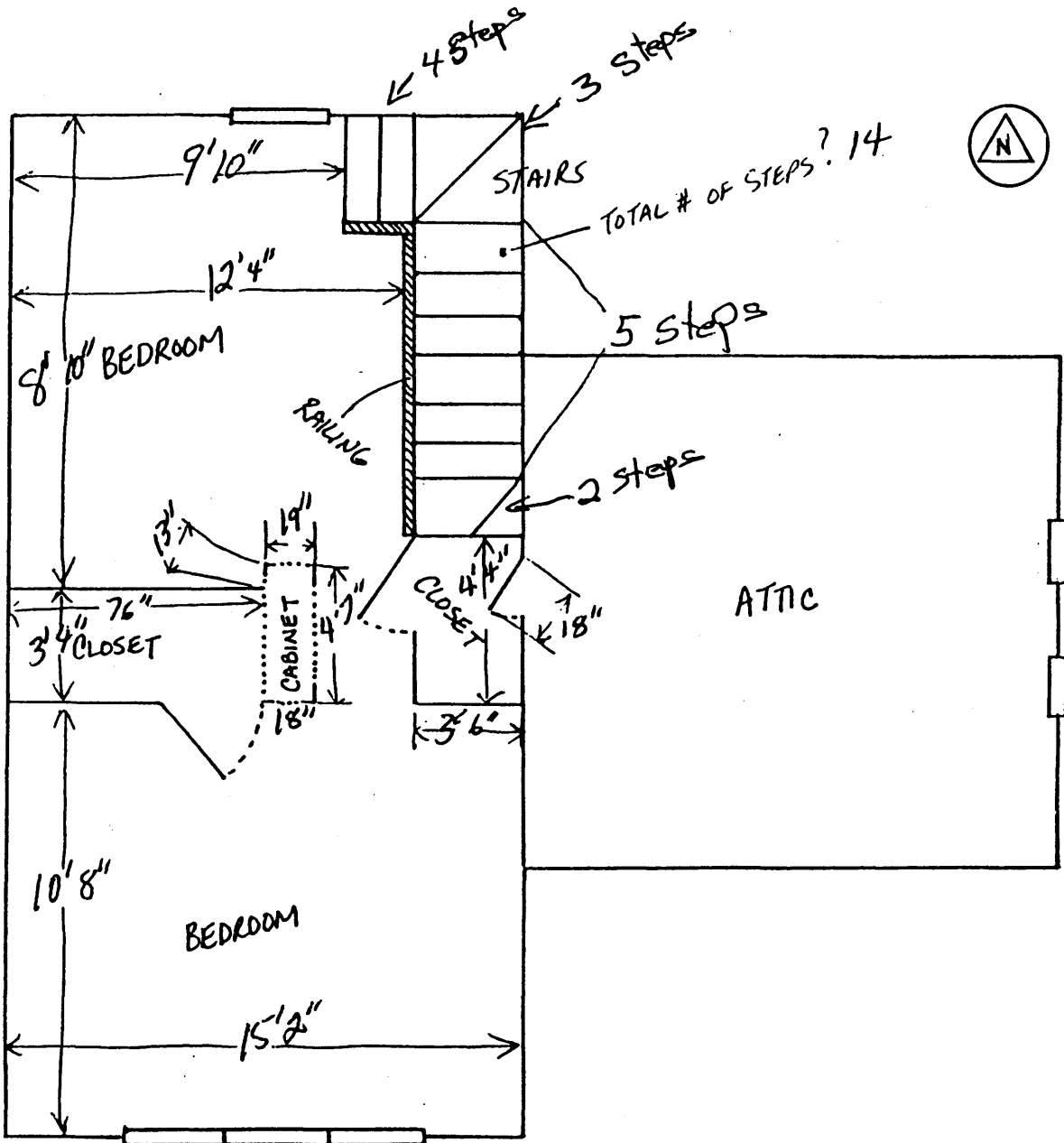
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Second Floor Plan



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Josiah B. Moore House  
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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Josiah B. and Sarah Moore house at 508 East Second Street in Villisca, Iowa is significant under Criterion A because it speaks to the social tensions lying dormant in many rural Iowa communities at the turn of the century. The dwelling symbolizes the manifestation of powerful forces of conflict that divided the community in the wake of the murders committed there. On the surface, this division was due to competing theories concerning the perpetrator of the crime. At a deeper level, the competing theories proved to be a conduit down which strong social tensions travelled.

The community of Villisca was typical of many small Iowa communities around 1910. It owed its birth to the railroad and built its economy upon agricultural activity. It grew slowly until the 1880s and the 1890s when mature rail routes and heavy immigration to Western Iowa prompted significant growth. By 1910, the town was assuming a progressive air as it acquired such municipal services as a water works and a publicly owned electric lighting company.<sup>1</sup> Villisca also had a social structure akin to that of other small Iowa communities.

Factors from which a community's social structure could be built began with money. One's income, business connections, liquid assets, and occupation were keys to determining one's position within the community. Money, and access to it, allowed one to display one's wealth in a variety of ways. The size of an individual's home, its location in the larger community, and the material possessions inside it were strong indicators of one's social standing. Other factors came into play as well, notably family ties, education, and involvement in community and government affairs. And depending upon the community, one's ethnic background and religious affiliation could help determine one's position in the local social structure.

In Villisca, the social structure was built with the same

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Josiah B. Moore House  
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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

materials described in the preceding paragraph. For example, there was the "friendly" religious division, in this case between the Presbyterians and Methodists in the community. The town had it's "bad" side of the tracks, literally the area south of the railroad line, and it had it's upscale residential area. And there was the the division between the "genteel" segment of the community and the emerging middle class elements of the community.<sup>2</sup>

It was into the former category that a man like F.F. (Frank) Jones belonged. He was the owner of a prosperous agricultural implement dealership that dominated the south side of the town square for thirty years. Jones was a member of the board of directors for the Villisca National Bank and a state legislator. As a successful businessman and a man of political stature, Jones' owned a large home in the most desirable section of Villisca. Frank Jones represented the "elite" of the community very well.<sup>3</sup>

Men of the solid middle class were represented by the likes of Josiah (Joe) Moore. Joe and his wife Sara rented the house at 508 East Second from 1901 to 1903, at which time they purchased the simple frame dwelling in a modest section of town. Joe worked for Frank Jones in his implement store for nine years before opening his own John Deere dealership in 1902. By 1912 the family included four children, Herman, Katharine, Boyd, and Paul. As the oldest, Herman and Katharine were likely charged with helping to care for the family's milk cows, horses, and chickens. The Moores' had a comfortable, quiet, and modestly successful life in Villisca.<sup>4</sup>

But their comfortable lives, and those of Villiscans, were ended in a horrible fashion. On the morning of June 10, 1912, the entire Moore family and two young girls spending the night (Ina and Lena Stillinger) were found murdered in their home. All had been killed with an ax that was left on the premises. No motive

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Josiah B. Moore House  
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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

was discerned, few clues were left at the crime scene, and neighbors knew nothing of strange happenings the night before.<sup>5</sup>

The ensuing investigation brought forth few clues as to the identity of the criminal. Wild rumors circulated about the town, including one that held businessman Frank Jones accountable for the slayings. Similar murders in Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, and Oregon fueled speculation concerning a serial killer's responsibility for the crime. Bloodhounds from Nebraska and a clairvoyant from near-by Red Oak contributed little to the police investigation.<sup>6</sup>

It was the "wild" rumor concerning Jones' involvement in the murders that began gnawing at the community on the day the murders were discovered. George Bloodgood, a town resident, saw Jones hurrying to the crime scene and noticed what he believed to be a guilty manner about the businessman. And later that day Mary Peckham told friends she believed Frank Jones had something to do with the deaths of her neighbors.<sup>7</sup>

Frank Jones was not beyond suspicion for other reasons as well. After all, his daughter-in-law, Dona, was known to be prone to indiscretions that involved Joe Moore. It was also known in the community that Joe and Frank disliked each other immensely primarily because Joe had "stolen" the John Deere dealership from his former employer. And rumors persisted that Jones interfered with the Attorney General's investigation of the murders. Together, such things did present an incriminating picture.<sup>8</sup>

However suspicious of Jones residents were, the case remained cold for two years. The tremendous lack of clues concerning the crime, the families' need for justice, and the Attorney General's desire to maintain order in the state (the murder stirred the fears of people across the state) meant that something had to be done. Ross Moore (Joe's brother) and the Attorney General of Iowa recognized this and took steps they

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

hoped would lead to a break in the case. Their actions had unintended consequences for the entire community.<sup>9</sup>

"Finally, there came to Villisca a catalyst, Detective J.N. Wilkerson, who organized and coalesced community suspicions into a formal case against Frank Jones.<sup>10</sup>" Wilkerson, a detective with the Burns National Detective Agency in Kansas City, arrived in the community and sensed the local suspicions of Jones. He also saw the residents' desire to have the case solved and used it to his advantage. Wilkerson held rallies in the county to stir up sentiments against Jones. He held a speaking tour of southwest Iowa to publicize his case against Jones and to raise money for the investigation. And he formed the Iowa Protective Association to meet financial needs and to help defend a man he believed was falsely accused of the murders.<sup>11</sup>

But Detective Wilkerson was not a man beyond reproach. First and foremost, he had an eye for opportunity and financial gain. He had been responsible for hiring three young men to rifle through Frank Jones' office in a search for information and was caught. He helped print and distribute anti-Jones literature during a state legislature race (1916) that specifically linked the candidate to the murders. And he was sued, unsuccessfully, by Jones for slander.<sup>12</sup>

Wilkerson's case work did not result in a grand jury indictment of Frank Jones. Surprisingly, George Kelly was indicted for the murders in 1917. An itinerant preacher with a history of mental illness, Kelly had begun to alarm his Nebraska congregation by claiming "they" were after him for the Villisca murders. In August of 1917 Kelly turned himself over to authorities in Red Oak, Iowa, and confessed to the murders not knowing that the Attorney General had issued a warrant for his arrest.<sup>13</sup>

Kelly, who also confessed to the murders in 1914 and 1915,

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

had been staying with the Presbyterian minister of Villisca the night of the murders. While Kelly had confessed, he later recanted and stated that he had been pressured to admit his guilt by the Attorney General. His indictment for murder was followed by a trial in September, 1917. The result was as surprising as Kelly's indictment. The jury could not reach a decision and Kelly was set free.<sup>14</sup>

The one constant over the five year period during which the investigation was carried out was that the murders divided the community. Those who felt Frank Jones was guilty joined the Iowa Protective Association. People who thought Reverend Kelly was unjustly accused also joined the association. Individuals who belonged to the Methodist Church and felt Jones was responsible for the crimes left the congregation. One local businessman, frustrated over the split within the community, moved his family to Red Oak and re-opened his enterprise. Jones was asked to step down from the Villisca National Bank's board of directors. Stories are told, locally, of there being separate entrances at chautauquas for those who did and those who did not feel Frank Jones had a role in the murders.<sup>15</sup>

The divisive nature of the conspiracy theory was not just a matter of who believed Frank Jones was guilty, however. The division occurred along lines that also marked the boundaries between the "elite" of the community and the up-and-coming middle class. The tensions between Jones and Moore played a role in the cleavage. Frank Jones' condescending attitude and inflated ego also stimulated this fissure within the community. But it was the line of demarcation between the uppermost portion of the Villisca social structure and the rest of the community's structure that was the most accurate gauge of who believed Jones was guilty and who believed his involvement was preposterous. There were exceptions to this generalization, but all sources point to its veracity.<sup>16</sup>

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

The division within the community growing out of the alleged involvement of Frank Jones has abated. The crime does, however, continue to impact the community. Residents still hesitate to discuss the event, which continues to define Villisca's place in history. In fact, the local Heritage Days Festival is the community's attempt to expand it's image beyond that of the "axe murder town". Alas, a new division has arisen, one in which residents are split over how the Moore house should be used. Currently it is a museum, a fact that displeases many. Others in Villisca want to reckon with their past by addressing the events of 1912.

The Moore house is only one highly unusual component of Villisca's history that should be used to develop a detailed picture of the community's heritage. Little survey work has been done in the town, but there are a number of late 19th and early 20th century properties of note. And a windshield survey of the town reveals that the potential for an historic district north of the square may exist. The area contains homes of larger size and scale than the Moore house, which lies just east of the area. The modest design of the Moore house, however, does not preclude it from significance as it is representative of middle class housing from the early years of this century.

The potential for an historic district is only one ingredient in the mix that will create a detailed picture of Villisca's history. Residents must, and have, shown a desire to work toward this goal. In an effort to be known as something more than the site of an infamous crime, the residents of the town initiated Heritage Days. Begun in 1986 as a response to the publication of a novel that sensationalized the steamiest details of the murder investigation, Heritage Days is a celebration of community and a common history. Villiscans also worked to raise the money necessary to construct a community center. These are the ingredients for future development of historic resources that will bear fruit for the community.

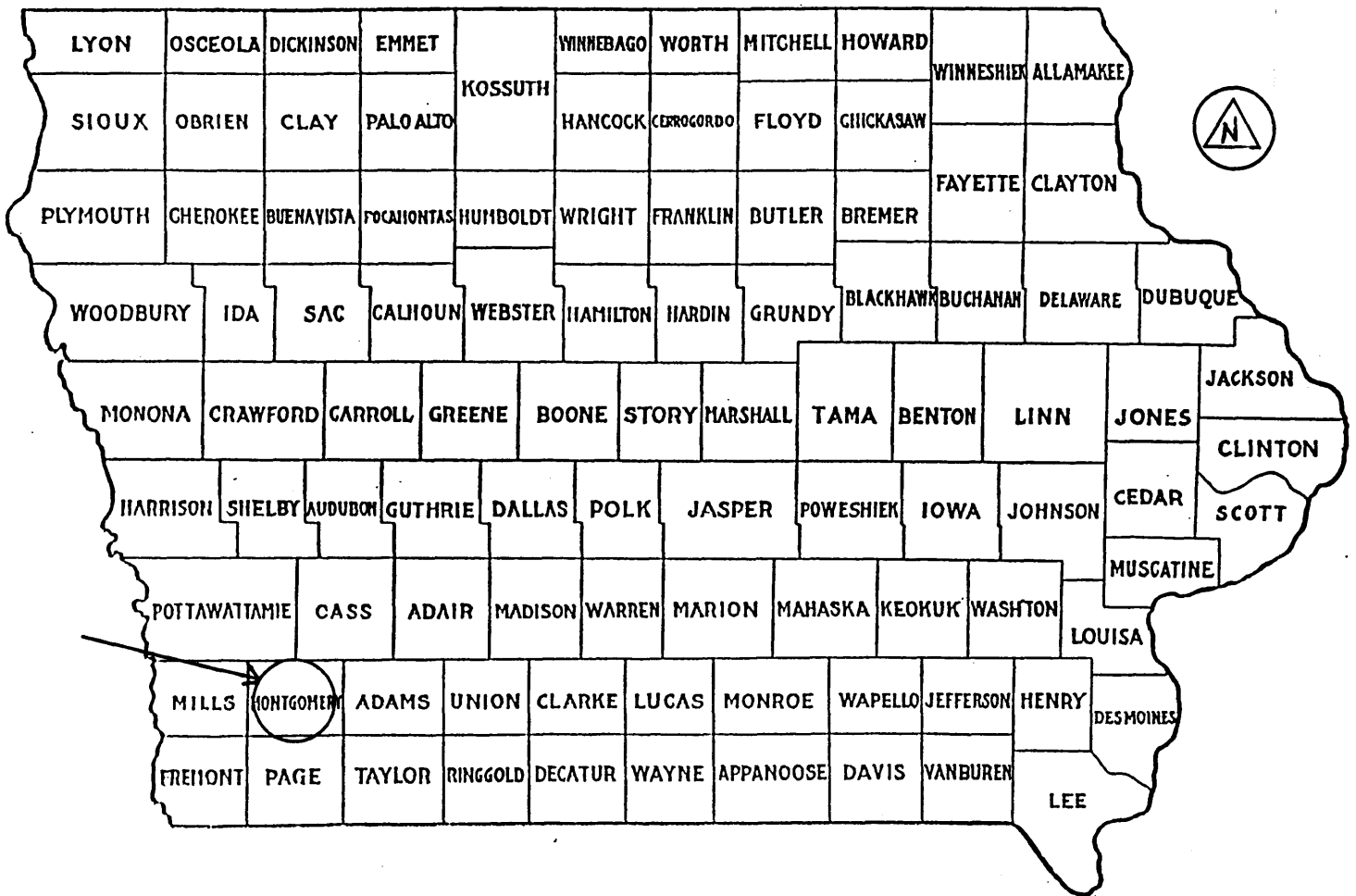
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Map of State of Iowa

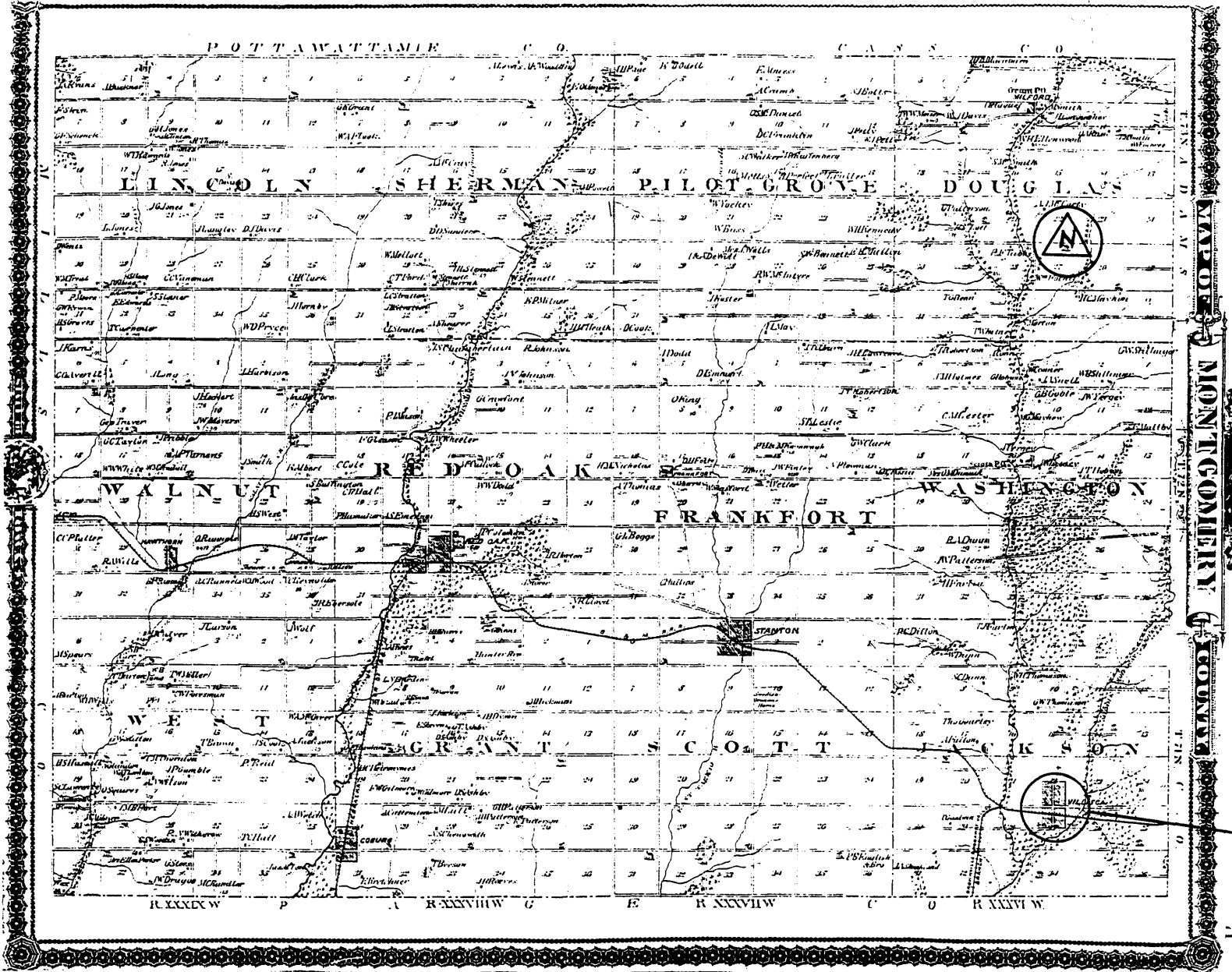
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1875 Map of Montgomery County  
Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa



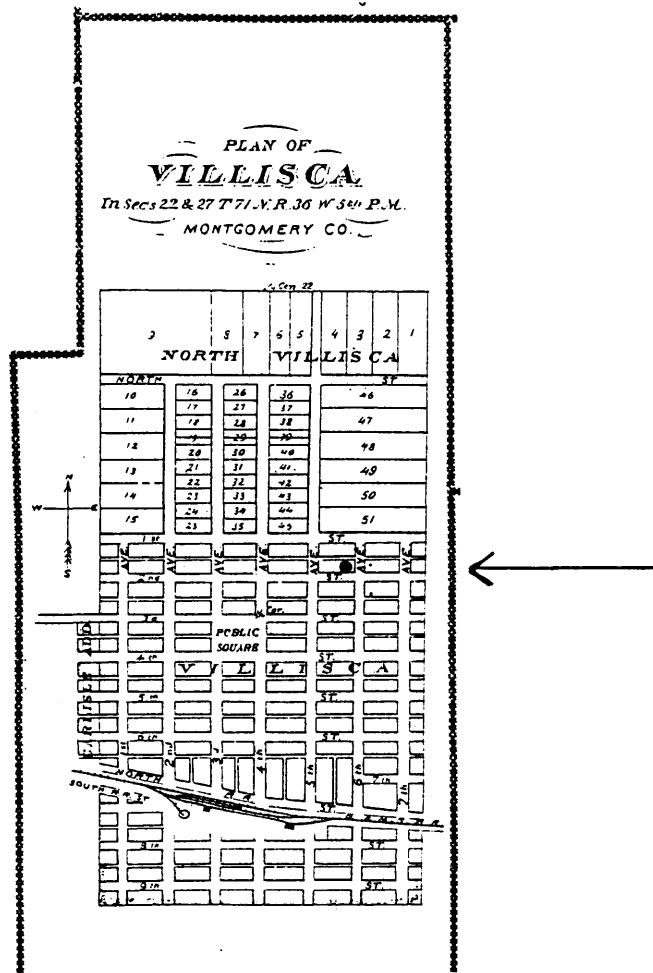
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1875 Map of Villisca  
Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa

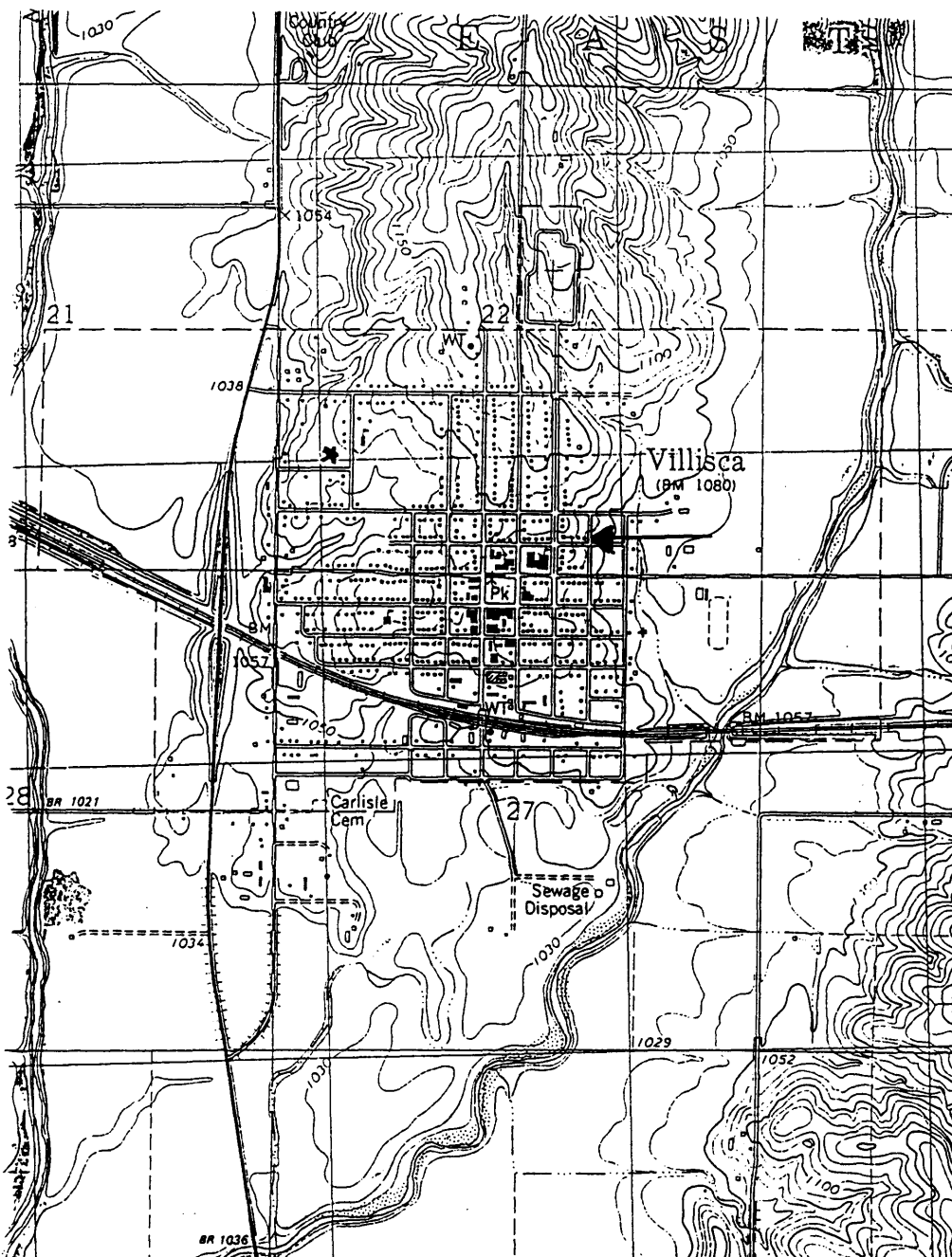
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JOSIAH B. MOORE HOUSE  
MONTGOMERY/IOWA

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USGS MAP, 1975, VILLISCA QUAD

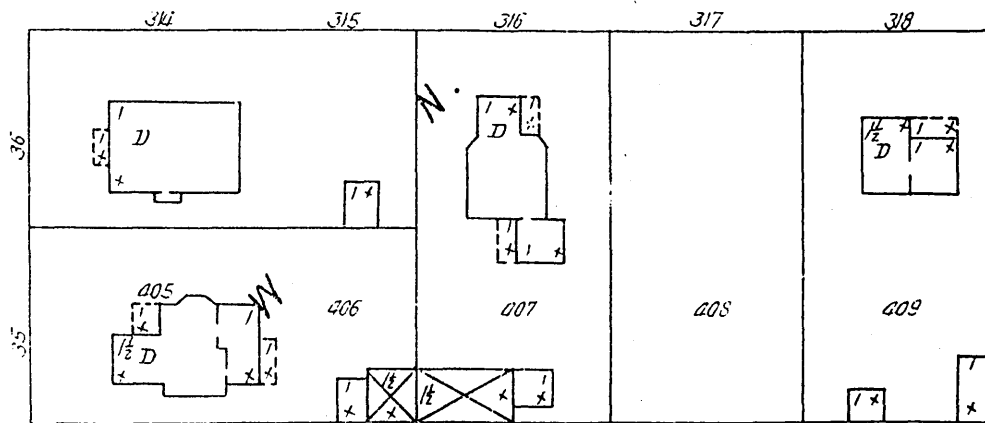
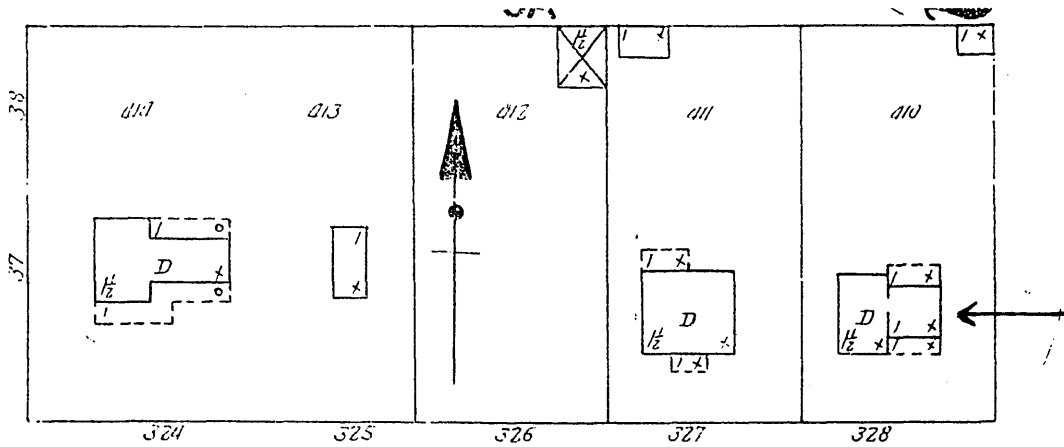
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1907 Sanborn Map of Moore House

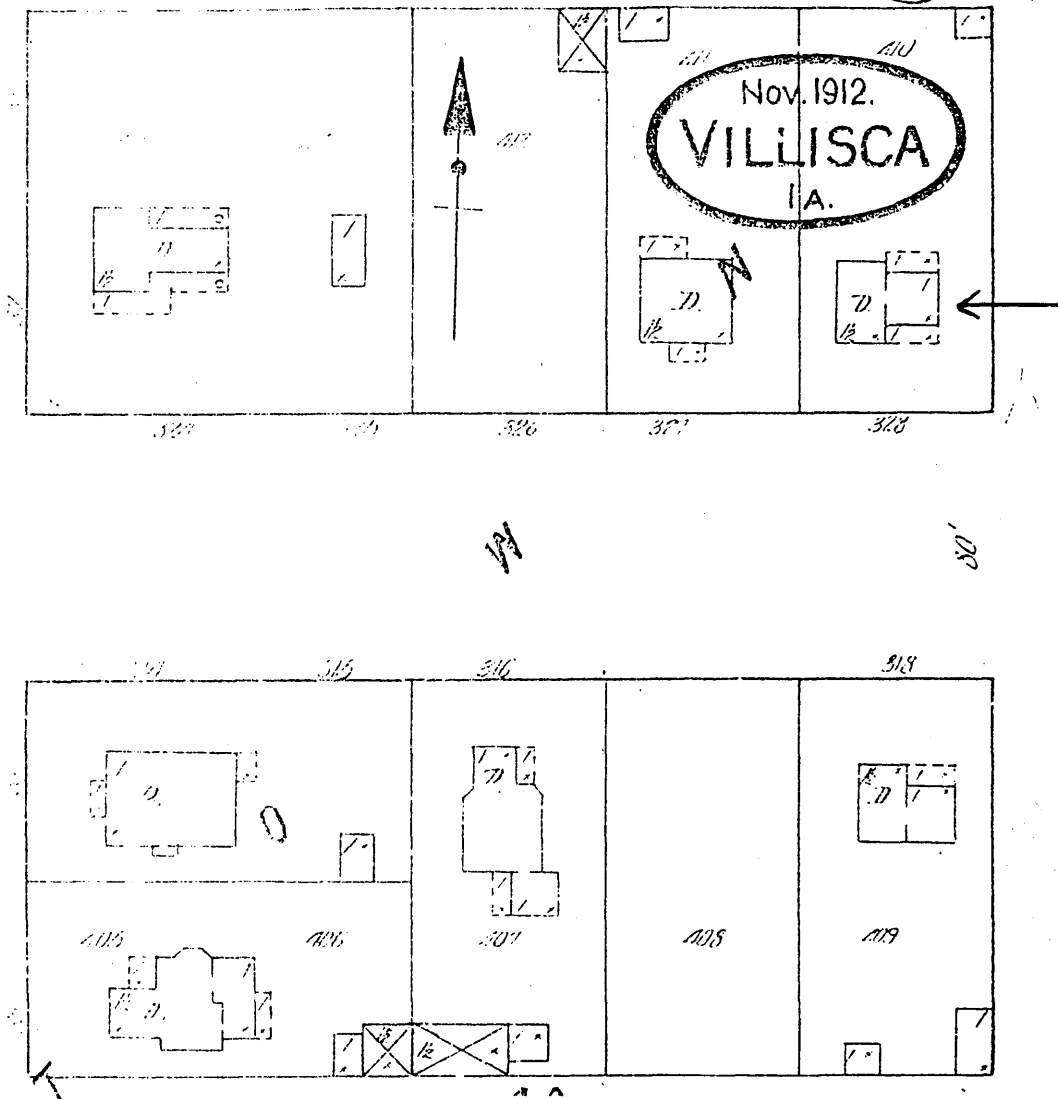
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1912 Sanborn Map of Moore House



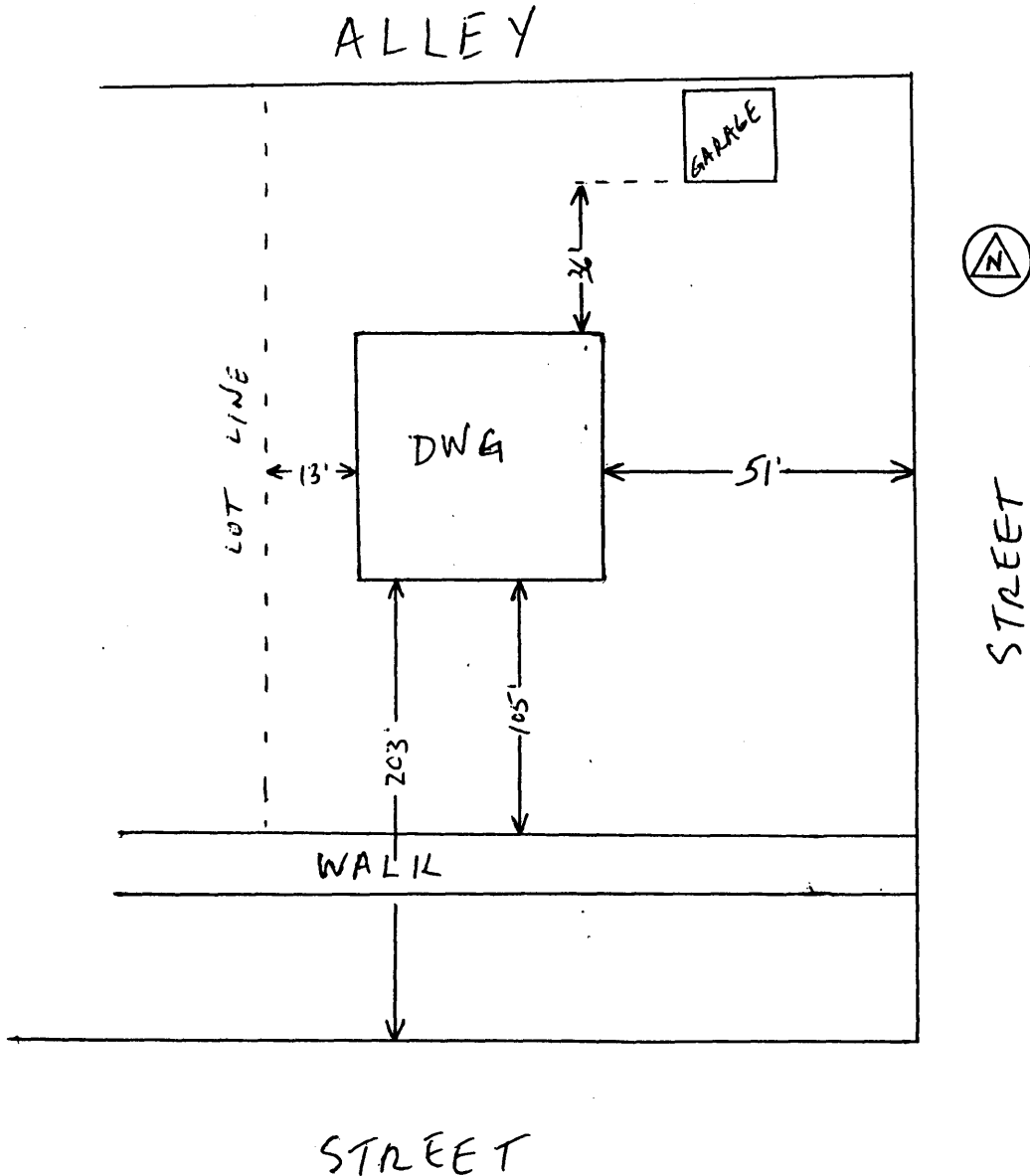
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MAP OF HOUSE ON LOT

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### END NOTES

1. Montgomery County History, (Des Moines: Iowa Historical and Biographical), 1881, pp. 489-495., A History of Montgomery County From the Earliest Days to 1906, (Red Oak, Iowa: Express Publishing), 1906, pp. 310-316.
2. Interviews of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 20 January 1997., interview of Edgar Epperly, 4 February 1997.
3. Interview of Edgar Epperly, 4 February 1997., Epperly, Edgar. "A Photographic Archives of the Villisca Axe Murder" (1995), pp. 11, 22-23.
4. Interview of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 21 February 1997., Abstract of Title to the East 21 Feet of Lot 417 and all of Lots 410, 418, and 419 in the City of Villisca, Montgomery County Iowa., Census of the United States of America, 1900, 1910.
5. Zenor, B.J. "Iowa Gothic: The Villisca Ax Murders" in The Palimpsest. (vol. 58, #5) September/October 1977., Brown, Don, Munday, Leo, and Epperly, Edgar. "The Villisca Axe Murders" in The Iowan. (vol. 6, #4) April/May 1958.
6. The Villisca Review. 13 June 1912, 20 June 1912, and 27 June 1912.
7. Interview of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 24 February 1997., Epperly, Edgar. "A Photographic Archives of the Villisca Axe Murder", (1995). pp. 19-20, 22-23.
8. Interview of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 20 January 1997., Villisca Journal. (vol. 3, #2) June 1995, pp. 1-2.
9. Interview of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 20 January 1997., Villisca Journal. (vol. 3, #2) June 1995, p. 4.
10. Epperly, "A Photographic Archives of the Villisca Axe Murder", p. 19.
11. Villisca Journal. (vol. 3, #2) June 1995, pp. 4, 36-37., interview of Edgar Epperly, 4 February 1997.

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12. Interview of Edgar Epperly, 4 February 1997., interview of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 24 February 1997.

13. Villisca Journal. (vol. 3, #2) June 1995, pp. 5, 7-8., Zenor, pp. 138-140.

14. Zenor, pp. 140-143.

15. Interviews of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 20 January 1997 and 24 February 1997., interview of Edgar Epperly, 4 February 1997.

16. Interviews of Kelly and Tammy Rundle, 20 January 1997 and 24 February 1997., interview of Edgar Epperly, 4 February 1997.

It must be noted that the information for this assertion is anecdotal. Nonetheless, it is highly credible as the individuals interviewed have been deeply involved in researching the murders in Villisca. Their research focused on who committed the murders and on setting facts straight. Information regarding the class division of the community in the wake of the murders was gathered inadvertently. Surprisingly, there is very little regarding the murders that has been published from a scholarly perspective. This makes the above mentioned sources all the more valuable.



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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abstract of title to the East 21 feet of Lot 417 and all of lots 410, 418, and 419 in the City of Villisca, Montgomery County, Iowa.

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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### INTERVIEWS

20 January 1997 interview with Kelly and Tammy Rundle, Fourth  
Wall Productions.

4 February 1997 interview with Edgar Epperly.

24 February 1997 interview with Kelly and Tammy Rundle.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Verbal Boundary Description: Lot 410 of original town plat of Villisca, Montgomery County, Iowa.

Boundary Justification: The boundary described above is that which is historically associated with the Josiah B. and Sara Moore House, Villisca, Montgomery County, Iowa.