

MISSISSIPPI RIVER MEN:
LE CLAIRE, IOWA 1850-1880

Name: John Smith House
Address: 426 Dodge
Owner: Clifford E. and Patricia Cotton
Address: 426 Dodge
Legal Description: West ½ of Lot 6,
Block 31, original town of Le
Claire
Acreage: less than one
UTM: 15/ 721000 4608250

Physical Description:

Built in the early 1850's, this house is a small brick dwelling, one story, on a low stone foundation. It has a gable roof, with ridge parallel to the front facade. The front is three bays, the sides two. The house has a center hall plan, the entrance sheltered by a small, flat-roofed porch supported on slender wooden posts. A wide wooden frieze, beaded at the bottom, runs across the whole of the front facade. Windows have flat stone lintels and sills. There is a small, one-story frame addition on the east side.

Significance:

John Smith, a pilot who won notoriety for his participation in the "Effie Afton" case, lived here early in the 1850's. He was a son of Ira Smith, one of the community's pioneer settlers, and, like many rapids pilots, began his career on the river while still in his teens. After the "Effie Afton" struck a pier of the new railroad bridge at Davenport in 1856, John Smith was hired by the railroad to prove that, properly handled, a steamboat could pass under the bridge without danger. This service to the railroad, a growing competitor of the steamboat trade, earned for Smith a bad reputation among many river captains who refused to hire him as pilot for several years. By the 1860's, however, he was working the river again, and after the Civil War devised the bowboat, a small steamer placed across the front of log rafts to aid in steering.

