

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received DEC 27 1982  
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Burr Oak House/Masters Hotel

and/or common Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum and Park

2. Location

street & number State Street \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Burr Oak \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state Iowa code 19 county Winneshiek code 191

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input 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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 Laura Ingalls Wilder Park, Inc.

street & number State Street

city, town Burr Oak \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state Iowa 52131

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Winnesheik County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Decorah \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state Iowa 52101

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title n/a has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state

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## 7. Description

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**Condition** excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed**Check one** unaltered altered**Check one** original site moved

date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Burr Oak House/Masters Hotel is a simple settlement era vernacular edifice that shows the influence of the colonial styles with its saltbox roof and gable end windows in its upper half-story and the Greek Revival with its pilastered corner boards, plain boxed cornice, and frieze board. This one and a half story building is of wood frame construction; is sheathed in white-painted wooden clapboards; rests on concrete blocks over a raised full basement; and is capped with a salt-box roof that is pierced at its apex by a single central chimney stack. Windows are of the one-over-one, two-over-two, and six-over-six wood sash variety and are set in rectangular surrounds. Except for the turned and bracketed posts that support the front porch, exterior ornamentation on the building is minimal.

Inside, the hotel contains eleven rooms located on three levels. The full basement houses the kitchen and two dining rooms; the main floor features two bedrooms, a parlor, and a former saloon room which now serves as a gift shop; and the top floor consists of four bedrooms. During the recent restoration, all the original lath and plaster was replaced by sheetrock, but much of the original interior woodwork remains. The rooms now contain exhibits relating to Laura Ingalls Wilder, and a number of antiques and other displays relating to local history.

The hotel as it appears today is the product of a restoration effort undertaken between 1973 and 1976 by area residents and fans of Laura Ingalls Wilder. By the time the house and acre of land around it were purchased in 1973, both were in terrible condition. The building was practically a shambles, and the area around it that contained the spring that furnished water for the hotel and the hill where Laura and her sisters had gone sledding, was overgrown and filled with junk. During the next three years the land was cleared and landscaped for a park, and the hotel extensively rehabilitated. A late 1890's addition to its south side was removed, and the exterior restored on the basis of an early photograph to what it probably had looked like when the Ingalls family lived there. The crumbling limestone foundation was replaced with cement blocks which the museum intends to face with lime rock to assimilate its original appearance in the near future.

## 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 type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1856 **Builder/Architect** Samuel and Wheeler Belding

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Burr Oak House/Masters Hotel has a three-fold significance. From the standpoint of architectural history, this vernacular edifice with colonial and Greek Revival overtones is one of a rapidly dwindling number of pre-1860 buildings built specifically as hotels which are still extant in Iowa. It is also significant for its lengthy service as a hotel in a small Iowa town, surviving changing economic times and tastes. Lastly the hotel has additional significance for its being the only known extant structure occupied by Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the "Little House" books, and her family during their sojourn in Iowa from 1876 to 1878. Although she did not describe Burr Oak in her published works, the time she spent here, says her biographer Donald Zochert, was for her "a crossroads of the spirit. It was the place where gently and imperceptibly she crossed the line between childhood and adolescence, and where she saw in the hardest times the possibilities that life held for her." Also, she found in the Burr Oak School "a teacher who introduced her for the first time to the real magic of language, to the rhythms and turns of good literature."<sup>1</sup>

Small hotels like the Burr Oak House/Masters Hotel were once relatively common along the wagon roads that pioneers followed during the settlement era in Iowa. The origins of this particular hotel can be traced back to 1851 when Samuel Belding and his half-brother Wheeler built a log hotel north of the present structure. The Wheelers eventually sold it to John Waggoner who operated it as the "Waggoner House." Waggoner eventually sold it but repurchased it in 1857. By this time the hotel had been enlarged several times, the log portion torn down, and had been renamed the "Burr Oak House." The growth of the hotel was due to the fact that the road through Burr Oak was a major road for the emigrant trains coming from the river counties along the Mississippi in Minnesota and Wisconsin. At times, as many as 200–300 wagons passed through the town daily, and at night the hotels, houses, and even yards were filled with people.

In 1873 John Waggoner sold the hotel to William J. Masters, and it became known as the "Masters Hotel." By this time, the flow of settlers through Burr Oak had greatly decreased, and business for the village's two hotels was slack. Three years later, Masters sold the hotel to William Steadman. Steadman had known Charles Ingalls and his family in Walnut Grove, Minnesota, and he invited the Ingalls family to come to Burr Oak and help him and his family run the hotel.

Charles Ingalls, his wife Caroline, and daughters Mary, Laura, and Carrie arrived in Burr Oak early in the fall of 1876 and moved into the hotel. That the hotel business was slow was evidenced by the fact that Charles Ingalls soon began operating a grinding mill in partnership with a local man. By early 1877 the Steadmans began to talk about selling the hotel, and Charles Ingalls decided to move his family into rooms above a grocery store next door. A few months later, the family moved again, this time to a brick house on the edge of town. It was here that Grace Ingalls was born on May 23, 1877. (Both the store and house have been demolished.) Although Laura Ingalls Wilder did not mention Burr Oak in the "Little House" Books, she did give the family's sojourn here considerable space in her unpublished memoir. Before writing the series, she

<sup>1</sup> Donald Zochert, "Wonderful Things for Laura," In Decorah Public Opinion June 1, 1976/

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Decorah Public Opinion, August 21, 1973, June 1, 1976.

Lichty, Irene V., The Ingalls Family: From Plum Creek to Walnut Grove Via Burr Oak, Iowa. (Mansfield, Mo.: Irene V. Lichty, 1970).

Zochert, Donald. Laura: The Life of Laura Ingalls Wilder. (New York: Avon Books, 1977).

Zochert, Donald. "Wonderful Things for Laura." in Decorah Public Opinion, June 1, 1976.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property one acre

Quadrangle name Burr Oak

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	5	5	9	1	7	7	0	4	8	1	2	0	5	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

C 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

D 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

E 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

F 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

G 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

H 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1 of 2 of 1 of 1 and Lot 2 all of Block 8, Original Burr Oak, and Lots 7 and 1 of 1 of 6 in NW $\frac{1}{4}$  fo NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 25, Twp.100N, R9W.

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

state Iowa code 19 county Winneshiek code 191

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator

organization Iowa SHPO date 12 December 1982

Historical Building

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

city or town Des Moines, state Iowa 50319

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Adrian W. Anderson*

title Executive Director, Iowa State Historical Department date 24 November 1982

### For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register

date 1/27/83

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Significance

Item number 8

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wrote a novel entitled Pioneer Girl which included the stay in Burr Oak, but publishers rejected it. There appear to have been two reasons why Burr Oak was not mentioned in the "Little House" books. When the series was published, the publishers insisted on adding two years to Mary's and Laura's ages because they felt that the two could not possibly remember and do some of the things they did in Little House in the Big Woods and Little House on the Prairie. Another reason for the omission may have been the family's general unhappiness during this period. Prior to moving to Burr Oak, their wheat crop was devoured by grasshoppers, and while en route the infant Charles Frederick Ingalls died. While in Burr Oak, they seem to have had a hardscrabble existence, and some sources suggest that the family left town in the middle of night to avoid payment of a debt. Laura Ingalls Wilder's biographer believes, however, that Burr Oak was an important turning point in her life, and that the people and experiences she encountered here played a major role in enabling her to write the eight books that comprise the highly successful "Little House" series.

Several months before the Ingalls family returned to Walnut Grove early in 1878, the Steadmans sold the hotel to William McLaughlin, who turned it into a dry goods and general store. In the early 1890's T. P. Emmons bought the building as an office and residence for his son Dr. W. H. Emmons. Around 1896, F.C. Schank acquired the property, and he added a two-story addition to the south side shortly afterwards and made it exclusively residential. In 1973 the building was purchased by Laura Ingalls Wilder Park, Inc., who restored and converted it into a museum.