

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received NOV 29 1982  
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Steyer Bridge

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Oneata Road, <sup>off</sup> east of jct. with US Hwy. 52 \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

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

state Iowa code 19 county Winneshiek code 191

3. Classification

|   |  |   |  |  |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Category</b>                               | <b>Ownership</b>                           | <b>Status</b> n/a                                     | <b>Present Use</b>                     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> district             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied                     | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture   | <input type="checkbox"/> museum                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> building(s)          | <input type="checkbox"/> private           | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied                   | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial    | <input type="checkbox"/> park                      |
| <input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> in process        | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation |
|   | <i>NA</i>                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> no                           | <input type="checkbox"/> military      | <input type="checkbox"/> other:                    |

4. Owner of Property

name City of Decorah

street & number

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

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Winneshiek County Courthouse

street & number

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

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title none 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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|  |                                       |   |   |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Condition</b>                         |                                       | <b>Check one</b>                              | <b>Check one</b>                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent       | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins        | <input type="checkbox"/> altered              | <input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair            | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed    |   |   |

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

The Steyer bridge is a small structure consisting of a single arch, formed by roughly-cut limestone voussoirs. The thick spandrels are laid up in coursed rubble limestone. They merge with low "walls" of the same material which form the foundation for the approaches to the bridge. The base of these walls, all the way to the lower edges of the arch, have been reinforced with concrete (in the 1970's). The bridge deck is concrete, edged with wood posts and 2" x 4" rails, bolted together. The keystone of the arch is a block of dressed limestone, into which the date "1875" and the mason's name, "Michael Steyer" are cut.

The bridge is located in a heavily wooded area outside of Decorah. Looming over it is a segment of concrete slab bridge (US52). When the highway was relocated here, the Steyer bridge was slated for removal. Local protest persuaded highway engineers to leave the stone bridge and to build over it. This relocation of the highway also took place in the early 1970's.

## 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce               | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy             | <input type="checkbox"/> theater         |
| <input 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) |

**Specific dates** 1875 **Builder/Architect** Michael Steyer

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Steyer bridge is one of the very few stone arch bridges known to exist in Iowa. This engineering form was seldom used in this state, perhaps because Iowa was settled late enough to take almost immediate advantage of the pre-fabricated metal truss which, as elsewhere, achieved great popularity in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Iowa's few stone bridges were generally the result of special circumstances -- specifically, a nearby source of good building stone and a local mason skilled enough to deal competently with the building of the arch.

In the range of stone bridges in Iowa, the Steyer bridge ranks as one of the less sophisticated, when compared to the three span Ely bridge near Monticello (Jones County) or the finely designed and executed Keystone Bridge at Elkader (Clayton County) which was the work of a trained engineer. Nonetheless, the Steyer bridge certainly merits recognition, as an example of vernacular engineering and as one of the limited instances of its type in the state.

Michael Steyer came to Decorah from Germany in 1867, to visit his brother Joseph (later proprietor of the Steyer Opera House in Decorah). He stayed on, to earn a good living as a mason, a trade he had learned in Germany. Steyer purchased a quarry near Decorah in 1876, and specialized in cutting stone for monuments and tombstones. He is also believed to have built other bridges in Iowa, but confirmation awaits additional research.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Knudson, George, "Self Guiding Tour of Decorah", Decorah: Luther College Press, 1972.  
Alexander, W. E., History of Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties (1882), pp. 288, 633.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than an acre

Quadrangle name Decorah 2 SE

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

### UTM References

A 

|      |   |         |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1    | 5 | 5       | 9 | 6 | 4 | 5        | 0 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Zone |   | Easting |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

B 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

C 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

D 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

E 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

F 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

G 

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| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

H 

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|      |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 1 of 1 of 1, East of Highway 52, in NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 20, Twp. 98N R8W

### 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 16 November 1982

street & number Historical Building  
East 12th and Grand Avenue telephone 515-281-6825

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 A. Anderson

title Executive Director, Iowa State Historical Department

date November 22, 1982

### For NPS use only

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

William Byrum  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date

1/4/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration