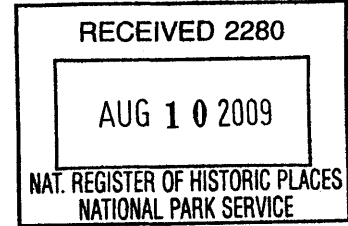


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



765

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 Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works

other names/site number The Brick Shop; Bloedel & Son Wagon Works

2. Location

street & number 524-526 Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town McGregor N/A vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Clayton code 043 zip code 52157

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).

Barbara Mitchell DSHPO August 4 2009
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
State or 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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edgar H. Beall 9.23.09

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Name of Property

Clayton County, IA
County and State

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	
2		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
2		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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate

OTHER: commercial false front

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/Limestone

walls BRICK

STUCCO

roof METAL/Steel

other METAL/Iron

Narrative Description

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

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Name of Property

Clayton County, IA
County and State

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.

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

INDUSTRY

TRANSPORTATION

Period of Significance

1862-circa 1887

Significant Dates

1862

circa 1887

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

Narrative Description

The Christian Bloedel Wagon Works is located at 524-526 Main Street in the City of McGregor in the northeastern portion of Clayton County, Iowa. The city is located on the west bank of the Mississippi River and owes its early development to its role as a river port and regional trading center. The main commercial district of McGregor developed along the southwest-northeast tending Main Street, with limited development along the side streets. The commercial district was previously listed in the National Register as a historic district and encompasses nearly the full length of Main Street from 4th Street northeast to the river (Rogers and Vermaas 2002). Most of the buildings within the district front Main Street, although a few front the side streets at the intersections of A Street and 3rd Street with Main. A total of 60 properties are included within the district boundaries. The wagon works is located along Main Street but is nearly two blocks southwest of the district's south boundary and is not included in the district boundaries.¹ The wagon works property consists of two brick buildings, one of which served as the main wagon shop and manufactory on the main floor and a residence on the second, with the second building of later construction serving as the wagon works paint shop on the main floor and another residence on the second floor. The main wagon manufactory building sits forward on the lot and abuts the sidewalk and street frontage along the northwest side of Main Street. The paint shop building is smaller in scale and is set back on the lot on the south side of the wagon shop but is a stand alone building. Both buildings are considered contributing to this nomination and represent the peak of the Bloedel Wagon Works as a small manufacturing complex.

Other buildings historically part of the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works were once located on this same property but are no longer standing. The archaeological potential of this property was not considered for the current nomination but is a possible contributing element that should be considered by any future studies of this property. In addition, the house on the adjacent lot to the north of the main wagon shop building was originally associated with the wagon works property but was later divided from the property and is now under separate ownership. This building is located at 522 Main Street and is a front-gabled, brick-veneered dwelling that always functioned as such. This house appears on the 1886 fire insurance map on the same parcel as the wagon shop building and likely served as a dwelling for the Bloedel family in addition to the dwelling spaces on the second floors of the wagon and paint shop buildings and in a small one-story dwelling (non-extant) at the southwest corner of the wagon shop property.²

The oldest extant building on the wagon works property is the main wagon shop building, which was constructed in 1862 for the wagon manufactory business of Christian Bloedel. This building is a front-gabled, two-story brick edifice that is made to look even more impressive by the construction of a stepped brick parapet that masks the gabled roofline from the street view. Such a device was utilized to make a storefront building more massive and impressive to better catch the eye of potential patrons. The façade of the wagon shop has a centered shop door opening wide enough to move wagons in and out of the main floor. This door is flanked by larger storefront-type windows that feature segmental-arched brick lintels and fixed four-pane windows. The second floor features a centered door with transom window that would have provided additional ventilation and light into the second floor interior. This door currently opens out onto a cantilevered porch with wrought iron

¹ The reason for the exclusion of the block on which the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works is sited was the amount of non-commercial development beyond 4th Street. The extant buildings in the 4th through 5th street blocks along Main Street are now largely residential. The Christian Bloedel Wagon Works is among the few exceptions and retains sufficient integrity and possesses sufficient significance to be listed individually in the National Register. Hence, the current nomination is being presented as an individual nomination and not an extension of the McGregor Commercial Historic District.

² The building at 522 Main Street does appear to retain sufficient integrity to be considered contributing to the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works property and should be considered as a potential addition to this nomination at such time that the adjacent property owner wishes to include his property in a nomination amendment.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 2**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

railing that was added during the early 1970s rehabilitation of this property.³ Prior to this rehabilitation, there was a flat cantilevered overhang at this location that had no railing; however, a 1920s photograph shows a solid wood-plank railing on top of the flat cantilever and people standing on this overhanging porch. The flat overhang was supported by two rather thin metal rods that attached to the façade on either side of the wagon door. Currently the porch overhang is supported by two angled wood brackets bolted to the porch floor and the brick wall. The wood brackets are sawn with a circular saw and have a simple scalloped or scrolled pattern on one edge. Additional support for the balcony is achieved by two iron chains that are bolted between the second floor brick wall and the floor of the balcony. Additional support for the façade just below the balcony is provided by a row of four bolted tie rods with circular caps.

The second floor door is flanked by two segmental-arched windows with 1/1 double-hung windows. These windows and the centered second floor door have wood shutters as does the window centered in the attic level above in the top step of the parapet. The shutters were added during the early 1970s rehabilitation of this property, although the 1920s photograph does show wooden shutters on the uppermost window on the façade. The attic-level window also has a segmental arched brick lintel and a 1/1 double-hung window. The first and second floor windows along both sides of the wagon shop building also have segmental-arched lintels but are a mixture of 1/1, 2/2, 6/1, and 6/6 double-hung windows. It is suspected that the original windows were 6/6 double-hung windows.

The façade of the wagon shop building is constructed of soft brick laid in a running bond where the bricks are laid in rows of stretchers, while the side and rear walls are laid in a 7:1 American bond, which consists of seven stretcher rows per single header row. The parapet continues the running bond to its top and was strengthened with a veneer of cement on its back side. The façade as a whole was further strengthened by the insertion of pairs of metal tie rods on all three levels. The tie rods have diamond-shaped end caps. The segmental-arched lintels above all the door and window openings are constructed of bricks laid in rowlocks capped by a projecting crown molding of brick laid in headers. The top of each step of the parapet is marked by a cornice constructed of bricks laid as a projecting denticulated frieze, imparting a Classical stylistic touch to the façade. The north lower section of the parapet was partially missing by the 1970s and was repaired and restored to its historic look during the 1970s rehabilitation of this property.

The main wagon door entry to the building has a tri-fold door, one door of which opens independently of the other two sections and acts as the entry door. The tri-fold door most likely dates from the early twentieth century. Screen doors were added in the 1970s rehabilitation.

In the modern era, a screened-in, second-story porch elevated on timber posts was added to the rear of the wagon shop building. External open-air stairs connect the upper porch of the wagon shop and the second floor of the paint shop building. The stairs then descend to a courtyard created by the construction of a wood gate between the northeast corner of the paint shop and the south wall of the wagon shop. The gate opened out to the paved parking lot that covers the area in front of the paint shop out to the street. The wooden gate was recently replaced with a wrought-iron gate.

An 1869 "bird's eye" illustration of McGregor shows that the stepped parapet of the wagon shop was original to the building's design (Ruger 1869). This illustration also shows a horizontal black line just above the centered ground floor doorway representing either a sign above the doorway or a cantilevered porch overhang similar to the one still present on the building in 1970. Neither the brick paint shop/dwelling south of the wagon shop or the brick dwelling north of the wagon shop were represented on the 1869 illustration of the wagon works property, which showed a small front-gabled building at

³ The wrought iron railing was manufactured in New Orleans (*Cedar Rapids Gazette* 1973).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

the rear of the lot (perhaps worker housing or a shed) and a lower rectangular building alongside the south wall of the wagon shop. This rectangular building conforms to the warehouse and paint room building shown on the 1886 fire insurance map of this property (Ruger 1869; Sanborn 1886).

The available fire insurance maps show that in 1886 the main building housed a "blacksmith shop" in the front main-floor room and a "wood work" room in the rear main-floor room. The second floor served as a dwelling; however, as noted above, the two-story, front-gabled brick house immediately north of the wagon shop building was part of the wagon shop property in the late nineteenth century and also functioned as a dwelling along with a very small one-story frame dwelling (now non-extant) in the southwest corner of the property. The 1886 map further shows a two-story shed behind the brick dwelling and a two-story warehouse with rear paint shop room along the full length of the south lot line. A small one-story frame privy was located along the rear lot line in-between the small dwelling and the shed. As a whole, this property constituted a self-contained manufactory where the owners and workers lived and worked on site. Comparing the bird's eye illustration and the fire insurance map indicates that the north brick dwelling was built sometime between 1869, when it was not represented on the bird's eye illustration, and 1886 when it was shown on the fire insurance map. It is suspected that this dwelling was built in the early to mid-1870s as the Bloedel sons came of age and got married. Both Henry and George Bloedel were known to have worked for their father, with George becoming a full partner in the business in 1875, and according to family history, both sons and their families lived on site. When George became a partner he was aged 23. Henry was the older brother and was already married and starting a family by 1874 according to census data (1880 U.S. Population Census). It may be that the north dwelling was built for Henry upon his marriage in 1872, with the south dwelling built for George at a later date.

The 1880 U.S. Population Census listed three households of Bloedels living side-by-side. These households included: son George and his wife, Rosa, and their two-year-old son, Edwin; family patriarch Christian and his wife, Sophia, and their 22-year-old daughter Johanna; and son Henry C. Bloedel and his wife, Bertha, and their six-year-old son, Robert and four-year-old daughter, Sophia. A fourth household listed just after Henry's household was that of Frank Kramer, his wife and two children. Frank Kramer was a wagon maker likely employed by the Bloedel's and may have been living on the wagon works property in one of the dwellings with his family. Family history states that Christian Bloedel lived above the wagon shop with his family, with the two sons and their families eventually occupying the brick houses on either side of the wagon shop (*Cedar Rapids Gazette* 1973). However, in 1880, the brick dwelling on the south side of the wagon shop had not yet been built; so one of the sons, probably George, was occupying a non-extant dwelling space on the property.

By the time of the 1894 fire insurance map, the long warehouse building along the south lot line had been removed and the extant two-story brick "south dwelling" had been built on its site.⁴ Two one-story frame sheds were now in the northwest and southwest corners of the property, with a one-story privy along the rear lot line but farther north than the 1886 privy. The new two-story brick dwelling was shown as L-shaped in plan, with a one-story rear ell perpendicular to the main two-story section of the dwelling. It was labeled on the 1894 map as a dwelling and had a front porch similar in scale to the extant porch on the dwelling north of the wagon shop, which was simply labeled as a store on the map. The north dwelling was still represented within the same property boundary as the other buildings in 1894.

The south dwelling is a front-gabled two-story brick building that is smaller in scale than the wagon shop and is recessed back on the lot from the frontage of the wagon shop. The buildings are side-by-side but are separated by a ten-foot gap. The fire

⁴ The fire insurance map data indicate that the south dwelling/paint shop building was constructed on this property sometime between 1886 and 1894, with a c.1887 date of construction used herein for this building because if family history is correct and brothers, George and Henry, lived in these dwellings, it would have to have been built before George left the business and McGregor "about 1887" (*McGregor News* 1901).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 4Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

insurance maps labeled this dwelling as "veneered," along with the dwelling north of the wagon shop. Both buildings are similar in design having a front-gabled orientation, relatively low-pitched gable rooflines, and three windows across the second floor. The dwelling to the north has a door to the left with two single windows to the right and covered with an open porch supported by turned spindleposts. The dwelling to the south of the wagon shop on the nominated property currently has a wagon door on the left and a single window on the right of the façade. The 1894 fire insurance map shows a porch across the façade of the paint shop building, with the building identified only as a dwelling on that map. An enclosed porch was still present on the building's façade in 1970 but was removed when the current façade was rehabilitated in the early 1970s. It is possible that this building was originally built in the same design as the dwelling to the north but was subsequently converted on the first floor into a paint shop, which entailed removal of the porch and replacement of the door and one window with the wagon door opening. The wagon door opening is currently covered with two open-out wood doors that have vertical four-pane windows on the upper section of the doors. Above the flat timber lintel over the wagon door is a row of projecting brick ends that impart a denticulated effect. This area was rehabilitated in the 1980s.

The windows on the south dwelling all have segmental-arched lintels constructed of brick laid in two rowlock courses. The extant windows include both 2/2 and 1/1 double-hung windows. A single metal tie rod with a star end cap is present in the center of the façade. The side walls of the building are currently stuccoed as are the walls of the rear ell, which was enlarged with a second floor sometime between the time of the 1914 and 1930 fire insurance maps. Interestingly, while the available fire insurance maps all showed the function of this building as simply a dwelling, it is known that the first floor portion of the two-story section of the brick building was used for a time as a paint shop for the wagon manufactory next door.

The 1902 fire insurance map showed a one-story addition to the rear of the north dwelling. This map also showed a one-story addition connecting the rear of the south dwelling to the one-story building in the southwest corner of the property that was present on the 1894 map. This new addition was connected internally to the paint shop building but both rear additions have subsequently been removed and are non-extant. The 1902 map also shows the main wagon shop building as simply a dwelling in function.

By 1914, the dwelling to the north was shown on a separate lot from the wagon shop property, although the one-story shed to the rear of this house overlapped the property boundary. All three main buildings were still shown as dwellings in function. For the first time on the fire insurance maps, the wagon shop building was shown with the second floor balcony. Indoor plumbing must have been implemented in McGregor by 1914 because the outdoor privy was no longer represented on the fire insurance map.

The 1930 fire insurance map showed the main wagon shop building as a carpenter shop powered by a gasoline engine. The rear additions on the south dwelling had been removed by this date, with a one-story frame building now present along the rear lot line perpendicular to, but separate from, the dwelling. The shed behind the north dwelling had been completely removed, with that dwelling still shown on a separate lot and now having an automobile garage to the north. It should be noted that the second floor balcony overhang was not represented on the wagon shop building on the 1930 map even though this overhang would have been present at that time.

Both the wagon shop and the paint shop buildings are used as residential properties in the present day, although the manufactory interiors of both buildings have been left open with exposed timber posts and beams and are still recognizable for their historic industrial functions. The vertical posts were added during the early 1970s rehabilitation but the horizontal beams are likely original to the building's construction. The current owners, John and Mary Ellen Bickel, have rehabilitated both buildings, with projects including: spot repointing; brick replacement as needed and rebuilding of one area on the south wall of the wagon shop building where the wall had cracked and bowed; replacement of two smaller windows with the rest

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 5

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

being historic in age and retaining 95% of their original glass panes; the addition of storm windows; and the installation of steel roofing where wood shakes and tin had been the historic materials.

During the rehabilitation of the main wagon shop in the early 1970s, the owners discovered that the building lacks a substantial foundation and they had to add footings to improve the building's structural soundness. The original floor joists of both the wagon shop and the paint shop buildings sat on flat rocks resting on the dirt ground surface. The paint shop room also had wood planks on the floor that were found to be covered with thick layers of paint supporting the conclusion that this room functioned for a time as the paint shop for the wagon manufactory.

The rehabilitation of the wagon shop building included the removal of a covered staircase on the rear of the building, which had provided the only access to the second floor. The owners then added a circular staircase on the interior. A dormer was also removed from the roofline of this building, and in the process an ornate painted board was discovered in its structure. The ornate nature of the painted design suggested that the board had come from a vehicle fancier than your average farm wagon or carriage initially leading to the speculation that it might have come from one of the Ringling Brothers circus wagons (see the historical significance section of this nomination for further information on the Ringling Brothers connection to McGregor).

The Christian Bloedel Wagon Works retains generally good integrity under all seven of the aspects of integrity for consideration of National Register eligibility. Specifically, this property is the location of the Bloedel wagon manufactory and retains the original wagon shop building that served as the main manufactory throughout the property's industrial history. It also retains a secondary building that served for a time as the paint shop for the wagon shop. Two of the dwelling spaces associated with the manufactory are also still represented in the upper floors of both the wagon and paint shop buildings. These spaces reflect the historic function of this property as a self-contained manufactory where the Bloedel family and their employees worked and lived. Both buildings retain good integrity of their original designs, materials and workmanship, having seen comparatively minor modifications through the years. Both buildings still retain many original and/or historic period elements on both the exterior and interior. The property still evokes a strong sense of time and place and the feeling of this property as a historic manufactory. The two buildings are also still recognizable for their historic association with one another. It should also be noted that the dwelling to the north on property now under separate ownership is still identifiable as having an association with the wagon shop property because this house and the house on the wagon shop property are nearly identical "bookends" to the wagon shop building. These dwellings are set back the same distance on their lots, their rear ells essentially wrap around towards the rear of the wagon shop in mirror image of one another, and they have similar designs in their form and style. The north dwelling is currently not included within the nominated boundary because it is owned separately from the wagon works proper, but it could certainly be included within the boundary at such time that the owner wishes it to be included in the National Register.

The Christian Bloedel Wagon Works is significant as a well preserved example of a small nineteenth century manufactory important in the early history of the City of McGregor. The property is being nominated by the property owners to recognize this significance and to aid in the property's future preservation.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 6

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

Statement of Significance

The Christian Bloedel Wagon Works is locally significant under Criterion A for its historical significance as a well preserved example of a nineteenth century, family-owned and -operated wagon manufactory in the City of McGregor, Iowa. The wagon shop and residence also represent a particular phase in American manufacturing history and a manufacturing strategy peculiar to the wagon and carriage trade as well as a few other specialized industries. Specifically, Bloedel's wagon shop reflects the mid to late-nineteenth-century importance of such small wagon shops to the trade, many of which flourished even into the twentieth century through a combination of batch production and the use of mass-produced wagon parts. The wagon shop is also locally significant under Criterion C for the survival of two brick buildings directly associated with the wagon shop business and the Bloedel family in the late nineteenth century including the original wagon manufactory building constructed in 1862. The brick construction of these buildings reflects the importance of brick construction in McGregor by the 1860s and continuing throughout the late nineteenth century. The design of both buildings further reflects their original functions as manufactory buildings for the wagon business and the use of their upper floors as living space for the Bloedel family. A third brick building located adjacent to the wagon shop property to the north was also historically associated with the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works business and functioned as a dwelling, probably for one of the sons of the Bloedel family in the late nineteenth century. This dwelling is not included in the current nomination because of its separate ownership but is certainly contributing to the significance of the wagon shop property and its presence adds to the integrity of the historical setting of the wagon shop property. The period of significance for the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works is 1862-circa 1887 encompassing the construction date of the original wagon shop in 1862 and the period in which the wagon shop was operated by the Bloedel family. Around 1887, the family partnership dissolved and the Bloedel sons moved to Minnesota, with Christian Bloedel then selling the business and retiring in the years prior to his death in 1901. Significant dates include: 1862 when the wagon shop was first built and the business was established in McGregor and circa 1887 when the south dwelling/paint shop building was added to the wagon works property.

Commercial Growth of McGregor, Iowa, 1830s-1880s⁵

The Christian Bloedel Wagon Works is located in McGregor, Iowa, which was known as the "Pocket City," so-named because of its location within a ravine in-between 400-foot river bluffs at the Mississippi river's edge. McGregor is currently a river town of 871 residents in the northeastern quadrant of Clayton County, about 67 miles north of Dubuque. Main Street runs northeast toward the river and its historical development relied heavily on its proximity to the river. The street's commercial architecture dates primarily from the mid-to-late nineteenth century when town growth was booming.

In 1836, Alexander MacGregor, originally a resident of New York State, established a horse ferry business from Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, to the river's western bank. He christened this stopping point "MacGregor's Landing." His operation initially struggled, both because of northeast Iowa's challenging terrain and a lag in settlement from the southeast. Indeed, the first river towns established in Iowa lay south of rival Dubuque. The ferry operator's desire to take advantage of the river traffic and create an effective regional trading post paid off when the military contracted with him in 1840 to use the landing for supplying Fort Atkinson located 55 miles to the north-northwest. Soon builders constructed a warehouse at what is today the foot of Main Street. Six years later a county surveyor drew the pioneer village's lots.

Unlike most Mississippi river towns in Iowa, Main Street's orientation in the town now renamed McGregor did not obediently follow the river. Rather, it moved slightly away, at a roughly 45 degree southwest angle, with the river bank

⁵ Most of this section was taken from "McGregor Commercial Historic District," National Register Nomination form authored by Rogers and Vermaas (2002).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 7Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

figured as its terminus. Although a concession to the area's confining topography, the street's unusual direction uniquely captured the town's reliance on the river, a kind of commercial red-carpet bowing to the river. The diagonally-directed street spanned only two blocks in 1846, its expanse forming the hypotenuse of an interior right triangular area of four blocks between it and the river.

Early businesses, primarily log structures, started at the street's northeast end toward the river's edge. In the 1850s, the town began to experience a population boom—jumping from 280 residents to 2,000 between 1857 and 1858—and began to enjoy a prolonged period of prosperity. Henry D. Evans, who in 1848 had opened a general store in Alexander MacGregor's warehouse basement (located near the foot of Main Street), had plans five years later for its massive expansion. An observer noted, among other improvements, that the proprietor was “commencing to build a warehouse 100 x 70 feet, four stories high” (Price 1916:90).

Most of the buildings in 1853 were frame or stone structures located near the river, including: Jones & Bass, general merchandisers; Kinsley & Rhoades, steamboat agents and commission merchants; and three hotels, the American House, McGregor House, and Upper House. Out of this early group of structures, only the American House survives.⁶ Boarding houses became important enterprises given the trade volume the town's river location began attracting. The commercial district's development migrated southwest, starting with the lots between Front and Second streets, whose early inhabitants included a boarding house/saloon and a drugstore. The town's incorporation soon followed in 1857, when Main Street boasted its first bank building and had another on the way.

Numerous visitors soon marveled at the district's remarkable commercial atmosphere, a newspaper editor breathlessly finding that “everybody was busy, building, repairing, cleaning, merchandising, ferrying, and [doing] everything else that tends to make a people happy, wise and rich” (Price 1916:93). Warehouses and elevators lined the river. The Civil War only increased trade demands, and the town's fortunes rose yearly throughout this period even though three great fires damaged the commercial district (ibid.:176). Grain merchants proudly boasted that McGregor was the “largest primary grain-receiving depot in the world,” with 600 to 800 teams pulling in upwards of 3 million bushels of wheat, and handling \$200,000 worth of pork, 10,752 barrels of flour, and \$100,000 of hides and furs, sometimes daily (ibid.). Traders and suppliers promenaded up Main Street, forming one long procession that “crowded” its entire length. A *Dubuque Herald* journalist described the prosperous scene as one involving an “almost continuous” line of teams, sometimes “four abreast, . . . a perfect jam of loaded teams at the warehouses along the river front [extending] as far as the eye could reach along the main street, . . . most of them laden with goods purchased at McGregor” (ibid.). Witnessing the amazing sight of over 1,000 teams inhabiting the one-mile strip, with many of them facing a return trip 150 to 200 miles or more, another observer easily affirmed that “not only is McGregor a great grain market, but it is the principal depot for the supply of household furniture, farming machinery, wearing apparel, groceries and other commodities” (ibid.:176, 187).

McGregor reigned as the state's undisputed northeastern wholesaling and trading center during the 1850s and 60s. Its river banks were often piled with Wisconsin white pine and rafts of logs, lumber, lath, and shingles and lines of barges bulging with four or five train cars. Main Street was alive with customers (Price 1916:180). However, when railroad development started in the region during the late 1850s, it challenged the town's aspirations. Towns not so favorably situated on a waterway soon would have their own shipping and transportation links to sustain them. McGregor's commercial prospects were further damaged when North McGregor (now Marquette) secured the coveted McGregor Western railroad depot and bridge connection to Prairie du Chien in 1864, even though a land grant stipulated its location at the foot of McGregor's Main Street. According to local historians, the construction of railroad bridges across the Mississippi eventually depreciated

⁶ The American House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 8 Page 8 **Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

McGregor's value as a transportation hub and central trading post.

Regardless of such a devastating setback, McGregor flourished for the next twenty years. Although the ambitious river town did not become the region's main railroad hub, rail transport did enter McGregor in 1857, immediately benefiting the town's commercial trade. The McGregor, St. Peters, and Missouri route, which followed the river through town, increased ferry freight traffic to Prairie du Chien to such an extent that a railroad agent ordered the building of tracks on barges to ease a train car's loading and unloading. After multiple buyouts, the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul (CMSP) Railroad secured ownership seven years later, whose Dubuque Division included McGregor as one of its five whistle stop stations (Eckhardt 2001:16; Price 1916:179). The CMSP line eventually operated a distinctive triangular-lot passenger depot around 1869 that fronted Main Street's northeastern end well into the twentieth century when it was demolished (McGregor Public Library Clippings Files). About two-and-a-half blocks south, the rail company installed a freight depot by 1886 at Front and B Streets near the river's edge and added a modest section house a little more than one block north at A and Front Streets about 15 years later. The company constructed a larger section house sometime after 1914 in the same riverbank spot, a location that remains more of an industrial area today. With the population near peaking around 4,000 by 1875, total business transactions in McGregor soared, reaching just over \$15 million (Andreas 1875:436-67). Market shipping and wholesale trade continued to reap a majority of the profits, reaching \$3.9 and \$1.5 million, respectively.

While commercial enterprises filled in Main Street from the river bank heading southwest during this period, the main commercial district at its peak thinned out past Fourth Street. The area of the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works in the block of Main Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets had become primarily residential by the 1880s, with only scattered industrial businesses from Fifth to Seventh streets. These industries included the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works, the A. Pearsall & Son Carriage Factory, and a lumber yard at the corner of Sixth Street and Ann, a business which backed up to the Main Street intersection (Sanborn 1886). There were two blacksmith/wagon shops and one blacksmith shop in the Fourth to Fifth street block of Main in 1886 (*ibid.*). These operations appear to have been of smaller size than the Bloedel Wagon Works, and none of these buildings are extant. The Pearsall & Son Carriage Factory building and the lumber yard are also non-extant.

The Bloedel Wagon Works is among a handful of historic wagon and carriage manufactories and repair shops that have been recorded in the Iowa Site Inventory to date. The others include: the Fish Wagon Works in Clinton, the Funck & Hertzler Wagon Factory in Burlington (National Register listed); the Burg and Sons Wagon Factory in Burlington (non-extant); the Rommel Wagon Factory in Alden; the Harris Wagon and Carriage Shop in La Motte (National Register listed); the Charter Oak Wagon Works in Fairfield; the Schreiber Wagon Factory in Chariton; the Burg Wagon Works in Farmington (National Register listed); the Quasdorf Blacksmith and Wagon Shop (National Register listed); and the Cedar Rapids Carriage Works (National Register listed). There are also several blacksmith shops in the inventory, with one—the Begolty Blacksmith in Burlington—listed in the National Register. The Bloedel Wagon Works stands apart from most of these other manufactory buildings in that it retains not only the main wagon shop but two other buildings that were once part of this small factory complex. The current nomination does not include the second of the two other buildings (*i.e.*, the brick dwelling to the north of the wagon shop) because it is under separate ownership; however, its presence adjacent to the nominated property certainly enhances the historic setting and association of the nominated property.

Christian Bloedel Wagon Works and the American Wagon Trade, 1860-1885

In 1860, Christian C. Bloedel (1825-1901) arrived with his family in McGregor, Iowa, and found the little Mississippi River

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 9Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

town brimming with activity and opportunity. An immigrant from Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany,⁷ Bloedel had learned the art of wagon-making early in life, most likely through an indentured apprenticeship that ended at age 21 (Kinney 2004:39-40). Thus free to make his own way, Bloedel arrived in America in 1848 and spent six years in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, practicing his trade. There, he met and married Sophie Heine in 1849, and the couple eventually had five children who survived, namely Henry, George, Leonard, Charles, and Johanna. In 1854, Bloedel moved to Detroit, Michigan, where he opened a grocery store. In 1856, the family moved to Saginaw, where Bloedel once again “worked at his trade” and owned a small farm. In 1859, he moved to Guttenberg, Iowa, and a year later to McGregor, working as a blacksmith in both towns (Inter-State Publishing 1882:969; *McGregor News* 1901; 1860 U.S. Population Census).

By 1860, the town wagon-maker was an integral part of most small communities on the frontier. Wagons and carriages had gained diversity in function and design throughout the nineteenth century, and after the Civil War, nearly every farm kept a buggy, a work wagon, and a sleigh in one of its outbuildings. Fragile-looking buggies took families to town, dances, church, and funerals. Sturdy farm wagons hauled supplies, hay, manure, or even whole families for long distances. During Iowa’s winters, farmers found sleighs indispensable. Resembling work wagons on iron runners, sleighs laden with logs or cord wood glided easily over roads packed with snow (Watson 1977:81-2). Those who knew the trade could find a ready market for their skills in almost any small town in the mid-nineteenth century.

Christian Bloedel set up his wagon and carriage business in McGregor in the midst of the Civil War, a volatile time that caused upheaval in the usual production and distribution of goods. In particular, the war disrupted New England’s domination of the wagon and carriage trade, cutting them off from what had been a lucrative southern market (Kinney 2004:17). In the Midwest, where land was cheap, timber plentiful, and railroads beginning to expand, enterprising blacksmiths and wagon-makers stepped in to fill the void (ibid.:22). Many started their own fledgling manufactories, turning out goods for burgeoning new markets where vehicles were most needed. Despite three great fires and the loss of the McGregor Western depot to North McGregor, Bloedel’s blacksmith and wagon shop prospered in McGregor’s “golden days,” that almost daily brought numerous wagons into town. In 1861, according to the *Chicago Times*, McGregor was “the largest primary grain-receiving depot in the world,” with 600 to 800 teams arriving daily during grain season (Price 1916:175). In January 1864, the *McGregor News* declared the Prairie du Chien Railroad “insufficient to carry away the produce collecting there.” The newspaper reported Market Square “filled with teams,” as well as “a solid procession of teams waiting to have their loads weighed—extending up Ann Street to Third, on Third to Main street to its junction with upper Main street, a distance of nearly or quite one mile!” In addition, McGregor was a lively gathering place and social center. In 1863, the town’s Fourth of July celebration drew “thousands upon thousands” to McGregor. As the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* observed:

Long trains of wagons came twenty, forty, and seventy five miles, in some instances, bringing with them the ladies and young folks of their respective households, constituting trains of immense length, composed of conveyances drawn some by one, two, four or more horses, beautifully caparisoned and with almost innumerable banners streaming in the air, presenting many scenes really imposing (*Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* 1863).

The location of Bloedel’s shop, five and a half blocks from the busy river port and railroad stop, suggests the wagon-maker intended to cater to locals and farmers arriving in town by several roads from the surrounding countryside and farther west. In 1853, the old military road from McGregor to Fort Atkinson was, according to the *Dubuque Herald* editor, “not surpassed

⁷ Bloedel became a naturalized citizen of the United States and his application for a U.S. Passport in 1880 noted that he had been born specifically in “Gross Herzothum Hessen-Darmstadt” using the German spelling. The application noted that he was then 55 years of age, 5 feet 5-1/2 inches tall, had “very light hazel” eyes, a “medium” nose, “ordinary” mouth, “broad and full” forehead, “round and full” face, “short and wide chin,” and “brown hair turning gray” (U.S. Passport Application, Form for Naturalized Citizens issued April 13, 1880, for Christian Bloedel; accessed at www.ancestry.com, July 2008).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 10Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

by any route in northern Iowa of the same length." Along this route and the McGregor-to-Monona road, the *Herald* editor observed a number of farmers were building houses and making other improvements (Price 1916:83; 93). Connected by river, rail, and stage, McGregor's trade territory to the west in the 1860s included Mason City, Iowa, and Albert Lea and Austin, Minnesota. Bloedel's location in mid-town McGregor along the main road may have brought him a preponderance of farming customers. This may partly explain his specialization in wagons and sleighs as noted in 1881 by a Chicago newspaper when the town's manufacturing enterprises included: one carriage factory (this would have been the Pearsall factory)⁸ and three "sleighs and wagons" factories (this would have included Bloedel's operation) (*The Daily Inter Ocean* 1881).

In 1860, McGregor was the kind of bustling town in which a man could go from "tenting in the woods" one year to owning a five-acre farm and log home "with conveniences" the next (Price 1916:90). Bloedel experienced similar economic success. Census records reveal Bloedel's personal worth to have been \$100 in 1860. Yet after only two years of blacksmithing in booming McGregor, Bloedel had become prosperous enough to buy a lot in the newly platted James McGregor Jr. Addition for \$650 and build a handsome brick two-story shop and residence (Title Abstracts for SW1/2 and NE1/2, Lot 7, Block 9, McGregor, Iowa, in possession of John and Mary Ellen Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; 1860 U.S. Population Census).⁹

Owning one of just a handful of masonry structures on McGregor's Main Street in 1862, Bloedel referred to his wagon-making manufactory as the "Brick Shop" in advertisements in the local newspaper. According to one of these early advertisements, for those needing a wagon or blacksmithing services "The place for good work is at the BRICK SHOP, On Main Street, McGregor, Iowa" (*North Iowa Times* 1868). In the late 1850s, bricks were handmade in small numbers near construction sites, making brick commercial buildings in small towns scarce. The arrival of railroads in Iowa in 1860 made mass-produced bricks from regional manufacturers easier to procure (Nash and Rogers 2002:E-15). Merchants who could afford to build masonry shops used them to market their services and wares. For Bloedel, the name "Brick Shop" conferred a certain status on his work (brick was substantial and fireproof), and made his shop a landmark in the community. The "Brick Shop's" height and distinctive stepped pediment was notable along McGregor's latest Main Street block. Side windows that allowed ample light into the wagon construction area on the first floor and into the living quarters on the second floor discouraged future link-ups with other business buildings as was common with "Main Street" commercial buildings in the 1860s (Nash and Rogers 2002:E-29). Bloedel seems to have intended his "Brick Shop" to stand out and stand alone.¹⁰

Like many commercial buildings of the time, the Bloedel Wagon Works housed the business on the ground floor and the family home on the second. Wide front doors accommodated the farm wagons, carriages, and sleds in which Bloedel specialized. An outdoor staircase at the rear of the building provided private access to the second-floor residence.

Over the years, Bloedel took advantage of his large lot to enlarge his wagon-making facilities. Like many rural wagon-

⁸ Amos Pearsall came to McGregor in 1856 and operated a livery stable until 1871 when he joined the G. Hawley & Son carriage business, where he remained a member for nine years. In 1880, Pearsall purchased the Hawley factory and took his son, Charles A. into partnership with him. The firm was known after that as A. Pearsall & Son Carriage Factory (*North Iowa Times* 1956).

⁹ In 1862 Bloedel purchased the SW½ and NE½ of Lot 7, Block 9 of James McGregor Jr. Addition, which had been platted in 1851. Out of the 160 acres McGregor had purchased in 1851 for \$150, he platted the James McGregor Jr. Addition on March 22, 1860. Full lots in this addition measured 50 x 100 feet (Title Abstracts for SW½ and NE½, Lot 7, McGregor, Iowa, in possession John and Mary Ellen Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa). The abstract for the SW1/2 of Lot 6, Block 9, adjacent to the north was not available to the current study; however, the fire insurance maps indicate that this lot was part of the Bloedel wagon works property by at least the 1880s if not from the 1860s.

¹⁰ That same year, 1862, Bloedel was an organizing member of the German Presbyterian Church and helped build the first church. He was also a member, along with his son Henry, of Itasca Lodge, No. 111, I.O.O.F.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

makers, Bloedel was able to divide his operation between several buildings, leaving blacksmithing and woodworking in the main wagon shop, setting up a warehouse and paint shop next door, and maintaining separate living quarters for family and hired help as well as storage space in other buildings on the property. Typically, paint shops in wagon manufactories were separated, either on a top floor or in a separate building, from the smoke and dirty air of the blacksmithing and wood-working operations. An open courtyard behind the main wagon shop would have assisted in moving the wagons between buildings and provided space for drying freshly painted vehicles (Kinney 2004:53-4; Sanborn 1886).

In the late 1860s, Bloedel advertised to McGregor citizens and visitors that he was “constantly manufacturing Wagons, Carriages, Sleighs, buggies, &c., from the very best materials” and made to order “every style of Wagon or Carriage desired, on the shortest notice and in the best manner.” He offered blacksmithing “in all its branches, performed in true mechanical style,” and he repaired wagons, carriages and farm tools promptly and neatly. Offering the latest in wagon engineering, Bloedel let McGregor know that he had purchased the rights to use “the celebrated Patent Thimble Skeins & Babbited Axle Box,” which was “the best ever invented” (*North Iowa Times* 1868).¹¹

Wagon-making was a trade unto itself, requiring the adaptation of several specialized tools and skill sets, including those of the blacksmith, wheelwright, cabinet maker, and painter. The wagon-maker not only selected and dried the proper wood; he also cut, fit, joined, and finished the dozens of pieces that made up the body of a typical wagon or sleigh. To accomplish this, numerous iron parts and fittings, many often forged by blacksmiths in the wagon shop, were used to fasten every vehicle together. A typical wagon required about 117 fittings, 84 carriage bolts, 50 or 60 wood screws, and 8 to 12 feet of chain (Watson 1977:84). The easy availability of ready-made wagon parts beginning in the 1850s proved key to the survival of small wagon and carriage shops (Kinney 2004:6).

Small, family-owned and -operated wagon shops like Bloedel’s not only survived but flourished despite industrialization, mass production, and the domination of the industry by large factories like Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company in Indiana, which in 1880 turned out one hundred wagons daily. One of countless examples in the carriage trade, the family shop of Christian Bloedel not only defied the inevitability of large-scale mass production, it flourished along with McGregor from the 1860s to the mid-1880s (Kinney 2004:3-4).

Small shops like Bloedel’s represented what historians call *batch production*. Unlike mass-production, batch production produced “short runs of products whose changing physical specification and episodic demand require technological and institutional flexibility” (Kinney 2004:4). Batch producers turned out “small groups of similar or identical goods to order or in anticipation of demand” (*ibid.*:5). The economic ebb and flow of a river town like McGregor in the 1860s would have suited such a manufacturing strategy. Batch production would have given Bloedel the flexibility of building custom orders for vehicles as well as anticipating the demand of those crowded markets or holidays that brought thousands to town. Bloedel also did repairing, or “jobbing,” a service that remained a staple of small wagon shops into the first decades of the twentieth century (*ibid.*:6).

Though small shops could produce almost any kind of horse-drawn vehicle, the presence of competitors usually necessitated specialization (Kinney 2004:6). In the 1870s, Bloedel’s “Brick Shop” began competing with several other wagon

¹¹ Bloedel seems to have kept current on relevant new inventions in his trade. The patentee was G.F. Gillett, a wagon maker in Sparta, Wisconsin. Gillett’s patent was featured in *Coach-maker’s International Journal* in October 1867, with an advertisement and three illustrations of the axle (Information obtained from Carriage Museum of America [Lexington, KY] website at http://www.carriagemuseumlibrary.org/carriage_wagon_axles.htm.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

manufacturers in McGregor including: M. Maltzky, J. Clemens, and G. Hawley and Co.¹² Apparently, McGregor's economy was brisk enough to sustain all four wagon shops for a time. Bloedel was so busy, he brought his two teenage sons, Henry and George, into the business as blacksmiths and hired an additional wagon-maker, Fred Stevens, who was a Prussian immigrant and lived on the property at the time of the 1870 U.S. Population Census.

Evidence suggests that the several McGregor wagon manufacturers divided the town trade by customer and vehicle type, with Bloedel specializing in wagons and Clemens devoted to carriages (Andreas 1875:519). Neither Bloedel nor Clemens, however, achieved the success of G. Hawley & Co., which became A. Pearsall & Son in 1880. In 1871, Hawley's carriage factory was "first among the manufacturers" of McGregor. His carriage works consisted of a three-story, 75 x 75 foot factory, located on several lots at the corner of Main and Fifth Streets. "Devoted to the manufacture of all light vehicles," Hawley employed 30 men in his factory (*Milwaukee Sentinel* 1871).¹³

In 1875 Bloedel officially partnered with his son George, and the company now known as Bloedel & Son "did a large business sending their wagons to all parts of western Iowa, Minn., and Dakota" (*McGregor News* 1901).¹⁴ In 1880, both sons, Henry and George, and their respective families were living on the wagon works property, with Henry occupying the brick house to the north and George probably residing in the non-extant dwelling shown at the rear of the property on the 1884 fire insurance map. Henry was listed as a blacksmith in the 1880 census, with George listed as a wagon-maker (*Cedar Rapids Gazette* 1973; 1880 U.S. Population Census).¹⁵

¹² Of these former factory buildings, only the Bloedel Wagon Works appears to survive in McGregor (Rogers and Vermaas 2002; Sanborn 1886-1930).

¹³ In 1880, G. Hawley & Co. was bought out and became A. Pearsall & Son Carriage Factory. In the 1882 county history, Pearsall was said to manufacture 200 buggies annually, and "everything in the construction of them is made in the shops; nothing is purchased by the firm except the raw material" (Inter-State Publishing 1882). This was perhaps a swipe at smaller wagon-makers who survived and even competed with larger manufacturers like Pearsall by purchasing mass-produced wagon parts and fittings (see Kinney 2004:6). By 1894, the Pearsall factory was being operated by the McGregor Carriage Manufacturing Company. By 1902, McGregor was in rapid decline, and the carriage factory on the corner had given way to Clark Hospital (Sanborn 1886, 1894, 1902).

¹⁴ Local lore has it that Bloedel made wagons for the nascent Ringling Brothers circus. August Ringling (originally spelled Rungeling) lived in McGregor with his seven sons until around 1875, when the family moved to Baraboo, Wisconsin. Between 1870 and 1875, the oldest Ringling brothers began giving amateur backyard circus performances for the children of McGregor (Allen 1952:457-9; Wisconsin Historical Society 2008). During that period, the oldest of the Ringling brothers would have been in their late teens to early 20s. The first Ringling performance started by five of the brothers was held on November 27, 1882, in Mazomanie, Wisconsin, and was more of a vaudeville-type performance than a circus. Their first circus opened in 1884 and involved a "traveling wagon, a rented horse, and a partnership with veteran showman 'Yankee' Robinson" (Wisconsin Historical Society 2008). The wagons built for the Ringling Brothers circus as it grew from 1884 until 1890, when they turned from overland to railroad transportation, all appear to have been built in Wisconsin. A contract for wagon building with a McGregor firm would have been unlikely during this period given the distance between McGregor and the circus home base; however, it is possible that trips through McGregor, such as an early Ringling hall show held in McGregor in 1882 and a Ringling Brothers circus held in McGregor in 1888, might have resulted in the need for repairs to Ringling wagons or carriages, and Bloedel's wagon shop may have been pressed into service for that type of work (Fred Dahlinger, E-mail communication to Erin Foley of the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and forwarded to Jennifer Price of Tallgrass Historians L.C. regarding the Ringling Brothers' McGregor connections dated March 27, 2008. Dahlinger is a wagon expert knowledgeable of Ringling Brothers history). However, by 1887, the Bloedel & Son Wagon Works was in decline, with the dissolution of the partnership and the moving of George Bloedel from McGregor to Duluth around that time. Christian Bloedel was headed for retirement in the late 1880s, and it was unlikely that this firm had much of a role in making circus wagons for the Ringlings.

¹⁵ Frank Kramer, a Luxembourg immigrant and son of a Guttenberg harness maker, is listed in the 1880 U.S. Population Census immediately after the three Bloedel families on Main Street. Kramer, a wagon-maker, lived with his family either on the property next to the three Bloedel families or in a dwelling at the rear of the Bloedel property.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 8 Page 13**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

The second brick dwelling was added to the property sometime between 1886 and 1894. It is suspected that George Bloedel and his family lived in this dwelling for only a short time before their departure from the business and McGregor "about 1887" (*McGregor News* 1901). Bloedel family history indicates that the brothers occupied the two brick dwellings, with Christian and Sophia Bloedel always living in the quarters above the wagon shop (*Cedar Rapids Gazette* 1973). By the 1900 U.S. Population Census, only Christian and Sophia Bloedel were still listed on the property, with both now in their seventies. No occupation was listed for Christian, who was retired by this time. He died the next year and his obituary noted that Henry, George, and Johanna had all relocated to Duluth, Minnesota, where George had established a furniture business by 1890 (*McGregor News* 1901).¹⁶

The obituary also noted that "the deceased after disposing of his business" had retired from active life. He suffered from rheumatism and eye problems in his later years but died from the "grippe" in 1901 (*McGregor News* 1901). He is buried in the Pleasant Grove Cemetery in McGregor. The notation that Christian had disposed of his business suggests that he sold the business to someone else, who may have then continued to operate the wagon manufactory at the same location.¹⁷ The 1894 fire insurance map suggests that the wagon shop was still being operated as a business, with the building labeled "S" for store or commercial property; however, by 1902, all three buildings on the property were labeled simply as "D" for dwellings. In the 1920s, the building was owned by Charles Kreutter, who operated his carpentry business out of the old wagon shop. A sign on the building advertised his business as "C.B. Kreutter Contractor & Builder." After this, the shop was used for a short time as a grocery and then served as the electrical repair shop of Herbert O. Peterson from the 1940s until Peterson's death in 1967 (Title Abstract to NE1/2, Lot 7, Block 9, in possession of John and Mary Ellen Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; 1920-30 U.S. Population Censuses).

Decline of McGregor and Bloedel & Son, c.1887-present

The north end of Main Street deteriorated by the 1870s, as McGregor's former riverfront advantage suffered from the railroad's competitive presence. The riverfront area gained an unflattering reputation from the late 1880s to century's end as a rough part of town where prostitutes reputedly solicited river men in the American House's (then part of the Ryan House) downstairs saloon (Eckhardt 2001:6). Hotels continued to develop uptown, as did other lucrative businesses, many of them the last of the significant ones to emerge during this era.

¹⁶ The 1900 U.S. Population Census for Duluth, Minnesota, listed George, his wife Rosa, and their four children living on East First Street and next to the household of a James McGregor (relation to any of the Iowa McGregors is currently not known). George Bloedel was listed as a furniture dealer. The census listing also noted that George and Rosa had married c.1877 (1900 U.S. Population Census accessed at www.ancestry.com, November 2008). Henry Bloedel and his wife, Bertha, were living on 4th Avenue East in Duluth in 1900, with Henry occupied as a salesman (perhaps for his brother's furniture business?) (*ibid.*). This census listing noted that Henry and Bertha married c.1872. Johanna Bloedel Berkleman and her husband were living on 21st Avenue North in Duluth in 1900, with Carl (or Karl as it is variously spelled) working as a night watchman. The Berklemans married c.1883 (*ibid.*).

¹⁷ The 1900 U.S. Population Census did list Charles Fessman in the household right before Bloedel's listing, with Fessman's listed occupation as a carriage wood worker. It may be that by that time, Fessman was operating Bloedel's former business at the wagon shop location and living perhaps in one of the brick dwellings still on the Bloedel property. It is known that in the late nineteenth century, Charles Fessman had worked as the foreman in the G. Hawley & Son carriage factory and its later incarnation as the A. Pearsall & Son carriage factory, which was located nearby (*North Iowa Times* 1956). Thus, his living next to Bloedel in 1900 may simply have been just because he also worked in the same neighborhood, although the Pearsall factory had changed ownership by 1894 and by 1902 was no longer in operation. Therefore, the fact that Fessman was still being listed in the 1900 census as a carriage wood worker and was then living next to the Bloedel household at a time when Christian Bloedel was in retirement, gives some plausibility to the theory that perhaps Fessman had purchased the Bloedel Wagon Works business and was still operating it by 1900. In the 1880 census, "Fessmann" was living in the household next to Amos Pearsall's household on Main Street.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 14Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

McGregor's commercial decline can also be attributed to the downturn in wheat production in the Upper Midwest in the late nineteenth century. In Iowa, wheat production peaked in the 1870s. By 1880, disease and devastation from chinch bug invasions, coupled with increasing profits realized from corn, hog, and cattle production, contributed to the collapse of wheat production in the region. Wheat would re-emerge as a viable crop in Iowa in the early 1900s; however, wheat never regained the place it once held in Iowa's agriculture (Soike 2000; Strong 1990).

Around 1887, with McGregor in decline and probably unable to compete with the A. Pearsall & Son Carriage Factory just a few doors away, George Bloedel left Bloedel & Son and McGregor, moving to Duluth, Minnesota, where he opened a furniture business with John Ebeling (*McGregor News* 1901).¹⁸ On February 13, 1901, Christian Bloedel died, leaving all of his property to his wife Sophia. Bloedel's sons Henry and George were appointed executors of the estate. Sophia Bloedel died on November 3, 1919, and later that month, the Bloedel children and heirs (Henry C. & Bertha Bloedel; George J. & Rosa Bloedel; Johanna Bloedel Berkleman & husband Karl; and Leonard R. Bloedel) sold Lot 7 and the SW1/2 of Lot 6 of Block 9 to brothers L.P. & E.A. Bickel for \$2600.¹⁹ Six months later, L.P. and his wife, Doii E. Bickel subdivided the property, separating the wagon shop on the NE1/2 from the south dwelling on the SW1/2. That same year, the Bickels transferred the SW1/2 to C.B. Kreutter for the nominal price of \$1.00.²⁰ The Bickels "reserve[d] right to use sidewalk along northeast side as an access to the rear of the building situated on the NE1/2 of Lot 7" (i.e., the wagon shop building)²¹ (Title Abstracts to SW1/2 and NE1/2, Lot 7, McGregor, Iowa, in possession of John and Mary Ellen Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

After several transfers of the house on the SW1/2, in April 1958, Albert J. Oelberg sold the SW1/2 to Richard & Lois Cosgove (or Cosgrove) and finally completed the contract for sale four years later. After the Cosgoves divorced in 1971, Lois Cosgove sold the house on the SW1/2 to Aloysius & Elizabeth Schwartzhoff. In 1981, Elizabeth Schwartzhoff, widow, transferred the house and property to Elden and Helen Ahrens, with John and Mary Ellen Bickel acquiring ownership of this property in 1981. John Bickel is the grandson of L.P. Bickel.

L.P. & E.A. Bickel held onto the wagon shop on the NE1/2 of Lot 7 until 1925, when they sold the property to C.B. Kreutter, who owned it until 1947 and had his carpentry shop in the old wagon shop. In 1947, Kreutter sold the shop to H.O. Peterson, who used it for his electrical repair shop. After divorcing his wife in 1948, Peterson continued to live and do work in the former wagon shop until his death in 1967. In 1969, when John P. and Mary Ellen Bickel acquired the property, they brought both of the lots and buildings back into Bickel family ownership. Since reuniting the 1862 wagon shop with the c.1887 residence, the Bickels have been responsible for the restoration and preservation of Christian Bloedel's wagon-making manufactory and in doing so have helped preserve a reminder of McGregor's golden days.

¹⁸ Brother Henry and sister Johanna were also both living in Duluth when their father died in 1901 (*McGregor News* 1901). The 1890-92 Duluth, Minnesota, city directory listings showed that George J. Bloedel was in the furniture business with John H. Ebeling as "Bloedel & Ebeling" (1890-92 Duluth city directories available online at www.ancestry.com, accessed November 2008).

¹⁹ Originally, the Bloedels also owned the SW1/2 of Lot 6, which Warren Wetherill now owns. This is the lot on which the north brick dwelling is located. They sold the Lot 6 property to L.P. & E.A. Bickel in the 1919 transfer that included all of Lot 7 as noted above. The Bickels then subdivided Lot 7 but it is not known how long they owned the property in Lot 6.

²⁰ In 1945, Kreutter transferred to Harriett and Charles Vaughn the SW1/2 of Lot 7 via a Quit Claim Deed. In 1946, the Vaughns transferred to Fred G. and Mae Huebsch the SW1/2 of Lot 7 via a Quit Claim Deed. In June 1946, Huebsch transferred to Albert J. Oelberg the SW1/2 of Lot 7 via a Warranty Deed.

²¹ The date of the sale of the SW1/2 of Lot 6, on which the house to the north of the wagon shop is located, remains unknown. Lot 6 of Block 9 is now owned by Warren Wetherill.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 15

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 16

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 17

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works consists of Lot 7 of Block 9 of the James McGregor Jr. Addition to the City of McGregor.

Boundary Justification

The boundary consists of that portion of the original wagon works property under the current ownership of John M. and Mary Ellen Bickel. This includes the original 1862 wagon shop/dwelling and the circa 1887 paint shop/dwelling. The associated dwelling to the north of this property is excluded from the current nomination because it is owned by another party.

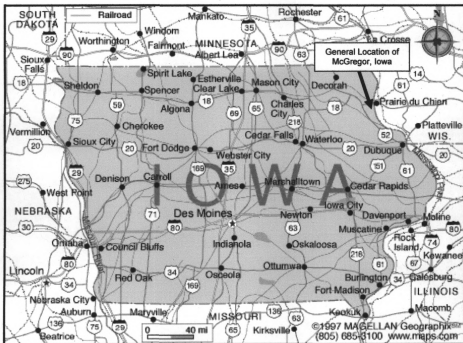
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 18

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Map of the State of Iowa showing general location of McGregor, Iowa
Source: www.maps.com, Magellan Geographix 1997



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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

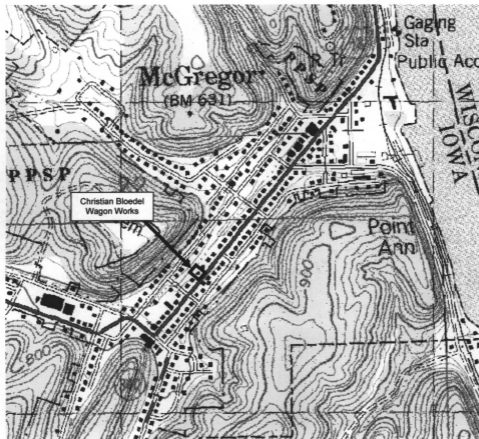
Additional

Section number Documentation Page 19

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Topographic Location of the Christian Bloedel Wagon Works

Source: USGS Prairie Du Chien, Iowa-Wis. 1983; obtained from <http://www.trails.com>, July 2008



0 0.05 0.1 0.15 0.2 0.25 mi



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 20

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Aerial map showing National Register boundary and plan of Christian Bloedel Wagon Works

Source: <http://clayton.iowaassessors.com/> accessed July 2008



= original wagon shop

= paint shop/dwelling added c.1887

= porch addition

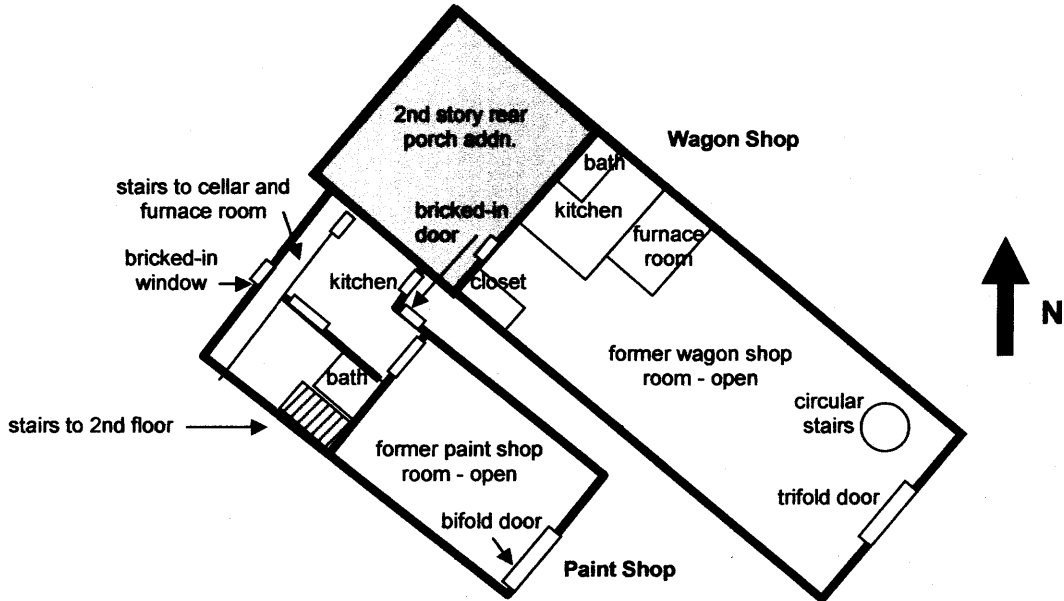
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

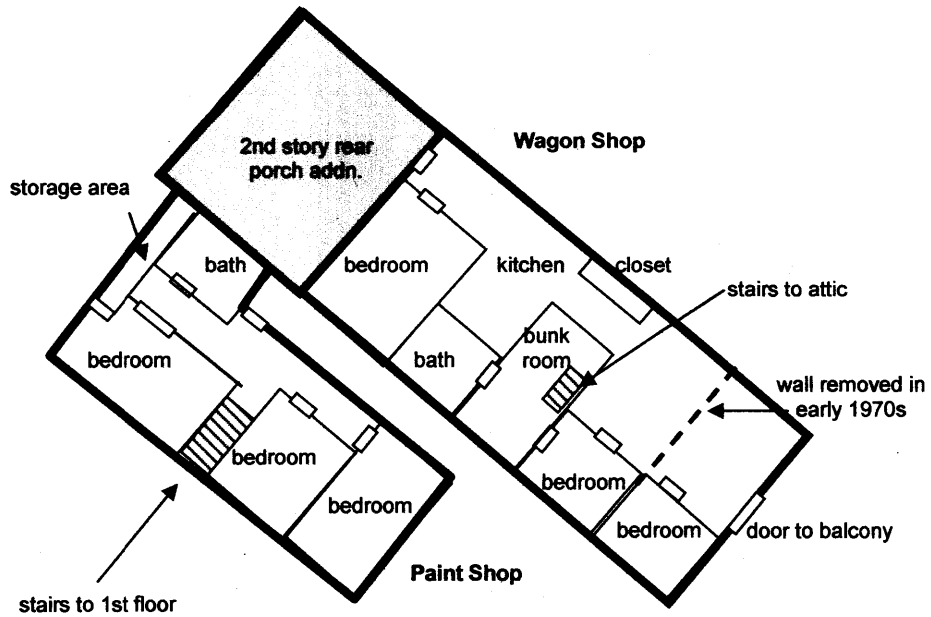
Section number Additional Documentation Page 21

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Floor plans - First Floor (Not to Scale)



Floor plans - Second Floor (Not to Scale)



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National Park Service

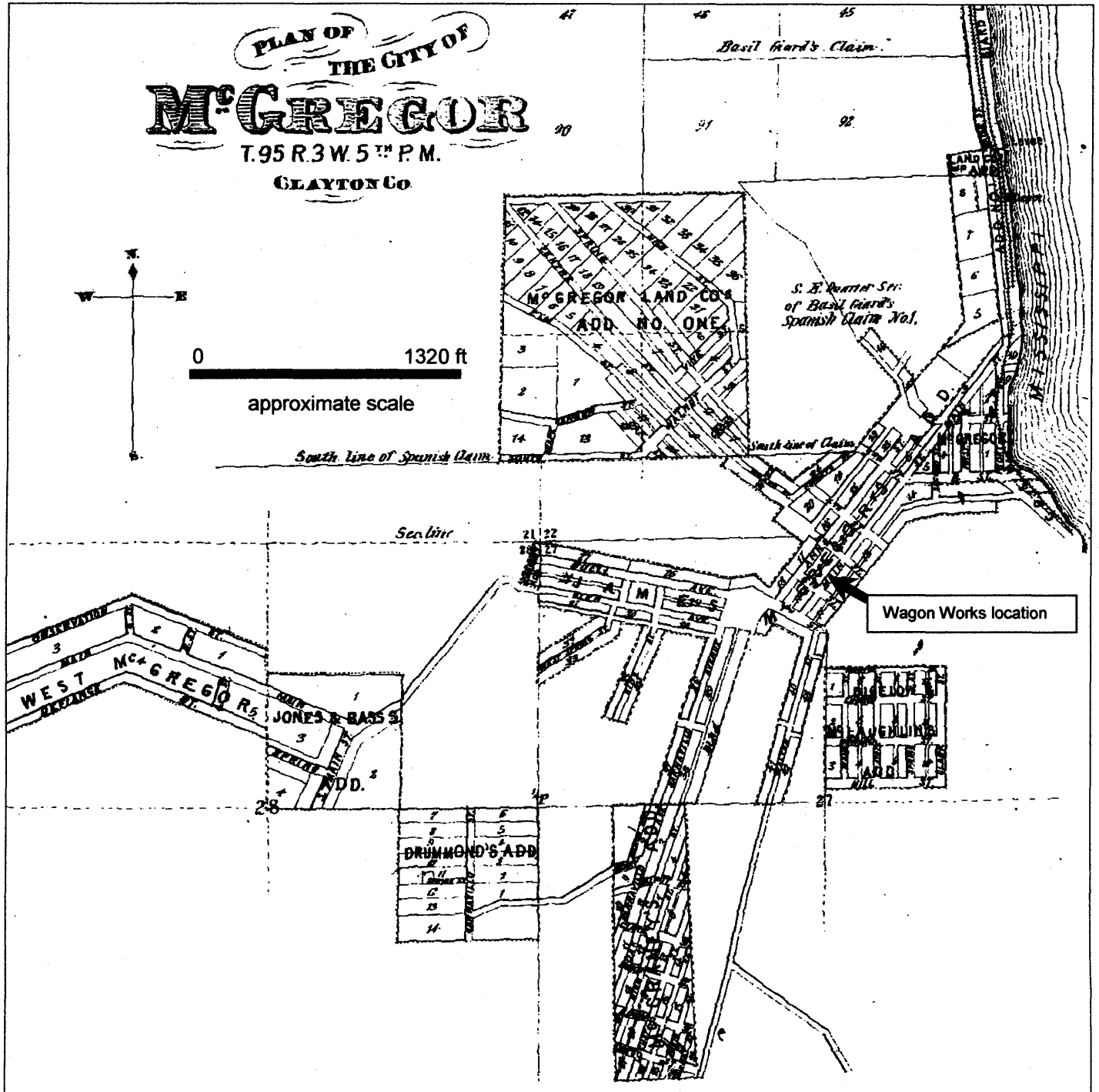
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 22

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1875 Plat of McGregor showing approximate location of Christian Bloedel Wagon Works
Source: Andreas 1875



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 23

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1869 Bird's eye view illustration of McGregor showing Christian Bloedel Wagon Shop (small arrow)
Source: Ruger 1869; accessed at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html> on February 20, 2008

(not to scale)



In 1869, Christian Bloedel's successful wagon and carriage works stood out on Main Street with its masonry construction and distinctive stepped pediment. Bloedel was at the time the only vehicle manufactory in that part of town, located close to the lumber yard at Sixth and Ann Street (far left). Note: Both brick dwellings which currently sit back on the lot on either side of the wagon shop building are not present in this illustration.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Documentation Page 24

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA



1868 ad for Christian Bloedel's Wagon Shop (ad ran from 1867 through at 3/23/1870)
Source: *North Iowa Times*, July 22, 1868

WAGON MAKING BLACKSMITHING!

THE place for good work is at the
BRICK SHOP,
On Main Street, McGregor, Iowa. I have on hand
and am constantly manufacturing
WAGONS, CARRIAGES, SLEIGHS, BUGGIES, &C.,
from the very best materials, and will make to order
every style of Wagon or Carriage desired, on the
shortest notice and in the best manner.

BLACKSMITHING in all its branches, per-
formed in true mechanical style, and

REPAIRING of Wagons, Carriages, Farm
Tools, &c., promptly and neatly done. I have pur-
chased of the patentee the right to use the celebrated
PATENT THIMBLE SKEINS & BABBITED AXLE BOX,
A good thing; the best ever invented. Wagons fur-
nished with these Boxes run with one third less fric-
tion, and of course one third easier than with any
other axle ever invented. Come and see them.

 **All Work Warranted to** 
Give Satisfaction-

CHRISTIAN BLOEDEL,
BRICK SHOP,
596 **Main St., McGregor, Iowa.**

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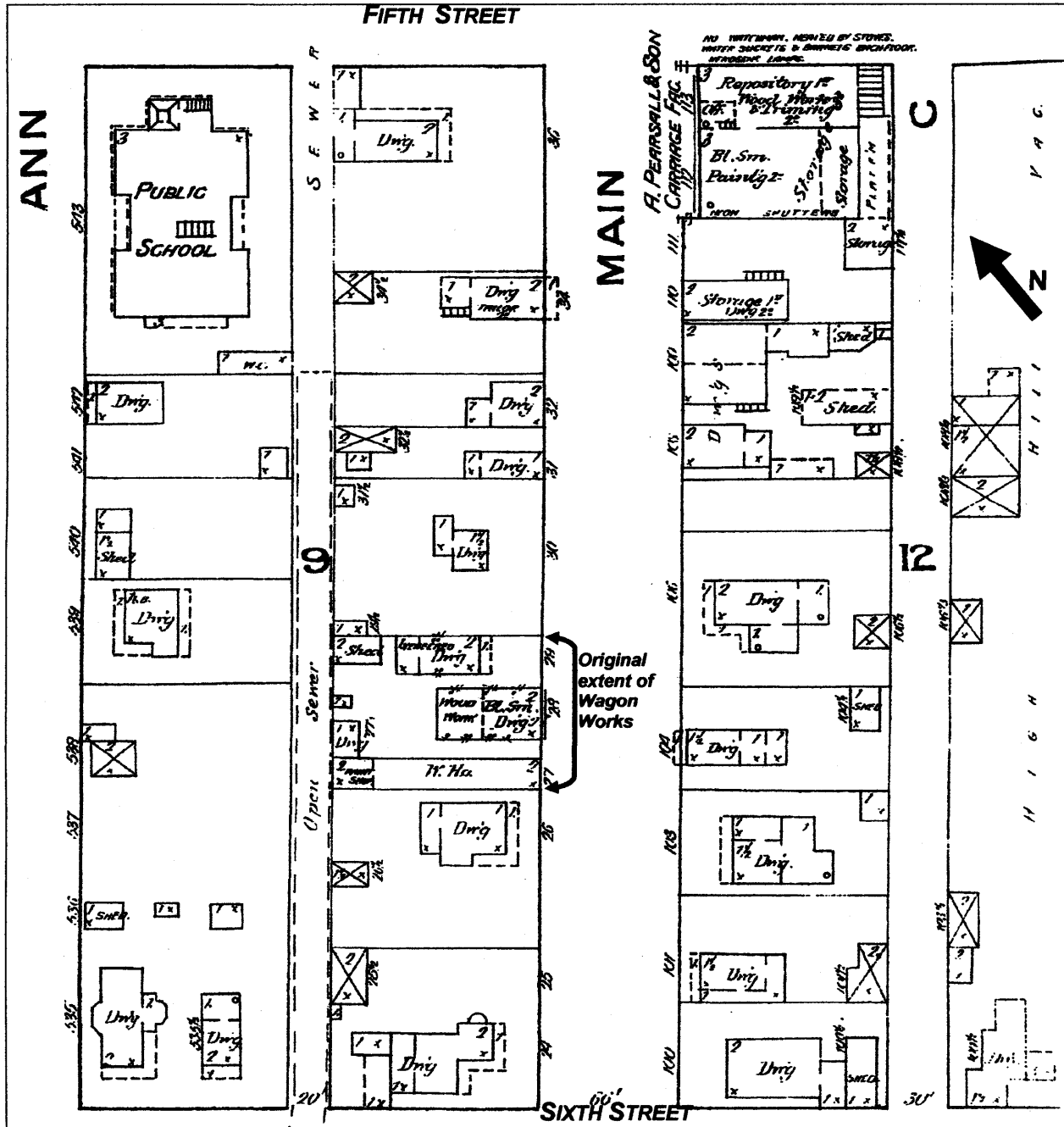
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 25

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1886 Fire insurance map showing Christian Bloedel Wagon Works

Source: Sanborn 1886; accessed at <http://www.statelibraryofia.org/services/resources/sanborn-login> on February 25, 2008



In November 1886, when the Sanborn fire insurance map recorded the wagon works, the business was in decline, with George Bloedel soon to leave the partnership and Christian Bloedel headed towards retirement. Competition from the larger and more modern A. Pearsall & Son Carriage Factory (top right) at the corner of Fifth and Main Streets was a likely factor in this decline.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

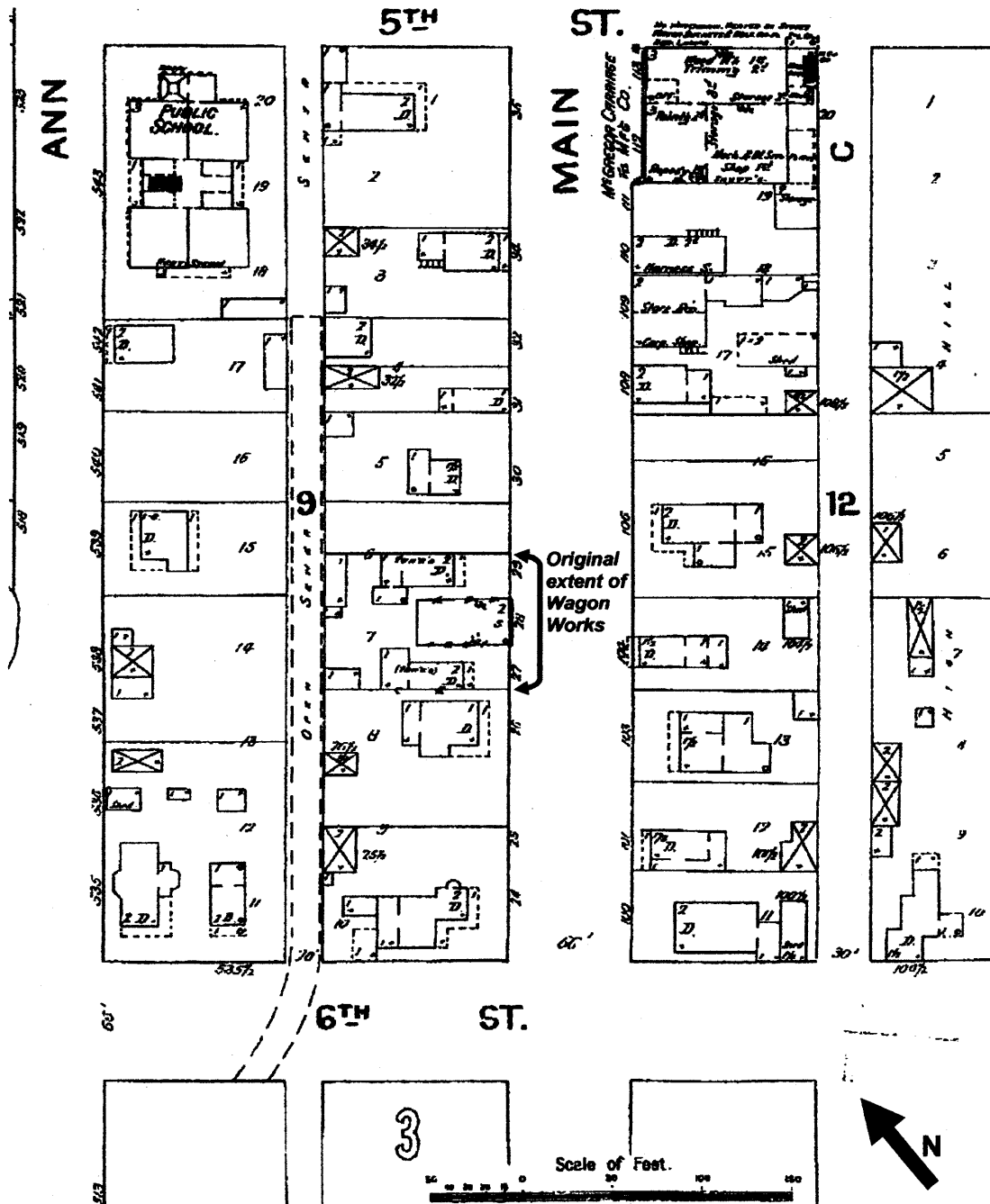
Additional

Section number Documentation Page 26

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1894 Fire insurance map showing Christian Bloedel Wagon Works

Source: Sanborn 1894; accessed at <http://www.statelibraryofiowa.org/services/resources/sanborn-login> on February 25, 2008



By this time, the second dwelling had been added to the wagon works property but the wagon works business was winding down and may have been under different management by this time as Christian Bloedel eased into retirement.

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National Park Service

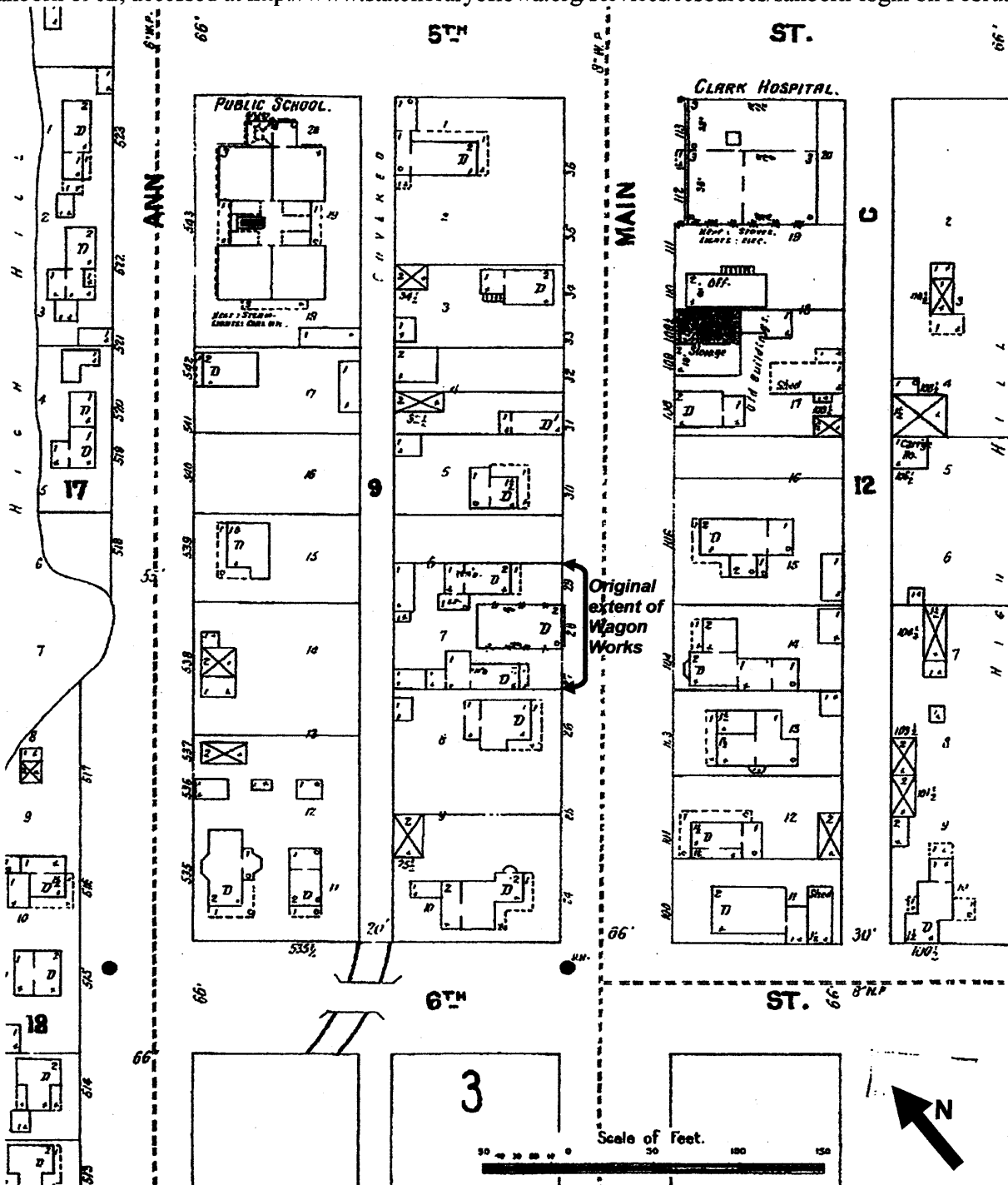
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 27

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1902 Fire insurance map showing Christian Bloedel Wagon Works property

Source: Sanborn 1902; accessed at <http://www.statelibraryofia.org/services/resources/sanborn-login> on February 25, 2008



All three buildings were now shown as dwellings, with Christian Bloedel having passed away in 1901.

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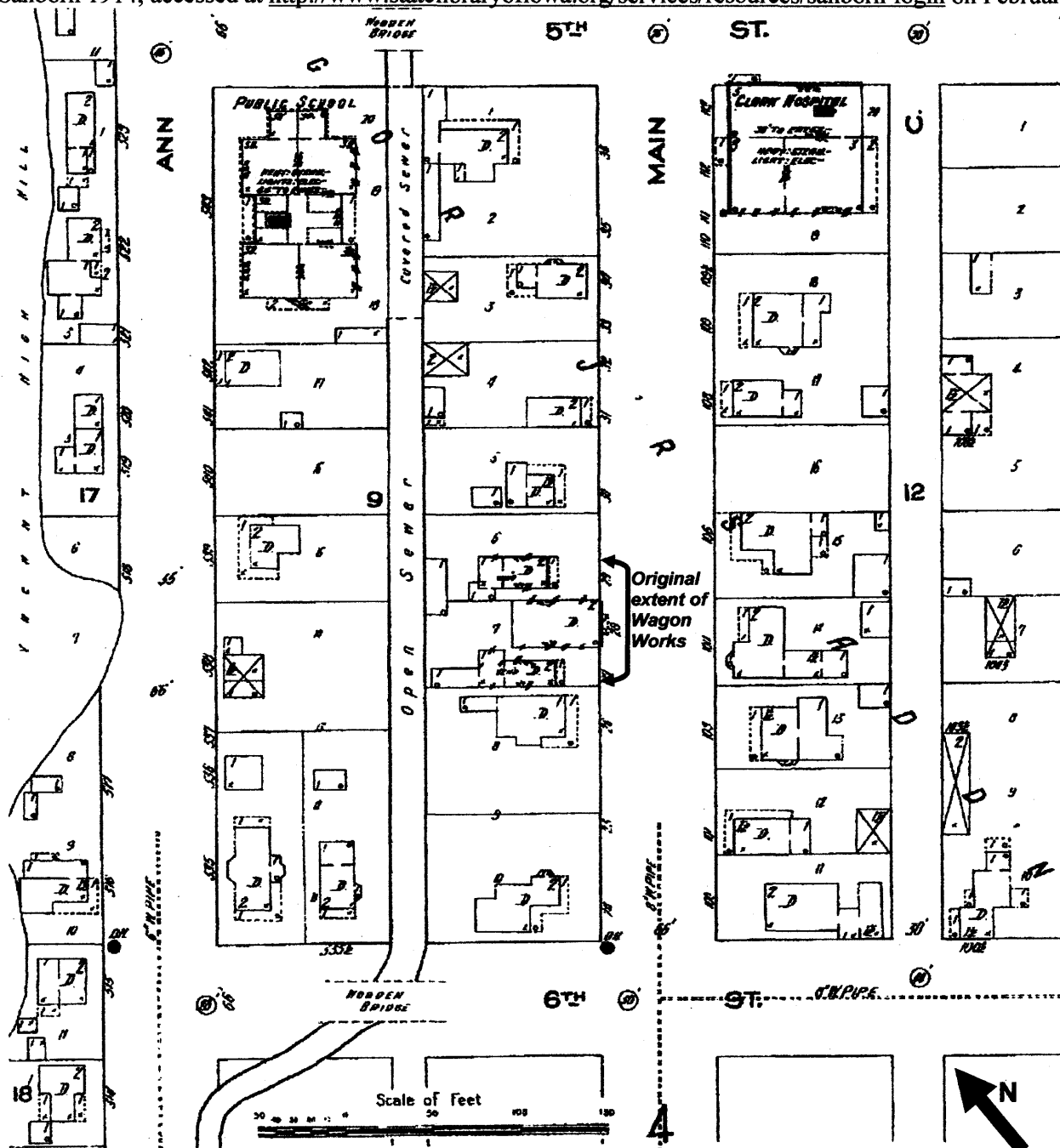
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 28

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1914 Fire insurance map showing Christian Bloedel Wagon Works property

Source: Sanborn 1914; accessed at <http://www.statelibraryofia.org/services/resources/sanborn-login> on February 25, 2008



By this time, the north dwelling had been separated from the original wagon works property, with the wagon shop and south dwelling achieving the current National Register nomination boundary.

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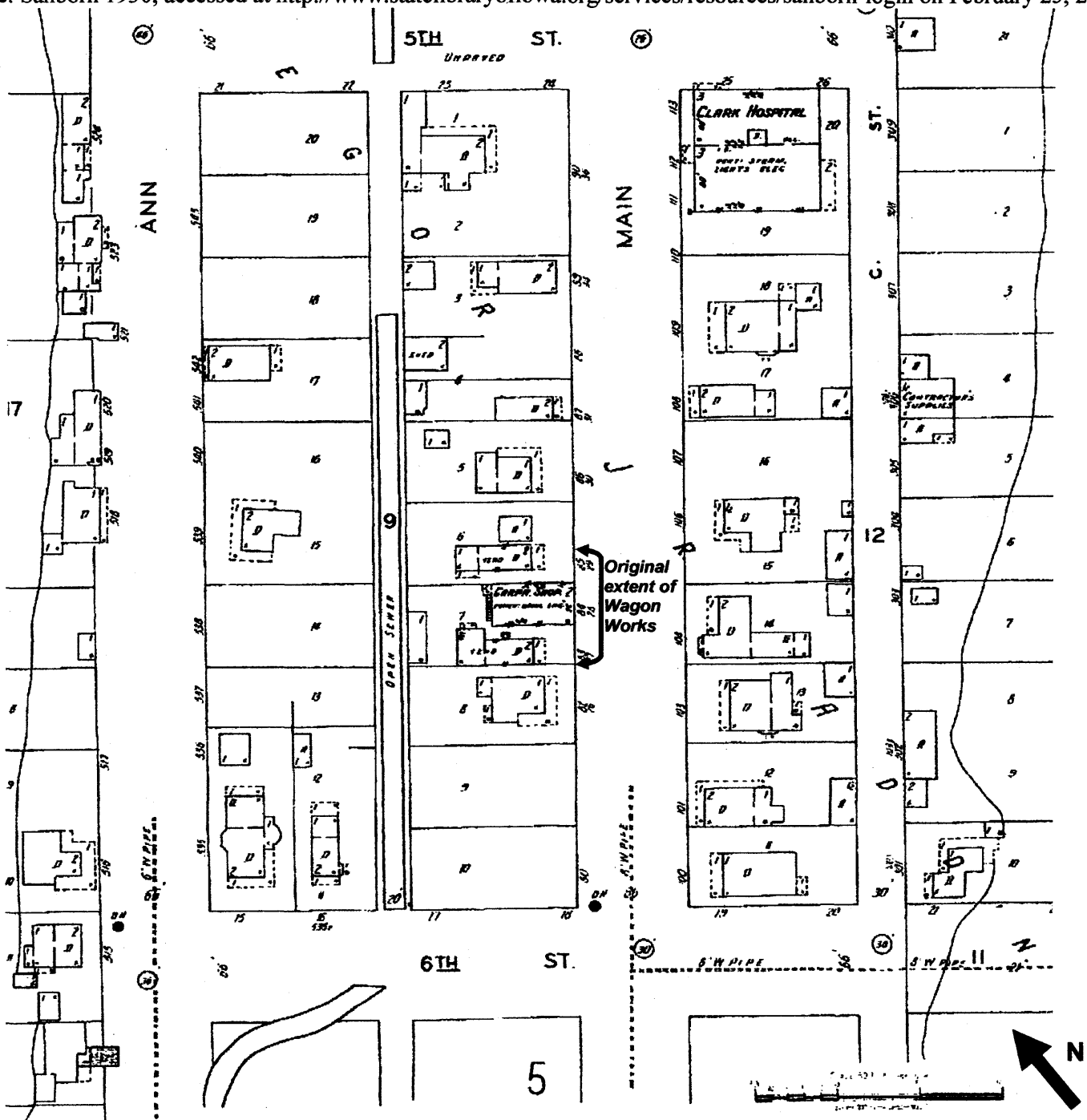
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 29

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1930 Fire insurance map showing Christian Bloedel Wagon Works property

Source: Sanborn 1930; accessed at <http://www.statelibraryofiowa.org/services/resources/sanborn-login> on February 25, 2008



By 1930, the wagon shop had been converted into a carpenter shop.

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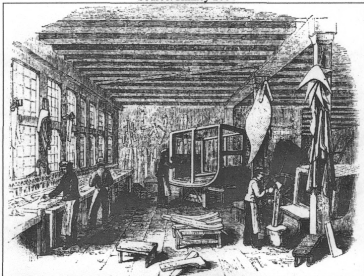
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional

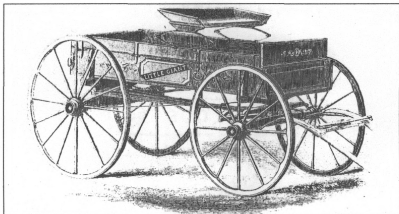
Section number Documentation Page 30

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Historic illustrations of wagon and carriage shops and products
Source: Kinney 2004



Interior scene typical of the small wagon and carriage shop in nineteenth century America.
This particular scene is a coach factory in the early 1840s.



Typical farm wagon circa 1880.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 32

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1920s photograph of Christian Blodel Wagon Shop building when it house C.B. Kreutter's carpenter shop
Copy of historic photograph provided by John M. Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 33Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Early 20th Century Photograph of Charles Kreutter and an unidentified man (employee?) in front of the former Christian Bloedel Wagon Shop. Photograph provided by John M. Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



1930s Photograph of Christian Bloedel wagon shop interior when it was being used by Charles Kreutter for a carpenter shop. Photograph provided by John M. Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 34

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Photograph of Christian Bloedel wagon shop prior to early 1970s rehabilitation undertaken by current owner
Photograph provided by John M. Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



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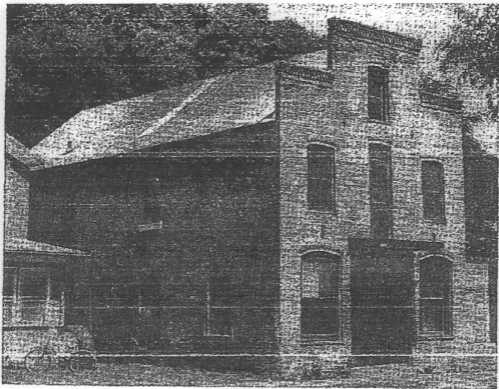
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 35

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

1970 Photograph of Christian Bloedel wagon shop prior to rehabilitation undertaken by current owner
Note: porch then on south dwelling at left edge of photo. Source: The Cedar Rapids Gazette, September 30, 1973



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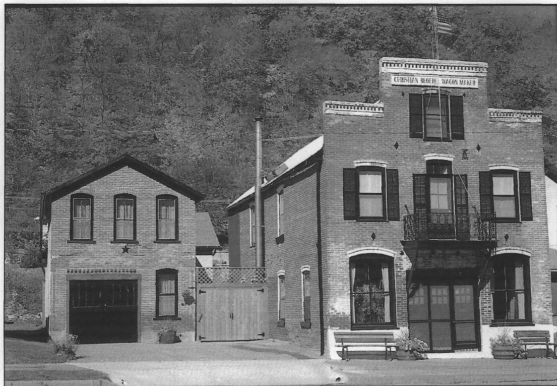
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 36

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Post 1970 photo postcard showing Christian Bloedel Wagon Works property following 1970s-80s rehabilitation
Source: Postcard provided by John M. Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



Wooden gate has since been replaced with wrought iron gate between the two buildings.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 37

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Photographs taken in 2004 of Christian Bloedel Wagon Works property
Photographs taken by: John M. Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



Top: Paint Shop to left, Wagon Shop center, and Dwelling on adjacent property to right looking WNW
Bottom: Paint Shop and Wagon Shop looking NW



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 38

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Photographs taken in 2004 of Christian Bloedel Wagon Works property
Photographs taken by: John M. Bickel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa



Top: Rear of Paint Shop looking South; Bottom: Rear of Wagon Shop looking ESE



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Additional

Section number Documentation Page 39

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Current photographs of Christian Bloedel Wagon Works
Photographs taken by Rev. Richard Thomas, April 13, 2008



Top: Paint Shop and Wagon Shop looking North; Bottom: Interior of Wagon Shop looking towards front door



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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number Additional Documentation Page 40

**Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA**

Photographs

Name of Property: Christian Bloedel Wagon Works
County and State: Clayton County, IA
Name of Photographer: #1-6 taken by Richard Thomas; #7-14 taken by John Bickel
Date of Photographs: #1-6 taken July 2008; #7-14 taken October 2008
Location of original negatives: Tallgrass Historians L.C., 2460 S. Riverside Drive, Iowa City, IA

- #1 General view of Wagon Works, looking down Main Street towards river, View to the NE with Wagon Works on the left side of photograph
- #2 General view of Main Street towards bluff from the Wagon Works, View to the SW
- #3 General view of Wagon Works property, with paint shop/dwelling to left and main wagon shop/dwelling to right, View to the North
- #4 Façade of main wagon shop/dwelling building, View to the WNW
- #5 Façade of paint shop/dwelling building, View to the WNW
- #6 View of North side of main wagon shop/dwelling and the brick dwelling to the north that was originally part of the wagon shop property but is now outside of the National Register boundary, View to the WNW
- #7 General view of property, View to the SW
- #8 Wagon shop and brick dwelling to the north, View to the WSW
- #9 Façade and north side of wagon shop, View to the WNW
- #10 North side of wagon shop, View to the WSW
- #11 Detail of wagon shop façade, View to the NW
- #12 Detail of window on south side of wagon shop, View to the NE
- #13 Rear of paint shop building, View to the SSW
- #14 Interior of wagon shop building, View to the SE towards front door

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Additional
Section number Documentation Page 41

Bloedel, Christian, Wagon Works
Clayton County, IA

Aerial map showing photographic views

Source for aerial map: <http://clayton.iowaassessors.com/> accessed July 2008

