

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

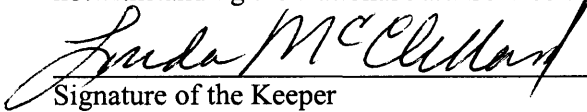
Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 03001370  
Property Name: Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District  
County: Mahaska State: Iowa

Multiple Name  
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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

	January 8, 2004
Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 6/ Function or Use: The following sub-functions are hereby added to both the historic and current function for Agriculture: agricultural outbuilding, animal facility. Domestic/single family dwelling is hereby added to the historic function.

Section 7/ Description Under architectural classification, "Other" is hereby changed to "Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> century American Movements" to more closely describe the 1922 farmhouse. Under materials, "weatherboard" and "concrete" is hereby entered for wall materials, "metal" added for roof materials, and "concrete," "metal," and "glass" added under other materials.

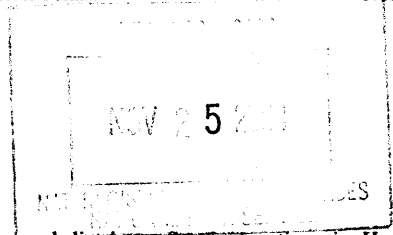
The Iowa State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" on the appropriate line 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 VANDER WILT FARMSTEAD HISTORIC DISTRICT  
other names/site number Heritage House Bed and Breakfast

**2. Location**

street & number 1345 Highway 163, Black Oak Twp., Sec. 22, T76N, R17W, SW of NE N/A not for publication  
city or town Leighton N/A vicinity  
state Iowa code IA county Mahaska code 123 zip code 50143

**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.)

Signature of [Signature] STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA Date November 24, 2003

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 Keeper [Signature] Date of Action 1/8/04

Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District

Mahaska County, Iowa

Name of Property

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many lines as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one line)

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	1	buildings
		sites
3	2	structures
		objects
6	3	Total

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE  
DOMESTIC/hotel

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER

foundation Other  
walls Stucco  
roof Asphalt  
other Wood

**Narrative Description**

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

Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District  
Name of Property

Mahaska County, Iowa  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" on one or more lines 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" on all the lines that apply)

Property is:

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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1904-1955  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1904  
1920  
1955

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Sjaardema, Douwe  
Iowa Concrete Crib and Silo Company

**Narrative Statement of Significance** - (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**9. Major Bibliography 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):**

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository  
\_\_\_\_\_



Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District  
Name of Property

Mahaska County, Iowa  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 9 acres +/-

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 15 | 516465 | 4579960 |

Zone Easting Northing

2 | --- | --- | --- |

Zone Easting Northing

3 | --- | --- | --- |

Zone Easting Northing

4 | --- | --- | --- |

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

**Boundary Justification**

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

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title William C. Page, Public Historian; Iola Vander Wilt

organization Iola Vander Wilt date November 30, 2002

street & number 520 East Sheridan Avenue (Page) telephone 515-243-5740; FAX 515-243-7285

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50313-5017

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

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

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

**Photographs** - Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

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

**Property Owner**

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

name Iola Vander Wilt Revocable Trust

street & number 1345 Highway 163 telephone 641-626-3092

city or town Leighton state Iowa zip code 50143

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

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

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 3

CFN-259-1116

Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

The second floor has a central hall flanked by two bedrooms on each side. A bathroom is situated between the two bedrooms on the east side of the hall. A linen closet is situated at the south end of the hall. A built-in clothes chute is located in the hall next to the bathroom. A modern pull-down ladder in the ceiling of the hall now accesses the attic. The northeast bedroom originally gave access to the balcony over the rear wing; but, although this door remains extant, the balcony deck has been covered with a shed roof, as mentioned above. Each of the bedrooms on the second floor has a closet. Two of these closets feature a window. The southwest bedroom features a walk-in closet.

A full basement is situated under the main block. The walls are made of hollow tile from Pella Drain & Tile Co. The basement features a poured concrete floor. There are four large spaces: coal room, furnace room, main room, and the fruit cellar. All of the rooms except the coal room possess drains.

The coal room is situated in the southwest quadrant of the house. The coal room features plastered walls and ceiling to keep the coal dust from infiltrating throughout the house. Originally, the coal room had an outside coal chute, but this was subsequently filled in.

The furnace room is situated in the southeast quadrant of the house. Originally, a large, cylindrical tank was located in front of the furnace overhead and held water. In the wintertime, this tank provided hot, running water.

The main room is situated in the northeastern quadrant of the basement. All of its walls are plastered. The main room features the stairs to the first floor, built-in cupboards, wainscoting, and a dumbwaiter, which is located in the southwest corner. Another cupboard is located at the top of the stairs to the basement. Known as the "boot box," this storage area is now used for gloves, flashlights, fuses, and other incidentals. At one time, the main room possessed a motor with a large flywheel, located in the northeast corner of the room. This motor powered the pressure throughout the house for water drawn from a shallow well southeast of the building. A cistern, located outside the house to the north provided the source of soft water. When the cistern collapsed in 1983, the Vander Wilts siphoned the remaining water out and filled it in. The pipe to it is still there.

The fruit cellar is situated in the northwest quadrant. The door to the fruit room is next to the stairs to the first floor and to the dumbwaiter for convenience in conveying canned foodstuffs to the basement or to the kitchen. The fruit cellar provided storage for apples, potatoes, turnips, and carrots. Shelves about six inches deep, nine inches high, and ceiling height stand all across the south wall and three feet along the east wall to store canned jars of fruit and vegetables that Emma and Iola canned.

Garage (noncontributing)

A 1-story, 2-bay, frame garage is situated near the northeast corner of the farmhouse. The garage measures about 20' x 20'. A hip roof with asphalt shingles covers the garage. It was originally constructed in 1947 by Gerrit J. and Emma Vander Wilt and substantially rebuilt by Alvin G. and Iola Vander Wilt in 1993.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**ANIMAL FACILITIES**

The animal facilities land use area contains a number of structures to facilitate livestock operations. They include the corn crib, dairy barn, 1904 barn, two silos, and feed lots. These resources provide facilities for the care and feeding of farm animals. These animal facilities are located to the east of the home grounds and on the eastern edge of the farmstead.

1904 Barn (contributing)

Constructed by Gerrit and Johanna Vander Wilt in 1904, this barn measures approximately 42' x 50'. Constructed of heavy, interlocking posts, it features a structural system of six bents, vertical board cladding, and a front gable roof with asphalt shingles. The barn faces to the south

The floorplan is laid out in a "U"-shape with the interior portion of the "U" open from floor to roof. The rest of the area possesses two levels with a hay mow on the second level.

Originally, a drop-down door was situated in the south gable end of the barn, and it was equipped with a hay fork and track to handle hay. When the Vander Wilts began to bale hay, they replaced this drop-down door with a sliding door. A small, drop-down door is also situated in the north gable end of the barn to provide access to the mow.

Originally, the floor of this barn was dirt. Later, "Junior" Vander Wilt hard-surfaced it with hollow tile. The tile did not hold up, and he subsequently laid concrete on top of the tile.

The barn is in fair condition. Its asphalt shingles have deteriorated and earlier wood shingles are exposed in many places.

Corn Crib (contributing)

A concrete block corn crib is located near the south corner of the animal facilities area. The Iowa Concrete Crib & Silo Co. of Des Moines built this structure in 1953. A loan to the Vander Wilts through the Federal Land Bank for \$5,300.00 financed its construction. (Arvin J. De Cook and Iola Vander Wilt)

The corn crib possesses an oval footprint approximately 24' x 34' in size and features four spatial units. The first unit is a drive-through central hall. The second and third units are the storage bins on each side and above the central hall. The fourth unit is an overhead bin, which is situated above the other three units. Each side of the crib will hold 3,000 bushels of ear corn. An additional 3,000 bushels of shelled corn or soybeans can be stored overhead. A continuous elevator services the units. The overhead elevator carries the shelled corn up, and a swinging chute carries it to the bins. When a

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

Farmhouse (contributing)

Completed in 1920 by contractor-builder Douwe Sjaardema of Pella, Iowa, the Vander Wilt Farmhouse is a wood frame, 2-story, single-family dwelling clad with stucco applied onto wood lath. The farmhouse rests on a hollow tile foundation. The Pella Brick & Tile Co. supplied the hollow tile and brick for the foundation. The Leighton Lumber Yard likely supplied at least part of the lumber. Fred Sjaardema, Douwe's brother, owned and operated this latter business between 1915 and 1922.

The main block of the house features a 30' x 30' footprint. A 2-story, east wing projects from the main block and measures about 5' x 16'. A 1-story rear wing is situated at the northeast corner of the building. It measures about 8' x 18'.

A flared, hip roof covers the main block. A flared, hipped roof covers the wing and intersects that of the main block at a lower level. A hip roof covers the rear wing. A 1-story, open front porch stretches across most of the façade of the building. This front porch measures 7' x 26' and is covered by a hip roof. All these roofs feature asphalt shingles and deep eaves. A wide cornice surrounds the main block, and the east wing.

The house features 1/1 double-hung sash. The fenestration of the south façade features a symmetrical arrangement of windows. A 1-story, bay window is situated on the southeast corner of the east façade. It abuts a stoop porch to the north. The bay window and the porch are covered with shallow hip roofs. This bay originally featured three ribbon windows, now replaced by a picture window. A dormer window, covered with a flared, hip roof, is situated on the south façade of the building. It features a pair of 1/1, double-hung windows. Modern, fixed shutters now flank most of the windows.

A brick chimney originally was situated near the center of the main block. A metal flue subsequently replaced this chimney.

At one time, a second floor balcony was located above the rear wing. The railing has been removed and a shed roof constructed over the deck of the balcony to deflect water.

The stucco exterior of the house originally featured a finish coat encrusted with crushed oyster-like shells. The iridescent color of these shells sparkled in the sunlight. Unfortunately, the stucco proved difficult to maintain. It cracked and flaked off. The present owner expended about \$7,000.00 recently to repair the stucco. It is now painted a tawny-yellow color trimmed in white.

The first floor has a living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, half bath, washroom, and pantry. Woodwork is oak and pine with natural finishes, except in the kitchen, where the pine is painted white. A large opening stands between the living room and the dining room. This opening can be closed off with double, French pocket doors. Although the kitchen cupboards are new and an island has been constructed in the middle of the room, all the original woodwork, clothes chute, dumbwaiter, and broom closet remain as built.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

The Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District is a collection of buildings designed and built between 1904 and circa 1953 by three generations of the Vander Wilt family to serve their evolving agricultural operations.

The Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District contains nine resources for this nomination. Six are counted as contributing, and three are counted as noncontributing, as shown by the following table:

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Date Built</u>	<u>Classification</u>	<u>Category</u>
1904 Barn	1904	Contributing	Building
Farmhouse	1920	Contributing	Building
Garage	1947, 1993	Noncontributing	Building
Feed Lots	c. 1940	Contributing	Structure
Corn Crib	1953	Contributing	Structure
Dairy Barn	1955	Contributing	Building
Airstrip	1953	Contributing	Structure
Stave Silo	1957	Noncontributing	Structure
Stave Silo	1973	Noncontributing	Structure

These resources cluster (and are described below) within the following land use areas:

- Home Grounds
- Animal Facilities
- Vehicular Drives
- Airport

In addition to these areas, a network of vehicular drives articulates them and a system of wells, tanks, and underground pipes historically provided a private utility for running water.

Each of these land use areas serves a specific function, and each has evolved over time and as the Vander Wilt family has made various improvements to the farm.

**HOME GROUNDS**

The home grounds contain two resources, the farmhouse and an automobile garage. These resources provide domestic shelter for the family. They are located along the western edge of the farmstead.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

sliding door is opened at the base of the overhead bins, the grain empties by gravity. A firm by the name of Meyers, based in Illinois, manufactured the elevator. (Iola Vander Wilt)

Dairy Barn (contributing)

Constructed by Gerrit J. ("Junior") Vander Wilt in 1955, this barn measures approximately 52' x 66'. The barn rests on concrete footings and features a concrete floor, vertical board siding, and a front gable roof. John Van Englehoven of Oskaloosa, Iowa, built the barn from lumber provided by the Leighton Lumber Company of Leighton, Iowa. At the time, television station WHO in Des Moines and other media in Iowa featured stories about this barn because of its latest innovations in modern dairy farming. (See Continuation Sheets 7-22 and 7-24.)

Silos (noncontributing)

Two concrete stave-type silos stand directly to the east of the 1904 barn. The silo nearer the barn was built in 1957. The roof of this silo is nonextant. The silo farther from the barn, which is the larger of the two, was built in 1973 by the Hanson Silo Company of Lake View, Iowa, according to the firm's bill for the job. Its diameter measures 18' and it stands 65' high.

Alvin G. and Iola Vander Wilt built these silos. Iola recalls that the bigger of the two was actually built larger than needed. Prior to the construction of these silos, the Vander Wilts employed "pit silos" on the farmstead. A pit silo was an excavated trench, where silage could be stored.

Feed Lots (contributing)

The feed lots on the farmstead changed over the years in relationship to the farm's operation. An historic photograph (see Continuation Sheet 7-17) pictures the lots in 1947. They lay to the east, west, and south of the 1904 barn. These lots had been laid in concrete by the 1940s. Hay bunks stood on the east side of the 1904 barn so that hay could be forked out of the hay mow. This lot was fenced off with a five-foot high fence boards because the Vander Wilts also raised hogs at this time. After they acquired Holstein cows, they rebuilt much of this fence line, as it had deteriorated and could not hold the big Holsteins. Iola notes that the Holsteins:

got out many times, getting us out of our warm beds to chase them. Usually the neighbors were called in to help us. It was "scary" because we were so close to the highway. None of our cows were ever hit but our neighbors' cows were, killing quite a few and wrecking a truck and car. (Iola Vander Wilt)

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

This lot was all one lot. Sometimes, the Vander Wilts fenced it off between the barns so they could keep the “dry cows” from the milking cows. They also installed concrete bunks in front of the two silos with augers that carried the silage into the bunks.

Another lot was south of the old hog house. The Vander Wilts raised hogs there. A hay bunk and long feeding troughs were also located there to feed dairy heifers.

The Vander Wilts ceased their dairy operation in 1990 and raised feeder cattle until 1994. The feed lots are presently not-in-use.

**AIRPORT**

As part of their farming operation, Alvin and Iola Vander Wilt constructed an airport to serve their needs. This airport included a hanger and an airstrip.

The utility, safety, and active use of this facility was confirmed in 1965, when the Iowa Aeronautics Commission registered this landing area as the “Vander Wilt Airport.”

Airstrip (contributing)

The airstrip consists of a 1,500' long and 150' wide dirt runway. It runs from the northeast corner of the farmstead northward and terminates at 190<sup>th</sup> Street, a county road in Mahaska County.

Originally laid out and constructed in 1953, the airstrip was later improved with a row of runway lights homemade by Alvin. These were situated on the west side of the airstrip. The airport also featured a cone wind direction indicator. According to one newspaper report:

Vander Wilt's five-acre landing strip isn't a true luxury. This area is part of a pasture-rotation system he uses. Cows graze the field on certain days—but then are rotated to a different part of the pasture whenever he wants to use the airplane.” (*Des Moines Register*, November 9, 1964)

Although the runway lights have since been removed and the airstrip is no longer in active service, the landing area remains as tangible evidence of the Vander Wilt Airport.

Hangar (nonextant)

In the 1950s, a frame building was constructed north of the 1955 dairy barn. Covered with a front gable roof, this building served as a hanger for Alvin's Cessna 170 airplane. Later, a lean-to was constructed on the east side of the hanger for additional space. The hangar was razed in the 1990s.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**VEHICULAR DRIVES**

A network of vehicular drives articulates the Vander Wilt farmstead for pedestrian and equipment movement to and fro throughout its land use areas. The vehicular drives are described in this nomination but are not counted as resources because they are viewed as elements of the home grounds and animal facilities.

An entrance drive accesses the farmstead from Iowa Highway 163. Surfaced with rock, this drive runs about 200' north of the highway, where it branches to the east and to the west. The east branch accesses the animal facilities area. The west branch accesses the home grounds. The dairy barn is located at the head of the entrance drive on the north.

To service the machine shed and the lean-to hanger, a rear drive ran from the east to the west directly south of these equipment storage facilities to provide access to them, to fields, to the calf pasture and huts, and to a loading dock for machinery. This rear drive also accessed a runway for the Vander Wilts' airplane. The rear drive is clearly shown in an historic aerial photograph of the farmstead in 1947. (See Continuation Sheet 7-17.) When these two structures were removed in 1999, the rear drive fell into disuse and was subsequently plowed up and planted with lawn, garden, and crops.

**PRIVATE WATER UTILITY**

A system of wells, tanks, and underground pipes historically provided a private utility for running water. Although this system ceased operation with the advent of Mahaska Rural Water in 1978, a number of its component parts remain extant. They include underground pipes to both barns and a deep well just off the northwest corner of the house.

The water utility changed over the years, as the Vander Wilts improved the system. A water tank, constructed of wood staves and reinforced by metal bands, was located at the southeast corner of the 1904 barn. An underground pipe led to a water tower located at the north corner of the farmhouse. A well located between the water tower and the farmhouse provided water for the tank and tower. A windmill by the well pumped the water.

A cistern along the north elevation of the farmhouse stored soft water for domestic use. A pump in the basement provided water from this cistern for laundry. Another pump for the cistern was located in the washroom on the first floor. The water for the rest of the house was provided by a shallow well southeast of the house. A flywheel plump in the northeast corner of the basement's main room provided the pressure. It was very, very noisy. Consequently, Alvin and Iola replaced it in the late 1950s.

Later, the animal facilities area was further plumbed for water. In the 1920s, an underground pipe was installed from the tank near the 1904 barn to the nonextant hog house. A hydrant in the hog house provided running water for this facility.



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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

As farming operations evolved, changes occurred in this water system. When the dairy barn was constructed north of the farmhouse in 1955, an underground pipe was installed between it and the holding tank north of the house. When the hog house was razed, the underground pipe between it and the 1904 barn fell into disuse. That tower was destroyed by wind subsequently dismantled in 1999.

Although deep-well water was generally plentiful to supply this private water utility, the water had a heavy content of iron. This water spotted household laundry. The water also corroded the galvanized pipes underground to the barns. In the 1950s and 1960s most of the pipes underground were replaced with plastic, including those in the house. The advent of rural water in 1978 came as a welcome improvement.

#### **CHANGES TO THE FARMSTEAD**

Following World War II, the Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District entered a period of transition as its operations shifted from general farming to specialized dairy farming. An aerial photograph of the farmstead pictures it in 1947 about the time this transition began.

In 1947, structures within the animal facilities area included a hog house, a wooden corn crib, several farrowing houses, two barns, and a silo. Most of these structures are nonextant. A new corn crib replaced the wooden one in 1953. Soon after World War II, the Vander Wilts built three, metal, Butler-type grain bins on the west edge of the animal facilities area directly east of the entrance drive to the farmstead. These bins were later relocated to the Gerrit J. ("Junior") Vander Wilt north farm near Peoria, Iowa, now owned by Gerrit's daughter, Wilma Memmelaar.

About 1920, a barn was moved onto the farmstead from the property across Iowa Highway 163 to the south. This barn stood directly west of the 1904 barn and is pictured in the 1947 aerial photograph. This barn burned in 1955 and the new dairy barn subsequently replaced it on the same site.

The windbreak, which bordered the western edge of the farmstead, is clearly shown in the 1947, but most of this windbreak is nonextant.

In the 1920s, the farmstead was extended to the north with the construction of a frame machine shed. Built in 1924, it was subsequently enlarged in 1954 with a lean-to addition on its east elevation. This lean-to provided a hanger for Alvin and Iola Vander Wilts' airplane. The 1947 aerial pictures the machine shed before the addition. Both the shed and the lean-to were razed in 1999.

Other changes also took place prior to the farm's transformation as a dairy operation. The original farmhouse, for example, had stood behind the present farmhouse. After the Vander Wilts moved into their new home, the old farmhouse was used for many years as an automobile garage, according to Richard Vander Wilt. The old farmhouse was probably taken down in the 1930s. Fire destroyed the hog house in 1996.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**SITE**

The site of the Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District is located 9.5 miles northwest of Oskaloosa, Iowa, and 5.5 miles southeast of Pella, Iowa, on Iowa Highway 163. The land in this area is gently rolling.

The property stands on the north side of the highway, an historic route between southeast Iowa and Des Moines designated with markers in the 1920s as the "Great White Way." The road markers for this highway featured a white band around utility poles, hence the name. (See Continuation Sheet 7-14.) The road was paved in 1927-1928 along this stretch. In the 1990s, it was rebuilt as a divided highway. The State of Iowa purchased a 4.4-acre right-of-way across the front of the property in 1995, and the new road opened in 1998. Since 1983, Iola Vander Wilt has operated the Heritage House Bed and Breakfast on this property.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**SITE MAP**  
**ARROW LOCATES PROPERTY**



Source: U.S.G.S. Map (7.5 Minute Series), Leighton Quadrangle, 1980.



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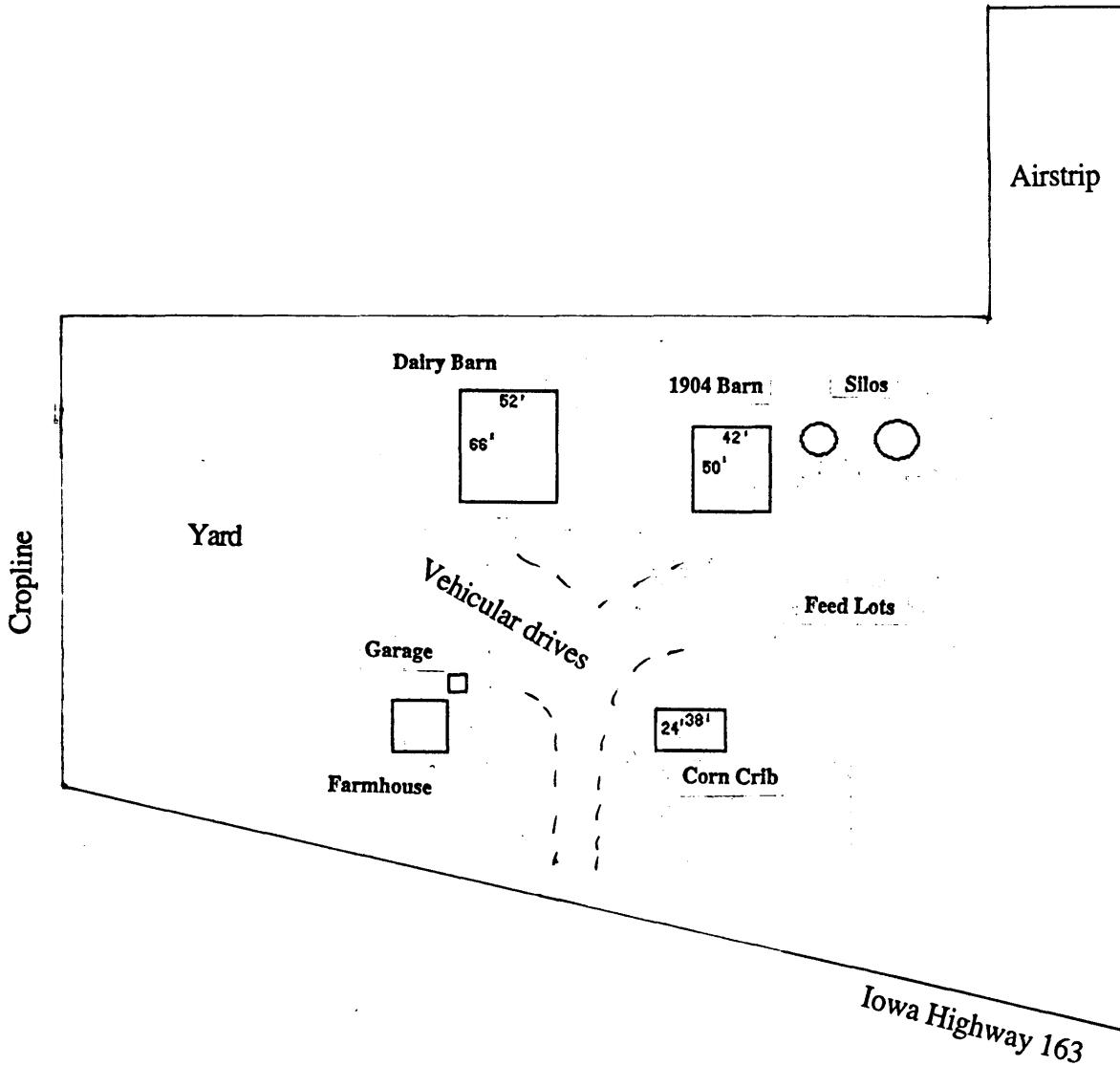
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

## FARMSTEAD SKETCH PLAN

190<sup>th</sup> Street



Source: William C. Page, 2003. Not to scale.



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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**FARMHOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

1918



Douwe Sjaardema (front and center) and his crew pause while constructing the basement of the Vander Wilt Farmhouse. Douwe's crew included his sons and his brother Fred, who owned the Leighton Lumber Yard. The wood stave water tank shows at the right and a privy at center.

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**VANDER WILT FARMSTEAD**

**CIRCA 1916**



The old farmhouse is clearly visible to the right of the road. The barn at the far left was later moved across the road and became a part of the Vander Wilt Farmstead. Fire subsequently destroyed it. White bands painted at the base of the power poles mark the route of the "Great White Way," today's Iowa Highway 163.

Source: Richard Vander Wilt.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**FARMHOUSE**

**1919**



The Vander Wilt Farmhouse without its coat of stucco but nearing completion. The exposed lathe is quite visible.

Source: Wilma Vander Wilt Mommelaar.



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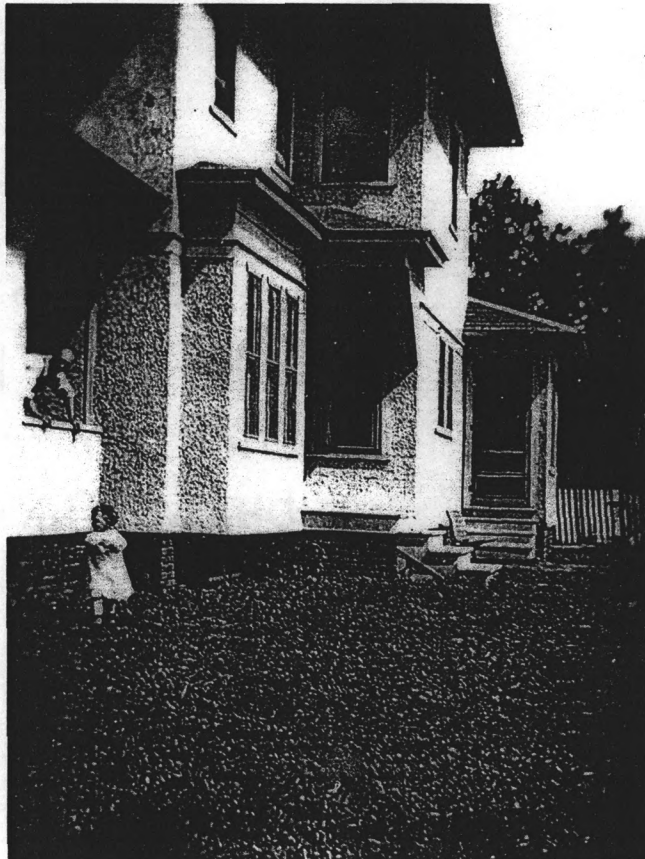
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**DETAIL OF EAST FACADE**

**CIRCA 1920**



Gerrit J. ("Junior") Vander Wilt and daughter Wilma play outside the newly completed farmhouse.

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.



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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**VANDER WILT FARMSTEAD**

**CIRCA 1927**



“This shows the old hog house [front and center], built in approximately 1926. The old farmhouse barely shows in this picture. The old wooden corn crib (nonextant) is also there. It sat a little east and south of the old barn. The foundation is still there.”  
(Iola Vander Wilt) The 1953 corn crib was built a little to the west of the hog house pictured here.

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**VANDER WILT FARMSTEAD**

1926



The poles to the right of the highway carry the rural electrification high line.

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.

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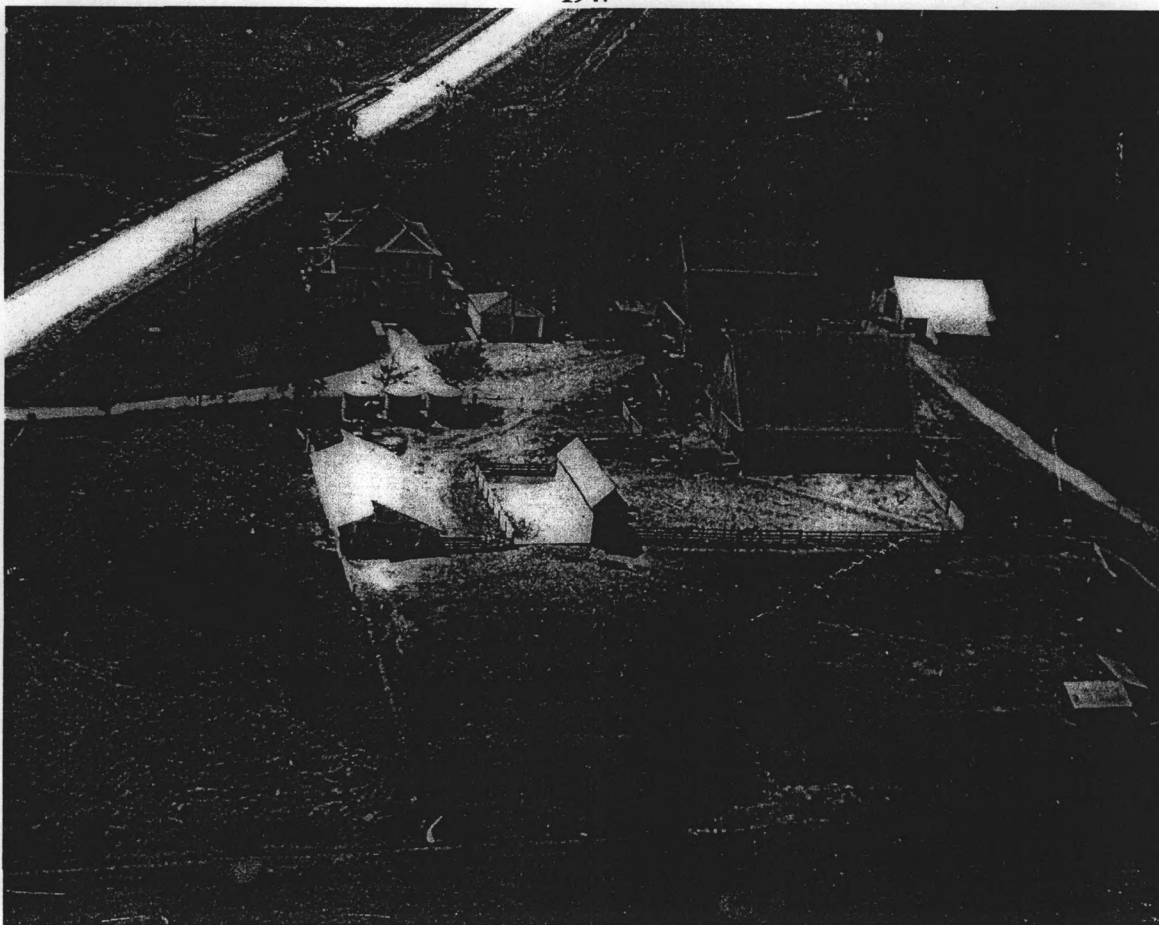
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**VANDER WILT FARMSTEAD**

1947



This aerial view of the Vander Wilt Farmstead, photographed by Airview of La Plata, Missouri, looks to the west. The component parts of the farmstead are clearly visible: animal facilities (foreground), home grounds (upper left), windbreak (top), and machinery facilities (right of rear drive).

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.

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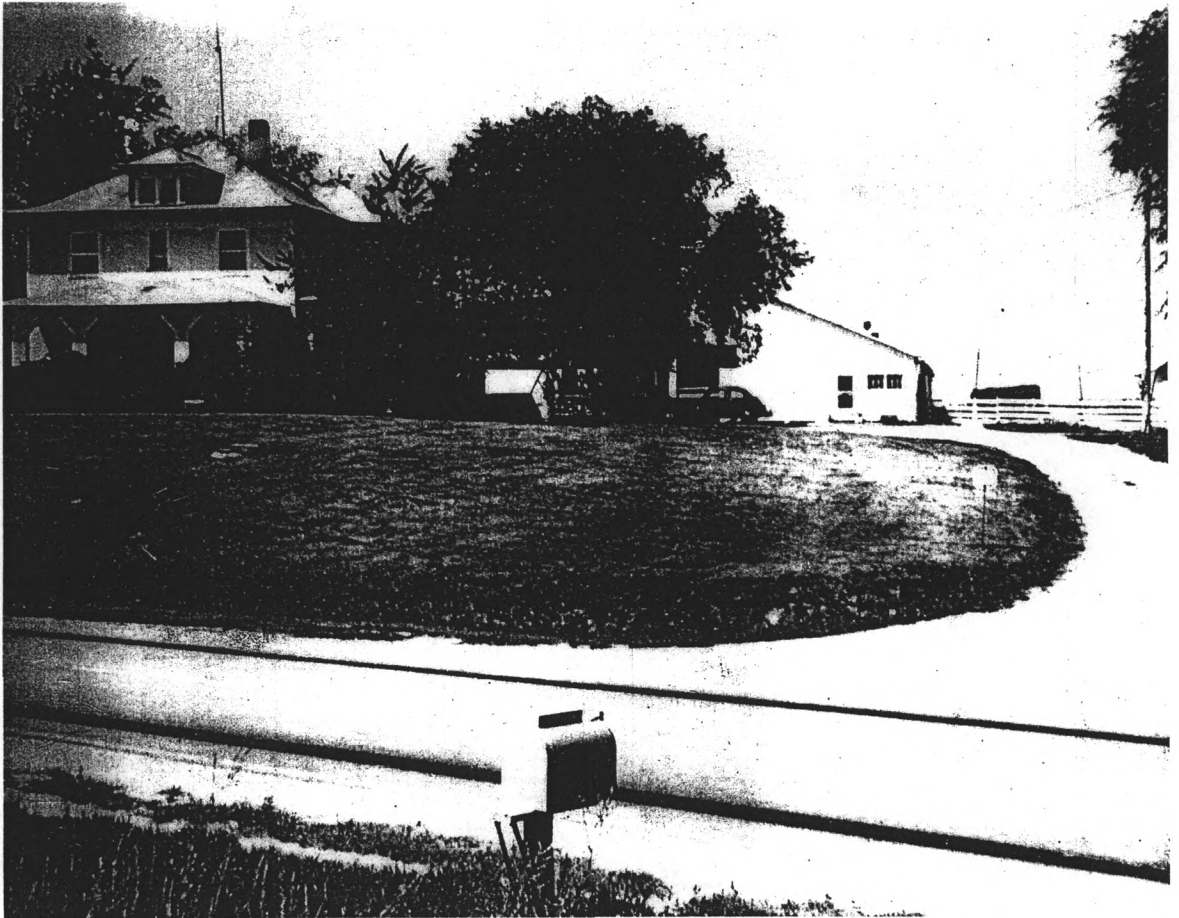
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**VANDER WILT FARMSTEAD**

**CIRCA 1969**



This photograph clearly pictures the Dairy Barn, constructed in 1955 (center), and the vehicular relationship between the farmstead's front drive and U.S. Highway 163.

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.

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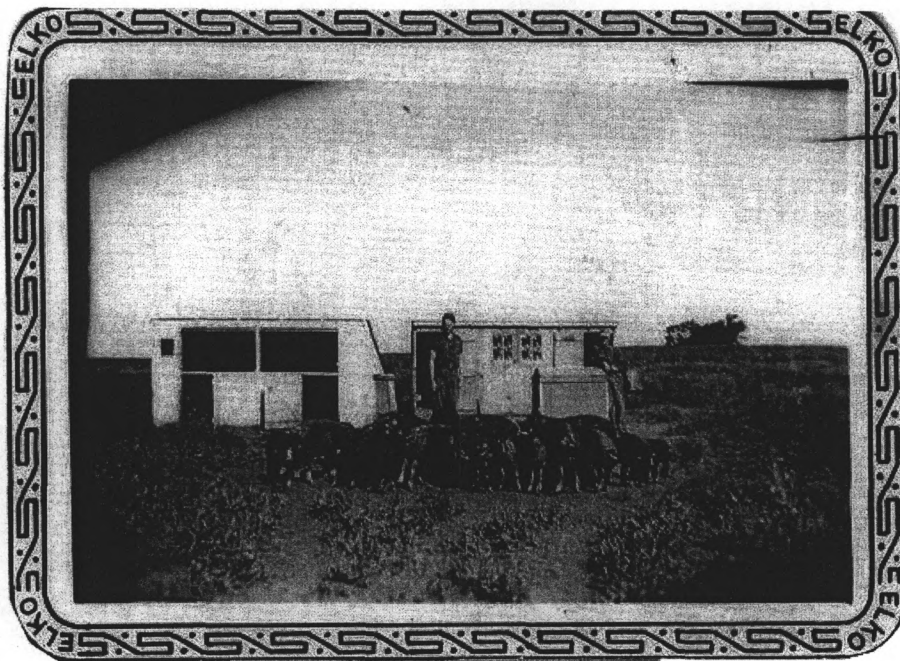
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

# ALVIN VANDER WILT & HIS PUREBRED DUROC HOGS

1943



“Alvin raised purebred Duroc hogs for 4-H and Future Farmers of America.  
Alvin won the National FFA award in 1945.” (Iola Vander Wilt)

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

# VANDER WILT BARN AND NONEXTANT SILO

CIRCA 1934



Gerrit ("Junior") Vander Wilt poses with some of his show horses. The 1904 barn and nonextant stave silo, built in 1934, stand in the background. Richard Vander Wilt reports that the silo was built in the drought year and filled with corn fodder—no corn or crop that year.

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.



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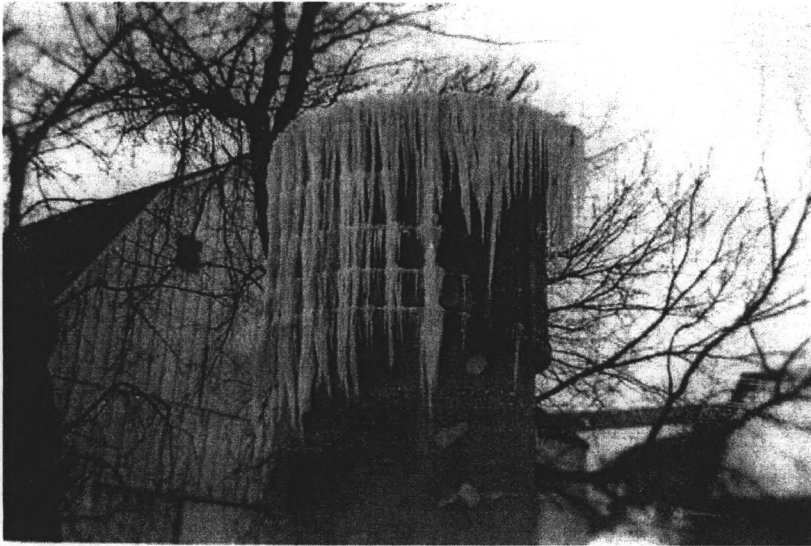
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**WATER TOWER (NONEXTANT)**

**(BUILT IN 1918 AND REBUILT IN 1924 TO MAKE IT AS TALL AS PICTURED HERE)**



“The water tower [which is seen in the picture of the farmhouse foundation on Continuation Sheet 7-10] was made of the same tile as in the basement [of the farmhouse] and then cemented over. A wooden top, banded with metal and shown here, was added to increase water pressure. There was also a round tank for the cows, also wooden with the metal bands. . . I would guess they were both done in 1918 when the house was started, since the short tower is in that picture.” (Iola Vander Wilt)

Source: Iola Vander Wilt.

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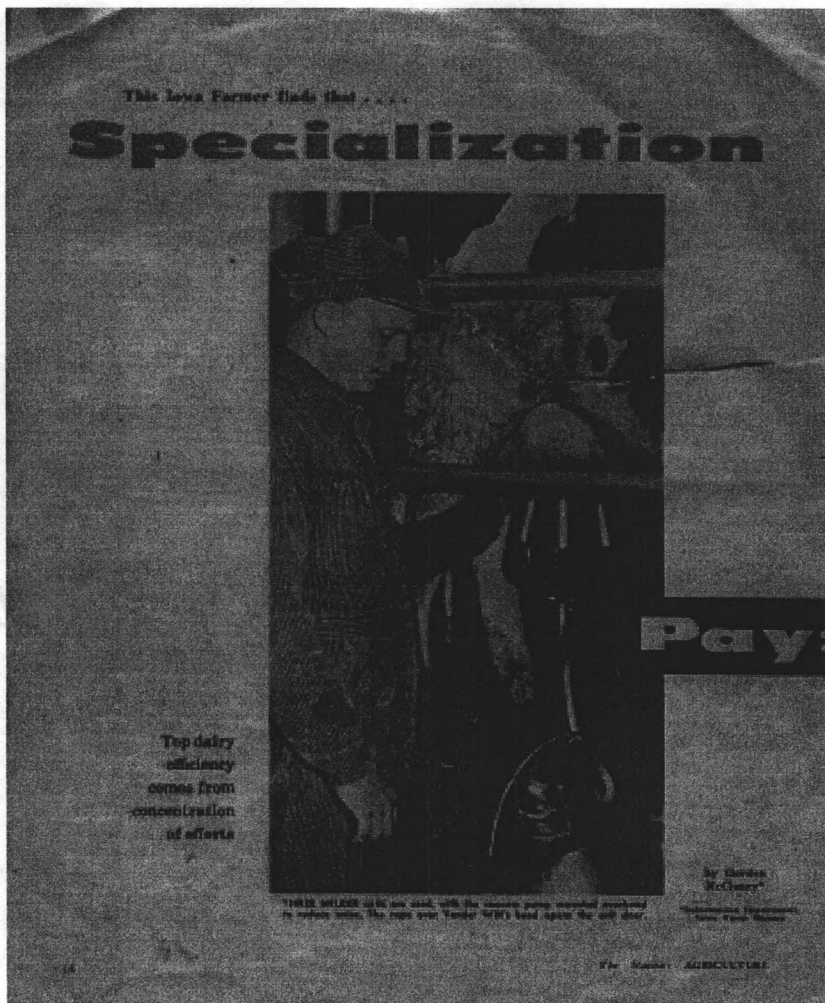
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

## VANDER WILT DAIRY FEATURED BY FARM BUREAU



Alvin G. Vander Wilt demonstrates his modern equipment in a story about dairy efficiency.

Source: *The Nation's Agriculture*, July/August 1956.



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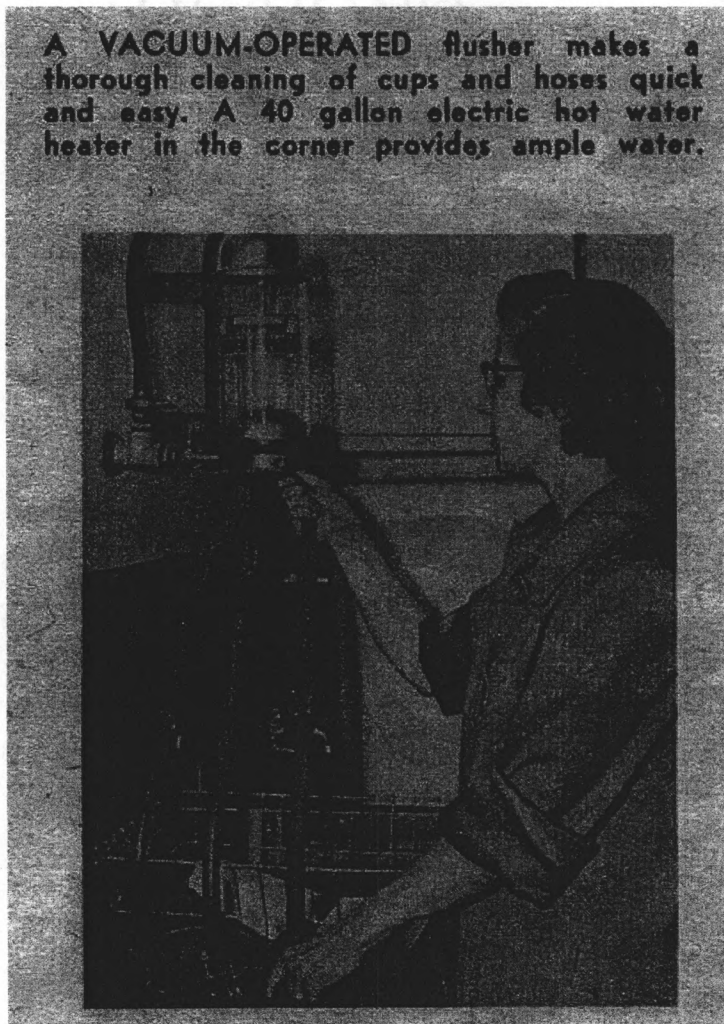
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

### VANDER WILT DAIRY FEATURED BY FARM BUREAU



Iola Vander Wilt demonstrates an up-to-date device to clean milking equipment at the farm.

Source: *The Nation's Agriculture*, July/August 1956.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

### VANDER WILT DAIRY FEATURED LOCALLY



The Vander Wilts' dairy innovations continued to attract publicity.

Source: *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, October 26, 1965.

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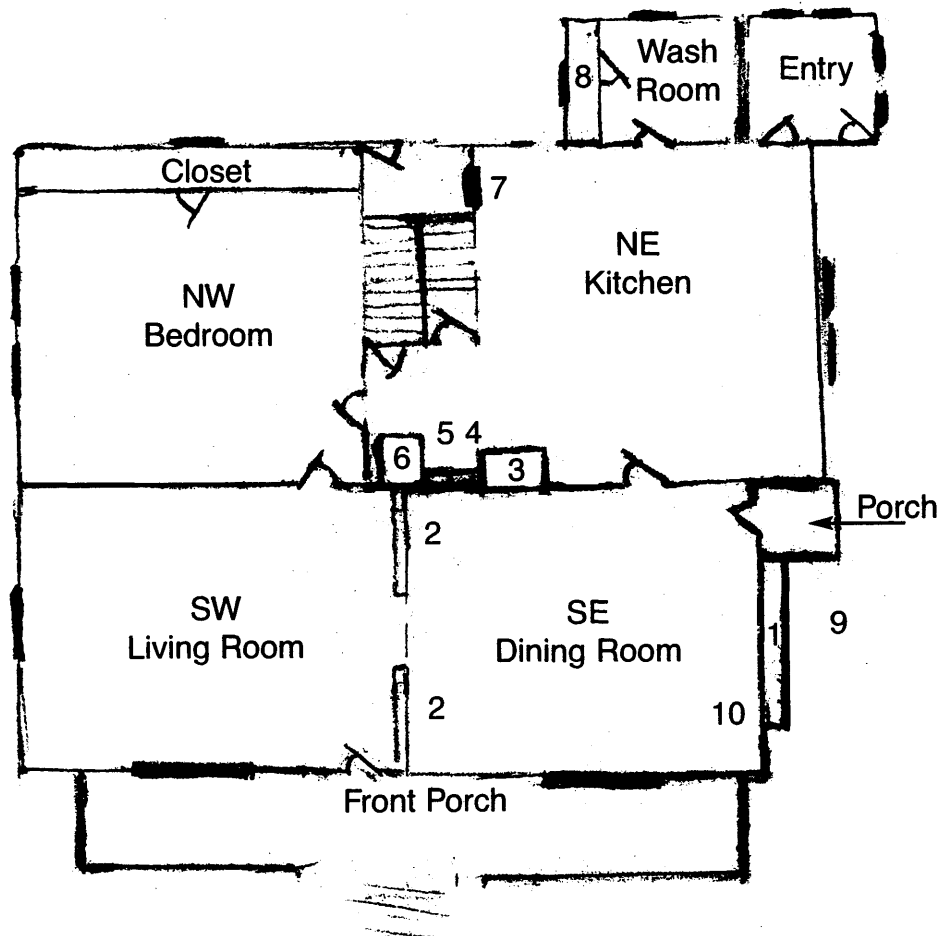
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

## FARMHOUSE FIRST FLOOR PLAN SKETCH

1. Window Seat
2. Pocket-French doors
3. Chimney
4. Clothes Chute
5. Broom Closet
6. Dumb Waiter
7. Boot Box
8. Pantry/Closet
9. Three-bay Window
10. Built-in Drawers under window seat



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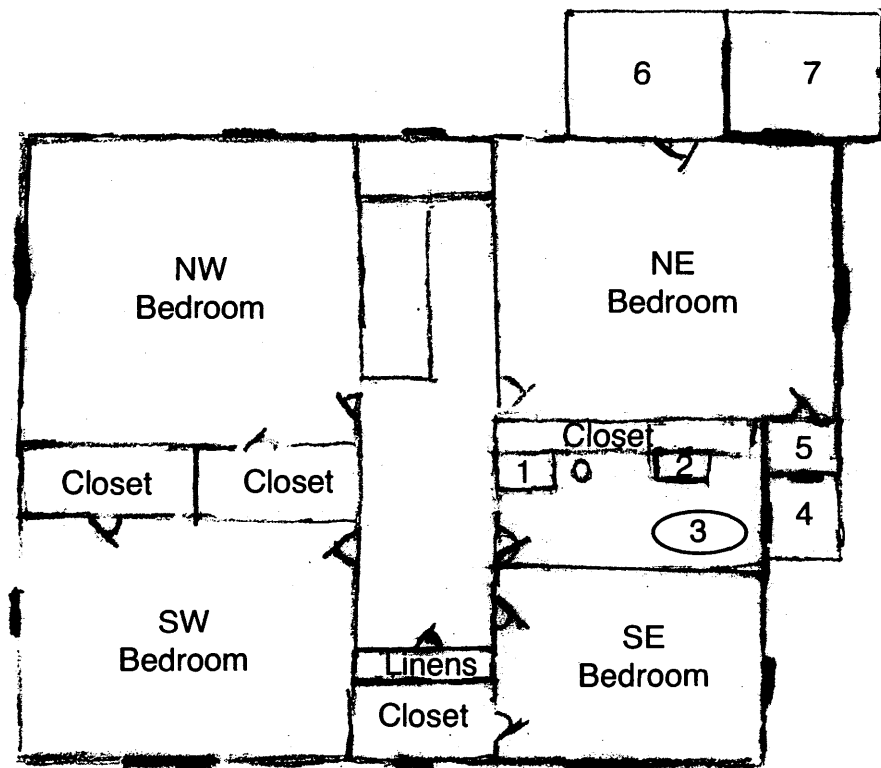
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

## FARMHOUSE SECOND FLOOR PLAN SKETCH

1. Chimney
2. Sink
3. Tub
4. Roof
5. Closet
6. Balcony
7. Roof



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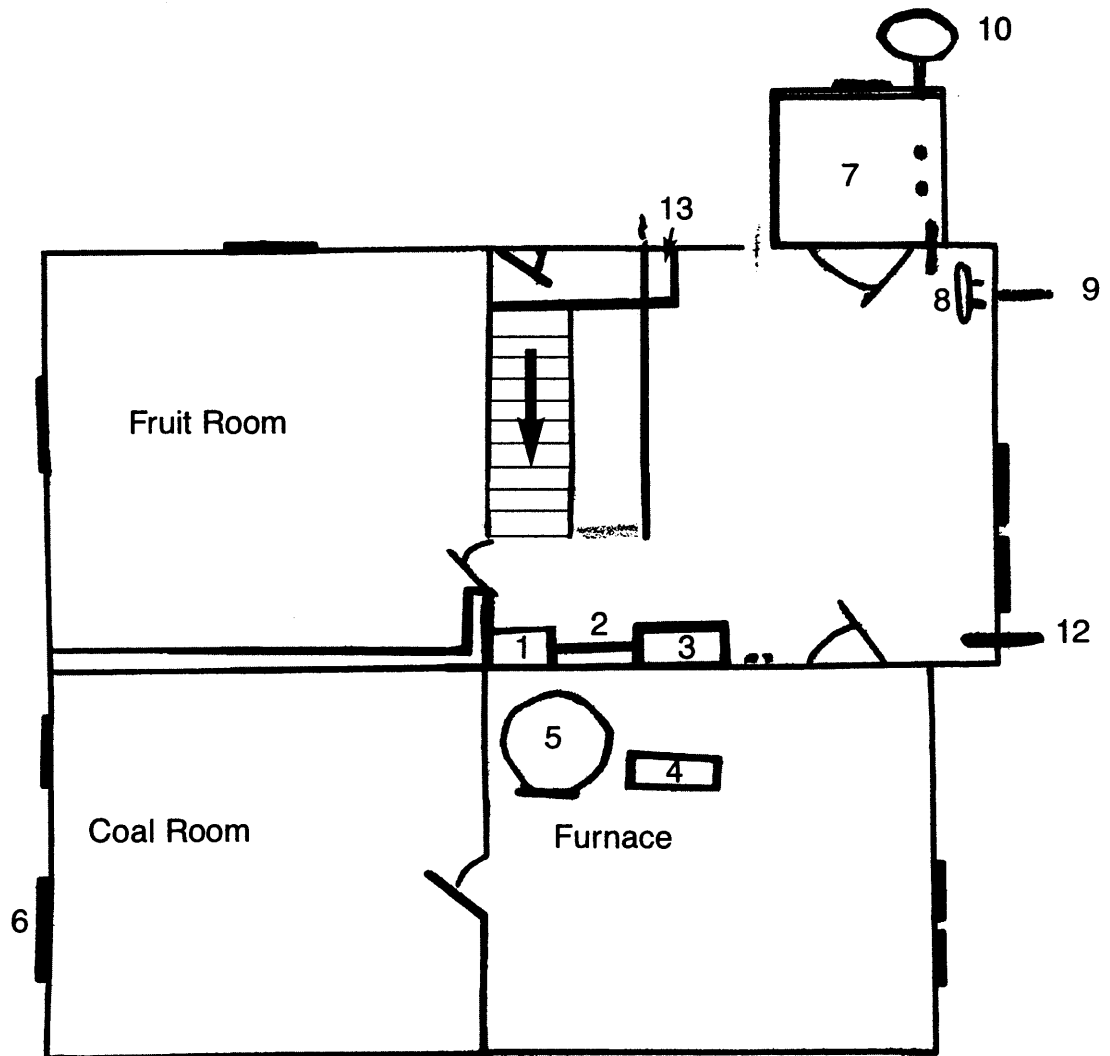
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

## FARMHOUSE BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN SKETCH

1. Dumbwaiter
2. Built-In Cupboards
3. Chimney
4. Hot Water Tank (ceiling)
5. Furnace
6. Coal Chute
7. Water-pipes-well, Cistern
8. Pump & Water Entry
9. Well Entry
10. Cistern
11. Shelves-canned food
12. Sewer Entry
13. Boot Box



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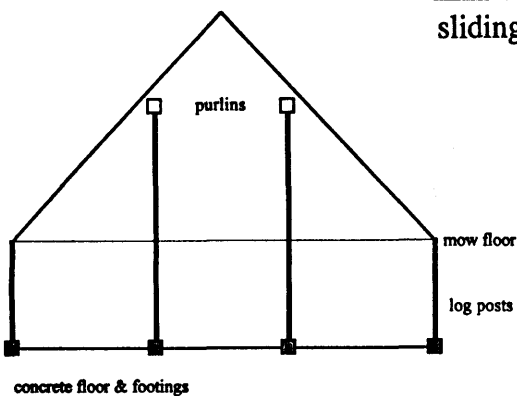
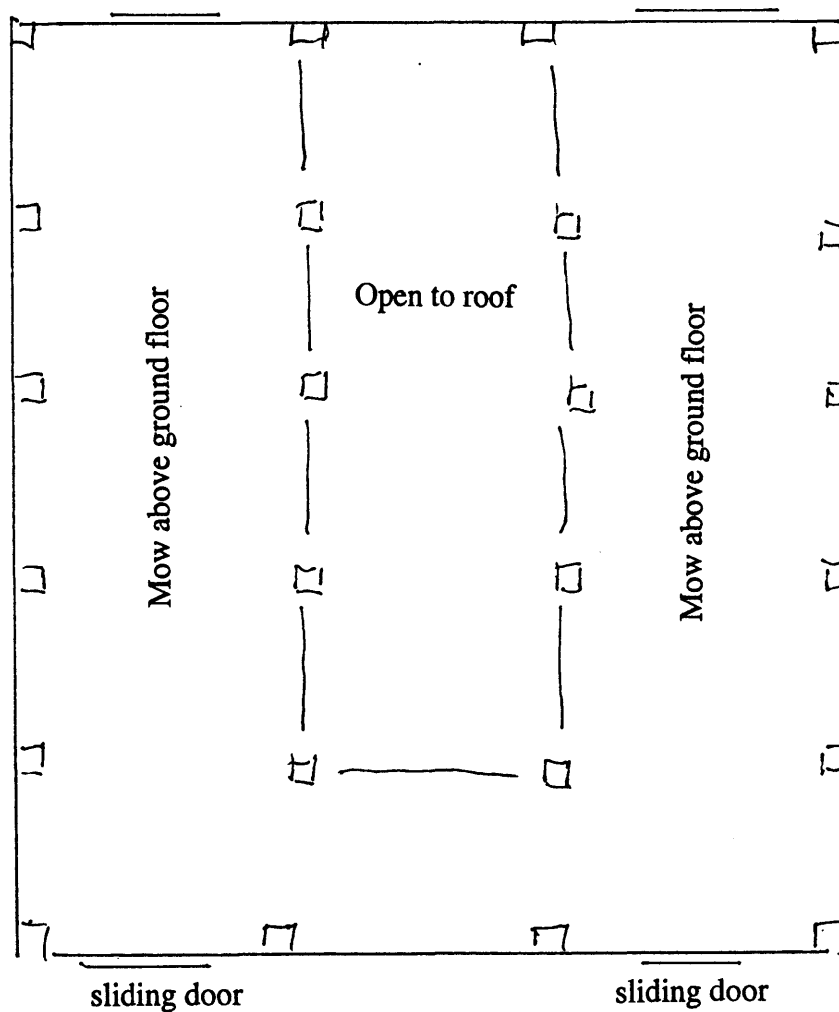
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

## 1904 BARN FLOOR PLAN & BENT SKETCHES



Source: William C. Page, 2003.



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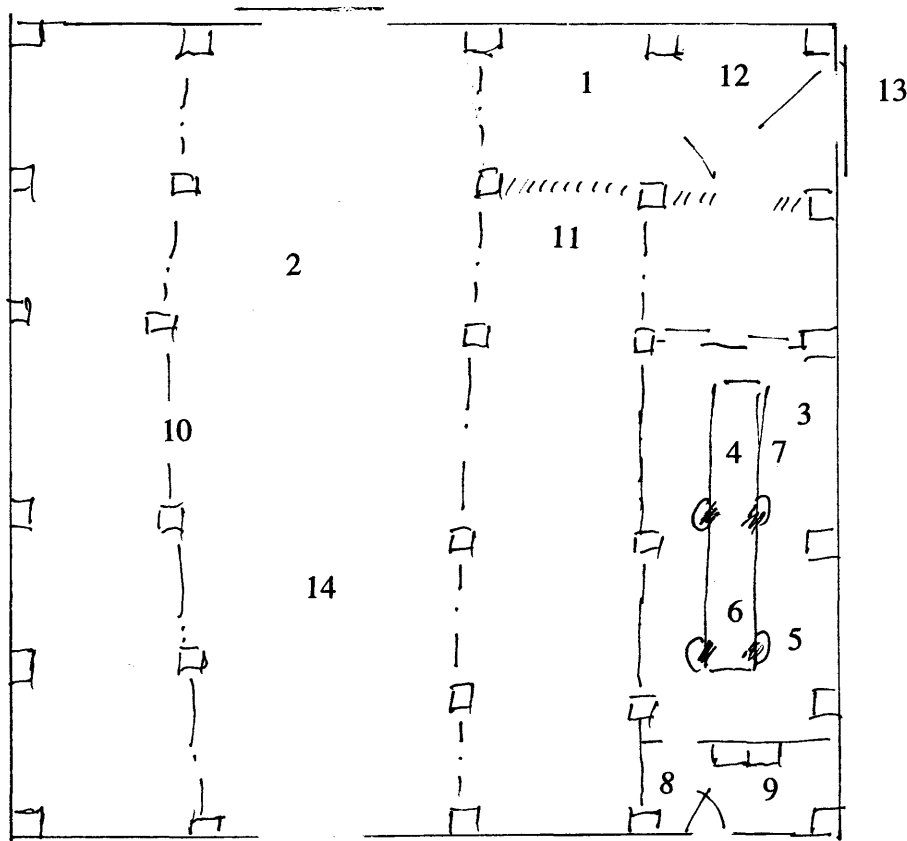
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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

## DAIRY BARN FLOOR PLAN SKETCH



- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Holding Pen  | 7. Stanchions above pit          |
| 2. Concrete pad throughout barn                       | 8. Cooler Room                   |
| 3. Milking Parlor                                     | 9. Double sink & vacuum cleaning |
| 4. Pit where farmer stands to connect milking machine | 10. Posts and beams              |
| 5. Feeding dishes                                     | 11. Fences                       |
| 6. Feed chutes to feeders from storage above parlor   | 12. Gate                         |
|   | 13. Sliding door                 |
|   | 14. Storage area                 |

Source: William C. Page, 2003.



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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

Van Englehoven, John  
Hanson Silo Company

**SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District is locally significant, under National Register Criterion A, for its historical associations with "Progressive agriculture." The property calls attention to the Country Life Movement in the Midwest during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Progressive reformers sought to improve rural life by extending the conveniences of industrialization and urbanization from the city to the countryside. A report from the Country Life Commission, established by President Theodore Roosevelt and published in 1909, laid the foundations for the movement by calling national attention to the need for such improvements. Subsequent reform over the ensuing three decades brought electrification to the countryside, improvements to rural education, advances in farming methods, and other social benefits. Farm newspapers like *Wallace's Farmer* and *Successful Farming*, published respectively in Des Moines, Iowa, by the Wallace Homestead Company and the Meredith Company, helped publicize these efforts and popularize them among farm families.

The Vander Wilt Farmstead is a fine example of the Country Life Movement at work. Gerrit J. and Johanna Vander Wilt, followed by Gerrit J. ("Junior") and Emma Vander Wilt, their son and daughter-in-law, transformed this farm from the typical, late Victorian operation they had purchased in 1901 into a model of modern efficiency. Built in 1920, the Vander Wilt Farmhouse earned the local moniker "the house of firsts" because it featured electricity and other modern conveniences. It became a model for other farm families in the vicinity to emulate.

The period of significance, under Criterion A, is 1904-1955, the time when successive generations of the Vander Wilt family modernized the farm's operations. Although the 1955 date slightly exceeds the National Register's fifty-year requirement, it avoids an arbitrary cutoff date because this more logical closing includes the Dairy Barn, built in 1955, as a contributing resource. Significant dates include 1904, the year the Vander Wilts built their first barn; 1920, when they completed the farmhouse; and 1955, when the Dairy Barn was built.

**BACKGROUND**

As with many Dutch proper names in the Pella area, "Vander Wilt" has been spelled several ways over the years. They, include "Vander Wilt" and "Van der Wilt." The spelling used in this nomination reflects the family's styling of their name since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Three generations of the Vander Wilt Family have owned and operation this farm since 1901. It remains in the family to the present day. The Iowa Department of Agriculture has registered it as a "Century Farm." This designation recognizes farms owned by one family for at least one hundred years.



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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

Gerrit J. ("Old Gerrit") and Johanna Vander Wilt,

Gerrit Vander Wilt (1857–1925) was born in Breukelen, Utrecht, Netherlands, and married Johanna Hessing Vander Wilt (1879-1947) in 1889. Gerrit Vander Wilt emigrated in 1867 to the United States, settled in the Pella, Iowa, area and farmed. In 1901, Gerrit and Johanna bought a farm from the Veldhuizen family and continued to enlarge its acreage. The farm remains in the Vander Wilt family to the present day and is a registered Century Farm.

Gerrit and Johanna had one son, Gerrit J. Vander Wilt. (Another son died in infancy.) In later years, the family began to call the father "Old Gerrit" to distinguish him from his son.

In 1915 when their son married, Gerrit and Johanna retired and moved into nearby Pella. The son continued the family's farming operation. His parents retained ownership of the property.

Gerrit J. ("Junior") and Emma Vander Wilt,

Gerrit J. Vander Wilt (1890-1956) and Emma Meyer Vander Wilt (1893-1971) married in 1915. Gerrit and Emma had three children, Alvin, Richard, and Wilma.

Junior continued to operate the farm and subsequently acquired it in 1951 from his parents' estate. As an only child (a brother died in infancy), Junior was the only direct heir. Meanwhile, Junior and Emma retired in 1950, moved to an acreage one mile east of Oskaloosa, and turned over the farming to Alvin G. and Iola Vander Wilt, their son and daughter-in-law.

Alvin G. and Iola Vander Wilt

Alvin G[ene] Vander Wilt (1927-1994) and Iola Vander Wilt (b.1930), his wife, purchased this farm in 1972 from the estate of Emma Vander Wilt, Alvin's mother. Alvin and Iola married in 1950, and Iola moved to the farmstead to live with him and help him operate it. At that time, the elder Vander Wilts moved to the acreage mentioned above. Alvin and Iola operated the farm on a 50-50 basis with Alvin's parents until they purchased the property. The career of Alvin is discussed in more detail below.

**AGRICULTURE**

The Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District is an outstanding example of the Country Life Movement at work. Completed in 1920, the farmhouse featured electricity, a private system for running water, and central heating even before these conveniences were widely available in rural areas. The house was large in size even by urban standards at the time and featured many modern conveniences. All of these conveniences were new to rural Iowa at the time, and the Vander Wilt residence became known around Oskaloosa and Pella as "the house of firsts." The farmstead's 1904-built barn also featured running water at this time, another innovation, obtained from a large, round stock tank in front of the barn.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

The Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District calls attention to the career of Alvin G. Vander Wilt, who transformed the property into a specialized dairy farm in the late 1940s and 1950s and became a model of the progressive dairy farmer.

### Rural Electrification

The Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District provides an example of an early effort to electrify Iowa farm operations. The original construction of the house in 1920 included built-in electrical conduit, wall outlet sockets, on-and-off switches on the walls, and overhead light fixtures. The Vander Wilts included these modern conveniences in their new house because the Iowa Railway & Light Corporation was beginning a program of rural electrification at the time.

Oskaloosa was an important coal mining center in Iowa at this time, and the area was rich with entrepreneurial initiative to improve local infrastructure. The Oskaloosa & Buxton Electric Railway, for example, sought to build an interurban trolley between Oskaloosa and Buxton, an active mining community. Although the firm never realized its goal, it was succeeded by the Oskaloosa Traction & Light Co., which built and operated a trolley line between Oskaloosa and Beacon. (Carlson: 296)

As the utility industry in Iowa began to consolidate following World War I, Iowa Power & Light Co. of Des Moines expanded its operations. The progressive business environment in Oskaloosa encouraged Iowa Power, as it expanded its operations, to acquire the Oskaloosa Traction & Light Co. This occurred circa 1928. Iowa Power subsequently extended its electrification service from Oskaloosa to rural areas in Mahaska County. The first of these rural electrical high lines went to Leighton. This line followed the route of highway 92. Subsequent construction extended these high lines to New Sharon, Delta, Rose Hill, part-way to Eddyville, and other areas. (Merrill Sarver) These rural lines followed highway routes and eventually branched off to serve farmsteads in the hinterlands.

The exact year the Vander Wilt Farmstead came on-line remains uncertain. Significant in this regard remains the fact that the Vander Wilt family equipped their new farmhouse in 1920 with all the conveniences offered by electricity in the anticipation of its arrival.

As state and local historian Tom Morain has written, such progressive measures to improve the life of farm families were unusual prior to the 1930s:

In a few instances, farmers installed their own generating units and wired their homes and barns for lights. The Delco Light Company manufactured a farm generator unit and advertised in the rural press. A gasoline-powered engine charged a battery, which stored electricity for home needs. (Morain: 3)

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the lack of electricity on Iowa farmsteads had become a social as well as a work-related issue:

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

Farm families for the most part did not share in this new technology. Electric lines did not extend into the country. While farm life did not actually grow worse, rural residents grew more discontented as they witnessed the expansion of comforts and conveniences available to those in town.

A 1920 study showed that urban women, the majority of whom lived in homes with electricity spent the equivalent of twenty working days less per year doing their laundry than farm women, who did not have electricity. One 1919 USDA study reported that rural families spent over two hours a week just to pump water and carry it to the kitchen. (*Ibid.*)

The following example points out the social ramifications of rural life without electrification:

Mrs. Burdette Bowley, daughter of a prominent Jefferson [Iowa] lawyer, was given a Delco system for a wedding present when she married a Hardin Township farmer and prepared to move to the farm. She was an exception in two ways, however. First, most farm families did not have Delco systems or their houses wired, either because of the expense or the inconvenience of maintaining their own generating plants. Second, most town girls of her era preferred to fall in love with town boys. The prospect of moving from homes with electrical conveniences to one without lights, indoor plumbing or even running water made even the most lovesick stop and think over the proposition very carefully. When the news got out that Dorothy Sayers and Burdette Bowley were engaged, several of Mrs. Sayres' friends expressed their sympathy. Another woman claimed that her mother did not want her to date farm boys. This was no idle prejudice. It represents, at least from the mother's view, a legitimate concern for her daughter's welfare. While these are two extreme examples, they illustrate an unfortunate trend which grew in the early decades of this century; as long as farms did not have electricity or little prospect of getting it, farm families were becoming second-class citizens. And until the mid-1930s, the future did not promise much hope. (Morain: 3-4)

Rural electrification generally dates from the 1930s and the establishment of the Rural Electrification Administration by the New Deal in 1935. Before that time, rural electrification was spotty at best in Iowa. The state's 1925 census, for example, enumerated the number of modern homes among farm operators equipped with heat, light and bathroom facilities in the state. That count concluded that Mahaska County possessed only 390 of these modern homes, while Marion County possessed only 119 of them—these from a total of more than 2,800 farm operators in Mahaska County and more than 2,000 in Marion County. (State of Iowa: 1003, 1014) The statewide total of these modern farm operator homes numbered 26,887. (*Ibid.*: 1013)

“As late as 1930, only 17% of farms in the nation had light and power supplied by a power company. In most case, those who enjoyed these benefits were the ones on the periphery of urban power companies, the hinterlands remained dark.” (Morain: 5) Other sources estimate that by 1935 less than 11% of Iowa's rural families enjoyed the conveniences of electricity. (Severson N.d.: 3)

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The fortunate few had been able to persuade the power companies that lines should be extended to serve their farms or they were located on a major road between cities.

At that time, utility charges for rural service were considered exorbitant by the applicants. It was general practice to have the rural consumer pay for the line extended to his home. . . then deed it to the utility. (*Ibid.*)

Other Modern Improvements

Running water was another modern convenience, which most Iowa farmsteads lacked until rural electrification, and which the Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District helped pioneer in Mahaska and Marion Counties.

By 1918, the Vander Wilts had installed a private system of wells, water towers, and underground pipes to provide running water to the farmhouse and to the barn. Electricity operated a pressure pump to provide running water for the kitchen and bathroom. A large tank in its basement was located overhead in front of the furnace. This tank provided hot, running water during the winter. (This method to provide hot water survived until 1953, when Alvin and Iola installed an electric water heater.) Cistern water was used to wash clothes, as all the deep-wells on this farm produced hard water. (Other wells were shallow.) Cistern water was heated on an oil stove in the basement and panned over into the washing machine. (Iola Vander Wilt) A large, wooden, cylinder-shaped tank, located in front of the 1904 barn provided running water to this facility through gravity feed.

Mahaska Rural Water, originating in Oskaloosa, arrived at the Vander Wilt Farmstead in 1978.

As a result of these modern improvements, the Vander Wilt Farmhouse became known locally as the "house of firsts." The house was widely known to visitors from the surrounding countryside through the meetings Vander Wilt family hosted for the farm bureau and other farm-related organizations. Through this means, the house became a model to inspire the emulation by other farm families.

Alvin G. Vander Wilt

Alvin G. Vander Wilt is of historical interest because, as a third generation member of Vander Wilt, he transformed the property into a specialized dairy farm in the late 1940s and 1950s and became a model of the modern dairy farmer. Media such as *The Nation's Agriculture*, *The Des Moines Register*, WHO television, and local newspapers reported on the Vander Wilt operation and showcased it as a model for others to emulate.

Local conditions prompted Alvin's decision to specialize rather than diversify. Because his neighbors on surrounding farms prized their family farming operations, Alvin was precluded from buying additional land and expanding horizontally, so, as Iola Vander Wilt later explained, he decided to expand vertically by specializing in Grade A milk production.

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To assist this operation, Alvin constructed a modern dairy barn on the farm in 1955. As a touchstone of its innovation, the Farm Bureau of Iowa sponsored a television documentary about its construction. Produced and broadcast in 1956 by station WHO of Des Moines, the program aimed to educate farmers about up-to-date dairy methods and equipment. The use of television—still a relatively new technology—as the medium for this educational feature further exemplified the progressive spirit, which has characterized the evolution of the Vander Wilt Farmstead throughout its history.

Alvin's successful dairy operation garnered even wider attention. In 1956, a national dairy trade publication featured the Vander Wilt dairy operation and reported on the success it had achieved:

Located in the heart of hog and cattle feedings area, Alvin really appreciates the way dairying has paid off since he specialized. Dairy milk production in May was about 1,700 pounds, and at about \$4 a hundred (blended price), the investment is bringing a good return and also paying Vander Wilt a good wage. (*The Nation's Agriculture*, July-August 1956)

The article concluded with this summary:

Some farmers might lose a little sleep having so much of the farm income dependent upon one operation. Alvin doesn't. He's in an area of growing population; the Iowa Dairy Promotion Association and the ADA are both doing good work to boost use of dairy foods. And a recent Iowa study also proved what we have known a long time: More protein and calcium is needed in both adult and child diets.

Most important, specialization makes laborsaving equipment practical. With that fact on his side and with careful management and planning, Vander Wilt can withstand the "downs" and capitalize on the "ups" in farming. (*Ibid.*)

Another publication described the modern equipment used in the Vander Wilt milking parlor:

Alvin's milking setup is simple, but very efficient. He has a four-stall walk-through milking parlor, where the fresh milk is piped directly from the cows to a 625-gallon bulk cooler tank, by means of which no hands or air come in contact with the product. Fresh milk going into the cooler drops in temperature from 90 degrees to 40 within one minute. Fast cooling slows bacteria action, he explained, thereby increasing its quality. He has had automatic auger-type feeding bunks about nine years. (*Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, October 26, 1965)

Although this equipment has been out-of-service for many years, it remains extant in the dairy barn's milking parlor to the present day.

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Vander Wilt sold his Grade A milk to the Des Moines Cooperative Dairy. It was picked up every other day and delivered directly to dairies in the capital city.

Iola Vander Wilt later described how Alvin worked to improve his dairy herd, another aspect of his progressive approach to farming:

We used DHIA records (Dairy Herd Improvement Association). The DHIA man came once a month and weighed and tested the milk for butterfat and kept statistical records on each cow's night and morning milking. He usually stayed overnight, testing, weighing, and sampling each cow, identified by a number on a chain hanging on each cow's neck. We sold the bull calves. We raised our own replacement heifers, keeping the calves from the highest producers and the purebreds. We were too busy to keep the papers up to date on the purebreds. We used artificial insemination and used the top bulls from "21<sup>st</sup> Century Genetics." (Iola Vander Wilt)

Alvin's interest in dairy farming put him in contact with associated trade organizations. Memberships in these organizations led him to posts of official responsibility. In the 1960s, he served as president of the Iowa Chapter of the American Dairy Association and as the president and the secretary of the Iowa Dairy Industry Commission. He was an officer of the Mahaska County Farm Bureau, as secretary in 1955 and later as its vice-president. Later, he served as a voting delegate in the organization. He also served ten years on the board of the Mid-American Dairy Association.

Alvin's utilization of aviation formed another aspect of his progressive farming. He began flying in 1953, purchased a Cessna 170 airplane, and constructed an airstrip on the east side of his farmstead. In 1954, Vander Wilt erected a lean-to alongside the machine shed and used this structure as a hanger for the airplane. He also constructed a lighted runway adjacent to the farmstead 1,800' long and 60' wide. Alvin flew to dairy association and other farm organization meetings in Iowa and the Midwest. He also joined the "Flying Farmers of Iowa," an international organization of farm families, and subsequently became the president of the state organization. The 1955 fire, which destroyed a nearby barn, slightly damaged the hangar; but the airplane escaped damage, when family and friends pulled it to safety. In 1965, the Iowa Aeronautics Commission certified the "Vander Wilt Airport" (as the certificate reads) as a registered landing area and included it on aviation maps of state airfields. When returning home at night by plane, Alvin would buzz the Vander Wilt Farmhouse. This meant that Iola should turn on the runway lights. (Iola obtained her pilot's license in 1965. A documentary collection about her career is on deposit in the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.)

After a long battle with cancer, during which time many neighbors helped the Vander Wilts in their farm work, Alvin died. The title to the farm transferred to Iola Vander Wilt in 1994 upon his death. The property transferred again in 2001 to the Iola Vander Wilt Revocable Trust.

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**ARCHITECTURE**

Farmhouse

The Vander Wilt Farmhouse is of architectural interest as a “machine for living,” a popular phrase used across the nation during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe domestic design which conformed to the principles of utility espoused by Progressive reformers. In addition to its electrification, running water, and central heat, discussed above, the farmhouse also possessed the following conveniences:

Dumbwaiter from basement to kitchen  
Clothes chute from second floor to basement  
Coal room with plastered walls and ceiling to reduce infiltration of coal dust throughout the house  
Fruit cellar in basement  
Bedrooms with closets  
Closets with outside windows for ventilation  
Built-in cupboards in dining room  
Broom closet in kitchen  
Washroom off kitchen  
Pantry off washroom  
Cupboards in basement

The configuration of two closets on the second floor is particularly notable. Each of its four bedrooms has a closet, and two of these closets possesses outside windows. While it is not unusual to find houses of this era equipped with closets, the amenity in Vander Wilt Farmhouse of two closets with windows points to a conscious effort to create a home of prepossessing utility. Although it remains to be proven whether this fenestration design relates to a Dutch tradition, the presence in these windows relates directly to the concern among Craftsman-designed homes to include labor-saving and health-inducing features. The presence of these windows allows the closets to be aired.

The exterior of the house is clad with stucco applied onto wood lath. Its history calls attention to some of the pluses and minuses of this building material. Although the oyster-type shells applied as part of its finish coat sparkled in iridescent color in the sunlight, the stucco itself lacked durability. The present owner of the house, who has expended a good deal of money to maintain its stucco, concurs with architectural historian Ralph J. Christian’s comments about some stucco. “He said it didn’t hold up—how well I know!” (Iola Vander Wilt) During the 1910s and 1920s, manufacturers developed a variety of stucco finishes. One trade product named “Cellostone” (or perhaps “Kellostone”) gained favor in Des Moines. It featured an aggregated finish coat with a pleasing texture. (Lowell J. Soike) Numerous building suppliers during the 1910s and 1920s offered products to color stucco. “Any careful mechanic who will follow directions can prepare and apply colored stucco in a satisfactory manner.” (National Building Publications: 49) As building products improved during the 1920s, wire mesh became available as a base for stucco. The mesh proved faster to install than wood lath, and building suppliers touted its greater durability. Of course, the formula used to mix the stucco varied from building contractor to building contractor, and this played a role in the quality of the product.

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Stucco lacked the pliancy of wood and could crack as a building settled. This usually occurred at stress points near the foundation of a building. This is where the stucco failed in the Vander Wilt house.

The construction of the Vander Wilt Farmhouse became the subject of debate within the family. Junior Gerrit wanted a new house to replace the dwelling his father and mother had purchased in 1901 and where he had grown up. Old Gerrit opposed the new construction. Father and son subsequently resolved their differences, when the elder told his son "all right, you can build a new house, but you pay for it" or in like words.

Little machinery was employed to build the farmhouse. Richard Vander Wilt (b. 1916) recalls workmen excavating for the basement with a scraper, a wagon, and horses. Lumber from the old house, including sub-flooring and doors now in the basement, was recycled in the building's construction. (Richard Vander Wilt)

Douwe Sjaardema

The Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District is of architectural interest because of its associations with Douwe Sjaardema (1863-1944), the contractor-builder, who built it. (Pronounce his name DOW-ee SHAR-da-ma.)

Born in the Netherlands, Sjaardema trained there as a carpenter. Recent research obtained through the Internet by Iola Vander Wilt describes his birthplace:

In Oppenhuizen, Friesland, in 1840, a survey shows the small village to have 51 houses with 354 persons living there. It is known that there were [and still are] two large farms in Oppenhuizen, one occupied by the Sjaarda(ma) family and the other by Pier Foppes. The farms are referred to as "stinzen." A "stins" is the Frisian name for [a] farm owned by a Frisian nobleman. I do not know if Sjaarda and/or Pier Foppes were the actual owners/noblemen referred to.

I check the passenger list of Douwes Sjaarda where he has listed himself as a carpenter. The profession is written down from information supplied by the emigrant himself so I think it is highly unlikely that he would call himself a carpenter if he was in fact an architect. University education was quite rare in those days and generally reserved for rich city dwellers.

The passenger list notes that they were living in Amsterdam prior to their departure to the U.S. (Murt Kooi)

In 1885, Douwe Sjaardema and Catharina Van Dyke (1865-1953) were united in marriage. In 1892 the Sjaardemas, along with three of their children and Mrs. Sjaardema's brother and his wife, emigrated to the United States. (Eight more children subsequently were born to the Sjaardemas.) Upon arrival in



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America, the Sjaardema family traveled to Alamosa, Colorado, at the invitation of the San Luis Colonization Company. Douwe later described in a newspaper interview what subsequently transpired:

“The country was not what we expected to see. The land was irrigated, and we found there were water rights just as there are land rights. Getting water when needed for the soil depended on whether your rights were No. 1, 2, or 3. If number 1, your chances were good; if number two, it was not so bad, but number 3 was not so good. It only rained once during the summer that we were there. . . I was a carpenter by trade and expected a real harvest there in building homes for the colonists, but I was badly disappointed in that.” (*Pella Chronicle*)

Still, the Sjaardema family stayed in Colorado for over a year. Then they moved to Pella, Iowa, in 1893. According to one report, Douwe:

built two houses here [in Pella]. One is the Andrew Van Drimmelin home and the other is the recently acquired property of Ben Kuyk, both in the west part of town.

Mr. Sjaardema built several houses in the country. This he found unsatisfactory for the reason that he had to leave his wife at home with three small children, and he had to be gone all the week.

The Sjaardema family left for Wright county on March 1, 1896. That was a flat country and he says they found much mud in the wet season. On March 1, 1903, they came back to Pella and lived on a farm three and one half miles northeast of here.

They moved to Sully on January 1, 1910, where he bought the lumber business from Reerink and Van Spanckeren. They returned to Pella on Dec. 20, 1920, having bought the house where they live [at 615 West first Street] from Sam Van Vliet. The same was built by W. W. Cook 40 years ago, but it is a good house and is modern. .” (*Ibid.*)

While in Wright County, Douwe helped build the Christian Reformed Church at Kanawha, Iowa, and was largely responsible for the construction of that church’s parsonage. According to a local history:

In 1895 money was pledged by the families [of the congregation] to build a parsonage next to the church. The church was fortunate to have a carpenter in its midst in the person of D. Sjaardema who supervised the building of the house. (Wright Christian Reformed Church: 5)

Sjaardema’s later business ventures included work as a building contractor in the Pella area and ownership and operation of a lumberyard at Sully, Iowa. While in Pella, Sjaardema built the Vander

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Wilt Farmhouse (1918-1920) and at least two other houses, as yet unidentified, which a newspaper article in the *Pella Chronicle* mentioned in 1937.

In his own words, Douwe described what happened while he owned the Sully lumberyard:

“I sold [building materials] when everything was at its peak. Everybody was at work at good wages. Farm prices were good, money was plentiful and all were happy and contented. When I sold at Sully 2x4s were selling for \$70.00 per thousand, compared with \$25.00 when I bought the business.” (*Ibid.*)

He was also quoted to say:

The period between 1910 and 1920 was the most prosperous of all times, but not the most conducive to the general good of the country. . . . “People had money, and they either spent it for what they needed and luxuries on the side or invested it in high priced land or other property. I have never seen before or since such spending. They should have known that prosperity would not last, but they rushed madly on with no thought to the end. . . . The banks were willing to finance farmers and other investors and anyone could borrow money.” This, he said, was the beginning of the financial crash and the ruination of many.” (*Ibid.*)

Douwe Sjaardema also farmed, as we know from a census records, where his occupation is listed as “carpenter & farmer.”

**REPRESENTATION IN OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEYS**

In 1978, the Central Iowa Regional Association of Governments (CIRALG) conducted an historic resources survey of Pella, but this project did not survey the surrounding countryside.

In the 1990s, Bear Creek Archaeology, Inc. surveyed the Iowa 163 highway corridor between Oskaloosa and Pella for a road improvement project. The survey focused heavily on archaeological resources and did not identify or evaluate the Vander Wilt Farmstead.

**POTENTIAL FOR HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY**

The site's potential for archaeological significance is, as yet, unevaluated. Historical archaeological investigations may uncover traces of previous construction on the site--such as privies or other nonextant outbuildings.

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND REGISTRATION**

The Vander Wilt Farmstead is a complex property, which deserves further research and registration activity.

The farming careers of Alvin G. and Iola Vander Wilt are prime cases in point. The Farmstead might qualify under National Register Criterion B because of Alvin and Iola's roles as model dairy farmers. Because the period of significance for this context continues past the National Register's 50-year cut-off date, the claim for the Vander Wilt's significance as individuals was excluded from this nomination. This issue should be revisited and redressed as the passage of time permits more perspective on the matter.

A Criterion C case might also be made for the Vander Wilt Farmstead. Further research might explore the status of the Farmhouse and the Dairy Barn as innovative architecture. As more is learned about Douwe Sjaardema, here is another opportunity to assess the architectural significance of the Farmhouse with the context of his work.

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**ORAL HISTORY**

Kooi, Murt, with Iola Vander Wilt, November 2002. Kooi, a local historian in Pella, Iowa, obtained genealogical information via the Internet, which she shared with Vander Wilt.

Memmelaar, Wilma, with William C. Page, November 6, 2002. Memmelaar, the daughter of Gerrit J. and Emma Vander Wilt, shared information about the Vander Wilt Farmstead, her childhood home.

Sarver, Merrill of Beacon Iowa, with William C. Page, December 11, 2002. Now a nonagenarian, Sarver, went to work for Iowa Power & Light Co. in Oskaloosa, Iowa, in 1926. He shared information about the company's rural electrification program during the 1920s.

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Soike, Lowell J., with William C. Page, December 11, 2002. Soike shared information about the stucco on his Beavertdale home in Des Moines, gleaned from his own oral informants.

Vander Wilt, Iola, with William C. Page, various times during the fall and winter of 2002. Vander Wilt shared information about her own fifty-year residence on the Vander Wilt Farmstead, as well as that of her in-laws, who purchased the property in 1901.

Vander Wilt, Richard, with William C. Page, November 6, 2002. Vander Wilt, who is the son of Gerrit and Emma Vander Wilt, shared information about the Vander Wilt Farmstead, his childhood home.

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Vander Wilt Farmstead Historic District, Mahaska County, Iowa.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Beginning in Section 22, Township 76 North, Range 17 West at the point on the west line of the Northeast Quarter where it intersects the center line of the west-bound segment of Iowa Highway 163, thence to the north 198 feet, thence to the east 600 feet, thence north to 190<sup>th</sup> Street, thence to the east 150 feet, thence south to the public right-of-way of said highway, and thence west parallel to said highway to the point of beginning.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Contains all land associated historically with the resource.



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1. Vander Wilt Farmstead  
1345 Highway 163  
Leighton, IA 50143  
Farmhouse  
Looking northwest  
William C. Page, Photographer  
September 26, 2002
  
2. Vander Wilt Farmstead  
1345 Highway 163  
Leighton, IA 50143  
Farmhouse  
Looking northeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
September 26, 2002
  
3. Vander Wilt Farmstead  
1345 Highway 163  
Leighton, IA 50143  
Farmhouse  
Looking southeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
September 26, 2002
  
4. Vander Wilt Farmstead  
1345 Highway 163  
Leighton, IA 50143  
Farmhouse and Garage  
Looking southwest  
William C. Page, Photographer  
September 26, 2002
  
5. Vander Wilt Farmstead  
1345 Highway 163  
Leighton, IA 50143  
Barn (1904) and Silos  
Looking northeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
September 26, 2002

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6. Vander Wilt Farmstead  
1345 Highway 163  
Leighton, IA 50143  
Corn Crib  
Looking northeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
September 26, 2002
  
7. Vander Wilt Farmstead  
1345 Highway 163  
Leighton, IA 50143  
Dairy Barn (1955)  
Looking northeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
September 26, 2002