

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received AUG 19 1986  
date entered SEP 22 1986

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

1. Name

historic James M. Forney House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 401 Cedar \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Burlington \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state Iowa code 019 county Des Moines code 057

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. John A. Newton, Jr.

street & number 401 Cedar

city, town Burlington \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state IA 52601

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Recorder's Office

street & number Des Moines County Courthouse

city, town Burlington \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state IA 52601

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Burlington Architectural Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1976 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Iowa Office of Historic Preservation

city, town E. 12th & Grand Ave., Des Moines state IA 50319

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## 7. Description

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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

The M. Forney House (1864) is a 2 1/2 story brick home that is a vernacular combination of the Gothic and Italianate styles. It stands out in the neighborhood because of its fine line, detail and orientation. The house is situated on a large lot on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, with very steep land on the east and south boundaries. Because the structure sits on a half block property, it has breathing room setting it apart from other houses in the neighborhood.

Strong Italianate influences in the main block, roofline, and ornamental details are combined with Gothic Revival influences. The front centered cross gable, pointed windows in gables, and the tracery between the columns on the front porch are reminiscent of the Gothic Revival style, also popular at the date of construction. Italian Villa and Gothic Revival designs were popularized as picturesque styles in the 1850's and 60's. This was in contrast to the more formal Italian Renaissance, Tuscan and Greek Revival styles. Books published during this period by Andrew Jackson Downing, Calvert Vaux, and Cleaveland & Backus depicted Gothic cottages with a cross gable and central entry that usually had other more pronounced Gothic qualities. In addition, these publications often showed the perspective drawings of their cottages, whatever style, with curving or circular carriage drives leading up to the entry. The brick walk at the Forney House is another hint of the picturesque cottages depicted in these books. These qualities may have influenced a local architect or builder to design the Forney House with this mixture of styles.

**House Exterior**

The Forney House architectural style represents a blending of elements from different periods. The house has Italian details utilizing an earlier period symmetrical facade and central entry-hallway. Typical early Italian influenced houses with Italian detailing would fall more into the category of Italian Villa. They often had the gable roofline with flared eaves, but not a central hallway plan. Transition Italianate or Italian Renaissance Revival houses sometimes had a central hallway plant, but usually had a hip roof to go with their more square shape. With its flared eaves, central entry and Gothic influences, the Forney House is unique in the surrounding neighborhood and no other structure that we are aware of in Burlington exhibits these transitional or vernacular influences. Other Gothic Revival houses are usually more pointed in ornament with steeper pitched roofs, and the Italianate influenced houses are picturesque in plan and asymmetrical, or symmetrical in plan with a hip roof, or later became the Italianate side ranked structure with a hip roof.

Although the building is typical of the Picturesque Movement, the combination of architectural styles exhibits a sensitivity to design which would likely come from an architect. We suspect that an architect was involved in the design of this building, based on our familiarity with local architects' work and viewing houses in Burlington. There were at least four architects working in the community during the

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	

**Specific dates** 1864 **Builder/Architect** Aimeon Russell, Contractor

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** Contributing Resources: 1  
Criterion: C

The James M. Forney House was constructed in 1864 of red brick and capped with a side gabled roof, featuring a front center gable, consisting of 2 1/2 story rectangular core and a 2 story symmetrically placed rear wing. Viewed collectively with its period carriage house, patterned brick walkways and general landscape qualities, this house, which combines the Gothic Revival and Italianate, is typical of the picturesque movement promoted by Andrew Jackson Downing and other pattern book authors in the 1850's and '60's. The Forney House and its surroundings are very well preserved and constitute one of the best examples of the picturesque in the area. The house proper is believed to be the only extant major domestic example of picturesque combining Gothic and Italianate in Burlington.

From a physical point of view, the architecture of the Forney House is the most significant aspect of the property. People traveling through the neighborhood are drawn to this picturesque setting with an expansive view of the Mississippi below. However, the Forney House also serves as a reminder of several important commercial-industrial developments in late 19th century Burlington. There were several people involved with this property whose overlapping business ventures highlight real estate and the building trades during a period of rapid community growth. Real estate developer J. W. Heisey worked primarily in the outlying suburban neighborhoods and was responsible for the Forney construction. To this project he brought well known Burlington contractors, including Simeon Russell. Many substantial commercial and public buildings of the period are attributed to Russell, a brick mason and general contractor. James M. Forney, longtime owner and resident of the house was a successful businessman whose life was representative of the capitalists of his day. He was able to determine the needs of the expanding West and then meet them in a way that brought to him a comfortable lifestyle. His fortune was made in sawmills, tinsmithing, real estate, and carriage wheel manufacture. The result of these economic successes is distilled in what we see as the Forney House today.

The land was developed by John W. Heisey, advertised as a real estate broker, speculator and capitalist. He was active in the surrounding neighborhood as early as 1862, living in several houses that he built and sold before setting into a long term residency there (extant, but altered). Heisey was also instrumental in developing other suburban neighborhoods. For example, during approximately the same period (1869), he purchased several lots in what was to become known as Cameron's Addition in the western section of town; the main street in the addition is named for Heisey.

Working with Heisey were two well know Burlington contractors--Heinrich Meyer, whose family were stone cutters and stonemasons, and Simeon Russell, brickmason and building contractor. Also involved in the Forney House construction was a third contractor, J. S. Holiday (Or J. S. Halliday) who may have been a stone cutter. It was a relatively common practice at this time for contractors to receive a mortgage on the house they constructed to insure payment for their services. All three of

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet 9-2

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property ~~less than one acre~~

Quadrangle name Burlington, ILL-IA

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

### UTM References

A 15 659970 4518150  
Zone Easting Northing

B [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]  
Zone Easting Northing

C [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

D [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

E [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

F [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

G [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

H [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

Verbal boundary description and justification The north eighty feet of Lot 509, excluding Lots 509A and 509B, Original City of Burlington. This includes only the house and carriage house.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Text, Research: Steven R. Brower, Landscape Architect  
Form: James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator

organization State Historical Society of Iowa  
Bureau of Community Programming date 11 August 1986

street & number Office of Historic Preservation  
E. 12th & Grand Ave. telephone 515-281-4137

city or town Des Moines state IA 50319

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *David L...*

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 8/12/86

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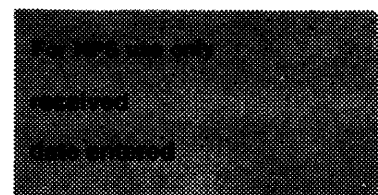
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
Entered in the National Register

*for Andrew Green*  
Keeper of the National Register date 9/22/86

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

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Forney House construction. The house has the characteristic scale, space and detail that are considerably finer than most contractor designed and built houses of the period. In 1864 the central hallway and gable roof with flared eave combination was unusual in Burlington and is not typical of a pattern book house.

The formal symmetrical facade faces east with gable ends of the roofline on the north and south. The double door main entrance is centered in the east facade with a central gable projecting over it. Notable Italianate characteristics are the tall doors and windows, the gentle pitch of the gable roofline, and the round arched, segmental window headings with repeating caps. However, the most outstanding Italian feelings come from the eave line and the porches. The flared eave is supported by single, scroll shaped brackets which project below the cornice to rest on the brick wall surface. The one story front porch over the entry repeats the main cornice with brackets and modillion blocks. A flight of limestone steps leads up to the porch between the paired, square box columns with inset panels.

Marks on the building indicate that the front porch roof was at one time capped by a balcony railing with balusters on either side of the window. There is also a mark on the north end of the facade that may be the result of an earlier porch. However, there is no indication that a porch symmetrically extended on the southern half of the facade. There are no known early photos of the house and the Sanborn Fire Atlas of 1900 shows the facade as it is now.

The building's main block measures 32' x 40' with a two story wing telescoping to the west measuring 17' 10" x 20'. A low limestone foundation with stringcourse supports the brick, load bearing walls. The one story porch on the north side of the west wing is in the same style as the front porch, but simpler in detail, with solid square posts and chamfered corners. According to marks on the building, the north side porch originally extended to the northwest corner of the house. The south screen porch was constructed somewhat prior to 1950 and replaces an earlier porch in that location. The porch was indicated as being narrower and having an L shape in the 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

The tall windows have capped, segmental arches. They are original 6 over 6 with the exceptions of the original 6 over 9 walkout onto the front porch roof and the four 1 over 1 windows on the north side main floor that are replacements. The louvered openings in the gable peaks are original window openings that have been refitted for attic ventilation. The house has been continuously occupied as a single family residence. A recent extensive maintenance project has put the exterior of the house into excellent condition.

**Interior**

The main entry in the east facade has double doors with transom above. Beyond these is a small vestibule and a single interior door with two panels of oval glass

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and a fanlight. This opens into a spacious central hall with double doorways to the rooms on either side and a curving walnut staircase at the rear. There are two coal burning fireplaces--one marbelized soapstone, the other wood frame with ceramic tiles.

Oak flooring runs throughout the first floor main block with perimeter inset strips of walnut and butternut. The double door frames off the main hall indicate that the south side doors had a middle closure and the north side was hinged so that the door folded open to the east or front of the house. All the doors on the second floor have transoms over them, giving the hallway a light and airy feeling. The upstairs hall front window is a 6 over 9 pocket window leading to the front porch roof. (See floor plans and interior photos.)

The wall dividing the living room and dining room was modified circa 1940's to an arched double doorway. At about the same time, a wall was removed from the master bedroom. The long parlor exhibits no indications of having any walls removed. The horizontal leaded glass window at the end of the parlor appears to be original, as there are no signs of modifications to the brickwork. In the northwest corner of the living room is a chimney added for central heating which runs up through the closet in the master bedroom.

The basement under the rear project was dug out probably during the 1940's and cement block walls erected underneath the structure. The joists in the basement are old in character and have circular peg holes indicating raft floated lumber. In addition, the exterior brickwork is laced into the main block without any scars or abnormalities that would have indicated the rear projection to be later construction.

#### Carriage House and Grounds

A feature which might be considered an extension of the architecture is the brick walk system surrounding the house. All sidewalks are done in the herringbone pattern. The gracefully curving walk which leads to the front door was possibly intended to fit a carriage drive. A separate lane goes south across the front of the house, and originally went around to the west where it met the carriage house. The doors make it appear that the carriage house was originally constructed with a drive through arrangement. The west side garage doors adjoining the alley. The structure is one and a half stories, balloon frame, measuring 29 1/2' x 32'. It has board and batten siding and a gable roof with a simple rafter system in the attic with no roof trusses. There is one dividing wall both down and upstairs, and no interior finishing on either floor. Downstairs the spaces were a carriage room and a workshop. The double door cast iron rollers are stamped with an 1881 patent date.

The large size of the property, which is actually three lots combined, is mostly the result of the surrounding landscape. As a hilltown, Burlington had to develop

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its street systems by quarrying the rights of way out of the limestone bluffs. Locust Street and this particular block of South 4th Street are good examples of where this quarrying took place in the 1860's and 70's. The contour lines on the location map indicate where the bluff was notched out for South 5th Street. Most of the street rights of way were eventually developed. However, there are a few quarried areas, such as this block, that remain in a semi-grade condition and were never completed because of their steepness. The lots comprising this property were left largely inaccessible on the street or front sides by this quarrying. Subsequently, the slopes were covered with second growth vegetation and are now a part of the open space of those neighborhoods. Forney, desiring to have a larger estate property, went to some inconvenience to purchase the parcels of land adjacent to his new home. This involved obtaining clear title from early owners who did not get around to developing their lots and abandoned the land. These two southernmost lots are however excluded from the nomination boundary due to their lack of any defineable landscaping or other significant historic features.

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the contractors mentioned held such mortgages from August 1864 until March 1866.

Most important among the contractors was Simeon Russell (1825-1906), who started his career in Burlington as a brickmason working on Burlington's first public school building (North Hill School 1851). Immediately after that he went into the contracting business for himself. He sometimes worked with various architects and served as construction superintendent for public and commercial buildings. Among his activities, he was City Building Commissioner (1885-86) and worked on the first brick street paving in 1887. Russell built many notable structures between 1851 and 1886 - South Hill School (1852), Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1855), Second Presbyterian Church (later St. Paul's 1856), South Boundary School (1861), Germania School (1866), Hibernia School (1875), Prospect Hill School #1 (1879), German National Bank (1885) and Saunderson and Sunnyside Schools (1891). Russell is also reported to have done numerous residential structures. However, his own residence (1851 in the present day Heritage Hill Historic District, NRHP) and the Forney House are the only known residential projects.

The Forney property was originally purchased from J. W. Heisey by Edward Van Meter, a Burlington music professor and proprietor of Van Meter and Lang Music Store. Although the contracting for construction was initiated by Heisey and Van Meter, it is not clear whether Van Meter ever lived in the house. He sold to James M. Forney in March of 1866 at the time the contractor mortgages were retired. Van Meter lived at various places throughout the town from 1864 to 1876 and then disappeared from city directories.

As a young man in Pennsylvania, James Forney was trained in the art of cabinetmaking. But he was drawn by the opportunities in the West, settling in Burlington during 1850. This was a boom period for Burlington and Forney's first business venture was the operation of a sawmill, one of the most important industries of the day. River floated log and lumber rafts coming from the northwest pineries in Wisconsin and Minnesota provided the resources for regional expansion. Burlington's riverfront hummed with activity as these raw materials were sawed up for both local use and westward shipment on convenient rail service. During the 1850's there were at least six sawmills operating in Burlington, and probably several others. This young industry experienced tremendous growth and competition between the firms. One result of this rapid growth was that the larger mills of E. D. Rand and the Gilbert Brothers bought out controlling interests in the smaller ones. The early sawmill operators had the opportunity, after becoming established, to make a good profit and move into other capitalist ventures.

So in 1857 Forney entered into a partnership with his brother-in-law, Samuel Mellinger. He joined the firm of Mellinger & Co., Tin and Coppersmiths, who also dealt in stoves and sheet iron manufacture. By 1866 Forney was a twice successful businessman who "retired" into his spacious new home on the river bluff at the ripe old age of 44. He is representative of the capitalists of this era who made



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considerable fortunes during the periods of rapid community growth and then retired to enjoy life and continue investing in other commercial ventures.

Forney had come to Iowa at the urging of Mellinger, who came from Pennsylvania the year before Forney. One of the reasons Forney retired to this neighborhood was that Mellinger had earlier located his family on a South 4th Street property "commanding a beautiful river view". When Forney purchased his new house at the corner of S. 4th and Cedar, the brothers-in-law became neighbors. Then in about 1889, Mellinger built a newer home on his property across the street from Forney (extant, but altered).

After his retirement Forney was at least partially involved in real estate. Mellinger and Forney had sold the tinsmith business by the middle 1860's and Samuel Mellinger had become a real estate broker. In 1870 Forney and Mellinger purchased a business block on the north side of Jefferson between 5th & 6th Streets, a prime location. Mellinger then maintained his real estate office in the "Mellinger and Forney Block". Mellinger's son, Frank, was also in another business with Forney and then followed into the real estate business, becoming well known for extensive farmland developments in the river bottom areas. The extent of Forney's involvement in real estate is yet unknown and he was about to enter into another manufacturing effort. However, real estate brought together three capitalists as the Forney House: Heisey, Forney and Mellinger. Although Forney bought the house, it was the interrelationship of these men which brought Forney to the site.

In 1875 Forney began another commercial venture, which was perhaps his most significant. M. C. Buffington was the inventor and patent holder for the Improved Sarven Wheel, also known as the Buffington Wheel. But he did not have the means to manufacture and market his improvement. James Forney, because of his background in the building trades, recognized the value of the invention, furnished the capital for the business, and took Buffington into partnership with him. They became Buffington, Forney & Co., carriage wheel manufacturers. Frank Mellinger eventually became secretary treasurer of the company, continuing those family business ties even further.

The factory, located on Osborn Street, was a substantial three story building which expanded with an additional four story building in 1882 (razed 1983). The company employed fifty people, but frequently could not keep up with their orders. By 1882 their business was between \$80,000 and \$100,000 yearly. The unique feature of the Buffington Wheel was a "centrally enlarged, two-band hub, with mortised metallic shell in combination with mortised wooden hub." The hub was banded and the band riveted together before the spokes were driven, making it easy to repair because it was not necessary to remove any rivets. According to their advertisements, it was guaranteed to be the best spoke holding wheel on the market. It was strong, durable and easy to repair. The market was national--from Kentucky and Illinois, through Kansas and Missouri, all the way to the Pacific

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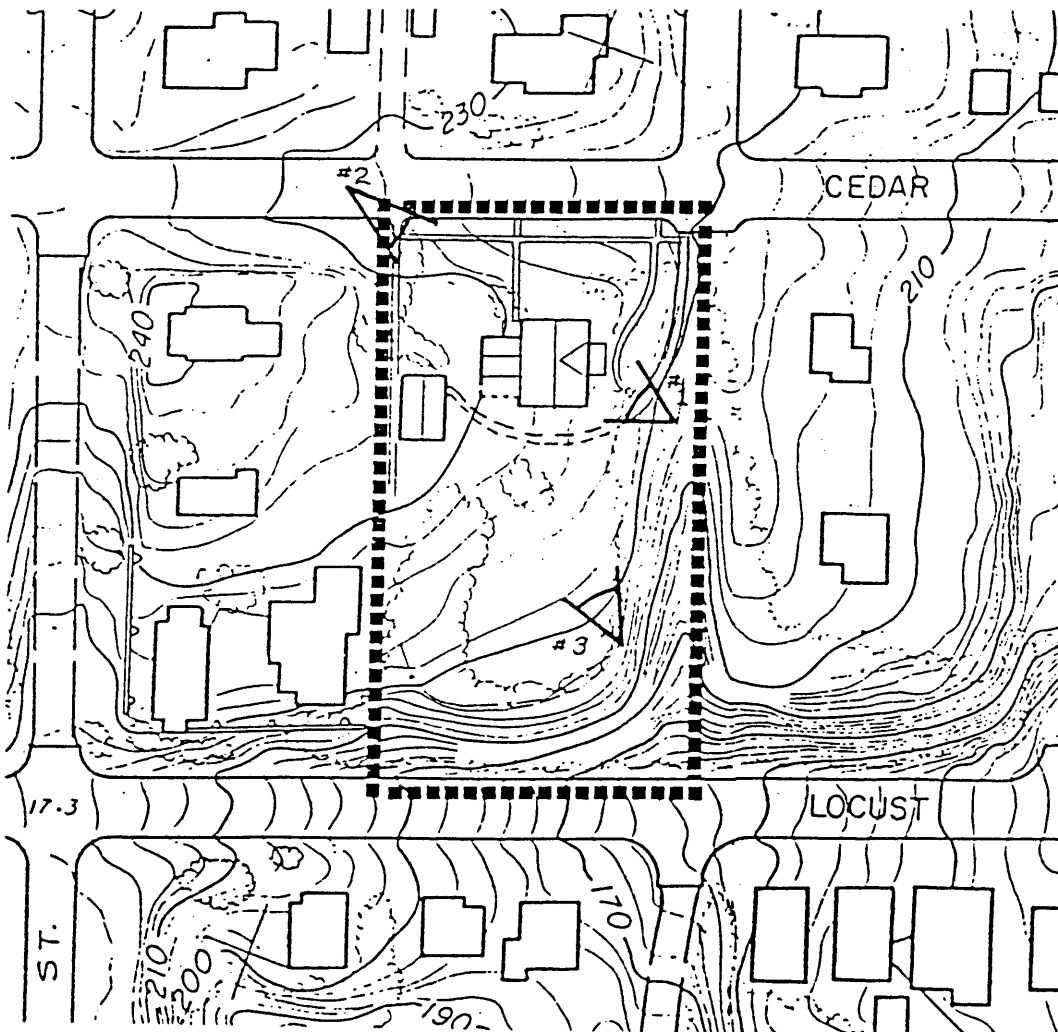
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Coast.

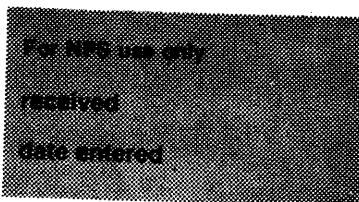
The Universal Wheelwright Machine was also patented and manufactured by Buffington, Forney and Company. It was called the finest wheel making machine in the world and was used by some of the largest wagon manufacturers in the West. The company was absorbed by the American Wheel Company around the turn of the century

Forney's first business venture--the sawmill, and his last--the wheelworks, best show his capitalist abilities in identifying the managing industries important to the growth of the era. His house is representative of this success. Forney family members were longtime residents of the house--75 years. The address was 803 S. 4th through the turn of the century, but was changed to 401 Cedar in more recent years.



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Major Sources

- Abstract of Title, 401 Cedar, property of Mr. & Mrs. John Newton, Burlington, Iowa.  
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