

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

..... Name of Property
..... County and State
..... Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1

**Supplementary Listing Record**

NRIS Reference Number: SG100002575

Date Listed: 06/20/2018

Property Name: Ross Grain Elevator

County: Audubon

State: IA

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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

  
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Signature of the Keeper

6/20/2018  
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Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

**Geographic Data**

The U.T.M. coordinates as presented on the nomination form are accurate, but they do not correlate to the Latitude and Longitude coordinates provided.  
The correct Latitude/Longitude points should read: 41.773643 -94.922051

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The IOWA SHPO was notified of this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

562575

# 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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Ross Grain Elevator

Other names/site number: The Old Mill

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

### 2. Location

Street & number: 5940 Main Street

City or town: Audubon State: Iowa County: Audubon

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: X

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

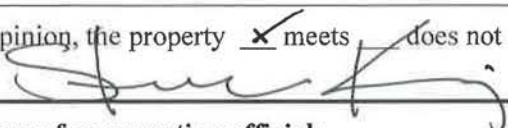
I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A \_\_\_ B X C \_\_\_ D

<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>		<b>Date</b>
<u>State Historical Society of Iowa</u>		
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>		
In my opinion, the property <u>X</u> meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.		
		<u>02 MAY 2018.</u>
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>		<b>Date</b>
<u>D SHPO</u>		
<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

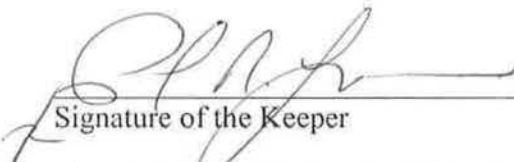
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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

  
Signature of the Keeper

6/20/2018  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
<u>2</u>	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>3</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**  
**Historic Functions**

Agriculture/Subsistence: Storage  
Agriculture/Subsistence: Processing

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

Vacant/Not in Use

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Stone/Limestone  
Roof: Asphalt  
Walls: Metal/Steel  
Brick

### Narrative Description

#### Summary Paragraph

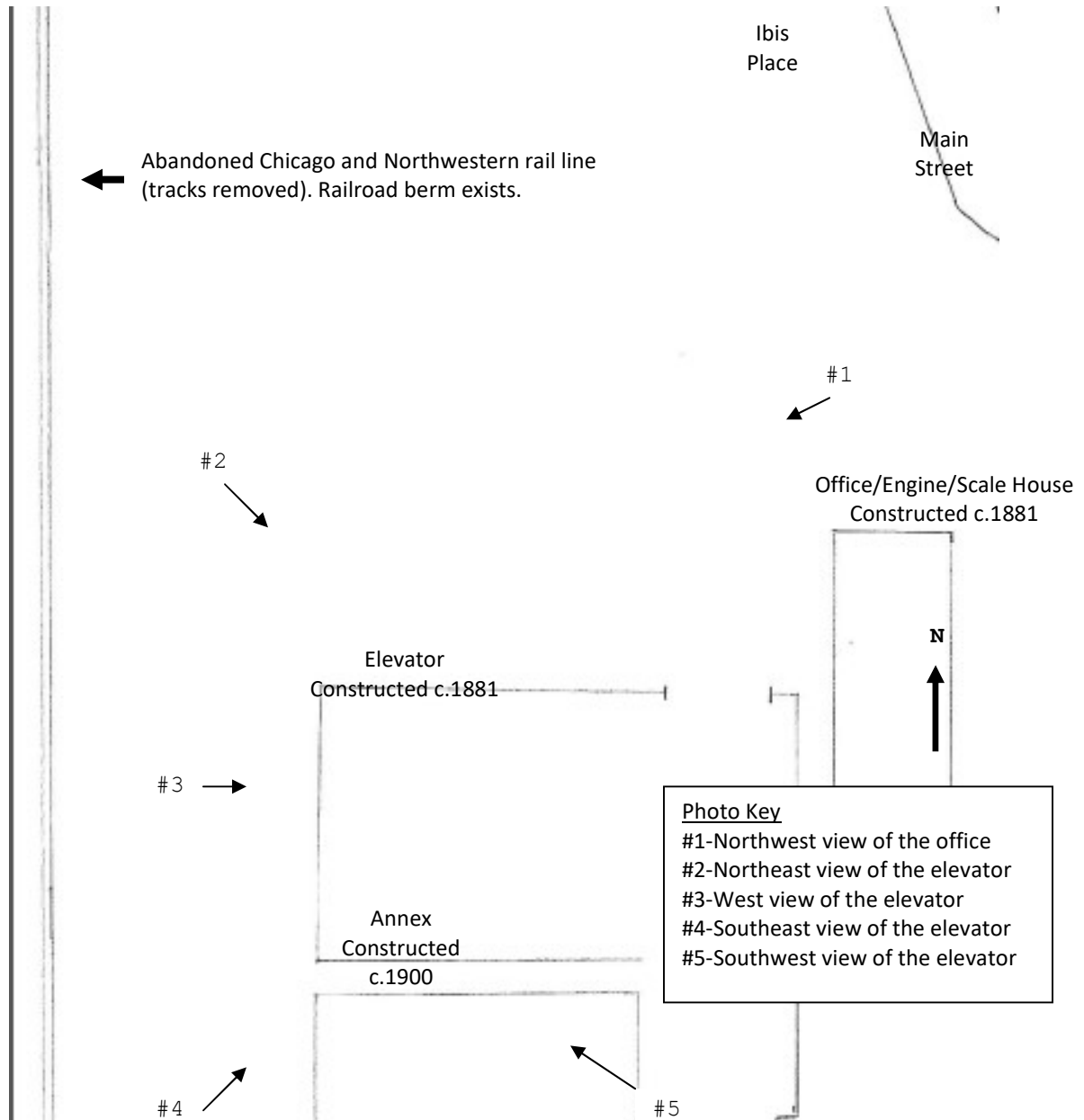
The unincorporated town of Ross is located in north-central Audubon County in west-central Iowa. The Ross Grain Elevator sits on the western edge of Ross adjacent to the now abandoned Chicago and Northwestern Railroad that borders the Blue Grass Creek. The elevator is located on land that was once owned by the railroad and plotted by the railroad's subsidiary "The Western Town Lot Company". The elevator stands 70' tall and can be seen from Highway 71 located a mile to the west. The elevator complex consists of two structures and one building: the elevator, office/engine/scale house (hereafter office) and annex. The land size is 1.71 acres and once contained not only the elevator but an additional grain elevator, train depot, stock yards, coal shed and milling operation (hence its nickname "The Old Mill"). Currently, other than scattered trees and grass, the elevator complex is all that remains. The construction technology is significant in that the elevator and annex are crib constructed, built with dimensional lumber (2x8, 2x6, 2x4) stacked flat then spiked together, forming an extremely strong structure. The office originally housed the engine that powered the elevator and was built with a double layer of brick in order to resist fire.

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### Site Plan Map Showing Direction of Photographs #1-5

Sketch by Bob Nelson, March 31, 2017



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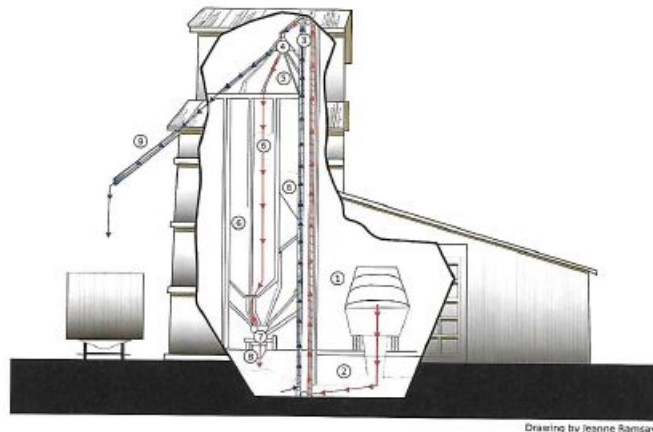
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## Narrative Description

### Type or Form: Agricultural Building

**Setting:** All three buildings (elevator, annex, and office) remain in their original locations just west of the unincorporated village of Ross, Iowa, and east of the abandoned Chicago and Northwestern Railroad line. The property currently consists of approximately 1.71 acres of pasture and scattered trees bordered by the town of Ross on one side and conservation reserve program ground on the other, which is planted in trees bordering the Blue Grass Creek then surrounded appropriately by farm fields. The 1.71 acres was originally divided into lots by the Western Town Lot Company but the land was owned by the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. A business was allowed to build and own a structure but had to lease the land it stood upon. The Ross Grain Elevator was the first business constructed and multiple other businesses soon followed taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the elevator and railroad. When the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad determined the track through Ross was no longer profitable, they pulled up the tracks and offered the land up for sale and included the addition of ½ of the adjacent Ross train depot grounds, the combination of these two parcels equaled 1.71 acres. None of the other businesses remain and no modern buildings exist to take away from the original 1881 character. It continues to define the “sentinel of the prairie”<sup>1</sup> term of many years ago.

At ground level the elevator measures 25' X 32' and is constructed on a limestone foundation consisting of 12 bins, 6 on the main level, 3 above the grain dump(driveway) and 3 above the hopper scale but below the headhouse (see diagram). Its construction is remarkable as its cribbed constructed meaning the lumber is stacked flat with one board on top of another. Starting from the foundation, 2X8 lumber is laid flat, stacked, then spiked together. As the building became taller, the lumber switched to smaller 2X6 than 2X4 lumber laid flat and then spiked together, eventually reaching 70' feet in height. The workings of the original grain elevators were described in the simplest of terms, comparing itself to a man; the highest part is the “headhouse”, containing the main grain distributor referred to as the “throat”. Below this within the main part of the elevator are the grain bins or “belly”. Then the wooden grain “legs” that carried the grain to the headhouse. In the basement is the



Grain elevator flow diagram illustrating grain movement within an elevator:  
1) Driveway (grain dump); 2) Pit(boot); 3) Leg; 4) Distributor (throat); 5) Bin Spouts; 6) Grain Bins(belly); 7) Mixer; 8) Hopper scale; 9) Rail Car Spout  
*Drawing by Jeanne Ramsay, University of Colorado Denver*

<sup>1</sup> “Sentinel of the prairie” was a relatively common phrase in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that described any tall man-made object or common animal located on the vast plains. It gave people comfort and reminded them they were not alone. The term has also been used to describe windmills and prairie dogs.

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“boot” otherwise called the grain pit. The annex at ground level measures 25’X25’ and is 40’ tall. It’s also crib constructed, starting with 2X6 lumber before progressing to 2X4 lumber. It originally contained four 12’ X 12’ X 30’ bins with a smaller distributor visible inside near the roof. The grain capacity of the elevator and annex combined is 35,000 bushels.<sup>2</sup>

The Ross elevator was originally sided with wooden clapboard, but circa 1900 the annex along with the elevator were sided with galvanized metal to prevent fires caused from steam locomotive sparks and wildfires.

The brick office-house sits on a limestone foundation and is originally constructed of brick. It measures 25’ long by 12’ wide and 16’ in height. All three buildings sit in their original location and few alterations have been made to the buildings original construction.

**General Characteristics:** The elevator and annex are constructed from stacked dimensional lumber and covered with galvanized metal and roofed with architectural asphalt shingles. The annex has a poured concrete foundation; the elevator and office rest on a limestone foundation. The limestone foundation at the base of the elevator is 32” thick. The office is brick constructed with a metal roof covering the original wood shingles.

**Interior and Specific features:** The main features of all three buildings remain unchanged from the original except for two entry doors added to the annex. All other doors and windows are in the original locations. The only chimney is in the office and the portion extending up from the roof line has collapsed.

Country grain elevators were basic utilitarian buildings with few decorative features. On the west side entry door that passes through the limestone foundation, a brick arch was formed over the door. The office doors also had this brick arch but no longer exist at this time.

Significant interior features: The floor plan of the elevator and office remain original, the annex has been modified. The elevator floor plan consists of the lower level (grain pit), main level, and the headhouse.

The lower level contains the grain pit and is entered via one entrance door on the west side through the limestone foundation. Once inside to the south and north are crawl spaces leading to vent windows covered with hinged wooden doors. The grain pit itself is formed with stacked limestone measuring approximately 8’ X 14’. The grain legs start in this area, with the floor sloping abruptly and dropping 3.5’ to accommodate the flowing grain. The elevator is built into the side of a hill so much of the lower level is below grade.

The main level consists of the grain drive/dump, work area, steps to the headhouse, and six grain bins. The grain drive/dump measures 9’ X 36’ and is entered via two large doors—one on the north and one on the south—that were originally designed to be large enough for a team of horses and a wagon. In the floor of the grain drive are three doors that open to allow the grain to

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<sup>2</sup> According to “Grain Elevators in Minnesota” country elevators are at the small end of the capacity spectrum, compared to terminal elevators, having total capacities averaging 25,000 to 35,000 bushels but can be built to hold up to 100,000 bushels and over.



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be unloaded (dumped into the pit). Above the grain drive are three grain bins with visible grain shoot openings for loading wagons. On the southwest side of the grain drive is a small area (3' X 13') between the annex and the elevator that leads to the door entering the annex. An exterior door on the west side leads to a set of steps that go down to ground level. To the west of the grain drive is the work area (8' X 23') that consists of the grain legs, the grain bin selector, and the hopper scale. A door and a window are located on the west wall. The door is for the purpose of exiting onto the top of a grain car and is 7 ½ feet off the ground. To the north of the work area are three grain bins and to the south three more grain bins, all cribbed, measuring 7' X 7' X 30' each accessible with hinged bin doors measuring 16" X 30".

The headhouse is accessed via a wooden staircase consisting of four flights and 47 steps. The headhouse floor measures approximately 8' X 23' and is where the grain legs terminate. The grain flows from the legs into the distributor that hangs from the roof of the headhouse. The distributor is controlled via the bin selector on the work area. The headhouse has five windows; two on the east and one facing each other direction.

It appears that in the 1920s some of the elevator's mechanisms were updated. The hopper scale was replaced, a pneumatic wagon lift was added, and the Fairbanks wagon scale was replaced with one that could accommodate the introduction of the truck. Approximately a decade later, the hit and miss engine was replaced with an electric motor.

The interior of the annex was originally four 12' X 12' bins with a small inspection door located approximately 6' off the ground for each bin. The only door was located near the roofline via a permanent ladder attached to the exterior of the annex which still exists.

In order to make the annex accessible, the inside of the annex was modified in 2016 from the original. Two entrance doors were added: one on the north in between the annex and the elevator and one on the south. The interior wall dividing the four bins was removed opening up a 25' X 25' room with arches cut into the stacked lumber mirroring the design of the interior of the elevator. Wood reclaimed from corncribs from the same time period was used to create a floor over the slanted concrete that once directed grain to the auger which then carried it to the elevator. A small access door was added to the floor to show the original concrete. Due to the 4'5" drop from the south door added to the annex, a 12'x16' wooden deck was added. This room now showcases a rare look into the workmanship of the bins which was previously inaccessible.

**Deterioration:** The elevator complex has suffered greatly from deterioration and vandalism. The roofs on the annex and elevator were in disrepair for decades with large sections missing. Most windows and doors were missing, which caused a tremendous amount of rot. All below grade portions of the elevator's limestone foundation had collapsed and over half of the bricks from the office had fallen. Vandalism occurred with spray paint on the walls inside the elevator and the office bricks and the interior and exterior of the office was damaged with the use of sledge hammers. The elevator complex exterior has been shot an untold number of times with an assortment of firearms and raccoon hunters had chopped holes in exterior walls.

**Rehabilitation:** Rehabilitation started due to ongoing fundraising efforts, and in no small part, a significant matching grant from the Iowa Barn Foundation which saw value in the Ross Grain

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Elevator. Over the past two years, the elevator and the annex are now nearly complete and the office is now in the process of rehabilitation. The elevator and annex have new roofs and the foundation repair is complete. All windows and doors are in place and rotted wood repaired. Every effort has been made to keep repairs invisible. The vast majority of materials used in the rehabilitation have been salvaged from other buildings of the same vintage.

**Future plans:** There are no specific plans for the Ross Grain Elevator. The whole purpose of this project is to simply keep it around. We have opened up the annex creating a 25'X 25' room that could possibly be used in the future for small community gatherings.

### Statement of Integrity

The Ross Grain Elevator remains in its original **location** and as it relates to historic integrity is very good. The builders chose this location as it was between the platted village of Ross and the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad line. The elevator gave producers a place to sell their grain and the railroad allowed the grain elevator operators access to outside markets. The money the producers received from the elevator then could be spent on goods and services offered in Ross. Grain elevators were constructed in productive grain growing regions giving as many producers as possible the ability to deliver a wagon load of grain and be back to the farm in a day's time.

The **setting** of the Ross Grain Elevator is in the side of a small natural hill and the historic integrity of this location remains. The land surrounding the elevator consists of gently sloping hills planted in grass, trees, and fields of corn and soybeans. The setting allowed the main drive through and grain dump to be on level ground allowing horses and wagons to enter on the north side of the elevator without having to use a wooden or earthen ramp. The office is just east of the elevator and closest to the road as it was the first place the producers needed to stop. The annex is towards the back side of the elevator on the south side and its sole purpose was to store grains.

The **design** of the Ross Grain Elevator as it relates to historic integrity remains very good. The Ross Grain Elevator consists of the elevator, the annex, and the office. The design of each building works in conjunction with the other. The office contains the scale and was used to weigh the grain and determine its worth. It also provided a location for the engine that powered the elevator. The engine was a potential fire hazard, therefore the office was built with two layers of bricks to make it fire resistant. The elevator contains the mechanisms to allow the grain to be unloaded from the wagon, elevated to the top, and then distributed to the various grain bins or into a train car. The annex was the least complex building, used only for storing grain until needed at a later date. Both the annex and elevator were cribbed constructed; this provided the strength to withstand the tremendous force applied to its walls when fully loaded with grain. The elevator complex continues to hold many of its components; the hopper scale, wagon platform pit scale, grain legs, bucket conveyor, distributors, pneumatic wagon lift, air compressor and tank, wooden grain chutes, large wooden drive wheel and flexible metal train car chute. The elevator is not operational, but enough of the components remain to have a good understanding of its intended design functionality.

**Materials** used in the construction of the Ross Grain Elevator are a testament to the historic integrity of the elevator complex and remain as original. The elevator has a stacked limestone

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foundation and the framing is cribbed constructed. On top of the foundation, 2x8 dimensional lumber (Douglas Fir) was laid flat with the ends overlapping then each board was spiked together. As the building became taller, the lumber was switched to 2x6's then towards the top 2x4's. The annex's foundation is poured concrete and is also cribbed constructed using 2x6's and 2x4's. This construction technique created an extremely strong building designed to withstand the force of thousands of pounds of grain. Around 1900, the annex and the elevator were sided with galvanized metal to reduce the chances of an outside fire destroying them. The roofs of both are constructed of shiplap then covered with composite shingles. The office is built on a limestone foundation and constructed of double wall brick, due to containing the engine that powered the elevator, was designed to be fire resistant. The original wood shake roof is partially visible under a metal roof added many years ago. During the rehabilitation efforts, materials salvaged from agricultural building of the same era were used whenever possible making repairs purposely difficult to notice.

The **workmanship** of the elevator complex is apparent as it relates to historic structural integrity. The crib construction and the ability to stack the lumber straight and plumb and form the necessary rooms and bins took craftsmanship. The office is double wall brick with arches above the doors and windows. The fact that these buildings remain at all after the decades of abuse, vandalism, and lack of care that they endured is a testament to their workmanship.

The Ross Grain Elevator **association** as it relates to historic integrity is relevant by the association of agriculture and commerce. Without the elevator, the town of Ross would never have existed. The elevator gave the local farmers a place to sell their commodities, which led to the town being established. Entrepreneurs opened businesses in Ross, homes, churches and schools were then constructed. The elevator's association with its original function and identity as an important component of the economy in Ross remains physically evident in its rural setting among planted fields; remaining equipment, such as the hopper scale, grain legs, and wagon platform; and position to the west of the railroad berm that once was a part of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad.

The Ross Grain Elevator retains a great deal of the **feeling** of its historic roots as it relates to historic integrity. Its location, setting, association, design, materials and workmanship have been mostly retained. It's a great example of a historic cribbed constructed wooden grain elevator and visitors leave with a better understanding and appreciation of agricultural history.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

Agriculture  
Commerce  
Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

c. 1881 – 1970  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

c. 1881  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

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

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Stuart, Charles  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Ross Grain Elevator is locally significant under Criterion A for its historic role in sustaining agriculture and commerce in and around Ross and was also built by a prominent founder of several local towns throughout Iowa. It is also locally significant under Criterion C as a relatively intact example of grain elevator construction from the late nineteenth century. The main elevator structure was most likely built in 1881 on the western edge of Ross, Iowa, along the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad line that once ran through Audubon County. The period of significance starts c.1881 (the approximate date of construction) and ends in 1970 when the elevator was abandoned according to the previous owner. The elevator ceased operation due to the costs involved in its upkeep, especially when compared to the low operating costs of the modern stand-alone galvanized metal grain bin with an integrated dryer. There is no available documentation which states the actual date it was built, however, research has shown that Captain Charles Stuart was instrumental in its construction and there is evidence found within the elevator that it was built in 1881.

## Narrative Statement of Significance

Grain elevators were invented in 1842 in Buffalo, New York by Joseph Dart and Robert Dunbar to assist in unloading and storing grain transported via the Erie Canal. They were inspired by the steam-powered flour mills invented by Oliver Evans in 1804, which used a bucket elevator conveyor belt system to move grain through the mill. Later, grain elevators were adapted to the requirements of loading, storing, and transporting grain from interior farmlands using railroads. The elevators were located in small towns approximately 10 miles apart which assisted farmers so they could take their harvest by horse and wagon to market and return home the same day.

Grain elevators built in this country are an iconic example of the American pioneering spirit—people overcoming insurmountable odds in an effort to feed their families and the country—the Ross Grain Elevator is a rare remaining example of this spirit and gave birth to the town of Ross. In the surrounding states, elevators listed in the National Register of Historic Places include two in South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska and Illinois; one in North Dakota; and none currently listed in Missouri or Iowa.

### Architecture:

There are two types of elevator functional types: “terminal” and “country” elevators. The Ross Grain Elevator is a country elevator and is classified as such in relation to how it receives and transfers the grain from the structure. The *Multiple Property Documentation Form of Grain Elevators in Minnesota* by Robert Frame states that the country elevator was built with cribbed bins until the World War I era and received grain in small wagon and truck lots (100-150 bu.) and transferred it into railcar lots (boxcar, 2,000 bu.; hopper car, 3,000 bu.). The terminal elevator receives the railcar lots and transfers the grain into barge, ship, or other railcar lots.

After 1900, all-wood construction of elevators declined in favor of alternative building materials that were fire resistant: concrete, steel, tile, or brick. The reasoning was that fire and fire insurance rates were making fireproof forms of construction materials desirable. Fires were common with elevators whether from a spark from a steam engine, grass fires, or dust

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explosions. At this time, most wooden elevators, including the Ross Grain Elevator, were covered in corrugated galvanized steel siding, or termed “iron-clad”, for fire protection.

According to the Founder and President of the Country Grain Elevator Historical Society and vintage grain elevator expert, Bruce Selyem of Montana, the Ross Grain Elevator is one of the oldest and quite possibly the oldest elevator left in Iowa. He has visited 5,200 grain elevators in North America and hundreds in Iowa, including Ross, and says the Ross Grain Elevator is different from anything he has ever seen regarding its shape, age and construction. Bruce notes that the unique size of the headhouse, in relation to the storage area where the headhouse is as tall as the building itself, can be deemed architecturally significant. The foundation is constructed of stacked limestone. The vast majority of wooden elevators had poured concrete and this is a good indicator of its age and rarity. Finally, the elevator is built into the side of a hill bank-barn style as most were constructed on flat ground. Bruce stated “Grain elevators were first built in North America beginning in the late 1860s. The Ross elevator is from this era, it may be the oldest example in Iowa with few left in the United States” (oral interview, June 5, 2014).

According to oral history and photographs, this same piece of property once contained another elevator, train depot, stock yards, milling operation and numerous other outbuildings but the elevator complex is the only element in this list still in existence. The elevated railroad bed is still visible on an adjacent property and several depressions in the earth remain, otherwise no visible signs of the other historic features remain. An archeological investigation was not part of this nomination. Additional research may identify archeological sites that could contribute to the overall historical significance of the property.

The Ross Grain Elevator is significant for many reasons:

- It was built before the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where most wooden elevators remaining were built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- There were two ways to build a wooden elevator at the time—cribbed or balloon framing with cable bracing. The Ross Grain Elevator is cribbed constructed, known for its strength and expense as an enormous amount of lumber is needed to build. After the foundation was constructed, dimensional lumber was laid flat, with ends overlapping alternatively then spiked together with large nails. The Ross Grain Elevator’s first layer is 2X8s, then 2X6s with the upper reaches eventually becoming 2X4s.
- Originally, lap siding covered the cribbed construction and was painted red, but due to so many wooden elevators burning to the ground from steam engine sparks, new elevators built after 1900 were covered with steel. The Ross Grain Elevator and its annex were sided with steel c.1900. The fire danger was the demise of the wooden grain elevator. Technological changes now offered fire resistant steel and concrete grain elevators. This combined with the high cost of wooden grain elevator construction helped to make the old wood form obsolete.
- Most wooden elevators were built on a flat piece of land with a poured concrete foundation. The Ross Grain Elevator is unusual in that it was built into the side of a hill similar to a bank barn. The main section of the elevator’s foundation is constructed of limestone.
- Most of the few remaining wooden elevators have been greatly modernized or

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surrounded with newer construction. The Ross Grain Elevator is well preserved both in terms of materials and design as well as setting.

Research has shown the Ross Grain Elevator was built by Captain Charles Stuart c.1881. Charles Stuart was a pioneering entrepreneur and adventurer. Born in Vermont in 1826, by age 23 he owned his own business as a successful merchandiser. This job while lucrative became too confining, so he sold it. He invested his money in the livestock business. This new venture allowed him more freedom to travel and see the sights near Vermont and as far away as Canada. According to a post on June 21, 1999 by Gregory Rogers on the website RootsWeb.com, "Being of ambitious, energetic and restless disposition" he wanted to see more than just the Northeast.

In 1853 Charles Stuart was hired by Fairbanks Scales and moved to Chicago. According to the *History of Adair County Iowa and its people*; "For four and one half years traveled over the settled portions of the western states". Rogers on RootsWeb.com recalls, "It was in this way that he made his first acquaintance with Iowa, traveling across her prairies when settlers were scarce and towns far apart, separated by unmeasured miles of trackless space-no roads, no trees, no houses-only billowing seas of waving grass".

By 1860 with the impending possibility of Civil War, Charles Stuart formed a rifle company with his neighbors and other volunteers in Elmira Township, Stark County, Illinois, called the Elmira Rifles. Once the Civil War began, he was unanimously voted Captain by his men thus forming the Union Army Company B 19<sup>th</sup> Regiment. He was able to take part in active operations of the war until his health failed and he was honorably discharged.

After the Civil War, he moved to Iowa taking advantage of his connections made during the war by becoming an advancing agent with the Chicago and Northwest Railroad.

The *History of Audubon, Iowa 1878-1978* shows Charles Stuart was instrumental in founding the towns of Stuart, Iowa (his namesake), Adair, and Audubon (where he is buried). He built the Audubon grain elevator in 1878. He and his brother-in-law, George Gray, built a steam powered elevator in far northern Audubon County in the town of Gray in the 1880s. The *Biographical History of Shelby and Audubon Counties, Iowa*, states that Charles Stuart and his son had an active grain trade in Ross.



Bob Nelson with son, Ben, holding a board they found buried while digging out the elevator grain pit. The board has the possible initials of Charles Stuart and his son, William Stuart, carved into it and the year 1881.

Verbal accounts from old time, unnamed Ross locals mentioned that construction of the Ross Grain Elevator may have started prior to the railroad being constructed. Verifying this, during renovations of the elevator, a carved board was found with what appear to be Charles Stuart and his son's initials and the year 1881. The railroad was constructed in 1882.



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Charles Stuart and his son had both died by 1890. The next evidence of ownership comes from Davidkusel.com *History of Manning*. The website shows the elevator was in possession of W.J. Leake and Sons in 1899.

**Agriculture & Commerce:** The significant years of the elevator began with its construction in 1881 and ends with its abandonment in 1970. The original elevators are significant as they helped settle portions of the country by giving grain producers a place to sell their commodities. Prior to the Ross Grain Elevator (and other elevators of the time) grain would have to be bagged, hand loaded onto wagons, and then taken many miles by horse to the nearest flat house before being unloaded. Flat houses were warehouse type structures with a large flat floor, usually next to a railroad, designed to hold bags of grain. Then they were loaded on a train one bag at time, or sold to local large ranches making large scale grain production all but impossible. Grain elevators changed all of this allowing grain to be handled in bulk and mechanically loaded into train cars.

All grain elevators of this time period were significant components of the local agricultural economy. According to "Architectural Resources and Settlement Landscapes of Hardin and Grundy Counties in Northcentral Iowa: A Historic Architectural Survey of Primary Roads Project" by Marlin R. Ingalls, the period after the Civil War saw land use changes in the expansion of railroads that connected towns and farms to elevators. Section line county roads were increasingly being laid out by government land surveys by legal township and range in a grid pattern. The growth of towns and farm productivity were closely related which led to the increase of merchants and farmers to the area. A town on a railroad line was more significant and compared to one just on a main road or solely on a watercourse. It was at this time the country elevator became a sentinel of the prairie which drew local and regional harvest of grain before it would be shipped by rail to a larger area.

The elevators allowed pioneers and farmers a place to sell their commodities and most elevators paid cash at the time of sale. Thanks to the elevators, towns sprung up around them selling services and goods with the cash flow provided by the elevators. The Ross Grain Elevator is historically significant not only due to its construction technology, but it also gave farmers at that time a place to sell their commodities, helping to open portions of northern Audubon County to settlement. These once booming towns quickly declined when railroad connections were severed with the elevator.

The Ross Grain Elevator, similar to those once found in many small rural communities, was the local peripheral component of larger regional grain companies. Small elevators became federally regulated nationally in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the sweeping changes of the Federal Warehouse System Act of 1916. Owners could voluntarily accept the government regulation requirements that standardized grain shipment and sales. This eventually led the Ross Grain Elevator being owned by larger grain conglomerates such as Updike Grain Company, Bartlett/Frazier, Trans-Mississippi Grain Co. based in Chicago and Omaha. According to the *Audubon News Guide* of Feb. 27, 1933, the Trans-Mississippi Grain Co. made a substantial investment in the Ross Grain Elevator; "A half-dozen specially constructed open cribs have been built at Ross to date."

According to newspaper clippings dated March 21, 1939, the Updike Grain Company bought

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elevators in Iowa and Nebraska from the Norris Grain Company which had recently acquired the Bartlett/Frazier Company. Ross was listed as one of the locations of the elevators purchased. The elevator was a part of the Federal Warehouse System. A copy of a form from that organization dated 1937 lists the Bartlett/Frazier Company as the name of the Warehouseman. The Bartlett/Frazier Company of Chicago assumed ownership of the Trans-Mississippi Grain Company in 1933.

By the 1930s, cars and trucks had begun to take business away from small towns like Ross and the elevator business began to decline. From the early 1930 on through World War II, maintenance was important for elevators continued use, but, with increasing technology, it was getting too expensive to compete. "Grain Elevators in Minnesota" states that a number of factors were pushing owners to install faster handling equipment: "large boxcars, large trucks, combines and hard roads have joined forces to make the old time slow handling elevator a most expensive luxury."<sup>73</sup> This meant generally larger, stronger, and more dependable scales; faster and more convenient dumps; larger capacity legs; more efficient head-drives, distributors and cleaners; and sometimes more bins, all to accommodate the larger and larger trucks, which by 1938 were beginning to include semi-trailers".

According to an interview with daughter Susan Sievers, the Fred Sievers family purchased the elevator in the late 1930s for \$1000 from the Updike Grain Company conglomerate. The land the elevator sits on was acquired by Fred Sievers, Sr., for \$225 from the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in 1953 according to the Quit Claim Deed dated August 11, 1953. This was also the time when "hobos" and "gypsies" were common, as were recalled by locals, and were allowed to camp in the "waste" area at the south end of the elevator property which was also the location of the Ross town dump.

Until 1970, the Sievers family used the elevator to buy grain from local producers to be used in its cattle operation, but by then, the elevator was too outdated and expensive to maintain. The elevator was virtually abandoned for the next 45 years until the Nelson family purchased it in 2014.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

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- "Eastern Plains and Front Range Grain Elevators of Colorado, Reconnaissance Report and Historic Context." Report prepared by Kris Christensen. University of Colorado Denver Center of Preservation Research College of Architecture and Planning, June 2009. Grain Elevator Flow Diagram illustration by Jeanne Ramsay, University of Colorado Denver.
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- *History of Manning* (1881-1910), illustrated by F.L. Robb, published by Berthold Kraus [www.DavidKusel.com/centennial/148mill.htm](http://www.DavidKusel.com/centennial/148mill.htm), accessed March 20, 2017.
- Ingalls, Marlin R. "Architectural Resources and Settlement Landscapes of Hardin and Grundy Counties in Northcentral Iowa: A Historic Architectural Survey of Primary Roads Project F-20-5(53)-20-42 Relocated U.S. 20." HADB #00-023.
- Map of Iowa, [http://www.vidiani.com/maps/maps\\_of\\_north\\_america/maps\\_of\\_usa/iowa\\_state/large\\_regions\\_map\\_of\\_iowa\\_state.jpg](http://www.vidiani.com/maps/maps_of_north_america/maps_of_usa/iowa_state/large_regions_map_of_iowa_state.jpg), accessed April 14, 2018.
- *Official Directory and Atlas Naming Shippers of Staple Commodities*. Lanward 1901.
- Oral interview with Betty Sievers family; owners of the Ross Grain Elevator since the 1930s, December 2013. Letter from Betty Sievers, November 9, 2014.
- Oral interview with Bruce Selyem President of the Country Grain Elevator Historical Society, June 5, 2014.
- Property boundaries, <http://Beacon.Schneidercorp.com> by The Schneider Corporation, accessed March 28, 2017.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
  
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 1.71 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Latitude: 1252522.64                      Longitude: 649361.70

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927    or    NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15 N                      Easting: 340254                      Northing: 4626430

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## Verbal Boundary Description

### Geographical Data

That part of a portion of the plat of the Town of Ross, recorded in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds in Audubon County, Iowa on July 1882 in book B village Record page 322 designated as Warehouse Lots and part of the right of way and Depot Grounds of the Iowa South Western Railway Company (now the Chicago and North Western Railway Company) all situated and being in the Northeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter of section 4 Township 80 North Range 35 West of the Fifth Principal Meridian bounded and described as follows, to wit: Beginning at the point of intersection of the North line, extended West of Main Street in said Town of Ross with the Easterly line of said Depot Grounds said line being a line parallel with and 161.5 feet Easterly of the center line of the Main track (now removed) of said Railway Company as the same was originally constructed over and across the said northeast quarter of the Northeast quarter; thence Northerly along the Easterly line of said Depot grounds a distance of one hundred feet; thence Westerly at right angles to the said line of Depot Grounds a distance of 121.5 feet to a point 40 feet distant Easterly measured at right angles from the center line of said main track; thence Southerly parallel with the center line of said Main track a distance of 600 feet; thence East parallel with the South line of said Northwest Quarter of the Northeast Quarter a distance of 121.5 feet more or less to the Easterly line of said Depot Grounds; thence Northerly along the Easterly line of said Depot grounds to the point of beginning.

### Boundary Justification

This is the land historically associated with the Ross Grain Elevator.

---

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Robert Nelson, owner, Ross Grain Elevator

Organization: Ross Grain Elevator

Street & Number: 5950 Main Street

City or Town: Audubon State: Iowa Zip code: 50025

E-mail: [save.ross.elevator@gmail.com](mailto:save.ross.elevator@gmail.com)

Telephone: 712-304-5809 (cell)

Date: August 29, 2017

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As former owners of the Ross Elevator, we are extremely happy that new owners, Bob and Janet Nelson have been successful in applying for and receiving a matching grant to help restore and preserve the elevator as a historical landmark.

The elevator was purchased by Fred Sievers<sup>Sr</sup> in 1936 from the railroad company. He used it for storage of large quantities of corn used in his cattle feeding business. Mr. Sievers also purchased corn and loaded grain cars out of the elevator to be shipped to Texas in times of drought. The railroad was dismantled in about 1960 and this was no longer possible.

The elevator was significant during the depression in the 1930's as a place where farmers could sell a small wagon load of corn or oats to get a few dollars to buy groceries each week.

The building has been standing for at least 130 years until the present time. With some expert care and attention afforded by this grant, it can be preserved for many years to come and put to some useful purpose.

Betty Sievers  
Nov. 9, 2014

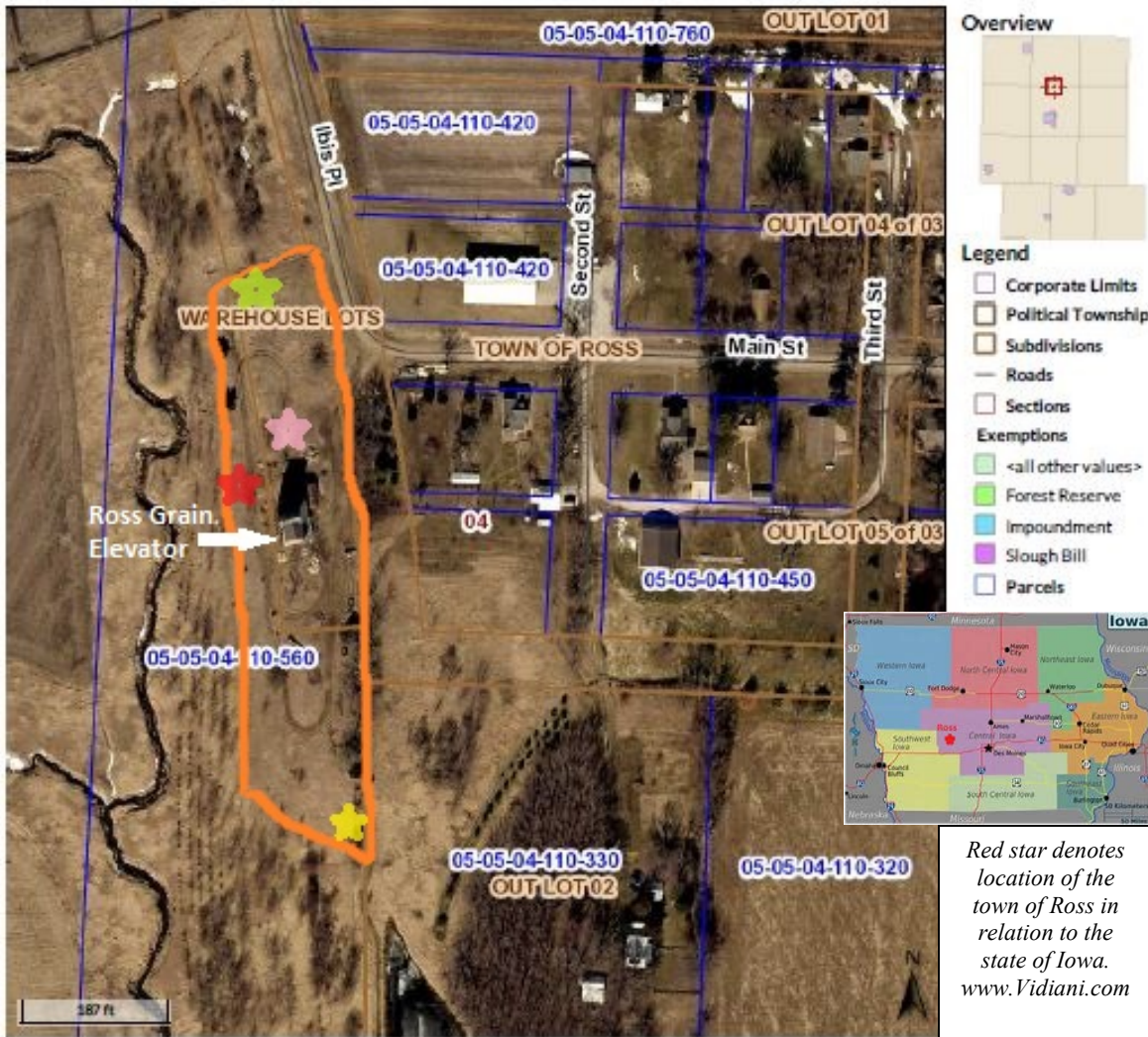
Letter written by previous owner Betty Sievers whose family has owned the Ross Grain Elevator since the 1930s.

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*Beacon overview of Audubon County, IA, March 28, 2017, with current property boundaries and past historical areas of interest: green star: stockyard; pink star: non-extant grain elevator; red star: train depot; yellow star: town dump/gypsy & hobo campsite.*

 **Beacon**<sup>TM</sup> Audubon County, IA



Disclaimer: The maps included in this website do not represent a survey and are compiled from official records, including plats, surveys, recorded deeds, and contracts, and only contain information required for government purposes. No warranties, expressed or implied, are provided for the data herein, its use or its interpretation. Audubon County assumes no responsibility for use or interpretation of the data. Any person that relies on any information obtained from this site does so at his or her own risk. All critical information should be independently verified.

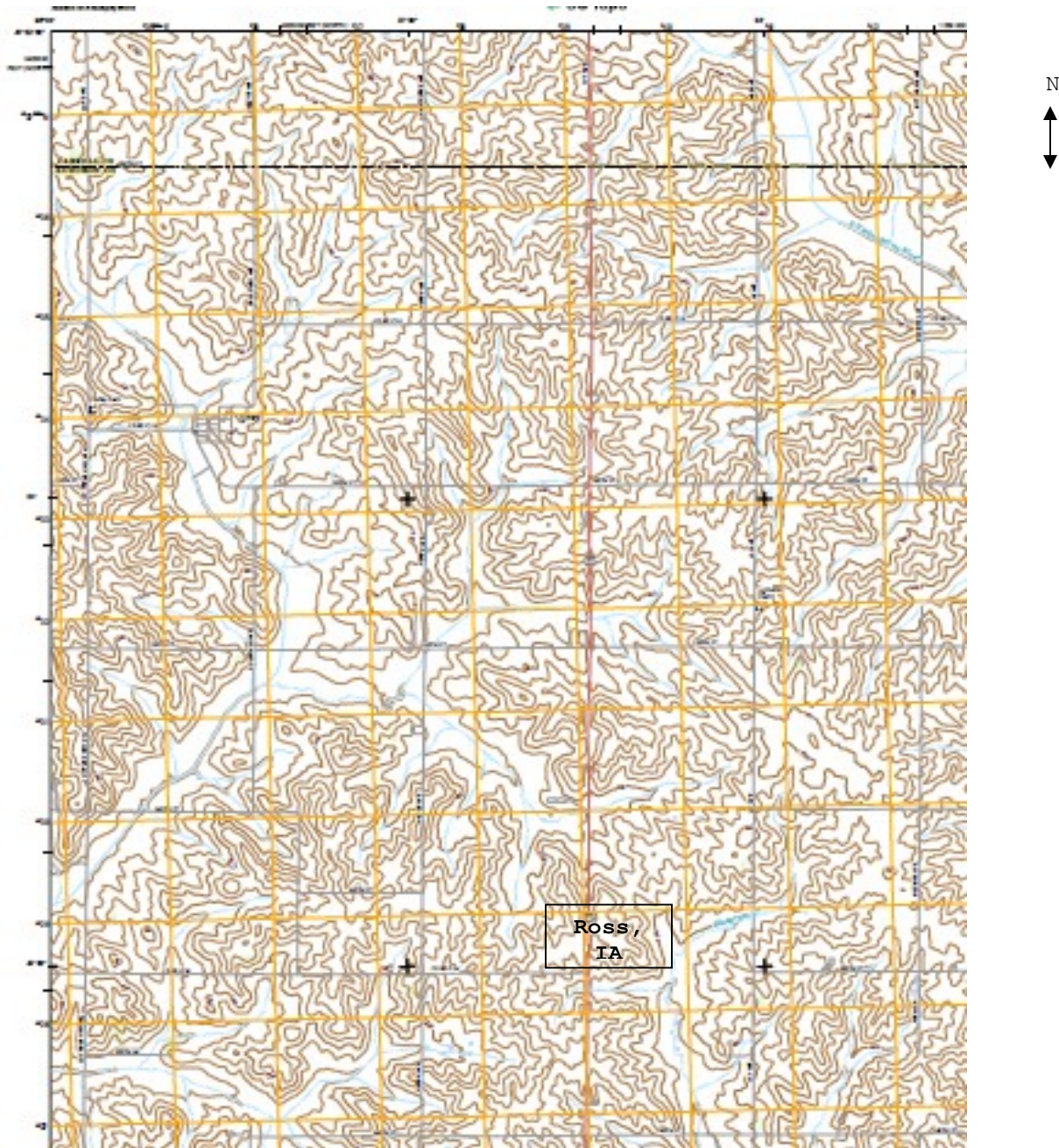
Date created: 3/28/2017  
Last Data Uploaded: 3/28/2017 4:33:37 AM

 Developed by  
The Schneider Corporation

*Source: [www.Beacon.Schneidercorp.com](http://www.Beacon.Schneidercorp.com) by The Schneider Corporation, accessed March 28, 2017.*

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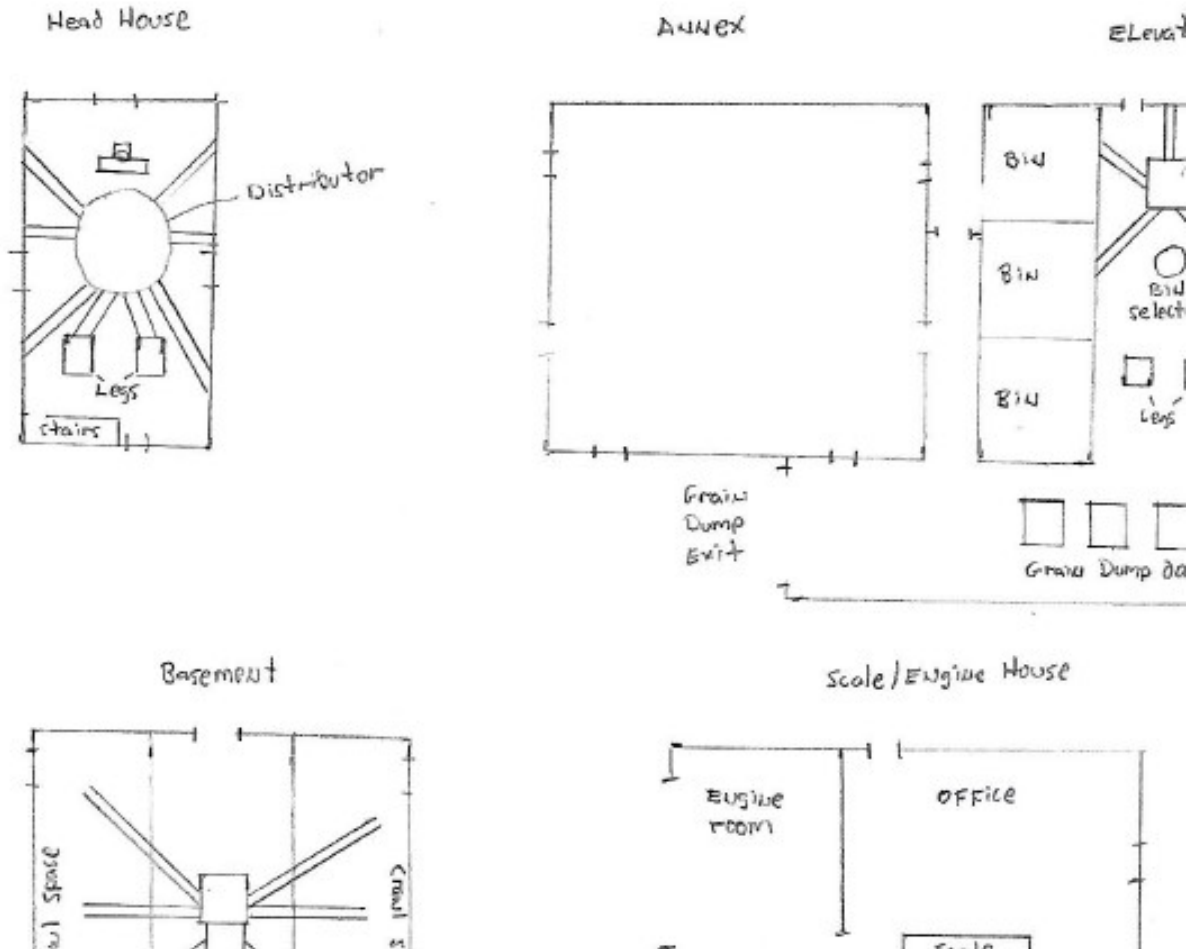
*Gray Quadrangle 7.5 Minute Series.  
Topographical location of Ross, IA., U.S. Department of the Interior U.S.  
Geological Survey of Audubon County, IA.*



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Present Floorplan.



*Floor plan of the Ross Grain Elevator including the headhouse, basement, annex, and office/engine/scale house drawn by Bob Nelson, March 12, 2017.*

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*Sketch Map of Ross Grain Elevator property provided by the Federal System in 1937. It shows the office to the east, the elevator with its 12 bins, and the annex with four bins to the south of the elevator. The rail road lines for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad were on the west side of the buildings.*

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### **Photographs/Photo Log**

1 of 5. View of the office and the elevator as seen from the northeast. The office is still under rehabilitation. The elevator and annex are nearly complete. (Ross Iowa Grain Elevator, Ross, IA. Audubon County, Iowa. Photographer, Robert Nelson, owner. Photo taken March 2017.)

2 of 5. View of the elevator as seen from the northwest. Most of the visible portions of the limestone foundation are original, all portions below grade had collapsed. The collapsed portions of the foundation have been reconstructed and stabilized with new concrete footings. Rotten wood was replaced throughout the exterior and interior, reclaimed windows were used, new doors were built, steel siding reattached, and a new roof was installed. (Ross Iowa Grain Elevator, Ross, IA. Audubon County, Iowa. Photographer, Robert Nelson, owner. Photo taken March 2017.)

3 of 5. View of the elevator as seen from the west. This is the backside showing where the Chicago & Northwestern train would get loaded with grain from the grain spout shown near the window. (Ross Iowa Grain Elevator, Ross, IA. Audubon County, Iowa. Photographer, Robert Nelson, owner. Photo taken March 2017.)

4 of 5. View of the annex and elevator as seen from the southwest. This shows the annex and how the elevator was built into the side of a hill which was unique construction for a grain elevator. The elevators foundation is limestone, the annex is approximately 20 years newer and has a poured concrete foundation. (Ross Iowa Grain Elevator, Ross, IA. Audubon County, Iowa. Photographer, Robert Nelson, owner. Photo taken March 2017.)

5 of 5. View of the annex, elevator and office from the southeast. Prior to rehabilitation, the East wall of the elevator was deteriorated and its foundation collapsed exposing the interior of the elevator. Now, the overhang has been re-constructed, a new wall and foundation were put in place. The annex, which consisted of four grain bins with four small ports for access into the bins, was opened up. A door and a deck were added. (Ross Iowa Grain Elevator, Ross, IA. Audubon County, Iowa. Photographer, Robert Nelson, owner. Photo taken March 2017.)

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*4 of 5. View of the annex and elevator as seen from the southwest. This shows the annex and how the elevator was built into the side of a hill which was unique construction for a grain elevator. The elevators foundation is limestone, the annex is approximately 20 years newer and has a poured concrete foundation. (Ross Iowa Grain Elevator, Ross, IA. Audubon County, Iowa. Photographer, Robert Nelson, owner. Photo taken March 2017.)*

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*5 of 5. View of the annex, elevator and office from the southeast. Prior to rehabilitation, the East wall of the elevator was deteriorated and its foundation collapsed exposing the interior of the elevator. Now, the overhang has been re-constructed, a new wall and foundation were put in place. The annex, which consisted of four grain bins with four small ports for access into the bins, was opened up. A door and a deck were added. (Ross Iowa Grain Elevator, Ross, IA. Audubon County, Iowa. Photographer, Robert Nelson, owner. Photo taken March 2017.)*













UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Ross Grain Elevator

Multiple Name: \_\_\_\_\_

State & County: IOWA, Audubon

Date Received: 5/7/2018      Date of Pending List: 5/30/2018      Date of 16th Day: 6/14/2018      Date of 45th Day: 6/21/2018      Date of Weekly List: \_\_\_\_\_

Reference number: SG100002575

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

- |                                       |  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal       | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL            | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape       | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver       | <input type="checkbox"/> National        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other        | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
|                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG             |  |

Accept       Return       Reject      6/20/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Ross Grain Elevator is locally significant under National Register Criteria A and C in the areas of Agriculture, Commerce, and Architecture. Set on a stacked limestone foundation, the circa 1881 grain elevator is an excellent example of a pre-World War I wood cribbed country elevator, re-clad in metal siding around 1900. The 70' tall elevator is complemented with a brick office/scale house and cribbed wood annex. The elevator complex played a significant role in support of regional agriculture and commerce, providing an essential link between farm and market.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept NR Criteria A and C.

Reviewer Paul Lusignan      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2229      Date 6/20/2018

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : **Yes**

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF  
CULTURAL AFFAIRS

KIM REYNOLDS, GOVERNOR  
ADAM GREGG, LT. GOVERNOR

CHRIS KRAMER, ACTING DIRECTOR

May 2, 2018

IOWA ARTS  
COUNCIL

PRODUCE  
IOWA

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

STATE HISTORICAL  
MUSEUM OF IOWA

STATE HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

STATE HISTORIC SITES

STATE HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION  
OFFICE OF IOWA

IOWA HISTORICAL  
FOUNDATION

J. Paul Loether, Deputy Keeper and Chief  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Loether:

The following National Register nomination(s) from Iowa are enclosed for your review and listing if acceptable.

**Ross Grain Elevator**

The Ross Grain Elevator is locally significant under Criterion A for its historic role in sustaining agriculture and commerce in and around Ross and was also built by a prominent founder of several local towns throughout Iowa. It is also locally significant under Criterion C as a relatively intact example of grain elevator construction from the late nineteenth century. The main elevator structure was most likely built in 1881 on the western edge of Ross, Iowa, along the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad line that once ran through Audubon County. The period of significance starts c.1881 (the approximate date of construction) and ends in 1970 when the elevator was abandoned according to the previous owner.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Laura Sadowsky  
State Historian and National Register Coordinator  
State Historical Society of Iowa

Enclosures.

