

2009

OCT 16 1989

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name : Robert and Esther Armstrong House
other names/site number Pleasant Hill

2. Location

street & number 370 34th Street, SE not for publication
city, town Cedar Rapids vicinity
state Iowa code IA county Linn code IA 113 zip code 52403

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	1 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
		1	1 Total

Name of related multiple property listing: NA
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.
David L. ...
Signature of certifying official Bureau of Historic Preservation Date 10/11/89
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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):
Alana Byers Entered in the National Register 11/16/89
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OF USE

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / Single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Regional vernacular

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone

walls Limestone

roof Shingles

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Significant Person

Period of Significance

1933

Significant Dates

1933

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Grant Wood

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Linn County Historical Society
Cedar Rapids, IA 52403

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 3.09 acres.

UTM References

A

1	5
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6	1	4	5	6	0
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4	6	4	8	8	0	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Zone Easting Northing

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Grant Wood Forest 1st.
Lot 8

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

1 acre = house lot
2.09 acre = Forest Reserve.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mrs. Eudora Seyfer

organization Linn County Historical Society date 10 July, 1989

street & number PO Box 823 telephone (319) 362-1501

city or town Cedar Rapids, IA state IA zip code 52406

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1

CFN-259-1116

DESCRIPTION OF PLEASANT HILL

Sited in a wooded area on one of the highest elevations in Cedar Rapids, the Robert and Esther Armstrong House is a 2½ story, native stone structure that rests on foundations of the same material, features eight-over-eight and eight-over-twelve wood sash windows with large stone lintels, and is capped with a medium pitched gable roof with interior end chimneys. Many of the house's features, including doorway entries, fireplaces, paneling, ceiling plaster work, and closets, are almost exact reproductions or adaptations of those in pioneer houses Grant Wood and the Armstrongs visited in the area surrounding Cedar Rapids. Stylistically, the house is a strange hybrid. Essentially, it is an almost archeologically correct copy of local vernacular stone houses that exhibit a Greek Revival influence in their window and door treatments, and could perhaps be described as stylized vernacular.

Ground was broken for the house in October 1932, and construction was completed in the early fall of 1933. The house is set back 275 feet from the street and 3½ acres of land are included in the property. This size is necessary in order to provide the proper setting for the home. The gardens and orchard are at the rear of the house and many ancient oak, hickory, and maple trees grace the property. This hilltop was once an Indian campsite. It is also the site of a historic old road which ran from Prairie du Chien to the territorial capitol in Iowa City. To preserve the contours of this old road, Mrs. Armstrong built a dry wall for spring flowers on the north side. It is believed that this is the only preserved site of the old road which was deep-rutted from the wheels of covered wagons.

The Armstrong house stands out because it is a stone house, built from random-sized creamy-beige Stone City limestone. It resembles the pioneer homes built in the mid-1880s in the vicinity of the Stone City quarries. There are no similar homes in the area.

The only change in the original house is the roof. Because of fire department regulations, this was changed from

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wood shingles to asbestos composition. However, there have been no other removals, additions, or rearrangements of any kind and the Armstrongs have carefully preserved the home exactly as designed by Grant Wood.

Of special interest are the two-ton stone lintels located above the front door and the large south windows, as well as the one-ton lintels over the other doors of the house. It was necessary for these lintels to be hoisted into place by a derrick.

The lights at the front door are of special note. Because Grant Wood wanted simple, unostentatious lighting, he recessed one frosted light on each side of the front door, countersunk into deep cups in the stone.

The exterior shutters on the first floor actually open and close.

The unique design of the screened porch at the rear of the house is also of interest. Grant Wood remembered seeing a porch with arches of the type used here. With Esther Armstrong and Bruce McKay, he set out to find it. When they managed to locate it, Grant Wood designed the porch with its octagonal pillars and graceful arches.

Grant Wood wanted an arbor near the kitchen as a place for outdoor food preparation. A wooden structure with a gate leading into it and a seat built on either side, the arbor provides a shady retreat for shelling peas or shucking corn.

Wood also designed the front gate on 34th Street SE at the front of the property. He showed the carpenter how to "adze" (Wood's term) the post which supports the name, "Pleasant Hill."

Directly behind the house is a garden surrounded by a low stone wall. At the rear of the garden is a semi-circular garden seat which Grant Wood designed using huge stones which he salvaged from an abandoned mausoleum at Oak Hill Cemetery. This seat is centered exactly opposite the large bay window in the dining room of the house, creating a unique symmetrical arrangement and a charming view from the dining room. A round table in front of the stone seat is made from the mill wheel from a mill which belonged to Mr. Armstrong's maternal grandfather, William Cooper. (The mill was located on the Cedar River at the spot that it now approximately 100 First Avenue NE., Cedar Rapids.)

The first floor of the house consists of front hallway

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with staircase, living room, dining room, breakfast room, kitchen, den, half-bath and back hall with staircase. There is also an attached double garage accessible from the back hall as well as the screened porch.

Of special note are the ceiling light fixtures which are surrounded by circular medallion-like designs in the plaster. These resemble the plaster work which supported kerosene pull-down lamps in the ceilings of old homes.

Focal point of the large living room is the fireplace. Copied from the fireplace in the Perkins Tavern, it has a simple fluted design on either side of the brick facing. Above the mantle, board-and-batten wood panelling extends to the ceiling.

Board-and-batten panelling is used generously both upstairs and downstairs, always painted the same soft gray-green putty color as the woodwork. Many cupboards and closets are built into this panelling as they were in pioneer homes.

Iron hardware with steeple-shaped hinge pins and white china doorknobs are used throughout the house. These are authentic and were purchased in 1933 from an old wholesale firm in Kansas City which still had a few in stock.

The fireplace in the library is also of special interest. It is set diagonally across the corner of the room and the bricks are painted. Grant Wood designed iron hooks to hold the children's Christmas stockings as well as the fire screen which is made from wrought iron.

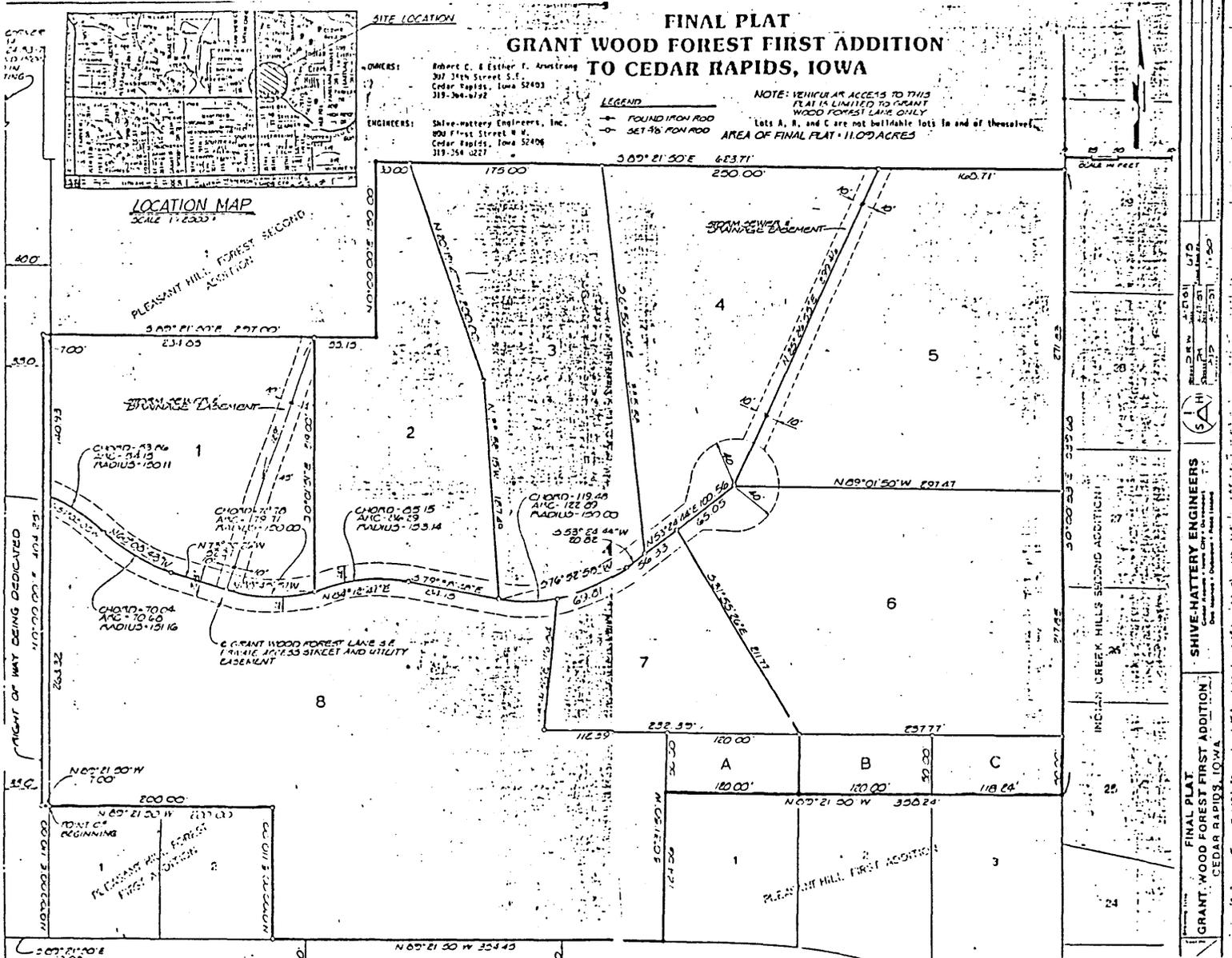
The second floor consists of four bedrooms and three bathrooms, as well as two rooms over the garage which were planned as the maid's quarters. The same pioneer simplicity is evident upstairs.

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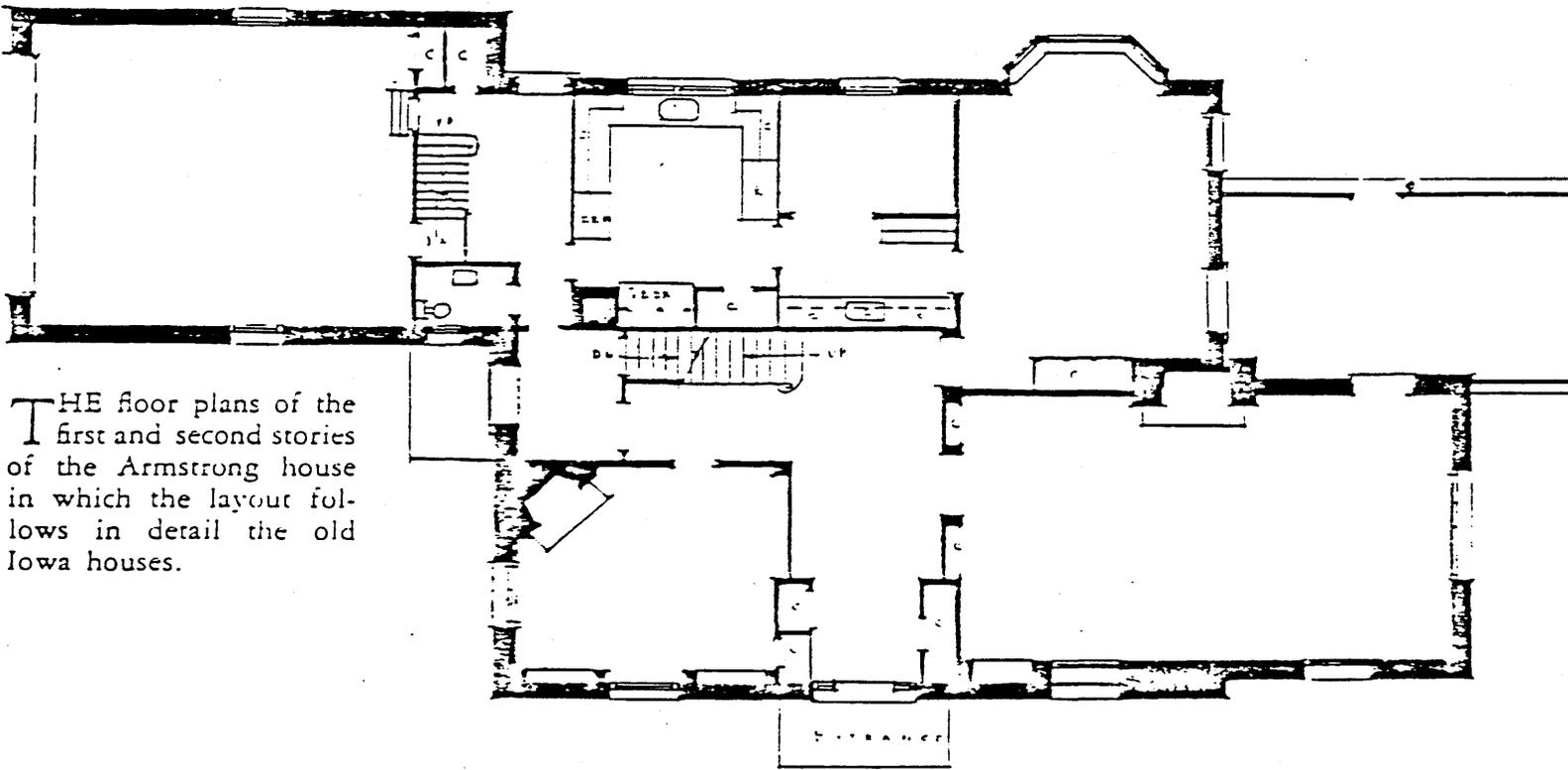


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

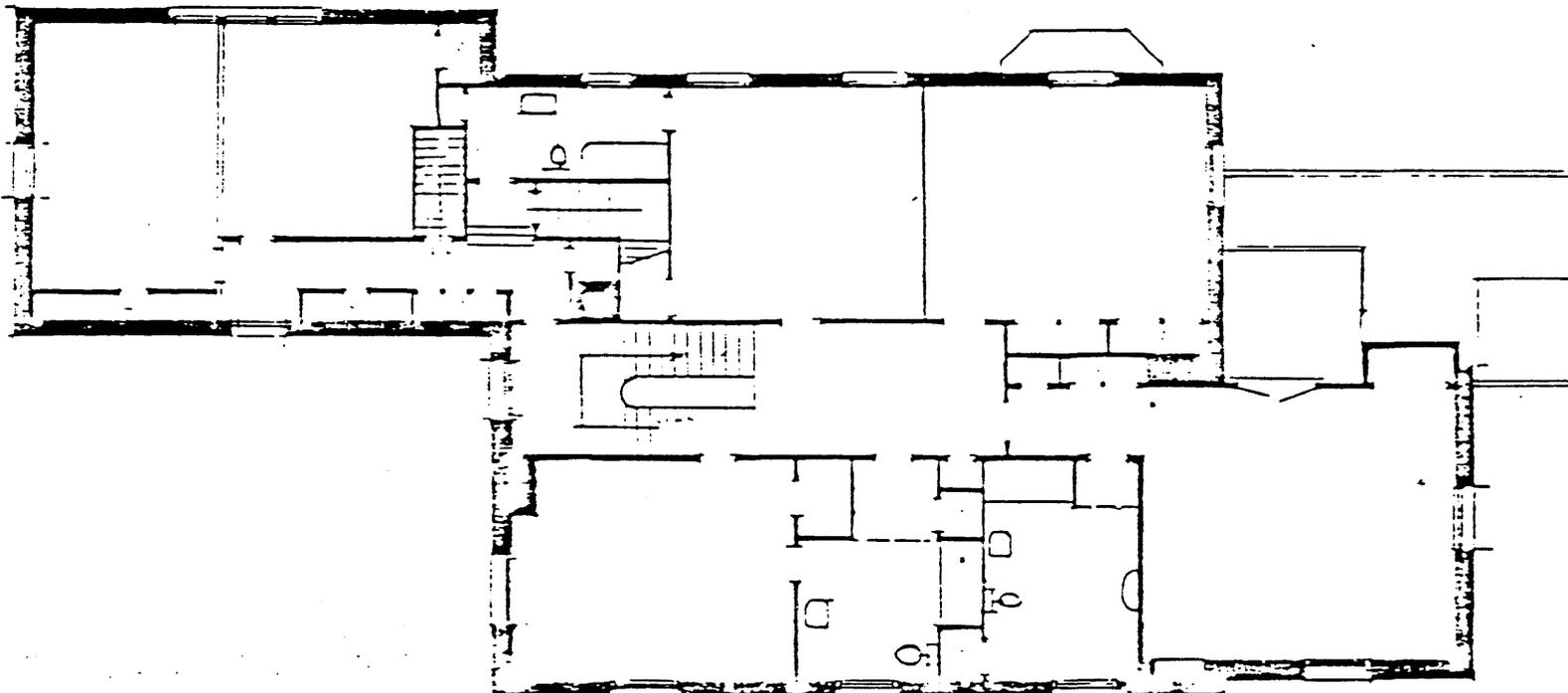
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THE floor plans of the first and second stories of the Armstrong house in which the layout follows in detail the old Iowa houses.



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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Robert and Esther Armstrong House testifies to Grant Wood's considerable talents as an architectural designer and the impact of his Regionalist Credo on those designs. Although best recognized for his paintings, Wood had considerable interest in and talent for interior and exterior design, and the Armstrong House is one of many (fourteen are documented) such projects he undertook in Cedar Rapids and one of two residences in that city that he designed in their entirety. Wood ardently believed that art and architecture should reflect the past traditions and craftsmanship and native materials of an area. In designing this house and in directing its construction, he based its exterior and interior on early stone houses near Stone City, Waubeek, Viola, and Manchester and utilized locally quarried building stone in its construction. The property is significant under Criterion C as the work of a master designer.

Between 1925 and 1933, Grant Wood supported himself and his mother and managed to buy the painting supplies he needed by designing and decorating homes. The Armstrong home was the last of these, and it is the architectural manifestation of the regionalist philosophy for which Grant Wood became famous. Architecturally, Pleasant Hill is as regionalist as is "American Gothic," the painting which rocketed Wood to fame and is considered America's best known painting.

In her book GRANT WOOD, THE REGIONALIST VISION, Wanda Corn writes, "The Armstrong home, the most original and distinctive house Wood ever designed, demonstrated his new commitment to local and regional history."

Wood's style of painting developed gradually. Early in his career, he was identified with an updated medieval style tied to the Arts and Crafts movement. Next came a period of neoclassical painting influenced by his study in Europe. Finally his regionalist style evolved. As he explained: "To my great joy, I discovered that in the very commonplace in my native surroundings, were decorative adventures and that my only difficulty had been in taking them too much for granted."

In home decorating and design, Wood's development followed the same path. Many examples of Wood's neoclassical decorating can be found in Cedar Rapids. But slowly, he found true beauty in the sturdy, regionalist architecture with its

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clean, uncluttered lines.

It is easy to understand why Grant Wood was so enthusiastic when the Armstrongs approached him about designing a home featuring "Iowa architecture." He had worked as a decorator at Armstrong's store and knew Robert and Esther well. With his good friend, builder/contractor Bruce McKay, this was an opportunity to translate his philosophy of regionalism into Thus began the search for the architectural elements which Wood wanted to use in the design of the house. Esther Armstrong, McKay, and Wood combed the countryside, travelling many dusty side roads, centering their search in the area of Waubeek, Stone City and along the old Ridge Road on the way to Anamosa. Eventually, two houses provided most of the details for the design of the Armstrong house. They were the Eugene Doe house built in 1860 by Bennefield Wertman, a Pennsylvania native who had learned the mason's trade in the East, and the old Perkins tavern, built in 1855 by an unknown builder. Both were stone houses resembling early Pennsylvania fieldstone houses, understandable since their pioneer builders wanted their new homes to resemble the houses back east.

From the Doe home came the entrance recessed into the thick stone wall, the size of the window panes, and the design of the old slatted shutters. From Perkins Tavern came the designs for interior doors, cabinets, stair railing, fire-place, hardware and moldings.

Among the regionalist features Grant Wood included in designing Pleasant Hill are:

1. Native stone. The exterior of the house is made from stone quarried at Stone City, transported to Cedar Rapids by boxcar, and hand-hewn by two 80-year-old skilled stonemasons chosen by Grant Wood. Large lintels which weighed between one and two tons each were hoisted into place by derricks. Large stones were also used at the front gate to protect the entrance gate which Wood designed. He also designed the garden seat from three large pieces of stone, and used stone for the garden wall. Two boxcars of stone were required for the house and one boxcar for the garden wall.
2. Board-and-batten interior walls. Many walls, both upstairs and down, are board-and-batten construction, typically mid-western according to Grant Wood. Batten boards are fastened over the seams of wider boards.
3. Plaster work. Grant Wood designed and made the mold for the unusual plaster work which surrounds the ceiling light

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fixtures. Very different than his earlier ornate plaster work, this simple design was made to resemble the plaster work surrounding early kerosene pull lamps. He also designed the crown molding.

4. Interior woodwork. Grant Wood designed the black-walnut front staircase based on one at the Perkins Tavern. He also designed the cupboards, doors and baseboards, using native pine, birch and walnut.

5. Bay window. Because pioneer homes often included bay windows for growing plants during the long, dreary winters, Grant Wood designed one for Pleasant Hill. Located in the dining room, the window looks across to the garden seat. He also designed a special plant shelf for the window with upside-down terra cotta tiles forming a saucer to hold spilled water.

6. Brussels carpet. On graph paper, Grant Wood designed the original carpet. Specially woven in Philadelphia, it combined several shades of green with red threads to add sparkle. Although it had to be replaced some years ago, Esther Armstrong has samples of it.

7. Furniture. Grant Wood designed the two love seats which flank the fireplace in the living room. They are the same design he used in designing his Pullman chair, but elongated to form short sofas. Grant Wood also assisted Esther Armstrong in her search for fine regional antiques. Of special note are the yoke-back chairs which Esther found. Grant Wood supervised their restoration with the original stenciled designs.

8. Hardware. Hardware throughout the house was either selected or designed by Wood. Antique steeple iron hinges and large white porcelain knobs were used throughout. Grant Wood designed the two fireplace screens and added iron hooks to hold Christmas stockings above the library fireplace.

9. Porch. Patterned after an old porch which he admired, Grant Wood designed the rear porch with octagonal pillars supporting scalloped arches.

10. Arbor. Wood insisted that there should be an arbor near the kitchen door as did many midwestern pioneer homes.

11. Front gate. The wooden gate at the entrance to the property on 34th Street was designed by Grant Wood as an appropriate gate for his concept of regionalism.

The Armstrong house endures today, charming and timeless,

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its design a credit to Grant Wood's abilities. It is also a testament to the Armstrong family which has played such an important part in the history of Cedar Rapids.

The maternal grandfather of Robert Armstrong, William Cooper, with his wife and two children, came to Cedar Rapids in 1861 in a covered wagon. He was fleeing from LaCrosse, Wis., where his partner had been scalped by Indians. It is probable that he arrived via the old territorial road which once ran through the Armstrong's property. The site of this old road, which ran from Prairie du Chien to the territorial capitol in Iowa City, appears in the original survey made in 1841 and is recorded in the Library of Congress. William Cooper founded the Union Mills where he made flour, grist and cattle feed.

Armstrong's store, one of Iowa's largest department stores, was founded by Robert Armstrong's father, Samuel G., in 1890 with five employees.

It is impossible to measure all that Robert and Esther Armstrong have contributed to the city of Cedar Rapids. Both have been active and generous in civic, educational and church affairs. Through Robert Armstrong's guidance, Armstrong's Department store has been the anchor in the downtown area. Through his steadfast efforts, the downtown has remained healthy and viable.

The family has given much to Cedar Rapids -- including the wisdom to recognize the talents of Grant Wood and to use his abilities in the designing and construction of their home.

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Supplementary information to Section 8.

THE FOLLOWING HOMES AND BUILDINGS IN CEDAR RAPIDS ARE AMONG MANY
DESIGNED AND/OR DECORATED BY GRANT WOOD

Building or home	Information Source	Grant Wood's part
1. 3178 Grove Ct. SE c. 1917	Wanda Corn book	With his friend Paul Hanson Grant Wood built this small bungalow. Wood, his mother and sister Nan lived here from 1917 to 1924.
2. #5 Turner Alley 1924	Carol Hoffman, Turner mortuary director. Also many books and photos.	Wood remodeled the carriage house loft into a home and studio. He and his mother lived here from 1924-1933. Here he designed many innovative features: unique iron work, closets which roll out, a sunken bathtub, skylights, checkerboard floor, etc.
3. Turner Mortuary	Carol Hoffman	Grant Wood designed and supervised many unique features in the remodeling of this home into a mortuary. He designed the lovely wrought iron gate at the entrance which has become Turner's logo. Designed the stained-glass window in the chapel, biers to hold caskets, and interior windows on landing which repeat the design of exterior gate. Designed Pullman chair displayed on second floor.

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|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4. Dr. McKeeby home
2649 Meadowbrook
Dr. SE
c. 1926 | Francis Gillon,
present owner.
Hazel Brown book. | Although it is known that Grant Wood did the interior decorating in both Dr. McKeeby's home and office, nothing remains which can be specifically identified. (Dr. McKeeby was the dentist who posed for "American Gothic.") |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
-
- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5. Memorial Coliseum window, first floor lobby.
1927-1929 | Wanda Corn book
James Dennis book | Commissioned by Hanford Post of the American Legion, this window is made from 9000 pieces of imported stained glass. Labeled "irreplaceable and priceless" by insurance appraisers. |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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- | | | |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6. Holmes house
369 Forest Dr. SE
c.1927 | Attorney James Holmes. When a small boy, he and his mother drove to Turner Alley often to pick up Wood who was decorating their home. | In entrance hall and living room, Wood applied canvas to the walls, then 2" vertical strips of wood were applied, then all was painted with a golden glaze. This is still intact. Wood devised a spot light fixture in dining room, flush in ceiling. Esther Armstrong recalls that Wood re-designed front door of Holmes house adding panes of glass surrounding it. |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7. Turner home
301 23rd St. Dr. SE
c. 1929 | Marilyn Pickens
(Mrs. James) who
lived here many
years after pur-
chasing it from
David Turner who,
in detail, told
her of the work
done by Wood. | Wood designed the land-
scaping in front of the
Turner home. It is built
from stone from Stone City
and was termed "Flying
Buttress" by Mr. Turner.
Interior French doors open-
ing to the den were painted
by Wood in a delicate floral
design. Wood designed the
round-topped door on the
landing. In several rooms,
wood strips were attached to
plaster, then painted and
antiqued a muted olive
green. Much in this home
remains intact. |
| <hr/> | | |
| 8. Dolson home
2247 Meadowbrook
Dr. SE
c. 1929 | Marilyn Pickens | Dr. Dolson was noted for his
beautiful gardens. David
Turner told Marilyn Pickens
that Wood designed the land-
scaping for the Dolson home
in a manner similar to his.
(See above.) Landscaping is
intact. |
| <hr/> | | |
| 9. Bruce more:
Queen-Anne style
mansion, property
of National Trust
for Historic Pres-
ervation.
2160 Linden Dr. SE
c. 1929 | Peggy Whitworth,
Bruce more director. | Floral designs in stucco
walls of a second floor
porch were designed and
applied by Grant Wood. |

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- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10. First Congregational Church,
361 17th St. SE
1930 | Dorothy Higgins,
church archivist | A bill was submitted on July 9, 1930 for "Interior Decoration plan":
26 hrs @ \$3.00 = \$78.00
On Grant Wood's letterhead, the bill includes a handwritten "Paid." Wood chose the paint color for the sanctuary and ordered the stage curtain for Fellowship Hall. |
| <hr/> | | |
| 11. Hamilton home
2345 Linden Dr. SE
c. 1930 | Barnes and Judy
O'Donnell,
present owners | Ceiling in front hall was painted by Wood. He designed iron sconces in hall (like his in Turner Alley), circular stairway, wrought iron railing, two fireplace screens. (One now owned by C. R. Art Museum) Floral designs in plaster were done by Grant Wood. He also designed the double iron gate at front of house. |
| <hr/> | | |
| 12. Van Vechten
Shaffer home,
2001 Linden Dr. SE
c. 1930 | Wanda Corn book
and present owner,
Mrs. Timothy White | Wood decorated this home in a baronial style: stuccoed walls, ceiling floral plaster decorations, classical designs painted on doors to library, heavy wooden tables, wrought iron doors. |
| <hr/> | | |
| 13. Stamats home
2131 Linden Dr. SE
c. 1930 | Wanda Corn book | Grant Wood decorated home in neoclassical style. His overmantel decoration, oil on upsom board now belongs to C.R. Art Museum. |

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14. Hazel Brown home
2398 Blake Blvd. SE
c. 1933

Hazel Brown book
and former owner,
Pat Lawson.

Grant Wood drew the plans for this home for his good friend Hazel Brown and her parents. Named home "Northwest Chalet." Home features high-pitched roof. Board-and-batten design of fireplace and iron hardware were probably designed by Wood.

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Section number 9 Page 1

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Liffring, Joan "The Armstrong House," The Iowan (Summer Issue, 1963), pp. 32-37.
- Liffring-Zug, Joan This is Grant Wood Country Davenport: Municipal Art Gallery, 1977.
- Rinard, Park "The Real Grant Wood," Des Moines Register (Jan. 15, 1984), Section C - p. 1.

Maps available at Linn County Recorder's Office
930 First St. SW
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Robert & Esther Armstrong House
370 34th Street, SE
Cedar Rapids
Linn County
Iowa

Photographer: John McEnroe
Date: 1989

View:

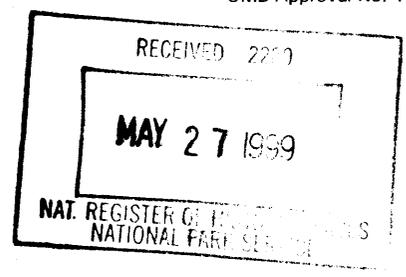
1. West elevation
2. Detail, Front door, west elevation
3. South elevation and west elevation
4. East elevation
5. South elevation and east elevation
6. Detail, bay window on dining room, east elevation
7. Interior detail. view through dining room bay window of garden seat
8. Detail, east garden, garden seat and millstone table
9. Detail, living room fireplace
10. Detail, den fireplace
11. Detail, view from dining room onto south screened porch
12. Detail, view of entry hall, front door, west elevation
13. Detail, entry hall, view from front door to stairway
14. Detail, view from living room into entry hall and main stairway
15. Detail, ceiling medallion designed by Wood with recessed light fixture
16. Detail, recessed light fixture designed by Wood, next to front door
17. Detail, main stairway

AD

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Robert and Esther Armstrong House (Updated Information)
Linn County, Iowa

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patricia O'Brien King DSHPD _____
Signature of certifying official Date 5-18-99

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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National Park Service

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Robert and Esther Armstrong House (Updated Information)
Linn County, Iowa

EXPLANATION OF THE AMENDMENT

This amendment to a previously listed National Register Registration Form is being filed under "Section VI. Amending National Register Forms" of National Register Bulletin 16-A, using alternative #1 listed on page 71. Alternative #1 requires submission of "continuation sheets with the new information and an explanation of the amendment."

This nomination is being amended to correct and provide additional information on the Architect/Builder. The new information follows:

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architect/Builder

Wood, Grant and McKay, J. Bruce
McKay Construction Company

The Robert and Esther Armstrong House was listed in the National Register in 1989. In the process of working with the several individuals who had a hand in preparing the nomination, one of our major questions at the time was the extent to which J. Bruce McKay played a major role in the design of the Armstrong House. We were well aware of McKay and the fact that he had accompanied Grant Wood and Esther Armstrong in their travels around the countryside looking for an "Iowa architecture." What we did not know was the full degree of his participation in the design process beyond preparing blueprints, and the fact that the McKay Construction Company actually built the house. In response to staff queries about McKay, Robert Armstrong noted that "while McKay was primarily a builder, we considered that he had exceedingly good taste and was an excellent cooperater with Grant Wood, whom we considered to be an artist of great ability in the field of architecture, in working with design, wood stone, metal, glass, etc." Further, "Grant was responsible for the design of the exterior of our home and much of the interior although he followed Esther's floor plan for the interior." Finally, in describing the roles played in seeking out the traditional buildings that comprised an "Iowa architecture", Armstrong mentions Wood "making sketches," McKay "taking measurements" and Esther Armstrong "taking photographs of portions that would be reproduced in our home." (Quoted in Robert Armstrong to James E. Jacobsen, March 15, 1986 in correspondence file for Robert and Esther Armstrong House National Register of Historic Places Nomination File, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines) Largely on the basis of this correspondence from one of the participants, we determined that Grant Wood played the major role in designing the house, and that R. Bruce McKay's role was secondary.

In late 1998, however, we received a letter from Mrs. Gordon B. McKay, Bruce McKay's daughter-in-law, requesting a clarification or addendum to the Armstrong House nomination to clarify Bruce McKay's role in the design of the house. Mrs. McKay's letter was accompanied by an impressive amount of primary and secondary documentation which clearly indicates that Bruce McKay's role in designing the house was much greater than we had concluded in 1989. While going through McKay Construction Company building plan files in 1997, prior to transferring them to the vaults of Leo C. Peffer Architects for safekeeping, Mrs. McKay discovered the original plans on vellum for the Armstrong House. Dated October 29, 1932, the ten page set of plans bore the notation "Planned and to be built by McKay Construction Co." (Quoted from Mrs. Gordon Bruce McKay to Beth Foster, October 12, 1998, National Register Coordinator Files, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines) Additional detail on McKay's active participation in the design process for the house is contained in Martha Darbyshire's "An Early Iowa Stone House," published in the March 1939 issue of Arts and Decoration, some six years after the house's completion. According to Darbyshire, McKay was largely responsible for scouting the locations of the old stone houses that served as the inspiration for the design of the Armstrong House and did most of the measuring and sketching of favored design elements. Writing in later years about the Armstrong House, Bruce McKay stated "I happened to be, with Grant, the designer and builder." (quoted in Hazel Brown, Grant Wood and Marvin Cone: Artists of An Era, p.67)

After reviewing and re-reviewing the data in the National Register file and Mrs. McKay's submittal, we came to the conclusion that Grant Wood and Bruce McKay were jointly responsible for the design of the Armstrong House and that the nomination should be amended to reflect that fact.

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National Park Service

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Robert and Esther Armstrong House (Updated Information)
Linn County, Iowa

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Robert Armstrong to James E. Jacobsen, March 15, 1986," located in Correspondence File for Robert and Esther Armstrong National Register of Historic Places Nomination File, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

"Mrs. Gordon Bruce McKay to Beth Foster, October 12, 1998," located in National Register Coordinator Files, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

"Residence for Robert C. Armstrong, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Planned & To Be Built by the McKay Construction Co., Cedar Rapids, Iowa, October 27, 1932," 10 sheets, Currently stored at Leo C. Peiffer, Architects, P.C., Cedar Rapids, Iowa.