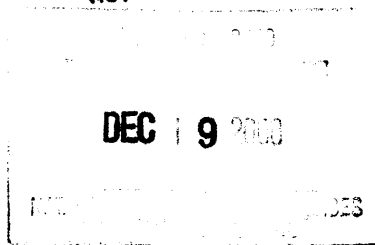


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



1681

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Decorah Woolen Mill

other names/site number Meritol Building, Decorah Tire Service

2. Location

street & number 107 Court Street not for publication N/A
city or town Decorah vicinity N/A
state Iowa code IA county Winneshie code 191 zip code 52101

3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patricia Orlin King DSHPD 12-8-00
Signature of certifying official Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. 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): _____

Edson A. Beall

1-26-01

[Signature]
Signature of Keeper

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: INDUSTRY Sub: Manufacturing Facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT Sub: Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: No Style Sub: _____

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/Limestone
roof SYNTHETICS/Rubber
walls BRICK

other CONCRETE

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Industry

Period of Significance

1867-1919

Significant Dates

1867

1908

1920

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: Luther College Archive, Decorah

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1 <u>15</u>	<u>598,280</u>	<u>4,795,180</u>	3 _____	_____	_____
2 _____	_____	_____	4 _____	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a **continuation sheet**.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a **continuation sheet**.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David C. Anderson

organization _____ date _____

street & number 169 Lundy Bridge Drive telephone 319-382-3079city or town Waukon state IA zip code 52172

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**

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

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

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

Property Owner

(This item must be completed.)

name Decorah Tire Servicestreet & number 416 Montgomery St. telephone 319-382-3687city or town Decorah state IA zip code 52101

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

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

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshiek County, IA

DESCRIPTION

The Decorah Woolen Mill building, most recently occupied by the Decorah Tire Service, consists of a 38 by 60 foot segment dating from no later than 1867 and a 30 by 46 foot addition dating from 1920. It occupies a portion of Lot 1, Block 5 of the Original Plat of Decorah. This is on the north side of Water St., which has been the city's principal commercial street since the earliest days of Decorah's history. Winneshiek County is in Northeast Iowa along the Minnesota border one county west of the Mississippi River.

The area directly north of Water St. is a floodplain of the Upper Iowa River, which originally flowed south of its current course and directly adjacent to the woolen mill. The river's present location dates from 1949, when it was diverted north, and the floodplain is now protected by a system of dikes that has permitted the development of this area, now occupied mainly by parking lots, schools, and other public buildings.

Both segments of the building contain three stories, and the 1920 segment includes a full basement. Although the floors coincide throughout, there are significant differences between the two parts of this property, and they will be described separately.

The 1867 segment, the original woolen mill, is of solid (soft) brick construction. The walls are 20 inches thick on the ground floor and 14 inches at the second and third floor levels. The face brick is laid in common bond and the walls stand on a limestone foundation. It was a full four stories high until 1908, when Decorah was hit by a tornado that badly damaged the roof and top floor. Consequently this was eliminated, and the end walls now terminate with a ceramic cap on a short parapet. Both long sides include eight evenly spaced windows on each floor and four on each end, except for doorways in one bay of each floor on the east end. Exceptions are on the ground floor where large doors have been cut into the wall on the north side to accommodate vehicles and on the west side, where a double door was cut into the wall (date unknown). With its three stories, evenly spaced windows on the long sides, simple rectangular shape, and the utilization of timber beams and columns to support floor systems inside masonry load-bearing walls, it is typical of American "mill construction" of the 1870s to the 1890s.¹

The original windows contained 6/6 double-hung sash in openings with cambered heads. These are still in place on the north side, but a hailstorm in 1998 damaged most of them on the south, and they were modified to contain single panes (1/1). The window openings on the south, east and west elevations have brick hood moldings and limestone sills, while on the north side the segmental arch tops are built with a double course of header bricks flush with the wall and the sills are of wood construction.

When the addition was built, the east wall of the 1867 segment was retained on the second and third floors. A wall has been installed in front of this on the second floor, but on the third floor the original 15 foot wide round arch door with its triple molded head and the three window openings are still in place, although the windows have been filled in with concrete blocks.

On the interior, the floor heights run from 12 feet on the first and second to 8 feet on the third. The second story has a ceiling clad with pressed metal, but no doubt the same system of construction exists behind this as is exposed on the other levels. The roof support system may actually be the original floor of the fourth story, and it includes 12 by 2 inch sawn pine joists on 18 inch centers running east-west and mortised into 10 by 12 inch wood beams running the width of the building. These are supported at midpoint by 10 by 12 inch chamfered posts and divide the space on each floor into four bays. The first (ground) floor is concrete with a two-foot-deep pit and two

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshie County, IA

hydraulic lifts. The floor above is exposed and reveals a system basically the same as under the roof, with the addition of long diagonal braces off each center post. These look to have been added after initial construction, since they are not mortised into the posts and beams but nailed into place along the narrow edge and have little structural function.

The 2 by 12 inch joists in the second floor system were vertically sawn and/or hand-hewn. Although the surfaces have been painted, vertical saw marks and the traces of hewing are visible as is evidence of damage by fire on some of the joists. A number of these have been reinforced with a second 2 by 12 attached to the support beams with steel hangers.

There is a 5 by 6 foot freight elevator in the southwest corner of the building.

The 1920 segment of the property has walls of hollow tile faced with brick laid in running bond on a concrete foundation. All three floors are of reinforced concrete construction. The east side of this segment was built to be the principal facade of the reconstituted and enlarged manufacturing facility (drugs and cosmetics). There are five bays with windows comprising 1/1 double hung sash set in openings with brick sills and cambered heads on the second and third floors. Windows on the first floor on the east side are large, fixed sash, and these may have been installed after 1920.

Each bay on the east and south sides is recessed slightly, and there are panels outlined in brick between the floors. This gives the facade and south elevation a neo-Classical flavor, since the zones separating the bays suggest pilasters. The end walls are terminated with parapets and ceramic caps which match those on the 1867 segment.

The main entrance is on the north end of the east side, and this includes a porch roof held in place by triangular braced supports. There is a second entrance on the east side that gives direct access to the staircase in the southeast corner of the building. There are three windows with 1/1 double-hung sash on each floor on the north and south sides.

On the interior, the basement contains an older non-functional furnace and several concrete stalls which were probably coal bins. The first floor includes a showroom and sales counter plus an office in the northwest corner. Two storage rooms and a toilet are placed along the south wall west of the staircase. The walls and ceiling on this floor are clad in paneling and other material that is not the original fabric.

This changes, however, upon entering the staircase, which has walls and ceiling clad in beaded board sheathing. The second floor space is partitioned into six rooms of wood frame and lath and plaster construction. The windows, doors, and other woodwork plus the hardware and finish (dark varnish) on these elements appear to be original throughout.

As noted above, the 1867 wall is covered over at this level, and an unusual three-panel door leads into the 1867 segment.

The third floor of the 1920 segment is undivided and unfinished, and the original 1867 exterior wall is fully exposed.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshie County, IA

The flooring in both segments is 1 by 3 inch industrial grade hard pine (quarter sawn). In the 1867 segment this is laid diagonally, and in the 1920 addition it is laid at right angles to the joists. The roof in both segments is a single nearly flat rubber composition clad surface that drains to the north.

An engraved illustration of the building in the 1875 *Andreas Atlas of Iowa* and a Sanborn Map from 1885 (see pp. 13-14, Section 8) show a single-story structure on the east side of the mill within the space now occupied by the 1920 addition.

Aside from the changes described, both segments of this property retain sufficient historic integrity to represent their period and methods of construction although, understandably, the changes in function over the years have meant the removal of all fixtures and equipment associated with its historic functions. The property is in fair to good condition in that many window frames and sills are deteriorated and the exterior brick work needs repair at certain locations.

¹Rabun, p. 137.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Decorah Woolen Mill property is significant for its association with early water-powered manufacturing in Decorah, the seat of government in Winneshie County, where settlement began in 1849. The county was organized in 1851, and Decorah was platted in 1853. Located on a terrace on the south bank of the Upper Iowa River and in an area with several large springs flowing into the river, this was identified at the beginning of the period of early settlement as an outstanding location for a city because of the growth potential offered by water power, good and plentiful building stone, timber, and rich soil in the area. Water from one of the several springs here was first harnessed by William Painter for a grist mill in 1849, and over subsequent years water power was exploited not only by flour, woolen, and paper mills in the area, but also by other manufacturing enterprises and to produce electricity. This property is also significant in the context of 19th century wool milling in Iowa and the Midwest.

The Euro-American settlement of most of Northeast Iowa began in 1849 after the removal of the last Winnebago Indians to a reservation in Minnesota. The settlement of the territory west of the Mississippi including what became the State of Iowa in 1846 was off limits to European-Americans until the conclusion of the Black Hawk War. This was in 1832, and the treaty which followed in 1833 made a large segment of eastern Iowa bordering the Mississippi available for settlement, except for a large tract known as the "Neutral Zone." This was a piece of land 20 miles on either side of a line running southwest from the mouth of the Upper Iowa River near the northeast corner of the state to the Des Moines River, a distance of 200 miles.

This territory had been ceded by the Sioux (northern half) and the Sac-Fox (southern half) Indians via the 1830 Prairie du Chien Treaty. In 1837 Winnebago Indians were moved there from Wisconsin to act as a buffer between the hostile Sioux and Sac-Fox tribes. Winneshie County was within the Neutral Zone, and Fort Atkinson and an Indian mission had been established by the Federal government in 1840 a few miles southwest of Decorah's future location to administer what was a de facto Winnebago reservation.

Meanwhile, settlement in areas to the south and east of Winneshie County had been underway since 1833, and the Federal government removed the Winnebagoes from the Neutral Zone beginning in 1848. The settlement of the Decorah area began in 1849 and proceeded rapidly. The importance of this village was enhanced by the

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshiek County, IA

establishment of a Federal Land Office there in 1855. The population of Winneshiek County grew from 546 in 1850 to 13,492 ten years later. In 1870 it was 23,570 and reached a peak at 23,937 in 1880. The pattern for Decorah has been somewhat different, however, in that the rise in population continues into the present day, while in rural areas of the county it continues the decline which began in about 1880.

As noted above, the first water-powered mill in Decorah was set up in 1849 by William Painter. However, the first mill in the territory dates from 1843, and it was set up on the Turkey River at the Indian Mission near Fort Atkinson to process grains raised on the Mission farm and by the local garrison. The Painter family and the William Days were the first permanent settlers in Decorah. Painter's first mill ("Spring Mill") was north of the Upper Iowa and was sold early on to another early settler, Eli Dunning. This site is now known as Dunning's Spring, and it was later used to power a stone cutting works, creamery, and brewery in addition to a flour mill.¹

In 1851 Painter sold his first mill to Dunning and turned his attention to the potential of the Upper Iowa River, on the south bank of which the burgeoning village of Decorah was located. He obtained title to a 40-acre parcel which was to include the site of a mill which still stands and bears his name and the locations of three other water-powered manufacturing facilities: the Ammon-Scott Co. (foundry and machine shop), a sawmill, and the Decorah Woolen Mill. Henry T. Morse, the first man to be married in Decorah (on 8/22/52) owned the sawmill, and he and Painter built the first dam on the river and the mill race which powered these facilities. In 1857 Morse obtained title to Lot 1 of Block 5, the future location of the woolen mill.

An early account of Decorah's origins gives credit to Messrs. Painter, Dunning, and Morse for "the first beginnings by way of improving the abundant water power with which we are favored . . ."² Subsequent developments on the Woolen Mill site will be taken up later, but the larger context of water power in Iowa and in the neighboring areas to Decorah must be developed first.

Water-powered mills are intimately associated with the early settlement of Iowa and elsewhere in the Midwest, and flour milling was the predominant use of water power in the state until wheat growing declined in about 1880. In the 1850s, however, most water-powered mills produced lumber, and the first such in what later became Iowa was erected on the lower Yellow River in neighboring Allamakee County in 1829 to process timber for Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien. A large number of saw and grist mills were established in the state during the 1850s, and most were operating for a local market only. By 1860 there were at least 333 flour mills and 540 sawmills in the state, and the number of flour mills continued to grow into the 1870s, while small-scale sawmilling declined.³

According to census reports (10th U. S. Census: Manufactures, 1880), there were 713 flour mills and gristmills powered by more than a thousand water wheels, with 287 steam engines as supplemental power. In addition, there were 34 woolen mills using 22 water wheels, the "water wheels" being mostly turbines by the 1870s.⁴

In Winneshiek County the Federal census reported four flour mills and gristmills and one sawmill in 1860 and 18 flour mills in 1880. When Alexander's history of Winneshiek County came out in 1882, there were five flouring mills in and around Decorah, and the most prominent of these, now known as the Painter-Bernatz Mill, still stands. It continued operation until 1966 and used water power until 1947.⁵

These figures do not, however, accurately represent the full spectrum of water-powered manufacturing in Iowa or in Decorah. Besides the Decorah Woolen Mill, a similar operation was built on Trout Run, a spring-fed tributary of the Upper Iowa on the outskirts of Decorah. A factory manufacturing furniture and other wood products had been established there in 1860, but this was made over into a woolen mill in 1867 and destroyed by fire in 1874.

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshiek County, IA

And downstream from Decorah on the Upper Iowa a paper mill was established at Freeport in 1869 that operated until 1905.⁶

In addition, a variety of other early manufacturing enterprises in Decorah used water power. These include two breweries, a creamery (1882), a stone-processing works (1866), the Ammon-Scott Co., established in the early 1850s which also had steam power, and a scale factory (1880), powered by water from Twin Springs. And then in 1906 the first of two dams on the Upper Iowa was built to harness water power for producing electricity. Known as the Upper and Lower Dams of the Upper Iowa Power Co., these supplied Decorah and other locations in the region with power until 1958.

Returning to the Decorah Woolen Mill, the published sources tell us that this facility was built in 1867 as a woolen mill at a cost of \$35,200 including machinery.⁷ Its ownership is somewhat unclear, but deed records indicate that in 1867 a firm identified as the Winneshiek Manufacturing and Commercial Association bought the property including the south portion of the lot, which is directly on Water St., for a total of \$7,300. The property was mortgaged for \$30,000 in 1869, and in 1873 it was purchased at a Sheriff's sale by the Decorah Woolen Mill Co. This is the first mention of the firm, which went out of business in 1882, selling the property to the Lawler Company which owned a flour mill in Decorah. The woolen mill was then leased by John E. Duncan, "who has repaired and improved the machinery, and will run it to its full capacity."⁸

The best detailed descriptions of the Decorah operation come from the 1870 Federal Industrial Census report and the 1875 *Gazetteer and Directory of Winneshiek County*.⁹ The census report informs us that the mill could produce 140 pounds of carded wool/day, processed 12,960 pounds of wool a year, employed 21 men and 12 women, and ran nine months each year. Quoting from the *Gazetteer*,

The machinery is all of Eastern make, and is run by one of Leffel's double turbine water-wheels of the largest size (66 inches diameter), besides which there is a fine steam boiler for scouring, dyeing and heating purposes.

The machinery consists of two sets of Davis & Furber's 4-inch cards, three jacks, of 200 spindles each, six broad and five narrow looms, one set of custom roll cards, with a full set of finishing machinery, and the mill is capable of turning out upwards of 12,000 yards of goods, besides yarns, each month. The cassimeres (sic), flannels, jeans, opera flannels, blankets, yarns and other goods produced by the Decorah Woolen Mills (sic) Company are too well known, both in the Chicago and home market, to need any special mention here. (. . .) The full complement of hands required to run this mill numbers some thirty or more . . .

Turbines of various design had replaced the old-fashioned water wheel in all types of water power mills by the 1870s, and James Leffel's "old Reliable Standard" – a 25" turbine – was patented in 1862.¹⁰

The next published report of operations at the woolen mill is dated 9/30/1880 (*Decorah Republican*):

The mill is now running on custom carding and spinning. Parties bringing in wool from a distance will be accommodated when possible by receiving back their rolls the same day. Cloth fulled and blankets scoured. Old wool batting recarded. Wool rolls and batting on hand for sale.

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshiek County, IA

The last documentation indicating the processing of wool at the mill is in the form of a Sanborn fire insurance map dated December 1885. This indicates that the mill was powered by a 25-horsepower steam engine, and used the river for cleaning (scouring) the wool. In addition, a separate structure for dyeing was shown attached to the main building on the east side. The picking and carding took place on the first floor, weaving and spinning on the second, and the third and fourth floors were used for storage. A store associated with the mill is shown on the north side of Water St.

In 1908, when a tornado hit the building, it was being used by the Decorah Glove and Mitten Works.¹¹ The property had been sold by John Lawler's widow to B. Anundsen in 1893, and he was a co-founder of the Glove and Mitten Works which was created in 1908. Two year later and minus the top floor, the "entire building" was occupied by this operation, which had been steadily growing since its beginning and employed "about 20 hands, with an extensive output of fabric, gloves, and mittens each week," with sales all over the U.S. (*Decorah Public Opinion*, 2/9/10). How long this enterprise continued to flourish is not certain.

The next major events affecting the mill occurred in 1919 and 1920 when the American Drug and Press Association (the Meritol Co.) purchased the property and in 1920 put on an addition to the mill. This firm made pharmaceuticals and patent medicines and occupied the premises until 1932 when it went bankrupt. The property went through several hands and was used for many purposes until 1955 when it became the Decorah Tire Service building.

The history of the Decorah Woolen Mill relates in several ways to the 19th century woolen industry in the Midwestern U.S.¹² As noted above, early settlement communities like Decorah had a wide range of local or "residential" manufacturing facilities before railroads fully penetrated the areas west of the Mississippi after the Civil War. The high costs of transportation and rapid growth of population in the rural areas up to about 1880 meant that most of the raw material had to be obtained locally, with the goods produced being sold or bartered locally as well. After the Civil War, which had produced an intense but short-lived demand for woolen fabric, a decline in prices and improved transportation meant that the "pioneer enterprises" associated with the early settlement period faced increased competition from larger, longer established, and better capitalized eastern manufacturers.¹³

In 1870 the average investment figure in the 881 woolen mills of the eight Midwestern states was \$17,700.¹⁴ In terms of the kinds of materials produced, the Decorah operation was quite typical, in that initially fabric (e.g. cassimere (cashmere) and flannel) and later dyed yarn were the major products. A large percentage of custom work for a local clientele was also typical for these mills and at Decorah. This included cleaning and carding, which were more efficiently done by the factory machines than by hand.

In Iowa, the impact of the Civil War on wool production and, in association with this, sheep farming, was more pronounced than elsewhere. Since Iowa (the first free state in the Louisiana Purchase) was cut off from not only southern staples including cotton but also from the Mississippi as a means of transportation, wool and woolen goods became a substitute for cotton. This plus the demand for military uniforms caused the price of wool to rise dramatically. In Iowa sheep-raising was promoted to the extent that a "sheep craze" resulted.¹⁵ The rise in wool production was dramatic, going from 660,858 pounds in 1860 to 5,323,385 in 1867 and back to 2,967,043 by 1870.¹⁶ In Winneshiek County 1867 was also the record year for wool, but the decline was slower than in the state as a whole, perhaps because there is more land suitable in northeast Iowa for sheep pasture than elsewhere in the state.

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshiek County, IA

As noted above, there were 34 woolen mills operating in Iowa in 1880. This is a decline from the 85 in 1870 as reported in the 9th Federal Census. In 1880, 27 counties had at least one woolen mill. In terms of the capital invested, the number of employees, and value of the materials produced, Winneshiek County was in the lower one-half on a scale that ran from \$1,029 to \$213,000 in product value.¹⁷

The 881 woolen mills operational in the eight Midwestern states in 1870 had declined to 183 by 1900.¹⁸ There were many reasons for this, and they include a move away from sheep farming in general, but also an increasing preference for crossbred sheep over Merinos because they were better sources of meat but produced an inferior wool. Another factor that came increasingly into play as the turn-of-the-century approached was the rise of fashion and ready-made clothing as determining elements in product lines. Producers had to change their goods on short notice to meet consumer demand, and this flexibility required levels of capitalization, supply and distribution networks that the residentiary operations could not match.¹⁹

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Water power was of fundamental importance in the establishment and growth of Decorah as an industrial-commercial center during the early settlement period and later. Whether from the Upper Iowa River or the several springs that flowed into it in the area, a variety of manufacturing and processing enterprises were created that depended on this resource. Local manufacturing made the city and the farms of the region relatively self-sufficient, and many of the products, e.g. flour, butter, farm implements, textiles, and ornamental stone, were also exported.

By the time Edwin Bailey's history of Winneshiek County was published in 1913, however, a number of these early manufacturing concerns were out of business or had been consolidated. Yet, new industries had been established as well, including a new source of power for commercial use: electricity, produced by two water-powered plants on the Upper Iowa River.

Most of the locations of Decorah's early mills are locally well-known, but the springs that furnished power are best known today as natural areas, since little more than scattered remnants of dams and foundations are still extant. The Ammon-Scott foundry, machine shop, and manufacturing complex is intact, but it has been largely adapted to different functions (office, exhibition, and storage for the Vesterheim Museum). The Painter-Bernatz mill is also extant and serves as a museum for farm implements.

The historical importance of local manufactures including woolen mills is summarized by Crockett:

Their most important single contribution resulted from the simple production of goods for sale to people residing in relatively isolated areas. During the initial years of settlement the combination of high transportation costs and poor country roads excluded eastern manufactures from some portions of the midwestern market.

By accepting farm produce in exchange for custom services and fabrics, extending credit to merchants, and providing farmers with a convenient local market, such mills eased the scarcity of money in isolated areas.¹⁹

The Decorah Woolen Mill also represents the period of Decorah's history when water power was essential for the viability of permanent settlement, and an important segment of its later history is also illustrated there by the

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshiek County, IA

variety of manufacturing enterprises it housed over the years since its initial construction as a woolen mill. Current plans are to convert the property into apartment housing.

¹Alexander. On pp. 164-168 Alexander gives a condensed history of water-powered manufactures in Decorah up to 1882.

²Sparks, p. 89. The account is quoted from a manuscript by E. Adams, in Sparks, p. 90.

³These figures are cited in Swisher, pp. 287-292, 217.

⁴ibid., p. 218.

⁵Knudson, p. 49. Kirby, p. 6.

⁶Knudson, p. 50.

⁷Sparks, p. 99. Kirby, p. 7. Alexander, p. 165.

⁸The quotation is from Alexander, *ibid.* The title transfers, mortgages, foreclosures, etc. pertaining to the woolen mill property are in the title abstract, part 1.

⁹pp. 7-8 in the *Gazetteer*. The 1870 Census report informs us that the mill could produce 140 pounds of carded wool a day and had processed 12,960 pounds of raw wool during the previous year. The mill employed 21 men and 12 women and ran nine months of the year. The report also indicates that the mill did both custom work and manufactured certain materials for export. The figures on this are not legible on the handwritten original (microfilm).

¹⁰Swisher, pp. 183-84.

¹¹See the 6/25/08 issue of the *Decorah Republican*, which is also the source of the following: "The old woolen mill building, which was being used by the Decorah Glove & Mitten Works, was shorn of its third story. . . ."

¹²The source relied upon here for the brief context included on the woolen industry in the Midwest is Crockett (see Bibliography).

¹³Crockett, p. 100.

¹⁴Crockett, p. 31

¹⁵Ross, p. 57

¹⁶1836-1880. Census of Iowa, p. 364.

¹⁷The figure was \$5,063 for Winneshiek County. See Table CIII on pp. 932-933 in *A Compendium of the Ninth Census* (Washington, DC, 1872) and Table XXXI-5 on p. 375 of *Census of Iowa 1836-1880* (Des Moines, 1883).

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¹⁸Crockett, p. 111.

¹⁹Crockett, Chapter VI.

²⁰Crockett, pp. 129, 131.

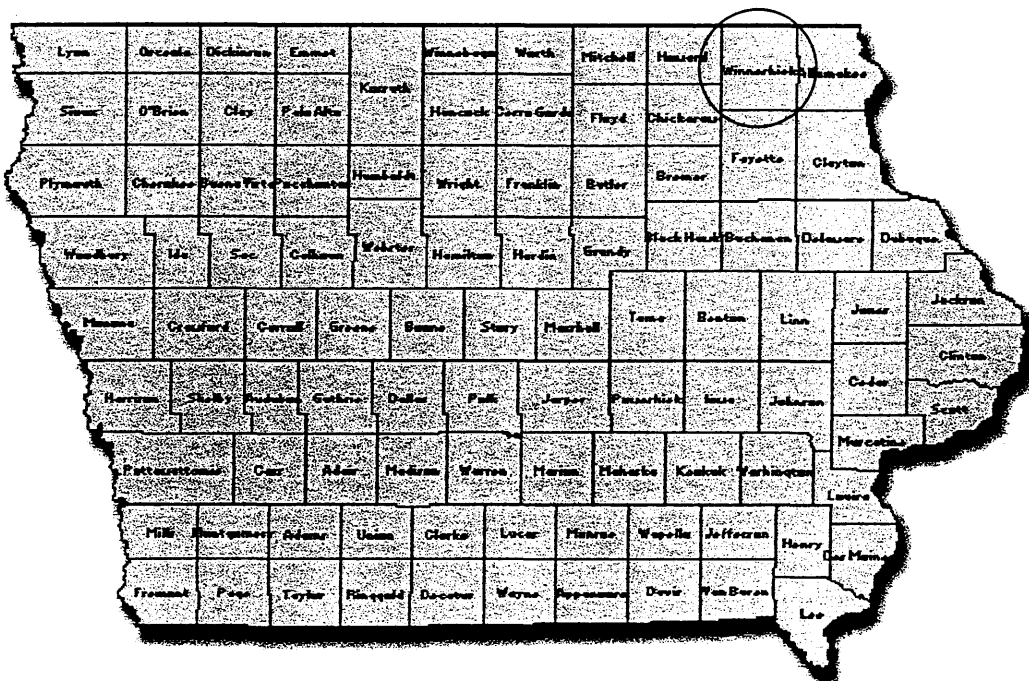
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Map of Iowa Source: Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation
Location of Winneshiek County



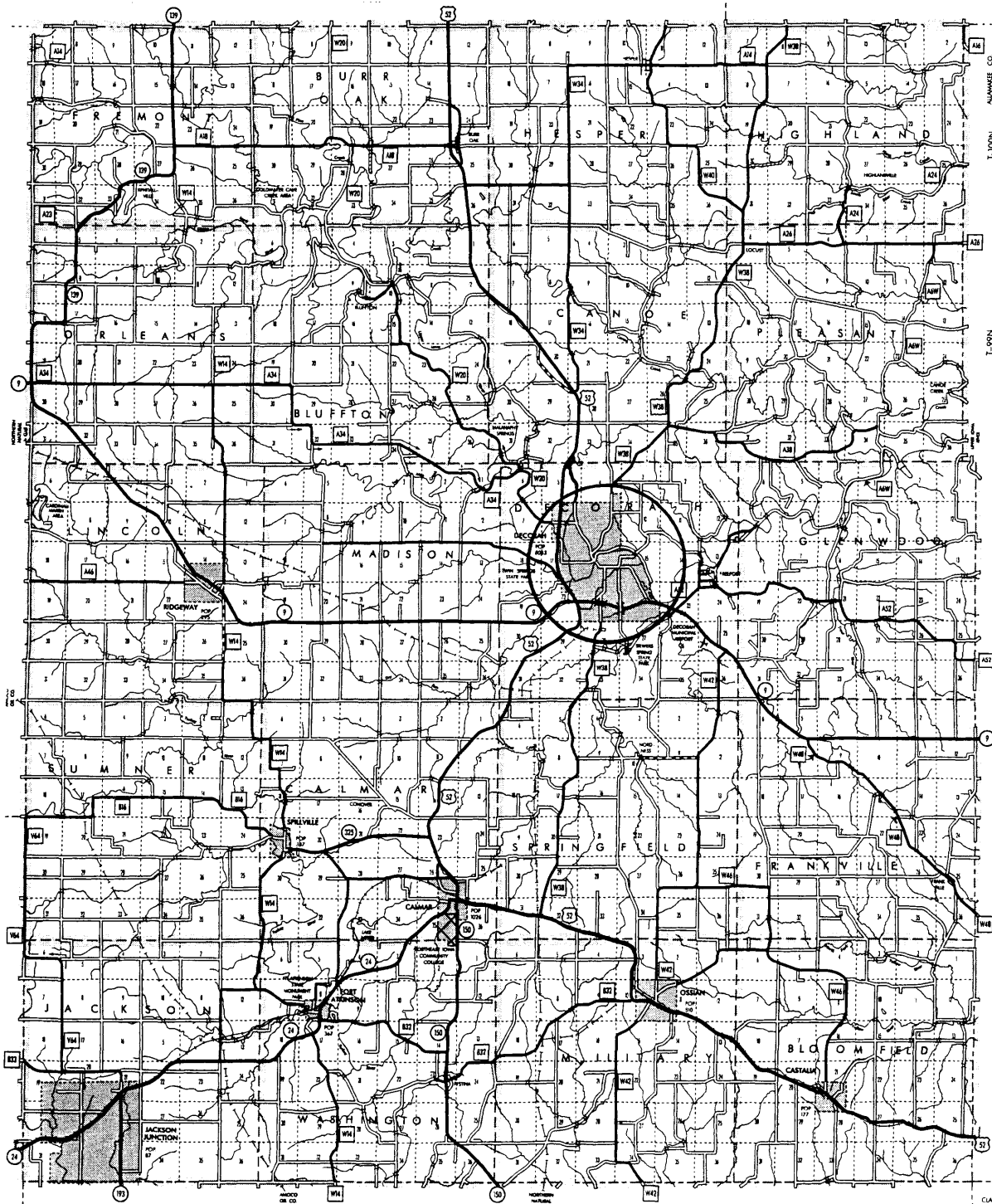
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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshie County, IA

Map of Winneshie County Source: Iowa Department of Transportation
Location of Decorah



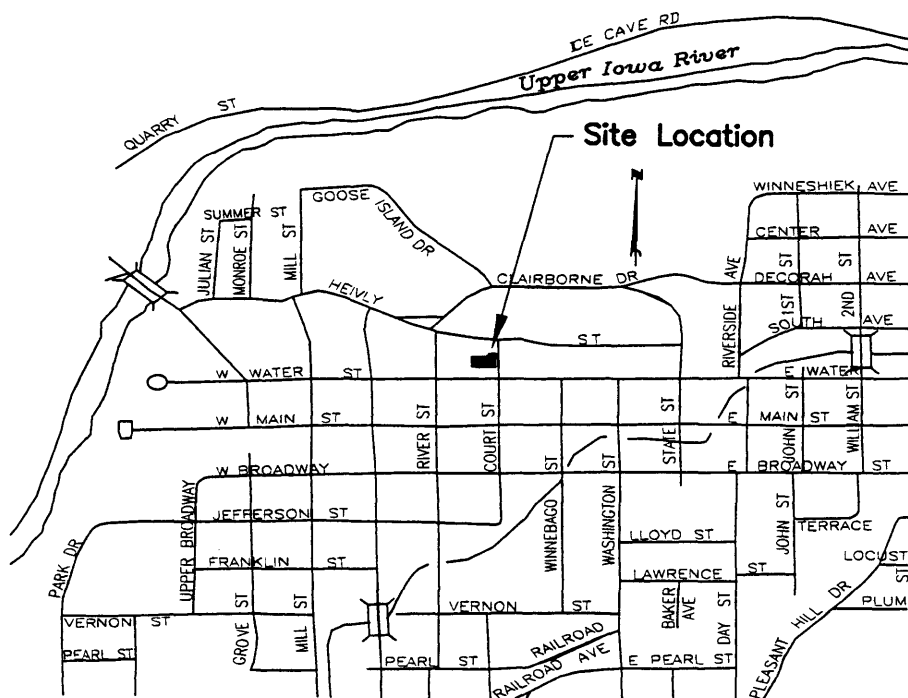
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VICINITY MAP



CITY OF DECORAH

Source: Erdman Engineering
September 3, 1999

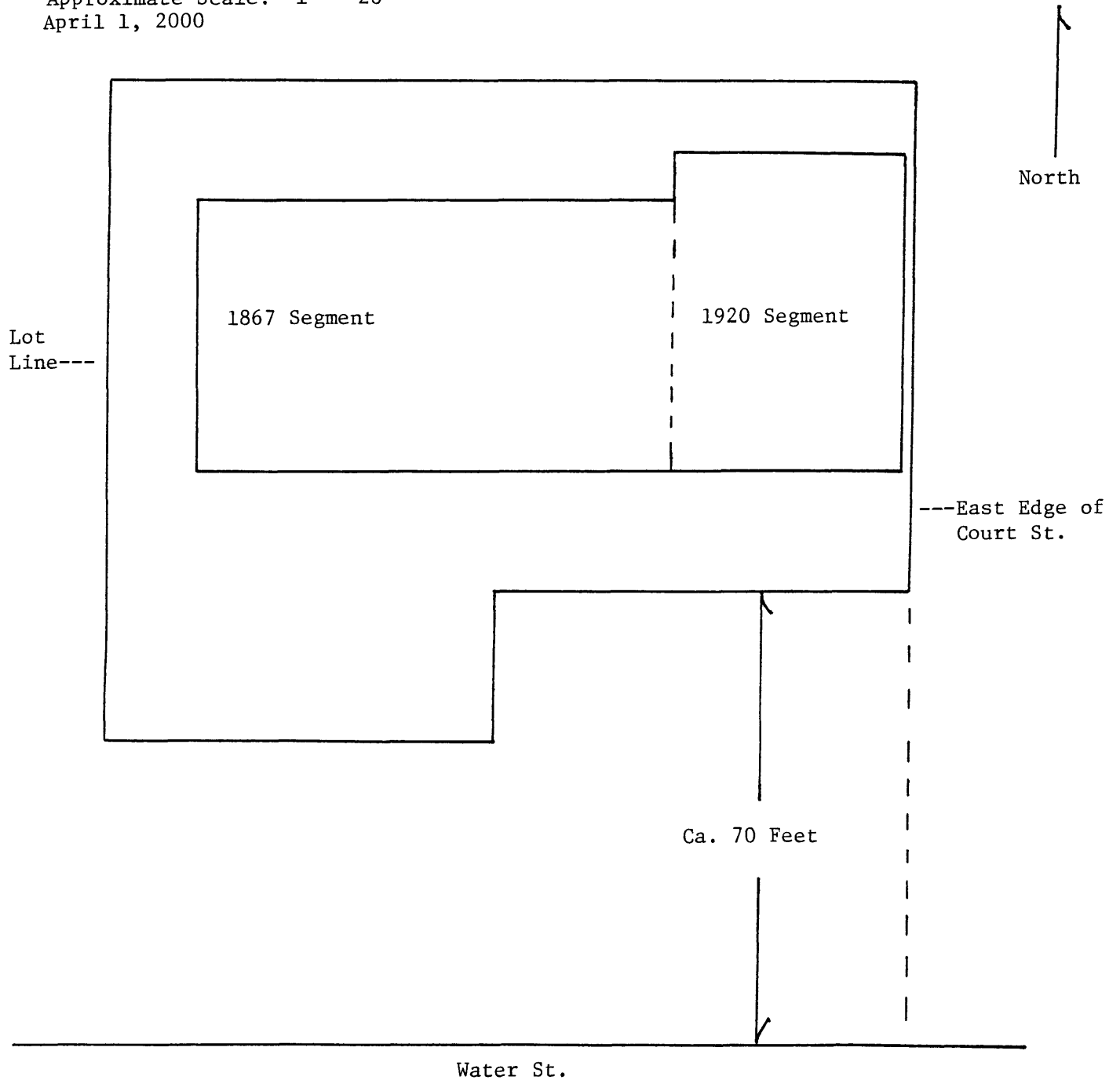
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Decorah Woolen Mill
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Site Plan
Approximate Scale: 1" = 20'
April 1, 2000



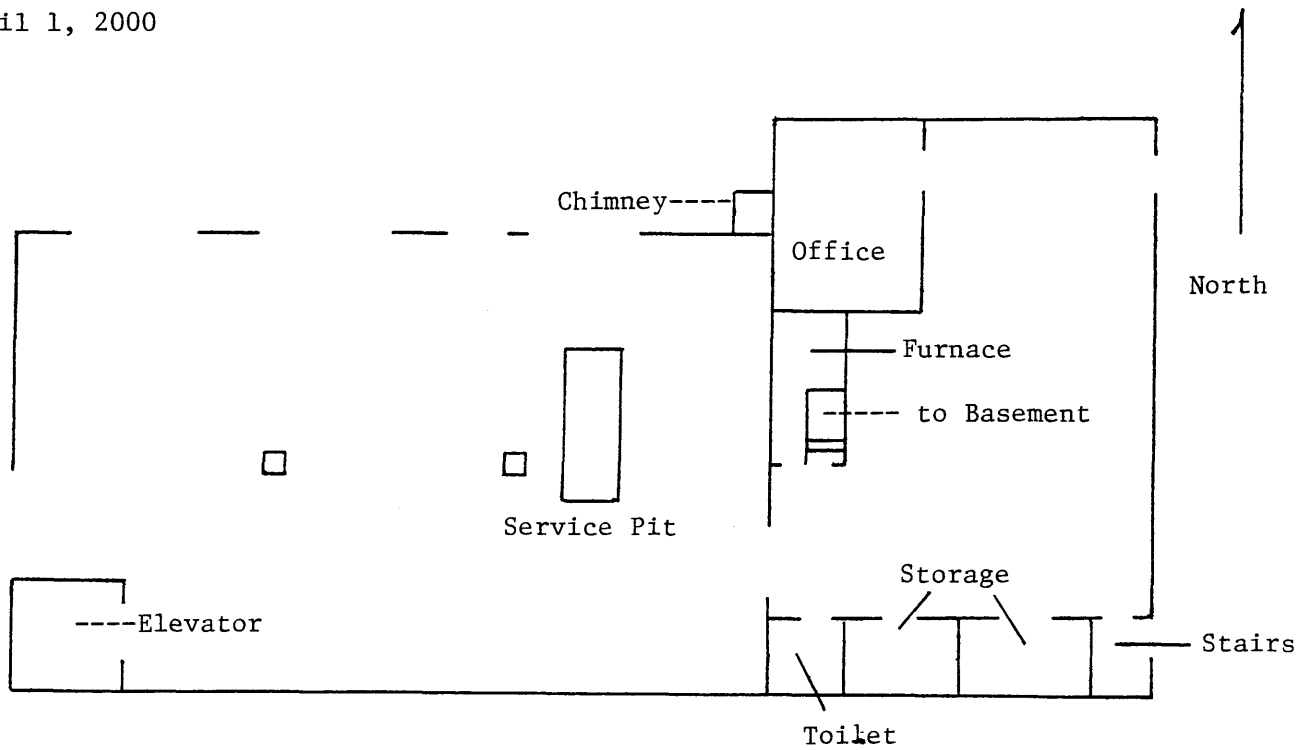
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Decorah Woolen Mill
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First Floor Plan
Approximate Scale: 1" = 15'
April 1, 2000



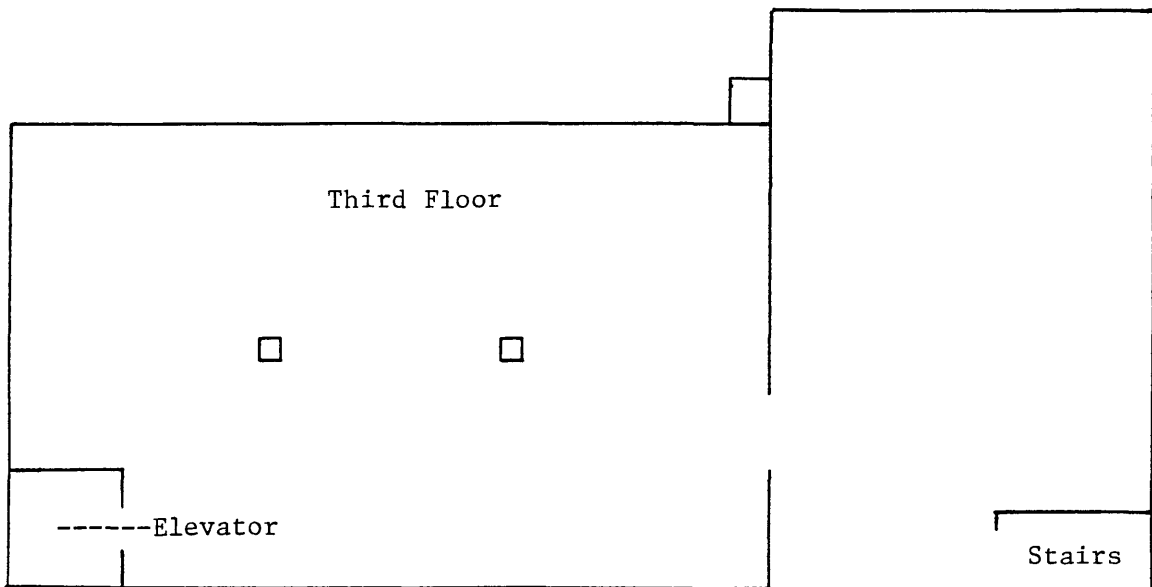
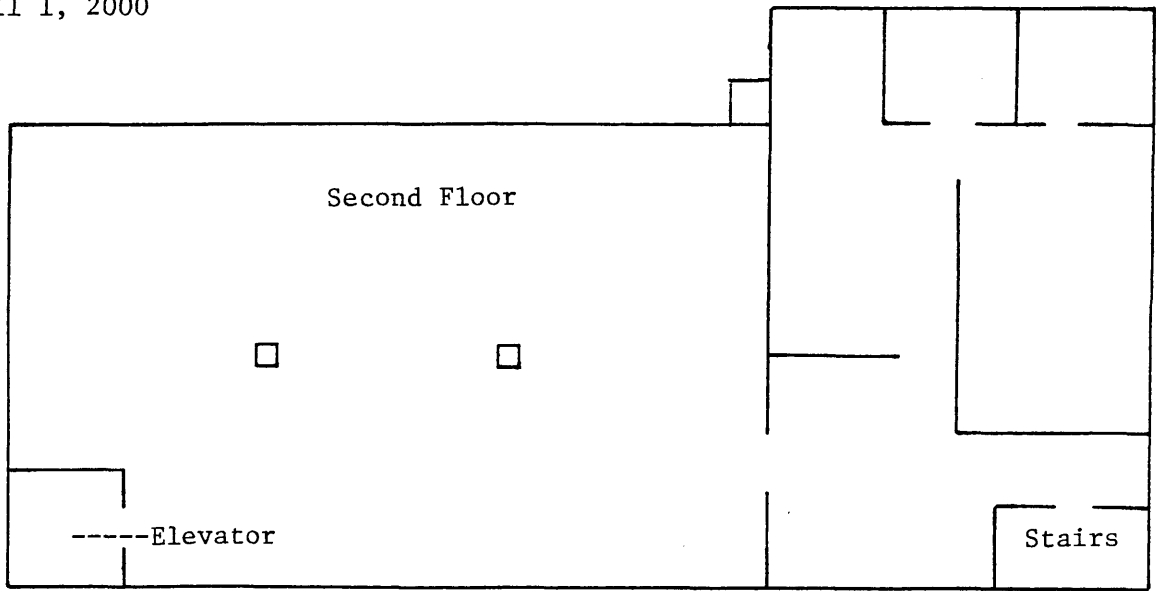
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Decorah Woolen Mill
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Second and Third Floor Plans
Approximate Scale: 1" = 15'
April 1, 2000

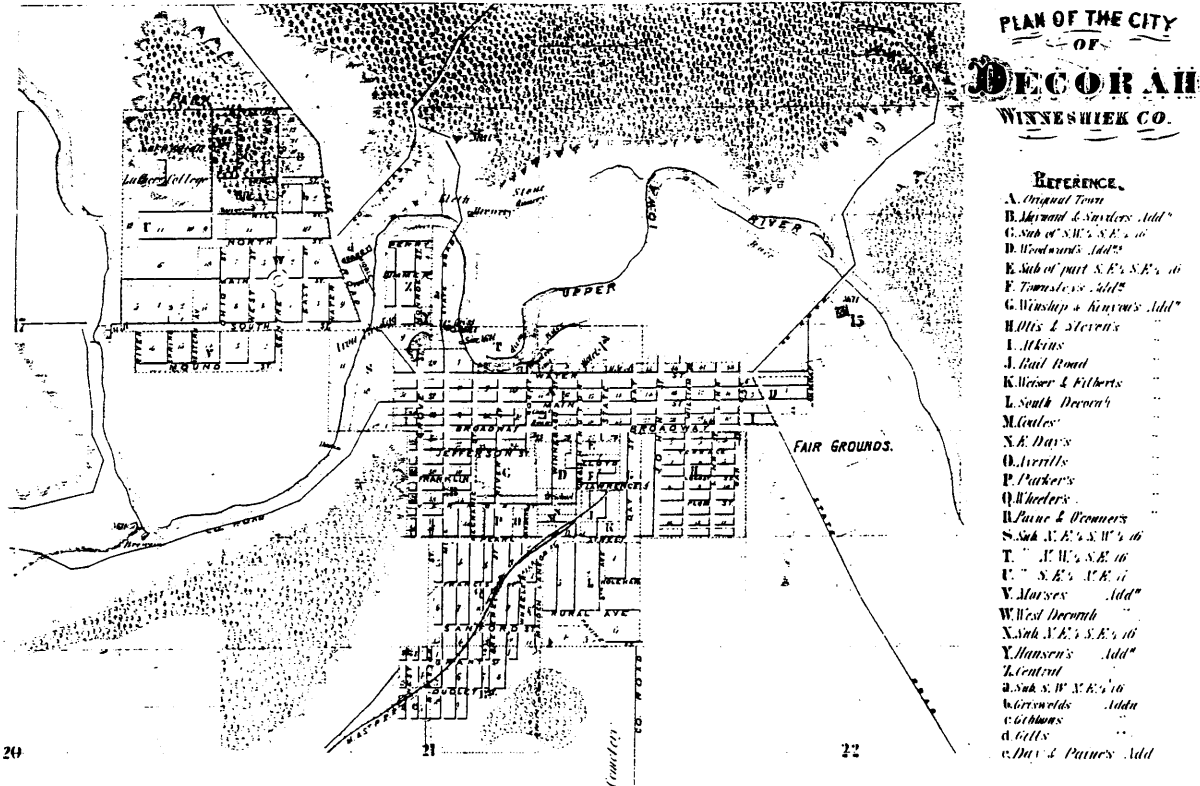


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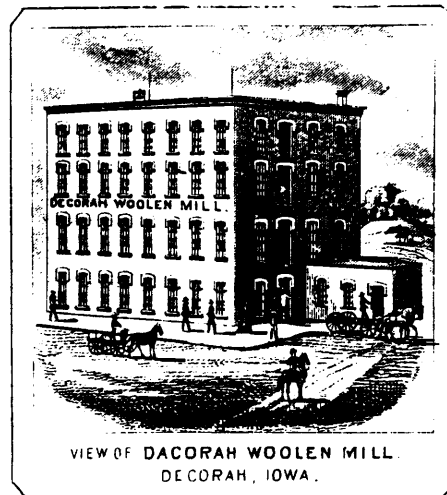
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Decorah Woolen Mill
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Source: Andreas Atlas of the State of Iowa, 1875 (1970 reprint), p. 103.



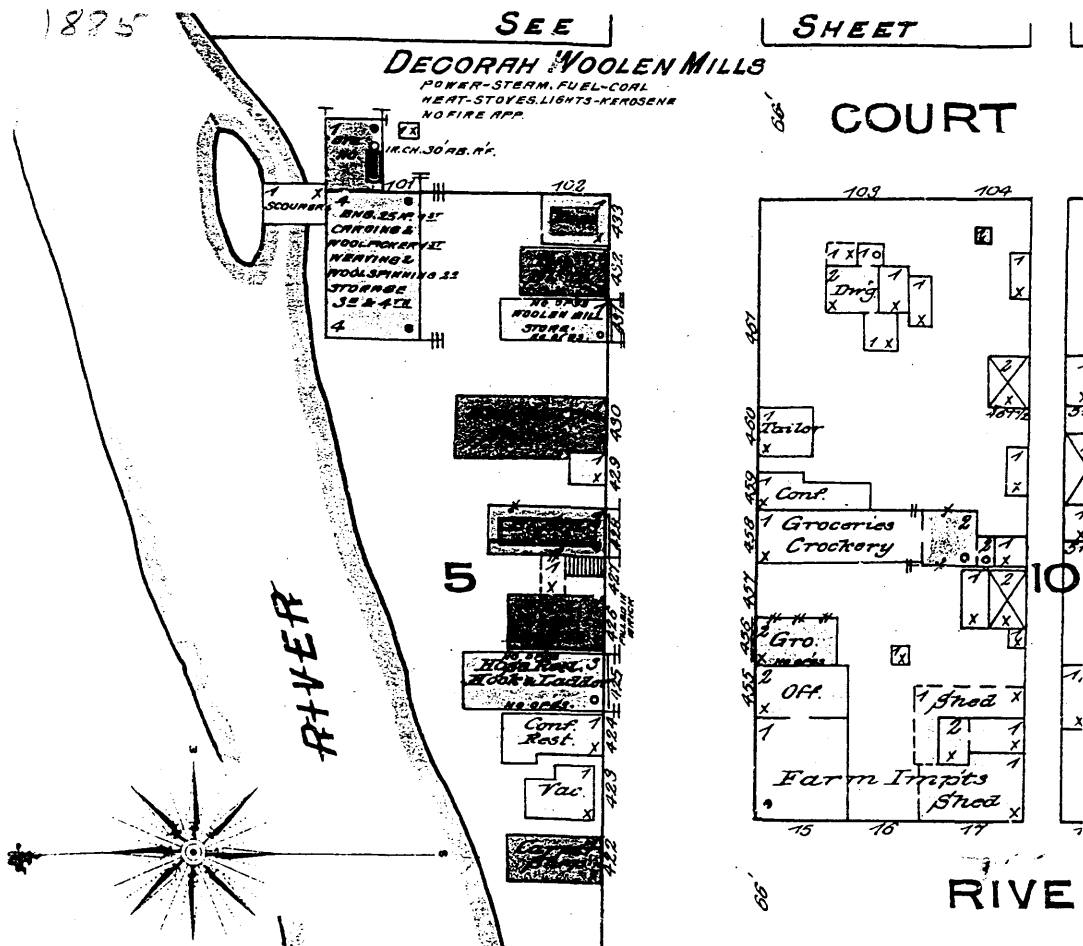
Source: Andreas Atlas . . ., 1875 (1970), p. 334.

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Decorah Woolen Mill
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Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. December, 1885 (excerpt)

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point 70 feet North and 33 feet East of the Southeast corner of Lot 1 of Block 5, Original Decorah, thence West 55 feet, thence South 20 feet, thence West 52 feet, thence North 90.3 feet, thence East 107 feet, thence South 70.3 feet to the place of beginning, in the City of Decorah.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The above description includes the 1867 mill and its 1920 addition. The south portion of Lot 1 is not included. It was associated with the Decorah Woolen Mill Co., and with some of the subsequent operation in the Woolen Mill building until 1932 when the two portions of the lot became owned by different parties and were used for different purposes. No pre-1932 structures are extant on the south portion of the lot.

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Decorah Woolen Mill
Winneshiak County, IA

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Darrell Henning

Date: Feb. 10, 2000

All are "Camera Facing"

- No. 1 General View--SW
- 2 General View--SE
- 3 Detail of West Elevation--SE
- 4 South Side--NE
- 5 First Floor, 1867 Segment--NW
- 6 Third Floor, 1867 Segment--NW
- 7 Third Floor, 1867 Segment--NE
- 8 Third Floor, Original Exterior of 1867 Segment--NW