

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received DEC 15 1983

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Chris Neessen House

and or common

2. Location

street & number 601 East 4th not for publication

city, town Wellsburg vicinity of

state Iowa code 019 county Grundy code 075

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. Burdette E. Walters

street & number 601 East 4th

city, town Wellsburg vicinity of state Iowa 50680

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number Grundy County Courthouse

city, town Wellsburg state Iowa

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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

The Chris Neessen house in Wellsburg is a remarkably well preserved example of Prairie School design. The house is notable in terms of its scale, use of materials, and location within its local community.

The Neesen house exemplifies the Prairie School, appears low in its overall elevation due to the strong horizontal visual emphasis which is imparted by its five foot wide eaves overhang, low pitched roof, bands of wide windows, and a series of stone water table and ribbon bands. Heavily pilastered single story front and side terraces (now enclosed) broaden the building mass and continue the thrusts of short two story wings on the south and west facades. The walls are load bearing, consisting of three space tile with a dark brick veneer. A large chimney with stone cap and ribbon band is centered on the red tile roof.

The irregular plan measures 68' by 56'. Two thin courses of Indiana Bedford limestone parallel the concrete foundation, being separated by single courses of brick. A third stone ribbon band similarly underscores a broader stone sill band on the second floor. Additional horizontal lines are created by the porch friezes, and gutter and eaves lines.

The plan of the architect, Howard B. Burr, was largely implemented with only a few exceptions. The architect appears to have envisioned a wood shingle roof. For the most part, the more elaborate multi-paned windows of the Prairie School were not used, and large double hung sash with plain upper sash were substituted. Several extra windows were added on the second floor north facade at the time of construction. While the actual banding of windows, typical of the Prairie School are absent the closing in of the terraces with window bands recreates this visual aspect. The front door is composed of a single beveled glass pane, and the front entrance has sidelights. Other notable exterior features include the bracketed corner porch which is juxtaposed to the front terrace wing, gracefully curved copper downspouts which arch directly from the gutter line to the wall and a red tile roof. On the north face of the house, a third short wing projects and a second story terraced porch was placed on the northeast corner, with the broad opening facing east. Below on the first floor a short stair stoop turns into a covered vestibule. On the east end of the same facade, a fully enclosed patio was built on the second floor.

Inside the house is in mint condition, with a few removed features which are stored. Any changes made from the architects were made at the time of construction. Floors are of oak, fireplace is of porcelainized glazed brick, the oak inlay work retains its original finish. Downstairs doors are inlaid with ebony and holly. The built in Plumb and Attwood vacuum cleaner, dinner bell, and bedroom bell systems all function. The french doors retain their beveled glass and original hardware, and the majority of the original light fixtures remain in place. An original bevel plate mirror retains its matched side lights in the downstairs hall. The original ice box with exterior service door is intact. Terraces, vestibule, porch tile floors survive as do connecting brass door sills. Bathrooms retain original marble floors and fixtures.

The house occupies a prominent elevated corner location (lot measures 110' by 150') south

## 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** 1916 **Builder/Architect** Howard Bowman Burr, Architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Chris Neessen House (1916-17) is a remarkably well preserved example of the Prairie School design, unusual in terms of plan and scale, and its location within its community.

Christopher Neessen (1864-1944) immigrated from Germany to this country in 1880 and was a most prominent citizen in his county. He farmed, became a large land owner, and was founder and president of the Farmers' & Merchant's Savings Bank (which closed prior to his death). Neessen built this house late in life, yet included in its plan a closet sized counting room with small wall safe, and records storage capacity. He occupied the house until his death, twenty seven years later.

Howard Bowman Burr (1885-1964), a Waterloo architect, designed the house (plans dated 18 June 1915). The son of Waverly banker Henry Burr, he was educated at Upper Iowa College in Fayette and the Iowa State College of Architecture and the Mechanical Arts in Ames (presently the Iowa State University). He received his certificate in professional engineering on January 10, 1920 from the Iowa State Board of Engineering Examiners. Burr lived in Waterloo and developed strong community ties there. He is known to have designed a bank in New Hartford, a school in Dike, and major residences in Grundy Center for the Willoughby family (similar to this house), and the Moody family. He also designed a house for the son of the man who built this house. He designed a public toilet in a chinese mode for the city of Waterloo (recently demolished, documented), did design work for John Deere & Co., was building superintendent for the Waterloo Register Company, and was buildings and grounds engineer for the Construction Machinery Company in Waterloo after 1943. He died in Denver, Colorado in August, 1964.

The Neessen house was the last built of a series of major merchants' homes in Wellsburg. Located on a prominent elevated street corner, the construction of this very substantial house was closely monitored in the county papers. Between September 14 and December 21, 1916, at least six progress reports appeared in the Wellsburg Herald, and also in the county paper, the Grundy Democrat. On September 14 the house plan was described as being "...a brick faced house, in all respects modern with a tile roof. It will be one of the finest in this section of the country." Two weeks later, the paper added "This house when completed will be a credit to Grundy County. It will have everything in it that can be bought to add to any family's comfort. The architect who drew the plans estimated that the cost to complete the house would be around \$15,000. No other house has been built in this county which costs as much." By late December, the structure was basically complete, despite delays in the delivery of trim stone, windows and furnace fittings. On December 21 it was noted that the windows were "...all special made, with extra heavy frames and plate glass panes so they had to be built for the job." The garage was built early in 1917. Mylon Alexander Rohrbacher was the local builder.

The house gained local reknown as being the preferred site for spooning, being termed as "the international date line." The local paper (22 August 1928) documented this reputation when it praised new stop signs and added "Now if the city authorities will just break up that gang of spooners hanging around the Chris Neesen Corner almost every evening we will have the town in good shape."

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Wellsburg

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	5	5	0	6	2	0	0	4	6	9	7	7	9	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

West 110' of south 150' of Lot 12, 1926 Plat of the Town of Wellsburg.

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

state N.A. code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator

organization Iowa SHPO date 6 December 1983

street & number Historical Building  
E. 12th & Grand Blvd. telephone 515-281-8152

city or town Des Moines state Iowa 50319

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Adrian A. Anderson*

title Executive Director Iowa State Historical Department date 6 December 1983

### For NPS use only

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

*Melvyn Byrd* **Entered in the National Register** date 1/12/84  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Description

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of the town city park. A brick two car garage with tiled roof and roofridge crest is to the northeast of the house. Its four-part hinged doors are in storage having been replaced by a small tiled front additon with single suspended garage door and board and batten infil. The corners of the property were originally marked by stone capped brick pillars, decorated on each side with sword-like light brick inlays (of brick identical to the interior fireplaces). One of three pillars survives, the corner pillar having been removed due to street widening. A raised concrete retaining wall surrounds the property. A portion of the original street side tree canopy survives in front of the house, and an original deciduous treet planting on the southwest corner now obscures much of the house. A flared short stairway and walk runs west to the side street from the garage.

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Significance

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Today the Neesen house shelters a notable collection of Victorian pump organs, ornate hardwood furniture and patterned china which the present owner has assembled. The same individual has carefully worked to restore the house and to reproduce authentic floor coverings and lighting fixtures.



Architect Howard Bowman Burr

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Continuation sheet Bibliography

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Bibliography:

- Interviews: Mrs. John Masselink, Grand Haven, Michigan, daughter of C. Neessen, summer 1983.  
Mrs. Ethel V. Cannon, Grand Haven, Michigan, granddaughter of C. Neessen, summer 1983.  
Mrs. Marcella Neessen, Wellsburg, Iowa, granddaughter of C. Neessen, summer 1983.  
Chris Neessen Masselink, St. Louis, Mo., grandson of C. Neessen, summer 1983.  
Mrs. Genevieve Woodbridge, Waterloo, Iowa, daughter of contractor, summer 1983.  
Mrs. Carol B. Knox, Aurora, Colo., daughter of architect, fall 1983.

Grundy Democrat, 14 September - 28 December 1916.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Wellsburg, Iowa, July 1933.

Blueprints, Chris Neessen Residence, Wellsburg, by H. B. Burr.