



1206

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 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 Irwin, John N. and Mary L. (Rankin), House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number 633 Grand Avenue N/A not for publication \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Keokuk N/A vicinity \_\_\_\_\_  
state Iowa code IA county Lee code 107 zip code 52632

=====

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 Ann King \_\_\_\_\_ 10.13.99  
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

Edson H. Beall 10.14.99

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): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
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>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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: Domestic Sub: single dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: single dwelling  
Work in Progress  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

=====  
7. Description  
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Mixed  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/limestone  
roof Stone/slate  
walls Brick  
  
other Wood  
\_\_\_\_\_

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)

Politics/Government  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1885-1905  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates 1885  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
Irwin, John N.

Cultural Affiliation N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Daugherty, John  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(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: Keokuk Public Library

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10. Geographical Data

=====

Acreage of Property Less than one

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	637810	4473360	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 James and Nancy Bowden  
organization \_\_\_\_\_ date April 20, 1998  
street & number 633 Grand Avenue telephone 319/524-4340  
city or town Keokuk state IA zip code 52632  
=====

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  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name James and Nancy Bowden  
street & number 633 Grand Avenue telephone 319/524-4340  
city or town Keokuk state IA zip code 52632  
=====

=  
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.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Irwin, John N. and Mary L. (Rankin), House  
Lee County, Iowa

Section number 7 Page 1

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## Narrative Description

Located in a fine old residential district, the Irwin home is an example of mixed style, including the influences of Greek Revival, Italinat, and Classical Revival. According to John N. Irwin the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the home went through at least one, possible two, alterations in the Irwin ownership. The house was constructed in 1856 of brick, and has one of the most beautiful views of the Mississippi River, in Keokuk. The original portion of the house was constructed by local builder John Daugherty.

The Irwin Mansion is a large two and one half-story brick home that stands on a limestone and concrete foundation. The roof is constructed of slate, and metal, adding beauty to the overall appearance of the house. Four massive chimneys constructed of brick rise high above the eaves. The house exterior is a soft red brick. The wood shutters, and the large front porch are a treasure to see.

The front elevation features a projecting dormer with a Palladian window on the top level of the house. The upper half story is a large spacious ball room where balls and cotillions were once held for the cream of Keokuk society, and out of town guests. The balls were said to be anything but usual.

The house had gone through changes during the Irwin ownership. It is not known what the house looked like before. Through research at the Keokuk Public Library, and the Lee County Courthouse, I have not been able to document when said changes were made. At one time a veranda existed on the left side of the house. No recorded documents have surfaced at this time to changes made after the death of John N. Irwin. No changes have been made in the last twenty-five years.

When entering from the large front porch, you cannot miss the large double oak doors. They are three inches thick, six feet wide, and seven feet tall. Above the doors is a transom window, excellent for viewing the morning glow, and the glow of the night. Wood shutters that hang from the windows are of original color. There is a long hallway, that empties into large spacious rooms. To the right, you enter into the double living room. The front half has a black onyx fireplace, and 12 foot ceilings. The woodwork is pine. The back half, used as a music room, overlooks the Mississippi River and Lock and Dam 19. On the right side is the large blue carpeted dinning room, which also overlooks the Mississippi River. It has its own fireplace. There is a butlers pantry with massive shelves and cabinets. As you leave the dining room the stairs leading to the basement are on your right. Back to the hallway you see the winding wooden staircase, which leads to the second floor. At the foot of the staircase is an elevator that operates from the basement to the second floor. Also on the main floor is the parlor and a half bath. The parlor was used mainly for weddings and funerals. Entering back into the hallway, to your right, you see the library. There are large built-in, glass front bookcases, which surround you with charm. You leave the house through the wood and glass fronted double doors, that lead to the front doors.

The foundation is made of limestone and concrete. Above the foundation, the house is made of soft red brick, with fine mortar joints.

The rear elevation of the house stands tall and proud. Every window from the back of the house, has an excellent view of the wonderful wildlife and the mighty Mississippi.

Landscaping of the back yard was difficult. At one time the entire back yard was laid with brick. It was said that when the weather was too hot for inside dances and gatherings, the back patio was used for lawn dances. The brick patio extends to the end of the bluff, which overlooks the great Mississippi River at Lock and Dam 19. We now have many yard swings and yard benches for viewing the Mississippi River and Locks. The eagles roost high up in our trees, which hang over the bluff. We have a wide array of birds, squirrels, rabbits, and deer which enjoy our yard. We have an excellent view of the Illinois side of the river.

The house attracts the attention of passers by. The house is on the Keokuk walking tour. Out of towners often drive by to admire the house. A few even stop and ask questions about the history of the house.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Irwin, John N. and Mary L. (Rankin), House  
Lee County, Iowa

Section number 8 Page 2

## Statement of Significance

The property is eligible for the National Register at the local level of significance under Criterion "B" for its association with John N. Irwin, whose public service and commercial success earned him a significant place in Keokuk history. In late nineteenth century Iowa, Irwin drew the high regard and pride of his contemporaries for his widely known talents and accomplishments. Indeed, upon his death, the editor of the *Annals of Iowa* described him as "one of the foremost business men and statesmen of southeastern Iowa" while another found him to be one of the "most gifted young men Keokuk has ever produced."<sup>1</sup>

By 1885, the year when John Irwin bought the house that is this subject of this nomination, he had already achieved considerable financial and political success.<sup>2</sup> Now forty-two years old, he had graduated from Dartmouth College, been admitted to the bar in 1869, married Mary Rankin with which whose father he had studied law, and practiced in successful partnership with James Hagerman until he entered his father's expanding wholesale dry goods firm. During the early seventies, the firm of Irwin, Phillips & Co. was growing more extensive throughout the middle west and the always versatile John Irwin now turned his energies to the family business. He first became its bookkeeper and cashier and later its guiding financial manager. Running parallel with his rise to commercial leadership in Keokuk was a political career. Being "extremely bright and vivacious, attractive and convivial" and blessed with a "fluent and classical eloquence," he quickly gained distinction as a public speaker.<sup>3</sup> He served one term as a representative to the Iowa General Assembly (1875), followed by election as mayor of Keokuk in 1876-77 and, in 1883, President Chester A. Arthur appointed John Irwin to be territorial governor of Idaho.

After a brief time in Idaho he was back in Keokuk and soon moved into this nominated property. Thereafter, John Irwin's life became ever more devoted to local and national public service and to supporting Keokuk enterprises. City voters elected him as their mayor in 1887 and 1888. Then, in 1890, President Benjamin Harrison appointed him to be territorial governor of Arizona. During his year-long administration there, the Territory of Arizona held a Constitutional Convention in hopes of gaining admittance to the Union as a state but, with Arizona being mostly Democrat, statehood had to wait. In 1899, President McKinley appointed him as U. S. Minister to Portugal where he served until returning home after about one year in office to direct his private business.

His character was not that of an aggressive, ambitious politician, but rather one of quiet persuasion, dedication and service—the qualities of a diplomat.<sup>4</sup> He became a strong man of affairs, stated one writer, because "He possessed culture. He had business tact. He knew when to be theoretical and when to be practical. He was therefore successful, and in the city of Keokuk where he had lived so long, he had the genuine respect of all classes of people."<sup>5</sup> It was said "His political opponents he numbered among his best friends." Another put it this way: "With tact and consummate skill he could control men without recourse to oratory, which he possessed in abundance."<sup>6</sup> These qualities were demonstrated in his last service to Keokuk, which took him to Washington D.C. with other local citizens to urge that Congress grant permission to construct the great water power dam across the Mississippi River. "John N. Irwin was chosen because he was a diplomat and because he had more friends in the country among official men than any other Keokuk man." When their efforts "effected results which even the most sanguine hesitated in believing possible," the outcome "showed what deft manipulations he was capable of effecting by honorable and unimpeachable means."<sup>7</sup>

Throughout his career of commercial leadership in Keokuk, John Irwin also generously supported city initiatives, among which included board president of the Western Base Ball Association, which fielded Iowa's first professional and only major league baseball team, the Keokuk Westerns in 1875.<sup>8</sup> As noted in the city's newspaper upon his death:

"Every public institution has felt his influence and aid. Where money was of advantage in improving Keokuk as a city, he bought stock. He was the prime promoter and founder of the Keokuk Loan and Building Association and served for over a

<sup>1</sup> *Annals of Iowa*, 3d Series, 7:4 (January 1906), 319; Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public men of Early Iowa* (Des Moines: The Homestead Publishing Co., 1916), p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> The most detailed biographical information is contained in the obituary notice, "Hon. John N. Irwin Answers Summons," Keokuk (IA) *Daily Gate City*, December 23, 1905, pp. 1, 5, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa*, p. 363.

<sup>4</sup> Irwin's diplomatic nature and that of a quiet, gentle spirit is noted throughout the December 23, 1905 article in the *Daily Gate City* on "Hon. John N. Irwin Answers Summons".

<sup>5</sup> "John N. Irwin," Des Moines (IA) *Capital* (December 23, 1905), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> "Hon. John N. Irwin Answers Summons," Keokuk (IA) *Daily Gate City*, December 23, 1905, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Christian, "High Expectations, Small Market, Regionalism, and a Short-lived Season: The National Association's Keokuk Westerns of 1875," Paper presented at SABER Conference, Kansas City, MO, June 7, 1996.



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Irwin, John N. and Mary L. (Rankin), House  
Lee County, Iowa

Section number 8,9 Page 3

year as secretary of the corporation without compensation, even going so far as to buy with his own money the record books. No man in Keokuk had more to do in furnishing Keokuk with a first class opera house. He was a prominent promoter of the new Hotel Keokuk and did much toward furnishing Keokuk with a good first class hostelry.

At the time of his death Mr. Irwin was a director in the Iowa State Insurance Co., the Keokuk Savings Bank, the K. K. K. Medicine Co., as well as his own wholesale business.”<sup>9</sup>

During the last several months of 1905, following his trip to Washington on behalf of Keokuk’s water power prospects, John Irwin struggled against complications of kidney trouble. As the condition “undermined his strength and sapped his vigor” he traveled to Hot Springs, Arkansas as a last resort to treat the condition. Within six weeks, however, he died and was returned to Keokuk for burial.

## Bibliography

Previous occupant, John N. Irwin II, [New York, N.Y.], (interview through mail correspondence)

Williams Keokuk Directory and Business Mirror, Volume 1, (pages 63, 118)

Holland’s Directory, (page 91)

Keokuk and Lee County Directory, (page 73)

City of Keokuk Directory, (64)

General Business of Keokuk, (years 1883-1884)

Yesterdays, Reminiscences of Long Ago, Irving, Virginia Wilcox, (pages 54-55)

Early Keokuk Homes, Garson, Raymond E.

Des Moines Sunday Register, (January 7, 1939)

The Governor’s, Goff, John S., Black Mountain Press, Cave Creek, Arizona, (1863-1912)

Court Records, Clerk of Courts Office, Lee County Courthouse

Deeds Records, Recorders Office, Lee County Courthouse

Annals of Iowa, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 7:4 (January 1906, 319);

Edwards H. Stiles, Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa, Des Moines: The Homestead Publishing Company, 19160, P363

The most detailed biographical information is contained in the obituary notice, “Hon. John N. Irwin Answers Summons,” Keokuk (IA) Daily Gate City, December 23, 1905, (pages 1,5,7)

“John N. Irwin,” Des Moines (IA) Capital, December 23, 1905 (page 4)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. In an obituary notice on “Gov. John Irwin Died Yesterday,” Des Moines (IA) Register and Leader, (December 23, 1905), p. 1, John Irwin was counted as being “head of the Irwin-Phillips company, one of the largest and oldest wholesale dry goods houses in the state. He was also identified with many Keokuk enterprises and was rated among the wealthiest citizens here. For a number of years he was the principal owner of the Keokuk Daily Gate City.”

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Irwin, John N. and Mary L. (Rankin), House  
Lee County, Iowa

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Ralph Christian, "High Expectations, Small Market, Regionalism, and a Short-lived Season: The National Association's Keokuk Westerns of 1875," Paper presented at SABER Conference, Kansas City, MO, June 7, 1996

Ibid. In an obituary notice on "Gov. John Irwin Died Yesterday," Des Moines (IA) Register and Leader, December 23, 1905 (page 1)

## Verbal Boundary Description

The northerly ten and one-half feet of lot six; all of lots seven and eight; the southerly thirty-seven feet of lot nine; all in block forty-four in Mason's Upper Addition to the City of Keokuk and that part of the northwest quarter of section thirty; township sixty-five north, range four west of the Fifth Principal Meridian, Lee County, Iowa located in the city of Keokuk, lying between the land of Keokuk and Hamilton Water Power Company, now Union Electric Company and the easterly line of Mason's Upper Addition.

## Verbal Boundary Justification

Boundary includes the house and the land historically associated with the property

## Photographs

The following information is common to photographs 1 through 7:

Photographer – Nancy Bowden

Date – July 2, 1998

1. West view of house, showing the large front porch. Camera facing East.
2. North view of octagon side of house, which features the library. Camera facing South.
3. North view of the massive side depth of house, which reveals the parlor door. Camera facing South.
4. East view of the back of the house, showing the excessive height of the house. Camera facing Southwest.
5. South view of the back of the house allows you to see the many wood windows the house has. Camera facing East by Northwest.
6. South view of front half side of the house, it shows two of the four chimneys and the ballroom window. Camera facing Northeast.
7. Southeast partial view of the bluff, and the Mississippi River, and Lock and Dam 19. Camera facing Southeast.