

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC The Farm House; The Knapp-Wilson House

AND/OR COMMON

The Farm House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER Iowa State University Campus

CITY, TOWN

Ames

VICINITY OF

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5th

STATE

Iowa

CODE

19

COUNTY

Story

CODE

169

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**NAME Iowa State University--Vice President for Information and  
Development

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Ames

VICINITY OF

STATE

Iowa

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE, Story County Courthouse  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1972

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" 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 Farm House, as it has always been known in Iowa, was built as the main building of the model farm which began in the middle of 648 acres about 30 miles north of Des Moines, and became the Iowa State University of today. Work was started on the house a year after a bill for the organization of a state agricultural college was passed in 1858. The kitchen wing was begun first, in 1860, and the main portion of the house in 1861. The house was substantially completed in the spring of 1864, the verandah and several outbuildings were built in 1865 and the annual report of the college that year described the building as "finished except for painting the inside work."

Milens Burt of Muscatine was the architect and builder, and much of the material and labor for the house was furnished by local workmen, some of it volunteer. The bricks were manufactured on the farm, where the clay was available, as was timber, and the stone for the foundation was quarried about one and one-half miles from the building site.

In December 1859 the building plans were described as:

Farmer's house, 32 by 42 feet, two stories, brick, with pantries and kitchen back, 16 by 24, one and a half stories of brick. Back of this is a washroom, milk room and wood shed, 24 by 24, one story, of wood.

A 1862 report said "Each story is nine feet high, of good brick on solid stone walls, with cellar under the whole of the house," and also mentioned a 42 by 60 foot frame barn.

The original plan of the house is substantially the same as the plan today (copies enclosed) although both the exterior and interior have been added to and remodeled many times during the occupancy of the 18 families or college groups who have lived there. The rear wing of the house adjoins the present living room and contains the original kitchen on the first floor. The present kitchen addition dates from approximately 1886 when the house was remodeled to provide for two family occupancy.

The major alterations to the original were made while James Wilson's successor, C. F. Curtiss and his family resided there, beginning about 1896, and, therefore, these changes post-date the nationally historic period. The present front porch was added at this time and the house was reroofed, bathrooms and electricity were added and the interior was repapered and painted. The house was connected to campus central heating plant about 1909 and the soft, crumbling exterior brick walls were coated with limestone plaster and the screened porch on the west side was built. At the same time considerable work was done on the interior and the Curtiss' may actually have gutted the first floor. There apparently are no remarkable decorative features from the pre-1900 period, as the Farm House was a very unpretentious

(Continued)

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input 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		

1861 (Constructed)

SPECIFIC DATES	BUILDER/ARCHITECT
1880-1885 (Knapp)	Milens Burt
1891-1896 (Wilson)	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Farm House and its outbuildings were the first structures to be built on the 648 acres of unimproved land of the Iowa State Agricultural College and Farm, the first land-grant institution to be formally recognized. Built in 1861 this original structure was used as the residence first of the successive Superintendents of the Farm, and later of the Deans of Agriculture. This building was the home of Seaman Asahel Knapp, noted agriculturist and teacher, from 1880 to 1885, and from 1891 to 1896 it was the residence of James ("Tama Jim") Wilson, agriculturist and later Secretary of Agriculture in the cabinets of Presidents McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft.

### BIOGRAPHY: Seaman A. Knapp

Born in Essex County, New York, December 16, 1833, Seaman A. Knapp made nationally significant contributions to agriculture, primarily in the South. He entered Union College, Schenectady, in 1852, graduating with honors in 1856 and for ten years thereafter he taught school. In 1866, Knapp met with a serious accident which crippled him for several years. Moving to Benton County, Iowa, he bought a small farm at Big Grove. He served as Methodist pastor at Vinton, Iowa, and for five years as superintendent for the state school for the blind at Cedar Rapids. He then returned to his farm. In 1872, he had begun to publish the Western Stock Journal and Farmer. On his own farm, he used improved seed and brought in better livestock. He was one of the organizers and the first president of the Iowa Improved Stock Breeders' Association.

In 1879, Knapp was selected as professor of agriculture and manager of the farm at Iowa State College. From 1884-1886, he was president of the college. He drafted the first experiment station bill, a bill which opened the way for the passage of the Hatch Act in 1887.

Knapp's greatest contribution to agriculture, however, was in the South. In 1886, he took charge of a large colonization experiment in Louisiana. To interest the native population in agriculture, he offered very favorable terms to farmers from northern states who would settle, one to a township, and demonstrate what could be accomplished by good farming. The plan was so successful that thousands of farmers were attracted to the region and the local people improved their practices. Knapp had great influence in the development of the rice industry of the Southwest.

(Continued)



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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

house. The present large living room that occupies the west side of the house was made by the Curtiss' by removing the partition between the two original rooms, and the fireplace, flanked by french doors leading to the porch on the west, as well as the decorative molding in this room is ca. 1909.

The Farm House today is an L-shaped, stuccoed building with wooden trim around the fenestration and the porches with simple balustrades and pillars, all painted white. The main portion has two stories, an attic and a cellar while the north wing has one and one-half stories and cellar, and the frame addition and the porches are one story in height.

In 1972 the university began a restoration project which has repaired structural problems and is restoring the house to ca. 1910 appearance, for planned use by the university as a meeting place and reception area.

\*\*\*Information from report by Wesley Shank, "Studies of Historic Iowa Architecture," Engineering Research Institute, Iowa State University, July 1972 (ERI proj. 101).

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

When James Wilson (see below) became Secretary of Agriculture, Knapp was appointed special agent for the promotion of farming in the southern states. He was sent to China, Japan, and the Philippines to investigate rice varieties, its production and milling. His findings resulted in a great expansion in the rice industry. When in 1903, the Mexican boll weevil appeared in Texas, Knapp contributed much to the education of cotton farmers in combatting that insect. Knapp also inaugurated the Farmers Cooperative Demonstration Work in the U. S. Department of Agriculture, which was designed to place object lessons before the farm masses. Under his direction before his death, hundreds of experienced agents were employed throughout the South to assist in this work. Knapp died in April, 1911, and was buried in Ames.

BIOGRAPHY: JAMES WILSON

Born in Ayrshire, Scotland, August 16, 1836, James Wilson emigrated with his family to America in 1851. The family first settled in Connecticut, moving in 1855 to a farm at Tama County, Iowa. Young Wilson early chose farming as his life work. After holding a number of local and state offices, he served three terms in Congress, after which he returned home and engaged in farming for seven years.

In 1891, he was appointed professor of agriculture and head of the experiment station at Iowa State College, where, with the assistance of Charles F. Curtis, who succeeded him as dean of agriculture, he placed agricultural instruction on both a practical and scientific basis.

In 1897, Wilson began his 16 years as U. S. Secretary of Agriculture, under Presidents McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Taft, the longest term of service of any secretary of this department. Under Wilson's direction, the activities of the Department of Agriculture were extended in many fields. Experiment stations were established throughout the United States. Farm demonstration work was begun in the South, and Cooperative extension work in home economics and agriculture was begun. An army of experts were employed to conduct research in agriculture and obtain information all over the world for the promotion of agriculture. Legislation relating to insect pests, plant and animal diseases, forestry, conservation, irrigation, roadbuilding and agricultural education was enacted.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

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Following his retirement in 1913, Wilson returned to Tama County. After investigating and reporting upon agricultural conditions in Great Britain in conjunction with Henry C. Wallace, Wilson spent the remainder of his life in retirement. He died August 26, 1920.

\*\*\*Biographies from original form by Ray H. Mattison, 1963.

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The Farm House  
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

Located in the midst of a large modern campus, the Farm House (Knapp-Wilson House) is surrounded on the north, east and south by buildings of much later style and large scale, however, on the west it retains a view of the beautifully landscaped park of the central campus. The boundaries of the landmark are the university roads and walkways nearest to the house, allowing room for some landscaping which aids in partially screening the Farm House from massive structures nearby.

Beginning at the point where the walkway south of the horticultural greenhouse meets Knoll Road, south along the western curb of Knoll Road, then west along the first walkway just north of Ross Hall, then in a diagonal northwesterly direction, then north at the next junction, running toward the greenhouses, then east along the walkway just north of the house to the beginning point. (see enclosed "Iowa State University," January 1966 map).