

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. ~~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 an 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 Duncan/Duitsman Farm Historic District  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 4324 180th Street NA  not for publication  
city or town George  vicinity  
state Iowa code IA county Lyon code 119 zip code 51237

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.)  
[Signature] 7/27/94  
Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
State of 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 certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the 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): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper  
Edson H. Beall  
Entered in the Date of Action  
National Register 9/23/94

Duncan/Duitsman Farm  
Name of Property

Historic District

Lyon, Iowa

County and State

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  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
12	2	buildings
4	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
17	2	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register

Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/agricultural outbuildings

AGRICULTURE/agricultural field

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

VACANT/NOT IN USE

AGRICULTURE/agricultural field

7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

no style

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD

roof WOOD

other

Narrative Description

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

Duncan/Duitsman Farm  
Name of Property

Historic District Lyon, Iowa  
County and State

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.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or 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)

AGRICULTURE  
ARCHITECTURE  
SETTLEMENT

Period of Significance

1878-1944

Significant Dates

1878

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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:

Duncan/Duitsman Farm  
Name of Property

Historic District

Lyon, County  
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 160 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

15	261960	4808800
Zone	Easting	Northing

  
2 

15	262720	4808780
Zone	Easting	Northing

3 

15	261920	4808000
Zone	Easting	Northing

  
4 

15	262715	4807960
Zone	Easting	Northing

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 Jan R. Nash  
organization Tallgrass Historians L.C. date March 8, 1994  
street & number 931 Maiden Lane telephone 319/354-6722  
city or town Iowa City state Iowa zip code 52240

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Ollie Duitsman, Ila Duitsman, Alvin Duitsman  
street & number R.R.1 Box 132 telephone 712/475-3810  
city or town George state Iowa zip code 51237

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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Duncan/Duitsman Farm Historic District, Lyon County, Iowa  
Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa, MRDF

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RECEIVED 413

CFN-259-1116

AUG 1 0 1994

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

7. DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

The Duncan/Duitsman farm includes a collection of buildings and structures assembled by the two farm families who have owned this tract of Lyon County, Iowa, farmland. The c. 1878 house on the Duncan (east) farmstead is a modest, but well-proportioned, one-and-a-half story frame dwelling constructed by Marion and John Duncan, original settlers of this section of treeless, windblown prairie. Lumber for its balloon-frame and clapboard siding, square nails, and soft red bricks for its chimney likely were all hauled to the site from nearby Sibley, terminus of the railroad since 1872. Surrounding the five-acre farmstead are aged and broken cottonwoods and box elder trees, remnants of the Duncans' windbreak. Beyond the windbreak are the fields and pasture by which the Duncan's made their living for 16 years. John Duncan broke the prairie sod of nearly all his 80 acres to plant flax and a variety of subsistence crops, while his father-in-law, John Watkins, labored on his 80 acres next door to the west. These fields remain in their original configuration, though the crops planted in them have changed. After the Duncan farmstead was sold to John Duitsman in 1894, and probably between 1904 and 1909, the extant farm buildings associated with the property were constructed, including a small gambrel-roof barn, a hen house, and a garage. Next to the Duncan farmstead, on the land once owned by John Watkins, is another more recent farmstead. Its buildings also were constructed at the direction of John Duitsman after he acquired title to Watkins's 80 acres and thereby became owner of the entire 160 acres of Section 16 of Grant Township (Figure 1.), which is the subject of this nomination. The west Duitsman farmstead is occupied and still in use as the sole active farmstead. Its original nineteenth-century farm house (similar to the extant Duncan farm house) was removed in 1949 and replaced by the present house. The c. 1878 Duncan farm house has been unused for 30 years, but remains intact and little altered.

DESCRIPTION

*Duncan (east) Farmstead*

The Duncan house, along with the original windbreak of cottonwoods and box elder, and the farm land comprising the east 80 acres of the southwest quarter of Section 16, Grant Township, are the core



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group of resources in the Duncan farmstead (Figure 2.). Additionally, three ground depressions near the rear (north) of the house, a foundation near the extant hen house, and the large ground depression of a barn destroyed by a tornado in 1938 may constitute the sites of Duncan-era buildings. Together these components reflect the historic landscape of prairie pioneer settlers who struggled to alter the natural environment in order to create shelter, feed and cloth themselves, find successful cash crops, and fulfill the promise of opportunity in the Middle West.

The farmstead sits along the south boundary of the 80-acre Duncan tract (Figure 3.). The farmland is generally level and treeless. Just beyond the north boundary, the land quickly descends into a waterway--a slough area where the level of running water varies with the annual rainfall. During 1993, when excessive precipitation was experienced throughout the Middle West, this slough was a full, fast moving stream of water. During dry years, it may disappear. Curving into the north boundary line of this quarter section of Section 16, the water has cut a steep bank which must be avoided by farm machinery. The area has never been plowed and remains a small remnant of native prairie. Descendants of John Duitsman who still own and farm the land report finding projectile points in this general area, though no archaeological studies have been conducted anywhere near the site.

The house (1) is the only remaining building of the Duncan period.<sup>1</sup> It is the nearest building to the road, with all other farm structures placed well behind it. Its rectangular (20'x26') shape is oriented north/south with the narrow gabled front directed south toward the road. The foundation along this south front is obscured by clapboards. The side and rear foundation material is concrete, added during the first part of the twentieth century when a partial cellar was excavated under the house. Frame walls of the building are clad by narrow clapboards trimmed with vertical corner boards. Square nails are visible on the wood siding. Fenestration is symmetrical and identical on the north and south end walls. A door is centered between two windows at ground level and overhead, under the gable peak, two windows are placed close together and centered over the door below. The front entrance has a

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<sup>1</sup>Three ground depressions near house are likely associated with the Duncan period. Size and proximity to the house indicate they may be a well or cistern, and privies or other accessory building associated with domestic life. A large ground depression at the north end of the farmstead is the site of the barn that was demolished in 1938 by a tornado. The barn which was approximately 14' by 30' had a lean-to on the north end. It had a pink Sioux quartzite stone foundation and square nails were used in its construction.

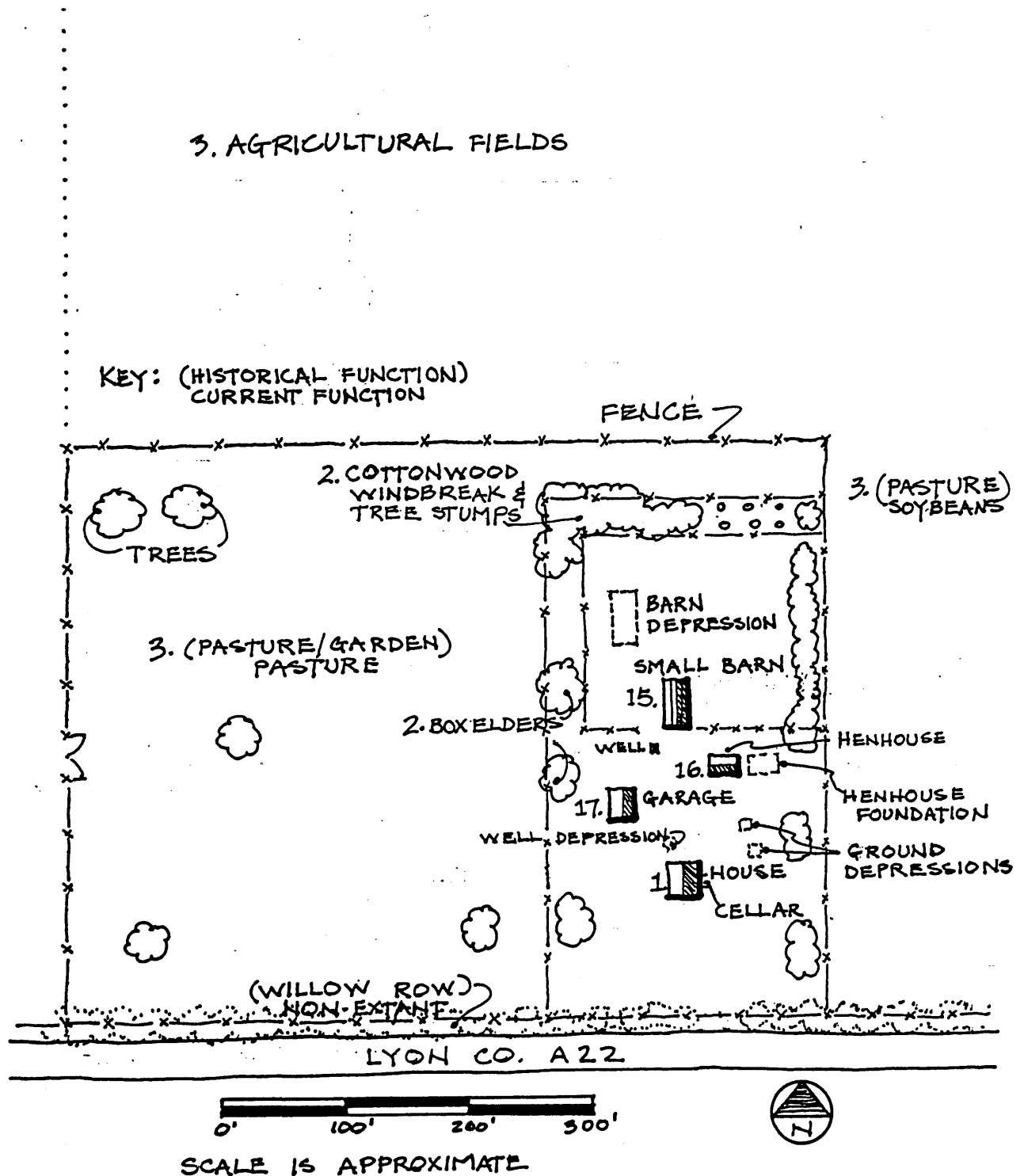
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Figure 2. FARMSTEAD LAYOUT. Detail of Duncan (east) farmstead, Section 16, Grant Township, Lyon County, Iowa. (Drawing by Cecilia Rusnak, February 1994).



1-3, 15-17. CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES



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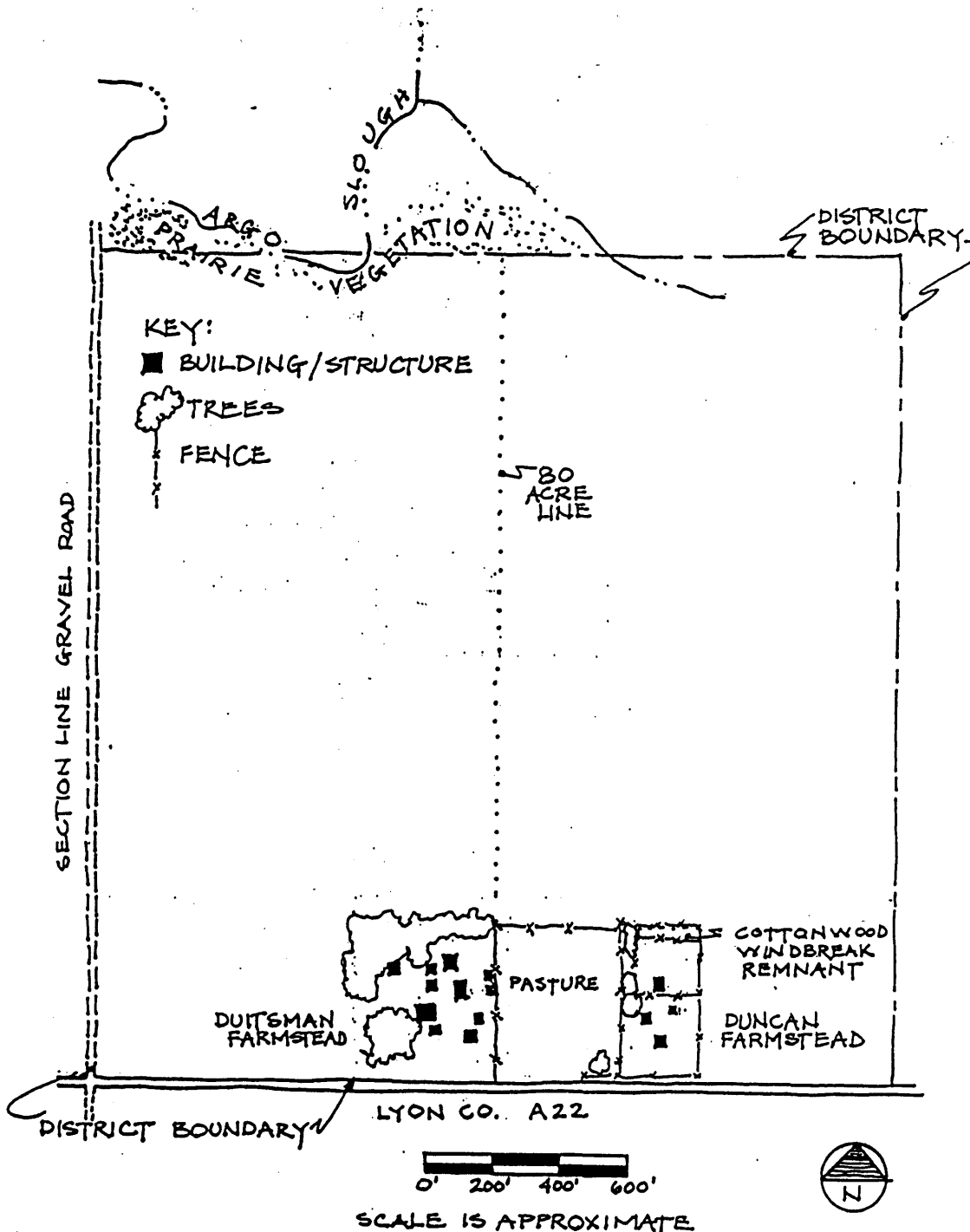
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Figure 3: DUNCAN/DUITSMAN FARM HISTORIC DISTRICT, southwest quarter of Section 16, Grant Township, Lyon County, Iowa. The district is bounded by fence lines on the north and east and by roads on the west and south. (Drawing by Cecilia Rusnak, February 1994).



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four-panel wood door. Windows are two-over-two sash. Historic photographs reveal these sashes replaced earlier four-over-four sashes, at least on the front of the house.

The historic photographs from the early twentieth century (c. 1905) reveal striking similarities between the c. 1878 Duncan house and the original house on the Duitsman (Watkins) farmstead next door. They share the same scale, are similarly shaped (gable-front rectangle) and are of similar construction materials. Both have narrow siding trimmed with corner boards, and similar eaveline and window trim. They have identical four-panel front doors. However, the non-extant house was slightly larger, its ground-floor fenestration arrangement was asymmetrical, and it had a small east side wing.<sup>2</sup>

The interior of the Duncan house (Figure 4.) is divided into a front parlor, front bedroom, and rear kitchen on the ground floor.<sup>3</sup> A stairway along the west wall, accessed through the front parlor, leads to the second floor where there are two bedrooms on the east and an open storage area on the west. Heat was provided by a central stove. The chimney stack of soft red bricks is still present, positioned just to the east of the roof ridge.

The Duncan house appears consistent with Fred Peterson's "Type 1" farmhouse, a one to one-and-a-half story gabled rectangular house, "...the kind of affordable structure built when circumstances

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<sup>2</sup>Duitsman family memory dates this second house to 1888 and attributes it to an interim property owner named Kinnan who owned the west 80 acre parcel between John Watkins's and John Duitsman's periods of ownership. The side wing is said to be the original two-room "homestead" house of John Watkins to which Kinnan added the gable-front portion. However, 1880 census records indicate the elder Watkins' household needed to accommodate 6 members, including three unrelated boarders or laborers, while his daughter and son-in-law only needed to shelter 4 family members. It seems unlikely, the Duncans would have built a larger permanent house in 1878 while the Watkins household of 6 related and unrelated people stayed in a two-room homestead house for any length of time. It is at least as likely that the two stages of the west farmstead house were both constructed under Watkins' direction. Census records indicate Watkins had the financial means, whether in cash or credit, to afford to construct the larger house. While the similarities between the two houses might be explained by dating the *Duncan house* later (in other words, both houses might have been constructed c. 1888) nevertheless Kinnan never owned the east 80 acres which passed directly from the Duncans to John Duitsman in 1894.

<sup>3</sup>An extra room off the rear kitchen wall, added by a shed-roof porch probably constructed by John Duitsman the same time he excavated the cellar, has collapsed recently.

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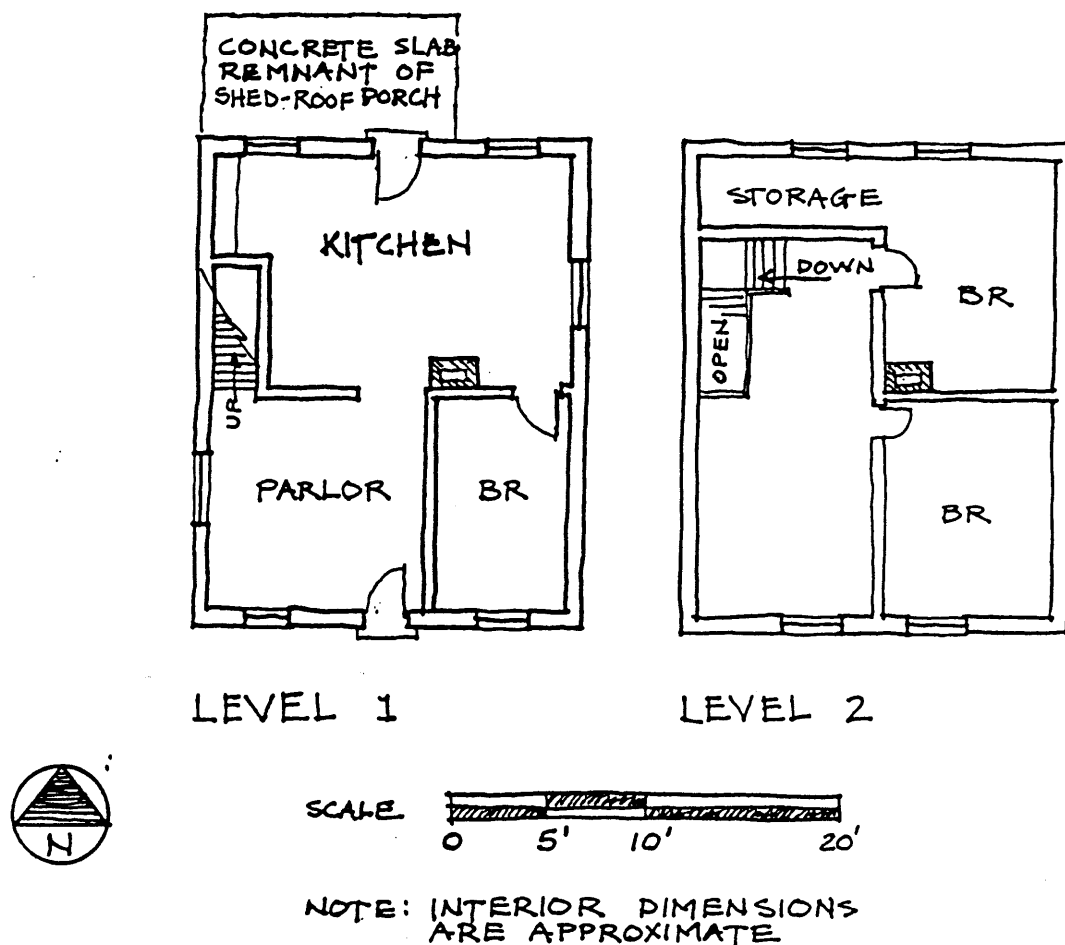
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Figure 4. FLOOR PLAN of Duncan house, Section 16, Grant Township, Lyon County, Iowa.  
(Drawing by Cecilia Rusnak, February 1994).



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permitted the family to move from the temporary subsistence shelter to more a permanent dwelling."<sup>4</sup> However, the Duncan house differs in proportion from most of Peterson's examples which present a tall and relatively narrow profile. The Duncan house, at 20' by 26', is closer in scale and proportion to the school *houses* being built in Grant Township at the time. The township already had five school houses by 1876 when John Duncan arrived.<sup>5</sup> In 1882, Grant Township School Board had three more built, each 22' by 28'. A historic photograph of one early school house shows similarities to the Duncan house in form and finish material.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the Duncan house may be reflecting local carpentry traditions, in addition to regional architectural trends.

Vacant since the 1960s, the Duncan house never had plumbing and was only wired for electricity in 1942. The house currently is used for storage. Evidence of deterioration is quite apparent in the collapse of the rear lean-to and portions of the foundation.

Three other buildings constructed after 1894, when John Duitsman acquired the farmstead, are extant, a small barn (15), a hen house (16) and a garage (17). These three buildings are made of similar materials--plank framing covered by horizontal shiplap wood siding and wood shingles, on concrete foundations. The barn is quite small, and was used to shelter four cows in the open north half, a team of horses in a stall, calves in a pen enclosure and grain in a closed feed bin. All three buildings are deteriorated. The barn is twisting on its foundation; likewise the hen house is sagging and shows evidence of a broken roof ridge. All buildings currently are used for miscellaneous storage.

*Duitsman (west) farmstead*

Because the history of the side-by-side 80-acre farms is linked historically by the kinship of the

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<sup>4</sup>Fred W. Peterson, *Homes in the Heartland: Balloon Frame Farmhouses of the Upper Midwest, 1850-1920*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 62-3.

<sup>5</sup>*Centennial Sketch History of Grant Township, Lyon County, Iowa*, handwritten unpub. ms., 1876, 2. Located at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City office.

<sup>6</sup>Bicentennial Committee, *In and Around George, Iowa, 1871-1912*, (Hills, Minnesota: Crescent Publishing Co., 1976).

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Duncan and Watkins families, and were later combined under the ownership of John Duitsman, the Duitsman farmstead (Figure 5.) on the west 80 acres also contributes to a larger historic district with boundaries drawn around the entire 160-acre quarter section of combined farms.

The west farmstead, like the east, has its farmhouse located close to the road, with all other buildings sited behind it. Except for three garages and the sheep building, all farm buildings are oriented on a north/south axis. The farmstead is on level terrain and a windbreak of trees protects it on the north and west sides. The majority of farm buildings date to the early twentieth century (two are later) and were constructed at the direction of John Duitsman. No buildings remain extant from the Watkins period of ownership, although the current farmstead is sited in the same location as the original Watkins farmstead.

The barn (4) was built in 1911 by carpenter Emil Knoblauch. It has a gable roof and its basic mass is rectangular. The west side of the gable roof has an extended roof line which provides more interior space for storage and livestock and gives the barn a square foot print. A large hay door is located on the south front gable peak. The hay hood, which protects and provides structural support for the hay lifting apparatus, projects from this gable peak. Fixed sash windows and numerous pass doors break the wall surface. The interior of the barn was not accessible for close inspection, however, at the time the barn was constructed, its John Duitsman was using dimension lumber and a plank framing system for his other farm buildings. This barn is known to have been constructed with nails, since his daughter-in-law, Ollie Duitsman, remembers Duitsman's irritation when the carpenter would grab a rock to pound a nail rather than the proper tool. The barn is clad with a modern siding, as has the front of the corn crib. The choice of a traditional red with white color scheme helps to minimize the effect of the newer siding on the barn's integrity.

The large double-pen corn crib and granary (5) has a central drive and a gambrel roof. It has small-grain storage in front bins (and likely overhead on the second level) and, to the rear, the central drive is flanked by corn cribs with wide spaces between its horizontal wood-slat siding. This provides for circulation and drying of the ear-corn during storage. A long, narrow one-level sheep building (6) is situated with its gables to the east and west. A row of windows on the long southern side permits light into the interior. A small gambrel-roof barn or shed (7) located to the rear (north)

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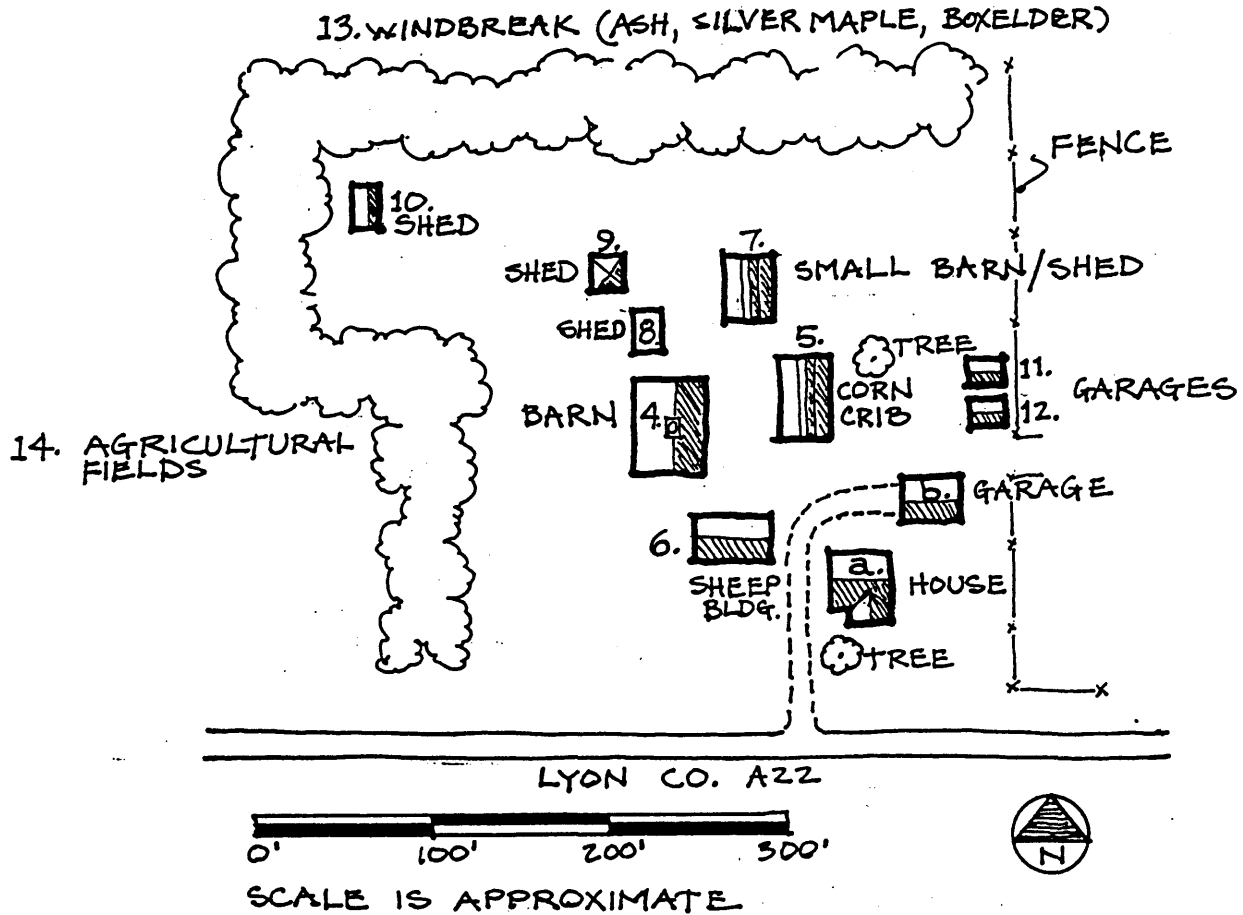
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Figure 5. FARMSTEAD LAYOUT. Detail of Duitsman (west) farmstead, Section 16, Grant Township, Lyon County, Iowa. (Drawing by Cecilia Rusnak, February 1994).



4.-14. CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

a, b. NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

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of the farmstead provided shelter for small livestock, likely chickens, swine or sheep. It is covered with horizontal wood siding, has a large, sliding central door, and vertical light, fixed sash windows. Three wooden sheds (8,9,10) are extant on the farmstead, including one with an arched roof and vertical wood siding, and two older garages (11, 12) which are quite similar to the garage on the east farmstead.

More modern buildings on the farmstead included the 1949 house, built with the simple lines common to much post-World War II housing, and a 1979 garage.

*Resources Associated with the Duncan/Duitsman Farm Historic District*

The following list of resources contribute to the significance of the Duncan/Duitsman Farm Historic District (see Figures 2, 3 and 5).

Resources contributing to the significance of the east farmstead as a Pioneer Prairie farmstead property type, including the original 80 acres farmed by John and Marion Duncan:

1. Duncan house, c. 1878 (key structure)
2. Duncan windbreak, c. 1878
3. Duncan agricultural fields, 1878

Resources contributing to the significance of the west Duitsman farmstead, including the original 80 acres associated with Watkins and the 80 acres associated with Duncan:

4. barn, 1911, Emil Knoblauch, builder
5. corn crib/granary, 1929
6. sheep building, c. 1908
7. small barn/shed, 1940
- 8-10. sheds, c. 1908-1940
- 11-12. garages, c. 1908
13. Duitsman windbreak
14. Duitsman agricultural fields (160 acres)

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East farmstead/Duitsman-era contributing resources:

Several of the buildings on the east farmstead are located near the Duncan house and post-date the Pioneer Prairie Farmstead period. They are to the rear of the Duncan house, are of modest size, and overall do not adversely impact the house's integrity. However, these buildings did play a pivotal role in the tradition of ethnic support followed by the Duitsman family (as did the Duncan house) and are contributing to the district because of that historical association. Since the integrity of the Duncan house is not impaired by the presence of the Duitsman-era buildings, these buildings have been counted as contributing resources. They include:

- (15) small gambrel-roof barn, c. 1904-1909
- (16) hen house, c. 1904-1909
- (17) garage, c. 1904-1909.

Resources considered non-contributing:

- (a) Duitsman house, 1949; located on the west farmstead, it is non-contributing because of age
- (b) garage, 1979; located on the west farmstead, it is non-contributing because of age

The total number of contributing resources is 17 (12 buildings, 4 sites, 1 structure); the total number of non-contributing resources is 2 (2 buildings).

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

## SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Duncan farmstead within the Duncan/Duitsman Farm Historic District is an important surviving example of a nineteenth-century Iowa farmstead established by prairie farmers who arrived in Lyon County in the 1870s to settle the last frontier



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region of Iowa.<sup>7</sup> The farmstead is significant at the local level under Criterion A because it represents an example of a Pioneer Prairie Farmstead subtype under the *Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa Multiple Property Documentation Form*. It is also significant under Criterion A as a tangible reminder of the way that settlers arrived, established their farms, and then provided support and assistance to newer arrivals or younger farm families. The Duncan house on the farmstead is also significant under Criterion C as a property type because it is an example of the earliest farm houses built in Lyon County. Intact, unaltered, farm houses from this time period are extremely rare in the county.

*Criterion A*

As a Pioneer Prairie Farmstead, the Duncan Farmstead represents a once common but now rare example of the early agricultural development of Lyon County and the incredible environmental transformation the land underwent in the late nineteenth century, from tallgrass prairie to grid-patterned, checkerboard farms. During the time John and Marion Duncan farmed the land, from 1878 to 1894, Lyon County grew from a scattering of residents (less than 2000) to nearly thirteen thousand (Table 1. *Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa MPDF*). Railroads arrived and transformed the markets and economy of the region and the county's frontier status disappeared forever.

*1. Duncan/Watkins Period 1878-1894*

Census records and local historical accounts enable a reconstruction of the arrival and first few years of the Duncan/Watkins prairie farming enterprise. John Duncan, 30, and John Watkins, 55, arrived in the county in 1876.<sup>8</sup> Watkins and his wife, Cyrene, were from New York, though both were native-born in Vermont. Their daughters, Marion, and much younger, Sarah, were both born in New York. John Duncan, Marion's husband, was Scottish. Their two children were both born in New Jersey in 1874 and 1878, making it unlikely Marion accompanied her husband to Iowa in 1876. It is likely the

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<sup>7</sup>*Tenth United States Census: 1880*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883.

<sup>8</sup>*Pioneer Association of Lyon County, Compendium of History Reminiscences and Biography of Lyon County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1904-05), 154. [Hereafter called *Compendium of History*.]

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Watkins and John Duncan came to Iowa to join forces in the new farming venture, while Marion waited in New Jersey until at least minimal accommodations could be built.

The Watkins's and John Duncan may have spent 1876 to 1878 on land in Section 17 just west of the present Duncan Farmstead (in Section 16). Property owner records and historical atlases indicate the entire east half of Section 17 was in John Watkins's (200 acres) and Marion Duncan's (120 acres) names. When the Section 16 quarter section now constituting the Duncan (east) and Duitsman (west) farmsteads was sold by the State of Iowa to the Duncans in 1878, the entire 160 acres were placed in Marion's name.<sup>9</sup> The west eighty acres of this 160-acre section were transferred to Marion's father two-and-a-half years later, in 1881. Why the land was in Marion's name, at a time when custom generally meant property was owned by the *male* family member, is pure speculation. Regardless, together the two families owned three quarter-sections of land--480 acres--a small empire on the prairie.

Duncan labored on his land to break the sod and was able to plant 40 acres in flax by 1879. Watkins, on the other hand had more head of cattle than needed for his family's own use and had invested significant amounts of cash in fencing.<sup>10</sup> In fact Watkins cost for fencing in 1879 well exceeded every other farmer in the entire county but two. While most farmers either reported not spending any money for fencing in 1879, or spending in the \$25 to \$200 range (amounts needed to fence *out* animals from gardens and other small areas), Watkins spent \$1500. Four hundred eighty acres plus a large capital investment in fencing may indicate an intent to go into livestock raising on a large scale. Comparing investments and improvements made by the two men reveals the elder Watkins had substantial financial resources, certainly greater than John Duncan's. If Watkins was "bankrolling" this family enterprise, that may well explain why the Duncans' land was put into Marion's name.

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<sup>9</sup>According to federal law, Section 16 of each township was reserved to the state as the "school section," to be used to supporting public education. Section 16 lands would not have been available for homesteading.

<sup>10</sup>By 1880, the elder couple, John and Cyrene Watkins, had three young people living with them on the west farmstead. It may be coincidental that all three were from New York, but they may have also accompanied the Watkins couple in 1876. These young people, a 16 year-old school teacher, an 18 year-old farm hand, and a 14 year-old girl who was just "living with" the Watkins, perhaps were nieces or nephews whose extra hands would be welcomed on the frontier.

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Whatever his intent, Watkins's farming venture did not last long. In the fall of 1882, he sold<sup>11</sup> both his land in Section 17 and the Section 16 land next to his daughter and son-in-law's farm and moved into the nearby settlement of George, about three miles away.<sup>12</sup> Watkins started a newspaper, the *George Courier* and served as Lyon County Treasurer in 1883 and 1884, then left the area completely. Local historical accounts claim Watkins returned to New York to work as a newspaperman.<sup>13</sup>

The Duncan Farmstead remained in Marion Duncan's name until 1894 when it was sold to John Duitsman. Local accounts indicate the Duncans also returned to the east.

## 2. Dreesen/Duitsman Period 1894-1944

When John Duitsman purchased the east 80 acres of the southwest quarter of Section 16, he unwittingly recreated the kinship relationship to the land that the Watkins and Duncan families had first established. In 1891 Duitsman's father-in-law, Hinderick Dreesen, had purchased the west 80 acres from J.O. Kinnan. Dreesen's daughter, Henrietta, had come with her father from East Friesland in Germany to settle in Freeport, Illinois. She and John Duitsman were married in 1887 and must have lived in the Duncan house on the east 80 acres from 1894 to about 1904. During this time John constructed the extant farm buildings behind the Duncan house.

John and Henrietta Duitsman had lived on the east farmstead for ten years when John acquired the west farmstead from his father-in-law in 1904. From that point until today, the west farmstead has been the active family farmstead, while the east farmstead has been occupied by a series of young families, connected to the Duitsman family by kinship, ethnicity, or simply traditional neighborliness.

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<sup>11</sup>Watkins sold his land to J.O. Kinnan. Little is known about the Kinnan family other than they were from Illinois, operated as Kinnan and Sons, and arrived in the county about 1880.

<sup>12</sup>George wasn't officially platted for another five years when the Illinois Central Railroad built its line, and must have been a small settlement when Watkins relocated.

<sup>13</sup>*Compendium of History*, 254.

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The Dreesen family marked the beginning of what would become a significant colony of East Friesen settlement in Lyon and Osceola Counties. This farmstead served as a zone of emergence whereby young East Friesen couples established themselves in this new land.

Present family members relate a history between 1904 to World War I of a series of young immigrant families and couples from East Friesland who temporarily occupied the east farmstead while seeking to establish themselves on their own farmlands. The immigrants, as the family refers to them, likely also included second generation residents of other immigrant communities in the United States, particularly the 1850s East Friesen settlements around Lawrence Station and Freeport, Illinois. Their residence with others of their ethnic group followed larger patterns of many European immigrants who sought and received support from compatriots as they became established in the United States<sup>14</sup>, and followed a strong tradition of communal assistance integral to the East Friesens.

For the East Friesens and other immigrants from the Friesen cultural areas in Germany and the Netherlands, support often began before even leaving the homeland. Removed by both geography and language/dialect from the rest of Germany in their native country, the East Friesens had a history of self-sufficiency and independence. While research on East Friesen migration per se is limited, the immediately adjacent and culturally related areas of Dutch Friesland and German North Friesland suggest patterns which were followed by the Duitmans and their tenants. In discussing the settlement of Dutch Friesens around Pella, Iowa, around 1850, one author explained:

Sjoerd [Sipma] saw little economic opportunity in his homeland. With his bride and several other penniless Friesen seceders, he was sponsored by a local benefactor and fellow immigrant, Hierke Ypes Viersen. Working briefly for Scholte and Viersen and then for an unidentified American farmer living on the southern outskirts of the settlement, the Sipmas prospered and within two years managed to repay their 202 guilder (\$81.00) and purchase a

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<sup>14</sup>See for example, Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Immigration to the USA*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

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small twenty-five acre farm from the local school fund commissioner.<sup>15</sup>

Immigration from the North Friesen islands of Fohr and Amrum followed a similar pattern through the 1870s, where immigration became a virtual tradition among young people. "All immigrants first traveled in groups. Their passages were partially paid in advance by relatives in the USA, by whom they then worked."<sup>16</sup>

East Friesen settlements in the United States of the 1850s clearly included a tradition of mutual support among first-generation immigrants:

Before we arrived, my father-in-law had purchased a 120 acre parcel of land for me, with the provision that the purchase would be invalid if I did not like the land. I liked it, however...In the primitive cabin, we lived happily and with satisfaction for ten years. Frequently one or two other families lived with us for some weeks. But we all found space...My father-in-law and I jointly owned a wagon and a plow. Because our farms bordered each other, we could work together.<sup>17</sup>

and,

Most, particularly those with families, made an effort immediately to buy a parcel of land

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<sup>15</sup>Sjoerd Aukes Simpa, "A Dutch Immigrant's View of Frontier Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* (Fall 1965), 86.

<sup>16</sup>Gerhard Kortum, "Migrationstheoretische und bevölkerungsgeographische Probleme der nordfriesischen Amerikartuckwanderung" in *Die Deutschen und Skandinavischen Amerikaauswanderung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Hrsg. Kai Detlev Sievers. Karl Wachholtz Verlag: Neumunster, 1981, pp. 143-47. Translation by Carmen Tschofen. This "tradition" was a result of extremely limited employment opportunities in an area which depended largely on a declining whaling industry. Unless a young person could secure one of the few teaching positions available, there was virtually no other employment. Because East Friesland was sited partly on mainland Germany, opportunities may have been somewhat greater, but still largely undesirable for ambitious youth.

<sup>17</sup>George Schnucker, *The East Friesians in America*, translated by Pastor Kenneth De Wall, (Topeka: Jostens Printing and Publishing, 1986). The untranslated version used is: *Die Ostfriesen in Amerika*, (Cleveland: Central Publishing House, 1917) 25.

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from 40 to 160 acres. The better-off stood staunchly at the side of those without resources...One also know that one could call on those so supported as helpers in unexpected need. So it came about, that each one helped the other to acquire his food and property.<sup>18</sup>

That this tradition of support was strongly imbedded in the East Friesen culture into the twentieth century is illustrated by John and Henrietta Duitsman's use of the Duncan Farmstead. Between 1904 and 1914, according to family sources, at least three such young families occupied the farmstead. One of these was the family of John Goeman which included six children. The Goemans moved on west, to Ramona, South Dakota. A second family with the surname Jurrens is said to have descendants still living in the area. A third couple by the name of Koens, left their name and the year "1914" inscribed on the concrete well cap behind the Duncan house.

Whether or how much rent was required of these young families is unclear, as is the degree to which they helped the Duitsman family in the farming operations, but occupants of the Duncan house did have the use of a small amount of pasture and garden area.

The tightly-knit East Friesen immigrant group maintained their ties among themselves and with their homeland through their own newspaper, *Die Ostfriesische Nachrichten*. Such newspapers were common among immigrant groups, and Iowa alone had nearly 40 publications produced by German immigrant groups alone. "Even the smallest could print notices in a language intelligible to their readers, advertise the group's banks, notaries and stores, and announce weddings and meetings. They could print European news, and, by being sent to the old country, they could preserve family and local ties..."<sup>19</sup> *Die Ostfriesische Nachrichten* was published in Breda (Carroll County), also in western Iowa. It easily could have been used by the Duitsmans to publicize the availability of the Duncan Farmstead.

By 1917, the "colony" of East Friesens in the Lyon and Osceola county area was considered to be one of the larger settlement groups. Around 1155 families, with some 5775 individual family members,

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 27, translated by Carmen Tschofen.

<sup>19</sup>Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 216.

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lived within an approximate 50-square mile radius. After the First World War, the Duncan Farmstead was occupied by another series of relatives and neighbors who were primarily second and third generation East Friesens simply due to the density of the East Friesens in the area. These families stayed from one to three years before moving to their own places. Ollie Klaasen Duitsman, 90-year-old daughter-in-law of John Duitsman, whose parents and sisters were temporary occupants in the late 1930s, recalls that the Duitsman farm was one of the few in the area that was able to accommodate such arrangements. Most young families moved on farther west or remained on a parent's homeplace themselves during their first years. It was during this period that the Duncan Farmstead acquired the affectionate nickname of the "Honeymoon Cottage."

The tradition of mutual cooperation among generations of farm families on Section 16 began during Watkins and Duncan's time in the 1870s. It continued with Hinderick Dreesen and young John Duitsman at the turn of the century. As John and Henrietta Duitsman matured, they in turn passed along the tradition, first to young immigrant and second-generation East Friesens, then after the First World War to the growing population of Lyon County-born families of similar heritage. The tradition ended, though, in the 1960s. The house and farm buildings now stand quiet, unused and ever so slowly returning to their natural state.

*Criterion C*

The Duncan house on the farmstead is locally significant under Criterion C as a property type under the *Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa, Multiple Property Documentation Form* because it is an example of one of the earliest type of farm houses built in Lyon County. Intact, unaltered, farm houses from this pioneer prairie time period are extremely rare in the county.

Future archaeological research may show that the Duncan/Duitsman Farmsteads Historic District is locally significant under Criterion D. This is because it has components which may have potential to reveal information about how first settlers John and Marion Duncan lived and about the domestic life of successive generations of farm families on the farmstead. The archaeological resources also may reveal information about the earliest agricultural practices on the farm.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Additional references not listed in the bibliography of the *Historic Farmsteads of Lyon County, Iowa, Multiple Property Documentation Form* are:

Kortum, Gerhard. "Migrationstheoretische und bevölkerungsgeographische Probleme der nordfriesischen Amerikarückwanderung" in *Die Deutschen und Skandinavischen Amerikaauswanderung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Hrsg. Kai Detleve Sievers. Karl Wachholtz Verlag: Neumunster, 1981.

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Simpa, Sjoerd Aukes. "A Dutch Immigrant's View of Frontier Iowa." *Annals of Iowa* (Fall 1965).

Taylor, Philip. *The Distant Magnet: European Immigration to the USA*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

*Interviews:*

Interview of Elvin Duitsman by Jan Nash, 15 September 1993.

Interview of Elvin Duitsman and Ollie Klaasen Duitsman by Carmen Tschofen, 23 December 1993.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

*Verbal Boundary Description*

The southwest quarter section of Section 16 of Grant Township, Lyon County, Iowa.

*Boundary Justification*

The boundaries are the 160 acres granted to Marion Duncan in 1878 and ultimately owned by John Duitsman in the twentieth century.



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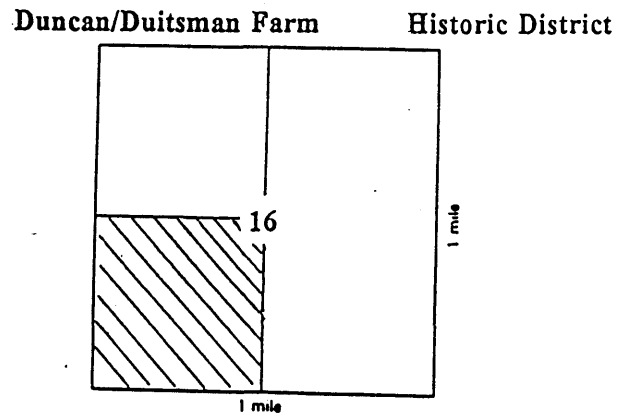
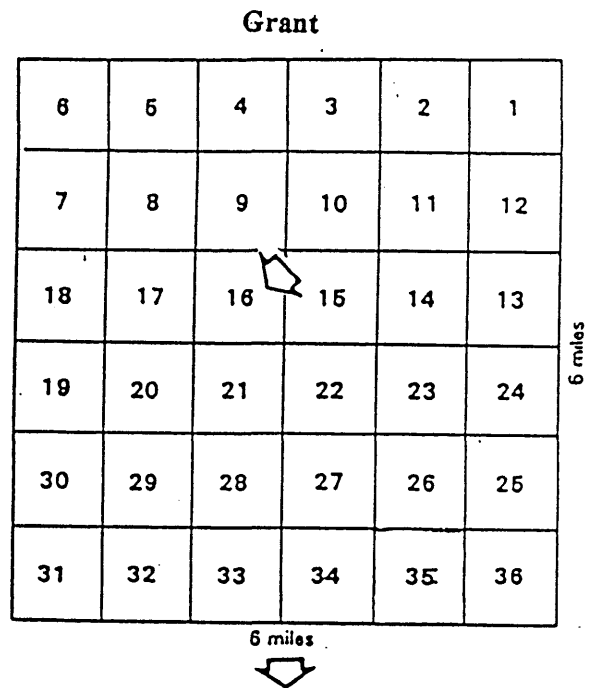
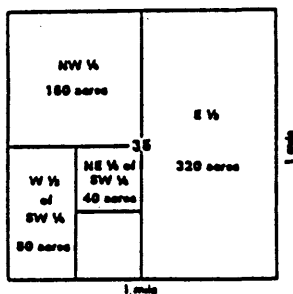
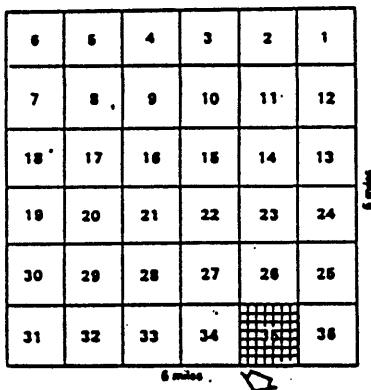
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Figure 6. Sketches of typical township layout and detail sketch of Section 16 of Grant Township, Lyon County, with the Duncan/Duitsman Farm Historic District marked by diagonal lines.

Typical township configuration and standard acreage sections.



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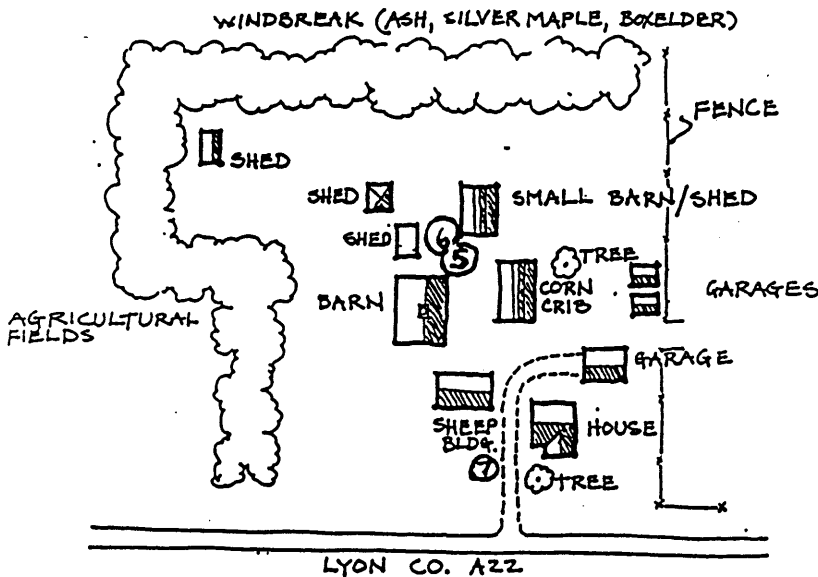
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Duncan/Duitsman Farm Historic District Photograph Sketch Map:

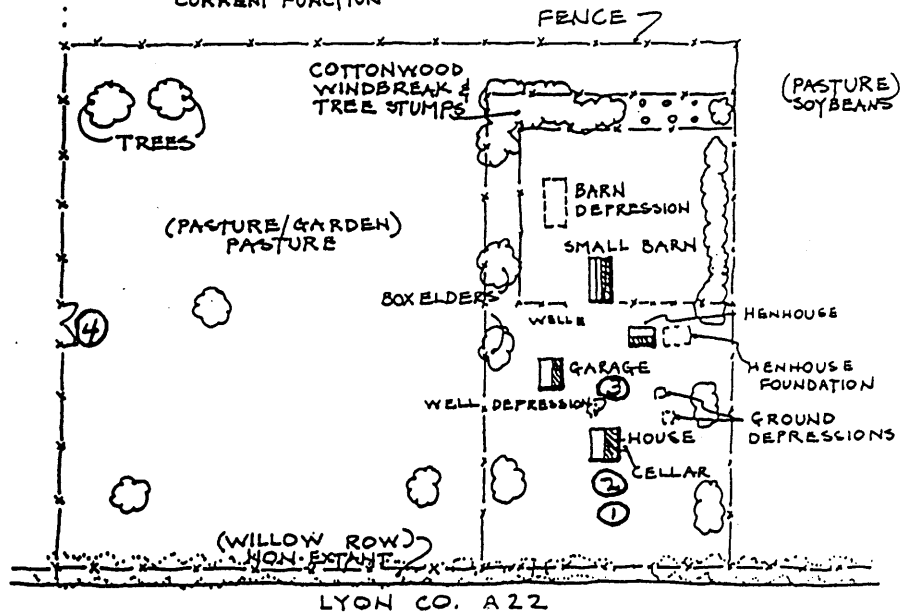


DUIZSMAN  
FARMSTEAD

0' 100' 200' 300'  
SCALE IS APPROXIMATE



KEY: (HISTORICAL FUNCTION)  
CURRENT FUNCTION



DUNCAN  
FARMSTEAD

0' 100' 200' 300'  
SCALE IS APPROXIMATE

