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Curtis, General Samuel R., House Name of Property*		Lee, IA. County and State		
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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.
- [X] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of 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.

Lee, IA **County and State**

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ENGINEERING

MILITARY

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

TRANSPORTATION

Period of Significance 1849-1866

Significant Dates

1849-1866

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) CURTIS, SAMUEL R.

CURTIS, SAMUEL R.

Cultural Affiliation

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 fo	rm on one or more continuation sheets.)
Previous documentation on file (NPS):	Primary location of additional data:
preliminary determination of individual listing	[X] State Historic Preservation Office
(36 CFR 67) has been requested	Other State agency
previously listed in the National Register	Federal agency
previously determined eligible by the National	[] Local government
Register	University
designated a National Historic Landmark	[_] Other
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey	Name of repository:
#	Keokuk Public Library
recorded by Historic American Engineering	
Record #	

Curtis, General	Samuel	R.,	House
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Lee, IA County and State

0. Geographical Data creage of Property <u>Less than 1 acre.</u>	
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ots 1 & 2, Block 51, Original City of Keokuk, Lee County, Iowa. Coundary Justification Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)	
1. Form Prepared By	
ame/title Maxine Smith	
rganization <u>N.A.</u>	date _03/03/96
reet & number 206 High Street	telephone (319) 524-5068
ty or town Keokuk	
dditional Documentation	
ubmit the following items with the complete 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	D for any additional items)
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Property Owner	
(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
name James B. & Maxine F. Smith	
street & number 206 High Street	telephone <u>319-524-5068</u>
city or town Keokuk	state lowa 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 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.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number <u>7</u> Page <u>1</u>

Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa

Narrative Description

The Samuel R. Curtis house is located at the corner of Second and High Streets within one block of the bluffline overlooking the Mississippi River. Situated in an old residential area of this original platted part of the city, the Curtis house consists of a two-story rectangular shaped limestone structure built in the Greek Revival style. The substantial stone building was completed for Samuel R. Curtis about 1849 and occupied by him during his lifetime. It remained in possession of the family until 1895 when it passed into other hands.

The Greek Revival influenced building contains a five ranked front façade balanced by the central door. There is a full width porch supported by round prominent columns with ionic capitals. Its prominent cornice line with a wide divided band of wood trim gives emphasis to the diamond pane upper story windows below. Also, the front door has a full transom light with simple entablature. Adam influences can be seen on the side door swag embellishments as well as the garland swags on the front porch portico. The rear of the dwelling, which appears to be three stories high due to the slope of the lot, accommodates a walkout basement with full 6/6 windows on the original ell of the building. To the rear of the lot is a large two-story carriage house, which was constructed, in the late 1800s. This building, considered noncontributing because it falls outside the period of significance, serves as a three-car garage for the present owners.

The house originally was constructed in the shape of an "L" and later in 1857, during Keokuk's boom building year (538 buildings erected), the first floor corner of the "L" was filled out with an addition, making the house more nearly square. The 1857 City Directory for Keokuk reports that "a stone addition was added to the Honorable S. R. Curtis home at the cost of \$3,000." Proof of this addition can be seen in the house today by the thickness of the doorway between the dining room and utility room, which has doorways 22 inches thick. It is hard to tell exactly what the addition did to the house's appearance; it may have involved the addition of a single story to more nearly fill out the "L" shape. At this time the house still had its pier style portico and half windows on the second floor. Visual analysis reveals narrower mortar lines on the second floor, which may indicate the addition of full windows at a later date. The diamond panes were added when the windows were enlarged.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s the house received various changes. The windows were enlarged on the second floor and a full roof (originally side gabled and changed to hipped with dormers after 1900) was added plus a front porch along with pillar columns. The present side door may have been a window at one time. A brick carriage house was also added to the southwest edge of the lot.

Overall, it can be said that, while the house has been enlarged and improved, its essential form and style has been retained. Clearly from the street the General Curtis family would recognize the building today as having once been their own.

Within the interior, the basement has been floored and plastered and furnished for everyday living quarters with a kitchen, dining room and sleeping quarters for taking advantage of cooler summers and warmer winters. The basement area still has partial wood floors with windows that look out under the front porch as well as full windows which overlook the back yard.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2 Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa



National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

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Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa



4

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number <u>7, 8</u> Page _4_

Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa

Description (continued)

The interior floor plan includes, on the first floor, a library, living room, bath, dining room, kitchen, utility room/pantry, and front foyer. The second floor contains four bedrooms, a dressing room, two bathrooms and hallways. There is a walkout deck from one bedroom on this floor. There are approximately 1,700 square feet per floor and most rooms are 16-feet by 15-feet with ten-foot ceilings. The interior woodwork is of yellow pine, which is painted throughout the home with the exception of the present kitchen, and utility area where it is a natural finish. An interior modification made by a subsequent owner involved renovating the living room fireplace by having it faced in pink onyx marble trimmed in mahogany.

The view from the second floor remains spectacular today. As in the time of Curtis, one can see the Mississippi River and Des Moines River in the winter months when the trees are defoliated. One can easily understand why Curtis chose the site for his family house. There he built a sturdy limestone house for his family in 1849, which remains a Keokuk landmark after 148 years. It is now owned and occupied by James and Maxine Smith.

Statement of Significance

The property is eligible for the National Register at the state level of significance under Criterion "B" for its association with the life and accomplishments of Samuel R. Curtis. It was built by Curtis in 1849 and remained his home until he died in 1866. As chief engineer of the Des Moines River Improvement project, as Keokuk mayor, as three-term Republican congressman promoting railroad development, and as military general leading northern troops during the Civil War in the West, Curtis achieved importance and popular respect. As such, he played a significant part in the economic and political life of the Des Moines River Valley, the State of Iowa generally, and in the Civil War history of Mississippi Valley campaigns.

Historical background and significance

How is it, one might ask, that Samuel R. Curtis—described as "colorless," "a quiet West Pointer," and known for lacking "any of the qualities to capture the masses"—achieved remarkable success in politics, civic life and as a military figure? Much of the answer lies in knowing that, while Curtis had these qualities, he had others as well which fit his times when development projects, political party upheavals, and armed conflict gave opportunities to westerners with engineering, political and military skill. People saw in Curtis "a man of commanding appearance in size and deportment, of pure habits and full of self-confidence, of an amiable disposition." And though ambition ran through him and he felt "competent to fill any position," Curtis pursued his goals in ways that people respected for "his high moral character and honesty of purpose." Another contemporary described him this way: "Of the Iowa major-generals, General Curtis is the largest in person. He has a tall, fine form, and, though nearly sixty years of age, is erect and vigorous. His large, hazel eyes give his countenance an expression of gravity and thoughtfulness, which comports well with the dignity of his movements and manners. But, if he is

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Section number 8

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Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa

Statement of Significance (continued)

sedate, and if he never laughs boisterously, he is nevertheless easily approached and sociable; he is kind and generous-hearted, and would not knowingly injure the feelings of the most humble or unfortunate."

Ohio born and trained as a engineer at West Point, Samuel Curtis graduated at age twenty-four and soon left the army to pursue civil engineering, first on the National Road and then as engineer-in-chief of the Muskingum slackwater improvement project until 1839. By 1841, he had been admitted to the Bar and practiced law in Wooster, Ohio until war commenced with Mexico. Upon entering service during the Mexican war, he became commander of the 3rd Ohio volunteer regiment and later a military administrator in northern Mexico.² After that, Curtis moved to Keokuk, Iowa in 1847. There, Congress had appropriated lands on the Des Moines River to build a series of slackwater navigation locks and dams for improving steamboat travel upriver. And, based on Col. Curtis work damming the Muskingum, the project commissioners selected him to be engineer.³ He served until 1850, producing a survey report and construction plans as Curtis divided his time between his legal practice and engineer work, and then became city engineer for St. Louis and where he achieved his greatest engineering fame.

When Curtis arrived, St. Louis was in distress. He saw a city without street sewerage and facing the results of bad past engineering in the form of a polluted lake created in the city's upper part and a pond in its lower southwest part. He heard important businessmen complaining about inadequate levee facilities for their steamboat businesses. And he looked upon the dire prospect of the Mississippi River leaving the city without a harbor as it threatened to cut a new channel at the Illinois shoreline. Curtis—supported by a strong mayor and council—brought into existence a large-scale sewerage system to deal with poor sanitary conditions and a threatening cholera epidemic. This led to completion of an underground tunnel from the river for draining the contaminated lake above the city and building a sewer line to empty the pond at the south. Meanwhile, he inaugurated harbor improvements to broaden the wharf for steamboats. To handle the danger of river current altering the Mississippi channel, Curtis abandoned past engineering schemes that had been attempted to keep the current on the Missouri side and prevent a sand bar from collecting in front of the city. This he did by adopting and carrying out the basic idea made over a decade earlier by the youthful army engineer, Robert E. Lee, which called for building dikes along the Illinois side to stabilize the bank and deflect current to Missouri. The project brought into being a long stone dike stretching from the foot of an island towards the St. Louis side and a filled-in

¹ His qualities were well observed by two contemporaries: Hawkins Taylor, in his "Gen. Curtis," *Iowa Historical Record*, 3:4 (October 1887), 561-567; and Stuart, Addison A., *Iowa Colonels and Regiments* (Des Moines: Mills & Co., 1865, pp. 49-50, as quoted in Ruth A. Gallaher, "Samuel Ryan Curtis," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 25:3 (July 1927), 355-356. See also Bruce Catton, *Terrible Swift Sword: Volume Two, The Centennial History of the Civil War*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), 220-224; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 404-405.

² A recent book on his career in the Mexican War is Joseph E. Chance (ed.), Samuel Ryan Curtis, Mexico Under Fire: Being the Diary of Samuel Ryan Curtis 3rd Ohio Volunteer Regiment During the American Military Occupation of Northern Mexico 1846 (Texas Christian University Press, 1994).

³ Gallaher, "Samuel Ryan Curtis," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 334-336. On the broader context of the Des Moines River improvement project, see Hubler, David, "Des Moines River Navigation: Government Expectations Unfulfilled," *Annals of Iowa*, 3rd Series 39:4 (Spring 1968), 287-306; Swisher, Jacob A., "The Des Moines River Improvement Project," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 35 (April 1937), 142-180.

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Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa



Maj. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis From Brady National Photographic Art Gallery, created between 1860 and 1865 (Copied from Library of Congress American Memory, Historical Collections for the National Divital Library)

Statement of Significance (continued)

channel between the island and the Illinois shore. These gave St. Louis a rebounded current which brought about a deep channel for boats along the whole front of the city.⁴

Returning home to Keokuk in 1853 when a reversal of St. Louis politics turned him out of office. Curtis maintained his law practice and became engineer surveying a line for a railroad project known as the proposed "Air Line" road. This grand scheme, which never materialized, envisioned building a railroad across Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, cross the Missouri River and on up through the Platte River Vallev and beyond the mountains to San Francisco. During these years, while so engaged, he also entered politics, first as mayor of Keokuk in early 1856⁵ and then during the fall as the successful candidate of the new Republican Party for Congress. Reelected in 1858 and again in 1860, he energetically promoted in Congress the idea of a central railroad west to the Pacific, submitting a report to Congress on behalf of such a railroad as chairman of a select committee on the Pacific Railroad. Within three months after the firing on Fort Sumter, however, Samuel Curtis accepted election as colonel of the Second Iowa Infantry and soon thereafter resigned Congress to become a Brigadier General and report for duty at St. Louis under Major Gen. Fremont.6

Placed initially in command of Benton Barracks in the outskirts of St. Louis in September 1861, Curtis had by

⁶ The Civil War career of Curtis sketched here is drawn from the following sources: Gallaher, "Samuel Ryan Curtis," in *Iowa Journal* of History and Politics," 339-358; Curtis, Samual Prentis, "The Army of the South-west, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," Annals of Iowa, (First Series), 4:2 (April 1866), 625-637. For other analyses of his military campaigns, see William L. Shea and Earl J. Hess, *Pea Ridge: Civil War Campaign in the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Burkhard, Dick J., "The Edge of Glory: The Civil War Career of Samuel Ryan Curtis," M.A. thesis, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, 1984; Duffus, Gerald R., "A Study of the Military Career of Samuel R. Curtis, 1861-1865," M.A. thesis, Drake University, Des Moines, 1966; Holst, David L. "General Samuel Curtis and the Civil War in the West," M.A. thesis, Illinois State University, 1974.

⁴ Taylor, "Gen. Curtis," 364-365; John P. Dietzler, "Major General Samuel Ryan Curtis—City Engineer," *Missouri Historical Review*, 51:4 (July 1957), 354-361.

⁵ Ever the development visionary, Curtis recommended in his inaugural address, among other things, that the city pursue a plan for avoiding the obstruction to easy navigation posed by the Des Moines Rapids of the Mississippi River through constructing a canal along the Iowa shore, which would also yield water power. The cost of building it delayed fulfillment until the late 1860s when the United States government constructed it along lines recommended by Curtis. See Wilson, Ben H., "The Des Moines Rapids Canal," *Palimpsest*, 5 (April 1924), 117-132.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

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Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa

Statement of Significance (continued)

Christmas been given command of the Southwestern District of Missouri with orders to drive from Missouri the Confederate army. With his force of 12,000 moving from Rolla to Springfield in early March 1862, Curtis met others commanded by Major General Earl Van Dorn. In a series of separate battles over three bleak late winter days at Pea Ridge, Curtis kept the Confederate forces separated, stopped the flanking march by Van Dorn's troops, and counterattacked to scatter them from the field. This early victory—one of the greatest west of the Mississippi—not only made Samuel Curtis a major general, but also secured Union control of Missouri and domination of the entire trans-Mississippi region for the remainder of the war.

Thereafter, Curtis commanded the Department of the Missouri, including Missouri, Arkansas, and Kansas, from September 1862 until May of 1863 when a political dispute with Governor H. R. Gamble of Missouri resulted in his reassignment to the Department of Kansas. Another political dispute arose after he defeated the army of General Sterling Price and drove it back across Kansas into Arkansas. This led to Curtis being transferred to the Department of the Northwest at Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he remained until the end of the war.

Within only eight months of his return to Keokuk, however, he died. While engaged in work to construct the Union Pacific Railroad west of Omaha, he had just completed an inspection trip when, walking over the Missouri River on the ice, he stepped into a carriage and died within a half a mile of the riverbank. Curtis was in his sixty-first year of life. Buried at Keokuk, the citizens of Keokuk gave tribute to General Curtis, including a procession consisting of many military units and social organizations marching from Main Street to the Curtis home, then down High Street to the Chatham Church and on to Oakland Cemetery. Reflecting community sentiment, the Keokuk *Gate City* observed that the death of Samuel Curtis "has caused the profoundest regret in this city and will throughout the State and the country, with the history of which in peace and war, Gen. Curtis has markedly connected himself. His varied services in civil and military place have made for him wide reputation"⁷

Three decades later Keokuk paid further tribute when, in 1898, a bronze equestrian statue of General Curtis was dedicated during the Fourth of July ceremonies. This statue stood on Main Street for many years and was a local landmark for many citizens until its removal to Victory Park along the riverfront. The original copy of this statue, from which the moulds were used to cast the Keokuk copy, continues to stand with two other Civil War generals on the Capital grounds in Des Moines, Iowa.

The limestone house of Samuel Ryan Curtis came into existence soon after his arrival in Keokuk. "We landed in Keokuk June 14, 1848," he wrote in his diary, "and stayed at the Mansion House where we were nearly eaten alive by rats, mosquitos, and other varmits."⁸ To get away from these pests, Curtis bought the lot at Second and High and hurriedly built a two-room clapboard house with brick between the studding into which he moved his family. A start was made on the stone house but due to an early fall and extremely bad winter there was not

⁷ Keokuk (IA) Gate City Weekly, January 2, 1866. See also the Keokuk Gate City, December 27, 28, 30, 1866.

⁸ From a microfilm copy of his diary in the "Davis Papers" at the Keokuk Public Library.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa

Statement of Significance (continued)

much progress. Again, quoting from the diary, "we spent the severest winter I ever saw in Iowa." By early May of 1849, however, he was reporting good progress to his brother: "Our house is still progressing so that we hope before long to be pleasantly and comfortably located. [B]y the way my house looks much larger than I supposed it would and much larger in fact than it really is. You can see it as you come up the Mississippi for some miles looming up higher than any house in the city. It is of good limestone cut into blocks about one foot thick and two feet long."

Once completed that year, it became the Curtis family house throughout the remainder of his eventful life and remained in family ownership for several decades thereafter.

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Curtis, General Samuel R., House, Lee County, Iowa

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Verbal boundary description

Lot one (1) Block fifty-one (51) Original City of Keokuk; Low two (2) Block fifty-one (51) Original City of Keokuk.

Verbal boundary justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Samuel Ryan Curtis House.

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Figure 1. Property Site Map from excerpt of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1900

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Figure 2. Location of Property in Keokuk USGS map (7.5 minute Series—Keokuk Quadrangle)

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Curtis, General Samuel R., House, LeeCo. IA.

206 High Street Keokuk, Iowa, Lee County

Date: 1996 Photographer: Robert Diefenbach View:

- 1. Front and side view, approximately 1897.
- 2. Front facing SW.
- 3. Side view looking NW.
- 4. Rear view looking N.
- 5. Rear view looking E.
- 6. Side view looking SE.
- 7. Front porch and surround.
- 8. Detail of front porch.
- 9. View showing detail of capitals.
- 10. Side door showing garlanding detail.
- 11. View showing diamond window detail and brackets.
- 12. Carriage House, and side yard.
- 13. Grave site, Curtis has the taller granite stone.
- 14. Base of stone showing inscription.

Location of Original Negative: Robert Diefenbach