

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

NOV 15 2004
NOV 17

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction 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 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 Norton, Charles Henry and Charlotte, House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 401 North Chestnut Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Avoca [N/A] vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Pottawattamie code 155 zip code 51521

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.)

Rowell S. Soike Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer November 16, 2004
Signature of certifying official/Title 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 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
[] See continuation sheet.

Edson H. Beall Signature of the Keeper 12/30/04 Date of Action

C.H. Norton Home
Name of Property

Pottawattamie County/IA
County/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 count previously listed resources.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic

Single Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic

Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian/Gothic

Late Victorian/Italianate

Late Victorian/Stick/Eastlake

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stucco

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other

Narrative Description

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

C.H. Norton Home
Name of Property

Pottawattamie County/IA
County/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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Periods of Significance

c. 1878

Significant Dates

c. 1878

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

N/A

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:
State Historical Society of Iowa

C.H. Norton Home
Name of Property

Pottawattamie County/IA
County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 15 304920 4594440
Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. 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 Brian K. McCutchen & Carol Ahlgren, Architectural Historians

organization National Park Service

date April 28, 2004

street & number 401 North Chestnut Street

telephone 712-343-5008

city or town Avoca state IA zip code 51521

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 Brian and Sharon McCutchen

street & number 401 North Chestnut Street

telephone 712-343-5008

city or town Avoca

state IA

zip code 51521

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

C.H. Norton House
Pottawattamie County, IA

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SECTION 7 DESCRIPTION

Architectural Description

The Charles Henry Norton House, circa 1878, is located in the small farming community of Avoca, Pottawattamie County, Iowa (2000 population, 1,610). Geographically the house is located on a high hill, at the northeast corner of Chestnut and Taylor streets. This location serves as the highest geographical peak of a ridge bounded on either side, east and west, by the West and East Nishnabotna rivers which merge approximately one and a half miles to the south. It is between these two meandering rivers on the descending part of the ridge that the community of Avoca rests. From 1886 to 1992 Avoca served as the sub-county seat for the nine hundred-sixty square mile linear county. The community's 1887 sub-courthouse (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) continues to serve for periodic county activities and as a museum.

The one-street downtown and earliest residential areas of Avoca are situated on the lower portions and rising slopes of the southern and eastern portions of the ridge, allowing accessibility to the large railroad yard [non extant] that served as the heart and base of the community from its inception in 1869 throughout the mid-twentieth century. It was the railroad that led to the establishment of the community during the laying of the Rock Island Railroad in 1868-1869.

The Norton house is located in the Allen Cook Addition,¹ as platted in 1870 and rests on a property ninety-three feet wide (north/south) by eighty-eight feet deep.² A sidewalk parallels the west (front) and south elevations of the home, providing a sizable front and side yard, with an approximate eight foot section of lawn continuing to the respective streets of Chestnut (front) and Taylor (side). Large maple trees line the streets on these sections of the property. Both the north and east (back) elevations of the property are bounded by lots containing single family homes. Directly across from Taylor Street (south) is the parking lot and place of worship for the Trinity Lutheran Church. Across Chestnut Street, to the west, is the 1925 Avoca Grade School. This historic lot has served as a site of two previous educational facilities dating back to the 1870s (non-extant) – and an integral feature of late-nineteenth century Avoca.

According to Gebhaard and Mansheim's *Buildings of Iowa*, "Up on the hill in a residential area overlooking the downtown is a large brick villa (c. 1878) at the northeast corner of Taylor and Chestnut streets. The designer's catholic taste brought together an Italianate tower and bays, accompanied by both Gothic Revival and Eastlake detailing."³

The entire structure is constructed of soft-fired brick laid in a "common bond" pattern. The overall layout is that of an "L" plan tall tower protruding from a corner. In every instance, each exterior bay (door and window) is Italianate in form and crowned with a polychromatic segmental arch.⁴ A wide belt course fully encircles the house's perimeter, dividing the foundation surface from that of the structural exposed brick.

¹ The Allen-Cook Addition was a speculation venture by John P. Cook, of Davenport, and B. F. Allen, of Des Moines. Allen was considered Iowa's first entrepreneurial "millionaire," and was the wealth and genius behind the erection of Terrace Hill in Des Moines.

² Historically, the depth of the property extended to a total of one hundred sixty-eight feet. In 1960 the farthest east eighty feet was sold for construction of a contemporary house.

³ David Gebhard and Gerald Mansheim, *Buildings of Iowa*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 460.

⁴ This feature is presently covered with white paint – an ill, but temporary alteration applied by the former owners during 2000 renovation. As documentary photographs taken during the application of paint demonstrates, the polychromatic detailing is fully intact and will be revealed and restored in 2005.

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Pottawattamie County, IASection number 7 Page 2*Front (West) Elevation*

The front façade provides the appearance of a classical Italianate; complete with tall windows, double front doors, and a very distinguishable Italianate porch that also includes elements of the Gothic Revival and Eastlake styles.

The extreme steepness of the core structure's roof pitch is characteristic of the Gothic influence, another example of the integration of two of the period's most significant styles into one cohesive structure. At the upper portions of the gable, massive crossbraced vergeboards complement the expanse. The detailing of this feature is of floral and leaf/stem ornamentation, providing a nearly lace-like appearance.

The first level of the façade contains two nine-foot high one-over-one windows, starting six inches above the porch/floor level, using the belt course as its framing base. Immediately to the right, nine-foot high arched double doors serve as the primary entrance to the residence. A wider segmental polychromed arch adorns the doorway. Such is identical in color and texture of all other bays of the house. A wide and deep cut stone comprising the threshold base is integrated into the belt course, creating a seamless integration of doorway and constant parallel.

The second story of the primary façade continues the Italianate window design, with two windows grouped by connected arches. The windows are centered within the steeply pitched facing gable – a key element invoking the Gothic Revival style. Fixed within the gable is an ornate crossbraced vergeboard component that begins at the lower portion of each gable tip and arches upward in a curtain effect. Cross bracing timbers project this detailing out and away from the brick facing approximately eighteen inches. Two brackets adorn each side of the gable and vergeboard.

A two-story tower protrudes forward from the flush, right front elevation of the house. The visible foundation is of smooth mortar, with a significant belt course forming a transition between the foundation and that of the primary brick wall.⁵ A faux window indentation, identical in size to the primary windows of the house, sets centrally on the first floor tower facing – giving a semblance of balance. This stylistic deception is further accomplished by being covered with two closed shutters. Directly above, a second story one-over-one window provides light to the interior stairwell. The tower is topped with a steep, pointed four-sided roof that features an ornate wooden four-sided finial. Double brackets are located at corner. A small, sub-gable and recessed overhang breaks the tower roof base on each side.⁶ A continuous polychromed band encircles the tower at the base of each window arch, providing a linear connection on each elevation.

Separating the primary front gable and the tower is a recessed area, located directly above the door and adorned with a large, circular window with multi-patterned brick outwardly encircling the bay. The roof of this recessed area is directly above the first-story foyer.

Completing the front elevation, a distinctive Italianate porch adorns the first story. It stretches from six inches to the right of the northwest corner and integrates with the projecting tower to the right. It's depth of approximately five feet projects the front of the porch outward about three feet further than that of the tower. Four posts support the porch with two half posts supporting flush with the brick wall at the back left (northeast) and back right (southeast) corners, respectively. All posts are beveled to eight sides for the majority of the

⁵ The original foundation surface coating around the perimeter was of a concrete material formed to resemble a quarried and beveled finish stone. Due to cracks and spalling of the original material, the previous owners placed a mortar coat atop the original detailing and protected the new material with beige mortar paint.

⁶ Historic photos indicate that each side of the tower roof had bracketed light wells present, located approximately one-third up the primary slope. It is uncertain whether such window placements were for additional Gothic Revival effect or for additional light to the spiral stairwell within. It appears that the side framing for these features continued the Eastlake style of detailing. Replacement of the windows may be replaced, per Secretary of the Interior's Standards, upon further study and verification.

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height and include details near the bottom one-third and upper one-fourth that give semblance to Gothic Revival impression. At the top of the post, identical, scrolled brackets are present. Arches of Eastlake and Gothic Revival detail, complete with cross bracing identical to that of the house's gable and vergeboards that are less significant of an arching effect, but complete with detailing that is ornate with arrangement and circular holes forming a pattern.⁷

Side (South) Elevation

Facing Taylor Street, this side elevation provides a clear view of the overall depth of the house and an all encompassing display of the details and elements throughout. An ornate brick patio and wall system surround the right (east) portion of the elevation, and a simple, concrete walk parallels the house, providing access to the front (west).

Beginning with the tower, the south elevation is identical to that of the front (west). To the right of the tower, a two story, gable facing portion of the house begins. It is identical in size, ornamentation and pitch to the fore-mentioned front gable. A single (rather than double as on the front) window is present on the second story, carrying on the one-over-one window treatment and polychormed arches. The window is centrally located beneath the gable peak.

Immediately below the second story window, a large, Italianate-influenced, one-story bay window juts forward. Three, one-over-one windows (one per side) are linked together by a parallel band of brick of different color that joins at the base of each window arch. Unlike most other openings of the house, the windows of the bay do not have keys at the crest of the arches. Beneath the overhang, common dentil Italianate brackets are present.

Set back two feet from the main gable facing elevation, a simple wing projects to the right (east) for a distance of twenty feet. A porch adorns this side segment. It is identical in decor to that of the front (west) porch, though smaller in width and containing only three supporting posts across. A "cellar" entrance to the basement is to the right, allowing access to below and subsequent access to the basement.

A one-over-one window, again, of the same design and pattern of the aforementioned polychrome arched windows, is to the left, while a single door and arched transom rest beneath the home's typical top adornments. Placed tightly between the overhang of the roof and the roof of the porch, is a simple, small, square.⁸

Back (East) Elevation

Historically, the Norton House property extended an additional sixty-two feet of its present boundary.⁹ The area was originally utilitarian and included a carriage house and stable. This portion of the historic Norton property sold in 1961 for construction of a new residence. Today, a brick patio continues around the south elevation, extends from the back of the house to the property boundary - a distance of approximately ten feet.

⁷ Historic photos show a Gothic Revival style balustrade or cresting that decorated the roofline edges of each porch and same of the bay window projection. This non-extant feature was complete with bracing elements of the same form and size of the gable and porch decoration. A combination of documentation and "shadow lines" on the brick allow for a planned recreation of this long-missing original feature.

⁸ In addition to the aforementioned features for the Taylor Street (south) side, historic photos show that a quite ornate chimney penetrated the roof to the extreme right, where an HVAC exhaust now exists. Historical architects have developed plans for a replica of this original feature for placement at a later date.

⁹ Abstract of Title for The South Third of Block No. 43, Allen and Cooks Addition to Avoca, Iowa, (Council Bluffs, IA: Real Estate and Title Abstract Office of J.W. Squire & Co.). February 1961 the eastern most of property was sold to a Charles Baugous and wife for the sum of \$2,000.00.

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This patio rests atop an original cistern located to the right of the main, gable-facing elevation.

When compared to the front and sides of the house, the back (east) elevation is quite utilitarian in form. Historically facing the family barn/carriage house to the east [non-extant], the elevation was not a primary focus for ornament or social view. As such, the arches above the windows are quite simple and non-ornamented, and the gable area is without decorative brackets and vergeboard.

Three windows are present on the gable end of this wing, each with a common brick arch, rather than the more ornate toppings that are apparent on the other elevations. On the first story, a one-over-one window is to the left, providing light into the kitchen. Immediately above, a window is tucked into the right portion of the gable and a second window for this story is to the right, proportionately spaced with the other. These two windows, in contrast to its first floor counterpart, are two-over-two systems.

The gable facing wing measures twenty-three feet in width, left to right, before receding sixteen feet toward the front of the house (west), meeting with another east facing wall sixteen feet in width. This segment, like its more easterly sibling, contains no overt adornment. A single window rests at the same elevation and rests centered to the width of its wall.

Side (North) Elevation

This elevation combines an integration of the utilitarian, non-ornate appearance of the aforementioned rear (east) elevation with a protruding gable-facing façade that returns to the higher-style of its Italian Villa and Gothic Revival core.

Beginning from the left (east) and extending for sixteen feet, a one-over one window, identical in bay design to that of its non-ostentatious mates around the corner, sets beneath the slope, centered parallel in this extension. A gable-facing elevation protrudes seven feet forward (north), being identical in gable pitch and width to that of the front (west) and south gable on the opposite side. His elevation, however, consists of two windows, one on the first story and an identical configuration directly above. Each are centered under the peak of the gable. It is at this feature that the ornamentation of brackets and vergeboard, and polychromatic details return – identical to that the other major façades.

Continuing on the first story, to the right of the gable, the wall continues, providing for an identical window treatment. Above is the slope from the front-facing (west) gable. Spacing between the left and right windows are of equal proportion on this facing wall.

Noted Interior Features

The C.H. Norton House is being nominated, under Criteria C (Architecture) primarily for its exterior significance; there are interior elements, however, that are noteworthy.

Upon entering the front doors of the front (west) of the house, an ornate, masonry and plaster archway is located to the right. This “tunnel” enters into the projecting tower, located on the southwest corner of the house. The front of the entry is arched with a detailed and rounded band and a cherub-type head on either side. Below this facing entry wall, the front corners are beveled for a distance of approximately five feet, before returning to sharp corners and meeting with the wide baseboards.¹⁰ The depth of the “tunnel” is actually the masonry wall thickness and the upper portion of the stairs as they make contact with the second floor.

¹⁰ Wide, eleven-inch baseboards are universal throughout the house.

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Inside, a tightly curving circular stairway radiates upward 270 degrees, clockwise. This stairwell has a strong resemblance to that of the historic Dodge House in Council Bluffs, IA – a National Historic Landmark. Like the Dodge House stairway, a stylized hexagonal newel post forms the stairway's substantial base. Likewise, combination turned/carved/hexagonal spindles and the curving handrail complete the front stair system of the house. All of this detail is of a rich-grained walnut.

Second story interior features of note are the corners of the upstairs hallway. Rather than sharp, ninety-degree angles for each corner, the walls and baseboards form wide, graceful curves. Carrying on this theme of curves, a circular window is located at the front (west) end of the hallway, overlooking the West Nishnabotna Valley and the farm ridge a mile and a half to the west.

Lastly, features within the house include tall ceilings – approximately eleven feet in height on the first floor and ten feet for the second. Massive, nine-foot tall pocket doors divide the historic front parlor from that of the back (presently used as family room and dining room). The room consisting largely of the south-facing bay window (historically the dining room) contains gracefully turned moldings window within each of the three window frames.

All floors of the first level are of oak, with the exception of the foyer that has been covered with a rich, wide pine. All interior doors are original, four-panel style with transoms. The doorframes of this level are all of wide, panel-encased facings typical of Italianate interiors. Decorative panels are located beneath each window, rising from the floor to the window sill.

The floor plan provides a classical interpretation of high society late nineteenth century residential design. From the foyer the spiral stairway is to the right, a doorway straight ahead leads to the music room (historic dining room), and a door to the left leads into the historic front parlor (present family room). Within this latter room, wide moldings and twelve-inch high baseboards accent the interior. Large, heavy pocket doors rise almost to the ceiling, providing entry to the dining historic back parlor (present dining room). A door from each respective parlor provides entry into the historic dining room (present formal room). A substantial bay that projects to the south accents this room. A short hallway, located between two pantries, leads to the kitchen. This room has been fully modernized, but adorned with tin ceilings and wainscoting. The kitchen has four doors – one in the southeast corner leading to the side porch, another in the northwest corner leading down a stairwell to the basement, and a third immediately to the right that serves as the back stairwell to the second floor. The fourth door, situated in the northeast corner of the kitchen, provides entry into a full bath with late nineteenth century marble sink and claw-foot bathtub.

The details of the second floor are considerably less formal and detailed than that of the first. Most floors of this story have been covered with the same wide, salvaged pine used in the foyer. While doors of this floor are identical to those below, door hardware and frame-style are very simple and non-ornate. Unlike the first story, a substantial L-formed hallway largely divides the second. All doors, except for the master bedroom entry and the closet doors, are complete with transoms. Primary corners of the hallway have wide, rounded corners, creating an open feel. Baseboards in the hallway and the four primary rooms have wide baseboards with a routed linear detail. Decorative panels are present under each window, rising from the floor to the windowsill.

After ascending the front stairway, a hallway leads to the left. Directly across the hall is the bathroom for the second floor. This room historically served as a bedroom and provides access to the only two closets in the house, with their entry located to the back of the room. It is believed that each closet was a traditional trunk closet divided by a solid wall. Access to the west closet was through the aforementioned room and entry to the opposite, or east closet was through a back bedroom. A doorway now connects the two closets for easier access.

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Returning to the stairway and following the hallway to the left a doorway leads to the master bedroom and turns to the right. The master bedroom is large and has two windows, close in arrangement that face to the west. A doorway, located along the room's east wall, connects to another bedroom. The purpose for this connection is not certain, though it was not uncommon during the nineteenth century for a home to have separate bedrooms for each spouse. A window is located along the north wall, centered under the gable peak, which necessitated the hipped ceiling form of the north half of the room. A doorway along the room's south wall opens onto the central portion of the east-west hallway. The hallway ends along the east wall. A doorway to the immediate left, along a short north wall, provides access to the back stairwell, returning to the kitchen. A door at the hallway's end along the north wall provides entry into a back bedroom. This room is noticeably north/south in form and has a smaller room to its north. A third door, located at the southwest of the bedroom, provides access to the aforementioned walk-through closets.

The C.H. and Lottie Norton House exhibits an extremely high-degree of interior and exterior integrity with no major alterations or additions. As such, this house provides an excellent example of late nineteenth century architecture, and the fusing of two or more popular styles of the period.

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Pottawattamie County, IASection number 8 Page 7**SECTION 8 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE****Architectural Significance**

The Charles Henry (C.H.) Norton Home is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under *Criterion C* as a distinguished design combining the Italian Villa and Gothic Revival styles. There is no comparable example of this combination to such a degree in the Avoca area.

Significant Interior Features

The combined design of Italianate and Gothic Revival blends elements that were high style for the time, reflecting a fashion that began in England as a reflection of the noted "Picturesque Movement." Such was a reaction to the formal classical ideas in architecture and art that had been in vogue for the previous two centuries. Typically, in America, the Italianate/Italian Villa revivals followed the informal rural variations of the aforementioned movement, while the Gothic Revival continued the pastoral character with noted architects Andrew Jackson Downing and Alexander Jackson Davis stressing the Gothic influence as being that of "rural" in character. As such, few urban American homes of this type were created. Proliferation of the Italianate and Gothic Revival styles was particularly common in the expanding towns and countryside of the Midwest.¹

The Norton House boasts characteristics of the Italian Villa design including the basic stretcher brick pattern, two story stairwell tower, Italianate styled elaborated window-crowns, tall, large paned double front doors that replicate the same window crowns. The windows are of a tall, arched form, and a characteristic Italianate round window is located left (north) of the tower. Also present, an imposing, angled, single story bay protrudes from the south elevation. This bay, like other elements of the roof line includes decorative brackets for support and design.

Polychromatic detailing of the window and door crowns is created in textured and tinted brick providing a buff color and texture in contrast with the standard brick used throughout. This same alternating pattern is viewable along the second story of the stairwell tower, providing a linear band around the four sides of the projecting feature and linking the upstairs stairwell windows in a pleasing and stylistic manner.²

In addition to the above, the building boasts a secondary stylistic component – Gothic Revival. Such integrated influences include highly ornate crossbraced vergeboards, steeply pitched gables, polychromatic masonry work above windows, doorways, and along the upper elements of the tower. Hipped roofed porches consisting of porch posts with the corners angled and integrated, stylistic cuts project an Eastlake influence. Decorative patterned and scribed brackets radiate from the upper elements of the posts. A finial/spire projects from the top of the steeply projecting tower roof.³

Although not as prominent, the Eastlake style comprises a third element, present in the vergeboards and porch and roof-line brackets. Detailed, floral and leaf/stem elements are artfully detailed throughout – a skill most difficult and rare even after the widespread use of the jigsaw.

When compared to its exterior counterpart, the interior of the home is quite passive in adornment. However,

¹ Virginia and Lee McAlister, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984), pp. 197-200.

² During the home's rehabilitation in 2000, the polychromatic detailing and sills were painted a solid white color. All of the polychromy masonry exists in its entirety beneath the paint, which is slated to be removed in 2005.

³ Historically, three additional such finials projected from the front and side facing gables; they are to be reproduced and placed in 2005.

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tall ceilings, wide and impressive doorway and transom work, wide, lightly detailed baseboards, and fairly unostentatious crown moldings provide an ambiance of architectural affluence.

Notable features include a deep and elaborate archway that allows access into the projecting tower stairwell. A single, plaster cherub head adorns each side of the arched entry. Inside, a tightly curving circular stairway radiates upward 270 degrees, clockwise. This stairwell holds a strong resemblance to that of the historic Dodge House in Council Bluffs, IA – a National Historic Landmark. Like the Dodge House stairway, a very similar, stylized hexagonal newel post forms the stairway's substantial base. Likewise, carved, hexagonal spindles the curving handrail complete the front stair system of the house. All of this detail is of rich-grained walnut.

On the second floor, a long hallway runs the length of the house, dividing the second floor. Of note are the curved corners of the hallway walls. Consisting of wide, skillfully constructed curved corners rather than sharp right angles, the harshness of sharp corners of such a long hallway is diminished. The wide baseboards of the hallway are artfully crafted as they follow the curvature.

A large, unique, circular window is located at the west (front) elevation of the hallway. This window provides light to the deep hallway, as well as a pleasant view of the Nishnabotna Valley to the west.

Lastly, a significant feature, not readily viewable is the wall construction of the masonry home. Built of soft-fired brick, the wall system is of cavity construction. From the foundation footer upwards, two rows of stretcher brick comprise the exterior wall. A second wall, one layer of brick thick, dictates separate, parallel interior walls on each respective side. An air gap, approximately four inches wide, separates the interior and exterior structural walls. Interior, lateral support for this form of construction is accomplished through the periodic placement of elongated, triple deep brick which forms a connection between the respective interior and exterior courses. While structurally significant, this innovation is not apparent.

Location Significance

Being located on the highest prominence of historic Avoca, the circa 1878 house and its location served as an icon to an expanding Avoca of the 1870s and 1880s. Due to flood plain surrounding community to the south, east, and west, progression along the northward ridge was the only option. Expansion tended to be for the more high-style properties and construction toward the north, and the more comprising, vernacular structures primarily located in the "flats" of the flood plain; thus creating a social-economic split in culture that is evident when surveying the community's built environment.

On this peak, in the vicinity of the Norton House, Avoca was given its formal name. The earliest residents of the 1869 railroad community referred to the location as "Pacific," but in April, 1869, it was changed to Botana. Shortly thereafter, an excursion of ladies and gentlemen came out by rail and looked up and down the beautiful Nishnabotna River valley. The scenery recalled to one of the gentlemen Tom Moore's poetic work, "Sweet Vale of Avoca." He quoted several of its lines, and inspired by the circumstance, one of the ladies clapped her hands, with the exclamation, "that's it," and that became the new name of the town.⁴

House History

Born in 1839 in New York State and raised in the community of Oakfield [non-extant], Cass County, Iowa, Charles Henry Norton would grow to become one of the founding residents of Avoca and a leader of public improvement. After actively serving four years with the Thirteenth Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment during

⁴ Keatley, Col. John, History of Pottawattamie County, Iowa, (Chicago: O.L. Baskin & Co., 1883), 247.

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the American Civil War, Norton returned to Oakfield and married Charlotte "Lottie" Howlette, a native of England. Within two years, Norton and wife moved to the sparsely settled, and yet unnamed railroad stop where they would live the rest of their days. In 1869, just as the railroad throughway was finishing completion, Norton opened the first general store in the area, name it *Norton & Jones Mercantile*. Initially supplying the necessities that the newly settled community required, the hardware and mercantile aspect soon grew to specialize in buggies, wagons, and harness.⁵ Within a short period of time, Norton's business expanded into farm implements and even plumbing. Again, the enterprise expanded to include a sales facility in another community.

After the opening of a hardware store in nearby Oakland (twelve miles to the south by railroad), not only did Norton's business responsibility grow, but so did his dedication to service. Norton along with other community leaders, served as a member of the first Avoca City Council, established for operation in March 1875.⁶ In addition to city politics, Norton also served with the community fire department and later the school board

With a growing family – eventually numbering four children, Charles and Lottie Norton acquired a sizable lot on the ridge overlooking the downtown and the West Nishnabotna Valley. In September of 1878, a lot measuring of 93.3' x 160', was purchased for the intent of building a home that is the focus of this nomination.⁷

At the time of its erection, the C.H. Norton House was one of the few residences in this expanding area of Avoca. A grand school [non-extant], erected in 1871-1872, was located directly across Chestnut Street from the Norton lot.

Little is known as to the later years of the senior Norton's personal life. Three of the four children eventually left Avoca for other areas of the country. The youngest, Charles William ("Chub"), joined his father's firm in 1900 and eventually assumed full proprietorship under the name of C.W. Norton.

C.H. Norton died in 1917 and his wife, Lottie, followed in 1918. Both are buried in Avoca's Graceland Cemetery, approximately one mile north of the house.

Following Lottie's death, the estate was held in probate for a year before being sold to the family of Fred Christensen for the sum of \$6,000.⁸ Christensen, an immigrant from Denmark, and his wife held possession of the Norton House until his death in 1935, when it was conveyed to their daughter, Olive True.

It was under the ownership of Mrs. True that, following her becoming a widow, for many years the Norton House served as a boarding house. Primarily providing housing to teachers of the former primary and high schools that were located across Chestnut Street, students and single employees of the local electrical company also rented rooms in the home at various times.

⁵ *A Community History, Avoca, Iowa, 1869-1994*, (Avoca, IA: The Journal-Herald, 1994), pp. 270-271.

⁶ Keatley, Col: John, *History of Pottawattamie County, Iowa*, (Chicago: O.L. Baskin & Co., 1883), 248.

⁷ *Abstract of Title for the South Tird of Block No. 43, Allen and Cooks Addition to Avoca, Iowa*, (Council Bluffs, IA: Real Estate and Title Abstracts Office of J.W. Squire and Co.).

Note: The present owners hold safely in their possession the original abstract indicated land acquisition via U.S. Land Grant in 1856 through subsequent sale and mortgage exchanges through 1885. Mortgage and property information dating from 1889 – is provided in a progressively compiled Abstract of Title.

⁸ Ibid.

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Unlike many single family homes turned rental, no alterations were done to the house. At least one large room of the first floor was turned into an individual apartment, normally occupied by single teachers. Rooms on the second floor were likewise used for individual kitchen occupancy. Mrs. True continued to live in the residence, using the former back parlor, dining room, and kitchen for her personal use. In response to its long use to the serving of housing for the city's educators, the Norton House is also known largely as "The Teacherage."⁹

Following the 19970 death of Mrs. True, successive sales were not friendly for the Norton House, and it eventually fell into disrepair. As ownership continued to change at a rapid rate, apparent multiple uses for the property persisted. One reputed use was that the house was used for the storage of antiques. Another owner, it is said, stored motorcycles within the baby window (historic dining room) area.

By 1989, the Norton House was in a state of disrepair and slated for demolition. A couple visiting Avoca, David and Pamela Rogers, saw the challenge and purchased the property, moving into its first floor. Though saving it from demolition and spending the next decade striving to restore the home as time and finances permitted, the project was deemed too time consuming and the couple sold the house, moving to a newer home in the community.

In 2000 Wade Duncan, a real estate agent from Missouri Valley, Iowa, purchased the home in partnership for the sole purpose of restoring the home for resale. Though the wiring, plumbing, and kitchen were fully modernized, the integrity was not altered and missing interior features replaced. On the exterior, repair was made to the massive Gothic Revival bargeboards and the front (west) and side (south) porches were replaced with *fully* detailed reproductions of the originals.¹⁰

The present owners acquired the property in 2001 and have been active in "undoing" previous repairs and minor alterations that did not follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Present plans are to accurately restore the few missing Gothic Revival details from the house's exterior; including finials for the north, west and south gables, removal of paint from polychromatic details, and small light wells formerly located on each side of the tower roof (see architectural description of Section 7).

Architect

Research has yet to positively identify an architect for the Norton House. Searches conducted by architectural historians of the National Park Service and state historic preservation offices have not determined a definitive builder.

Seeking the design of this resource or similar features, numerous nineteenth century pattern books have been researched to no avail. Jim Draeger, senior architectural historian at the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office, is in the process of referencing his personal collection of more than one thousand period pattern books in hopes of determining a source or possible reference to the Norton House.

One hypothesis is that the house may be the product or influence of noted Des Moines architect William Foster.

⁹ Many stories have been passed onto the present owners by former residents of the house when it was a rental (teacher and student alike), residents who took piano lessons in the apartment of a former music teacher (the front parlor), and elderly neighbors who long-witnessed the progression of the Norton House from majestic home to subdivided rental, to disrepair, restoration and its return to single family residence.

¹⁰ Photographs illustrate the restoration in progress and the intricate details fully duplicated from the original porch features.

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Advertisements for his firm *Foster & Blake* detail Italian Villa forms with Gothic finials and protruding towers.¹¹ Another supporting characteristic – and unique to the Norton House and Foster’s design practice, is the use of cavity wall construction in his projects.¹² This practice, not a common building technique for nineteenth century Iowa, proved ahead of its time.

A second candidate for designer is well-known Chicago architect William Boyington. Similarities of design, spiral staircase and wide ornamental woodwork are comparable though on a smaller scale to the general Greenville Dodge House in Council Bluffs, Iowa, which was designed by Boyington in 1869. Despite similarities with known Boyington examples, this hypothesis is much less likely as it is believed that the architect had returned to practice solely in Chicago several years before the Norton House was constructed.¹³

While the identity of an architect or pattern book of the Norton House has yet to be determined, the owners are determined to learn more about the origin and construction of the property.

In Closing

The house erected by early Avoca entrepreneur and leader Charles Henry Norton was constructed as a model of the integration of Italian Villa and Gothic Revival styles. It’s emphasis of traditional Italianate influence, combined with details attributed to the Gothic Revival – and elaborated further with Eastlake style detailing, provides a complicated, yet balanced and pleasing architectural example of the late nineteenth century.

As is common throughout many American communities, as decades progressed, the stately home passed from owner to owner, and eventually became a property for multi-residential rental and then into a state of disrepair and intended demolition.

Today, the C.H. and Lottie Norton House has been “brought back to life,” and serves not only as a comfortable home for its present owners, but also an educational tool in illustrating an important period of architectural design and culture of late nineteenth century America.

¹¹ Davis, J.J., *History and Business Directory of Madison County, Iowa*, (Des Moines: Mills & Co., 1869), 133.

¹² Mills, George, The Man Who Wouldn’t Go Back – William Foster, Pioneer Architect Left an Impressive Record in Iowa,” *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 24 June, 1957, A-52.

¹³ Further details of Boyington’s return to Chicago were provided via telephone conversation by Historian Ralph Christian of the State Historical Society of Iowa, 8 July, 2004.

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Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Legal Description:

The West 88' of the South 93.3', Block 43, Allen & Cook's Addition, as surveyed, platted, and recorded in Pottawattamie County, Iowa.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

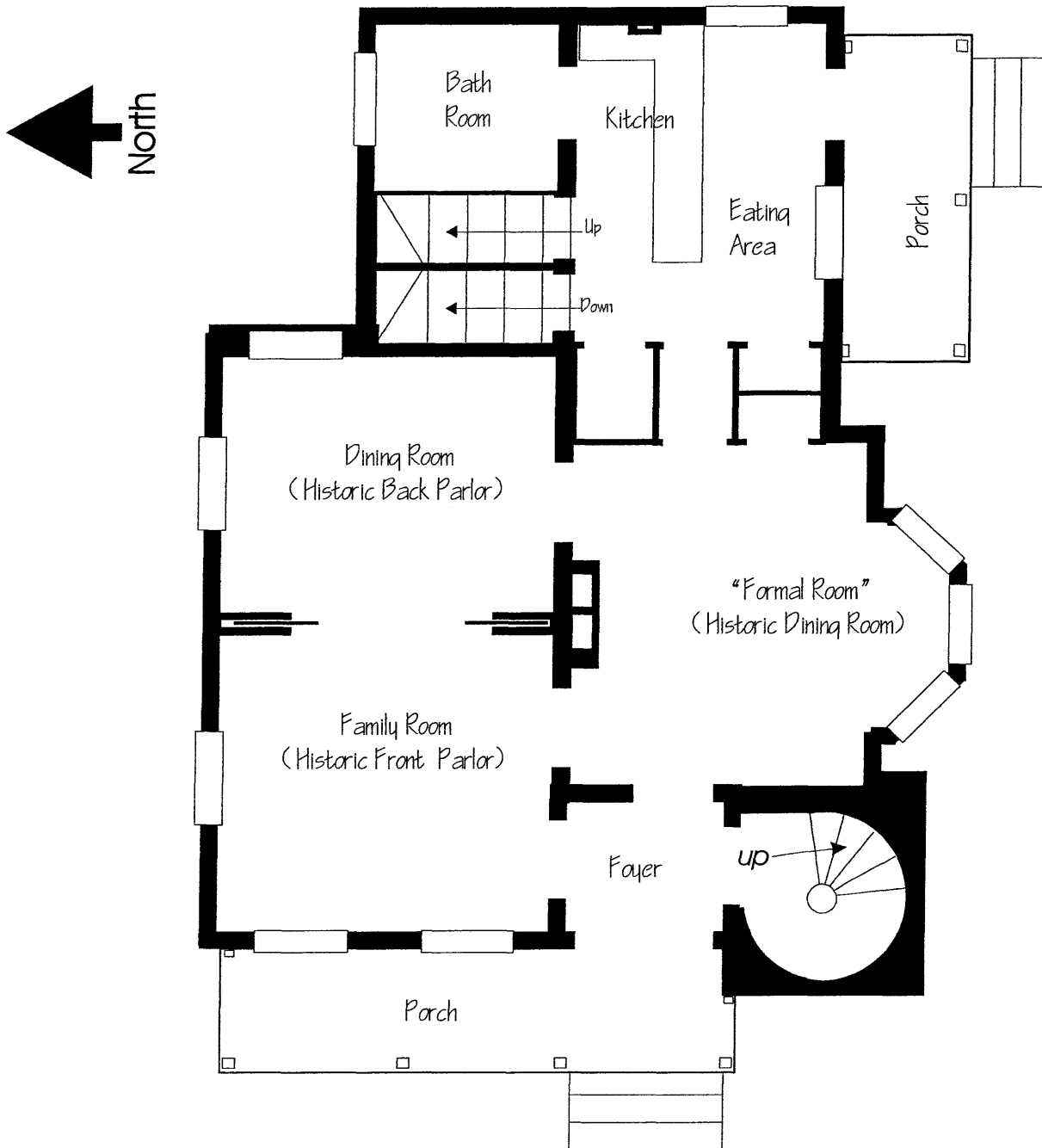
The boundary includes the C.H. Norton House and all property within the historic lot boundary – less the eastern most sixty-two feet that was separated from the property in 1960.

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First Floor Plan

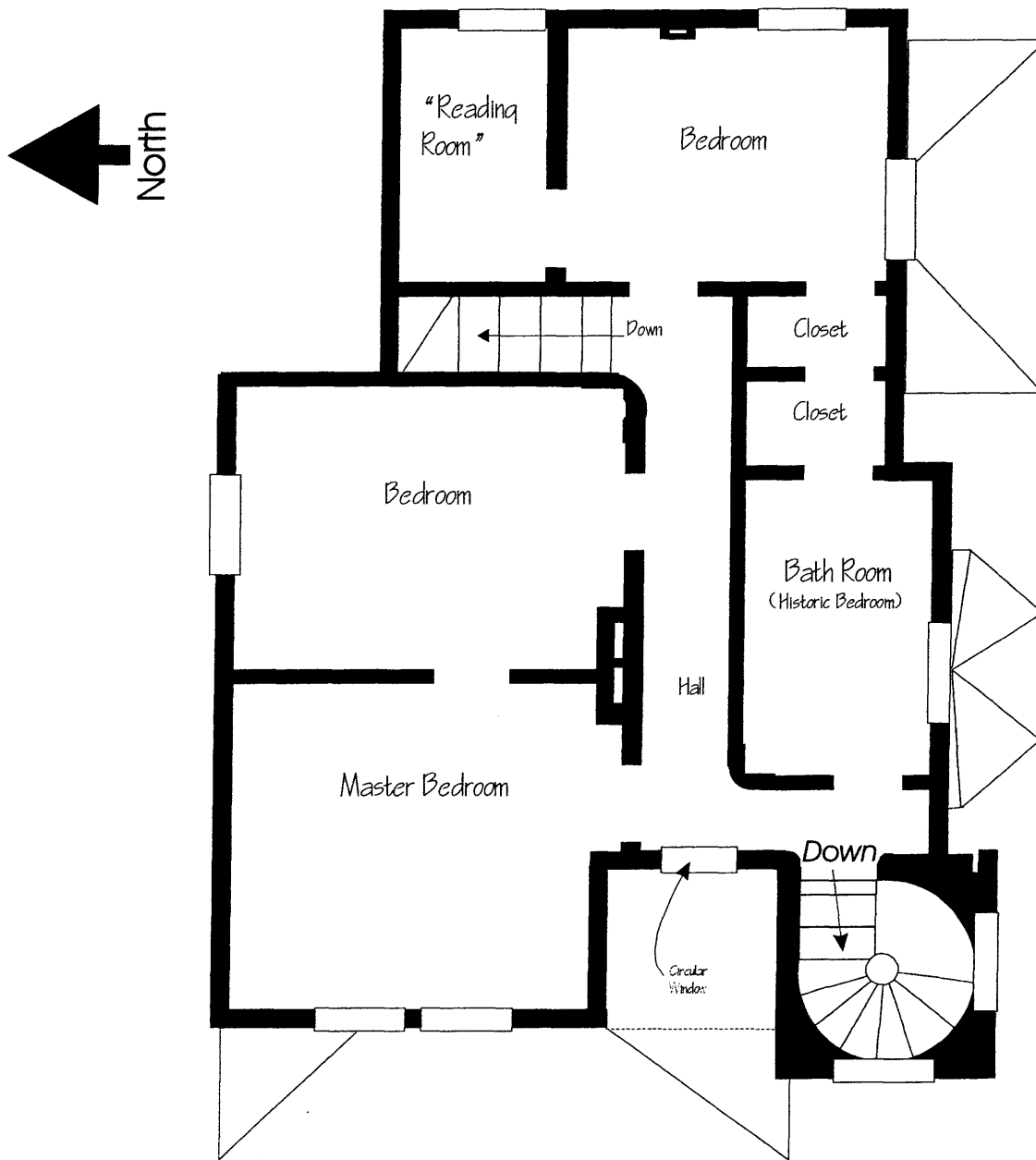
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Second Floor Plan

C.H. Norton House
Avoca, Pottawattamie County, Iowa

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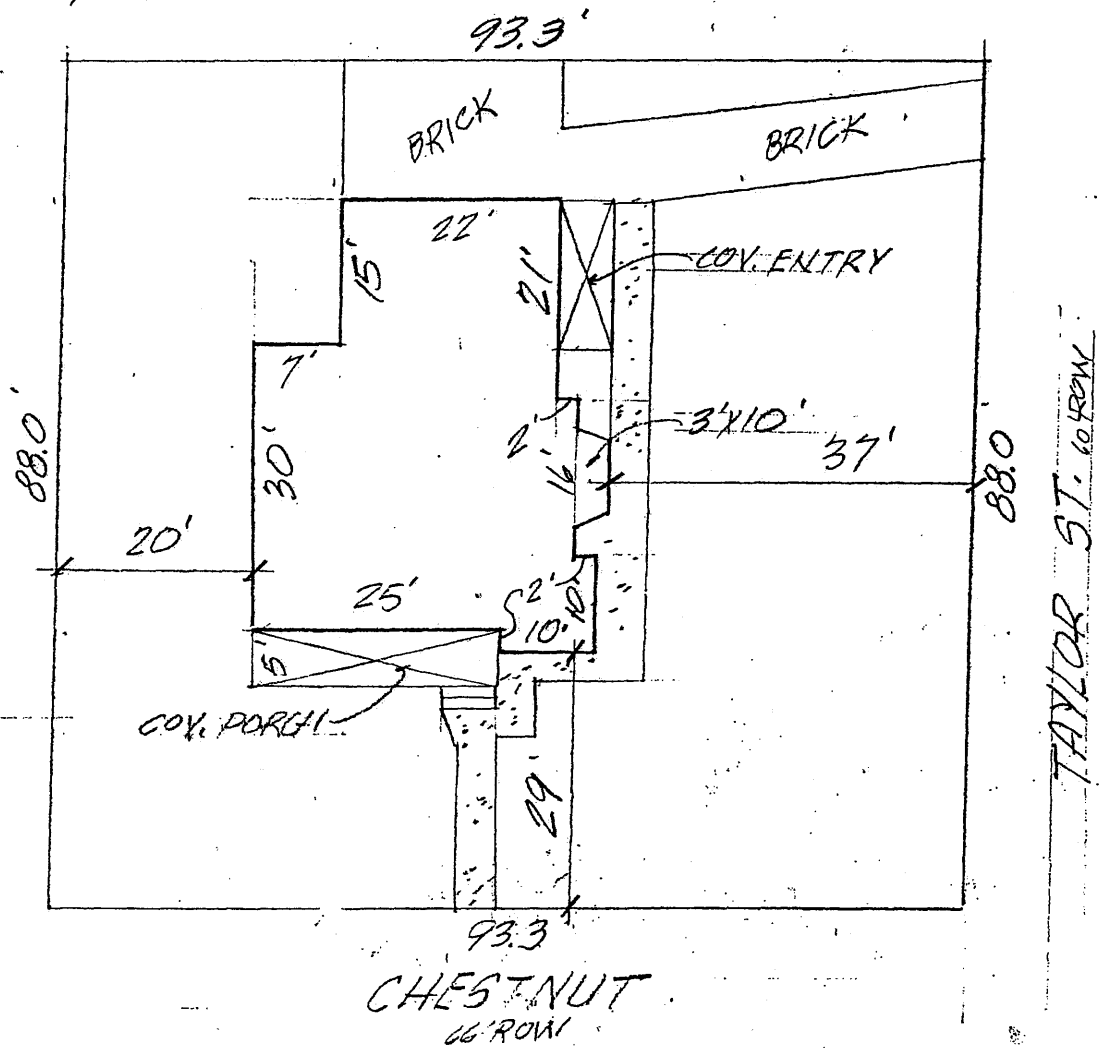
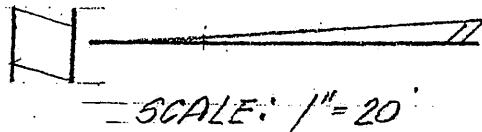
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Property Plat

LEGAL: The West 88' of the South 93.3', Block 43, Allen & Cook's Addition, as surveyed, platted, and recorded in Pottawattamie County, Iowa.

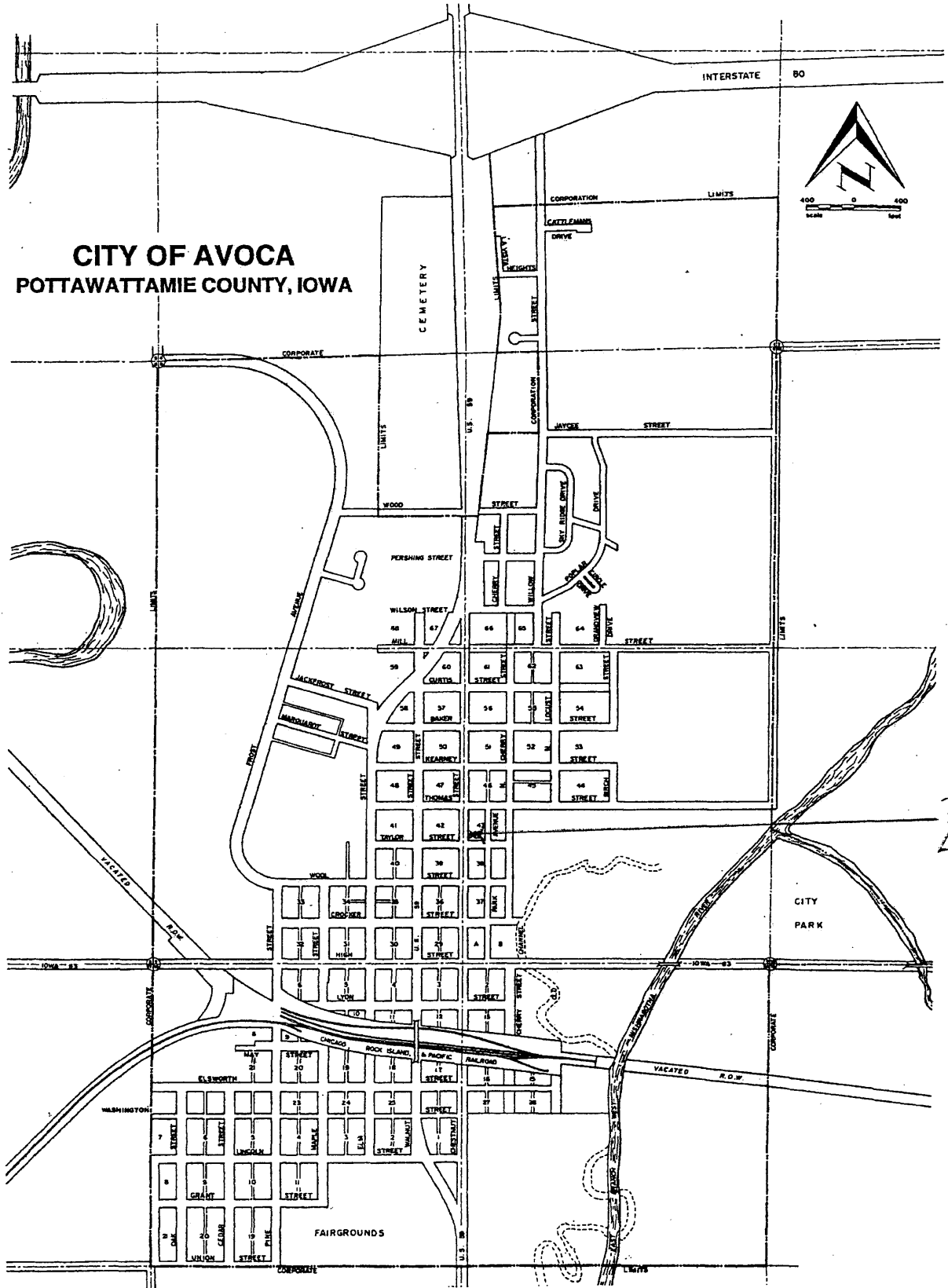


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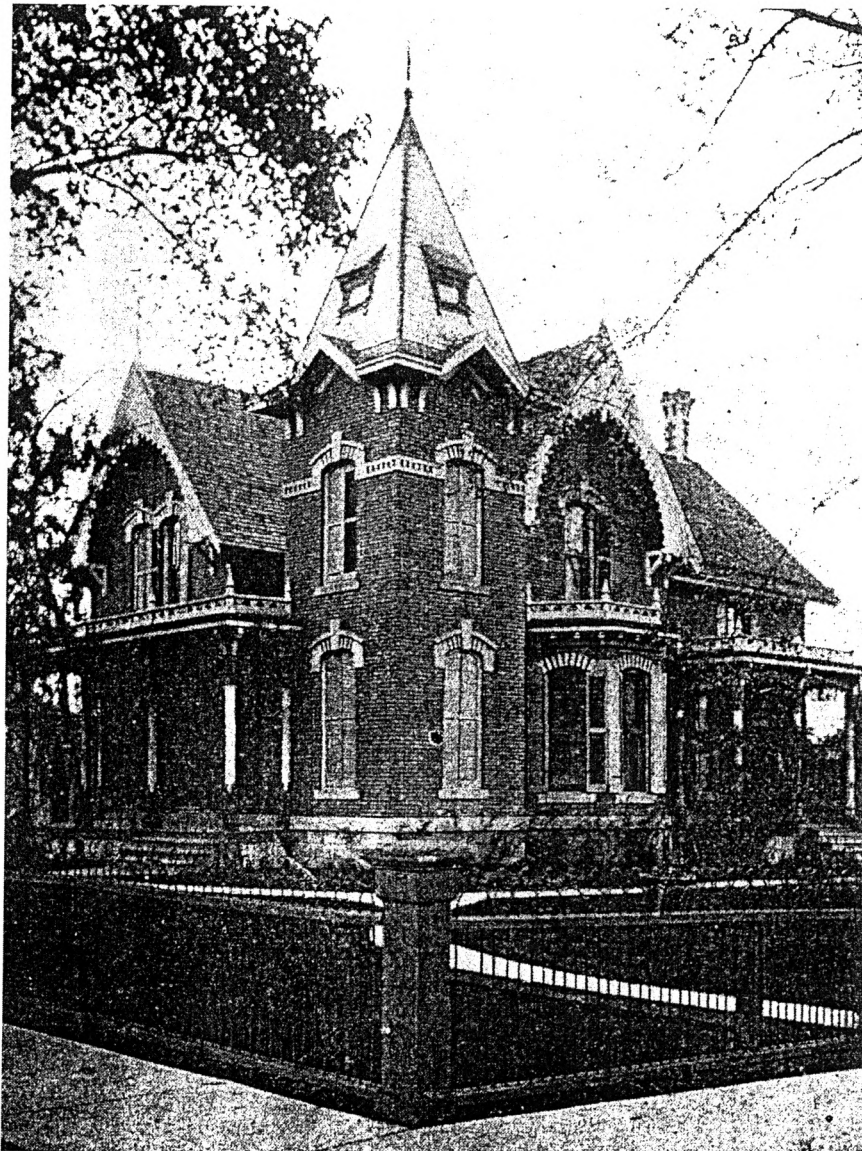


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C.H. Norton House
Avoca, Pottawattamie County, Iowa
Source: Souvenir of Avoca, Avoca, IA: Avoca World-Herald, 1906.
Circa 1900

View Looking northeast, showing front (Chestnut) and side (Taylor Street) elevations.

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C.H. Norton House
Avoca, Pottawattamie County, Iowa
Source: Private collection of Brian McCutchen
Circa 1920

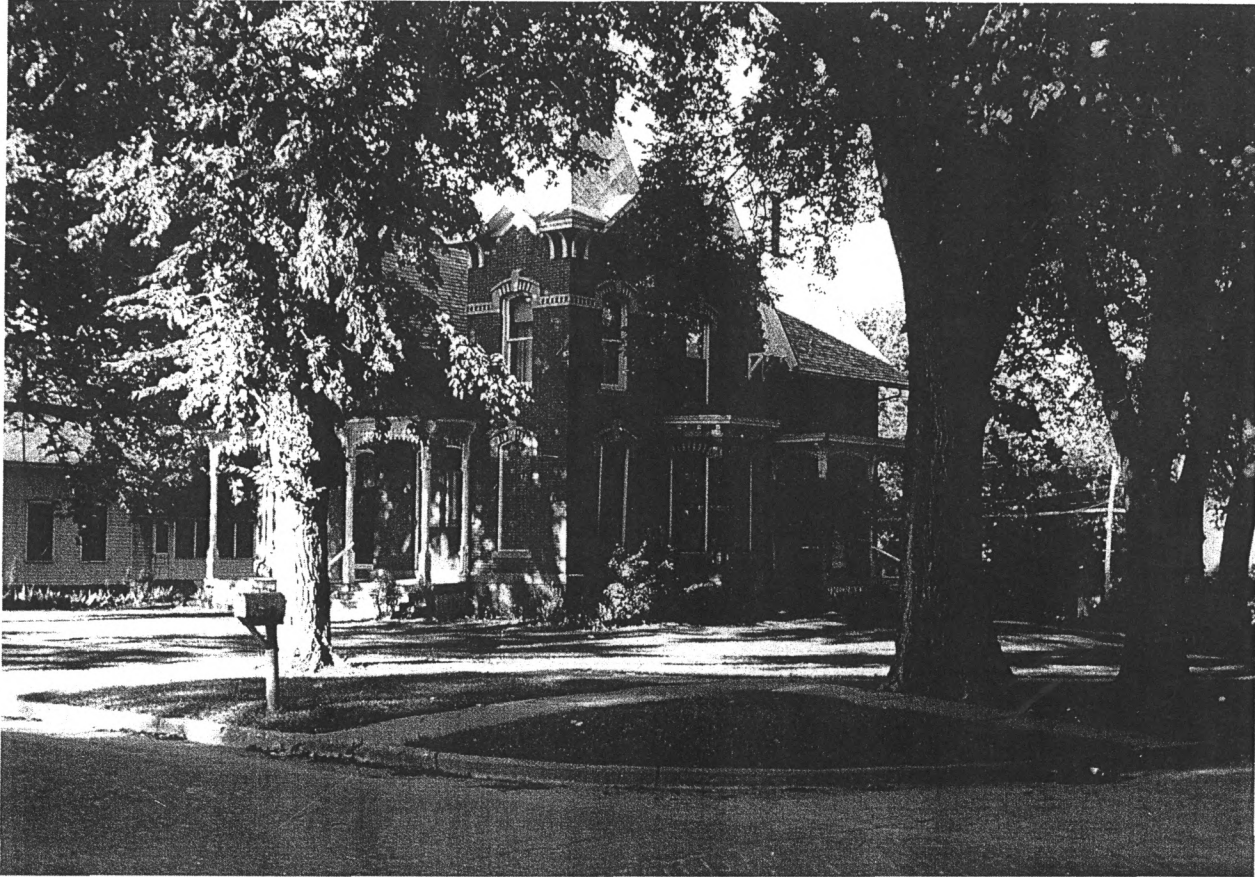
View Looking northeast, showing front (Chestnut) and side (Taylor Street) elevations.

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C.H. Norton House
Avoca, Pottawattamie County, Iowa
Source: Private collection of Brian McCutchen
Circa 1950

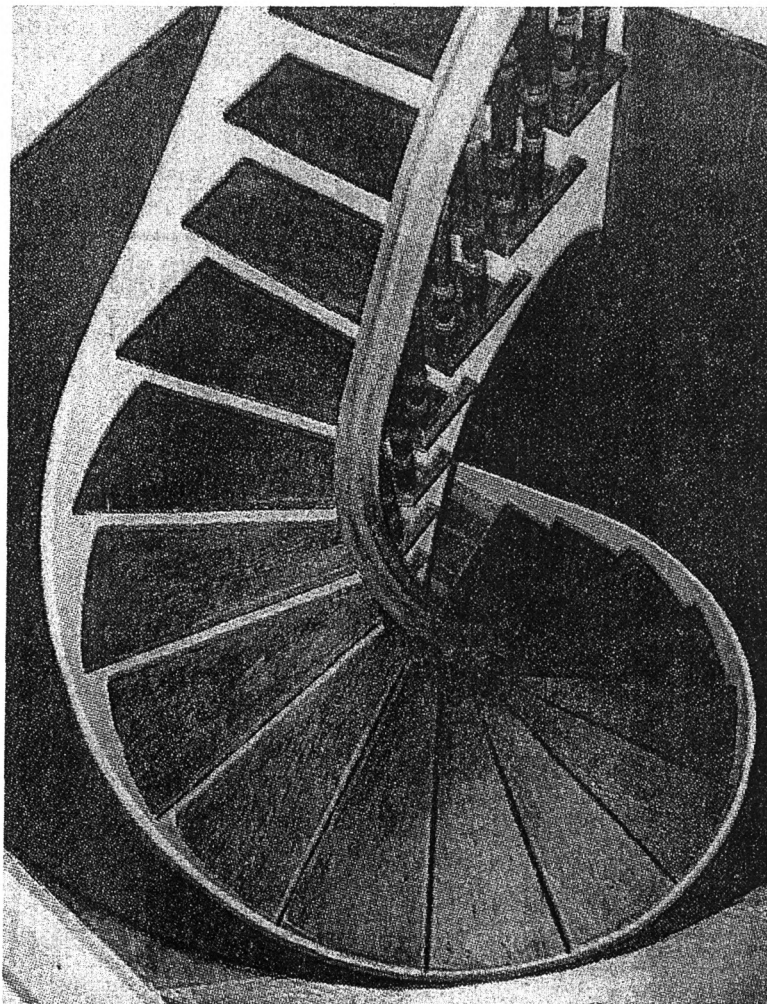
View Looking northeast, showing front (Chestnut) and side (Taylor Street) elevations.

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C.H. Norton House

Avoca, Pottawattamie County, Iowa

Source: Photograph by Wade Duncan

As published, "Renovated Inside and Out – Crumbling Iowa Victorian Looks Just Like New Again,"
Omaha World Herald, Sunday, 22 October, 2000.

View from second story corner of tower looking down circular stairwell.