

DATA SHEET

PH0695386

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 23 1979
DATE ENTERED APR 13 1979

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Houses

Thematic Resource

Residences of Mississippi River Men, Le Claire, Iowa: 1850-1880

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

—NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Le Claire

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

— VICINITY OF

First

STATE

Iowa

CODE

COUNTY

Scott

CODE

163

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT
- Thematic group

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

See inventory sheets

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

— VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Scott County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Davenport

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

—FEDERAL —STATE —COUNTY —LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT

GOOD

FAIR

DETERIORATED

RUINS

UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED

ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE

MOVED

DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Introduction

The three decades after 1850 were perhaps the most significant in the history of Le Claire, Iowa, a Mississippi River town founded in the late 1830's at the head of the Upper Rock Island Rapids, about 15 miles north of Davenport. During this period, Le Claire was a "river town" in every sense: not only was its physical layout typical of most river towns, but the lives and livelihoods of many, perhaps most, of its inhabitants, were intimately tied to the river as a major artery of transportation and commerce. Men of Le Claire worked in the boatyards, or as ships' clerks, or ran hotels and mercantile establishments geared to the river trade. The most adventuresome, and best-known, were the steamboat captains and the pilots: specialists who guided steamboats and lumber rafts through the rocks and treacherous currents of the Upper Rapids between Le Claire and the head of Rock Island at Davenport.

The properties included in this nomination have as their common link the fact that they were the homes of river men -- captains, pilots, builders, owners -- in the heyday of Le Claire and of Mississippi River transportation and commerce. All were built in the mid-19th century, mostly between 1850 and 1870, and exhibit variety in their style, form, size, and materials of construction.

The town of Le Claire is located at a point where the Mississippi makes a sharp bend to the southwest, and for 15 miles below the point forms a rock-strewn, treacherous stretch of water known as the Upper Rapids. The plan of the town reflects the river orientation: the central business district extends along one street, that parallel to and nearest the river, with residential areas west and north of the commercial center. Due to the gradual rise of the land westward from the river, many houses sit on terraced lots with stone retaining walls; or, if they face west, have walk-in basements. The properties included in this nomination are located in a roughly backward-L-shaped area. Most are located along Cody Road (originally Main Street, and nearest the river) and Second Street, which parallels Cody Road on the west. The base of the L consists of a few properties between Wisconsin and Dodge, which run east-west through the southern part of the town.

Stone, brick and wood are materials used in construction, and are largely of local derivation. Le Claire had several limestone quarries, and a good supply of clay from which soft yellow bricks were made. After the river trade, milling was probably the most important industry in the community, giving inhabitants ready access to supplies of lumber for frame dwellings.

The houses reflect a variety of architectural influences popular at mid-century. Most prominent is the Italianate, with examples of both brick and frame construction. The Greek Revival is expressed in several modes, ranging from the relatively sophisticated to the decidedly vernacular. A traditional form, the center-hall, single- or double-pile house, is also represented.

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Mississippi River Men: Le Claire, Iowa 1850-1880

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The identification of the resources included in this nomination was largely the work of Dorothy Lage, former schoolteacher and long-time resident of Le Claire, whose published history of the town outlined the significance of the river and the river men in mid-19th-century Le Claire. Working with members of Division staff, Mrs. Lage was able to identify a great many buildings associated with the community's river history. It was decided that a majority of them located along Cody Road, would most appropriately be nominated to the National Register as an historic district. But the homes of the river men -- pilots and captains in particular -- seemed to be a special case: because the men themselves were, collectively and in some cases individually, representative of perhaps the most important component in the history of the Mississippi River as an artery of transportation in the Midwest, and in the history of the river town, Le Claire.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1850-1880

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of these resources lies in their association with Mississippi River steamboat captains, boatbuilders, and raft and rapids pilots who lived in Le Claire during the mid-19th century. Men in these occupations, wherever located, were even then considered heroes and much admired, for the skill and courage with which they guided steamboats and log or lumber rafts through the treacherous currents and over the dangerous, rock-strewn waters of the Upper and Lower Rapids. Eventually, they became, collectively, part of American folklore, with no little assistance from that one-time river man, Samuel Clemens, and any number of retired rafters, pilots and captains who published their reminiscences (always colorful) in the early decades of the 20th century.

The river men of Le Claire were a part of this chapter of American history, and at the same time were the most prominent local representatives of the river trade which brought the community to its peak of prosperity and vitality in the mid-19th century. During the decades 1850-1880, the Mississippi River was at its height as a principal artery of transportation and commerce in the Midwest, and the fortunes of many a community along its banks were tied to the steamboats, cargoes, and lumber rafts that passed up and down this broad stream. The character and prosperity of Le Claire during these years were functions of the river phenomenon, much of its commerce and industry a response to river traffic, and the occupations of many of its inhabitants carried out on or near the water. In this, Le Claire was not unlike other early Iowa communities: much of Iowa's early history is the history of towns -- Dubuque, Bellevue, Le Claire, Davenport, Burlington, etc. -- that were located on the Mississippi and whose economies depended upon it, at least in the first decades of their existence. A number of these towns, ^{later} diversified their economies: Dubuque and Burlington became heavily industrial, Burlington also a major rail center, and Davenport a dominant commercial center in eastern Iowa. Much of this reorientation was due to the railroads, which soon eclipsed the river as a swift and economic form of transportation. Le Claire, however, did not grow with the century: the river was its life, and once the days of steamboats and log rafts were over, the prosperity and population of the community declined.

The location of Le Claire is of particular significance in accounting for the many pilots and captains who lived there. Its situation at the head of the Upper Rapids actually allowed certain river men to specialize -- in guiding steamboats and log rafts the 15 miles of rocky stream between Le Claire and Davenport. The Le Claire pilots may have even had a monopoly on this particular trade: Walter

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Mississippi River Men: Le Claire, Iowa: 1850-1880

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Blair, a former pilot himself, listed pilots who worked the Upper Rapids from the 1840's to nearly the turn of the century, and all 16 lived in Le Claire (Blair, pp. 275-76). Pilots, unlike captains who commanded their crafts the full distance of any journey, came on board for only short stretches, their importance lying in a thorough understanding of particularly dangerous sections of the river. There was also a distinction between raft and other pilots, though many men practiced both trades as the occasion required. Raft pilots were associated with the lumber industry, and the immense rafts of logs or lumber lashed together and floated from the northern forests to the mills located downstream in Iowa, Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Before the Civil War, the rafts had no propulsion other than the current, and pilots were then literally in command of the rafts alone. After the war, the pioneering efforts of the Van Sants and John Smith, all of Le Claire, resulted in the raftboat, which pushed (or "towed") the lumber rafts, and the bowboat, a small sternwheeler set crosswise at the front of the raft to provide additional control over direction of movement.

The river men of Le Claire constituted, by 1870, a significant proportion of the town's population. The 1856 census listed 5 pilots and 1 captain, in a community of about 700 people. By 1860, there were a handful of captains, more pilots, and a growing variety of river-oriented occupations. (The microfilm copy of this census is nearly illegible due to scratches, thus no adequate count was possible.) In 1870, Le Claire had a population of 1093, of whom over 20 were captains, pilots or boat builders (the Van Sants), and the range of other river-connected occupations included caulkers, boat carpenters, engineers, mates and "raftsmen", young men who acted as deck hands on the lumber rafts. A curious fact about these men was that so many of them were related: river work was a family affair, represented in Le Claire by two generations of Tromleys, Dorrances, Smiths and Van Sants, and three generations of Suiters.

Today in Le Claire the boatyards are gone, the "levee", such as it was, no longer readily discernable. The houses of Le Claire's river men remain the last tangible, direct link to the community's once vital role in the history of Mississippi River transportation.

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Mississippi River Men: Le Claire, Iowa, 1850-1880

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Of the thirteen properties included in this nomination, five are of local architectural interest. Three (Jacob Suiter House, Dawley House, and McCaffrey House) present variations on vernacular Italianate forms, the McCaffrey House in wood construction, the other two in locally-manufactured brick. The latter two have clean proportions and simple lines. The McCaffrey House, with its two-story polygonal bay and curved tops on the window and door enframements, presents a rather different, less solid character, and is made particular imposing by its extremely fine situation on a corner lot well above the main road. Another house, the "Old Mill House", is, for all its present decrepitude, a pleasing example of the Greek Revival influence in residential architecture, and still among the architectural gems in the Le Claire community. Finally, the George Tromley, Jr. house is of interest for its odd and rather picturesque use of the jerkinhead gable.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY see inventory sheets

QUADRANGLE NAME Port Byron, Illinois; Iowa

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES see inventory sheets

A

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B

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

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D

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H

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

see inventory sheets

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

M.H. Bowers, National Register Coordinator

ORGANIZATION

Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

26 East Market Street

TELEPHONE

319/353-6949

CITY OR TOWN

Iowa City

STATE

Iowa 52240

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Adrian A. Ford

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE Jan. 12, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

Bill Bolovich

DATE

4/13/79

DATE

March 12, 1979

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- Manuscript Census Records for Le Claire, Iowa: 1856, 1860, 1870.