

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received MAR 11 1986

date entered 4-28-86

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Graceland Cemetery Chapel

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Graceland Cemetery, U.S. Hwy. 59 ___ not for publication

city, town Avoca ___ vicinity of

state Iowa code 019 county Pottowattamie code 155

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Town of Avoca

street & number Town Hall

city, town Avoca ___ vicinity of state Iowa 51521

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Recorder's Office

street & number Pottawattamie County Courthouse

city, town Council Bluffs state Iowa 51501

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

For well over a century, Graceland Chapel has been the focal point of Avoca's city cemetery, located on the northern edge of the city limits. This picturesque one-story octagonal building, at various times throughout its history has served as a temporary mausoleum, sexton's office, and general storage facility, as well as a place for holding funerals. Architecturally, the edifice exhibits the combined influence of both the Gothic Revival, Greek Revival, and Italianate styles, and its overall design and execution reflect well on its currently unknown architect/builder. Except for alterations to doorways and deterioration due to deferred maintenance, the chapel underwent little physical change over the years. Since 1984 the local historical society has been restoring it, a task yet to be completed.

Graceland Chapel is a wood frame octagonal building that rests on a stuccoed brick foundation. Walls measure eight feet on each side and are sheathed with wooden clapboards that are currently painted white. Doorways were placed in the northeast and southwest walls while the remaining six walls each contains a single four-over-four wood sash window. The octagonal hipped roof was originally covered with wood shingles which in more recent years were replaced with asbestos ones. The roof is pierced on the southeast side by a single, inside brick chimney stack with a corbelled cap.

Because of its siting and octagonal form, Graceland Chapel has a "picturesque" quality, and this aspect is further enhanced by an effective combination of decorative elements drawn from the Italianate, Greek Revival, and Gothic Revival styles. The Greek Revival influence can be seen in the narrow, pilastered corner boards that delineate the eight wall sections and the entablature along the roofline that features a plain architrave, frieze, and boxed cornice.

PHYSICAL

Revival influence can be seen in the narrow, pilastered corner boards that delineate the eight wall sections and the entablature along the roofline that features a plain architrave, frieze, and boxed cornice. The wide eaves, carved pendants, and brackets that appear to provide roof support, however, are characteristic of the Italianate mode. The architect/builder took his window and doorway treatments from the Gothic Revival, placing all of them in pointed arch wooden surrounds that help to give the building the quiet dignity one might expect of a structure of this type.

The interior of the chapel consists of a large open space with built-in wooden benches attached to the walls. Walls and ceiling are covered with wooden car siding of uncertain vintage. Originally, the floor was brick, but in later years it was covered with concrete. In all likelihood, there was once some type of catafalque here to hold coffins during services, but no documentation to establish this has been located.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion		
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science		
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture		
___ 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/		
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ humanitarian		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater		
___ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation		
		___ invention		___ other (specify)		

Specific dates c. 1875 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion C: Architecture

Avoca's Graceland Chapel is one of two octagonal cemetery chapels known to be extant in Iowa. Octagonal buildings were never a common type in the state, and this one-story, wood frame example with eight foot sides is one of 50 survivors of the approximately 100 octagonal houses, barns, and public facilities erected in Iowa from the 1805's to 1940. Constructed around 1875 toward the end of the octagon craze in the state directly traceable to Orson Squire Fowler, Graceland Chapel features decorative elements drawn from the Greek Revival, Italianate, and Gothic Revival styles that in conjunction with its unusual form gives the building a most pleasing and picturesque quality and a quiet dignity that belies its functions.

Although octagonal buildings were constructed by the ancients and the octagon concept was advocated by leading architects like Robert Mills and amateurs like Thomas Jefferson whose country house Poplar Forest was octagonal, the principal impetus to the 19th century octagon craze came from Orson Squire Fowler, one of the more strident advocates of major reform in antebellum America and the foremost spokesman for the pseudoscience of phrenology. The publication of his *A HOME FOR ALL: OR A NEW, CHEAP, CONVENIENT, AND SUPERIOR MODE OF BUILDING* in 1848 introduced the octagon concept to the general public in a form they could readily comprehend and in a manner calculated to inspire emulation. In this book and several subsequent editions, magazine articles, and public lectures, Fowler, who was one of the better known Americans of his day, argued that octagons were superior to other plans because they more closely resembled the forms of nature, provided more space and sunlight, eliminated useless corners, made communication easier, and were more economical to construct. Fowler's ideas won general acceptance and sparked an octagon mania which lasted until the Civil War and to a certain extent after. Most popular magazines and newspapers of the era publicized his ideas and published illustrations and floor plans of octagon buildings, and virtually every architectural pattern book contained at least one octagonal design.

Based on construction dates, it appears the octagon fad reached Iowa in the mid-1850's. Fowler lectured in Dubuque, Davenport, Iowa City, and Keokuk in 1856, and his writings appear to have circulated in the state for many years afterwards. Although most architectural histories content that the octagon craze ended with the coming of the Civil War, this is not true for Iowa. More octagonal buildings were constructed in the state after the war than before, and several were erected in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Unfortunately, the architect and/or builder of the Graceland Chapel is unknown at the present time, but it appears that he may have had some familiarity with Fowler's ideas and writings. Although Fowler's primary interest was residential design, he advocated the octagonal form for public buildings, especially those used for large gatherings. According to Fowler, "to impress an audience, a speaker requires that they be gathered all around him," and "the octagon form secures this end perfectly... Compactness and equi-distance facilitate impressibility. These the octagon form promotes, while the square and oblong shapes prevent."

9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet 9-2

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Avoca

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

UTM References

A

1	5	3	0	4	8	7	0	4	5	9	5	8	2	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification A part of (defined as a thirty foot diameter circle the center of which is the centerpoint of the chapel itself) the cemetery legal description which is the southeast one fourth of the southwest one fourth of Section 4, Range 39W, Township 77N. Includes only the chapel.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

Form by James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator
name/title Text by Ralph Christian, Architectural Historian

Office of Historic Preservation
organization Iowa State Historical Department date February 26, 1986

street & number E. 12th & Grand Ave. telephone 515-281-4137

city or town Des Moines state Iowa 50319

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

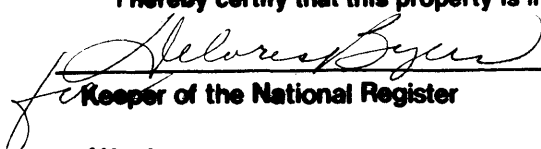


title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

date February 28, 1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register



Keeper of the National Register

date 4/28/86

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Description

Item number 7

Page 2

In addition to having its brick floor covered with concrete, the chapel was altered by having an outhouse attached to the door on its southwest side a number of years ago. The most significant alteration occurred a few years ago when a large portion of the doorway and wall on the northeast side was removed to make it easier to store machinery used at the cemetery. In addition to these indignities, the chapel was a victim of deferred maintenance for a number of years, and by the summer of 1984 appeared to be in such a deteriorated state that the city proposed its demolition.

The demolition threat caused a group of local citizens to band together to save the chapel. Calling themselves the Newton-Avoca Historical Society, they launched a successful fund raising campaign and volunteer rehabilitation effort. By the late fall of 1984, they had stabilized the building and had begun its restoration. To date, they have replaced rotted sills and deteriorated siding, removed the outhouse that had been attached on the southwest side, restored the doorway on the northeast side, but unfortunately placing a Queen Anne cottage door with art glass in it, resurfaced the floor with concrete, and restored several of the Gothic windows. As funds became available, the historical society will complete the work, especially restoration of the remaining windows which are currently covered up to protect the chapel's interior.

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Continuation sheet Significance

Item number 8

Page 2

Furthermore, said Fowler, "the octagonal form also facilitates the congregation's seeing one another, and thereby the interchange of friendly and benignant feelings toward one another." Fowler's advice was also followed as to the number of windows. "One window on a side should suffice," he stated, "and made the larger the more light is wanted, but is in better taste than two."

Since its completion, the chapel has served multiple functions, including temporary mausoleum, sexton's office, and general storage facilities, as well as a place for holding funerals. In the 1920's and 1930's as funeral homes came into vogue, fewer services were held in the chapel, and over the years it increasingly came to be utilized primarily to store this type of equipment. Since 1984 the building has been undergoing restoration to return it to what is believed to be its original appearance.

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Continuation sheet

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Item number 9

Page 2

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