

832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (Cottage)  
Des Moines  
Polk County  
Iowa

HABS No. IA-191

HABS  
IOWA  
77-DESMO,  
27-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

## COTTAGE

HABS No. IA-191

Historic Name: COTTAGE

Location: 832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway  
Des Moines, IA 50312

Leyner's Plat of Town Lots and Streets  
Lot 4  
Block C

HABS  
IOWA  
77-DESMO,  
27-

Present Owner: City of Des Moines, Iowa  
400 East 1st Street  
Des Moines, IA 50307

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of  
Significance:

Constructed in 1889 and located near the Sherman Hill Historic District, the architecture of this cottage is significant because it calls attention to a vernacular design influenced by Queen Anne taste. This cottage also illustrates one type of affordable housing being constructed in Des Moines during the boom years of the early Twentieth Century. The expectations of middle-class homeowners had risen in the city by this time, as is attested by the presence of the decorative woodwork on the first floor, a feature not found in comparable housing of an earlier generation. By the same token, the modest architecture of this cottage also shows how land use affected the quality of town lot improvements. In this instance, the presence of a nearby cemetery depressed the improvement of lots on its fringes, while lots located in neighboring Sherman Hill were more extensively upbuilt. Finally, this cottage is significant because it provides one example of a little documented property type in Des Moines--the "house to rent." Originally constructed for David R. Ewing, lumber merchant of Des Moines, this cottage was built as an investment to provide for and profit from rental housing, in short supply in the city during the boom years of the 1880s and 1890s. As such, the building relates in function to its neighbor to the south, 828 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (HABS IA-192).

Prepared by: William C. Page, Public Historian  
Des Moines, IA

# I

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. PHYSICAL HISTORY:

1. Date(s) of Erection

1889.

2. Architect

Unknown.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners

[This property has also been known historically as 832 21st Street, 850 G Street, and 832 Harding Road.]

Emma Barrows, widow of Charles O. Barrows, occupant (1892 city directory).  
Harry Robson, clerk for J. P. Morey Co. (1908 city directory).

4. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers

Ewing and Jewett, lumber merchants of Des Moines, Iowa, are thought to have supplied the building materials.

5. Original Plans and Construction Drawings

Unknown.

6. Alterations and Additions

Enclosure of front porch, addition of rear wing.  
Installation of cover-up siding.

### B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The historical context for this resource is discussed in Chapter III of this report, beginning on page 7.

# II

## ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. GENERAL INFORMATION

#### 1. Architectural Merit and Interest

This cottage is of architectural interest because of its proximity to the Sherman Hill Historic District and because it illustrates an affordable house constructed from vernacular design during the boom years in Des Moines' growth during the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century.

#### 2. Condition of Fabric

Dilapidated (to be demolished).  
Extensive fire damage in rear wing.

#### 3. Summary Description

This is a 1-story, frame, single-family dwelling. The footprint of this resource measures approximately 204' x 48', including front porch, back porch, rear wing, and south wing.

### B. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR

#### 1. Foundation

Concrete block foundation.  
Footing materials, if any, unknown.

#### 2. Wall Construction

Asphalt roll siding with masonry design finish.

#### 3. Structural Systems

Balloon wood frame construction.

4. Porches, Stoops, Etc.

Enclosed front porch.  
Enclosed rear porch.

5. Openings, Doorways, and Windows

Front doorways on south and east elevations.  
Modern, wooden, hollow-core front door on east elevation.  
No front door on east elevation.  
Back doorway on south elevation.  
Wooden, back door with 5 horizontal panels.

1/1 double-hung sash windows.  
Louvered openings in gable ends of east and west elevations.

No shutters.

6. Roof

Cross-gable roof over main house.  
Hip roof over south wing.  
Shed roof over front porch, back porch, and rear wing.

Rear wing and back porch have exposed rafters.

All roofs covered with asphalt roll.

Medium width eaves surrounding main house.  
No eaves on rear wing.

South wing may not be original to house.

No cornice.

No dormers, cupolas, or towers.

7. Chimneys

One interior brick chimney, now parged with cement, located on ridge of east-west gable.

One interior free-standing metal flue, on west slope of rear wing.

One interior free-standing metal flue, on west slope of south gable.

C. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR

1. Floor Plans

5 rooms on Floor 1 (parlor, living room, bedroom, dining room, kitchen).

Crawl basement.

2. Stairways

None.

3. Flooring

Softwood floorboards on Floor 1 (appear to be pine), partially carpeted.  
Crawl space under rafters.  
Earth floor in basement.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finishes

Plaster finish on Floor 1 walls and ceilings.  
Basement unfinished.

5. Doorways, Doors, and Windows

Doorframes trimmed with decorative molding, bull's eye corner blocks set on both sides of lintels, and plinths at base of doorjambs.

Most doors missing.  
Wooden door to furnace closet with 2/2 panel configuration.

Decorative molding on inside casing of window.

6. Interior Trim

Baseboard, decorative base molding, and quarter-round base shoe in each room.  
No crown molding between ceiling and walls.

7. Hardware

Removed.

8. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment

Floor furnace in utility closed off kitchen.  
Flue openings for wood burning stove pipes in bedroom and dining room.

9. Lighting Fixtures

Modern, overhead fixtures with exposed incandescent bulbs.

10. Plumbing

Standard modern.

D. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

1. Orientation and General Setting

Lot measures 50' x 130'.

Level topography. (Front of property is higher than street because of street grade cuts.)

Lot abuts alley and public cemetery at rear.

House faces east.

Modern chain link fence along north in backyard.

Paved street with curb and gutters.

2. Historic Landscape Design

Concrete block and brick retaining wall across front.

Poured concrete steps and pedestrian walk from sidewalk to front porch.

Brick sidewalk in herringbone pattern near east property line, enjungled with vegetation.

Sundry mature and immature trees in backyard, including two mature Catalpa trees and one mature Walnut tree.

Privet hedge, severely cut-back, on north property line by front yard.

3. Outbuildings

None.

# III

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### A. SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1889, the cottage at 832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway calls attention, as a good but not outstanding example, to several historic qualities in Des Moines during the Victorian period. Although located outside the boundaries of the nearby Sherman Hill Historic District (listed on the National Register of Historic Places and locally designated as an historic district), this cottage also contributes to that district because of these qualities of significance.

This chapter explicates the significance by evaluating the cottage within the following historic contexts:

Town Building in Des Moines: A Legacy of Laissez Faire

Town Building in Des Moines: Land Use

Architecture of Affordable Housing in Victorian Des Moines

Town building addresses several of the most important aspects of Des Moines' history as a community. During the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the economic and social principles of laissez faire underlay most building practices in Des Moines and strongly affected the course of the city's upbuilding and improvement.

Patterns of land use also affected this development. In spite of the effects of laissez faire, a number of traditional patterns of land use were observed in Des Moines. These, and a series of new patterns of land use, imparted a certain feeling of uniformity to town building in the city.

During the latter years of the Victorian period, affordable housing emerged as a new property type, replete with comforts previously restricted to the affluent. Although the large homes of the Victorian period have captured popular imagination, this period also saw the construction of numerous cottages for the middle, lower-middle, and lower classes. The Queen Anne Cottage is one example of this new property type in Des Moines.

Concurrent with the construction of these owner-occupied buildings, local capitalists and real estate investors responded to the city's pressing need for rental housing. While renters previously had been restricted to multiple-family dwellings within the inner city, the affluence of the period and access to public transportation raised the life-style expectations of renters, as well as homeowners. Renters now demanded detached, single-family dwellings, situated on lots removed from the city's congestion. The house to rent emerged as another property type during the period. Popular architectural styles also influenced its design.

## B. TOWN BUILDING IN DES MOINES: A LEGACY OF LAISSEZ FAIRE

### Introduction

Nineteenth Century Des Moines was characterized by a patchwork quality of urban design. Throughout that period, the economic and political tenets of laissez faire spurred the growth of the city. Unrestricted by municipal ordinances, zoning laws, building codes, or other limits on private initiative, real estate interests subdivided ever smaller tracts of land and developed them for residential purposes, often relying exclusively on economic dictates. As the city's population boomed during the 1880s and 1890s, frenzied real estate speculation swept Des Moines. Hundreds of new plats and thousands of new residential housing units were laid out and constructed. As a general rule, little regard was given to good urban planning.

The acreage of the plats, for example, varied widely. Some large tracts were laid out. In many other instances, the proprietors of large tracts subdivided and sold them to other speculators, who in turn further subdivided them. Parcelization of land resulted.

Within the plats, the size of lots also varied. Some plats included uniform and rather large lots, such as Thompson's Subdivision, located adjacent to West 9th Street (Page and Walroth:Map following E-96). In contrast, the lot sizes in North Park, an area immediately to the south of Thompson's Subdivision, were both narrower and less deep. In Leyner's Plat, the subject of this study, the 50' x 130' lot sizes were uniform, albeit small in width.

This city's street network also illustrates the results of laissez faire practices. Each plat reserved certain areas for streets and alleys, but little attention was paid to conformity. Two adjacent plats might provide traffic corridors that did not meet or varied in width. North Street (now University Avenue) provides a good example. Not until the Twentieth Century was this major east-west artery rationalized into a thoroughfare. By the 1920s, the public recognized the bitter fruits of unregulated development. Hired by the City of Des Moines to study the problem and recommend solutions, Harland Bartholomew, urban planner of St. Louis, Missouri, reported:

Altogether the subdividers of land have thus far platted approximately 1100 "additions" in Des Moines. These operations in actuality are city planning. When the owner of an acreage tract cuts it up into lots and streets he is engaged in a small way in the highly important work of fixing the ultimate character of the city. What he does may be either an advantage or a disadvantage in later years. Under such circumstances it is entirely reasonable to urge that his activities be brought within the purview of municipal authorities. If Des Moines some time ago had appreciated the full significance of the operations of land subdividers it might have reduced the 1486 jogs and dead ends which appear in its streets and might also have made their widths more nearly proportionate to their importance. (Harland Bartholomew:31.)

### Leyner's Plat of Town Lots and Streets

Located on Des Moines' near West Side, Leyner's Plat provides one example, among many, of real estate speculation in the city during the Nineteenth Century and how its effects contributed to a lack of uniformity in city streets.

Officially recorded as "Leyner's Plat of Town Lots and Streets," this tract of land was laid out in 1856. It consisted of some eight acres. The proprietors of the plat, Peter A. Leyner, Mary E. Leyner, and John Leyner acquired this portion of land from the Pursley Farms Estate, an early tract of farmland on Des Moines' near West Side. The Military Road to Fort Dodge, which later became Cottage Grove Avenue, skirted Leyner's Plat. The convenience of this transportation route probably encouraged the Leyners in their scheme. In fact, however, this real estate venture did not succeed. Title transfer records, censuses, and city directories all suggest that the property remained largely--if not entirely--unimproved into the 1880s.

Leyner's Plat continued, nonetheless, to affect the future development of the neighborhood. Its street network and town lot configurations formed to a certain extent the basis for Kuhn's Addition, another speculative scheme platted in 1857.

A major influence over the development of Leyner's Plat occurred in 1859. At this time, the City of Des Moines established Woodland Cemetery as a public burial ground nearby. Several privately owned cemeteries followed suit, purchasing adjacent land. The presence of these institutions exerted a strong influence and appears to have depressed the real estate market for residential town lots in the vicinity.

## C. TOWN BUILDING IN DES MOINES: LAND USE

### Introduction

Although laissez faire practices resulted in unrestricted development, some traditional patterns of land use continued to obtain authority in Des Moines during the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. These widely respected principles of town building imposed a certain uniformity on the city. For example, the American grid system of streets and lots was almost universally followed. Lots in almost all the plats were laid out in rectilinear configurations.

Other traditional patterns of residential land use also held force. Low-lying areas, initially shunned as inappropriate for habitation because of drainage, structural, and health problems, became more attractive for development as the choice high-lying locations close to the city were improved. (Still, these low-lying areas usually were never improved with the same quality of housing stock as at the preferred locations.)

New patterns of land use also developed in Des Moines during the period. Cemeteries, which had attracted wide public attention in the mid-Nineteenth Century as parklands, became subject to public debate later in the century, as officials spoke out against their threats to health. This debate, coupled with their gruesome purpose, fostered a predilection against residential development on the fringes of these institutions.

The growth of transportation played another important role in influencing land use. Three aspects are apparent. The rise of streetcars and public transportation opened vast new sections of the city for residential development. Grand boulevards and the traffic thoroughfares appealed to emerging Victorian social customs and economic capabilities because they showcased conspicuous consumption and usually enjoyed the convenience of the first-to-be-paved streets. Grand Avenue in Des Moines became a preferred residential corridor for these reasons, as well as East 9th Street and West 9th Street, to name a few others. In contrast, those streets which ran higgledy-piggledy from plat to plat lacked such appeal and did not attract the same quality of improvements. In the city's near westside,

20th Street and 21st Street between Woodland Avenue and Center Street provide good examples.

### Cemeteries and Land Use

Four cemeteries are located adjacent to one another on Des Moines' near westside-- Woodland Cemetery, St. Ambrose Catholic Cemetery, Odd Fellows Cemetery, and Jewish (or Emanuel) Cemetery. Significant in terms of acreage and function, the presence of these cemeteries profoundly affected the evolution of land use in the surrounding sections of the city.

The Victorians looked upon death as an important aspect of reality. Consequently, they respected symbols, ceremonies, reminders, and tokens of mortality. Because cemeteries formed such large and imposing monuments to death, they assumed great significance in the Nineteenth Century. Not only did they serve the practical function as burial grounds, by mid-century they had become associated with parks and recreation. Indeed, in many American cities, Des Moines included, the public cemetery often provided the only large parkland space in the urban environment.

A few cemeteries in America achieved national attention and influenced the evolution of the landscape architecture of cemeteries across the country. Among them, Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston, and Graceland Cemetery in Chicago stand out in importance. All across the settled regions of the country, cemeteries served as parks, and city residents visited them for leisure and moral education--to stroll, enjoy the natural world, and perhaps pay respect to deceased family and friends.

Less is known at present about cemeteries and their significance in Des Moines, although references by name occur in local newspapers, citing Mount Auburn and Greenwood Cemeteries as models (*Iowa State Register*:1889a).

Woodland Cemetery, consisting of forty acres, was established as a public burial ground by the City of Des Moines and laid out in 1859. This cemetery embraced Odd Fellows' Cemetery, which had been established in 1858. St. Ambrose Catholic Cemetery, comprising twelve acres, was laid out in 1866. Consisting of two acres, Jewish (or Emanuel) Cemetery was established in 1871, although it was not laid out until 1880 (*Iowa State Register*:1880).

Originally located on the outskirts of the community, the combined presence of these large tracts of publicly and privately owned property overshadowed the development of the surrounding land. As this land was subdivided into plats and built up, and, as the number of burials mounted, this influence increased. At first, the cemeteries had been viewed as parklands, leisure grounds, and public amenities. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, they had become the subject of public agitation. Health professionals voiced concern about the contagion of disease. Investment interests supported a plan to disinter the burials and relocate them to new cemetery sites (possibly because they coveted the property for real estate development). Each of these issues contributed to the public debate.

Already in the 1880s, local newspapers discussed health concerns regarding cemeteries. The *Iowa State Register*, for example, published a long article on the topic, citing potential pollution of the city's water supply from the creek which drained Woodland Cemetery (*Iowa State Register*:1889c).

In the 1890s, diphtheria became a major concern for Des Moines. In May of 1889, only one death from this disease had been reported (*Iowa State Register*: 1889b). Between October 1, 1890, and October 1, 1891, in contrast, 100 deaths were attributed to the disease (*Iowa State Register*: 1891c). A contemporary newspaper account reported one method city residents employed to combat the spread of this disease:

A sad and touching sight was witnessed on Locust street, between First and Second streets, yesterday. A funeral procession crossed the bridge, coming from the east, and stopped when opposite the German Lutheran church. Just as the hearse halted, a band of forty children came out of the church and standing on the steps sang three verses of a familiar Sunday-school hymn. No explanation was needed, but passers-by could read the sad story at a glance. A child from the Sunday-school had been taken away by the dread diphtheria. No public service in the church could be held. But the former playmates and associates gathered on the church steps, to sing a hymn of sympathy and comfort, as the broken hearted mourners passed on their sad journey to the cemetery. (*Iowa State Register*:1889d.)

In addition to quarantine, health officials lobbied for other measures to combat the disease. The need and location for a new cemetery were widely debated (*Iowa State Register*:1891d) and the subject of water pollution from burial grounds discussed (*Ibid.*:1889e).

In the end, the city purchased new land to the northwest, established Glendale Cemetery there, and retained Woodland Cemetery. As a result, Woodland and its sister cemeteries continued to exert influence on the evolution of land use in the surrounding neighborhoods. Residential development skirted the cemeteries on all four sides, yet remained overshadowed by the character of the cemeteries' purpose. The cemeteries formed obstacles to cross-town transportation. Finally, the presence of these cemeteries tended to separate Des Moines' near West Side from that section of the city farther to the west.

### Transportation

Transportation patterns have exerted profound affects on land use in Des Moines. Numerous dogleg and dead-end streets discouraged quality improvements in the neighborhoods adjacent to them. For another example, the presence of a thoroughfare for motorized vehicles encouraged redevelopment of residential properties along its fringes to ever higher uses.

By the early Twentieth Century, Des Moines streets had become a maze, yet an increasing number of cars and trucks spurred the need for cross-town roads to speed traffic . The historical implications of laissez faire development became particularly significant following World War I, when Des Moines sought to improve north-south traffic arteries through the construction of what was to become Harding Road.

Now named Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway (the street has been renamed several times, Warren Street, G Street, 21st Street, as well as Harding Road), this street and the city plats in this area illustrate irregular planning and its consequences for city streets. As Figure 6 shows, 21st Street lacked a standard width. This street also came to an end at Center Street. Through traffic was required to turn into Center Street before proceeding again north, a traffic pattern still true today. Construction of Harding Road reconfigured the plats

fronting 20th Street and 21st Streets between Woodland and Cottage Grove Avenues and these changes illustrate the effects of transportation on land use.

Prior to the 1930s, north-south traffic from Des Moines' northwest side relied on Cottage Grove Avenue and a series of north-south streets to access the downtown. Formerly known as the Military Road or the road to Fort Dodge, Cottage Grove historically provided a popular northwest artery in and out of the city, but the haphazard configuration of plats and traffic usage in Des Moines manifested no particular street to serve as its north-south link to the downtown. Keosauqua Way was one attempt to solve this problem. Another attempt, sponsored by the Des Moines Realtors Bureau in 1919, proposed a new traffic way from Grand Avenue to Cottage Grove.

The proposition involves the widening of a part of Twenty-first street, a new way being cut through from Twenty-first to Twentieth street, and the widening of the last street until it reached Cottage Grove avenue. Most of the proposed way is now paved, but probably two-thirds of it is brick in bad condition; and part is not wide enough for a standard street. (*Des Moines Register*:1919a.)

A plan of this proposed route was published at the same time (see Figure 6). Although faced with difficult constraints of property ownership and street configurations, city planners opted to adopt this plan. It involved a bend in Harding Road at its intersection with Center Street, effectively joining 20th Street and 21st Street into this new north-south route. After long discussion, planning, and federal commitment, this new traffic way was built in 1935 (Journal of City Council:1199).

The construction of Harding Road provided Des Moines with a new and needed cross-town traffic way. Its success can be measured by increased traffic on this road over the years and recent plans to expand the route, now known as Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, into a bypass to skirt downtown Des Moines and connect with the Des Moines Freeway. While this progress benefited the entire community, it depressed the adjacent residential neighborhood. The traffic way injected a barrier between dwellings east and west of it in Kuhn's Addition and Leyner's Plat. The dwellings on the West Side suffered the most because they were isolated between the traffic way and cemeteries. In this sense, Harding Road further compounded the irregularity of this irregular section of Des Moines. Finally, the route introduced new levels of noise and vehicle emissions into these and other adjacent plats, such as Brown's 4th Addition.

#### D. ARCHITECTURE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN VICTORIAN DES MOINES

##### Introduction

This and a series of associated Historic American Building Survey recordations (HABS Nos. IA-190, IA-192, IA-193, IA-194, and IA-195) provide opportunities to analyze and evaluate, in intensive fashion, several examples of affordable housing constructed in Des Moines during the 1890s and the first decade of the Twentieth Century. These recordations serve to supplement the findings of a previous architectural survey, which identified certain design subtypes within the Queen Anne architectural resources of the city. Finally, these recordations provide an opportunity to study the Victorian "house to rent," a little-studied subject to date.

Although the large homes of the Victorian period have captured popular imagination in America during the last decade, the late Nineteenth Century also saw the construction of numerous cottages for the middle, lower-middle, and lower classes. Because these modest dwellings lack the size, architectural detailing, and complexity of larger dwellings, they have received less scholarly attention. They are also difficult to evaluate because archival information about them is limited. Nonetheless, affordable housing emerged during the late Nineteenth Century as an important property type in Des Moines and attracted the attention not only of the potential homeowners, but also real estate investors. The cottage provided an ideal property type for both purposes.

The preparation of this historical context was aided by a study prepared by William C. Page and Joanne R. Walroth, "Towards a Greater Des Moines: Early Suburbanization and Development, circa 1880-circa 1920," a reconnaissance survey of certain suburban neighborhoods in Des Moines during the late Victorian period. This 1992 study identified style and function as two important architectural influences prevalent in the city during that period. In terms of style, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival tastes held sway over local design. In addition to these stylistic changes, residential design also evolved according to its function. For example, Page and Walroth identified the double house as a new property type because it responded to the need for rental property.

This present HABS recordation expands the reference points of the 1992 study by identifying affordable housing as another architectural influence over the evolution of residential design during the period. As home ownership came within reach of an increasing number of residents, the demand for affordable housing stimulated new architectural designs. The cottage provided one good solution and was adapted to both owner-occupied and rental purposes.

### Queen Anne Cottage

Constructed in 1889, this cottage at 832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway exhibits several aspects of Queen Anne architectural influences. The roof design of the building is most notable in this regard. This section of the report analyzes this influence and places the house in historical context among other dwellings built in the city during the same period.

"Towards a Greater Des Moines" identified five categories of Queen Anne designs, differentiating them according to their size (1-story, 1.5-stories, and 2- or 2.5 stories) and according to their roof configurations. The smallest of these designs, the Queen Anne Cottage, consisted of a T-shaped building covered with a cross-gable roof.

Although it relates to the Queen Anne Cottage in terms of size, the cottage at 832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway does not conform to any of these categories. This resource, in contrast, possesses an ell-shaped floor plan with a porch situated within the ell and a wing situated at the rear.

The roof is a prime element of any building and its design is strongly effected by questions of architectural taste. In this regard, the roof configuration for the resource at 832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway constitutes one of the chief diagnostic characteristics of its vernacular design. It, too, however, does not conform to roof configurations identified in "Towards a Greater Des Moines." Nonetheless, the roof features a more complex design than utility would dictate. It is this attempt to add a note of picturesqueness to the building, which places it under the influence of Queen Anne taste.

The roof design consists of a full cross-gable roof of moderate pitch. The front-gable roof runs front-to-back over the main block of the house. This roof is intersected by a side-gable roof, located about 19 feet from the face of the east elevation. The side-gable roof covers a portion of the main block and an extension of the main block on its south elevation. In this regard, the roof configuration calls further attention to the modest design of this resource. Although it possesses a full cross-gable roof, such as other nearby examples of the Queen Anne Cottage (810 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, HABS No. IA-193, for instance), this resource lacks the added picturesqueness of these resources because one portion of its side-gable roof is not visible on the east elevation.

It should be noted that this discussion has addressed only the roof of the original building. Enlarged by several wings, the hip roof over the south wing and shed roofs over the back porch and rear wings reflect these alterations and diminish the integrity of the resource's original architectural design.

The construction date of this cottage, 1889, was provided by records in the Des Moines City Assessor's Office. This date corresponds with the property's transfer of title to David R. Ewing in 1889.

### The Affordable Cottage

The cottage evolved during the late Nineteenth Century in Des Moines as a new type of residential dwelling. Formerly the word "cottage" had euphemistically described a wide range of suburban dwellings. In 1887, for example, Palliser, Palliser, and Company, architects of New York City, published a pattern book illustrating dozens of "cottage" designs, which, in fact, were intended for the substantial, upper-middle class pocketbook.

These semantics notwithstanding, the economic prosperity of the 1880s and 1890s stimulated construction of many new "cottages" in Des Moines. As the *Iowa State Register* reported:

The homes now being built are of the most modern and ornate style of architecture and are much more roomy and extensive than formerly. Both the mansion and small, unpretentious cottage of to-day are not considered complete without the furnace, and hardwood finish, once luxuries only accessible to the rich. (*Iowa State Register*:1889a.)

In this regard, it appears that life styles of affluent and modest householders in Des Moines narrowed during the late Nineteenth Century as more and more homes featured modern conveniences and amenities.

The "small, unpretentious" cottage at 832 Woodland Avenue calls attention to one example of such an affordable house. Its original woodwork remains extant and features a level of decoration higher than simple utility. The two front entrances to the building add additional amenities. By the same token, however, this cottage was originally heated by stoves and not by a furnace. In this respect, the cottage stands in contrast to those described by the *Iowa State Register*. The fact that this cottage was built as a rental property probably played a role in this.

## The "House to Rent"

As the result of complex factors, the "house to rent" (an historic phrase to describe a detached, single-family rental dwelling) emerged as a new property type within the architectural resources of Des Moines during the late Nineteenth Century. Other types of rental housing--hotels, boarding houses, double houses (or duplexes), and tenement houses--are thought to have had played an important role in sheltering the city's early inhabitants, but few of these buildings remain extant today (Page and Walroth:E-62/E-63). In each of these facilities, all residents shared a common roof.

Between 1880 and 1890, the population of Des Moines more than doubled (Ibid.:E-2). This huge increase constituted a boom of hitherto unseen proportions in the city and resulted in housing needs and shortages. Houses to rent were in short supply. One contemporary reported:

"In all my experience in this city," said Mr. Thos. Hatton, the real estate dealer, "I never knew such a scarcity of good houses to rent. There is always at this time of year a good demand for houses, but now there is a demand for a better class and a demand which cannot be met. Many houses have been built the past year and are occupied and yet the people keep coming and want more. It is an excellent indication of what the year may bring to us." (*Iowa State Register*:1890a.)

In addition to this shortage, the establishment and expansion of public transportation in Des Moines provided workers with convenient and rapid transportation to jobs. No longer restricted to live within walking distance of employment, workers could live in the suburbs away from the core city. Finally, Des Moines experienced a period of economic growth during the 1880s and early 1890s, which heightened life style expectations among its residents, increased their leisure time to enjoy parks and public amusements, and fostered construction of new homes with modern amenities for the middle and lower-middle classes, as well as for the affluent.

In 1890, the *Iowa State Register* neatly summarized these and other issues as they related to rental housing. In an article titled "Real Estate Talk...The Strongest Demand for Homes Ever Known in Des Moines," the newspaper noted that:

The house renting season is here and never before has there been such a scarcity of houses to rent. The demand has far exceeded the supply. It has been almost impossible to get good houses to rent. The old shells down town, which are hardly fit to live in, are for rent and always will be. The long rows of cheap bricks are also to rent and many will never again be occupied. People will not put up with cheap crowded houses or old dilapidated buildings when rapid transit has made it possible to enjoy cheap suburban cottages. The universal call now among renters is for cottages with large yards and plenty of room, no matter how far out situated. The desire to live "close to business" has almost gone. (*Iowa State Register*:1890b.)

This article clearly points out changes in the rental market. This new market demanded a detached, single-family dwelling situated on a private city lot and removed from the crowded conditions of the inner city, preferably near a streetcar line.

As a result, the architectural design of the house to rent in Des Moines changed. As with each of the previously popular types of rental housing, the detached rental house presented unique exterior and interior design problems. Because land costs constituted an appreciable portion of the landlord's overall investment, small-sized lots were preferred. The cottage at 832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, provides one example. Situated on a lot measuring 50' x 130', the relatively small size lot imposed restrictions on the cottage's architectural design. While the building could extend far to the rear, the lot's narrow width restricted design of the facade. It is also presumed that, because the lot is situated next to Woodland Cemetery, a location less preferred because of associations with disease and death, the price of the lot was cheaper than those of comparable size in more desirable locations. In point of fact, N. B. and Mary E. Vertress paid \$250 for this lot, when they purchased it in 1885 (Abstract of Title). This price should be compared with the selling price of other lots, as this information becomes available.

A few conclusions can be drawn. This cottage was heated not by a central furnace (as the *Iowa State Register* article had noted were *de rigueur* even for the owner-occupied "small, unpretentious cottage of today"), but rather by two wood or coal burning stoves, each with separate flues and chimneys. As such, this rental property suggests that the house to rent in Des Moines may have lacked some of the luxuries enjoyed by homeowners. On the other hand, the interior decoration of the building is not without architectural ornamentation. Its woodwork, for example, features molded window and door trim with bull's eye corner blocks that compare favorably with other cottages of the period. Given this conflicting evidence, it is clear that the subject of the house to rent needs further study.

The role of D. R. Ewing in this context deserves further study, as well. David R. Ewing (1834-1902) was born in Pennsylvania served three years as a carpenter's apprentice to William Grubb, "one of the best builders" of Philadelphia (*Iowa State Register*:1902). After construction work in the Southern states, Ewing came to Des Moines in 1864, having lived in Eddyville, Iowa for a time. "Mr. Ewing at once went to work at this trade, and soon became a boss carpenter and contractor" (*Ibid.*). He was elected a member of the city council in 1878, and, in 1879, formed a partnership with George A. Jewett and Ed S. Chandler. Chandler soon dropped out of this business, and the firm continued as Ewing and Jewett until Ewing's death in 1902. As a member of the Disciples of Christ Church, Ewing took great interest in that denomination's advancement. For example, Ewing acted as superintendent of construction without pay when the Central Church of Christ in Des Moines built their new sanctuary in 1889. Ewing also served on the Board of Trustees of Drake University.

Although the extent of Ewing's rental holdings is not presently known, Ewing possessed at the time of his death "a large amount of real estate, much of which he jointly owned with George A. Jewett" (Abstract of Title). If the cottage at 832 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway is any indication, Ewing quickly recognized the need for rental houses during the boom years of the late 1880s and 1890s and acted to profit by this opportunity. Ewing owned this cottage from 1889 until his death in 1902. The building became owner-occupied in 1906.

# IV

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### A. ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

No original architectural drawings, plans, or elevations were found for this building.

### B. HISTORIC IMAGES

No historic images of this property were discovered.

### C. INTERVIEWS

Gerald A. Jewett with William C. Page, July 18, 1994. Jewett shared information about his family and the development of the Jewett Lumber Company. He also provided access to the company's file of corporation history.

John P. Zeller with William C. Page, at numerous times in 1994. Zeller shared his extensive knowledge about the history and development of Des Moines and answered specific questions about it.

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1878b "University Place Items." June 18.

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1880 "Our bretheren [sic] of the Jewish faith..." July 7.

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1881 "The New Cemetery." August 23.

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1888 "The Year 1888."

*Iowa State Register*

1889a "Building Up Des Moines." September 22.

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1889b "Dr. Matthews has prepared this summary" [mortality rates].  
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1889c "Cemetery Danger." November 24.

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1889d "A Sad and touching sight..." [diphtheria]. November 28.

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1890a "Des Moines in 1890." January 26.

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1891b "The Funeral of T. E. Brown." May 10.

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E. LIKELY SOURCES NOT YET INVESTIGATED

As further scholarly work investigates the "house to rent," this information can be used to reevaluate this aspect of affordable housing in Des Moines.

F. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

The following supplemental material is added here to outline the methodology used in this report. Because of the scarcity of good historical accounts of Des Moines, particularly its

architectural development, the use of primary materials was mandated. In an effort to conduct a systematic, yet realistic, search within the time constraints imposed by the contract deadline, a few variables were defined. The search then focused on finding the following facts:

- Year of the resource's construction.
- Name of the first owner.
- First owner's occupation.
- Determination whether the property was owner occupied and/or a rental.

Primary research was conducted using newspapers, federal census records, Des Moines city directories, and Sanborn fire insurance maps. Each of these sources has its own limitations. The search was further complicated because the address of the resource has changed several times due to city renumbering and renaming of the street.

Although numerous newspapers were consulted, no direct citation was found to document the year of construction of the resource. The modest size of this house, the low level of its architectural detailing, and the quantity of similar houses being constructed in Des Moines during the late Victorian period made it unlikely that this house was the subject of newspaper attention.

The Federal census of 1880 was consulted for data concerning Ward 4 in Des Moines. This census listed individuals by name. The researcher noted every address whose location was near the study area. None of these addresses related to the resource under study.

The results of this research were then checked against the Des Moines City Directory of 1882. This directory lists individual's dwellings in an various ways, often mentioning only an area of the city. From this sketchy data, the researcher determined that none of the 1880 census names appeared in Kuhn's Addition or Leyner's Plat, although this determination is imprecise. Analysis of this research concluded, therefore, that no residents were living in either Kuhn's Plat or Leyner's Addition in the summer of 1880.

The Federal census of 1900 was then consulted. This enumeration has addresses for individuals, and it also shows whether the occupant of the property is an owner or renter.

The Des Moines City Directory of 1908 was then consulted. This is the first city directory that contains a street-by-street index with addresses the same as the homes retain today.

The earliest Sanborn fire insurance map for the neighborhood shows the neighborhood in 1901. Two other Sanborns mapped the area, one in 1920 and one in 1943. All of the resources under study in this series of HABS recordations appeared on the earliest Sanborn map. The single exception was the cottage at 810 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, which appeared for the first time on the 1920 map.

## G. PROJECT STATEMENT

This documentation stems from the proposed construction of the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway loop bypass in Des Moines, Iowa. This project requires demolition of the building documented in this recordation.

This documentation was prepared for the Des Moines Community Development Department in partial fulfillment of a Memorandum of Agreement signed by the City of Des Moines, the Iowa State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Federal Highway Administration.

Specifications for this recordation were outlined by Gregory D. Kendrick, Chief, History Branch, Division of National Preservation Programs, Rocky Mountain Regional Office of the United States Department of the Interior in a letter of May 1993.

William C. Page, Public Historian of Des Moines, acted as principal investigator for the project and prepared the written narrative. He was assisted by John P. Zeller, researcher, and Joanne R. Walroth, editor. Ralph J. Christian, Architectural Historian of the State Historical Society of Iowa, consulted the principal investigator in developing historical context for this recordation.

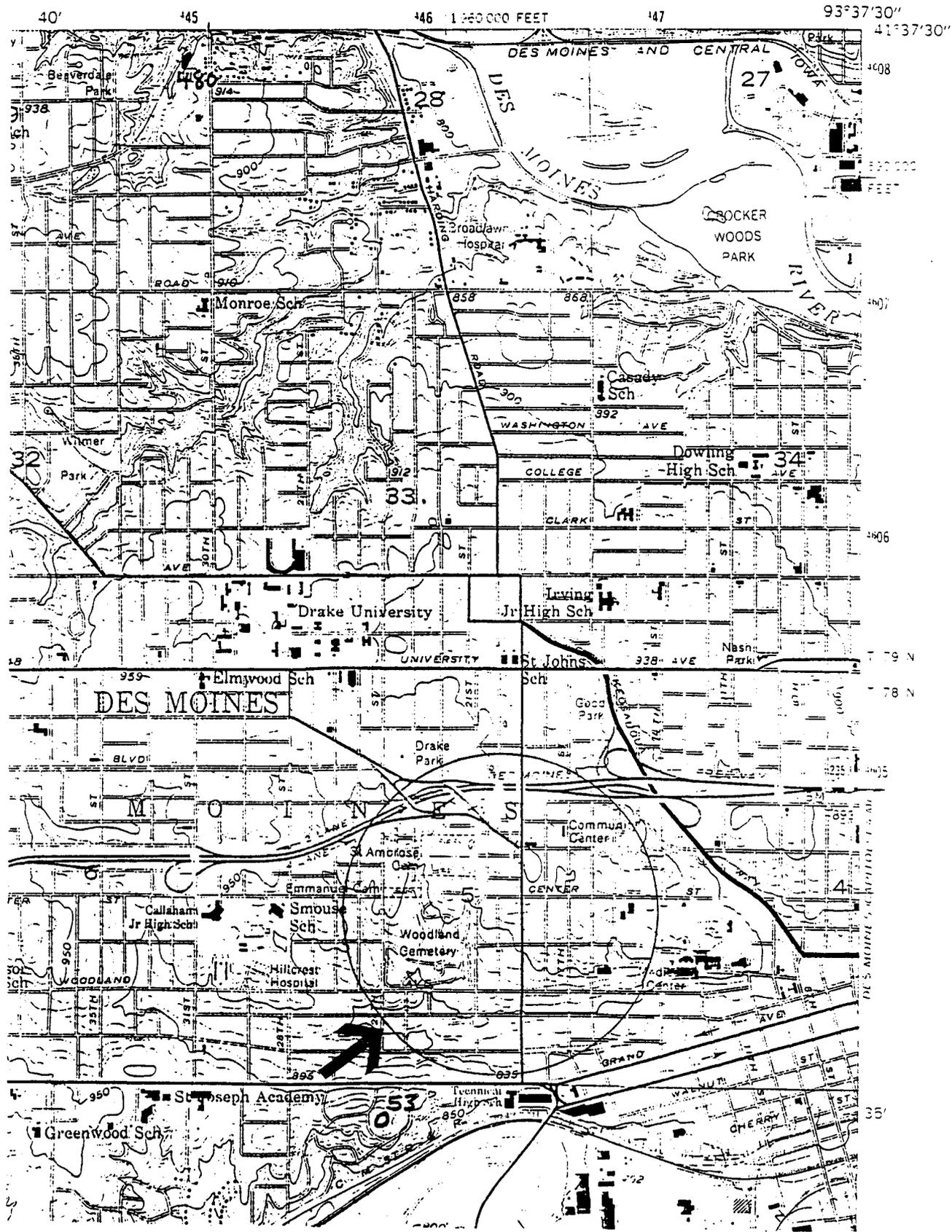
Steven Alexander, Alexander's Photography of Des Moines, served as photographer. He shot all photos for this project and supervised development and printing of the photographic products.

Mary Neiderbach, Associate Planner of the Des Moines Community Development Department, served as coordinator.

Christine Whitacre, Historian, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, United States Department of the Interior, served as project reviewer.

All work for this recordation was accomplished in July, August, and September 1994.

# AREA MAP DES MOINES, IOWA



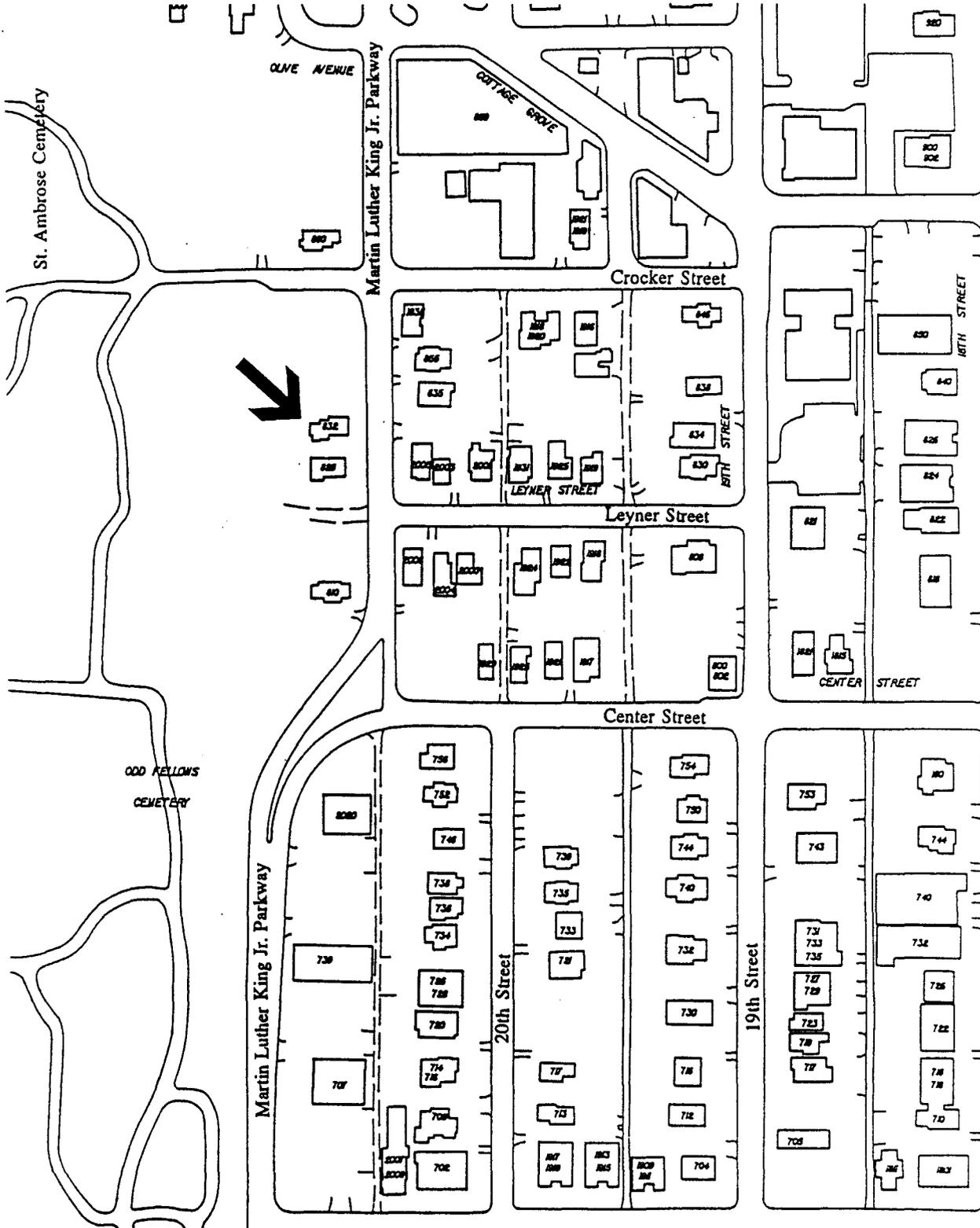
Source: U. S. G. S. Des Moines SW Quadrangle, Iowa.

Figure 1



# SITE MAP

Scale: 1" = 200'. 832 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. PARKWAY



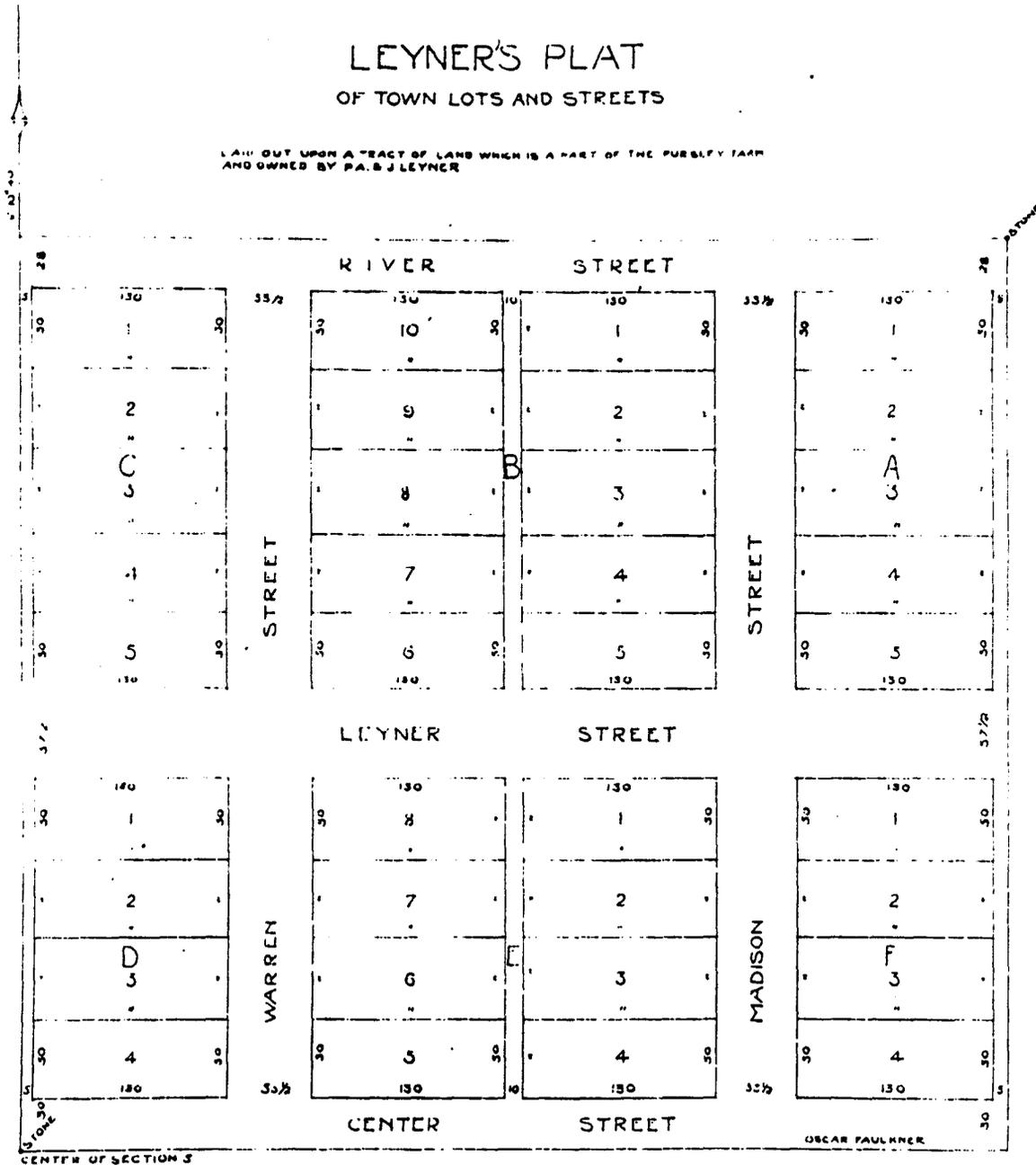
Source: City of Des Moines Engineering Department.



Figure 2

# PLAT

## LEYNER'S PLAT OF TOWN LOTS AND STREETS



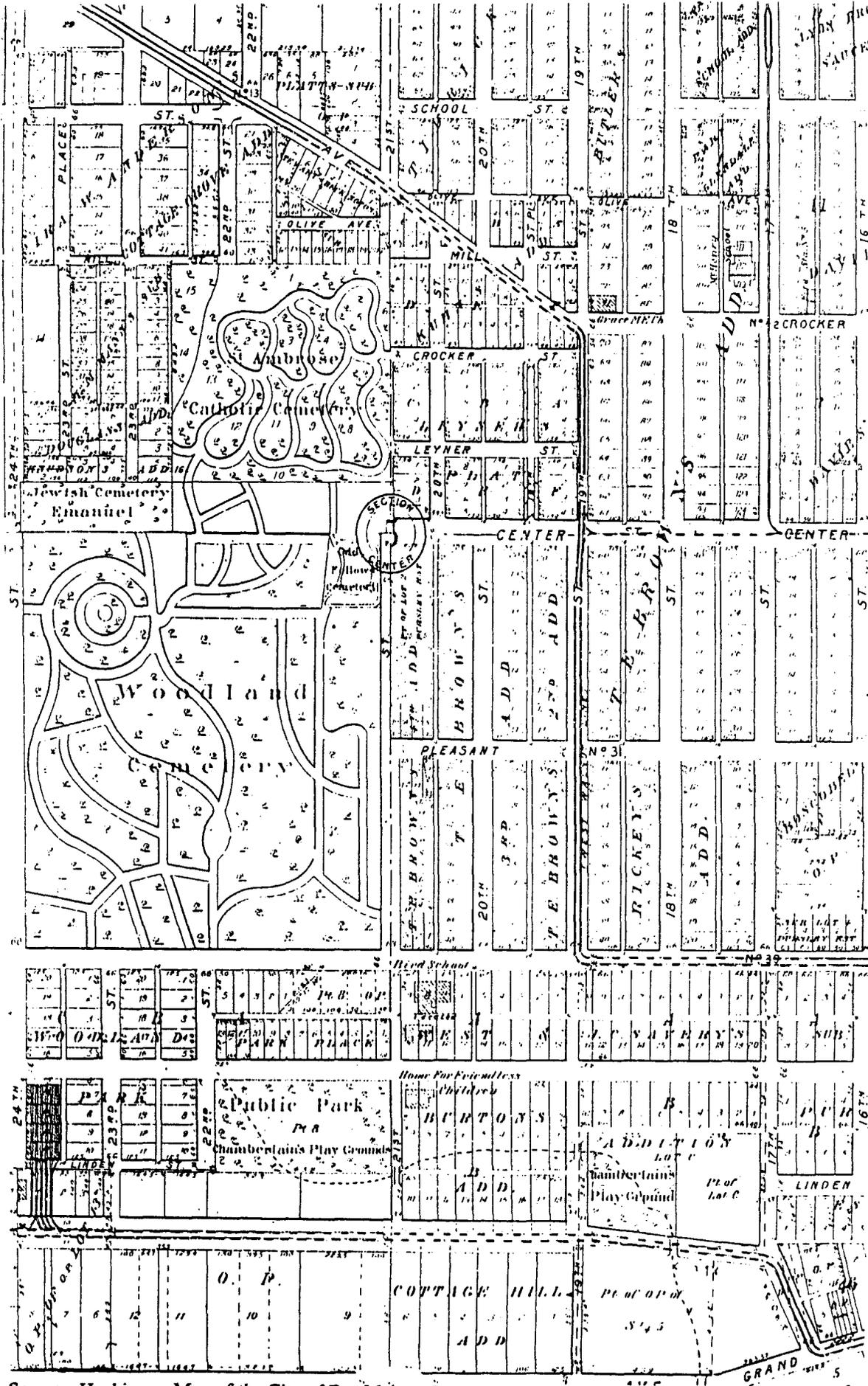
Source: Polk County Recorder's Office, Plat Book A, p. 21.

Figure 5



# NEIGHBORHOOD MAP CIRCA 1909

COTTAGE  
HABS No. IA-191  
Page 26



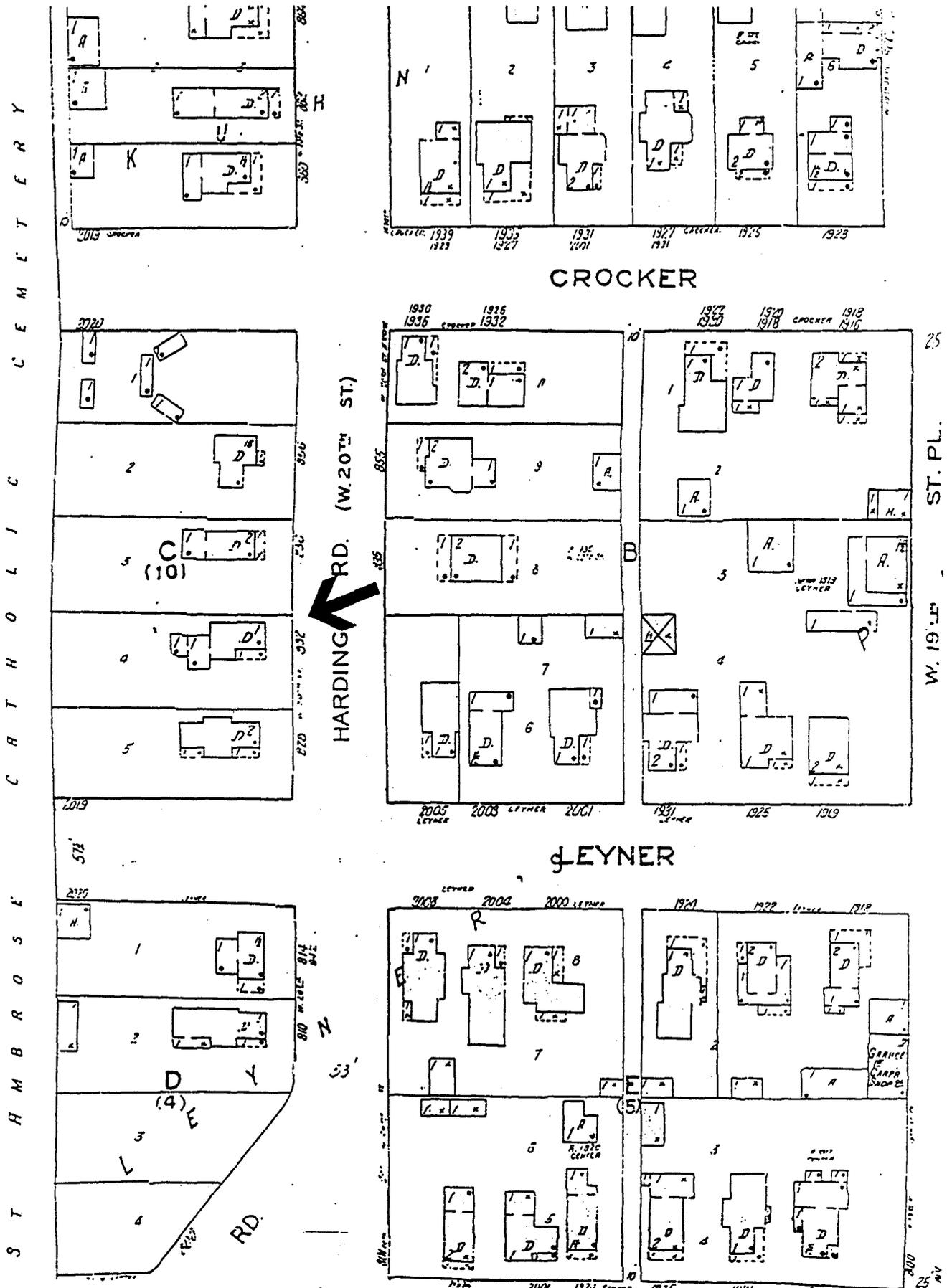
PAGE 57

Source: Huebinger, Map of the City of Des Moines, Iowa, 1909.

Figure 3



**NEIGHBORHOOD MAP  
CIRCA 1920-1943  
832 INDICATED BY ARROW**

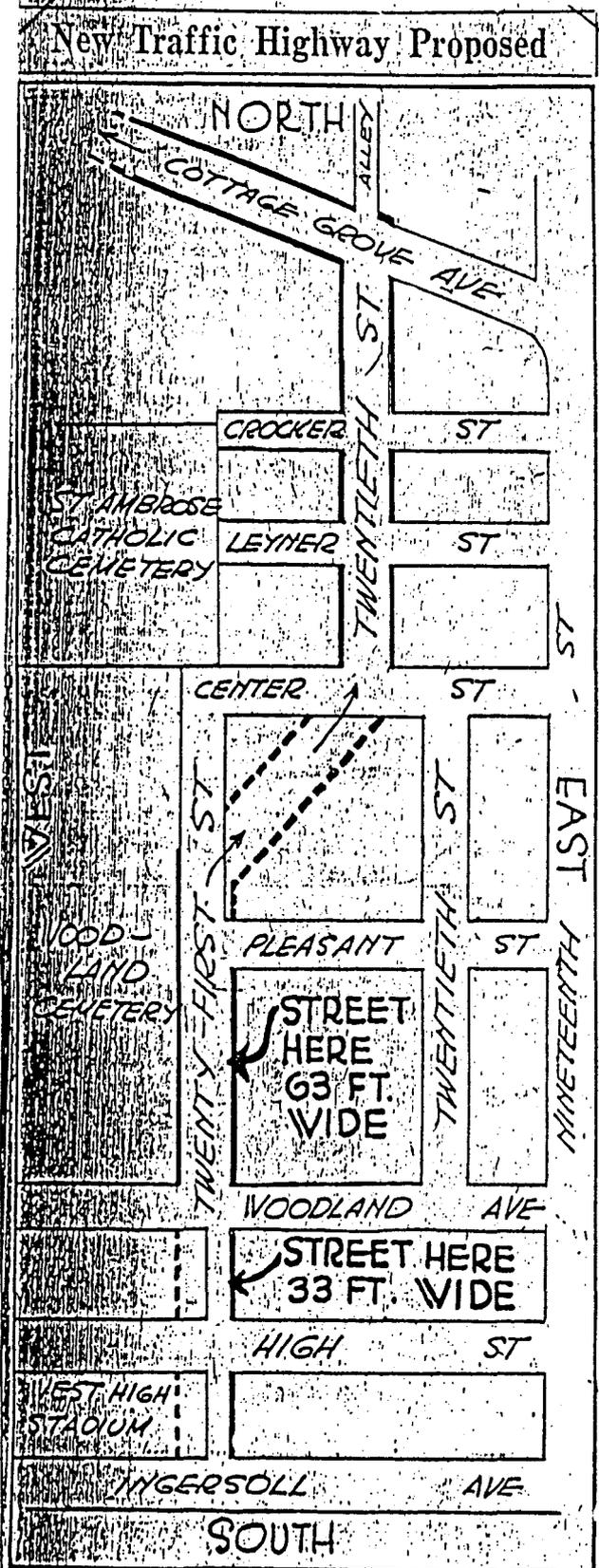


Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1920-1943.

Figure 4



# PLAN FOR HARDING ROAD 1919



Source: Des Moines Register, October 20, 1919.



Figure 6