

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Decorah Historic Preservation Commission

Contact: Mark Z. Muggli, DHPC chair ([mugglimz@luther.edu](mailto:mugglimz@luther.edu); 612-720-5795)

### Fullerton and Wadsworth Presented Annual Historic Preservation Awards

**Decorah, IA (June 11, 2020)** – The Decorah Historic Preservation Commission (DHPC) has presented awards to Stan Fullerton for his sensitive rehabilitation of the former J.C. Penney's building at 101 W. Water St. in downtown Decorah, and to David Wadsworth for the full-scale rehabilitation of a historic home at 409 E. Main St. Because of coronavirus restrictions, no public award ceremony will be held in 2020.

#### 101 W. Water St.

The DHPC praised Fullerton for his previous maintenance of the Penney's building exterior, including the careful preservation of the Bedford stone parapet in recent years. But the closing of the Penney's store in 2017 created a more major restoration opportunity. With the help of Impact Coffee business owners Jeff, Anja, and Sean Brown, both the building's interior and exterior were completely rehabilitated.



According to DHPC member Steve Kelsay, the removal of the Penney's broad sign plate from the side and front of the building revealed features that had been lost to sight, especially the completely intact stone-framed entryway. "This project is a beautiful example of what careful rehabilitation can achieve," said Kelsay. Although new, uniform windows were introduced to replace earlier, inappropriate ones, the original window openings were carefully preserved.

The Penny's building was actually created in 1925 from two nineteenth-century buildings. The 1925 project was led by local entrepreneur Bertha (Christen) Mott, recently celebrated by the DHPC on the National Trust's "1000 Places Where Women Made History" website (see <https://savingplaces.org/where-women-made-history>). The project designer was local architect and engineer Charles Altfillisch, whose work is part of a long-term DHPC research project. The building construction was by A. R. Coffeen, a local contractor who often worked closely with Altfillisch.

DHPC chair Mark Z. Muggli noted the importance of recovering the 1925 facade. "People sometimes puzzle over which historic features of a building should be highlighted and preserved. There are photos of the attractive nineteenth-century stone buildings incorporated into the Mott building. But the 1925 transformation was so complete and so distinguished that it would have made little sense to attempt to restore or reconstruct the building's previous incarnations."

Fullerton's rehabilitation also included major interior work. Because of the difference between a 1925 department store and a contemporary coffee shop, the focus was not on recovering Altfillisch's original interior design. Fullerton noted that the tin ceiling restoration required scraping, power-washing, patching, and painting. Said Fullerton, "It was a monumental task but

a pleasure to do.” DHPC secretary Judy van der Linden noted, “The restored ceiling conveys the original openness and grandeur that had for many years been lost because of the many claustrophobic interior additions and the diminished window openings.”

Fullerton has in the past shown commitment to other historic preservation projects. Commission member Diane Scholl noted in particular Fullerton’s historically-precise reconstruction of the belvedere on his former home at 208 Leif Erikson. “As a home with important connections to Luther College’s early years, the Leif Erikson reconstruction made an important contribution, not just to the beauty of Decorah’s architecture, but to the preservation of its history.”

#### **409 E. Main St.**

David Wadsworth says that he had often driven by the house at 409 E. Main St. without noticing it. But when the building’s cement siding was removed in preparation for full demolition by a previous owner, Wadsworth discovered how much of the original wood siding and window detailing remained.

Wadsworth purchased the building, successfully applied for National Register of Historic Places eligibility, and began rehabilitation.

In this case there is no single year of historic significance. Wadsworth and local historian Elizabeth Lorentzen established that parts of the home date back to about 1869. Regional historian Jan Olive Full, who worked on the National Register nomination, established that the main house was a distinctive example of an “I-House.” But the building also includes various additions, and has windows and other materials of many different periods.

“What Wadsworth did,” noted Muggli, “was to preserve the building’s overall structure and exterior look, including the wooden siding and the window openings. But he also sensitively retained and refurbished many historic features, including some rare nineteenth-century windows and flooring. And by mechanically introducing a baths, he has this home to serve century.”



1920’s woodwork and replacing the house’s systems and modern kitchen and made it possible for people into the next

DHPC member noted that also helped feature of the

larch tree that the DNR identifies as the largest in Iowa. Midge Kjome from the Decorah Genealogy Association says, “This tree was planted in 1875 by Knudt Thompson as a memorial to his homeland [in Norway].”

Adrienne Coffeen preserving the house preserve a distinctive yard, a European

For a full history of the 409 E. Main St. project, including over 100 before-and-after photos, see <https://wadsworthconstruction.com/historic-restoration/>

Wadsworth also received the DHPC historic preservation award in 2014 for his work and regional presentations on historic window preservation. For a complete listing of former annual

historic preservation awards, see the DHPC website at <https://www.decorahia.org/historic-preservation/awards>.

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