The Quick Tour

Short on time, but interested in Charles Altfillisch's work? Try this abbreviated route highlighting the best examples from his portfolio noted with stars below.

Revival Style house
Lester and Helen Larson. *South Decorah Tour #5.*

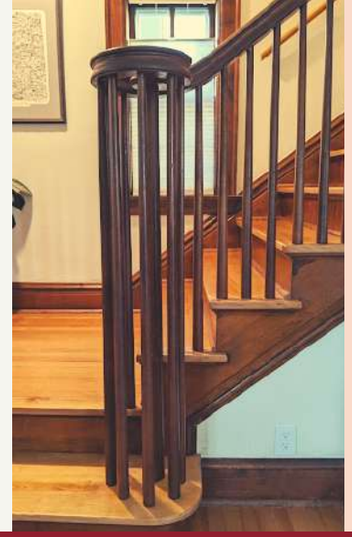
Revival Style house
Edwin and Virginia Goen. *West Decorah Tour #3.*

Modern house
Ole and Corinne Davidson. *West Decorah Tour #17.*

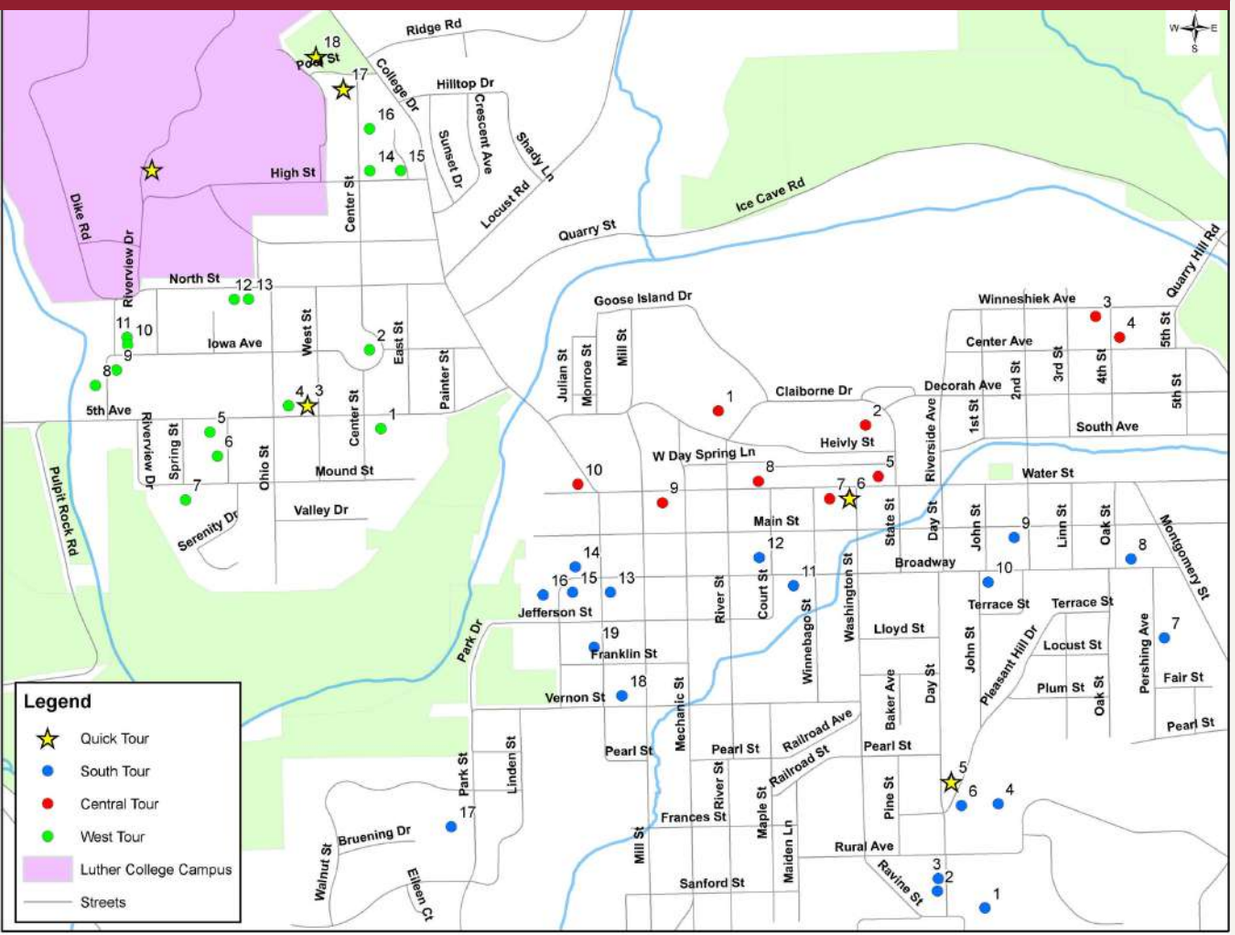
Early major commercial building
Bertha Mott Department Store. *Central Decorah Tour #6 .*

Modern civic building
Bathhouse and Swimming Pool. *West Decorah Tour #18.*

Modern educational building with deep history
Main III. *Luther College Tour.*



"It's the small touches--the natural wood window sills, the oak floors, the phone nook, the laundry chute, the kitchen breakfast nook--that have made all the difference."



Descriptions and photographs of these properties are available at the following website: decorahia.org/historic-preservation/historic-tours The website also includes materials on some noteworthy Altfillisch properties not included on this printed brochure.

Please be considerate and DO NOT TRESPASS ON PRIVATE PROPERTY (including lawns, private sidewalks, and driveways).

Three notes on the property descriptions:

1. The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) references below are either individual NRHP designations with date included or are properties within the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District (1976), the Decorah Commercial Historic District (2017), or the Luther College Campus Historic District (2021).
2. "DHPC Award" refers to the 2018 Decorah Historic Preservation Commission's annual Historic Preservation Award presented to five characteristic, particularly well-preserved Altfillisch residences.
3. The architectural style identifications come from Altfillisch records, NRHP nominations, and/or our own judgment.

Thanks to the three Altfillisch grandchildren for donating family records to the Luther College Archives.

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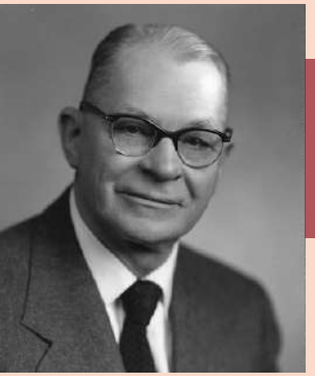
Decorah Historic Preservation Commission

A Tour of the Decorah Architecture of Charles Altfillisch

A Visionary Who Reshaped Decorah's Built Environment



About Charles Altfillisch

Charles Altfillisch was born in Bellevue, Iowa, in 1891, earned a B.A. in General Engineering at the University of Iowa in 1914, and began working with City Engineer and contractor A.R. Coffeen in Decorah around 1916. After serving with the U.S. Army in France in 1918-19, he returned to Decorah permanently. In 1920, he married a Decorah native, Leila Marsh (1897-1988). In 1922, they had one daughter. In summer 1925, Charles studied at Carnegie Tech's School of Architecture. Charles Altfillisch formally retired around 1963, but continued to work at the firm into the early 1970s. He died in Decorah in 1978.

Charles Altfillisch had a greater impact on the present visual character of Decorah than any other single individual. As an engineer, from 1919 onwards he conceptualized and forcefully advocated for the Upper Iowa dike system, finally completed in 1951. As a city employee he designed major infrastructure systems and was in the 1930s the driving force behind the introduction of zoning and permitting procedures. He founded a Decorah firm that grew to four architects, who together designed many hundreds of buildings throughout the upper Midwest. It is sometimes difficult to attribute the firm's buildings to particular architects. In addition to many homes and countless remodeling projects, Altfillisch himself designed major buildings at the University of Iowa, the Allamakee County Courthouse, and many hospitals and schools throughout the region.

Luther College Tour

Luther College has the largest concentration of Charles Altfillisch buildings anywhere; all major college buildings from 1926 through 1966 were designed by Altfillisch. In recognition of his importance to the campus, Luther College in 1952 presented Altfillisch an honorary law degree and in 1964 named him "College Architectural Consultant." Signs with maps can be found throughout the campus, which will facilitate a self-guided walking tour; most building facades cannot be adequately seen from an automobile. Many buildings are open to the public during the day. The properties are here listed in chronological order. All existing properties except the College Bell and the Athletic Center are NRHP 2021.

1. Preus Gymnasium. 1926. Tudor Collegiate. Sited underneath the current Center for Faith and Life. Burned 1961.
2. J. Magnus Rohne/O. J. H. and Magdalene Preus. 408 High St. 1927. English Cottage/Tudor Revival.
3. Korsrud Heating Plant. 1947/1966. Collegiate Gothic.
4. Brandt Hall. 1949/1957. Collegiate Gothic.
5. Main III. 1952. International Style.
6. Olson Hall. 1955. Midcentury Modern/Streamline Style.
7. Valders Hall of Science. 1960. International Style/Roof Architecture.
8. College Bell. 1961. Midcentury Modern.
9. [Dahl] Centennial Union. 1961. Midcentury Modern.
10. Athletic Center. 1963/1991/2014. Midcentury Modern/Contemporary.
11. Ylvisaker Hall. 1964. Midcentury Modern/Streamline Style.
12. Facilities Service Building. 1965. Ranch Style.
13. Regents Tower Dormitories, with Brunsdale Lounge. 1966-68. Midcentury Modern.

Central Decorah Tour

7 civic & commercial, 3 residences

1. City Hall and Fire House. 400 Claiborne Dr. 1960. International Style/Roof Architecture.
2. John Cline School. 101 Claiborne Dr. 1962. Midcentury Modern.
3. Justin and Louisa (Mairs) Hammond. 607 Winneshiek Ave. 1938. Cape Cod Colonial.
4. Frank C. and Sofie (Klatt) Kochendorfer. 702 Center Ave. 1938. International Style.
5. Holmberg and Erickson Meat Market. 118 E. Water St. 1921. Twentieth-Century Commercial. NRHP 2017.
6. Bertha (Christen) Mott Department Store. 101 W. Water St. 1925. Colonial Revival/Collegiate Gothic. NRHP 2017.
7. Larsen Clothiers. 105 W. Water St. 1939. Art Deco. NRHP 2017.
8. Clark G. Tillinghast. 310 W. Water St. 1937. 1930's Vernacular Commercial. NRHP 2017.
9. Oneota Bowling Company. 511 W. Water St. 1940. Art Deco/Streamline Moderne. NRHP 2017.
10. Adolph and Frances (Young) Leytze. 704 W. Water St. 1922. English Cottage.

The 1937 Decorah Bathhouse - 701 College Dr.

West Decorah Tour

16 residences, 2 institutions

1. Charles and Leila (Marsh) Altfillisch. 305 Fifth Ave. 1921. Dutch Colonial.
2. West Side Grade School. 301 Center St. 1939/1954. Moderne.
3. Edwin J. and Virginia (Amsden) Goen. 500 Fifth Ave. 1932. Early American/Colonial Revival. DHPC Award 2018.
4. Daniel C. and Anna (Egge) Jordahl. 504 Fifth Ave. 1935. Cape Cod.
5. Gustave A. and Lydia (Bredeson) Sundby. 705 Fifth Ave. 1948. Cape Cod.
6. Emil and Elinor (Langum) Miller. 107 Western St. 1951. Colonial Revival.
7. Charles and Leila (Marsh) Altfillisch. 801 Mound St. 1957. Midcentury Modern. DHPC Award 2018.
8. Carl and Eleanor (Field) Nichols. 217 Riverview Dr. 1956. Midcentury Modern Ranch.
9. Donald and Ilene (Meyer) Moore. 220 Riverview Dr. 1947. Midcentury Modern Ranch.
10. Obert D. and Gladys (Glesne) Bremness. 310 Riverview Dr. 1941. Cape Cod.
11. Roderick C. and Fay (Pelton) Weagant. 312 Riverview Dr. 1941. Colonial Revival.
12. Adrian and Orene (Madson) Docken. 605 North St. 1948. Usonian Midcentury Modern.
13. Oivind and Harriet (Knutson) Hovde. 603 North St. 1948. Usonian Midcentury Modern.
14. Roy and Helen (Bauder) Carlson. 212 High St. 1938. International Style.
15. Carl and Olga (Soreide) Selland. 202 High St. 1932. Minimal Traditional/Cape Cod.
16. George and Shirley (Lembke) Knudson. 616 Center St. 1948. Minimal Traditional.
17. Ole and Corinne (Hellie) Davidson. 629 Center St. 1957. Midcentury Modern.
18. Bathhouse and Swimming Pool. 701 College Dr. 1937. Art Moderne/International Style/Streamline Moderne. NRHP 2011.

South Decorah Tour

16 residences, 3 institutions

1. Everett and Eva (Nelson) Reardon. 900 Pleasant Ave. 1942. English Cottage.
2. Carl and Inga (Rasmussen) Vick. 805 Day St. 1948. Minimal Traditional.
3. Harold E. and Carrie (Plear) Hoffman. 803 Day St. 1936. Minimal Traditional.
4. St. Benedict Catholic Grade School. 402 Rural Ave. 1963. International Style/Roof Architecture.
5. Lester and Helen (Kersten) Larson. 100 Pleasant Hill Dr. 1940. Colonial Revival with a Cape Cod form. DHPC Award 2018.
6. John J. and Angela (Moore) Blodgett. 101 Pleasant Hill Dr. 1938. Colonial Revival.
7. Isadore and Sylvia (Isenberg) Meyer. 318 Pershing Ave. 1950. Minimal Traditional.
8. Steve and Grace (Wilson) Hauser. 704 E. Broadway. 1938. Colonial Revival.
9. Fridolph and Edna (Hanson) Peterson. 407 E. Main St. 1930. Tudor Revival Cottage.
10. Frank H. and Bess (Jones) Germann. 401 E. Broadway. 1921. New England Colonial.
11. First Congregational Church Congregational Center (education building). 209 W. Broadway. 1957. International Style. NRHP 1976.
12. First United Methodist Church education and office building. 302 W. Broadway. 1961. Midcentury Modern. NRHP 1976.
13. Charles and Dorothy (Reeves) Weiser. 609 W. Broadway. 1923. Dutch Colonial. NRHP 1976. DHPC Award 2018.
14. William B. and Sophia (Larson) Ingvoldstad. 704 W. Broadway. 1929. English Cottage/New England Farmhouse. NRHP 1976.
15. Edward F. and Laura Mae (Barthell) Hagen. 302 Upper Broadway. 1941. 1930s Organic Style/International Style. NRHP 1976.
16. Hjalmar and Helen (Arnold) Carlson. 303 Upper Broadway. 1960. Midwest Modern, with Prairie Style influences. NRHP 1976. DHPC Award 2018.
17. John and Jean (Baker) Sproatt. 901 Park St. 1957. Midcentury Modern Ranch.
18. Hjalmar Carlson Duplex. 606 Vernon St. 1936. International Style/Art Deco.
19. L. O. "Ollie" and Mary (Updegraff) Reed. 407 Grove St. 1936. Tudor Cottage.

Living room of the 1957 Alltfillisch family home - 801 Mound St.