

WHAT'S STILL HERE: Decorah's Surviving Properties, 1849-1870

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This version of "What's Still Here" combines our original June 8, 2024, 175th Anniversary talk, a few updates from an Oct. 26, 2024, Decorah Genealogy Association talk, and a few paragraphs from a topically-organized August 29, 2024, *Driftless Media* article on the same topic.

Most American cities of any size have a book documenting its demolished buildings: "Lost New York." "Lost Cleveland." "Lost Dubuque."

The book "Lost Decorah" would be plenty large, and painful. Most of us can name our favorite lost building.

But today, in a mood that may run counter to our basic personalities, Judy van der Linden and I, representing the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission, are taking a more positive, upbeat approach and emphasizing what survives from Decorah's earliest years.

When Judy and I first said that we wanted to highlight what survives from Decorah's earliest years, someone said, "Well, there isn't much." But we identified 45 period properties, even though we mostly included only "Significant" buildings with "Integrity" (a National Register of Historic Places evaluation that basically means, "Would someone from the original time period still recognize the property?").

For comparison, we counted the buildings visible on the 1870 Decorah birdseye map. This was challenging: the buildings along Water St. are nearly indistinguishable, and the barns and outhouses often resemble small homes. Still, Judy and I counted separately and came up with close to the same number, roughly 500. That means that around 10% of the 1870 Decorah buildings survive in their original locations.

Really, that's quite amazing.

So rather than lamenting the many great Decorah buildings that have been lost, we are celebrating those that have been preserved—those survivors that inspire us daily with our common history in this beautiful place. Our apologies that we have undoubtedly missed some early properties that have not been noticed or studied.

The Oneota people remain only in archaeological evidence. The Ho-Chunk, whose presence and removal we acknowledge, are visible by historians and tribal members like Prosper Waukon, but not by much physical evidence.

There are many buildings, mostly in the Commercial Historic District, that have foundations or core structures dating back to this earliest period in Decorah’s history, but which have been covered with later facades.

1. Many of these buildings are documented because they are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or are part of Decorah’s three National Register Historic Districts: Broadway-Phelps Park, the Commercial District, and the Luther College Campus. Others have been documented in State of Iowa Site Inventories or in published sources like those by George Knudson, Robert Davis, the Seegmillers, Elizabeth Lorentzen, Will Bunge, Steve Johnson, Shay Gooder, and others, and by three highly productive local organizations, the Decorah Genealogy Association, the Winneshiek County Historical Society, and the Winneshiek County Historic Preservation Commission. Given the popular nature of today’s event, we are not going to credit most of these secondary sources, even when we haven’t done any new primary research. All these non-NRHP properties are included on our Commission’s “Significant Decorah Properties” list that we first published on our website last year.
2. Here, to start us off, is the 1870 “birds-eye” Decorah map that Judy has made much use of in establishing this chronologically-organized list.
3. Painter Mill. 1851. Industrial Stone Vernacular. Vesterheim Heritage Park. The Painters built a mill at what we call Dunnings Springs in 1849, and then soon thereafter constructed this building in 1851, that is now part of the Vesterheim Museum. It is likely the oldest surviving Decorah building. Shay Gooder believes it was the last Iowa mill run entirely by water power. It was donated to the Museum by Roy and Helen Carlson in 1968, and was entered on the National Register in 1974, evidently the first NRHP Decorah building. [Knudson, Davis, Auto Tour, Stone Structures, Mills]
4. Egge Cabin. 1852. Vernacular log cabin. Vesterheim Heritage Park. This building represents many non-surviving wooden buildings of the first generation settlement. It was built by Erik and Helene Egge southeast of Decorah, near Washington Prairie. Because of its associations with Ulrich and

Elizabeth Koren, in 1913 it became part of the Luther College Museum and was moved to the Luther College campus, and later still to its present site in the Vesterheim Heritage Park. [Knudson, Davis, Vesterheim]

5. John Ammon House. Ca. 1854. Italianate Greek Revival. 602 W. Main St. This home was built by John Ammon, the partner in the Ammon/Scott agricultural implement manufacturing business. Elizabeth Lorentzen has dated the house to approximately 1854, with the oldest section being the single story portion on your left. In 1894, the house was purchased by George Bernatz, who, along with his descendents, operated the Vesterheim Painter Mill from 1900-1964. [Vera Harris, Lorentzen private communication]

6. Bernatz Grocery. 1855. Stone Vernacular, with Greek Revival references. 523 W. Water St. This is a beautifully-preserved building exhibiting the use of local stone materials. The building was constructed by William Painter, who as a “millwright and stone mason” [see Seegmiller, 199], is thought to have himself constructed a number of the early Decorah buildings. The ground floor has a recreated historically-appropriate wooden storefront. Similar stone buildings are hidden beneath the brick exteriors of a good number of Decorah’s Commercial District buildings. [Knudson, Davis, NRHP, Stone Structures]

7. Winship Tin Shop. 1855. Stone Vernacular. 701 Mound St. This is a one-story, partially-underground vernacular wood and stone building constructed as a tin shop by one of the first settlers in West Decorah. After being sold to Decorah Greenhouse in 1876, the building was used as a home, greenhouse storage, and office. [Stone Structures]

8. Teeter-Daubney House. 1855-1861. Midwest Vernacular. 620 North St. This is one of those early vernacular wood frame homes that rather unobtrusively create part of Decorah’s historic feel. The original house is the west or left hand portion, and was built about 1855 by Michael Teeter. Current resident Midge Kjome has a newspaper notice from 1861 announcing that the next owner, George Daubney, will build an addition, what is now the mid-section of the home. The final east portion was added later, sometime before 1924, when Midge’s grandparents purchased the property. [Midge Kjome personal communication]

9. Luther & Catharine Griswold House. 1856. Gothic Revival. 308 Leif Erickson. Here is a distinctive Gothic Revival house built by the Griswold’s as part of their “country estate” named “Lindeswild.” It originally had park-like gardens on the hillside below the house. In 1862, they sold the house and six lots to Luther College’s U. V. Koren. It has been owned and lived in by a striking number of Luther people, and was actually used as a classroom for a year

after the burning of Luther's Main II building in 1889. The garage, which has Gothic bargeboards that match the house, was built by former Luther president Elwin and Helen Farwell. [Knudson, Davis]

10. Norris Miller Stovewood House. 1856. Vernacular Classical. 118 North Mill St. This is an original West Decorah house from 217 Ohio St. that was lived in until it was moved to Vesterheim in 1976. It was one of two stovewood houses constructed in Decorah by Norris Miller, and is now said to be one of only three such houses existing in the U.S. (the other two being in Wisconsin). [Knudson, Davis, NRHP]

11. Dayton House. 1856-57. Wooden frame vernacular, with Greek Revival styling. 516 W. Water St. (Vesterheim Heritage Park.)
 Silas Dayton constructed this wood frame vernacular building for a grocery store and upstairs dwelling. After having been considerably changed, especially at the first story level, the building was refashioned after its original design by Vesterheim in 1985. Downtown Decorah was originally populated by many buildings of this style and construction; some remain under more modern facades; this is the only surviving visible representative of the style. We're all very happy that this example survives, but as dedicated historic preservationists we sometimes imagine what Decorah would be like if we had preserved *all* of these first generation buildings—and we think especially of those many striking later buildings that we would never have had, at least not in this downtown location. [Knudson, Davis, Decorah's Historic Architecture, NRHP]

12. Addicken-Klein Beer Vaults. 1857. Stone Vernacular. 203 Quarry St.
 The 1857 Addicken brewery has disappeared, and the 1872 Addicken-Klein Italianate house standing nearby is outside our time period, but the original 1857 stone vernacular beer vaults still remain. Shay Gooder's excellent work for the Winneshiek County Historic Preservation Commission's booklet, *Stone Structures of Winneshiek County*, documents the layout: three large chambers, the largest of which extends sixty feet into the hillside. [Stone Structures] That hillside entrance is covered by the red doors visible on the right. If you look carefully at the etching on the left, you can see the same vault entrance just above the beer barrels on the river bank.

13. Otis Building. 1858. Originally Classical Revival. 202 W. Main.
 Although much altered since its construction by E. E. Otis in 1858, the building is important, first, because it was used by Luther College from 1862-65 before the 1865 completion of Main I, and, second, because it was later the prominent St. Cloud Hotel. Although it retains its original five-window width, the building, now 3 ½ stories tall, with a flat roof and 1979 stuccoing,

was originally brick, and two ½ stories high, with a side-gabled roof. [Bunge, NRHP]

14. Logan/Painter Octagon House. 1857/1858. Fowler Octagon. 408 W. Broadway.

Orson Squire Fowler published his book on the Octagon House style in 1848, and a minor fad resulted. Many hundreds of octagon houses from this period still survive, although in Iowa, very few of the original twenty-seven survive. The Decorah Octagon House was built of “grout” (a mixture of mortar, straw and small pebbles poured into forms). Shay Gooder believes the outer wall is stone, with stucco added in the 1920s. George Knudson writes that the stucco was redone in the late 1960s. Like other octagon houses, it originally had a belvedere with glass windows. The house has had several additions. [NRHP, Knudson, Davis, Decorah’s Historic Architecture, Stone Structures]

15. Warren Field House. 1858. Gothic Revival. 404 W. Broadway.

Bert Porter was raised in this house by his grandparents, the Fields. Although Bert stuccoed this house and removed its detailing in the 1920s, it still retains the steeply pitched gables and wide eaves of its original Gothic Revival styling. [NRHP, Vera Harris, Walk into the Past]

16. William and Elizabeth (Thompson) Day House. Pre-1860. Classical Revival. 112 Riverside.

For information about this house, we’re relying on Vera Harris’s notebook, which was so expertly researched and beautifully presented by Elizabeth Lorentzen in 2010. Vera remembers that the core house, since remodeled and expanded, was built by the Days before William died in 1860. [Vera Harris]

17. Parliman House. 1860. Vernacular Wood Frame I-House. 206 Lloyd Street.

This house wouldn’t have come to our attention if Dean and Lois Humpal—who along with their daughter Chanda received the 2024 DHPC Historic Preservation Award—hadn’t recently restored it. The assessor dates it to 1860, and Lois says the house may be visible on the 1870 Decorah birdseye perspective map. The house still had a dirt-floor basement and the rough stone foundation of an early home. A Dr. William Parliman owned the property in the 1860’s, although we’re not sure he built the house. The Humpals have upgraded the house’s mechanicals, have added a compatible garage, and have breathed another hundred year’s life into this small home. [van der Linden research]

18. Woodruff House. Ca. 1860. Greek Revival, with Eastern Stick Style additions. 700 W. Broadway.

This Greek Revival/Eastern Stick Style house was dated ca. 1860 in the Broadway-Phelps Park National Register nomination, and 1858-69 on the historic architecture brochure produced by Wanda Gardner and Elizabeth Lorentzen. The current owners, Nan and Steve St. Clair, think it may go back to 1853. The house, in any case, includes an indoor tree trunk that helps support the building's second story. [NRHP, Decorah's Historic Architecture]

19. Landers-Adams House. 1860. Greek Revival/Italianate. 509 W. Broadway.
This Greek Revival/Italianate house was built in 1860 by Frederick and Sarah Landers, who added to it in 1871. The house was owned by direct descendents of the Landers, through marriage, until it was gifted in 2016 to the Winneshiek County Historical Society, which has been doing an exemplary restoration of the whole building. [NRHP, WCHS website and newsletter]
20. Alonzo Bradish House. 1860-63. Greek Revival/Italianate. 301 W. Broadway.
Vera Harris said that Bradish ran a tinsmith shop in this location before he left Decorah during the gold rush. The Greek Revival/Italianate house was evidently built in stages. Originally a single-family home, the building was modified to serve as the Miller law offices sometime after the mid-twentieth-century. [NRHP, Vera Harris]
21. Grier-Green House. 1862. Gothic Revival Cottage. 503 W. Broadway.
Built of local brick, this Gothic Revival Cottage was evidently painted quite early in its history. It has an elaborate gingerbread porch and striking vergeboards in the gables and up until relatively recently on the roof peaks. Knudson says it was built by a Quaker, and he and others report the story that the house was used for the underground railroad. [Knudson, NRHP]
22. "Hututu." 1863. Colonial Revival. 204 W. Main St.
We earlier noted that in 1862, Luther College bought the 1858 Otis building for classes. Then in 1863, Luther built a brick dormitory just next door at 204 W. Main. This simple building retains its original shape, window openings, and its brick walls on the east and north; the porch and surface stucco are later additions. [Luther College histories, "Walk Into the Past"]
23. Robert "Deacon Francis" Gibson House. 1863. Greek Revival/Italianate. 501 W. Broadway.
This brick house was originally only two rooms, but has been modified a number of times and was stuccoed in the 1920s. "Deacon Francis" Gibson is said to have constructed at least seventeen Decorah buildings, and lived in a good many of them, having during his lifetime built up and unfortunately lost several fortunes. [NRHP, Vera Harris]

24. Engebretson Stone House. 1864. Stone Vernacular. 401 E. Water St.
This simple, side-gabled house is a beautifully-preserved example of Decorah's first-generation stone construction. According to an article by Darrell Henning, it is a clear example of the Norwegian three-room Akershus plan. The structural red brick lintels over the door and first-story windows add a striking contrast to the local stone. Ole Engebretson was a prominent early settler, whose son Richard became an influential member of the next generation of Decorah business people. [Davis, Stone Structures, Henning]
25. Joseph Steyer House. 1865. Midwest Vernacular. 601 W. Broadway.
The Broadway-Phelps National Register nomination identifies the Joseph Steyer house as "Midwest Vernacular." Although the house has been sided, it retains its original simple lines and is a reminder that there are probably many other vernacular Decorah houses from this period that haven't been noticed or studied. Originally a stonecutter, Steyer was the German-immigrant entrepreneur who built the National Register Steyer Opera house building. His younger brother Michael followed him to Decorah and worked as a stonemason and quarry owner—he's responsible for the 1875 National Register Steyer Bridge and other local stonework. [NRHP, stone Structures, DHPC Steyer Bridge research]
26. John Driggs House. 1865. Italianate. 208 Leif Erickson Dr.
This house is partly important as the one-time home of Luther College president Laur. Laursen and at least two later Luther faculty. The home's well-preserved Italianate architecture is made more prominent by the presence of the unusual belvedere, which local carpenters Dan Sand and John Kjome recreated in 1998 for Stan and Lorraine Fullerton, using an old engraving. Most Decorah roof-top structures like this have been removed. [Vera Harris, *DPO*, Sept. 15, 1998]
27. Diedrich Addicken House & Brewery. 1865. Renaissance Revival Brewery and Greek Revival house. 1400 Oneota Dr.
Although the original mill has disappeared, and the Greek Revival house and Renaissance Revival brewery have been modified, they together still convey the feeling of a semi-rural industrial estate. According to Robert Davis, the mill and brewery were both powered by the Twin Springs Creek. Davis says that the stair-stepped-looking brewery, visible behind the house to the left, looks as though it has been altered several times, but has not been. [Davis]
28. H. A. Hegg House. 1865. Greek Revival. 601 Maple Ave.
This brick Greek Revival home was constructed by Norwegian immigrant Hans A. Hegg, a saddle and harness maker with a shop on Water Street between Day and State streets. The assessor gives 1865 as the date—one of those fairly rare instances when the assessor provides a likely-accurate date

for houses built before 1900. [Judy van der Linden research, Significant Decorah Properties]

29. Bernard Kornmeyer, Sr., House. 1865. Italianate. 210 East St.
A 1865 newspaper article announced the construction of this house by Bernard Kornmeyer, “the brick-maker for the College,” but by 1868 an advertisement announced that the house was for sale. At some point the house also held a grocery store. A German immigrant, Kornmeyer and his two sons used local clay to fire soft bricks for Decorah buildings up into the 1920s. The Italianate house has had various additions, has probably lost some detailing, and was at one time divided into four apartments, but it remains a substantial reminder of one of Decorah’s early industries. [Decorah newspapers, *Vera Harris*, owner information]

30. B. O. and Margaret Dahly house. 1866. Colonial Revival. 513 Locust Road.
This is the original farmhouse of an important Decorah business family. The wide siding is a later addition, but the Colonial Revival house retains its overall massing and provides a useful historical contrast with the great majority of the 1950s subdivision homes built on the Dahly farmland. [Significant Decorah Properties]

31. Simeon Leach House. 1866. Gothic Revival. 902 Maple Ave.
David Faldet tells us that Simeon Leach moved from New York state to Winneshiek County in 1851. He first farmed in Canoe Township and then bought this land and built this house in 1866. The home’s distinctive Gothic Revival gables and window hoods are original, although the front bay window, the rear addition, and the renovated porch are early twentieth-century additions. The matching garage, using Gothic windows from a neighborhood house that was being remodeled, was built by David Faldet in 1995. [David Faldet personal communication]

32. Decorah Woolen Mill. 1867. Brick Mill Style. 107 Court St.
The western (right-hand) side of this building was constructed as a Woolen Mill in 1867 of solid-brick walls, 20” thick at the lowest level. The mill’s power came from the Upper Iowa River, which at that time flowed up to the northern backside of Water Street. The brick walls and interior timber framing are typical of U.S. mills of the period. Originally four stories, the building lost its top story in the 1908 Decorah tornado. The eastern (left-side) building was added in 1920. The complex has been used as apartments since 2002. [Knudson, Davis, NRHP, Mills]

33. Pastor Brandt’s Parsonage. 1867. Italianate. Luther Campus.
This red brick Italianate home was built as a parsonage for the regional Lutheran congregation soon after the 1865 completion of Main I. As you can

see by comparing the historic and modern pictures, the brick porch is a later addition, and the original circular third-story window has been replaced. [Knudson, Davis, Bunge, NRHP]

34. Ira Ward House. 1867. Mixed vernacular style. 309 Center St.

Another of the many early houses listed in Vera Harris's notebook. The brick mixed-style house was later owned by Oscar Adolf Tingelstad, a Luther professor and registrar who went on to serve for fifteen years as the president of Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma (where, by the way, Charles Altfillisch did a campus plan and designed the Tingelstad president's home and a number of other campus buildings). [Vera Harris, Luther histories and archives]

35. Ammon, Scott & Co. Warehouse. Ca. 1866. Industrial Brick Vernacular. 502-04 W. Water St.

In 1866, young architect/builder H. O. Ball drew up plans to enlarge the stone building on this site. John Ammon and his post 1870 partner George W. Scott manufactured agricultural equipment in the resulting industrial brick vernacular building. After the business's failure, the building was used for a wide range of manufacturing. It is now used by Vesterheim for education. [van der Linden, Knudson, Davis, NRHP]

36. Ellsworth-Porter House. 1867. Italian Villa. 401 W. Broadway.

This is a beautiful Italian Villa-style house built out of locally-produced brick for successful local businessman Dighton B. Ellsworth. The building was also designed by H. O. Ball. The beautiful porches are later, Queen Anne style additions. And the famous wall is, of course, Bert Porter's twentieth-century creation. [Knudson, NRHP, Davis, Vera Harris]

37. Cooley-Whitney House. 1867. Italianate, Classical, and Tuscan styling. 305 Grove St.

This is another 1867 project of H. O. Ball, this time for E. E. Cooley, a banker, businessman, and mayor who had arrived in Decorah in 1857. The mixed-style Italianate/Classical/Tuscan house has been well-preserved by a series of owners. [NRHP, Decorah's Historic Architecture, van der Linden]

38. Dickerman and Paine Commercial Building. 1867. Italianate Commercial. 116-118 Winnebago.

H. O. Ball was also responsible, in 1867, for this large commercial building that has for many years functioned as two separate properties. [NRHP, van der Linden]

39. William T. Baker House. 1869. Italianate. 601 W. Main.

And as Judy van der Linden's research has shown, H. O. Ball might also have been responsible two years later, in 1869, for building the impressive William T. Baker house on the corner of Main and Mill streets. The house has been stuccoed and received a third story sometime early in this century. But the current owners have redone the stucco to make it less obtrusive and are carrying out an extensive interior renovation/preservation. [Vera Harris, van der Linden, Constance Johnson]

40. Claiborne Day House. 1867. Greek Revival. 707 E. Broadway.
The current owners believe this house was built by Claiborne Day before 1867, or soon after by the Montgomery family. A prominent Greek Revival red brick house in a prominent location, it has a recent compatible wooden addition to the rear, constructed of 1856 logs, that replaced a similar earlier addition. The recent garage is built of logs dated to 1854. The house is strikingly similar to the early 1860's Bradish house at 301 Broadway and the 1865 Hegg house at 601 Maple Ave. [Owner research]
41. Henry Paine House. 1867. Gothic Revival Villa. 301 Upper Broadway.
In addition to being distinctive architecturally, with its steep Gothic Revival gables and arched "ogee" windows and locally produced brick, the Paine house had an extensive landscaped yard with terraces and topiary that Paine developed over several years. The landscaping is partly visible in the 1875 etching on the left. The house has been well-preserved by a series of owners. [NRHP, Davis, Vera Harris, Decorah's Historic Architecture.]
42. Relf Building. 1868. Italianate and Queen Anne. 128 W. Water.
English-born James Relf's 1868 building is a useful reminder that historic preservation doesn't always mean meticulous restoration of an original. The 1868 building was a two-story Italianate, with a third, elaborate Queen Anne style story being added by Relf's son James T. Relf about 1891. The 1993 facade renovation by the Decorah State Bank, which was located next door and owned the building, included the recreation of the original ground story to include historically-appropriate full-size windows and transoms. At the time, Janice Relf, a great-granddaughter who had herself once owned the building, donated a replica of the Relf name lettering visible on the third-story window. [Davis, Seegmiller, NRHP]
43. Luther College Farm. 1868 ff. Stone and wood agricultural vernacular. Luther College campus, North College Drive.
Dating the many Luther College Farm buildings, additions, and renovations has challenged historians, but it is probable that the oldest barn, as well as the stone icehouse visible here on the right, date from soon after Englishman Captain A. J. Ashmore purchased the 320 acre farm in 1868. In 1874, Ashmore sold to Jacob Jewell and built a new family home in West Decorah.

Luther College purchased the land and buildings in 1929, and in the 1990s Peter Jorgensen performed a restoration miracle on all of the buildings.
[NRHP, Jorgensen]

44. Archa and Mary Dennis House. 1869. I-House. 409 E. Main St.
The house is a vernacular “I-House,” a house defined by its interior layout—essentially two rooms wide and one room deep. The house was recently beautifully restored and documented by David Wadsworth. The house is also notable because its yard includes the largest European Larch tree in Iowa, planted in 1875 by Julia and Knut Thompson in the year that they purchased the home. The Thompsons also added the two story addition to the south. [Wadsworth website]
45. George Holway House. 1869. Greek Revival. 706 W. Broadway.
Despite various additions, this house still reveals some of the basic symmetrical look and low hipped roof of its Greek Revival origins. [NRHP]
46. Charles Rudolf Building. 1869. Italianate. 206 W. Water St.
Charles Rudolf was a German immigrant who stopped in Wisconsin and Minnesota to have three children before settling in Decorah in 1859. He built this tall, beautiful building where he operated a saloon and by 1880 also a drugstore. As was typical of many of Decorah’s downtown buildings, the Rudolf family lived in the upstairs—a good use of these upper stories now being revived by many building owners. In 2013, Mike and Dominique Bockman received the annual Decorah Historic Preservation Award for a sensitive renovation that included the second and third story window restorations by David Wadsworth. One of the building’s beauties is that the curved window openings have curved-top windows. [NRHP, Davis, Seegmiller]
47. Various Christian denominations were present here from the earliest years, often worshiping in log or wooden buildings. They now worship in second or third generation buildings, with a remarkable SIX of them still located in the Broadway-Phelps Park Historic District. But reminders of the churches’ earliest years are still visible in Decorah’s three cemeteries:
 - a. The 1859 Simpson, Montgomery, and Goddard cemeteries were incorporated into Phelps Cemetery in 1896.
 - b. The first permanent St. Benedict Catholic cemetery has been dated to the mid-1860s. [Kath dates the cemetery to 1863-67 during Fr. Lowery’s pastorate. Davis notes that the earliest graves date to the 1860s.]
 - c. And the Lutheran Cemetery was established in 1869.
[Davis, Significant Decorah Properties]

48. Henry Schultz Kiln. Ca. 1870. Industrial. Park St.

Yes, the Schultz Kiln is just outside of a strict twenty-year cutoff, but it seems appropriate to end here nevertheless. “Built by Henry Schultz, this kiln produced brick used in several Broadway structures and many Decorah buildings. The clay came from the hillside near the kiln, was processed in a home-made mill, and fired in the center of the kiln.” The 1976 National Register nomination, from which we lifted that description, ends with the comment, “It is [in a] deteriorating condition at present.” But in 1983 the Iowa Historic Preservation Office funded a restoration effected by local mason Ted Wilson. The kiln now stands as a beautiful symbol of Decorah’s early years and of the power and importance of historic preservation. [NRHP]

Yes, we’ve lost a lot of properties since 1849. But we’ve also preserved some important buildings and the history and art that they embody.

And why do these properties survive?

We must, first of all, thank local organizations committed to preservation.

- A full six of the surviving pre-1870 properties are part of the Vesterheim complex (although each building has its own unique preservation history).
- The Porter House and the Winneshiek County Historical Society Heritage Center are in such marvelous condition because their volunteers have generously given time and money.
- The Luther College Brandt Parsonage is well-preserved because it is a handsome, useful building that is a strong reminder of the college’s earliest history. The College has not, alas, found continuing use for the Luther College Farm buildings.
- The Schultz Kiln is part of the Decorah Park System.
- Almost two-thirds of the surviving 1849-70 buildings are included on the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of Decorah’s three Historic Districts. The National Register is overseen at the local level by the Winneshiek and Decorah Historic Preservation Commissions.

But most of these buildings have been preserved because individual owners—too numerous to mention here—have seen their continuing value as homes and businesses. The mechanical systems, kitchens, and baths are new and the interiors are often remodeled, but many buildings retain much of their original exterior finishing and window and door openings and their interior floor plans, millwork, doors, and stairways. These buildings are living properties that continue to serve our needs, but they also embody our shared story in this historic place.

CONGRATULATIONS, DECORAH, ON YOUR 175TH, AND ON YOUR HISTORY OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION!

49. Final Slide.

We're happy to get responses to this presentation, and will make this and later versions available on our city website.