

## Spot on SHPO

### News from the State Historic Preservation Office

For the last 15 years, every drop of rain that has fallen in Iowa has been compared to the Floods of '93. My memory of that disaster is limited to a single day: I was a student at Iowa State and I remember studying for a test, only to have it cancelled when the campus was closed. People around me with family in Iowa were affected; my friends working in Des Moines were affected; I now know historic buildings were affected, too. But I was an architecture student with no other connection to Iowa, and my preservation ethic was not yet well-defined, so none of it really meant much to me. Little did the naïve student know what such a disaster could do to lives, property, and community.

We're all still struggling to comprehend the "Floods of 2008." First, the "Floods of 2008" weren't just floods. The relentless rain from April through June and into July, the tornadoes, straight-line winds, storm sewer backups, and the river flooding are all discussed collectively as the "Floods of 2008" in the mainstream media. Historic properties across the state have been damaged by all of these things, not just flooding. Second, beginning with the first reports of damage to historic properties in April, the extent of damage continues to astound me today as we try to pull actual facts and figures together. While the damage to individual historic properties is extremely disheartening, damage to entire communities that revolve around the businesses and residences within historic properties seems to magnify that impact. Lastly, there are many historic properties—especially properties in rural areas and archaeological sites—about which we still have no information. How can we comprehend something that still has so many unknowns associated with it?

We've been told it will take Iowa ten years to recover from this disaster. Already, as we do each time a disaster of any magnitude occurs, we are picking each other up and beginning to rebuild. It is my sincere hope that "rebuilding" will include rehabilitation of historic properties rather than demolition. We've lost some historic properties already, but there are many more that can be saved if we are able to give them the technical and financial assistance they need. Our office is working closely with federal agencies to ensure the historic properties they are providing assistance to will be treated appropriately. And, in cases where demolition may be inevitable, hopefully we can capture the historic spirit of the property before it disappears.

One thing we should not lose sight of as Iowa recovers is how to better prepare for the next disaster. As our department responds to this disaster, we continually return to discussing ways to improve disaster preparedness and response for the future. If we are better prepared at all levels—from house museum to historic preservation commission to state historic preservation office—then more historic properties could be prevented from being damaged in the first place. Maybe with better planning up front, more historic communities can remain whole.

Before closing, I want to express a sincere "thank you" to everyone who has been helping the recovery effort. Within days of the national news picking up the tornado and flood stories, my office received phone calls from people across the country wanting to help our historic resources in any way they could. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Midwest office, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Offices, the American Institute of Conservation, the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, and the Heritage Emergency National Task Force all offered their services. Most importantly, though, citizens and preservationists in Iowa began to help our department collect data and get technical assistance to those who needed it most. IHPA was a leader in this effort, along with Main Street Iowa, 1000 Friends of Iowa, Silos and Smokestacks and Certified Local Governments across the state. As many have already heard me say: Thank you for all that you do!

*Contributed by Barbara A. Mitchell*

### Recent Actions on the National Register of Historic Places

**Foster Park Historic District, Le Mars, Plymouth County. Listed 04/25/2008.**

**Grocers Wholesale Company Building, Des Moines, Polk County. Listed 04/25/2008.**

**Community Building, Princeton, Scott County. Listed 04/25/2008.**

**Simmons Hardware Company Warehouse, Sioux City, Woodbury County. Listed 04/25/2008.**

**West Hill Historic District, Muscatine, Muscatine County. Listed 04/30/2008.**

**Pioneer Implement Company, Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie County. Listed 04/30/2008.**

**The Elgin Block, Elgin, Fayette County. Listed 05/08/2008.**

**Thos. D. Murphy Co. Factory and Power Plant, Red Oak, Montgomery County. Listed 05/19/2008.**

**Wahkonsa Hotel, Fort Dodge, Webster County. Listed 05/21/2008.**

**Sioux City Fire Station Number 3, Sioux City, Woodbury County. Listed 05/21/2008.**

**Hale Bridge, near Anamosa, Jones County. Re-listed in new location 06/04/2008.**

**Interstate Power Company Building, Dubuque, Dubuque County. Listed 06/26/2008.**