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Abstract

The current project represents the completion of the county-wide comprehensive survey and evaluation project by studying the Early Settlement Era resources of Subsections A, K, and S. Subsection A includes: all of Grant Township, the west part of Spring Grove Township, part of the northeast corner of Washington Township, and the northwest corner of Otter Creek Township. Section K includes the south half of Marion West Township, part of the western edge of Marion East Township, and the east portion of Monroe Township, while Subsection S includes the south half of Monroe Township. The towns within the current subsections include Walker in Subsection A and Robins and part of Hiawatha in Subsection K, and the rest of Hiawatha in Subsection S. Hiawatha is not an early town in Linn County but rather is the county’s most recent town designation having been incorporated in 1950. In addition to the towns in the current subsections, the former road-side/cross-roads settlements of Alice and New Buffalo were located in Subsection A and Subsection S, respectively. There are several standing architectural properties from the Alice community, with no extant properties associated with New Buffalo except for the New Buffalo Cemetery. Subsections A, K, and S encompassed a total area of 56,186 acres (22,755 ha). Of this area, approximately 30.5 ac (12.4 ha) was physically surveyed for archaeological resources associated with the Early Settlement Era of Linn County.

The architectural history portion of the current investigation noted the presence of three properties that are currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places, with one located in Subsection A and two located in Subsection S. These properties include the Chain Lakes Bridge, the Walker Depot, and the Taylor-Van Note House (Wayside Inn). All three properties remain extant and preserved, although the Wayside Inn has been resided and the windows replaced and all of the former outbuildings that were still standing in the 1980s have since been removed.

In addition, a previous road corridor study in Subsection K resulted in the recording of two properties that were recommended as eligible for the National Register but have not yet been listed. These two properties are the Seth and Elizabeth Stinson House at 2760 E. Robins Road and the Gray/Cooper/Huntoon Farmstead at 3620 Alburnett Road.

The current investigation resulted in the inventory and evaluation of 33 previously unrecorded architectural properties, with eight previously inventoried properties more fully examined and evaluated as part of the current study. This brings the total of architectural properties examined during the current investigation to 41.

The current archaeological investigation recorded five new sites and examined five previously recorded sites that had not been field-check or fully evaluated. In addition, the historical map locations of Hunt’s Mill on Blue Creek in Subsection A and Milburn’s sawmill on Otter Creek in Subsection S were examined with no archaeological evidence observed. Therefore, a total of 10 archaeological sites were examined and two other potential sites were examined but were not recorded as archaeological sites.

Nine architectural properties were recommended as eligible for the National Register in Subsection A, with one potentially eligible architectural property noted in Subsection S and seven eligible architectural properties noted in Subsection K. Only two of the archaeological sites examined were recommended for further investigation, with the other eight sites recommended as not eligible for the National Register for lack of sufficient integrity. Of particular note in the architectural/historical study of Subsection K is the presence of at least three farmsteads that were formerly Witwer Grocery Co. Farms in the 1930s-60s. These are just three of 32 reported Witwer Farms once located in Linn and Benton counties during this period. In addition, a large farm that was a hybrid seed corn operation of some size in the mid-to-late twentieth century. It was recommended that future studies consider intensively researching and compiling a Consolidation Era agri-business context and identify other Witwer Farms, with the purpose of listing well preserved examples in the National Register under a Multiple Property Submission.
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Statement of Historic Contexts

Introduction

The following historic contexts are based on contexts developed in the following studies: a first-phase comprehensive planning document (Rogers 1992); seven comprehensive survey projects for Linn County, Iowa, that followed (Rogers 2003, 2006; Rogers and Page 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996; Rogers and Nagel 2013; Rogers and Price 2011); two Phase II-level investigation of selected properties identified in previous survey projects (Rogers 1998, 2008); and three National Register nomination projects specifically based on the results of the previous investigations (Rogers 2000; Page 2002a, 2002b) (Figure 1). The first-phase project involved a compilation of contexts applicable to the county’s historical development as a whole, while the subsequent phases added detailed contexts applicable to the individual subsections of the county being surveyed. The county’s historical development can be subdivided into four general eras of development: Native American Contact, Early Settlement, Expansion, and Consolidation (Rogers 1992). Within each era, a number of subcontexts were also identified and consisted of the development of communities, commercial districts, transportation, agriculture, industry, religion, education, social culture, architecture, and notable persons associated with these developments. The comprehensive survey projects expanded upon these contexts and identified some new ones, including: town building, local contractor/builders, rural architecture, family-oriented rural settlement patterns, ethnic settlement patterns, and transportation corridors.

As noted above, the initial surveys were followed by selected National Register nominations of districts and sites identified in the previous survey projects. The National Register properties listed to date as a result of the comprehensive survey projects include:

One early historic period habitation site:
Dewitt/Harman Archaeological Site (13LN454) located in Bertram Township

Three farmstead districts and two houses:
Podhajsky/Jansa Farmstead District located in College Township
Janko, Jan and Antonie, Farmstead District located in College Township
Minor, Josias L. and Elizabeth A., Farmstead District located in College Township
Moorhead, Joseph and Clara A., House located in Putnam Township
Horecky, Henek and Mary, Log Cabin, located in Franklin Township (Recently delisted because it was moved to a new location nearby. The plan is to relist it once it has reached the five-year mark at its new location.)

Two commercial districts:
Central City Commercial Historic District
Dows Street Historic District, Ely

One school:
Ely School
Figure 1. Linn County historical survey county sectional map showing areas surveyed by past and current studies. Note corporate boundaries have changed in the Cedar Rapids-Marion metro area since this map was first generated in 1992.
The current project represents the completion of the county-wide comprehensive survey and evaluation project by studying the Early Settlement Era resources of Subsections A, K, and S (see Figure 1). Subsection A includes: all of Grant Township, the west part of Spring Grove Township, part of the northeast corner of Washington Township, and the northwest corner of Otter Creek Township. Section K includes the south half of Marion West Township, part of the western edge of Marion East Township, and the east portion of Monroe Township, while Subsection S includes the south half of Monroe Township (Figures 2-3). Subsection A is in the northwest corner of the county with the county boundaries forming the north and west sides of the subsection and Troy Mills Road and Central City Road forming the east and south boundaries, respectively. Subsection K is bounded by the corporate boundaries of the cities of Marion and Cedar Rapids on the south side, Highway 13 on the east side, Interstate 380 on the west side, and County Home Road on the north side. Subsection S is bounded by Interstate 380 on the east side, the corporate boundary of Cedar Rapids on the south side, the Cedar River on the west side, and roughly Tower Terrace Road on the north. Through the years it has been noted that while the original idea of survey subsections based on road and river boundaries rather than township boundaries made some sense as study units because transportation corridors are meaningful divisions for early settlement and subsequent settlement expansion. However, historical records are based on governmental boundaries, specifically by township, and trying to research the history of a particular “subsection” unit often involved piecing together histories from portions of up to four different townships. As a result, it is highly recommended that any future studies of this type in other counties in Iowa use township boundaries rather than transportation corridors for survey boundaries.

The towns within the current subsections include Walker in Subsection A and Robins and part of Hiawatha in Subsection K, and the rest of Hiawatha in Subsection S. Hiawatha is not an early town in Linn County but rather is the county’s most recent town designation having been incorporated in 1950. It should be noted that the corporate boundaries of both Cedar Rapids and Marion have changed since 1992, and while the current survey attempted to work around the new boundaries, it was found that there were some notable rural resources that were worthy of noting that may technically be within the corporate boundaries of these two metropolitan areas.

In addition to the towns in the current subsections, the former road-side/cross-roads settlements of Alice and New Buffalo were located in Subsection A and Subsection S, respectively. There are several standing architectural properties from the Alice community, with no extant properties associated with New Buffalo except for the New Buffalo Cemetery.

Subsections A, K, and S encompass a total area of 56,186 acres (22,755 ha). Of this area, approximately 30.5 ac (12.4 ha) was physically surveyed for archaeological resources associated with the Early Settlement Era of Linn County (Figure 4). Portions of each subsection had been previously surveyed to the Phase I level by other cultural resources investigations. Most of these previous investigations were conducted for transportation-related projects such as road and highway improvements and bridge replacements. In Subsection A, the previous cultural resources investigations are few and very limited in size, with no major corridor studies conducted to date (Figure 5). The previous investigations in Subsection K included more extensive transportation studies as well as smaller development area and cellular towers on the outskirts of Marion and Hiawatha (Figure 6). Among the transportation studies were those related to the Tower Terrace Road and I-380 interchange projects. The most extensive of the previous investigations were the cultural resources investigations conducted for the Highway 100 corridor that crosses Subsection S (see Figure 7). This highway extension is currently under construction.

The architectural and archaeological properties previously recorded largely consist of those recorded as part of intensive cultural resources investigations for highway and other construction projects, but also include properties inventoried by interested individuals and property owners as well as some cemeteries assigned inventory numbers by the State Historic Preservation Office but no other information yet recorded. In addition, some of the previously recorded archaeological sites are based on data from the original land survey plats on cabin locations but were never actually surveyed for archaeological evidence. Some of these sites were examined during the current study.
Dashed outline/shaded areas = Linn County Survey Subsections A-S. Solid blue outlines = township boundaries.

Black outline/shaded areas = approximate corporate boundaries for Cedar Rapids, Marion, Mount Vernon and Lisbon. These areas were excluded because these communities are CLGs and have conducted their own surveys.

Figure 2. Map of Linn County showing township boundaries/names with overlay of survey subsection boundaries. Overlay map compiled by Tallgrass Historians L.C.
Figure 3. Linn County road map showing location of current study areas (blue outlines approximate boundaries). Source: IDOT Transportation Map 1995