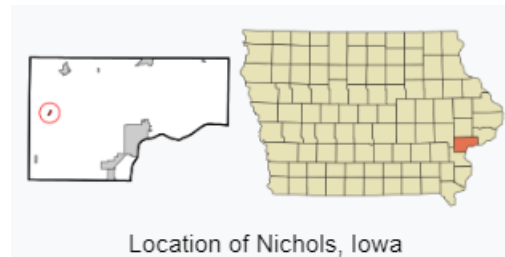


# Historic Preservation in Small Town Iowa

Preserve Iowa Summit 2024



Location of Nichols, Iowa



## Presenters:

Lynn Pruitt, Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission

Jennifer Price, Historic Preservation Consultant, Price Preservation Research

# Nichols, Iowa History

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- Iowa Territory formed from Wisconsin Territory in 1838
- Samuel Nichols built a house in 1839; moved his family here in 1840
- Muscatine County formed 1842
- Pike Township formed in 1853
- Town of Nichols platted in 1871; incorporated in 1884



# Nichols Growth and Development

- Expansion from Mississippi River (Muscatine) westward
- Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railroad in 1872; Muscatine & Western Railroad in 1873; they crossed in Nichols
- Population peaked at 398 in 1900; now 340 (2020 census)



# Nichols Family Line

- Samuel, Sr. – 1746 to 1824 – Lived in Ohio
- Samuel, Jr. – 1794 to 1870 – Moved to Iowa Territory in 1839
- Benjamin Franklin Nichols -- 1825 to 1893 – Named town “Nichols”
- Townson Burt Nichols – 1874 to 1942
- Benjamin Franklin Nichols – 1898 to 1975
- Charlene Ann Nichols/Meacham/Hixson – 1923 to 2020 – Last of “Nichols” names



# Samuel Nichols Family Home

- Samuel and Nancy Nichols Home
- Located about 1 mile east of Nichols
- Built 1869-1870
- Replaced 1839 log cabin which served as home, post office & store
- A typical 19th-century brick vernacular farmhouse (Adam style) with a single-story wing on the back
- Nominated to National Register of Historic Places in 1978



# Rural Iowa (Nichols) Historic Preservation

## Recent Accomplishments

- How one small Iowa town received National Register of Historic Preservation recognition for:
  - The central business block as a Historic District
  - A historic church
  - The town's founder's home
- Also investigated two other churches and another historic home
- Signage for all church and school sites (historic and present)

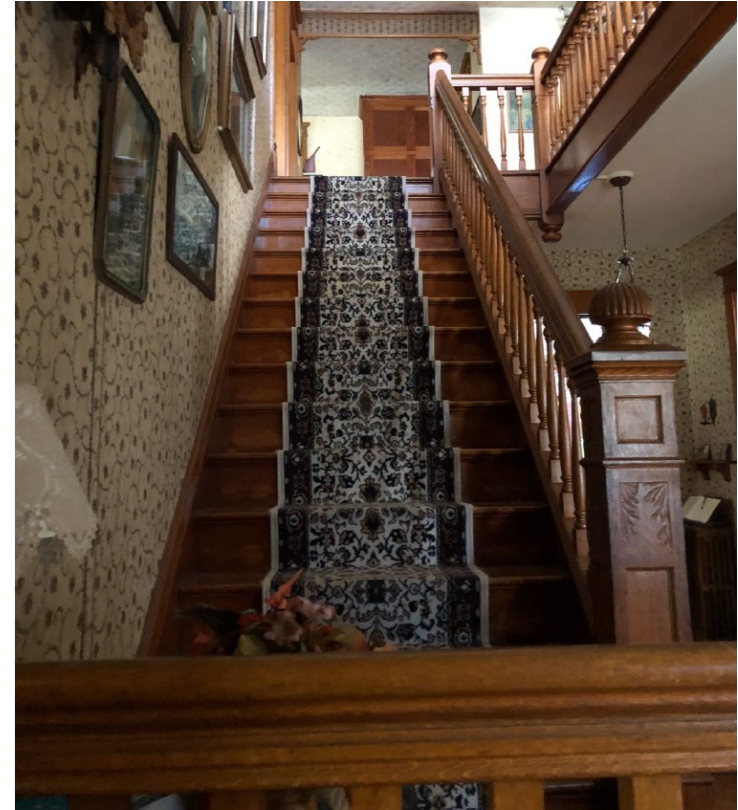


# Nichols Downtown Historic District

- Friends Group Organization
  - Visionary
  - Organizational
  - Cooperative
- Research
- Consultant Funding
  - HRDP Grant Application
  - Cash Match
  - In-Kind Services
- Successful Nomination
  - 9/18/2020



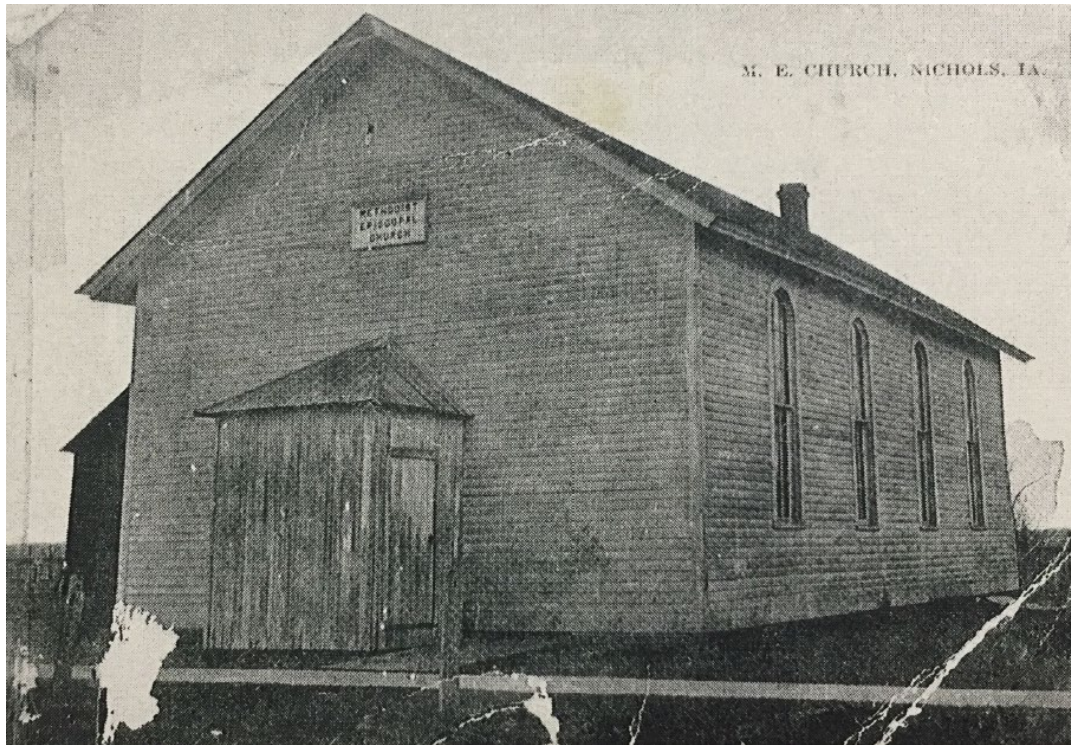
# Field Services Program – Townsend Nichols Home



Queen Anne Spindlework subtype, Built 1895



# Field Services Program – Nichols Methodist Church



Original German Lutheran Church, built 1875; purchased by Methodist Church in 1890; moved and expanded in 1909/1910 and 1956

# Field Services Program – Nichols Christian Church



Christian Church built 1875; remodeled 1934; classroom added 1951

# Nichols Saint Mary's Catholic Church

- Field Services Investigation of Qualification
- Interested owners (part of Friends Group)
- Church built 1904/1920
- Nomination self-funded by Church
- Consultant Research
- Successful Nomination  
9/23/2022



# Historic Nichols Family Home

- Benjamin F. and Susan M. Nichols home
- Founder of City of Nichols
- Preserved Historic Home
- Built 1870/1884/1888
- Field Services Investigation of Qualification
- Interested Owners (part of Friends Group) with Cash Match
- 2022 CLG Grant application and award
- Research assistance
- Successful Nomination 10/25/2023



View southeast in den showing doorways from (right to left) dining room, front hall, and front parlor. The

# Recognition of Schools and Churches

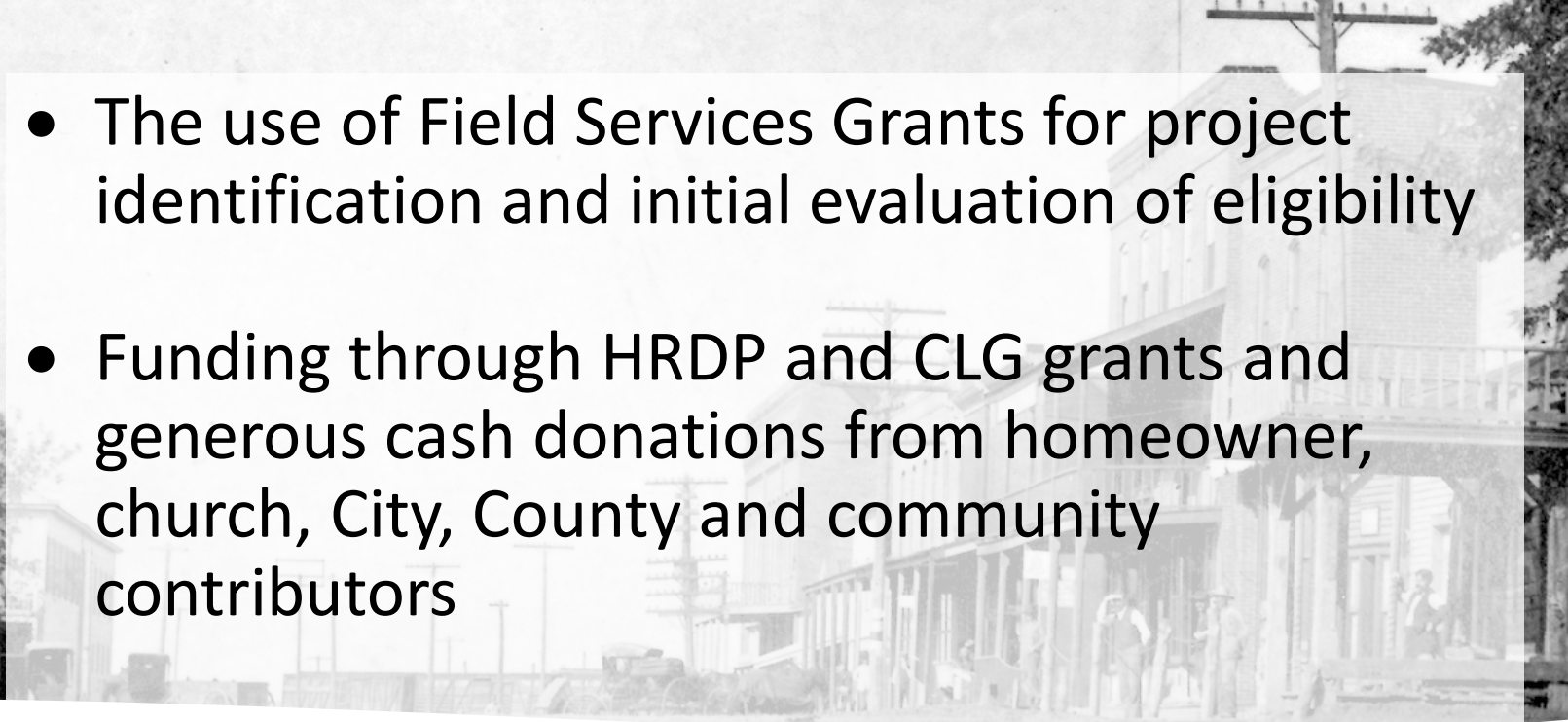
- All country schools and churches (including small towns) surveyed throughout Muscatine County via a 2020 CLG Grant
- Resulting report available to the public in book form (\$25)
- On-line maps and QR codes also available
- CLG Grant cash match provided by County using Section 106 mitigation funds
- Signs with QR codes purchased and installed for 8 historic school and church sites in Nichols





## **Successful Small Town Historic Preservation**

- The use of Field Services Grants for project identification and initial evaluation of eligibility
- Funding through HRDP and CLG grants and generous cash donations from homeowner, church, City, County and community contributors
- Friends Group involvement and contributions to project success
- Consultant and local HPC research including site evaluations and records search
- Successful nominations to National Register of Historic Places





# Field Services Program

- Provides technical assistance to historic property owners, local governments, etc.
- SHSI administers the program, matches property owners with consultants.
- SHSI provides 24 hours of a consultant's time at no cost. Grant recipient cost is minimal: usually just mileage for a site visit.
- Consultant findings are submitted as an Iowa Site Inventory Form to the SHPO and grant recipient, and recommendations for next steps are provided.
- What tips the scale for eligibility? Sometimes it's obvious, sometimes more research is required beyond the Field Services grant.



# Sources of Historical Information

- Governmental records and archives
- Public libraries & historical societies
- Historical newspapers (online)
- Historic Maps (online)
- Online searches (books; collections)
- SHPO Staff
- Family photos and artifacts
- Townhall meetings
- Sometimes you get lucky!



# **Interesting Nichols Research Finds**

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St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church architect and his similar works

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Nichols' brick-maker's house becomes town-founder's house

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The origin of the word "Ijem," in Ijem Avenue Historic Commercial District

# St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, 1904/1920, Criterion C Significance

- This was the third Catholic Church in Nichols, built in 1920 after the second church, built in 1904, was destroyed in a fire.
- The Field Services evaluation of the church failed to uncover any architect attribution, although it was clearly designed by an architect, and was almost identical to the previous church.
- Since this was a rebuilt church, the historical significance of the town's second Catholic church had been lost and without an architect, it would be difficult to argue architectural significance.



# Additional Research Requested and Funded

- The SHPO reviewers requested additional research: 1) to identify the architect; and 2) whether the fire destroyed the church's integrity.
- Funding was secured to pursue additional research.
- Happened across a new addition to the Advantage Preservation newspaper archive: *The [Davenport] Catholic Messenger*.
- Almost immediately found this article about the Nichols Catholic church... and the name of architect in the last line!

It is estimated that the new church will be ready for occupancy about Aug 15, and plans have been made to have the dedication Labor day, Monday, Sept. 6th. The construction is under the direction of Blunk & Jehnke of Davenport and the plans were drawn by George P. Stauduhar of Rock Island.

## IMPROVEMENTS IN CHURCH PROPERTY AT NICHOLS, IA.

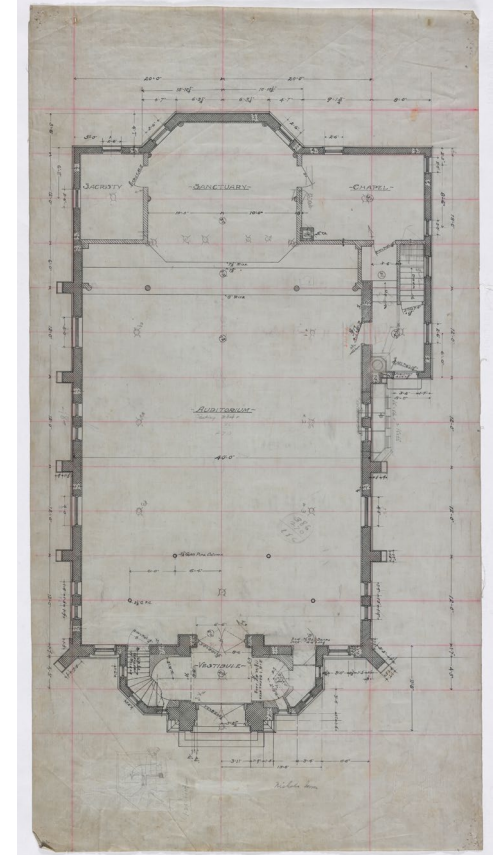
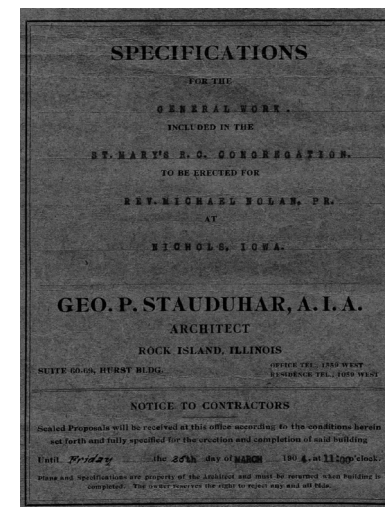
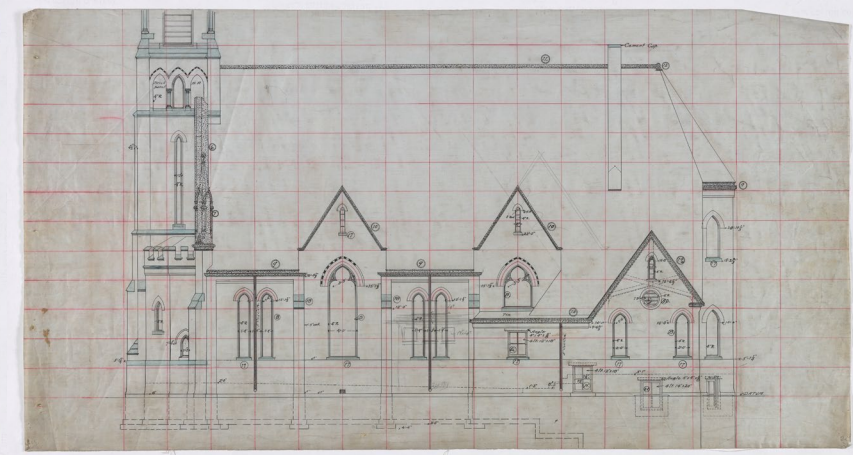
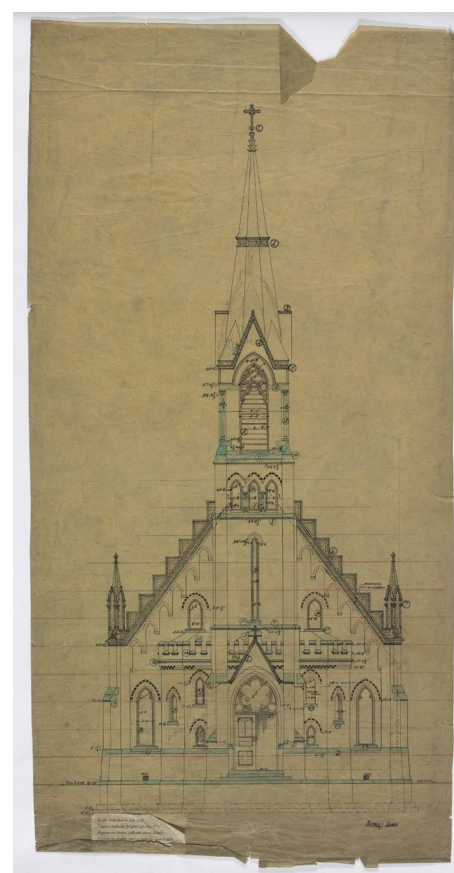
The pastor, Rev. M. W. Kissane, and his people of Nichols are entitled to much credit for the many improvements made on their church property the past few months. The last issue of the West Liberty Index has a story noting the great progress made by the Catholics of that vicinity. The work on the new church is progressing and will be finished in a few weeks. The rectory has been remodeled and greatly improved at a cost of \$3,000.

March 13 the old church was destroyed by fire of unknown origin. As soon as the insurance was adjusted, Father Kissane lost no time in setting about to rebuild. The new church will be superior to the old. It is perfect Gothic in architecture, and will rank among the most artistic of the state, a credit to the people of Nichols and something that can be admired with pleasure and satisfaction. The pride which the people of the community feel in the new building was evidenced last week when Protestant and Catholic vied in the amount of subscriptions, and the result is that enough money was subscribed to pay the entire cost of the building and improvements with a good sum left for future needs.

It is estimated that the new church will be ready for occupancy about Aug 15, and plans have been made to have the dedication Labor day, Monday, Sept. 6th. The construction is under the direction of Blunk & Jehnke of Davenport, and the plans were drawn by George P. Stauduhar of Rock Island.

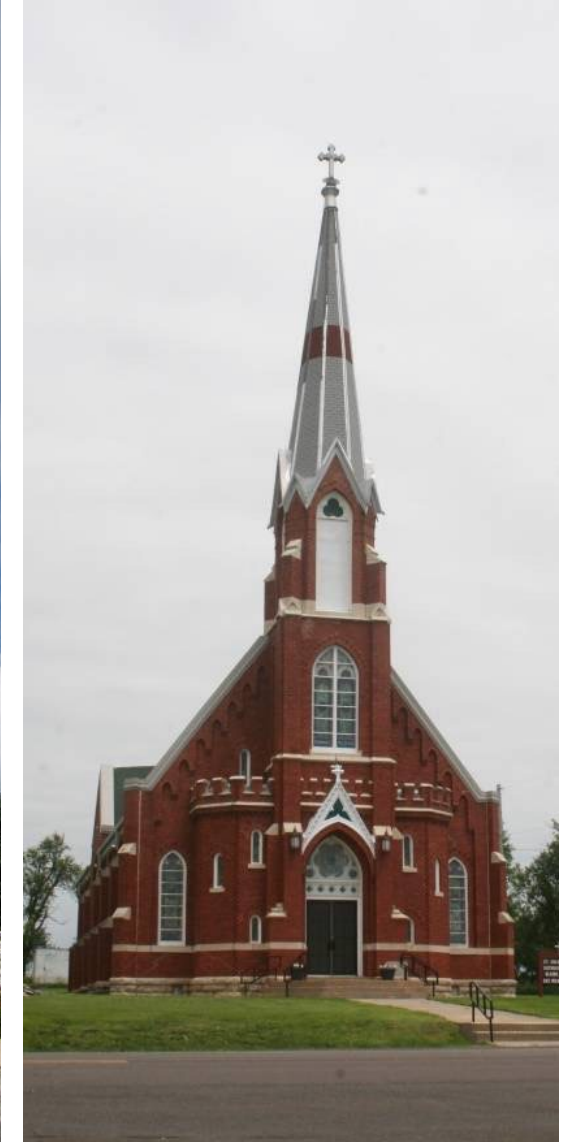
# George P. Stauduhar, Rock Island Church Architect

- With the architect and his place of business identified, an avalanche of research finds began.
- Internet research led to the George P. Stauduhar Papers at the University of Illinois.
- Discovered Stauduhar had also designed the 1904 Nichols Catholic Church and the plans were in the collection.
- Stauduhar was rehired after the fire to essentially rebuild the same church, making use of the remaining walls and brick. He reused his plans and specifications, making changes where necessary.



# A local scholar had been researching the architect

- Paula Mohr at SHPO knew that Barbara Mooney, Professor of Art History at U of Iowa had been researching the architect. She generously shared her research with me.
- That included photographs of other Stauduhar churches nearly identical to Nichols' church – St. Columbkilles in Blaine, KS; and St. Lawrence in Penfield, IL
- With all of SHPO's requests for more information fulfilled, a supplemental site form was prepared, and the SHPO determined the church eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, and the nomination phase began.





**Benjamin F. and Susan M. (Jenkins) Nichols House,  
Criterion B Significance**

# Researching the build date of the Nichols House changed the narrative of the nomination

- The big research find happened at the nomination stage.
- Odd that no newspaper articles reporting the construction of Nichols' house had been found. Everything Nichols – “Uncle Ben” – did was big news, except this.
- Lynn Pruitt went to the county courthouse to find the deed and maybe a hint about a mortgage.
- Instead, he found this 1877 Quit Claim Deed – Weshe to Nichols. The property was situated on Benjamin Nichols' land, but the Q.C. Deed was for this:

***“The two story brick dwelling and all the barns, sheds outhouses etc connected with said dwelling and the grounds upon which said improvements are situated...”***

1877  
Weshe to Nichols  
Quit Claim Deed

I know all you by these presents that Carl Weshe Ellen Weshe his wife of Muscatine County Iowa, in consideration of the sum of Eight hundred (\$800) Dollars the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged by these presents Receive Release & Quit Claim unto Benjamin Nichols his heirs & assigns forever, all our right, title & interest in & to the following described Real Estate to wit: to wit: situated in the county of Muscatine, State of Iowa, to wit: The two story brick dwelling & all the barns, sheds, outhouses & connected with said dwelling & the grounds upon which said improvements are situated, viz: in the south east quarter of the south west 1/4 of Section 20 in 10th Township, 30th Range, 1st Meridian, Iowa.

To have & to hold said premises unto the said Ben Nichols his heirs & assigns forever. And the said Carl Weshe & Ellen Weske hereby release Release & Quit Claim unto the said Ben Nichols his heirs & assigns forever.

In testimony whereof the said parties of the first part Carl Weshe and Ellen Weske have hereunto set their hands & seals this 31<sup>st</sup> day of October 1877.

Carl Weshe  
Ellen Weske

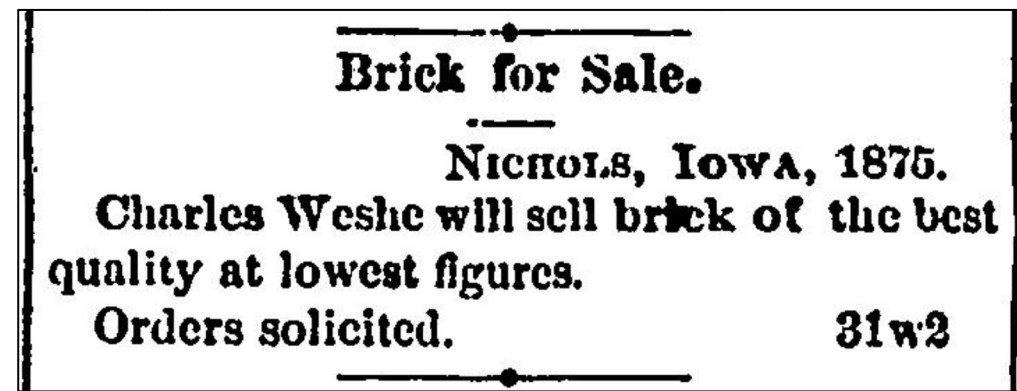
State of Iowa, Muscatine County ss:  
Benit Remembersed that on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of October A.D. 1877 he for the undersigned a Notary Public in & for said county personally appeared Carl Weshe & Ellen Weske to me personally known & to the same persons whose names are affixed to the foregoing Deed as Grantors.

# Researching Carl Weshe

- Born in Germany, Weshe (or Wesche) immigrated to US, and by 1867 he and his wife and family moved to Muscatine, where he worked as a “brick moulder.”
- In 1869, he was living in Pike Township. He may have come with a crew of brick makers and masons, “who traveled from town to town with a kiln.” This was the year Samuel and Nancy Nichols’ House was built.
- In 1870, Weshe was residing and working as a “brickmaker” near the Samuel Nichols home, which that year included Samuel Nichols and the Nichols brothers, Benjamin and Townsend, and Susan Jenkins, Benjamin Nichols’ future wife.



# Town Founder and Brickmaker: A Symbiotic Relationship



- At some point, Weshe made a deal with Nichols that allowed the brickmaker to build a house and establish a farm on Nichols' land in exchange for Weshe providing brick for Nichols' newly platted town.
- Such symbiotic relationships between early town landowners and skilled brickmakers existed during the settlement of Iowa, with town landowners allowing brickmakers to reside and build on their land in exchange for producing building material for town development.
- By 1876, Weshe reported himself as a "farmer" in Military Duty lists, and by 1877, he left Nichols for Kansas, transferring his house and improvements to his "benefactor."



# This Photo Was Suddenly Important

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- It was found hanging in the property owners' house
- Nichols had just bought and moved into Carl Weshe's brick house
- *Left to Right:* Susan M. (Jenkins) Nichols, son Townsend B. Nichols; Benjamin F. Nichols; Margaret (Nichols) Swickard; husband John Swickard.
- We can date the photo to 1878, because Margaret died in 1879, just one year after this photo was taken.

# Now the Nichols House Made Sense

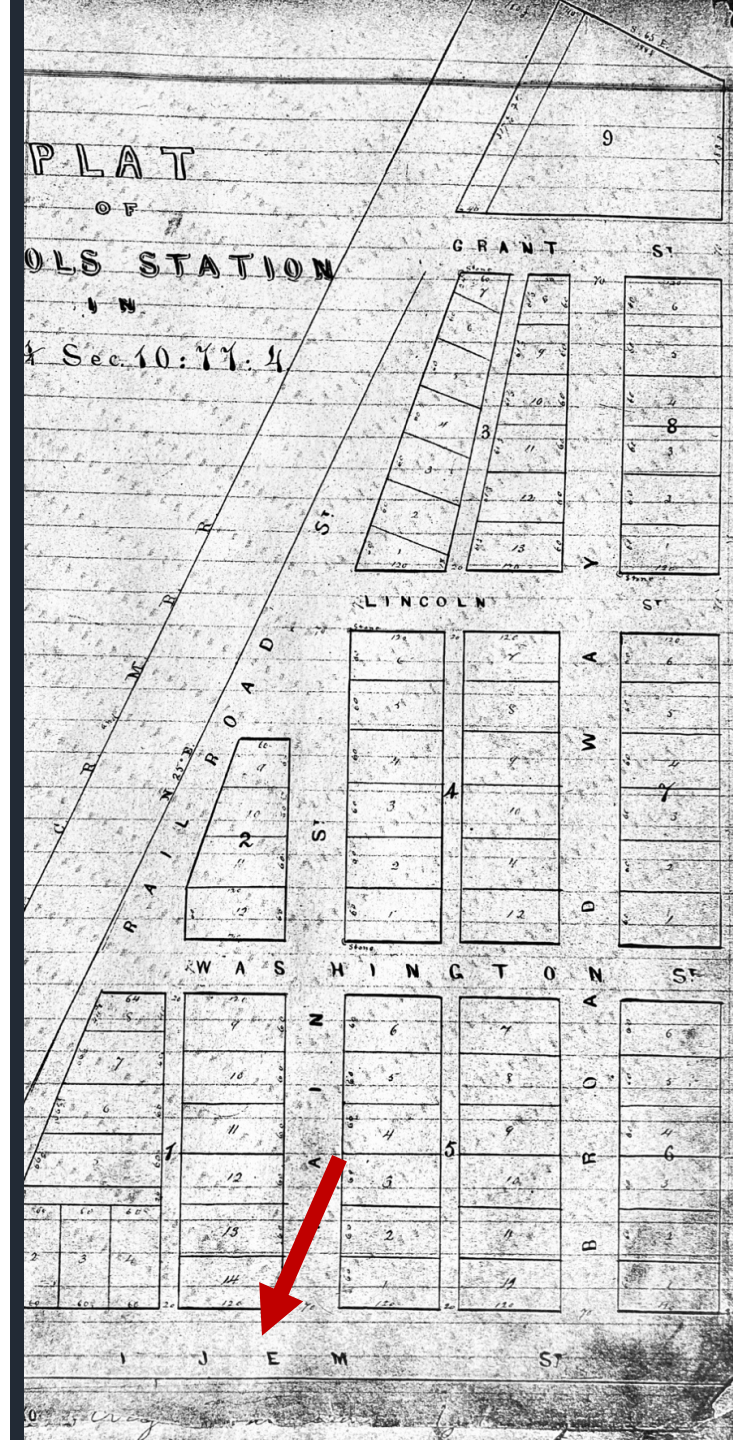
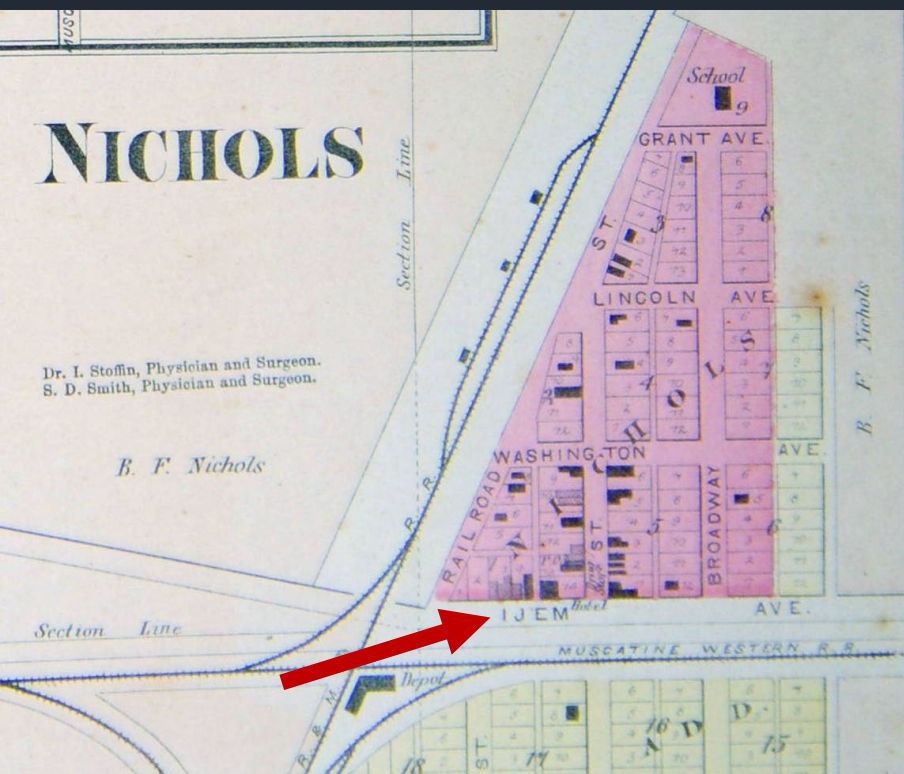
- The Weshe house was the nucleus of the Nichols House
- Only the gable ends of this house are visible, after Nichols added a north and south addition to it in 1884 and 1888.
- The front door and flanking windows of the Weshe house became the entrances to the front hall, dining room, and east parlor of the 1888 addition.



# Origin of "Ijem," in Ijem Avenue Historic Commercial District

- Original Town Plat shows "Ijem St" as the road to and from the BCR&M Railroad Depot

- On the 1874 Nichols Town Plat, it has changed to "Ijem Avenue," as it is today.





# “Ijem” Avenue?

- Did it originate with Benjamin Nichols and his 1871 town plat?
- Was it an anagram for Nichols’ relatives? I-J-E-M?
- Was it scrambled letters from his own name? “Benjamin”
- Lynn Pruitt asked older residents of Nichols. No one knew.
- What if it’s older and just spelled wrong? So, I started entering new search terms with different vowels: IJOM, IJUM, IJAM

# Road named for I. H. Ijams, the original road builder in 1856

- Mr. Ijams solicited subscription and superintended the building of the English River Road across the notorious “Elephant Swamp” through central Pike Township.
- For a while it was called Elephant Swamp Road.
- But the name most often used was the “Ijam Road.”
- 15 years later, “Ijam Road” became “Ijem Street” on Benjamin Nichols town plat in 1871.

**Elephant Swamp Conquered.**  
Through the energetic exertions of I. H. Ijams, Esq., resident of Iowa City, the community will have the beneficial results of the following important improvements, all built up by individual enterprise, to-wit: Our Superintendent has located and got a grant

feel it my duty to tender to the citizens of this city my sincere thanks for their kind and hospitality to me during my business sojourn in their midst, and trust they will be remunerated by a large augmentation of commerce and trade, which must most inevitably be secured to Muscatine, by the completion of this grand work.

Respectfully,  
I. H. IJAMS, Sup't.  
Muscatine, May 21, 1856.

We cordially invite all the stockholders and others to make a visit to the new road across the Elephant and examine for themselves its beauty and utility.

J. G. WALLINGSFORD,  
JAMES M. RIPLEY,  
J. H. IJAMS,  
Suprs. of M. & Eng. River Road.  
Muscatine county, Iowa, Nov. 14th, 1856.



## **Documentation and National Register Listing Benefits**

- Captured history (whether eligible or not)
- Local and regional recognition
- Potential grants and historic tax credits

# Need for a Local Champion

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Member of local HPC or interested citizen

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Passion for history and historic preservation

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Knowledge of locality and members of public

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Time and resources



*Thank you*

*For listening and watching*

*Any questions or comments?*

