

## The Simeon E. Dow House —A National Historic Place\*

---

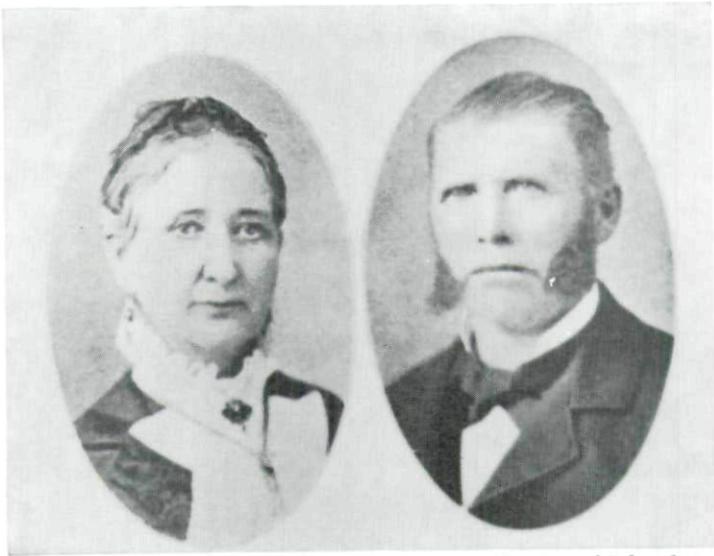
Judith Gildner

THE DOW HOUSE attained recognition largely through association with the family of the builder, Simeon E. Dow. The prominence of the Dows in business, local government, and in the founding and growth of Dow City in Crawford County gives the family's home significance sufficient to warrant its inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to its strong historic significance the house is interesting in its combination of architectural features. It stands out in sharp contrast to the houses of contemporary period in Dow City and nearby Denison, where most are of Gothic Revival pattern.

Simeon Dow was born in New Hampshire in 1821. He migrated east with his parents to Michigan, married Chloe Anne Smith in 1846 and moved to Iowa in 1852. In 1855 the couple settled in Union township, Crawford County, on the present site of Dow City. In that year, by means of land-warrants he had obtained, Dow secured the property upon which he later erected a permanent family home.<sup>1</sup> He proceeded to

<sup>1</sup>Congress passed a veterans' benefits act in March 1855 that provided for the issuance of land-warrants to veterans of any of the conflicts in which the U.S. had engaged to date. Each land-warrant was redeemable in cash, or in public lands. Since many eligible veterans did not wish to go west, land speculators like Dow bought up land warrants at minimum prices in the East, took the warrants to western land offices and exchanged them for specific tracts of land. *Source: Report by Robert A. Murray, Interpretive Consultant to Hoskins-Western-Sonderregger, Inc.*

\*Grateful acknowledgement is made to Larry W. Hughes of Hoskins-Western-Sonderregger, Inc., Lincoln, Nebraska, for providing the author with much of the material used in this article.

**Chloe A. Dow***Courtesy of John Phipps*  
**Simeon E. Dow**

build a successful real estate business: at the close of the Civil War his land holdings amounted to 2,600 acres.

The Dows were among the founders of the first school and Baptist church in the community, which by 1873 was known as Dowville and by 1879 as Dow City. Eventually the family owned several businesses in the developing town including a lumber yard, a grain elevator, a cheese factory, a mill, a hardware and a farm implement business.

On a rolling hill overlooking the Boyer River Valley, Dow built his two-story red brick home. Work on the structure was begun in 1872 and finished in 1874. During the 1870s the general trend in architectural design, though somewhat diverse, tended toward the complex and ornate. The Dow House, however, stands out as an example of quality construction and essential simplicity of plan and design. It reputedly cost \$11,000 in 1874 at a time when the median construction costs of a new house ran in the \$2,000 range. During the period 1874 to 1902 the Dow House served as a focal point of much of the economic, political, social and cultural activity in the community. In 1902 it was sold to George Crandall and through the years passed from owner to owner. Remodeling

projects altered the original structure as inside plumbing was installed, porches were tacked on, a garage added and rooms divided. The Crawford County Conservation Board has purchased the house and, in conjunction with the Crawford County Historical Society, is restoring it as much as possible to its original Nineteenth Century condition.

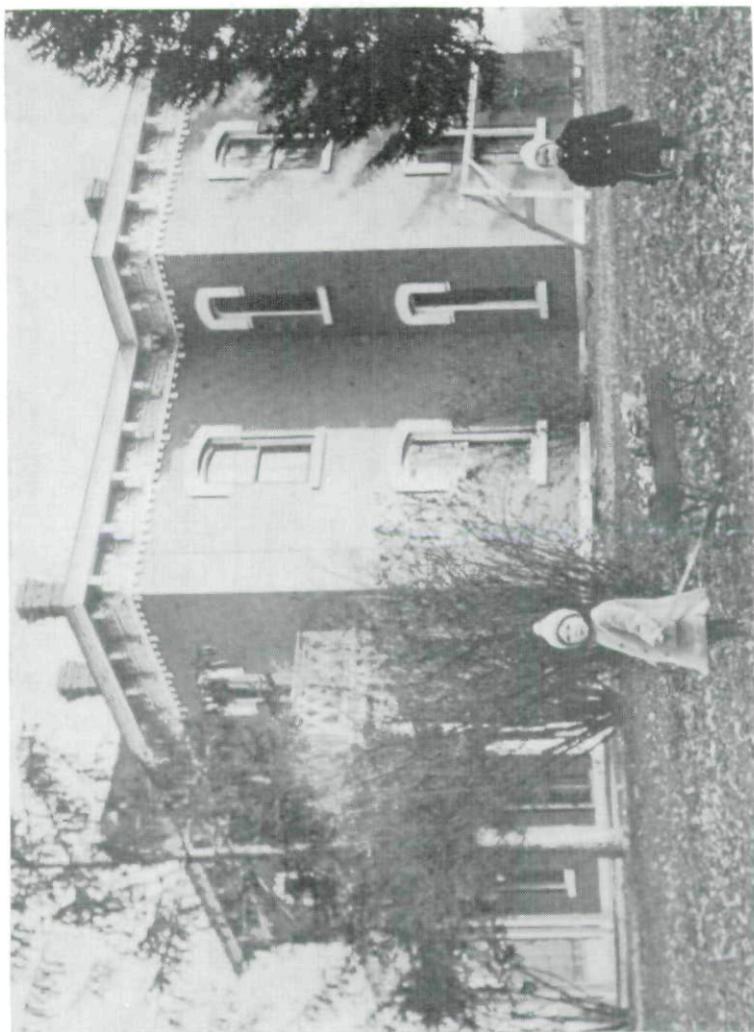
Plans for restoration call for predominately Renaissance Revival style furnishings. According to a report issued by Hoskins-Western-Sonderegger, Inc., the architectural firm serving as consultant to the restoration, certain assumptions about period styles were made in establishing guidelines for the interior decoration of each room. For example, though the basic period setting was the Victorian era, America during that time was undergoing dynamic change. Therefore the house probably contained only a few pieces of a truly Victorian style. Pieces brought west early from the East might have included a piece or two of Empire style, but more probably included pieces of cottage style common in Michigan when the Dows lived there. Rococo styles were simply too expensive for this home, says the architects' report, and "Eastlake" furniture, important in the middle west in the 1880s and 1890s was not yet available. Some Louis XV Revival pieces and Gothic Revival pieces may have been included, but the Renaissance Revival style was definitely dominant. The house will be furnished according to these guidelines wherever possible.

An important piece of furniture in the front hall will be the etagere, a combination whatnot, umbrella stand, and hat-rack with mirror—a Renaissance Revival style piece, probably in black walnut. The hall should be covered with a carpet runner of floral pattern in grain carpeting, and the room finished with a hanging kerosene lamp.

The library-office functioned as a place to receive business callers, as a retreat for the gentlemen to talk business and politics after dinner, and as a private retreat for Dow. Furnishings would include a heavy, black walnut cylinder font type desk of Renaissance Revival or earlier period with a matching swivel chair; a large, rectangular "library table"; a heavy, tall bookcase and a bookcase-secretary; a large, single-end lounge of black walnut wood and black leather covering; a

**The Simeon  
E. Dow House**

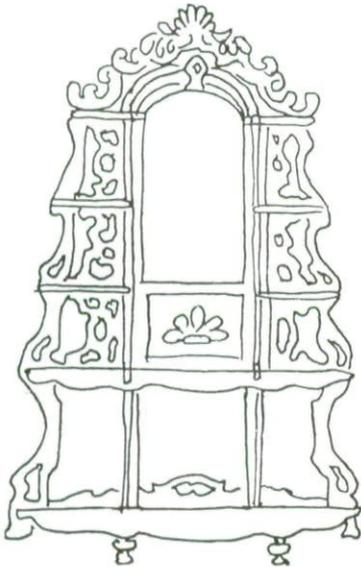
*Courtesy of Hoskins-  
Western-Sonderegger, Inc.*



small, plain walnut lamp table and lamp; an armchair of fairly comfortable design and matching ottoman; and several side chairs.

The parlor was probably a classic Victorian parlor. The dominant furniture probably included a good "parlor set," consisting of a sofa, arm chair with footstool, lady's chair, and parlor side chairs. This set would be in late Renaissance Revival with wood elements of black walnut or mahogany, and the upholstery of needlepoint or plush. At the center of the room there should be a good walnut parlor center table with white marble top, with matching lamp tables beneath each window. A large standing whatnot set of shelves in a corner, and a large, gilt-framed mirror over the mantel would complete the major furnishings.

The dining room was also used as a family room. The principal item of furniture would be a large, round-topped extension table, in Renaissance Revival pattern in black walnut, accompanied by at least eight bar-back side chairs, cane seated or padded and upholstered. A sizeable break-front or other sideboard should match the table, says the report, and other furnishings would include a "second-best" armchair



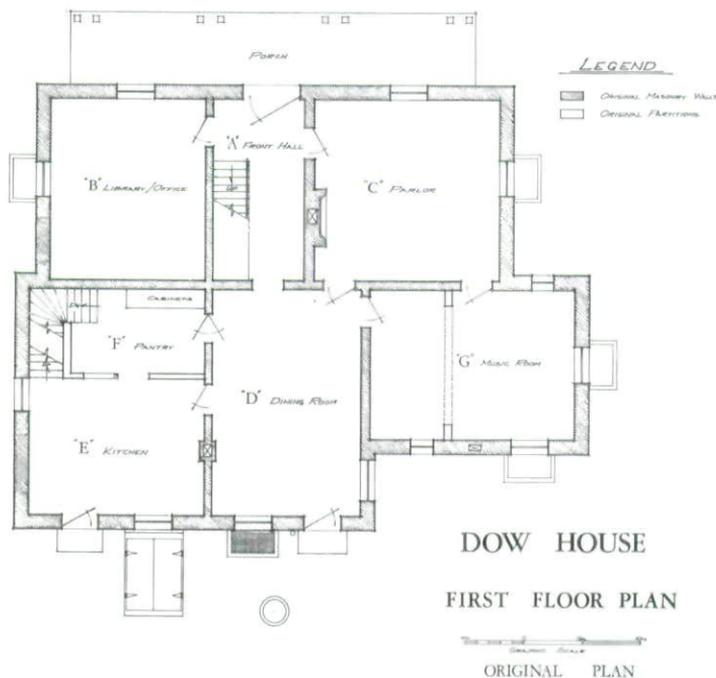
Sketches of furniture pieces to be found in the house are an etagere, left, and a sideboard, right, below.

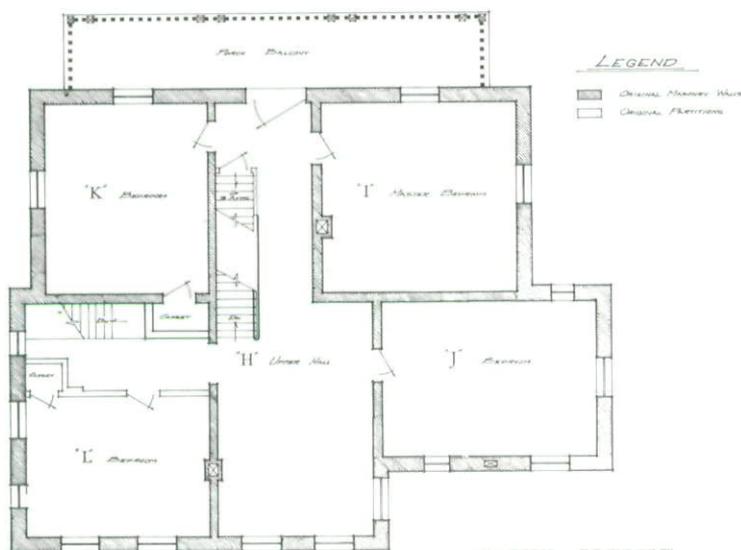


with ottoman, a rocker, and lamp table.

The music room served as a center for formal and informal entertainment. The major furniture pieces in this room were the status musical instruments of the day, a square piano of quality, with a mahogany or walnut case, and a harp in the stage area under the proscenium arch. Furniture here should be of a parlor quality and would include a love-seat, arm-chairs, and several parlor side chairs of good Louis XV or Renaissance Revival styles, although slightly less stiff and formal than the parlor furniture.

There are five rooms on the second floor of the Dow House, including the large upper hall and four bedrooms. The hall was light and well-ventilated enough to be a comfortable room for entertaining year-round and also served as a sewing and writing area for Mrs. Dow. Furniture would include a good, but older parlor set, such as Louis XV Revival; a good but ornate secretary-bookcase; a well-made but older table





## DOW HOUSE

## SECOND FLOOR PLAN



ORIGINAL PLAN

with spool-turned legs; the walnut-cased sewing machine; two rocking chairs; and whatnot shelves.

Bedrooms in this period also functioned as baths and dressing rooms, with appropriate furniture encompassing all these functions. The four bedrooms thus are much the same, but with different pieces corresponding to the different occupants.

The Dow House is undergoing restoration that will include extensive landscaping and the installation of several picnic areas. The carriage house now on the estate will be remodeled into an apartment for the caretaker of the grounds. The official recognition ceremony for the Dow House National Historic Place was held October 15, 1972. As an interpretive exhibit it reveals a great deal about the life of a prominent upper-middle-class citizen and his family during Iowa's formative years.

## Sources

- Chaplin, Lon F. *Early Days in Iowa*. Southwest Publishing Company. Pasadena, California, 1898.
- Crawford County History*. Compiled by the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration, 1941.
- Denison, J. W., "Letters of J. W. Denison," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, January, 1933. State Historical Society of Iowa.
- Ecklund, Grace, "Dow House Plans Call For 100-year-old Furnishings," *Denison Bulletin*. January 5, 7, 11, 1971.
- Historic Dow House, A Plan for the Restoration, Furnishing and Site Development*, prepared by Harold Hoskins and Associates, Lincoln, Nebraska. 1970.
- Lokken, Roscoe L. *Iowa Public Land Disposal*. State Historical Society of Iowa. 1942.
- Mack, Barbara, "Countywide Effort to Restore Dow City Founder's Home," *Des Moines Sunday Register*. October 1, 1972.
- Meyers, F. W. *History of Crawford County, Iowa*. S. J. Clarke and Company. 1911.
- Murray, Robert A., "Report on the Dow House Project," n.p. ms.
- Newcomb, Rexford. *Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory*. University of Chicago Press. 1950.



## Book And Film News

---

George S. Mills, longtime political and legislative reporter for the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, has given us a fascinating history of Iowa in *Rogues and Heroes from Iowa's Amazing Past* (Iowa State University Press, 1972). The book is a collection of stories about Iowa and its people. It reveals Mills' insight into the impact of personalities on events. He covers such topics and events as the displacement of the Indians, the great wars, the effects of technological advancement on Iowa's communities, the struggles by ethnic groups to attain their rights, the rise of women's rights movements, the growing pains of railroads and highways, and the growth and perils of early education. In a city-by-city approach Mills relates a series of vignettes that, taken together, comprise an informative narrative of Iowa history. *Rogues and*

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.