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Home Is Where the History Is

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Home is where the history is

A HOUSE is a reflection of its designer and builder, of its occupants, and, more generally, of the culture, time, and place in which it was built. In the 1920s a young entrepreneur named Howard Moffitt began building small rental houses in the university community of Iowa City. His houses are neither large nor ostentatious, yet they tell an important story — how a local builder adapted national trends in American housing. It’s an entertaining story as well, for Howard Moffitt was no ordinary builder. Architecturally, the houses may be broadly categorized as “Period houses.” Locally, they are known as “Moffitt houses.” Their enduring appeal — explained by two current owners on pages 159 and 160 — attests to the effect a structure can have on people and on a community.

Historical study and preservation efforts have often focused on nineteenth-century buildings, including elegant Victorians. But more modest structures, as well as those built in this century, also tell us much about our past. Indeed, the Moffitt houses, built just over fifty years ago, are now eligible for the National Register of Historic Places because of their architectural significance on a local level. In fact, a cluster of five Moffitt stone cottages is currently in the process of being nominated to the National Register.

By looking at Moffitt houses from three viewpoints — the builder, the historical context, and the occupants — this Palimpsest encourages readers to look at their own communities and countryside for similar examples of how Iowa’s built environment reflects the past.

— The Editor