The many histories of the Hatton House

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The many histories of the Hatton House

by

Danelle Theresa Stamps

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies

Program of Study Committee:
Neal Bowers, Major Professor
Hamilton Cravens
Arvid Osterberg

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2006

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This is to certify that the master’s thesis of

Danelle Theresa Stamps

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
Dedication

To my loving and patient husband and fellow adventurer whom without.....well.....who else would I gleefully throw snowballs at when the blizzard drifts inside?

And to Lily, for whom the dream was built.

Thank you both.
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CHAPTER 1: IN THE BEGINNING

Chad and I, newly wed, had outgrown our two bedroom home and postage stamp garden we had purchased early in our relationship. I was feeling claustrophobic and the house was almost finished with renovations, leaving me with not much to do. Chad wanted a bigger yard, one with trees, and I wanted a bigger house, with a tower and a library. I had house lust for a dwelling I had not yet known, except for episodes of "If Walls Could Talk" or pages of "Victorian America" and the novels from my childhood that boasted of green gables or wuthered heights.

House lust is a dangerous thing. When left unsatisfied it festers and boils in the imagination. House lust is best defined as a longing for a structure, much like you long for a date with a movie star. The problem with house lust is sometimes there are dangerous financial deals you can make that will land you with your object of affection and that no matter how dilapidated or structurally unsound the monster is, you gaze lovingly with star struck eyes and whisper lustfully, "It's all cosmetic," or "The neighborhood's on the upswing...."

So I started trolling. I wanted to move to Savannah, Georgia or New Orleans, somewhere warm, somewhere where the humid air drips with history and agony; a place where I could either be a writer or be a character someone would write about and where much of the property is incredibly cheap when viewed online. Des Moines, Iowa just wasn't the place that I wanted to settle down in but it's where we were. One night, as I was drooling over a particularly affordable row house in a bad neighborhood in Savannah, Chad suggested that I enter my criteria and do a search
in Des Moines. Begrudgingly and reluctantly, I humored him. Ok, I snottily humored him. I entered 4 bedrooms, 3000+ square feet, two, yes two, fireplaces, hardwood floors, formal dining room, library, two or more stories, and more than seventy five years old. “It has to have a tower,” I said dramatically.

There were two hits.

The first house had a virtual tour of the formal rooms and the grand foyer. It was completely restored, move in condition, and amazing AND in Des Moines. We were more than a little surprised.

The house at 1601 Arlington was a fully restored, right down to the original paint colors, Gothic Victorian, with a tower and atop a hill. The interior dripped with sunlight and architectural detail. The light fixtures were ornate cherubs, that twisted with crystals and brass, and the draperies swished with an elegance and luxury you just can’t get in suburban townhomes, real damask brocade, and there were even hand painted flowers on the wall. The Arlington house had been built for a notable sculptress, Alice Hubbard. It had a grand foyer oak staircase, two parlors, and room after room of hardwood floors polished to a high shine. Everything was heavy and rich.

We met with the real estate agent that sold us our first house, Patty Daniels, the following Tuesday. The house was more amazing than the photos showed online. We spent about two hours ogling over the parquet floors and the huge spaces.

The price tag was too high for us most certainly, but the love wasn't there.
Though we could have made the dollars work somehow, I couldn't imagine myself there.

As the Realtor drove us home, she meandered down another nearby street. She slowed as she drove past a twin of the house we had just toured. Except that it was a dilapidated, dark windowed, monster of a house with a crooked "for sale" sign planted in the barren yard. It was reminiscent of entering a ghost town, the light seemed harsher, the wind more bitter, and gunshots echoing in the too near distance. Actually, to be fair, it was probably a faulty muffler we heard, but the set up of our first encounter with the Hatton House was too eerie to ignore. It was hit number two from the real estate website.

We wouldn't even consider stopping. It was our last act of sanity.

That night I dreamt about the second house. That night, in my dream, it towered above the other houses and glowed eerily from within. The glow was a warm ember, a feeling of home. In my dream, I sat at a large dining room table and two children sat drawing pictures and telling me all about their house and how they wanted to go home. The crayon drawings were of the house in bright waxy colors.

I woke up startled. The next morning I got up early and attempted to drive over to the dreary old house on Seventh Street. I couldn't remember the street or
where to turn and so, frustrated, returned home. After lunch I made an excuse to go to Tar-"ghetto" and our house mate, Ryan, offered to go with me. I found the right turn and managed to make this particular drive to Target "scenic". "And oh, by the way what do you think of that house?" I asked as I slowed the car and pointed.

Not waiting for his answer, I got out of the car and just stared up. And up. Although the house did not perch atop a hill, the tower was intimidating and eclipsed the noon sun from where I stood. Like a halo, sunlight hazed the blue sky around the narrow peak of the crested roof line. The sunlight speared in the curtainless windows and reflected outward through the many stain-glassed windows. The effect was stunning and cathedral-like.

It was at this moment that I could see myself coming home to this house.
CHAPTER 2: THE LIST

I had to talk Chad into seeing the house, actually going inside, and it went like this:

Me: Come on. Just look at it. It'll be fun. It's not like we're obligated to buy it just because we ask to look at it AND I drove by yesterday and looked in the windows, it looks finished on the inside. Come on, just come take a look.

Chad: No. Not interested.

Me: Please, please, please, just take a look.

Chad: (hesitantly) Ok.

That bit of history we agree on, mostly.

And so it began.

Patty met us at the location this time. Somehow we got lost on the way there, but still managed to be on time. This day the air was warm and sweet. The birds were chirping and the sunlight was tempered by a haze from that morning's rain. It was the kind of day that you call in sick for because it's so nice that you have to delight in it unencumbered by work or school.

I stood in front of the house once again in awe. Chad twisted his lip at me in obvious exasperation. He often accuses me often of thinking with my fancy and not my brain. He's a data man.

We stomped through the house quickly. Up the stairs, down the stairs, up more stairs, and up another set, and then down again. Chad was not impressed by the cracked and peeling plaster and the dusty subflooring. We paused briefly, only
twice: once in one of the bedrooms to admire mockingly a huge mounted swordfish and once at the back of the servants hall because we had come down from the third floor (Chad got disoriented and thought we were on the first floor instead of the second.)

We met the agents in the dining room where I gingerly thumbed through the historical information laid out on a card table. The house was individually listed on the national Register of Historic Places because of the unique architecture of the tower bay and its association with the Hatton Family, specifically Raymond Hatton, a Hollywood film actor that had appeared in over 300 movies (between 1909 and 1969) and numerous television appearances in the 1950's (IMDB 2006). His last movie appearance, before he died in 1971, was the dramatization of Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" (1967) as the old hitchhiker in the beginning of the film. This caught my eye because I am a huge Truman Capote fan and I had coincidentally just seen this movie. Cupid's arrow sunk a little deeper and I was officially enamored wit the idea of owning this historic house.

Chad made small talk with Marc the Listing Agent.

Allow me to interject here that I know Marc from my old neighborhood. As a teenager, I was helping a neighbor with the annual Halloween Potluck and Marc and his entourage showed up in full drag regalia and various stages of intoxication. They asked me where the powder room was and asked if we had any spare socks to
assist "Shirley" with her lopsided bosom, as said cleavage had become dislodged on the march over. The group of "ladies" stumbled giggling up the stairs and commented on the homeowner's sense of color when decorating. While not flattering to my friend, their criticism of the wall decor was hilariously accurate. I admired these men for their laughter and their courage, but this scene was playing in my memory as my punk rock husband chatted with Marc the Realtor, currently clad in a fine and very straight suit and driving a shiny black and chrome Mercedes.

Marc made a point of saying, "An architect friend of mine is about to put an offer in. His mother is driving up from Kansas City on Saturday to see the place."

Ah. An old trick salesmen play on thinner victims, I mean, customers. I recognized it right away. "Hmnggh," I said. I don't liked being played.

"It's a great project for somebody, just not us," Chad told them honestly, "It's way beyond what we can do."

We left after spending only twenty minutes in the house.

Memory is a strange thing. I remember the conversation on the drive home like this:

Five minutes of silence.

Me: No way. Compared to this monster, our finished, cozy little Victorian cottage looks like paradise.

Chad: But it is the house we always dreamed about. How often do houses like this show up on the market in our price range? It has a tower for God's sake!

Me: I just don't know. It's a lot of work.
Chad: Nothing you don't know how to do or can't learn to do.
Me: Great, more space for me to clean AND for me to work on.
Chad: You? Clean? Ha ha. Come on, it's big enough for us to get a dog.
Me: Uhm.
Chad: It's big enough for us to start a family.....
Me in me head: Finally! Yay! That's the deal breaker!
Me: Ok, let's go back tomorrow and make a list. Then we can evaluate how much needs to be done and how much we can do and then how much we can afford to pay for.
Chad: Ok, that's reasonable.

But.......

Chad remembers it like this:
Me: Please please please! It's an amazing house and you'd have a garden and a library and a huge kitchen. There's room for apple trees and a pond and all your books. And there's a ballroom! And it's called the Hatton House.....I'd be the Mistress of Hatton House. Just imagine! The work....it's all cosmetic and I can do it all easily myself.

Chad: Let's get more data and then talk about it. And the fish has to go.

Ah yes, the fish. The fish was a six foot long, mounted to the wall, bright blue and green swordfish. It looked like the Victorian, marine equivalent of a pink plastic yard flamingo. It was mounted to the north bedroom wall over a bed (that we later
discovered to be blocking the view of a large gaping hole that we subsequently blocked from view with a dresser).

It's funny how memory can be so flawed.

I worked on the list of things we needed to collect data on before making an actual decision. Looking back I can truly say that the list was misleading and offered a false sense of security; it served merely the purpose of making the two of us more confident and naively assured with our own capabilities to make such a huge mistake.... I mean.... commitment.

What happened next is also a matter of family controversy.

“But there are bars on the neighbor's windows,” I said as I slumped down in the passenger seat of our conspicuous and covered in punk band stickers little sedan. “Don't make eye contact!”

“Grow up,” my Chad chided. I slid back up and slouched back. “Ugh,” he sighed. I was having cold feet, which backs up my tentative version of events.

We pulled up in front of the house. There was a crowd of people waiting in the yard. That was a little intimidating. Both the listing agent and our agent were there, the seller's mother Betty, and someone else that I cannot remember. So not really a crowd, but more than just Patty. I readied my pencil and notebook with the list of one hundred items that we needed to evaluate the night before, so all that was left was to tour the house again and check off the items.

Betty introduced herself and right away I liked her. She was kind and stern all in the same breath, like a pioneer woman in “Little House on the Prairie.” She
answered every question we had as she tailed us around the exterior of the house. She was very obviously sizing us up and as it happened she was the current owner of 1601 Arlington, the house that had led us to this one. The amazing one on the hill. This one, the Hatton House, belonged to her eldest daughter. They were consolidating households and both houses had to be sold in the process.

Roof was new, wooden shingle, cedar: check. The windows had no storms: check. Front door, new custom made with real hand rolled stained glass: check. My curiosity was piqued. The woman who owned the house had taken enough care to attend to the detail of the right kind of glass put in custom wood double entry doors and an authentic wood shingle roof, but the body of the house was peeling paint like a bad sunburn. Betty peeked over my shoulder as I scribbled the question down for my own notes.

"She got a grant to do the roof and windows according the Standards, the money didn't cover the paint...." Betty added in low tones, "Teri's good for nothing husband left her in the middle of the project. Some nights Teri'd be trying to saw a board with no one supporting the end."

I turned my attention back to the list and we headed inside.

"This house is way more dilapidated house than we need," Chad said as the floors creaked and plaster crackled as we gingerly crept our way past the grand staircase. Marc the Realtor had almost broken the key in the door and no one mentioned the obvious mammalian scuttles that greeted the sunlight when the door finally opened.
We stomped through, quickly marking items off and on our list. I have to admit, I was sold on the house when I had stood in the eclipse of the tower that afternoon. There was something about the place that called out to me, that wrapped around me and whispered tenderly, “Welcome, you’re home.” It was this fantasy that clouded my judgment, it was this awakened lust that started burning in my chest and I couldn’t sleep at night. I needed to come home, this house needed me.

The list looked like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Cost (to be filled in later)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roof</td>
<td>New wood roof: 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td>done in 1990's</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>done in 1990's</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows</td>
<td>good, stained glass restored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm Windows</td>
<td>none</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floors</td>
<td>finishable, originally had carpet?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walls</td>
<td>minor plaster repair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td>antique sink stays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appliances: none</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cabinets: none</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood trim</td>
<td>beautiful!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staircases</td>
<td>Oh my God!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>7 on property, Chad says 5 are in bad condition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard</td>
<td>Soil needs to be tested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Basement: dry

Furnace: Steam boiler

Water Heater: new-ish

Foundation: needs minor work

Light fixtures: needs

Utility bills: 200$ a month budget billing, really?

Taxes: abated for 10 years

Neighbors: nice according to Betty, but she made a funny face, what does that mean?

Neighborhood Association: Again the funny face.

Historic designation: National Register, individually listed for historical significance and architecture because of the tower!

Gutters: built in, finish first? ???

Rodents: some mice seen in basement.

Insulation: blown in 1990's

Doors: pocket doors there, other's missing.

Laundry: 2nd floor, but washer dryer not staying

Fireplaces: 2, only one mantel

Exterior Painted: I can do.

Chimneys: Teri did herself: 1998, brick and lovely

Tile: none, but I want!

Sidewalks: new on city, we'll need brick for walk
Fence: yucky and only 8 ft.

Property borders: have surveyed

As we drove away from the second walk through, which took over two hours, we sat in silence again. Chad said it first, “I think we should offer what she’s asking.”

And so we did. We put a contingency that we sell our house first, that all the extra/ spare fixtures stored in the basement stay and that the fish on the wall must go. It all seemed pretty easy. Teri accepted our offer.

“House house house,” waw waugh waw waugh...like the Peanuts teacher. I couldn’t get the house out of my mind and everyone I encountered got a glazed look when I enthusiastically brought up the loving details of the balustrade, the graceful roundness of the plinth blocks, the vaulted ceiling in the ballroom...... the ballroom!

Weeks went by. She showed our cute little house almost everyday. We had a few almost bites. It was so easy. The hardest thing was keeping our discarded dirty socks picked up.

Then we got a phone call. “Another offer has been made. You have 48 hours to withdraw your contingency,” Patty informed us. Another young couple. Teri was out of town and that bought us some time, but not much.

What were we supposed to do? I was frantic. I didn’t want to lose my house, the Hatton House. This is a warning to those in similar panic: do not let your house lust cloud your judgment. Remember the definition of house lust? Chad and I made the dumbest decision fueled by our desire to come home to this Victorian fantasy: we financed something called a “bridge loan” and found a kind relative to co-sign
our loan. This enabled us to buy the house without selling our first house. We still had to pay both mortgages. We could do it for a little while, after all it won’t take more than a couple more weeks to sell.... right?

And so it was done. We finagled it just in time to eliminate the threat of the other couple's offer. The Hatton house would be mine!
CHAPTER 3: MOVING DAY

The day we closed on the house there was an air of excitement. Until we signed our names to the papers, the house was not ours and yet, and yet we had taken up the task of loading a semi sized U-Haul with the entire contents of our former home and drove it to the bank for the signing. 110%, nothing short of the effort would do, after all, I had started packing the boxes the day I had first seen the Hatton House.

I got up at crack of dawn and got beef jerky and coffee from QuikTrip as a ritual offering of the symbolic road trip we were about to take. It felt strangely and comfortably like the trips we would take when we were dating, like we were off to see an obscure band play in a wheat field in Illinois or see friends in Kansas City. The excitement of adventure buzzed in my ears. I insisted on riding in the moving van, shotgun to Chad and the ride to the bank, the entire ten miles, was golden for me and completely obnoxious to my poor, sweet husband. Just imagine those old cartoons with the steady and stern bulldog patiently tolerating the yippy annoying Jack Russel bouncing back and forth over him asking excited happy questions, “Hey, are we there yet? Hey, turn there! Hey, are you excited too? Hey, I love you! Hey, what color do you think we should paint the......” Ashamedly I admit, I was that annoying little dog.

The truth of the matter was that we were taking a huge risk, both financially and with our marriage and we both knew it. We had been married a little less than nineteen months, although that’s misleading since we had dated for three years and
known each other in high school. In the bigger picture, we had been together longer
than many actual marriages last, but not so long as to impress anyone and Chad's
grandmother is still bent out of shape that we lived together before getting married,
money problems solved by doing so or not. But still, it was a roll of the dice to move
from a lovely, warm 1200 squarefoot cottage that we were lucky to buy at such a
young age, and burden ourselves with the responsibility and utility bills of a 4,000+
square foot Victorian mansion with both obvious and hidden deprivations.

But it was also necessary for us to move from the house that we were
married in. I hesitate to include why, but the architecture of the little cottage was
claustrophobic and created nocturnal echoes that were just plain scary (translate:
the house was uber haunted and I am still not willing to admit it out loud.....) It was
also located two blocks from my totally insane and controlling, not to mention
meddlesome, mother and that particularly fragile relationship was disintegrating in a
way that was infecting our marriage. We had to flee, financial burden or not, my
sanity and survival depended on the distance we could put between nut job mom
and us and we were not able to move to Mars for the preferred distance. Come on,
learning to speak Martian is really hard, not to mention the atmosphere and moving
costs!

So we arrived at the bank a half hour early and nervously waited in the
parking lot.

The signing was delayed only by the fact that we had to open a checking
account with that branch to get the extra discount on the closing. Chad says that I
squealed several times and was acting like a giddy school girl. Whatever....ok, possible....

We signed the papers. Then Marc the Realtor handed Patty our Realtor the key. Ok, then I did squeal and quite a bit like a giddy school girl.

Of the nine times the Realtors had opened the house for us I had never noticed that the front door key was actually a skeleton key. When it was presented, the vision of myself as the Mistress of Hatton House was sealed.
CHAPTER 4: ZIPPY, THE BLIGHT SQUIRREL

The first night we moved in dozens of our new neighbors walked or drove over to greet us and welcome us to the neighborhood. I had that warm fuzzy feeling of finally being home. One family brought us a homemade apple pie. The irony that the pie had gone sour by morning was not lost on me. The second day the neighbors interrupted our moving furniture with pleas for us to join the association. When we said that we intended to, their tone changed completely. It became one of childish cliquishness and political maneuvering. There were sides to be taken. It was disgusting.

The funny thing was that by day three we realized that none of the neighbors that had come to greet us were part of the diverse population that the neighborhood boasted. I learned quickly that I had met almost the entire Neighborhood Association in two days.

We attended the neighborhood meetings, but soon discovered that they are held and populated by a handful of the neighborhood’s 11% of white property owners, many of whom complain about the neighborhood being labeled a ghetto and how it affects their property values and tax benefits, some of whom do not live in our neighborhood and some own property that they rent subsidized. There are 1100 households in River Bend, 89% of which are “ethnic” but these neighborhood association meetings are attended by 40 adult members (20 households) (RBA 2004) and all but a handful own their own homes and are white (USBC 2000). Just like my husband and I.
That was my introduction to the lie that was marketed in the area brochures and to the chaos that we actually live in the midst of.

My other neighbors were immediately suspicious of me and aggressive towards Chad. They were afraid that I would call the police on their uncle who is in a gang. “This is true,” I said, “but only when I saw him engaging in criminal activity.” I grew up in an urban area that was thick with gangs and I know that for survival and family safety sometimes you have to affiliate with a group. How could my neighbors know this about me? I wear my scars inside out.

I made a huge effort to get to know the people around me. I made up welcome baskets for the other new families moving in, I stopped and introduced myself whenever I met someone out gardening, and I was friendly with anyone who stopped to talk with me. This is what I learned: They are afraid that I will buy their house or fix mine up “too good” and make their taxes go too high. I can barely afford my own house but it is true that taxes are going up 8.7% every year all over the City regardless of property improvements (Dobbs 2005). They are afraid that an army of educated white women will buy out their homes and families and they will be displaced again. Gentrification. It’s a big word, but that’s what it means. Once I tried to explain, teasing, that it’s really re-gentrification since the neighborhood was originally an affluent suburb, the first in Des Moines, filled with towering mansions. That did nothing to ease their fears and I felt bad for sharing that bit of history, seeing the looks on their faces.

Displaced again. Many of my neighbors are refugees from Laos and Bosnia,
but the displacement comment came from an African American woman whose family had been in Iowa over a hundred years. I pushed her on this issue. She muttered something about Center Street and Oakridge and changed the subject. Her tone and attitude toward me also changed. No longer friendly and almost bitter.

I didn’t think twice about her comment at that time. I was still new to the neighborhood and relatively new to Iowa. Once I realized that I was lied to about the diversity of the area and because of my intense love for history of any kind, I hit the library.

The library had a smattering of cut out articles in the hard to access vertical files, but what I learned was that the River Bend area is an urban area that was also known in the 1960’s as three separate neighborhoods (Forest Hills, Walnut Hills, and North Park), was designated a blighted area in the late 1960’s. The city of Des Moines received federal funding as early as the 1960’s to address poverty, infrastructure deterioration, and other problems (Coffman 1967).

In Des Moines, Iowa many housing changes occurred over the years for many reasons, including fire, housing shortage, and “urban renewal”. The housing shortage during and after the Great American Depression led to many of the larger homes being divided into apartments (Page, 1998). The housing boom of post WWII created new suburbs for middle class residents to flee to and the segregated housing issues of the 1950’s and 1960’s also contributed to “white flight”. Middle and upper class minorities did not have the mobility or housing choices to reside in the new areas and thus the minority population expanded inside City limits. (Spiegel
"Urban Renewal" defines an era that came next and has not yet ended. That was nothing surprising. That is what happened to all urban metropolitan cities in the 1960's when the Interstates went in and suburbs bloomed.

According to grants filled out on behalf of several residential properties, the area known as River Bend was considered the worst blight/slum area in the State of Iowa in the 1990's (SHPO, 77-020-3073).

Interesting. The worst blight slum area in the state. But really how bad could that be, it is Iowa right? A ghetto in Iowa. Yeah right.

It was the urban renewal effort of the late 1960's that began most of the damage to the architecture of the houses. Residents were advised by the City of Des Moines to remove porches and decorative trim to decrease the taxable value (Urban Renewal Pamphlet 8). The pamphlet had a happy squirrel on it proclaiming, "I'm nutty for home improvement!"

Some of the other changes that residents were suggested to make in the 1960's Urban Renewal movement, in some cases required to make, were items such as removing the architectural detail along the bottom roof line and gables, removing decorative details and spindles, boarding and siding up windows and doors, skim coating the foundation with cement (which causes severe deterioration in the soft brick underneath), and many other "improvements" such as these (Urban Renewal Pamphlet)

It was also a trend to modernize the interiors by replacing the solid oak and pine doors with hollow core press board and plywood doors, covering hardwood
flooring with carpet and linoleum, dropping the ceiling height with asbestos hanging tiles, adding closets and bathrooms, and removing original kitchen cabinets (Urban Renewal Pamphlet).

These types of improvements are still encouraged and perpetrated by unaware homeowners and developers. Homeowners who appreciate historic character spend thousands of dollars to either purchase a home with original features intact or to find and replace missing elements in the housing stock that was left stripped to bare bones.

People who can afford it, pay a lot of money to contractors to strip off the cover-up siding installed by the improvers of this early era to uncover the original wood siding and architectural detail. (By restoring houses to their pre-urban renewal glory the structures increase in value and increase neighborhood property taxes and therefore city and county and, most noteworthy, public school revenue, but this at an additional cost to residents who may not be able to afford such an increase in housing cost.)

This is what is causing the blight I thought. These awful and misguided "improvements". I made copies of the article I didn't have time to read and I made a note to tell Chad about Zippy the Squirrel.

I met some friends at a downtown restaurant and had a few too many sips that night (alcohol has an instant effect on me, three sips and I'm to the wind.) I was still snickering about the claim of a ghetto in Iowa when we pulled up to my house. It was scary and looming in the darkness. Graffiti still seeped like a tattoo under cover
up paint from when the house was abandoned. The white turned gray paint peeled and crackled and the house truly looked like something out of the Hitchcock movie "Psycho".

In the shadows of my yard I could make out movement inside of my 1953 Chevy that was half rusted out and up on a jack next to the house. It was way late for my husband to be working on the car and way too dark so I jumped out of my friend's jeep and walked towards the car.

I found two women inside the car. They were smoking and drinking and carrying on. A third one was lying on the hood. My friend ran up behind me and grabbed my arm. She worked with neighborhood teens that summer and she recognized them as three local and prone to violence prostitutes. Fueled by a little pina colada and a lot by the tension and frustration that welled up inside me from months of living in a house with little and at times no heat, unstable floors, and constant neighborhood trauma, I angrily confronted them. They got out of the car and headed toward me. I didn't back off.

"Get out of my car! Get off my property! Get out of my yard you... #$%$% #&(" I was trembling with the words that were coming out of my mouth. I had been conditioned out of my foul urban mouth through four years of college, a hard lesson to learn in academia. Here I was spewing obscenities and gesturing like I did in high school.

"I gots every ride to bes here!" she screeched in my face, intimidating as she walked forward, "you don'ts like it, you move!"
I held my breath. My 4'10" frame vibrated with adrenaline. I could claw her throat out. My jaw was grinding. I felt the same tension I had before a street fight in my childhood neighborhood.

I turned my back and walked away from her.

“You ain’t gots no ride to be talkin' at us like that,” she hollered back.

“You gonna call the cops white bitch?” the other one jeered.

“Nope.”

I intended to go inside and splash cold water on my face. I intended to let the anger wash down my drain. I would not revert back to the violent nature of my teenage days. As I walked to the front door and fumbled with my keys, I noticed the garden hose spraying out a tiny trickle of water.

I picked it up, turned, and said, “You have until the count of three to get off my car and out of my yard.”

I didn’t count to three. They weren’t moving.

The water arched and sputtered an icy stream to the car.

Their screams woke up the neighbors. And their foster mother.

As it turned out, they were 14 and 15 years old and the foster kids of the renter next door. Their guardian was just as charming. She had a few choice words to say about “da privade life!” and “mindin' yous own bidness”. She threatened to sue me for water damage. I said trespassing and drug dealing and whoring out teenage foster kids would trump that. Neighbors started to gather. The police were called. One officer took me aside and explained that as long as I didn’t use the jet
setting on the spray nozzle what I had done was considered self and property defense. After all the girls were trespassing. He thought it was funny.

But it wasn’t over. A week later I saw one of the girls stuffing a paper bag into my car’s tailpipe and when my husband confronted her she tried to throw a full cup of soda at him. She miscalculated the “throw” and it ended up soaking both her and her sister. It was hilarious at the time and I commented that, “why is it whenever they try and deal with us they end up wet?” We laughed and went inside. That night an angry man, armed with baseball bat, showed up at our door at dinnertime accusing me of assaulting his niece. Not so funny when my husband tried to calm the situation and get Mr. Uncle-With-Big-Stick off our porch. I hit the alarm system’s panic button to set the loud alarm off and call the police. He screamed, “I ain’t afraid of no police! I have money too!” As if money insulates people from the police. Oh wait. It does, doesn’t it? The police treated us with respect and him with hostility, although, to their credit he was still holding the baseball bat.

Our neighborhood situation got worse. The City had a budget crisis and shut off the street lights, cut back on police patrols, and all but eliminated animal control. The neighborhood association was still in the midst of some weird power struggle between people who refused to believe that the women and men on Forest and Seventh are actually prostitutes and drug dealers and the people who had lived here long enough to know the women by first names. I mean how stupid can you be to first argue that there is no crime in River Bend and that the same thirty people who don’t live in the neighborhood and all have extensive criminal records have the
God given right to loiter and block traffic on the same corner night after night.

The neighborhood was getting worse instead of better. I asked a former City Planning Director what he thought the cause of the blight and chaos in River Bend was. He said it was the 1960's elimination of the street car and the I-235 freeway that cut through the heart of all the urban neighborhoods displacing many families.

Hmmm. Displacement. Back to the library. This time I went to the City Planning office and found a scrapbook of articles.

As I read, I began to understand that the decline of this North Des Moines neighborhood is directly related to the hardships inflicted on the people displaced to there. It is known as River Bend because the neighbors, sensing that the neighborhood needed a new identity, changed the name in the mid 1980's. Neighborhood pride is still an issue and residents fiercely object to any regulations on their properties. Several residents wanted to change the zoning ordinance to protect the historic architecture of the private homes, but they could not get a majority vote from the majority of the property owners. Many people feel forced to live in the neighborhood because there are few other low-income housing options, especially for large families.

The people who have lived here long enough to have the memory of displacement remember what happened to them and their rights as property owners the last time the city imposed zoning restrictions on their properties and it is easy to understand their resistance. The reason they are afraid of the neighborhood becoming gentrified, is because that is what happened to the other two historic
neighborhoods that adopted zoning restrictions for exterior improvements. The prices and taxes on these homes are so high that the areas are priced out for all but the “upper middle class” (a.k.a. “rich folk” by most locals) (Polk County Assessor 2006).

At the same time that the streetcars were cut off from downtown by the MacVicar Freeway and the Metro Transit Authority converted to the diesel fueled buses used today. Those who had money bought cars and those who did not have money or means rode the bus (Foster). It was yet another mechanism to socially separate the poor and the rich.

The areas targeted near downtown for the “Urban Renewal” effort and highway displacement housed a significant percentage of the African American population (USBC 1950), more than half the total Negro population in Iowa, and it wasn’t long before “Urban Renewal” came to be known as “Negro Removal”. Rozenting Hardaway, president of the Center Street Improvement Association and member of the Des Moines Human Rights Commission, complained that urban renewal in Des Moines was “a planned program of segregated housing in Des Moines and de facto school segregation.” He is credited for coining the phrase Urban Renewal=Negro Removal.” (Coffman, 2). Not once did this happen, but twice in a ten-year period.

The first displacement involved the Center Street Neighborhood, an enclave of wealthy black residences featuring a successful business district, was vacated and demolished and the residents were primarily shifted to the Oakridge and Forest
Hills/Walnut Hills neighborhoods in the late 1950's for the creation of I-235 MacVicar Freeway. They were not fairly compensated for their properties nor assisted in moving their families or businesses in a manner that would be acceptable by the city's present standards (Gary 2003).

The second displacement occurred in 1967 when much of the Oakridge neighborhood was displaced to Forest Hills/Walnut Hills for the construction of a north/south freeway that never was built. Many view this as merely a tool to control and limit the location of the African American population in Des Moines. Residents were again not paid the assessed value of their homes and often could not find comparable housing options, creating an economic burden. Leaders in the black community accused the paid city staff that were coordinating the relocation efforts of being "haughty, dogmatic, summary and arbitrary." (Coffman 1). Rozenting Hardaway also claimed that the same problems and hardships incurred by the African American population in Des Moines because of the first urban renewal relocation (Center Street) were forgiven by people because of the learning process, but that this second attempt was repeating mistakes and would not be taken so easily (Coffman 1).

In a 1950 map of racial demographic more than 50% of the population located in the affected areas was identified in the census as African American. It also indicated that this fifty-percent was ninety percent of Des Moines' total African American population (USBC 1950).

The African American population was also restricted, not by law, but by
custom and social pressure as to where they could relocate to or purchase property. Des Moines did not have written legislation for segregation, but practiced social restrictions (Spiegle 1966). These social restrictions were and are much harder to fight than laws because they involve generations of misinformation and belief systems and they also involve the human nature of societal pecking order. To believe you are upper middle class, a middle class and a lower class must tangibly exist and you must be able to see the line that separates you and your family from those lower in the class hierarchy.

Then I found a picture of a family in front of a house, the three children in suits, the mother and father elegantly dressed. A Des Moines surgeon and his family were unable to purchase a home in the neighborhood next to the hospital that employed him (Spiegle 1966).

Dr. Johnson was quoted as saying, “Discrimination in Des Moines housing flourishes because minority and majority groups are complacent; because real estate agencies fear reprisals from their associates, and bankers and lending institutions fear the finger pointed at as not following the line,” referring to the “red line” put in place to officially and later unofficially segregate neighborhoods as a way to control blight and limit banking institutions’ financial liability. (Spiegle 1956) Dr. Johnson filed a complaint with the Commission on Human Rights and was accused by local Realtors of not really wanting to find a good house but only wanting a house in a white neighborhood and also wanting negative attention.

But to understand the social custom behind such segregation one must also
understand more than just 1960’s and Civil Rights history. Racism was historically justified academically. A 1935 study conducted and published by the Iowa State Planning Board claimed that Negroes caused infrastructure blight and crime by their racial nature and the state of Iowa established such practices to control crime under that belief system. The strategy included building low-cost housing complexes (rental) to shift the population to and contain “blight” in those locations. The report concluded that Negroes could not be trusted to maintain property infrastructure or sanitary measures in their own housing and therefore should live in buildings that were maintained by the government or an outside group that could be trusted to maintain the structures. It was this ideology that fueled the urban renewal movement and led to the creation of “public” housing (Gary 2003).

“My God,” I said aloud. The other library patrons glared at me for breaking the sacred silence. “Shhhhhhhhh.” “My God,” I whispered. In 1935 Hitler was using this same theory and implementing this same policy to address and separate those people he thought were the dregs of society and also on a racial basis. This is the historical basis for the term “ghetto” that is so freely applied to such housing developments.

There were other factors inside the Negro and minority populations. A Kankakee Illinois newspaper cited in the 2000 project, “Skin Deep”, that black residents expressed fear regarding the option of moving to a suburb or unincorporated area because the fire departments were run by volunteers as opposed to paid and might not respond if a fire started in their homes. The fire departments
that were part of a paid public service system, such as Des Moines employed, provided a sense of greater public safety for all. This is just one aspect of service, but public safety issues like this were huge concerns to those who might be affected adversely.

Iowa House Representative Wayne Ford(D), the legislative representative for River Bend and surrounding neighborhoods, said at a public forum, "Middle-class blacks are still not treated fair, doctors still cut off limbs faster." (November 2003, Des Moines Register). The fear that racial bias would endanger personal well being and safety is still extant. I can't imagine going to a hospital and having that statistic guiding the surgeon's knife. Is this true? I worked at a hospital as a volunteer and I remembered one thing. It was poor people who lost more limbs, those that the doctors knew had no insurance. But in an area where poverty is imposed on people because of the color of their skin or religion, race and class discrimination become one and the same.

The housing decline and severe crime rate increase that resulted from “urban renewal” in many urban areas did take its cue from the freeways being built, but there were other factors. The factor that had the biggest impact was the way in which residents were relocated and the racial segregation factor. When a population is dislocated and does not have the mobility of choice, a psychological factor takes toll. In a 1967 Des Moines Tribune article a lecture series at Harvard given by Robert Weaver is quoted, “enforced dislocation involved psychological and economic hardship.” Headlines that year read “See No Gain in Moving to New
"Slum", "Less Than Fair Market Value", "I Feel They Just Took Our House", and "Segregation Nearly 100% Effective". Negro leaders said publicly that the city was creating blight by herding the disgruntled Negro population into already declining areas of Des Moines (Coffman 1966). People who had worked and purchased their own homes and businesses were treated like common criminals and an inconvenience to progress even though their economic status on paper put them on par with other "upper middle class" citizens if not for their skin color.

And making the situation even worse, some residents discovered they were sold sub standard housing, and building code issues like rubber plumbing and faulty furnaces and wiring had passed the City inspectors' notice. These were the exact issues that the city had publicly said they had paid the urban renewal coordination staff to prevent from happening.

It was hard not to confront the history as an issue when at 2 am a light skinned black woman, reeking of cheap booze and cigarettes, knocked on our door asking for change and then screeched, "RACIST!" when we refused give her money or when a group of black men hooted and whistled at me while I painted window trim and when I didn't respond called me a stuck up white bitch.

I wouldn't give money at 2 am to a midget white man nor do I respond well to anyone heckling derogatory terms at me because I am wearing a tank top and shorts while painting in the Iowa July heat. However, the five-year-old next door doesn't know that, she knows what racist means and she asks me later why I don't like black people. I tell her I don't like rude people, drunken people, or racist people
and I try not to be any of those things myself. Two years later all she remembers is that her cousin called me racist so it must be true. That will be her memory of me when she is an adult. Racism runs deep both ways in River Bend. It has become a silent and dangerous wall that has grown up between neighbors and prevents the neighborhood from moving forward. I sensed this right away, but I was still not fully aware of the implications. The implications are that the racism reinforces itself when people refuse to acknowledge its existence and therefore refuse to change.

It is ridiculous that anyone would think we are rich, but they do. If I had money I'd pay someone else to paint my house in this July Iowa heat. That point is lost because I own the house and it is not apartments, just one really big house. The average two-bedroom apartment in my neighborhood would fit in my living room. Actually, it did. The house had been turned into apartments and was divided into nine units that shared one bathroom. It didn't meet rental code when such a code was adopted in the 1970's and in 1980 was abandoned. Not vacant, however, and because of the vagrant and drug dealing and prostitute inhabitants, the house was slated for demolition in 1990.

Teri Toye, the previous owner and then neighborhood activist, saved the house by chaining herself to the front porch and facing down the City bulldozers. Ten years later, we took the project over from her. The house did not rise out of the ashes like a phoenix, but rather was slowly brought back to life like piecing together a Frankenstein and waiting for the lightening strike. We did not just step into a Victorian Dream; in fact for the first two years we declined most visitors because if
you stepped in the right, or rather the wrong, places in the floor you could end up in
the basement. If we did not do the majority of the work ourselves we could never
afford to live in such a house. I am referring to the dream of what the house will be
when the restoration starts to take hold, not now. We joke that for the first two years
we had the housing lifestyle of homeless teenagers squatting in an abandoned
building.

We impact our block because we are different. Rather, what our neighbors
see is different from them. They see we are married, white, young, childless, and
employed. They assume we are both educated. I am college educated, but not the
way most go about it. I worked full time, financed the tuition, and took mostly night
classes. Graduate school was in question, not because I wouldn't be accepted, but
because we were unable to afford the additional tuition and commute. Eventually we
figured out what else we could sacrifice to pay more tuition. I grew up on and off
welfare on the inner edge of several Mid-western metropolitan centers and college
was never a certainty. Chad is a high school drop out. He grew up in an affluent
suburb of Kansas City. He chose not to go to college and instead put me through
first. Our neighbors assume he is more educated than me and part of that is the way
he was brought up to carry himself and his self-confidence. That, too, is a privilege.

What our neighbors don't see is that we are careful with our decisions, careful
with our money, and careful with each other. Despite our altercations, we try to be
good neighbors, but generally no one from the neighborhood comes to our potlucks
or open houses. We invite, but they don't come. I don't blame them. The
neighborhood association people usually don't answer our invitations either but, when they do, they criticize our workmanship and declare we should fire our carpenters or painters or that we should have purchased better materials.

But despite this and because of this, we feel sad and out of place in both worlds: the boisterous and dangerous street life in front of our house and the protesting, yet privileged, association membership are equally as foreign to us.

I am angry.

I am angry about stupid things. I am angry when we can't have girls' night at my house because half of my friends are afraid to drive in my neighborhood after dark and the other half during the day as well. I am angry when I think about the future too. Will I have trouble finding a baby-sitter that will come to our house too or our future children's friends, will their parents allow them to play here, knowing the neighborhood? What about slumber parties, the traditional rite of passage for teenage girls?

On the other hand, I will have the opportunity to raise my family knowing what the effects of racism are from community example and not by textbook. (They will see the effects of drug abuse first hand from watching the woman who lives in the group home beg for quarters on the street corner; she can barely see or speak clearly, her body mangled from years of drug and alcohol abuse, and not from the wealthy plastic surgery maintained city attorney's wife with the same, yet not as obvious, addiction.) They will see diversity in practice and learn by our example that perceptions can be wrong and that people are not all the same, do not have the
same customs, and do not always agree. I have been challenged by family members who say that it is wrong for us to even consider raising a family in the midst of such blight, and by choice. We do have the mobility to build a new and safe house and live in a cookie cutter neighborhood where all share our values and our culture. But isn’t that a perception, a myth, as well?

It is not safe to walk anywhere alone at night anymore, so safety is a relative concept. It pisses me off when family, friends, and complete strangers are hesitant to visit us because of the “crime” even after I educate them. It’s not crime, it’s perception and the perception is that the neighborhood of River Bend is inherently “bad”. The only real difference between River Bend and other perceived “safer” neighborhoods is the ethnic demographic. Linda and Kay, the white middle aged prostitutes on 7th and Forest (I’ve been here long enough now to know them by name now) don’t even live here. They live in an apartment in Clive, one of Des Moines supposedly affluent suburbs. The newspaper lists their clients, when they catch them, as having mostly out of Des Moines addresses too. The law abiding homeowners who live in the houses Kay and Linda work the street in front of are from El Salvador and Laos. Across the corner are two black families. When you pair the crime statistics over the ethic demographics of the Federal Census it only appears that the two correlate.

It is easy to say that the families should call the police, but now that I’ve lived here I realize how difficult that is especially if you don’t speak English or come as a refugee from a place where the police are corrupt. It is even harder when you do call
and the police either don’t come at all or when they do they come up to your door and let everyone know that you called them. It is easy to say that because it takes the responsibility off of those it belongs to. But how do you address such a letter to the soccer mom whose husband is using the family minivan to pick up a prostitute while he’s “working late downtown”?

The issue is this: how do you create an apology to an entire neighborhood that your city has disenfranchised and continues to economically cripple with its policies and budget crisis? Now that I am part of this neighborhood, I demand moratorium on further damage.

I am screaming into the faceless blue sky. If a tree falls and only I am there to witness it…… I end up pinned beneath said tree. Crushed.
CHAPTER 5: BUDGET BILLING

Then cold weather hit. We learned quickly about something called "energy conservation". Yes, that seems like a simple concept. I'd guess that to most people, and certainly to Chad and I at age 22, that it means doing things like riding your bike to work, shutting off lights when you leave the room, and maybe possibly turning the thermostat down to 67 degrees. Maybe it means remembering to recycle soda pop cans or driving a fuel efficient car and filling it with corn gas instead of premium blend. "Put on an extra sweater if you're cold," I said to Chad the one winter we spent in our cozy little Victorian in the posh little neighborhood near downtown.

Yeah. Let me tell you, you know nothing about energy conservation until you spend a winter in an under-renovation-Victorian heat sucker. It was as if someone had turned on a giant heat sucking vacuum and left us with one hell froze over cold spot that stopped at our front door. Oh yes, there was even a tropical micro climate surrounding our house that allowed the tulips we naively planted in the fall to push through the snow in February. Putting on an extra sweater was not an option.

Let me back up. It's October 2000. We had forever dreamed of a home with clanking steam radiators, the kind that have fill agree cast iron and serve as furniture in the whole elegant function of the entire room. This house had 'em. They were salvaged out of a demolished apartment building in Waterloo, Iowa. The whole set matched. It was a little rusty and some needed new paint, but the whole image of Teri hanging on a crane hook to haul these beauties out of a crumbling building just added to the enchantment of the place and to our admiration of her effort to pull
together authentic pieces.

The radiators started to come on. The clanking in the pipes sounded like trolls fighting in a death rage. No, actually it's more musical than that. I so enjoyed the sound and the beautiful, homey warmth that they produced that I often cranked the heat to 75 just to get the boiler going. In October, in Iowa, the days can often be in the 80's and still I turned the dial.

November came and went. Bills started piling up and money was tight. The Sherman Hill house still hadn't sold and I had quit at the Chocolate shop. We were eating lots of ramen and spaghetti at home and Chad was eating gas station taquitos at lunch. The school semester was in full force and I was already freaking out about graduating in the Spring. The thermostat setting was the last thing on my mind.

Until.

Until the bill from MidAmerican Energy came. It was $900 for October. I had missed opening that bill. Shit happens. I then opened November's bill. $2,623.00 plus the $900 odd dollars from October. My last paycheck from the shop had been less than $200. Chad's monthly earnings totaled $1,416 after tax and our mortgage was $765 for this house and $725 for the house in Sherman Hill. Our car payment was $157, water $45, and car insurance $99. We were screwed. Two months into owning the Hatton House and we were upside down.

The thing that really angered me was that my notes said in bold letters: heat bill=200/month budget billing.
Agh. Budget billing! I dialed MidAmerican. Budget billing, budget billing. The pert little operator not so courteously informed me that they'd be happy to put us on budget billing if I had my husband call and authorize me to the account. I put him on the phone, he authorized me, and then she said, “Ma'am. There is no way I can authorize budget billing unless you pay the balance on your account.”

Shall we review? That's $3,523+. Yeah, not going to happen. I try and explain this. She was not so courteous once I degenerated into language that befitted cable TV.

I called back. I tried explaining the situation to more unsympathetic ears. The money wasn't going to materialize magically. I went and got a job at the local JC Penneys. They hired me on the spot. So much for being a stay-at-home renovator.

Still, at $7/hour our hope did not lie in my being employed. I called MidAmerican back and asked to speak to a manager. I called the local office, not the 800 number. Long story short: $800/month payment plan (still more than my entire earnings from JC Penneys) and $100/month until the initial balance is paid off. Not good, but better.

We had snowball fights in our bedroom with the snow that was blowing in the windows and drifting by the walls. We started leaving the milk out on the counter to save fridge space, since the actual temperature was 34 degrees in the kitchen. Then one morning we came down and the gallon of milk had frozen solid. We started keeping it in the fridge to keep it thawed enough to drink. We learned another simple chemistry lesson: wine and other alcoholic beverage does not freeze.
Once my heart started beating again, I began to realize that the power company was not the root cause of my woes. Funny, I didn't blame the house either. We turned the thermostat down to 60, put on more sweaters, and invested in space heaters.

Yup. None of those things really made much difference.

And as many funny jokes as I can tell about that winter, the truth of the matter is that utility bills can not only sabotage a restoration project by quickly draining the escrow money for the rehab, but the financial burden and physical stress of being so utterly and completely frozen cold can and has ruined relationships. It very nearly broke our happy marriage apart.

We were driving to the airport to pick up Chad's father one night and we were arguing pretty heavily about dollars and lack of. Chad had turned the thermostat up and decided that we were going to eat out that night, I argued that spending money that we didn't have was a bad idea and that he could buck up and put on a sweater. We still have this argument, as my dearest husband really would spend his entire life in a punk rock T-shirt and shorts regardless of the blizzards blowing outside our Iowa home. The next ice age could come and he'd still refuse to put a sweater on, opting to complain about being cold. I don't understand this about him. Everything else in life, he confronts as problems to be solved and finds solutions.... but personal comfort? He won't even consider wearing weather appropriate clothing. In summer he wears long, heavy, canvas pants and long sleeve knits. It's enough to drive me crazy when he complains about the heat!
That night he had complained about the cold and I exploded inside, seething with frustration. As we headed down the hill through downtown, I clenched my jaw. He had lectured me about letting the car get low on gas but when he filled my tank he got two hot chai lattes and was trying to brighten my dark mood. Yeah, wasn't going to happen. The milk in the latte tasted sour and the chai was rancid. It's why we call gas station coffee drinks Crappuccino.

I don't even recall what all we argued about that night, only that it involved hurtful words and a lot of anger. “We should talk about giving up,” he said. “I gave up long ago, bucko,” I replied. “What the hell does that mean?” he snapped. Divorce, walking away, accepting an internship in New York City, selling the house, selling our dreams....

Then it all stopped. I saw it coming. The little white Toyota Sedan streaked through his red light and the steep incline of the hill resisted the pressure of my foot on the break and won. The Toyota smashed into Chad's side door and pushed our car off the road. Momentum from the hill kept us moving and the car wrapped around a light pole, bounced back and then slammed forward into the corner of a concrete parking platform. The rancid, yet near boiling coffee flipped out of the coffee holder and drenched my lap. The horn was blaring. I reached down to pull the fuses out to stop the noise.

What Chad saw in the waning dusk light was dark hot liquid covering both of us and me slouched over the steering wheel. What he thought was that it was my blood and I was dead. The car was totaled. He kicked his door out and ran to my
side. My door was locked but the window was broken so he pulled at me. I was still trying to get the fuses loose. I fought him off, but eventually he pulled me out of the car and put me on the cold sidewalk, which made me more mad.

My car was smashed to all hell and my jeans were soaked with burning hot rancid chai latte crappuccino. My husband (or maybe it was I) had mentioned giving up on our dream. My night was really not going well.

The poor guy who hit us was crying and trying to help. Chad took a swing at him to keep him away. The fire department was there and an ambulance. Once the shock wore off and I managed to convince all that I was fine, and then the medical technician was able to convince Chad that I was alright, he embraced me hard and tight. We held each other all night like that and neither of us ever mentioned giving up on each other or the house again.

We've both explained it to people that we are partners in our suffering and as long as we remain united in the battle, the fight is worth fighting. Cheesy greeting card crap, but I think this is where houses become “divorce houses”. It's not worth doing if you lose everything else, like the love of your lifetime. I still think Chad should put on a sweater and stop complaining, but I love him and his temperature sensitive quirks.
CHAPTER 6: THE OTHER EVIL SQUIRREL

My career in the field of historic preservation started, not by the purchase of this enormously needy house, but as an outcome of a battle lost. Let me explain. I came home from my morning classes to grab a bite to eat, i.e. a pear and a glass of almost frozen milk. I dropped my bag on the floor, shed my outermost coat (I was wearing two coats and three sweater layers), and headed for the kitchen.

My attention was focused on the floor so as to not fall through the holes in the dining room and not step on the “repairs” we had made and create more holes. This is why I did not see it coming. A pear hit me on the forehead. I looked up.

Ok, it was a half eaten pear that hit me. My last one. My intended lunch. Apples with bites chewed out littered the floor. The untidy culprit had taken a bite or two out of each fruit before tossing it aside. Meet the evil squirrel.

We had tracked him in the snow drifts in our bedroom, we knew he had free run of the house, but, hey, he’s cold too and we were totally relating to that so we all lived happily together, but this was going too far. I grabbed a broom and charged. I don’t know what I was thinking. The battle ensued and I was not matched for this tiny beast. He dodged my parries, he dove from my swats, I destroyed plates, knocked down more plaster, and then... then... he served the final and winning blow. Perched from atop the shelves in the kitchen he lured me into his range by holding a piece of fruit mockingly chattered and then sprayed a magnificent and disgusting stream of rodent urine down... on me.

I had lost. I admitted defeat and backed out of the kitchen, backed out of the
house, and stood on the front porch, hot tears steaming in the frigid air as they flowed from my bloodshot and weary eyes. I didn't know what to do. I was at a breaking point. This scenario was not what I had in mind when I dreamed of this house.

Bundled, wet, and weary, I got in my car and headed downtown.

I had a plan.

Our former neighbor Judy McClure was the architect for the State of Iowa Historic Preservation office. When we moved from our cozy house in Sherman Hill, she had offered that if I needed anything to give her a call. Looking back, I realize that this offer likely did not mean an open invitation to interrupt her workday, but I was at that moment soaked with squirrel urine, plaster bits chunked in my matted hair, and my nerves were frayed. Trance like I parked the car and found my way to the 3rd floor of the State Historical Museum.

My luck was gone. Judy was out of the office. My last hope, withered. I sat down in the lobby and clasped my face in my hands, sobbing. I didn't know what to do. I smelled bad and I needed a shower, but more so I was so far in over my head with the house that I was suffocating. We'd only had the house four months....

Someone sat down next to me. I looked up. This was a moment I will never forget. Kindness emanated from this woman. In all reality, she probably drew the short straw in the office pool in who got to remove the homeless smelly kid (me, in my state of dress and smell appeared to be such) from the lobby, but she coaxed my hiccuping sobs into a clear statement, "My house...... hiccup.... is on National......
hiccup...... Register......... snow drifts...... hiccup....... don't know what to do........
hiccup...... help......”

She nodded knowingly; her many years had given her the innate sense to translate what I was hiccuping into meaning. She got up and went into the copy room, returning about ten minutes later with a huge ream of paper. The artificial lighting in the office, or my memory, recalls a haze of light around her spiky red hair resembling that of a punky renaissance angel. “Here is a grant application, the deadline is in two weeks, and you have to understand these technical briefs to write it effectively,” she presented me the stack of papers. “These are the Secretary of the Interior’s Briefs for Historic Preservation.”

“This series of booklets offers enormously detailed information on issues facing owners of older houses.....” (NPS) Indeed. Almost every book I have found on the subject of preservation or restoration that is any good, refers to these briefs. I took them from Cynthia. Somehow in the midst of my sobbing she had managed to introduce herself as the grants manager for the office and a friend of my former neighbor.

I had new purpose in life. All my years of schooling in Creative Writing and liberal arts had led up to this point...... I had to read a thousand plus pages of technical information and then write a product that could bullshit the reader into believing that I understood the material and present an argument that they should give me money. The number one skill you learn in college if you pay attention is how to cram and bullshit on a tight schedule.
And that's what I did. I read the briefs for three days straight, highlighting here, pencil annotating there, and on day three I emerged from my reading nook with a finished grant application and new realization: these technical briefs were not so much, they were common sense. Every approach to architecture and preservation was and is exactly what my first instinct would be when approaching any given problem. The main thesis and theme through every single brief is this: “If it isn't broke don't fix it and if it is broken- DO fix it, DO NOT replace it.”

Cynthia had given me keys to a whole new world and the confidence to return to the battle ground of the Hatton House. In the grant I asked for just the monies to seal “the exterior and interior envelopes.” In a nutshell, the plaster and windows needed to be fixed and the exterior painted. Those three things would affect the interior temperature crisis and make the home livable for normal people.

The gist of this was simple, but one of the things I learned from the briefs was that the original plaster is better quality, even damaged, than dry wall which is the modern material that is currently being used for new construction. Gypsum drywall basically melts when it gets wet, molds easily, and has no acoustic or insulation value, while plaster can be restored. Our first approach to the walls in the house was to tear them all out, insulate with bat rolls, and then install drywall. Demolition is fun, but really messy. We had not yet started this phase of the project because of the mess involved and the cost of materials and dump fees for debris. The approach outlined in the Briefs was much simpler, way cheaper, and very little mess or talent involved: patch the holes and skim coat what's there. When the holes are huge,
patch in with drywall, and skim to conceal. Instead of mixing horsehair, aggregate, water, and gypsum to make an accurate plaster compound, we used flexible joint compound for the cracks and a harder sealer for the skim coats.

We cheated on the ceilings. Sort of. Plaster patching and joint compound kept falling down before it dried. Gravity was winning and the holes were huge. I prepped the damaged plaster with bleach water mist and Kills paint sealer. We lifted drywall up, secured it with long screws, and skimmed like plaster. This lost the room one inch in height, but since we didn't tear out the old plaster, it retained the acoustic and insulating value while achieving the smooth look we wanted. This may not have been 100% hard core preservation. We did our best with the walls and the only place it's really obvious that this shortcut was used is a joint seam in the South bedroom that wasn't skimmed properly. We'll just call it the mark that particular craftsman left on our home for sake of history.

While waiting for the grant to be processed, we began practicing our new found techniques. It's fine and dandy to write about them and even better to talk and explain them to people, but the simple truth of it is this: Chad and I both suck at plaster repair. We'd attempt a section of wall and work work work until we were both so exhausted that we collapsed in a pile of fighting exasperation and a full two ft by two ft section would be crappily patched and we'd be covered in plaster dust and look like albino mimes. Then for the next two weeks, every time we looked at the section, it would trigger a fight.

And while the grant application pending gave us hope, it did not stop the
snow or the cold.

Also, we bought a bigger trap to get the damn squirrel. The little bastard outsmarted it, but broke his tail in that great escape. He made the very wise decision to retreat to the third floor for the rest of the season. The trap remained sprung in the front parlor until..... we caught a raccoon. Rocky the Raccoon, I named him. He tore the floor apart trying to escape the trap. I called the Police unit of animal control and they refused to handle an animal I had trapped, the reasoning was that they would simply let him loose outside and he would climb up the side of the house and get right back in. If I had just let him run loose in the house THEN they would trap him and remove him and let him loose outside and then..... you get the picture. So I sat next to the cute little critter and waited for Chad to get home. I fed him pears and named him Rocky. We set him loose in a new suburban development that needed some character, since the snout houses that lined the street were devoid of such.

Someday Evil Squirrel will join him and they can run and play in the treeless streets of West North Nottingham Glen Park or whatever pseudo British fairytale name the Stepford neighborhood has that year. Rocky and Evil can wreak havoc and play with the robot Ritilain children and maybe then animal control will change their policy on pest removal.

Spring came and I called Cynthia. Grant applications had been reviewed, but the budget wouldn’t cover all the projects that had applied. There was also a problem with ours: Teri had been awarded a grant and defaulted on it. Her project
included the exterior work that we had requested, but because of the nature of the application review, the committee had no way of knowing that we were new owners and questioned why the work had not been completed previously. We were denied.

Crestfallen, I sighed deeply into the phone. Cynthia had an idea. Check the employment site she advised. There was a job open with their office and I applied.

Whatever was I thinking! The job was for Architectural Historian and I had just graduated with a not impressive degree in Creative Writing, and a portfolio of performance poetry. The application was returned to me with a “not qualified” stamp in red across the main page. I called the head of the SHPO office to ask why. I didn’t wait for him to return my call and instead drove down and waited outside his office all morning.

As crazy as that was, I’m sure he remembered me from before. He was very kind to me. I asked what I needed to do to get qualified for such a position. Graduate school and experience in the work field of Historic Preservation. Time. He suggested an internship. Cynthia followed up with me and thought that was a great idea. She passed the application to Barry Bennet, cubicle to the south of hers, and he called me for an interview. The internship paid ten something an hour and consisted of driving around Iowa documenting historic properties and, on off days, filing the paperwork and working with archaeology map updates. I’d work with six other interns and really get to know the work of the State office.

I was elated when I was hired. The money was enough to pay the other mortgage and the heat bills and I would be immersed in my newfound interest and
spend my days in an office full of professionals that I could ask questions and run ideas by.

The summer hours allowed me to work ten hour days, four days a week or start the day early and go home by three, certainly enough time to get a couple of good hours of painting out of the way. My days were bliss. We'd head out, coffee in cup holder, skittles and sun chips in travel bag, and see, photograph, and write about historic buildings. The "interior envelope" repair may have been delayed, but warm weather had returned and things were not so desperate, so work resumed on the Hatton House at our leisurely and fantasy driven pace.

August came and went and all but two of us interns returned to school. We remaining two set out to finish the project, tie up loose ends, and complete the database. There were twenty or so counties to finish out of ninety-nine.
CHAPTER 5: ASHES, ASHES

We headed out for Alamakee county. 2001, September 10th. Shauna and I had been given the assignment to survey the historic structures of Alamakee County in the far far NE corner of the state of Iowa. The State owned pick-up started to roll smoke from the hood about 30 miles West of Dubuque (a town well known for it's River Boat casinos.... but I'll get to that). We pulled over, exchanged arguments over whose fault it was that the vehicle was probably on fire, and, once we agreed to blame the "man" for providing us with a flaming truck, sat on the side of that vast open road sorely disappointed that our trip had started out with such a "bang". Shauna's father worked in the car dealership world, so she called some people and a tow truck was soon on its way.

We called home base and were informed that we were to wait for the vehicle to be repaired to return home. The dealership gave us a loaner car to tool around Dubuque and we spent the afternoon sight seeing the local antique shops and historic house museums, all on the state's payroll. Taxpayer dollars hard at work. I worked very hard at the Hamm House to try, unsuccessfully, to convince the curator to let us wander the upper levels of the museum. I used the "we're not the public, we're state employees!" argument, the spiel about the true lovers of history, and offered to sign a waiver. Nothing worked, to her we were just two ghost hunting kids trying to bend the rules. After managing a museum site for three years I know the truth: museum employees get a little kick out of having exclusive access to a part of the house that no one else does. It's a little compensation for being paid a pittance
and docenting ungrateful, cranky “bank” tours. She could have taken us up there if she wanted to!

Exhausted by all our hard work, we headed to find a hotel worthy of our mini vacation: the Julian Hotel. Al Capone stayed there and supposedly one entire floor is closed to the public because it's too haunted by the disgruntled suicides of hiding in Iowa gangsters. The room we rented was campy and very vintage, right down to the television set. We called back to the repair shop. The engine block had melted or some such rubbish and repair was not likely. The State was sending a tow vehicle possibly by the end of the week. NOOOOOOOOO!

We called back to the home office. Everyone was booked in meetings until the end of the week. Unless some kind family member was willing to retrieve us, we would have to stay in Dubuque. On the clock. With nothing to do. “Sorry.”

We contemplated our options. Carefully. It was a five hour drive. On the clock, hotel and food paid......we headed out to see the town at night!

I had never been gambling. I'd tasted it a little in high school betting on hopeless local football teams and lost too much money to admit too. I spent a month turning over lunch and snack money to some pimply 14 year old who had handled the transaction. I only had $20 in cash to last the week so we went to a quaint Irish pub to talk about the movie vs. throwing money away at the boat casino option. A couple of cherry grenadine colas later we were at the dock. I had agreed to spend on slots only the $8.50 that movie admission would have set me back. Dude, I won $60 dollars on slots and made back the $12 I spent. Shauna didn't fare so well, but
we had a good time and our constant bickering seemed a little less impending.

We got back to the hotel room late and forgot to reset the alarm clock
television set.

The TV clicked on at 8am. I rubbed the sleep out my eyes just in time to
watch the live coverage of United Airlines flight number 175 hit the South tower. I
watched and my heart froze. It was the view from the airplane window from our trip
to New York City when I interviewed for an internship at Forbes Magazine. It was my
irrational fear that if aliens were to bomb a city, NYC would be it. This was the crazy
reason I passed up the opportunity to live there one year prior to being sent to
Alamakee County and then stranded in Dubuque. Then my brain said, “No no no
turn off the crazy and think about this....it’s probably HBO and totally some action
movie where Bruce Willis or Chuck Norris will come bounding into the scene and
totally save New York City.”

I called Chad. I said, “Turn on the TV, New York City is being attacked....
airplanes..... bombed.”

He was asleep, “Nice one, I miss you too. I'm sleeping.” Click.

I called back twice but he had turned off the ringer. I sat there amazed and
horrified. Shauna at some point woke up and appeared to be in just as much shock.
After a couple of grunted attempts to explain what I was seeing, she headed for the
shower.

I called the SHPO and asked to talk to Barry. He wasn't in yet, but another
plane had crashed near the college his daughter attended in Pennsylvania and he
wasn't yet able to reach her. What everyone was feeling and how that was conveyed is impossible to explain. What I can recall is that when Shauna called back, someone told her Barry had taken the fleet minivan and was on his way to get us.

We packed up silently and checked out. We waited in the lobby for hours. I called home again. Chad's voice was strained, "I love you. I'm sorry I was asleep, I thought you were joking...."

The SHPO called us and relayed to us the message that Barry's daughter was safe. What I remember about the moment he arrived was Shauna telling him this, he sat down, closed his eyes and just sat there. After about ten minutes it appeared to us that he was asleep. We respectfully waited with him in silence. Most of my memory of that day is silence. Silence on the marathon drive home, over our lunch, silence when we checked in, silent embraces upon arriving home.

I came home to a tower of my own. The tower image became an icon to the American collective memory. Our tower was visible, a good ten feet taller than the roof lines of the surrounding houses on our block. It was a status symbol, an in your face representation of the American Dream. Tower became an idea, a target.

There are three major lessons that I learned that year:
1) There is no place like home.
2) Squirrels pee as a defense mechanism
3) It's never a good thing when you have to buy a bigger trap
4) It's a bad omen when a farmer with a shotgun on a tiny riding mower chases you down mainstreet and then out of a small lowan town....
To clarify, it's a bad omen in regards to your employment status when an irate old man wielding shotgun on a riding mower with a "The South will Rise Again" bumper sticker chases you out of town when your job is to survey said town and track GPS coordinates for historic structures. Old dude was apparently retired military or something and the next day someone from the CIA or FBI called our boss at the home office to verify we were legitimate and not an undercover posing as state employees terrorist cell, systematically documenting the exact coordinates of abandoned historic schools. It almost sounds ridiculous, but there was a fear coursing through the veins of America that no one was safe, not even in middle America, especially not in the bread bowl of the world.

Septembers 11th, 2001...that day changed many things. It was the end of an era. Soon after, as in about two weeks after, the State cut the funding to our project. Everywhere we had gone people had reacted poorly to our State vehicle, our equipment, and our explanation that we were creating a coordinate database inventory of Iowa's historic resources. People were scared of our legitimacy, and in case we were with the State, the existence of such a database being used to drop bombs of their homes and farms.

The project ended shortly thereafter along with my paycheck and my reason to get up in the morning. So I was unemployed again, gas prices spiked, and our house in Sherman Hill had not yet sold.
CHAPTER 8: GREAT STUFF

We did the math once again and called the Real Estate agents. We were at a breaking point financially. We had decided to put the Hatton House on the market and move back to the Sherman Hill house. We were admitting defeat and returning home with our tails between our legs, "You were right"'s prepared in advance.

Patty asked, "How much are you short?" She knew. She knew we were in over our heads and floundering, drowning, and failing miserably. My rib injury from the car accident had all but stopped progress on the house. "Three hundred dollars," I replied after some quick math. She wrote us a check for $350 and said, "Give me one more week." The next day she called and said she had a buyer. Not only that, the potential buyer wanted to rent the house until the closing date. We met him, he signed a lease and a purchase agreement. He loved Chad's garden; it was the main selling point for him. Chad was happy again as I lowered my ego and mumbled, "You were right...." I couldn't be that mad, since it looked like we might make it after all.

I turned my focus back on weatherizing. October was coming and the boiler was about to be ignited; stay tuned for "The Snow Must Fall" Iowa Winter vs. Chad and Danelle, the sequel.....

I returned to work at JC Penney's and soon found a second job at Wells Fargo Financial taking calls from irate credit card customers. The two things I learned at that job was that furniture salesmen are smarmy and they are twice as smarmy in New Jersey. These two jobs were loveless and I looked back on my
days at the State with wonderment and longing. I plugged away my time on the house, literally plugging any holes that drafts were entering with a product called “Great Stuff” and volunteering with various Historic Preservation efforts locally.

My efforts soon paid off and I got an email about an opening at a local museum. I interviewed for the job and didn’t get it. Then the lady who did quit after two months (bad sign) and I got a call back. Was I interested?

Now, I am skimming over the details to avoid a libel suit and get back to the point to this book, but suffice it to say my advice is this: “Be weary of the job that six people have held in six months.” I made the best of the situation and soon the reason for the workplace turnover had resigned and the job was a great learning experience. Chad was promoted and our old house had sold.

A turning point came one afternoon when I got a phone call from Roger T., the past president of River Bend Association. There was a Wells Fargo guy nosing around River Bend to sell people on refinancing their homes and Roger wanted me to filter out the jargon to see if the guy was worth dealing with.

I tend to agree to do stuff even when I don’t have time, but this was for the valiant cause of our dear neighborhood.

I called the guy whose name was Kent. I could insert here my immediate bias against anyone named Kent or Ken, but it doesn’t make any sense. I grew up hating Barbie’s Ken, my former “boss” at the museum was a Kent, and the creepy guy across the street was a Kenneth. So, I was tentative, but I set up a time to meet with the guy.
I arranged for him to come to the Hatton House and do a walk through, a mock of what he would do for someone going through his program. I thought it was neat that a mortgage lender would come to my house. My experience has always been traveling annoying distances to sign papers in weird sterile cubies in suburban banks, usually with middle aged women who wear too much make up. Kent was coming to see us.

He arrived with a building inspector. They examined the house top to bottom and asked questions about the house, the area, and the architecture. It was quick, easy, and simple. He was not at all like creepy guy or bearably vain “boss”. It was also embarrassing. I hadn't expected a complete walk though and our laundry issues were really earning the moniker “Mt.Washmore” and there was what I am convinced was raccoon poop in the south bedroom, a room that we had not often entered and had for some time had a plastic sheet for a “door”.

After the walk through, he got out a calculator and a pencil and started adding numbers while I chatted with the inspector. Inspector guy was the nephew of one of our neighbors and so we gossiped a little about neighborhood stuff.

Kent scribbled and scribbled and then looked up, “I'll have to verify the numbers, but I think we can do this.”

We played along. We gave him our W-2’s, got estimates, and went a little silly with what we wanted done. We even included the back addition remodel, which was so far not part of our plans for the immediately future and fell deeply into the realm of healthy imagination.
Kent called back the next day. He told us the new number for the mortgage. The work we wanted done would seal our exterior envelope, fix the basement wall, install new wooden storm windows, install hardwood flooring in 3,000 square ft, finish all the plaster walls (by a professional and not us), and completely restore the back addition Summer kitchen. The improvements would, in theory, decrease our heat bills by 80%. We were seriously dreaming when we gave him the list, snickering and playing along the whole while.

The new mortgage was only $350 a month more than we were currently paying and ALL of the fantasy work could be completed. I called Chad. I was in shock. Could we do it? Could we find a contractor that would honor our philosophy of historic preservation?

Yes. And so we set out in earnest, after our meal of crow and a hearty apology to Kent for our snickers, and re-financed. I enrolled in Graduate school so as to offset my student loan payments (which were at the time $350 a month) and the work on Hatton House continued.

What did finally make a difference in our heat bills and warmth factor was insulating the attic floor. The lack of insulation in the top was actually made worse by the presence of insulation in the walls. It created a chimney effect and kept cold air moving through the house. What made a bigger difference was putting wooden storm windows on 45 windows. MidAmerican gave us a $700 grant for the insulation and the inspector recommended the wooden storm windows: wood is an insulator and metal (the typical material for storm windows) is not. He actually recommended
repairing the original wood windows and adding the storms as opposed to replacing the windows with new. This surprised me at first, but once I researched it I found that the restoration with storm combo actually has a better R value and lifetime than a new window. Huh. That's not what every window salesman tells every weary bill struck homeowner. The storms cost $90 per window, while replacement would have cost us $500 per for a good window. Besides, R value is what counts right?

Fixing the floors and plaster walls cut down on the air flow. We also had the furnace serviced. Now our budget billing is closer to $300/month and I know better to think of recycling cans and energy conservation in the same paragraph. No, energy conservation can hit you in the pocket book. I used to joke that I barricaded the hospital door when our daughter, Lily, was born because I wasn't sure that I didn't bargain away my first born to MidAmerican customer service reps that first winter in Hatton House. Maybe I just guessed the customer service troll's name in time.

The windows at the Hatton House were in excellent condition compare to other homes that I have evaluated. I reviewed, through our local historic preservation commission, a project on a beautiful historic apartment building that was being turned into condominiums, in which the windows were being replaced with metal clad windows and the memory of that project makes me sick. Those windows were wonderful with beautiful original hardware, they stuck a little and needed to be repainted and reglazed, maybe paired with a storm window for better R value......, but certainly nothing terrible. I'd love to compare energy efficiency with
the current occupants just for kicks. The major argument that the renovators of that building made was that the R-value was awful and no matter how many studies I pushed in front of them proving that the overall heat loss was not solely through the windows and they'd be better off with storms and repairs.... the new fake window salesman was more convincing and now they can never go back. The windows, much to my objection, were chucked into dumpsters. I heard that they sold the hardware for $50 a set. Rumor...but plausible. The price for the hardware I've found to replace the originals missing at the Hatton House is $60 per window pull inset. Man, that gets my goat.

Why is it that people are so easily swayed by their general contractors and material vendors? Especially for something so important as their home? Well, the answer is simple. The charletons play on the poor souls ignorance of factual data and their eagerness for a good deal. The apartment project mantra was, “But he said he could get them wholesale.....” the “he” being their general, making 15% commission off the project and a little bonus form the window manufacturer. So, instead of paying $50 a window for repairs, $100 for a good storm window, and keeping the hardware, they paid $400-500 per window, wholesale, plus installation and hardware to end up with less R/U value than possible with original restoration. Does that make any sense?

I was not about to fall for that scam, not with forty eight windows to deal with.

I made sure I found a contractor that would not play on my naivety nor be sold to the almighty dollar. After many, many interviews and walk throughs, we found
Doug.

Doug's specialty was "new construction" and he had finished Chad's parents' suburban basement. I humored them when I interviewed him begrudgingly, but there was something about him that I instantly liked. He didn't give us a number on the spot, nor was his the lowest bid that came in, but his numbers were the closest to my own and he would let us do some of the work to bring the cost down.

And with Doug came Josh, a kid about our age that would swear by saying, "Holy Buckets!" and he meticulously cleaned up the work site every day. Doug's crew was polite, tidy, and had a good sense of humor. Which was a good thing for all of us considering that they spent nearly two years working in our home and we spent the same living in the middle of their worksite.

Work began in June and, before we knew it, all the walls were plastered and repaired using our well researched and by the Standards method of patching and skim coating. Chad and I gleefully enjoyed helping move the furniture out of the way.
CHAPTER 9: BUG SPIT AND THE ERA OF RECONSTRUCTION

That phase of renovation was tough even with a contractor and crew doing much of the work. To be able to afford Doug’s price tag we had agreed to do any demolition work, which included gutting the back addition (and later meant tearing the whole structure down when it was determined to be unsavable). Towards the middle of the project another decision was presented. We had planned on having Doug install prefinished hardwood floors downstairs and carpet (a “for now” compromise) upstairs, but because of the lumber prices doubling because of the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq the price of the wood flooring had doubled too. Doug had found an alternative: unfinished hardwood. Would we be able to finish it ourselves? We punched the numbers. Then we asked Doug if it was hard to install? He said not really. Chad vied for an air compressor and an acetylene torch, the 1980’s Ghostbusters kind with a backpack and flamethrower.

The end result was that Chad got his air compressor (and a small propane torch, on compromise), we purchased enough flooring for both upstairs and down and we agreed to install and finish it ourselves. It was a medium quality three quarter, Red Oak.

Of course there had to be a snag. By the time Chad had enough of the flooring installed for me to start staining and sealing it, we discovered that I was pregnant with our first child. That eliminated the possibility of using most staining or sealing products. However determined I was to have the house ready for the baby’s arrival, determination alone does not materialize the funding and we could not pay
for someone to finish this task nor was Chad talented enough to spread the stain evenly. By that point we had treaded heavily on the generosity and good will of both family and friends, so no volunteers were to be had either.

I hit the stacks at the library again. Nothing. Internet...nada. Finally I started asking questions to the suppliers and vendors. I acquired the spec sheets for supposedly environmentally safe products and gave them to our Obstetrician, hoping for something that was safe to use. We found one stain and one sealer. The doc sent the product specs to the "transgenetic center" in Iowa City for verification. Their answer was this: wear gloves and work in a well ventilated space.

The stain was just a water based one, but the sealer was something called Shellac. Shellac is the product, surprisingly enough, that was historically used (Labine 152). It's basically insect excretions (not bug poop, as thought by some, it's more like bug spit) mixed with denatured alcohol (which is the ingredient that necessitated wearing gloves). It's pretty cool. The more layers that are brushed on, the prettier it gets. If it gets scratched you brush more on and instead of totally refinishing the floors every 5-10 years as required with urethane sealers, you just mop more shellac on whenever the floors look a little dull. It dries in twenty minutes. Not bad for something made of bug "excretions". It's water resistant and pretty, easy to maintain, and surprisingly not very expensive. All these things and at our local hardware store in gallons (Zinsser 2006).

When people ask me about the wood finishing technique that I use, I give them what I call the recipe (it's even on a recipe card):
Step 1: Wipe clean with slightly damp rag (or vacuum)

Step 2: Wipe with mixture of Murphy's oil soap (or mop) Use four times as much of the soap as recommended on the label. For floors that are heavily crusted with grime, use an industrial floor scrubber like the Hoover FloorMax.

Step 3: Allow to dry, if the floor is in good condition, skip to step 6

Step 4: If floor has major scratches or you have to patch repair, sand with a floor sander. I skip the hard grit and start with medium and then fine. Sand one round with each, vacuum the dust in between.

Step 5: Apply stain. Even if you like the natural color of the wood, the stain conditions and adds moisture to the wood. Let that dry. Tip: Stains say to apply with rag and wipe of excess. Of you do that, you'll go through gallons of stain and ruin your back. I use a big fluffy polyester sponge and wipe on and off the excess in one swipe, then squeeze it back out for the next section. Instead of using 2 gallons per room floor, I used a quart and a half. For lighter stains on floors, you can use a lambs wool mop, but this it is harder to spread dark stain evenly this way. Wood trim is way easier to stain with sponge than with a rag.

Step 6: After the stain has dried (wait at least twice as long as the label says and feel free to panic when the stained surface starts to dry and looks like someone spread moldy butter all over it. Calm down, drink some chamomile tea and mollify spouse, who is doubting your handiwork, by whatever means necessary. Mine required a new power tool to play with....) prepare the shellac brush. I know people who apply who rooms with a paint brush. Fine for woodwork, sucks for floors. I
bought something called a deck brush and attached it to a broom handle. The first coat gets applied really thin. It should barely rectify the fogging caused by the stain. Many people get giddy about how pretty the floor starts to look and tip the whole bucket to shellac out and just push it around the room. It's one thing if the bucket spills by accident......

Step 7: Apply additional coats. Each coat should take 15 minutes to dry + 15 minutes for each coat that's newly beneath it. So, if it's the second coat from that day, 30 minutes, but if it's the second coat and the first coat was done two years ago, 15 minutes. If your shellac coat takes longer to dry then the shellac may have been expired or you spread it too thick.

It's gets prettier and prettier each additional coat, but four coats should do you just fine.

*Maintenance:* If the surface gets scratched, get out a brush and some shellac (check the date) and touch up the spot. If it's a dark stain and the scratch is deep, you might want to touch up the stain first. When I do Spring cleaning every two to three years, I give each of my floors a new thin coat of shellac. It takes about a day to do, but it's way easier than having them refinished every 5 years! Oh, and I use Amber Shellac by Zinsser and I get the pre-mixed kind with the three year shelf life.
CHAPTER 10: THE BONE HOLE

There were two things that happened that summer that spoke to the history of the house in a way that I had not suspected. It began with a phone call and a run home for lunch break:

It was a hot hot June day in Iowa, and humid in a way that only corn can infect the air. My car drove as if underwater, the humidity wiped off the windshield with the steady beat of wipers, the sun blazing overhead in the perfectly blue sky.

That day the contractors were digging out the cistern. I parked the car and headed back to see what treasures they had found. I expected glass jars and bottles, I hoped for the unexpected, the Antique Roadshow million dollar find (and hoped that only I would recognize it as such....), I'm the worst kind of daydreamer, the kind that hopes to find gold coins in the walls or pirate chests on the beach, the kind that gets totally fished in when I hear stories about secret rooms full of old beer bottles that turn out to be worth thousands and end up paying for the renovation......or the family that was restoring a house and the owners from three generations back pull up with a moving truck filled with all the original house parts like fireplace mantels, built in buffets, and oak trim (that really happened to one of our neighbors......).

What I did not expect was to see everyone standing around the hole with worried, pained expressions on their faces.

"It's lunch time, right?" I thought. "Why isn't anyone eating?"

I walked spryly to the edge of the hole and poked Josh's arm, "What's up?"
He pointed. Bones. A leg bone, part of a pelvis, some rib cage....

Bones.

Covered in sludge, bones. One man in the hole hauling up sludge and waste, buckets full of debris, and bones.

My head swam in the heat. The bones were not those of a full sized adult human.

When we had first opened the hole we had seen fast food wrappers from at least the 1980's. That meant that the hole had been opened while the house was a crack house, while the house was abandoned. We knew that. We knew that was one of the reasons for having a hazardous waste pump truck drain the water and mud from the hole. There could be drug materials from that era, could be human waste. We also knew that there could be cholera virus, small pox, or influenza strain from the earlier part of the 1900's still infectious and swimming in the muck. Fine. These things are all reasonable explanations, textbook, in your head.

The tight feeling in my chest was not fear, it was sadness. The bones, what if they belonged to a small child? What child could disappear and not be missed? Or if missed, not found? What circumstance could lead to the planks of an old wooden floor being removed, a heavy cement cap lifted, and then replaced after such a small burden disposed of in the green depths of the silent murky water and sludge.

A second set of bones came up. Tiny. "Must be a cat or a squirrel," one guy said. They were tossed in the debris hauler truck as soon as the skull came up to verify: definitely feline.
Bucket after bucket came up and was slowly dumped into the hauler. Now and then another bone would appear in the sludge and it was laid out on the grass. This was the first time that the stories of prostitutes, gang members, drug dealers, and junkies were not funny, cocktail party epics. This was the moment that the people that inhabited the Hatton House in its worst time became real to me. People not dredges, not infestations of pests like the squirrels, ants, or rodents, to be removed and forgotten in favor of the beautiful romantic Victorian history. Put away in favor of the jazz music and funny restoration narratives. People. People whose lives had fallen to despairing depths and personal agony. The remnants of which were so disgusting to us we needed Hazmat to remove.

This is when it hit me that the man who had tried to push the door in that rainy night was looking for a dry place to rest, that the woman on the corner could disappear and people would notice and assume she'd be in jail, that the runaway who had already disappeared had met some terrible part of their lives at this house. That these stories are the lives of people and deep, unforgiving suffering. That we are all a footstep away from the edge of that hole where our stories end.

Then came one collective sigh of relieve as the guy in the hole handed up a skull. It was a dog. It was a dog. A dog. I walked inside and vomited in the kitchen sink.

That was the first contact I had with that era of the house's life in it's dark days. The next came when I was painting the trim in the upstairs hallway:

I was perched on a ladder to reach the top of it nine feet up, the underside of
the transom to the bathroom. The paint glopped on the end of my brush. I had in
one hand a rag, in the other the paint brush. Dover White, Sherman Williams interior
architectural enamel, semi-gloss. The rag, undetectably damp, wiped. I dropped the
brush on the floor. (My legacy: dropping things from ladders.....) I climbed down
retrieved said brush and headed back up. Brush perched in my hand, I went in for
the kill.

This time I dropped the brush out of surprise. The rag had wiped away layers
of dust and revealed dark brown droplets splattered on the underside of the transom
and down the side.

I climbed down again and returned with a very wet rag and pinesol. No
amount of scrubbing was working, only making the material redder. I got dizzy on
the ladder and figured it was the fumes. I descended once again and called both my
husband and my sister, Ri, a forensics TV junkie and criminal justice major at our
local State University. They both said the same thing.

Me: Hey lady, hypothetically....say you find a splatter on the wall.... how would
you test it to see it was, say, blood?

Ri: You found blood? Where?

Me: I don't know, how do I test it to see?

Ri: Try peroxide, see if it bubbles.

It bubbled.

Logically, it had occurred to me that it could not be anything else. Black
Cherry pudding? Right, splattered nine feet in the air in the back upstairs hallway.
Yeah.

But it could be...ok, a bloody nose sneeze? Gross, but possible? An injured bird or bat loose in the house and splattering as it bounced off the walls?

Chad: Not likely, there'd be more blood and the splatter array would be more random.

He didn't have to tell me this. I watch CSI Miami (for shame........I have guiltily watched network prime time when I should have been writing, plastering, painting, cleaning.....). I knew instinctively what its source was more likely to have been. I also understood that this was the source of my vertigo on the ladder.

My imagination had dramatized it in my daydream: someone cowering at the end of a darkened hall. Either their own hand or another's on the trigger of a gun......

If it were my choice, I'd never have set foot at the end of this particular hallway ever again. My bladder necessitated a compromise since this was the doorway to the only bathroom in our house and as it turned out, I was soon after pregnant with our first child. The compromise was this: the doorway got painted by someone else and I would remember to speak with a proper tone of reverence when discussing the lives of those who came to the Hatton House with journeys that may have ended or continued on in not the best of circumstances.

People lived in this house even when it was “abandoned”. Old houses echo the lives of those who loved, who hated, who agonized, whose joy was shouted, and hurts were murmured. It's embedded in the shellac, sometimes in the deep grooves of the wood, in the grain lines, covered in dust, ashes, and, sometimes, even human
detritus. We uncover the layers like urban archaeologists, sifting through the sediment of neglect. It makes a good story to claim, “This Victorian mansion sat abandoned for ten years and was the worst crack house in Iowa!”; “The neighborhood crime rate dropped by 80% when this house was reclaimed!”; “People could smell the debris for blocks and Hazmat had to remove the flooring!”; “Teri and her family used snow shovels and filled huge dumpsters cleaning out thousands of Bic lighters and body parts!”. But as Charles Dickens said best:

_Thus, it comes to pass, that a certain room in a certain old hall, where a certain bad lord, baronet, knight, or gentleman, shot himself, has certain planks in the floor from which the blood will not be taken out. You may scrape and scrape, as the present owner has done, or plane and plane, as his father did, or scrub and scrub, as his grandfather did, or burn and burn with strong acids, as his great-grandfather did, but, there the blood will still be - no redder and no paler - no more and no less - always just the same._

-Charles Dickens, A Christmas Tree
In the fall of 2003, I received a phone call from this guy about a postcard. It was a strange call, but not entirely out of my newly formed frame of experience since moving into the Hatton House. William Dodds, local historian, called me to say that he saw a picture of our house in the local paper and that he owned a postcard advertisement that he was pretty sure featured our house. Would I like to come take a look at it?

Um, yeah.

Wow, 1907. I was totally giddy with excitement to see the postcard. When I finally got to Mr. Dodds home, which was strikingly similar to the Hatton House both interior and exterior, I was literally about to pee my pants. What totally blew me away was the information surrounding the photo on the postcard. Yes, this was indeed my home, the Hatton House, but in 1907 it was the Prospect Park Sanitarium: a hospital for the "ethical and non-surgical treatment of chronic and malignant diseases.....". When I first heard the term "sanitarium" I, like many others, imagined a loony bin with straight jacketed psychopaths drooling and being tortured. It is much more likely that the home was used for discreet drug rehab or tuberculosis treatment. To date, I have found no other historical references or documents (other than the postcard) referencing the Prospect Park Sanitarium.

My memory of the rest of that particular day is totally gone. I was wrapped up
in my own imagination; not only was I now the Mistress of Hatton House, but also the proprietor of the former Prospect Park Sanitarium. WaaaaaHaHa......<insert evil laugh>

The bigger significance of this postcard was that it is an historical record of the architectural detail in 1907. The roof cap of the tower is already gone, but the corners of the tower have an extraordinary carved wooden detail that is now missing, but can be more accurately duplicated, the original porches are featured, and the original barn can be seen in the background. The photo is sepia toned, but the tonal values of the original painted exterior color scheme can be seen. Original landscape plantings are clearly visible. The postcard itself was mailed to a Dr. Dicey in Indianola, Iowa and he can be tracked genealogically to add his story to the historical association of the home.

The journey to discover the history of the land on which my home was built has been frustrating. The abstract begins with the Louisiana Purchase. Everyone in Iowa who owns land property can say that. So after the French decided that they could “sell” the territory, most history relates to the immigrant settlers and ties in with the greater United States history. As the old saying goes, “History is written by the victors,” (www.wikipedia.com).

I began my search for pre-Captain Allen Des Moines history at the
neighborhood website:

The River Bend neighborhood contains the largest number of Victorian houses in the Des Moines metropolitan area. Examples of these homes, built from the early 1880s through the early 1900s, include fine examples of Queen Anne and Colonial Revival design. The neighborhood also boasts a large number of Craftsman and Foursquare homes.

Des Moines experienced a great housing boom during the Victorian era, and North Des Moines became the fastest growing and biggest neighborhood in the city. At that time, three different street cars connected the neighborhood to the downtown area via 2nd, 6th and 9th avenues. -(River Bend website, neighborhoodlink.org)

The website and brochures that represent the historic neighborhood are the gatekeepers of data for the general public. The above blurb is used on most of their promotional material. What does this matter to the average person? Not much. But, to the historian, it is highly significant and what is interesting is the omission. What has been omitted in the above passage is information about the land and residents pre-Victorian suburbanization. Surely there must be a resource for the area that dates back before the year 1880?

Since the City of Des Moines does not have a local historical society or museum for city history and the Polk County Historical society does not have a repository, I then headed for the State library and their experts.

I quickly became frustrated with vague details and condescending history. Iowa History Project, for example, reads a passage:

Iowa was a battle ground, but the records are lost, save as the mounds would furnish mute testimony to the deeds that were.

It is possible that the Mound Builders fled southward, and that in Arizona and New Mexico and vicinity they built new homes.

The Indians were left in possession of the Upper Mississippi Valley.
Iowa was now the field of a long struggle. The families overlapped here. The Sioux held the region in the north of Iowa and in Minnesota, and penetrated into Wisconsin.

The Algonquins surged below them to the Missouri, occupying the rest of Iowa and the north of Missouri. The line between the rivals reached about from the mouth of the Upper Iowa River to the mouth of the Big Sioux. (Chapter 4)

And then follows with:

A reservation of government land, watched over by government officials, was the only place proper for the Indian after his haunts had been over-run by the whites. Civilization demanded his removal. But this picture of the Sac and the Fox, with bowed head half enveloped in a blanket, leaving behind them familiar valley and stream, and filing sadly over the Iowa prairie, bound eventually beyond the borders and into a strange country, is one that we must not forget when we say:

"Lo, the poor Indian." (Chapter 5)

This is problematic for me. First, the historian disassociates the Mound Builders from “Indians” and makes clear that the Sac and Fox invaded (surged in) and drove out the original inhabitants (which echoes the history of European colonization....), and then paints a narrative descriptive picture of a defeated people that “Civilization demanded removal” of. In this history I found little mention of the Native Americans who stayed nor those who returned. The language used to tell this history was unsettling to me.

So, I started looking for other histories.

The first I found was a humorous yet poignant tale of a practical joke:

But he insists that rather than denoting the tribe’s true identity, the name was a ribald joke offered up to French explorers Marquette and Jolliet in 1673 as a bit of razzing between competing Indian communities.

McCafferty based his conclusion on the work of another
linguist, David Costa, who wrote an article on the etymology of a number of Miami-Illinois tribal names, Moingoana among them. Moingoana, McCafferty cites Costa, originates from the word "mooyiinkweena" - which translates, politely, to "the excrement-faces." (www.desmoinesregister.com, Challender 2003)

This history is the first that I came across that showed the native people of Iowa as human and intelligent instead of idiots or savages. It also makes sense with some of the other histories that I found that designate Sauk as people of yellow earth (color of mud painted on their faces) and the Fox as people of red earth (www.mnsu.edu).

The iowahistory.org site had a useful timeline that designated briefly when and where Indian removal occurred. It also was the first online source I encountered that stated that some Fox (Mesqwik) never left and also related the tale of return by some who had gone to Kansas and Arkansas.

By far the most useful and informative site was Lee Sultzman's history project (http://www.tolatsga.org/sf.html) to detail 240 tribal histories, but even this history only goes as far back as the year 1600.

I left the stacks and virtual halls for an afternoon and went down to the river by my home.

This particularly lovely riverfront park is called Prospect Park. It is touted on the City's website as having a boat dock, a grilling and picnic area, and a playground. In reality, it is where quite a few homeless people camp and a good deal of drug transactions happen. Last month a high school girl was found on the trail, her heart had stopped due to severe alcohol poisoning and her friends left her
there in below freezing weather (www.dmregister.com, 12/8/05). I have my own horror stories to tell, but that just adds to the police rap sheet for the area. Suffice to say it's not the kind of park you'd pick as your first choice when considering what playground to take the kids to. I have never seen any children on the play equipment there.

The area is divided from Hickman by a huge embankment, owned by Broadlawns Medical Center, a tax equity company, and a private citizen. A neighbor once told me that the mound was a Woodland burial mound. I decided to pull up an aerial view to investigate.

Both the embankment and the area along Spring Creek Drive seemed similar to other burial mounds that I had seen photos of and visited along the Mississippi River in Eastern Iowa at the Effigy Mounds National Park. So I emailed the state historian and the state archaeologist.

State Historian, Ralph Christians, responded:

*Historically, this area was part of Prospect Park, which was a rather elaborate 19th Century amusement park. The current Hickman Road did not exist then. Prospect Road was a rather windy road that left Sixth Avenue one-two blocks south of where Hickman starts, gradually working its way over to part of what is now called Hickman before snaking its way westwardly down into the park whose buildings were adjacent to the creek. The area had a number of natural features which have been illustrated in a number late 19th century history books. The architectural plans for some of the park buildings are in the SHSI manuscript collections. Several persons have told me that the foundations for many of the buildings still exist. The park even had a steamer that brought people from downtown up and back. Major flooding in 1902 and 1903 largely destroyed the buildings, and it was largely abandoned.*
Again, he was referencing Victorian era history. This was not unexpected given the resources available and the multiple histories of Des Moines all starting in the 1800's.

Daniel Higginbottem, Archaeologist for the State Historic Preservation Office, responded:

"I-Sites does not identify this as a mound (or any other type of archaeological site). I think that what you have here is a natural landforms and not a cultural earthwork. The local landscape depicted on the USGS topo map suggests that this is an elongated, natural levee remnant with an abandoned channel of Spring Creek on the one side and the active channel on the other. However, considering its proximity to the Des Moines river and the presence of archaeological sites locally, I wouldn't be surprised if a site were found at that location."

This is what I suspected. Our neighborhood is one of the high and dry spots in Des Moines. While it is true that Prospect Park floods about twice every spring, my house and much of the area has no signs of ever flooding either in the foundation or outbuildings and yet, we are glances from the Des Moines River itself. It is not a jump to conclude that underneath thee ruins of a former Victorian amusement park and zoological garden there would also be evidence of a previous culture.

The state archaeologists in Iowa City won't verify that they have known records of burial sites in the vicinity until I can prove the legitimacy of my inquiry.

Which led my curiosity into another stream of thought. Why not include these culturally significant sites on our historical maps and other heritage material and histories? Why hide them?

The above map from the National Parks Service website categorizes Polk
County Iowa having 143-991 sites of significance. That's quite a few, the same color code as the county where the Effigy Mounds National Park is located along the Mississippi River and yet there is not information that I could find to locate or identify specific sites.

This is possibly a good thing, as frustrating as it is, for the preservation and integrity of such sites. Just because the culture I live in showcases their historic cemeteries, does not mean that is an acceptable way to honor other cultures' burial sites. There is quite a bit of controversy regarding this exact debate on the Internet, a whole website is dedicated to the subject:


The flip side to this is that if we cannot, or will not, identify the sites, how can we protect them from urban or agricultural development, scavengers, or natural disaster? If we cannot learn about the local history and integrate meaningful places into our experience of those histories, how can we bring that history into our collective and community identity?

Professionals strive to protect the significance of both cultural landscapes and structural integrity of architectural history. We are all the custodians of our history and the record of that story is not solely what written with ink on paper. The challenge, therefore, is to integrate another aspect of history and culture into how we, as such custodians of public history, view the landscape and built environment and how we understand it.

There is no such place that one could build new or change the integral design
of that would not affect either the landscape or the built environment. So one must consider the cultural and historical impact of such designs, either through new additions or existing structure rehab or renovations, and how to integrate them well with both. A quality design would have to speak to both aspects to be successful. This standard, I have come to understand, speaks to most of the cultural belief systems I have studied: Native American, Victorian, and modern Historic Preservation principals.

I returned to researching the history of the Hatton House. I busied myself with building the archive of history for the house and I maintained the fantasy that there would be enough items of interest to build a museum exhibition.

The Hatton House is a two and a half story residence built in 1887. According to the vertical file at the State of Iowa Historic Preservation Office, the house is largely Stick style, but shows evidence of Italianate influence in the tower and exterior ornamentation; this means that there is a lot of vertical board detail and there are fancy brackets at the roof line. The house is referenced as the best-preserved example of the canted bay subtype and the only one remaining in Des Moines with a full three-story tower, but I have seen many other similar towers throughout Iowa and especially in Sioux City, Iowa. There is no known architect for the Hatton House, so it is likely the work of local craftsmen, there is speculation that it was built by developers Adams and Hastie (Page 1998).

Dr. John Hatton, the first documented resident and namesake of the home, was born among the Indians in a camp in 1839. A graduate of the College of
Physicians and Surgeons at Keokuk, Iowa, he relocated from Red Oak, Iowa to Des Moines in 1889 and formed a partnership with one of the oldest practitioners in Polk County (Who's Who Polk County 226).

His sons, John and Raymond have notable histories that relate to the structure. John, the oldest, became an architect and there are photographs of the buildings he designed in New York City in the Library of Congress's National Archives. Several of the photographs are of Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, NY (Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc., 1941).

Raymond Hatton's history is the story most referenced in relation to the house. He appeared in over 300 movies and many television shows before his death in 1971. He began his theatrical career in the loft of the now non-extant barn at the back of the Hatton House's property. Raymond was quite a figure in Hollywood, not just for his history of bit parts, but his friendships and influence in social circles. It is from this association that the lore that Louis Armstrong visited the home is rooted. Raymond's biography is easily found, as he is listed in the Des Moines Register's Famous People of Iowa archive. The house is even referenced in the story (Longden).

When I found relatives of the Hattons on genealogical forums online, they filled in some of the history gaps for me. Nellie Rebecca, the sister of John and Raymond ended up a favorite teacher at a school in Los Angeles and Anna, their mother and Dr. Hatton's second wife, moved to California after losing the house in 1907.
It is after 1907 that the history of the house becomes a little vague. I have the postcard and the property abstract. The postcard tells us when the house first became something other than a single family home and documents visually the physical structure, but little else.

Density in this house had been increasing since 1910 and by the 1970's had become five slum rental units.

One summer we met Bobby “Parker” Blue and we've been in contact briefly, several times over the course of the years. The first time, he knocked on the door when Chad was home alone, Parker introduced himself and said he had lived in the house when it was apartments in the 1970's. The two chatted and Chad gave him a tour. Of course, Chad asked none of the essential questions. Questions like, “Do you remember what the original fireplaces looked like? What about the buffet? The kitchen windows and cabinets?” No; they just chatted about what we were doing with the house.

But Parker left his card. Months later, when I started researching the house in earnest, I came across the card in a desk drawer. I emailed him, but it bounced back. So, I “googled” the name on the card “Jackson Blue.” Hit.

Jackson Blue is a jazz band based in California, Robert Parker aka Parker Blue is a keyboardist with the band. And he responded to email inquiries. What I learned from him was that his aunt was the landlady of the apartments that were the Hatton House in the 1970's and he and his new wife (since divorced) lived on the first floor. He had a cat that would run crazy around the outside of the house. He
didn't remember any fireplaces or cabinets, but did remember glass French doors into the library room and that he kept his recording equipment and piano in that room. He said the pipes would freeze in the winter and that frost would build up the inside of the windows it was so cold. He said he almost bought the house but for the bad pipes.

He said that “Big Mike” Edwards used to play with their band and he's now in the Iowa Blues Hall of Fame.

Our friend and former neighbor, Deryl Mertz, in Sherman Hill related to us his experience with the house in the early 1970's. From what we can tell, he lived there just before Parker's residence. He gave us a tour of what the floor plan was like when he lived there and related stories about the other tenants. His apartment consisted of what is now the South, North, and West bedrooms and he had to cross the hallway and unlock one of the rooms separately. He said the West bedroom was his kitchen, the South was his living room, and the North his bedroom. He said all the tenants on the Second and third floors shared the bathroom (that is now our very tiny upstairs laundry room. He said what is now the bathroom was just a storage closet. He said that there were two apartments on the third floor and that the landlady lived on the entire first floor. He said that he did not remember there being any fireplaces then either and he did not remember the built in buffet in the dining room.
CHAPTER 12. WORST CRACK HOUSE IN IOWA

It was sometime in the 1980's that the home was abandoned and the drug activity worsened. In 1989 it was considered to be one of the most notorious “crack houses” in Des Moines. The Hatton House was declared a public nuisance by the city and was slated for demolition.

That’s when the house met Teri Toye.

Teri Toye. Her name does nothing to describe her. We first met her just before we closed on the house, or just after. My memory of that moment is shadowed by her actual presence and that is the hard part to describe. I had heard from friends that they had met her while she was roofing her mother's house with wood shingles, or at an art show, or while she was fighting for something at City Hall and that she was a strong and towering presence. What I imagined her to be like was more in line with her mother: physically muscular, tough, and spirited- like a pioneer women. I wasn't completely off base, but mostly.

To describe Teri is a terrible charge. If I get it wrong, it's only because my imagination is colored by my admiration of her. When I met her she towered above me, but she was gracefully thin. So thin that I could not imagine her hefting sheaths of shingles up a ladder and doing the physical labor associated with roofing; the wind should have blown her away, but like a Willow tree she swayed. I fully understood the description given that someone could be willow thin. She emanated determination and when she spoke her voice was stern and very much like her mother's. I could fully picture her in my mind standing contemplatively in front of an
oil work or a sculpture at a show and terse words flowing from her.

But when I introduced myself, her gaze was at once penetrating and sizing. Suddenly I was the one being evaluated. But her eyes were suddenly sad, or it was at that moment that I noticed the sadness. At that point I did not, could not, understand the depth of that grief.

She was the individual who saved the Hatton House from certain destruction. The lore has it that she tied herself the the front porch and met the bulldozers head on, refused to budge to attempt to buy time for her legal team to acquire the house. Another version has her borrowing cars and arranging them along the street so there was nowhere for the machines to access the block and that a few of the cars she had to rent from Enterprise. Whatever she did worked. In 1993 the abstract shows ownership being transferred to her and her husband Patrick Fox.

The next thing that happened also lives deeply in lore. The neighbor have all shared stories about the work that Teri did to stabilize the house. The structure was so full of debris, that in some places it reached the ten foot ceilings. One guy who worked for her said that for months they worked, filling ten yard dumpsters with thousands of Bic lighters shoveled out with snow shovels. Human debris saturated the floors to the point that the flooring had to be removed by Hazmat. Neighbors said that the place, when abandoned, wreaked stench for blocks, but when the debris was being removed the smell intensified so that children would walk extra blocks around the house to get to school. Some of the children said that they heard that body parts came out of the house and that it was haunted. Whatever the truth
was, Teri brought the house back from the dead, dealt with the debris, and cleaned her up.

Since the house had been declared a public nuisance, supposedly the worst drug and whore house in Iowa, and slated for demolition, the clean up was not as simple as clearing out debris. According to the City of Des Moines, the house must be brought back to code and acquire a certificate of "occupancy" to be removed from the death rolls of the bulldozers. All the plumbing, wiring, and mechanicals (furnace and hot water heater) must be brought to current construction code to achieve this certification. This is no easy feat for an old house. Then the roof and windows must also be stabilized and brought to code. On top of all that, the house could not be financed until the title was totally cleared and even then most banks would not touch it.

So, not only did Teri have to clean out the house and deal with the legal red tape, she also had to reconstruct the central nervous system of the house. Most people I have worked with or talked to approach this task with efficiency. They do the bare minimum, asphalt the roof, clean old duct work, and buy a forced air furnace.

Not Teri.

The house at the time of it's death warrant had been divided into five apartment units and then left abandoned for many years. The roof had collapsed in
places and the porches sagged with their own rot. The windows had been boarded over, the few that actually remained, and the place was filled with old furniture, clothing, rotting food, and drug paraphernalia. Urban miners had stripped the place of its built in buffet, both fireplaces mantle and tile work, doors, hardware, and anything else that could be easily pried off and sold. She saw the beauty beneath the mask of death and debris. She saw what could be revived.

She put on a wooden roof, reconstructed the tower cap, reused remaining stained glass to reconstruct each of the eleven stained glass windows, found and restored a steam boiled system, and carefully studied all available resources associated with the house. She reconstructed the original single family floor plan. She lived in the house with little or no heat for years. In the midst of the project her husband left her. The abstract shows a legal divorce decree transferring ownership to Teri. A letter in the State of Iowa Preservation files from her describes a stall in the project that she received grant monies for, “It is unfortunate that my “child” the Hatton House has become a hostage in a battle......I remain the faithful parent.” (Toye 1994) There is no question that she dedicated herself to this structure in a way that only those who have suffered from “house lust” can fully understand.

In 2004, while I was working at the museum, a man knocked on the door and asked to see me. I had been sorting old photos of Henry A. Wallace for an upcoming museum exhibition and my mood was, let’s just say, less than hospitable. This changed immediately when he opened the file he was carrying. Mark Mikunas worked with Teri during the roof reconstruction and he provided me with the plans
for not only the roof, but the interior floor plan, and the color schemes they were considering. It was amazing. Teri had gone to great lengths to do justice to this house (Mikunas 1990-1995).

Which brings us to another facet of history and explanation as to why she gave up on the house. As graffiti surfaced itself from under layers of peeling paint that first summer and another house nearby was tagged with "KKK", a neighbor reflected on the history of hate crime in River Bend. He said that Teri was threatened with violence almost daily because she was actually a man, a transvestite. Immediately I mentally referenced the legal documents in my desk drawer referencing the legal divorce separating Teri Toye from Patrick Fox. In Iowa same sex unions are not legal, so what did our neighbor's assertion that Teri was a man mean?

This also conflicted with my memory of meeting her. She was very much a woman, a graceful and powerful force. So I did what people do now to find out more about a person: I “googled” Teri Toye.

The first hit I found was an article about Britney Spears and a photo shoot that her photographer did modeling Britney after a famous model of the 1980's: Teri Toye. “Fashionistas find this all quite amusing since the shoot was apparently inspired, in part, by Teri Toye, a legendary transgender from the eighties who modeled for the likes of Karl Lagerfeld and Jean Paul Gaultier.” (Malkin 2003) The photos of Britney were not pretty, but they were interesting and artful, a definite split form her usually sickly sweet oversexed bordering on child porn work. The photos
were dark, black and white, and sad. I searched for the originals. I searched for verification that the famous trans-gendered model referenced was the same Teri that sold us the Hatton House.

I found them. She is. I found a photo by Nan Golding of Teri and Patrick, “on their honeymoon”. I found Steven Sprouse’s work featuring Teri. I found a video featuring a party in 1979 with celebrities, Teri listed as a main feature. I found articles referencing her as a major figure in the world of trans-gendered people and the movement:

_In New York, fashion editors chose the American transsexual Teri Toye as the girl of the ‘80s and months later the American magazine CIRCULATE dedicated six of its’ pages to the South African born model, Lauren Shipton. (Kingry, 1)_

Then I found a small blurb, “Toye returned to her native Des Moines, Iowa, in 1987 to live the life of a suburban housewife.” from July 21, 2003 issue of New York Magazine. Well, that’s definitely Teri, sort of. Except for the suburban location and the typical image of housewife.

What I find incredibly tragic about Teri’s situation is that hate might have been a factor in driving her from the Hatton house and from River Bend. That people’s hate for something they did not understand could overshadow and ultimately eclipse her love for architecture and for the Hatton House. I am certain that this loss is one that we might never fully understand and it’s depth is at the heart of the sadness I saw in her that first time we met.

I have so many questions for her and, yet, I am terrified of talking to her. I keep promising myself that I will call her and ask, but with my chronic foot in mouth
disease, will I say something that will offend her? The chance of that is pretty good, but I know that the benefits to the historical archive for the house's history outweighs my fear and shortcomings. When I ran into her at a local art gallery I turned into a pool of goo and sputtered out questions about the exterior color scheme. She answered them gracefully and I tried very hard to honor what she said. When I came by some old color sketches that her architect had done for the house, the colors we used pretty near to those she had chosen and I only hope the outcome is what she intended.

Of all the people, famous or not who lived in the house and shaped what it has become, Teri is by far the individual whose impact has been the most notable. Any Victorian family could have purchased it on speculation, many houses were used as hospitals at the beginning of the last century, and the fate of the majority of Victorian Houses in Urban Des Moines was to be chopped into apartments mid-century. Many houses burned or were bulldozed or both. There were few individuals who attached themselves to houses in order to save them, and few of those with the tenacity to fight such a passionate fight so as to succeed.

Sometimes I wonder if I have it in me to fight such a fight. Sure, Chad and I have boarded and guarded neighboring houses, appeared at City Council on their behalf, but we have attached ourselves to a home that is safe from such threat and well insured in case of major catastrophe. All I can have is a terrible admiration for the pioneers that faced the machines, bureaucratic and steel.
CHAPTER 13: SO WHEN WILL YOU FINISH THE HOUSE?

I would like to eventually trace the architectural history of the Hatton House from pre history to the land development in Des Moines in the 1860's through 2005. In that time the neighborhood has gone from woodland to farmland to elite to urban blight to revitalization. Layered on that story, the one of the land and the house's structure, is the human architecture: how people used the house and how when use changes so does structure, how to interpret change and understand and preserve that history. On top of that story is the history of the people themselves- from the elite doctor with one of the first telephones in Des Moines and the postmaster general to the prostitutes and transients occupying abandoned houses to the present day owners who have had to fight the neighborhood and the city government to save the structures from being torn down. There is one more item to throw in the mix: urban legend and how the stories grow out of these houses and why they are told.

Ernest Pickering wrote in *The Homes of America*, "A history of American homes is necessarily a history of American life...." That phrase is the basis of my story, that the history of Des Moines architecture and the lives of those inhabiting are tied together. The historian cannot effectively tell the history of a building without reflecting on the social and personal histories of the people who built (the carpenters and artisans), the people who lived and/or worked in the building, and the history of the cultural landscape. What was happening in the world affects this history as well: for example, some houses were divided into apartments during the depression and
further deteriorated during the decline of the urban and boom of the suburbs between the 1940's and 1980's. "Urban Revitalization" efforts, which often mean mega-stores and parking lots, still threaten to change the landscape and environment of these neighborhoods. The history of the people is reflected in and tied to the architectural structures of the communities and the vice versa. The disciplines of history and architecture intertwine and weave together in an intricate tapestry.

Then there is the history of the historian. In the last twenty years, there has been an effort to catalog and document the history of the architecture and the people of these threatened areas but the story that gets told is a value judgment on the part the historian. Often the stories of people and their individual histories are woven together and complex, thus creating a confusing dilemma in what pieces are relevant to the larger story. What this results in is entire lives being omitted from history: the maid the Campbell's employed is not as interesting as Mr. Campbell's practice as a Pharmacist is; the story of the homeless prostitute who squatted in the abandoned house is despised and thus omitted in favor of telling the story of the widowed socialite who barely held her family and finances together from 1895-1907. All of these individual histories shaped the building and the history of the area. Then there is the story of the people who save the buildings from demolition, their struggle with the surrounding urban blight, bureaucracy, and the material structure itself and the history that reveals itself through discovery when taking a house down to its bare bones and then re-fleshing it.
Local historian, Lynn Loheed, said that 80% of structures in the United States were built after 1940. Think about how many of the remaining 20% were built between 1910 and 1940 or before 1850. It leaves the Victorian home at a very small percentage and dwindling. Think about how rare the Hatton House is as an architectural antique. The historical community is lucky to have such rehabilitations in our midst. It represents the culmination of neighborhood, non-profit, and individual efforts to preserve a piece of local history and architecture through creative means and this house, in particular, set an example of what the restored house can achieve and contribute to the greater neighborhood.

The home I live in currently is on the Nation Register of Historic Places for its unique architecture but that is not why people remember it: the Hatton House is remembered because of the stories that its history tells us about our own and Iowa's heritage. Every house has its own story to tell, one of location, geography, and of the human architecture - the people and the lives that inhabited these shelters.

This project will never be done. I know this because I not only know houses, but I know this house. This house is a child, just as Teri loved it, and as a child needs constant care and attention to grow and evolve in it's own life. I gave up a lot for the sake of this house and because of the sacrifice have gained so much. A house like this is more than just a financial investment and more than an investment in a lifestyle: it's an investment in a life less ordinary. We have been defined by this house, even as I struggle to properly define and document it's history we are weaving the pages of this era, leaving our mark on the property. Hopefully, the
caretakers fifty years from now don't hate us for the effort we have made.

There is more to know. There are stories that may never be told, that people will die with and will be lost forever in the sludge Hazmat hauled away. There are memories that will be told as remembered and will be closer to fiction once they are realized. Memory is like river water: constantly murky and changing, distorted even when seemingly clear. That is the nature of human history. When we stand where the river bends and look both up and down river, we can see our past and our future and quite a few tents pitched in the underbrush and debris.

Right now the dark side of Hatton House's past isn't far away. The men that squatted, homeless, in her abandoned wreck may very well be the occupants of those tattered tents down the bluff. The crack head on the corner downtown, may very well have started her business though the hole in the door. But the glimmer of hope that even lives can be restored resides in the little boy who grew up to be a successful designer, the renter who is now a well to do jazz musician, and the two naive 22 year olds who fell in love with the house and have grown up into....well that is yet to be determined. Chad might still want to be a rocket ship when he grows up and I am still relishing the very dramatic title..... "the Mistress of Hatton House".......
Appendix

Timeline of the History of the Hatton House

1848: Land deeded to Benjamin F. Allen

1850-1884: Land was parceled and sub parceled out to various persons including notable citizens James Callanan, Francis West, and S.R. Ingham.

1883-1886: Prospect Park Improvement Co. including shareholders J.A.Jackson (former governor of Iowa) and Jacob Howell,

1886: Adams and Hastie build many houses in Prospect Park, likely builders of Hatton House as they owned the title.

1890: The City Directory lists Dr. John B. and Anna Hatton as residing at 1730 7th, listing the telephone numbers for Dr. Hatton as 21 and 24. The Hattons do not appear on the chain of title until after John's death and list Anna as a widow in 1901.

1899: Obituary for Dr. John B. Hatton states he died at home of Consumption. Their children are listed as John, Raymond, and Nellie Rebecca at the time of Dr. Hatton's passing.

1900: John Hatton Jr. graduates from West High School, Raymond takes a job at the Opera House downtown, and Anna takes in boarders.

1902: Anna mortgages the house for $1,600 and then again for $2,100.

1908: There are a string of lien owners and title holders.

1910 C.O. Roe clears the title and holds sole title. Dr. Morse and Dr. Guild open the Prospect Park Sanitarium at the address of 1730 Seventh Street.

1920: Mr. Roe and his wife Belle sell the property to Almeda Belle DeArmond. It is listed as being classified as a Multiple Dwelling District class: use for boarding, lodging, hotel, hospital, clinic, school, or private club. It was understood by a later tenant that it was a hospice at the time his family purchased the home in 1944.

1944: Almeda DeArmond sells the house for $1 to George and Myrtle McClain. During their ownership many mortgages are taken for improvements to the property. It is assumed that it was this family that divided the structure into apartments.

1960: Myrtle dies and shortly after George McClain marries a woman named Zada.
1970: George dies and the property is disputed in an inheritance settlement by George and Myrtle's daughter Nora. In his will he refers to Apartment #1 at 1730 7th as being where he resides with Zada.

1976: The dispute is settled and the property sold. Owners between 1976 and 1990 are as follows- Carzoli, Cunningham, Chaudry, Powell, Paradise Investment, Robert Dishman, Patrick Neptune, and Comly. It is believed that during this span of time that the home sat vacant and the criminal activity was at its height.

1990: 1730 7th is slated for demolition under a "public nuisance" order. A neighborhood activist and former N.Y. and Paris model, Teri Toye, and her husband Patrick Fox start legal proceedings to gain title of the home.

1995: Teri and Patrick divorce and once again the house is caught in dispute. Teri continues work and a Certificate of Habitation is granted to the structure. Teri moves in alone.

2000: Teri Toye sells the property to Chad and Danelle Stamps.
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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people who shared their piece of the Hatton House history, either by scrap, photograph, or memories. These materials are the heart of this work.

Thank you to the staff of the State Historical Preservation Office, past and present for both professional assistance and friendship. Most especially, thank you to Cynthia Neib, who first put the resources into my arms and whose friendship opened many doors for me.

Thank you to the professors of Iowa State University whose enthusiasm and curiosity kept the water boiling when I most needed it.

And many grateful nods to all the people, strangers and friends, who listened patiently as I rambled off the stories that made their way to these pages.