

2025 EDITION

MUSCATINE COUNTY, IOWA:
Survey of Transportation Development in Muscatine County

Certified Local Government Grant Project No. 202301-12223

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Prepared for
The Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission and
The State Historical Society of Iowa

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Abstract

The Survey of Transportation Development in Muscatine County focused on developing historic contexts for the history of transportation development in Muscatine County, including early river transportation, early roads and stage routes, ferries and bridges, development of modern county roads and state and federal highways and bridges, railroads and interurbans, and the county's airport.

The survey portion of the project sought to identify through a reconnaissance survey those extant and nonextant transportation-related resources that reflect the historic contexts of transportation history in the county. It also included the inventory of selected historic sites identified during the survey, resulting in a total of 20 historic resources newly recorded as part of the current study. Recommendations for potential NRHP eligibility of each resource was made, with some requiring additional research before a final recommendation of eligibility can be made.

The research and survey for the current study were completed with the assistance of the Muscatine County HPC members, who conducted in-depth research and provided information and photographs of the historic resources. The location and basic information for all the transportation-related resources identified during the survey will be entered into Muscatine County's MAGIC geodatabase system.

In total, the survey identified 93 transportation-related sites, including three ferry crossing sites; one road segment; 16 road bridges and remnants; 26 railroad bridges and remnants; one state highway garage; one truck weigh station; seven depots; one stagecoach stop; nine gas/service stations; two roadside one-stops; five automobile dealerships; one tourist home; three tourist camps (intact, remnant, and site only); two motels; one roadhouse/supper club; one fast food restaurant; three railroad hotels and associated buildings; three examples of railroad rolling stock and tracks; three highway grain/feed elevators; four bulk fuel stations; two railroad grain/feed elevators; and one airport hangar.

Of the 93 historic resources surveyed, 10 were already listed on the National Register and three were previously evaluated as eligible for the National Register. Of the 80 resources identified during this survey, eight resources are recommended potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; four resource groups have potential historic district eligibility under Criterion A for transportation-related historical significance; two potential Multiple Property Documents were identified with five and 18 resources, respectively; more research is recommended for 19 resources; and 23 were not eligible for the National Register.



Looking west-southwest at Moscow Railroad Bridge from Langes Ferry Crossing, 2023

Photo by Bill Koellner, Muscatine County HPC

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission – and in particular Project Director Bill Koellner – for providing administrative and general support for the transportation development survey project. Muscatine County’s historic preservation commission contributed valuable time to this project. The members of the commission include: Bill Koellner, Chair and Project Director; Lynn Pruitt; Rebecca Furlong; Rebeckah Allgood; Mary Berveridge; Phyllis Sterba; Rebecca Bovenmeyer; Jane Daufeldt; Joe Harper; Ken Snyder; Jimmy Hyink; and John Kiwala. The members of the commission are enthusiastic preservationists and – with the support of the Muscatine County Board of Supervisors – their efforts in promoting the history of Muscatine County through historic preservation activities have already met with success and promise to continue moving forward, as well.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission (MCHPC) received a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant to complete a Survey of Transportation Development in Muscatine County, a project recommended in the Planning for Preservation report that was completed in June 2017.¹ The purpose of this project was to research and develop historic contexts related to the history of transportation development in Muscatine County – from river travel and road improvements to railroad building and airport development – and to identify and document historic county resources (outside the corporate limits of the City of Muscatine) related to these contexts for future preservation projects.

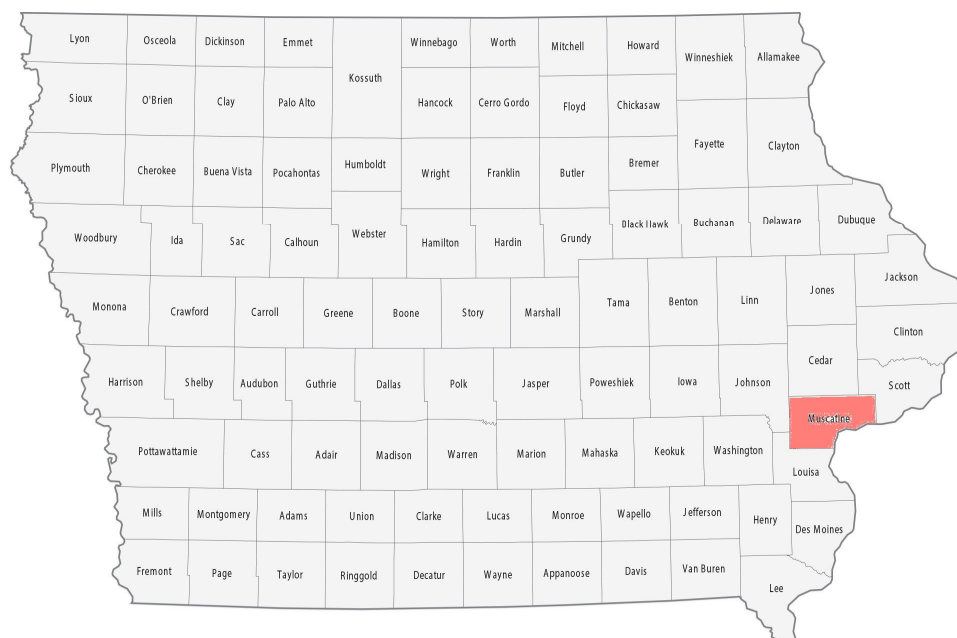


Figure 1. Project Area - Muscatine County, Iowa

Muscatine County is located in southeastern Iowa along Iowa's eastern border in a prominent bend in the Mississippi River (Figure 1). Unlike most of Iowa's rectangular-shaped counties, the curve of the river channel here influenced the shape of the Muscatine County, and thus it has only 14 townships instead of the more usual 16 townships. The Mississippi and Cedar rivers channels also determined the shapes and sizes of Muscatine County's townships. Unlike the typical Iowa township with 36 one-mile square sections, the smallest township in Muscatine County has only 18 sections, and not all of which are one mile square.²

The 14 townships in Muscatine County include (from top right to bottom left): Fulton, Wilton, Moscow, Goshen, Wapsinonoc, Montpelier, Sweetland, Bloomington, Lake, Pike, Fruitland, Seventy Six, Cedar, and Orono. Bloomington Township was much larger originally, with its south half later subdivided into Fruitland Township. The modern cities and towns in the county include the county seat of Muscatine, Stockton, Wilton, Moscow, Atalissa, West Liberty, Nichols, and Conesville. Other historical communities have included: Adams, Ardon, Cranston, Bayfield, Fairport, Fruitland, Montpelier, Petersburg, Pleasant Prairie, New Era, Rainbow, Schmidt, Summit, Sweetland Center, and Port Allen, and some of these have disappeared completely.

¹ Rebecca Lawin McCarley, *Planning for Preservation in Muscatine County, Iowa*. Prepared for the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission, (2017).

² Leah D. Rogers, *Historic Country Schools and Churches Survey, Muscatine County, Iowa*. Report prepared for the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission and State Historical Society of Iowa (2021), 1.

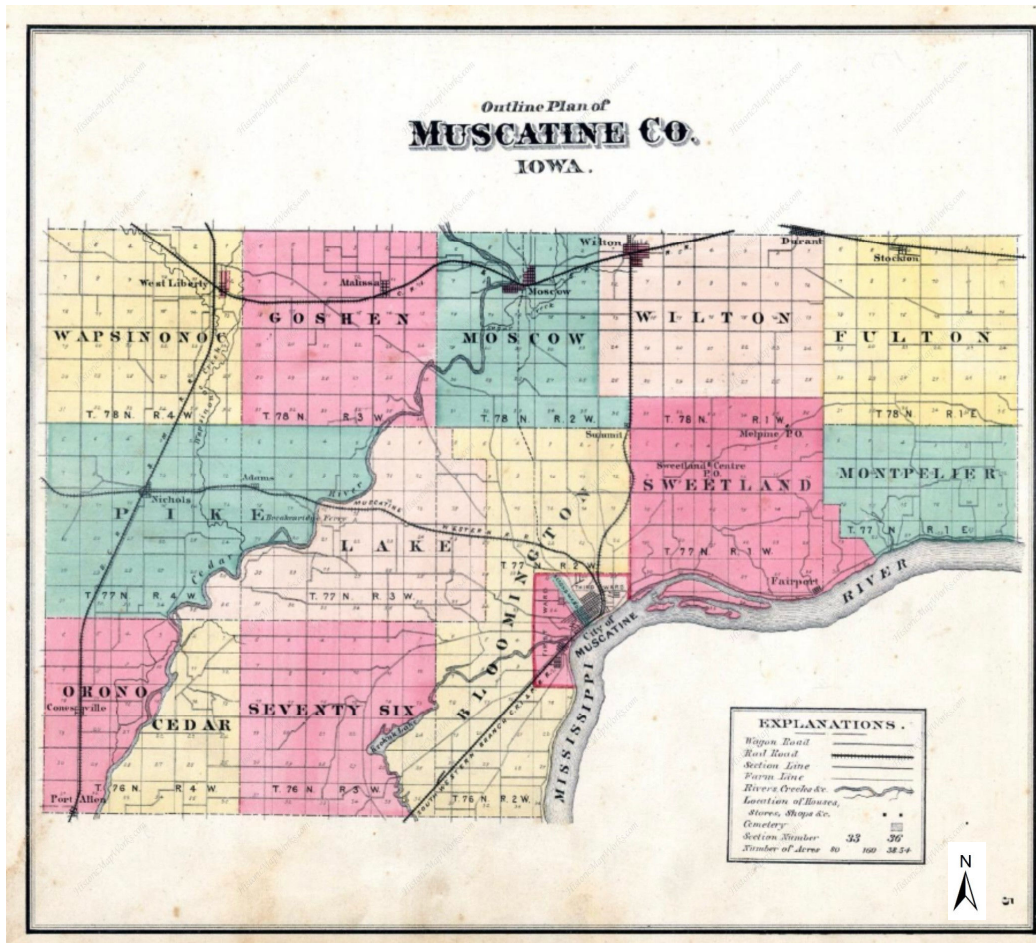


Figure 2. Muscatine County and Townships, 1874. Source: Harrison & Warner 1874 – Historic Map Works website

Methodology and Project Activities

The overall structure of the Survey of Transportation Development for Muscatine County project had three main phases: 1) researching historic contexts related to transportation development in Muscatine County, particularly focusing on the evolution of transportation arteries; 2) identification and reconnaissance survey of resources related to transportation history in Muscatine County, and selection of 20 resources for more intensive Iowa Site Inventory form documentation; and 3) the preparation of the survey report, complete with survey results and recommendations, and 20 site inventory forms.

Rebecca McCarley of Spark Consulting in Cedar Rapids started this project in May 2023. She met with key members of the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission (MCHPC) online on May 10 to discuss project organization and structure. She planned and publicized the first public meeting, and completed and submitted the research design to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), which approved the research design on June 5. She headed the countywide public meeting – attended by nine people – on June 12, 2023, and presented information on historic preservation and the survey of transportation development in Muscatine County, and provided training on research methods for the MCHPC and volunteers. Attendees provided information on known historic transportation resources in the county, and this information was collected and compiled into a

spreadsheet to be further expanded with information collected at town hall meetings by the MCHPC over the next two months and through initial research.³

In late August 2023, Jennifer Price of Price Preservation Research took over the project from McCarley as principle investigator and consultant and oversaw the research and reconnaissance survey phases of the project. The consultant attended all commission monthly meetings in 2023 to keep the project focused, provide guidance in research and field survey methods, and assign members to specific townships for research, field investigation, and resource photography. The commission members uploaded their survey notes and photographs to the Google Drive project folders in December 2023. In January 2024, the commission made its final selections for the 20 historic resources to be documented in Iowa Site Inventory Forms.

In January and February, the consultant started processing and analyzing the results of the reconnaissance survey and outlined the draft report. In late February, she began preparing the Iowa Site Inventory Forms, many of which would provide in-depth historical information for the historic contexts. By early April, the 20 site forms were complete and uploaded to the Google Drive project folder for review by commission members. Writing the report began in earnest.

At the May 2024 Muscatine County HPC meeting, the consultant presented preliminary results of the transportation survey. The consultant continued to work on the draft report, which, along with the draft site forms, was submitted digitally on June 17 to the SHPO (via E-SHPO) and the Muscatine County HPC. The consultant requested a month's extension to the project at the June 18 Muscatine County HPC meeting to give SHPO and commission members time to review the draft report and site forms and for the consultant to make corrections, changes, or additions to the final report and site forms.

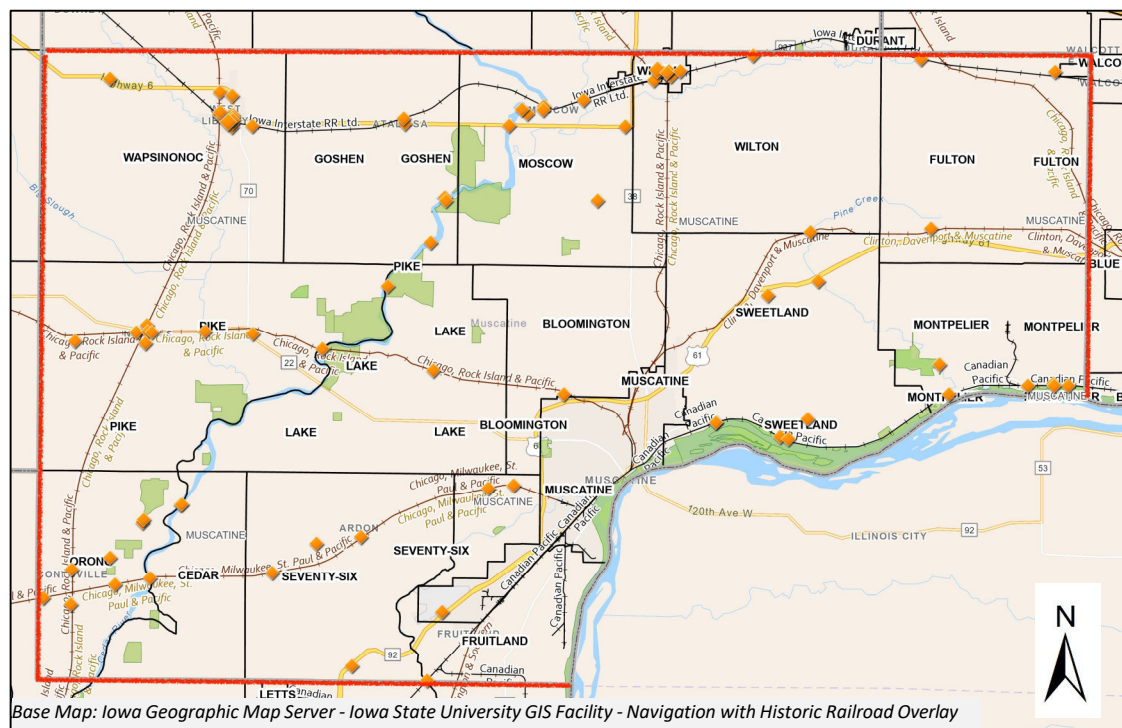


Figure 3. Project Map – Survey of Transportation Development in Muscatine County, Iowa, showing locations of the 93 historic resources (orange diamonds) identified during the reconnaissance survey.

³ Rebecca Lawin McCarley to Jennifer Price, via email, August 17, 2023.