



Preserving the past. Building the future.

January 29, 2024

Joy Beasley
Keeper of the National Register
National Park Service
National Register Program
1849 C Street, NW (7228)
Washington, DC 20240

RE: Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for Property in Nebraska

Dear Ms. Beasley,

This submittal contains a true and correct copy of the nomination for the Ella Eager House located in Beaver Crossing, NE, to the National Register of Historic Places.

Notification

The property owner(s) was (were) notified of the proposed nomination on August 16, 2023.

- ☒ No objections to the nomination were submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office during the public comment period.
- ☐ An objection to the nomination was submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office during the public comment period.
- ☐ A letter of support for the nomination was submitted to the State Preservation Office during the public comment period.

Certified Local Government

- ☒ The nominated property is not located in a CLG community.
- ☐ The nominated property is located in a CLG community and a copy of the local commission's review is attached.

Historic Tax Credits

- ☐ The federal historic tax credit is being used in the rehabilitation of this property.

NPS Grant-Funded Submissions

- ☒ Not funded with an NPS grant
- ☐ African American Civil Rights Grant
- ☐ Historically Black Colleges & Universities Grant
- ☐ History of Equal Rights Grant
- ☐ Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program
- ☐ Save America's Treasures Grant
- ☐ Semiquincentennial Grant

1500 R Street
Lincoln, NE 68508-1651
P: 402.471.3270
history.nebraska.gov

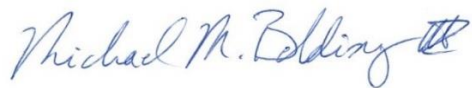
- ☐ Tribal Heritage Grant
- ☐ Underrepresented Communities Grant

State Review Board

The Nebraska State Historic Preservation Board reviewed the draft nomination materials at its meeting on September 15, 2023. The Board voted that the property meets the National Register Criteria for Evaluation under Criteria B and C. The State Historic Preservation Officer has approved the nomination.

If you have any questions concerning this nomination, please do not hesitate to contact me at michael.belding@nebraska.gov or (402) 613-1591.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael M. Belding III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a stylized "M" and "B".

Michael M. Belding III
National Register and Historic Markers Coordinator
Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office
Phone: 402-613-1591
michael.belding@nebraska.gov

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Eager, Ella, House

Other names/site number SW01-005

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & Number 915 Walnut Street

City or town Beaver Crossing

State Nebraska

County Seward

Not for publication ☐ Vicinity ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: ☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D


Signature of certifying official/Title:

SHPO/Director

1/16/24
Date

Nebraska State Historical Society

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other, (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

Ella Eager House
Name of Property

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ Private
☐ Public-local
☐ Public-state
☐ Public-federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ Building(s)
☐ District
☐ Site
☐ Structure
☐ Object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	Objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: Queen Anne

Materials (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood

Ella Eager House

Seward County, NE

Name of Property**County and State****Description**

Summary Paragraph (Briefly describe the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

The Ella Eager House is in Beaver Crossing, Nebraska, a small community in Seward County. At its most populous, between 1910 and 1940, Beaver Crossing counted 550 residents. The town offered a full complement of businesses and services in generally small-scale one-story brick and wood frame commercial buildings. The Eager residence is a two-and-a-half story wood framed Queen Anne style residence at 915 Walnut Street. After her divorce Ella Eager had it built for herself and her granddaughter in 1904. Threatened with demolition in 1974 by a bank's desire to build on the corner the Eager House occupied, the house was moved from its original location on the block's southwest corner to its northeast corner. The residence retains a high degree of physical integrity except for location. The location remains on the property historically associated with the residence, though the lot has since been subdivided. The design, setting, feeling, association, materials, and workmanship remain high. The nomination consists of one contributing building.

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

Ella Eager House

The Ella Eager House is a two-and-a-half story, wood-frame, Queen Anne residence. The main entrance faces north toward Walnut Street. Notable Queen Anne features of the house include multiple cladding materials, a generous wraparound porch, and steeply pitched complex roofline. The main façade has a gable end with distinctly defined stories. Gable returns and wide fascia boards with horizontal banding define the roof and gable area from the second-floor windows. The gable ends are clad with a combination of diamond and fish scale shingles. Centered within the end is a tripartite Palladian window with louvers to ventilate the attic.

The second floor facing north presents a symmetrical façade. Cladding at this level changes from the decorative shingles of the gable ends to horizontal wood clapboards. Fenestration is comprised of three one-over-one double hung windows, with the center window slightly larger than the two flanking it. Horizontal wood clapboards continue at the first level, where fenestration punctuates the walls in a variety of configurations. A tripartite window has a leaded glass transom above the center pane, and a large, single double hung unit flank the main entry door. The main level is accessed under the wrap-around front porch. The configuration and roofing of the porch was retained through the 1974 move. Decorative fish scale and diamond shingles make-up the sloped and rounded roofline of the projecting porch.

Three doors on the wraparound porch provide access to the house. The primary entrance opens from an off-center door in the forwardmost plane (the gable front.) Two other doors open to the house from the ends of the horseshoe-shaped porch, where it terminates in the short north elevations of the house's cross-gable. The collection of windows and doors under the porch are asymmetrical and comprise multiple configurations. Adjacent to the main entry door (east), a tripartite window unit has a leaded glass transom area. A single double-hung window unit flanks the door to the east. The door at the end of the east branch of the horseshoe porch, in one of the canted sides of the cross-gable's east end, opens into the dining room. The porch door at the end of the west branch of the horseshoe porch opens into a living room. Simple columns support the porch roof. A balustrade of turned posts encloses it. All entrances retain original wood screens and wood and glass doors.

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The cross-gable's east end features canted walls on the first and second stories. The canted walls rise to carved corner brackets that intersect at a right angle under the cornice returns that frame the diamond-and fish-scale shingled gable. The central first-story window of the east gable matches the center component of the façade's tripartite window, being a large square pane surmounted by a leaded-glass transom. An entry door and window are within the canted wall forming a large bay. Leaded glass transom ornaments the first-floor window. The rear half of the house contains its kitchen and bedrooms. Rearward on all elevations the house lacks the ornamentation of the façade and more forward sections.

The south facing wall has the same decorative shingles in the gable end with a single paired window unit that is partially infilled with ventilation louvers. Three windows punctuate the second level with only one off-center window at the first level where the kitchen and bathroom are located. Accessed outside the house at the south wall is an underground root/storm cellar with stairs to the basement.

A smaller, west-facing porch placed at the house's southwest corner shelters a door that opens into the kitchen. Here the house retains an original door and screen door. Turned posts support the hipped porch roof and, as on the wraparound porch, a railing with turned balusters runs along its outer edge. Above, between the porch posts and the wall, spindle-work friezes provide ornamentation. Finally, between the porch posts, a fretwork frieze decorates the porch. It is a modern addition to the house.

A steeply pitched roof of asphalt shingles tops the house. Four lightning rods with porcelain balls are placed on the ridge line near the house's exterior walls. A central chimney pierces the ridge line just behind, or south of, the cross-gable.

The exterior retains a high degree of physical integrity. The few changes that have been made include the addition of louvers to attic windows; the addition of decorative elements on the west porch, which opens into the kitchen; the use of new roofing materials; and the installation of new wood windows. The new windows and roof were replaced following tornado damage.

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The image above shows the Ella Eager house shortly after construction, likely c. 1905. The image below is a similar point of view of the residence today.

Interior

First Floor

Like many Victorian residences, the Ella Eager house is clearly divided into formal spaces for receiving visitors and family spaces for resting and dining. Visitors were invited into the formal parlor, now located at the north end of the house. Within the entry vestibule, a single flight main stair leads to the second level. Accenting the stair is a wood railing with turned balusters and a newel post topped by a finial and decorated with florettes. The formal parlor, a relatively small room compared to the others in the house, is adjacent

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to the stair. The formal parlor is separated from the family living areas by an oak door with four full-length vertical panes of glass.

Beyond the formal parlor are two family spaces, that include a music room and sitting room. One corner of the sitting room has an angled tile fireplace surrounded by an elaborate mantle, topped by a mirror that is flanked by columns and capped by a shelf. The firebox is behind a decorative japanned hearth plate. The sitting room and music room both have wood plank floors and picture rail. Paired pocket doors, in excellent condition, separate the music room from the living room. Another set of paired pocket doors enclose the sitting room from the dining room. Decorative, carved stick and ball fretwork has been added to this opening outside of the historic period.

The family dining room and kitchen are located beyond the living and music rooms towards the back of the house. Both feature large built-in cabinetry. Most notable is the built-in in the wall between the dining room and kitchen, which can be opened from either side. Its four large drawers are below two glass doors that enclose three interior shelves. Large wood floor grates provide circulation throughout the residence. The kitchen is adjacent to the dining room and retains extensive built-in cabinetry, recessed pantry, and ceiling beams with decorative brackets. The kitchen's woodwork has been stained with a flat finish, in contrast to the high-gloss finish used throughout the rest of the house, imposing a plainer aesthetic. However, the kitchen is not devoid of embellishment as decorative brackets support exposed ceiling beams. Adjacent to the kitchen is a bathroom with a pedestal sink, foot or sitz tub, stool, and clawfoot tub. Jack-and-jill doors separate the bathroom from the kitchen and the music room. At the back of the kitchen a broad staircase leads to the rear of the second story.

Second Floor

At the top of the formal front staircase a corridor leads to the main front bedroom with large walk-in closet. The carpeted, off-center second-floor corridor leads rearward to four other bedrooms and an additional bathroom. The bathroom features a pedestal sink and clawfoot tub. Each of the four other bedrooms also has a large walk-in closet with built-in cabinetry. Likely Ella's bedroom at the front, its large closet features a built-in cabinet with decorative hardware. Flooring and wood elements at the second level are pine. The domestic space of the second floor would have exceeded the needs of Eager and her granddaughter, suggesting that they may have hosted numerous people for overnight or extended visits.

A ceiling hatch in the corridor provides access to the unfinished attic. Despite its state, it may have had a specified use in the past, as historic photos of the house show curtains in the attic windows. A basement, with concrete floors and walls, was excavated for the house in 1974 when it was moved. Three different staircases provide access to it: one at the front of the house, one off the kitchen, and one from the outside. The first leads to a workroom or office; the second to a room for storage and mechanical systems; and the third, to the storm cellar. The basement also includes a third bathroom in the storage area. All the rooms are interconnected and can be accessed through any of the stairs.

Like the exterior, the interior also retains a high degree of historic integrity. Minor changes include flooring material such as vinyl and linoleum in the kitchen and bathrooms, some applied ornamentation on the windows and door openings that are not historic, and an expanded footprint for the second-floor bathroom to accommodate the stool and lavatory. This expansion may have been accomplished by removing a staircase that led up to the attic. The foot or sitz bath in the first-story bathroom is also a probable modification from after the period of significance. Former owners were committed to its preservation and at the same time built on the style by adding non-historic trim work at the doors and

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windows inside the house. This trim does not impact the physical integrity as it clearly reads as being from a different period and ongoing life of the residence. It is an applied ornament that can be removed without damaging the historic fabric of the house.

Not all modern changes to the house have been voluntary. In May 2014 a tornado hit Beaver Crossing, damaging virtually every building in the town. The Ella Eager House was more fortunate than many buildings but the tornado blew out several windows and damaged the roof.

The Ella Eager House retains its physical integrity in materials, design, and workmanship. The house clearly illustrates the Queen Anne architectural style. Moving the house in 1974 and reorienting it to face a different street (and direction) diminished the integrity of its setting, feeling, and association. However, the manner in which the house was moved kept these aspects of integrity intact. Namely, although it was moved to what by 1974 was a different land parcel, it was moved to a place that was part of the lot on which it was originally built. The move, therefore, does not significantly affect the integrity of the Ella Eager House's setting, feeling, and association. Indeed, the move itself is nearly 50 years distant.

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This image illustrates the previous and existing locations of the Ella Eager House . It is not scaled and not meant for specific distance measures, but to indicate the proximity of the previous and existing locations.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☒ B Removed from its original location.
- ☐ C A birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D A cemetery.
A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ E A commemorative property.
- ☐ G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1904

Significant Dates

1904 – Construction

1974 – House moved

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Ault & Crone

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Ella Eager House is in Beaver Crossing, a small community in Seward County, Nebraska. The residence represents the appearance in a small Nebraska town of domestic architecture in the Victorian Queen Anne style. These stylistic elements include multiple cladding materials, wrap around porch, elaborate trim and decorative elements, and a complex steeply pitched roofline. The house's most notable historical owner, Ella Eager, made many contributions to the community and exhibited an ability to survive and thrive as a community leader and businesswoman after her divorce. She built this residence for herself following her divorce; the house is emblematic of her life afterwards. She raised her granddaughter in the house, which also functioned as a gathering place for the children of the people who ran the businesses Eager owned. The house's original construction in the Queen Anne style and subsequent preservation give it local significance under Criterion C. The period of significance is 1904, when the residence was completed.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Beaver Crossing History

Beaver Crossing is a small town in southeast Nebraska's Seward County. It was platted in 1875 as a railroad town, though the railroad did not arrive until 1887. Roland Reed, who owned a ranch near Beaver Creek, was appointed the settlement's first postmaster; he is credited with naming it in 1866. About three years later T.H. Tisdale established the first general store in an existing residence. Soon after a flour mill was established on a neighboring ranch. Tisdale built an impressive Italianate home, was eventually appointed postmaster, and remained in Beaver Crossing as one of the town founders. In the 1870s and 1880s the settlement grew to include a hotel, store, blacksmith shop, churches, and school.¹

Ella and DeWitt Eager arrived after the town was established. They opened several businesses, including what became the largest mercantile store in the county. One of Eager's most significant discoveries was an artesian well in the basement of his mercantile. An existing well installed for customer use was in the lower level. As the well water diminished in quality, Eager dug deeper to access clearer water. He inadvertently tapped into a flowing artesian well that erupted so profusely it almost immediately flooded the basement. Soon, many others in Beaver Crossing tapped into the well and water was flowing across the community. In 1908 a park committee purchased nine acres of land within the city limits that had already established shade trees and flowing wells. A small swimming pond was created with a pavilion, recreational sports courts, and a fountain. The swimming pond measured 225 feet across and was filled by several flowing wells that constantly poured in fresh, cool water. Within Nebraska it was unique, which attracted many people to the small community. Even at its highest, in 1910-1940, the population of Beaver Crossing never exceeded 550 people. The community pool as well as the largest mercantile in the county, owned by the Eagers, were major attractions to the community.² And just as the wells provided refreshment

¹ Beaver Crossing Women's Club. *Community History: Beaver Crossing, Nebraska*. 1932, 20-24.

² Mary Lanik. "An Artesian Well System in Beaver Crossing, Nebraska-It's Development and Demise" (2010). Environmental Studies Undergraduate Student Theses. 22. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/envstudtheses/22>; Population information from U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Census of Population and Housing from <http://www.census.gov>.

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in the summer, so too did they provide sustenance in winter; and just as the Eagers, the waters, and Beaver Crossing were entwined through the wells' discovery, so too were they entwined through thier year-round use. Their waters provided ice that could be used to preserve food, and the Eagers owned one of Beaver Crossing's ice houses. Irrigated gardens and orchards were common in town, while the swimming pond attracted thousands of seasonal visitors.



Postcard image of flowing artesian well at Beaver Crossing. Image: Untold History of Southeast Nebraska Postcard

The wells began to go dry during the drought years of the 1930s, which famously precipitated the Dust Bowl further south and west, but the swimming pond was maintained by the city and eventually turned into a fishing pond. By 1962 the site was filled with dirt and leveled.³

³ Ibid.

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Beaver Crossing Pool approximately 1908, Photo: UNL Digital Commons



Beaver Crossing swimming pool with turtle roost, bath houses, and slide. Photo: History Nebraska.

The Eagers of Beaver Crossing

Ella and DeWitt Eager were married in Central City, Nebraska in 1874. Together they moved to the Pawnee Reservation, which soon after became Nance County, Nebraska in 1877. DeWitt was born in Oneida County, New York on April 20, 1850. He was the youngest of nine children. His mother died before his first birthday and various family members raised him. By 1855 Eager's siblings had moved to Rock County, Wisconsin. That year Eager joined them and attended school there. He worked in mines in Diamond City, Montana in 1868, and moved in 1873 to Polk County, Nebraska to homestead.

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Ella Eager was born in Medina, Ohio on July 7, 1854. Her father died in the Civil War as a Union Army soldier. Her mother later married Frank Hodges and the family moved to Lone Tree, Nebraska (now Central City) in 1873.

Governor Albinus Nance appointed DeWitt Eager clerk of Merrick County in 1879. However, the following year the Eagers moved to Seward County to farm in M precinct near Beaver Crossing.

Eager purchased the old Tidyman & Dimery Mercantile store and rebranded it to the Eager Mercantile. In establishing his own business, he moved the old Tidyman & Dimery building to the south of its original location and built a new building on the site. Construction began in 1887 and a frame structure with brick veneer was completed in 1890. DeWitt became the postmaster when the post office was located within his mercantile and he continued in that role from 1886-1890. This also made the mercantile a gathering space for local farmers and merchants. Eager's enterprise was central to life in and around Beaver Crossing, as attested to not only by the fact that his was one of only a few stores in the vicinity but also by his regular advertisements in the local newspaper(s) and sponsorship of floats in local parades, to say nothing of his earlier-mentioned discovery of an abundant artesian well--the first in Seward County--in the basement of the new store he built. As described in local accounts, "...the water rushed up with such force that the store cellar was half full before anyone realized what had happened." After this, many other residents of Beaver Crossing also dug wells to access the artesian waters, and their discoveries increased their property values. Eager took advantage of this interest in well digging and established an icehouse to gather the waters into blocks during winter months.⁴

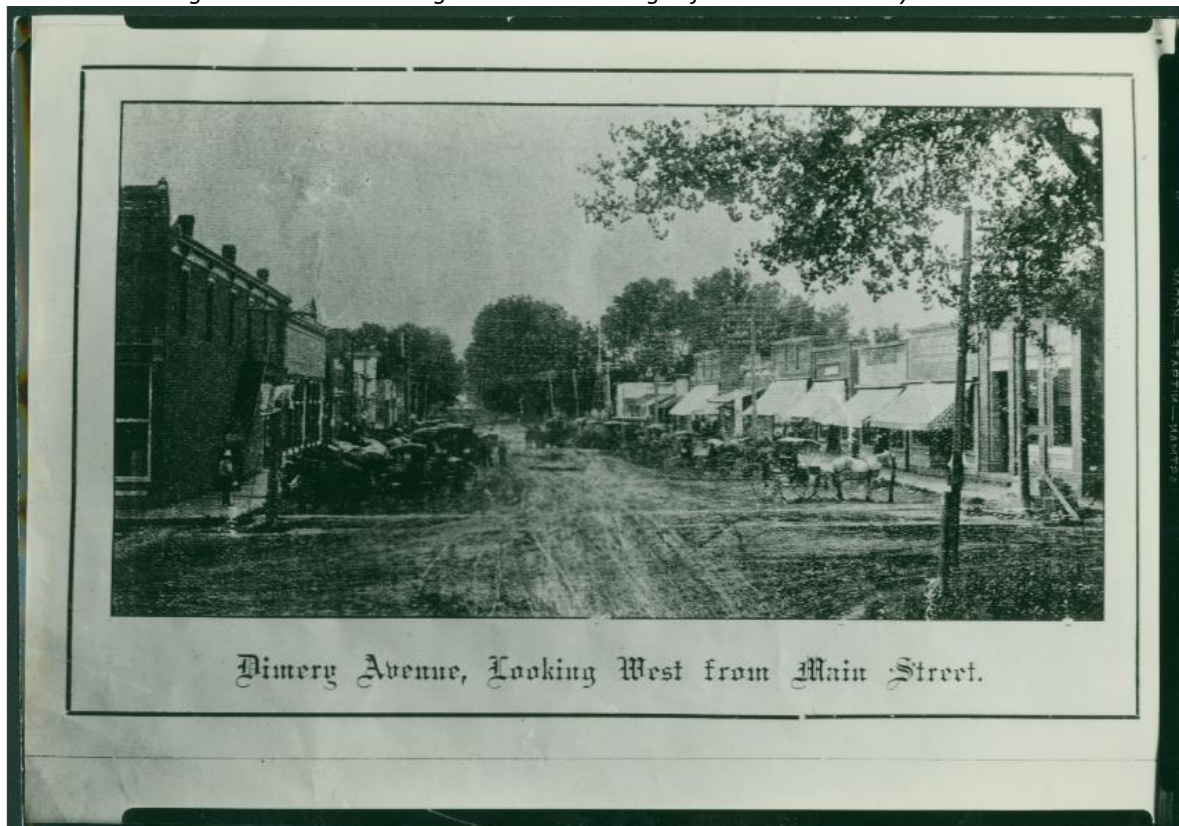
⁴ "Three Flowing Wells." *Seward Independent* (Seward, Nebraska) August 2, 1895, 1.

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Eager Mercantile with Eager children standing in front. Photo: History Nebraska.



Dimery Avenue, Looking West from Main Street.

Beaver Crossing at Dimery Avenue looking west from Main Street, date unknown. The Eager Mercantile is visible at the far left corner of the image. Photo: History Nebraska.

Ella Eager House

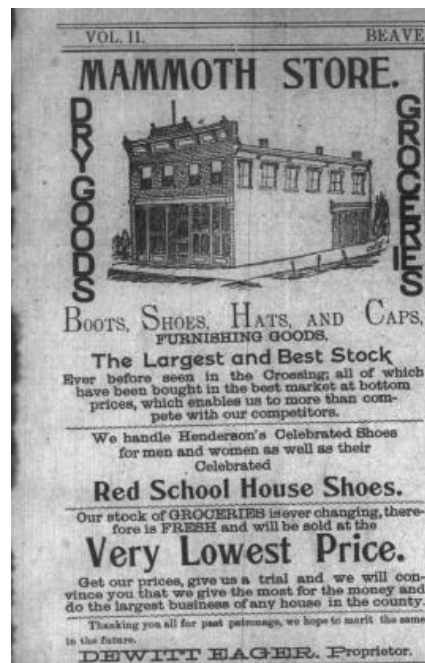
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Eager's opportunistic business expansion in the wake of the artesian well discovery was hardly his last. In 1891, he purchased the newspaper printing facility and leased it to Ed Miller for *The Farmer's Patriot*. In 1898, he started a lumber business in Beaver Crossing north of his house in Block 14. He was the first resident owner and manager of the business. In 1898 he began work on a brickyard and newspaper accounts noted that, "he has always been a man of large caliber and broad views and has the courage of his own convictions."⁵

In the 1890s the Eagers were not only expanding into new business opportunities, they were displacing older elements of Beaver Crossing society, gaining a leadership role. In 1892, DeWitt and Ella Eager purchased the house of town founder Thomas Tisdale, on Block 16 of the Tisdale Addition on the corner of Main and Dimery. Here Ella and DeWitt raised their five children named Edna, Elmer, Earl, Alta, and Oliver. Ella was known for hosting social events at the house such as game nights for local youth, and club gatherings. She was a community leader and socialite within Beaver Crossing. The Beaver Crossing Women's Club, the Kensington Club and the Royal Neighbors social were hosted in her home.⁶

DeWitt was a Republican until 1890 when he took part in Populist Convention in Lincoln. In 1896 he was elected as a populist to the Nebraska Legislature, and took part in the 1897 session as a representative of the 29th District.⁷ DeWitt Eager traveled extensively during the 1890s as well. Later in the decade he spent a prolonged period in Alaska and California. During his absence, Ella and her children managed the family businesses.



December 7, 1893 advertisement in the Beaver Crossing Weekly Review.

⁵ Ogle & Co. 1899

⁶ *Weekly Review*. (Beaver Crossing, NE), June 13, 1895.

⁷ A.G. Wolfenbarger, ed. *Nebraska Legislative Year Book for 1897* (Lincoln, Nebraska 1897), 93. Accessed at <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/topic/resources/OLLibrary/Legislature/1897/index.htm>

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This advertising metal sign was auctioned with the Eager Ice House. It is reported to be five feet tall and some say that it represents Ella Eager. Image: Becky Latka and Linda Kalbach Personal Collection.

In addition to being prosperous enough that they could hold political offices and participate in social activities, the Eagers were part of a Gilded Age middle-class society that could move with relative ease, both for tourism and health. Ella took several trips to warmer climates to treat her lifelong asthma. The family also visited Chicago during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. The Eagers regarded culture as being important to life back in Beaver Crossing as well and their children were interested in music. For example, in 1901 they acquired a piano for their daughter, Edna.⁸

Profound changes came to the family at the turn of the twentieth century. In January, 1901, Ella gained custody of her granddaughter, Nellie, after Elmer's wife Bessie died shortly after giving birth.⁹ Elmer eventually remarried, but Nellie remained in Ella's custody throughout her life. In July, after 24 years of marriage, alleging cruelty and non-support, Ella filed for divorce from DeWitt. DeWitt immediately left Beaver Crossing with no objection to the divorce clauses. That month, DeWitt sold most of his business and real estate holdings to his son Elmer for \$1.00. This included the lumber yard, the mercantile store, icehouse, and other real estate. That same day in July 1901, Elmer resold all the holdings to his mother for \$1.00, making Ella the sole owner. Overnight, in addition to being a woman in her mid-forties, mother

⁸ *The Weekly Review*, (Beaver Crossing, NE) January 11, 1901.

⁹ *Seward Independent Democrat*. (Seward, NE) January 3, 1901; *Tamora Weekly Register*. (Tamora, NE), January 4, 1901.

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of five, custodial grandparent of one, and divorcee, Ella Eager became a locally wealthy head of household with active business interests.¹⁰



Ella and DeWitt Eager with their children c. 1890. Photo: Image: Becky Latka and Linda Kalbach Personal Collection

Ella's children Edna, Earl, and Elmer ran the mercantile store. The community seemed to strongly support them. In December 1901 a lengthy article profiling them and the store appeared in the Beaver Crossing newspaper, which touted its benefit to the community.¹¹ Ella was clearly moving on from and independent of DeWitt.

Ella (hereafter Eager) was rooted in Beaver Crossing and left no evidence suggesting that she planned or wanted to relocate. Not long after the divorce she moved to break with her past and engaged local carpenters Ault and Crone to design and build a new house. Eager's contractors moved the former Tisdale house that she had lived in with DeWitt Eager and the rest of her family so Eager's new house could be built on the same site. Construction began on her new Queen Anne style house in 1903. In February 1904, Eager moved into "one of the finest residences in Seward County."¹² In another act of financial independence, she mortgaged the house for \$2,000 later that year.¹³

¹⁰ *Seward County Independent*. (Seward, NE). July 25, 1901; Seward County Abstracts filed July 1901.

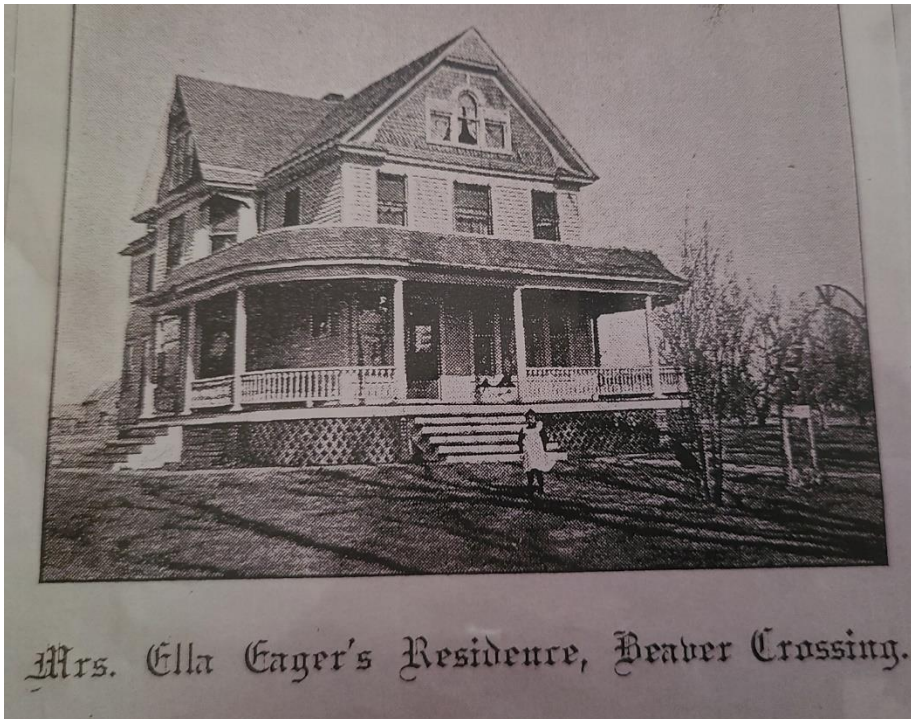
¹¹ "Eager Mercantile Company." *Weekly Review*, (Beaver Crossing, NE) December 13, 1901, 5.

¹² *Weekly Review*. (Beaver Crossing, NE) December 11, 1903, 3.

¹³ Seward County Abstract, Block 6, mortgage filed February 9, 1904 for \$2000.00

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Ella Eager residence. C. 1905. Image shows a young Nellie in front of the residence. Image: Becky Latka and Linda Kalbach Personal Collection

Between the house's construction in 1904 and Ella's death in 1915, the house was a center of community activity, social events, and educational programs. Eager was an accomplished cook and widely known for her culinary skills. She hosted many events in the new house including Kensington Club meetings, three-course dinner parties, family events, and ice cream social fundraisers. As owner of the icehouse, she was one of the few able to offer such a treat. Ella taught domestic science class at the local high school and grew exotic plants including a lemon tree. She was a staunch supporter of local organizations like the public library and showed that support by hosting fundraisers at her residence. In 1905, Eager served as Secretary of Supplies for the Women's Home Mission Society, a religious organization associated with the Methodist Church. She was an active speaker and participant in this group.¹⁴ Ella was also an accomplished needle worker and attended and hosted luncheons, needlework clubs, and working groups associated with handwork and quilting.

Eager hosted other social events at the house including the weddings of her daughters Alta and Edna. Both were elaborate and impressive events showing off Eager's wealth and community status.¹⁵ Edna would eventually return to live in the house following her mother's death in 1915.

Eager also supported women's suffrage, a political opinion she proclaimed by having her yard decorated to welcome a 1914 caravan of automobiles promoting women's right to vote.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Beaver Crossing Times*. July 13, 1914; October 5, 1911; September 7, 1911; June 5, 1907; January 28, 1909; February 13, 1913. The Society was a religious organization associated with the Methodist Church.

¹⁵ "Wedding Bells." *The Independent Examiner*. (Beaver Crossing, NE), September 15, 1906, 8.

¹⁶ "Equal Suffrage Meeting." *Beaver Crossing Times* (Beaver Crossing, NE), October 8, 1914, 1.

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Eager's activities made her a beloved member of the community, and she was given the nickname Mama Eager. Eager's ownership of her former husband's Beaver Crossing businesses was a rare achievement for a turn-of-the-century divorcee, but she also acted on diverse social interests in large part by making her home a centerpiece of the community's public life.

Between her divorce and her death, Eager sought to treat her fragile health, particularly her asthma symptoms, by traveling with Nellie, the granddaughter of whom she had custody, to California and Texas. Eager retained all her family holdings as the sole owner of multiple businesses in Beaver Crossing.

DeWitt Eager (Additional Context)

Following their divorce in 1901, DeWitt left Beaver Crossing and immediately began a new life. He purchased the stock of goods from another mercantile store and rented a building in Pierce, Nebraska, northeast of his former home in Beaver Crossing. Local accounts advertised his successful business experience dating back to 1885 and welcomed him to the new community. It is noteworthy that by January of 1902 he was remarried, and the newspaper remarks noted that he and his wife secured a residence in the town.¹⁷ This business effort was very short lived. By December 1902 he sold out the mercantile venture at Pierce, and relocated to Spragg, Nebraska, where he attempted to put up another new store, bought a ranch, and continued again to start his life over.¹⁸ This move was spurred by the failure of his recent marriage. He and Jennie Eager were married in 1901 in Plattsmouth, Nebraska, the same year Ella filed for divorce. Jennie Eager claimed, "her husband systematically pursued a course to compel her to furnish grounds on which he might secure a divorce." It is unclear what this actually means, however it was in the same newspaper article that two women sued for divorce on the grounds of cruelty. Jennie Eager and a woman named Ada Chute who claimed that after seven months of marriage she was beaten and threatened with death.¹⁹ In September 1903, DeWitt's second marriage ended for the same reasons as his marriage to Ella; on the grounds of cruelty, desertion and failure to support.

DeWitt seemed to struggle while ranching in Spragg, but in 1905 managed to remarry for a third time, only for this marriage to also end in divorce. In May 1914, DeWitt filed for divorce from his then wife Emma Eager. He asserted that she did not care for him, and after several months left him to stay in Chicago and never returned. Prior to her departure they divided their property, and he gave her about \$6,000 worth of goods. He was granted the divorce decree.²⁰

For unknown reasons, DeWitt returned to Beaver Crossing shortly after his third divorce. In the summer of 1914, Ella was hosting equal suffrage gatherings on her front lawn, fundraisers for the public library, and suffering from declining health. She and DeWitt remarried in Fall of 1914 and in November departed to winter in Texas in hopes of improving Ella's health.²¹ DeWitt wrote a letter to *The Times* in Beaver Crossing in which he described their trip, stops along the way, made comparisons between Corpus Christi and Lincoln, Nebraska, and public benefits of the community including graded streets and cement sidewalks. At the end of the letter, he notes that Ella's health had not improved, but they were hoping for a favorable climate.²²

¹⁷ Pierce County Call. (Pierce, NE) January 31, 1902, 8.

¹⁸ Spragg no longer exists, but was in neighboring Rock County, Nebraska.

¹⁹ "Two Wives Allege Cruelty." *Morning World Herald* (Omaha, NE), September 26, 1903, 6.

²⁰ "Temperament Grated on Both Sides and Divorce Is Granted." *Lincoln Journal Star*, (Lincoln, NE), May 4, 1914, 13.

²¹ *Beaver Crossing Times*. (Beaver Crossing, NE), 1.

²² "A Texas Letter." *The Beaver Crossing Times*, (Beaver Crossing, NE), December 3, 1914, 2.

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Ella died at her home on a Sunday morning on June 27, 1915, just shy of her 62nd birthday. Funeral services were held at the house. A formal funeral with music and overflowing flowers was held at the residence. Their son Oliver drove down from neighboring Goehner, Nebraska and took DeWitt Eager back with him two days after the funeral. DeWitt again left Beaver Crossing, not to return until his death in 1924.

Ella Eager left all her goods, property, and resources to her children only, as per her will, written on February 3, 1915. Because she had remarried DeWitt, he was required to sign a quitclaim deed that rapidly transferred ownership of the residence to their daughter, Edna Gake (nee Eager) who inherited the house and all its furnishings. Edna and her husband moved into the home. DeWitt Eager eventually moved back to Lincoln, remarried for the fifth time, and moved to California with his new wife. Upon his death in 1924, his body was shipped back from California to be buried in the family plot next to his first wife, Ella.

Criterion C: Architecture

The Ella Eager House is locally significant under Criterion C as an exemplar of the Queen Anne style. Its period of significance is 1904, the year its construction was completed. In Nebraska, as elsewhere, they were mostly built between 1880-1910. Richard Norman Shaw and other English architects initiated the style, but it was popularized in the United States through pattern books, architectural magazines, and transportation systems such as railroads. Rails made decorative architectural elements and other building materials available virtually anywhere. Machine lumber processing made ornamentation inexpensive and easy to apply profusely. Anecdotally across Nebraska the most ornate Queen Anne residences are often associated with the local lumber yard's owner, who used the style as a life-size, practical advertisement for their wares.

Salient decoration of the Queen Anne style includes wood trim, turned posts and balusters, delicate spindlework and brackets, exterior walls textured by shingles, half-timbering, or other applied relief, and exuberant color schemes. Structurally, numerous features may call out a Queen Anne house. These include complex roofs, asymmetrical facades, large dormers, expansive porches, round or polygonal corner towers, and Palladian windows in gables. Though rooted in English precedents, the style became distinctly American with the use of mass produced and profusely applied detail.²³

The Eager residence is not the only Queen Anne style or influenced home in Beaver Crossing. The Nebraska Historic Building Survey includes several others that were noted in previous surveys of the county. These include a handful of smaller-scale and vernacular residences that incorporate some elements of the style, most notably the wrap-around porch.²⁴

Ella Eager's residence represents the best and largest example of the style in Beaver Crossing. It has a steeply pitched cross gable roof with a Palladian window in the gable end. Both rounded fish scale- and diamond-shaped decorative shingles clad the gable ends. The asymmetrical exterior has four entrances; three from the façade's wraparound porch, which enter into the formal parlor, dining room, and family living room, and one from the west elevation's porch, which opens into the kitchen. Original doors and decorative windows are present throughout the residence. The only major queen Anne feature the house

²³ Virginia and Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. (New York, NY) Alfred A. Knopf, 1990, 268.

²⁴ These properties include survey numbers SW01-055, SW01-040, SW03-019, SW06-058, SW06-062, SW09-066, and SW09-053. These houses represent a mix of one and two-story with features inspired by the style.

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lacks is a corner tower, but the horseshoe-shaped wraparound porch nods to one with its roof that curves at the corners, flares out at the bottom, and is topped with fish scale shingles.

The interior retains a high degree of physical integrity. It is significant at the local level under Criterion C as a property that exemplifies the Queen Anne style in Beaver Crossing.

Ella Eager House Moved

In the 1970s the Eager House was in jeopardy. The Home State Bank had purchased the residence with the intent to demolish it and construct a new building on the lot it occupied at the corner of Main and Dimery Streets, a strategic commercial location. In response to public outcry, however, the bank decided to move the house a short distance from its contemporary location at the southwest corner of the block to its subsequent location at the northeast corner of the block. This new site has long been a different land parcel but was part of the historic parcel associated with the Eager's ownership of the residence. The house was rotated to face north toward Walnut Street. The bank listed the house for sale; subsequent owners have preserved it with care. The current owners sponsor this nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Summary

The Ella Eager House is locally significant under Criterion C as an example of Queen Anne architecture. The house was built by Ault and Crone, a local partnership of movers and carpenters. As the owner of the local lumberyard and with railroad access, Eager likely had her pick of applied decorative architectural details. The footprint of the house heavily emphasizes family living spaces, with only a small portion of the plan dedicated to the formal parlor and front staircase. The back stairs, often presumed to be used by hired staff, in this house are wider and easier to traverse than the formally decorated front stair. Its applied ornamentation, wrap around porch, complex roofline, and cladding materials all exemplify the Queen Anne style. It remains one of the largest homes in Beaver Crossing.

The property also meets Criterion Consideration B because it was moved in 1974. Consideration B defines a building or structure removed from its original location, but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event.²⁵ The Ella Eager House was moved in 1974 in order to preserve it from demolition. In the process of relocating it, the historic decorative and structural elements that identify the Queen Anne style were preserved, and still exist. Additionally, the house was moved to a compatible location: a site that, at the time of its construction, was part of the lot on which it was built.

9. Major Bibliographic References

²⁵ National Register Bulletin 16.

Ella Eager House

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Government

United States Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing 2021 accessed at <https://www.census.gov>.
University of Nebraska Lincoln, Digital Commons
History Nebraska Photo Collection
County Records at Seward County Courthouse
Seward County Abstracts filed July 1901-Abstract Block 6, mortgage filed February 9, 1904.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other (Name of repository)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): SW01-005

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than 1 USGS Quadrangle Beaver Crossing

(Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates. Delete the other.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

1.	Latitude	<u>40.779241</u>	Longitude	<u>-97.279032</u>
2.	Latitude	_____	Longitude	_____
3.	Latitude	_____	Longitude	_____
4.	Latitude	_____	Longitude	_____

OR

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map): _____

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1.	Zone	_____	Easting	_____	Northing	_____
2.	Zone	_____	Easting	_____	Northing	_____
3.	Zone	_____	Easting	_____	Northing	_____
4.	Zone	_____	Easting	_____	Northing	_____

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is an imaginary line beginning at a point five feet northwest of the northwest corner of the house running to a point five feet northeast of the northeast corner of the house, thence to a point five feet southeast of the southeast corner of the house, thence to a point five feet southwest of the southwest

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corner of the house, thence to its starting point five feet northwest of the northwest corner of the house, within Lot 1 of Tisdale's First Addition in Beaver Crossing, Nebraska.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary encompasses the house and no other resources.

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Melissa Dirr Gengler with Becky Latkaorganization Historic Resources Group, Inc.date July 2023street & number 2840 Calvert Streettelephone 402-770-5877city or town Lincolnstate NEzip code 68502email melissa@hrg-nebraska.com

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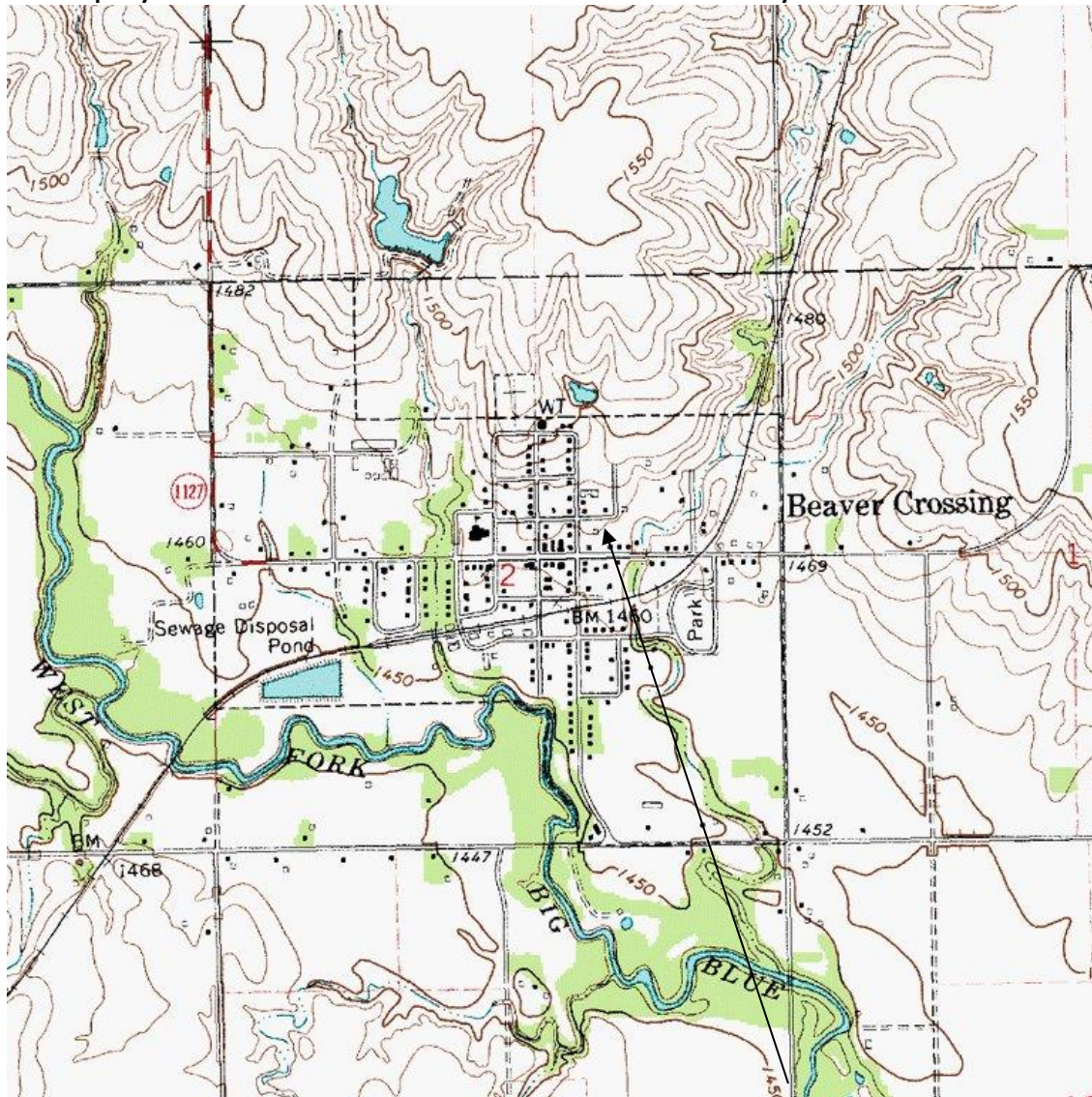
Submit the following items with the completed form:

-
- BEAVER CROSSING, NE
7.5-MINUTE SERIES
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
- USGS
National Map Accuracy Act of 1967
- US Topo
- Produced by the United States Geological Survey
under contract to the National Geographic Society
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Beaver Crossing, NE, 1:24,000, 7.5-Minute Series, 1999
- SCALE 1:24,000
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100
- Legend
- Contour Interval: 20 Feet
- Spot Elevation: 100 Feet
- Water: Blue
- Swamp: Green
- Barren: Yellow
- Forest: Green
- Highway: Red
- Railroad: Black
- City: Black
- State: Black
- County: Black
- Section: Black
- Range: Black
- Township: Black
- Latitude: Black
- Longitude: Black
- Beaver Crossing, NE

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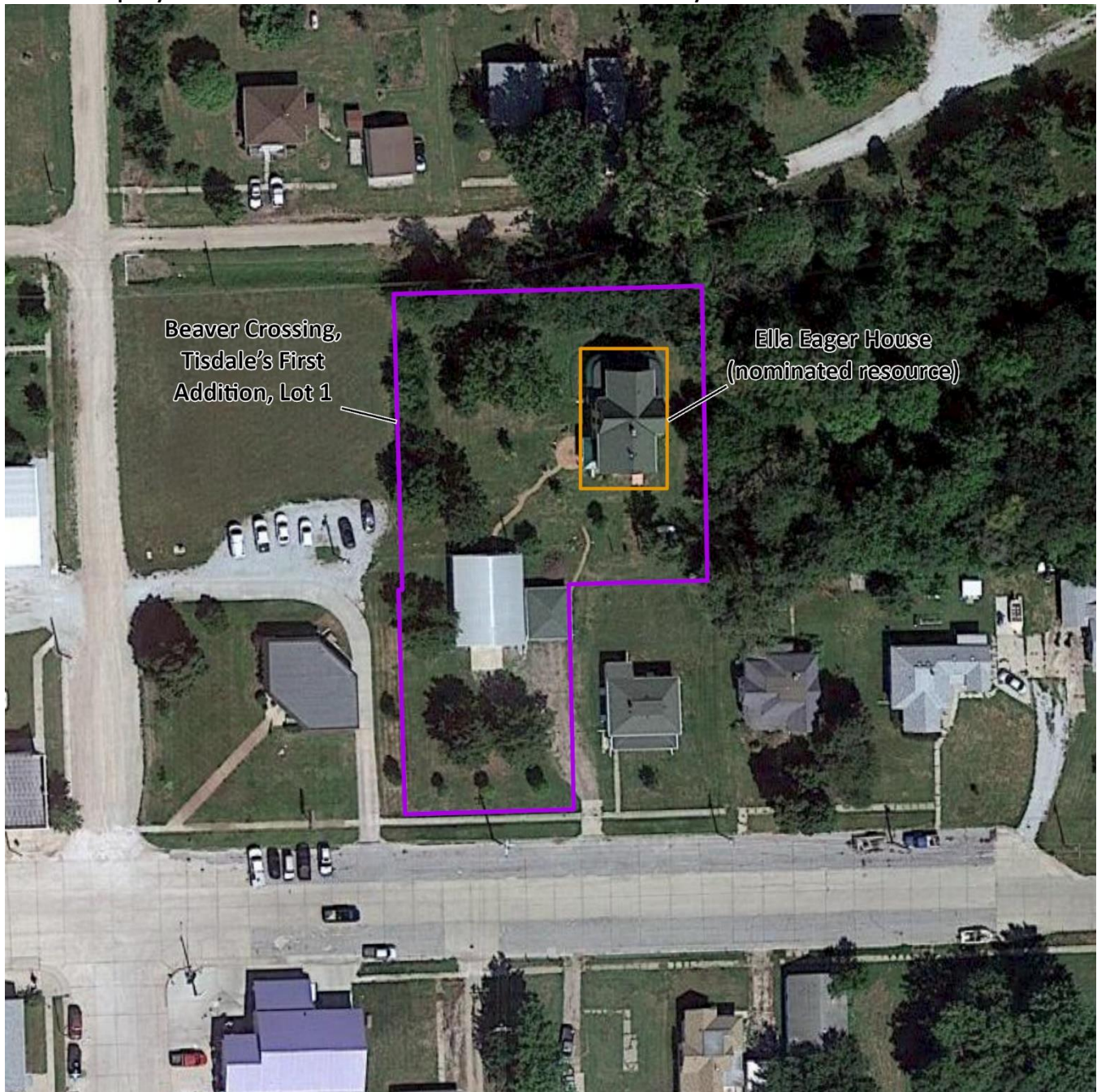
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Detail of 2014 USGS Quadrangle, Beaver Crossing, NE. Arrow indicates location of Ella Eager House.

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Detail of the location of the Ella Eager House within Beaver Crossing, NE. The land parcel on which it stands is highlighted in purple; the boundary of the nomination is highlighted in orange (Satellite image from Google Maps. Boundary lines drawn by History Nebraska staff).

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo LogName of Property Ella Eager HouseCity or Vicinity Beaver CrossingCounty SewardState NebraskaPhotographer Melissa Dirr GenglerDate Photographed May 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

1. View of main façade facing north.
2. View of east side and south side (back) looking northwest
3. View of east side and north (front) looking southeast.
4. View of built in dining room cabinet with drawers that pull both out into the dining room and into the kitchen from behind. Looking southeast.
5. View showing kitchen with built in cabinet at back wall, looking north. Dining room drawers are to the right.
6. Living room fireplace detail, looking south.
7. Wood and glass door between formal parlor and family parlor looking north.
8. Dining room looking south showing original door and screen.
9. View looking south toward formal front stair.
10. Second level bathroom looking east.
11. Second level corridor looking south.

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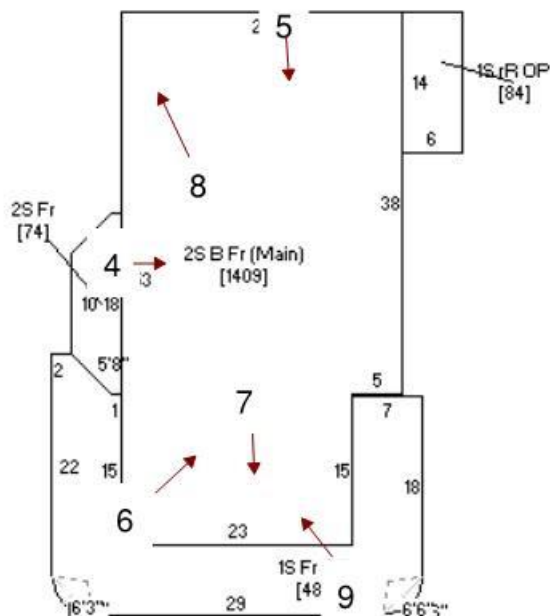
Seward County, NE
County and State



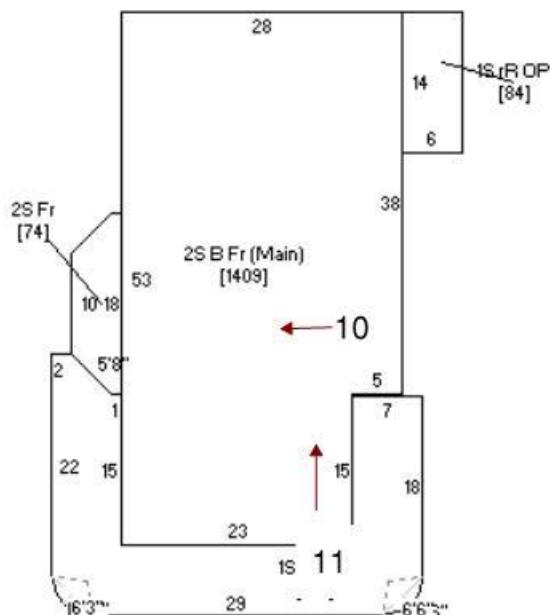
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Ella Eager House
First Floor
Photo Key



Ella Eager House
Second Floor
Photo Key



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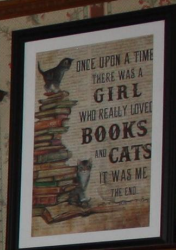
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