

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
—PREHISTORIC	—ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	—COMMUNITY PLANNING	—LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	—RELIGION	
—1400-1499	—ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	—CONSERVATION	—LAW	—SCIENCE	
—1500-1599	XAGRICULTURE	—ECONOMICS	—LITERATURE	—SCULPTURE	
—1600-1699	—ARCHITECTURE	XEDUCATION	—MILITARY	—SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
—1700-1799	—ART	—ENGINEERING	—MUSIC	—THEATER	
X1800-1899	—COMMERCE	—EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	—PHILOSOPHY	—TRANSPORTATION	
—1900-	—COMMUNICATIONS	—INDUSTRY	—POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	—OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		—INVENTION			

1861 (Constructed)

SPECIFIC DATES	1880-1885 (Knapp)	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Milens Burt
	1891-1896 (Wilson)		

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Farm House and its outbuildings were the first structures to be built on the 648 acres of unimproved land of the Iowa State Agricultural College and Farm, the first land-grant institution to be formally recognized. Built in 1861 this original structure was used as the residence first of the successive Superintendents of the Farm, and later of the Deans of Agriculture. This building was the home of Seaman Asahel Knapp, noted agriculturist and teacher, from 1880 to 1885, and from 1891 to 1896 it was the residence of James ("Tama Jim") Wilson, agriculturist and later Secretary of Agriculture in the cabinets of Presidents McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft.

## BIOGRAPHY: Seaman A. Knapp

Born in Essex County, New York, December 16, 1833, Seaman A. Knapp made nationally significant contributions to agriculture, primarily in the South. He entered Union College, Schenectady, in 1852, graduating with honors in 1856 and for ten years thereafter he taught school. In 1866, Knapp met with a serious accident which crippled him for several years. Moving to Benton County, Iowa, he bought a small farm at Big Grove. He served as Methodist pastor at Vinton, Iowa, and for five years as superintendent for the state school for the blind at Cedar Rapids. He then returned to his farm. In 1872, he had begun to publish the Western Stock Journal and Farmer. On his own farm, he used improved seed and brought in better livestock. He was one of the organizers and the first president of the Iowa Improved Stock Breeders' Association.

In 1879, Knapp was selected as professor of agriculture and manager of the farm at Iowa State College. From 1884-1886, he was president of the college. He drafted the first experiment station bill, a bill which opened the way for the passage of the Hatch Act in 1887.

Knapp's greatest contribution to agriculture, however, was in the South. In 1886, he took charge of a large colonization experiment in Louisiana. To interest the native population in agriculture, he offered very favorable terms to farmers from northern states who would settle, one to a township, and demonstrate what could be accomplished by good farming. The plan was so successful that thousands of farmers were attracted to the region and the local people improved their practices. Knapp had great influence in the development of the rice industry of the Southwest.

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The Farm House

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When James Wilson (see below) became Secretary of Agriculture, Knapp was appointed special agent for the promotion of farming in the southern states. He was sent to China, Japan, and the Philippines to investigate rice varieties, its production and milling. His findings resulted in a great expansion in the rice industry. When in 1903, the Mexican boll weevil appeared in Texas, Knapp contributed much to the education of cotton farmers in combatting that insect. Knapp also inaugurated the Farmers Cooperative Demonstration Work in the U. S. Department of Agriculture, which was designed to place object lessons before the farm masses. Under his direction before his death, hundreds of experienced agents were employed throughout the South to assist in this work. Knapp died in April, 1911, and was buried in Ames.

BIOGRAPHY: JAMES WILSON

Born in Ayrshire, Scotland, August 16, 1836, James Wilson emigrated with his family to America in 1851. The family first settled in Connecticut, moving in 1855 to a farm at Tama County, Iowa. Young Wilson early chose farming as his life work. After holding a number of local and state offices, he served three terms in Congress, after which he returned home and engaged in farming for seven years.

In 1891, he was appointed professor of agriculture and head of the experiment station at Iowa State College, where, with the assistance of Charles F. Curtis, who succeeded him as dean of agriculture, he placed agricultural instruction on both a practical and scientific basis.

In 1897, Wilson began his 16 years as U. S. Secretary of Agriculture, under Presidents McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Taft, the longest term of service of any secretary of this department. Under Wilson's direction, the activities of the Department of Agriculture were extended in many fields. Experiment stations were established throughout the United States. Farm demonstration work was begun in the South, and Cooperative extension work in home economics and agriculture was begun. An army of experts were employed to conduct research in agriculture and obtain information all over the world for the promotion of agriculture. Legislation relating to insect pests, plant and animal diseases, forestry, conservation, irrigation, roadbuilding and agricultural education was enacted.

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Following his retirement in 1913, Wilson returned to Tama County. After investigating and reporting upon agricultural conditions in Great Britain in conjunction with Henry C. Wallace, Wilson spent the remainder of his life in retirement. He died August 26, 1920.

\*\*\*Biographies from original form by Ray H. Mattison, 1963.