National Historic Sites

James B. Weaver House
The James B. Weaver House is a historic house in Bloomfield, Iowa. Built in 1865, it was the home of James Baird Weaver (1833-1912) until 1890. Weaver was politically active, and he helped organize Iowa's Republican Party. He also served in the Union Army in the American Civil War. A champion of the rural farm electorate, he ran for president of the United States on the Greenback Party ticket in 1880, and the populist People's Party in 1892, having helped form the party out of a group of reform-oriented organizations the previous year. Weaver lived in this house until 1890, when he moved to Des Moines. After passing through several private owners, it was acquired by the Davis County Chautauqua Association, which operated it for a time as a historic house museum. It was eventually returned to private ownership, and is now operated as a bed and breakfast inn. The house was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1975.

Terrace Hill
Terrace Hill was completed in 1869 in the developing, fast-growing community of Des Moines. Des Moines became Iowa's capital city in 1857 and exploded in size and importance after the Civil War. As the capital city grew, its first millionaire, Benjamin Franklin Allen, began working on his dream home: Terrace Hill. Allen hired renowned Chicago-based architect William W. Boyington to shape his vision into a reality. The cost of construction amounted to a lofty $250,000.

Terrace Hill displays not one, but two elaborately mansarded towers, as well as projections, bays, balconies, lambrequined canopies and columned porches on every front, making the house truly unique. Terrace Hill also has the advantage of a superb location. Perched high above the Raccoon River on its “terraced hill,” it commands expansive views in every direction. Terrace Hill has intrigued and inspired the public since the first guests walked through its doors for the housewarming party of Arathusa and Benjamin Franklin Allen on January 29, 1869. Not long after Allen built Terrace Hill, he lost his fortune and sold the mansion to Frederick Marion Hubbell, a prominent Des Moines real estate, railroad and insurance magnate, for only $60,000.

Frederick Marion Hubbell and his descendants lived in Terrace Hill for over 70 years. The last Hubbell in residence left Terrace Hill in 1957, whereupon it remained vacant and unused, leaving its fate and ultimate disposition uncertain. For 15 years, B.F. Allen's dream and F.M. Hubbell's proud symbol stood empty. In 1971, slightly over a century after its completion, the Hubbell heirs donated Terrace Hill to the state of Iowa, and the latest period in its long and compelling history began. Terrace Hill transformed to become the official residence for Iowa's governors. The first governor to take up residence was Governor Robert Ray, who moved in with his family in 1976. Terrace Hill celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2019. The house was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2003.
American Gothic House
The property was plotted by W.H. Jaques in 1881. The first recorded owners were Charles and Catherine Dibble in 1887. They lost the house due to overdue taxes and E.P. Forest Howard purchased the home in 1897 and operated a candy and novelty store which later failed. Gideon and Mary Hart Jones purchased the house in 1917 and were living there when Grant Wood painted American Gothic. Seldon and Myra Smith bought the house in 1942 and their son, Carl inherited it in 1960. He maintained it until he gave it to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1991. The visitor center, built by the city of Eldon and Wapello County, opened in 2008.

Wood's most famous painting is titled American Gothic. This painting was created in 1930 and depicts a farmer and his daughter in front of a small farmhouse. The models for the painting were Wood's sister and Wood's dentist. The bullet-shaped window in the background is where the name of the painting came from. The window looks like windows on the large churches in Germany built in the Gothic tradition of architecture.

American Gothic was the first painting by Wood to receive attention outside of Iowa. Up to 1930, Wood's work was well-known within the Cedar Rapids community and had received awards at the Iowa State Fair, but few people outside of Iowa knew of his art. This all changed when American Gothic was shown at a Chicago art exhibition in 1930. The painting won an award and was purchased by the Art Institute of Chicago, where it is today.

The house used as the backdrop for the painting is located in Eldon, Iowa. The house was found by Wood when he was scouting for things (landscapes, towns, people) to paint. The house today appears the same as it did when Wood originally sketched it for his painting.

American Gothic has become a well-known image of Americans and Midwesterners, especially Iowans. The picture has been used in many different places: on magnets, ties, t-shirts and in political cartoons. The image of a couple in front of a house has been used to sell a wide range of products. Many people (and animals) have replaced the original pair: presidents and their wives, Native Americans, Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy, pigs, cats, cows and movie stars, to name a few. The original pair has been placed in many different settings: under water (when Iowa was flooded), on the beach, at a party with figures from other well-known paintings (Mona Lisa, Whistler’s Mother, The Scream), in a car and in France.