



The Sim Town House and Properties, Onslow, Iowa

In 1899, David Sim retired from farming and he and his wife Jeannette Wasson Sim moved into a new house that they built in the west side of Onslow – the Sim Town House. Over nearly 50 years, this house was owned at various times by David and Jeannette Sim, Jeannette’s nephew Duncan Wasson and her brother Joe Wasson, and it has been home to three generations of Wassons. We are direct descendants of Joe and Duncan Wasson.

From a School to a Home

In the early days of Jones County, Iowa, school districts did not cross township lines. This became a problem for Onslow after it was established in 1871, as the west side of Onslow was in Madison Township, and the east side was in Wyoming Township. The law allowed that independent school districts could unite, even if they were in different townships. Elections were held in early 1874, and voters approved that sub-districts in each township become independent districts, where the subdistricts each included part of Onslow. Another election was then held on June 13, 1874 that organized the Independent School District of Onslow that united the two independent districts. The consolidation of the school district was completed in a July 3, 1874 election.

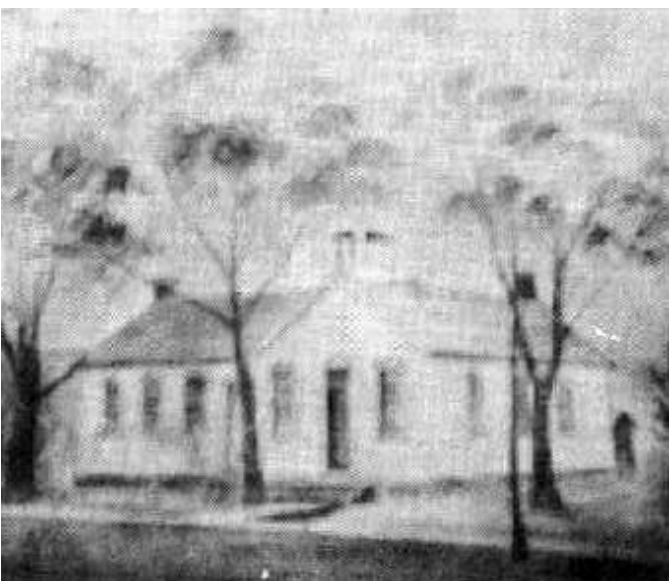
The new school board advertised for bids to build a new school house – a one-room school with two ante rooms and an entrance hall, to be built of brick or wood, on a stone foundation. Things moved quickly. By late October 1874, George Chase & Company, the selected contractor, reported that the new school would be ready to be occupied in a week.

The new school was built at 102 2nd Street, on the southwest corner of Anamosa Avenue and 2nd Street. Although the original school reportedly could accommodate 85 students, it proved to be too small for the growing community, and a second room was added just four years later in 1878.

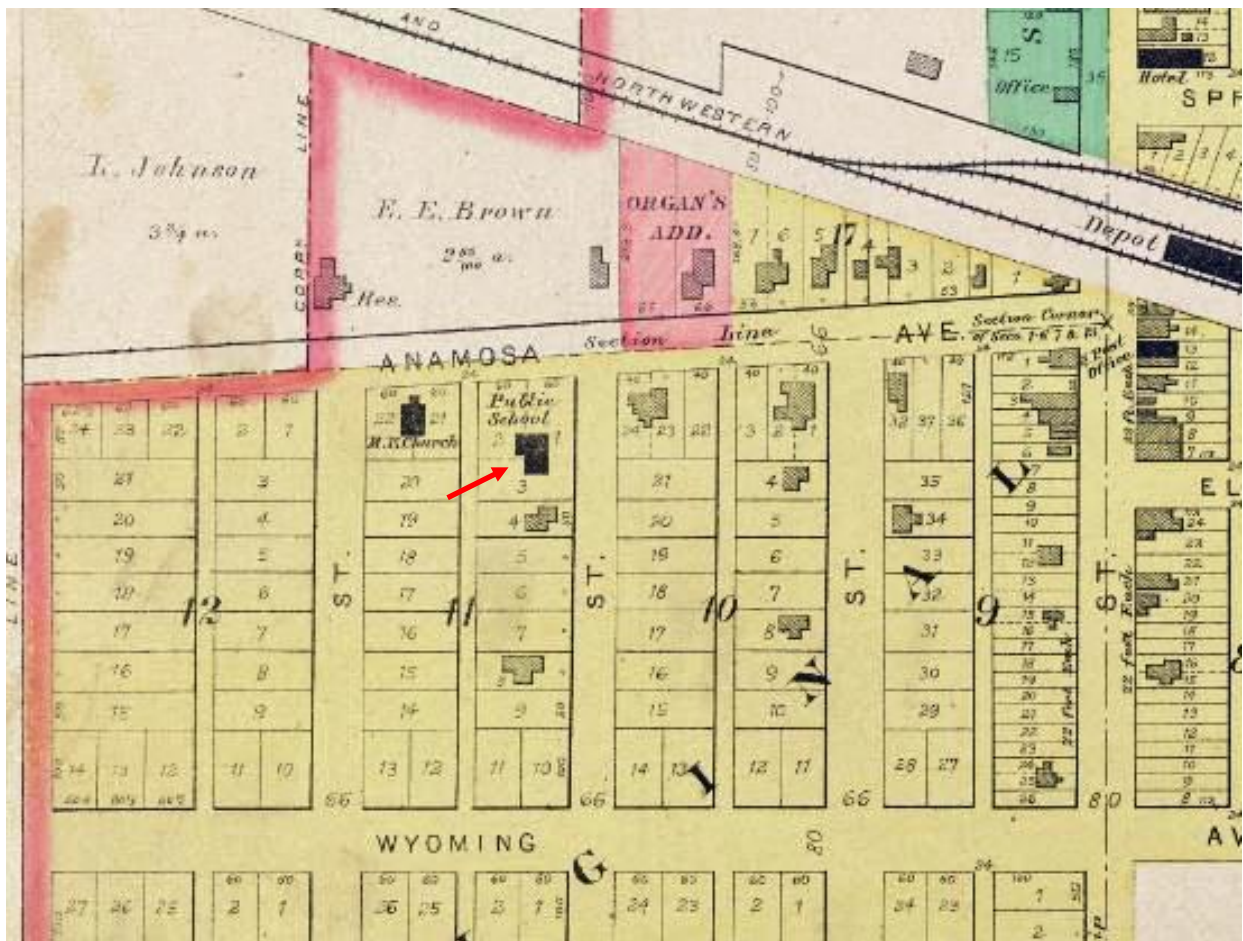
NOTICE.

Specifications for Bids for building the School House of the Independent School District of Onslow, Jones county, Iowa—size of building, 24x42, height twelve feet above foundation, to be built of brick or wood, eight feet of front be set off for two ante rooms and entrance hall, eight windows of proper size. Foundation to be built of good stone and to be all completed by November 20th, 1874—sealed bids to be handed to the Secretary of Board on or before September 1st, 1874.

JAMES W. BATTLES, Sec'y.
 Directors—President, S. L. GILBERT,
 Secretary, J. W. BATTLES, Treasurer,
 JNO. V. SMITH.
 Onslow, Iowa, August 3d, 1874.



Advertising for sealed bids to construct the new school, Wyoming Journal, August 19, 1874 (left); the school after a second room was added in 1878 (right)



The 1893 Onslow plat map shows the location of this school on the northeast corner of Block 11.

Meanwhile, widower John Sim turned over management of his farm east of Onslow to his son David, who eventually bought his father out. David Sim and his wife Jeannette Wasson Sim farmed that land until 1896 when David retired from farming.

It was about this time that the two-room school house was no longer sufficient for meeting the needs of the community. In 1898, the Onslow school board bought a site for constructing a new school building. Construction was underway by that summer. A July windstorm blew “to pieces” the work that had been completed by then, but by late September, the new two-story, four-room school opened for instruction.



Onslow's new school was completed in time for the 1898-99 school year.

The Sims decided to move into town. They bought the three lots where the old two-room school stood, and began construction of the Sim Town Home on the property. Part of the old school was sold and relocated. It was used as a residence for a while, although it was eventually torn down with the lumber used to build another residence. The other part of the old school was converted into a barn on the Sim property.

Research Notes

The Onslow, Iowa Centennial 1871-1971 book suggests that David Sim owned this property as early as 1874 when the original school was built: “The above school was started by the erection of one room and located on the ground just south of the residence of Mrs. George Hinrichs, then owned in 1874 by Mr. David Sim.”

I believe this is at best an awkwardly worded and inaccurate sentence. There is no other evidence that David Sim owned the property in 1874. David Sim was just 25 years old at the time, and he did not even own his own farm at this point in his life. He was not mentioned at all in any of the news coverage regarding the 1874 construction of the school.

Had the Sims bought up a large portion of this part of Onslow, tying up some piece of that land for a school to use for decades might have made sense, but the Sims did not start buying other land in this part of town until much later.

Also, the sentence should read “...just south of the *present-day* residence of Mrs. George Hinrichs...” George and Emma Hinrichs bought the Sim Town House from Duncan and Esther Wasson in 1946, and Emma continued to live there until after the centennial book was published.

The Sim Town House

The Sim Town House was completed in late 1899, and David and Jeannette moved into their new home that December. They rented out their farm east of Onslow to Harbison Orr.



Duncan Wasson, his friend Will Dennison and Duncan's horse Duffy are parked in front of the Sim Town House, likely before 1914. The barn in the left background was once part of the public school that was built on this property in the 1870s.



This is an old postcard view facing west on Anamosa Avenue in Onslow. The Sim Town House can be seen through the trees on the left side of the road.

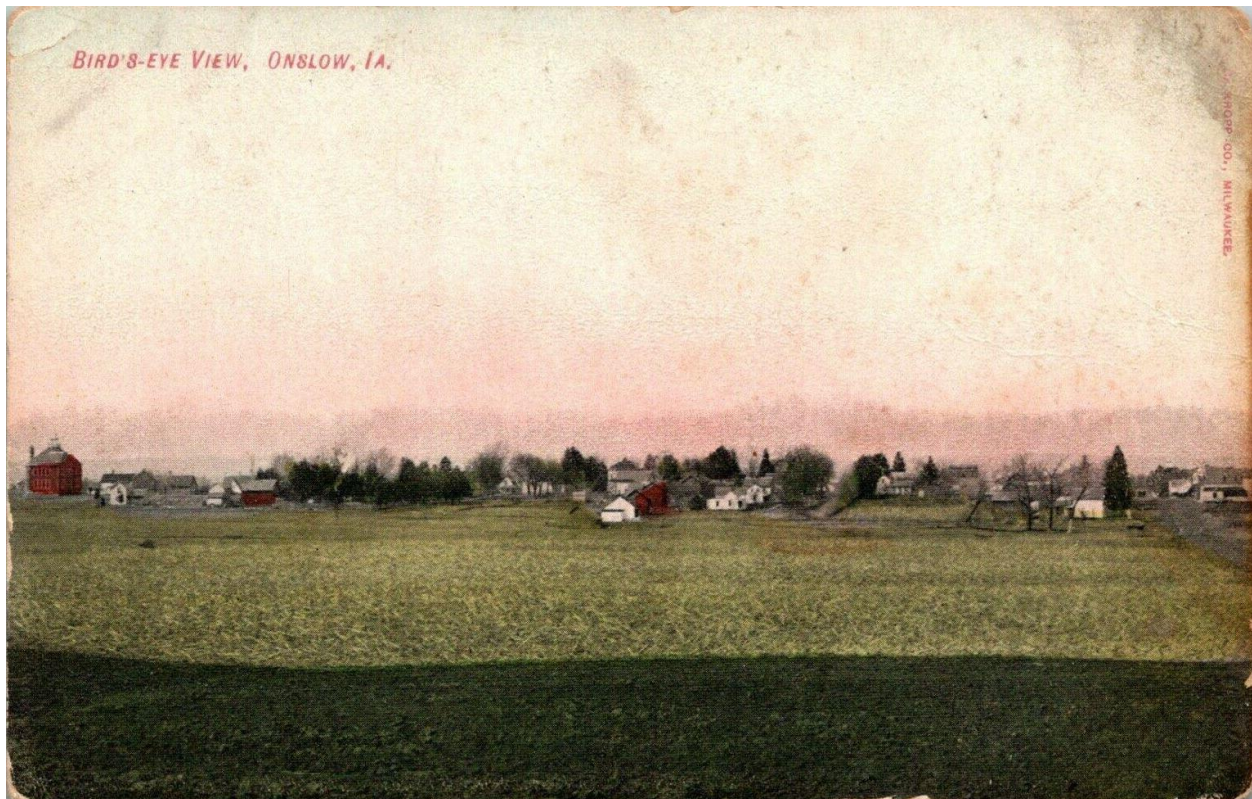
After settling into their Onslow house, David and Jeannette acquired other properties in town, starting with Block 11, Lots 16 and 17 in 1901. By 1912, the acquisitions in town added up to about 15 acres.

David Sim died in 1902. The only real estate described in his will was part of their farm east of Onslow and a pair of woodlots in Wyoming and Clay Townships. The Sim Town House, the rest of the farm, and other town properties apparently were already in Jeannette's name. As David Sim was already rather sickly when they moved into town, this isn't surprising.

Jeannette's brother Joe and her nephew Duncan began renting the farm east of Onslow in 1906, and Duncan owned the farm by 1910. By 1912, Joe and Duncan decided to "retire" from farming, rent out the farm, move into town and focus on real estate and livestock trading and other such endeavors.

In 1912, Joe and Duncan bought 14 ½ acres of land from Jeannette for \$2500. This included a Sim-owned house where a Mrs. Beck lived. Joe and Duncan apparently moved into that house.

All the news accounts of this transaction said the land was 14 ½ acres in section 12 of Madison Township, which includes the west side of Onslow. None of the available plat maps show any Sim-owned property in section 12 outside of Onslow, so I suspect that this was a big part of the west side of Onslow at the time.



Postcard featuring the west side of Onslow in 1910. In 1912, Jeannette Sim sold 14 ½ acres in the west side of Onslow to her brother Joe Wasson and his son Duncan.

The 14 ½ acres may have included all of Jeannette’s property in town except for the Sim Town House and the three lots that it stood on. Jeannette gave the house and that property to Duncan in 1914, just a week before she died.

Jeannette Sim died without a will. No real estate holdings were identified in the probate documents. As part of the process of settling her estate, Duncan was called to appear before the court. Although the reason wasn’t stated in the news coverage, I suspect it had to do with the timing and circumstances surrounding her giving Duncan her house and remaining town properties just before she died.

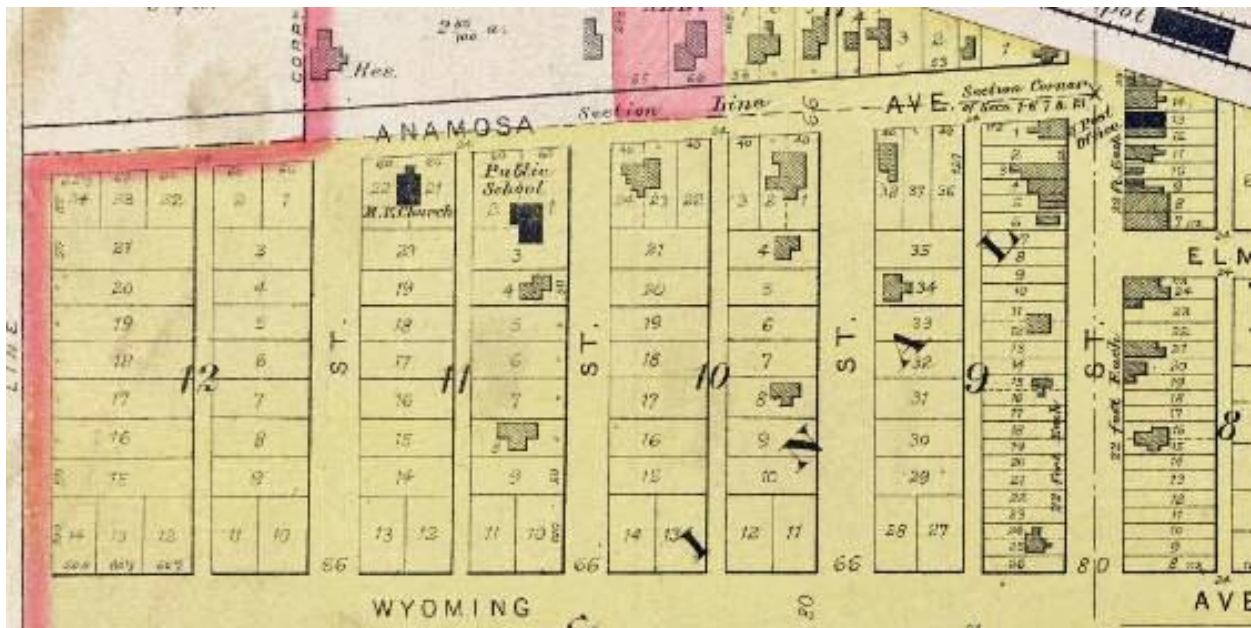
After he took ownership of the Sim Town House, Duncan spruced up the house, made some updates, hosted an ice cream social there, and moved in.

Duncan and Joe's Ownerships

In February 1918, Duncan sold Block 11, Lots 1, 2, 3, 16, 17, 18 and 19 and Block 10, Lots 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 to his father Joe for \$4000. This included the Sim Town House. A few months later, Joe and his third wife Edna moved into the Sim Town House.

Here is where I speculate some. I don't believe that the Block 10 and 11 lots listed above add up to 14 ½ acres, and the contemporary plat maps do not show any houses on those lots other than the Sim house that could have been where a Mrs. Beck once lived. I suspect that Joe and Duncan split the 14 ½ acres they bought from Jeannette, and then Joe sold off his lots when he remarried, including the Sim/Beck house. Joe and his wife Edna had moved to Anamosa, returning to Onslow to live only after he purchased the Sim Town House and properties from Duncan in 1918.

Duncan kept his lots, and he added to them when Jeannette gave him the Sim Town House in 1914. He held the house and the lots listed above until he sold them to Joe. Duncan moved to Anamosa and then to Cedar Rapids, both in 1918, and then moved in with his sister Jessie and her new husband Harb Orr in their new Cedar Rapids home in 1919.



The 1893 plat map focused on Blocks 10 and 11 in Onslow

Joe lived at the Sim Town House for the rest of his life, putting on a new roof on the house in 1923.

Joe died in August 1934. Shortly after, his wife Edna moved in with her daughter and rented out the house to the school superintendent and his wife. A tax notice was filed against the property later that same year.

Apparently by 1936 the house was owned by a Mrs. Will Lamey of Cedar Rapids who rented it out – unless there was another house in town also known as the “Joe Wasson House” that I am not aware of. But that ownership must have fallen through, because the house was back in Edna’s hands in 1938.

That year, a Sheriff’s sale of the house and associated lots was ordered with Howard Hall as the “substituted plaintiff”. Hall, who was known for his ties to the Brucemore estate in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was originally from Onslow and had been a close friend of Duncan Wasson. The case against Edna Wasson was for \$1441.02 plus \$101.38 in costs. The case covered the same lots that Duncan had sold to his father 20 years earlier. Edna lost the case on May 2, and the properties were ordered sold, ending 39 years of family ownership of the Sim Town House.

Duncan Buys – and Sells – the Sim Town House

After Duncan Wasson married Esther Gensicke in 1921, in early 1922 he and Esther moved onto the old Sim farm east of Onslow that Duncan had owned since at least 1910 – the Sim-Wasson Farm. He settled down as a farmer, and he and Esther raised their family there. For several years, they lived in what is believed to have been the old Sim farm house. In the 1940s, Duncan and Esther started preparing to replace that old farm house with a new, modern home.

In August 1944, Duncan bought the Sim Town House, starting another two years of family ownership of the house. The following month, he tore down the old barn that once had been part of the two-room school built back in the 1870s that he had attended, and built a modern garage. He also added a conventional indoor bathroom to the house.

I assume that Duncan and Esther then rented out the house for at least part of the next 1 ½ years, although I have not found any source for information about the house during that time. The house was being rented by Roy Walters and his family at the time Duncan bought the house, so perhaps that continued for some time.

In March 1946, Duncan, Esther and sons Glenn and Boyd moved into the Sim Town House, where they lived while their new home was being built on the farm.

That summer, the Wassons put the Sim Town House up for sale. They sold it that July to George and Emma Hinrichs of Wisconsin. The Hinrichs would take possession of the house late that fall after the Wassons moved back to the farm. The Wassons moved into their newly built farm home by early December 1946. George Hinrichs died in 1952, but Emma remained in the house for more than a quarter century.

At some point, Duncan and Esther had re-acquired Block 11, Lots 16, 17, 18 and 19. They made a “transfer as joint tenant” for those lots to George and June Edwards in March 1847.

The Sim Town House in the 21st Century

The Sim Town House still stands at the corner of Anamosa Avenue and 2nd Street in Onslow. In the early years of the 21st century, the house was showing some signs of lack of care when it was put up for sale in 2007. The new owners renovated the property later that year.



The Sim Town House in 2007 before the sale



The garage that Duncan Wasson built in 1944



Later that year, the new owners began updating the house.



The Sim Town House in 2008 after renovation was completed.



The garage that Duncan Wasson built was also repaired and updated.

Prepared by Mark David Wasson
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