

1271

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Watson's Grocery

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 106 Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town State Center N/A vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Marshall code 127 zip code 50247

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patricia Chenkin DSHPD 9-10-98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

State of Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other. (explain.) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall 10-22-98
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Watson's Grocery
Name of Property

Marshall County, Iowa
County and State

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	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade/Specialty Store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation Culture/Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Metal

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** 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

1895 to 1948

Significant Dates

1895

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

State Center Economic Development
State Center Historical Society

Watson's Grocery
Name of Property

Marshall County, Iowa
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property N/A Less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 486440 4651380
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gloria D. Stewart Historical Society Board Member

organization State Center Historical Society date 1 June 1998

street & number (home) 1930 235th Street telephone (515) 753-6981

city or town Marshalltown state Iowa zip code 50158

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name State Center Economic Development Association

street & number 201 West Main Street telephone (515) 483-2081

city or town State Center state Iowa zip code 50247

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

The Watson's Grocery store stands virtually unchanged since it was built in 1895, following a fire that destroyed most of a city block. The sole owners, the Watson family, were meticulous care takers and maintained the building exquisitely.

The rectangular-shaped store is located in a typical Main Street juxtaposition of the late 1800s, bordered by shops on each side that have been converted for other uses.

At the rear of the building is a small delivery area. In one corner of the delivery area is a rope operated elevator used to bring items from the basement storage to the main floor. In the other corner is a small restroom. The building measures 25 feet by 80 feet with party brick walls resting on foundation walls of Anamosa stone.

The storefront is Milwaukee pressed brick and plate glass. The front top features carved frosty-toned limestone accents. Between the brick edging, the storefront is made of wood painted a cream color. The entrance features a small porch enclosed by paned windows surrounding the seven-foot outside door on the sides. Above the door, a six-pane window, the same size as the door, is bordered on both sides by smaller three-pane windows with Victorian-style ornamental wooden columns. These feature Neoclassical motifs. There are two 5-foot wide by 12-foot high storefront windows on each side of the entry door area. Under each of the larger windows is a smaller window leading to the basement.

The interior of Watson's Grocery consists of one large room, a side access-hall and a full basement. The main room has a large central aisle flanked by custom made oak counters and shelves. A three and a half foot square by three foot high register allows hot air from the basement furnace heat the store. The Classical Revival influence is seen in the decorative steel ceiling which was restored by local citizens about six years ago. Suspended from an offset pattern in the metal ceiling, are antique white lights of the 1800s type, as well as suspended fans.

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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

At the front of Watson's Grocery, two large window display areas exist on each side of the center doorway. One wall inside features a broad oak counter where grocery orders were taken, reminiscent of days when grocers took the list and gathered items for customers. On one side in the back of the store is a four-door cupboard which houses 40-gallon vinegar barrels. On the rear wall stands a beautifully restored oak ice box. Opposite the vinegar cupboard is a meat display case. Along side this case is a maple chopping block and an 1800s type meat scale.

Near the oak ice box is a small set of stairs leading to a balcony where the Watsons used to sleep when they spent the night in the store. For many years the store was a Greyhound bus stop. A counter on one side was where the tickets were written and a long oak bench was a common waiting area for passengers.

The store is equipped with the usual 1800s sack dispenser hanging from the ceiling, brass scales, broom holders, a large safe, tin credit ticket holder and string dispenser. There is also a large coffee grinder, wire fruit and vegetable baskets and a three-wheel delivery cart with a folding box to hold the orders to be taken to customers' homes. One of the most historic parts of the store is the row of solid oak bins with curved, slide-up doors along one side behind the oak counters. These were used for bulk coffee, sugar, flour, salt, beans and other staples.

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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

This article was published in the *State Center Enterprise* announcing the opening of the new Watson's Grocery, rebuilt after the 1895 fire.

A PALACE GROCERY

"Billy Watson's new grocery was opened to the public on Wednesday evening of last week. Everybody and his wife and children were there. They swarmed over the building from basement to top, stood behind the counters, rode the elevator, traveled on the elevated coal railroad in the basement, and danced on the top floor. Jas. Allison made an opening speech and the brass quartette - Messrs. Palmer, Brimhall, Tummel and Richards furnished the music. It was an admiring crowd, an enthusiastic crowd and a hilarious crowd. The store was brilliantly lighted, its windows handsomely decorated, its shelves, counters and show cases filled with a tastefully arranged stock of bright new goods, and altogether it looked like the palace grocery that it is.

It is a building built for the business, and is 25 x 80 feet, two stories high, with a high and light basement. Everything is arranged for convenience and for reducing the heavy work. In the basement is the furnace which supplies heat for the entire building. A car moved back and forth on an iron rail fastened to the ceiling joists carries the coal from the coal house, on a level with the basement outside the building, to the furnace door. The best arrangements for ventilation and for regulating the temperature are employed. There is abundant room for storage of apples, vegetables, and heavy goods. An elevator from the basement to the second floor makes the moving of heavy packages upstairs or down, play instead of work.

The first is of course the public floor, the salesroom. This is most conveniently arranged under the direction the proprietor himself, who knows how things ought to be fixed. A partition the length of the building is set on the east wall. In this space thus set out is the street entrance to the second floor, the safe is set in from the business office near the center, beyond it the refrigerator, then stairways to the basement and to the upper floor, and at the extreme rear is a wash room-everything being as handy as a pocket in a shirt, and out of the way. Shelving fills the west wall for the grocery department, and

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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

the east wall to the office for crockery. Boxes and barrels are relegated to the rear of the store. The finish and decorations of the room are in good taste and make it a very pleasant looking place.

A large room, and a smaller one, are built on the second floor front and finished in the elegant manner and are occupied by Dr. Ball. The remainder of the floor, and it is a large space, is used by Mr. Watson as a flour floor and for other purposes connected with his business. There is room in the building for every line of goods dealt in, and they are all within easy reach. It is a grand moment to the pluck and enterprise of the proprietor, whose career since he struck the town twenty-five years ago as a kid without money and without friends has been uniformly and remarkably successful. It is likewise an improvement the entire town regards with pride and admiration.

The foundation walls are of Anamosa stone; the front is Milwaukee pressed brick and plate glass; the roof is old style tin and the floor in the basement is hardwood, and the first floor is polished maple on common flooring of pine. The ceiling is steel in handsome design and decoration. Every stroke of work from beginning to finish was done by State Center workman, and every ounce of material was furnished by State Center Dealers.”

- from the *State Center Enterprise*, 1895

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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

Statement of Significance

The Watson's Grocery building, which is located on the main street of commerce in State Center, Iowa, meets National Register criteria C as a rare unaltered example of store construction that was once common in the small towns of nineteenth century Iowa. Built in 1895 following the original store's destruction in a large city fire, the building remains unchanged in appearance inside and out since its years of operation. The Watson family members were meticulous caretakers and maintained the building while making only a few modernizations before the store closed in the early 1980s. Watson's Grocery symbolizes an era that nearly vanished with the introduction of supermarkets as competition.

The history of Watson's Grocery spans more than 100 years. As a young man, William "Billy" Watson worked as a grocery clerk for S. W. Morgan. On April 28, 1880, he married Pauline Tummel and together they raised five sons. When Billy purchased the original store from Morgan in 1885, he renamed it W. E. Watson and Sons. Ten years later this first store fell victim to fire which destroyed eight businesses on State Center's Main Street. While the structure was being rebuilt, Billy Watson sold groceries from a tent.

The new store was well positioned for retail success. Located less than one block from the town's original lifeline - the railroad - the grocery later benefited from its Main Street location which bordered the major thoroughfare, transcontinental Lincoln Highway, also known as old US Highway 30. There, farmers brought their produce to town, purchased needed goods, and exchanged community news.

Billy Watson paid off his mortgage on March 17, 1917 and, in 1920, his sons William E. Jr. and Ralph Watson bought shares in the operation. Ralph and his wife Florence operated the store on their own after 1932. When Ralph died in January 1981, Florence kept the store open for a short time, then one day locked the door and never returned. It sat undisturbed until her death in April 1989.

Stepping into Watson's Grocery is like going back in time. The fixtures inside are evidence of the quality of workmanship demanded by the Watson family in 1895. The original maple flooring and painted ceiling frame the long rectangular building. Rare,

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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

tin-lined oak storage bins, with curved slide-up doors, that once held bulk flour, sugar, raisins, coffee and beans, carry the label of the cabinet-maker Geo. S. Carter and the date 1895. Two 40-gallon vinegar barrels, a coffee grinder, and the hand-written accounting system of paper cards, all reveal a way of life and business common in the early 1900s. Brown paper bags hang from the suspended wire holder near a string dispenser. Large ceiling fans show how the Watsons kept their store comfortable in the summer-time, thanks also to the north-facing storefront that avoided the direct sun's rays.

Watson's Grocery reflects several periodic changes that came to the Midwest. The store's hanging gas lights and the oak ice box were modified for electricity during the years of operation. Indoor plumbing replaced the outhouse. The original gas furnace, installed on June 4, 1927, remains in place.

On June 28, 1989, a group of State Center residents formed a committee to try and save Watson's Grocery as a landmark and museum. Through an enormous community effort, over \$15,000 was raised to help purchase the building and fixtures at the Watson heirs' auction. The group was able to buy most of the fixtures in a piecemeal fashion, including the front door handle. The process of restoration followed soon after. On October 19, 1989, the community opened Watson's Grocery's doors once more, this time as a turn-of-the century grocery store museum.

Watson's Grocery survived the popular idea that "bigger is better" because the Watsons proved to their faithful customers that personal, dependable service was more valuable than getting the best bargains. The store stands today as a representation of days when there was a closer society, where people depended on each other.

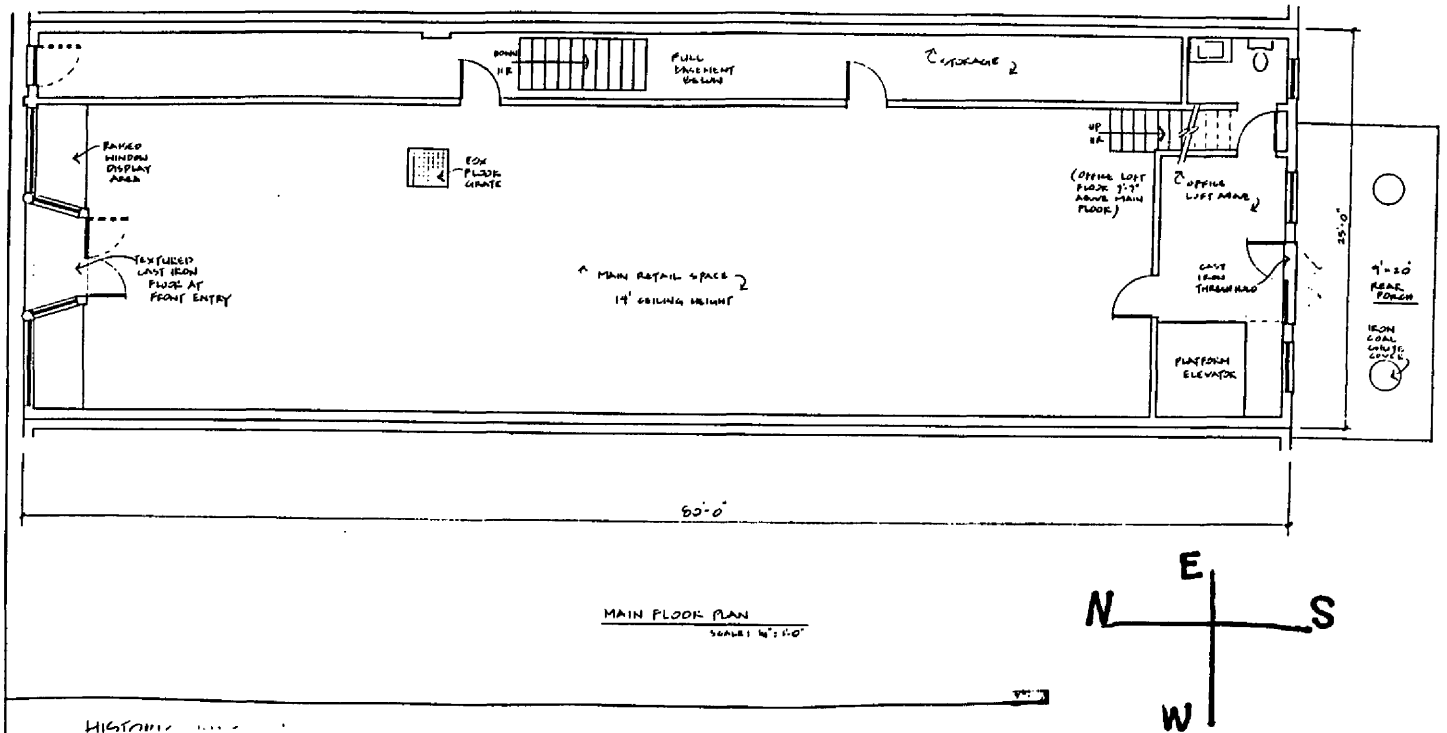
Watson's Grocery is a reminder of a time when the retail food business involved trading goods and commodities, such as fresh eggs from farm wives. It is evidence of the commitment made by early proprietors to serve the needs of their community, just as the Watsons did by filling their customers' grocery lists, loading a wooden hand cart, and walking the delivery to their doors. The grocery preserves a piece of time when life in the Midwest was simple, and it shows the changes that led to the closing of small town "mom and pop" groceries. Watson's Grocery has remained a landmark to the town of State Center for over 90 years, showing its enduring presence and influence upon the people of this area.

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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

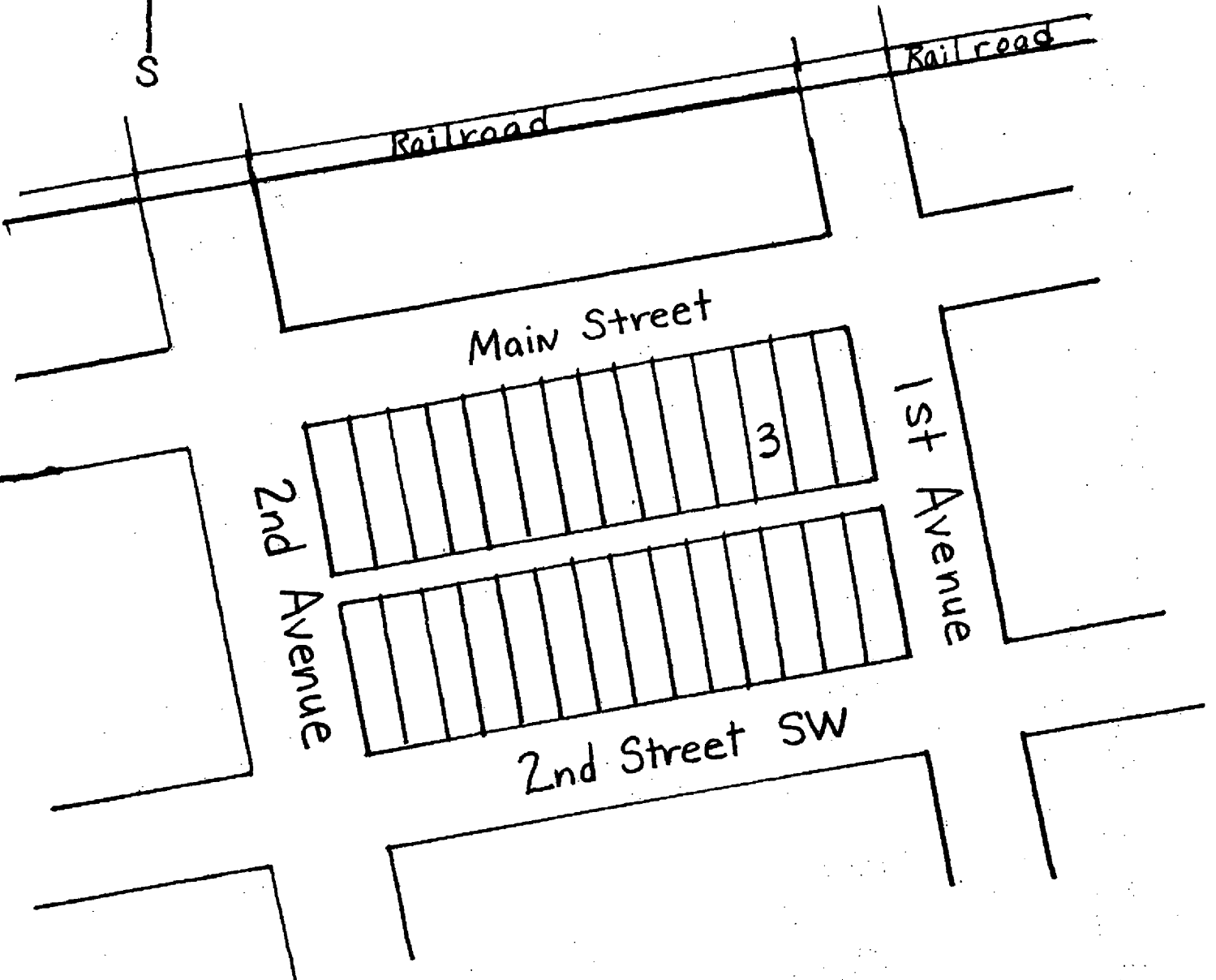
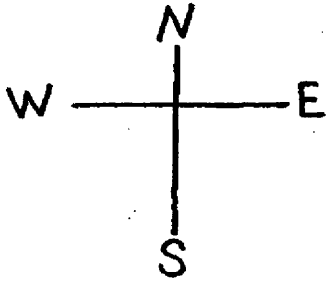


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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

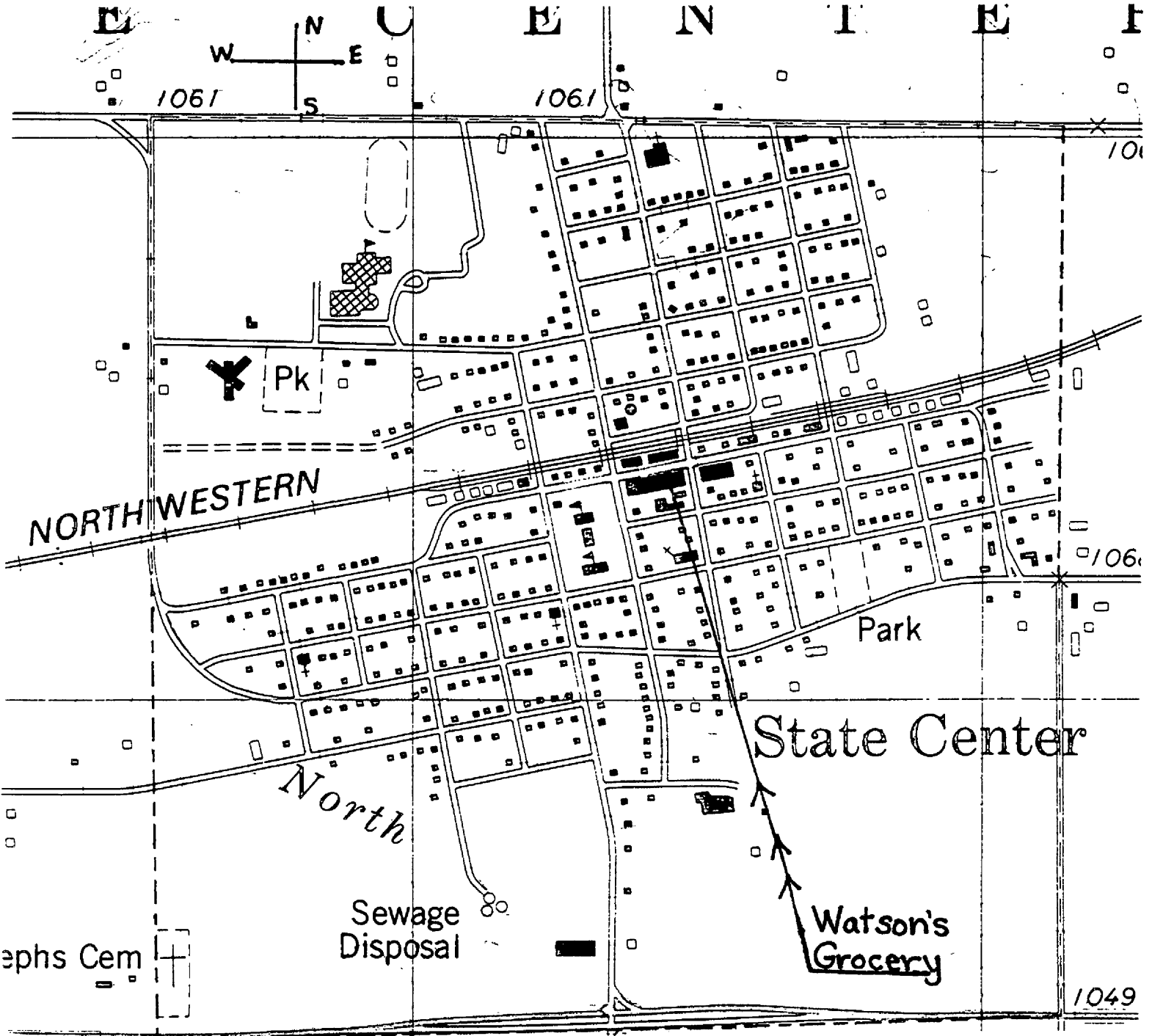


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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa



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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

Bibliography

Abstract of Title of Lot 3, Block 18, Town of State Center, Marshall County, Iowa.

Enterprise-Record, files October 19, 1989 to present. State Center, Iowa. Located at office of Enterprise-Record, 130 West Main, State Center, Iowa.

Lamberto, Nick. "Business for Him at 79 Boils Down to Helping Others." Des Moines Sunday Register. Nov. 26, 1972:C1.

State Center City Council Minutes, 1895. Located in State Center City Clerk's Office, 118 East Main Street, State Center, Iowa.

State Center Enterprise, files 1917-1989. Located in office of Enterprise-Record, 130 West Main, State Center, Iowa.

State Center Enterprise, random collected clippings, 1895-1916. Located in Watson's family scrapbook, and random newspapers donated from community members. Located at Watson's Grocery Museum.

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Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 3, Block 18, Town of State Center, Marshall County, Iowa.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with Watson's Grocery store.

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Section number Photos Page 12

Watson's Grocery, Marshall County, Iowa

The information below is common to all photographs.

Watson's Grocery
106 W. Main Street
State Center, Marshall County, Iowa
Photographer: Gloria D. Stewart
Date: 12 August 1997, except where noted otherwise.
Negatives are in the possession of the photographer.

1. North facade - camera facing south
2. West inner wall - 1895 built by "Geo S. Carter, Maker, Minn., Minnesota"
(as inscribed on bins)
15 large, 6 small oak bins original to the store
camera facing south
3. Store interior facing south, camera at front door.
Broad view showing tin ceiling, oak floor, shelves and grocery counter.
4. South wall of Watson's Grocery
Original oak ice box, modified to electricity. Hand grocery delivery cart used
by the Watson brothers on the streets of State Center.
5. Southwest wall of interior Watson's Grocery
Two of four original wooden vinegar barrels used until 1971 when replaced by
plastic jug containers.
6. East wall of interior shows wooden bench where grocery customers shared the
daily news or waited for the next Greyhound bus to stop.
7. Rear delivery area of Watson's Grocery - photo taken 9 May 1998
Camera facing west. Rear of store faces an alley used by delivery trucks.
The large arched metal doorway in center of porch area is the rear entrance.