

PH0502031

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED AUG 8 1977  
DATE ENTERED NOV 10 1977

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Municipal Building

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

East First and Locust Streets

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Iowa

VICINITY OF

CODE

COUNTY

Polk

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Des Moines

STREET & NUMBER

E. First and Locust

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

STATE

Iowa 50309

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Polk County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

STATE

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION                                     |                                       | CHECK ONE                                   | CHECK ONE   |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD                 | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR                 | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED    |   |   |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Municipal Building is a straightforward expression of the Beaux Arts, set on the east bank of the Des Moines River which flows through the heart of the city. It is the only structure which was actually built, of a "city beautiful" plan for several governmental buildings intended to complement the ornate and imposing state capitol.

The Municipal Building is built of limestone, buff in color and smoothly dressed. Symmetry is a guiding feature in its design, which is basically an 11-bay main block with two-bay wings on either end. The elevation is in two stages: a rusticated ground level and a two-story upper stage in which most of the decorative elements are contained. The whole is topped with a wide modillion cornice below a parapet which is balustraded on the wings.

The ground floor stage contains segmentally-arched windows, with paired lights and keystone, voussoired heads. Three centered doors (on east and west sides) are of like shape. Over the east entrance is a three-bay balcony, supported by massive brackets. Similar balconies are found on each end.

The second stage is marked on east and west facades by a two-story, nine-bay arcade. Engaged Doric columns separate tall, round-arched windows with keystone hoods. Windows flanking the arcade on the second floor are pedimented. Similar hoods are found over the three center windows at the same level on each end. Windows in this stage (excepting those of the arcade) are rectangular, in simple stone surrounds. Original wood sash have been replaced by modern aluminum framing.

North and south facades are identical. The main differences between the east and west elevations are the lack of balcony over the west entrance and the addition of small entrances three bays from each end. Exterior alterations are minimal: original lighting fixtures are gone; one door in the west elevation has been remodelled to accommodate the handicapped. The east entrance was originally reached by two flights of stone steps; the lower flight has been eliminated.

The most prominent interior feature is the long, barrel-vaulted room which occupies the whole main floor of the central block. The rest of the floor space is cut up into offices and other rooms of various sizes and purposes. Much of the interior is elaborately decorated, utilizing marble in several colors and ornamental plasterwork.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD                                    |  | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC      | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC  | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING      | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE         | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION            |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499        | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC     | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LAW                 | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE             |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599        | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS               | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE                     | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE           |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION               | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY                       | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799        | <input type="checkbox"/> ART                     | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING             | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC                          | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER             |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899        | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE                | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT  | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY                     | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION      |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS          | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)     |  |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION               |   |  |  |

SPECIFIC DATES built 1909-10

~~BUILDER~~ ARCHITECT Four firms, all of Des Moines:  
 Liebke, Nourse and Rasmussen  
 Hallett and Rawson  
 Wetherell and Gage  
 Proudfoot and Bird

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Municipal Building is significant for its architecture and for its association with the form of municipal administration best known as the Des Moines Plan of government by commission, which was adopted in this city in 1907. The Municipal Building, built 1909-10, to house the new form of government, was then viewed as a symbol of Des Moines' commitment to progress and change. Of further interest is the lawsuit arising out of the municipal election which approved both the adoption of the Des Moines Plan and the erection of a new city government facility: in *Coggeshall v. City of Des Moines* (138 Iowa 730), the statutory rights of women to vote on questions of municipal finance were clarified, resulting in the holding of a second referendum on the building question in 1908.

Stylistically, the Municipal Building is a very competent rendering of Beaux Arts civic architecture, complementing the public library of similar grandeur on the opposite side of the Des Moines River. For all the rhetoric which attended its construction (see below) the exterior of the building is wholly unrevealing of its use as a facility for municipal government by commission. The interior is more revealing, particularly in the vast main-floor room which was expressly designed for easy access to the combined activities of the various city government departments.

Government by commission (demonstrated earlier in Galveston, but eventually best known as the Des Moines Plan) was one aspect of Progressive-era municipal reform movements. As expressed in reform ideology, the Plan was an opportunity to replace the much-discredited system of ward bosses and machine politics with a small group of commissioners, elected at large and without reference to party affiliation. More than this, however, the commission method involved the centralization of city government and the "placing of municipal business on a business basis"<sup>1</sup>-- to be controlled, most logically, by men of business. Indeed, the origins of Des Moines' move toward municipal reform lay in the city's Commercial Club, a group of locally powerful businessmen. Among the members were James G. Berryhill (who first proposed the commission plan), Harvey Ingham, S.B. Allen, Lafayette Young. (A former member, Jefferson Scott Polk, was the architect of the city's urban transit system and the force behind the Greater Des Moines Movement, which oversaw the annexation of a number of adjoining suburbs in the 1890's.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Coggeshall v. City of Des Moines, 138 Iowa 730.  
 Hays, Samuel P. "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era,"  
 Pacific Northwest Quarterly LV (October, 1964), pp. 157-169.  
 Shambaugh, Benjamin F. Commission Government in Iowa: The Des Moines Plan. State Historical Society of Iowa, 1912.  
 Baldwin, Sara Mullin (ed.) Who's Who in Des Moines. Des Moines: Robert H. Baldwin Corp., 1929.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY lot approx. 200' x 300' (approx. 1 1/4 acres)

UTM REFERENCES

|   |      |                  |                     |   |      |         |          |
|---|------|------------------|---------------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1, 5 | 4, 4, 8, 6, 4, 0 | 4, 6, 0, 4, 1, 2, 0 | B |      |         |          |
|   | ZONE | EASTING          | NORTHING            |   | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C |      |                  |                     | D |      |         |          |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Bounded on northwest by East Grand Street, on northeast by East First Street, on southeast by East Locust Street, on southwest by the Des Moines River.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Jack C. Porter, Associate Architect

ORGANIZATION

DATE

City of Des Moines, City Planning and Zoning

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

East 1st and Locust

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Des Moines

Iowa 50309

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Adelle A. Anderson* AS

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

8/5/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

*Charles A. ...*

DATE

11/10/77

DATE

11-7-77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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The rhetoric attending the "Municipal Days" ceremonies of 14 June, 1910, at which the cornerstone for the new city facility was laid, invested the planned structure with much symbolism. Quite explicitly, the building was to be "a monument to the commission form of government... it was planned with the one thought in mind of making it convenient for government by commission".<sup>2</sup> Even the design was done by a commission -- of four leading architectural firms of the city. Prominently noted among the building's features was the great, main-floor "counting room". In this space the functions of city government were to be concentrated, centralized, rather than distributed (much as had been political power heretofore) behind the closed office doors of "101 petty officeholders", "political friends and ward bosses".<sup>3</sup> Even the name was a talisman: it would be known as the Municipal Building rather than as City Hall, with all the latter's undesirable connotations.<sup>4</sup>

The Des Moines Plan, which changed not only the form of the government but removed political power from its traditional center among the working and middle classes into the hands of the economic elite, was adopted by many other cities, wholly or with variations, particularly in the south and midwest. Many of the worst excesses of traditional ward politics were thereby ameliorated, as promised in the ideology, but, more significantly, political and economic power were now firmly joined to form a new, businesslike basis for urban growth and change.

The special election of 20 June 1907 presented to the voters two questions. One was whether the commission form of government should be adopted; the other was "Shall the City of Des Moines erect a city hall at a cost, not exceeding \$350,000?" On that day, four women attempted to exercise their voting rights (as set forth in Section 1131 of the Iowa Code) and were turned away from the polls on the grounds that women were ineligible to vote in this election (and therefore the city had made no provision for the casting of women's ballots). These women, represented by attorneys Grace Ballantyne and William Baily, sued the city, and the case eventually reached the Iowa State Supreme Court, which on 7 July 1908 found in favor of the women and declared the 1907 election invalid. Among their findings, the Court first held that questions concerning the purchase of ground and erection of city halls were, because they involved the levy of a special tax or the issuance of bonds, matters upon which the Iowa code permitted women to vote. The Court also found that Article 2, Section 1 of the Constitution had reference to "the qualifications of voters at the elections for the choice of officers only"; therefore, Section 1131, giving women voting rights on questions of tax levies, issuance of bonds, and public indebtedness (on the municipal level) was not in violation of the Constitution.

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Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Des Moines Register and Leader, 12 June 1910.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Brigham, Johnson. Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911, p. 628.

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Brigham, Johnson. Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa (2 Vols.) Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911.

Des Moines Municipal Exposition, Des Moines, 1911.

Des Moines Register, 5 June 1927, 8 October 1961.

Des Moines Tribune, 4 October 1930, 14 February 1934, 25 December 1976.

Ely, Richard T. Commission Government in American Cities. New York: MacMillan Co., 1911.

Evening Tribune, 1 December 1909.

Gray, Steve. Proudfoot and Bird. unpublished ms, 1975.

Harlan, Edgar. The People of Iowa. New York: American Historical Society, Vol. IV, 1931.

History of Polk County, Iowa. Des Moines: Union Historical Co., 1880.

Des Moines Register and Leader, 12 June 1910.

Wagner, William, "Influences on Iowa," Iowa Architect. March/April, 1959.

Weitz, Rudolph W., Pioneer Building Industry in Polk County, paper presented to the Pioneer Club 6 September 1969.

Witney, Henry F. and Elsie R. Witney. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (deceased). Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956.