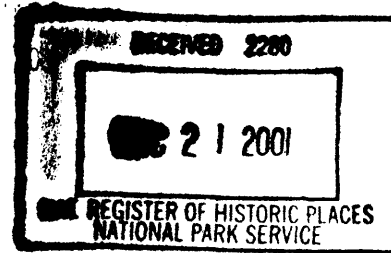


**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

APR 30



**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 Dubuque Young Men's Christian Association Building

other names/site number Iowa Inn

**2. Location**

street & number 125 West Ninth Street n/a  not for publication

city or town Dubuque n/a  vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Dubuque code 061 zip code 52001

**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.)

Howell J. Locke, DSHPO, November 9, 2001  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

**STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA**

State or 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 certifying 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):

Anna McWilliam 1/3/02

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

**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	
2	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	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)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: sports facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE: auditorium

DOMESTIC: institutional housing

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

---

**7. Description**

---

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof OTHER

other

**Narrative Description**

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

(see continuation sheet)

---

**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.

**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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

---

ARCHITECTURE

---

---

---

---

**Period of Significance**

1894 - 1951

---

---

---

**Significant Dates**

1894

---

1916

---

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

---

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

---

---

**Architect/Builder**

McLane, Cyrus D.

---

Zwack, A.F.

---

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - other
- name of repository:
-

---

**10. Geographical Data**

---

Acreage of Property less than one**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 15 691720 4707950  
zone easting northing2 \_\_\_\_\_  
zone easting northing**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on continuation sheet)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on continuation sheet)

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

name/title Clayton B. Fraser, Principal  
organization FRASERdesign date 12 March 2001  
street & number 420 South County Road 23E telephone 970.669.7969  
city or town Loveland state Colorado zip code 80537

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**Additional Documentation**

---

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**A **USGS map** (7½ or 15 minute series) indicating the property's locationA **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/title MDI Limited Partnership No. 47  
street & number 1600 University Avenue, Suite 212 telephone 612.646.7848  
city or town St. Paul state Minnesota zip code 55104**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.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

section number 7 page 1



DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa

The Dubuque YMCA is located within the central business district of the eastern Iowa river city of Dubuque [see Figure 1]. Situated a block or two north of the district's center, the building stands at the northeast corner of Ninth and Iowa streets, facing south toward Ninth. The nearby buildings are primarily one- and two-story commercial blocks of various ages. Typical for its time and place, Dubuque's business district consists primarily of low- and medium-rise commercial and institutional buildings, built and modified over an extended period. All about the sidewalks, use similar materials and have similar proportions and scale. Integrity of these buildings ranges widely, with the most serious alterations generally occurring on the street-level storefronts.

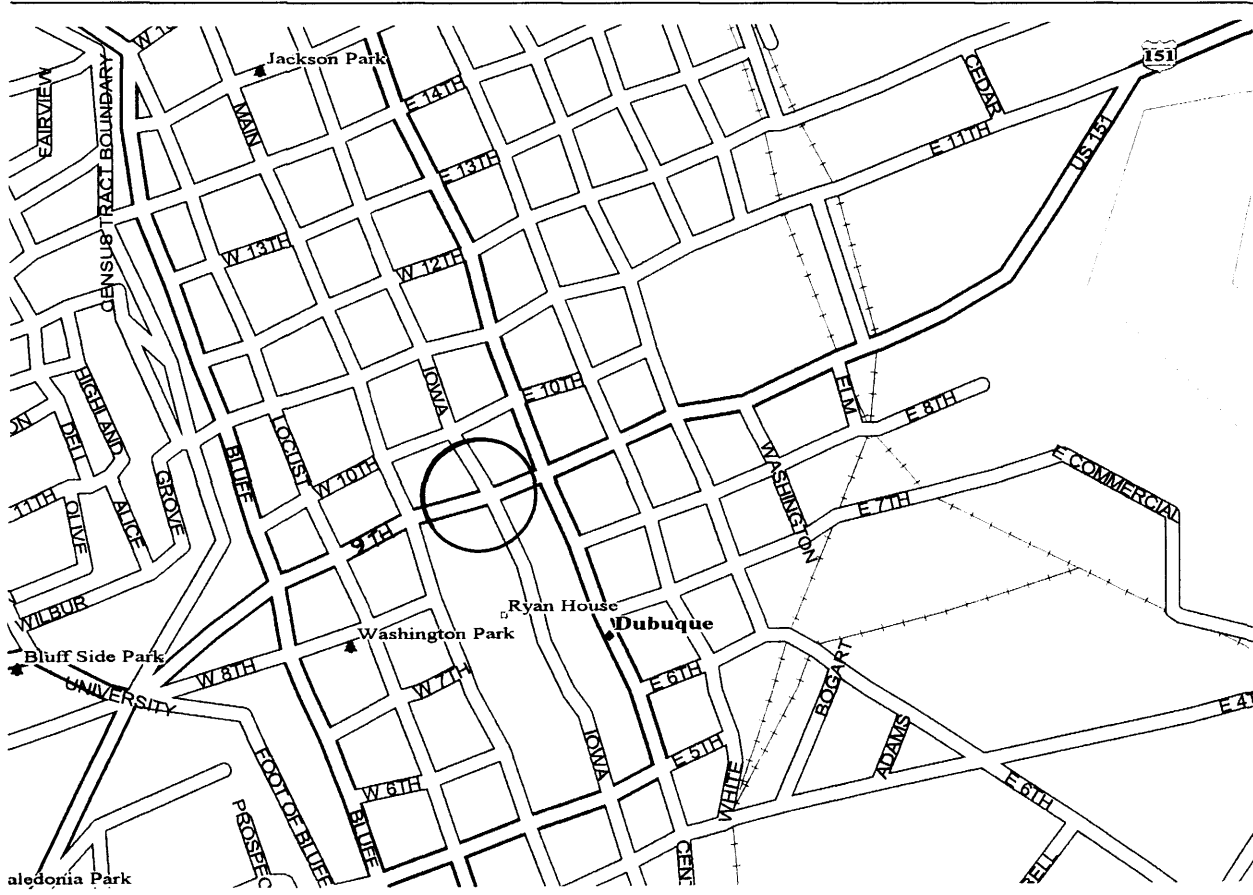


Figure 1. Location Map, from DeLorme Mapping, 1993.

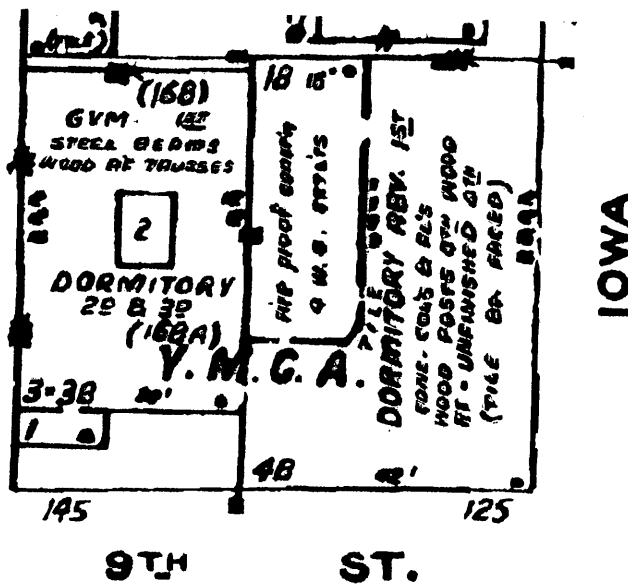
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National Register of Historic Places  
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section number 7 page 2

DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

Immediately south of the YMCA across Ninth Street is a single-story bank, built on the site of the Central Fire Station. East across Iowa Street is a parking lot where a frame livery stable once stood; beyond this is a relatively new fire station. Southeast across the intersection is a single-story restaurant located where the Dubuque Boys' Club once had its gymnasium. West of the YMCA across a narrow alley are the rears of two-story brick commercial blocks that front on Main Street. And forming the rear of the YMCA property behind the building is a small asphalt-surfaced parking lot, beyond which is a real estate office and more parking lots [see Figure 2].



The Dubuque YMCA is actually made up of two adjoining buildings: an 1894 Richardsonian Romanesque structure on the west and a 1916 Commercial Style building on the east. Built on the site of an 1857 house, the 1916 section is a massive four-story block that abuts the sidewalk on its south front and east side. The 1894 building houses three above-ground stories and is taller than the 1916 section by virtue of its steeply sloped gabled roof. It abuts the alley on its west side and is stepped back somewhat from the sidewalk on its south front, to accommodate a small brick entry vestibule in the southwest corner. The 1894 section measures 50 feet wide by 80 feet deep; the front vestibule measures 8 feet by 20 feet; the 1916 section, 64 feet by 113 feet.

Figure 2. Site plan, from 1950 Sanborn Map.

The 1894 building features classic Richardsonian Romanesque architecture. It is configured as a simply massed rectangular box with a steeply pitched, front-gabled roof. The exterior walls are made up of pressed red brick laid in common bond; the trim, buff-colored limestone. The building's facade is symmetrical (disregarding the corner entrance vestibule), with four rows of windows that align vertically. A smaller fifth bank of windows in the gable allows light into the attic. The ground-floor brickwork features corbeled horizontal band coursing and three window openings. This is capped by an elevated, corbeled brick water table, which doubles as a continuous sill for the second level of windows. The openings at this level provide light to the running gallery in the gymnasium; they are grouped as four single windows symmetrically flanking a center pair, for a total of six openings.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

section number 7 page 3

**DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING** Dubuque County, Iowa

Above this row the building originally featured a 3' x 17' carved limestone panel that had the words "**Stout Auditorium**" surrounded on top and bottom by "**Young Men's Christian Association**" and on the sides by "**Y.M.**" and "**C.A.**" This panel was replaced with another bank of six windows when the building was converted into a dormitory. The fourth row of windows, which originally lit the second-story auditorium and now lights the building's third-floor dormitory rooms, aligns over the lower three, with the central four windows capped by Romanesque round-arched heads. The brick voussoirs of this central four-window grouping feature corbeled outer courses in typical Romanesque fashion. The uppermost window bank features twelve openings divided vertically into three banks of four by limestone lintels. A datestone ("**1894**") is centered in the peak of the gable.

Other than the Romanesque fourth-level windows, all of the openings feature flat-arched heads, wood frames, one-over-one wood sash and stone lug sills. The windows in the rear wall of the 1894 section are banked vertically and horizontally like those on the front, with the only discernable difference being the lack of corbeled bricks in the round-arch voussoirs. The windows on the building's alley side are similarly configured, with three levels of openings grouped in three pairs flanked by singles on each end.

The building's roof is today sheathed with three-tab asphalt shingles. A large skylight straddles the ridge at its midpoint; this has more recently been shingled as well. The roof is bordered on the front by a parapet with stone copings and on the rear and sides by plain boxed cornices. It is punctuated by a single brick furnace chimney in the northeast corner. The small entrance vestibule has a flat roof bounded by a brick parapet with a round-arched blind arcade. Providing the street entrance into the 1894 building, this vestibule features a double-leaf doorway on its west side and a bank of three small windows on its south front. A steel fire escape, mounted on the alley side of the building, provides emergency egress from the second- and third-floor dormitory rooms. It features decorative cast steel cantilever brackets and open-tread steps and landings.

The exterior walls of the 1894 building are load-bearing. Internal support for the gymnasium floor is provided by a traditional timber post-and-beam system in the basement. The original wood-beam-and-joist floor of the auditorium above is supported by an innovative suspension system, however, in which eight turnbuckled iron eyerods are suspended from four timber trusses in the attic. These modified scissors trusses are made up of heavy timber compression members, each with iron tension rods threaded through cast iron skewbacks. Iron straps have been used to join many of the abutting timbers in the trusses, and the eyerod suspenders for the floor are connected to the trusses by threaded iron pins passed through forged iron hangers. These trusses also provide the structural support for the roof, through a conventional system of purlins and rafters.

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Continuation Sheet

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**DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING** Dubuque County, Iowa

Designed in 1916 by architect Cyrus D. McLane of Rock Island, Illinois, the building's eastern wing uses a more conventional structural system, with concrete foundation walls, concrete post-and-beam structure and concrete slab floors. Its concrete structural system and masonry exterior walls classified the building as a fireproof structure. It has a rectangular footprint on the ground level, with an el-shaped floor plan on the upper levels to create a rear light court that provides light and ventilation to the dormitory rooms and allows daylight into the skylights over the basement swimming pool. It features four above-grade floors on a raised basement, with a flat, built-up roof surrounded on all four sides by brick parapets.

This section employs the Commercial Style in its exterior architecture, though it could hardly be considered a high-style example of this broadly defined idiom. Facing Ninth Street, the double-leaf main entrance features a classical revival cast stone surround, with a dentilled entablature and fluted pediments with modified Corinthian-style capitals. A simpler secondary entrance is situated on the building's east side, facing Iowa Street. Like the main entrance, this features a double-leaf doorway, but instead of a classical surround, it is enframed by corbeled brick courses and stucco panels. The doorways on both sides are flanked by large fixed-sash windows--either single or triple-ganged--with multi-light transoms.

The exterior walls are made up of red wire-brushed brick laid in running bond, with brick-lined stucco inset panels that frame the windows and form horizontal bandcourses. Fenestration on the second and third floors is relatively plain-faced, featuring pairs of one-over-one windows with loose lintels, soldier brick heads and corbeled rowlock brick slip sills. The fourth floor windows align over the openings below but are more embellished with ornamental surrounds. Like the middle-level windows, these are ganged in pairs. They are placed within a continuous stucco panel, which is edged and accented by corbeled bricks. This panel forms the figurative cornice for the building. It is capped by a band of corbeled rowlock bricks, over which coping tiles are laid. The building's north rear has fewer windows than the street facades, but these are configured and framed comparably. Like the 1894 section, two steel open-tread fire escapes are mounted on the east side of the 1916 section.

Although it is difficult to imagine today, given the building's deteriorated interior condition, the Dubuque YMCA was once a point of pride for the Association. The *Telegraph-Herald* described the interior at the grand opening in December 1916:

The main entrance is on Ninth street and leads into a handsome, finely furnished lobby called "Fellowship Hall." Strong, massive golden oak leather-upholstered furniture gives the lobby a more than comfortable and striking appearance... The gymnasium, just off the lobby [in the 1894 section], is equipped with all the latest modern appliances, from dumb bells and Indian clubs to a rowing machine. The "gym" is seventy-seven feet long and forty-seven feet wide. It is excellently ventilated and lighted. It is encircled by a spectators' gallery. In the front of the basement, facing Ninth street, is a social room containing six pocket billiard tables and so arranged that more tables may be added when they are needed. The second and



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National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

third floors are given over mostly to dormitories all larger than the average Y.M.C.A. dormitories. On the second floor there is a finely equipped kitchen and dining room in which club dinners will be served. The dining room can be divided, by means of folding partitions, into separate class and meeting rooms.<sup>1</sup>

The building's interior retains most of its original spatial organization [see *Figures 3-7*]. The Ninth Street entrance opens directly into the men's lobby--the so-called Fellowship Hall. To the west of this is a small men's reading room and stairs up to the running gallery and dormitory levels and down to the gymnasium in the adjacent 1894 building. North of the men's lobby, beyond the registration desk, is a warren of administrative offices and storage rooms, more recently built over the basement swimming pool. East of the lobby is the men's game room, which features a fireplace centered on one wall. The Iowa Street boys' entrance on the east side of the building provides direct access into a separate boys' lobby and game room. Beyond this to the north is another boys' game room, this one with a large fireplace on its northern wall.

The second floor of the 1916 section is accessed by a stairway from the first-floor lobby. It is configured as a series of small single-occupant rooms that adjoin a central double-loaded corridor. Occupying the entire northern end of this floor is the original dining room/kitchen. The third and fourth floors are given over to dormitory rooms and bathrooms lining a central hallway. The upper two floors of the 1894 section are similarly organized around a central light well. The first floor of the 1894 building houses the YMCA's gymnasium. Occupying the entire floor, it is encircled by a six-foot-wide running gallery supported by cantilevered steel brackets. The basement under both sections houses a weight room, boxing room, locker rooms, offices, showers, handball court, equipment room, billiards room and boiler room, in addition to the swimming pool situated on the west side of the 1916 section [see *Figure 4*]. According to the *Telegraph-Herald*, "The bathing pool, built of marble and concrete, is one of the distinctive features of the institution. It is sixty feet long, eighteen feet wide and is filled with filtered water heated to a temperature of seventy degrees. The deepest water is nine feet and the shallowest three and a half feet. In connection with the pool are separate shower baths for men and boys. A spectators' gallery surrounds the pool."<sup>2</sup>

Many of the interior finishes remain intact, though years of deferred maintenance and the building's service as a flophouse over the past thirty years have taken their toll. Most of the walls and ceilings feature painted or papered plaster surfaces. The floors contain a variety of covers, including carpet, linoleum, wood tongue-in-groove boards, ceramic tile and vinyl-asbestos tile. The swimming pool and gymnasium both appear largely intact. The latter space features maple strip flooring, wood paneled and painted plaster walls and an acoustical tile ceiling.

<sup>1</sup>"Y.M.C.A. Is Ready for Big Opening," *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, 20 December 1916.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

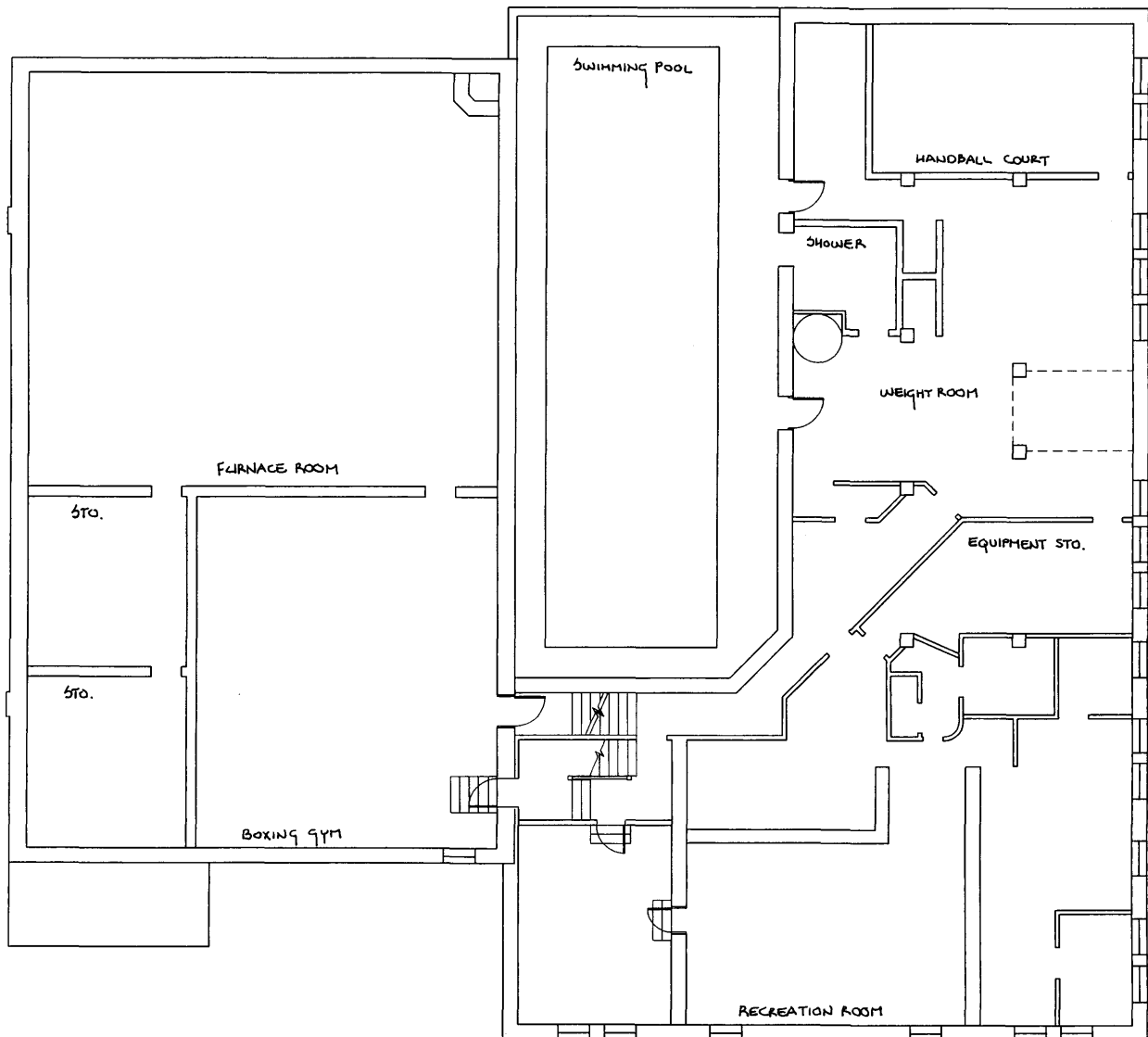
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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa



1 BASEMENT LEVEL AS-BUILT PLAN  
AB101 SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

Figure 3. Basement Plan, by Sikes Abernathie, Architects, 2001.

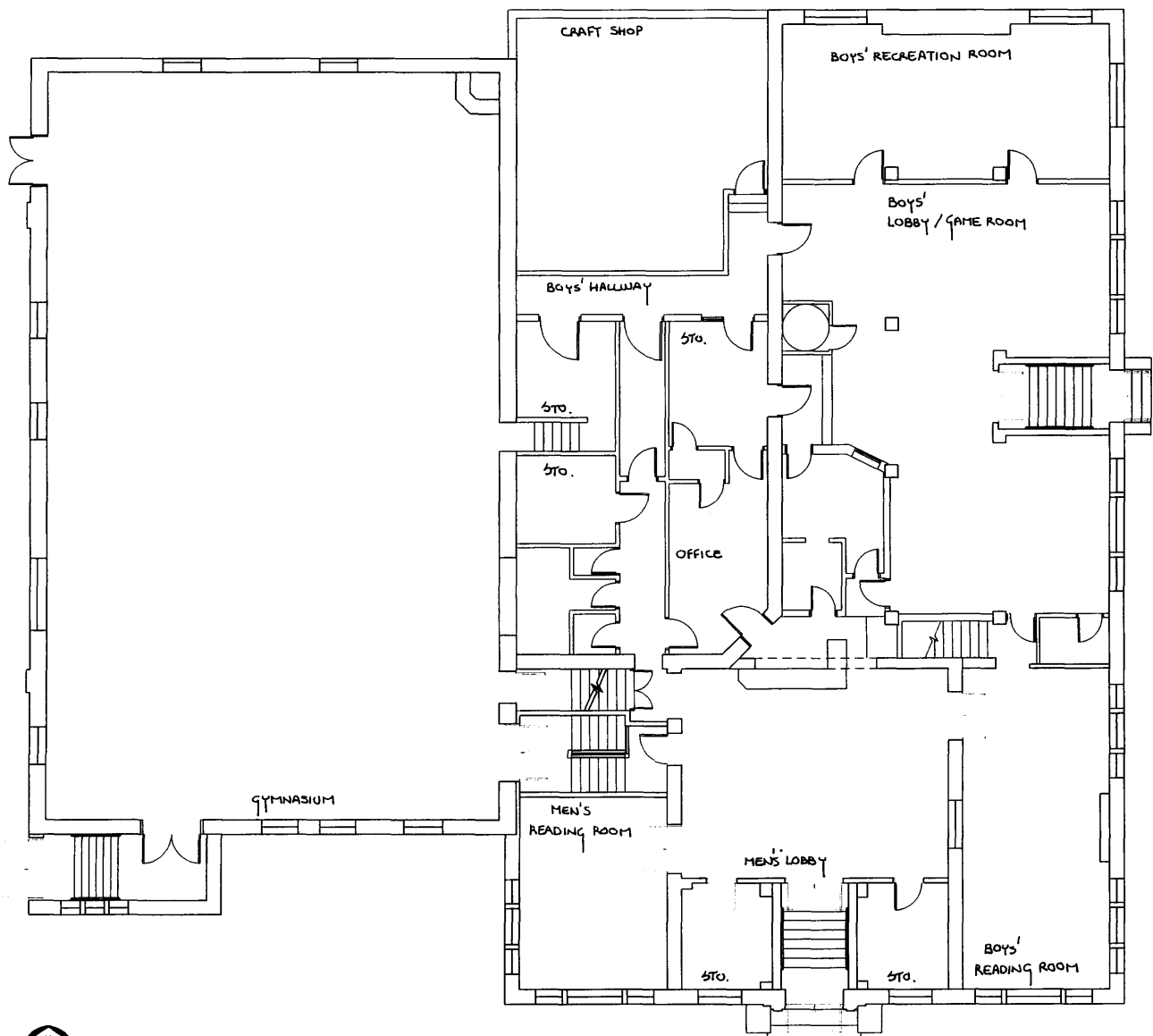
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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa



2 FIRST LEVEL AS-BUILT PLAN  
AB101 SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

Figure 4. First Floor Plan, by Sikes Abernathie, Architects, 2001.

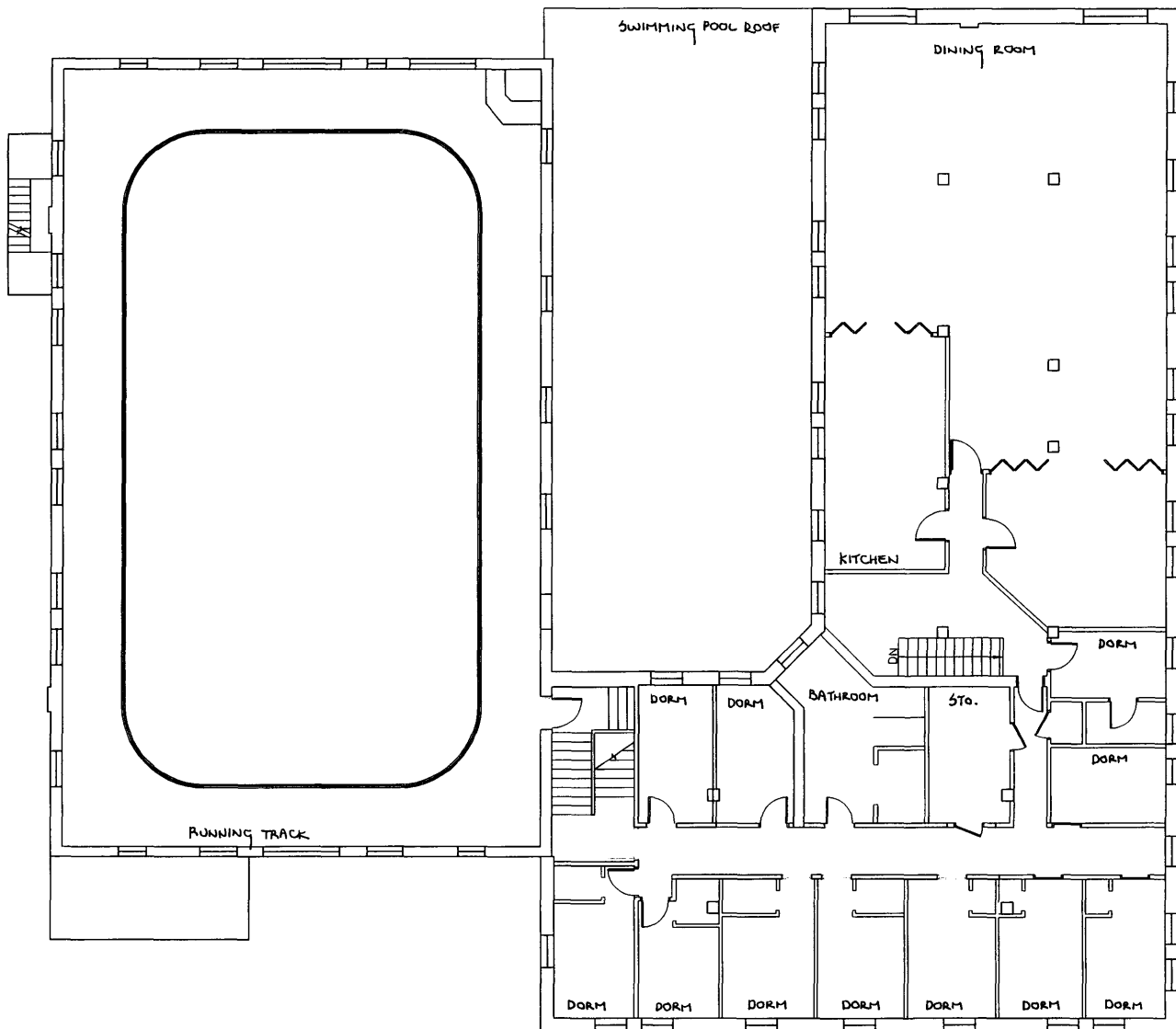
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Continuation Sheet

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa



1 SECOND LEVEL AS-BUILT PLAN  
AB102 SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

Figure 5. Second Floor Plan, by Sikes Abernathie, Architects, 2001.

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Continuation Sheet

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa



2 THIRD LEVEL AS-BUILT PLAN  
AB102 SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

Figure 6. Third Floor Plan, by Sikes Abernathie, Architects, 2001.

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Continuation Sheet

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa



1 FOURTH LEVEL AS-BUILT PLAN  
AB103 SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

Figure 7. Fourth Floor Plan, by Sikes Abernathie, Architects, 2001.

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

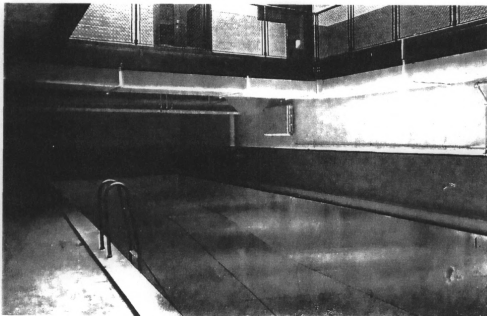


Figure 8. Swimming pool in Dubuque YMCA, 1916.

The Dubuque YMCA has undergone numerous alterations since the building opened in 1895. The most serious of these occurred in 1906, when the original second-floor auditorium of the western section was subdivided into dormitory rooms. At that time the space was cut up into two floors and subdivided into some 50 small rooms. The original suspension structural system remained, but additional beams and joists were added to support the new floor. A new level of windows was cut into the south, north and west walls between the existing second and third rows, necessitating the removal of the building's original name stone. A frame light well was built in the building's core, extending from the roof, through the attic and the upper two floors, and a steel fire escape was mounted on the alley. At this time the gymnasium was enlarged by removing a first-floor locker room at the building's south end. Basketball hoops were installed onto the running gallery.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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**DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING** Dubuque County, Iowa

Construction of the 1916 section necessitated the demolition of the original 1857 house that had been donated to the YMCA by benefactor H.L. Stout. Since its completion, this part of the building has remained comparatively intact. According to city building records, renovations of various scales were made to the building in 1935, 1937, 1938, 1940, 1941, 1948, 1975 and 1985. The litany of alterations includes bricking-in of a large archway in the east wall of the 1894 section; construction of new partitions in the basements of the two wings; replacement of the wood roof shingles on the 1894 section with asphalt; construction of a glass block bar in the second-floor dining room in the 1916 section; partial reconfiguration of the men's lobby to accommodate a registration desk and storage rooms for the Iowa Inn; removal of the skylights and spectators' gallery over the swimming pool and construction of offices, storage rooms and a shop on the first floor over the pool; covering-over of the skylight on the 1894 section with shingles; installation of the aluminum/plastic "Iowa Inn" sign over the main entrance; installation of aluminum storms over the windows; replacement of the original front entrance with an aluminum storefront; replacement of the interior door frames on the fourth floor of the 1916 section with hollow metal units; replacement of many of the interior finishes; installation of acoustical-tile ceilings; and boarding-over of many of the windows with plywood. And finally, before being evicted from the building in 1997, some of its occupants set fires, causing fire and smoke damage in several of the rooms of the 1916 section. Despite these alterations, damage and deterioration, the Dubuque YMCA maintains a relatively high degree of integrity of design, workmanship, location, setting, materials, feeling and association. The building is an important landmark for the city, a visual anchor for the central business district.



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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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 DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

Constructed in two stages in 1894 and 1916, the Dubuque Young Men's Christian Association Building is a locally prominent landmark that derives its significance from two principal areas: social history and architecture. The property is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for its exemplification on a local level of a nationally important social institution. The YMCA has played a complex and evolving role in American society. What started out in the 1850s as an arm of the Protestant church was reorganized in the late 1860s as a more secularly based institution. Church management of the YMCA gave way to that of the business community, and the organization's mission shifted gradually from proselytizing to housing, recreation, education and athletics. The YMCA was sometimes cynically viewed by its supporters in the business community as a means to insure the continuity and soundness of their working force. In this capacity, Association buildings throughout the country have served a variety of functions in their communities: educational center; recreational alternative to saloons; facility for athletic activities such as gymnastics, swimming and basketball; auditorium for social and entertainment events; boarding house for single young men; haven for homosexual cruising; and, most recently, health club for a largely suburban, middle-class clientele. Embracing all of these functions, the Dubuque YMCA Building has played an important historical role in the social fabric of this city.

The Dubuque YMCA Building is also eligible under Criterion C for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of two periods and styles of construction. Although the YMCA was actually a loose confederation of independent associations, these municipal groups often relied on each other for architectural direction, often copying or adapting the successful designs of buildings in other cities. As a result, YMCA architecture acquired an institutional character, distinctive in both its form and style. YMCA buildings in 19th century Iowa generally employed Richardsonian Romanesque architecture, with the most outstanding examples in the state being the facilities in Des Moines, Ottumwa and Iowa City. The 1894 wing of the Dubuque YMCA exemplified this style, though not as distinctively as its high-style peers. After the turn of the century, YMCA architecture trended more toward Classical Revival and Commercial styles, and in this the 1916 wing of the Dubuque building is a representative example. It thus embodies two of the major architectural trends of this institution from the historic period. Although the Dubuque YMCA has suffered the demolition of its earliest component--the 1857 house of benefactor H.L. Stout--and has undergone numerous changes to its interior spaces and finishes, the building has retained its overall architectural character. Indeed, its staged construction and subsequent alterations illustrate the evolving role that the YMCA has played in Dubuque. For decades a local landmark, the Young Men's Christian Association Building represents an important aspect of Dubuque history. As such it deserves to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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**DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING** Dubuque County, Iowa

Dubuque, Iowa, in 1857 was experiencing an unprecedented wave of prosperity. Founded by lead miners two decades earlier, the settlement had soon become a stopping point for boats plying the river trade. Dubuque's location midway between St. Louis and St. Paul insured the city's strategic importance to river-borne commerce, and it soon became known as "the Key City of Iowa." By the mid-1850s Dubuque had emerged as a major regional industrial and transportation center. In 1856 Dubuque was designated a port of entry by the federal government. That year the first railroad--the Dubuque and Pacific--extended tracks into the city, and though completion of the major railroad bridge over the Mississippi River here was still twelve years away, the railroad brought with it important ties to Eastern markets. As river trade increased and railroad service into the town expanded, Dubuque's population grew substantially. Between 1850, when the first steam ferry began operating across the Mississippi, and 1861, when the Civil War erupted, the town's population burgeoned from 3,100 to more than 13,000 people. The new townspeople brought with them increased commerce and the need for greater services and manufacturing facilities.

These facilities developed rapidly during the decade, as Dubuque underwent a major construction boom in the 1850s. The location of the ferry terminals and rail yards near the original Mississippi River levee had the effect of directing commercial development to an area between First and Sixth streets. Residential neighborhoods containing everything from mansions to tenements grew on the peripheries of the commercial district and sprawled across the bluffs that overlooked the town. Dubuque was laid out using a traditional gridiron, oriented approximately to the cardinal points with the primary north-south thoroughfare unsurprisingly named Main Street. This, along with parallel Locust, Bluff and Iowa streets, formed the heart of the town's central business district. By 1857 business houses covered a four-block-wide area from First to Seventh streets, with some 40 buildings lining Main Street and 47 on Locust. A local newspaper reported at that time:

The buildings that are going up in the various parts of our city are of a superior character, much surpassing those constructed in previous years; and should the balance of the great number already under contract prove to be of the same description, they will greatly enhance the beauty of our city, and will challenge comparison with the architecture of any city in the West.<sup>3</sup>

By 1857 Dubuque supported seven banking houses, eighteen hotels, nine printing shops, four daily and six weekly newspapers, four public schools, thirteen churches and scores of bars and saloons. Dubuque manufacturers then produced wagons and carriages, crockery, furniture, vinegar, agricultural implements, white lead and rifle shot, in addition to grain milling, leather

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<sup>3</sup>*Dubuque Daily Express and Herald*, 1 January 1858.

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

tanning, meat rendering and beer and liquor brewing, distilling and rectifying. The city's millworking industry used the abundant materials from the hardwood forests of Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin to develop rapidly in the 1850s, so that by 1857 Dubuque housed seven lumber and planing mills, a shingle factory and six lumber yards.<sup>4</sup>

One of these was managed by Henry L. Stout, a capitalist who had moved to Dubuque in 1836. Born in 1814 in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, Stout had worked in the building trades in Philadelphia before moving to Dubuque at the age of 22. "For a time he was occupied with building and mining," a biography later stated, "and in both was moderately successful, though his health was not good during the first ten years of his residence in Dubuque. The country was somewhat unhealthful and physicians advised him to return east, but he refused to do so, being determined to succeed in his original plan, and after becoming acclimated he enjoyed the best of health." Stout took a job as a salesman for the Knapp-Taintor Lumber Company, and in 1853 he used some of his mining earnings to purchase an interest in the firm. Under Stout's capable

management, the small company soon grew into one of Dubuque's largest. Two years later the establishment was renamed the Knapp-Stout Lumber Company. "[Stout] infused life into the business, and success rewarded the combined efforts of himself and partners."<sup>5</sup>

H.L. Stout was savoring the newfound success of his lumber company in 1857 when he built a mansion for himself and his family in the residential neighborhood at the northern edge of Dubuque's downtown [see Figure 9]. Situated on the corner of Ninth and Iowa streets, the Stout House resembled other high-style residences then under construction for the *nouveau riche* of Dubuque. While such landmark structures as the Dubuque County Jail and the Dubuque City Hall--both then under-way--employed Egyptian and Greek Revival

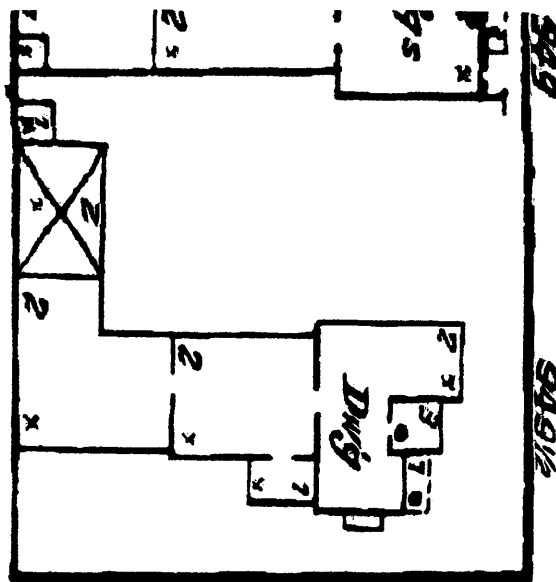


Figure 9. Site plan of H.L. Stout House, from 1884 Sanborn Map.

<sup>4</sup>"Statistical Report. Buildings Erected in Dubuque During 1856," *Dubuque Daily Express and Herald*, 8 March 1857.

<sup>5</sup>B.F. Gue, *Biographies and Portraits of Progressive Men of Iowa* (Des Moines: Conway and Shaw, 1899), 438.

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 DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

architecture, the prevailing residential style in Dubuque at the time was Italianate. In form and detail the Stout House was pure Italianate. It featured two front-gabled, two-story wings asymmetrically framing a central, three-story tower in a picturesque Italian Villa configuration. The house featured classic Italianate architectural elements, including stuccoed exterior walls, shallowly pitched gabled and hipped roofs, projecting eaves with scroll-sawn brackets, balconets on the tower with scroll-sawn brackets and wrought iron railings, and narrowly proportioned, hood-moulded windows with semicircular heads. In its style and scale, Stout's house fit well within the milieu of 1850s residential construction in Dubuque.

Dubuque's residential architecture followed national trends in 1857, and at the time the city was beginning to take on the social trappings of a blossoming metropolis as well. Three Masonic lodges were then active, as well as four lodges of Odd Fellows. Dubuque fielded a literary society and a typographical union and had its own Turnverein at the corner of Sixth and Iowa streets to provide an athletic facility for the city's youth. In 1857 several area churches joined to form a local chapter of the Young Men's Christian Association. That September the group joined with the national confederation of YMCAs, marking the first contact the city had with this national league. "By this step taken by our Society," the group reported in the *Tribune*, "it is brought into more intimate relationship with similar organizations, not only on this continent, but through Christendom; and by occasional correspondence and an interchange of sentiments, new views of the range and nature of duties are imparted, and a reciprocity of happy influences springs up."<sup>6</sup>

William Vandever was elected the Dubuque YMCA's first president, with D.N. Cooley, G.F. Bissell, J. Clement and George Chamberlain as vice-presidents. In January 1858 the Association adopted a constitution, setting up committees for finance, publishing, and lectures, as well as committees responsible for establishing a library and mission sabbath schools. The church committee, made up of representatives from participating congregations, was charged with visiting "young men who have recently taken up their abode in the city, and endeavor to bring them under moral and religious influence, by aiding them in the selection of suitable boarding places and employment, to introduce them to the members and privileges of this association; secure their attendance at some place of worship on the Sabbath, and, by every means in their power, surround them with Christian associations."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>"Young Men's Christian Association," *Dubuque Tribune*, 27 September 1857.

<sup>7</sup>"Young Men's Christian Association," *Dubuque Tribune*, 4 May 1858.

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**DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING** Dubuque County, Iowa

In its structure and goals, the Dubuque YMCA mirrored the national association. Established by several merchants in London in 1844, the YMCA initially functioned as little more than a prayer group for young men come to the city during the Industrial Revolution. Americans exposed to the organization during the 1851 London World's Fair formed YMCAs in New York and Boston the following year. These were soon followed by chapters in other Eastern cities. In June 1854 at a Convention of Christian Organizations in Buffalo, some 32 local associations in the United States and Canada formed the Confederation of North American YMCAs.

Functioning as a loose alliance of autonomous groups, the YMCA provided the means for middle-class Protestant reformers to counter the debilitating effects of urban life on single young men. Like their British counterparts, they had been alarmed by the widespread corruption of an entire class of citizens. They condemned the pervasive moral turpitude of men who had moved to the cities from untainted rural regions. Single, poor, largely uneducated and disoriented by urban life, these vulnerable young men seemed in desperate need of Christian fellowship. Ministers and lay reformers alike recognized the necessity for a secular organization that would provide practical and spiritual guidance to the millions of men moving to the cities at mid-century. According to historians Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt:

*Members of the urban middle class were not only distressed by the prospect of the migrants' fall from grace. They also feared that the moral debasement of these men and women would corrupt other segments of urban population. Determined to safeguard the souls of the migrants and to preserve the established urban order, reformers launched the YMCA as an agent of Christian morality and traditional values.<sup>8</sup>*

Fueled largely by the increasing number of workers drawn to the cities by factory jobs, the YMCA experienced tremendous success in the 1850s. By the end of the decade, some 200 associations were active in America, including the one in Dubuque, which had been one of the first chapters formed west of the Mississippi River. The YMCA's ambiguous relationship with the church allowed it to proselytize the migrants and assume various charitable roles in the community while enjoying the good will of Protestantism. The good will within the association itself became severely strained by the end of the decade, however, as the YMCA was split by the same sectional differences that divided the rest of the country. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, many of the YMCA's potential charges were called to combat. The southern association members quickly dropped out, and the Confederacy of North American YMCAs broke up. By the end of the war, some sixty YMCAs were still functional. Only two of these were located in the South.

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<sup>8</sup>Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, ed., *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 2.

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**DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING** Dubuque County, Iowa

When the national Confederation began its reformation after the war, it sought to distance itself from the church. Though still an agglomeration of individual associations, the YMCA no longer functioned as an unofficial church auxiliary. Instead it undertook more secular programs and offered recreational, educational and athletic activities to urban migrants as a bulwark against alcohol abuse. With this broadened appeal, the organization gained the active support of community business leaders. Prominent businessmen took leadership roles in their local YMCAs, transforming their identity from that of loosely run, church-backed institutions into more tightly controlled corporate entities.

The increased support of business also provided the YMCA with greater operating capital, transforming the association's complexion between 1870 and the turn of the century. Before the war, most YMCAs operated frugally from rented rooms. After the war, with the financial support of the business community, many were able to acquire or construct their own buildings. The newly built YMCAs began to feature libraries, reading rooms, gymnasiums, swimming pools, bowling alleys, classrooms, cafeterias and dormitories. The associations' positions as social, athletic and housing centers soon overshadowed their roles as religious outlets. With the support of local merchants, factory owners and railroad officials, the YMCA created a network of so-called "manhood factories" intended to socialize young men new to the cities.<sup>9</sup>

**D**ubuque's YMCA was apparently one of the casualties of the wartime disintegration of the Confederation. The Association faded from public view after 1859 and eventually ceased activities entirely during the war. After the war, the community moved to re-instate the Association. In September 1866 several representatives from area churches met in the Congregational Church to discuss re-establishing the YMCA in the city. Within a month the group had elected N.C. Ryder as president, enacted a new constitution and garnered the membership of some 230 businessmen. By November the Association had moved into temporary quarters above E.H. Moore's drug store on Main Street. The men allowed women to join their

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 5. "The cities' commercial elites often financed the construction of YMCA buildings in an attempt to regulate the business practices of the mercantile community. Traditionally, they had relied on the apprenticeship system to initiate new generations of men into the community of merchants. However, during the late nineteenth century this system, which allowed for the close personal supervision and discipline of an apprentice, was replaced by the complex and often impersonal structure of the corporation. The older generation of urban merchants concerned about ensuring the survival of their values in this new corporate age turned to the YMCA. The association represented an ideal partner because it fostered proper business ethics through the promotion of Protestant virtues such as thrift, honesty, temperance, industriousness, and benevolence."

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**DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING** Dubuque County, Iowa

club as associate members in the hope that they would contribute furnishings and decorate the rented rooms. In its first annual report, made in October 1867, the Association stated that its rooms had indeed been embellished through the efforts of the women. "Pictures, mostly the gifts of friends, adorn the walls thereof," Superintendent George Ransom reported. "Books, newspapers and periodicals are mingled with the games of chess and draughts. Our aim has been to afford such social inducements to young men that they would find their way to the rooms in preference to visiting the places where vice is pandered to, and where Satan watches for precious souls."<sup>10</sup> With limited facilities, the Dubuque YMCA could offer little more than a couple of small rooms for reading and games, with a library shelf in one corner.

Ten years later little had changed. The membership level remained essentially static at around 300 business and church supporters, and the Association still rented small rooms on Main Street. The primary purpose of the YMCA seemed to be as a safe haven for temperance--an alternative to the more than 130 bars and saloons then operating in the city. In 1877 the YMCA moved to the upper floor of another commercial building, but money for decorating was still tight. "We need to furnish a more attractive place in our reading room than we have had," President William Wheeler commented in October. "The floor of our new room should be carpeted, more pictures hung on the walls, a fountain, flowers, statuary, and many other objects to beautify and make cheerful put in, which will attract the young as do the places of gin and whiskey."<sup>11</sup>

By 1884 the YMCA had moved once again, but this time things were different. For the first time the Association had outfitted a gymnasium for its members, providing horizontal and parallel bars, swinging rings, ladders, dumbbells and Indian clubs.<sup>12</sup> As meager as its facilities seemed, the YMCA offered the only public gymnasium in town other than the German Turnverein. In 1889 the Dubuque Athletic Club opened, offering another alternative venue. When this closed three years later, the YMCA took over its space in the Globe Building and purchased its exercise equipment at a discount. The move represented a major improvement in the Association's physical plant, as reported by the *Herald* at its opening in August: "The elegant furnishings of the parlor and reading rooms were admired by all. The baths and gymnasium were a

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<sup>10</sup>"Young Men's Christian Association," *Dubuque Times*, 2 October 1867. "It affords us pleasure to notice that the rooms are becoming a place of resort for both strangers and residents; and especially this is true as regards evenings. It is not uncommon to have our large reading table surrounded, and our small but growing library is made to contribute its share in entertaining the guests. It has been our privilege to know that some at least have been kept from the seductive influences of the dram shop and other kindred associations by the inducements our rooms afford."

<sup>11</sup>"Y.M.C.A.," *Dubuque Times*, 13 November 1877.

<sup>12</sup>"Y.M.C.A. Gymnasium," *Dubuque Herald*, 3 January 1884.

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

source of delight to all who are interested in athletics."<sup>13</sup> Even with these improvements, the Association was beginning to plan for a building of its own. In January 1893 a group of businessmen met at C.H. Eighmey's house to discuss fundraising for the proposed structure. Supporters estimated that they would need to raise \$40,000 to acquire the land and construct the building. In a concerted citywide effort, ministers all over town began proclaiming the need for a YMCA building from their pulpits. "Plans for the new building are already under discussion," the *Herald* enthused. "It is proposed to make it one of the finest Y.M.C.A. homes in the west and something in which the city can take pardonable pride."<sup>14</sup> With contributions of up to \$2000 coming in from prominent Dubuque businessmen, the Association appeared well on its way to owning its first building after over 25 years of renting.<sup>15</sup>

The Panic of 1893 clouded plans for the new building, as pledges quickly dried up. The outlook improved appreciably in March 1894, though, when the YMCA received the offer of a free building from H.L. Stout. Still in the lumber business, Stout's fortunes had improved steadily since he had built his mansion on Ninth Street in 1857. His firm had grown into one of the largest lumber suppliers in the Midwest, incorporating as Knapp, Stout and Co. in 1878 with a capitalization of \$4 million. Owning timber holdings and mills from Lake Superior to New Orleans, the company shipped about 125 million board feet annually. Stout had

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<sup>13</sup>"The Good Work Begun," *Dubuque Herald*, 30 August 1892. The article provided a glimpse into the true nature of what the YMCA had then become. "John Adams gave the business man's view of the association. The business man supports the association not because he may be interested in physical, mental or moral development, but because he sees that it develops character in young men... There are examples all over the country showing that for purely business motives the association was liberally supported. The Union Pacific railway company pays \$40,000 a year towards the support of associations along its line simply because it improved the employees and caused them to render better and more faithful service. We would be badly in need of an association in Dubuque, said Mr. Adams sarcastically, if there were intemperance and Sunday desecration in our city; if our officials were not laying awake nights thinking of how they could enforce the laws; if there were temptations for our young men; and if the pastors were not fairly overwhelmed with Christian fellowship. When the association has demonstrated its practicability in uplifting the young men, there is nothing in reason which the business men will not do to support it."

<sup>14</sup>"Generous Contributions," *Dubuque Herald*, 11 January 1893.

<sup>15</sup>Some of the largest contributions came from the city's lumber interests, with \$2000 each pledged by the Farley-Loetscher Lumber Company and the Carr, Ryder & Engler Company, and \$1000 pledged by H.L. Stout. "A Most Generous Offer," *Dubuque Herald*, 27 March 1894.



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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

twice been elected mayor of Dubuque, served on the boards of most of the railroads that had built into the city, and provided capital for numerous business enterprises in town. This included a thoroughbred horse farm he owned with his oldest son, Frank. Henry Stout was also active in several philanthropic pursuits in Dubuque, including the Home of the Friendless, the Finley Hospital and the Young Men's Christian Association. In the fall of 1893 he moved with his daughter Fannie into a new Queen Anne house next to his son's residence on Locust Street. In March 1894 Stout was approached by the Association about donating his old house to the YMCA for use as its headquarters. A week later he agreed, with the proviso that the Association raise \$7000 with which to build a gymnasium at the rear of the property.<sup>16</sup>

The four first-floor chambers of the residence would be converted into a game room, reading room, office and parlor. The upstairs bedrooms would be used as classrooms. Before occupying the house, the YMCA would first renovate it. The lower-level floors would be replaced with hardwood, the upper levels covered with carpet, and the house otherwise updated. Planning for

the new addition began at once, and actual construction began just two months later. By mid-June the rear of the house had been demolished and excavation for the auditorium's foundation completed. That summer and fall the contractor worked on the new structure. Measuring 50 feet by 80 feet and standing three stories above the street, it towered over the original house [see Figure 10]. Its ground floor was taken up almost entirely by the gymnasium, located at the north end of the building. A 14-foot-wide locker room was situated at basement level at the front of the building; above this was the physical director's office and a bath room. The gymnasium was outfitted with exercise equipment, and a six-foot-wide running track (22 laps per mile) encircled the room at gallery level.

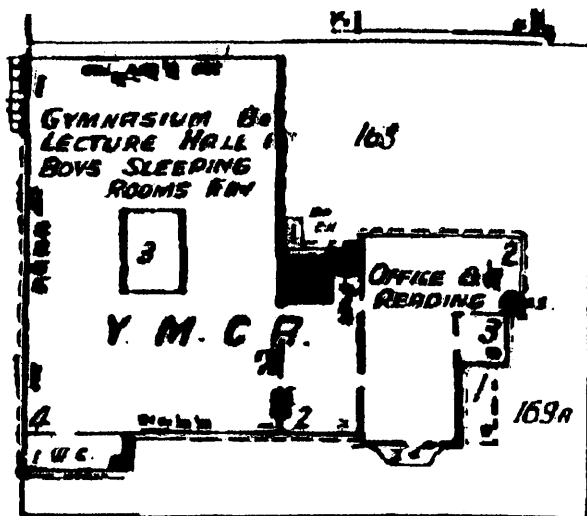


Figure 10. Site plan of YMCA, from 1909 Sanborn Map.

<sup>16</sup>"Y.M.C.A. New Home," *Dubuque Daily Times*, 27 March 1894. "The residence in question is one of the finest and most commodious in the city and is peculiarly adapted to the use to which the association will make of it. The property consists of two lots fronting on Iowa street and running back to the alley, a depth of one hundred feet. It is said that Mr. Stout has fixed the purchase price of the property at \$20,000. The home is a two story and basement building, a large hall running through the first and second floors."

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 DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

The second floor was taken up entirely by the auditorium. With a ceiling height of 22 feet, this room featured a raised stage centered on the east wall, around which opera chairs were positioned in a semicircle. Some 577 chairs fanned out on the main level, and an additional 354 were situated in a balcony that extended along the west, north and south walls of the space. "This beautiful room is painted in delicate terra-cotta tints, lighted with fairy-like clusters of incandescent lights, and seated with 900 opera chairs," the *Herald* stated at its opening. "Its acoustical properties are perfect. There is no echo or confusion of sound, even under the deep galleries."<sup>17</sup> To eliminate the need for columns in the gymnasium below, the auditorium floor was suspended from heavy timber roof trusses using iron rods.

The gymnasium and auditorium were accessed by stairways branching from a small vestibule on the front of the building facing Ninth Street. A rear exit from both levels fronted the alley, and the new building was accessible from hallways in the original house. The auditorium was built of red pressed brick, with limestone trim. Three rows of wooden-sash windows (23 on the south and 15 on both the west and north) lined the exterior walls. The new building was named the Stout Auditorium, and a carved stone panel laid into its front wall featured this name, surrounded on top and bottom by "**Young Men's Christian Association**" and on the sides by "**Y.M.**" and "**C.A.**"

Little effort was made to integrate the new building with the old architecturally [see *Figure 11*]. The original house was a freestanding Italian Villa; the auditorium attached to its rear was a straightforward example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. With its steeply sloped front gable, simple form, masonry walls, round-arched windows and emphasis on massiveness, it exemplified this prevailing architectural style. The YMCA resembled a scaled-back version of Dubuque's Grand Opera House, built five years earlier. It employed some of the same architectural elements as the house that H.L. Stout's son, Frank, had recently completed on Locust Street. More importantly, it resembled several other YMCAs that were built in Iowa around this time. Although the YMCAs around the country functioned as autonomous groups, they often relied on each other for architectural direction, often copying or adapting the successful designs of buildings in other cities. As a result, YMCA architecture acquired an institutional character, distinctive in both its form and style. YMCA buildings in 19th century Iowa generally employed Richardsonian Romanesque architecture. Probably the best Romanesque YMCA building in the state was the Des Moines facility, a picturesque five-story structure with a corner tower. Another significant YMCA in this style was Close Hall at the University of Iowa, a four-story stone/brick building with a witch-capped circular tower. Other noteworthy examples built in the 1890s were the YMCAs in Ottumwa, Oskaloosa, Sioux City and Ft. Dodge.

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<sup>17</sup>"The Stout Auditorium," *Dubuque Herald*, 14 June 1894; "Y.M.C.A.," *Dubuque Herald* (Dorothy Dix Circle Edition), 14 February 1895.

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa

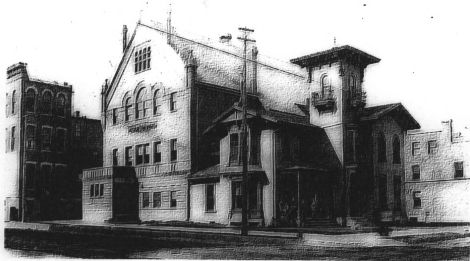


Figure 11. H.L. Stout House and Stout Auditorium, circa 1895.

The new auditorium was completed early in 1895 and dedicated on February 9. Between the 1893 fundraising drive and the greatly improved facilities, the YMCA had by then doubled its membership to about 600 members. In the 1890s and 1900s the Association sponsored a range of educational, inspirational and athletic activities and offered practical services to its clientele, reflective of its religious and business backing. In 1904 the YMCA launched its own barge at the foot of Third Street to provide a safe place to teach swimming. That year the *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald* ran a feature article on the Association, calling it a "bee hive of activity":

The Young Men's Christian Association stands for clean manhood, good fellowship, increased mental ability and practical Christianity. To bring about these desirable conditions a number of different enterprises are constantly being energetically pushed. Its walls are decorated with inspiring pictures; its reading tables and files piled with choice literature; its Star Course scintillates with bright lectures, pure fun and soul-stirring music; its religious efforts are earnest, devotional and helpful; its game rooms are free from the profane while teeming with men; its camp life is refreshing and restful; its office forum a unique and special attraction; while its educational privileges are within reach of every man.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>"The Young Men's Christian Association," *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, 6 February 1904.

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa

The focus of YMCAs nationally had evolved over the last two decades of the 19th century. Though nominally still a Christian group, the YMCA had been gradually changing its programs to fit more practical needs. Many associations acted as employment agencies, finding jobs for migrants new to town. As indicated by a 1908 cartoon in the *Chicago Tribune*, YMCAs also ran lunch rooms, cafeterias and places to take a shower, in addition to their traditional gymnasiums and classrooms [see Figure 12]. Many of the YMCAs in larger cities had begun to provide boarding houses for young men. The Dubuque YMCA was converted into a boarding house around 1904, when the original house was subdivided into dormitory rooms and a small lunch room added. In March 1905 the Association could report that the house was full, despite its Spartan conditions. "Our dormitories are all occupied and this has been the condition most of the time during the quarter. Some articles of comfort have been added to the furnishings of the house, such as curtains, a storm door, a door mat, a quilt, etc. There is large room for improvement in our furnishings, and we are hoping that there may be some needed articles added by generous friends. Continually we hear the sigh, 'We need a better building,' and we think the need is gradually becoming a settled conviction in the minds of many of our friends."<sup>19</sup>

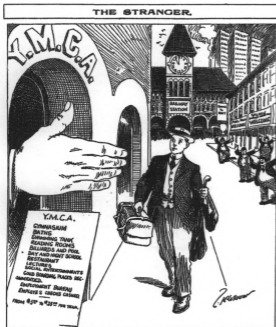


Figure 12. "The Stranger." from *Chicago Tribune*, 1908.

In January 1906 the Association began a campaign to raise funds to build fifty more dormitory rooms by infilling the auditorium. Collecting \$15,000, they began construction that summer.

<sup>19</sup>"Boardmembers of Ass'n Entertain Guests," *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, 15 March 1905.

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 DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING Dubuque County, Iowa

The space was subdivided both vertically and horizontally by adding another floor and partitioning the two floors into warrens of small dormitory rooms. An extra row of windows was cut into the exterior walls--sacrificing the name stone on the front--and a frame light well was added in the building's core to provide daylight and ventilation to the rooms.<sup>20</sup> At this time the ground-floor gymnasium was remodeled to accommodate a basketball court, allowing the Association to field its first five-man team. The space was enlarged into the old locker room and hoops were attached to the running gallery at either end. With the auditorium now gone, the gym also doubled as an auditorium and sometime banquet hall, with a seating capacity of 800 on moveable chairs.

In 1913 the Association again began boosting for new facilities. Fundraising proceeded sporadically over the next two years with the assistance of officials from the national and Des Moines organizations. In June 1915 the Association published renderings of the proposed building that had been prepared by the Rock Island, Illinois, architectural firm of Cyrus D. McLane. Touted as "a matter of pride to the whole city," the plans called for replacing the existing building entirely with a new three-story structure that covered the site. YMCA officials estimated they needed about \$100,000 for the project, but when it became clear that they would fall well short of their goal, they quickly pared back the scheme. Instead of building an all-new structure, the Association would now raze only the 1857 house and erect a new four-story dormitory building in its place. The 1894 gymnasium/auditorium/dormitory would remain. This evidently proved embarrassing for the Association, for in architect's renderings and subsequent photos the 1894 structure was eliminated entirely [see *Figure 13*]. "The new building will not be right up to date," the *Telegraph-Herald* allowed, "but considerably in advance of many buildings that are considered up-to-date."<sup>21</sup>

H.L. Stout's house was cleared from the site early in 1916 and construction begun on the new structure. In February Dubuque contractor A.F. Zwack excavated for the foundations, pouring the walls to the first-floor level the following month. The cornerstone was laid ceremoniously in

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<sup>20</sup>"New Life in Y.M.C.A. Work in Dubuque," *Dubuque Times-Journal*, 4 November 1907. "The building as it now stands consists of an office, reading room, game room, gymnasium, toilet rooms and locker rooms on the first floor. On the second floor are parlors, auditorium and class rooms in addition to dormitories and bath and toilet rooms, while the third floor consists entirely of dormitories and bath and toilet rooms. The dormitories are all large, well lighted, heated and ventilated and are elegantly furnished. There is good light from the outside in all of these rooms in the day time, while at night strong electric lights are provided. The baths consist of both shower and tub baths, while both cold and hot water are provided in quantities to meet the demand of all who care to avail themselves of the privilege of the baths."

<sup>21</sup>"Simple Ceremony to Mark Laying of Corner Stone at the New Y.M.C.A. Building This Afternoon," *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, 2 April 1916.

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DUBUQUE YMCA BUILDING

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 13. "Y.M.C.A. Building, Dubuque," 1916.

building was an undistinguished example of Commercial style architecture: a brick box with just enough surface ornamentation to make it respectable. Architectural embellishment in the form of window and door enframements was limited to the ground and top floors, and a cornice of sorts was created with brick and stucco band coursing.

In this the Dubuque YMCA represented the prevailing style of architecture used for Association structures in the state. After the turn of the century, Iowa YMCAs had largely turned from the Romanesque to Commercial or Classical Revival styles. This new generation of buildings was represented by examples in Marshalltown, Muscatine, Keokuk and the Dubuque addition. This new structure housed game rooms, reading rooms and offices on the ground floor and dormitory

<sup>22</sup>"Splendid New Y.M.C.A. Building Thrown Open to the Public Christmas Week," *Dubuque Times-Journal*, 24 December 1916. "Dubuque people who make use of the opportunity granted by the Y.M.C.A. officers to visit the new building during the week will find that Dubuque can now boast of one of the best appointed and most richly furnished Y.M.C.A. buildings in the country. The furnishings of the building, from the cellar to the top floor, are magnificent and all selected to carry out the general color scheme. From one end of the building to the other, the visitor will find some of the most beautifully furnished rooms to be seen in any club room in this part of the country."

March; by August the building had been closed in and the plasterers were at work inside. During Christmas week the building was substantially complete and opened for public inspection.<sup>22</sup>

As before when the 1894 section was built, the architects made no attempt to integrate the new building with the old. The two structures sat uncomfortably side by side, with little more than propinquity to tie them together. The new Dubuque YMCA

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rooms on the floors above. A swimming pool was situated in the basement between the new and old buildings. "Perhaps--no, not perhaps, but positively--the most attractive attraction is the big white swimming pool," the *Times-Journal* stated at the opening. "Filled to the brim with clear, sparkling water heated to just the right temperature, and being constantly sent certainly does look tempting. The building resounds with squeals of joy as the boys plunge in."<sup>23</sup>

One aspect of YMCA culture that went largely unspoken in the popular press of the time was the presence of homosexuality. Beginning in the late 19th century, gay men had used YMCA facilities as relatively safe places for homoerotic encounters. The single-sex ambiance of YMCAs--with their shared dormitory rooms and baths and emphasis on male fellowship and indoor physical exercise--afforded the ideal environment for the growing homosexual subculture at the turn of the century. The Association's Christian underpinnings and backing by respected members of the business community provided a perfect cover for gay men searching for lovers. Cruising YMCAs was far more discrete than visiting other homoerotic venues, and in relatively small, fundamentally conservative towns such as Dubuque, YMCAs often provided the only public place where men could meet for homosexual liaisons. The comparatively rapid turnover of residents in a typical YMCA not only provided exposure to a wide range of men, it insured a degree of anonymity to gays anxious to keep their sexual practices confidential from the community. The Christian origins of YMCAs actually encouraged the homosexual proclivities of young men unsure of their sexuality. Men could visit YMCAs and experiment with gay encounters under the relatively safe umbrella of YMCA culture without having to commit themselves to the gay lifestyle.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>John D. Wrathall, "Taking the Young Stranger by the Hand: Homosexual Cruising at the YMCA, 1890-1980," in *Men and Women Adrift...*, 250-270. In his essay, Wrathall extensively documents the widespread observation that YMCAs were "gay turf, almost as much as the [gay] bars," in such cities as San Francisco, Portland, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and even smaller cities such as Newport, Rhode Island. "The gay community had been aware of the sexual activities at the YMCA since the turn of the century," he states. "Indeed, the YMCA assume such an important role in modern American gay life that jokes and anecdotes about sexual encounters at the association have been an integral part of the gay community's oral tradition. Moreover, gay artists have celebrated and popularized male-male sex at the YMCA in songs, paintings, and literature. Gay erotic writers and photographers, for example, have often set their stories in YMCAs, and gay artist Paul Cadmus immortalized cruising at the association in his 1930 painting, the 'YMCA Locker Room.' In addition to literary and visual arts, songs such as Rae Bourbon's 'Queen of the YMCA' and the Village People's chart-topping 'YMCA' have capitalized on the connection between the YMCA and gay sex." Wrathall concludes:

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The architects for the Dubuque YMCA were tacitly acknowledging the issue of homosexuality when they designed the 1916 building. There was little they could do about man-on-man contact, but they took pains to limit encounters between men and boys using the facilities. The principal entrance to the building for men was situated on the Ninth Street facade. A completely separate, secondary entrance fronting Iowa Street gave access to minor boys. This entered a separate lobby, with its own adjoining boys' game room and corridor to the gymnasium. "The boys' room is so arranged that the boys are entirely separated from the lobby and all departments for men," the *Telegraph-Herald* observed at the building's opening.<sup>25</sup> The boys descended to the basement swimming pool via their own spiral staircase from their game room and, once downstairs, they used a separate shower and dressing room. In addition to the architectural separation between men and boys, YMCA administrators were careful to schedule events that would keep the two groups from mingling.

With the completion of the 1916 building, the Dubuque YMCA had taken on its final physical form. Through the 1920s and 1930s the Association continued the programs that it had initiated earlier, educating, housing, feeding and exercising thousands of young men who came here under various circumstances. Beyond this, the YMCA acted as a community center, as numerous other organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the Boys Club, the Red Cross and the Kiwanis regularly used the facilities here. During World War II the YMCA provided temporary housing for soldiers returning home. And in the 1950s and 1960s, as the dormitory settled into a state of seediness, the building provided housing for transients and low-income workers recently moved to Dubuque. In the mid-1960s membership in the YMCA began to shift nationally from single young men to entire families who used the facilities as health clubs. With increased mobility from automobiles, this membership changed demographically from inner city dwellers to suburbanites. During this time, the emergence of the gay pride movement, the publicity given to homosexual cruising at the YMCA, and the shifting complexion of

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It seems unlikely that a majority of association members were involved in the YMCA cruising scene. However, association cruising was an important field of erotic interaction between straight and gay men, and far more men participated than most were or are willing to admit. For those who participated, whether they later denied or celebrated it, as many gay men have, cruising played a crucial role in the redefinition of gender and sexual relations in urban America in the twentieth century. An awareness of the possibility of male-male sex, which cruising [at the YMCA] had created, required men to reflect on their sexual identities. The tendency to dismiss cruising as a marginal activity of a minuscule, perverse minority says more about the American imagination than it says about cruising or its relationship to the YMCA.

<sup>25</sup>"Y.M.C.A. Is Ready for Big Opening," *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, 20 December 1916.



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its membership marked the decline of YMCAs for homoerotic encounters. Associations across the country began moving their headquarters from downtown buildings to more spacious suburban facilities.

In 1967 the Dubuque Association began contemplating moving and joining with the Young Women's Christian Association in a single jointly held building. Ground was broken for the new facility on Dodge Street in September 1969, and a year later it was opened to the public. Meanwhile, in January 1970 the downtown YMCA was sold to William Allendorf, owner of the St. George Hotel on Central Avenue. Allendorf called the building the Iowa Inn, renting rooms to long-term, low-income tenants. In 1992 he sold the building to Maximo Damaso, who in turn sold it five years later to Dubuque Building & Trust, trustee for the Iowa Housing Commission. In December 1997 the building's few remaining residents were evicted and it has since stood vacant. Three years later the Dubuque YMCA/Iowa Inn was acquired by MetroPlains Development of St. Paul, Minnesota. MetroPlains plans to adaptively reuse the structure to provide subsidized senior housing. Sensitively rehabilitated, the Dubuque YMCA will again offer an opportunity for preservation and interpretation of this important aspect of Dubuque history.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

Lots 168, 168A and south half of Lot 167, Original City of Dubuque, Iowa.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries of the nominated area coincide with the legal and historical boundaries for the property.



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Date of photographs: January 2001  
Location of original neg.: FRASERdesign, Loveland, Colorado  
Description of views:

- Photo number 1: General view of YMCA Building and neighborhood. View to northeast.
- Photo number 2: South front and west side of building, with 1894 section at left and 1916 section at right. View to north.
- Photo number 3: South front and east side of building. View to west.
- Photo number 4: East side and north rear of building. View to southwest.
- Photo number 5: North rear and west side of building. View to southeast.
- Photo number 6: Detail of main entrance on south front of building. View to north.
- Photo number 7: Interior view of men's lobby in first floor of 1916 section, looking toward registration desk. View to north.
- Photo number 8: Interior view of men's game room in first floor of 1916 section. View to southeast.
- Photo number 9: Interior view of gymnasium in first floor of 1894 section. View to northwest.
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- Photo number 11: Interior view of dining room in second floor of 1916 section. View to south.
- Photo number 12: Interior view of dormitory room in second floor of 1916 section. View to northeast.
- Photo number 13: Interior view of dormitory room in third floor of 1894 section. View to south.
- Photo number 14: Interior view of attic in 1894 section, showing roof trusses. View to north-west.