

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" on the appropriate line 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 THE MAQUOKETA COMPANY-CLINTON MACHINE COMPANY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING  
other names/site number Building #7; Clinton Engines Corporation Administration Building

2. Location

street & number 605 East Maple Street N/A not for publication  
city or town Maquoketa N/A vicinity  
state Iowa code IA county Jackson code 097 zip code 52060

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.)

Donnell J. Sorko, Deputy 5/1/20 July 12, 2006  
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)

Edson W. Ball 8.23.06  
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
Name of Property

Jackson County, Iowa  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many lines as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one line)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	_____
1		buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1		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**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

COMMERCE/TRADE/professional

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Glass

Metal

**Narrative Description**

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

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
Name of Property

Jackson County, Iowa  
County and State

### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" on one or more lines 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" on all the lines that apply)

Property is:

**A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

**B** removed from its original location.

**C** a birthplace or grave.

**D** a cemetery.

**E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

**F** a commemorative property.

**G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY

ARCHITECTURE

#### Period of Significance

Circa 1947 - 1959

#### Significant Dates

1947

1950

#### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

#### Cultural Affiliation

#### Architect/Builder

The Maquoketa Company

Depue, C. A.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** - (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

### 9. Major Bibliography 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):

- previous determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Record
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
Name of Property

Jackson County, Iowa  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 15 | 3 | 967 00 | | 465 9 19 0 |

Zone Easting Northing

2 |    |    |    | |    |

Zone Easting Northing

3 |    |    |    | |    |

Zone Easting Northing

4 |    |    |    | |    |

### Verbal Boundary Description

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

### Boundary Justification

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

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title William C. Page, Public Historian; Joanne R. Page, Project Associate

organization Under contract with Jackson County Historical Society date March 3, 2006

street & number 520 East Sheridan Avenue (Page) telephone 515-243-5740; FAX 515-243-7285

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50313-5017

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

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

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

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

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

## Property Owner

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

name Jackson County Historical Society

street & number 1212 Quarry Street telephone 563-652-5020

city or town Maquoketa state Iowa zip code 52060

**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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building, Jackson County, Iowa.

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building (a.k.a. Building #7) is a 1-story and basement, masonry building begun in 1945 and completed circa 1947. It originally housed the administrative offices of The Maquoketa Company, the Clinton Machine Company, beginning in 1950, and subsequently the Clinton Engines Corporation. "Building #7" is a shorthand name for this structure and is used for convenience throughout this nomination. Building #7 is the sole survivor of a once thriving manufacturing plant, which by 1950 also included a 160,000 square foot foundry, machine shop, and assembly plant, as well as parking lots and landscaped parkland. Building #7 is presently unoccupied and in fair condition. In 2003, the Iowa Historic Preservation Alliance designated it as one of the most endangered historical properties in Iowa. Recently, the Jackson County Historical Society acquired the title to this property and is in the process of stabilizing and rehabilitating the building.

The Clinton plant is located on the southeast side of Maquoketa. The City of Maquoketa has designed a substantial area in this section of the city as "Industrial Park #1" to promote economic development in the community. (See Continuation Sheet 7-6.)

**SITE**

The historic site of the Clinton Machine Company embraced about 12 acres and included factory buildings, employee parking lots, Building #7, and landscaped parkland among other improvements. (See Continuation Sheet 7-8.) All of the factory buildings and the concrete slabs for employee parking lots have now been demolished.

Building #7 stands on a site of just less than five acres. Its principle façade faces to the north, and the building is situated near the rear of the site. The expansive tract of land to the north of the building was landscaped as parkland, when the building was constructed. The rear of Building #7 nearly abutted one of the factory buildings, although this building is nonextant, as explained above.

In the 1950s, the parkland was landscaped with evergreen trees, shrubs, floral plantings, and pedestrian walks. An historic photograph pictures the layout of these plantings in regular rows around the perimeter of the 5-acre site. (See Continuation Sheet 7-8.) Many of these plantings, particularly those around the foundation of Building #7, became overgrown and were removed. The evergreen trees, which stood on the eastern edge of the site and contributed to the park-like feeling of the site, were also removed. Several deciduous trees that stood on the property sustained substantial storm damage over the years. These too were removed. A poured concrete pedestrian walk accesses the front door of Building #7 from the public pedestrian walk on the north side of the property.

Maquoketa's prevailing winds blow from the west and north, a fact that no doubt influenced the selection of this site, downwind from town center, for the construction of the Clinton plant. (See Continuation Sheet 7-8.) Rural areas stand adjacent to this area to the east and south.

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**EXTERIOR**

The perimeter of Building #7 measures 104 x 50 foot. A semi-circular entrance stands on the north side of this footprint. It features the main entrance to the building. The curvilinear design is repeated on the northeast and northwest corners of the building. These rounded corners lend a streamlined look to the building. The windows on these locations conform to the curved design of the exterior walls.

Building #7 is situated on concrete footers and a 12-inch concrete foundation wall, 6 foot 6 inches high, with 4-inch face brick on an 8-inch concrete wall extending 3 foot 6 inches high above a full basement. The exterior walls of the building feature 4-inch face brick on 8-inch hollow tile. These exterior walls rise 12 foot high to the eaves. Pre-cast concrete coping surmounts the walls. The face brick is of a warm, creamy yellow color.

The fenestration of Building #7 features steel windows. These windows were custom fabricated for the building by The Maquoketa Company and are one of its most prominent features. Most of the windows are of casement construction, flanked by fixed windows. The building's fenestration is symmetrically arranged. The east and west elevations have five bays of windows on the first and basement levels. The windows on the first floor feature configurations three panes wide and six panes high with the casement occupying the lower four panes of the central vertical row. The windows on the basement feature configurations three panes wide by three panes high with the casement occupying the central vertical row.

The rear of the building has a centrally placed rear door flanked on each side by five windows. Their design is the same as on the east and west elevations except for one window adjacent to the west of the rear door, which is smaller than the rest.

The main entrance is located in a semi-circular projection of the building's north facade. This entrance features a front door flanked by large windows. The windows in this projection feature configurations four panes wide and eight panes high. One set of smaller windows on the north facade flank this projection. They feature configurations two panes wide and six panes high. The rest of the north elevation windows conform to the design of those on the other elevations.

The northeast and northwest corners of Building #7 feature curved windows, conforming to the exterior shape of the building. The window sills throughout the building are of pre-cast concrete. Window lintels are bands of heavy steel.

The front door to Building #7 is of steel construction, custom fabricated by The Maquoketa Company for it. The front door features four horizontal panes over a single metal panel. The doorway is accessed by a flight of five poured-concrete steps, which lead from grade to a stoop porch. A metal, tubular railing flanks the steps and the porch. It was undoubtedly constructed by The Maquoketa Company for the building.

The front door is centrally placed on a brick wall, which projects slightly in front of the semi-circular entrance. The plane of this projecting wall is flat rather than curvilinear and this provides an accent to

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the doorway. The projecting wall runs from grade to about seven feet above the front door and is crowned by pre-cast concrete coping.

The rear entrance to the building is situated on its south elevation and features double doors of steel construction. The Maquoketa Company custom fabricated them for the building. They feature four horizontal panes above single, metal panels. A metal chimney is situated on the south elevation between the second and the third windows from its east end. A steel ramp leads from the rear door and bridges a swale to the land at the rear of Building #7. This ramp led originally to the now-demolished factory units of the property. A metal, tubular railing flanks this ramp.

All of the metal windows and railings described above are painted a warm, reddish-rust color. This color accents the creamy yellow color of the brick exterior walls and provides an attractive contrast.

The roof of Building #7 is flat and had deteriorated over the years and leaked. Recently, this roof was replaced with a new rubber membrane system with R40 insulation.

### **INTERIOR**

A flight of concrete steps on the north façade accesses the main entrance to Building #7. This entrance leads into a foyer with a receptionist's booth directly in front of the entrance. A half-flight of concrete stairs leads up to the first floor of the building, and a half-flight of concrete stairs leads down to its basement. These stairs are curved to conform to the curvilinear shape of the building's exterior walls.

The first floor housed the business offices of the firm. A bookkeeping room is situated in the northeast section of the building, and other offices are situated in the southeast section. Executive offices occupied the northwest section of the first floor. The southwest section contained additional offices. A vault is situated adjacent to one of the east rooms. The first floor ceilings are covered with acoustical tile, likely original to the building. Patches of this tile have failed in some places, as water penetrated the ceiling, but most of the tile remains intact. The partitions, which define these interior spaces, are constructed of hollow tile, faced with plaster finishes.

The interior walls feature plaster finishes, applied directly to the building's masonry. The interior walls remain in good condition, although much of their painted surfaces are beginning to peel, as a result of the building's damp condition. Ceilings are mostly covered with acoustical tile. The floors originally featured mastic tile, laid on reinforced concrete, laid in turn on a metal pan, laid on a frame of structural steel. As described below, this mastic tile has now been removed, exposing the concrete.

The basement is situated on a concrete slab. The basement contains about 4,500 square feet and has two main sections. A drafting room occupies the east section of the basement. Company engineers used this space to plan and design products. A class and meeting room occupies most of the west section of the basement. The company's national sales representatives met in this room, and service technicians from around the world used it for training sessions conducted by the company. The partitions, which defined these interior spaces, were constructed of temporary construction and shifted

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occasionally into different configurations. These partitions have now been removed. Mastic tile originally clad the basement floor, but this asbestos material was removed in 2000, when the City of Maquoketa abated the problem to render the building more attractive for redevelopment. The large windows in the basement helped illuminate this area by natural light.

One set of men's and women's restrooms are located on the first floor. Heating was originally provided by steam heating from a central supply. This heating system remained inoperative for a number of years and is no longer functional. Pipe conduit wiring carried electrical power for the building's fluorescent light fixtures. Recently, the building was rewired for electricity and a temporary heating system installed. The building was never fully-air conditioned. Several window units provided some air-conditioning to selected areas of the building.

#### **INTEGRITY AND PRESENT CONDITION**

##### Integrity

Building #7 possesses excellent integrity. The building is located on its original site with its architectural design unimpaired except for the repairs noted below. While much of the property's original landscaping has been removed because of deteriorated condition, the building's setting has been preserved. The land in front of the property remains an open lawn, as originally designed. Except for some minimal repairs (also noted below), most of the building's materials remain original. Workmanship is an important aspect of this building's integrity because its metal windows and doors were custom built for it. These elements remain intact. The property's feeling and association with its historic events also remain intact. Those individuals involved in these events would immediately recognize the building as it appears today.

##### Condition

The foundation is solid with no evidence of settling. The exterior and interior load-bearing walls show no sign of deterioration.

Virtually all of the building's original steel window frames—an essential element of the building's design—as well as its front door and its rear door remain extant.

Vacant and largely unoccupied for a number of years, the building did sustain some vandalism, mostly broken window glass. Outside security lights were subsequently installed to help deter vandalism, along with cover-up materials on the windows to protect the interior of the building.

Recently, major improvements took place. In 2005, the existing metal window frames were repaired in areas that had been cut out for mechanical systems, welded shut, and sealed. The frames were scraped, primed with rust inhibitor, and painted their original color as determined by color analysis. The building's deteriorated roof was replaced with a new rubber membrane system with R40 insulation.



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Environmental concerns associated with the building have been abated. The building's mastic tile contained asbestos. After the City of Maquoketa acquired Building #7 in 2000, the City solved this problem by removing the mastic tile as one component of efforts to make the property more attractive for redevelopment

Until recently, a few of the original interior spaces had been subdivided, paneling had been installed over some of the plaster walls, and some rooms were littered with debris. The debris and temporary walls have been removed. (According to local contractors, these temporary walls changed often.) Today, the floor plan on the upper level resembles its original layout. The lower level is now one large open area. Other improvements have also taken place. Electricity, water, and gas now operate in the building, and it has one working bathroom. Temporary heat has been installed to allow for work to continue during inclement weather. The site has been cleared, graded and contoured, grass is seeded, and eight memorial trees have been planted.

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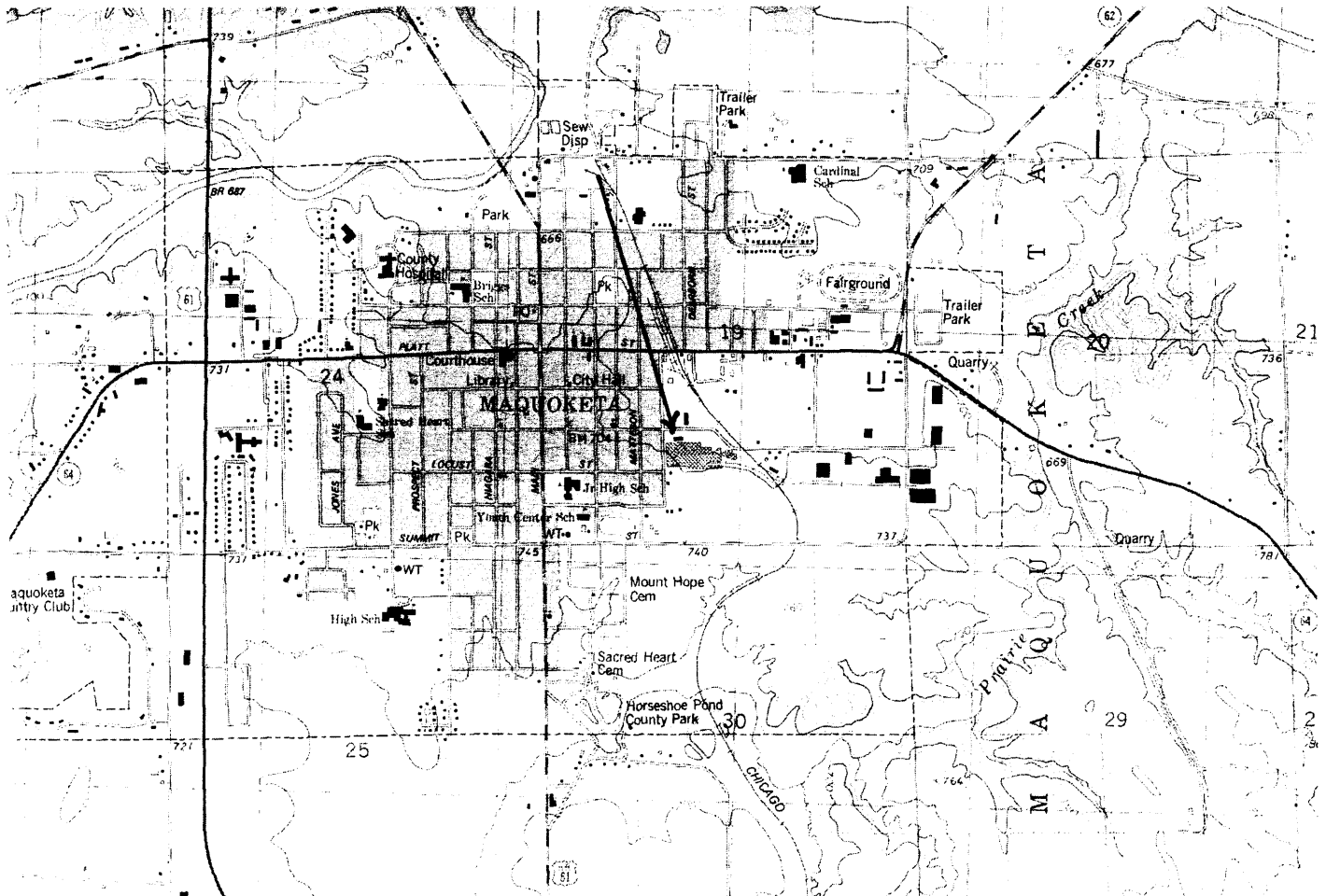
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The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building, Jackson County, Iowa.

## SITE MAP

ARROW LOCATES PROPERTY



Source: U.S.G.S. Map (7.5 Minute Series), Maquoketa, Iowa, Quadrangle, 1980.

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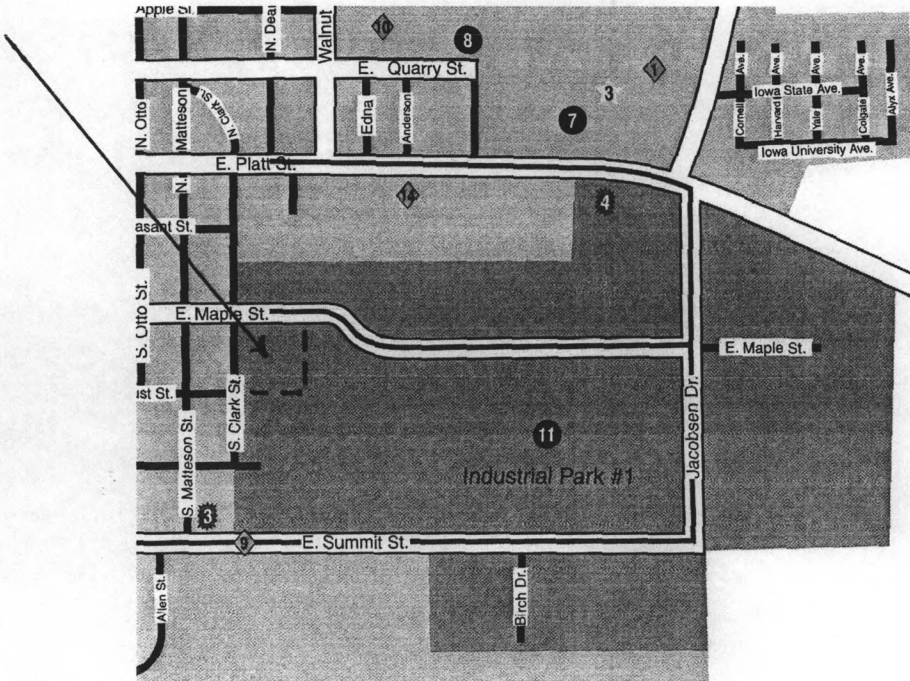
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The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building, Jackson County, Iowa.

## MAP OF VICINITY

ARROW LOCATES SITE OF BUILDING #7



Building #7 is located on the southeast corner of East Maple and South Clark Streets. The City of Maquoketa has designed the balance of the area shown as "11" on this map as "Industrial Park #1" for future economic development. The Clinton plant formerly occupied most of the area between Jacobsen Drive and East Maple, South Clark, and East Summit Streets.

Source: Promotional Brochure, City of Maquoketa, Chamber of Commerce, *et al.*, 2002.

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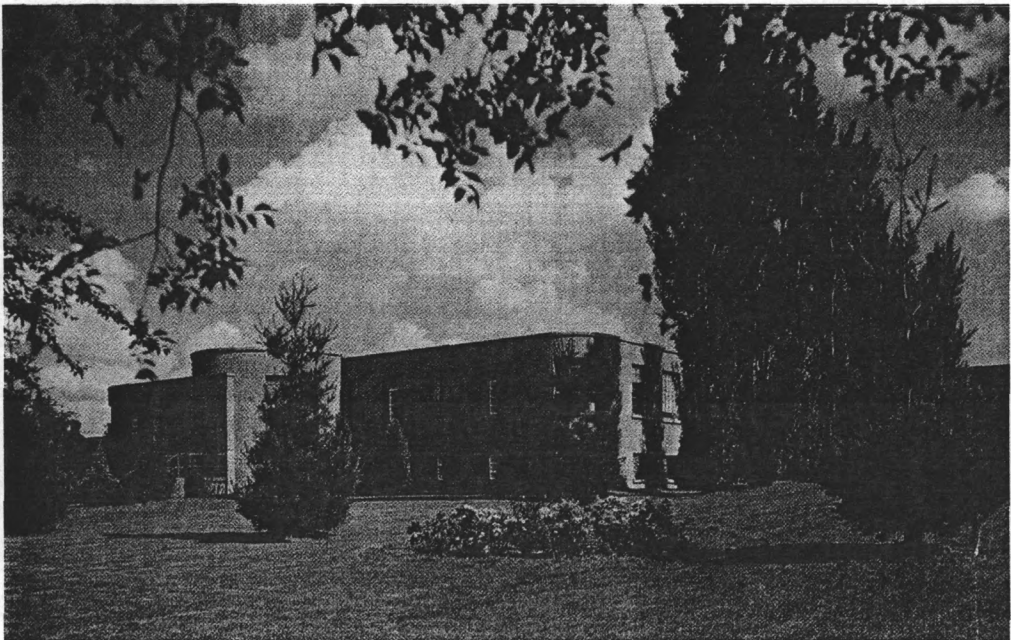
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The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building, Jackson County, Iowa.

**BUILDING #7 AND SITE**

**CIRCA 1957**



The verso of this color postcard, published by The L. L. Cook Co. of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reads:  
"This is the home of the world famous quick starting engines, chain saws, and outboard motors."  
The view looks to the southeast and pictures manicured lawns and plantings. The poplar trees on the west elevation (right) provided rapidly growing vertical elements to the design but were not long lived.

Source: Jackson County Historical Society.

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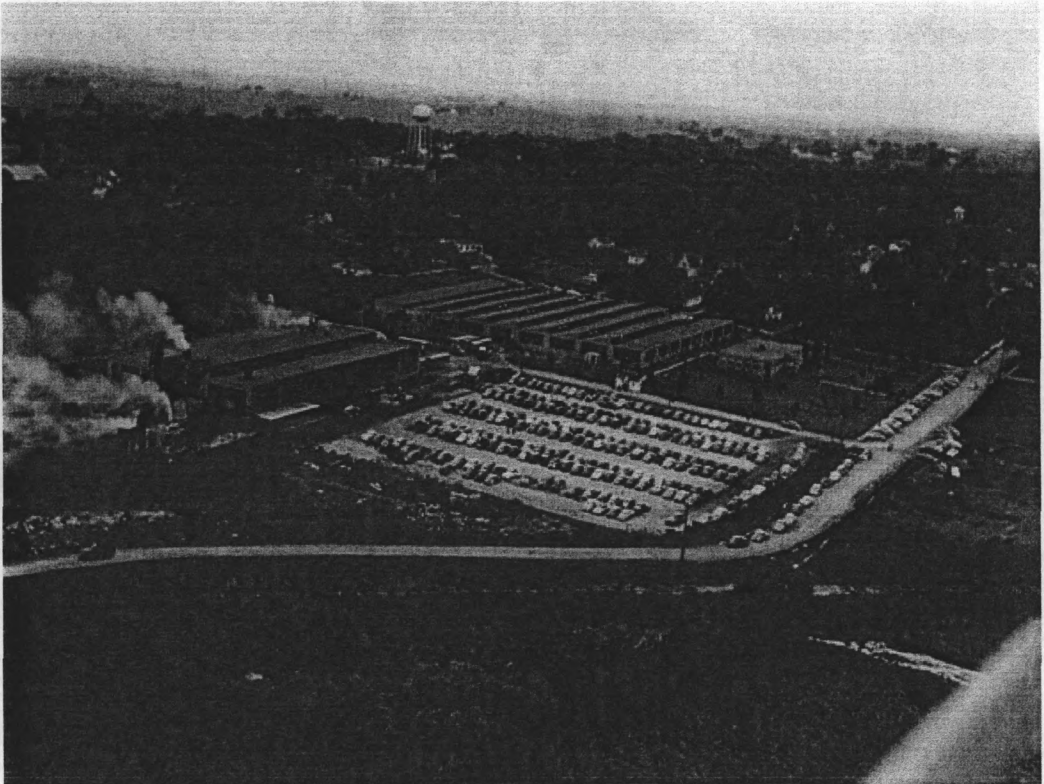
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# CLINTON PLANT

CIRCA 1957



Looking southwest, this aerial photograph pictures the Clinton Engines plant circa 1957. Building #7 stands right center, surrounded on three sides by landscaped lawn. The factory buildings and employee parking lot (all nonextant) are to the left and in the foreground. Maple Street runs in front (right) of the plant. Smoke from the factory follows Maquoketa's prevailing winds, one reason for the plant's location at this site. Town center is to the right in the photograph.

Source: Courtesy Jackson County Historical Society.

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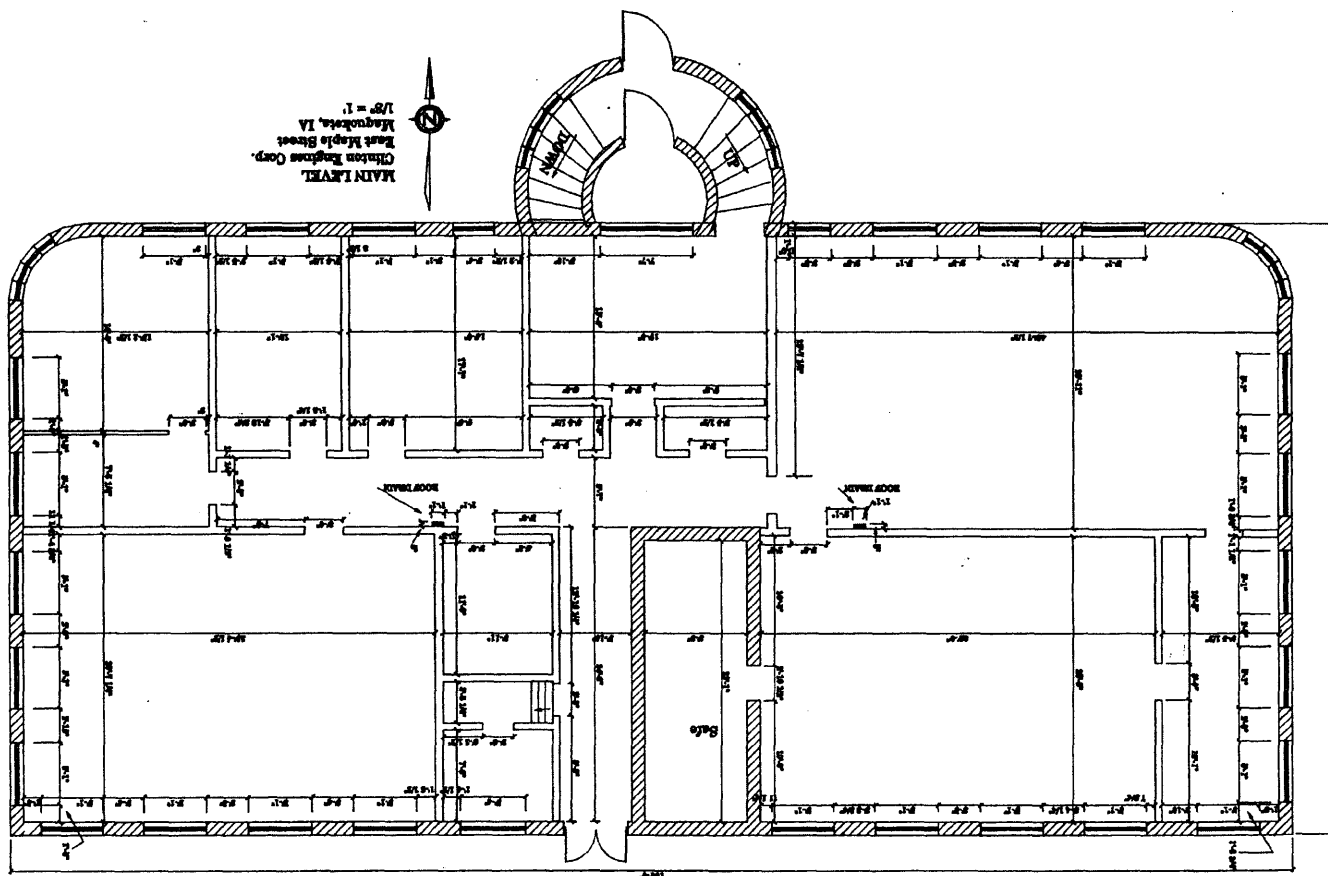
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## FIRST FLOOR PLAN



Scale: 1/8 inch = one foot.

Source: Courtesy Jackson County Historical Society, 2005.



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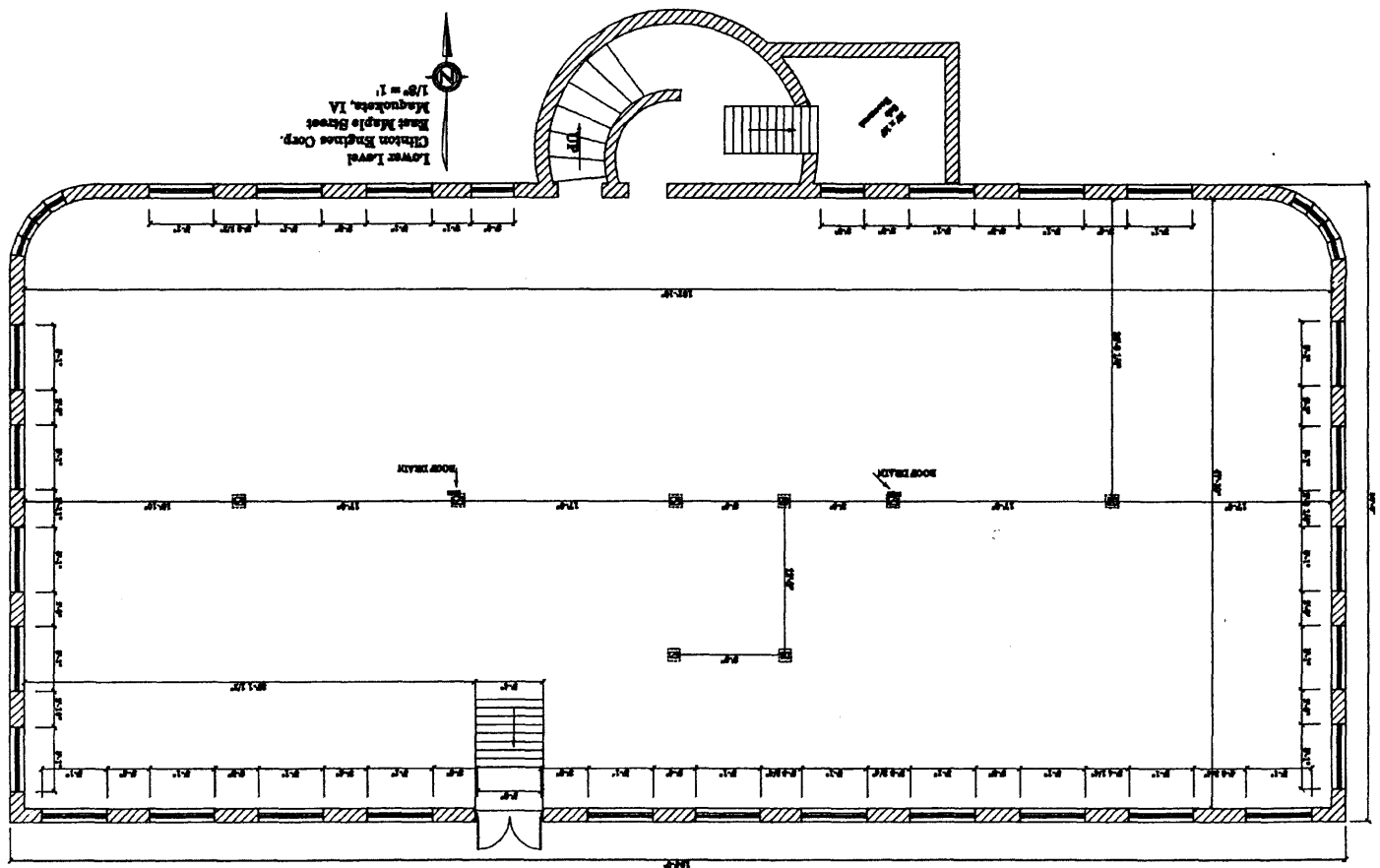
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The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building, Jackson County, Iowa.

## BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN



Scale: 1/8 inch = one foot.

This plan shows how all the movable partitions in the basement have been removed.

Source: Courtesy Jackson County Historical Society, 2005.

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The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building, Jackson County, Iowa.

**SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building is significant under National Register Criterion A. Also known as Building #7, the property calls attention to the Clinton Machine Company, one of the world's largest manufacturers of small engines and one of Iowa's largest employers during the 1950s. The company's trademark—"Clinton" superimposed on a projectile point—became an internationally recognized symbol of reliability and an ambassador for Iowa's reputation for quality products. Building #7 was constructed over a period of time, beginning in 1945 and completed circa 1947.

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building is significant under National Register Criterion C. The building calls attention to the influence of Art Moderne on its styling, as designed and built by C. A. ("Art") Depue, the president of The Maquoketa Company, and his employees.

The period of significance, under Criterion A, is circa 1947 to 1959, the time when Building #7 operated as headquarters of The Maquoketa Company, the Clinton Machine Company, and the productive years of the Clinton Engines Corporation. Circa 1947 is significant as the date Building #7 was completed. The year 1950 is significant as the date when the Clinton Machine Company purchased the property and converted it into a factory for small engines. With additional investigations, a case may be made for state significance. In 1959, an out-of-state investment firm bought the Clinton Machine Company and company decline ensued. This is the reason for the selection of that year to mark the end of the property's period of significance.

The property contains one resource for this nomination, Building #7 itself, which is contributing and classified as a building.

**BACKGROUND**

Building #7 was originally built by The Maquoketa Company, a firm founded in Maquoketa, Iowa, by C. A. ("Art") Depue, president of the Central Steel Tube Company of Clinton, Iowa. During World War II, Depue expanded his operations by opening a small factory in a Maquoketa garage to manufacture machine gun components for the war effort.

Depue was so impressed by the Maquoketa workforce that he decided to increase the scope of his operation there by establishing a company bearing the town's name. In 1945 during the final months of World War II, the U.S. Government contracted with The Maquoketa Company to increase production in Maquoketa. A foundry building was built and production increased. Following the war, Depue further enlarged the Maquoketa plant and production increased again. Building #7 was begun in 1945 and completed circa 1947. By 1950, the plant included a 160,000 square foot factory, as well as the administration building.



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The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building, Jackson County, Iowa.

Later in 1950, Depue sold this property to the Clinton Machine Company, based in Clinton, Michigan. Following the sale, the Michigan firm expanded its operations to Maquoketa, and The Maquoketa Company relocated its equipment to Clinton, Iowa. The crossover names of the firms' locations (Clinton Machine Company in Maquoketa and The Maquoketa Company in Clinton) were purely coincidental.

### **CLINTON MACHINE COMPANY**

The story of the Clinton Machine Company in Iowa is largely the story of Don Thomas, its founder and president. Thomas led the firm to national prominence in the 1950s and exercised controlling interest in it. A New York conglomerate, followed by other owners, later acquired the firm. It ceased operations in the late 1990s.

#### Boom Time

Donald ("Don") Dee Thomas (1908-1995) was born in Traverse City, Michigan, and graduated from Southwestern High School in Detroit. He apprenticed as a bricklayer and later worked in construction. (*Tecumseh Herald*)

Thomas had a fascination with machinery. In the 1930s, he opened a gasoline station in Detroit and quickly established seven other service stations and an automobile accessory business. The need for machine parts during World War II provided Thomas with an opportunity to produce gears for tank turrets. When this operation outgrew his Detroit premises, Thomas moved his growing business to Clinton, Michigan, where he expanded production. With victory in Japan, Thomas turned his attention to peacetime products. Correctly foreseeing a future in the production of small engines, Thomas acquired an engine design and parts to assemble it. On April 11, 1946, the first of these engines—named the 700 series—was completed. The demand for power lawnmowers and a strike at a competing firm fueled huge orders for Thomas' engines. By the end of 1946, Thomas' workforce numbered 1,000. (Melvold 1988: 153) In 1950, Thomas expanded his factory operations to Maquoketa, Iowa. Over the next few years, Clinton Engines became a dominant force across the world in manufacturing small gasoline engines and one of Iowa's 10 biggest employers. The link between Don Thomas in Michigan, C. A. Depue in Iowa, and the sale of Depue's factory in Maquoketa remains unclear.

The Clinton Machine Company manufactured small gasoline engines. The quality of these products during the early 1950s earned the firm a nationally accepted trade name, which subsequently became internationally recognized. The firm's chief competitors for world markets were Briggs & Stratton and Tecumseh Power Products. (Melvold 1957, 1988, 2000) By 1956, the Clinton Machine Company had become one of Iowa's ten biggest employers. (*Ibid.*, 1957)

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The small gasoline motors manufactured by Clinton provided the motive force for many widely used tools. The suburbanization of America, which followed the end of World War II, prompted a huge demand for power lawnmowers. Major national retailers like Montgomery-Ward and Western Auto subcontracted with Clinton to supply small engines for their products. Known as "original equipment manufacturers" (OEMs), these big companies assembled and retailed products from parts provided by other firms. By the mid-1950s, these OEMs purchased engines from Clinton in lots of five figures. A full 80% of these engines powered lawnmowers. At the same time, the other 20% was used to power other kinds of tools, including water pumps, washing machines, chain saws, outboard motors, garden tractors, sprayers, truck refrigeration units, emergency generators, and post hole diggers. The demand for these tools and the engines to power them was increasing. (*Ibid.*)

By 1956, some 65 central distributors extended Clinton sales and service to 8,500 outlets throughout the United States and Canada. (See Continuation Sheets 8-22 and 8-23) That year, the firm sold almost two million units, ranging in size from two- to ten-horsepower with 22 basic models to chose from. A quality service department supported these products and added luster to their reputation for reliability. The department's 90-page service directory listed repair technicians throughout the Free World, and the Maquoketa plant operated a service school to train them. (*Ibid.*)

The service school provided a major boost to the local economy. The service school was continually busy and the classes grew larger and more diverse. There were students not only from all over the United States, but many foreign countries as well. Some returned to Maquoketa for further training with their families. International visitors were big news in so small a town in the 1950s. Also, the hotel/motel business boomed. The restaurants were busy and gas stations were seemingly on every corner. In fact, many households supplemented their incomes by boarding guests of Clinton because they had already filled all available hotel rooms. (Bonnie Mitchell and informant interview with Bill Mayberry) According to one 1952 newspaper report headlined "Do You Have A Room?":

In order to accommodate an anticipated 150 officials of large manufacturing concerns Monday and Tuesday nights with sleeping quarters, the Clinton Machine company stands in need of locating rooms in private homes about the city. Clinton will pay room fees. Householders will not be required to provide meals—merely lodging for a night or two. Local hotels will not accommodate all those expected for the O.E.M. event, company officials explain. (*Maquoketa Community Press*, September 19, 1952)

Clinton sought to produce locally as many of its needs as possible. As one account relates, the firm:

is a complete manufacturing operation, as distinguished from merely an assembly plant. A foundry pours castings for major components. From there they go to the "block" lines, "crankshaft" lines, etc., for machining, and then on to the assembly lines. Smaller parts are diecast or stamped in line with Clinton's policy of fabricating from raw materials whenever and wherever possible. (Melvold 1988)

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By 1956, over 1,800 people were employed at production peaking with a payroll of \$7,100,000. This number of employees placed the firm within Iowa's top ten employers and ranked the firm as probably the world's largest producer of small engines. The firm's fiscal year ended in 1957 with some \$30 million in sales and \$2.25 million in profit before taxes—a very good year. (*Ibid.*)

Still, the plant continued to operate with war-surplus machinery. At the same time, the lawnmower industry was moving toward rotary mowers, and the Clinton engine was designed to power reel-type machines. Rotary mowers operate blades like helicopters and turn horizontally to the grass. Reel-type machines operate blades like those on standard hand-powered lawnmowers. The period also witnessed a transition from motor blocks fabricated of cast-iron to those of aluminum. Aluminum casting required new metallurgy and equipment. Competition within the small engine industry became fierce, as companies jockeyed for position. Clinton Engines and Briggs & Stratton, for example, became embroiled in a patent infringement suit over designs for aluminum blocks. (Roger Stewart: 38-39)

Within the context of this transition, Don Thomas recognized the need to update his operation. In 1958, the firm changed its name from Clinton Machine Company to Clinton Engines Corporation, one sign of the changing times. Thomas decided subsequently, however, to sell his firm rather than update its equipment. Thomas also owned and controlled other business interests in Michigan, where he maintained permanent residence, and was said to have wished a respite from the pressures of industry. Thomas also experienced difficulties in obtaining sufficient financial backing to retool his company. In 1959, he sold the firm to the Charnay Group, a New York City investment corporation, headed by David B. Charnay.

Labor and Community Relations

Relations between the Clinton Machine Company, its workforce, and the Maquoketa community were outstanding. Don Thomas had experienced as a boy the plight of Detroit automobile workers during the Great Depression. Thomas' subsequent treatment of his own employees reflected his high respect for laboring men and women. According to one account, the Clinton Machine Company

brought a generous profit-sharing and incentive plan to Maquoketa. The plans were Don Thomas' 'babies' rooted in his childhood experience and from things he learned as a machinist. He genuinely valued and respected the employees, considering them to be his most valuable asset, as did Messrs. Socks and Bird [Clinton's executives in Maquoketa]. Mr. Thomas even involved the communities in his award/sharing programs with the ceremonies being accompanied by appropriate fanfare and publicity. In a very real way, Mr. Thomas put the employees at the front and center of the company. Even the International Molders and Foundrymen of America (led by Henry Nugent) had its union hall with 200 man cafeteria located across the street from the plant. . .

Though the star of Clinton Engines was not destined to reach its full promise, the employee and customer loyalty generated by and nurtured so carefully by Don Thomas

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remains to this day. And discussing the company with those who have some connection to it brings twinkling eyes, a little straighter posture, a lot of animation and a torrent of Clinton Engines stories. It is truly remarkable that such employee loyalty and pride could so long endure. (Jackson County Historical Society)

To highlight its economic impact on the community, the Clinton firm paid its Maquoketa employees at a Profit-Sharing Day celebration in the 1950s approximately \$245,000 in cash with two-dollar bills. The ripple effect throughout the community was astounding. (Asher Schroeder)

Clinton Engines Corporation

Over the early 1960s, Clinton Engines continued to excel in the production of small engines. Clinton manufactured small engines for both its own products and for a variety of other manufacturers, including Maytag washing machines, various chain saws, outboard motors, industrial air circulation fans, and lawn mowers. These products were sold under many brand names.

In 1966, the firm won the coveted "President's E." Issued in the name of and by the authority of the President of the United States, the award recognized the firm's outstanding record in export expansion. The award was the highest level of recognition awarded to private industry and was modeled after the World War II method of recognizing production plants for patriotism by awarding "E Pennants." The latter practice was begun in 1961 by President Kennedy, and is still in existence in 2006. "E" stands for Excellence, Expansion, Effort, and Exports. The recipient is entitled to use this emblem in advertising and to issue pins to employees. It does not appear that this was done in the case of Clinton. (The Jackson County Historical Society hopes to fly an "E" flag on the historic site, when its current rehabilitation is complete.)

Although Clinton's "E" award occurred outside the period of significance for this nomination, its citation referenced that era. According to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce:

Astute negotiations of management, personal contacts by resourceful sales representatives and an established world-wide distribution network have earned Clinton Engines Corporation continuing success in world trade.

Constant development and unique adaptability to exacting requirements of growing needs in ninety-one countries have contributed to its leadership in the small engine industry.

Ingenuity and vision are also reflected in one of the corporation's more recent achievements. . . the development of motorization for Oriental fishing fleets.

The outstanding international marketing effort undertaken by Clinton Engines Corporation reflects credit on management, employees and the American system of free enterprise.

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Signed in the name of and by the authority of the President.

John T. Connor  
Secretary of Commerce

Source: *The Maquoketa Community Press*, May 24, 1966, p. 1.

When presenting the award to the firm, the Secretary noted that

Small gasoline engines, power chainsaws and outboard motors manufactured by Clinton Engines Corporation, Maquoketa, Iowa, are helping to improve the living standards of millions of people throughout ninety-one countries of the free world.

Since the first Clinton engines were exported in 1952 sales have grown to a point where today they account for more than 25% of the company's total business. (*Ibid.*)

The Secretary pointed out the ingenuity required to achieve these results:

There were problems to be solved and obstacles to be conquered. In some areas they were unable to compete successfully with the gasoline engine against European diesel engine because the price of gasoline was too high. To remedy this situation it was necessary to develop engines that would operate on kerosene which was comparable in cost to that of diesel fuel. Since the price of a kerosene engine is substantially less than that of a diesel, this opened a market to many potential engine users, who could not afford the expensive diesel engine in the past. (*Ibid.*)

To mark the occasion, Clinton Engines unveiled the "E" flag, received as part of this recognition, and conducted a brief ceremony on the front lawn of the plant on May 25, 1966, to raise the new flag in an honored place below the Stars and Stripes. (*Ibid.*)

In retrospect, the "E" award was a swan song for Clinton. Following its sale to Charnay in 1959, many of Don Thomas' former management team left the new firm to join competitors, like Briggs & Stratton and Tecumseh. Vern Socks, for example went to Briggs, where he later became a member of its board of directors.

The Charnay Group headquartered its operations of Clinton Engines in New York City, while their local executives commuted to Maquoketa from Davenport, Iowa. Locally, the Charnay investors were perceived to lack the initiative to revitalize Clinton Engines. (Melvold 1957, 1988, 2000) Lacking financial support from New York, the Clinton firm ran out of money and filed for bankruptcy in 1966.

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Subsequent to this filing, Martin Hoffinger, a New York investor, reached a settlement with court-appointed bankruptcy administrators and purchased the Clinton Engines Corporation. Hoffinger re-established the firm on a much-reduced basis, with a few hundred employees. Clinton still produced about two million units in spite of this downsizing. Units ranged in size from two- to ten-horsepower in the mid-1980s. (Melvold 1988.) These operations subsequently were further downsized to produce spare parts for engine repairs. By 1999 only about 35 employees remained, and in the summer of that year, most of them were laid-off.

In poor repair and barely operating, the Clinton Engines plant had become a liability. The City of Maquoketa debated what to do, including the designation of the site as a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to encourage the owner to abate the nuisance. Then, in another twist of fate, owner Martin Hoffinger and the City of Maquoketa reached an agreement in 2000 for the City to acquire the property as a donation. All operations ceased at the plant. Hoffinger donated the site to the City in two phases over a period of two years. The eastern portions of the factory were subsequently demolished, followed by the demolition of the western portions. Building #7 was left intact. Later, the City of Maquoketa and the Jackson County Historical Society reached an agreement, whereby the society would take title to Building #7 and rehabilitate it as a museum and administration center.

### **ARCHITECTURE**

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building is architecturally significant as a fine interpretation of Art Moderne styling, locally designed and constructed in Maquoketa, Iowa. The building's simple lines and shapes reduce Art Moderne to its essentials. The building's windows—key elements of its Art Moderne design and fabricated by The Maquoketa Company—show how homegrown products can translate a national style into a local expression.

Art Moderne was popular in the United States already in the 1930s for movie theaters, bus and railroad depots, apartment buildings in resort cities, and other types of architecture. Its slick surfaces, horizontal emphasis, and curvilinear corners betokened movement and speed, antidotes to the feeling of paralysis associated with the Great Depression then gripping the nation. Art Moderne lingered on following World War II but subsequently vanished as an unwelcome cultural reminder of hard times, its place taken by the International style for commercial architecture and the Ranch style for residential architecture.

The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building reflects this period of transition. Its design is a combination of simple lines, shapes, and planar surfaces. The contoured shapes of the front façade and its entryway exemplify Art Moderne's interest in geometric shapes. The aerodynamic look of the building's corner windows, the horizontal emphasis on the building's lines and exterior walls unstopped by cornice or embellished with pinnacles show further influence of the style. The selection of a warm-colored face brick for the exterior walls show another Art Moderne influence—a favoring of light colors for exterior walls (whether of brick, stone, or other material) with

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strongly colored accents. These accents could be vibrant—like pink, red, or orange, as with this building—or majestic as with the use of black, Carrara marble or gold leaf.

The design of Building #7, as well as its construction and some of its building materials, were local products. C. A. (“Art”) Depue, the president of The Maquoketa Company, used his own employees to design and construct the building. The company’s foundry fabricated the building’s steel doors and windows. This emphasis on homegrown ability calls attention to the company’s predilection towards independence in all matters whenever possible. Depue and his firm knew how to fashion metal, and the building’s design extensively employed it.

Depue was also responsible for the design and construction of other projects in northeast Iowa, including a single-family dwelling (now the Camanche Public Library) in Camanche and a house in Calamus. Depue built the Camanche property as his own home. The Calamus property is said to have been built for Adolph Wildfang, a Depue employee. According to one source:

All buildings use hollow clay tile with a brick veneer, steel beams, trusses, etc., flat steel roofs and metal lathe/plastered ceilings supported from steel tubes with the lathe wired to them, all have the same curved window features—the houses have one on each corner—and the same framed windows (though the house and Camanche have redone these in wood—Depue was President of Central Steel Tube Co. in Clinton and the Maquoketa Co. in Maquoketa. The buildings were built of materials on hand—cheapest for Depue to obtain, steel—and Central Steel’s equipment was used to fabricate the pieces—nothing was forged in Maquoketa. Charles H. Mitchell)

This emphasis on local talent did not always prove satisfactory. The absence of vapor barriers in the outside walls, for example, led to the continual peeling of paint on the inside of Depue’s designs. (*Ibid.*)

As might be expected in conservative communities like Maquoketa, Camanche, and Calamus, the incidence of Art Moderne styling is limited. In Maquoketa, the style’s influence made little inroads in the community during the 1930s. Following World War II, new construction in Maquoketa focused chiefly on single-family dwellings, and for them, the Ranch style quickly gained ascendancy over all other architectural influences. According to Bonnie W. Mitchell, Curator of the Jackson County Historical Museum, “We have found no evidence of Art Moderne architecture in Maquoketa, or for that matter, in Jackson County.” (Letter of Correspondence)

**REPRESENTATION IN OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEYS**

In 2003, the Iowa Historic Preservation Alliance recognized the significance of Building #7 and called attention to its threatened future by including the building on its Iowa Most Endangered Properties List for 2003. Sponsored by the Jackson County Historical Society, this listing stimulated re-thinking the

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building's future. The Timber City Survey of cultural resource properties in Maquoketa in the 1990s had excluded Building #7 from its evaluation. In 2004, William C. Page, Public Historian, of Des Moines, Iowa, surveyed Building #7 under a Technical Advisory Network (TAN) consultation between the State Historical Society of Iowa and the Jackson County Historical Society. Page evaluated the building as National Register eligible under Criterion A and Criterion C.

**POTENTIAL FOR HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY**

The site's potential for archaeological significance is, as yet, unevaluated. There is historic archaeological potential to investigate the various non-extant features of the post-1945 factory complex.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

A case could be made for this property's significance under Criterion B because of Don Thomas' contributions to the community as an exceptional employer. Although additional research and discussion would be needed, a wealth of archival and oral history documentation exists, as well as the local expertise to write the story. The Clinton Machine Company's role in Vietnam also merits further research and evaluation. Oral history about the Clinton firm should be collected and preserved, while former employees and townspeople alive at the time still can tell about the firm's labor relations and remarkable goodwill engendered locally.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This nomination is a collaborative effort. The Jackson County Historical Society gathered information about The Maquoketa Company, the Clinton Machine Company, and the Clinton Engines Corporation from archival records and newspaper accounts. Bonnie W. Mitchell, curator of the JCHS, shared this information for the nomination. Charles Mitchell scanned many historic images of the property and produced a slideshow entitled "Thunder on the Prairie" to highlight the plight of Building #7. Bill Mayberry, a high-ranking officer of the Clinton firm, had the foresight to preserve all of the minutes from the company's board of directors meetings—an incalculable resource for scholarship. The JCHS Board of Directors, Asher Schroeder, Chair, underwrote the cost of the nomination. William C. Page, Public Historian, of Des Moines, Iowa, prepared a Technical Advisory Network (TAN) report for the property in 2004 through the State Historical Society of Iowa, and contracted with the JCHS to prepare the final nomination. Bob Beckley, a former Clinton Engines employee, and other volunteers had previously circulated a petition to save Building #7 from the wrecking ball and raised public awareness of its endangerment.



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**DON THOMAS**

**FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, CLINTON MACHINE COMPANY**



Don Thomas founded and led the Clinton Engine Corporation to international prominence.

Source: *The Maquoketa Community Press*, undated newspaper clipping, circa 1951.

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## COMPANY TRADEMARK



The Clinton trademark became an internationally recognized symbol of industrial reliability. The projectile point shape with the Clinton name superimposed on it carried different messages, as the company adapted the trademark to different products. Two variations are pictured here. The stone arrowhead conveyed power, durability, and an American cachet.

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# NATIONAL SALES MEETING

CIRCA 1952



By the mid-1950s, Clinton's central distributors extended the firm's sales and service to some 8,500 outlets throughout the United States and Canada. This photograph was taken in Building #7's Training Room.

Courtesy Jackson County Historical Society.

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### SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPLACEMENT PARTS SENT AROUND THE WORLD



An enterprise in itself, the service department at Clinton Machine company is a 'round-the-clock proposition. Shown above are just a few of the more than 45 persons who staff that department. Pictured selecting and packaging small parts of Clinton engines for shipment to the four corners of the globe are (from back to front) Jim White, utility man in the parts department, Etta Starr, Dorothy Graves and Marilyn Daniels, clerks. Wilbert Bruse, parts department foreman, stands behind Miss Daniels. Clinton's entire service department is located at the Maquoketa plant. (Press Photo by Grady)

By the 1950s, the Clinton Machine Company's service manual had grown to ninety pages.

Source: *The Maquoketa Community Press*, undated newspaper clipping, circa 1951.

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#### **VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Lot 1, Clinton Engines First Subdivision in the City of Maquoketa, Jackson County, Iowa, as shown on Final Plat filed October 27, 2004, File No. 04 4820, Book 1-P page 7, Office of Recorder of Jackson County, Iowa. Said premises being all of Block 15 of Goodenow's Addition to the City of Maquoketa, Jackson County, Iowa and also a portion of Out Lots 76 and 77, and that portion of Dearborn Street located North of Locust Street and South of Maple Street in said City of Maquoketa, Iowa. Subject to easements, reservations, restrictions and rights-of-way of record.

#### **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Contains five acres of the original plot associated historically with Building #7, including the parkland between the front façade of the building and East Maple Street. The remaining site of Clinton's factory operations now stands as raw land and was excluded from this nomination because the structures associated with these operations have been demolished.

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**LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS**

1. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking southwest  
William C. Page, Photographer  
April 5, 2004
2. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking southeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
April 5, 2004
3. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking northeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
April 5, 2004
4. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking northwest  
William C. Page, Photographer  
April 5, 2004
5. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking south southeast  
Detail of front entrance  
William C. Page, Photographer  
April 5, 2004
6. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking southeast  
Detail of northwest corner first floor window  
William C. Page, Photographer  
April 5, 2004
7. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking northeast  
Detail of interior: main entrance  
Bonnie Mitchell, Photographer  
January 20, 2006
8. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking northwest  
Detail of interior: first floor  
Bonnie Mitchell, Photographer  
April 5, 2004
9. The Maquoketa Company-Clinton Machine Company Administration Building  
605 East Maple Street  
Maquoketa, IA 52060  
Looking east  
Detail of interior: basement floor  
Bonnie Mitchell, Photographer  
April 5, 2004