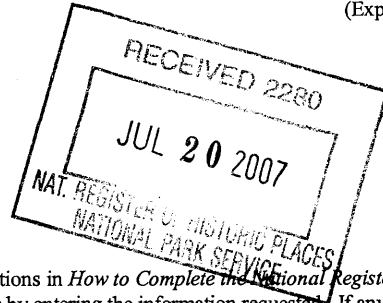


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any 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 Williges Building
other names/site number Cownie-Williges Building

2. Location

street & number 613-615 Pierce Street not for publication N/A
city or town Sioux City vicinity N/A
state Iowa code IA county Woodbury code 193 zip code 51101

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant X nationally X statewide X locally. (X See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Rowell J. Soike, Deputy SHPO July 19, 2007
Signature of certifying official Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register Linda McClelland 8/31/07
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the _____

National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the _____

National Register

 removed from the National Register _____

 other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

 N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE
INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION

Sub: specialty store
manufacturing facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT/NOT IN USE Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Modern Movements; Prairie School

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____

roof ASPHALT

walls TERRA COTTA

BRICK

other _____

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance 1930-c. 1954

Significant Dates 1930

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder Steele & Hilgers
Reische & Sanborn

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	713260	4708010	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

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

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Matthew W. Anderson and Glenda Castleberry; edited by Barbara A. Mitchell and Paula A. Mohr

organization SiouxLandmark date July 9, 2007

street & number 507 7th Street, Suite 401, P.O. Box 447 phone (712) 258-4238

city or town Sioux City state IA zip code 51102

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Security National Bank

street & number 601 Pierce Street, P.O. Box 147 telephone (712) 277-6500

city or town Sioux City state Iowa zip code 51102

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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

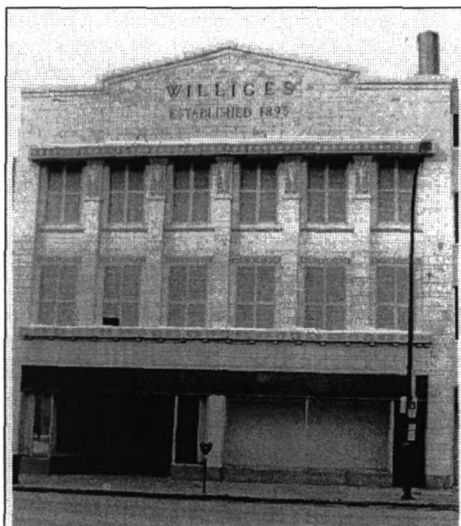
Narrative Description

The Williges Building occupies a 50-foot frontage at 613-615 Pierce Street, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, in downtown Sioux City, Iowa. The building faces east and has a parking ramp adjoining its north side. Security National Bank's main Sioux City office is located across an alley on the building's south side. Also sharing the block with the Williges Building is the Woodbury County Courthouse (a National Historic Landmark), which occupies the block's northwest corner, and City Hall, which occupies the southwest corner. The building is located approximately 5 blocks west and 2 blocks north of the Fourth Street Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1995.

The Williges Building is a three-story commercial block originally designed to function as the factory, salesroom, and storage facility for the fur manufacturing firm of prominent early twentieth-century Sioux City businessman August Williges. Stylistically, the Williges building is a commercial example of the Prairie School style, designed by Sioux City architects William LeBarthe Steele and George Hilgers. The decorative terra cotta on the building is Sullivanesque in nature, reflecting Steele's work in Louis Sullivan's office between 1897 and 1900. Built between 1929 and 1930, the Williges Building was one of the last manifestations of the early Prairie School style in the United States and Steele's last architectural commission in Sioux City.¹ The building's completion also coincides with the end of the "heyday" of terra cotta as an architectural cladding.²

Exterior

The Williges Building is rectangular in shape: 50 feet wide and 150 feet long. The steel-reinforced concrete construction is clad with brick and terra cotta. Although the rear of the building conveys a simple warehouse or industrial design, the east (front) façade, along with 19.5 feet of the south side, is clad with white glazed terra cotta.



Williges Building, façade (west elevation),
photograph by Bruce Meyer Productions, January 2007

¹ Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson, *Prairie School in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1977), 26.

² Susan Tunick, "The Evolution of Terra Cotta: 'Glazing New Trails,' *APT Bulletin* 32.4 (2001): 3-8.

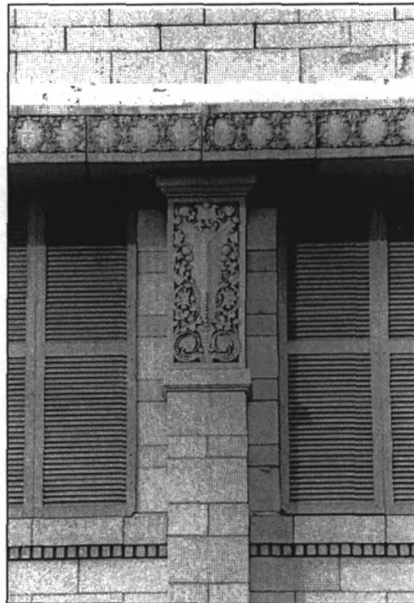
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

The overall composition of the terra cotta façade follows what Richard Longstreth has defined as the “enframed window wall” in *The Buildings of Main Street*.³ In this commercial type, the entire composition is framed by a continuous border that serves as a single compositional unit. On the Williges Building, this border is the primary plane of the façade, composed of alternating 7- inch and 13-inch rows of terra cotta. A simple parapet capped by terra cotta coping rises to a central, stylized pediment on the east. Below the pediment, applied serif lettering spells out “WILLIGES” and (slightly smaller) “ESTABLISHED 1895” indicating the year in which August Williges opened his first Sioux City store.



Detail of top of pilaster,
photograph by Bruce Meyer Productions, January 2007

Five terra cotta pilasters divide the upper two stories of the east façade into six bays, with window openings on each story. The window spandrels are set back from the primary plane and the pilasters, setting the window bays apart from the border and giving depth to the façade. Each pilaster is capped by a terra cotta capital ornamented with what appears to be a stylized animal pelt surrounded by foliage. Slightly projecting terra cotta bands at the top and bottom of each capital serve as a simplified abacus and astragal. The six window bays are tied together with projecting horizontal bands of terra cotta above and below. The upper band of terra cotta features blocks with three smooth round medallions surrounded by foliage. The lower band features blocks with a rectangular field of foliage emanating from a diamond-shaped center. Widely spaced dentils descend from this lower terra cotta band.

Although the windows are currently covered with narrowly louvered wood shutters, a photograph of the building published in 1977 shows what appears to be the original window configuration on the second floor: a horizontal pane

³ Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), 68-75.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

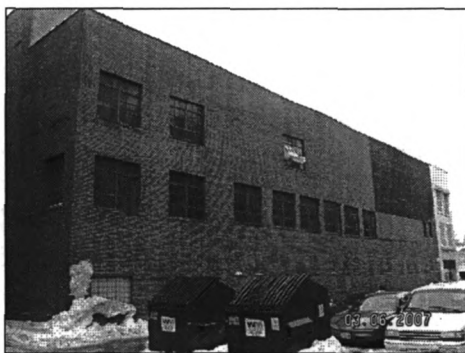
Section 7 Page 3

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

(possibly fixed) above two vertical sash (presumably casement). It is not known whether or not the original window sashes remain behind the shutters on either floor. An ornamental terra cotta band extending between the pilasters serves as a lintel above the second story windows and a dentil band sets off the third story windowsills.

The terra cotta details are repeated on the portion of the façade that wraps around the south elevation of the building. On this façade, however, a single pilaster, window spandrels, and the façade border are all set on the same plane, with the architectural features delineated by the terra cotta joints. The projecting horizontal bands above and below the two window bays and the slight projection of the coping, capital, and windowsills provide the only depth to the composition.

The two Williges storefronts feature tall windows resting on a 21-inch tall, pink granite bulkhead. The entrance to the south storefront, which originally led to the Williges store, is deeply recessed with glass display cases on either side. The ceramic tile floor in this recess is executed in an earth tone patchwork surrounded by a simple border. Near the sidewalk, a white field of small square tiles surrounds dark script lettering reading "Williges". Although the aluminum-framed display windows and interior finish materials are not thought to be original (replacement date unknown), the shape and size of the display cases appears to match the original configuration. The north storefront consists of a large display case and a slightly recessed door, which provides access to the second and third floors. Above the storefronts, a wooden signboard with "WILLIGES" in raised bronze letters runs across the entire length of the east façade. A smaller version of this signboard is located above the display window on the south façade of the building.



Williges Building (south elevation),
photograph by Doug Steinmetz, March 2007

The south elevation of the building is clad with reddish-brown brick laid in common bond. On the first floor of this elevation, a series of twenty concrete windowsills extends almost the entire length of the brick wall west of the terra cotta. These windowsills mark the location where small windows have been bricked in. A larger opening on the west end of this wall is filled in with glass block. On the second floor, a series of much larger window openings extends west of the terra cotta to the rear of the building. Eight of these retain their original industrial steel sash. The remaining three are bricked in. On the third floor, there are three window openings with industrial steel sash and one window opening that has been filled in with brick. The parapet is capped with tile coping.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 4

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

The west elevation (rear) of the building is also clad with reddish-brown brick laid in common bond. An elevator penthouse extends above the roof level and the parapet is capped with tile coping. Most of the windows on the rear are bricked in. However, concrete windowsills marking their placement remain. Two of the original industrial steel sash are extant (one on the second story, the other on the third), and a large opening on the first floor is filled in with glass block. There is a ground-level pedestrian door leading into the north half of the building and a loading dock door leading to the south half. Another pedestrian door is bricked in.

The north side of the building abuts a parking garage that was built in the late 1940s. Based on a 1944 photograph of the building (Section 8), this side of the building was entirely brick (no terra cotta) and was used for painted advertising.

Alterations

The primary exterior alteration is the bricking in of window openings on the rear portion (south and west) of the building. No records have been found to indicate when this occurred, but it is likely related to changes in building ownership and commercial practices (see Section 8).

The storefront does not appear to be original, although the original configuration of the south storefront does remain. According to newspaper articles at the time of construction, the storefronts were to be "finished in bronze" and feature "art tile floors." Although a remnant of the bronze trim survives at the top of the windows, the rest of the window frame has been replaced. The ceramic tile in the south storefront recess remains. Architectural renderings (Section 8) depict prism glass where the "WILLIGES" signboard is now. It is not known whether it remains behind the existing wooden signboard.

Historic photographs and articles indicate signage projected from the front façade. This signage presumably changed as the building changed ownership. None of the projecting signs remains. The only other exterior alteration is the elimination of an advertising sign painted on the south side of the building that originally read: "We Buy the Skins and Make the Furs." This was painted over after the firm closed its fur manufacturing business and became a strictly retail facility (see Section 8).

Interior

Newspaper articles at the time of the building's construction give a sense of how the interior appeared historically. A 1929 newspaper article indicated the ground floor would include a 25 by 150-foot salesroom for Williges, with the other half occupied by another tenant. Williges's salesroom was to include two vaults, each 100 feet long, and many mirrored recesses for customers to view their furs in "the best advantage." The salesroom was to have a terrazzo floor and soft colors throughout.⁴ After the fur-manufacturing factory was shut down c. 1954, the salesroom was remodeled and expanded several times to accommodate the increased emphasis on retail sales and the expanded line of products carried by the store. Eventually, the salesroom was expanded to occupy the entire first floor.

⁴ "New Williges Store to Be Last Word in Furrier's Headquarters; Construction Begins in Few Weeks," *Sioux City Tribune*, 17 Aug. 1929.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 5

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

Only the first floor of the Williges Building was accessible at the time this nomination was prepared. Very little historic fabric remains on this floor. Approximately one-third of the masonry wall which bisected the first floor lengthwise dividing the space into two retail spaces survives. Plaster walls and ceiling and a molded plaster cornice are also largely intact as is the yellow terrazzo floor featuring a modified checkerboard pattern.

The second floor of the building was originally the fur manufacturing area. According to the 1929 *Sioux City Tribune* article, the entire area was to be constructed of "noiseless material" and filled with machinery, including fur sewing machines, staying machines, blowers, and "other modern equipment." The floor also featured a drying room, cleaning room, and a vault to protect furs while they were in process. In recent years, the second floor was occupied by a dance studio. Although the second floor is not currently accessible, the vault supposedly remains.

The third floor originally contained eight large fire- and burglar-proof storage vaults, with a total capacity of up to 10,000 garments. These vaults were to be chilled with a cooling system to keep them at a proper temperature and to keep the furs safe from moths.⁵ A dumb waiter and elevator connected the third floor to the manufacturing department and salesroom on the floors below, and a "house telephone system" was to connect all the departments. The third floor remained the storage department even after the Williges factory ceased operation. This continued to be true up to the closing of the Williges store in 1999. Although the third floor is not currently accessible, the vaults supposedly remain. The freight elevator is extant.

Integrity

The Williges Building maintains a high degree of all seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Of primary importance is the integrity of design, materials, and workmanship extant in the terra cotta façade and overall form and fenestration of the commercial building as a whole. The building clearly exhibits Sullivanesque motifs and conveys its association with the Prairie School style, as evidenced by the horizontal bands of terra cotta and organic ornament. The window openings on the primary façade are intact. The original Williges storefront maintains its original configuration and ceramic tile mosaics. The integrity of the immediate setting of the building is also intact; Sioux City's commercial district surrounds the block and extends south and east. The building's proximity to Steele's Woodbury County Courthouse and other commercial buildings throughout downtown Sioux City featuring terra cotta ornament contributes to the overall sense of setting, feeling, and association. Although the interior of the store and fur manufacturing areas have been altered, the exterior of the building would still be recognizable by both August Williges and William L. Steele, if they were alive today.

⁵ "New Williges Store to be Last Word in Furrier's Headquarters; Construction Begins in Few Weeks," *Sioux City Tribune*, 17 Aug. 1929.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

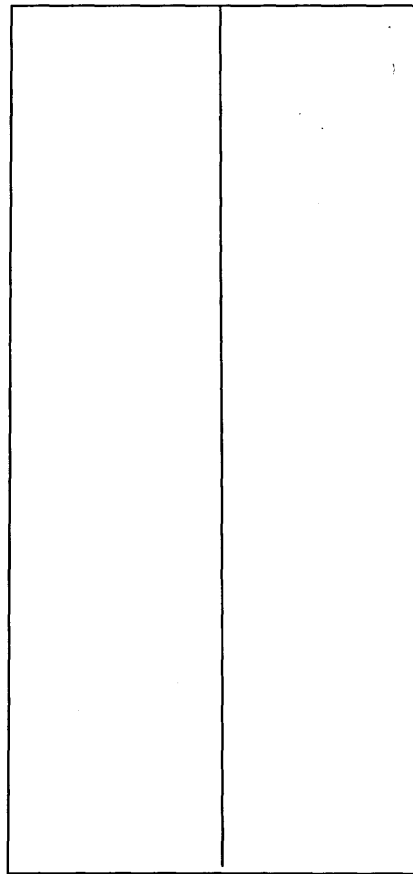
Section 7 Page 6

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

N →

←50'→

↑
150'
↓



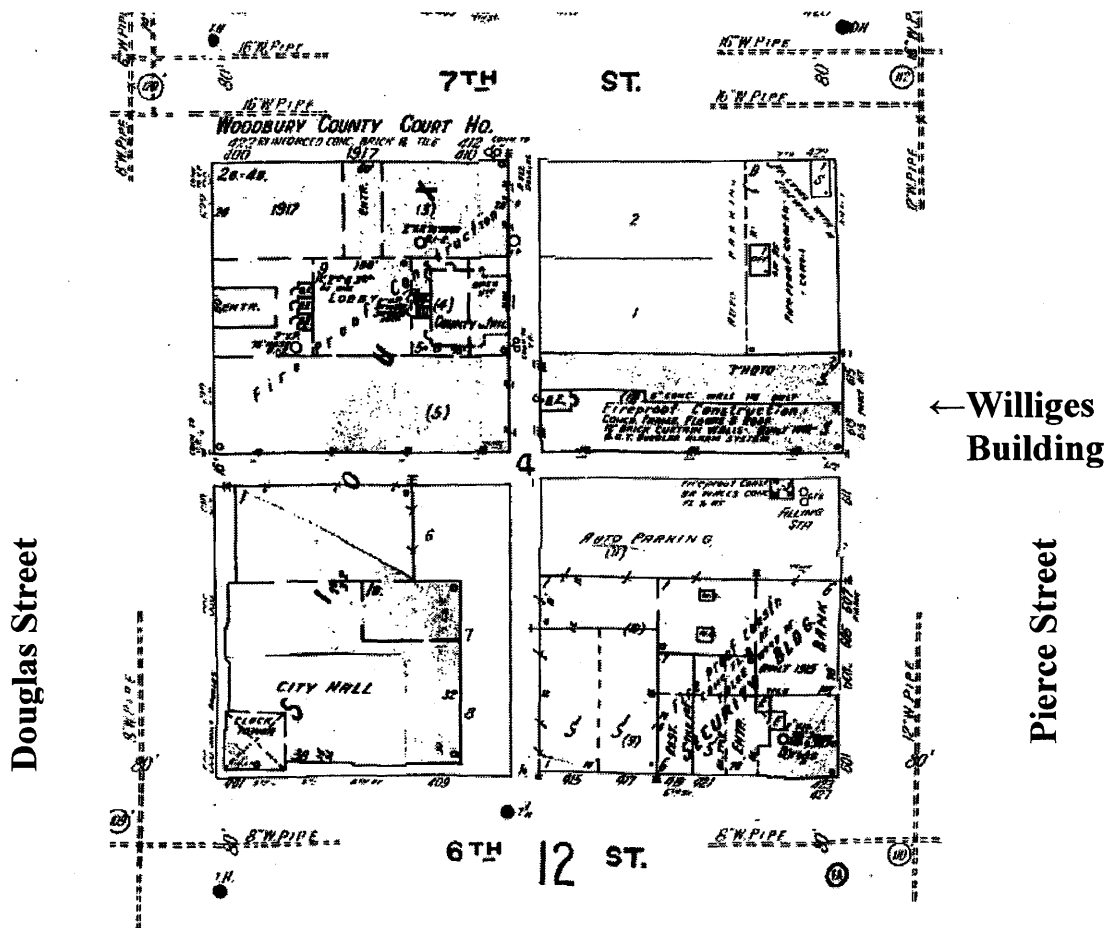
Footprint, Williges Building

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

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Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa



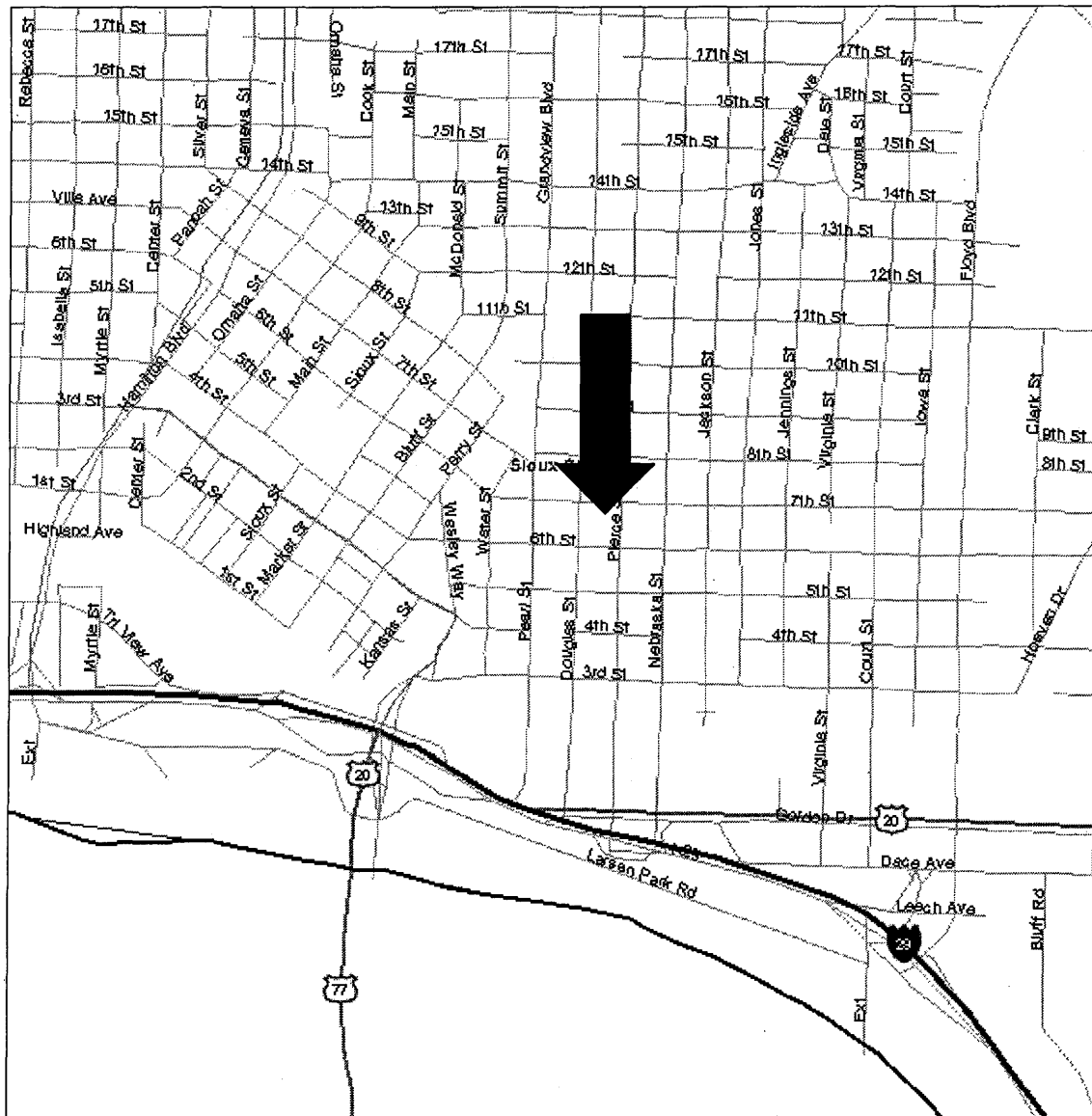
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Site Map, arrow indicates location of Williges Building
Source: Sioux City 1924-Nov. 1949 vol. 1, 1924-Nov. 1949, Sheet 3

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 8

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa



Site Map, arrow indicates location of Williges Building,
Source: Iowa Geographic Map Server, Iowa State University;
<http://ortho.gis.iastate.edu/>, accessed 01/31/2007

United States Department of the Interior
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 9

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

Summary of Significance

The Williges Building possesses local significance under Criterion A as one of the last surviving examples of a manufacturing and retail facility for Sioux City's fur industry. The period of significance for the Williges Building spans from 1930 when the building was completed to c. 1954 when the company stopped manufacturing furs. With further research it is possible a case for Criterion B could be made for August Williges as an influential Sioux City manufacturer and businessman of the early twentieth century.

Additionally, the Williges Building is of local, state and national significance under Criterion C as a late manifestation of early Prairie School commercial architecture in the United States. Designed by William L. Steele, a former draftsman in the office of Louis Sullivan, and his partner George B. Hilgers, this building is an important companion work to the more famous Woodbury County Courthouse (Steele, Purcell and Elmslie, architects, 1916-18, National Historic Landmark, 1996) located in the same block. The Williges Building, built nearly fifteen years after the courthouse, exhibits the enduring allegiance to the architectural ideas of Sullivan, who advocated the integration of function and rich architectural ornament rendered in terra cotta. Accordingly, Steele and Hilgers designed a terra cotta façade inspired by Sullivan's philosophy of organic ornament for this fireproof building of steel and reinforced concrete. The Williges Building is distinguished as the last building Steele designed for Sioux City and one of the few commercial examples by him to survive.

Historical Background and Significance

August Williges, the original owner of the Williges Building, was born in Hanover, Germany on March 26, 1858. He received a limited formal education and at the age of fourteen began a four-year apprenticeship with a fur manufacturer. This apprenticeship taught him the necessary skills to work as a furrier but also instilled in him a desire to operate his own business. More than fifty years later, Williges recalled,

Ever since my apprentice days I had one idea, namely to someday have a business of my own. I wanted to be in business for myself while still young, instead of wasting my youthful vigor working for the other fellow.¹

This dream of self-employment was a driving force throughout Williges' life but one which he would not realize for two more decades. After completing his apprenticeship, Williges toured Europe and then took a series of positions with furriers in the German cities of Hamburg, Heidelberg, and Stuttgart and in Zurich, Switzerland. In 1881, he decided to immigrate to the United States, reportedly motivated by his desire to open his own fur store. Upon his arrival, however, Williges worked for the New York fur-manufacturing firm of Joekel and Bindsell. He remained in New York for eight years, during which time he married his wife Regina and they had their first two children. It was also while living in New York that Williges was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Seeking a healthy place to recuperate, around 1889 he and his family moved to Springfield, Illinois. There Williges was employed by C.D. Roberts and worked as a furrier.

¹ Notes of an address delivered by August Williges before the Woodbury County Pioneer Club, 12 December 1931, Archives, Sioux City Public Museum.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 10

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

While living in Springfield, Williges learned about Sioux City from advertisements and promotional materials related to the city's "corn palaces" and new elevated railroad. He began reading Sioux City newspapers and noted with interest that the city was riding the crest of boom time prosperity. The accounts he read about overnight fortunes to be made there convinced him Sioux City was where he could realize his dream of owning his own business. However, when Williges and his family arrived in Sioux City in June 1895, they instead found a city in a state of economic disarray. The Panic of 1893 had taken its toll on Sioux City's business leaders. Many of the city's businessmen lost their fortunes because their money had been invested in reckless land speculation. Some of the city's most influential leaders were forced to leave town, while others remained and tried to recover their lost wealth. Upon viewing the city's economic condition Williges noted, "[t]his town was a poor house."² However, he remained confident Sioux City would be where he would establish his own business.

Late in 1895, Williges opened his first fur store—a small shop near Fifth and Jackson streets. Two years later, he moved his business to a new building at 609 Fourth Street (demolished). In 1912, the Williges firm moved again to a location at 310 Pierce Street (demolished) where it would remain until 1930. Williges' children joined the business with son William in charge of the raw fur department. Henry managed sales and Mathilde was the company's bookkeeper. Gradually, the firm had become one of Sioux City's prominent businesses and Williges often referred to himself as "Sioux City's Furrier" in newspaper ads and city directories.

While Williges sought to distinguish his business, the firm was in fact part of a larger fur industry in Sioux City. One newspaper wrote, "[t]he furrier industry is a Sioux City industry that is seldom talked about, yet in volume, invested capital, number of families supported and value to the community it is well up on the list."³ In 1930, when the Williges Building was completed, there were five furriers in Sioux City who generated nearly \$300,000 in business and employed 52 people. Williges, however, had an important advantage over his local competitors because he bought raw skins directly from hunters and trappers and fashioned his own garments, instead of buying prepared furs, as was the custom of the department stores. Williges' practice allowed him to control costs and this direct relationship with customers enabled him to have custom garments ready quickly. Williges' slogan, "I Buy the Skins and Make the Furs," summarized his emphasis on manufacturing as well as the retail aspects of his business.⁴

By the end of the 1920s, Sioux City was experiencing the largest construction boom since World War I and the new Williges Building was an important part of this expansion. This local prosperity preceded a nationwide program initiated by President Herbert Hoover to stimulate the economy following the stock market crash in October 1929. The *Sioux City Journal* boasted, "Sioux City has anticipated President Hoover's improvement, with the city's greatest construction program since the Great War."⁵ Along with the Williges store, other projects included the 12-story Badgerow Building at Fourth and Jackson streets, and a \$50,000 two-story structure built by the Davidson Realty Company at Fourth and Douglas streets. Plans were also underway for the construction of a \$125,000 J.C. Penney store, a \$10,000 Riverside Branch Library, and the first phase of construction of Briar Cliff College, valued at

² Williges address.

³ "Veteran Sioux City Furrier Has Seen Many Changes in Industry," n.d., n.p., Sioux City Public Museum Archives.

⁴ Sioux City Directory, 1927, 524. This slogan was also painted on the south elevation of the building.

⁵ "Sioux City is Several Jumps Ahead of Hoover in Program of Prosperity, Stupendous Building Boom Already is Under Way," *Sioux City Journal*, 8 December 1929.

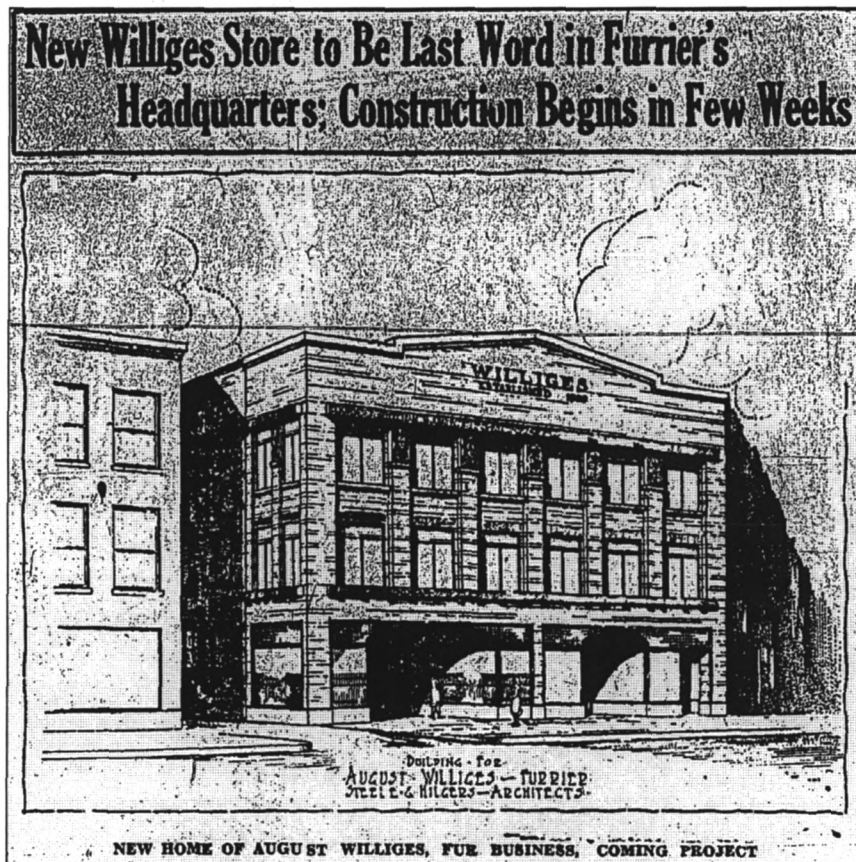
United States Department of the Interior
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 11

Williges Building
Woodbury County, Iowa

\$225,000. By December 1929, the value of construction work planned, under construction or completed totaled nearly \$12 million.⁶



View of the Williges Building, 613 Pierce Street, *Sioux City Tribune*, 17 August 1929.

After more than thirty years in business as a Sioux City furrier, in April of 1929 August Williges announced his plans to construct a purpose-built store and manufacturing facility for his company. Williges purchased a vacant tract of land immediately east of the Woodbury County Courthouse and hired architects Steele & Hilgers to design the building. At the time of the announcement Williges declared, "I expect to build a new store that will be the best possible fur store in the Middle West."⁷ Williges anticipated his new building would adjoin a new \$1,200,000 hotel to be developed by another party on the lot immediately north of the Williges site. However, by midsummer it was clear the hotel project was not going to materialize and Williges decided to proceed with his new building regardless. In August 1929, Williges awarded the construction contract to Riesche and Sanborn and subcontracts were let soon afterwards for the installation of electrical wiring, elevator equipment, and cooling equipment. By September, construction of the

⁶ "Sioux City is Several Jumps Ahead of Hoover in Program of Prosperity, Stupendous Building Boom Already is Under Way," *Sioux City Journal*, 8 December 1929.

⁷ "To Erect New Building Here," *Sioux City Journal*, 9 April 1929.

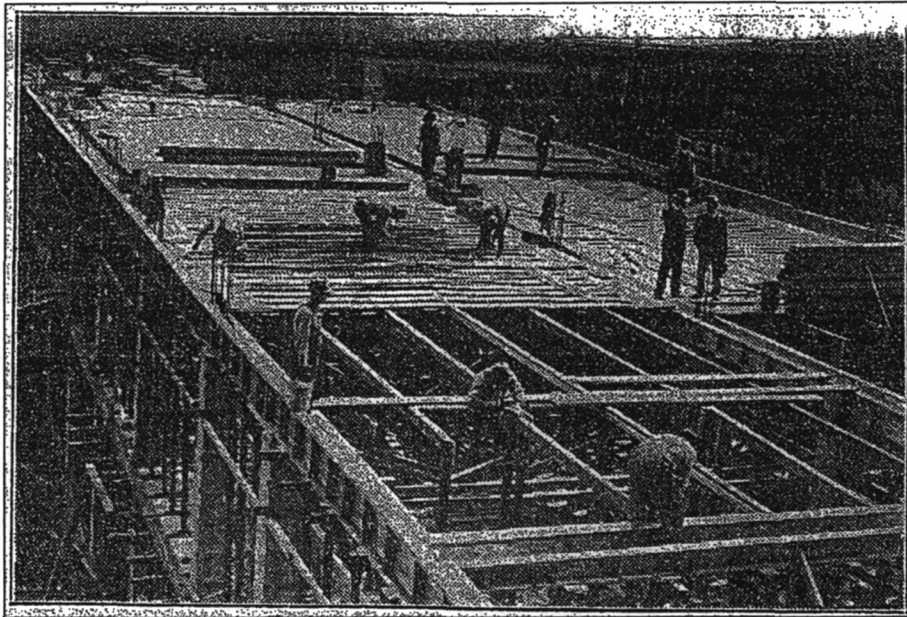
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building had begun. Northwestern Terra Cotta Company of Chicago was awarded the contract to make the terra cotta for the façade according to the design of Steele & Hilgers.⁸



“Work on Fur Shop Progresses Rapidly,”
Sioux City Journal, 8 October 1929.

By March 1930, construction of the Williges Building was completed and on opening day, more than 1,000 Sioux City residents toured the new facility. The *Sioux City Tribune* described the new building one of the finest retail fur shops, manufacturing and storing plants in the Midwest. The *Sioux City Journal* concurred, writing, “The new Williges building is one of the most modern in the city and is a tribute to the ambition of Mr. Williges.” Reportedly, Williges’ new store was the only building in Sioux City which had air conditioning throughout.

⁸ Shop drawings for the terra cotta survive in the Northwestern Terra Cotta Archives at the National Building Museum, Washington, DC.

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"Dream of Apprentice Boy Will Be Realized in Opening of Fur Shop,"
Sioux City Journal, 27 February 1930.

The Williges' fur business occupied the majority of the building except the north half of the first floor which was leased to the Goodyear Shoe Repair Company. The basement was also leased and in 1938, this space became home to the Art Center Association of Sioux City, an organization which had been established with the assistance of the Works Progress Administration.

Soon after opening his new building, Williges was invited to participate in the national convention of the National Association of the Fur Industry in April 1930. He was one of a dozen leading furriers invited to display their wares at the convention which was held in Los Angeles.⁹ Throughout the 1930s, Williges remained a prominent figure in Sioux City and the region. In 1934, he was elected president of the newly formed Iowa-Nebraska Furriers Association. Williges died May 1939 in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, after a bout with bronchial pneumonia.

⁹"Furrier Here is Given Honor," *Sioux City Journal*, 13 March 1930.

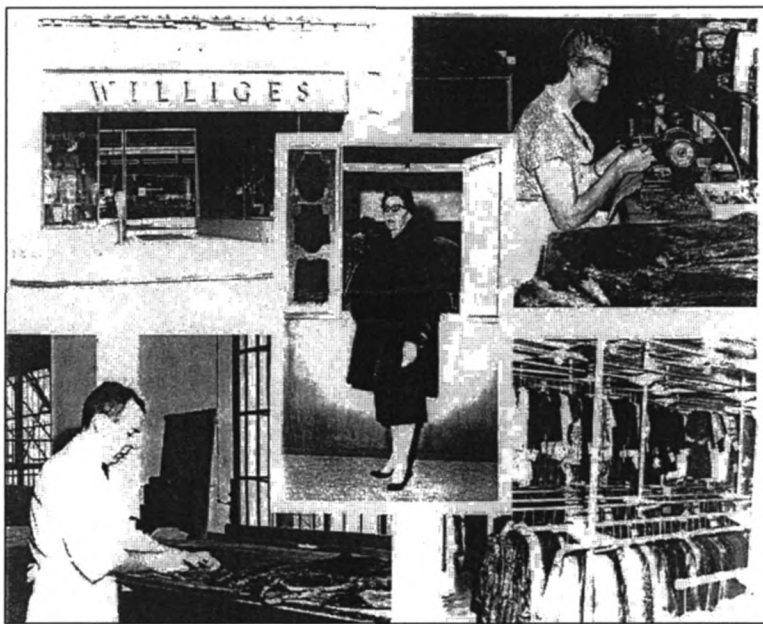
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After his death, Williges' estate was divided among his five children. In the 1940s, the business was sold to Cownie Fur Company of Des Moines and was renamed Cownie-Williges. In 1948, the store's general manager, Paul Wilderson, Sr., purchased the company from Cownie and became its president. Wilderson renamed the store Williges in the mid-1950s.¹⁰ Judging from the city directory for 1954 there appears to be a shift in the company's focus that year. The company's slogan "We Buy the Skins" is discontinued and for the first time there is a reference to the store selling women's apparel. It appears that at this time, the fur-manufacturing facility ceased operations and the business became a strictly retail business expanded to include clothing. To accommodate the new emphasis on sales, the retail space was remodeled and expanded several times. Wilderson's son Paul Wilderson, Jr. took over as president in 1965 and remained in this position until the store was purchased in 1980 by Bob and Janice Huisenga who operated it until 1999. The second story was occupied by a dance studio until recently. Currently the entire building is vacant and the future of the building is uncertain. The owner is exploring options for the building, which include conversion of the first floor into indoor parking.



Photomontage of Williges Fur Company, 1950s
(Pearl Street Research Center, Sioux City Public Museum)

Steele & Hilgers, architects

Steele & Hilgers, the architects of the Williges Building, formed their partnership in 1926. William LeBarthe Steele, the better known of the two, was born in Springfield, Illinois in 1875 and studied architecture at the University of Illinois. After receiving a B.S. in architecture in 1896, he joined the office of Louis Sullivan, working as a draftsman from 1897-1900—a period of time during which Sullivan was working on the Schlesinger and Mayer Building (Carson

¹⁰ "Williges Thanks Customers for 100 Years," *Sioux City Journal*, 29 October 1995, Williges Supplement.

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Pirie Scott Department Store) in Chicago and the Condict (Bayard) Building in New York. After leaving Sullivan's office, Steele moved to Pittsburgh, where he was employed in the offices of three architectural firms. In 1904, Steele moved to Sioux City and within a year became a partner with architect Wilfred W. Beach, whom Steele probably knew at the University of Illinois' architecture program, where Beach also studied. This partnership lasted approximately two years and in 1907, Steele established his own firm. Steele also served on the Sioux City's library board and later this association netted him several commissions for library buildings in Sioux City. His other professional activities included leading the effort to develop a building code for Sioux City. In part because of his work to establish registration laws for architects working in Iowa, Steele was elected president of the Iowa chapter of the American Association of Architects in 1917. As evidence of his professional standing nationally, Steele served on the American Institute of Architect's Board of Directors for a three-year term 1922-1925. He was Second Vice-President of the Institute for the year 1925-26.



W. L. Steele

William L. Steele
Sioux City Spirit of Progress, 20 May 1926.

In 1915, Steele obtained the architectural commission which would cement his reputation and bring national and international attention to Sioux City. Working with Purcell & Elmslie of Minneapolis, he was the principal architect for the Woodbury County Courthouse (National Historic Landmark, 1996) recognized as the nation's only major public building in the Prairie School and one which was described as a "splendid demonstration of modern common sense and architectural achievement."¹¹ Other buildings in Sioux City designed by Steele include the Sioux City Journal (c. 1932, demolished), the S.S. Kresge Building (1917, demolished), Livestock National Bank (c. 1920, demolished), the H.H. Everist House (1916-7, National Register, 1983), Davidson Building (1913, National Register, 1999) and five libraries for the Sioux City library system between 1913 and 1930 (three are on the National Register, various dates). Steele is also believed to have designed the home for August Williges at 1911 Summit (1919, extant).

¹¹ "Woodbury County Court House, Sioux City, Iowa," *Western Architect* 30.2 (February 1921): 7.

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Outside of Sioux City, buildings designed by Steele include the Charles Mix County Courthouse of 1917 in Lake Andes, South Dakota (National Register, 1993). In 1926, he formed a partnership with George Hilgers and in 1928, Steele relocated to Omaha, where he formed a partnership with Thomas R. Kimball. Steele died in Omaha in 1949.

Steele's partner George Bertram Hilgers (1889-1962?) is the lesser known of the two. Hilgers was born in Sioux City and received no formal training in architecture. He learned the profession through an apprenticeship with Steele which began in 1912. Hilgers' duties gradually increased in importance and later he was responsible for superintending construction for the firm. After Steele departed for Omaha in 1928, Hilgers' association with him continued for several years, and the two men collaborated with George Elmslie on two buildings in 1929 and 1931 for Yankton College (South Dakota). Hilgers continued his own architectural practice in Sioux City until the 1940s. It is believed that he died in 1962.

Architectural Significance

The Williges Building is important at the national level as a late example of the first phase of the Prairie School style in the United States. This initial phase of the Prairie School, a period which architectural historians have defined beginning c. 1900 and lasting to c. 1930, was inspired by Louis Sullivan who widely disseminated his ideas with respect to architecture and ornament through his writings and architectural designs. Sullivan's long lasting influence can also be attributed to the young architects in his office (such as William Steele and George Elmslie) who went on to have distinguished careers and who perpetuated the Prairie School principles in their own practices. The Williges Building, constructed at the very end of this first phase of the Prairie School, is an excellent and rare example of the enduring influence of Sullivan and of the Prairie School aesthetic into the third decade of the twentieth century.

This assessment of the building's national importance is supported by the views of two prominent architectural historians. Richard Guy Wilson has written that the Williges Building is nationally significant as "a very late example of the Prairie School mode that with a few exceptions (mostly in northern Indiana) disappeared in the later 1920s."¹² Architectural historian Ronald Schmitt, who illustrated the Williges Building in his recent book *Sullivan-esque: Urban Architecture and Ornamentation*, concurs with the building's national significance, noting that it is "among the final Sullivan-esque designs constructed."¹³ While there are few national studies of Prairie School commercial architecture, a survey of more than 750 Sullivan-esque buildings (extant and non-extant) in the United States conducted by Ronald Schmitt is instructive. Of the buildings catalogued by Schmitt, about 90 fall in the time period 1925 to 1930 reflecting the longevity (albeit a declining one) of the style just prior to the Depression. In short, the Williges Building represents

¹² Letter from Richard Guy Wilson to Ralph Christian, 23 January 2007. Wilson and co-author Sidney K. Robinson also discussed and illustrated the Williges Building in their book *The Prairie School in Iowa* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1977), 26, 121.

¹³ Letter from Ronald Schmitt to Ralph Christian, 5 February 2007; Ronald E. Schmitt, *Sullivan-esque: Urban Architecture and Ornamentation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 129.

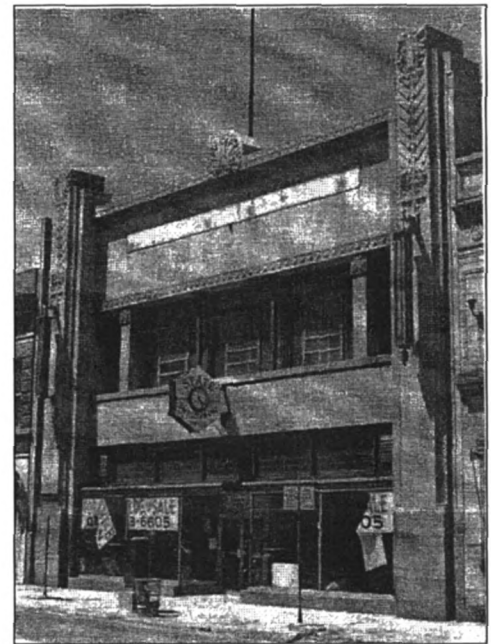
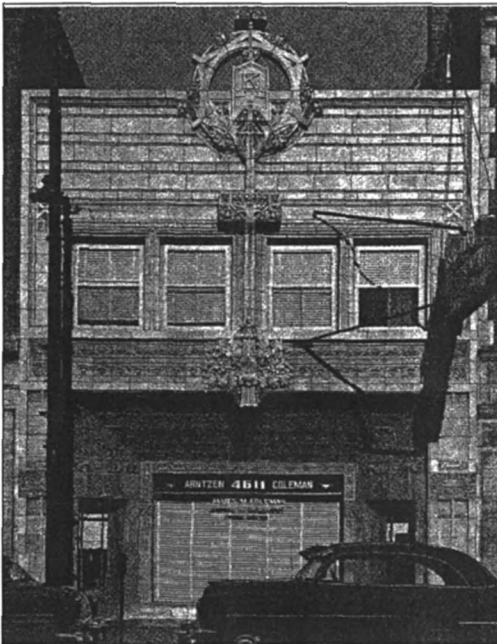
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the last gasp of the early Prairie School and is one of the last buildings to employ Sullivan-esque terra cotta in the United States.



Left: Krause Music Store, Chicago, 1922, Louis Sullivan, architect (Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture*, fig. 130);
Right: People's Gas Light and Coke Company, c. 1926, Chicago, George Elmslie, architect
(Schmitt, *Sullivan-esque: Urban Architecture and Ornamentation*, 115).

Although the popularity of the Prairie School began to wane in the 1920s, a stylistic and formal comparison with other commercial and industrial examples in this idiom further establishes a national context for the Williges Building. Importantly, these contemporary examples share a structural system of steel-reinforced concrete, a liberal use of Sullivan-esque terra cotta for the building's public face, and an association with Sullivan. The Krause Music Store by Sullivan himself (1922, Chicago, extant) is a two-story commercial building on North Lincoln Avenue in Chicago. Like the Williges Building, the façade of this building has large areas of plain terra cotta along with stylized organic terra cotta elements used selectively—but effectively—as accents. The People's Gas Light and Coke Company (c. 1926, Chicago, demolished), by Sullivan protégé George Elmslie, was a two-story commercial building also of comparable scale to the Williges. The Gas Light building, with its first floor storefront, deeply recessed upper story windows and terra cotta elements by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company, makes this example comparable in form, composition and material.

Additionally, the Williges Building is significant at the local and state levels as a work of William L. Steele who is considered to be one of Iowa's most important architects of the twentieth century. Steele, who worked in Louis Sullivan's office in the late 1890s, was inspired by Sullivan throughout his career and developed a highly personal interpretation of the Prairie School in his designs. Steele's buildings, many of which employed terra cotta, brought

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national and international attention to Sioux City “as a center of innovative and regionally based architecture.”¹⁴ Unfortunately, many of the commercial buildings Steele designed for Sioux City have been demolished, making the Williges Building a rare survival. Steele’s contributions to Sioux City and his role in perpetuating the Prairie School well into the twentieth century cannot be understated, and the Williges Building is an important part of that legacy.

¹⁴ Letter from Wilson to Christian.

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Personal Correspondence

Letter from Richard Guy Wilson to Ralph Christian, 23 January 2007.

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Letter from Ronald Schmitt to Ralph Christian, 5 February 2007.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 12, Block 7, Sioux City East Addition, Sioux City, Iowa

Boundary Justification

The nominated boundary is the boundary historically associated with the subject property.

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Photographs

Photographer: Bruce Meyer Productions

Date: January 2007

1. East elevation
2. Detail of top of east elevation
3. Detail of top of east elevation
4. Detail of terracotta pier at third story
5. Detail of sign above third story
6. East elevation of Williges building and parking garage located to the north
7. East elevation of parking garage located north of the Williges building
8. Detail of terracotta panels located under second story windows
9. View of west (rear) and south elevations