

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received **DEC 13 1983**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Northwestern Hotel

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 321 E. Walnut not for publication

city, town Des Moines vicinity of

state Iowa code 19 county Polk code 153

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Northwestern Limited Partnership

street & number 626 E. Locust

city, town Des Moines vicinity of state Iowa 50309

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk's Office

street & number Polk County Courthouse

city, town Des Moines state Iowa

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed**Check one** unaltered altered**Check one** original site moved

date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Northwestern Hotel stands as one of the better examples of the second Renaissance Revival in Des Moines. Designed by Iowa's premier architectural firm, Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson, the design combines modern hotel needs with a free but restrained use of classical motifs. It is by far the least altered of the nineteenth and early twentieth century hotels remaining in the city. The Northwestern Hotel is unique among the city's hotels in that it retains its original two-story open lobby, including original marble and plaster and stained glass detail.

Built in 1915-16, the 88' x 94' hotel was specifically designed to lodge railroad employees and others of modest means, and the principal decoration is therefore limited to the lobby area. A restaurant, cigar stand and drug store flanked this central space. On the second floor was a ball room with its own skylight as well as guest rooms. Guest rooms on the second and third floors were ranged around the skylit spaces and were generally small, with baths down the hall. Some of the larger suites, generally those with a view of the Capitol, had their own baths.

In the lobby, huge plaster capitals (the "German Renaissance" pattern from the Chicago Architectural Decorating Company) on heavy squared columns surround the rotunda, a particularly fine space. Corners of the original wood balustrade and the molded lip below it are curved on one side to highlight the hotel desk below and offer a pleasing foil to the dramatic capitals. A splendid skylight of green and yellow stained glass arranged in geometric patterns imparts an interesting glow to both floors. Other original materials include extensive marble wainscoting, terrazzo floors and metal balustrades. Another German feature is the Grill Room, which has a barrel vaulted ceiling, very dark wood paneling, and colored, leaded glass windows. The effect is that of a medieval rathskeller, highly appropriate given the German heritage of the hotel's owners.

On the exterior, a light tan ground floor provides the base for the dark red brick stories above. The building appears almost square but is actually trapezoidal to follow the angle of East Walnut Street. Four slightly projecting bays with heavy broken pediments and small lights with keystone-like ornament provide the principal relief on the regularly spaced design. The bays' upper windows are somewhat smaller than others on the second and third floors. Between these bays on the ground floor are a series of slightly recessed bays outlined in corbelling above and stone trim below. These recessed bays have entrances and windows on the north and high windows on the east. A stone course separates the ground and upper floors and also forms a sill for the simple rectangular windows. Contrasting lighter brick shapes with still lighter corners outline the upper windows. An ornate metal cornice carrying rosettes, consoles, dentils and molding tops the composition.

Changes in the hotel are minor and many will be rectified during the current renovation, including removing dropped ceilings in the former restaurant and drug store spaces, plywood panels over windows and aluminum storm windows, and renovating the lobby desk. The original iron marquee was removed from the north facade as some point in the past. A fire wall and other safety features such as fire doors have been added over the years. To maintain symmetry, the Fourth Street bay was designed as it now appears,

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1916–17 **Builder/Architect** Proudfoot, Bird, & Rawson, Architects

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Since it is virtually unaltered both inside and out, the Northwestern Hotel affords a unique view of the early twentieth century hotel and is a fine example of the Renaissance Revival of that period in Des Moines, a time of considerable construction. It is also representative and certainly among the most unchanged of the work of Iowa's leading architectural firm, Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson. In addition, its location and appearance are the sole reminders of the Chicago and North Western Railroad and its history calls attention to railroad-related events in Des Moines. As one of a handful of early significant hotels extant in the city (two nineteenth century and three early twentieth century), the hotel best illustrates that facet of commerce, for it has suffered the least alteration.

The hotel bears nominal and real associations with the Chicago and North Western Railroad. Anna and Frank Starzinger opened the first Northwestern Hotel, restaurant and bar around 1877 at this site, then opposite the Chicago and North Western depot site. The rail line gained access to Des Moines in 1879 when it leased the locally-organized Des Moines and Minnesota Railroad trackage. In 1884 the North Western Railroad took formal possession of this connection with Ames, Iowa. The tracks ran along East Fourth Street east of the hotel and the North Western roundhouse was located farther north. Clustered around the depot were the first Northwestern Hotel and the Nelson and Grand Hotels, with the Goldstone a block away. None of these early east side hotels remain.

Located hard by the tracks, both editions of the Northwestern Hotel provided accommodations for passengers and railroad employees. The present structure was specifically designed to provide low-cost lodging and had many small rooms for the railroad workers. Surviving correspondence dating from shortly before construction of the present hotel indicates that the Starzingers had some sort of arrangement with the North Western Railroad regarding room and board for railroad employees.

From the start, the Northwestern Hotel catered to a modest trade, including railroad workers and passengers, legislators and State Fair-goers. By far most guests were from Iowa, some from Des Moines. When trains arrived, representatives from the hotel went across the street to the depot and rang a gong to encourage arrivals to stay at the Northwestern.

The hotel was especially filled at Christmas and State Fair times. During the holiday season a huge Christmas tree soared in the lobby. During the Fair, weary sightseers asleep on cots were more likely to fill the space. The guest register for the original hotel for 28 August 1910 showed 258 registrants, many of whom were assigned a cot number instead of a room number. (In contrast, the register covered but two pages on 5 October 1910 and ten pages on 28 August 1910, Fair time.) Up to five people shared a room, and the prices were higher—around 75¢ to \$1.00 a night—than at other times of the year.

As business improved, the Starzingers expanded operations west along East Walnut Street, then constructed a separate brick annex to the south. The annex and adjoining

9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Des Moines SE

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

UTM References

A

1	5	4	4	8	9	9	0	4	6	0	4	0	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The North one half of Lot 11, and Lots 12, 13, and 14, being part of Scott and Dean's Addition of the City of Des Moines.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N.A. code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ms. Barbara Beving Long

organization Contact Iowa SHPO date 7 December 1983

Historical Building

street & number E. 12th & Grand Ave. telephone 515-281-8152

city or town Des Moines, state Iowa 50319

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Adrian A. Anderson

title Executive Director Iowa State Historical Department date 6 December 1983

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Melissa Byer
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 1/12/84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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brick storage facility (both razed) remained in use when the present hotel replaced the original, and a door on the second floor connected the annex with the hotel proper.

Frank Starzinger died in 1908 and one of his sons, Otto, took over hotel operations and management of his father's estate. It was he who chose to replace the aging 1877 Northwestern Hotel with the present brick fireproof building. Terms a "rounder" and a "black sheep" by those who recall him, Starzinger seems to have been a personable, independent hotelier. He parlayed his popularity and notoriety as a high school and college athlete into a seat in the 1917-18 legislature.

Otto Starzinger's new Northwestern Hotel opened for business on 22 August 1916, just in time to capitalize on the Fair crowds. However, the hotel that Starzinger envisioned never seemed to fulfill its early promise. Indeed, early plans (c. 1911) calling for a six-story hotel were scaled down to the present three and a half story building by 1915. The hotel was built with sufficient underpinnings to support additional stories in the future, a not uncommon practice in Des Moines. The cast concrete supports, even a fourth floor fireplace, are visible in the attic.

Starzinger selected the prominent architectural firm of Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson to design his hotel. The Des Moines-based firm dominated the state's architectural profession for thirty years between 1900 and 1930, capitalizing on its Republican contacts. In Des Moines, the firm received the lion's share of the major commissions during the boom period of construction in the early twentieth century. Planned to be fireproof, the Northwestern Hotel married the latest construction techniques (light tan concrete aggregate "bricks" on the ground floor exterior, cast concrete structural system, plumbing laid on absorbant sand, fireproof four-inch gypsum block) with the stately style and use of classical detail typical of Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson.

Despite the fine reputation of the restaurant's Sunday dinners in the 1920's, the hotel endured a long but steady decline, almost from its 1916 inaugural. A factor in its demise may have been changing practices among Fair-goers. With the advent of paved highways and the increase in car ownership, many farmers chose to drive to the Fair for the day and return home that evening. In 1931 the hotel was raided twice and illegal gambling devices, firearms and liquor were confiscated. Otto Starzinger died in 1935 but the Starzinger family continued to own the hotel for many years. During its final decline, the hotel was host to hold-ups and fights, transients and the down-trodden its guests. In 1982 it closed when county officials learned that it was unsupervised. The Northwestern Hotel lay vacant until 1983 when a group of lawyers whose office is in the path of the new state museum purchased the hotel for conversion to office space.

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Significance

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without an entrance.

The hotel is located in a modest commercial section on the city's east side and on the edge of a warehouse district. Walnut Street jogs slightly at the hotel site, and motorists are thus treated to a fuller view of the building than usual. The street angle and the hotel's corner location, unchanged appearance and height render it particularly noticeable, although it is similar in height and materials to neighboring buildings. Small brick commercial buildings of one and two stories and a new office complex covering three separate blocks are nearby and date from the late nineteenth century to the 1980's.

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- R. L. Polk & Co. Des Moines City Directory, 1920. Des Moines: R. L. Polk & Company, 1920.
- Des Moines Plain Talk, 9 September 1915, 11 May 1916, 24 August 1916, 14 March 1935.
- Des Moines Register, 2 March 1935, 31 August 1931, 29 December 1931, 12 March 1982.
- Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson. Blueprints, Northwestern Hotel, Revised August 1915.
- Guest Register from first Northwestern Hotel, 1905-10, and correspondence in possession of Mrs. J. Locke Macomber (niece of Otto Starzinger).
- Interview with Mrs. J. Locke Macomber, July 1983.