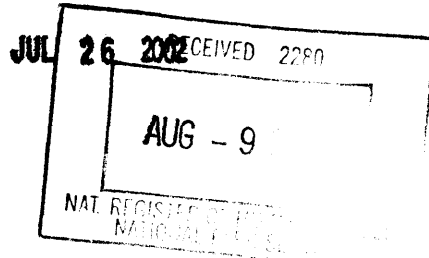


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**



1029

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Grand Opera House

other names/site number Grand Theater

2. Location

street & number 135 8th Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Dubuque [N/A] vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Dubuque code 061 zip code 52004-0632

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).

Doreen Laike *July 26, 2002*
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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Linda McCalland

Date of Action

7/20/02

Grand Opera House
Name of Property

Dubuque, Iowa
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/music facility

Recreation and Culture/theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian/Romanesque/Richardsonian Romanesque

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

roof stone/slate

other _____

Narrative Description

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

Grand Opera House
Name of Property

Dubuque, Iowa
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Architecture

Period of Significance

1890-1952

Significant Dates

1890

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Edbrooke, Willoughby J.

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

7. Narrative Description:

Descriptive Summary:

The Grand Opera House is located in downtown Dubuque, towards the center of the downtown proper. Main Street, formerly the principal street and presently closed off partly as a pedestrian mall, is half a block to the west. The county courthouse, built just two years after the Grand, is several blocks to the southeast. Figure 36 depicts the relationship of the building to the tallest downtown buildings, all of which clustered along Main between 8th and 9th streets. East of the theater there was just one contiguous building, the two-story corner saloon. To the north was a string of frame residences, a duplex and another building that was long used as auxiliary dressing rooms by the opera house company. Visible at the far left, also on Main Street, is the Town Clock Building with its distinctive tower and clock.

The Grand Opera House is an early substantial example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in Dubuque. It is possible that the Grand was the second example of this style in the downtown, the first being the Rider-Wallis Building. The Grand is a relatively early example of the style in Dubuque, the onset of the style being in the very late 1880s. In its massing it mimics an armory of its time period, and it deviates from the stylistic norm in its combination of a Second Empire mansard attic front, which is a common feature found in Dubuque commercial and vernacular architecture. The façade overlays the classical base, column and capital in its fenestration pattern, all applied to a broad, shallow gabled pavilion basic form. Twin armory towers with steeply pitched pyramid roofs and finials define the sides of the pavilion. Narrow flanking side stair towers complete the façade composition. The façade, while decorative in its stone inlay work and carvings, is surprisingly Spartan overall. The brickwork and stone foundation are purposely unified by means of a smooth finish and blended narrow mortar joints. The features of the façade are not carried over to either sidewall. The building stands five stories in height and measures 70x128.

The opera house interior has necessarily been repeatedly and thoroughly remodeled over time. Still much of the original theater interior survives unscathed. This is generally true of the out-of-the way non-public recesses of the theater. The side stairway retain their original surfaces, the walls are still unpainted since they were plastered up in 1890. Larger rooms including the rehearsal hall (fourth floor) and attic storage area (fifth floor or attic) are equally well preserved. The lobby stairways curiously retain their Queen Anne trim work and remain in their original locations. Most importantly, the basic form of the auditorium and the first balcony survive as do the dimensions of Dubuque's largest stage. Two cast iron columns pass upwards from the basement to the attic. Bulges at the third floor level denote the location of the second balcony, now long removed.

Multiple Property Statewide Contextual Association:

The multiple property documentation form "Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940" defines the opera house as a potentially National Register of Historic Places eligible property type and defines integrity requirements for that type. Under Criterion A an eligible opera house must retain "their historic location, setting, and enough of their historic appearance to recall the feeling and association of the period in which they served as an opera house." The Grand retains these three integrity measures. Under Criterion C, no similar list is defined, but the nature of the resource mandates the preservation of interior character defining features in addition to the "basic historic [exterior] appearance. An eligible opera house ideally retains in the same order of relative importance:

"an opera hall, dressing rooms, and box seats. As the most important feature in the hall, the stage should be present but if it is not, at least its footprint and the outline of the proscenium wall or arch should be visible.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

Like the general utility hall, the historic entrance (including stairway if it had one) to that part of the building occupied by the opera hall should be present, and the auditorium should be visible in plan."

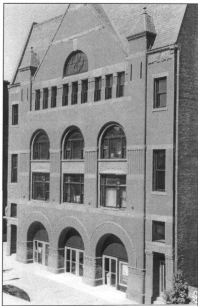


Figure 1: Façade view, from the southeast (photo by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

The Grand Opera House retains all of these elements save for its box seats. Consequently it fulfills the integrity requirements of the statewide context. While the context offers no set definition for what an opera house is, it establishes three phases of opera house development in the state. Phase II opera houses (generally post-dating 1870) were buildings "specifically designed for [live] performances" in contrast to a multi-use hall, and could present a theatrical company with as many as two dozen members. Phase III opera houses are defined by a much greater scale in terms of production size, rather than a chronological time period. Only the largest cities could even attempt to achieve this level. The context notes that Dubuque's earlier major theaters (the Julien Theater, c.1854) were sufficiently ornate and large enough to represent a Phase III opera house. Clearly the Grand, with its enormous scale and stage capacity, represents an excellent example of a Phase III opera house, arguably one of just a few surviving examples in the state. Theater historians Glenn and Poole take issue with the typology utilized in the multiple property document, particularly because no distinction is made between "grand opera houses" and opera houses, an important distinction in their opinion. The Grand, as the name implies, is a grand opera house (Cunning, pp. E-3 to E-7, E-46 to E-48).

Exterior Description:

The Richardsonian Romanesque style was nationally popular between 1888 and 1900, and the Grand dates to the onset of that national appreciation. The hallmark of the Romanesque style is the use of massive combined stone and brick exteriors, with arcades of heavy massive, semi-circular stone arches arrayed across the ground level of the façade, and lesser arcades

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

appearing higher up in the design. Commonly a tri-partite division breaks the façade design into the components of the classical column, the base, column and capital. This arrangement is employed in the Grand.

The façade design employs a broad shallow pavilion that is capped with a gable front dormer. Twin narrow side towers with pyramid roof caps define the sides of the pavilion. Twin slit window openings are cut into the brickwork just below each roof cap, adding to the sense that the design is that of a castle or armory. On either side, plain stair tower extensions complete the plan. These are plainly executed save for ornate single door entryways. Each entryway has a full stone surround and half-length sets of triple stone colonettes with carved stone blocks and caps. The doors are capped with a broad stone jack arch and a thinner rusticated sill line beltcourse set below the square transom opening, which tops each entry. There are full-length windows set between the second and third floor levels, and a half window at the fourth floor level.

The pavilion façade has a triple-arch Richardsonian arcade of brick arches, which are set on raised stone piers and capped with carved cushion capitals. Semi-circular stone surrounds trace the arches. A broad ashlar stone belt course separates the lower two floors and runs just below the windowsill line of the second story. An interesting feature of the façade in general is the uniformly smooth and uninterrupted flow of both the brick and stonework. Edges in the brickwork are softened by the use of quarter round brick. The intent of the designer was to contrast decorative elements with a monolithic front comprised of red brick (St. Louis pressed brick) and reddish stone (Bayfield Red Limestone, red sandstone), and red-tinted mortar. While the design is significant, that significance is not predicated on the ornate detailing of the Grand. In fact the overall design is purposefully understated. When the building was just completed the local newspaper the *Herald* was less than fully impressed when it observed, "It is a noble looking structure, although somewhat plain in its trimmings. It is a monument of local enterprise and is a grand representative of the lively city of Dubuque" (*Herald*, August 15, 1890).

The second and third floor fronts are merged by the architect's use of continuous window openings across the two levels (Figure 2). A second arcade of brick semi-circular arches tops these openings and each arch is of the same width and is set directly above its ground level counterpart. The use of solid limestone panels divides the windows in half. These bear the projecting lettering "GRAND OPERA HOUSE" across the three panels. There are two projecting bays at each side of the second floor which add a horizontal emphasis to the second floor level. Otherwise, the deeply recessed two-story window openings dominate. Sets of eight rubbed brick colonettes flank each of the window openings at the third floor level.



Figure 2: Façade detail (photo by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

Note the nearly invisible arches at this level.



Figure 3: Façade detail (photo by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

The capital component of the façade design (Figure 3) consists of a row of nine small windows, which are centered beneath a Palladian-like half-round window and dated capstone. The windows have an ashlar stone lintel beltcourse and a thicker ashlar stone lintel level. Brick colonette sets, of three or two colonettes flank the upper sashes of these windows. The outermost sets contain three colonettes. The heavy Richardsonian arch (eight rubbed brick rowlock courses) that encloses the Palladian opening springs from two broader support piers which are set within the row of windows. Each pier has a set of four colonettes. Each colonette set is capped with a rusticated cushion capital that is banded at base and cap. The gabled dormer surmounts the Palladian design. Ashlar stone beltcourses cross the gable at the top of the keystone and trace out the gable angles. The Palladian window itself, newly restored, employs four intersecting circles set within a larger one, forming a quatrefoil opening.

The attic front employs a side gable form and a mansard-like roof form. The slate roof has just been restored. The roofline is not otherwise ornamented. The sidewalls step up slightly above the roof plane level. There is a stone finial on the gabled dormer.

In some ways the Grand Opera House deviates from the Richardsonian norm. There is no tower or turret per se, apart from the square cut towers, which are subordinated to the overall massing. The overall design is symmetrical rather than asymmetrical as is the norm for the style. In the case of the Grand, the design was driven by the need to maximize the interior space and particularly the leased offices and storefronts in the front of the plan. Consequently, the façade is starkly vertical and is pushed out to the sidewalk on the lot. The entire façade is perfectly balanced in its fenestration, and the façade is monolithic, lacking recesses. The original plan had a recessed open foyer and the ground level arches were open, but this was the only deference to the style. The Grand lacks the expected hip roof form although it is probable that the hip roof was more associated with Romanesque residential designs. The alleyway location of the building afforded an opportunity to feature corner turrets or the like, but the architect did not take advantage of the opportunity. The opera house company also eliminated a proposed wrap-around continuation of the façade stonework and brickwork, in order to reduce building costs (McAlester, pp. 300-07).

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figures 4 and 5: Left, east sidewall, Right back or north wall (photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

The Side and Rear Elevations:

The east sidewall (Figure 4) was executed as a party wall. There is just one small window at the fourth floor level, which lights the stairway. Three full-height in wall chimneys project from the wall plane in the south half of the wall. The profile of the front Mansard attic and rear fly gallery penthouse can be readily seen. This sidewall was erected separately from any adjoining building.

The rear wall has more fenestration (Figure 5). There is a raised ashlar stone foundation and a single door in the northeast corner. It is probable that this door led to a frame scenery storage shed that was north of the theater, set against this wall. There are two full-height windows with segmental brick arches and double-hung sash (4/4 lights). The special restored feature (Figures 6, 8) is the two scenery/drop pass-through doors, which are paired on either side of the northwest rear corner. The taller door exits to the alley and served the larger drops, which were slid into the back stage and hoisted into the fly gallery. Three third floor windows (4/4 lights) light the base of the fly gallery at the third floor level on the rear wall. The present doors are modern replacements, and no longer open into the back stage.

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 6 and 7: Left, west side wall, view to south, Right, same, view to north
(photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

The alleyway west sidewall is more fully fenestrated (Figures 6 and 7). The main building chimney projects from the wall and it forms the southwest corner of the fly gallery. Windows and the drop entry door light the stage and fly gallery on the ground, first and second floor levels. In the middle of the auditorium fenestration accounts for rows of doors and windows on the ground, first and second balcony levels, and the attic level. A cast iron fire escape exits from the first balcony level. All of these openings have stone lintels and segmental brick arches and all originally featured iron fire shutters (all removed, hinges survive). The stairwell in the southwest corner of the plan has single centered windows on the ground level and between floors on the landing levels. There are two small windows at the attic level. There are also three 4/4 north side windows and a door set along the north side of the attic level. There is a single door set into the south wall of the rooftop fly gallery penthouse.

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

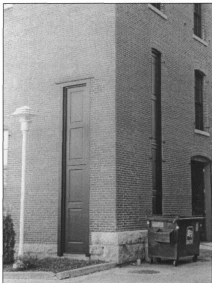


Figure 8: Special stage doors for drops and scenery
(photo by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

All of these elevations are laid up with locally produced common brick. The foundation, which is exposed toward the rear of the plan, is of local yellow colored limestone.

General Plan Comments:

The overall plan measures 128x70. Along the alley, a well room and furnace room intrude beyond the foundation and into the alleyway. A series of chambers also projects beneath the front sidewalk (Figure 9). Within the plan there is a stone-bearing wall that supports the wall that divides the entry and main foyers. A row of substantial brick columns supports the curved north wall of the foyer. Two primary cast iron columns pass from the basement to the attic floor level. These support the surviving balcony and originally supported the second balcony (non-extant) as well.

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

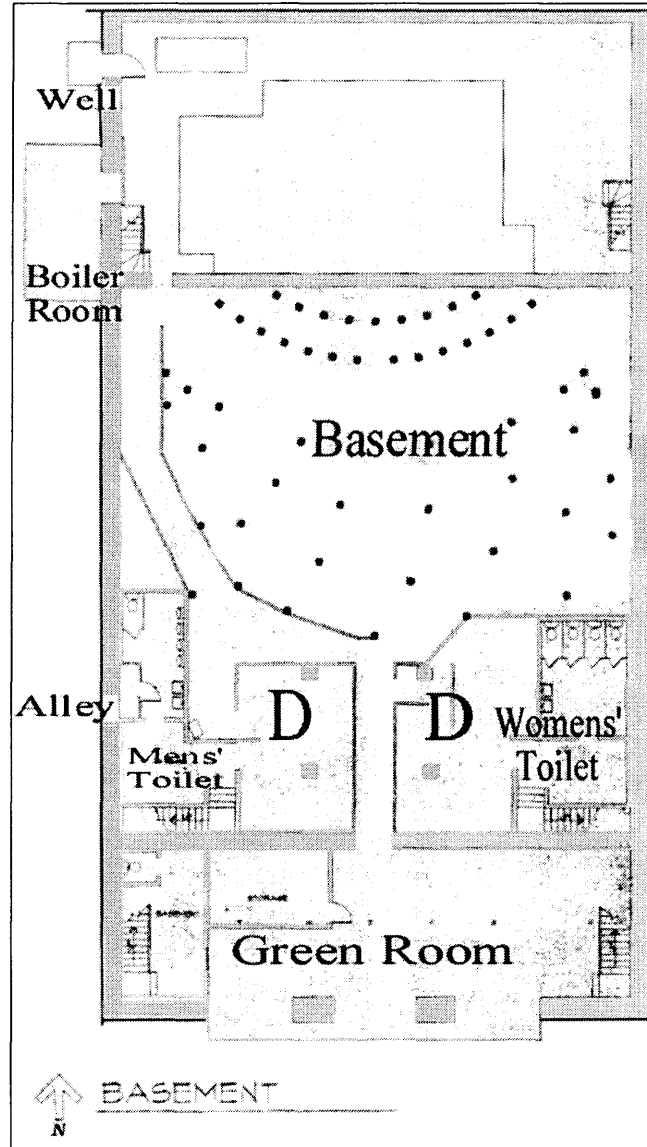


Figure 9: Basement plan, c.1970 (scale 1/8" = 1'0")

Interior Layout and Description:

Figure 9 depicts the basement layout. The "Green Room" was long used as a dressing room. The letter "D's" locate two later dressing rooms. Grayed lines locate load-bearing walls. Black circles locate the heavy timber columns which support the auditorium floor. The closely spaced semi-circular columns identify the former recessed orchestra pit. This area was raised up in the 1930 renovation. Stairways lead to the main floor from the bathrooms and from either side of the stage basement.

Figure 10 (below) depicts one of a number of heavy brick piers which support the inner curved wall of the foyer. Heavy timber beams rest on these supports. The same image also shows the round vent holes in the floor of the basement ceiling. Floor plugs have covered up the location of vents in the floor of the auditorium, beneath the balcony. A passive air ventilation

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

system drew air down through these holes into an air cleaner/air pump system set beneath the back stage. Figure 11 shows a cast iron floor support, the venting system and the stone wall that supports the wall that divides the auditorium/ foyer from the front of the plan. Figure 12 shows the door that leads into the air handling system.

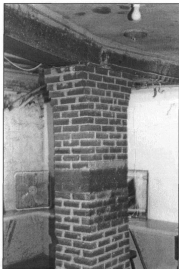


Figure 10: Principal brick support column, basement, note metal ceiling vent
(photo by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

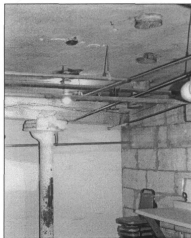


Figure 11: Cast iron basement column, stone interior wall, ceiling vent system
(photo by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

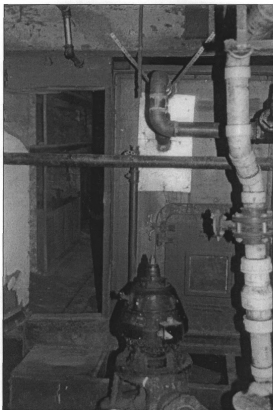


Figure 12: Ventilation unit beneath stage, view to east (photo by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

First Floor Description and Plan:

Figure 13 depicts the main floor plan. The remarkable feature of this plan is the absence of a large lobby. There is a narrow, curved foyer that is quite small in size and there is a centered entrance lobby. Originally, this entrance lobby was all the smaller and was possibly directly integrated into the foyer (note the absence of a bearing wall between the foyer door sets). The areas to the sides of the entrance lobby were leased storefronts and were not used for theater purposes (that to the west is labeled "the pompador." The plan locates the non-extant late 1960s concession stand. The ticket office is the current concession stand (Figure 16). The balcony levels were served with their own small lobbies, and this might explain why the ground floor lobby/foyer area was so meager. It was also in the interest of the theatre management to minimize lobby volume and maximize seating and leased spaces.

Stairways lead upstairs from each of the exterior front side entrances (Figures 14-15). The west staircase is broader and was likely primary in function, being used to access upper level offices. The basement level toilet room stairs also come up in line with these ascending stairs. In the foyer, matching staircases run east and west, turn at the sidewalls and continue north to

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

the balcony level. There are four auditorium aisles, the outermost of which lead to the stage via short runs of side stairs. Two cast iron columns, darkened, support the balcony above. There are three west exits, one from the stage area, and two from the auditorium proper. Basement stairs rise to the stage on either side.

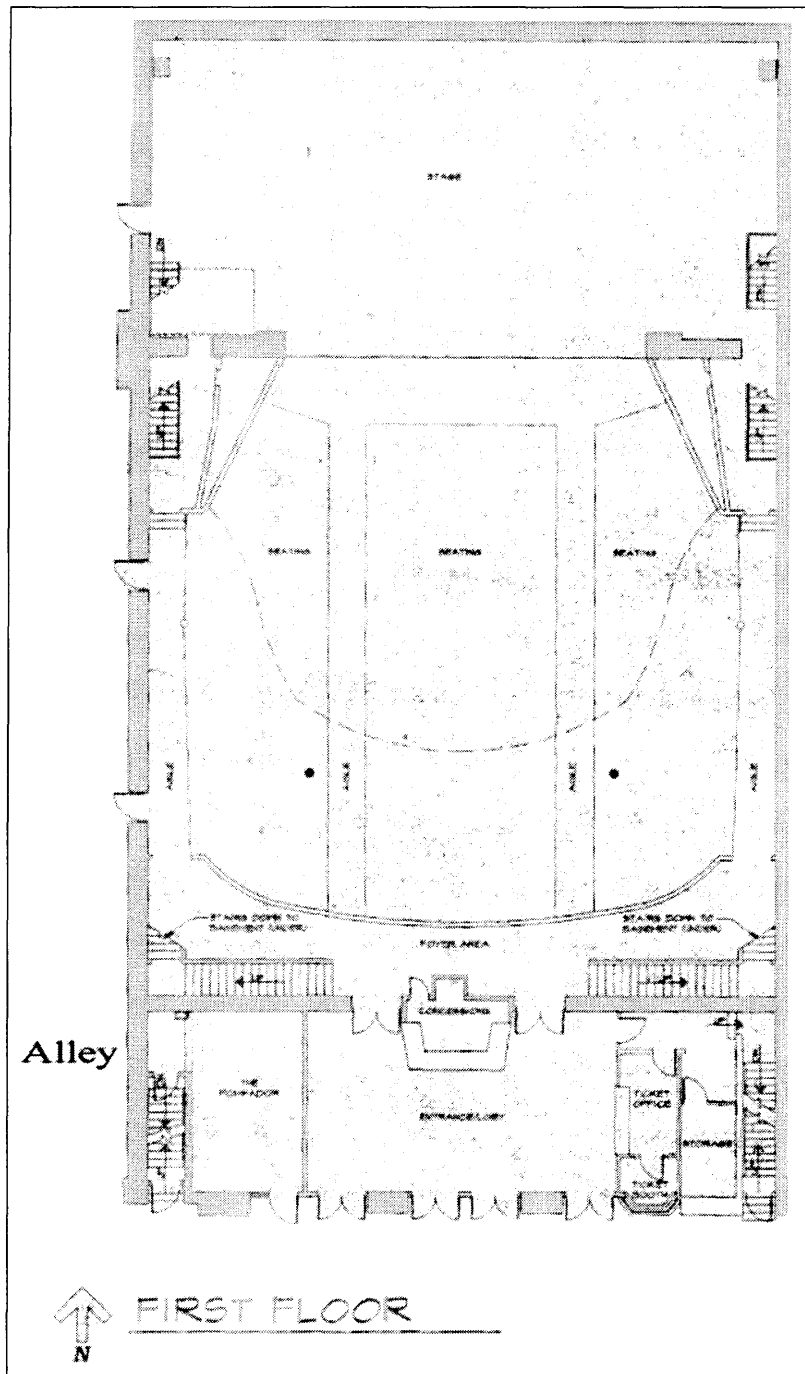


Figure 13: First Floor plan, c.1970 (scale 1/8" = 1'0")

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figures 14 and 15: Left, stairway detail, Right, lobby viewed to east from atop stairway
(photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)



Figure 16: c.1960s foyer concession stand, note botanical motif on walls

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 17: World War II (1943) foyer displays, note Art Deco wall treatments, "Dogs for Defense"

Figure 17 shows the Art Deco motif added to the entrance lobby in 1930. Multi-paneled Colonial style doors separated the lobby and foyer areas. There is now a double door in the wall shown in this image, connecting the lobby and former storefront area to the west.

The Stage:

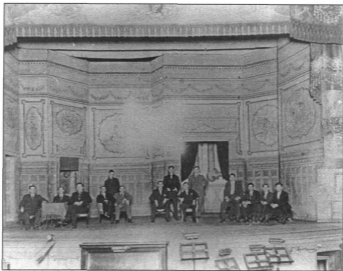


Figure 18: Historic stage and orchestra pit photo, undated.

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Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 19: 1930s stage remodeling



Figure 20: Current stage appearance

Figures 18-20 depict the evolution of the stage area. Figure 18 depicts the sheer scale, particularly the depth of the stage. Figure 19 shows the stage and sidewalls after the 1930 conversion of the theater to moving pictures. Note the balcony balustrade, now replaced by a solid metal front. The angled sidewalls, which flank the stage front, originally housed twin boxes, and it is possible that the wall decoration dates back to the original construction. With film conversion, this area

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

contained the sound system. Figure 20 is a current photo. The stage appears smaller but this is due to the camera angle. The sidewalls are also distorted, the arched openings remain from the 1930 reworking.

The stage dimensions were as follows:

Proscenium Opening, 35 feet wide, 25 feet high
Footlights to Back Wall, 32 feet
Footlights to Curtain, 2 feet
Height to Fly Galleries, 22 feet in clear
Distance between sidewalls, 70 feet
Distance between Fly Galleries, 46.5 feet
Distance to rigging loft, 70 feet
Distance to Fly Girders, 65 feet
Distance between Fly Girders, 40 feet
Sets of lines, 60

This was Dubuque's largest stage, and it survives with these dimensions. The stage was notable for its extensive depth as well as its width and height.

Second Floor Description and Plan:

On this level (Figure 22) there originally were three leased office spaces, the two to the west having been combined. The load-bearing wall that separates the auditorium and the front of the plan continues through this level, and there is a centered doorway between the balcony and the central office area. Note that there is no provision for a lobby on this level, the balcony is backed up to the internal support wall. The corner stairs serviced only this balcony, the second balcony having its own egress. In the present plan, doors exit to both front stair halls south from the landing of the lobby stairs. There is a ticket cage at the east stair landing on this level, an indication that patrons heading to the second balcony likely entered using the ground level door on that side of the plan (Figure 22).

Third Floor Description and Plan:

This level (Figure 25) originally contained theater offices and a small lobby/lounge for the second balcony. The main corner stairs primarily serviced the patrons of this highest balcony. Today two projection rooms, a larger west room and a smaller east room, have replaced the original layout. There is a hallway that runs south of these rooms, and the third floor windows front on this hallway. The projection rooms are self-contained with frame fireproofed walls due to the combustible nature of early movie film.

Two cast iron columns (darkened, Figure 23) still in place, with cross bracing to the south interior support wall, supported the third balcony. No plan for this balcony has been found and its seating capacity is undetermined. Figure 24 depicts the 1930 seating arrangement and the first balcony. There are sealed windows on the west sidewall and an exit door, which serviced this level.

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

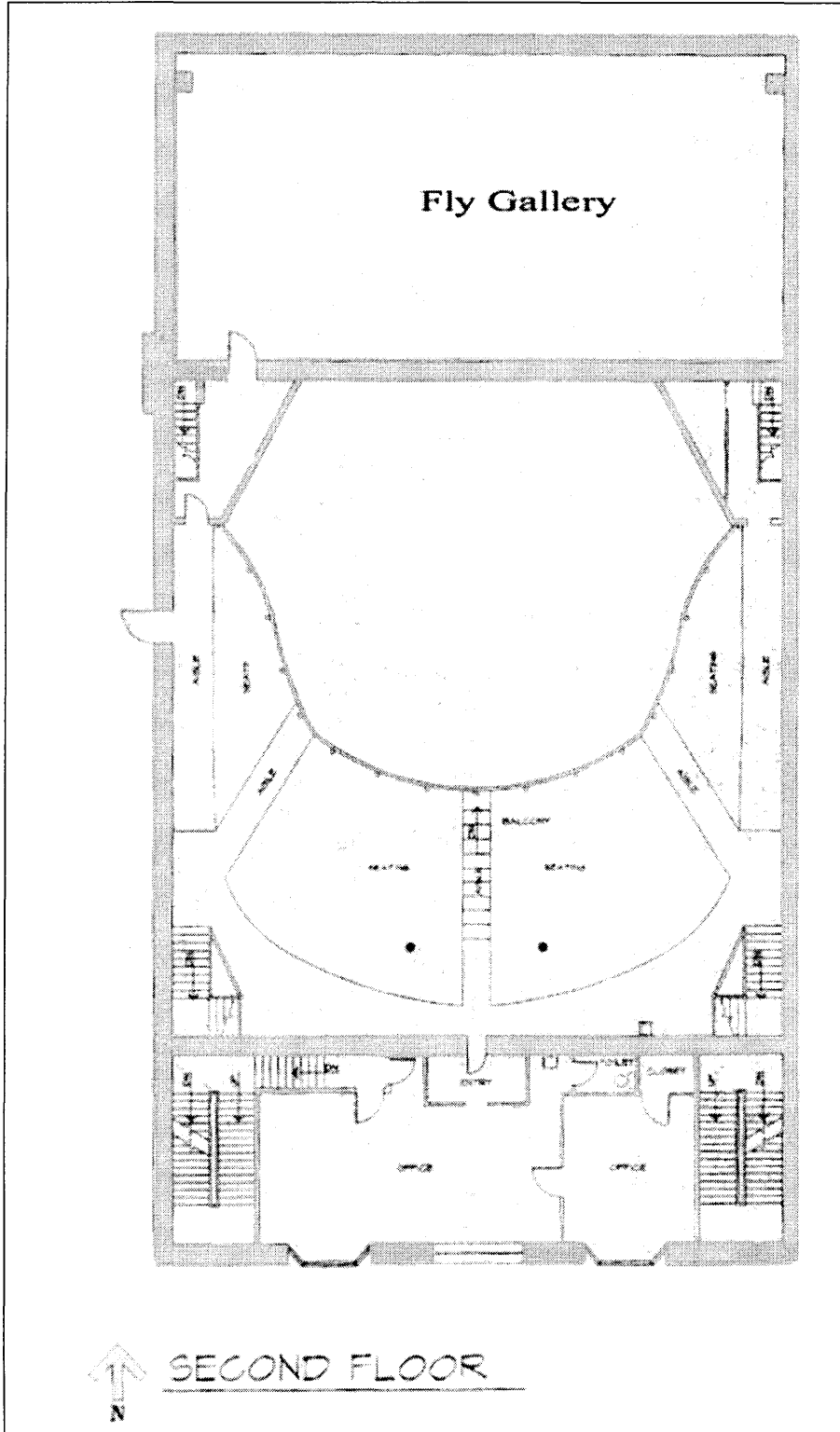


Figure 21: Second Floor plan, c.1970 (scale 1/8" = 1'0")

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 22: East stairway, balcony level, note ticket window in door
(photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)



Figure 23: Balcony level and column supports for second balcony
(photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

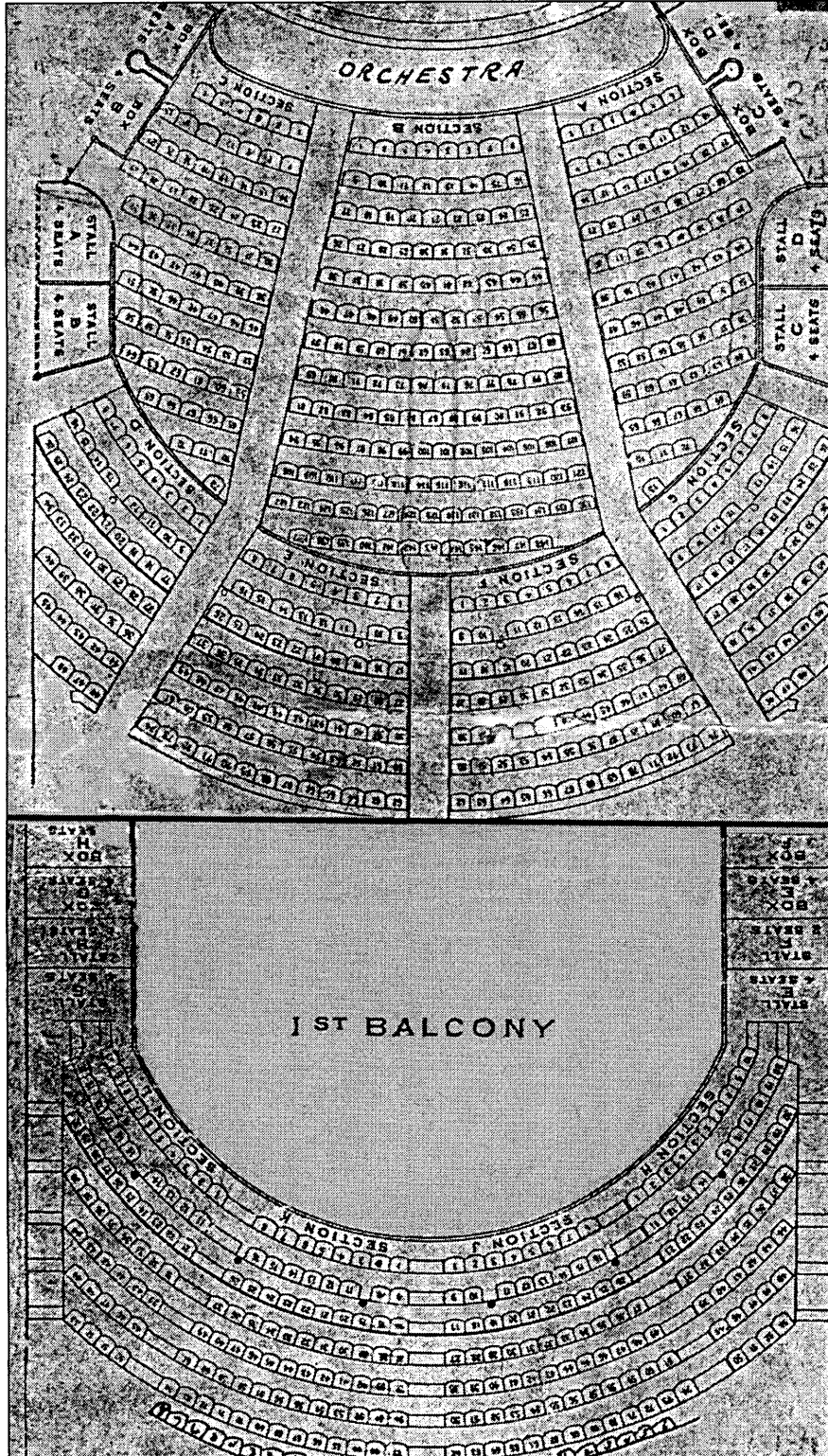


Figure 24: c.1930 auditorium and balcony plan (no second balcony, stalls and boxes retained)

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Grand Opera House/Theater

Dubuque County, Iowa

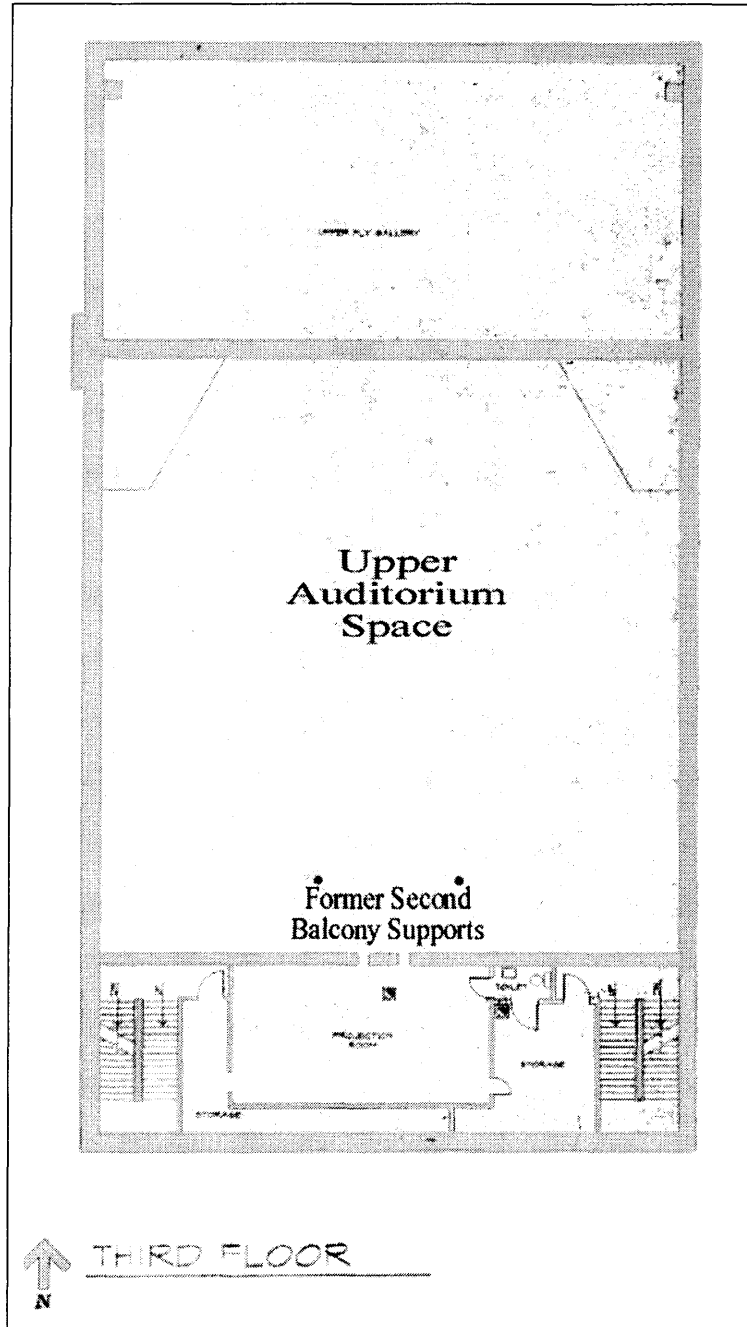


Figure 25: Third Floor plan (scale 1/8" = 1'0")

Fourth Floor Description and Plan:

This level (Figure 26) indicates that the front of the plan is infilled by a single large rehearsal hall and two square corner storage areas. This was a leased space originally and likely was only rarely used by the theater. The corner staircases change their configuration above this level, adopting a narrower four-sided arrangement with an open stairwell. The east

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Grand Opera House/Theater

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staircase ends at this floor level. Figure 27 depicts the stairs above this level. The stairs retain their original varnish and the walls remain unfinished with bare plaster. Figure 28 shows the south wall of the hall, with the newly restored Paladian window and window row beneath it. Note that the base of the attic Mansard roof partly intrudes into the headroom of the hall.

A raised small wall hatch in the northwest corner of the hall leads to the attic level north above the auditorium. Inside the attic are three massive composite timber and iron support trusses (Warren truss) which support both the auditorium floor and the roof. The auditorium roof has a hip form. Originally there was a large gas lighted central glass ceiling light or dome that was centered on the auditorium ceiling. The raised base (Figure 31) from which the dome was suspended survives. The fly gallery brick wall closes off the attic level to the north (Figure 30).

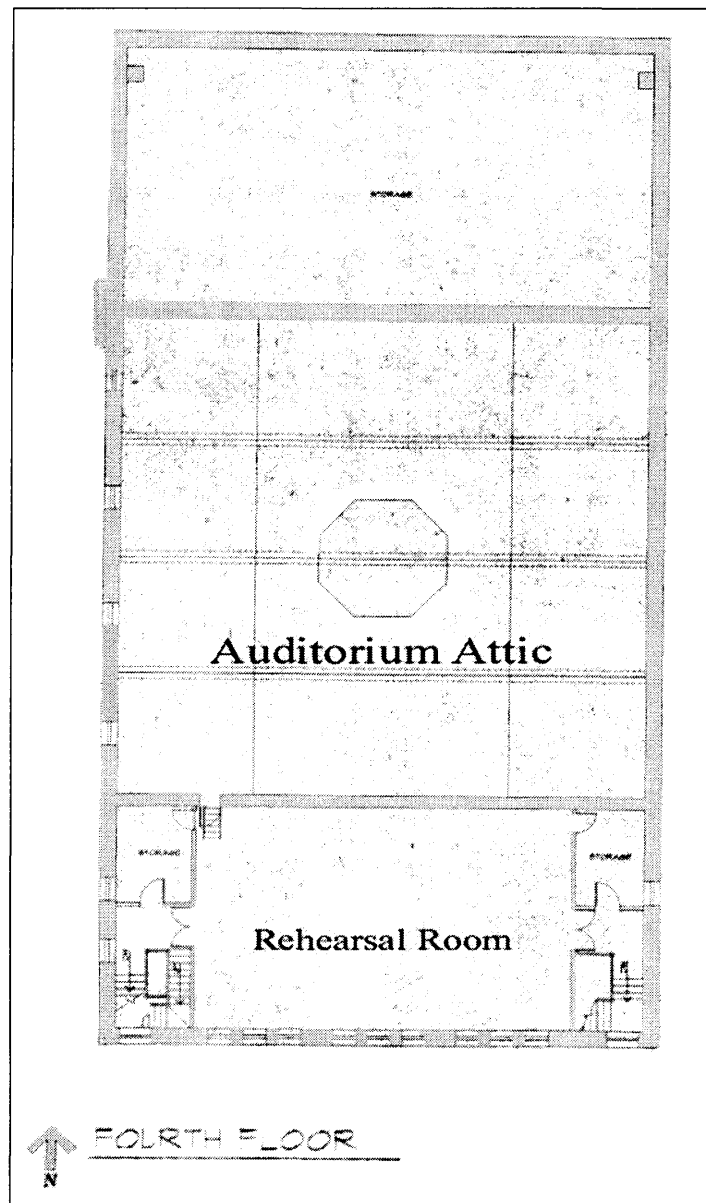


Figure 26: Fourth Floor plan (scale 1/8" = 1'0")

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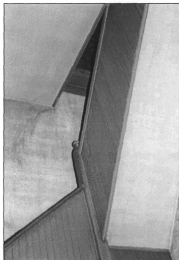


Figure 27: Fourth floor stairway to attic storage room, note wainscot and unpainted plastered walls (photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)



Figure 28: Rehearsal room, view to southeast (photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

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Figures 29 and 30: Left, attic truss juncture with west sidewall, note the angled auditorium ceiling below
Right, three attic trusses, note mortise cuts and steel compression bars, view north
(photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

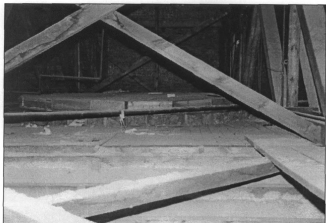


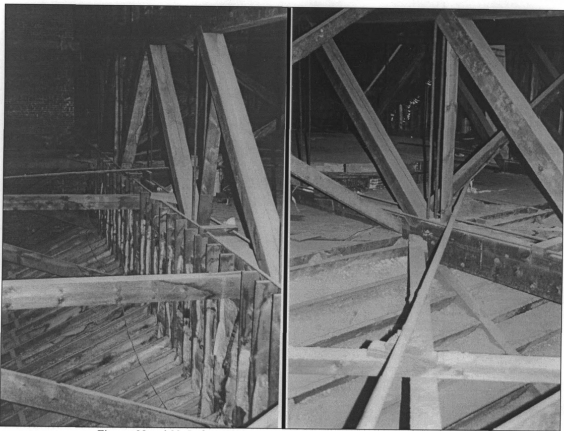
Figure 31: "104 Gas Jet Burner" Chandelier suspension base, cross-bracing, auditorium attic, view east
(photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

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Figures 32 and 33: Left, north truss, note the angled auditorium ceiling below,
Right, cross bracing between trusses, view southeast
(photos by James Jacobsen, August 2001)

Fifth Floor Description and Plan:

The uppermost floor (Figure 34) comprises the Fly Gallery penthouse and the attic storage room in the front of the plan, and the intervening rooftop. Single doors allow egress between these two rooftop structures. There is a raised sidewall.

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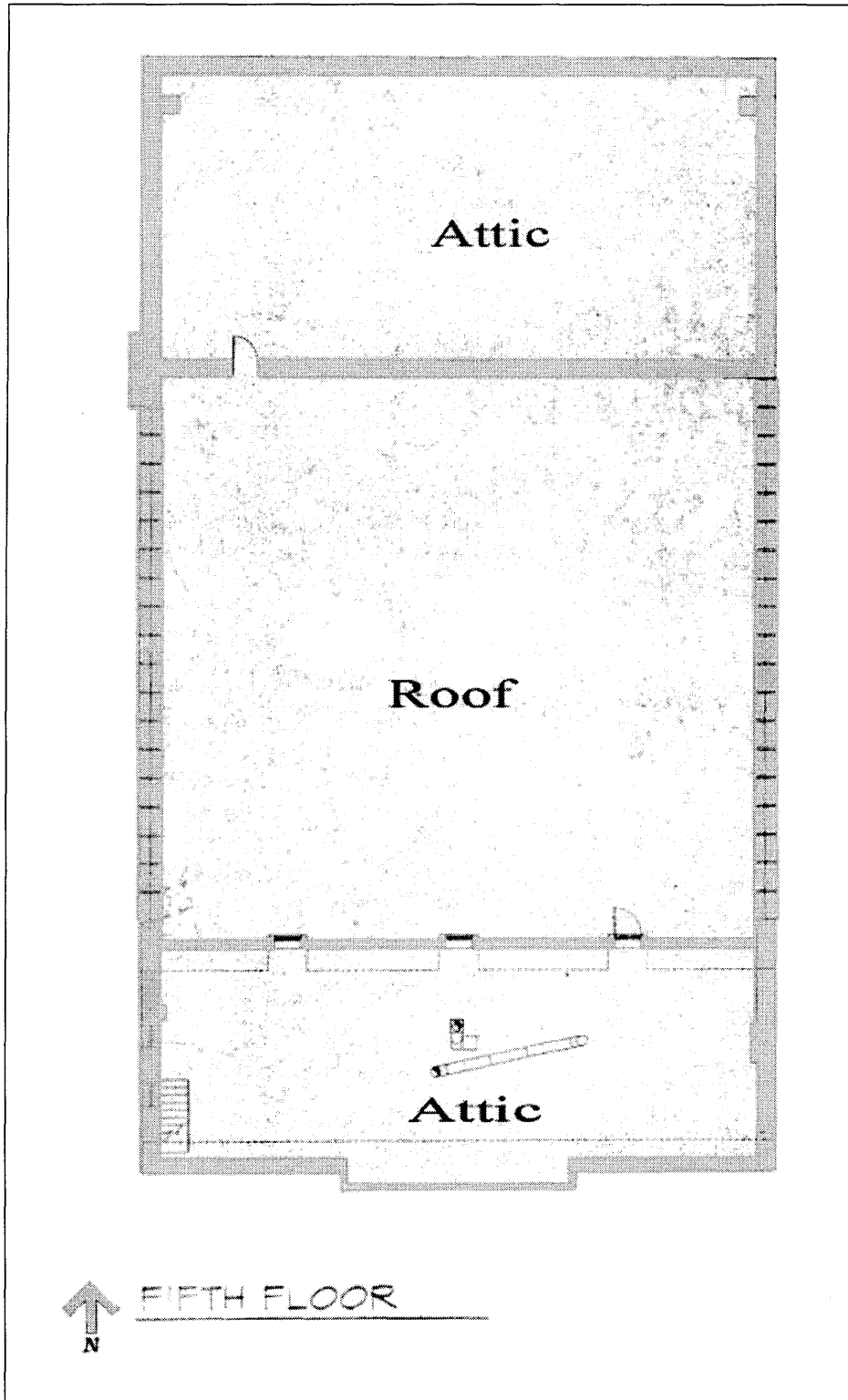


Figure 34: Fifth Floor plan (scale 1/8" = 1'0")

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Figure 35: c.1912 bird's eye view to northwest (photo taken from the courthouse roof)
Note the penthouse atop the Fly Gallery

Figure 35 shows the Grand in its more or less contemporary setting, viewed to the northeast. The Iowa Street properties beginning at 8th Street were an insurance (later a bank) building, a duplex, row houses (later Liccardi Gallery) and the city's fire headquarters.

Physical Changes Since Construction:

Significant changes to the Grand are listed in chronological order:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 1889-90: | Original construction, porte cochere added late in planning process, delete alley side stonework ornamentation "save for returns," abandon plan for separate heating plant |
| 1894: | \$1,342 in unspecified improvements |
| 1901: | Interior remodeling, \$1,421 expended |
| 1904: | \$3,915 in unspecified improvements |
| 1905: | \$1,106 in unspecified improvements, buy corner lot to east |
| 1906: | dress rehearsal changes \$1,513, other changes \$1,029, adjacent frame residence acquired as dressing room. |

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- 1907 fire escape \$389, repairs \$307, boiler replacement or expansion \$1,510, other \$513
1908 Two story saloon built on corner to east, replacing billboard lot
1910 new scenery and improvements, \$3,061, north side storage shed present by this year
1915: \$1,760 in unspecified improvements, films first shown, being advertised by a placard hung from the porte cochere.
1916: second year of motion pictures, equipment \$1,755, wiring for building \$558
1917: \$415 in unspecified improvements
1918: \$969 in unspecified improvements
1930: interior completely remodeled, orchestra pit filled in, second balcony removed, stage straightened ventilation system installed, new marquee, basement bathrooms added? Art Deco interior in entrance lobby enlarged and entrance doors infilled.



Figure 36: c.1970 aerial view to northeast

- 1950s: Floral wall décor in entrance lobby and foyer
1959: Building at 855-57 Iowa to east demolished for parking lot.
1961: replacement sewer line
1960: 1930's marquee reconfigured with new lettering and new light system by Larry Weitz Sign System.
1962: west wall reinforced with injected cement grout, curved screen rebuilt, new carpet
1964: façade covered with enameled metal panel front, new marquee or old one remodeled, second level added
1967: new concession stand in entrance lobby, new seats on ground level
1968: sell corner lot to east to City of Dubuque, balcony floor re-laid, re-seated and carpeted.
1988: Beginning of restoration efforts on a small basis,
1997: Removal of marquee, façade and roof repair
1998-2001 The porcelain enamel paneling, which covered much of the façade, was removed. The building gained a new slate roof, guttering, downspouts, coping and flashing. The masonry and stonework was cleaned and repointed (Phase I).
2002+ Public entrances restoration. Lobby, foyer, stage and fly-space restoration (all Phase II). Auditorium, rehearsal hall and offices restoration (Phase III).

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8. Significance Statement:

Significance Summary:

The Grand Opera House is Dubuque's only surviving grand opera house and it boasts the largest stage ever built in that city. For 30 years the Grand served the "carriage trade," offering the best of legitimate theater to the city and surrounding region. The Grand is architecturally significant on the national level (Criterion C) because it is one of the best designs of the nationally significant Chicago architect Willoughby James Edbrooke. The Grand is the only surviving grand opera house Edbrooke design and it was a part of the design portfolio that won his appointment as Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury in 1891, just a year following the completion of this theater. The Grand's design is representative of Edbrooke's smooth exterior wall interpretation of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Indeed, Edbrooke appears to have designed the first several examples of this style in Dubuque, beginning in 1888 with the Rider-Wallis Block. The Grand is historically significant (Entertainment/Recreation, Criterion A) on the local level due to its long time direct association with the legitimate theater in Dubuque between 1890 and 1928. This theater allowed for the staging of exceptionally large scale and high quality shows. The Grand is representative of what Dubuque's promoters felt the city deserved and demanded and its provision through a joint stock company symbolizes an effort to uplift the cultural life and the quality of life of the city and its residents. Dubuque enjoyed an exceptionally fortunate position vis-a-vis the legitimate theater and was the only city of its size to be so favored, with the best traveling companies visiting the city as they used it as a key railroad hub to reach major cities to the north, west and south. Finally the Grand represents a historic preservation success story. This landmark building with its high level of historic integrity was saved and is being restored by the same use for which it was first built, live stage entertainment. The historic building, its maturing cultural program, and its remarkable and unparalleled surviving historical documentation (opera house minutes, scrapbooks, play bills) combine to make the Grand Opera House a national treasure.

Architectural Significance:

Chicago-based architect Willoughby J. Edbrooke (1843-1896) was a nationally significant architect for four reasons. First, he was one of just 17 architects honored to be appointed Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury between 1836 and 1839. During his tenure, April 1891-May 1893, Edbrooke oversaw the construction of the first Ellis Island immigration complex, the government buildings at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and a total of 44 new buildings and 42 building remodelings. Most notable among his new designs were the "Old" Post Office on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., and major federal courthouses, customs houses and post office buildings in St. Paul, Milwaukee, New York. Edbrooke's appointment reflected the regional emergence of a Midwestern (Chicago) dominated new national architecture and Edbrooke was the first Midwestern appointee. As much an administrator, Edbrooke modernized the operations of his office, and protected it from private sector pressures to substitute individual architects for a centralized federal design model. Edbrooke's appointment was very much a national recognition of his private sector corpus of design work. Also significant was Edbrooke's ability to utilize an impressive national Congressional support base to obtain this appointment (Jacobsen, pp.1-56).

Second, Edbrooke's lifetime of work was conducted in at least ten states located in the Midwest, the West and the South. Many of his best commissions, scattered across the country, have been judged to be nationally significant, and consequently his career transcends any individual state design context. Further research into his earliest years of practice, 1871-78, will further enhance his claim to having produced nationally significant designs across the country. Over forty major educational and institutional commissions, including several state capital buildings, designed during these early years, remain to be identified and these were the basis for his selection to his best early works at Denver and Notre Dame. Edbrooke's most significant Chicago design work, no doubt included some of these key buildings. Finally, further research will illuminate Edbrooke's western design work. As early as 1881, Edbrooke was said to be "certainly one of the ablest [architects] in the

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West” and *Architecture & Building*, in 1891, lauded his reputation for school building designs and the fact that he was “well known in the West.” The strong western Congressional political support for Edbrooke bespeaks a well-developed Western reputation as an architect. Edbrooke leveraged a series of increasingly more significant commissions and public appointments on his developing design reputation. His initial 1870s work as noted, secured the commission for the Tabor Grand Opera House (1878-79), and the Tabor work helped Edbrooke secure the commission to rebuild the Notre Dame campus in 1879. These commissions helped him to prevail in the competition for the Georgia State Capitol (1884-85). These and his work with school designs resulted in Edbrooke’s appointment as Building Commissioner for the City of Chicago (1887-89), and his corpus of work through 1891, including the Grand, led to his federal appointment as Supervising Architect (*Notre Dame Scholastic*, March 4, 1881; *Architecture & Building*, April 18, 1891; Jacobsen, pp. 1-56).

Third, Edbrooke made substantial contributions to the evolution and promotion of the Romanesque and Renaissance Revival styles in the Midwest and nationally as Supervising Architect. His work was representative of a sub-school of those styles that emphasized a smooth, uninterrupted and light exterior wall plane treatment. Edbrooke was equally versatile in adopting the Classical Revival style and other modern emerging styles. His last designs, both as Supervising Architect and in his final private practice, reflects a growing use of and confidence with that style. Edbrooke was innovative in his design work and many of his best works were credited with modern innovations and that his innovations of the 1870s were later followed by his peers. Edbrooke advocated on behalf of more substantial construction to combat fire-induced collapse and he promoted the adoption of fire safety features in theater design (the Grand design exemplifies this concern and commitment). In preparation for finalizing his Tabor Opera House design, Edbrooke and Governor Tabor toured all of the major new opera houses in the Eastern cities, this being a measure of his pre-design research efforts. In his large city designs Edbrooke was an early user of the elevator and his Rider-Wallis building in Dubuque was the first example of the use of a composition type roof (Jacobsen, pp. 1-56).

Fourth, Edbrooke was significant for his role in the maturation of the architectural profession in the Midwest. While Edbrooke was an early member of both the American Institute of Architects (a Fellow) and the Western Association of Architects, his career is also representative of the increasing specialization of his profession. Early on, Edbrooke focused on educational and institutional design work, particularly public buildings, courthouses and state capitals. This emphasis increasingly took him away from the Chicago commercial building design venue. Edbrooke was capable of designing tall buildings, his tallest commission being a nine-story apartment in Chicago, and it appears that in his earlier years, Edbrooke was involved in major design work in the Chicago downtown. His specialization led to Edbrooke’s development of skills in rapidly designing massive and very complex buildings such as those in Atlanta or at Notre Dame. Edbrooke was as much sought after as a building superintendent as a designer and the two functions served him well. Again, his Supervising Architect’s appointment was a national recognition of these two skills.

Biographical and Design Overview:

Willoughby James Edbrooke was born September 3, 1843, in Deerefield, Lake County, Illinois, and was the son of English-born contractor Robert J. (1809-?) Edbrooke. Two brothers, Frank E. Edbrooke (1840-1921) and George H. Edbrooke (1837-1894) were notable architects, as was Harry W. J. Edbrooke (1873-1946), the son of Willoughby Edbrooke (Jacobsen, pp. 1-3).

Willoughby Edbrooke was largely self taught, particularly in the contracting profession. He worked in and studied under a number of unidentified Chicago architects during the middle 1860s. He started his own contracting business in 1868 and was solely working as an architect, on his own, as early as 1877. From 1879 through 1893, Edbrooke partnered with Franklin Pierce Burnham (1853-1909). Burnham, an architect, was the business partner, while Edbrooke did the design work,

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save for when he was working under a public appointment. Burnham was most likely greatly involved in the design of the Georgia State Capitol building, but otherwise was always of secondary importance to his partner, Edbrooke. Dubuque sources make no reference to Burnham with regard to the design of the Grand Opera House (Jacobsen, p. 4).

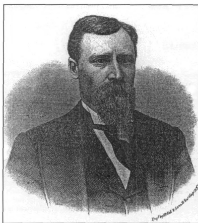


Figure 37: Edbrooke lithograph, 1876
(The United States Biographical Dictionary, Illinois Volume, p. 686)

The general career sequence of Edbrooke's professional work has already been summarized above. Suffice it to say that Edbrooke exhibited extraordinary capabilities to quickly design massive and complex buildings and he commonly worked on multiple major projects at the same time. Edbrooke was also noted for his ingratiating personality and this endeared him to his clients. Early on, Edbrooke obtained an opportunity to do important Western design work, apparently along the line of the Union Pacific Railroad. His partner Burnham was briefly living in California in 1879, an indication that both were working together in the west. His reputation for major works between 1877 and 1879, and his work in the west led to his designing the first two high style commercial buildings in Denver for Colorado Lieutenant Governor Horace Tabor, the Tabor Block (1888) and the Tabor Grand Opera House (1879) (Jacobsen, pp. 6-10).

The Notre Dame campus burned in April 1879 and Edbrooke prevailed in a national competition to plan replacement buildings before the fall term. The Main Building and a series of subordinate ones were completed in 90 days. Edbrooke later added three other major campus buildings and the whole campus district has been deemed to be National Historic Landmark eligible by the National Park Service. Major private commissions followed but it was winning the Georgia State Capitol design competition that made Edbrooke a national name. The competition was juried by noted New York architect George B. Post in 1883. Most of the most significant commissions date to the mid-to late 1880s. Edbrooke had notable near misses in several other design competitions. He placed second in a competition for a replacement Chicago City Hall and was bested by Burnham & Root in a design contest for the Kansas City Exchange Building in 1886. Fifty-three architectural firms participated, Edbrooke successively survived cuts to 14 and then five competitors (Jacobsen, p. 19).

Edbrooke's appointment as Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury was based on ten of his commissions. These were the Georgia State Capitol, Atlanta; the Kane County Court House, Geneva, Illinois; the Tabor Grand Opera House, Denver; the Tabor Office Block, Denver; the Mining Exposition Building, Denver; the "Notre Dame Indiana University [Main

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Buildings;" St. Mary's, Notre Dame University; Calvary Baptist Church, Kansas City, Missouri; the Amateur Athletics Club House and Lyceum Theater, Memphis; and the Grand Opera House, Dubuque. Photos of a number of these follow. The two Tabor buildings are non-extant (Commissions list, Record Group 56, Entry 210, Box 173, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland).



Figure 38: Grand Opera House, Denver, 1879-1880 (courtesy, Denver Public Library)

Note the striking similarities in design between the Tabor (non extant) and Grand opera houses, despite a ten-year separation in their designs. These are the only know Willoughby opera house designs so that might account for the substantial reuse of elements. Note the use of separate hip roof corner turrets on the main tower roof base.



Figure 39: Kane County Courthouse (1892), Romanesque Revival style

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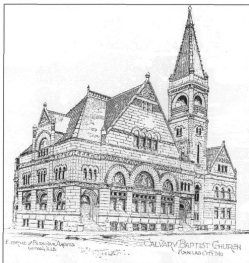


Figure 40: Calvary Baptist Church, Kansas City, Missouri
(Building Budget, March 1888)

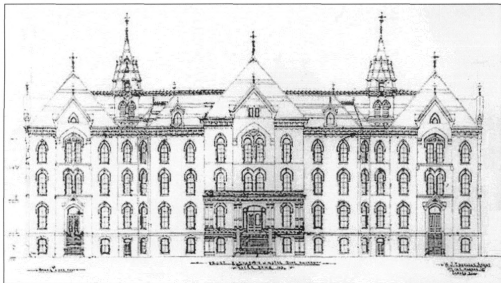


Figure 41: Notre Dame Main Hall Elevation (courtesy <http://lamb.archives.nd.edu/photos>)

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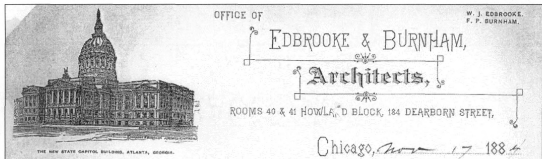


Figure 42: Georgia State Capitol, Office Letterhead, Edbrooke and Burnham, 1884
(Courtesy Notre Dame Archives, UPEL 27/4)



Figure 43: Amateur Athletic Association Building and Lyceum Theater, Memphis
(*Inland*, June 1892)

Edbrooke's Iowa Context:

Edbrooke's first known Iowa commission was in 1881 for S. B. Gardiner's Clinton Iowa residence, a brown stone valued at \$25,000. In 1888, Edbrooke designed the four story Rider-Wallis overall factory and dry goods wholesale warehouse Block at Seventh and Locust, in Dubuque (\$37,000). The building featured a Brock Automatic Patent elevator and the city's first composition roof (the local account stated "Nearly all the large wholesale houses of Chicago have composition roofs"). The Grand Opera House in Dubuque followed a year later and Edbrooke designed a second three-story store and office building of pressed brick and terra cotta, for John V. Rider of Dubuque (\$25,000). Under the auspices of his role as Supervising Architect, Edbrooke designed or completed federal buildings at Fort Dodge (post office, 1891), Cedar Rapids (post office, 1891), Davenport (court house, 1892) and Sioux City (courthouse and post office, 1892). The last named, pictured below, was almost completely demolished, only the tower remainin (*Inland Architect*, December 1884; December 1890).

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Figure 44: United States Courthouse and Post Office, Sioux City (1892) (largely demolished)

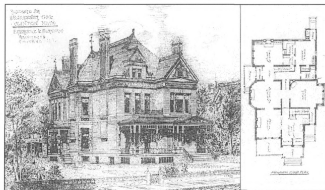


Figure 45: S. B. Gardiner House, Clinton Iowa, Edbrooke & Burnham (*Inland*, December 1884)

The Grand Opera House's Architectural Significance in Dubuque, Iowa:

The opening of this fine new building should mark an era in Dubuque. It is by far the finest and largest edifice of its character ever erected in the city, and it is not excelled in the state. Its erection has been in progress for over a year. It has been carefully constructed with a view solely to the purposes for which it is to be used. Its exterior is commanding and its interior is superb.

The Herald, August 10, 1890

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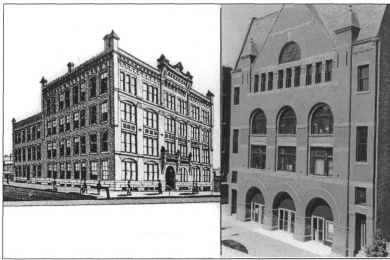
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The Grand was built between 1889 and 1890, dates, which place it very early in the timeframe of popularity, which is ascribed to the Romanesque or Richardsonian Romanesque style. The Grand's design was compared and contrasted with the Rider Wallis business block, an impressive four-story office block just completed. A comparison of the two buildings shows the Rider Wallis block to have been an important transitional design.

The Rider Wallis building was very similar to the Grand's design. Both had a central porte cochere feature and both had a tri-partite division of the façade design, a base, a linked second and third floor (pilasters with recessed intervening wall panels between the window sets) and a capital. Both designs had square-cut windows on its fourth floor level and both had rounded third floor window lintels, those on the Grand being much more Romanesque. Yet another common feature was the employment of square-cut towers with hip roof caps and finials. On the Rider Wallis building, these were on the outer corners, while on the Grand they framed a central pavilion.



Figures 46-47: Rider Wallis Building, c.1888 (left), Grand (1889-90) right

The Grand was sufficiently novel and architecturally impressive that the *Herald* rated it "one of [Dubuque's] chief architectural adornments, and one which will be an object of pride to the city for many years to come" and hoped that "it might be stimulative of the architectural taste of the city" (*Herald*, June 22, 1890).

The *Herald* once again praised the new building and those generous city benefactors who had made its erection a reality:

The opening of this fine new building should mark an era in Dubuque. It is by far the finest and largest edifice of its character ever erected in the city, and it is not excelled in the state. Its erection has been in progress for over a year. It has been carefully constructed with a view solely to the purposes for which it is to be used. Its exterior is commanding and its interior is superb...Never before has there been an opportunity like this. The first night should see a great turnout. Let everybody subscribe for a ticket, and be present (*Daily Herald*, July 23; August 10, 1890).

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Presumably the massive grandeur of the Romanesque architecture of the new building was being celebrated in these descriptive accounts. This architectural style coincided with the beginning of a major local building boom, particularly of massive industrial, commercial and institutional buildings. The Romanesque style was most effective when it was applied to substantial public and industrial plans. The Dubuque examples of this are more important to Dubuque, and by default to the state because Dubuque was busily raising-up examples while the rest of the state was relatively moribund. Most other



Figure 48: Sketch from plans, by Alex Simplot (*Herald*, January 1, 1889)

The *Herald* reported that Simplot's sketch was finished and that the newspaper would run it in about a week (*Herald*, December 7, 1889).

Iowa cities were prostrated by the financial downturn of the years 1891-92. Sioux City is the best example. Extensive East Coast financing was well on its way to transforming Sioux City into the "Chicago of the West" when the panic caught the city in an over-built state. Its early Romanesque examples had no successors as the city struggled to recover. The Richardsonian Romanesque is best represented in Dubuque by the F. D. Stout House, 1105 Locust Street (1890-91); the Mount Carmel Motherhouse, Grandview Avenue, 1893-94; Dubuque Brewing and Malting Company, 3000 Jackson Street, 1894-95; the Security (J. F. Stampfer) Building, 8th and Main, 1896; Dubuque Star Brewery (4th Street Extension, 1898); and the Bank and Insurance Building (909 Main Street, 1894-1895, architect W. W. Boyington of Chicago) (Jacobsen, pp. F-223-229).

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The Grand played a role in the county's acceptance, in mid-1890, of a \$125,000 bond issue to build a new courthouse. The \$75,000 opera house, the \$200,000 Julien Hotel, \$300,000 in electrical railway system improvements, new factories and numerous elegant residences were collectively offered as proof that Dubuque was "booming" and the public was called upon to support what turned out to be an affirmative vote. The new courthouse was begun even as the opera house was opened, but the courthouse would not be a Romanesque style design, an indication that the new style had yet to take hold on Dubuque, and the new opera house had not yet had its impact on local design (*Herald*, June 1, 1890).

The Grand's Theatrical Significance:

Sixteen buildings served as theaters in Dubuque prior to 1900. The majority of these buildings were not built as theaters, but rather were public halls for the most part. Most of these also enjoyed brief or fitful theatrical use. A handful had comparable theatrical histories, as did the Grand. The Globe Theater (Main and 5th streets) was used from 1850 until 1902. The third Turner Hall stood from 1872 until 1967 (on the southeast corner of 9th and Iowa). The Standard Theater, built in 1884, was one of two other "opera houses" in use when the Grand was built. The other was the Duncan-Waller Theater, at 4th and Main streets. Built in 1877 above a double storefront, it was the second of five theatrical buildings (the Athenaeum was the most notable of these) located at that corner, all of which comprised a continuous theatrical presence on that property from 1864 until the present day (the Orpheum-Five Flags complex). Today, just two buildings, both built as theaters, the Majestic-Orpheum (1910-11) and the Grand remain standing, and the latter is the only surviving opera house (Geroux, p. 12).

Historian Lawrence Sommer found that Dubuque's role as a theatrical and cultural center was an important one. While the city boasted two opera houses as of the 1890s, there is some indication that a cultural high water mark was achieved after 1900. The *Enterprise* noted in late 1902 that "Dubuque is fast becoming one of the best show towns in the state." Other developments, particularly the construction of the Carnegie-Stout public library, the founding of the Dubuque Club, and the flourishing of ethnic cultural organizations, combined to make the city a cultural center. Literary and other groups and the emergence of the *Enterprise* magazine, largely a local cultural journal, were other indications of a cultural and literary movement. Dubuque's many colleges and universities helped set the stage for a cultural renaissance in the years prior to the First World War (*Enterprise*, July 20, October 19, 1902; Lyon, pp. 40-41, 300, 321; Sommer, p. 129).

A 1933 *Telegraph-Herald* history of Dubuque theaters claimed between 1839 and 1889

"it was the shows of the theater that put Dubuque above all other cities of about the same size...Dubuque had the opportunity to see more big shows than any other city of similar population in the United States...Dubuque was associated with the biggest circuit...and it was one of the few cities in the middle west that was included on the stage routes...Dubuque was the turning point for the shows that would either take to the north, south or return to the east."

The high-water-mark of Dubuque theatrical history, in the opinion of the writer, came on April 21, 1888, with the only appearance on stage by the actor Edwin Booth (*Telegraph-Herald*, March 26, April 17, May 14, 1933).

The theater industry suffered a setback between 1889 and 1893, one that coincided with the national economic setback. Dubuque went from two opera houses to a single one during these years. The opening of the Grand necessarily coincided with this downturn. Recovery followed and by 1900 theaters were doing "a land-office business" that was enhanced by the invasion of "a galaxy of European performers."

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The same source described the theater business in Dubuque from 1889 until the demise of live stage to motion pictures c.1928:

...Dubuque occupied an enviable position with road shows. "The best there were" is the consensus of many Dubuquers who attended the shows at Dubuque theatres. In addition to the traveling companies, Dubuque was associated with the leading vaudeville circuits of the time. The big stars of vaudeville appeared from time to time, and theatre managers went out of their way to book the big companies for acts for local presentations.

The end of the live stage industry came at the end of the 1920s:

It was from that time [c.1900] until about two or three years ago, big stock companies stopped in Dubuque to give their respective performances. But with the adoption of the vitaphone or talking pictures interest in the stock companies waned and Dubuque like many other cities that were formerly interested to a great extent in the various presentations have been left off the booking circuit.

The Grand converted its facility to moving pictures only in 1930, reflective of this development (ibid.).

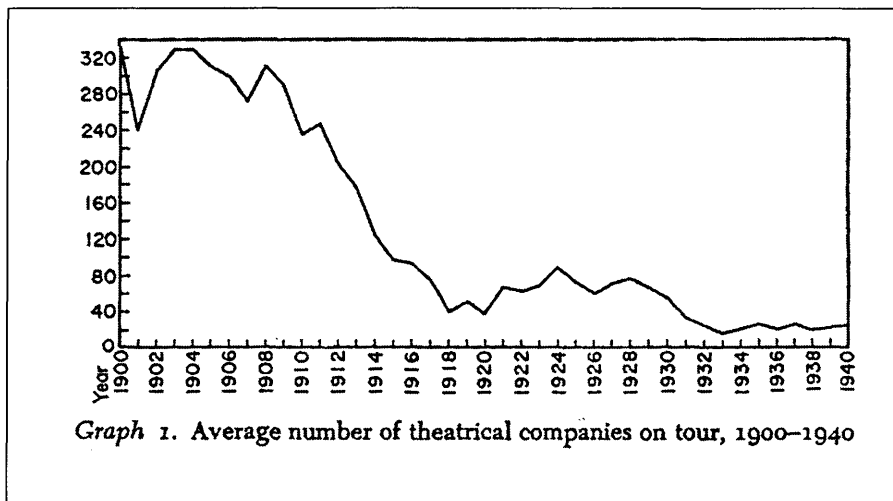


Figure 49: Declining stock companies on the road (Poggi, p.32)

A search of the general theatrical historical literature failed to find any treatment of the theater circuits apart from the struggle between the several national circuit monopolies. Historian Jack Poggi studied the economics of the theatre. Poggi found that the 1870s were a period of growth for independent stock companies. Many local theaters pooled their efforts to send a single agent to New York, which dominated theatrical production at that time. The western and eastern circuit monopolies developed during the 1890s and these influenced a stock company's ability to move nationally between the major cities. In larger markets, the company received one third of the receipts after the theater manager deducted his salary and expenses. Smaller theaters paid five to ten percent of receipts. Obviously the larger stock companies couldn't subsist on the latter class of theaters. The monopolies made certain that their own theaters received the best bookings. By 1907 there were simply too many theaters as the number of traveling companies rapidly diminished. Between 1910 and 1925, the number of declined from 1,549 to 674. Fewer productions and fewer theaters even as movie houses (it is more likely that the films created a new audience

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rather than diminished the live stage audience)¹ and the automobile transformed the entertainment world. Musicals and spectacles did the best on the road, comedies and average dramas struggled. Literary dramas for a long time had an advantage over silent films because sound was integral to their success. Rising transportation costs played a role, with an 80 percent increase occurring between 1913 and 1928. These costs more than any other reason pulled the companies away from the smaller theaters. Unlike other sectors of the economy, theater tickets failed to escape a \$2.00 “perceived cap” over a twenty year period (Poggi, pp. 10-43).

The Grand Opera House opened at a time when major grand opera houses were being built, notably the Auditorium in Chicago. The live stage was changing in response to the popularity of “polite vaudeville,” the variety show (first introduced in 1887), the minstrel show (nationally popular beginning in the early 1890s), the first appearance of agents for actors and the adoption of the “tryout system” on Broadway. The old theatrical greats like Edwin Booth were retiring (1891). The first gaslight marquee was created in 1897, the first “super colossal epics appeared in 1899. The craft professionalized with the first theatrical union being formed (1893) and trade journals were established (*Theater*, 1900-1917, *Variety*, 1905) (Wilmeth, pp. 24-104).

Multiple Property Linkage and Registration Requirements:

The Grand is but one of a handful of surviving Phase III opera houses in Iowa, as defined by the statewide opera house context, “Footlights In Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940,” and appears to be one of the earliest examples of its type. The registration requirements of that context allow for Criterion A significance “if they are particularly associated with the culture and social history of a town, a specific phase of theater history in Iowa or the region, or an Iowa-based troupe or resident stock company.” An opera house is significant under Criterion C if they represent

“the work of a master...who were well known for the design and construction of opera houses in the state...Additionally, opera houses embodying distinctive characteristics of a period may be eligible. Two possibilities might be a rare survivor from an early period of theater construction, or a theater structure that represents the first or only expression in Iowa of a particular style.”

The Grand Opera House embodies the high point of Dubuque’s sustained effort to realize the ultimate (Phase III) quality of live stage entertainment and as such, directly reflects that city’s continuing development is one of a few examples of Iowa’s best live stage involvements. The architectural reputation of the firm of Edbrooke & Burnham transcends a state level of significance and represents an Iowa effort to find the best national talent in modern theater design of the times. Finally the Grand is by default a rare survivor by virtue of its early age and it represents an early and pivotal example of the growing popularity of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in Iowa. The Grand consequently meets the registration requirements of the statewide opera house context (Cunning, pp. F-46 to F-49).

Grand Opera House Historical Overview:

Locating the New Opera House:

The Duncan-Waller Opera House, built in 1877, was judged inadequate as a theatrical venue by many community leaders, and it was judged to be located too far south in the downtown. Duncan and Waller were partner real estate dealers. Their house was tremendously successful with 1,500 total engagements over its 16-year history. The second-class older house boasted a review of the nation’s best actors. One source credits the realtors “[financial] return that far exceeded the normal

¹ The first films appeared in 1895 as chasers following vaudeville acts. By 1905 there were 5,000 nickelodeons in operation.

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investment yield" with encouraging those who would build a competing house, the Grand. As early as 1882 there was talk about a more "uptown" opera house, but it wasn't until mid-February 1889 that a serious and eventually successful effort was initiated. A vacant corner site at 8th and Iowa streets was then favored for the new opera house. A month later, the evolving committee met at the Board of Trade offices and elected officers. Chairman Jacob Rich rebuffed John R. Waller's proposal to sell his building to the group "at a large sacrifice" and set the desired standards for the new building. The opera house had to be on the ground floor with "plenty of exits." Public safety as well as a more modern facility would contribute to the up building of the city. Rich envisioned a \$40,000 building with "probably two galleries" (*Herald*, March 23, 1882; *Daily Times*, February 17, April 12, 1889; *Telegraph-Herald*, May 14, 1933).

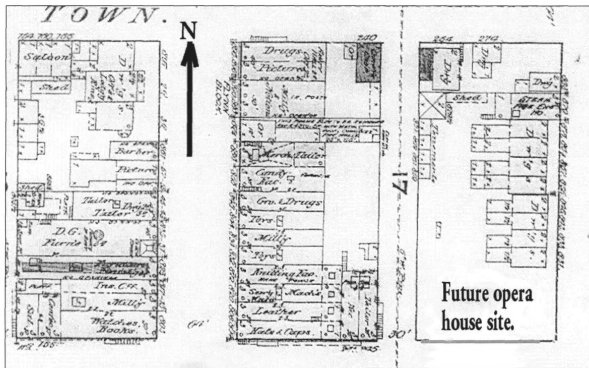


Figure 50: 1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Figure 50 underscores the very desirable and empty building lot at 8th east of Main. A large L-shaped parcel was clear. A firehouse was on the same half-block. The Town Clock Building, a Dubuque landmark, was immediately west on the west side of Main Street.

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Figure 51: 1889 Perspective map of Dubuque
(the dark line to the left is a fold line, the arrow points to the
vacant lot where the opera house would be built).



Figure 52: 1867 photograph of 8th and Main streets, view to the northeast
The Tremont House hotel, on the future opera house site, is visible at the far right, east of the alley
(*Telegraph-Herald*, July 12, 1936)

Within a month the subscription committee had raised \$25,000 of the estimated \$40,000, and the search for a location, certainly to be "above Ninth street," was underway. One desired location was the corner of Main and 10th streets. By May 17 an additional \$4,000 had been pledged and the committee promised to incorporate once the \$30,000 figure was in hand, the total estimated cost of lot and building said to be \$45,000. The Universalist Church site at Main and 10th streets was being seriously considered, with the 51x114 lot being doubled in width. The planned opera house would seat 1,400 and have two galleries. The "energy" of Chairman Rich was credited with the successful fund raising to date. Rich credited Dr. J. H. Day as his principal "coadjutor" with Mayor W. H. Day, C. H. Meyer, Lester Bissell, John V. Rider and William Bradley as his principal assistants. The fund raising success was all the more impressive because \$200,000 had been subscribed over the same three-

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month period for a variety of municipal initiatives. By May 27, \$35,000 was in hand and Chairman Rich persuaded the committee to formally organize so that actual costs could be determined. The opera house plan was to be ground level as noted, and would include "a parquet, dress circle, and two galleries" with a seating capacity of 1,000 to 1,400. Rich also recommended that the company officers would serve without compensation and that no free passes would be provided the officers or stockholders "because of their connection with the company." The Grand Opera House Company was incorporated on that date, with a seven-member board of directors. The corporation was capitalized at \$40,000 (*ibid.*, May 11, 17, 1889; Minutes, May 27, 1889).

The stockholders met on June 14, 1889 to select a site, having five candidate sites. The three less favored locations were 8th between Locust and Bluff streets, Locust near 8th and 9th and Locust. The final decision focused on the Universalist Church site, which garnered 108 votes, and the former Tremont House site at 8th Street between Main and Iowa streets. The latter site was selected with 195 votes. The site decision was influenced by the need to make the site fit with the need to have an area large enough to contain a building with a depth of 125 feet. At least four architects had already communicated their general plans to the corporation (Mr. Oscar Cobb of Chicago,² William Foster of Des Moines, and "others" unspecified). The winning lot measured 70x128 and had a selling price of \$12,500 (*Daily Times*, June 13, 15, 1889; Minutes, June 14, 1889).

Selecting An Architect:



Figure 53: Rider Wallis Block, 7th and Locust Streets

The design competition for the Grand was a fierce one. During the second week of July 1889 successive architects arrived in the city to present their plans. Most notable early on was Architect Oscar Cobb, of Chicago, who was one of a few designers who specialized in designing theaters. His plans were looked at on July 10, and a lengthy description appeared in the

² Maine-born Oscar Cobb (1842-1908) was a carpenter become architect who was drawn to Chicago following its 1871 devastation. By 1873 he was specializing in theatre design and was responsible for half a dozen notable Chicago theaters. He designed opera houses in Syracuse, New York, St. Louis, St. Paul and Minneapolis (Withey, pp. 129-30).

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local papers. Curiously the *Herald* noted that Cobb's plan closely resembled the new Rider-Wallis building, a design of another Chicago architect, Willoughby James Edbrooke. Architect "Schurman" (probably Scheurman), of Rock Island was the next to present his plans. His design was described in the *Herald* the next day and once again it was "similar in appearance to the Rider-Wallace building" (*Herald*, July 11, 1889).

Next came Architect Carter of St. Paul and his plans were "satisfactory in almost every respect. "Various" unnamed Dubuque architects and "several others, in Des Moines and elsewhere," had submitted plans as well (*Times*, July 16, 1889).

The opera house directors were ready to make their decision. The *Times* of July 26 said the selection would be made that day or the next, and added that excavation work would start that very next week! No decision was made and on August 1 architect Edbrooke of Chicago arrived in Dubuque, "bringing plans with him for an opera house. They were laid before the gentlemen who have been examining the different plans and were inspected. All the plans are now submitted, and a meeting of the board of directors will be held this forenoon to make a selection." Obviously Edbrooke had obtained a time extension to prepare plans (*Herald*, August 2, 1889).

The entire country was fixated on Chicago at this time. Chicago was strongly favored in hosting the Worlds Fair in 1892 (it finally opened in 1893 as the Columbian Exposition). A July 28 article in the *Daily Times* was titled "Chicago The Place—It's the Proper Location for the World's Fair." The Opera House directors had the chance to select a noted Chicago architect, and they seized it. The *Herald* announced on August 3 "The Plans Selected: Those Presented by Mr. Edbrooke of Chicago Decided Upon." Edbrooke was "...the well-known Chicago architect, who furnished the plans for the Tabor opera house at Denver, for the new state house in Georgia, and for a number of other celebrated buildings." The same source described the selected plan:

The building will be four stories and basement, 76 feet high, with a most elegantly designed front of St. Louis pressed brick with brown sandstone trimmings. The roof will be of unique design, gabled and subgabled, slated and turreted. Three stone steps will lead to the Eight street entrance in which will be the box office. The entrance will open into a foyer or rotunda 21 feet deep and of varying width, and the foyer will connect with the auditorium by six double doors. On either side of the entrance will be a store 20x21 which will be made most attractive by partitions of glass, and will be very desirable for confectionery, barber shop, etc. On one side of the foyer will be a ladies toilet room. From the foyer stairways will lead into the first and second balconies or the balcony and the gallery as they will be called. There will also be three entrances direct from the Eight street side and these latter entrances will be the exits from the balconies to the exclusion of the exits opening into the foyer, the purpose being to give the patrons of the parquette and the dress circle a monopoly of the foyer when the attendance is so large that the crowding of all into the foyer would leave no room for promenade. There will also be outside iron stairways leading to the first and second balconies, both on Iowa Street and the alley.

On the second and third floors will be six offices fronting on Eighth street. The balconies will be in the rear of these offices, and will be separated from them by a hall and a solid wall. On the fourth floor will be a hall 70x28 fronting on Eighth street.

The house will have a capacity of 1,200, and in the case of a jam 300 may stand in the rotunda, leaning on the railing for support. There will be 500 seats down stairs and 700 in the

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two balconies. There will be four boxes or stalls on a level with the stage and four on the parquette floor. Attached to these will be toilet rooms. There will be six exits from the balcony and gallery into the alley, which is as many as McVicker's has. The chairs on the first floor will be upholstered, have moveable backs, and hat racks will be placed conveniently under the chairs. In the basement will be the gentlemen's toilet room, Turkish bath room, a barber shop and a store room, and the entire building will be heated with steam. The height will be seventy feet and the stage will be thirty-six feet deep.

In accepting Edbrooke's design the directors had committed to a much more expensive building, and immediate efforts were begun to raise additional funds. The *Herald* continued:

The directors say they will have a fine opera house if they can carry it through, which is somewhat doubtful unless they can secure further subscriptions. Every citizen who can do so, should purchase a ticket for the opening night. The tickets will be sold for \$5 each and in this way \$5,000 or \$6,000 could be raised.

Opening night was thirteen months in the future! (*Times*, July 28, 1889; *Herald*, August 3, 1889).

The *Times* allocated just two short paragraphs to describing the winning plans, adding "further details cannot be given until the plans are perfected, which will be in about two weeks." It was common in design competitions such as these to make a decision on a conceptual design, with more detailed plans following in either a second round of finalist designers, or in this case, after an award decision was made. The *Herald* found more fodder for descriptive detail it would appear, but it also appears that Edbrooke wowed his new clients with a conceptual plan, possibly perspectives and a rough main floor plan (*Times*, August 2, 1889).

The directors met again on October 5 to review the Edbrooke's final plans and to find possible cost reductions. They eliminated decorative stonework on the alley sidewall "save for the returns" and abandoned a planned separate boiler house. Curiously they hired local contractor and 4th Ward Alderman D. W. Rand to "interpret" the plans, to make out a timber bill, and to superintend the construction of the building foundations up to grade. The *Herald* reported the next day that it was expected that the directors "will make several changes to the plans" (Minutes, October 5, 1889; *Herald*, October 6, 1889).

One very belated and quite substantial change was the addition of a central porte cochere. The porte cochere, was not original to the plan and was an addition made by the directors after the building had opened in late 1890. The September 28, 1890 minutes note "it was thought best to order directors to build a Porte Cochere, in front of [the] opera house." The porte cochere, in glass and cast iron, was very reminiscent of those which are found today on the Auditorium building in Chicago. That landmark building was built in 1888-89 (Minutes, September 28, 1890).

Construction Notes:

The opera house directors anticipated an immediate construction effort and no doubt, architect Edbrooke's reputation for delivering plans quicker than builders could build, was in their minds when they selected him. The *Herald* reported on August 2 that the ground plans for the new building had arrived from Chicago, and it was hoped that work would begin the next week. Nothing happened for several weeks and the directors finally filed their property deeds on August 21. The \$12,000 site purchase figure from a syndicate, included a \$4,500 subscription to the opera house project. On August 25, John Pinckney won

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the excavation contract. He began work a day later. Thomas Donahue was contracted on August 29 to build the opera house foundations (*Herald*, August 2, 21, 25, 30, 1889).

Work on the foundation walls was sufficiently advanced by October 9 that a boy, playing atop them that night, fell and broke an arm. This was the only building site accident noted during the construction. On November 11 the first shipment of Lake Superior red sandstone reached the city. Contractor Frank W. John, of Farley, Iowa, was contracted to do the stonework for \$1,960. The non-delivery of ironwork slowed progress in late November. The façade stonework, Lake Superior sand or brown stone was reaching the building site by November 27. The *Herald* promised that the stone “will make a substantial as well as [a] handsome front” on the opera house. The auditorium ceiling and roof were supported by “three iron cross beams” each of which weighed 3,500 pounds. John Drehouse had the contract to put these in place. As the photographs (#14-17) indicate, these were actually heavy wooden beams with iron tension rods and plates. In deed, the *Herald* reported three weeks later “the timbers to support the roof of the Grand Opera House are being placed in position.” The brickwork was continuing despite the season. Plastering started on April 17. The slate roof was fully installed by May 1 and the interior plaster walls were ready for their final finish coat. The interior decorators arrived from Chicago on June 22 and started their extensive work (*Herald*, October 10, November 12, 21, 19, 27, December 4, 20, 1889; May 1, June 22, 1890; *Times*, April 18, 1890).

The original cost estimates for the new building were, as is most always the case, optimistically low. It wasn't until September 28, 1890 that the directors admitted that the building cost “has considerably exceeded the original ideas of the company, the total outlay to date being \$66,785. On these occasions they assessed their capital stock, raising \$40,000 (30 percent on October 23, 1889, 20 percent on January 29, 1890, and a final 20 percent on April 19, that same year). Finally on July 1, 1890, they agreed to let director William S. Bradley advance the company funds as needed in amounts of at least \$1,000. In the end, he provided \$15,500 to keep the construction going.

The directors faced a debt of \$25,346. Of this, \$9,846 was due to contractors and the architect. The following itemized list of expenses, the only construction related notation to appear in the company's minutes, was recorded at the meeting of October 5, 1889, quite early in the construction work, but likely following the finalization of all the building contracts (Minutes, October 5, 1889):

Lot purchase	\$12,000	<u>Building Costs Subtotals:</u>			
Building costs	\$45,000	excavation work	\$ 336	lumber	\$3,579
Furnishings	\$ 5,153	stonework	\$1,923	millwork	\$7,669
Scenery	\$ 2,882	Cut stone, stone	\$2,595	water service	\$ 859
Fixtures	\$ 1,437	Brickwork	\$7,411	painting	\$ 660
Sidewalk	\$ 111	pressed brick	\$ 912	decorating	\$1,500 ³
Misc.	\$ 200	iron beams	\$ 537	plastering	\$1,317 ⁴
<u>Total</u>	\$66,785	other iron	\$2,432	tinwork	\$ 863
		gas/electric	\$1,222	steam plant	\$2,000

Carpenters:

Rand & Co.	\$2,863
Griggs	\$ 170
Jones	\$1,067

These Contractors/Suppliers were owed these amounts:

Novelty Iron Works	\$ 952 ⁵
Ris Brothers	\$ 274
W. S. Molo, plumber ⁶	\$ 846

³ Mitchell and Holbeck, of Chicago, received the frescoing/decorating contract worth \$1,500 (*Herald*, May 6, 1890).

⁴ Contractor Luck received the contract to plaster the opera house (*Times*, April 18, 1890).

⁵ Novelty Iron Works produced the ironwork for the entrance and the side stairs (*Times*, June 12, 1890).

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Howie	\$2,480
<u>Total:</u>	\$6,581

James Howie	\$ 700
Carr, Ryder, Engle	\$2,500
Standard Lumber Co.	\$2,286
Schreiber, Conchar & Co.	\$ 584
Edbrook & Burnham	\$ 200 ⁷
Schulte & Wagner	\$ 300

By mid-December 1889 it was hoped that the opera house could open in June and the opera house company began to advertise for an attraction for the grand opening. On February 6 it was announced that the Joe Jefferson and Florence combination was booked for the event. By March 5, the *Times* noted "the dates for the coming season at the Grand Opera House are nearly filled." Fall bookings were being made by early March. Manager Roehl tried to book the Vienna Orchestra which was doing an America tour. The first musical director for the Grand was to have been an import. Otto Muchlbaur was filling the same role for the Tnalía Theater in New York and he was secured along with number of his musicians. By mid-June Otto was forgotten and negotiations were underway with Professor C. A. Rastatter, apparently a local and well-known talent.⁸ Local cigar maker Dick Heller unveiled a new brand of cigars, the "New Grand Opera House Brand," in early May 1890. The Grand Opera Confectionery opened up on Main Street, across from the Town Clock Building in early June. Despite good progress with the building, the *Times* reported in mid-May that the opera house wouldn't be done until August and would open the next month. The next day the *Herald* said the building wouldn't be ready until September 1 "there is too much to do to finish before that time." Despite this, "The Stowaway" was booked for August 20. Optimism ruled by early July when the *Herald* assured its readers that the opera house would open August 15, with the 65-member Hess Company presenting the opera *Carmen* as the inaugural entertainment. As it was, the building was opened even before it was done, the board minutes of September 28, 1890 noting "the opera house structure being now practically completed (the minutes had been corrected, the word "positively" being stricken, the work "practically" substituted). Harger and Blish, Dubuque dry goods merchants, were so excited by the approaching completion that they featured the "new style opera glass...for the new Grand Opera House" as a Christmas idea in December 1889 (*Times*, December 10, 1889; February 6, March 5, 6, 22, May 15, June 8, July 23, 26, 1890; *Herald*, December 12, 1889; May 6, 15, 16, June 13, 1890; Minutes, September 28, 1890).

In July 1890 directors Bradley and Burch traveled to Chicago to select carpets. The heating plant was a continuing item of discussion, and the heating plant was only added later, occupying an alleyway cellar extension. The directors inspected sample chairs in December. A private telephone line was put in place between the vestibule of the opera house and Byrne Brothers Livery on 9th Street. The scenery contract was let to Sossman & Landiss of Chicago in mid-March, 1890. Initially the opera house was to be gas-lit despite the fact that theatrical companies disliked it. The manager promised "as soon as possible [to] put a dynamo in the basement and furnish their own electricity" using combination fixtures (*Times*, December 17, 1889; February 8, March 12, 1890; *Herald*, March 18, July 10, 1890; Minutes, July 1, August 19, 1890).

Final Touches:

The *Times* offered a detailed progress report on August 3, 1890 just two weeks before opening night:

The new opera house is fast approaching completion, and by the end of next week will be practically done. The decoration is complete, the chairs are all in, the painting and hard wood filling almost done and the scenery

⁶ Molo had the plumbing contract (*Times*, March 29, 1890; *Herald*, July 8, 1890).

⁷ Here is the only documentation for the architects, Willoughby J. Edbrooke and Franklin P. Burnham.

⁸ Rastatter was also first violin. The orchestra numbered seven members with three more as needed. Joseph Spahn, Henry Stuber, Joseph Schattgen, William J. Keller, John Stuber and Martin Scheidecker joined Rastatter on opening night (*Times*, August 16, 1890).

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largely in place. The great sun burner of 100 jets is here, as is also the other gas fixtures, and will soon be in place. The plush covering of the parquet, balcony box and state rails is nearly on, ready for the placing of the trap rail about boxes and parquet rail, which is already here. The carpets are already here, and will be laid this week, and the draperies for boxes and foyer will be put up. The tile for the grand entrance will be laid in a day or two, and the wood work for the entrance, the last work to be done will soon be in place. All who have seen the auditorium pronounce it a gem of beauty in its coloring of old ivory and its harmoniously decorated walls, brightened by warm maroon tints of the chairs. These chairs are handsome and furnished with all the modern appliances of comfort—hat racks, shawl and coat rack, cane rack, umbrella rack and foot rest.

The building was first lighted on August 12, so there wasn't any extra time between completion and the opening night (*Times*, August 3, 7, 1890).

The sunburner of 104 lights, which is the conspicuous lighting feature of the Grand Opera House, has been put in place, and is to be lighted by an electric flash. It was tested a day or two since, and made a large circle of beautiful rosettes of flame. All the other gas fixtures are now in place, and will make the ivory decorated house luminous in every part—when all lighted.

Herald, August 10, 1890

The drop curtain was hung on August 9, it was so massive that its counterweights on the rope drum totaled 150 pounds. It did not roll but was raised as a unit.

A view from the fly gallery of the Grand opera house would astonish anyone not familiar with the appliances and resources of the modern stage. The great space of 66 feet above the stage is filled with "flats" and "drops" and "tormentors" and "grand draperies" and various other sorts of scenery, and there are "drums" and "sheaves" and "skeleton grooves" and "border lights" and great counter weights of iron, and rails and belaying pins, and other appliances with which to operate them. The stage resources of the Grand Opera house will be unsurpassed

The Grand has not only provided working lines for its own scenery but it has put up thirty extra sets of lines for the use of companies that carry their own scenery. The scenic and spectacular features of modern plays have become their principal charm, and the builders of the Grand have been determined that every troupe that comes to the house shall have no excuse for leaving their scenic attractions behind them, but will insist that they shall give their play with every scenic effect.

...To give some idea of the scenic conveniences of the Grand Opera House, and the network of rigging that can be seen from the fly galleries and rigging loft, it is only necessary to say that 28,000 feet of strong manilla ropes descend from the rigging loft, while nearly a ton of iron has been used for counter weights in balancing the scenery (*Herald*, August 10, 1890).

The Public Response and Grand Opening:

The public was well aware of the financial dilemma that faced the opera house company stockholders. As construction neared completion, a group of non-stockholders planned the requisite "complimentary benefit" to show the community's appreciation for the gift of the new theater.

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The builders have added to the city one of its chief architectural adornments, and one which will be an object of pride to the city for many years to come. That it might be such an object of pride, that it might be stimulative of the architectural tastes of the city, that it might the more surely bring pleasure and delight to many succeeding generations of the people of Dubuque, the builders have spent money far beyond the expectation or demand of their fellow citizens, or their own first intentions, and of course beyond the probabilities of immediate profit. These facts especially enforce upon the people of Dubuque the duty, not only of adhering to the usual custom of a complimentary benefit, but of making it as liberal as possible. It is not improbable that a liberal sale of the opening night's tickets at this time will encourage a richer embellishment of the interior of the opera house than will otherwise be justifiable.



Figure 54 First Performance at the Grand
(*Herald*, August 12, 1890)

While being reminded that “Chicago gave the builders of the Auditorium \$50,000 for a choice of seats alone” benefit tickets would be just \$5.00.⁹ Given an uncertain completion date, the benefit was bereft of both date and program. The ticket-selling committee¹⁰ was making its rounds by late July. Boxer Tom Paisley, “the Ladies friend,” booked a box for \$20. (*Herald*, June 22, July 26, 1890).

A pre-tour of the nearly finished building was offered in late June 1890 when the benefit promoters praised and described the Grand:

⁹ This curious Chicago reference defies understanding. There is no record of the receipt of so large a sum in the company financial records and all of the boxes and stalls were available for auction as of the first regular season.

¹⁰ The community committee consisted of M. M. Walker, A. J. Van Duzee, W. H. Torbert, George Crane, C. A. Voelker, Fred Tschudi, Jno. Ellwanger, W. S. Molo and Paul Traut (*Herald*, June 22, 1890).

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The beautiful temple will attract the best artists, and these will be the more enjoyed because of the sense of safety, and the sense of comfort, and the sense of beauty caused by rich and artistic surroundings.

It will be a pleasure to gather in the beautiful and comfortable auditorium—entering under the graceful *porte cochere*, passing through the richly tiled and ornamented vestibule, and through the spacious softly carpeted and handsomely curtained foyer into parquet and dress circle and balcony furnished with roomy and handsomely upholstered seats. Even the upper gallery, ordinarily given up to plain benches, will be made comfortable with easy and ornamental chairs, so that even the “gallery gods” may participate in the general sense of comfort and beauty. These pleasurable surroundings will inevitably draw fuller audiences, and these will force a higher order of artistic entertainments, and it is not too much to hope or expect that through this beautiful temple will come repeated reunions of the people of Dubuque made pleasurable by brilliant surroundings and proving stimulative of their artistic perceptions

(*Daily Herald*, June 22, 1890).

The *Times* similarly lauded the building, writing in late July 1890 once the opening night date (August 14) had been finally set:

...it will be something to witness the fine building with its gala dress and the brilliant audience that will assemble for the first time within its walls. The building has been under construction for the past year and a half and is now nearing completion. Every detail known to modern architecture will be brought into play for the comfort and convenience of auditorium and stage, and our people will certainly look to it that a sum is realized generous enough to add such furnishings and appliances as will give us an opera house second to none in the northwest for its completeness and beauty. The tickets for the opening night have been placed at \$5 which is certainly reasonable for an occasion that is to mark an important page in the history of our thriving city.

The remaining boxes were auctioned off at the Harger and Bliss store during the morning of August 12 and the remaining reserved seats went on sale mid-morning on opening day. A drawing for early subscribers of reserved seat locations took place on August 13 (*Times*, July 30, August 9, 10, 1890).

One key component of the opera house façade, still absent at the time of the grand opening, was the planned *porte cochere*. The public was challenged to help make its completion a certainty:

The plans of the Grand call for a light, graceful iron and glass *porte cochere*, projecting over the sidewalk from the grand entrance, enabling those who come to the house in carriages to go and come without exposure to storm. If a proper appreciation of the enterprise is shown at the opening night, this *porte cochere* will be put up. As the house is otherwise complete without it, it probably will be left off, if the people of Dubuque manifest indifference by a conspicuous absence at the opening.

There were adherents for the older Duncan-Waller Opera House, but one of these, A. A. Cooper (“who has a part of everything stimulative of the growth of Dubuque”) was featured by the *Herald* as a supporter of the new one:

Mr. Cooper is closely related to one of the proprietors of the old Opera house, and had interests that would not naturally be favorably affected by the construction of the new house. But Mr. Cooper is so broad in his

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appreciation of what is for the general good of our people that when called on to take tickets for the Opera house opening, he unhesitatingly said, "Yes, boys, put me down for \$100 worth..." (*Herald*, August 10, 1890).

Opening night was set for August 14, 1890. There were few options for engaging a theatrical company at such short notice, given the imminent onset of the theatrical season. The Hess Opera Company had a Milwaukee summer engagement followed by three weeks of performances in Minneapolis and it was already in the area. The opening night matched their scheduled shift back to Milwaukee so their 65-person troupe could appear in Dubuque (*Herald*, July 23, 1890).

Some prominent Dubuquers scouted out the Hess Company's Minneapolis performance of *Carmen* and reported it "superb in every respect" and added the opera house management "could not have done better than to secure [the company] for opening night" (*Herald*, August 6, 1890).

Opening night failed to fill the house, given the 800-person attendance estimate but quality in terms of class was present. The *Times* reported "the second gallery was deserted, the calcium light being its only occupant." The four city railroad companies reigned in the "points of honor—the four [lower] boxes with their costly draperies and handsome furnishings." The occupants of the eight "stalls" were also carefully enumerated by the *Herald* and "the parquette and two lower circles were also filled by a fine assemblage of leading citizens." A. A. Cooper had Box E with four seats. The several railroad companies purchased entire boxes for their management personnel. The Chicago, St. Paul and Kansas City road (Box C), the Illinois Central (Box B), the Chicago, Burlington and Northern (Box D) and Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul (Box A) all paid \$100 for their boxes. These were the best "lower" boxes. The Kansas City line alone decorated the front of its box with the company's Maple Leaf symbol, "worked in ivory and smilax." Stalls D (Jacob Rich), B (G. B. Burch) and H (Mayor W. H. Day) all generated a \$25 premium in addition to the \$5 seat charge (6-4 seats). Boxes C (W. L. Bradley) and A (Jas. Forester) rated a \$20 premium. Stall G (C. H. Meyer) went to \$10, and the rest were pounded off for a mere \$5 premium (*Herald*, August 15, 1890).¹¹

The formal gowns of the best-dressed high society ladies were carefully noted, led by that of Mrs. B. H. Harger, who wore a "dainty albatross." The *Herald* was less than impressed with the performance. While the Hess Company was "above the average...there was much in their stage movements that would bear criticism." The three-plus hour-long *Carmen* was "on the whole...not one of the most popular operas in Dubuque, yet perhaps as much so as anything that could be secured at this season of the year." Encores were "neither numerous nor hearty" but the artists "carried their difficult parts well and caught the applause of the audience" (*Herald*, August 15, 1890; *Times*, same date).

The finished opera house interior was minutely described at the time of the grand opening event by the reporter from the *Herald*:

The house is constructed of Dubuque brick with the front wall of St. Louis pressed brick. The trimmings are of Bayfield red sandstone. The front of the ground floor is used as a vestibule, box office, two small stores and ladies' and gents' toilet rooms. Back of these is the opera house itself. Three offices each are located on the second and third floors in front, while on the fourth is a large hall which can be used for lodge or other purposes.

Passing through the vestibule, the doors swing open and we are admitted to the interior of the Temple of the Muses where oft in days to come the people of the Key City will be entertained by the best opera and dramatic

¹¹ The ushers were in full dress as well. Jo Kelly was head usher, assisted by Charles Tibbals, Charles Fitzpatrick, Jerry Howell Jr. and Vincent Lagen (*Herald*, August 12, 1890).

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troupes in the country. Gazing on the great room, one is impressed with awe, for it is as fine an opera house as can be found anywhere outside the great cities. The wood work is in imitation of old ivory. The walls are frescoed in modern style to harmonize therewith. The colors are most beautifully blended and under the softening rays of the gas light, the view is most pleasing to the eye. The decorating was done by Mitchell & Halbach, of Chicago...

The Grand has a seating capacity of 1,107, besides the boxes and stalls.¹² The seating space is divided into parquette, parquette circle, first balcony and second balcony. There are in the parquette and parquette circle 533 seats, in the first balcony 254, and in the second balcony 320. All the chairs are tilted and have cushioned backs, while the seats are cushioned as far back as the third row in the parquette circle and two remaining circles. The carpets are moquette and Brussels.

The eight boxes are elegantly hung with rich drapery curtains and enclosed, as are the eight stalls, with an ornamental brass rail. Superbly upholstered chairs in variegated plush colors, are in the boxes and stalls.

The stage is 66 ½ feet wide inside; wall to wall, 60 feet to rigging loft; 35 feet curtain opening; 36 feet in depth; 23 ½ feet under fly galleries.

The stage is supplied with a fine line of scenery from Sosman and Landis, of Chicago, and was put in under the superintendency of their stage machinist, Joseph Wikoff. It cost \$3,500. The drop curtain is especially grand. It is a copy of F. S. Church's famous painting "The Witch's Daughter." Attired in beautiful drapery, she sits on the moon, surrounded by light clouds, while at her side sits an owl, intently gazing into her face. The painting is a superb work of art and called for much praise last evening...(*Herald*, August 15, 1890).

The *Times* described an entryway "arched with several flags." The foyer and "ornamental stairs" had a soft gray colored carpet. The arches which separated the foyer and dress circle were "finished in ivory and gold and hung with beautiful draperies." "...flashing diamonds [worn by those in the dress circle] sent back again the rays of the big sun burner in the center of the roof.

¹² The reduced seating, down from the original goal of 1,400 seats, reflected a reduction in construction costs.

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Figure 55: Grand Theatre Advertisement with Potter sketch, 1892-93 Dubuque City Directory

The house inventory of scenery consisted of the following:

Interior Scenes:

French fancy scene, parlor set, Gothic scene, rustic kitchen, plain chamber set, palace and bastille prison.

Exterior Scenes:

A pair of cottage flats, ancient street, modern street, garden with steps and balustrades, dark wood, cut wood with drop and foliage borders, light landscape, ocean and mountain pass

Set Scenes:

House and return pieces, cottage and return pieces, rustic bridge, rocks, grounds and set waters, rustic kitchen fire place, sectional bridge, center vampire (better known as the Hamlet trap) side vampire, stair trap, rain boxes, glass crashes, wood crashes, picket fence, snow cloth and vases and statues to complete garden scene (ibid.).

Carmen was judged to be "passing fair" and Meddler suggested that the story was "too old and should be struck off the repertoire." Closing, he added "There; I have written up the Grand Opera House opening, and when the editor sees this, I expect to be fired" (Weekly Ledger, August 16, 1890).¹³

The irreverent *Weekly Ledger* sent its Samuel Clemens wannabe "The Meddler" to the opening performance. Meddler was assigned to the beat because his editor was too busy. This reporter was impressed by all of the finery but observed that others "such as newspaper men, wore their last winter suits, and a pleasant smile, which they always carry with them." The

¹³ Meddler promised "I am not going to say much about the opera house itself. The *Ledger* will attend to that later on in proper shape." The implication was that the building wasn't quite finished. Unfortunately the *Ledger*, known for its generous woodcut views of new buildings, both inside and out, never got around to the proper coverage (*Weekly Ledger*, August 16, 1890).

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railroad's uniform support was also impressive, particularly the Kansas City line for being the only company to ornament its box and to send an actual chief official. Meddler declined to identify the occupants of boxes, as had the other papers, "just as though they were on exhibition for prizes at a country fair." Meddler then turned to the real show:

The costumes worn by the ladies were simply elegant. Some of them were remarkable for their scantiness, and had to endure the stare of the opera glasses right and left. One young woman looked like a beautiful dream, and like a dream required a great deal of imagination to figure out what she was. There were, however, only a few costumes taken from French life, and those were worn by persons who will know better when they get older. Most of the ladies dressed in exquisite taste, and the flower of modesty gave a beautiful coloring to the gay assemblage of feminine beauty.

Finally passing on to the new building, Meddler noted:

...it is one of Dubuque's grandest achievements. It is a perfect paradise of art and beauty. It is the realization of long years of hoping and waiting on the part of our citizens. Like the new Julien [Hotel], it will add to the name of our city abroad, and prove a blessing to all our people who love the lessons taught by the stage (*Weekly Ledger*, August 16, 1890).

Poor Mr. C. D. Hess felt much abused by the Dubuque newspaper and wrote the opera house directors "taking exceptions to the criticisms in the daily papers [the *Ledger* was a weekly paper so its comments must have been missed!] of the opening entertainment and proposing to bring his troupe here in October for another entertainment to establish his reputation" (Minutes, August 19, 1890).

The Business of Running An Opera House:

The theater corporation was actually the equivalent of a not-for-profit entity of its time, being dedicated to providing a valuable public service to the City of Dubuque rather than making any money apart from breaking even with costs. Clearly costs were already outstripping any possible revenues. Central to the fiscal bottom line of the opera house venture was the leasing out of spaces within the building. There were to be two ground level storefronts, two second floor offices, a third floor hall with three rooms, all of which would yield just \$1,232 in receipts. The opera house operation would be leased for \$3,500 but paying a manager cost \$1,200 a year. Insurance would cost \$450 annually and property taxes totaled \$600. The corporation was left with a \$25,000 mortgage as they finished the building. Bonds were issued to cover the costs of the mortgage payments. Final total construction and furnishing costs were a reported \$75,000 ("which in any other city would have run up to \$100,000" noted the *Herald*) (ibid.; *Herald*, August 15, 1890).

There were 41 stockholders, the collective subscribers of the \$40,000 in corporation capital. Corporate officers at the time of the opening were Jacob Rich, president; W. L. Bradley, vice president; B. H. Harger, secretary; and George B. Burch, treasurer. The directors were W. H. Day, John V. Rider, C. H. Meyer and the three aforementioned officers. Day, Bradley and Rich comprised the building committee. The corporation had already lost one of its most energetic founders, Dr. J. H. Lull. The *Herald* mourned, "while his death was a loss to the entire city, it was particularly so to the Grand opera house" (*Herald*, August 15, 1890).

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Theatrical Operations:

William Roehl, "an experienced theater manager," became the Grand's manager as of August 27, 1890. The next winter, he was permanently contracted by the company at an annual salary of \$1,200. It was his intention to provide six plays weekly during the regular season. The first regular program, "The Noble Outcast," presumably another Hess Company feature, followed the opening night on August 17, drawing a "fair audience." By the end of the season it was claimed that the Grand had enjoyed "the largest [receipts] of any opera house in the state." The dozen boxes and stalls were auctioned off in mid-August 1890 at the start of the first season. Figure 24 depicts a modified auditorium seating plan that locates four large boxes and four larger stalls on the ground level, and four small boxes and the same number of smaller stalls on the first balcony level. It is probable that the original layout, likely four ground level boxes with four large stalls on that level and the first balcony was later subdivided to create more marketable smaller units. There were \$1,342 in additional unspecified improvements made during 1894, but no further such expenditures recorded until 1901 (*ibid.*, August 12, 18, 1890; February 22, 1891; Minutes, February 5, 1891).

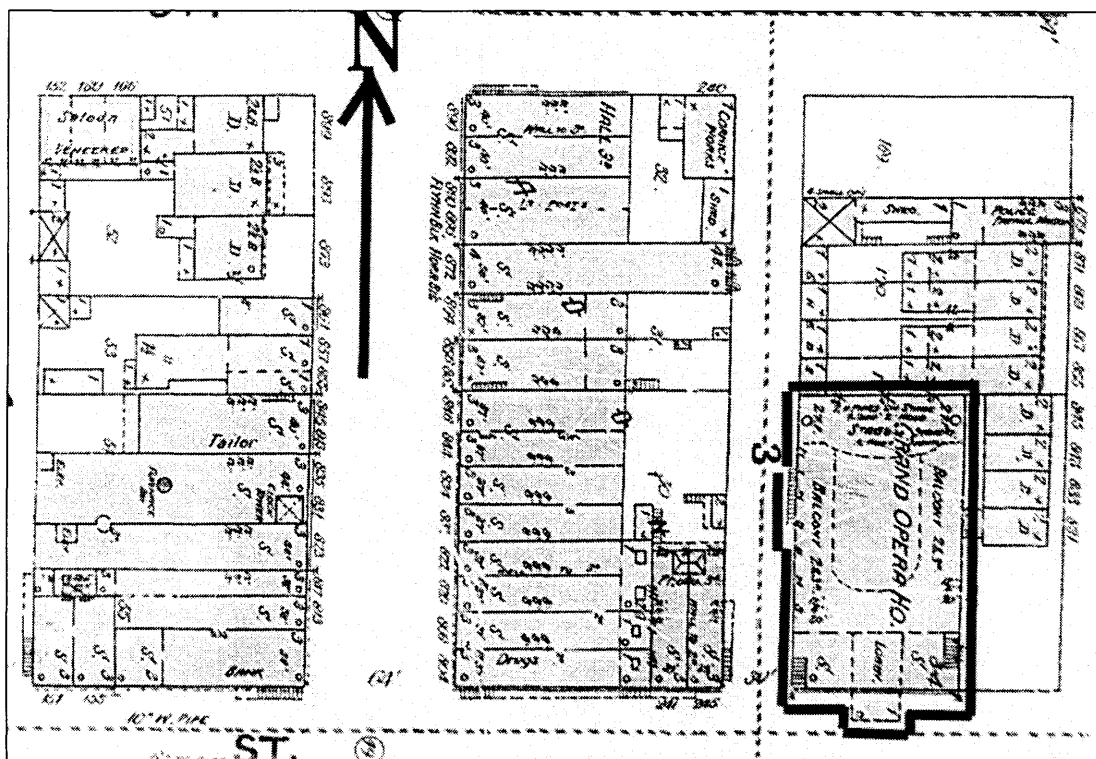


Figure 56: 1891 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (the building is outlined)

Figure 57 depicts the completed building with its twin storefronts on the ground floor front, and its two balcony levels. Note the lack of change in the half block save for the clearance of dwellings from the north end, presumably in preparation for building a new firehouse. The corner lot east of the opera house remains undeveloped.

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Figure 57: Grand and billboard corner lot, c. pre-1896.
Note the frame building to the east later purchased by theater, view to the northwest.
Note also commercial office lettering on right-hand second floor office window.

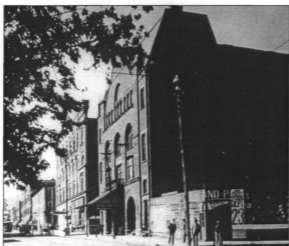


Figure 58: Security Building in place west of Grand, post-1896, view to the northwest
Eighth Street in the foreground crosses Main Street to the west.

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Figure 59: 1896 Security Building with Grant to east, view to the northeast from Main and 8th streets. Note similar glass and metal canopy on Security Building front, as well as intersecting car lines in foreground.



Figure 60: Parade in front of theater, note streetcar tracks on 8th Street, view to the northeast. This image clearly shows the presence of a recessed foyer with no doorways set within the main arches.

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All the events had wonderful bands with them and they would parade up and down Main Street at noon and before the show they'd play in front of the theater for a half hour.

Frank Hoffman, long-time usher (note Figure 60, above)
Telegraph-Herald, September 15, 1963)

On February 19, 1893 the old Duncan-Waller opera house offered its final stage show, now operated by realtors Duncan and Coates, gave up unequal fight with the Grand and closed its doors, leaving the Grand as the city's only opera house. Duncan had given live stage in Dubuque his best shot. Even as the Grand was being built, The *Weekly Ledger* had chided city residents for their failure to be supportive.

The people of Dubuque are not properly appreciating the efforts of Manager Duncan of the Opera House to give them first class entertainments. Very few of the companies playing in Dubuque for the past three months have paid traveling expenses. This is not creditable to Dubuque. These entertainments have been of a high order, and the paltry patronage accorded them is not only disgusting, but gives Dubuque a name abroad not to be desired, by any means.

The *Ledger* was the city's most outspoken newspaper (*Weekly Ledger*, September 28, 1889; *Telegraph-Herald*, May 14, 1933).

One Grand triumph, in just its first month of operating, was the only Iowa appearance of Edward Strauss' 43-member orchestra from Vienna. Dubuquers had the single chance to hear the music of the "Austrian king" given that this was the only Iowa performance in a six month tour and 250 concerts. Grand Manager Roehl hasd worked since March to schedule the orchestra but a last-minute commitment of \$1,200 sealed the deal. The *Herald* admitted "this is no small risk for Manager Roehl to run, but he desires to see if the Dubuque public desires that high grade of entertainments." The *Herald's* reporter was impressed, noting "never before has Dubuque heard such music and it will be years before she will hear better if as good." The public response was tepid, the same source noting "the Grand should have been crowded to its utmost, but it was filled with fully 1,000 to hear the matchless programme" (*Herald*, September 27-28, 1890; *Times*, March 6, 1890).

It is perhaps an impossibility to summarize the broad range of programs that the Grand would have offered during these early years. In addition to the travelling troupes opera houses offered "opera, concerts, minstrels, Humpty-Dumpty combinations (vaudeville, burlesques, exhibitions and lectures). Minstrel shows were the financial mainstay of many a theater. Included in the Grand's lengthy roster of visiting shows were Beach & Bowers, both native Dubuquers. Commonly a local organization would sponsor a major performance. In 1893 the Dubuque Boat Club sponsored a minstrel show. In 1906 the play the "Egyptian" was offered under the auspices of the local YMCA and as late as 1912 that same organization sponsored "Ahasuerus". The local Order of Eagles brought the Eagles Minstrels to the theater in 1908. German language and cultural programs dominated in a city that was disproportionately German. The Saengerbund held a singing concert at the Grand on November 9, 1891 during its second season (ibid., play bills).

Any theatre becomes embroiled in the occasional controversy and the Grand managers on numerous occasions were criticized, particularly by the Catholic Church, which was particularly dominant in Dubuque. The German Catholics asked Mayor Haas to prevent the performance of "The Girl In The Taxi" in 1914 but audiences loved the show. Most of these programs were found to be acceptable. The *Herald* reported "No Morals Ruined" for one 1900 performance. "Soul Kiss" offered in 1910 was said to have left its audiences "ashamed" (*Telegraph-Herald*, April 11, 1900; February 3, 1910; September 14, 1914).

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The most controversial Grand engagement was surely that of the notorious Cherry Sisters (Effie, Addie and Jessie), a female trio billed as “the World’s worst act.” When they appeared, or tried to appear in mid-May 1893, the Grand suspended its poorest curtain behind the sisters to protect its better ones from damage from flying objects. The largest tossed object was a wash boiler, that was passed into the balcony from the alley and tossed onto the stage. This was the first year on the road for the sisters and it would take them three more years to reach Broadway and the big time. The local newspaper rated the show “moral but audiences driven to drink.” The audience was predominantly male in its makeup, and the patrons were primed to show their appreciation of the sisters’ many talents. The local papers condemned the theater for failing to protect the performer, but Manager Roehl countered with a detailed account of how he stationed seven men in the gallery to keep the audience both off the stage and out of range. The sisters unsuccessfully sued the city for \$20,000 (Mills; *Daily Times*, May 17, 18, 19, 20, June 2, 1893; *Telegraph-Herald*, n.d.).

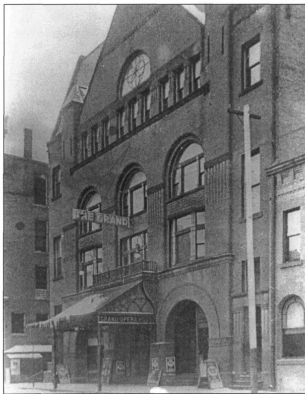


Figure 61: Winter view of façade, view to the northwest

Note “Grand Opera House” inscription along sides of canopy, balcony atop the canopy, and electrified “The Grande” suspended sign. A new two-story corner building stands east of the theater at right.

Notable performances brought large animals and fire and flood (rolls of blue cloth) to the stage. Chicago burned, the Battleship *Maine* sank, sandstorms were staged (“Garden of Allah” with donkeys, camels and horses) and there was a chariot

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race with three chariots and a dozen horses, which ran on temporary treadmills (the orchestra was told to play “furiously” to drown out the racket from the treadmills) as a part of Ben Hur. Ben Hur stayed for three evening performances while most bookings played just a single night. The Boston Opera Company was in Dubuque for a week and presented seven full-scale operas. “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” and the “Pirates of Penzance” were the most popular shows, the former came to Dubuque two or three times a year and commonly recruited its audience with a street parade, with Little Eva riding in a chariot. Some of the greatest names in the theater performed at the Grand. The list included Richard Mansfield, singer Al Jolson, Cornelious Otis Skinner (1896, “Richard III”), Sarah Bernhardt (1917, “Merchant of Venice,” farewell trip to America), Walter Whiteside (1896, “Hamlet”), George Arliss, Lillian Russell (1908), George M. Cohan, and the pianist Ignace Paderewski. John Philip Sousa’s United States Marine band was at the Grand. In total, an estimated 2,600 live stage performances graced the Grand from 1892 through 1928 (*Telegraph-Herald*, April 17, 1933; July 14, 1957).

The theater, after just eleven years, was substantially remodeled inside during the summer of 1901. The new work included “new decorations, new carpets and many other [unspecified] additions and improvements” along with all new scenery. The new furnishings likely did not include new general seating however. The company accounts list \$1,421 in repairs for the year (*Daily Telegraph*, August 25, 1901; Minutes).

Death claimed another theater founder in 1904 with the loss of William L. Bradley Sr. He was the board president at the time of his passing. He was succeeded by his son, William L. Bradley Jr. In early January 1905 the theater board purchased adjacent land to the east/northeast that included a frame residence (see Figure 69) to be used as a dressing room area. The *Daily Times* recounted in mid-July 1906

“the theatre has been handicapped for some time for dressing room accommodations and the building in the rear of the Grand will greatly overcome difficulties experienced in the past... The present dressing rooms of the theatre are now under the stage and they have been found to be inadequate. They will still be used in connection with the new rooms.”

Ten rooms were to be added to the newly acquired building. Another reshuffling was the relocation of the main box office to the theater building proper, no previous location being identified in the report (Minutes, July 27, 1904; January 9, 1905; *Daily Times*, July 7, 1906).¹⁴

Annual improvements are recorded in the company ledgers for the years 1904 through 1907. The purposes are largely unspecified. The 1904 figure was \$3,915, and that for 1905 was \$1,106. In 1906 \$1,513 was spent on the dress rehearsal area and another \$1,029 on other items. In 1907 improvements included a fire escape (\$389), general repairs (\$307), boilers (\$1,510) and “B&B” (\$513) (Minutes).

Manager Roehl tired of the frenetic pace of theatrical management mid-way through the 1905-06 season. “I have simply grown tired of the business” said Roehl, after 16 years in the position. President Bradley replaced him. The tragic Iroquois Theater fire in Chicago on New Year’s Day 1904 prompted city leaders everywhere to check on fire safety provisions at local theaters. Dubuque’s mayor Berg sent Fire Chief Reinfried and Captain Daly to inspect the Grand. The theater had nine exits for its 1,100 patrons exclusive of stage exits. All of the exits had outward-swinging doors. There was water and three hoses (covering both sides of the stage, the fly area and the area beneath the stage) on the stage and a fireman was present during every performance. Two alley side stage exits had their hinges reversed so that they too opened outwards, and the theater promised to buy and install an asbestos fireproof main curtain. The investigative report noted that the first balcony

¹⁴ The purchased involved the east 43 feet of Lot 171 and the north two feet of the east 43 feet of Lot 172, the purchase price was \$3,000 (Minutes, July 27, 1904; January 9, 1905).

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seated 252 patrons and was served by three exits as well as the main stairs. The gallery with an unspecified number of seats had two rear exits, one alley exit and separate stairs from the balcony below it. Manager Roehl invited the public to come to inspect the theater system. The curtain was installed just before the 1904-05 season opened. That season's first play, the "Heart of Chicago" featured the great Chicago fire onstage! That summer (1904) the theater had been re-seated with new chairs. Patrons were allowed more legroom. The existing basement dressing rooms were improved and others built. Hot and cold running water was added. A new ladies' parlor was built on the east side of the ground floor beneath the manager's office. A smoking lounge was added in the west basement. At year's end the entire building was finally wired for electric lights. The *Daily Times* of December 13, 1904 noted "Patrons of the Grand Opera House will be agreeably surprised tonight to see the house lighted with electricity throughout." The play "The Royal Chef" was the first performed under electric light and not the limelight at the Grand. Fire safety concerns continued into 1906 and Mayor Shrunck was involved in negotiations regarding the building of a rooftop fire escape onto the adjacent Malting Company building. At year's end an alley side cast iron fire escape was erected instead (Minutes, November 26, 1906; November 27, 1907; *Herald*, January 6, April 24, August 30, 1904; *Daily Times*, December 13, 1904; March 21, 1906).



Figure 62: Robinson Crusoe, "the big musical extravaganza"
(*Telegraph-Herald*, April 17, 1918)

In 1908 the billboard lot to the east of the theater was infilled with a two-story saloon. The theater board was asked to approve the saloon's location. The new building is visible in Figures 47 and 51. In 1909 the original theater corporation was resolved when it reached its 20th year of operation, and new articles of incorporation for the Grand Opera House (replacing the Grand Opera House Company) were filed for record. The only substantial organizational change was the reduction of the board size to between three and five members. One tenant firm in the theatre building was that of Bradley & Maclay, a real estate and insurance firm headed by two of the theater's officers, William Bradley, board president and John Maclay, who had replaced James Shields as secretary and director in June 1909. There was usually an eatery in one of the storefronts. The Opera House Restaurant was there as of 1902 and the Grand Opera House Buffet was in operation as of 1906 (Minutes, January 9, 1905; October 26, 1908; June 30, August 25, 1909; *Daily Times*, July 7, 1906).

By mid-1909 all but \$1,000 of the original \$25,000 mortgage was paid off, a clear indication of the profitability of the theater in its first 20 years. In addition to paying off the construction loan the directors had acquired the first of many sites scattered around the city which it used for billboard promotions for its productions. The new corporation bought out the old one for \$39,800 (*ibid.*, July 15m, 1909).

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The year 1910 was the year of fires for the city's theaters. On April 7 the Old Bijou at 4th and Main was destroyed by fire, setting the stage for the construction of Dubuque's other surviving theater, the Majestic/Orpheum.¹⁵ The massive Standard Lumber Company Fourth Street fire of late April 1910 threatened the Grand. That same night, four other arson-caused fires broke out in several factories including one near the Grand. Fire broke out in sheds between the theater and Iowa Street to the east. The fire started in an iron-covered shed used by the theatre for scenery storage. The shed had been added to the rear wall. Some of the scenery was destroyed and the rest was damaged (*Telegraph-Herald*, April 22, 1910).

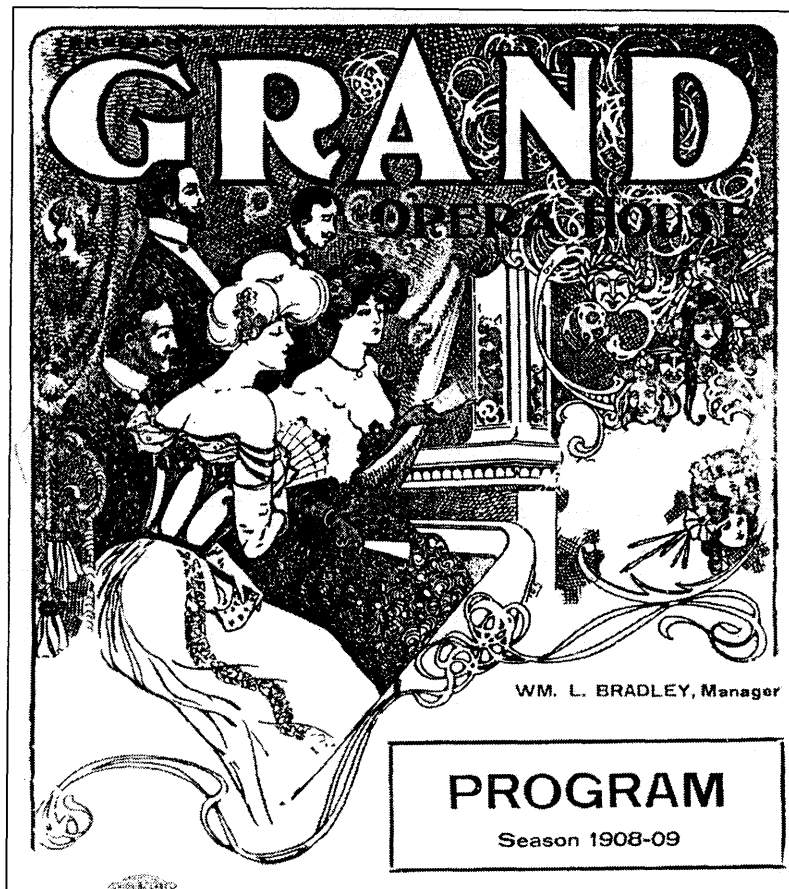


Figure 63: Opera House program cover, 1908-09 season.

The third 1910 theater fire was a sensational one, certainly due to the preceding larger ones. Walter Smith was charged with incendiarism for setting several fires behind and below the stage in the Grand on May 2. Smith was also suspected initially in having started the April fires as well. No serious damage was done to the theater, each fire being started in pieces of furniture and the blazes being quickly extinguished. Smith was sentenced to five years at the Anamosa Reformatory. The final 1910 fire was also at the Grand, a minor chimney blaze which broke out in December, creating "a small amount of excitement" (*Telegraph-Herald*, May 3, 4, 6, June 6, 18, 1910).

¹⁵ The Orpheum was not an opera house but was built for "refined vaudeville."

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The 1910 shed fire set the stage for all new scenery (“everything back of the curtain” in the words of Manager Voels) in August 1910. Company records give a total of \$3,061 expended. The Twin Cities Scenic Studio of Minneapolis produced the new sets. The theater was also redecorated and reseated. Another reason for the new scenery was the establishment of a house “permanent stock company” that would supplement a planned twice weekly “high class” travelling shows, the stock company performing five nights a week. Despite its new scenery, the stock company folded within a month’s time. This failure was compounded with the opening of the rebuilt Orpheum on November 16, 1910 (ibid., August 19, September 7, 14, October 13, 24, 1910).

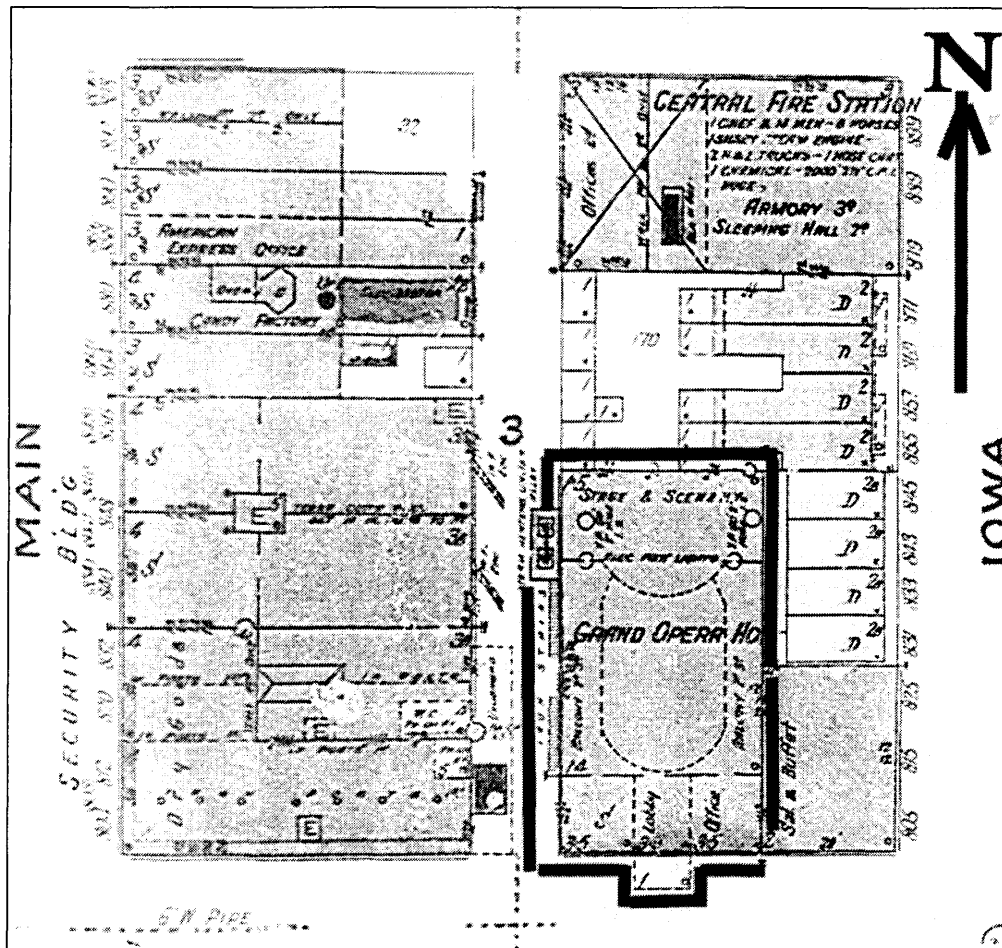


Figure 64: 1909 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (the building is outlined)

Figure 64 depicts the opera house when it was twenty years old. The original porte cochere remained in place, as did the twin balcony levels and the storefronts. Electric floodlights were noted in the stage area and a boiler room was now intruding west beneath the alleyway. For the first time a rear frame storage appendage adjoins the opera house along the northeast side. This was a scenery storage area and it figured in the 1910 fire the next year. Immediately west, the Security Building was in place on Main Street. On the north end of the half block the Central Fire Station had infilled the vacated lot and the police station building.

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In February 1911 the theatre management had to warn patrons that late-arrivals would no longer be seated between acts. Those wearing hats were thanked for removing them during performances. Manager Bradley resigned the next year (he “just didn’t care to continue”) and was succeeded by John H. Maclay (ibid., February 18, 1911; January 31, 1912).

The Grand started showing motion pictures beginning in 1915. The company records list \$1,760 expended that year and \$1,755 spent the next year for equipment, and \$588 for wiring.¹⁶ That first year film rentals of \$7,383 yielded receipts of \$22,872, a profit of \$15,488. Total theater profits doubled between 1914 and 1915, due to the addition of motion pictures. During this same time, legitimate theatre receipts declined from \$12,814 to \$4,772 in 1915. Chart 1 below graphically indicates where the money was when film revenues were compared to live stage revenues. The latter enjoyed a modest increase during the prosperous post-World War I years but film revenues simply exploded. Live stage was much more expensive to produce, a substantial cost being represented by the full size orchestra. In 1922 alone, this cost line was \$6,674 (Grand financial records, Minutes Books; Geroux, p. 531-32).

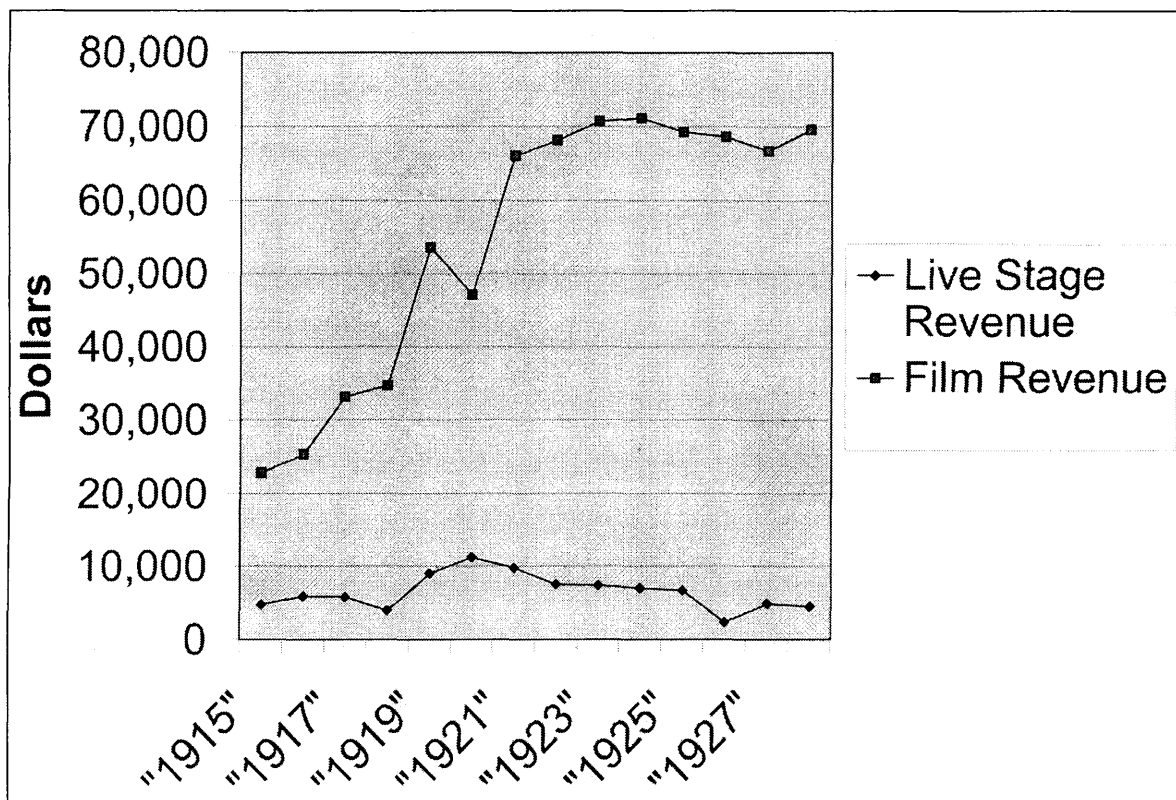


Figure 65: Film versus live stage revenue, 1915-1928

Figure 66, below, summarizes the financial picture of the Grand for its first 50 years. Prior to 1918, there were just six bad years. World War I related inflation greatly increased the theater’s operational costs beginning in 1915. Revenues briefly stalled in the postwar recovery but then rebounded, the increase presumably representing growing film revenues. The worst years were 1913-16, and 1926-27. Revenues declined and then flattened beginning in 1909 and rising costs nearly equaled income in 1913-14. In 1926-27 revenues fell below expenditures and the live stage revenues were just \$2,360 (ibid.; Geroux, pp. 531-32).

¹⁶ The last year for which improvement totals are available is 1918, when the total expended was \$969 (Minutes).

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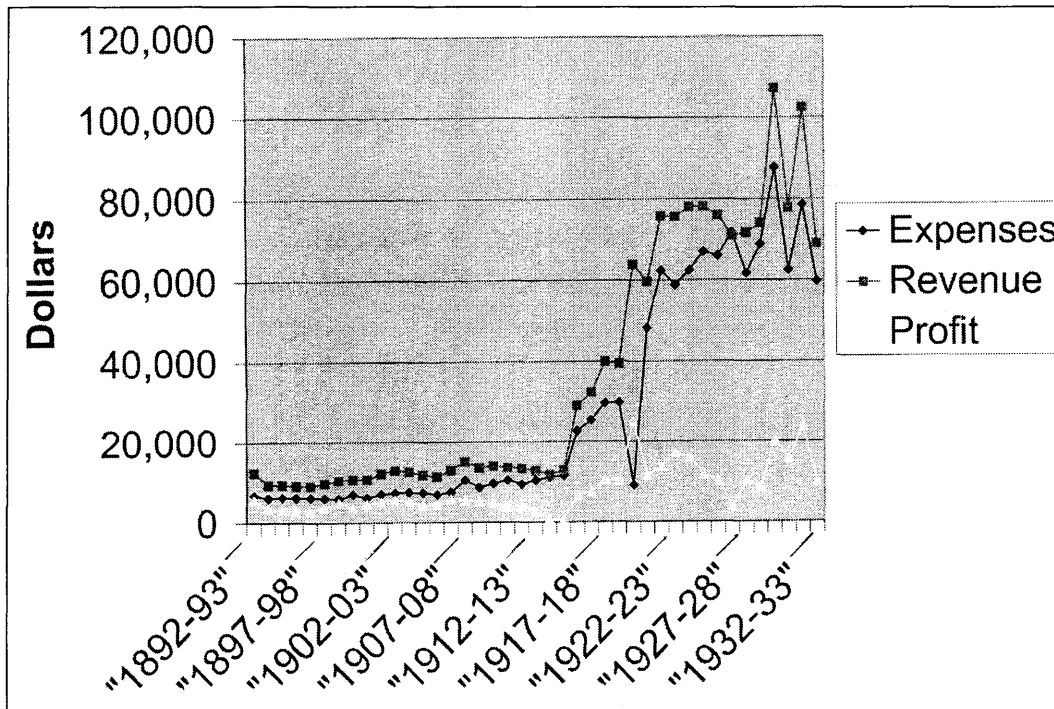
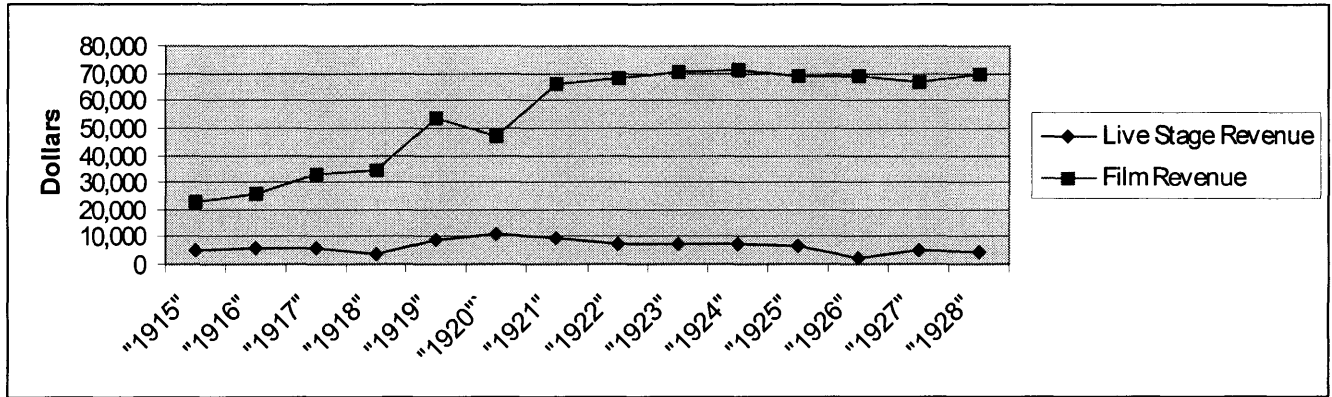


Figure 66: Revenue and expenses, Grand Theater, 1892-1932

Live stage performances presumably declined both in scale and frequency after the war. The final professional show was on March 14, 1928. Another performance, "Ladies of the Jury" produced such a dismal attendance that the manager cancelled the next planned attraction. The opera house company records are silent to programming during the 1920s. The company increased its capitalization from \$40,000 to \$150,000 in December 1922, and they issued \$60,000 in stock at the same time. There were 1,500 shares of stock. The articles of incorporation were renewed on August 12, 1929, having once again expired after 20 years. On September 6, 1949 the company became a perpetual corporation and capitalization was increased to \$200,000 (Minutes, December 18, 1922; August 12, 1929; September 6, 1949: *Telegraph-Herald*, April 17, 1933; September 15, 1963).

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Figure 67: Motion pictures displace live stage (*Herald*, January 10, 1926)

During the First World War, the Grand was literally center stage in Dubuque's efforts to push the Liberty Loan campaigns. Patriotic films were featured to generate war support in what was one of Iowa's most German cities. The pro-war hysteria peaked in May-June 1918 as the city's two German banks retitled themselves to halt the outflow of deposits. As Figure 68 indicates the governor of Iowa appeared on the Grand's stage on the anniversary of America's entry into the war. A month later, the film "The Unbeliever," a "smashing patriotic picture that has brought a thrill to the heart and tears to the eyes of thousands" was shown for four days at the Grand (*Telegraph Herald*, April 5, May 19, 1918).

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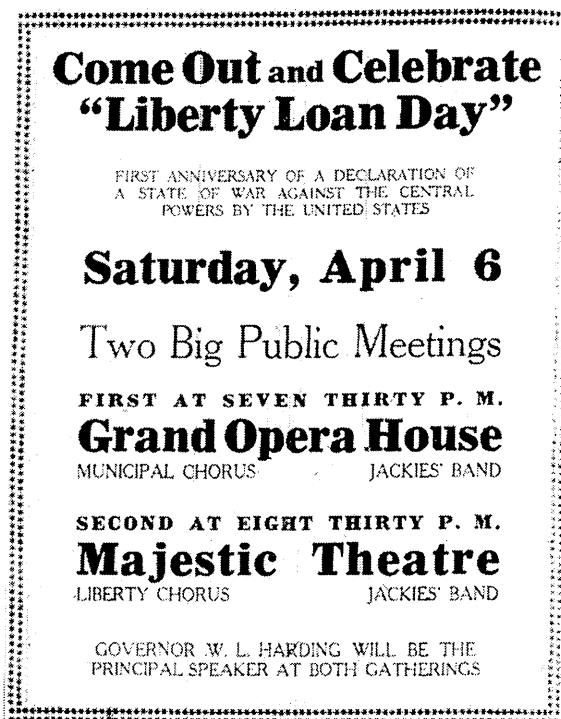


Figure 68: Dubuque *Telegraph-Herald*, April 5, 1918

In 1930 the theater was “stripped to its frame and rebuilt as a [movie] theater...” The extensive work required three months to complete. The entire auditorium area was remodeled, the upper balcony was completely removed and all of the box seats went with it. The orchestra pit was removed and covered over and the semi-circular stage front was flattened out. A massive air ventilation system filled the rehearsal rooms which were beneath the stage. The first movie screen (14x16) was one-sixth the size of the 20x35 cinemascope screen that was in place as of 1963. Two large fireproof projection booths replaced the dressing rooms and hall areas, which had served the upper balcony. The seats were recovered and just 681 of 1,100 seats remained. The Grand Opera House became the Grand Theater (*Telegraph-Herald*, July 14, 1957; September 15, 1963).

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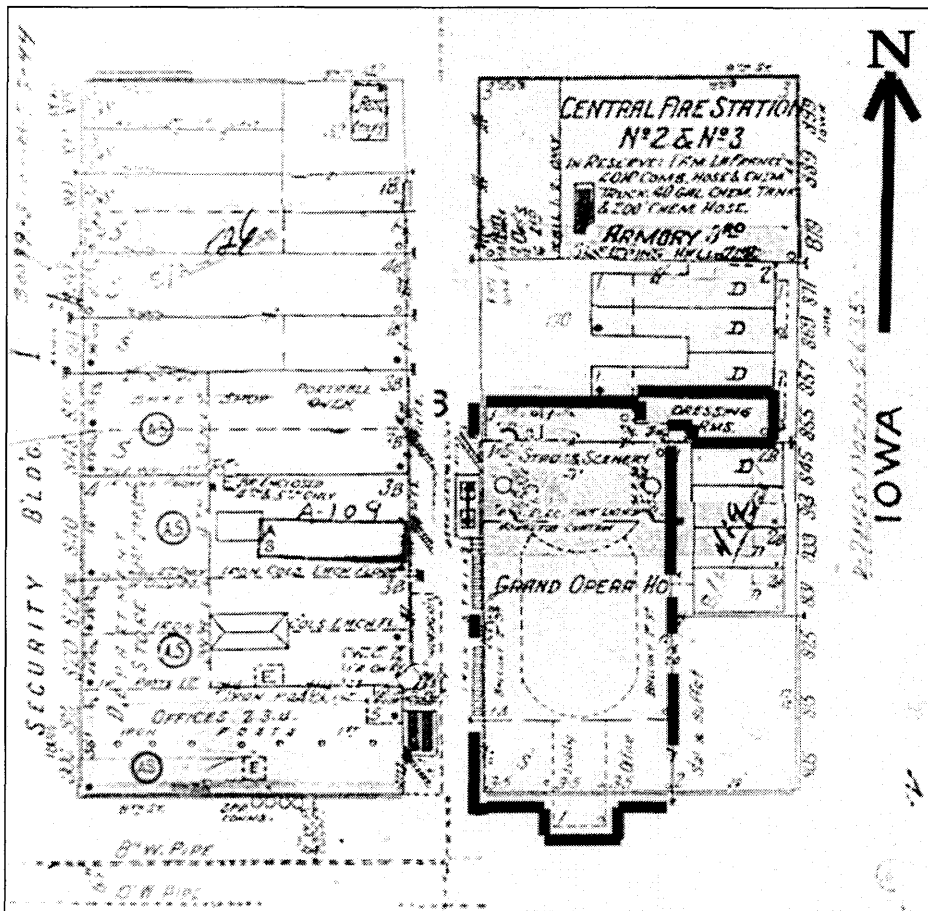


Figure 69:1909/36 Fire Insurance Map (the building is outlined)

The updated (to 1936) 1909 Sanborn Map (Figure 69) recorded an inaccurate depiction of the Grand Opera House. The map still depicted the two balcony levels and the original porte cocher as remaining in place. Neither was as of 1930. An asbestos curtain is noted. Behind the opera house was a range of attached storage sheds and a dressing room in one of the 8th Street properties. For the first time, a Sanborn map recorded the corner two-story building on the corner to the east.

An undated typed specifications list for the theatre, prepared while John H. Maclay was manager, gives the house capacity as 848 seats (554 on the main floor and 294 on the balcony). The seating plan presented as Figure 24 dates to this period of theater operation, c.1930. This list represents the theater operation when it combined films and live stage. The list contains full stage dimensions as well as the specifications for the two Kaplan Sure-Fit film projectors. The distance from the projector lens to the screen was 102 feet. The screen was 24 feet back from the footlights and eight feet in front of the back wall. There was a spotlight with color wheel, frames and slides and a Western Electric sound system. The ventilating system was powered by a 7.5 h.p. air washer motor, and two 10 h.p. blower motors. The theater was apparently reseated between this arrangement and the 1930 remodeling. In some manner 167 seats were eliminated with neither arrangement involving a second balcony. The majority of the removed seats must have been from the box seat areas. The upper balcony was apparently abandoned and it is possible that the film projectors were placed on the lowermost front of that balcony, thus accounting for the short distance between the screen and projector (typed manuscript, n.d.).

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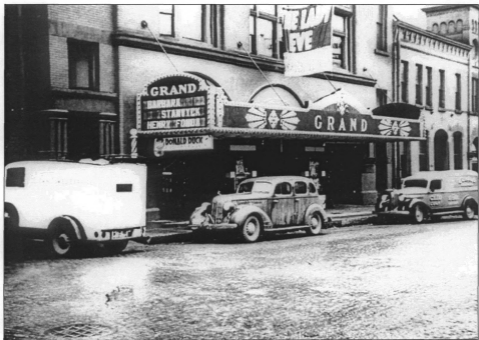


Figure 70: first marquee, 1941
This marquee dated to the 1930 remodeling.

After 1930 films were supplemented with wrestling matches on stage. Local wrestling star Heinie Engel was an attraction. These matches ceased with the onset of World War II but other annual benefit shows continued to use the stage (*Telegraph-Herald*, September 15, 1963).

Popcorn sales at the Grand were started in 1947. In the fall of 1954 the Grand Opera House Company divested of its three billboard advertising sites around the city. Four other sites had long been operated by Charles Murphy Advertising, the buyer of the properties, since 1939. In early 1955 the board discussed building a drive-in theater, and the Grand was redecorated, particularly to improve inadequate interior lighting. The company also owned the Strand and Avon theaters and had "a working arrangement" regarding the Orpheum Theater. The Grand work cost \$104,826. By July 1956 the capital surplus generated at the Grand was reduced by half, to just \$20,000. The Avon was closed and the board considered closing the State Theater. A separate corporation was finally organized to operate the State Theater (State Theater Company) in 1958. A new screen for the Grand was discussed in 1959 and the frame dwellings located north of and adjacent to the theater were in need of repair, just half of the buildings were rented. The board decided to demolish the buildings at 855-57 Iowa for use as parking. The 1958-59 season the Grand produced a profit of \$3,300, while the Strand lost \$4,300 and the Orpheum, now owned by the company, yielded \$8,900 (*Minutes*, May 1, 1939; September 28, 1954; January 1, 22, 1955; July 9, 1956; January 27, July 25, 1958; July 14, 1959, April 6, 1961; Lyon, p. 182).

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Figure 71: Second marquee, view to the northwest, note Colonial Revival foyer doors
Note the weather beacon on the American Trust & Savings Bank building (895 Main Street) at upper left.

The new parking lot became a problem by mid-1961 as large trucks began to use it as a shortcut. The Murphy Company was asked by the board to erect signs to stop the short-cutters, bringing back the corner billboard lot. The Grand gained a dual adult-child water fountain and the east wall was sandblasted and waterproofed, apparently because it was now partly exposed to the weather given the demolition of the adjacent building. Later that same year a collapsed sewer line was replaced and a 25-foot long alleyway west wall footing was discovered to be unsupported. In early 1962 the Prepakt Concrete Company pumped concrete grout beneath the abyss to give it the necessary support. The boiler room ceiling was reinforced at the same time. The alley was in use by heavy trucks and the boiler and well rooms extended out into the alleyway. Also in 1962 the curved movie screen was rebuilt and the foyer re-carpeted. The board decided to stop showing "arts films" at the Grand during the winter months given the lack of public interest (Minutes, July 18, December 18, 1961; April 9, July 2, 1962).

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Figure 72: Second marquee, 1957, view to the northeast, note remodeled corner building

In late January 1963 the board solicited advice on putting a new front and marquee on the Grand. The new design was generally approved three months later, and on July 22 Frank Hardee prepared an "artist's conception" of how the new front would look. The actual plan was not approved until the late fall. At the same time the board spent \$150 to hang a protective screen in front of the movie screen when the stage was in use, an indication that other types of activities were supplementing film income (Minutes, January 28, April 20, July 22, October 5, 1963).



Figure 73: Artist's Conception, Grand Theater remodeling plan, by Frank Hardie, 1963
(*Telegraph-Herald*, September 15, 1963)

The artist's conception shown below (Figure 75) "wished away" the upper part of the theater that was not to be buried beneath the metal front. As the other photos indicate, it didn't disappear as readily in reality. By mid-September it was

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reported that “workmen had chipped off the theater’s ornamental red stonework” and were then “covering the 850-seat theater with gray and red metal panels, as part of a remodeling program” (*Telegraph-Herald*, September 15, 1963).



Figure 74: Starting the cover up, 1963 (*Telegraph-Herald*, September 15, 1963).
Note the barbershop storefront at left.



Figure 75: Full Metal Jacket, and the second marquee, 1964

The company apparently stripped off the ornamentation from the existing marquee and added a new triangular neon masthead, a broader interpretation of the one envisioned by the designer. The year 1964 was a financially difficult one for the

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theater company and lowered admission prices failed to turn things around. A first nine months comparison with 1963 showed that the 1963 revenue was \$95,323, while that of 1964 was \$77,828. They decided that the "Grand Opera House" title was too "antiquated" for a firm that owned all of the downtown movie houses and the name "Bradley Theatres" was informally adopted in late January 1964 (Minutes, January 24, April 9, October 19, 1964).



Figure 76: Grand theater, view to the northwest, c.1970

There was a pecking order between the company's movie houses. The Orpheum was given preferential treatment in all things new and showcased the better films. The Strand received hand-me-downs from the Grand; its 1947 popcorn popper was replaced in 1961 and was recycled to the Strand. In 1966, the Grand's 12-year old magnetic sound system was shifted to the Strand as fewer new films used that technology. The Grand was being upgraded a bit and began to receive better films. In 1967 a new concession stand (Figure #16) was put in place along the north wall of the foyer. It featured two candy cases, a Formica counter top and a suspended ceiling. C. A. Johnson & Son of Des Moines provided the stand for \$2,900. The Coca Cola Bottling Company received a contract to provide drinks to the theater, and drink revenues grew in response to the new stand. In late 1967 the Grand was once again re-seated on the main floor for a cost of \$10,000. The new seats (644 in number) provided extra legroom. The main floor was re-carpeted, and the better older carpet was shifted to the balcony. The balcony interior was completely redone and a new floor laid in 1968. New Orzite carpet was installed. That same year the company sold the lot to the east of the Grand to the City of Dubuque (Minutes, July 23, 1965; July 18, December 15, 1967; January 31, April 23, July 15, 1968; November 27, 1969).

One by one the other movie houses disappeared. The Strand (southeast corner 12th and Main streets) suffered a fire, was empty for years, and was finally demolished in 1990. The State Theater (northeast corner 10th and Main streets) was damaged in a 1965 fire. It was then closed, just six persons attended its final film showing.

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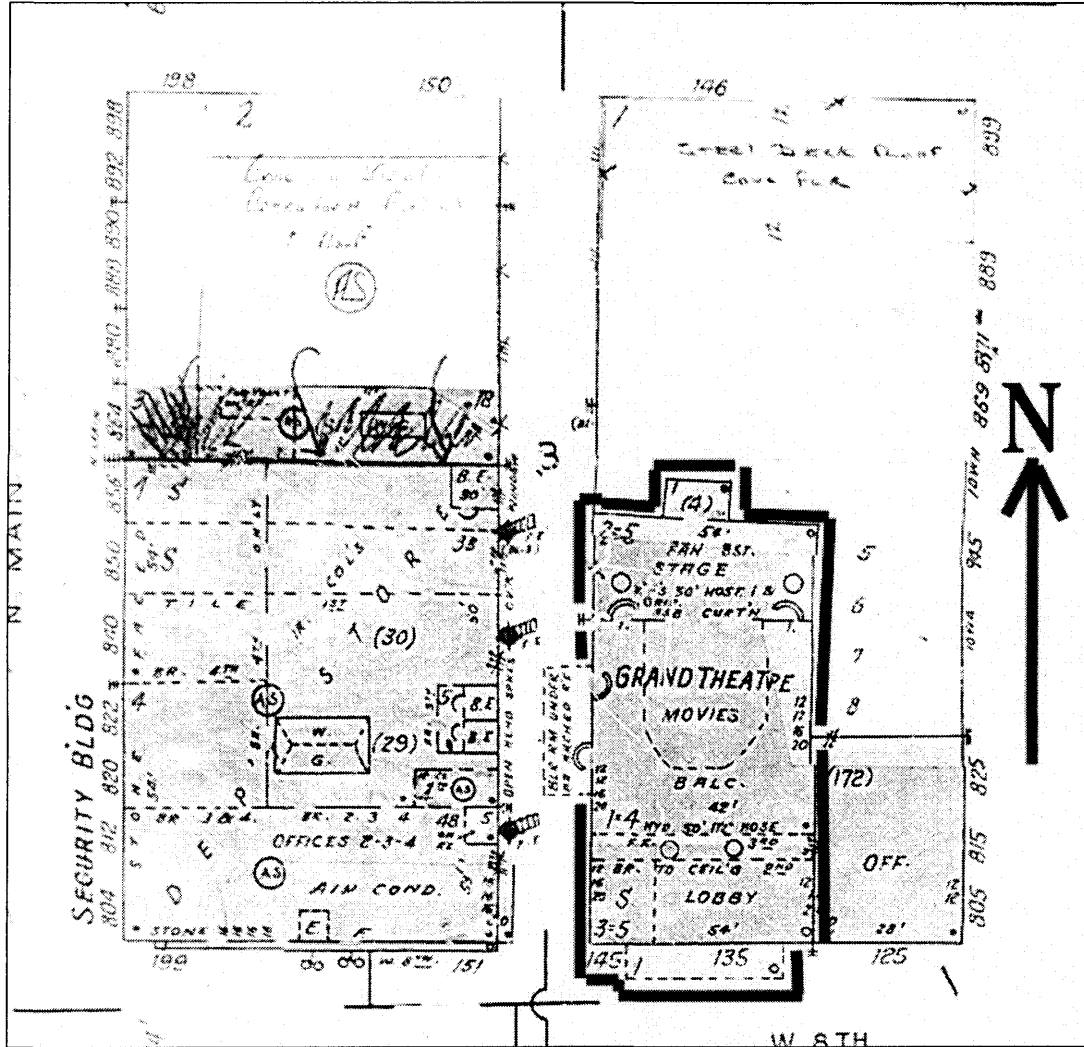


Figure 77 1966 Fire Insurance Map (the building is outlined)

Figure 77 clearly explains why the Grand was on the city's potential demolition list by the 1970s. The entire half block had been completely cleared save for the two southernmost buildings. The most notable change in the Grand was the consolidation of the original lobby and one of the storefronts into a single space. The second marquee is depicted and there was a different rear storage appendage, now centered on the north wall. The map also enlarges the alley side powerhouse and shifts it further south than had previous maps.

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Figure 78: Third marquee and initial restoration c.1993

Richard Davis of Des Moines purchased the Grand in 1972. The Dubinsky Brothers bought Davis' interests in 1976. The movie theater closed down at an undetermined date and the building was placed on a municipal list of potential demolitions. The Barn Community Theatre Troupe literally saved the Grand from the wrecking ball. On August 15, 1986 the musical "Tintypes" was offered by the Barn Community Theatre, just two weeks after that company purchased the Grand. The theatrical group was organized in 1971 and resided for first in a white barn in Flora Park and then at Sacred Heart School. The new company burned their new mortgage just three years later and celebrated the Grand's 100th birthday with a special program on September 14, 1990 (Lyon, p. 182; Huber, p. 26; DeLong, pp. 16-17).

In keeping with the resumption of live stage shows, the theater was renamed the Grand Opera House within a few years of the purchase of the building. A not-for-profit corporation was organized in 1996, titled the Grand Opera House Foundation. Its stated mission was the restoration of the Grand and the establishment of an endowment fund to both operate and restore the building and its programs. A capital campaign was begun in 1997. A three-phase restoration plan was formulated. The first phase removed the covering from the façade, cleaned and tuck-pointed the masonry and stonework, added a new slate roof and new copper gutters. This first phase was completed by 2001. The second phase will reconstruct the public entrances, lobby, foyer, stage and fly-space, and public restrooms. Funding has been secured for the restoration of the front doors. The third phase will restore the auditorium, rehearsal hall and office areas. The total estimated cost for all of this work is \$2.9 million.

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Figure 79: Marquee Removal, pre-1988



Figure 80 1967 concessions stand

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Ghosts of the Grand:

Any half-decent opera house acquires ghost stories over its history, and the Grand has a goodly number of them. Norman and Scott's Haunted America dates the Grand ghosts to post-1986, the time when the theater was refurbished for live stage once again. Most commonly voices are heard in the office area, floorboards creak, lights refuse to stay off. Less commonly cold drafts are felt, items are violently propelled across floors, and theater patrons briefly appear in the rear theater seats. One indication that this is not a new trend was the finding of a "ghost light" in the building attic. It was used overnight to provide light on the stage (Scott, pp. 120-26).¹⁷

¹⁷ A 1957 *Telegraph-Herald* article talked metaphorically about "Ghosts of the Grand's Glorious Past but gave no actual ghost accounts (*Telegraph-Herald*, July 14, 1957).

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United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

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Grand Opera House/Theater

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10. Geographical Data

Legal Description:

City Lot, Original Plat of Dubuque.

Boundary Justification:

The Grand Opera House building covers the entire lot that has been historically associated with the opera house.

Photographs:

Photographer: James E. Jacobsen

Date of Photographs: September 11-12, 2001

Film Type: TMAX 100 ASA

Location of Original Negative: Property Owners

Image:	Direction	Description
1.	northeast	general façade
2.	northwest	general façade
3.	north	façade door detail
4.	north	façade, side door detail
5.	north	detail, second-third floor windows
6.	north	upper windows, dormer, façade
7.	northwest	east side wall
8.	southwest	north wall
9.	northeast	west wall
10.	southeast	west wall
11.	southeast	detail, drop doors
12.	east	foyer, stairs to east
13.	east	second balcony supports
14.	north	attic trusses
15.	east	attic truss
16.	north	north end of attic, ceiling
17.	east	dome base