

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

OCT 28 2004

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORY
& EDUCATION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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 Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 12-18, 21 W. 5th St.
301-605 Grand Avenue; 10, 13, 15-19 W. 4th St. not for publication

city or town Spencer vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Clay code 041 zip code 51301

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.)

Ronell J. Locke October 26, 2004
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

State of Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other. (explain:)

Edson H. Beall 12/6/04
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 39 | 18 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | sites |
| 0 | 0 | structures |
| 0 | 0 | objects |
| 39 | 18 | Total |

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/Specialty Store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/Department Store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/Restaurant
- COMMERCE/TRADE/Financial Institution
- DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling
- DOMESTIC/Hotel
- GOVERNMENT/Post Office

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/Specialty Store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/Department Store
- COMMERCE/TRADE/Restaurant
- COMMERCE/TRADE/Financial Institution
- DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling
- DOMESTIC/Hotel
- VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

- LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque Revival
- LATE 19th/EARLY 20th C. REVIVALS:
Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Concrete
- walls Brick
- Ceramic Tile
- roof Asphalt
- other Terra Cotta

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1913-1935

Significant Dates

1931

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Barton, W.C.

Geiger Construction Co.

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 11 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 2 | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 3 | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 4 | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Molly Myers Naumann, Consultant

organization For the City of Spencer date June 2004

street & number 167 West Alta Vista telephone 641-682-2743

city or town Ottumwa state IA zip code 52501-1437

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name Various (See Attached)

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 1

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION (Cont):

Late 19th/Early 20th Century Revival (Cont)
 Mission/Spanish Revival
 Italian Renaissance
Late 19th/Early 20th Century American Movements
 Sullivan-esque
 Chicago Style
 Commercial Style
Modern Movements
 Art Deco

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION:

The Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District is a three block stretch of the main street in Spencer's central business district between 3rd and 7th streets. It includes a total of fifty-seven buildings: thirty-nine which are considered to be key or contributing, and eighteen which are considered non-contributing. All are commercial buildings (retail and/or professional services) except for The Hotel at the north end, and the former U.S. Post Office (now vacant) on the west edge. A limited number (less than a dozen) have residential units on the second floor.

The City of Spencer is located near the center of Clay County in an area described as "undulating prairie." The U.S.G.S. map illustrates how flat the area is. Grand Avenue runs north/south and is the dividing line between east and west for addresses in the city. The central business district is bounded by the Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad on the north and the Little Sioux River on the south. Businesses extend along streets approximately one block east and west of Grand. Grand was known as Main Street until 1939 when streets were renamed and renumbered.

Historic Appearance:

The original plat of Spencer (1871) was located immediately north of the Little Sioux River and consisted of twelve square blocks (A-J). It was bounded by South Street (now known as Park) on the south, with 1st through 4th Streets running east and west. 4th Street was the north boundary. North/south streets from west to east were: West, Main, Mill, and East. Main Street was platted 100' wide while all of the others were 66'. Lots on each side of Main Street measured 40 1/3' x 90' with the narrow end toward the street. All other lots were platted facing the east/west streets. The first commercial buildings appear to have been located along Main Street between 2nd and 3rd streets. After the Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad arrived in Spencer in 1878, the railroad platted the area immediately north of the original town as their first addition in 1880. 4th Street served as the south boundary for the addition and was platted 100' wide, matching the width of Main, while all the others continued to be 66'. Again, the lots on

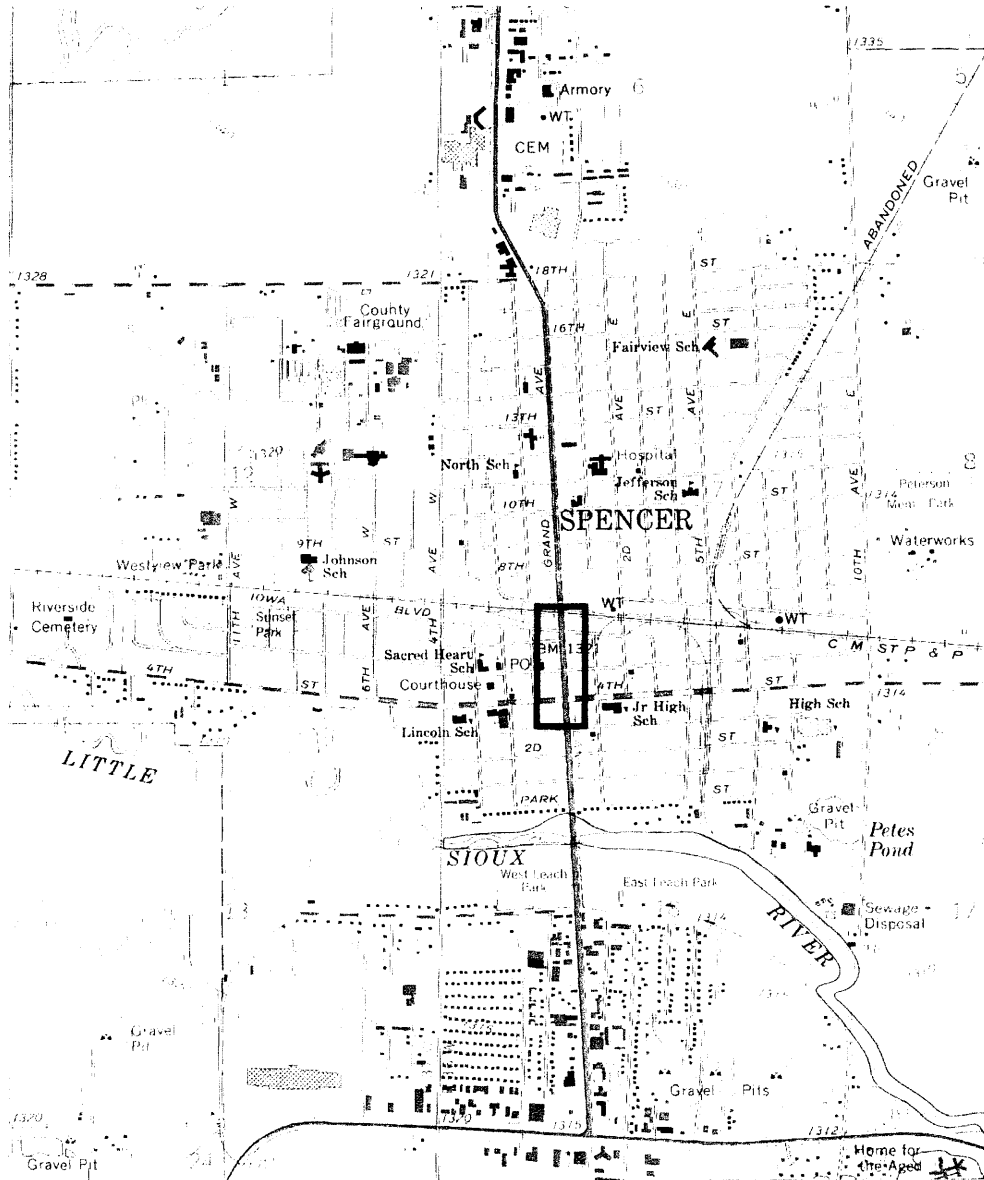
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7

Page 2



U.S.G.S. Map of Spencer (1982 revision)
Rectangle in center indicates location of central business district

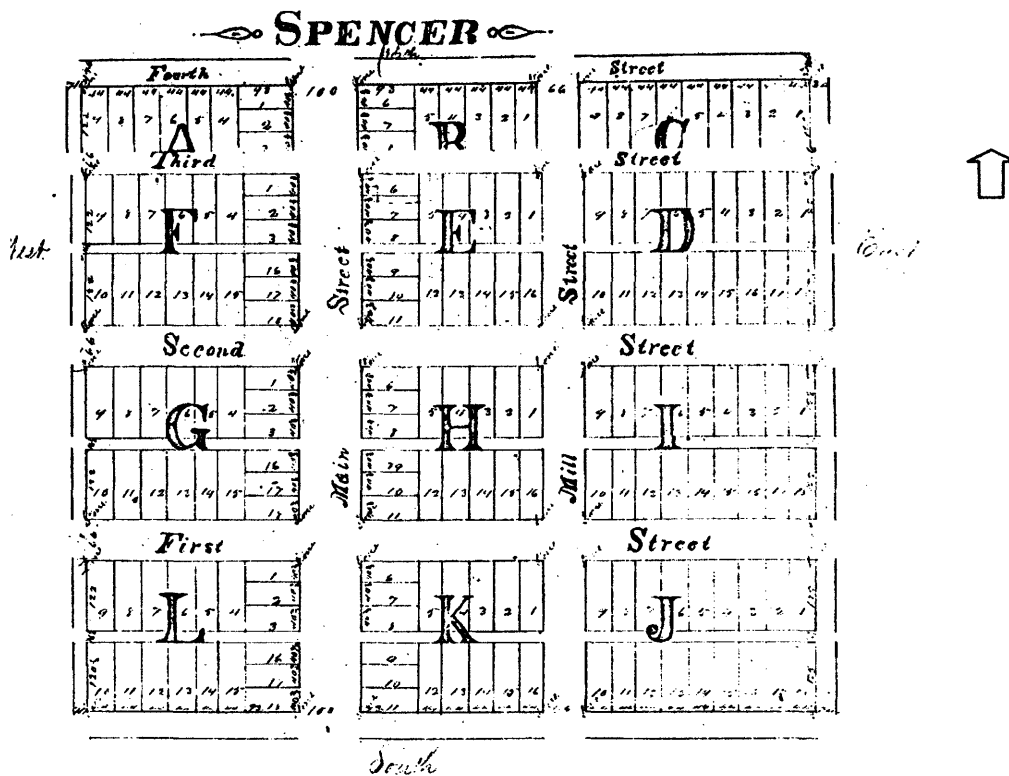
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7 Page 3

each side of Main were narrow, measuring 25' x 142'. The business district soon expanded north into this new addition.



Original 1871 Plat Map of Spencer
(Centennial-Spencer, Iowa: 1871-1971, p 3)

Few photos exist of the early days of Spencer's downtown, but it is known that the earliest building was of sod construction, before logs or lumber were available. The first mention of brick buildings downtown was found in an 1892 newspaper article "A Report on Spencer," but it did not identify the location of the buildings.

The earliest Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of the city was compiled in November 1893. The three pages of the map contain the area between the river and the railroad tracks within one block of Main Street both to the east and to the west. The block from the river to 1st Street is residential. The map shows a well developed business district along Main Street between 2nd and 4th, with the next block to the north filled with buildings along the west side, but only two buildings on the east. Wood frame was the dominant building material, with a scattering of brick buildings. The SW corner of Main and 3rd had two single front brick buildings, the SE corner

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

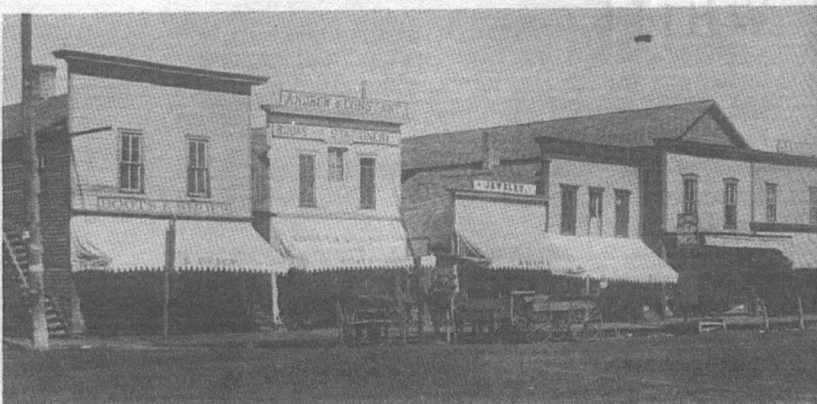
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7 Page 4

of Main and 4th had a double front brick with another small brick building three doors south. At the NE corner of the same intersection there were two double storefront bricks, and on the NW corner was a large double storefront plus two single storefront brick buildings.

A series of photographs from 1897 (Centennial: Spencer, Iowa 1871-1971) documents the appearance of Main Street at that time, basically reinforcing the information from the 1893 Sanborn map. The west side of Main was filled with one and two story frame buildings with "boomtown" fronts. The brick buildings at the corner of 3rd and Main can be seen, but those at 4th and Main were out of range of the camera. A large brick building with a corner turret is shown at 5th and Main.



West Side of Main between 3rd and 4th Streets (1897)



West Side of Main between 4th and 5th Streets (1897)

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 5

On the east side of the street the photographs show the same distribution of brick and frame shown on the Sanborn map. The block between 5th and Railway Street is shown with many empty lots on both sides of the street. Several of the brick buildings feature bracketed pressed metal cornices, while others have a simple brick cornice.



East Side of Main between 3rd and 4th Streets (1897)



East Side of Main between 4th and 5th Streets (1897)

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 6

By 1900 the Sanborn map shows there has been some frame in-fill in the block between 2nd and 3rd and a two story triple storefront brick has been built on the NW corner of 3rd and Main. It is the block between 4th and 5th that shows the most new brick construction, with all but two lots on the east side and only five lots on the west containing frame buildings. The section north of 5th remains unchanged.

Few changes are shown on the 1909 Sanborn map. The new Carnegie Library has appeared on 3rd Street half a block east of Main. A brick veneer building is located at the NE corner of 2nd and Main. Several frame buildings are missing along Main, but a new single storefront brick has been constructed near the north end of the 400 block. In the block north of 5th Street the only change is a brick livery stable that has replaced a frame livery.

The 1915 Sanborn maps show a maturing business district. The block between 2nd and 3rd has gained a frame fire department building on the east side, but the rest of the block is unchanged. The block between 3rd and 4th gained no new brick buildings, but two frame ones have been demolished. The last vacant lot in the block between 4th and 5th streets, the SE corner of 5th and Main, has been filled with a two story double storefront brick. The biggest changes are found in the block north of 5th Street. Along the east side three concrete block buildings have been constructed, two for auto garages, and the third, at the north end, for a creamery. On the west side of the street two concrete block buildings (one with brick veneer) anchor the north end, and a tiny concrete block building is located in the center of the block. Frame buildings continue to occupy many of the lots in this block.

A completely developed business district is shown on the 1924 Sanborn map. All lots are occupied in the block between 2nd and 3rd Streets, although many buildings are still of frame construction. At the NE corner of Main and 3rd a filling station fills a previously empty lot, with the rest of that half block being of frame construction. One vacant lot is seen on the west side of the street just south of the alley. A large new bank anchors the SW corner of Main and 4th. In the block north of 4th Street the entire east side is brick while one small frame building is located in the middle of the west side, and at the north end, the frame building has now been covered with a brick veneer. The block north of 5th is totally built-up on the east side with a combination of brick and concrete block buildings and just three small frame buildings. The west side is a combination of brick and frame with one narrow half lot vacant. A large new brick hotel fills the narrow block between 6th and Railroad (now 7th).

A major fire in 1931 on Main Street destroyed most of the buildings north of 4th Street on the east side of Main and half a block north of 4th on the west side. This fire totally altered the appearance of downtown Spencer. The 1941 Sanborn map shows the downtown much as it is today.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 7

Present Appearance:

U.S. Highway 71 runs north and south through Spencer along Grand Avenue. Grand is a broad thoroughfare lined with one and two story masonry buildings from 3rd Street north to 7th Street. It has a decidedly different appearance from most Iowa Main Streets as 78% of it was constructed or remodeled between 1914 and 1935. Only one pre-1900 building, the I.O.O.F. Building at 411 Grand, retains its original façade.

300 Block of Grand

Entering the district from the south, the west side of the street is composed of two story buildings at each end, with a collection of one story buildings in the center. The first major brick building is the two story triple storefront brick building at the NW corner of Grand and 3rd. The Union Block (301-305) was built in 1917 with Neo-classical details such as the stone cornice and parapet. The windows are banded in groups of four on the primary façade, with individual or paired windows on the side elevation. At street level the three storefronts retain the recessed center entrance and two of the three have large plate glass display windows. The southern storefront has been altered by the application of new material, but the original may still be underneath. The storefronts are divided by two sets of stairs leading to the second floor.

Anchoring the north end of the west side at 323 is the Farmer's Trust and Savings Bank from 1916. This limestone building features the monumental fluted Ionic columns and denticulated cornice common to classical revival style bank buildings of the day and is what Longstreth calls a "temple front." The monumentality of this building is continued on the side elevation with Doric pilasters separating groups of windows.

Three other buildings on the west side are representative of building types and styles from the period of significance: the single story building at 307 from 1917, the two story Woodcock Building at 315 from 1931, and the two story Hasting's Building at 319 from 1919.

The east side of the 300 block is also a combination of one and two story buildings, with the taller ones in the north half. The south end of the block begins with a group of three "new" or greatly altered buildings. The single story building at 310 was constructed c.1930 and has the decorative brick panel across the top that is typical of that period. A band of vertical vinyl siding links this building to the one next door at 312. The single story building at 312 is of frame construction with a terra cotta façade that was added in 1922. This cream colored façade features Sullivanesque panels of a deeper color on each side, plus small square tile and bands of tile in the same deeper shade. This is one of several buildings in the district with terra cotta details in this style.

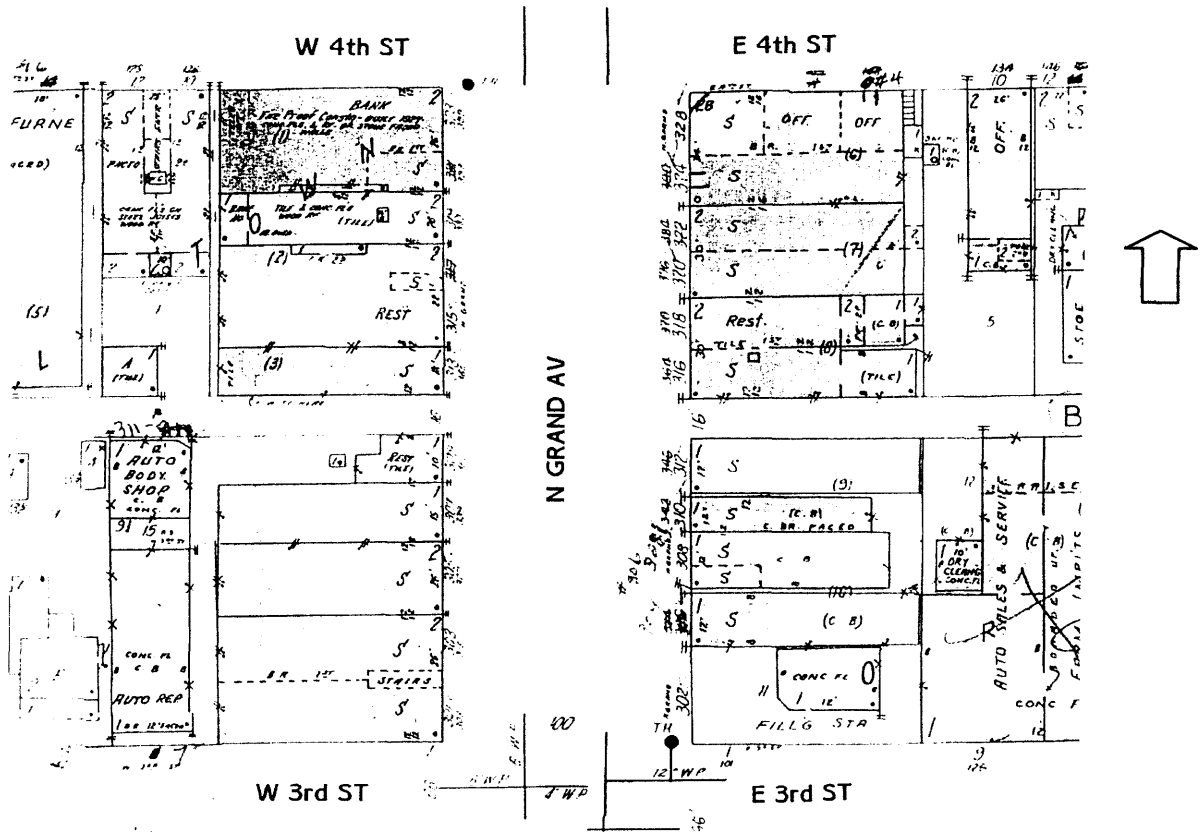
The three buildings immediately north of the alley exhibit characteristics of commercial design between 1915 and c.1930. 314 is a two story building of the light tan brick that was popular around 1930. It originally had a single broad window at the second floor level, but this has now been replaced with a set of three windows. Simple soldier courses are used to define the top of the storefront, the top and bottom of the second floor window, and the cornice. Next

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7 Page 8



1941 Sanborn Map of 300 Block of Grand

door at 318 is a c.1890 two story building that received a new façade around 1920-25. The brick is of a deeper, richer color and decorative brick designs are used for detailing around the broad second floor window and across the cornice. Brick "quoins" are found on both sides, and a soldier course of bricks defines the top of the storefront. The two story double storefront building at 320 was constructed c.1915. At street level it has a central stairway leading to the second floor dividing the two storefronts, each with recessed entry and large plate glass display windows. Second floor windows are grouped in pairs and a very simple brick pattern defines the cornice. Alterations at street level are primarily limited to signage and new doors.

The north end of the east side of the 300 block is filled with a single story double storefront brick building from 1963.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 9

W. 4th Street

Two buildings on W. 4th Street are important to the historic district. The Medlar Building at 10 W. 4th was built in 1921 to serve as a photography studio and family residence on the second floor, with retail space below. It has a symmetrical façade, full terra cotta front with neo-classical detailing such as the foliated capitals on the street level pilasters, and a Mediterranean tile roof. It is the earliest building in the district with Mediterranean elements.

Across the street at 15-19 W. 4th is the Heikens-Glasgow Building from 1916. This two story double front building features a light colored glazed brick façade. A recessed central entrance to the second floor separates the two storefronts. The paired second floor windows with simple brick panels above are typical of early 20th century commercial design.

400 Block of Grand

The west side of the block is almost totally composed of two story buildings, with one small single story building in the middle. The facades show a variety of colors and materials, ranging from deep red brick, to tan, to limestone. The NW corner of Grand and 4th is anchored by the two story triple storefront McAllister Block at 401-405 from 1932. This is an architect designed block that was planned in conjunction with the Clay County National Bank (407) and the Cole Block (409) immediately to the north. All five of these storefronts are in the Art Deco style, with the bank displaying the most prominent features of the style. Light tan colored brick was used for both the McAllister and Cole buildings. The brick is laid in a very simple pattern to create the cornice across the top of the building which is broken only by a stepped cornice, or parapet, directly above a doorway leading to stairs to the second floor. This parapet features vertical brickwork linking it to the second floor window, and then continuing down toward the doorway at street level. This pattern is interrupted by the shake shingle pent roof that extends across all three storefronts and wraps around the corner to the south side. Second floor windows in the McAllister Block are symmetrically placed individually, three per building, with the tops emphasized by a simple soldier course. The north two-thirds of this building (403-405) has been altered by the application of a thin coat of stucco to the brick at the second floor level, leaving the brick cornice in original condition. At street level the north third has been totally altered by covering the entire façade and creating a new eight-sided window.

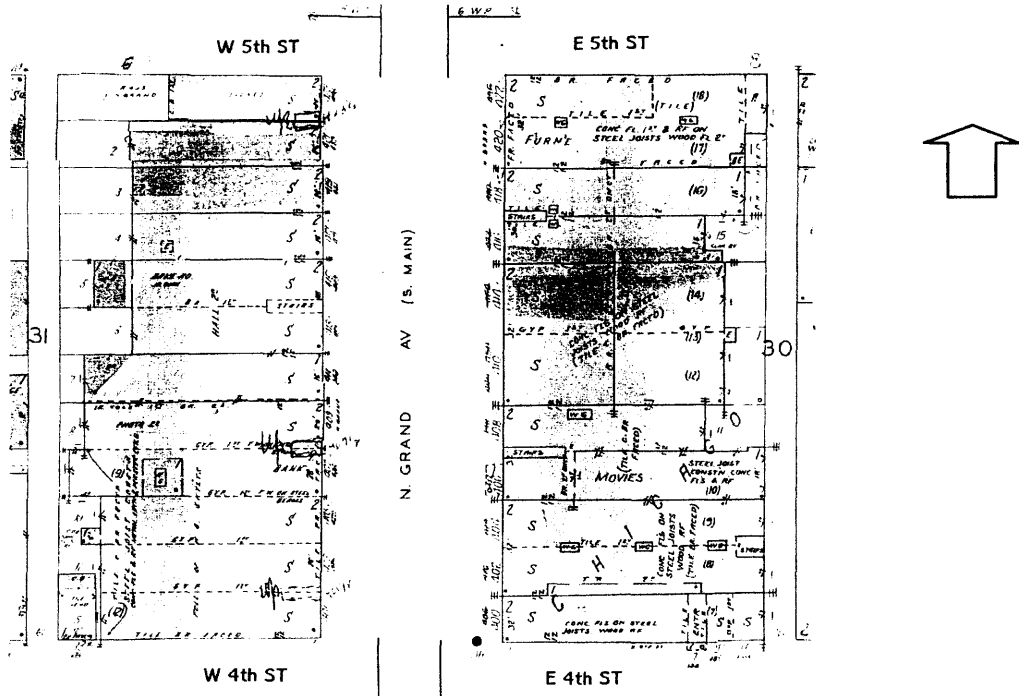
Next door to the north at 407 is the Clay County National Bank. This is a two story single storefront building with a limestone façade. This façade is what Longstreth refers to as an "enframed window wall." The entrance is not symmetrical, but is off-set to the right. The building features a stepped parapet with a slightly pedimented top. The words "Clay County National Bank" are carved into the stone in capitalized Art Deco style letters. Below the name is a two story recessed panel set back in the stone surround. This panel contains a set of four second floor windows, a triple panel with vertical stepped geometric designs, with three plain panels below. Across the top of the first floor windows and door is a narrow geometric frieze that appears as stylized festoons or swags. The stone of the bank façade extends north into the façade of 409 Grand just far enough to allow a stairway entrance to the second floor.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7 Page 10



1941 Sanborn Map of the 400 block of Grand

The only relatively unaltered building from the turn of the century is located on the west side of this block. It is the I.O.O.F. Building from 1895. This red brick building is a two story double front building in a simplified Romanesque Revival design. The rhythmical pattern established by the round arched windows on the second floor is typical of this style. The arches are defined by flat brick patterning rather than heavy cast hoods. The simple brick cornice repeats these arches below a row of dentils. The identification stone in the rectangular pediment reads "I.O.O.F" but does not contain a date.

The east side of the 400 block is made up entirely of two story brick buildings that were constructed after the fire of 1931, and all were architect designed. Like the west side, a variety of color and texture is seen, ranging from dark red to tan brick, red-orange roof tiles, and glossy enamel panels. The south end of the block is anchored by two multi-front buildings of tan brick with Mission/Spanish Revival detailing. The Flindt-Cummings-Rasmussen Building on the corner, 400-404 Grand, has been altered at street level, but the second floor retains the original brick detailing with flat round arches above the rectangular windows, and vertical brick panels above the windows. The north one-third of this building retains the original storefront, complete with prism glass transom. The Fraser Theater next door at 406-408 continues the Spanish Revival theme with a tan brick double front, red tile roof, and baroque center pediment which is echoed by small baroque pediments on each side. At the second floor level, original metal

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 11

casement windows remain in the north half, a flat round arch is located above the central stairway door, and a wrought iron balcony extends out above this door. Note the prism glass transom above the south storefront.

The Floete-Cornwall Building was originally designed with a carrera glass façade. In 1959 this was replaced by the present enameled panels, but the original design of the building remains in place.

The Smith-Knight Building at 416-418 Grand continues the use of simplified brick patterning to supply the decorative details. Soldier courses are used to define the tops of the windows on both the first and second floors, and a basket-weave pattern is found above the center doorway leading to the second floor. The top of the building is slightly pedimented with stone caps. Three stone panels across the top read "Smith," "1932," and "Knight." Again, a prism glass transom remains above one of the storefront.

The Redfield Building at the north end of the block, 420 Grand, at first glance has almost a 19th century feeling to it with the finials on the corners. Closer examination however, reveals Art Deco detailing in the sharply defined geometric patterning on the cornice and between the second floor windows that are arranged in pairs. The glass transoms have been uncovered above all the display windows, and these feature colored art glass designs.

W. 5th Street

Two buildings on W. 5th Street are included in the historic district. On the south side of the street at 12-18 W. 5th is a single story four front brick building. Each of the storefronts is separated from the next by fluted stone pilasters, and each front has a stepped parapet roofline capped with stone. Originally this 1935 building had a fifth front at the west end. It was narrower along 5th with a diagonal wall facing northwest toward gas pumps.

Across the street at 21 W. 5th is the U.S. Post Office from 1932. This single story building is typical of federal building design in small county seat towns, having a brick exterior with stone trim on a high stone foundation. It features a symmetrical façade with eight monumental classical columns across the center. The front door is reached by a set of broad steps. Windows have a stone surround and stone panel below. A classical stone cornice surround the building. Most windows on the secondary elevations are narrower than those on the front and have stone sills but no surrounds. This building has been altered by the installation of new windows and handicapped access, but it retains its original form and is considered a significant structure in the district.

500 Block of Grand

The west side of the 500 block contains a greater variation of buildings than any of the other blocks, containing ten buildings with original construction dates ranging from 1892 (with a 1919 "face-lift"), to 1964. There is a variety of color, material and size. The Citizens National Bank

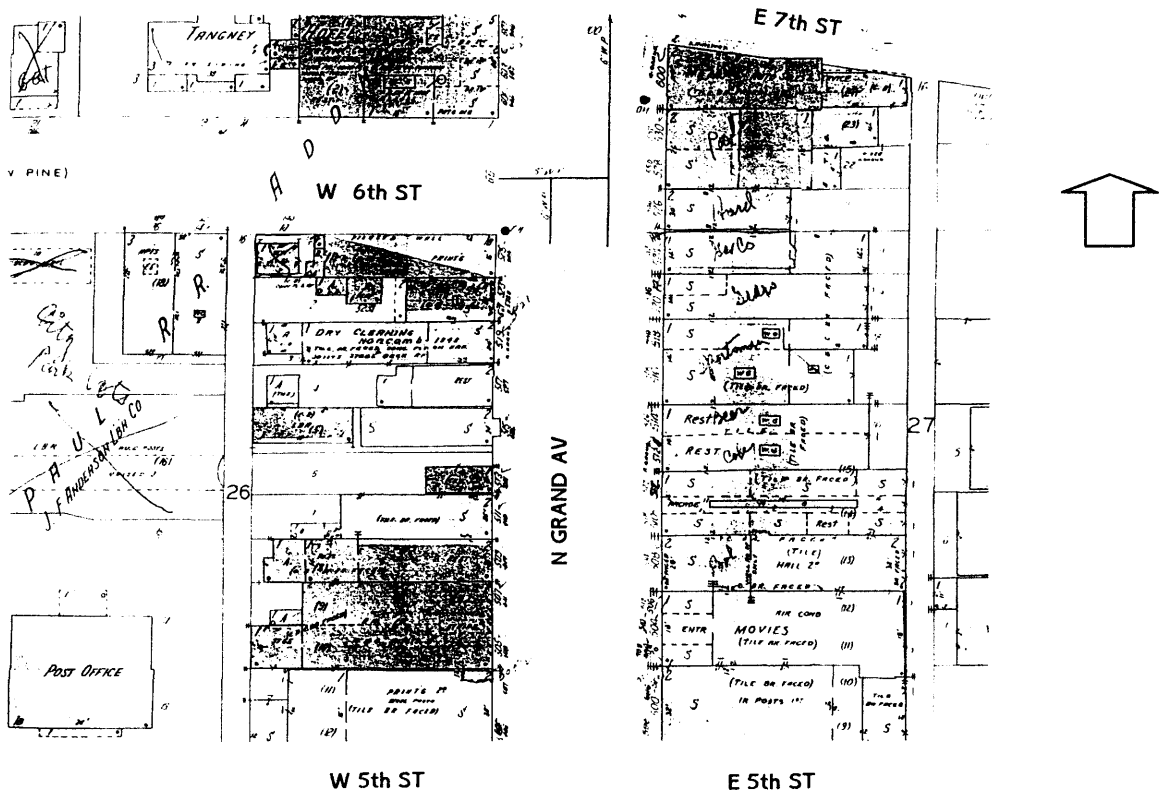
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7

Page 12



1941 Sanborn Map of the 500 and 600 blocks of Grand

building on the corner, 501 Grand, was built in 1892, and was totally remodeled in 1916, giving it the classical revival terra cotta façade favored for banks. It has been altered along the Grand Avenue street level, and second floor windows have been covered, but all of the elaborate terra cotta details are extant. Next door at 505 Grand is the Moore & Birdsall Building from 1922. It is a very good example of 1920's commercial design with most of the decorative elements being defined by brick patterning and/or inset stone panel. Although new display windows and doors with aluminum trim have been installed at street level, it appears that the original transoms remain in place. A small stone panel above the central stairway door reads "1922" and a stone cornice runs across the top of the first floor with square panels containing a rosette dividing each section of the building. The upper level of the building is intact. Original metal casement windows have received some type of insulating covering, but all the details including brick quoins at the corner are in place.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 13

The other building on the west side that is of interest is the F.W. Knight Building (1914) at 521 Grand. This is a fine example of a single storefront building of the period with classical revival details. It rests on a high stone foundation, allowing for windows to provide light to basement rooms, has a recessed center entrance with steps up to the main floor, and a side door on the north leading to the second floor stairway. Large plate glass display windows with transoms flank the central door. At the second floor, paired windows are separated by brick pilasters and a denticulated brick cornice connects these pilasters. A large identification stone reading "F.W. Knight" is located just below the crenellated roofline with stone cap.

The east side of the 500 block flows directly into the 600 block without a break for street or alley. The three buildings at the north end survived the 1931 fire, with all of the others on the east side constructed following the fire. Although both ends of the block are anchored by two story brick buildings, there are more single story buildings in this block than in any of the others. The Moore Building at the south end, 500 Grand, continues the Spanish Revival style seen on other post-fire buildings. Although altered at street level, the upper floor retains the original paired windows and decorative brick patterning of the original design. The brick patterns are very dramatic, including basket weave, and some strong diagonals. Baroque pediments mark the corners, and a colorful tile roof completes the design. Several doors to the north is the Asher Arcade Building at 510. This single story building was completely destroyed by the fire, except for the façade. It withstood the flames and was incorporated into the design of the new building. Like 312 Grand, it features Sullivanesque terra cotta panels across the top. The F.G. Floete Building at 520 Grand is an example of a simple single story commercial building from 1932 that exhibits simple brick patterning with inset stone panels and coping at the roof line.

600 Block of Grand

The only building on the east side of the street that is technically in the 600 block is 605 Grand, the Asher-Smith Building. This was built in sections to serve as an auto garage and showroom, the first floor being constructed several years before the second, but it was designed to work together. The broad display windows at the second floor are typical of commercial design c.1928-32, and the Sullivanesque terra cotta elements across the top echo the design on the other Asher building at 510 Grand. Alterations have had a negative impact on the building.

The Tangney Hotel, across the street at 600 Grand, serves as the northern anchor for the district. Originally constructed in 1920 as a four story brick building in the Renaissance Revival style, a fifth floor was added a few years later. Although the elaborate metal cornice has been removed, the overall shape and mass of the building is intact, and the quoined corners and main entrance on W. 6th Street with massive stone surround make this a major landmark in the district.

Within the past eighteen months Grand Avenue has been revamped with new paving due to new sewers, ornamental trees have been removed from the sidewalks, and new five lamp boulevard lights compatible with the 1932 overall flavor of the district have been installed.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 14

The appearance and atmosphere of Grand Avenue are unique in the state of Iowa. Nowhere else do you find a central business district with the cohesive visual quality of this 1930s streetscape.

Typology:

Identification of the buildings in this historic district is based on the typology developed by Richard Longstreth in The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture. Evaluation of the buildings in the historic district is based on elements of the popular styles of the 1920s and '30s due to the fact that the district contains excellent, often architect designed, examples of these styles. The following five types are found in the Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District.

Two Part Commercial. A little more than half of the buildings in the district fall within this type. It is best described as a building with a strong horizontal division between floors. The lower zone, at street level, contains public/business space with large display windows. The upper level, used for offices or apartments, is more private in nature and features smaller windows. Some examples are the Union Block at 301-305 Grand, The Flindt-Cummings-Rasmussen Block at 400-404 Grand, and the Moore Building at 500 Grand.

One Part Commercial. This is usually a single story building, and can best be described as the lower, or street, level of a two part commercial block. In many communities these small buildings are located just off the main street or public square. In Spencer however, these make up almost half of the buildings along Grand. Examples include the commercial building at 12-18 W. 5th Street, the building at 307 Grand, and the F.G. Floete Building at 520 Grand.

Enframed Window Wall. In this type, visual unity is achieved by enframing the center section with a wide border. It is more common in urban business centers than in small towns. Often used in Art Deco designs, the surround is fairly abstract. A good example of this type in Spencer is the Clay County Bank at 407 Grand.

Temple Front. This design was derived from Greek and Roman temples and was often used for bank facades in the early 20th century. These buildings were usually at least two stories high and were often located on street corners. A popular type featured monumental classical columns flanking a porticoed entry. On side elevations the idea of monumental columns was continued with the use of pilasters between windows. A full classical entablature surrounds the elevations. The Farmer's Trust and Savings Bank at 323 Grand is a fine example.

Central Block with Wings. This is another style that was often used for banks and public buildings. It features a façade with a projecting center section and a subordinate flanking wings. The (former) United States Post Office at 21 W. 5th Street is a good example of this type.

Buildings in the Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District are almost exclusively rectangular in shape, usually with the narrow end of the rectangle toward the street. All buildings except for 312 Grand have flat roofs sloping gently to the rear. 312 Grand is an unusual

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 7 Page 15

example of a single story gable roof commercial building with front gable entrance that has survived into the 21st century.

Integrity:

Commercial districts as a whole suffer a greater loss of integrity than residential or public districts. This is due primarily to the desire of the business owners to constantly upgrade their facades in an effort to attract more customers. In most instances, this "upgrading" is restricted to the street level of the building. This is the case in Spencer. Thirty-nine of the fifty-seven buildings in the district (68%) have retained sufficient integrity to be considered either key or contributing to the district. The most common alteration is the replacement of the original recessed entry with a door brought forward to the sidewalk. In addition, some display windows have been replaced by new windows with aluminum trim, and the transom across the façade covered with signage. In some extreme cases the display windows are almost totally covered or bricked-in, creating a very different appearance from the original. New materials used to cover windows and fronts at street level include bricks of a variety of colors, stucco, and metal panels. Some buildings have also been given new wood shingle pent roofs or awnings.

In four cases the total façade has been covered with new material. These buildings are the T.H. Jones Building at 417 Grand, the Solon Theater at 504 Grand, the Moore-Davies Building at 516 Grand, and the Reporter Building at 525 Grand. A fifth building, the Floethe-Thomas Building at 410 might be considered part of this group in terms of material, but the design has changed little. Originally known as the "Glass Block," the façade was covered with Carrera glass panels when constructed in 1932. In 1959 these panels were covered by the porcelain enamel panels in the standard design for a J.C. Penney store.

New windows are frequently installed in the upper levels of commercial buildings, primarily to make them more energy efficient. Little attempt is usually made to match the size of the new to that of the old, and often the new windows are surrounded by wood panels to fill in the window opening. Another window change is in the material used, with many being aluminum clad double hung windows, with thermopanels. On occasion, the new glass will also be tinted. All of these window changes alter the appearance of the building. A good example of a building which has new windows in one-half of it is the Fraser Theater at 406-408 Grand. In this case the original metal casement windows have been replaced by smaller aluminum windows in the south half. In a few cases, the second floor windows have been totally concealed by wood panels. Although this alters the present appearance, it is very possible that the original windows remain in place behind the panels and are being preserved.

The Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District retains a high degree of integrity of both buildings and overall surroundings. The broad street and the extensive use of light colored brick provide an open feeling not often found in linear business districts. The existence of a very active Main Street program has been a positive element in the survival of this unusual collection of buildings.

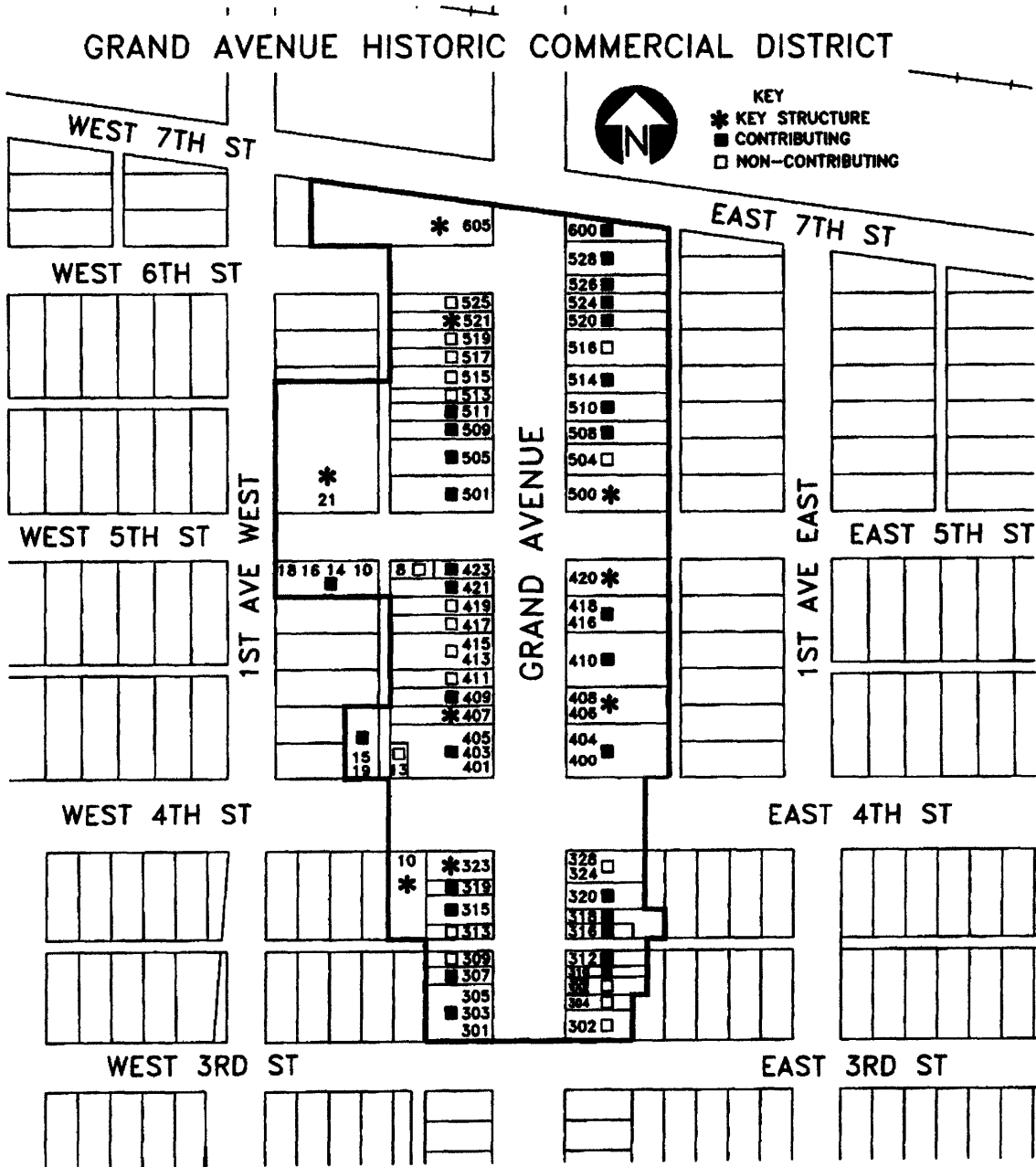
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7

Page 16



United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
 Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
 Clay County, Iowa

Section number 7 Page 17

LIST OF KEY, CONTRIBUTING, AND NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

| Address | Resource | Date | Key | Contributing | Non-Contributing |
|---------------|------------------------------|---------|-----|--------------|------------------|
| 301-305 Grand | Union Block | 1917 | | X | |
| 302 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1975 | | | X |
| 304 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1925 | | | X |
| 306-308 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1950 | | | X |
| 307 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1917 | | X | |
| 309 Grand | Commercial Bldg | c.1930 | | | X |
| 310 Grand | Commercial Bldg | c.1930 | | X | |
| 312 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1922 | | X | |
| 313 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1916 | | | X |
| 315 Grand | Woodcock Bldg | 1931 | | X | |
| 316 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1931 | | X | |
| 318 Grand | Commercial Bldg | c.1890+ | | X | |
| 319 Grand | Hasting's Bldg | 1919 | | X | |
| 320 Grand | Commercial Bldg | c.1915 | | X | |
| 322-324 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1963 | | | X |
| 323 Grand | Farmers Trust & Savings Bank | 1916 | X | | |
| 400-404 Grand | Cummings-Flindt-Rasmussen | 1932 | | X | |
| 401-405 Grand | McAllister Block | 1932 | | X | |
| 406-408 Grand | Fraser Theater | 1932 | X | | |
| 407 Grand | Clay County National Bank | 1932 | X | | |
| 409 Grand | Cole Block | 1932 | | X | |
| 410 Grand | Floete-Thomas Bldg | 1932+ | | X | |
| 411 Grand | Commercial Bldg | 1930 | | | X |
| 413-415 Grand | I.O.O.F. Bldg | 1895 | | | X |
| 416-418 Grand | Smith-Knight Bldg | 1932 | | X | |
| 417 Grand | T.H. Jones & Sons | c.1895 | | | X |
| 419 Grand | Leach/Thompson Bldg | 1908+ | | | X |
| 420 Grand | Redfield Bldg | 1932 | X | | |
| 421 Grand | Gilder-Krause Bldg | 1913 | | X | |
| 423 Grand | Haygarth Bldg | 1916+ | | X | |
| 500 Grand | Moore Bldg | 1932 | X | | |
| 501 Grand | Citizen's National Bank | 1892+ | | X | |
| 504 Grand | Solon (Spencer) Theater | 1932 | | | X |
| 505 Grand | Moore & Birdsall Bldg | 1922 | | X | |
| 508 Grand | Floete-Cornwall Bldg | 1932 | | X | |
| 509 Grand | J.L. Frank Bldg | 1922 | | X | |
| 510 Grand | Asher Arcade Bldg | 1928-32 | | X | |
| 511 Grand | Wilsey Bldg | 1919 | | X | |

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 19

ARCHITECT/BUILDER (cont):

**Boyd & Moore
Bueftner & Arnold
Dougher, Rich & Woodburn
Hardy, _____
Harris, F.A.
Leibenberg & Kaplan
A. Moorman & Co
Sund & Dunham
Thompson, Jens
Woolworth Co. architect**

**Camp, H.R.
Cown & Herman
Peterson & Dahi
Reed, McDonald & Brewster
Spencer Construction Co
White, Joe**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District is locally significant under Criterion A as it illustrates the development of the business district into the commercial center of Clay County and because it demonstrates the importance of community planning in the development and re-building of the central business district following a major fire in 1931. Planners and engineers were brought in from around the state to work with community leaders. It represents a coordinated effort by individual architects, builders, and owners to work with the planners in the creation of a new "cosmopolitan" commercial area. It has state-wide Criterion A significance because the Spencer fire of 1931 was directly responsible for the passage by the Iowa Legislature in 1937 of a law banning the sale of fireworks in the state of Iowa. The district is locally significant under Criterion C as it could be used to illustrate a dictionary of the popular styles used for early 20th century commercial design. The period of significance is from 1913, the date of construction for the first "modern" design building, to 1935, the construction date of the final building directly influenced by the fire of 1931.

Brief History of Spencer:

Spencer is the county seat of Clay County, the third county east of the South Dakota line, and the second county south of the Minnesota line. Although it was established by the Iowa Legislature in 1851, Clay County was not organized as a separate entity until 1858. In 1859 a commission was authorized to locate the county seat, and selected Sec. 20 of Sioux (now Spencer) Twp. George E. Spencer laid out a town in that section on the south side of the Little Sioux River, but there was no development of the site. Since there was not actual town, the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8 Page 20

citizens protested that Peterson, a small town in the southwest corner of the county, deserved to be the county seat, and it was agreed upon. The town of Spencer as we know it today, was surveyed by John Edmands and platted in 1871 on the north side of the Little Sioux. The county seat was moved from Peterson to Spencer in 1871.

The original plat of Spencer included twelve square blocks none of which was designated for a public square. Main Street, running north and south, was platted as 100' wide, while the others were 66'. This original plat established a linear plan, rather than one focused on a public square, for the new town. In recent years Tom Schmiedeler has conducted a survey of the forms and plans of Midwestern county seat towns. In 1998 he published his study of our state "Frontier Forms of Iowa's County Seats," in the *Annals of Iowa*. He identified the three types of plans found in Iowa's county seats: the central courthouse square; the linear town plan; and, the railroad town plan. A map showing the distribution of these three types across the state shows the prevalence of the central courthouse square across the southern counties, with the linear plan more popular in the north. In the northwestern section of the state, the almost flat, rolling prairie encouraged the broad Main Streets that became the norm. A brief study using Sanborn Fire Insurance maps has shown that the linear towns in the northwestern section of the state were far more likely to have Main Streets measuring 100' in width, than those in the south and eastern sections of the state where 66'-80' Main Streets were common.

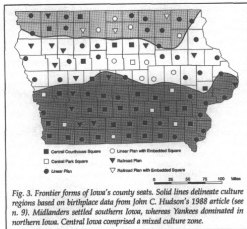


Fig. 3. Frontier forms of Iowa's county seats. Solid lines delineate culture regions based on birthplace data from John C. Hudson's 1988 article (see n. 9). Midlanders settled southern Iowa, whereas Yankees dominated in northern Iowa. Central Iowa comprised a mixed culture zone.

Map from Schmiedeler's article, p 7

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 21

Following the 1871 platting, several lots along Main Street were sold almost immediately and early businesses were constructed along the broad street, including: two general stores, a mill on the river a mile below the town, a blacksmith shop, a small hotel at the corner of Main and 2nd, a hardware store at the SW corner of Main and 2nd, a store at the corner of Main and 3rd, a drug store, and a bookstore with photo gallery on the west side of Main between 2nd and 3rd. Early residences were "modest" structures. This was basically the town until the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad arrived in 1878. (Gillespie & Steele, p 92)

The arrival of the railroad marked an important epoch in the history of Clay County.....Slowly but gradually Spencer and the county put on a new appearance. It was like the bedding of winter into spring. Houses sprang up on every hand; new arrivals came on every train; trade was given a fresh impetus; farmers were happy by receiving better prices for their stock and produce. The change was marked and great. The prospects for Spencer grew brighter than ever before in its history. (ibid., p 159)

The CM & StP RR platted three additions to the city of Spencer between 1880 and 1883, the first being immediately north of the original plat. The extension of Main Street to the north continued the linear plan of the original plat. The business district moved north into this addition, toward the railroad tracks which became the north boundary of commercial development.

.....the town seemed to take on new life. New and larger store buildings were erected; larger and better stocks of goods were placed in them and, in less than a year Spencer grew from a small village to a good sized town. It soon became a little city of about 1,000 inhabitants. (ibid., p 92)

By 1908, when Gillespie and Steele wrote their history of the county, Spencer could boast of a municipal waterworks with many wells and a large steel water tower, a "splendid sewer system of 22,131 feet," well kept streets and 230 blocks of cement sidewalks, a municipal electric light plant located just north of the business district and the railroad tracks, five school buildings with twenty-three teachers educating over 700 students, three newspapers (*The Spencer Reporter, The Spencer Herald, and The Clay County News*), a modern courthouse, the Grand Opera House, and a new public library financed by a \$10,000 grant from Andrew Carnegie.

In the thirty years between the arrival of the first railroad and the 1908 history, the town had grown from a population of 824 to almost 3,000. The 1897 photographs of downtown Spencer show a young, growing community. It must be remembered that Spencer, in the northwest corner of the state, was platted and settled later than most Iowa communities. By 1908 it had developed to the point that most eastern Iowa towns had reached by 1890.

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 22

Community Development:

In 1875 Clay County was described as

.....undulating prairie, with scarcely any waste land, and the soil is exceedingly fertile. The staple productions are wheat, oats, corn, grass and the various root crops. The county is well adapted to grazing, on a count of the abundance of nutritious wild grass and pure water.
(Andreas, p 466)

Like most county seat towns in Iowa, Spencer's development was tied to the agricultural economy of the area around it. The arrival of the railroad in 1878 was as much an asset to area farmers as it was to local businessmen. It was said that farmers from a thirty mile radius came to Spencer to market their grain and livestock. The Clay County Agricultural Society was formed in 1879 with plans to hold exhibitions on an annual basis. The society had a 30 acre plot which had stalls for horses and livestock, a judge's stand, a floral hall, amphitheater, etc. Although this group disbanded, it was the forerunner of today's Clay County Fair Association. Over the years there was an on-going discussion recognizing the need for a county fair, but time after time, the idea was dropped.

A list of Spencer businesses in 1892 showed the impact of the rural economy by offering services directly related to, and needed by, farming. Some of these businesses included a flouring mill, 4 livery barns, 2 grain elevators, a wagon factory, 5 blacksmith shops, 2 veterinarians, a feed and seed store, 6 feed and sale stables, 3 stock and grain buyers, 2 hay barns and steam presses (the Maurer Hay Press was designed by F.X Maurer and manufactured in Spencer), and 3 agricultural warehouses. (Centennial, p 35) All of this before the so-called "Golden Age of Agriculture" (1898-1914) had even begun.

The richness of Clay County's soil, and the skill of its farmers, was extolled by Gillespie and Steele (pp 133-4).

The soil and climate are well adapted to the production of wheat, oats, rye, barley, corn, flax, buckwheat, potatoes, and other vegetables. There are a number of orchards in the county.....blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, and currants [are also abundant].

Average yield of corn is 35-40 bushels per acre; wheat is 10-15 bushels per acre; and flax is 12-20 bushels per acre.

Perhaps few if any counties in northwestern Iowa excel Clay in character and class of stock raised.....The county being unsurpassed for pasturage and hay, stock can be kept with very little expense and grow sleek and fat on the nutritious grasses.

There are a number of fine herds of cattle of the Short-Horn, Jersey and Holstein breeds and a large number of grades of these various classes. In the horse line there is everything from the Shetland pony to the large and powerful Norman. Hogs and sheep are also of the very best breeding. There has been a large growth in the numbers of head of stock during the past ten years, particularly in cattle.

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number **8**

Page **23**

Technology and science became important aspects of farming in the last part of the 19th century. In order to pay for this new technology, farmers had to learn to be more effective producers. To stay abreast of all the changes taking place, the farmers of Clay County formed a Farmer's Institute to provide a place for meeting and exchange of ideas. The Union bought the old Methodist Episcopal Church (non-extant) and moved it to the SE corner of 2nd and Main. In that building they assembled and discussed "subjects of interest to the tiller of the soil." (*Ibid.*, p 142) Iowa State College offered seminars and classes in the latest technology, equipment, crops, and livestock, just as the ISU Extension Service provides the same services today. The European market had been profitable for U.S. farmers, but in the early 20th century the domestic market consumed more and more of their output. This led to the so-called "Golden Age of Agriculture." (Schlebecker, p 151) Between 1869 and 1910 the number of farms in the United States increased from 2 million to 6.4 million. Between 1900 and 1910 the value of Iowa farmland increased 104.2% and the average property value per farm increased from \$8,023 to \$17,259. (West Branch Commercial District, p 43)

The 1915 Census of Iowa enumerated the production of various crops, types of livestock and poultry as well as population figures and information on schools and churches. In 1914 Clay County had 104,456 acres in corn, with a yield of 4,424,361 bushels for a total value of \$2,322,352. There were 2,035 acres of wheat which produced 44,040 bushels for a total of \$28,257. Hay production amounted 19,560 bushels totaling \$142,058, and the 723 acres planted in flax produced 6,633 bushels totaling \$8,497. As impressive as these figures sound, Clay County appears to be solidly in the middle third of Iowa counties in terms of crop production. The number of horses (13,042) and cattle (45,353) reflect the same. Clay County was typical, but not outstanding in any of these areas.

With agricultural growth came prosperity, and this prosperity was not limited to farmsteads alone. Farmers had the money that they could expand operations, buying new equipment and automobiles. They could afford to replace the old (often original) farm house with a new residence of "modern" design, often a Bungalow or Four Square. And, perhaps most importantly, they could afford to buy not only the necessities, but some of the luxuries that made life in the early decades of the 20th century much more comfortable.

A look at the 1909 Sanborn map shows several downtown businesses serving the farming community. There was a harness shop in the 300 block of Main, a flax and seed store in the 500 block, Spencer Milling Company's large building was near the railroad tracks, and there were four farm implement dealers. There were five large grain elevators in Spencer, three on the Minneapolis and St. Louis, and two on the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. A single auto garage was located in the 500 block.

Between 1910 and 1920 Spencer's population increased by 50%, from 3005 to 4599. New houses, almost all in the Bungalow style, were being constructed all over town. These were not large, expensive dwellings, but ones that could be affordable to almost all. *The Spencer Reporter* ran photographs and stories about these new houses on a regular basis. It was noted that some of the new houses were being built for farmers who had retired and moved to town, while others were being built for farmers in anticipation of their retirement in the next few years.

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number **8**

Page **24**

A new high school was constructed on E. 4th Street in 1914, and two years later the Masonic Temple was built directly across the street.

Thirteen new buildings were constructed in the business district, all of brick construction. The earliest of these was a single story brick building at 525 Main that was constructed for the *Spencer Reporter* in 1913. Originally this building was a simple neo-classical design with brick pilasters and simple brick cornice, but the facade was totally altered near the middle of the century, and it is only on the side elevation that the original neo-classical detailing can be seen. The F.W. Knight Building next door at 521 was constructed in 1914, again with neo-classical details. This type of simple commercial classical design is also found on the H.W. Kraus Building at 421 Grand from 1913.

Two bank buildings from 1916 illustrate the "high style" neo-classical design that was popular for banks during this period. The Farmer's Trust and Savings Bank at 323 Main was organized in February of that year, and designed by an architect by the name of Hardy. It features the limestone façade with free-standing monumental fluted Ionic columns in front and pilasters along the side elevation that are characteristic of the style. The Citizen's National Bank at 501 is a large, terra cotta clad example. The bank building was originally constructed in 1892, but was totally remodeled by the Lytle Company in 1916, following the construction of the rival Farmer's Trust and Savings Bank one block to the south. The Lytle Company was known for their bank designs and examples can be found across the northern part of Iowa and into Minnesota. "The outside brick are to be taken off and a new pressed brick will be used and cream terra cotta on the outside." (*Spencer Reporter*, March 15, 1916, p 1) Terra cotta allowed for elaborate neo-classical details without the expense of stone.

The other style that was popular during the 'teens was a very simple commercial design which echoed the simplicity of the residential Bungalow style. The triple front Union Block at 301-305 Main, and the building next door at 307 illustrate a combination of the simplified design with brick patterning providing most of the details, the windows appearing in bands of three or four, and in this case, a very simple cornice that creates a subtle classical feeling. These buildings were constructed in 1917 following a fire that destroyed the original Union Block on this site. Two buildings from 1919, the Hasting's Building at 319 and the Wisley Building at 511 are excellent two story single front buildings in this style. The brick patterning on the Hasting's façade is exceptionally nice. The building at 320 Main and the Heinkens-Glasgow Building at 15-19 W. 4th Street are good examples of double front buildings from c.1915 that feature the paired windows and simple brickwork that was commonly used at this time.

Cement block became a popular construction material, and a new cement block plant opened in March 1914 (*Spencer Reporter*, March 11, 1914, p1) It became commonly used for the construction of auto garages. It was utilitarian, the rusticated surface gave it the appearance of stone, and it was fire-proof. In 1912 Fred Moore was said to be building a new garage just south of his livery barn. The 1915 Sanborn Map shows three auto garages on the east side of the 500 block, the one in the center is brick, while those on each end are concrete block.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 25



Auto Row, East side of 500 Block of Main, N.D.
(City of Spencer Photo Collection)

The growing popularity of the automobile is clearly shown by this new building type. Exactly how many auto dealerships there were in Spencer in the early 'teens has not been determined, but in 1913 the Reporter noted that "Spencer Auto has changed hands. It was purchased by P.J. Claer who will sell Auburns as well as others." (October 29, 1913) During 1914 the City Council ordered the paving of several blocks which was completed in November. The Main Street bridge across the Little Sioux was replaced in 1914, so it was the perfect time to upgrade Main Street. Service stations were starting to appear. In 1918 the city council approved construction of a new Standard Oil Station on Main, just south of the Milwaukee Depot. It was to be "one of the very best types of service station buildings erected by the Standard Oil." (Spencer Reporter, May 8, 1918, p 1 c 5)

Growth was taking place outside of the central business district during the 'teens as well. In 1914 the Ladies Hospital Association opened a small hospital just west of Main Street on W. 3rd Street. In 1915 a new industry came to Spencer when the Litt Cutlery Company bought a site on 5th Street for a factory to make razors and blades. A new smoke stack was erected for the light plant in 1917. It was of reinforced concrete, 6' in diameter, reaching 135' into the air, with a 21' square base. (Spencer Reporter, June 13, 1917, p 1, photo with caption)

In 1918 the dream of a Clay County Fair was realized when Iowa Governor W.L. Harding came to Spencer to dedicate the new Clay County Fairgrounds in September. The first annual exhibition was attended by 33,000 people. The fairgrounds, northwest of downtown, were destined to grow with each annual event. The Clay County Fair became not only an

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 26

opportunity to display the products of Clay County agriculture, but also to display the best that the city of Spencer itself had to offer.

By the end of the decade, the *Spencer Reporter* was noting the amount of construction taking place in Spencer. A July 30, 1919 story on the front page said "Many new buildings now under the course of construction. Material is hard to get. Several new business blocks are among the improvements now being made." The article mentioned not only buildings along Main and on 4th and 5th Streets, but also at least half a dozen houses in various parts of the city. A second article on the front page noted "19 Counties Favor Paving." This story concerned the building of the "North Iowa Pike" that would link the county seat towns aligned with Spencer all the way across the state (now U.S. Hwy 18). Still another article headlined "Work Will Start Soon," and referred to the "paving" of Clay County roads. Over 50 miles had already been graded and drained so it was anticipated that paving would start soon. The "paving" was not to be concrete but gravel, which would create a "hard-surface" road.

Although the end of World War I brought a decline in the demand for agricultural products, Clay County didn't seem to notice. The coming of hard-surface roads meant that delivering grain and livestock to market was much easier, and much quicker. Construction and business expansion continued as the city entered a new decade.

The early months of 1920 saw preparation for the construction of a multi-story brick hotel at the north edge of the business district. For years the frame Earling House had stood at the NW corner of Main and Pine (6th). It was to be replaced by a four story brick hotel that would be part of the Tangney Hotel chain which was established by E.C. Tangney. Other hotels in the chain included the Wahbonsa in Fort Dodge, the Burke in Carroll, the Muscatine in Muscatine, the Arlington in Sheldon, and the Lafayette in Clinton. Also associated were the Tangney-McGinn hotels headed by the Kirkwood in Des Moines. This fire-proof Renaissance Revival building features a first floor trimmed in dressed limestone with a symmetrical main entrance facing Pine Street. The central door and windows are round arched with all other in the building being rectangular in shape. Corners feature stone quoining. The upper levels of the building are "U"-shaped with the open part of the U directly above the lobby area. The quoining is executed in brick above the first floor. Originally there was a broad metal cornice around the entire building which provided an appropriate finish to the design. This cornice was removed some years ago, perhaps at the time that the fifth floor was added. The Tangney Hotel officially opened in April 1921 and included a dining room, candy kitchen, and billiard hall in addition to the "pleasant" hotel rooms. The hotel was considered to be important enough that the city agreed to the widening of Pine Street between Main and West.

W.C. Barton was the architect responsible for the design of the Renaissance Revival building. Barton had opened an architectural office in Des Moines around 1900, and moved that office to Spencer in 1920. He worked in a variety of locations between 1924 and 1931 when he returned to Spencer. (Shank, pp 17-18) Although he appears to be best known for residential design (Shank lists two residences in Des Moines by him), newspaper articles show that he designed a number of buildings in Spencer in the 1920s.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 27

During 1920-21 there was talk of paving the Air Line from the county line to Milford, asphalt paving on Main Street was repaired, the Grand Opera House was being redecorated, and a new theater, the Solon at 504 Main, was to be built, designed by W.C. Barton. It was to be red brick with terra cotta trim.

In June 1921 the contract was let for a new building on W. 4th Street for F.W. Medlar. Medlar was a photographer who designed the building the way he wanted it, and then had W.C. Barton draw the plans. It was the interior that was of greatest importance to Medlar as he needed good north light in his studio and adequate space in his darkroom. It is the exterior however, that became important in Spencer architecture. The building features a symmetrical terra cotta façade with neo-classical details such as pilasters at the corners, highly decorative panel above the front entrance, a bracketed cornice, and a red tile roof. This was the first building in Spencer with this type of roof treatment. Originally a large skylight was located on the west side of the roof, providing the necessary natural light. It has not been determined exactly when this was removed.

F.W. Medlar came to Spencer in 1887 and immediately opened a photograph studio, originally at the corner of 2nd and Main. He had been trained by his father, John S. Medlar, as a photographer, and in turn trained his own son Winton to be the third generation in the profession. F.W. was an award winning photographer who achieved both state and national significance, serving as the president of the National Association of Photographers in 1909. Many of the photographs which have documented Spencer's history and development were taken by F.W. Medlar. Unfortunately, F.W. lived only a short time after this building was completed, but his son maintained the studio for several decades.

Three buildings on Main from 1922-23 illustrate the simple commercial style with paired or banded second floor windows, inset concrete or stone panels, and brick patterning to provide ornamentation. These are the Moore-Birdsall Building at 505, the J.L. Frank Building at 507, and the Poole Building at 528.

A c.1890 building at 312 Main introduced a new type of decoration to the central business district, Sullivan-esque. In 1922 this narrow single story gable roof building was given a new terra cotta façade, cream with green rondelles and panels with foliated patterns. The green was used as coping across the top, and for horizontal emphasis across the front. Although the material is the same used for the Medlar Building, the design has much more in common with the work of Louis Sullivan than with Spanish Revival. This Sullivan-esque detailing can be found on two other buildings from the 1920s, the Asher Arcade (1928 façade) at 510, and the Asher-Smith Building from 1928 at 600 Main.

The *Spencer Reporter* carried an article (October 12, 1921) about a display in the window of Central Hardware of Spencer-made products. This included:

Concrete Products Co.
Spencer Manufacturing
Nelson Manufacturing Co.

Drain tile
Cement bricks and ornaments
Rolling window screens

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 28

American-Acme Manufacturing
W.H. Thomas Co.
Crown Bottling Co.
Litt Cutlery Co.
Spencer Dairy Co.
Randall-McKee Co.

Auto/Truck/Tractor accessories
Bulldog Line of auto/truck/tractor access.
Soda pop
Multi-blade safety razor
Butter
Blank books

Throughout the 1920s the newspaper carried articles asking that the county roads be paved or graveled, and listed new service stations opening all over Spencer, many of them outside the downtown area. Several auto dealerships opened north of the railroad tracks on Main. In 1922 the county spent \$140,000 on county highways, with a total of 140 miles graveled. The Farm Bureau made plans to build an Agricultural Hall at the Fairgrounds that would be ready for the 1923 Clay County Fair. The plans were drawn by Jens Thompson of Floete Lumber Company. In the years to come Thompson was to design many of the new buildings in downtown Spencer. In August of 1923 it was noted that the fairgrounds buildings had been painted with "white cement and looked fine." An airplane was on exhibit during the 1923 fair, giving many people a chance to see one for the first time. The 1908 Leach and Thompson Building at 419 Main was given a new storefront in October 1923, complete with "plate glass display windows framed in copper, and large ornamental top glass (transom)." (*Spencer Reporter*, October 3, 1923) New storefronts became quite popular, with the Haygarth Building (423 Main) being remodeled in the spring of 1924, and the Ostrom Building at 524 getting a new front that October. In 1928 the single story Frank Building at 509 got a massive remodeling when a full second story was added along with a new façade.

Municipal improvements during the decade included a new generator for the electric plant, and plans to beautify the area around the plant by creating a park. The park was to have a lily pond, bridge, and stone grotto. There was also discussion that the fire truck could be housed at the electric plant and quarters provided for the firemen. The Commercial Club decided to have a contest to select a new name for Main Street. They offered a list of seven to choose from: Main Street, Central Avenue, Iowa Avenue, Grand Avenue, Broadway, Sioux Avenue, and Liberty Avenue. In July newspaper readers voted to leave the name unchanged. More and more streets were graveled, and traffic downtown was considered to be heavy enough to warrant the installation of stop signs and a few stop lights along Main.

Highways continued to be a major subject of conversation. There seemed to be constant talk in the newspaper about paving the Air Line. It was finally announced on August 12, 1925 that "Air Line Through Spencer is Selected for U.S. Highway." It was to be numbered and marked along the route. (*Spencer Reporter*) It was two years however, before the Highway Commission got paving costs to the city. Paving 26 miles of Highway 18 was to cost \$780,000 while 7.8 miles of Highway 71 would cost \$235,000. The actual paving would still be years away.

Local businessmen were actively buying new buildings and/or remodeling the ones they already owned. New businesses were coming to town. Rent-A-Ford opened in 1925. A new International Harvester dealership opened in 1927, and the Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. leased space on Main Street for a new store that same year. A Woolworth 10 cent Store opened in the

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 29

D.E. Knight Building in 1927, a Council Oak store opened in the Wilsey Building in 1928, a new Red Owl opened in the Union Block, and Gambles decided to open a store in Spencer. Fred Moore bought the NE corner of 5th and Main, removed the frame building and had a two story brick built, and in 1929 the last frame building of the west side of Main between 4th and 5th was torn down to make way for a new one story brick. (*Spencer Reporter*, July 3, 1929, p1 c4) Bond issues were passed to build additions to schools, and to build a new elementary building.

In November 1926 several area banks closed. Farmer's Trust and Savings was saved by its depositors. In May 1927 depositors of 1st National Bank were asked to save it, but it closed its doors two weeks later. In early June Citizen's Bank closed its doors. In July a new bank was formed, Clay County National, and stock was offered to the public. It opened in August in the former 1st National building. The exact cause of these bank closings has not been determined. By the Crash of 1929, Clay County's banks were solid.

The farm economy must have been fairly stable as the Clay County Fairgrounds continued to develop, with the construction of an Automobile Building in 1927, a Boys and Girls Club building in 1929, and new grandstands in 1931. The Milwaukee Railroad talked about enlarging their stockyards in early 1929 because 20,000 hogs had been shipped out in the previous three weeks. After Swift & Co. announced that they were going to spend \$40,000 to build new stockyards, the railroad decided to build new stockyards near Swift's rather than enlarge the old ones.

Another sign of a strong economy was the number of auto agencies in Spencer in 1928. There were eleven dealerships, offering a broad choice of cars: Chevrolet, Plymouth, Dodge, Oldsmobile, Studebaker, Hudson, Essex, Ford, Graham, Paige, Oakland, Pontiac, Knight, Whippet, and Falcon.

After years of discussion, the contract to pave U.S. Highway 71 north of Spencer was let in November 1929 with paving to begin in the spring. It is interesting that when the paving started north of town, there still had been no decision reached on exactly where the highway would be routed through Spencer. As late as June 1930 it was thought it would go through on Grove Street in the western part of town. It was not until February 1931 that it was decided that both 71 and U.S. Highway 18 would run through Spencer on Main Street, with 18 then turning east past the Golf & Country Club. The city council had already been considering parallel parking along Main, had planned for new five light boulevard lights, and was thinking about replacing the paving on Main from 6th south to the bridge.

Things were looking bright for Spencer when, on June 25, 1931, the Mayor announced that dates for the sale of fireworks in Spencer that year would be from June 27 through July 4. He also issued a warning in regard to the use of explosives. Spencer's stores were known for going all out for the 4th of July holiday, moving their merchandise to the side so they could run long tables of fireworks down the middle of their store.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 30

The Fire of 1931:

Otto Bjornstad's drug store at the NW corner of 4th and Main was one of many in town selling fireworks. On the afternoon of June 27, 1931, business was as usual, the regular customers, plus two small boys looking at the fireworks. At 3:34 P.M. everything changed when one of the boys lighted a sparkler and accidentally dropped it into the pile of sky rockets, firecrackers, Roman candles, pin wheels, and cherry bombs. Almost instantly the first blast was heard, and then the store was filled with gas, flames, smoke, and blinding flashes of light. Everyone inside managed to escape, but not without two of them almost being trapped. The telephone office was on the second floor. Three operators stayed in the office until they could call the fire department, and then had to climb down a ladder to safety. Although the fire department responded quickly, inadequate water pressure kept the hoses from reaching the roof. Soon the flames were shooting 100' feet into the air and burning through the thin walls of the McAllister Block, from the drug store, into Grahams Department Store, and north into Stemen's Ladies Toggery. Within fifteen minutes flames from these stores were leaping out over Main Street with the help of a strong southwest wind.

On the east side of the street, the awnings on the William Flindt store and the Bee Hive caught fire, then a stairway to the second floor was engulfed, the fronts of the buildings began to smolder, and then the buildings on the south end of the block burst into flames. The fire continued north destroying all the buildings on the east side of Main between 4th and 5th Streets before leaping 5th Street and enveloping the buildings in the 500 block. The fire burned building after building, moving ever farther north.

In the end, it was dynamite that stopped the fire on both the east and the west sides of Main. The explosive was rushed in from area towns and, with help from explosive experts from Des Moines, walls were knocked down on the west side of the street, slowing the flames until they reached the new (1929) Kunath Building. This single story building had been constructed of fire-resistant material, and with the help of firemen pouring water on the roof, it became the bulwark between the fire and the rest of the 400 block. On the east side, the dynamite was set off in the Spencer Dry Cleaners building, stopping the fire before it took the last three brick buildings before reaching Railroad Street.

All buildings in the east half of the block between 5th and Railroad were also lost. In the east half of the block between 4th and 5th, a valiant effort by the firemen and volunteers saved the Schoeneman Lumber Yard. Had it caught fire, the highly flammable contents might have allowed the fire to spread farther east.

Both the *Des Moines Register & Tribune* and the *Sioux City Journal* sent airplanes and photographers to cover the disaster. The *Register* airplane, the *Good News II*, also carried Des Moines Fire Chief Will Burnett, Capt. Joe Offerdinger, A.J. Wyle, fire fighting expert of the Hood Rubber Company, and explosive experts from the Hercules and DuPont powder companies as well as news men and photographer, George Yates.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

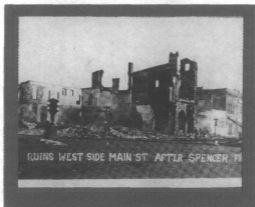
Section number 8

Page 31

The *Spencer Reporter* and the *News-Herald* carried stories loaded with details of the fire and great photographs that were taken by the *Des Moines Register*, the *Sioux City Journal*, and the Medlar Studio.



Looking SE from the Tangney Hotel



Ruins of the west side of Main Street, 400 block
(Both photographs courtesy of City of Spencer)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 32



Aerial View of Spencer fire ruins to SE
H.F. Strom, Photographer, Jackson, MN
Masonic Temple and High School in top center
Note complete devastation of the east side of the 400 block and
The storefronts remaining in the 500 block
(City of Spencer Photo Collection)

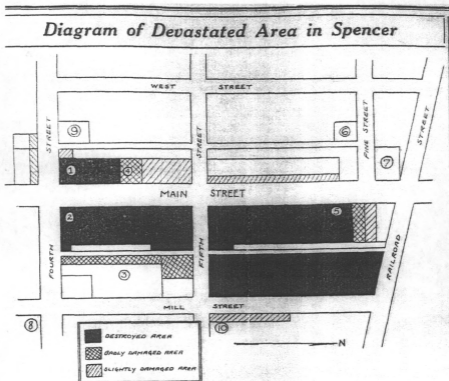
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 33



NOTE: North is to the right.

Locations shown in this drawing are: (1) Bjornstad's drug store where the fire started; (2) Cummings drug store where the flames jumped Main Street; (3) Schoeneman Bros. lumber yard where the heroic fight was made that save the yard and the houses east of it; (4) the Kunath Building where the fire was halted on the west side of the street; (5) the Spencer Dry Cleaners where the fire was halted on the east side of the street; (6) post office; (7) Tangney Hotel; (8) high school; (9) News-Herald Office; (10) Vanderhoff service station where the fire was halted on the east. (Map and information from the News-Herald, July 2, 1931)

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

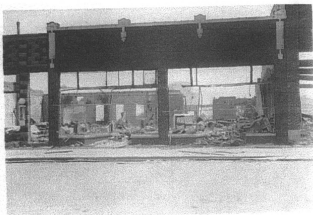
**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number **8**

Page **34**

In all, seventy businesses and professional offices were destroyed by the fire. Despite the work of fire departments from five communities, the center of the Spencer business district had been wiped out in a single day. Buildings that remained suffered smoke and water damage and broken windows from the dynamite blasts. Some houses to the east of downtown had small roof fires due to blowing embers. This was said to be the largest fire in the history of the state of Iowa. Fire losses were estimated at \$2,000,000.



Ruins of the Asher Arcade Building, 510 Grand, shortly after the fire
(City of Spencer Photo Collection)

By the July 2 newspaper, plans had already been made to house many of the burned out businesses in temporary wood and metal structures in the streets while new buildings were under construction. An interesting note is that the vault in the 1st National Bank had not been opened by July 2. It appeared to be intact, and it was believed that all records put into it prior to the fire were safe. However, if the door was opened while it was still hot on the inside, the papers would ignite. The decision was made to wait another week before opening.

The July 9 *News-Herald* (less than two weeks after the fire) carried headlines reading "Bank Vaults Opened; Cash, Paper Intact," "Plans Under Way for New Structures," and "Unite to Achieve Architectural Beauty and Harmony." The most important story of that day appeared on page 8.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 35

Work to Unify Architecture in New Blocks

Property Owners Express Cooperation at Meeting

Urging a unified and coordinated architecture without prejudicing the needs and construction costs of new buildings to be erected in the Spencer business district, the Spencer Commercial Club named a committee to serve as a Spencer Planning Committee at a meeting of property owners and directors held Friday at the Hotel Tangney.

Heading the committee are Walter H. Thomas and Fred Moore, while the members are Wilson Cornwall, J.A. Redfield, J.C. Rasmussen, William Flindt, and L.H. Rasmussen.

A meeting of property owners and builders was held Tuesday morning by the committee at the Commercial club rooms with the result that cooperation in a plan for architectural unity was developed.

Experts Give Aid

Assisting the city planners are J. Haslip Hall, city planning engineer of Des Moines, and I.H. Murphy, extension engineer of Iowa State College. They were sent to Spencer by the city of Des Moines and the college to cooperate with officials and individuals here without cost.

At Tuesday's meeting an agreement was arrived at whereby architects for the individual builders would confer and submit plans so that all might be coordinated into a general architectural scheme

Two suggested schemes of design were submitted, one in English style and the other in modified Italian, but no definite action was taken as to acceptance of either plan.

More meetings are to be held as building plans progress and it is believed by members of the committee that the result will be one of the finest business sections possessed by any Iowa city comparable with Spencer in size and resources.

The agitation for beauty of design, according to Chairmen Thomas and Moore, has led to a definite trend on the part of Spencer builders to beautify the facades of their structures after the modern fashion and without exception the cooperation of all builders is expected to be continued throughout the period of reconstruction.

After this article telling of the two possible themes for rebuilding the downtown, the subject never appears in the newspaper again. Plans were announced for several new buildings in the July 9 paper. Evidently the architects, builders, and committee worked behind the scenes to insure a visually harmonious business district. The major headline on the front page of the July 16, 1931 *Spencer News-Herald* read: "Construction Work is Started." All plans had to be approved by the city council before work could begin, and it appears that the council required all buildings to be of fire-proof construction.

Beginning with the newspapers published the week of July 23, drawings of the proposed new buildings were printed on a regular basis, along with commentary on how the projects were progressing.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

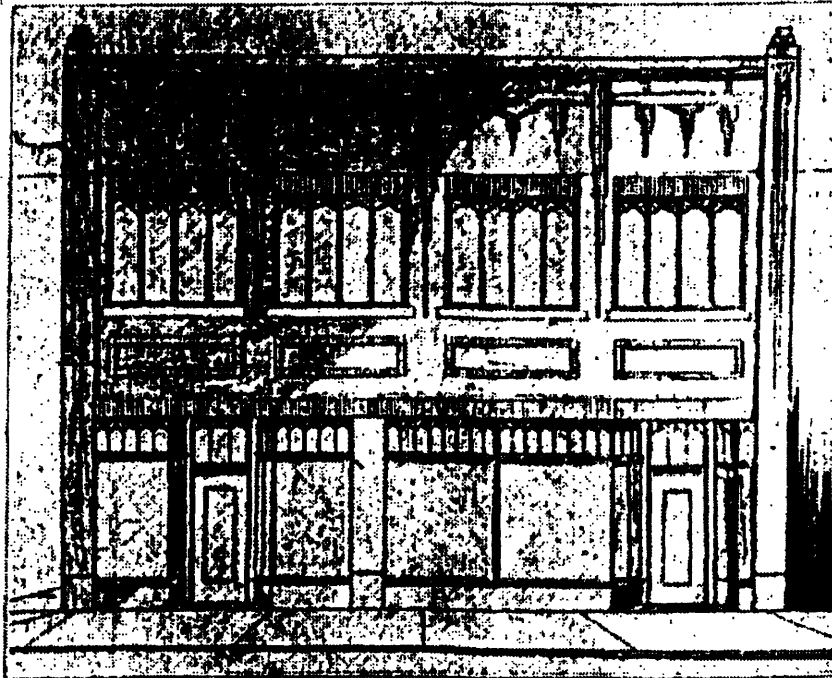
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 36

Three New Spencer Buildings



J. A. REDFIELD BUILDING

J. A. Redfield is intending to be floors and protected openings o

The Redfield Building will be constructed at the SE corner of Main and 5th Streets. Designed by architect F.A. Harris of Des Moines, the building will have "attractive decoration carried out in the brick work and the front will be marked by the use of a new type of cut glass in the windows. The panels open separately providing the latest in ventilating equipment. The building will be completely fire-proof with steel and concrete floors and protected openings of metal sash and wire glass where exposed to other structures." First floor occupants to be the Binkard Drug Store and Twetten Furniture, with offices and apartments on the second floor. (News-Herald, July 30, 1931)

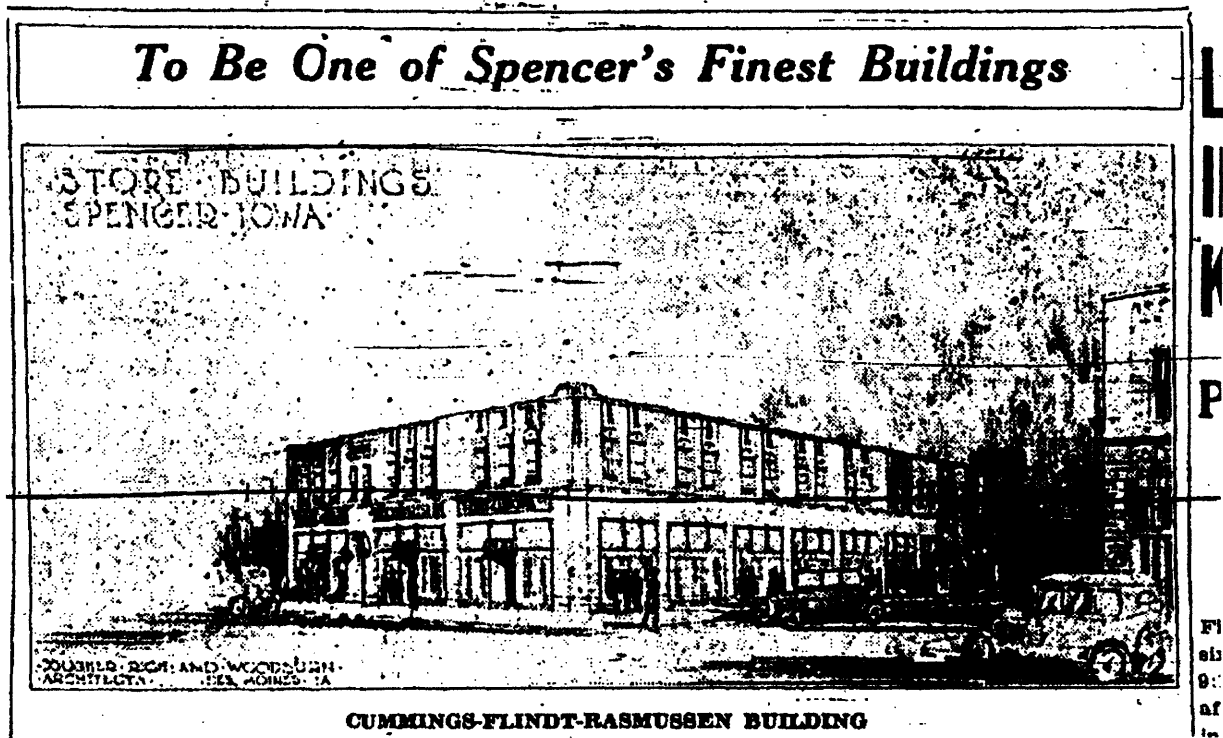
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 37



"Among the many beautiful new structures announced for Spencer's new business district, few if any, will excel in design and appointments the beautiful two-story commercial and apartment building to be erected for J.A. Cummings, the William Flindt Company, and J.C. Rasmussen at the NE corner of 4th and Main Streets.

Embracing the latest type of commercial architecture and embodying the use of vitrolite facing and other new materials, architects Dougher, Rich and Woodburn of Des Moines, developed this attractive elevation from their plans to be completed this week.

The new building will be occupied on the ground floor by the Rexall Drug Store on the corner, the William Flindt Company clothing store and the Bee Hive, operated by J.C. Rasmussen. Upstairs will be offices and apartments." (News-Herald, August 6, 1931)

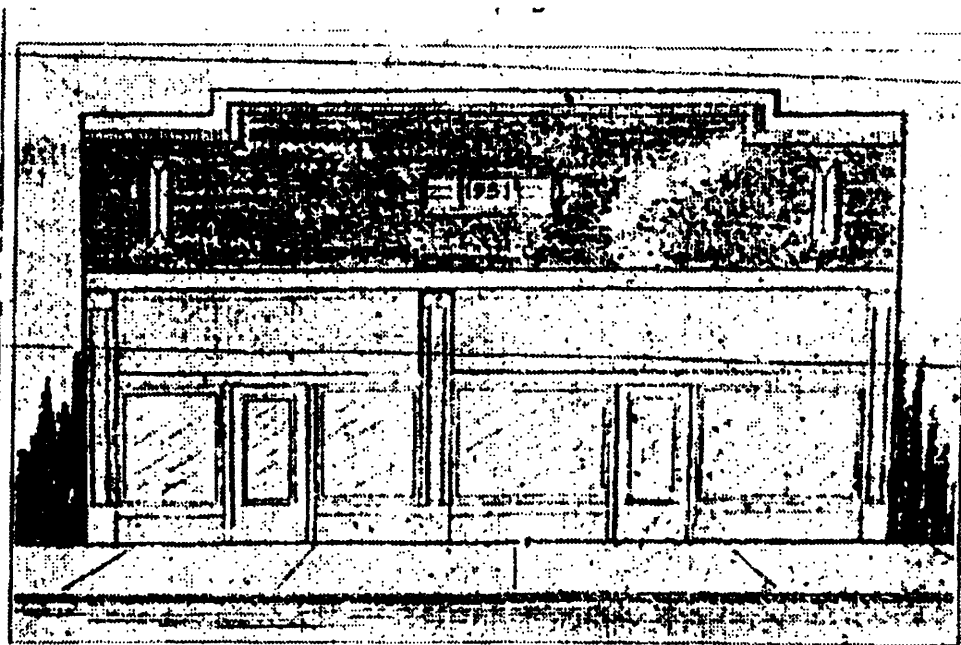
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 38



CLEMONS AND SHAFFER BUILDING

Work was started last week on of the former Jud's cafe on Main

"Work was started last week on the new one-story double-store building for L.P. Shaffer and R.E. Clemons of the Northwest Ice Cream Company and has now progressed until the foundation is nearing completion. Joe White, Spencer builder, has the contract.

The new building is on the site of the former Jud's Café on Main Street (514 Main) and will be occupied by the Nelson pool hall and a café when finished. It is of brick and concrete construction with prism glass used in the store front decoration.

W.C. Barton drew the plans." (*News-Herald*, July 30, 1931)

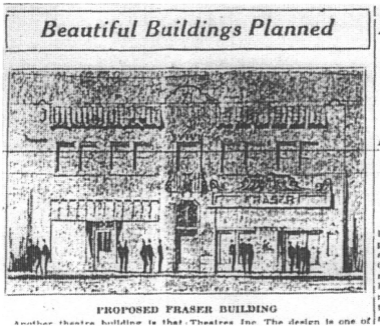
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 39



"Another theater building is that designed for Mrs. Rose Fraser by Liebenberg and Kaplan who prepared the above conception. It will be erected for the Finkelstein Theaters, Inc. [at 406-408 Main] The design is one of the most attractive of those being prepared for Spencer's new Main Street and will embody the use of face brick, tile, stone, and wrought metal decoration." (News-Herald, July 30, 1931)

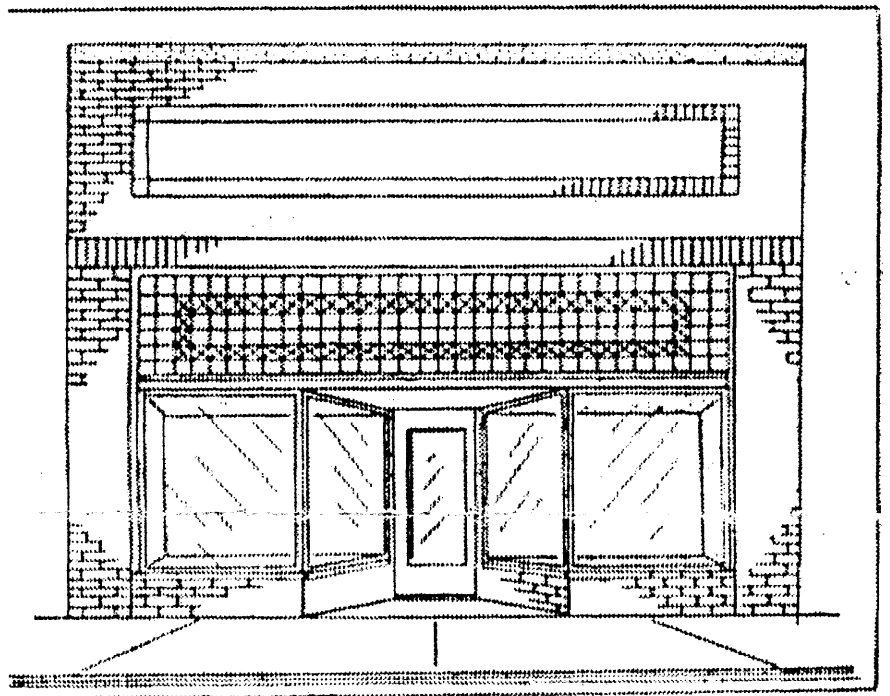
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 8

Page 40



PETER OSTROM BUILDING

Peter Ostrom has started work on this new building, by Jens Thompson drew the plans

"Peter Ostrom has started work on this new building to be erected on his property on Main Street near Pine (524 Main) to be occupied by the Arnold automotive supply company. Jens Thompson drew the plans. The building will be of brick and stone with prism glass used in the decorative above the display windows." (*News-Herald*, July 30, 1931)

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 41

These drawings illustrate the variety of designs that were prepared by the different architects, but they are all "modern" in style. There is a blend of Mission/Spanish Revival, Art Deco (the drawing was not reproducible), Chicago style (drawing not available), and a simplified commercial design. The use of different materials, both in color and texture, contributes to the unified quality of the re-built area. Gone is the red brick with heavy hoodmolds and metal cornices of the late 19th century. In its place is a coordinated group of buildings giving Main Street a "cosmopolitan" appearance.

By September 1931 the *News-Herald* headlined

"New Business Area Rising in Fire Zone."

The greatest building program in the history of the city of Spencer and the largest single program ever recorded in Northwest Iowa is under way as the burned section of the business section is rising above the ashes of the conflagration of last June 27 to become within a comparatively few weeks the newest, most modern and finest commercial center in a wide territory of this section of the state.

Considerably more than \$700,000 is involved in the rebuilding program that is under full sail at this time with the major part scheduled for completion before December 1 with the probability that the entire Main Street frontage that was destroyed in the fire will be completely restored by the beginning of 1932.

At the present time there remains but one site on Main Street where building operations have not been commenced, that being the new Floete-Thomas block to replace the old Grand Opera House. The plans for this structure, however, are in the process of preparation and a contract for the work is a probability within a short time. (*News-Herald*, 9-17-31)

Less than six months after the fire, the city of Spencer held a grand opening jubilee to show off its new business district. Again, the entire front page was dedicated to the fire and the rebuilding that followed. The *Spencer Reporter* (12-10-31) listed the accomplishments.

In excess of \$1,200,000 has been invested by Spencer business men and property owners in new buildings, fixtures, improvements, and stocks that compose the rebuilt section of the Main Street business district that was reduce to ruins during the Spencer fire of June 27.

Twenty new buildings, several of them being group structures replacing single edifices destroyed in the conflagration, and one completely remodeled structure form the Spencer rebuilding program that is to be celebrated next week from Friday, December 11 to Friday, December 18, with a great jubilee week program of entrainment and sales.

The new buildings, themselves, represent a value of over \$700,000, and it has been estimated, while costly fixtures and extensive and complete stocks of merchandise raise the total cost of rebuilding and fitting the new business district to well over the \$1,200,000-mark, according to the figures available.

With this tremendous investment and with the fact that the new district embodies the latest in architectural designs, scientific store arrangements and elaborate fixtures, Spencer now offers to Northwest Iowa its greatest shopping district.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 42

The newspaper listed the twenty new buildings by name and location, with the new occupants, and sometimes with a description of the building.

McAllister Block. (401-405) NW corner of 4th and Main, the place where the fire started. Two story fire-proof building of tan brick and vitrolite with all steel and concrete construction.

Clay County National Bank. (407) Immediately north of the McAllister Block. Minnesota marble with steel front.

Dan Cole Building. (409) Immediately north of the Clay County Bank, this matches the McAllister Block.

Flindt-Cummings-Rasmussen Block. (400-404) NE corner of 4th and Main. This building replaces three individual buildings that were destroyed.

Fraser Theater. (406-408) "One of the most attractive new buildings..." Located north of Flindt- et al.

Thomas Floete Building. (410) On the site of the Grand Opera House, "it will be a 'glass front' building in black, silver and grey.

Smith-Knight Building. (416-418) Tan brick double building. "It is of fire resistive construction and embodies the most modern design."

Redfield Building. (420) SE corner of 5th and Main. Light red brick with stone trim, "effective use of decorative brick on the front is one of its features."

Moore Building. (500) "Another of the most pleasing buildings on the new Main Street is the Moore Building at the NE corner of Main and 5th Street. Of light tan brick and fire resistive construction this building is so designed as to be one of the architectural triumphs of the new district."

New Spencer Theater. (504) The first building to be completed after the fire. The façade was re-used in the new construction.

Floethe-Cornwall Building. (508) Café on first floor, American Legion hall and Spencer Commercial Club on the second.

Asher Arcade (510) "A front of red brick, black vitrolite and silver opens into along arcade promenade that leads to some of Spencer's most modern shops."

Clemons-Shaffer Building (514) "one of the finest new one story buildings."

Moore-Davies Building. (516) "Modernistic" lines are featured in this one story fire-resistive building of light tan brick.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 43

F.G. Floete Building. (520) Another one story building, this one "of attractive design."

Peter Ostrom Building. (524) The last in the line of buildings destroyed by the fire. New building is a single story brick.

Several other buildings were either remodeled or relocated. The Davies Building at 501 was originally the Citizen's National Bank. Following the fire it was remodeled for the L.C. Burr Company. The Spencer Dry Cleaners built a new building at the corner of West and Pine, and the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company built a new fireproof building at the SW corner of West and 5th Streets.

A list of the architects who designed buildings for the "new" Spencer downtown includes;

W.C. Barton of Des Moines and Spencer
Dougher, Rich & Woodburn of Des Moines
F.A. Harris of Des Moines
Leibenberg & Kaplan of Minneapolis
A. Moorman of Minnesota
Sund & Dunham of Minnesota
Jens Thompson of Spencer
Woolworth Company Architect

The three architectural firms from Minnesota were arrested and fined for working in Iowa without an Iowa license. (*Spencer Reporter*, July 30, 1931)

New construction downtown did not cease with the rebuilding of the fire district. For a number of years Spencer had been asking for a new U.S. Post Office. A site was selected for it at the NE corner of 5th and West Streets. The new brick classical revival building was dedicated April 1933. Two years later a new five front single story brick building was completed directly across the street. This brick building with stone trim was a subdued example of the Art Deco style seen in the Clay County National Bank.

Results of the Spencer Fire of 1931:

The Spencer fire was directly responsible for the passage of a state-wide ban on the sale and use of fireworks by the Iowa Legislature in 1937. There was talk of such legislation immediately following the fire, but the actual bill was not passed for six years.

The fire provided the businessmen and community leaders of Spencer with an unparalleled opportunity to create a whole new downtown environment. They took advantage of this by bringing in planners and engineers to work with architects from both Iowa and Minnesota to design the new buildings. Exactly how they convinced all of these architects to work cooperatively was not explained. The result however, is a truly unique central business

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 8

Page 44

district. Although it was never mentioned in the newspaper articles, the architects and planners were obviously aware of Country Club Plaza in Kansas City which had been designed by architect Edward Buehler Delk for J.C. Nichols and built less than ten years earlier. Like Spencer, there was a strong Spanish/Mission influence found in the Country Club Plaza buildings. Both of these complexes illustrate the total design package that was to become popular, and common, in the 1950s as shopping centers started growing up on the edge of towns across the county.

In 1939 the city of Spencer decided to rename and renumber streets throughout the community. At that time Main Street was changed to Grand Avenue, a fitting name for the "new" business district.

Despite alterations to many of the buildings at street level, the Spencer business district retains an unusually high degree of integrity. The facades of these buildings could be used to illustrate an encyclopedia of early 20th century commercial design. Grand Avenue illustrates Francaviglia's definition of Main Street,

Main Street is where buildings are joined together and define the public space and the commercial activity.....The architecture of Main Street serves to delineate a powerful, almost urbanistically regimented corridor. (Francaviglia, pp 67 & 78)

The Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District is significant not just in Spencer's history, but in that of the state of Iowa as well.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number 9

Page 45

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Andreas, A.T. Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa. Chicago: A.T. Andreas Pub. Co., 1875.

"Architectural Inventory of Spencer, Iowa." Compiled by the Spencer Historic Preservation Commission, 2000.

Bogue, Allan. From Prairie to Corn Belt. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, Reprinted Ed., 1994.

Census of Iowa for the Year 1915. Des Moines, IA: Robert Henderson, State Printer 1916.

Centennial: Spencer, Iowa 1871-1971. Spencer, IA: Centennial Book Committee, 1971.

Ehrlich, George. Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History 1826-1976. Kansas City, MO: Historic Kansas City Foundation, 1979.

Francaviglia, Richard V. Main Street Revisited: Time, Space, and Image Building in Small-Town America. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1996.

Gilbreath, W.C. The History of Clay County, Iowa. No publisher listed, 1889.

Gillespie, Samuel and Steele, James E. History of Clay County, Iowa. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1909.

Herbert Hoover Library Association. The West Branch Commercial District: A Guided Tour of Iowa's New National Historic District. Monticello, IA: Julin Printing Co., 1987.

History of Clay County, IA. Spencer, IA: Parker Historical Society of Clay County, 1984.

Longstreth, Richard. The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architectural. (Updated Edition) Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, A Division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2000.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Spencer: 1909, 1915, 1924, 1941, 1941 updated.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Anamosa, Burlington, Charles City, Emmetsburg, Fort Madison, Keokuk, Le Mars, Maquoketa, Muscatine, Pocahontas, Sioux Center, Storm Lake, Waukon.

Schlebecker, John T. Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1975.

Schmiedeler, Tom. "Frontier Forms of Iowa's County Seats." Annals of Iowa, Vol 57, No 1, Winter 1998, pp 1-37.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 9

Page 46

Newspapers

Clay County News: Illustrated Supplement, Vol XXII, No 17, 18 April 1892

The News Herald: June, Nov-Dec 1931; Jan-Dec 1937

The Spencer Reporter: Jan-Dec 1886; Jan-Dec 1892; Jan-Dec 1895-97; Jan-Dec 1899-1904;
Jan-Dec 1911-21; Jan-Dec 1923-25; Jan-Dec 1927-41; Jan-Dec 1945Historic Photographs

Historic Photographs

City of Spencer Photo Collection

Parker Museum Collection

Main Street Spencer Collection

Private Collections

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number 10

Page 47

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

UTM References:

| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 15 | 325516 | 4779003 |
| B | 15 | 325636 | 4778998 |
| C | 15 | 325656 | 4778648 |
| D | 15 | 325496 | 4778648 |
| E | 15 | 325496 | 4778808 |
| F | 15 | 325471 | 4778808 |
| G | 15 | 325471 | 4778908 |
| H | 15 | 325516 | 4778908 |

Verbal Boundary Description:

Original Plat Block A, Lots 1-4 and 16-18
 Block B, Lots 6-11

Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad Addition
 Block 21, Lots 1 & 2, E 100' Lots 3 & 4
 Block 26, Lots 1-14
 Block 27, Lots 9-24
 Block 30, Lots 7-18
 Block 31, Lots 1-12, 18

Boundary Justification:

The is the part of the Spencer business district which best illustrates the commercial development of the community, and, which demonstrates the role of the major fire of June 27, 1931, and the planning and re-development that took place following the fire. This geographic area includes the best examples of the early 20th century architectural styles in the community as well as the architect designed buildings that were constructed following the fire.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number Photos Page 48

The photographs submitted with this nomination were taken by members of the Spencer Historic Preservation Commission and city staff in 2003 and 2004. All photographs accurately portray the historic district as it looks today. Negatives are on file in the Spencer City Hall, 418 2nd Avenue N, Spencer, IA 51301.

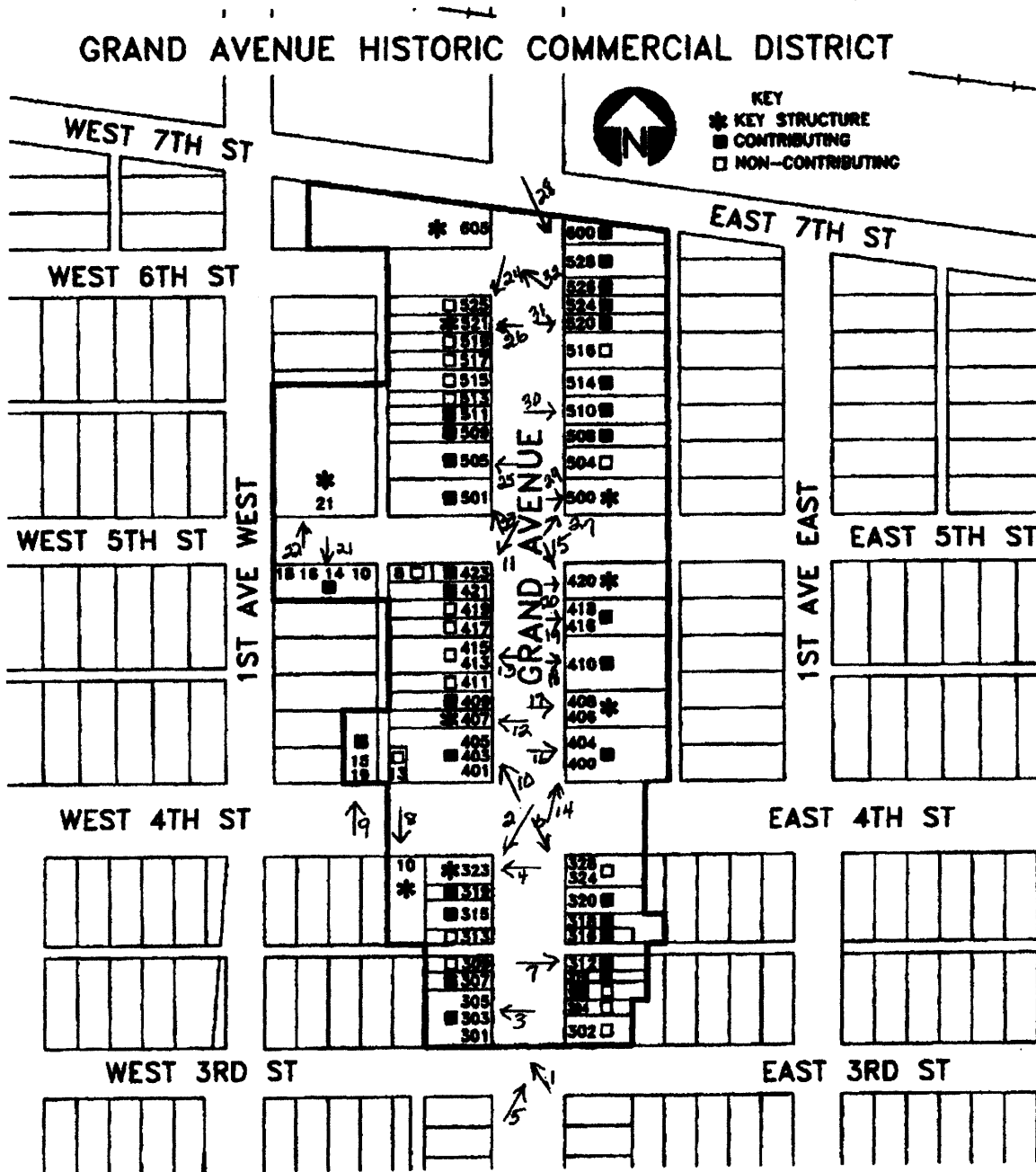
1. West side, 300 Block of Grand, looking NW from 3rd St.
2. West side, 300 Block of Grand, looking SW from 4th St.
3. Union Block, 301-305 Grand, looking W.
4. Farmer's Trust & Savings Bank, 323 Grand, looking W.
5. East side, 300 Block of Grand, looking NE from 3rd St.
6. East side, 300 Block of Grand, looking SE from 4th St.
7. 312 Grand, looking E.
8. Medlar Building, 10 W. 4th St, looking S
9. Heikens-Glasgow Building, 15-19 W. 4th St, looking N.
10. West side, 400 Block of Grand, looking NW.
11. West side, 400 Block of Grand, looking SW.
12. Clay County National Bank, 407 Grand, looking W.
13. I.O.O.F Building, 413-415 Grand, looking W.
14. East side of 400 Block of Grand, looking NE.
15. East side of 400 Block of Grand, looking SE.
16. Flindt-Cummings-Rasmussen Building, 400-404 Grand, looking E.
17. Fraser Theater, 406-408 Grand, looking E.
18. Floete-Thomas Building, 410 Grand, looking E.
19. Smith-Knight Building, 416-418 Grand, looking E.
20. Redfield Building, 420 Grand, looking E.
21. Four Front Commercial Building, 12-18 W. 5th St, looking S.
22. U.S. Post Office, 21 W. 5th St, looking NE.
23. West side, 500 Block of Grand, looking NW.
24. West side, 500 Block of Grand, looking SW.
25. Moore & Birdsall Building, 505 Grand, looking W.
26. F.W. Knight Building, 521 Grand, looking W.
27. East side, 500 Block of Grand, looking NE.
28. 600 Grand and East side, 500 Block of Grand, looking SE.
29. Moore Building, 500 Grand, looking E.
30. Asher Arcade Building, 510 Grand, looking E.
31. F.G. Floete Building, 520 Grand, looking E.
32. Tangney Hotel, 605 Grand, looking NW.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa

Section number Photos Page 49



Map showing camera angles for each of the 32 photographs

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number Owners Page 50

**John Paul Greer
1403 Country Club Dr
Spencer, IA 51301**

**John Vaubel
8 W. 5th St
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Curtis & Patricia Brownmiller
3344 Backland Rd
Royse City, TX 75189**

**Lynn Hunter Swan
3181 310th Ave
Dickens, IA 51333**

**Fred Moore Estate Trust
P.O. Box 617
Okoboji, IA 51355**

**Robt & Rebecca VanderTuig
1111 W. 8th St
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Ryan Sather
501 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Rony & Sue Sears
101 E. 5th St
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Vance & Elaine Frommie
P.O. Box 961
Spencer, IA 51301**

**D J & Sons LC
P.O. Box 972
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Bogenrief Studios
200 Main St
Merrill, IA 51038**

**R L Fridley Theaters Inc
1321 Walnut
Des Moines, IA 50309**

**Kari Roskens
513 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Clay Mutual Insurance Assoc
P.O. Box 467
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Diamond-Vogel & DVK Inc
1020 Albany Place SE
Orange City, IA 51041**

**Joel Bousema
620 Union Ave
Sheldon, IA 51201**

**Cotton-Grave Bldg Partnership
P.O. Box 462
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Duane Hansen
519 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Neal Drefke
804 W. 4th St
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Gary & Sharon Fitzloff
3575 260th Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Barbara Dean
10 W. 4th ST
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Wilma Hurd et al
7805 East Monterosa St
Scottsdale, AZ**

**Spencer Hotel Inc
605 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Linda Schaben
23274 178th ST
Okoboji, IA 51355**

**Leon & Willa Baldwin
P.O. Box 146
Dickens, IA 51333**

**Duane & Joan Kallsen
1202 Country Club Ln
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Helen Geddes
1214 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**CAMM Land Partnership
1710 Ithaca Ave
Spirit Lake, IA 51360**

**Michael Heffermen & Lisa Petersen
305 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Michael & Richard Patrick
1320 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Gary & Kathleen Halverson
419 W. 9th St
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Lorrie & Jeffery Balk
P.O. Box 837
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Penny Lidman
312 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Grand Avenue Historic Commercial District
Clay County, Iowa**

Section number Owners Page 51

**World of Fabrics Inc
P.O. Box 450
Willmar, MN 56201**

**Insurance Associates of
Spencer
P.O. Box 860
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Lawrence Smith/Georgia
Smith Res Trust
c/o Chris Bjornstad
P.O. Box 999
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Steven & Patricia Cook
P.O. Box 1316
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Jacobsen Homes Corp
P.O. Box 180
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Wayne & Barbara Workman
320 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Joy Thompson
1103 Gateway Blvd
Waverly, IA 50677**

**Terry & Betty Dandy
1304 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Robert Schall
P.O. Box 1105
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Mark & Kelly DeYoung
323 8th St
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Christopher Bjornstad
& Sandra Thiesen
P.O. Box 999
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Wyman & Kathleen
John Greer
1414 Country Club Ln
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Timothy & Sherri Steffen
1501 Patricia Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Thomas Nelson
409 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Spencer Area Arts Foundation
408 Grand Ave
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Donald Carlson
1608 Country Club Ln
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Brown's Shoe Fit
P.O. Box 480
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Kenneth & Lou Ann Ellingson
1207 12th Ave SE
Spencer, IA 51301**

**C&P Properties
1110 W. 14th St
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Leland & Brenda Kay Miller
1606 Country Club Ln
Spencer, IA 51301**

**Charles & Patricia Jones Trust
608 E. 13th St
Spencer, IA 51301**