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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name The Thos. D. Murphy Co. Factory and Power Plant

other names/site number Thos. D. Murphy Calendar Company, Thomas D. Murphy Calendar Co.

2. Location

street & number 110 South 2nd Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Red Oak [N/A] vicinity

state code IA county Montgomery code ¹³⁷~~69~~ zip code 51566

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [X] nationally [x] statewide [x] locally. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Barbara A. Mitchell DSHPO April 29 2008
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title State Historic Preservation Officer 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 [] See continuation sheet.

Signature of the Keeper Linda McClelland Date of Action 5/19/08

The Thos. D. Murphy Co. Factory and Power Plant
Name of Property

Montgomery County, Iowa
County/State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

2 0 buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

2 0 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 Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

INDUSTRY/energy facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

AMERICAN MOVEMENT

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

STONE Limestone

roof OTHER

other _____

Narrative Description

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

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE
INDUSTRY
ARCHITECTURE
ART

Periods of Significance

1905-1958

Significant Dates

1905
1907
1920

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Murphy, Thomas D.

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Lawrie, Harry
Garthwait, F.M.

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

The Thos. D. Murphy Co. Factory and Power Plant
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 15/ 312485/ 4541395
Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. Zone Easting Northing

[] 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 Ralph J. Christian, Jan Olive Nash, and Megan Masana

organization State Historical Society of Iowa and Tallgrass Historians L.C. date May 1, 2008

street & number 600 East Locust Street telephone 515.281.8697

city or town Des Moines state IA zip code 50319

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 Save Our Depot, Inc., c/o Jacky Adams

street & number 305 South 2nd Street telephone 712.263.6340

city or town Red Oak state IA zip code 51566

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 205

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7. Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Located in the western Iowa county seat town of Red Oak, The Thos. D. Murphy Co. Factory and Power Plant occupies most of a large block bordered by Second Street to the west, East Short Street to the south, Third Street to the east, and East Market Street to the north. The art calendar manufacturing facility shares the East Market Street frontage with several modest frame and brick residences. Bisecting this block on an east/west axis is the original right-of-way for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad (nonextant, tracks removed c. 2002), locally known as the "low line." Both the Murphy factory building (1905, expanded in 1907 and 1920) and its smaller power plant (1920) face west onto Second Street. By the time of the factory's construction in 1905, Second Street had become a major north/south thoroughfare, connecting downtown shops and the county courthouse several blocks to the north with the town's new railroad depot to the south. The extant railroad depot (NRHP, 1999), which sits on an elevated grade known as the "high line," is located about a block to the south of the factory. In between the depot and the factory are late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century buildings including two 2-story brick hotels and several small single-family houses. Both 2-story buildings now house apartments but are historically associated with either the depot or the factory. Topography rises rapidly to the factory's east, where more houses are located on the hillside. To the west, the landscape is flat and cleared of buildings. The Murphy factory now faces a graveled parking lot and vacant, grassy lots. While the low line tracks have been removed, the grassy right-of-way between the main factory building and the power house remains intact. Other landscaping includes mature trees and a grass lawn along the west façade of the main building. South and east elevations abut the streets, leaving no room for landscaping. Built of load-bearing brick exterior walls with a wooden post-and-beam interior floor system, the main Murphy factory building as well as the masonry power plant are an American rendition of the English Arts and Crafts Movement popular at the turn of the century. Decorative details are applied to a utilitarian factory form loosely based on Romanesque Revival architectural features such as the round-arched entrance and crenelated tower. The buildings combine period details from a variety of Old World eras and employ materials and finishing methods that enhance the "hand built" appearance of their exteriors. Inside, the main factory building is finished in similar period details in executive spaces and where the public and customers might be expected to visit. The bulk of the interior space of both buildings is purely utilitarian, however, reflecting the owner's concern for safety and functionality. Early wings added shortly after the factory's completion follow the same building program. While there are several alterations to the main building and the much later addition of modern storage wings to the east (rear) side, overall the two buildings strongly retain their historic appearance and exhibit excellent integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Exterior Descriptions

Upon approaching the building, the most notable overall feature is the brickwork. The building itself has no observable foundation and does not have a basement level, thus the facade appears to rise directly from its landscaped grade. American or common bond courses of "clinker" bricks—often cast aside or relegated to rear wall use as substandard—are used here to face the exterior public walls. The choice of these carefully selected bricks does much to accomplish the hand-made, vernacular appearance that architect Harry Lawrie was trying to capture. These bricks were hand picked from a Red Oak manufacturer to create an "imposing,

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substantial, and at the same time thoroughly artistic" look.¹ Irregular glazing and intentional chips on the brick face give them a rustic appearance, as does the occasional brick that projects beyond the face of the wall. The mortar joints are flush to slightly raked. On the west elevation, the mortar is colored red to blend into the brick color; to the south and east, it is white, probably because these portions of the building have less public visibility. Fenestration brickwork includes headers that are generally segmental arches except in the tower where they are round-arched at the front entrance and in the top, fourth floor. Bedford limestone was used for trim work, most importantly in the front entrance surround and the signboards.

West Façade and Tower Entrance (Front)

The western elevation is the obviously public face of the building and its entrance tower received the most visual and decorative attention (Fig. 7-1). Stone steps lead from the public walkway to the building's entrance, where a 10-panel oak door with black wrought iron kick plates and strapwork reinforce the decorative and vernacular quality of the building. The strapwork stretches from the doors to the masonry abutments. The imposts are in limestone, as are the spandrels. Just above the door itself, the glass tympanum window is decorated with a similar hand wrought scrollwork. At the center of the tympanum are a black shield plate and a lamp. The entrance's decorative features were intended to visually please Murphy Company customers and the Red Oak community alike.

Springing from the masonry abutments are archivolt courses—ornamental bands of moldings on the face of the arches—that are imitative of Romanesque arched entryways.² The archivolts are created from rows of headers that alternate between being flush with the wall face, and projecting from the wall itself. Just above the archivolts are two limestone spandrels. Within each spandrel is a limestone roundel, which adds an element of formality to the entry. Just above the spandrels, a light stringcourse stretches from the central bay to the two projecting bays that additionally comprise the entry tower. On the entry tower, this stringcourse creates a continuous sill for the second floor windows, and unites all three bays on the facade. Above this first story, within the central bay of the tower, a limestone panel bearing the incised words "Thos. D. Murphy Co." suggests a lintel for the second floor windows, while the weighted courseline above the sign creates a sill for the third floor windows. On the flanking bays, there is far less decoration, and the third floor windows are stacked above the second floor windows.

The height of the first level bays is much taller than those on the floors above and the windows become smaller with each ascending façade floor level. Throughout the building, the first, second, and third floor windows are rectilinear. The sill of all of the windows is flat, and composed of limestone. The lintels, however, are most often segmental arches composed of three courses of headers.

¹ "New Building Completed," Red Oak Express, June 23, 1905.

² Cyril M. Harris, ed. *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983), 29.

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Figure 7-1 Murphy Co. entry tower. Tallgrass Historians L.C.

The entry tower also has an additional fourth floor. Here, the third story is capped with a limestone beltcourse, which, like the stone course above the first floor, provides a continuous sill for the fourth floor windows. These windows, unlike those below, are capped with a series of round arches. Like the third story on the rest of the façade, the fourth story of the entry tower has a stepped corbelled cornice line, which supports a limestone stringcourse, and is capped with a stepped parapet roofline. The parapets are all capped with limestone.

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Stepped back from the entry tower, the west façade stretches both north and south. The wing to the north is comprised of five bays, flanked by six buttresses. The wing to the south has six bays and seven buttresses. Both wings are organized in a similar manner. Within each bay, there are two windows on each floor, capped with an arched lintel and having a limestone sill. Just above the second story, there is a stringcourse in limestone as well. On the third floor, the façade recedes slightly, and the buttresses narrow to about half their lower width. At the top of the third story, the buttresses become flush with the wall, where the corbelling seen on the central tower is repeated. As with the entry tower, this corbelled cornice line is capped with a limestone stringcourse and stepped parapet roofline. However, the parapets are only found on the north-most and south-most bays, where they are filled with a blind oculus.

Windows on the west façade, as well as the other three sides of the factory, are two-over-two sashes. Here, though, there are a few replacement windows, including several on the third-floor executive area which have been filled with glass blocks. The bulk of the factory's windows, however, appear to be unaltered.

North Elevation (Side)

The north side, unlike the west façade, served an important utilitarian role by virtue of its alignment along side the railroad tracks (Fig. 7-2). While it was primarily driven by function, the appearance of this side was also important because it was part of the factory view first observed by the public approaching from the downtown area. Therefore, it repeats the design of the west façade. When the Murphy Co. built its own power house just north of the railroad tracks in 1920, the view from the north was obscured until the observer was much



Figure 7-2 The northside railroad spur and loading dock area are evident in this postcard view dated 1908. Also shown is the wing expansion constructed east of the original north side (to the left of the box car), which repeated the architectural program of the original block. The extant power house was constructed later in the grassy area in the far left center of this view. Collection of Jan Olive Nash.

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closer to the factory. The power house's own decorative style was surely driven by its prominent position along the street.

Today, the wing expansion constructed in 1907 to the east of the original block is set off by a narrow inset panel from the original 1905 block. The original block (west half of the entire north side) has five bays and four buttresses. The eastern-most bay of this north block towards the center of the building is entirely filled with brick, reflecting the "annex" stairwell and elevator shaft inside the original 1905 block. A concrete loading dock fronts this half. The eastern wing portion of the north side is divided into six bays with seven buttresses and also has a loading dock enclosed by a metal shed. Similar to the western façade, only the end bays are capped with decorative stepped parapets.

East Elevation (Rear)

The rear elevation is composed of the east end wall of the 1907 wing expansion (described above) and the 1920 addition. This addition added 40,000 square feet to the factory proper, bringing total floor space up to almost 120,000 square feet. This east elevation received minimal decorative attention but is structurally composed in a manner similar to the north side and west façade. The 1907 portion has four bays and five buttresses, and is three floors high. The southern, 1920 portion has only two floors with nine bays separated by buttresses. While the northern half has a stepped parapet roofline, the southern portion has an entirely flat roofline. A steel staircase that leads to the second story is located at the intersection of these two halves. A small, modern metal addition is attached to the 1907 portion.

South Elevation (Side)

The long south side of the building is comprised of the south end wall of the original, front 1905 block, plus the south end wall of the 1920 rear addition described above, and a brick segment that fills the space between the two. This brick segment dates from 1920 but is plain and devoid of decorative detail or buttresses. When viewed as a single southern exposure, the three parts of the south elevation are described as follows: the eastern portion towards the rear of the factory is one story tall and divided into three bays with four buttresses. Each bay bears a pair of two-over-two sash windows with segmental arches. The roofline is decorated with two stepped parapets, each filled with a blind oculus. The central bay is a single story and has a flat roofline and six two-over-two sash windows with segmental arches. This central portion of the south side is recessed behind the other two portions. The third section of the façade (the original 1905 block's south end) towards the front of the building is divided into five bays with five buttresses. The eastern-most of these five bays is entirely filled with brick (reflecting the "annex" stairwell and elevator shaft inside), while the other four bays are composed similar to the western façade. Here too only the end bays are capped with parapets. This stylistic element unites the north, west, and south elevations into one consistent public "face" from any viewer's perspective on Second Street.

Interior Description

Because of the wings and additions to the original 1905 block, the floor plan resembles a square donut of irregular thickness. The center of this donut is an open courtyard with a large, mature red oak. Also in the

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courtyard is a small building that still houses the fire hose and fire-fighting equipment installed by Murphy. The landmark water tank, which appears from the outside to originate from this center courtyard, actually sits on or at least springs from the roof behind the entrance tower. The perimeter dimensions of the entire building footprint are essentially 237 by 198 feet, expanded from the original block's 237 by 70 feet.³ Local lore suggests the open courtyard was for the benefit of employees and included a smoking room. Additionally, it is thought Murphy wanted to maintain the open space out of fear of tuberculosis.⁴

Interior space was devoted to work space or storage. Long processing bays occupy the open spaces between regularly positioned structural posts. Within the tower, the open gateleg stair case occupies half the interior space, while office or meeting rooms occupy the other half. Major spatial functions by floor (as last arranged) are described as follows (also see the floor plans in the Additional Documentation section):

- First/ground floor: receptionist office, screen printing room, scrap storage and removal room, dock, restroom, storage space, old shipping room, plate vault, shop, cutting and collating room, dycril (letterpress printing plate) room, courtyard, and smoking room
- Second floor: conference room, lunch room, corporate office, corporate inventory, print vault, calendar samples room, customer service storage, eastside storage room, courtyard, and meeting area
- Third floor: customer service, order processing, accounting, computer room, mail/sample room, correspondents, art department, and file department.⁵

Of particular note is the interior structural system, where the floors are supported by a heavy timber post and beam frame system. The post and beam system is tied to the exterior load bearing walls by resting the beam ends on internal buttresses or broad inverted corbels. The posts, spaced more or less regularly throughout the long work spaces, dominate the interior, especially where they are not obscured by partition walls. Vertical posts are capped with a metal saddle, in which the beams rest. The interior walls, where finished, are irregularly swirled plaster. Brick walls are generally painted. Flooring changes throughout the spaces. Within the industrial work areas, the first floor is poured concrete, while upper floors are maple laid on yellow pine subflooring. Quarry tile was used on the ground floor in the receptionist room, while the lobby was floored in maple. The fourth floor of the tower housed a photography processing room, which is covered with linoleum tiles in a tan and red zig-zag pattern.

Other notable features include the firewalls and heavy fire doors throughout the factory, evidence of Murphy's concern about fire. In keeping with the slow-burning construction methods, the interior had fire doors that dropped down automatically to close off elevator and stairwell shafts in order to contain or slow the spread of

³ Existing dimensions were obtained from the Montgomery County assessor records, while the original dimensions are estimated in "Largest in the World," *Red Oak Express*, September 2, 1904.

⁴ Jacky Adams, verbal communication, to Megan Masana, February 28, 2006. Adequate ventilation for employee health purposes, as well as light, was provided by the sixty large original windows. "Largest in the World," *Red Oak Express*, September 2, 1904.

⁵ Interior spatial functions are taken from "Thomas D. Murphy Calendar Company" (unpubl. report prepared by Iowa State University, University Extension, for Jacky Adams, Save Our Depot Committee and the Red Oak Historic Preservation Committee, no date but c. 2004).

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a fire. Additionally, there is also an elaborate internal water pressure system and a system of light bulb alerts to visually signal the location of a fire.

Murphy and his architect, Harry Lawrie, were interested in more than strictly functional considerations. Murphy clearly wanted to impress clients and needed comfortable surroundings in which to conduct business with them. On the third floor, the executive offices are particularly noteworthy for their decorative quality and Thomas D. Murphy's corner office and reception ante room were especially handsome.⁶ Wood paneling and bookcases were executed in oak and walnut and detailed with Arts and Crafts hammered metal pulls and more classical motifs. Leaded, art-glass wall partitions and executive office bookcase fronts, however, reflect the client and architect's most obvious decorative efforts. Stylistically, these art-glass details reference the work of Lawrie's contemporary, Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, noted as both an architect and an interior designer.⁷ As a fellow Scotsman from Glasgow, Lawrie certainly was aware of Mackintosh and his contributions to the distinctive Arts and Crafts style. The Murphy stained-glass panels strongly suggest this Arts and Craft inspiration (Fig. 7-3).



Figure 7-3 The floral pattern of this executive office stained-glass partition wall was executed in greens and mauve, surrounded by semi-opaque glass. Tallgrass Historians L.C.

⁶ Perhaps this area received distinct attention because there was "a new attentiveness to the ideal of the 'handsome factory'" by a growing class of college-trained executives and their wives. One contemporary architectural engineer, Frank D. Chase, suggested in 1923 that this group's interests in the development of residential and civic art and architecture extended to the factory as well. Bradley, 205.

⁷ Anne Massey, *Interior Design of the 20th Century* (rev. ed., New York: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2001), 55.

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The third-floor executive offices are all aligned along the west wall, commencing with Murphy's own office at the northwest corner. These offices are interconnected with interior doors that enabled the inhabitants to walk from one to the next without having to first move out into the open clerical work space. The corner office also has its own reception office that acted as a buffer space and ensured Murphy's privacy. Woodwork in the corner office is walnut, while the other offices are decorated in oak panels. Each office has a centrally placed doorway, which opens onto another executive's office. When the doors of all of the offices are open, one long passageway is created. Bookcases in each office have distinctive leaded or stained glass fronts. These, plus stained glass upper wall partitions create visual unity between the executive offices. Classical pilasters frame these clearly Arts and Crafts elements in Murphy's corner office.

Power Plant (1920)

The one-story power house constructed to the north of the factory was built using similar materials and methods as the factory and these shared characteristics visually unify the two buildings. The power house has a brick foundation and clinker-brick walls, laid in common (American) bond pattern with wide red mortar lines. Limestone trims the cornice and is used in window sills. Three rows of brick headers are used to form segmental arch window lintels. Fenestration consists of two-over-two sash windows with distinctive black-painted wood and wire screens. Echoing the 1905 factory next door, paired windows are set between exterior buttresses that terminate in brick corbels and, on the west façade, a stepped parapet with a blind oculus. The façade has three bays; the south side four; the east rear two. The north elevation is heavily treed and obscured by foliage. The front entrance is a double door with a transom light overhead. Above the transom is a limestone sign panel with raised letters reading "Murphy Co. Power Plant." A central freight door and what appear to be two coal chutes occupy three of the south side bays. Off the rear wall is a tall brick or clay tile chimney stack wrapped with metal stays. Also projecting from the rear wall is a small wooden garage addition. Not including the garage, the rectangular footprint of power house measuring 45 by 67 feet. The garage wing measures 31 by 13 feet and is undated though it appears to date to at least the 1940s.⁸

Inside, the brick power house has two large rooms. The flooring is poured concrete in both. The dark, windowless rear room contains an enormous steam boiler which essentially occupies three-fourths of the room's volume. The rest of the space is devoted to a narrow walkway and coal bins aligned along the south wall. From this room, the walkway leads through a door opening in a brick wall to the front room. The front room is well lit by the large windows on the façade and south side. This room, too, is a single large volume of space occupied by the machinery that generated and regulated the power needed by the factory, essentially three different-sized engines and a large electrical panel. The largest machine is an impressive "Corliss" engine, with its flywheel sunk to the axle in a concrete pit in the floor.

⁸ Montgomery County Assessor records.

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Integrity Statement

The main building of the Thos. D. Murphy Co. maintains very good integrity despite window changes in the third floor executive area and the ground floor north side, minor interior renovations in some office areas, and the recent addition of modern storage wings to the rear (east) side. The power house exterior is unaltered, as is the interior, which still contains its engines and massive boiler. Though now mostly emptied of machinery, the interior spaces and finishes of the main building largely appear as they did when the building was a working factory and wings and floors were divided by function. The executive office suite continues to exhibit the decorative art glass and fancy hardwood millwork that represented the elevated status of the company's managers, while the concrete and wooden floors and exposed brick walls of the rest of the factory suggest the overriding concern with work flow, fire prevention, and the smooth completion of specific tasks in the manufacturing process. The exterior of the main plant still strongly reflects the original careful attention to finish materials and the building's association with its neighborhood remains intact, despite the loss of some nearby buildings and the old rail line between the power house and main plant. When compared to the overall size and scale of the two buildings, and their commanding presence in the neighborhood of mostly small homes, the alterations to the main plant dim to unimportance. Overall, the Thos. D. Murphy Co. plant strongly retains its historic appearance and exhibits excellent integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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8. Narrative Statement of Significance

The Thos. D. Murphy Calendar Co. Factory and Power Plant is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, B, and C at the national, state, and local levels of significance. The Murphy Calendar Company historic district is nationally and locally significant under Criteria A and B because of its direct association with Thomas D. Murphy, the primary inventor of the first successful advertising art calendars and the individual most responsible for the creation, development and expansion of the art calendar industry in the United States and abroad. His manufacturing facility in Red Oak would become the largest of its kind in the world, set the standard for quality in the field, and serve as the training ground for most of the individuals establishing competing firms. Murphy's significance went far beyond advertising and business and extended to art education. Writing in 1912, famed early 20th century philosopher, writer, and lecturer, Elbert G. Hubbard, asserted that Murphy and his company had made Red Oak, Iowa "the most influential art center in the world." In Hubbard's opinion, places like ancient Athens and Rome, Renaissance Florence, and Paris paled in artistic influence to Red Oak because "here the famous paintings of the world are reproduced in all the glory of their original hues and tints, and these reproductions scattered broadcast into a million homes. Where one man visits the Louvre, where one student draws inspiration from the sculptures of Phidias, ten thousand are educated to a better understanding of real art through a calendar made by Murphy in Red Oak."¹

The Thos. D. Murphy Calendar Co. complex is of state and local significance under Criteria C as an excellent example of an Arts and Crafts Movement influenced industrial facility that was considered a "model factory" in the early 20th century because of its lighting, ventilation, and sanitation features and was often compared to the now demolished, internationally famous National Cash Register factory in Dayton, Ohio. Constructed in 1905 and expanded in 1907 and 1920, the facility was designed by Scottish-born architect Harry Lawrie, who had worked for Burnham and Root in Chicago, before becoming a principal in the prestigious Fisher and Lawrie firm in Omaha, Nebraska. The Murphy factory is one of his largest surviving factory designs and one of several buildings designed by his firm still extant in Red Oak. The free-standing 1920 Power Plant building houses a 120 horsepower Corliss Steam Engine, built by the Murray Iron Works of Burlington, Iowa and is believed to be one of the last of its kind in the state. The period of significance for this district runs from 1905 when Thomas Murphy moved his art calendar operations into this factory to 1958, the arbitrary cutoff for the National Register, which also closely coincides with the beginning of the final phase of the company's history as locally owned and operated by the Murphy heirs.

History and Historical Significance

Early Beginnings

Thomas Dowler Murphy was born July 10, 1866, on a farm near Monroe, Iowa, to Hugh M. and Caroline Dowler Murphy. After attending country schools and the Monroe High School, he entered Simpson College in Indianola in 1884. During his four years on campus, he held a part-time job with one of the Indianola newspapers where he learned the "ins and outs" of running a weekly paper with a countywide circulation and

¹ Elbert D. Hubbard, *A Little Journey to the Home of the Thos. D. Murphy Company* (Red Oak: The Murphy Press, 1912), 5-6.

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became very familiar with the equipment required for such an operation. An excellent student with a very strong interest in literature and the arts, as well as things mechanical, Murphy stood at the head of his class and was valedictorian at his graduation in 1888. Most importantly, Murphy met Edmund B. Osborne at Simpson. Both men had much in common in terms of literary interests, belonged to the same fraternity, lived in the same boarding house for a time, and as Murphy fondly recalled many years later, "were confederates in an endless variety of college deviltry." Osborne, according to Murphy, "was a man of tireless energy—and a very live factor in college society and politics." Unlike Murphy, who received financial assistance from his family for college, Osborne was on his own financially and never had enough money to complete any of his three years at Simpson or advance beyond freshman status. His friend, Murphy reminisced many years later, was "a handy canvasser" to whom making "money came easily," but "he had a free and easy way with his money" that left him broke before the end of the school year, recalling that Osborne "was the only man in the college who wore tailor-made clothes."²

Shortly before Murphy started his senior year at Simpson, Osborne informed him that he had married and had established a general agency with Underwood and Underwood to sell stereopticons and stereoscopic photographs. Early in the fall of 1887, however, Osborne's father-in-law, who had a half interest in a newspaper in Red Oak, passed away, and Osborne moved to Red Oak to help keep the financially struggling *Independent* afloat. He met with some success but found himself at loggerheads with his partner. Soon Osborne began to bombard Murphy with weekly letters urging him to buy out his partner and join him in the newspaper venture after his graduation from Simpson. A few weeks before his 1888 graduation, Murphy finally relented and went to Red Oak to visit Osborne and consider his proposal. Murphy later recalled that "I wasn't very favorably impressed with the "layout," since he "knew something about a country printing office" from his experience working for one of the Indianola papers. In fact, "it didn't take much technical skill," Murphy stated, "to see that the *Independent's* plant was pretty "ratty." Although he turned Osborne down, the latter continued to bombard him with letters about his partner's growing willingness to sell especially after an incident one day when Osborne tossed him into a large trash can during one of their arguments. Finally after graduating and returning to his home in Monroe, Murphy's father after listening to yet another of Osborne's written entreaties, encouraged his son to reconsider and make another visit to Red Oak, offering to provide him with the necessary financial backing. Young Murphy made this trip and "the upshot of it," he later recalled, "was that I became the possessor of a half interest in the aggregation of junk styled the Red Oak *Independent* for \$1300—\$300 cash in hand and my note for \$1000, due in two years."³

Osborne and Murphy Make Their Mark

The July 13, 1888 issue of the Red Oak *Independent* announced the change in the paper's ownership, unveiled the new masthead of "Osborne & Murphy" and crowed that they were "the cheapest Republican paper in Southwest Iowa." Both men wasted little time in expanding the subscription list, collecting money from past subscribers and advertisers, and improving the overall look and quality of the newspaper. In addition, they expanded their business by offering "Wedding Invitations, Rich Designs, Elegant Printing, Low Prices." Within two months of Murphy's arrival, the major mortgage on the paper had been paid, and the

² Thomas D. Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry: The Story of the Early Struggles of the Founders with a Short History of the Thos. D. Murphy Co.* (Red Oak: Press of the Thomas D. Murphy Company, 1921), 3-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

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Independent was operating in the black. Refusing to rest on their laurels, Osborne and Murphy invested in more and better equipment and increased the quality of the paper. By December they noted with considerable pride that "There is only one steam printing house in this county. We have the best equipped job office in this section and our prices are the lowest."⁴ They also decided to expand their coverage of local news and events and develop a network of local correspondents throughout Montgomery County. To provide space for this additional coverage and expand the paper's size, Osborne and Murphy got rid of what they described as the "patent insides" of their paper. At the time, most county seat newspapers in Iowa featured these "patent insides" or inserts containing news items from all practically every corner of the globe. Typically printed in Chicago and containing news often several months old, they were shipped weekly to local papers who inserted them into their papers.

Early in 1889 the *Independent* was selected as the official newspaper for the Montgomery County Republican Party, providing another small revenue stream for Osborne and Murphy. Despite this and some modest success in specialty printing, "it was readily becoming apparent," Murphy later recalled "that some additional source of revenue must be discovered. Osborne always was a rather free spender and the fact that I was single and lived cheaply was all that kept us afloat."⁵ Then in the spring of 1889, the voters in Montgomery County approved the construction of a new courthouse in Red Oak. Osborne and Murphy wanted to run an illustration of the proposed design in their paper but soon discovered that a wood-cut would cost them a week's revenue. At this juncture, Osborne came up with the idea of using the wood cut as the centerpiece on a wall calendar surrounded by cards advertising local businesses. Proceeding ahead, Osborne and Murphy had little difficulty selling the necessary advertising, producing the calendars on their own equipment, selling several thousand calendars in Red Oak and Montgomery County, and turning a tidy profit.

Believing they had found their niche and calling themselves the Capitol Calendar Company, Osborne and Murphy planned to repeat their success by producing calendars featuring courthouses, state capitols, and other public buildings proposed for construction in adjoining states. They first turned their attention to Beatrice, Nebraska and the new Gage County Courthouse. Armed with a handsome woodcut, the partners were taken aback by the disinterest in their proposal in Beatrice and were able to rein in only one advertiser, a former Red Oak merchant. A similar venture with the new Colorado Capitol Building in Denver fared a little better financially but forced the partners to closely evaluate and actually reformulate their approach to the calendar business. What had become evidently clear was that the advertising card approach did not work, but that selling a particular calendar to an individual business could work if one employed the appropriate techniques of salesmanship. In addition to refining sales methods, most of their efforts were focused on improving the variety and quality of the artwork used; calendar design and layout; and obtaining the equipment and skilled workers required to manufacture the calendars.

Undeterred by the failure of their initial approach and borrowing rather heavily from local banks, suppliers, machinery companies, and even Murphy's father, the partners rechristened their operation the Hawkeye Art Calendar Company in September 1890 and sent out a force of four salesman, including Osborne himself, while Murphy handled all the office work while continuing to serve as editor of the *Independent*. Focusing primarily on Iowa and surrounding states but venturing eastward into Illinois, Osborne and the sales force,

⁴ Red Oak *Independent*, July 13, 1888; September 14, 1888; December 14, 1888.

⁵ Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 13.

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“demonstrated,” Murphy later recalled, “that there was a market for calendars in the Middle West.”⁶ By the end of the year, calendar sales totaled \$18,000, which combined with profits from the newspaper enabled the partners to retire most of their debt. Refusing to rest on their laurels, they made plans for expansion of their calendar line, purchased more equipment, and incorporated as the Osborne & Murphy Company in 1891.

The next few years Osborne and Murphy prospered, adding to their line and increasing sales in 1892, 1893, and 1894, even managing to weather the Panic of 1893 and its aftermath with little difficulty. The firm had found its niche or market by focusing its sales efforts on “the custom of retail dealers of annually presenting to their customers souvenirs, attesting appreciation of favors,” which according to Murphy, “has been a growing one, and recent years have witnessed marked improvement in the quality of goods used. Calendars are the most popular, and most sought for as they possess utility and those, which are really beautiful contribute to the attractiveness of a room.” Calendar quality was improving as well, Murphy noted, “as will be readily seen by comparing one of the old line red, blue, and yellow chromos with the beautiful art engravings” produced by him and Osborne.⁷ Still, “all our work was in one color,” Murphy remembered many years later, “though duogravures (I think Mr. Osborne was responsible for introducing this name, now in common use by the engraving trade) supplanted plain halftones.” As to sources for calendar subjects, “There was no international copyright,” he recalled, “and we made free use of photographs of English, French and German paintings, together with landscapes and a few heads and figures from life.” Still, “we introduced plain and gold embossing and really produced some creditable efforts.”⁸

Despite the company’s success and their ongoing personal friendship, Murphy and Osborne increasingly found themselves at odds on how the business should be conducted. Osborne desired to expand rapidly while Murphy “believed in going slower and building up on a sounder financial basis.” Also, the two men seemed to have had differences over the quality of the calendars they were producing. Murphy appears to have possessed a greater sense of the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the business, and later he confessed that “I realized that much of the work was rotten and once in awhile a customer did too.” He recalled a banker who “refused the shipment, declaring the calendars were not fit to use” before launching a “tirade against our high-art productions.” Fortunately, “the vast majority were more lenient or less discriminating; they took the stuff and money continued to roll in.”⁹

Osborne and Murphy Separate and Go Their Partially Separate Ways

The differences between Osborne and Murphy finally came to a head early in 1895. Faced with what he later described as “a give-or-take proposition,” Murphy decided to leave the calendar business.¹⁰ The calendar firm became the property of Osborne, who retained the Osborne &-Murphy Company firm name. Agreeing not to

⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁷ Red Oak *Independent*, December 18, 1891.

⁸ Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 30-31.

⁹ Ibid., 27, 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

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reenter the calendar business for at least five years, Murphy became the sole proprietor of the *Independent*, whose offices were soon relocated to the building the Osborne & Murphy Company was in the process of vacating for its new plant. In addition, Murphy became the exclusive Montgomery County agent for all Osborne & Murphy products, calendars, and steel embossed stationery. Murphy wasted little time in expanding and upgrading the newspaper and its printing operations. In early April, he formed the Express Publishing Company, purchased the competing Red Oak *Express*, and consolidated it with the *Independent* under the *Express* masthead. In short order, he managed to increase circulation of the new *Express* to substantially exceed that of both papers prior to consolidation, making it one of the most widely circulated country newspapers in Iowa.

While Murphy had signed a legal agreement keeping him out of the calendar business until at least 1900, his subsequent actions soon demonstrated his intention to return. His rather rapid success with his newspaper and printing operation and the realization, he later recalled that "I was up against well-defined limits so far as business in a town of five thousand was concerned," likely caused him to start planning and preparing for his reentry even before the end of 1895. A few days before Christmas that year, he published what he described as a "handsome art supplement" in the *Express*. Produced in-house by the job printing department, Murphy declared "it is handsome enough to frame and illustrates our fine facilities for printing halftone plates" serving notice that several such supplements would appear in 1896. During that year and in 1897, Murphy added staff to his company and made major upgrades to his equipment that allowed him to provide "Special Local Illustrations, including cuts of new buildings, portraits of such of our citizens who attain prominence, etc."; "Original Cartoons on local subjects"; heavily illustrated "Special Holiday Editions"; and "A Monthly Art Supplement," which was "reproduced from famous paintings and will prove an education in the history of art."¹¹ Yet, at the same time, he remained on very friendly terms with Osborne, published numerous accounts of Osborne & Murphy Company activities in the columns of the *Express*, and served as the local distributor for the firm's products.

In late December 1898, Edmund B. Osborne announced that the Osborne Company intended to move its operations from Red Oak to a much larger manufacturing facility in Newark, New Jersey and its corporate offices to New York City. Murphy personally covered Osborne's departure in the columns of the *Express*. As Murphy told it, Osborne believed he could no longer operate profitably in Red Oak because "recent years... have complicated the process of manufacture to an extent that the company claims greatly handicapped operations anywhere outside of a metropolis," because "the introduction of color processes, especially, made necessary a force of expert workmen." The seasonal nature of the firm's work, however, "furnishes work for those only a portion of the time. In its new location the company hopes to add general lines of printing which will give steady work for the force the year round." Osborne had "consistently endeavored to do this in Red Oak for some time," according to Murphy, "but has found it impossible to compete, on general lines, with city printers who had the difference in freight in their favor."¹² What went unsaid in all this, however, was the likely realization on Osborne's part that he would soon face major competition in the calendar business as 1900 approached from his former partner, who not only operated a highly successful printing company but also possessed much of the equipment and expertise to make a rapid reentry.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 37; Red Oak *Express*, December 20, 1895; December 11, 1896.

¹² Red Oak *Express*, January 6, 1899.

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Thomas D. Murphy Reenters the Calendar Game

Despite what might best be described as “friendly competition” between Murphy and Osborne, their personal relationship continued on the best of terms both before and after the move. As a matter of fact, Murphy took it on himself to speed up the sale of Osborne’s house. The Friday, January 6, 1899 issue of the Express gave three full columns of space describing the house inside and out and featuring one exterior and two interior photographs. By the end of that very same day, local jeweler and music dealer W.H. Evans had purchased it for \$8500. A few months later in late May, Murphy visited Osborne and other members of the “Red Oak Colony” in New Jersey as he toured several eastern cities and visiting various printing facilities. He visited Osborne’s new factory, finding it “housed in a very handsome and well arranged building,” noting that “it will afford ideal quarters for the work and will no doubt accommodate the big business which the firm will do.”¹³

Murphy’s first step back into the calendar business was to construct a new printing plant (still extant) on Coolbaugh Street, ostensibly for the Express Publishing Company. Murphy hired the Fisher and Lawrie architectural firm of Omaha to design a three story, 7,000 square feet, brick building based in part on those facilities he had visited on his eastern trip. “No attempt was made at architectural effects” Murphy claimed, with “plainness and solidity being rather sought after.” The contract for the building was let in early September, and construction proceeded rapidly. In late November, Murphy announced that he planned to “install the best and completest, if not the largest printing outfit west of Chicago,” and by January 1, 1900, the new building was declared ready for occupancy.¹⁴

Murphy officially reentered the calendar business on February 1, 1900 when he filed the Articles of Incorporation for The Thos. D. Murphy Company. “The general nature of the business to be carried on by this corporation,” according to Article III of the incorporation document, “shall be printing, publishing, book binding, the manufacture of calendars and advertising specialties, engraving printing plates and dies, and such other business as pertains to, and is usually connected with those above named.”¹⁵ Murphy was joined in this venture by his brother-in-law, William Cochrane. Capitalized at \$35,000, Murphy and Cochrane held almost all the stock except for a small number of shares held by H.C. Binns, a local investor whom they would soon buy out. Under the new arrangement, Murphy served as company president and chief spokesman with a primary focus on the artistic angle of the business while Cochrane focused more on sales and the production aspect of the operation. Murphy’s new venture differed from his earlier one with Osborne in the fact that most of the color prints for the calendars were reproduced from original paintings rather than existing prints of artworks as had been the case previously. This process greatly improved overall appearance, quality, and eye appeal. Murphy also improved the quality of his black and white work, and these dramatic improvements along with the introduction of the mounted calendar made the new firm immediately successful and a major player in the art calendar industry.

“Our first line,” Murphy recalled over twenty years later, “comprised about a dozen paintings reproduced in colortype and numerous duogravures from photographs.” Despite some of the problems inherent in

¹³ Red Oak *Express*, January 6, 1899; January 13, 1899; May 26, 1899.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, February 23, 1900; November 24, 1899.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, March 9, 1900.

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introducing new production techniques, creating and training a sales force, and hiring and training workers for the factory, the Murphy Company's first year, the *Express* reported, "was highly successful, the total business decidedly exceeding the expectations of the concern." At times, as many as 75 persons were employed in producing calendars and on average 40-50 were working full time. "Calendars were successfully sold," the *Express* continued, "in nearly every state in the union—some of the of the biggest sales being made in the east..." and there "seems to be little doubt," the paper crowed, "that Red Oak will not only retain her old time prestige as the calendar making center of the country, but will still further add to her fame as a fine art center."¹⁶

In fact, the volume of business forced Murphy and Cochrane to enlarge their plant. Early in 1901, they purchased the lot adjacent to their factory and started construction on a three-story, two-bay-wide, block, matching and attached to the existing one. By mid-August, this addition, which added nearly 12,000 square feet, more than doubling the floor space for the calendar operation, was nearly complete, but already the new addition, the *Express* reported "will be immediately occupied, with little or no surplus room."¹⁷ This situation occurred because the Murphy Company more than doubled its first year's sales, extending its business to every state in the Union. The company continued to grow by leaps and bounds with 1902 sales increasing fifty per cent over those of 1901. This rapid growth forced Murphy and Cochrane to rent two nearby buildings, providing them with a total of 20,000 square feet of floor space.

In 1903, Murphy and Cochrane, in an action unbeknownst to most of the public in both Red Oak and elsewhere, exchanged their stock in the Thos. D. Murphy Company for shares in the American Colortype Company, making their firm in effect a subsidiary of a large east coast holding company. Incorporated one year earlier in New Jersey, American Colortype was headed by none other than Murphy's former partner Edmund B. Osborne. This holding company or "combine" included many of the country's leading color engraving firms, being created officially "for mutual protection and reduction in expenses." This new company through its subsidiaries held a virtual monopoly on color printing processes and techniques, even claiming ownership of the "Colortype Process." Due to the new company's size and scale of operations, it had the ability to negotiate more favorable prices for machinery and materials. American Colortype was a closely held corporation that did not publish reports of earnings or business conditions and exercised minimal oversight over its subsidiaries. In taking this action, Murphy and Cochrane achieved a major element of stability in their company's operations while maintaining the impression they were a home grown firm, in spite of the fact they would be an American Colortype subsidiary for the next 28 years.¹⁸

Mr. Murphy Builds his Dream Factory

Also in 1903, a major fire in Red Oak's downtown came very close to engulfing the company's facilities, forcing Murphy and Cochrane to seriously consider their options in light of this near disaster. The combined impact of the fire, their downtown location with its attendant congestion, the crowded condition of their factory and its adjacent buildings, and rapidly growing demand for their calendars forced Murphy and Cochrane to seek a new location outside the main business district and make plans for a much larger and more fire-proof

¹⁶ Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 39; *Red Oak Express*, January 18, 1901.

¹⁷ *Red Oak Express*, August 16, 1901.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, March 25, 1902.

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facility. Murphy took the lead in developing the plan and design for the new factory, and as he recalled in later years, "I made a trip to the East looking through several representative factories and soon had definite ideas in mind." He focused his attention largely on printing plants, and undoubtedly he visited his old friend Osborne's facility in New Jersey, given the fact that rumors soon began to circulate that Osborne would be returning his firm to Red Oak to share space in the new Murphy facility. In the meantime, Cochrane took the lead in finding a new factory site on Second Street in Red Oak away from the downtown and in close proximity to the CB&Q station and freight yard. The block he selected had only a few houses at the time, and Cochrane, according to Murphy, acted "so quickly and so deftly that we soon had options at a reasonable price on every property in the block." Next, Murphy approached Harry Lawrie, whose firm Fisher and Lawrie, had designed their existing factory to develop preliminary plans and provide cost estimates for a new facility. In their meetings, Murphy recalled some years later that he had charged Lawrie with "keeping artistic effects as well as utility in mind."¹⁹

By late summer of 1904, Lawrie had developed a design for a three-story, 240 foot wide by 70 foot deep factory building containing 50,000 feet of floor space. Clad in red brick and trimmed with Bedford limestone, the building's exterior featured brickwork, doors, and detailing characteristic of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Style and architectural effects, however, were clearly secondary to efforts to make the new plant a "model factory" by providing as much natural lighting as possible with sixty large windows on each floor and painting the interior with a white paint containing an antiseptic, which it was believed would purify the walls while making the rooms lighter and insuring there were no dark corners anywhere in the building. Particular attention was paid to ventilation as well with a forced draft ventilating system installed on each floor. Initially, Murphy intended to put up a fire proof building of steel and concrete but began to have second thoughts when he learned that mill owners insurance companies provided lower rates for timber frame/mill construction buildings with sprinkler systems, which were also a little cheaper to construct. As a result, he instructed Lawrie to prepare two sets of plans for the building for both fire proof and mill construction. In Murphy's absence, the Fisher and Lawrie firm advertised and received bids. Seven bids were received on each type of construction with the low bid on mill construction being submitted by F.M. Garthwait of Chicago, who had extensive experience in factory construction, including one of the largest printing plants in the country at Hammond, Indiana.

On September 2, 1904, the front page of the *Red Oak Express* featured a lengthy description of the new factory sandwiched between a large architect's rendering of its front façade and a representative floor plan. According to the paper, Garthwait would immediately start construction on the factory, which would be "THE BIGGEST EXCLUSIVE ART CALENDAR MANUFACTORY IN THE WORLD," and complete it by January 1, 1905. As to labor and materials, Garthwait announced his intention to hire local labor and purchase materials from Red Oak businesses as much as possible. Of the workforce of fifty he employed on the project, only Garthwait's superintendent, engineer, and labor foreman were not from Red Oak and vicinity. He purchased twenty rail car loads of lumber through the local firm of Nagel & Son and over 750,000 of the 1,000,000 brick used were manufactured in the kilns of Cook's Brickyard in Red Oak. In fact, it was this particular brick with its "rough, rustic effect" that conveys what many consider to be an Arts and Crafts influence to the walls and the building's overall character. "The effect from an artistic standpoint," the *Express* declared with only a small degree of exaggeration, "is by long odds better than could possibly have been secured by the most expensive pressed brick in existence."²⁰ Construction on the new facility proceeded rapidly, thanks in large

¹⁹ Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 46-48.

²⁰ *Red Oak Express*, September 2, 1904; June 23, 1905.

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part to favorable weather, and a work crew laying 30,000 to 40,000 brick per day. By early November, the bricklayers were almost finished with their work, and only a delay in getting some of the heavy timbers prevented the roof from being finished and the building enclosed.

While construction on the new factory proper had been completed early in January 1905 and some operations had moved there in March, Murphy and Cochrane were unable to completely move their company into it until almost the end of June. The primary cause of this delay was a 75 per cent increase in business over the previous year, which made completing the move secondary to fulfilling these orders. Very quickly, it became apparent that "the capacity of the new building will, undoubtedly, be taxed to its utmost before the season closes," the *Express* declared in a front page article in late June celebrating the building's completion and inviting the citizenry to tour it. A 100 per cent increase in business for 1906 fulfilled this prophecy, forcing Murphy and Cochrane to engage Harry Lawrie's services for a substantial addition to the factory. By late March 1907, the 120 by 70 foot east wing or "Annex" to the factory had been completed, providing the company with nearly two acres of floor space. "This addition," according to Murphy, "put us on 'Easy Street' so far as space was concerned and allowed some room for future expansion."²¹

Murphy Calendar Rises to National and International Preeminence

Much of Murphy and Cochrane's success can be summed up in their company's motto, "one thing done well."²² What made their remarkable record of achievement possible was the shared vision both men had for the company, their ability to work together harmoniously, and a division of labor between the two that allowed them to employ their own particular talents in a fashion most beneficial to the greater good of the enterprise. Both men were exceptional judges of talent and they put together an outstanding work and sales force that propelled the firm into such a position that the phrases "Thomas D. Murphy" and "Red Oak" became virtually synonymous with calendars. The factory work force, which soon exceeded 300, was comprised largely of individuals from Red Oak and vicinity and carefully selected by management for their particular tasks. Somewhat unusual for the era, nearly a third of the employees were women, including several who were heads of departments. Particularly noteworthy in this regard was Red Oak native Nell Bishop, a graduate of the Chicago Art Institute and the firm's chief designer. Bishop would retain her position with the company well into the 1950s, coming to represent the stable labor force and many years of dedicated service from employees that made Murphy Calendar the leader in its field.

William Cochrane generally took the lead in the hiring and training of the sales force. In the early years of their partnership, Murphy and Cochrane had only a small number of salesmen, whose territories were primarily large urban areas, and conducted a large amount of business through the mail through the medium of increasingly elaborate catalogs. The company's "postage bill grew to such proportions," Murphy later recalled "that it was greater than that of all the rest of the town together... and elevated Red Oak to a first-class post office for a few years."²³ Due to the growing costs of catalogs and postage, the company decided

²¹ Ibid., June 23, 1905; March 22, 1907; Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 49.

²² Hubbard, *A Little Journey to the Home of the Thos. D. Murphy Company*, 13.

²³ Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 53-54.

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to focus on expanding the sales force and improving its training. This, in turn, led to a rapid drop in mail order sales, making them unprofitable and leading to their discontinuance. Murphy and Cochrane's primary tool in training and rewarding their salesmen was an annual convention and banquet in Red Oak in mid-December. These gatherings, the first of which was held in 1906, typically lasted 3-4 days and combined business with pleasure. They served to introduce the calendar line for the coming year; provide hands on classes in salesmanship; and to allow the sales force an opportunity to rub elbows with the company's management and occasionally some of the artists whose work graced the calendars. The company rewarded its best salesmen with induction into the "Knights of the Golden Acorn," a fraternal organization with three degrees whose membership was governed by sales volume. As the sales force grew to over 200, however, it became increasingly difficult to provide sufficient accommodations in Red Oak, and by 1918 the annual convention had been replaced by a series of regional meetings held in rapid succession. Red Oak continued to be a meeting site, and the annual sales meetings played a major role in linking the sales force to the factory and management and to the greater Red Oak community.

Thomas D. Murphy, on the other hand, focused much of his time and energy on selecting and purchasing the paintings and other art works for calendar subjects. To accomplish this task, he traveled extensively throughout the United States and Europe visiting art galleries and cultivating personal relationships with artists that often enabled him to sign them to exclusive contracts with the company. Murphy scored his first major coup by contracting with the famed sea and landscape artist Thomas Moran for all his paintings. He then followed this up with similar contracts with Henry John Dobson, A.J. Elsley, H.H. Bagg, J. Ross Bryson, Edmund H. Osthaus, and other leading artists. In addition to exclusive contracts, Murphy purchased paintings outright, commissioned artists for special topics, and purchased the reproduction rights to others. Within a few years, the Murphy Company had invested several hundred thousand dollars in paintings. All the paintings used for calendars were copyrighted, and a large number were exhibited in the factory's art gallery, which was often open to visitors and the general public. Some of the paintings were sold, often for as much as \$3,000, and still others were given to employees as awards and prizes.

Murphy's art forays soon enabled him to transform the company into an international operation. Early in 1904, a company office was opened in London, and Murphy himself spent considerable time there getting the office up and running and in hiring and training the sales force. Despite the obvious difficulties of shipping calendars produced in Red Oak abroad, the London office prospered and even extended their sales operations to several European countries. "The merit of Murphy art calendars," Murphy later recalled, "was recognized by European advertisers and our product became popular despite strong competition by British competitors."²⁴ Murphy took the lead in training and expanding the European sales force, often attending the annual conventions similar to those held in Red Oak. These European sojourns also enabled Murphy to expand his contacts in the art world and personally select paintings for calendar subjects.

Murphy's travels both at home and abroad, his connections to the art and publishing worlds, and his growing fascination and appreciation for the automobile enabled him to launch what was almost a second career as a travel writer. In 1908 his *British Highway and Byways from a Motor Car: Being a Record of a Five Thousand Mile Tour in England, Wales, and Scotland* was published by L.C. Page & Company of Boston, one of the nation's leading publishing houses at the time. The book was very well received, and it helped establish Murphy as a nationally and internationally known author of automobile travel guides. In the years that followed, he authored seven other books for Page & Company, including tomes on unfamiliar places in

²⁴ Ibid., 52.

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England, the highways of Europe, the highways and byways of New England, and four books alone on automobile travels to what he described as the "Wonderlands of the American West." Murphy's guides were typically 300 pages in length and amply illustrated, including both black-and-white and color plates. More often than not, these illustrations were based on the work of the same artists whose work was featured on Murphy Company calendars. While it may have been true that "the author business is pretty much of a sideline with me," as Murphy wrote to James B. Weaver in 1914, there is little doubt that his prestige as a travel writer and the attractively designed books produced by Page & Company provided invaluable advertising and publicity for the Murphy Calendar Company and its product line.²⁵

By 1912 the reputation of Thomas Murphy and the calendar company that bore his name had become so great that Elbert Hubbard, one of the country's most popular lecturers and a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts movement, traveled to Red Oak to visit the factory and interview Murphy, Cochrane, and other prominent members of the Murphy team for one of his famous "Little Journey" essays, which were part of an ongoing series of biographical and historical sketches penned in his own inimitable writing style. According to Hubbard, "the Modern Calendar was invented by Julius Caesar. Pope Gregory reformed it, and Thos. D. Murphy made it a thing of beauty and a joy forever." A large part of Murphy's and the company's success was due to Red Oak proper, which Hubbard described as the "Oberammergau of the calendar industry," whose people work with a common impulse" and who were true to the company motto of "One thing well done." The reason for this state of affairs, in Hubbard's opinion, was due to Red Oak being "removed from the turbulent metropolitan centers, in a community where culture and refinement are common to all." Hubbard even went so far as to claim that Thomas D. Murphy and his company had made Red Oak "the most influential art center in the world." In Hubbard's view places like ancient Athens and Rome, Renaissance Florence, and Paris paled in influence to Red Oak because "here the famous paintings of the world are reproduced in all the glory of their original hues and tints, and these reproductions scattered broadcast into a million homes. Where one man visits the Louvre, where one student draws inspiration from the sculptures of Phidias, ten thousand are educated to a better understanding of real art through a calendar made by Murphy in Red Oak."²⁶

Murphy and his company had tremendous influence on the development of the entire art calendar industry as well. As Elbert Hubbard related in his own unique style "Every other EXTENSIVE manufactory of art calendars in America is owned and run by men who learned all they know about the business in the Red Oak Works." The direct offshoots of Red Oak included Edward Osborne and his Osborne Company factory in New Jersey with its famous "Red Oak Colony"; the Brown & Bigelow Company in St. Paul, Minnesota founded by former Murphy salesman Herbert H. Bigelow; and the Gerlach-Barklow Calendar Company of Joliet, Illinois, established by Murphy alumni Theo R. Gerlach and Edward Joseph Barklow. Collectively, the Murphy Company and these three firms held a virtual stranglehold on the art calendar industry for many years.²⁷
The Impact of War and Postwar Growth and Expansion

The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 had a major impact on the Murphy Company in terms of calendar

²⁵ Thomas D. Murphy, letter to James B. Weaver, September 23, 1914 in Iowa Author's Club Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

²⁶ Hubbard, *A Little Journey to the Home of the Thos. D. Murphy Company*, 23, 18, 5-6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

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sales, initially causing them to shrink dramatically to the levels of the early 1900s before recovering somewhat. Although sales improved substantially in 1915 and 1916, the war destroyed the company's European market, leading to the permanent closure of the London office and disbanding of the sales force.

Although discussions ensued about reopening the London office after the war, international economic conditions made this impractical, thus ending the Murphy Company's venture as a multinational firm. Demand for Murphy Company Calendars in the United States and Canada increased dramatically in 1919 with orders increasing 50% over any previous year and then doubling that amount in 1920.

Such a dramatic increase in business placed a major strain on the company's buildings, equipment, and workforce, causing Murphy and Cochrane to take immediate steps to expand their facilities and operations. In 1920, a 40,000 square foot addition was made to the factory proper, bringing total floor space up to almost 120,000 feet or approximately three acres. In addition, a 45 by 60 foot, brick power and heating plant with a 110-foot smokestack was erected north of the main factory. Constructed at a cost of \$60,000, the facility featured a 120 horse-power Corliss steam engine from the Murray Iron Works of Burlington, which was connected to a 75 kilowatt General Electric direct current generator and two 120 horse-power boilers. North of the Power House, the company built a five room cottage for the engineer. In order to hire more female workers, Murphy and Cochrane purchased the Colonial Hotel across the street from the factory, converting it into the Murphy Company Girl's Boarding Hall. This building accommodated forty young women, but was set up to handle sixty if necessary. The facility provided "board at cost" and operated under the supervision of a matron.²⁸

In 1925, the Thomas D. Murphy Calendar Company celebrated what it described as its "Silver Jubilee." By this time, the company employed over 300 at the Red Oak factory and had a sales force of nearly 200. Calendars were being sold throughout the United States and Canada, Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, Latin America and Europe. The "Silver Jubilee" had been launched in December 1924 at the sales convention in Red Oak, which featured a lengthy speech by Thomas D. Murphy on the company's history and its prospects for the future. In comments very revealing about his character, Murphy "declared that although monetary gains was something to strive for in order to lay aside a nest egg for a rainy day . . . the greatest gain he had experienced;" during his years in the calendar business were "the life long associations formed with salesmen, their families, artists and business men in all parts of the country. 'These to me, mean more than any material gain.'" As he closed his address, Murphy declared somewhat prophetically: "Some of us will be at the next quarter centennial, some of us will not, but it is my hope and prediction that it will find a greater calendar line and a greater and growing business."²⁹

Less than four years later on September 15, 1928, Thomas D. Murphy passed away at the age of 62 at his home in Red Oak after a seven week long illness that started with strep throat before leading to the septicemia or blood poisoning that caused his death. Since 1918, Murphy and his wife had owned a residence in Los Angeles as well as Red Oak, typically spending the winter and spring in California before returning to Iowa for the summer and fall. The year of his death, he and Mrs. Murphy had come back from California in July, and "with his usual vigor," according to the *Express*, "returned to his desk at the Murphy company to direct" its affairs before falling ill in late July. Not surprisingly, Murphy's death sent shock waves

²⁸ Red Oak *Express*, March 1, 1920.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, December 8, 1924.

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throughout Red Oak and vicinity. His long time friends praised him as "a man of sterling character, always fair and considerate of others, high-minded in his views and a deep thinker"; noted that "nothing pleased him better than to do some unexpected act of kindness"; and declared that "his loss will be felt not only by this community but by many people in far-distant places." One John C. Bryant probably summarized Murphy's loss best when he declared: "Measured by the ordinary standards his time was short of expectancy by several years. Measured by the effort and the energy expended, his was a full lifetime crowned by achievement and honorable success."³⁰

William Cochrane Takes the Reins and Moves the Company Forward

William C. Cochrane, Murphy's original partner in founding the company in 1900 and his brother-in-law, succeeded to the presidency of the Thos. D. Murphy Calendar Company. Only six months younger than Murphy, Cochrane had been the firm's sales manager until 1918 when he assumed the post of general manager. This change in duties coincided with Murphy's decision to divide his time between his homes in Los Angeles and Red Oak, and for all practical purposes made Cochrane the *de facto* head of the company, making the transition in leadership ten years later relatively painless. In addition to the calendar company, Cochrane had other business interests. These included his presidency of two Red Oak banks; a vice presidency of the American Colortype Company; and a post as director of the Employers Mutual Casualty Company. He had also been a past president of the Iowa Manufacturer's Association and the National Advertising Specialty Association. Cochrane had also been active in local civic and political affairs. He served six years on the Red Oak City Council, and at the time of his elevation to company president had completed one term in the Iowa Senate and was a candidate for reelection.

Within two years of Cochrane assuming the presidency of the company, the Great Depression was in full swing. Initially, this calamity had relatively little impact on the Murphy Calendar Company and its sales, but by the fall of 1931, the future of the company as a Red Oak institution and mainstay of the local economy faced a serious threat, not so much from a sharp decline in calendar sales but from corporate restructuring. Since 1903 the company had been a subsidiary of the American Colortype Company, but as the Depression deepened, American Colortype launched a program to close older plants and consolidate them in newer buildings in larger cities. A research study concluded that closing the Red Oak factory and moving the Murphy Company east would reduce overhead to such an extent that the value of the buildings would be recouped in two to three years. Determined not to see this happen, Cochrane, in his position as an American Colortype officer and board member, carried on lengthy negotiations which culminated in his purchasing the Murphy Calendar Company outright in even exchange for his American Colortype Company stock.

On October 24, 1931, there was considerable consternation in Red Oak when the *Express* received an Associated Press wire story that the Thomas D. Murphy Calendar Company had been sold to an unknown purchaser. The paper's editor quickly got in touch with Cochrane via a long distance phone call to get to the bottom of the story and was provided with an exclusive of what had really transpired. The October 26, 1931 edition of the Red Oak *Express* trumpeted: "WILLIAM COCHRANE BUYS MURPHY COMPANY – Calendar Firm To Remain In City Of Birth – Local Company Cuts Off Alliance With American Colortype Company." According to the paper, "this deal is insurance that Red Oak will be the permanent home of the Thos. D. Murphy company." Thus, for the first time in twenty-eight years, the Thomas D. Murphy Company was truly

³⁰ Ibid., September 17, 1928.

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a Red Oak and Iowa-owned business, a situation which would continue for the next half century.³¹

Under Cochrane's able leadership, the Murphy Company weathered the Depression fairly well despite a significant downturn in business. By the end of 1933, the factory was running at full capacity and had 225 employees, who were said to collectively be earning nearly a thousand dollars per day. Plagued with fading eyesight, Cochrane increasingly relied on his sons-in-law Malcolm D. Lomas, J. Lyman Turner and John L. Crofts to run the business. Like Thomas Murphy before him, Cochrane began spending his winters in California. In Los Angeles on March 28, 1941, he died of a heart attack at the age of 74.

The Cochrane Heirs Continue the Murphy Legacy up to a Point

As had been the case when Thomas D. Murphy died, Cochrane's passing had little impact on operations because a well-trained leadership team was already in place. The sales of calendars and other advertising materials continued to increase, and the factory generally ran at close to full capacity. Probably the biggest change that occurred in the 1940s was a gradual shift from paintings and drawings to color transparencies for calendar art production. Murphy calendars continued to display the work of many noted artists like Frederick Remington, Edwin Lamasure, Maxfield Parrish, Claude Strachan, George Howell Gay, James Stuart, and Charles M. Russell. From the 1940s on, however, the calendars produced by the firm appear to have been less fine art productions and more focused on western, historic, and patriotic themes. In fact, Murphy even produced pin up calendars displaying the art work of some of the leading practitioners of that genre. While some of the art work displayed on the calendars might have caused some of the older employees to imagine Thomas D. Murphy spinning in his grave, these changes reflected the realities of the calendar market, American popular culture, and the art world in general. The wisdom of this approach was particularly reflected in the company's sales and growth in 1947. In a brief article in the Council Bluffs *Nonpareil*, Board chairman Malcolm D. Lomas reported that the company was "completing the biggest volume of sales and production in its entire history" and that the factory had been working overtime for four months to fill the flood of orders. Lomas also reported that the factory had been repainted and was being rewired for an up-to-date lighting system. In addition, a new art studio had been completed on the fourth floor.³²

In 1951 Malcolm D. and Anna Cochrane Lomas bought controlling interest in the Murphy Company from the other heirs with every intention of running the company in the tradition of Murphy and Cochrane. At this time, the company still had many employees like Nell Bishop and Estelle Priest, head and assistant head of the art department respectively, whose service with the firm actually predated the existing factory. In time, Bruce Van Druff, who had married the Lomas' daughter Mary Jo, succeeded Malcolm D. Lomas as company president. During the 1960s and 1970s, as many companies began to move away from calendars as promotional items, the Murphy Company expanded its product line to include specialty advertising items ranging from key chains to pocket knives to pens and pencils, etc. and executive gifts, a line of premium items like cameras, glassware sets, briefcases, and small appliances that businesses could purchase as awards or prizes for their employees. Finally, in 1985 Jordan Industries, Incorporated purchased the company from the Lomas and Van Druff families. Jordan or JII as it came to be called continued operations

³¹ Ibid., October 25, 1931.

³² Council Bluffs *Nonpareil*, November 2, 1947.

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for a time in Red Oak before gradually reducing the workforce over several years time, eventually shuttering the factory and officially moving the company to Sidney, Ohio in 2002.

Architectural Significance and Physical Setting

The Factory Setting in Southern Red Oak

In 1903, when fire destroyed much of Red Oak's downtown area, Thomas D. Murphy's original factory sat within one block of the damaged zone. As a result, Murphy decided to locate his new plant away from the congestion of downtown buildings to the southern edge of the town and a lightly developed area platted as "Shanks Addition" and "Southern Addition" [Fig. 8-1]. This area was free from heavy development at the time and, in addition to better fire safety, permitted construction of a much larger factory.³³ Like many factory owners at the time, Murphy had surely "begun to learn the financial advantages of insurance-company plans." By moving his factory to "open territory where a fire in a neighboring [building] would not instantly leap into [his] own," Murphy could build a "standardized, slow-burning structure of vast proportions and save on insurance fees. [Further], suburban land was abundant, cheap, accessible by railroads, and lightly taxed; that insurance companies implicitly mandated it as the only safe manufacturing location made it even more attractive."³⁴ Murphy's new location met all the qualifications. In addition to being in a lightly developed part of town, the new factory site was served by a rail line. The Chicago Burlington and Quincy (CB&Q) railroad tracks ran along the southern edge of Shanks Addition, but the mainline had recently been relocated to an elevated grade constructed another block to the south. While the old mainline railroad likely acted as a barrier to the town's development, now this lowline could serve the freight and hauling needs of the new Murphy factory operation.³⁵ The relocation of the railroad mainline, which eliminated a dangerous at-grade crossing of an urban street and a busy railroad line, as well as the construction of the Murphy factory, certainly drew more development to the expanding southern edge of town.³⁶

Joining the modest dwellings already located at the southern edge of town, many of which must have provided housing for CB&Q workers, was a brick hotel constructed at the foot of the new depot's drive. A second red brick hotel nearer the factory was constructed in 1910. Murphy purchased this second hotel building in 1920 for women workers who did not have housing in Red Oak.³⁷ Also in 1920, the Murphy Company constructed its own power house to the north, just across the lowline railroad tracks. To the "north

³³ Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 46.

³⁴ John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 85.

³⁵ Murphy, *The Art Calendar Industry*, 47.

³⁶ The new Murphy building actually necessitated the removal of a few extant buildings on the lot where it was constructed. "Largest in the World," *Red Oak Express*, September 2, 1904. This article contained the announcement of the factory's construction, explained its form and features, and contained artist/architect's sketches of the west façade and a floor plan (see Figs. 8-3 and 8-4 elsewhere herein).

³⁷ "Murphy Salesmen Arriving Here for Convention," *Red Oak Express*, December 9, 1920.

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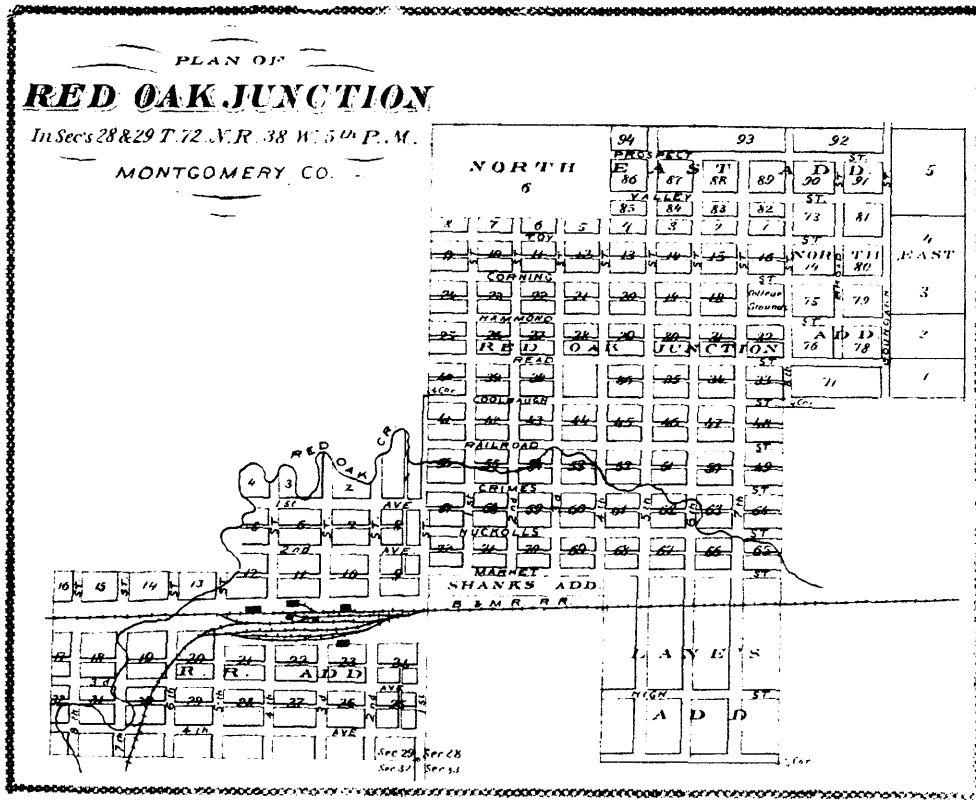


Figure 8-1 Shanks Addition to Red Oak is noted on this 1875 map just above the B. & M.R. railroad tracks (the local precursor to the CB&Q). While the Murphy Company's power house was built in Shanks Addition, proper, the main factory building was constructed within the large square south of the tracks and Shanks Addition. Detail from A.T. Andreas' *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*, (Chicago, 1875).

of the power house is the five room cottage built for the engineer" of the Murphy buildings (extant, ca. 1920).³⁸ The backyard of this house abuts the north side of the power house building, making it extremely convenient for the factory engineer. Though now covered by a heavy layer of paint, the house appears to have been constructed from the same hand-selected, irregular red bricks seen on the Murphy Company buildings. Both the brick residence hotel and the engineer's house are privately owned and no longer associated with the Murphy Company.

Architectural Influences

The architect chosen by Thomas D. Murphy for his new factory and the power plant was Harry Lawrie (1858-1935), of Omaha, Nebraska. Lawrie was a Scottish architect, who had practiced for nearly a decade in

³⁸ Ibid, 1.

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Glasgow and Edinburgh before moving to America in 1883.³⁹ He soon found employment in Chicago with the prominent architectural team of Daniel Burnham and John Root.⁴⁰ After four years in Chicago, in 1887 Lawrie moved on to Omaha to join the firm of Mendelssohn and Fisher, where he remained until his death.⁴¹ Like Burnham and Root, Lawrie was interested in revival styles, but he was also from Glasgow, where he was exposed to the popular Arts and Crafts Movement, and his Red Oak client was a prudent businessman concerned with function and safety as well as style.⁴² The local newspaper (of which Thomas D. Murphy, himself, was editor) asserted that “no special effort was made at architectural effects, although the castellated tower which is added as the entrance very effectively relieves the monotony of the usual factory building style.”⁴³ Overall, the new Red Oak factory building that Lawrie designed for Murphy suggests the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, not surprising considering the architect’s background and training. The Arts and Crafts influence is evident especially in the choice of materials that cleverly suggest hand crafting rather than machined mass production. Good examples of this influence are the carefully selected clinker-brick veneer, the over scale, “hand wrought” metal door strapping and ornamentation on the front entrance, and, inside, the executive offices’ leaded, pattern-glass partition walls and bookcase fronts.⁴⁴ Lawrie applied these Arts and Crafts decorative features to a building that both referenced older architectural inspirations *and* incorporated modern concepts of proper factory construction. The building’s form and shape is an industrial interpretation of the Romanesque Revival, what one industrial historian has called the “American round-arched style.”⁴⁵ This style not only drew inspiration from Norman architecture (which would have appealed to Murphy, who was from many accounts an Anglophile), but also suggests that the building was “slow-

³⁹ “Mendelssohn, Fisher and Lawrie,” from the vertical file “Mendelssohn,” Omaha City Planning Department.

⁴⁰ “Lawrie-Webster [engagement announcement], *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 25, 1884.

⁴¹ At the time of the Murphy commission, the firm’s name was Fisher and Lawrie (“Largest in the World,” *Red Oak Express*). Harry Lawrie achieved prominence in Omaha and Nebraska, designing business buildings, schools, civic buildings, and theaters in that city and other Nebraska towns. In 1925, he served as President of the Nebraska chapter of the American Institute of Architects. “Death Takes Architect,” unnamed Omaha newspaper, July 22, 1935, from the vertical file, “Lawrie,” Omaha City Planning Department.

⁴² Burnham and Root used a variety of revival styles, including Romanesque Revival for their Rookery Building (1886), Egyptian Revival for the Monadnock Building (1889), and Gothic Revival for both the Reliance Building (1895) and the Fisher Building (1896). See Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 139, 188.

⁴³ “Largest in the World,” *Red Oak Express*, September 2, 1904.

⁴⁴ Bill Risebero, *Modern Architecture and Design: An Alternative History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), 102, 122-123, 138-140.

⁴⁵ See Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 235. Typical of the style were “round-arched elements...[it] relied on brick and locally available stone. Characteristic of the style were pilasters and horizontal bands forming grids; elaborate brick corbelling, especially corbel tables; and molded surrounds emphasizing arched door and window openings...the vocabulary was expanded to include windows set off by projecting archivolt enriched with dentils, segmentally arched windows, and polychrome patterned brick.” The style was limited to the exterior appearance of a building, and rarely, if ever, influenced interior decorative features.

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burning.⁴⁶ The concept of a slow-burning factory gained popularity during the 1880s when, in response to a number of fires in wooden factories that killed numerous employees, the insurance industry and civil engineers joined forces to create new safety standards and building forms that reduced the risk of loss of life and property.⁴⁷

In both style and plan, the main factory building of the Murphy Company is similar to an exemplary slow-burning factory image published in a trade magazine in the late nineteenth century (Figs. 8-2 and 8-3). Murphy Company's low profile, flat roof, and brick construction epitomize the accepted form. In fact, concern

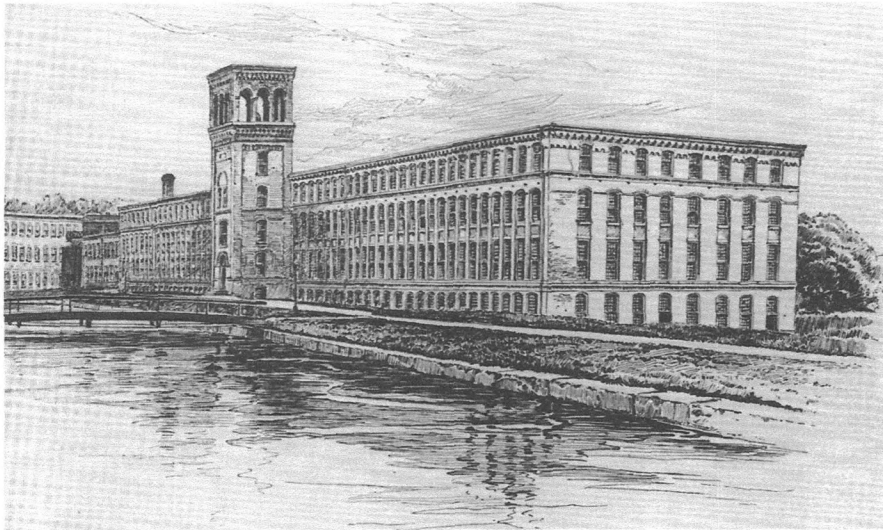


Figure 8-2 This model "slow-burning factory" from around 1900 reflects the Romanesque Revival stylistic influence in its central tower and round arches. Stilgoe, 83.

⁴⁶ "Norman architecture [is] the Romanesque architecture of England from the Norman Conquest [1066] until the rise of the Gothic around 1180." Harris, ed., *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture*, 374.

⁴⁷ John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 82. In 1889, engineer Edward Atkinson wrote an article for *Century* magazine, entitled "Slow-Burning Construction." The article discussed "construction that allowed factory employees to extinguish or at least control fires" and was illustrated with models.

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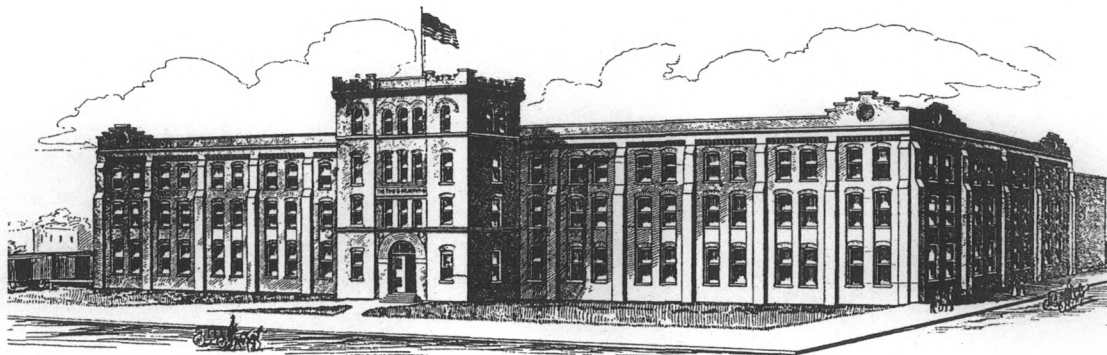


Figure 8-3 This artist's rendition of the "Front (west) elevation of The Thos. D. Murphy Co. Building now in course of construction..." suggests the degree to which Romanesque features had been popularized for factory architecture. The paper noted that the street alongside the right side of the building did not actually exist at the time. The suggestion of another building or wing behind the factory's right side is consistent with the paper's prediction that the factory would rapidly grow and expand. *Red Oak Express*, 2 September 1904.

about fire safety and the cost of insuring his new building were never far from Murphy's mind. "Management," said the writer of a 1904 front-page *Red Oak Express* article (Murphy as reporter?), "had plans prepared for both fire proof and mill construction, and estimates were secured on both of these. The original idea was to put up a fire proof structure. It was found, however, on investigation, that the millowners insurance companies will not allow as low a rate on a so called fire proof building as on a mill construction building with automatic sprinkler system"(emphasis added). Apparently, the "fire proof" building of the day was so only in name. The "mill construction," which consisted of exposed, heavy timber framing, and walls and ceilings with no hollow spaces for fire to spread, turned out to be cheaper to construct as well. Hollow spaces were avoided by leaving walls exposed to the brick and laying upper-level maple flooring over pine subflooring, which itself rested directly atop the heavy-timber joists of the internal frame. The sprinkler system Murphy installed had "sprinkler points which are closed by fusible plugs. These melt in case the temperature reaches a certain degree and the sprinklers immediately begin to work in the place where they are needed." Elevator fire doors were crafted also to automatically close when fire melted a similar plug. On the other hand, some of the building's embellishments—the corbelled central tower and stepped corner gables, for example—suggest a compromise to the theory of slow-burning construction, which "eschewed almost all ornament as an unnecessary fire hazard," in order to achieve the stylishness the Thos. D. Murphy Co. also desired.⁴⁸ The model slow-burning factory and the Murphy factory are both imitative of Norman castles in their use of this central tower, a prominent and distinguishing feature on any building, especially in a small town such as Red Oak. This feature well served the Murphy Co. for, as noted in the 1904 *Red Oak Express* article, "...the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

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building will be located in full sight of the new CB&Q station and will no doubt serve to advertise the principal industry of the town to the many thousands of people who go through on the main line every year." The tower's placement external to the factory itself helped to mitigate its role as a fire hazard or mere embellishment (Fig. 8-4).⁴⁹

Concern for creating a suitable landscape was also on the minds of client and architect, as evidenced by the 1904 *Red Oak Express* article. Remnants of this historic landscape exist today. The building's formality was enhanced by setting the main façade sixty feet back from the street to allow for a broad green lawn. "[T]his space," wrote the reporter (Murphy?), "should give a very pleasant perspective effect." The lawn with walks and trees was intended to produce a "general effect [that] ought to be very good and decidedly ornamental to the locality."⁵⁰ Several of the trees extant today on the front lawn appear old enough to be original to the site plan (as is the red oak in the interior courtyard). Only the west front of the building received this attention to landscaping (Fig. 8-5). Other sides lack planned landscapes because either they were more functional, filled with the building's footprint, or lacked a good public view. Nonextant, but a part of the original Murphy plan, was a "green space with trees and plantings" located directly west of the main entrance, across S. 2nd St. This park-like yard was eventually given over to automobile parking.⁵¹

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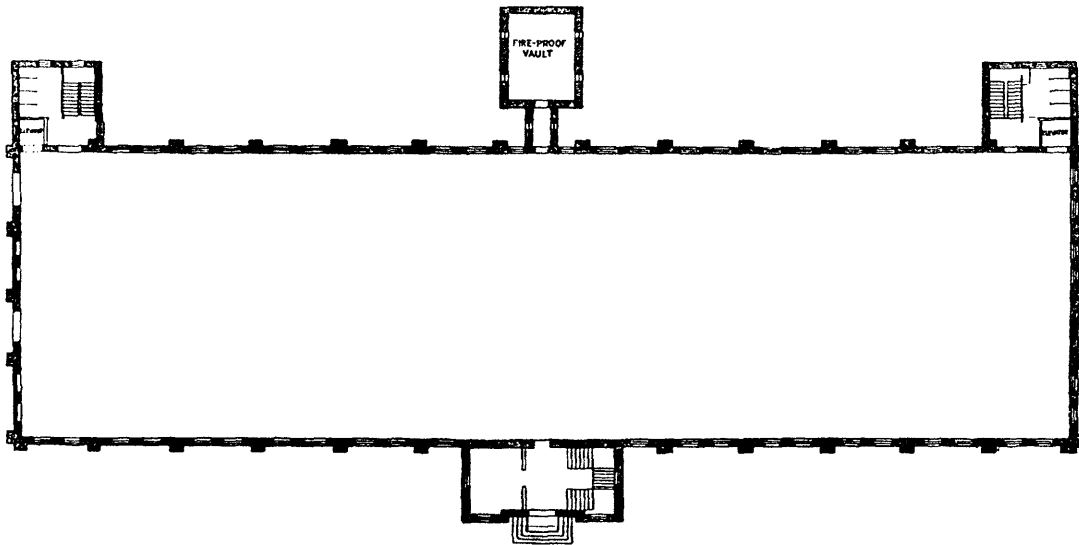


Figure 8-4 Representative Murphy Co. floor plan. Note the exterior placement of the tower stairwell, the fire-proof vault, and the two rear stairwells/elevator shafts. *Red Oak Express*, 2 September 1904.

⁴⁹ "Annexes" containing the rear stairwells and elevator shafts, as well as a fire-proof vault column, were also placed outside the factory's walls. Original intent notwithstanding, the wing expansions added soon after the original factory was built rendered the stairwells and elevator shafts interior features.

⁵⁰ "Largest in the World," *Red Oak Express*, September 2, 1904.

⁵¹ Helen Murphy, note written to Jan Olive Nash, June 2006.

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Figure 8-5 The importance of landscaping to the Murphy Co. is clearly displayed in this postcard from around 1910. Features include young specimen trees, flower beds containing tall yellow canna with large leaves and showy flowers, and a variety of walkway flower beds that have colorful annual flowers in full bloom. Traces of ivy are growing at the inside corner of the tower. In later photographs this plant nearly obscure several bays of the factory's walls. Undated color postcard in the collection of Jan Olive Nash.

Conclusion and Future Plans

In 2003, Jordan Industries, Incorporated, or JII, donated the Murphy Calendar Company buildings and their contents to a group of historically-minded Red Oak citizens dedicated to finding an appropriate reuse for the facility and conserving the company archives, documentary records, and printing plates and other materials directly related to the calendar manufacturing process. Incorporated as Depot Hill Historic District, LLC, this group has completed a feasibility study for reuse of the main factory building for senior housing and a Thomas D. Murphy Company Museum and Archives. The ownership group is actively pursuing listing the property on the National Register and possibly seeking National Historic Landmark status. Also they are very interested in State and Federal Historic Tax Credits and grant programs to carry out a historically appropriate rehabilitation of the factory that will not only preserve it for future generations but make it a vital and contributing element to Red Oak and Iowa's economic development.

This nomination includes only the Murphy Company Factory and its adjacent, free-standing Power Plant. The Murphy Company Girl's Boarding Hall, Engineer's Cottage, and a few other company houses located adjacent to the factory proper are extant and are likely National Register eligible. They are not included here because they are in separate ownership, but hopefully could be added later by amending this nomination as a historic district. A few blocks away in the downtown commercial district, several of the pre-1905 Murphy buildings survive. Given the fact that most of them have undergone some degree of modification, their best

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chances for potential National Register listing and eligibility would seem to be as contributing buildings in a Red Oak Historic Commercial District. Edmund B. Osborne's residence at 1020 Boundary Street was listed on the National Register in 1997. Thomas D. Murphy's house at 810 Corning Street is extant but has lost its original, rather substantial, front porch, making its individual National Register eligibility somewhat questionable. Given its largely intact interior and its continuous association with Murphy and his family down to the present day, it may very well be potentially eligible as a contributing building in a Heritage Hill Historic District National Register nomination.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 22-26 and 38-41 of the Southern Addition to the City of Red Oak, Iowa; Lots 4 and 13, Block 3, of the Shanks Addition to the City of Red Oak, Iowa.

Boundary Justification

These are the legal parcels of land that are historically associated with the property and currently under sole ownership.

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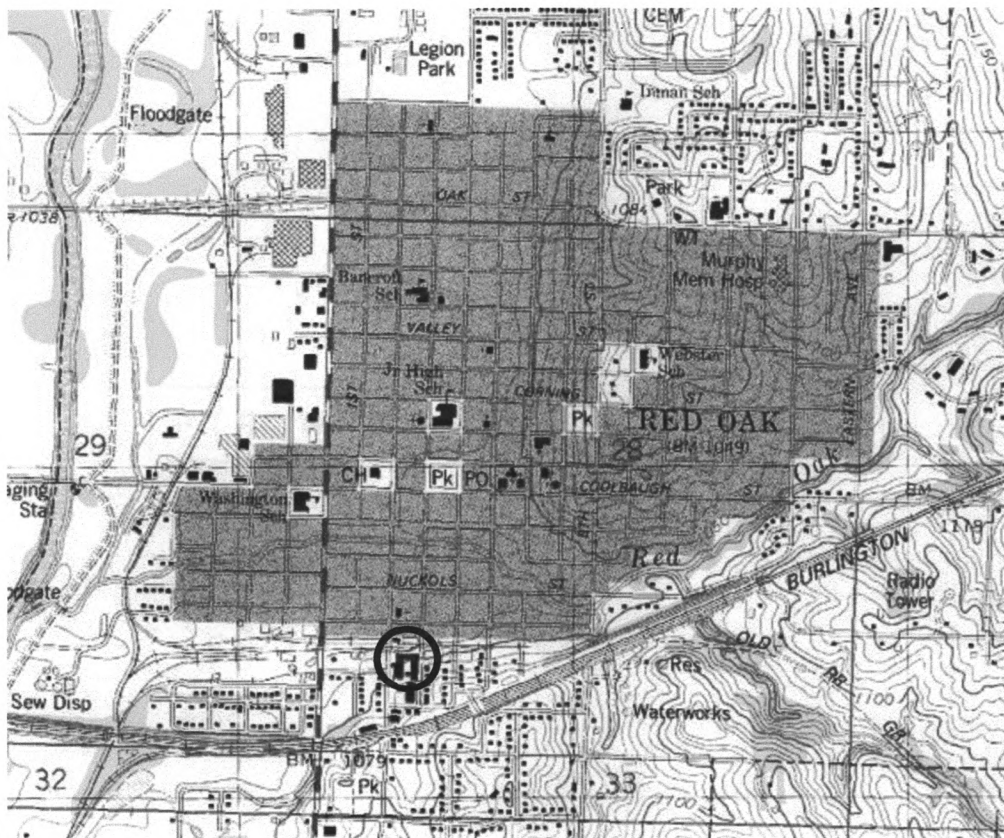
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City of Red Oak with the location of the property circled
(Source: <http://cairo.gis.iastate.edu/> accessed on 19 September 2005)



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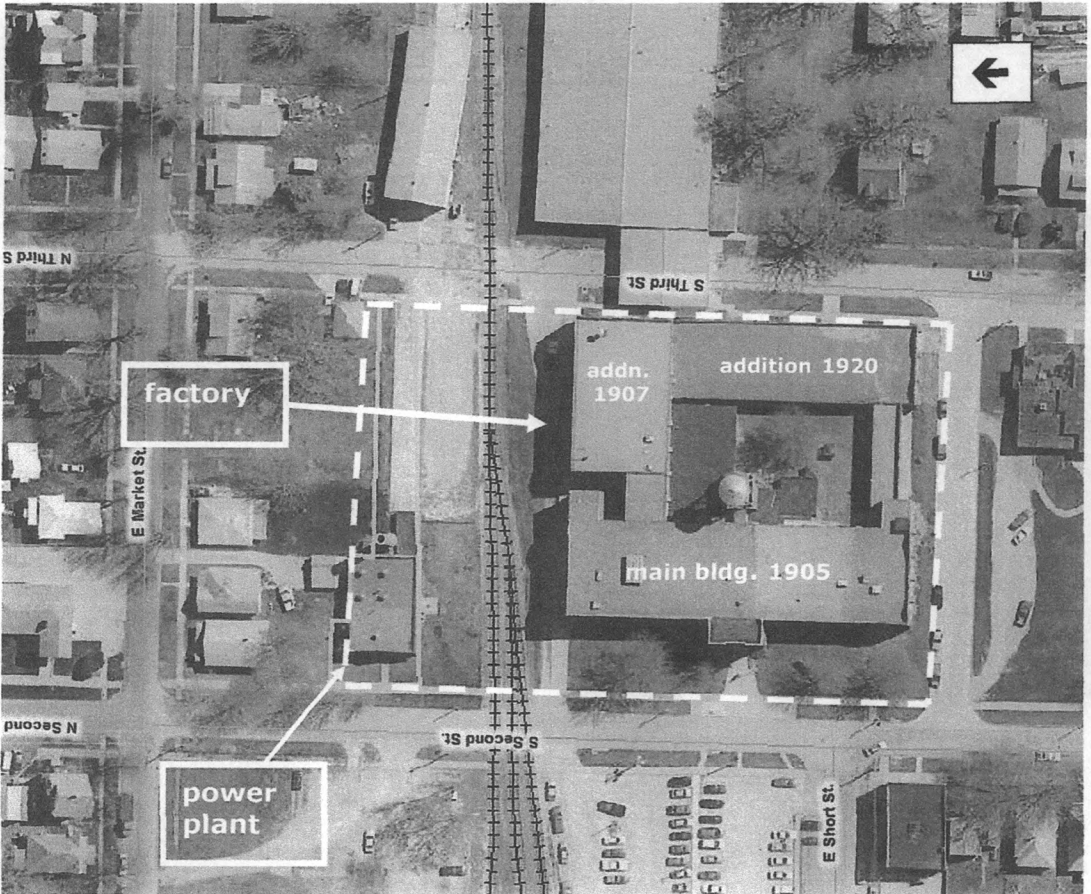
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Aerial Site Photo with factory construction dates
(Source: Based on Montgomery County Assessor aerial photograph, c. 2003)
(railroad tracks nonextant)



--- = nomination boundary

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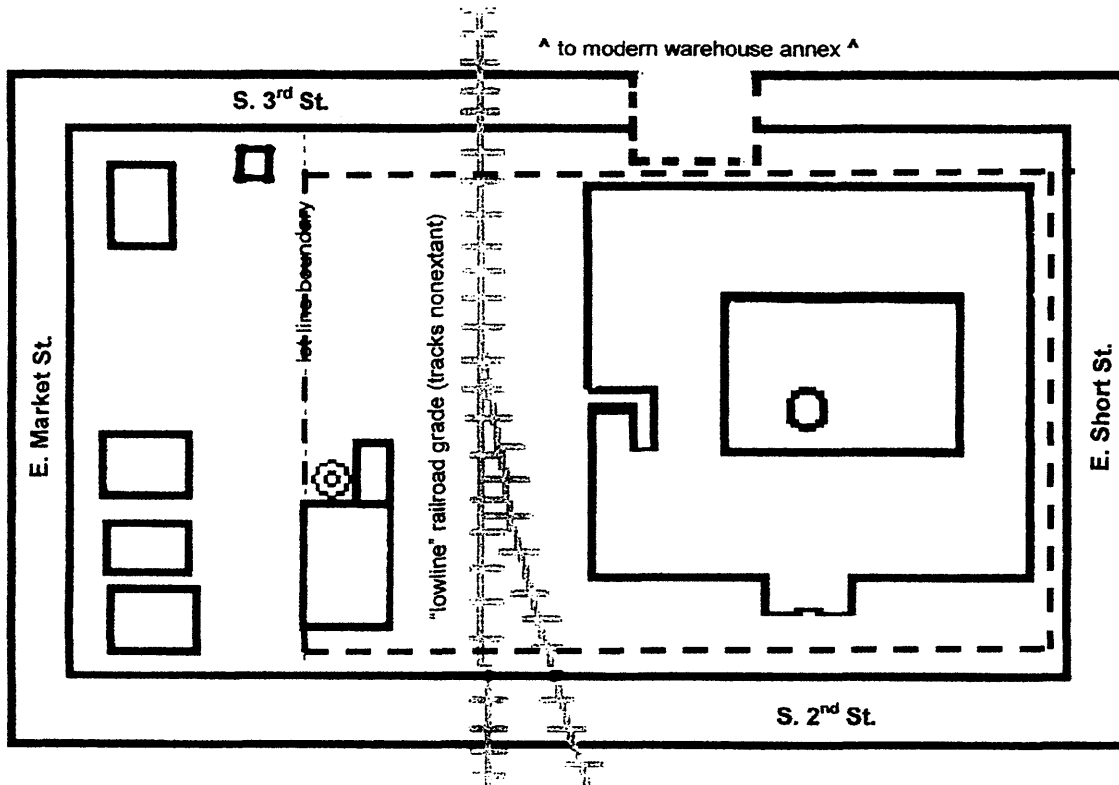
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Site Plan

(Source: Based on Montgomery County Assessor building footprints)



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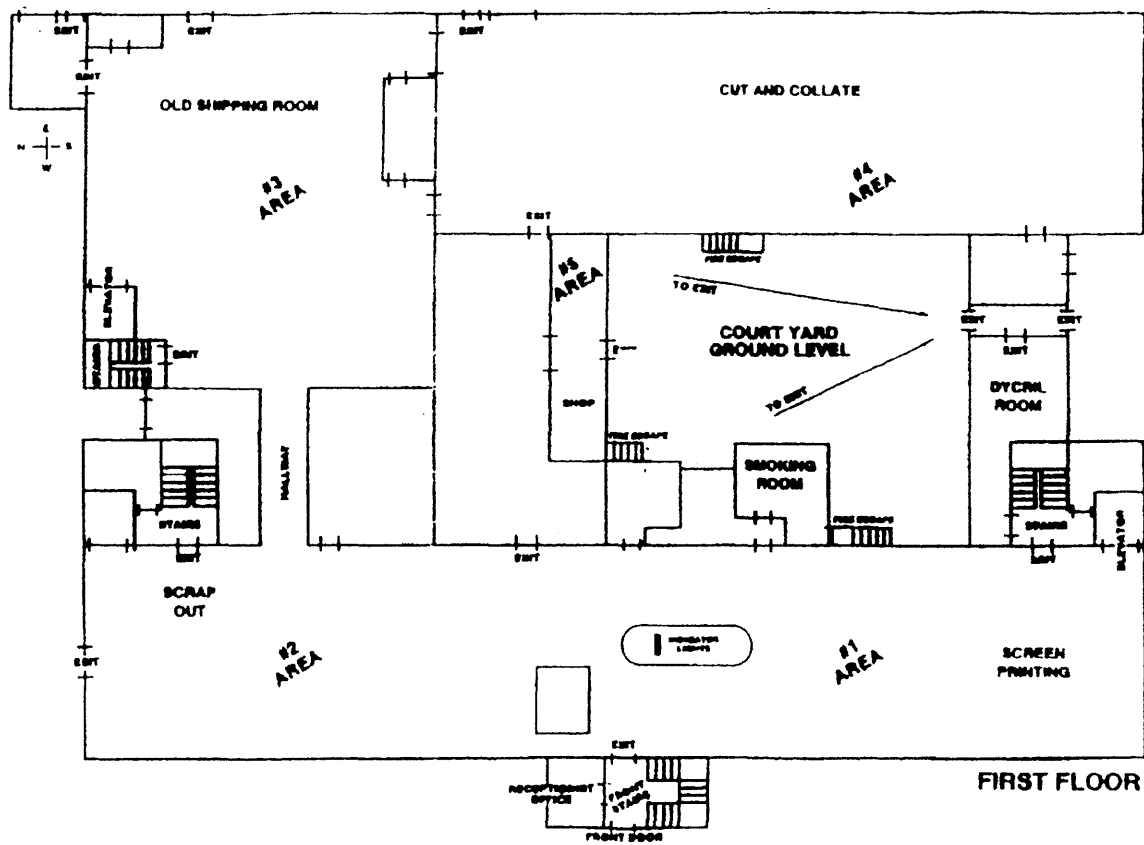
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First Floor Plan

(Source: Courtesy Jacky Adams, Red Oak, IA, c. 2003)



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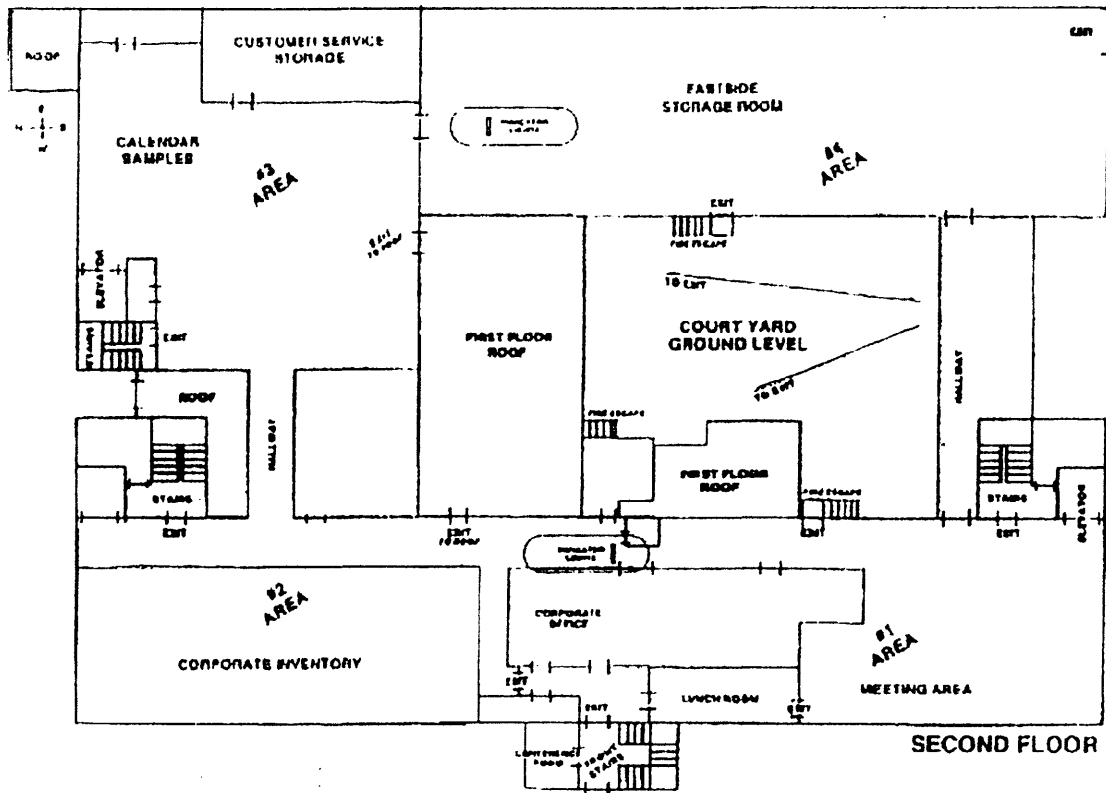
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Second Floor Plan

(Source: Courtesy Jacky Adams, Red Oak, IA, c. 2003)



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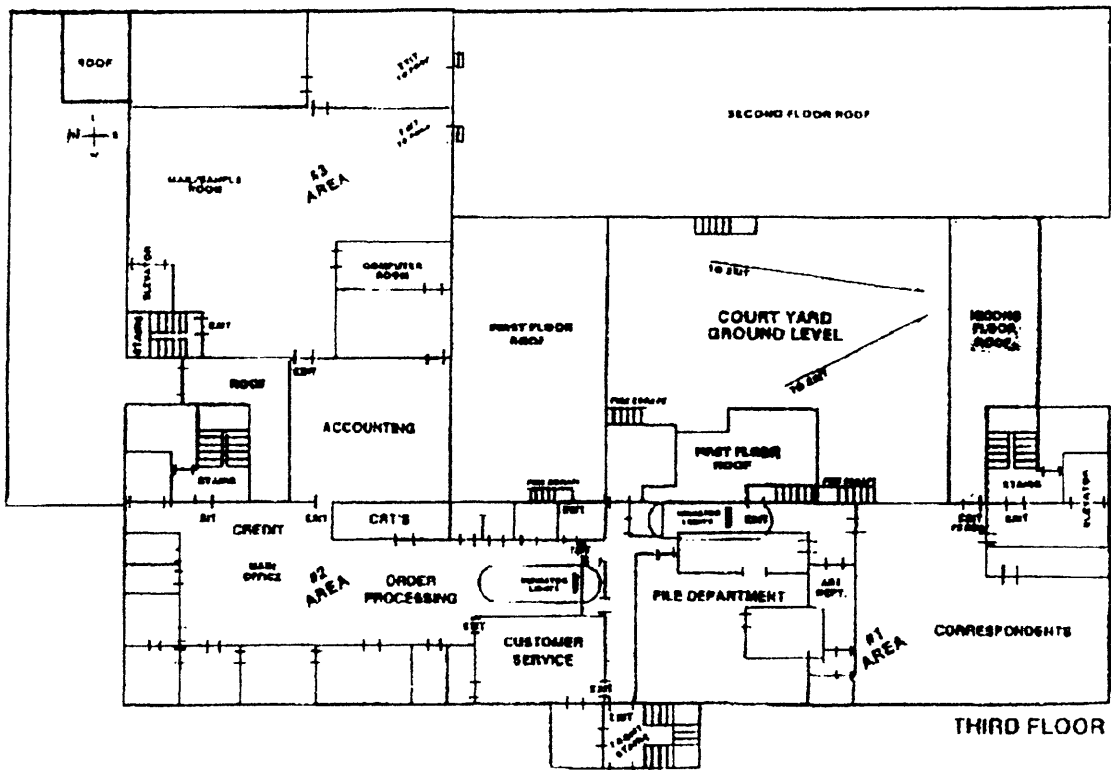
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Third Floor Plan

(Source: Courtesy Jacky Adams, Red Oak, IA, c. 2003)



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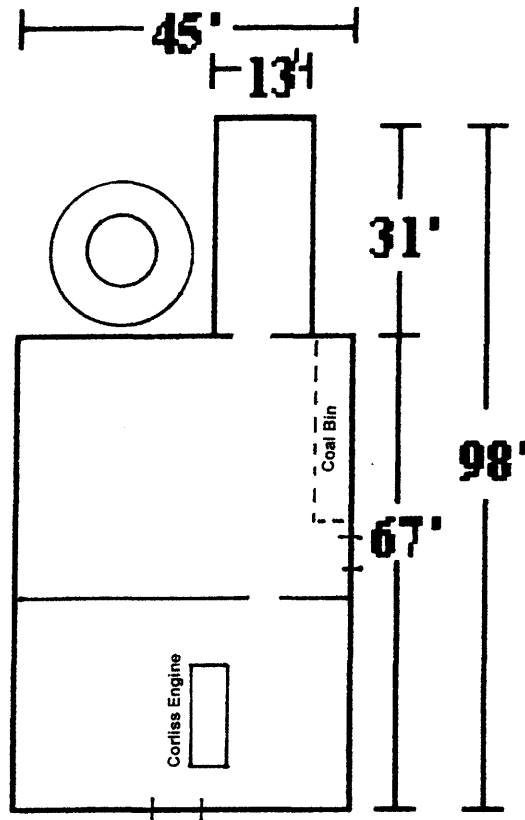
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Power House Plan

(Source: Tallgrass Historians L.C., 2006)



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PHOTOGRAPHS

Name of Property: The Thos. D. Murphy Co. Factory and Power Plant
County and State: Montgomery County, IA
Photographer: Jan Olive Nash
Date of Photograph: October 2005
Location of Original Negatives: Tallgrass Historians L.C., Iowa City, IA

- #1 General view of west façade, looking east
- #2 General view of west façade and north side, looking southeast
- #3 View of north side and water tank, looking south
- #4 Corner view of east rear and south side, water tank, looking northwest
- #5 View of south side, water tank, looking northwest
- #6 View of south side and west façade, looking northeast
- #7 Detail view of water tank, looking south
- #8 View of interior courtyard, looking east
- #9 View of interior courtyard and north wall of south wing, looking south southeast
- #10 Detail view of west entrance tower, looking east
- #11 Interior view of first floor
- #12 Interior view of second floor
- #13 Interior view of second floor and automatic fire door
- #14 Detail representative interior view of post and beam structural system
- #15 Interior view of second floor
- #16 Interior view of art-glass executive office partition wall
- #17 Interior view of art-glass-front bookcases in Thos. Murphy office, with view to #16
- #18 View of power house west façade and south side, looking northeast
- #19 View of power house south and east sides, looking northwest
- #20 Interior view of power house and Corliss engine, looking south

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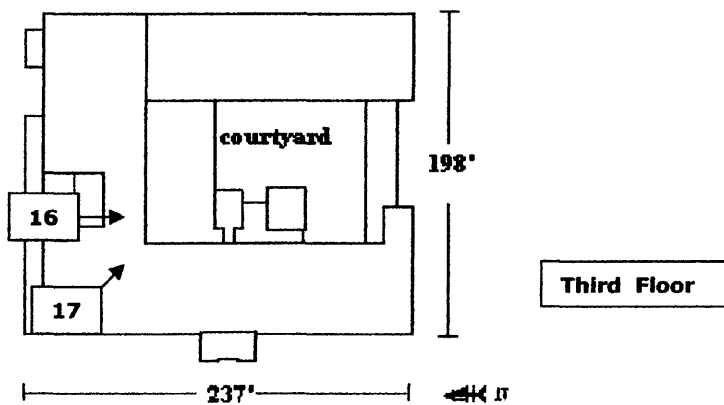
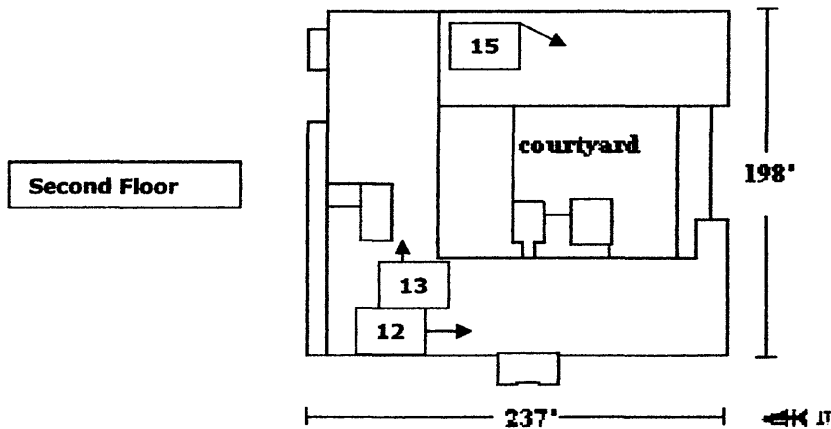
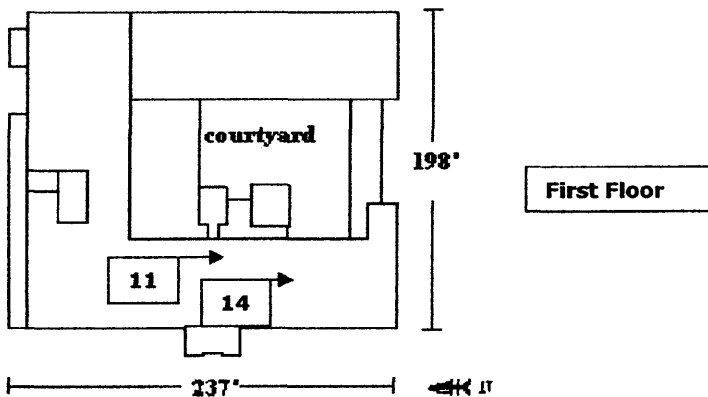
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PHOTOGRAPH KEY – Main Factory Bldg. Interior Views



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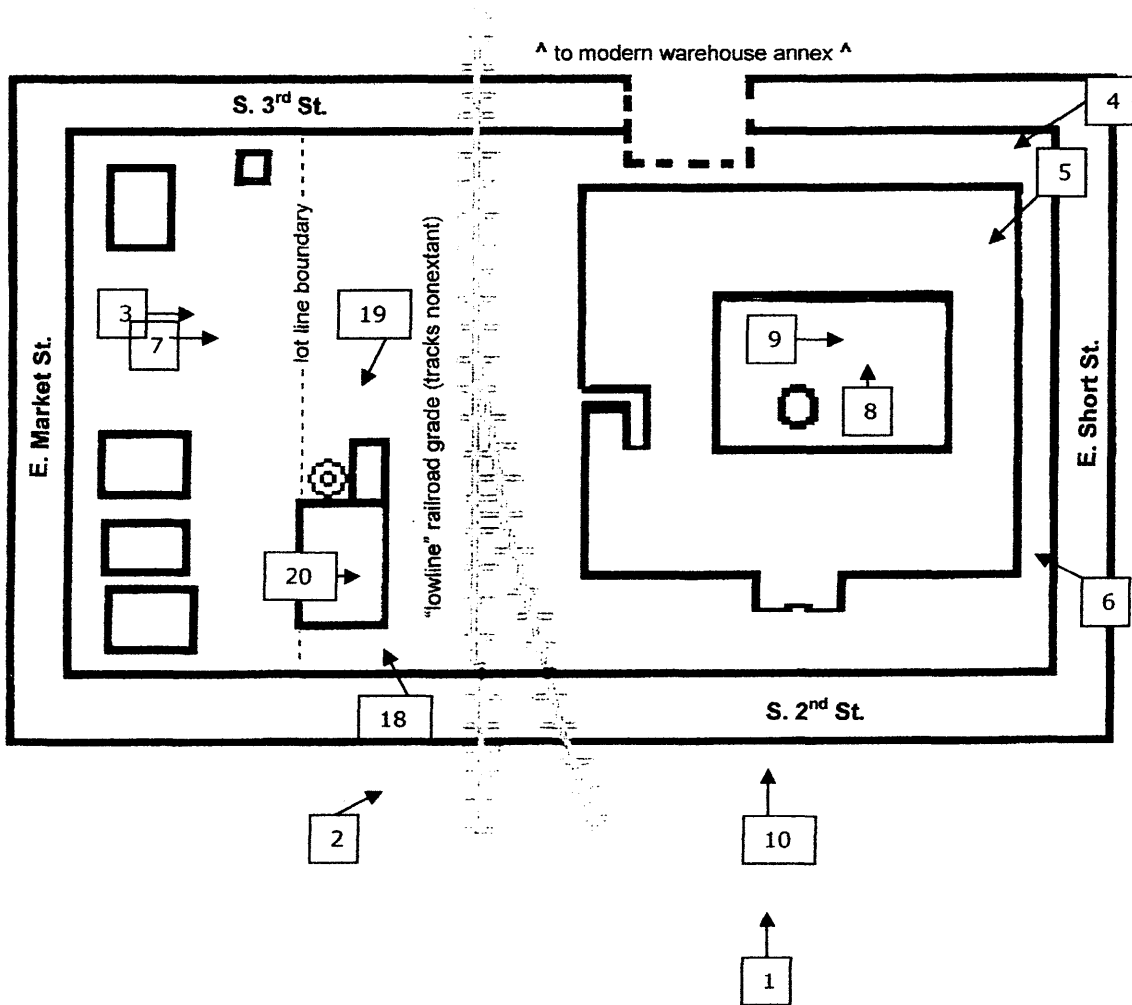
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PHOTOGRAPH KEY showing location and direction of views



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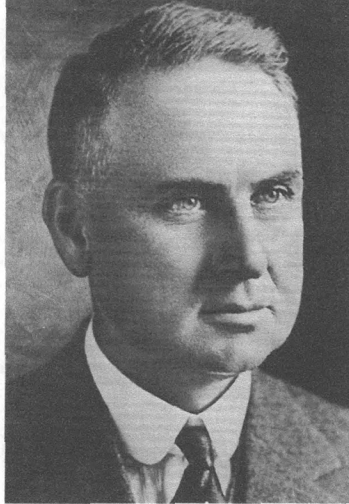
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Additional Historic Photographs



Thomas D. Murphy (Purcell, 163)



Thomas D. Murphy in his office (Purcell, 165)

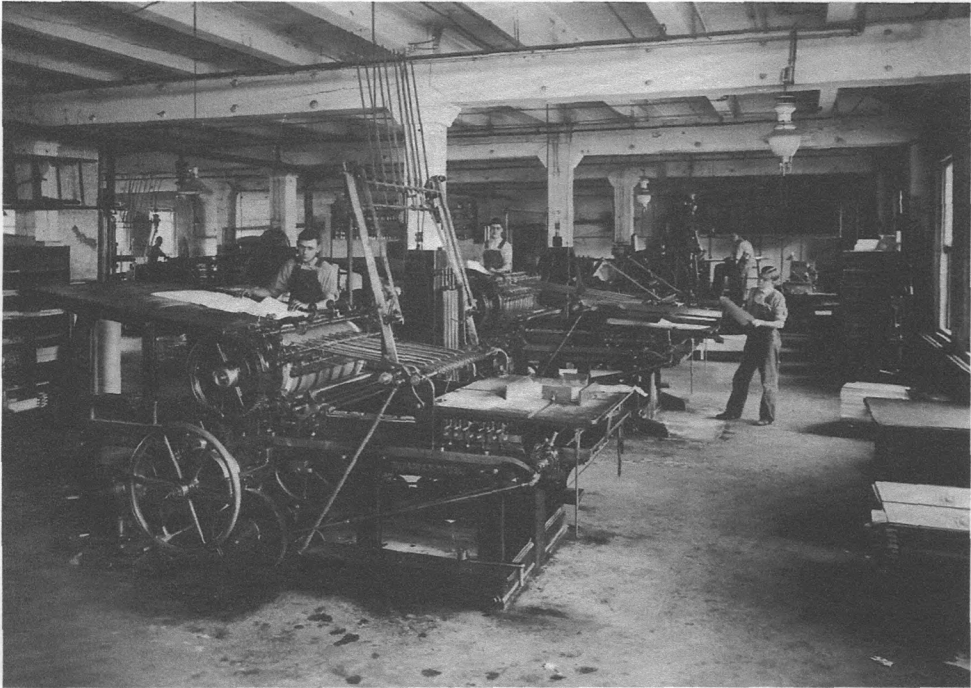
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The interior of the press room, with rows of Miehle presses, is visible in this 1912 photograph. (Purcell, 172)

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Murphy Co. job presses used to print smaller illustrations are lined up in this 1912 photograph. (Purcell, 173)



Among the many tasks performed by women at the Murphy Co., seen here in 1912, were pasting illustrations onto calendar pads and stitching the pads to the backing. (Purcell, 173).