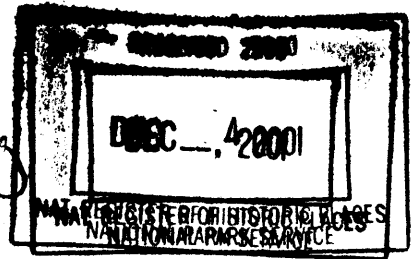


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1460



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" on the appropriate line 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 SETH RICHARDS COMMERCIAL BLOCK
other names/site number Lederer-Strauss Building

2. Location

street & number 300-310 Court Avenue N/A not for publication
city or town Des Moines N/A vicinity
state Iowa code IA county Polk code 153 zip code 50309

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Rowell G. Sike, DSHPO, October 30, 2001
Signature of certifying official/Title STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is :

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

- 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)

Linda McClelland

1/16/02

Seth Richards Commercial Block
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many lines as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one line)

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

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

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

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources
previously listed in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/speciality store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Romanesque Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

Stucco

roof Asphalt

other Glass

Metal

Narrative Description

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

Seth Richards Commercial Block
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" on one or more lines 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" on all the lines that apply)

Property is:

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

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

ETHNIC HERITAGE/OTHER

Period of Significance

1890

Circa 1897

Significant Dates

1890

Circa 1897

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

9. Major Bibliography 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):

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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository

Seth Richards Commercial Block
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 15 | 4 4 9 3 0 0 | 4 6 0 3 7 0 0 |

Zone Easting Northing

2 | --- | --- | --- |

Zone Easting Northing

3 | --- | --- | --- |

Zone Easting Northing

4 | --- | --- | --- |

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 William C. Page, Public Historian; Alexa McDowell, Project Associate

organization Group VII, LLC date June 20, 2001

street & number 520 East Sheridan Avenue (Page) telephone 515-243-5740; FAX 515-243-7285

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50313-5017

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 1st owner: J.H.F., Inc. 2601 Stanton Ave., Des Moines, IA 50321

street & number 2nd owner: I-80 Spagetti Works Corp., 1105 Howard St. telephone 515-285-3847 (J.H.F.)

city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68102 (402-345-7776)

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

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

7. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Seth Richards Commercial Block is a large, 4-story, brick complex erected in two phases. The construction of the first phase was begun in 1889 and completed in 1890. The construction of the second was completed circa 1897.

The first phase consisted of two commercial blocks--one located at 300-302 Court Avenue and one located at 304-306 Court Avenue. The second phase consisted of one commercial block, located at 308-310 Court Avenue. As defined here, a commercial block is a multi-story, commercial edifice, whose primary facade possesses two commercial rooms on the first floor. The Seth Richards complex possesses three of such commercial blocks. Each commercial block shares in common its architectural design and building materials with the others. This lends a unified appearance to the entire property and confers upon it a monumental presence and dignity.

The footprint of this complex measures about 130' x 130'. It rests on a brick and stone foundation, and its walls are constructed of load-bearing brick. The north, east, and west elevations feature an orange-red colored brick, while the south elevation features a reddish colored brick. The internal structure of the building is provided by steel posts and two load-bearing brick walls--one located between 302 and 304 Court Avenue, which extends to the top of the building, and one located between 304 and 306, which extends to the third floor. (See pages 7-10 and 7-22.) The complex is covered with a flat roof of built-up composition.

Each of the complex's four floors contains about 16,900 square feet, and its full basement contains another 16,900 square feet, with the total area of the complex containing about 84,500 square feet.

The Polk County Assessor's Office employs another method to describe this complex. Their records divide the complex into four units, designated Unit A, Unit B, Unit C, and Unit X. Unit A corresponds to the first floor of 300-302 Court Avenue, presently occupied by Johnny's Hall of Fame. Unit B corresponds to the first floor of 304 Court Avenue, presently occupied by Charles' BBQ Shack. Unit C corresponds to the first floor of 306-308-310 Court Avenue, presently occupied by the Spaghetti Works. Unit X is used to describe each of the complex's three upper floors, which are presently vacant and unoccupied. The strength of this description is that it clarifies the present uses of the building. The weakness of this description is that it does not reflect the original configuration of the complex.

The north elevation of the complex is its most decorative facade. Storefronts occupy the entire first floor. These storefronts are defined by load-bearing, cast iron columns. Most of the historic building materials survive in the storefronts at 308 and 310. Each of these storefronts features five bays defined by the columns. Each bay possesses a plate glass window surmounted by paired transoms. The storefronts on the 300, 302, 304, and 306 units have been remodeled. Those at 300 and 302 have been almost entirely filled with brick, but the original cast iron columns might remain extant behind this cover-up material. The storefronts at 306 and 308 feature an entrance to the first floor commercial area, as well as an access to the upper floors; and, although these building materials are not entirely

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

original to the building, these storefronts retain some original materials, and more may lie beneath cover-up materials.

A band of brickwork, laid in an angled or sawtooth pattern, surmounts the transom area all across the north elevation. A stringcourse of cast stone is situated above this brickwork, which also serves as the sills for the upper floor windows.

The upper floors of each of the commercial blocks retain fine integrity. Each unit features five bays. Each bay is filled with paired, double-hung, 1/1 sash windows capped with two fixed glass panes. A heavy wooden muntin divides the paired windows. The original cornice of the complex is only partially extant. Although the original pressed metal portion is nonextant, the brickworked corbels under it remain intact.

The west elevation of the building features eight bays on each of the complex's four floors. The east side of the building features nine bays on each of the complex's four floors. The parapet along the east and west elevations are stepped down from the front to the rear of the complex. Four steps reduce the height of these side walls to account for the diminished height of the complex's slanted roof. The east elevation also features two iron fire escapes. All windows on the east elevation are presently covered. Those on the first floor are bricked in, while those on the upper floors are covered over with plywood. Original sash might remain extant beneath the plywood.

A brick chimney is located near the southeast corner of the complex.

Three painted signs are situated on the west elevation of the complex. Although much weathered, one reads "Wholesale Millinery." It runs vertically near the northwest corner of the complex. Another sign, painted below it, reads "Lederer Strauss Co. Inc. Wholesale Millinery." The third sign reads "Spaghetti Works." This is a large, contemporary sign, painted in black and white, which runs horizontally near the top of the building.

The south elevation is strictly utilitarian and is constructed of common brick. One iron fire escape is situated on the south elevation. A dividing line is visible in the brick between the portion of the block originally constructed and the west addition to it.

In the interior, the upper floors of each of the units features large, open space unencumbered by partitions. Pine floors are featured. Iron and wood load-bearing columns and horizontal I-beams provide the internal support for the complex. The columns are spaced at intervals of 22' x 14'. Ceiling heights average 12'. An open staircase runs from the second to the third floor. Featuring oak newel posts, rails, and balusters, it provides the most decorative element in an otherwise plain and simple interior.

During the 1920s and later, these areas were occupied by ladies with sewing machines fabricating hats. There were steam presses to block felt hats, wood forms for their patterns, supply areas for bows and ribbons and other findings, quantities of straw to make hats, and rows and rows of finished products waiting to be shipped. (Marjorie Spevak and Frances Shloss informant interviews) Hats for

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

the spring season were typically made of straw, silk, or crepe. Those for the winter were typically made of felt, wool, crepe, velvet, or satin. (*Des Moines Register*)

A fire occurred at the rear of the complex circa 1929. A member of the Prouty family notified the Shloss family of the fire, and since that time, the Shlosses always referred to this event as "the Prouty fire." The extent of this fire is presently unknown, and it might have occurred at an adjacent property.

Site

The site of the Seth Richards Commercial Block is densely built-up urban. The building directly abuts the public rights-of-way on the north and on the east. Two Locust street trees stand on the north side of the building. During the season, a portion of the pedestrian walk in front of 308-310 Court Avenue is furnished with restaurant tables and chairs in a railed-off area.

A modern kiosk is situated adjacent to the southwest corner of the complex. This free-standing structure provides a facility to control automobile parking around the complex.

Surroundings

Court Avenue is a thoroughfare in downtown Des Moines, which runs to the east from the public square, where the Polk County Courthouse is situated.

Today, Court Avenue is a one-way street for eastbound traffic. This avenue formed the principal retail spine of downtown Des Moines during the city's early years. As the city grew and increased in importance as a regional wholesale center, downtown Des Moines moved slowly to the north and to the west, and the Court Avenue area became more oriented toward wholesale and durable goods.

By 1884, for example, many buildings along Court Avenue housed wholesale establishments for liquors, cigars and tobacco, notions, millinery, boots and shoes, hardware, drugs, oils, and glasses, as well as agricultural implements and wagons, plumbing and gasification supplies, carriages and plows, pipe fittings, and brass goods. (Sanborn 1884). The wholesale establishments to the north of the railroad lines tended to be light industrial, while the wholesale establishments to the south of the railroad lines tended to concentrate on heavier goods, such as lumber, agricultural equipment, and storage transfer. The resultant architecture tended to reflect these purposes. Wholesale establishments along Court Avenue resembled commercial buildings, while those to the south of the tracks looked more like warehouses.

Following World War II, the decline of the American railroad systems and the rise of motorized trucking industry changed wholesaling operations in Des Moines. With proximity to the railroad lines no longer a prerequisite, wholesale establishments gravitated to locations in the metropolitan area more convenient to the highways. Court Avenue declined as the metro's primary wholesale district and gained a reputation among the demimonde.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, a combination of factors--including low rental costs, the area's architectural and historical ambiance, and its adjacent location to downtown--attracted a new breed of entertainment-oriented businesses. In 1983 the Community Development Department of the City of Des Moines surveyed the Court Avenue area to assess the area's potential for adaptive reuse. From then on, the area grew in popularity for restaurants, pubs, events, and a place to see and be seen. Each year now, on Saturdays from May to October, a farmers market is held along Court Avenue, for example.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

SITE MAP

ARROW LOCATES PROPERTY



Source: U.S.G.S. Map (7.5 Minute Series), Des Moines SW Quadrangle, 1956, Photorevised 1976.

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National Park Service

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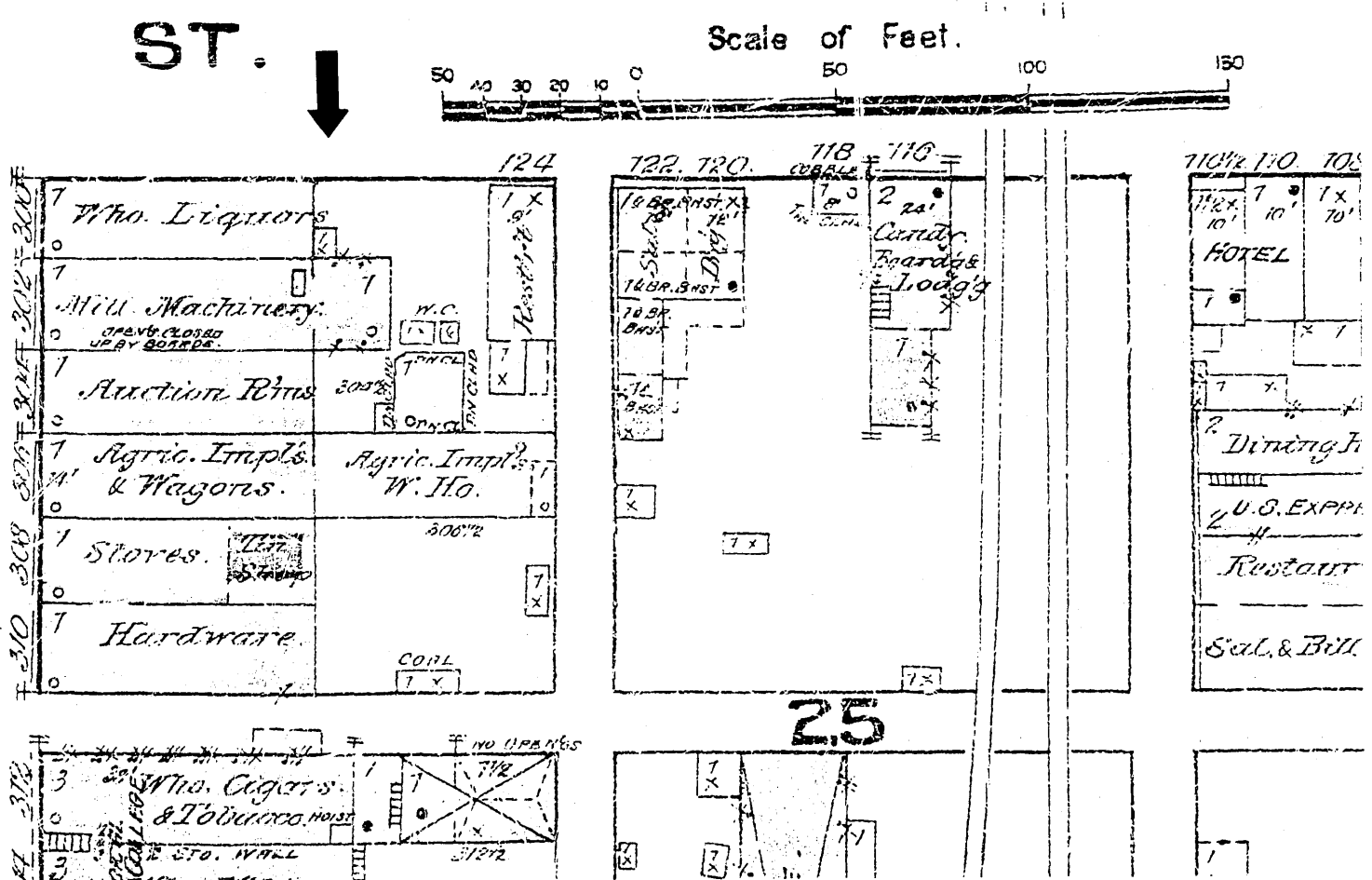
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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

1884 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

ARROW LOCATES SITE PRIOR TO CONSTRUCTION OF SETH RICHARDS COMMERCIAL BLOCK



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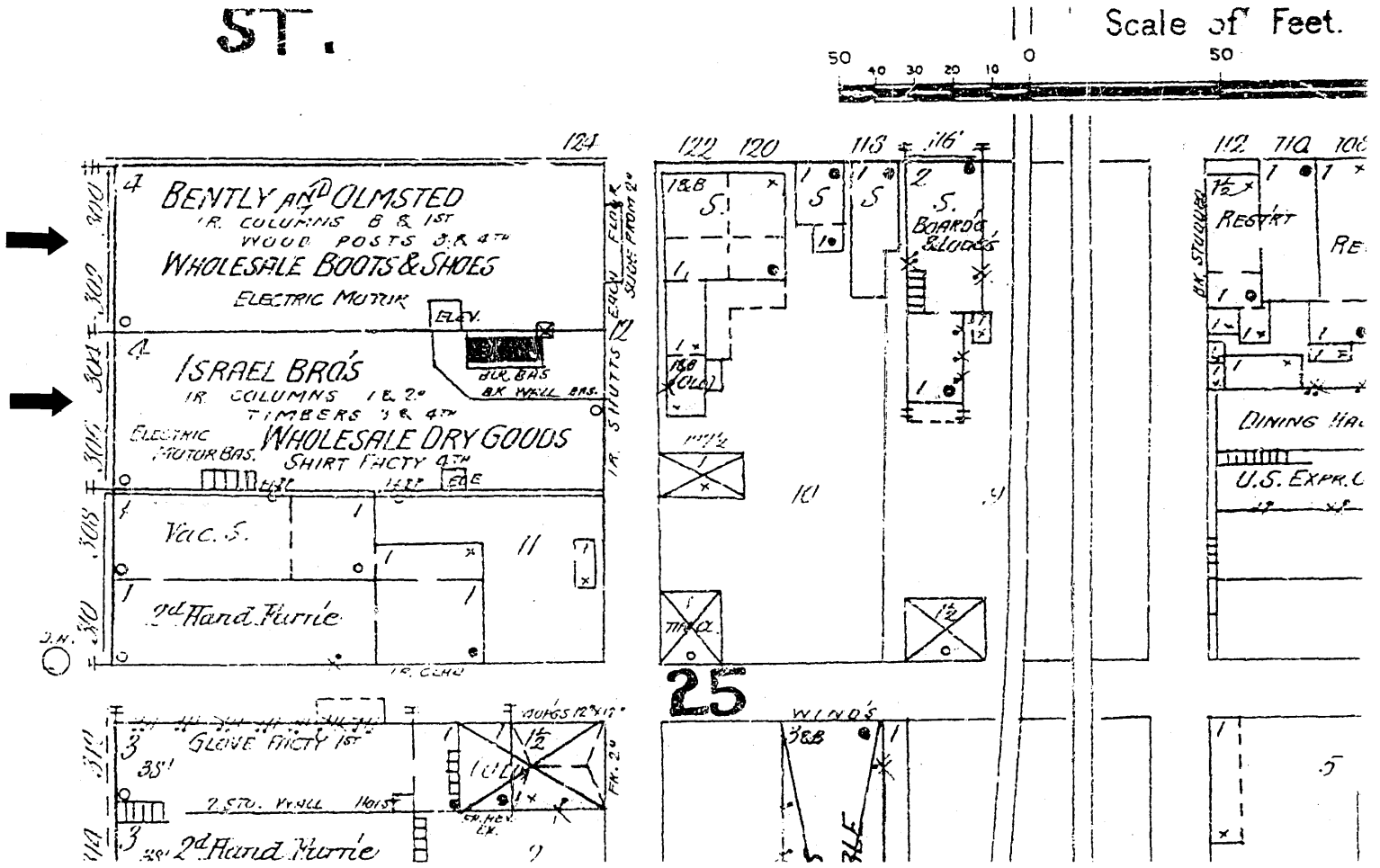
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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

1891 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

ARROWS LOCATE SETH RICHARDS UNITS AT 300-302 AND 304-306 COURT AVENUE



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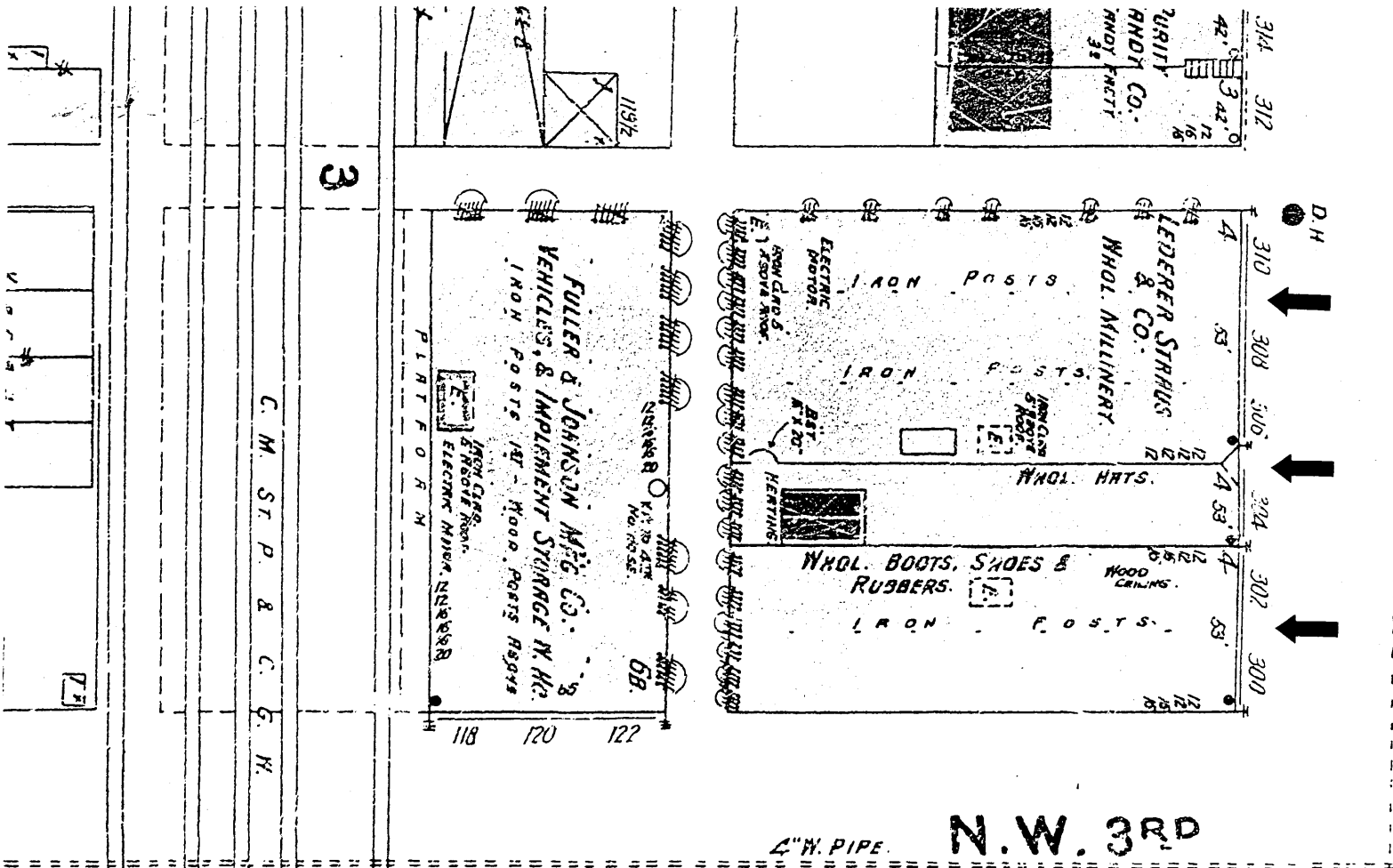
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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

1901 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

ARROWS LOCATE ALL THREE SETH RICHARDS UNITS IN PLACE



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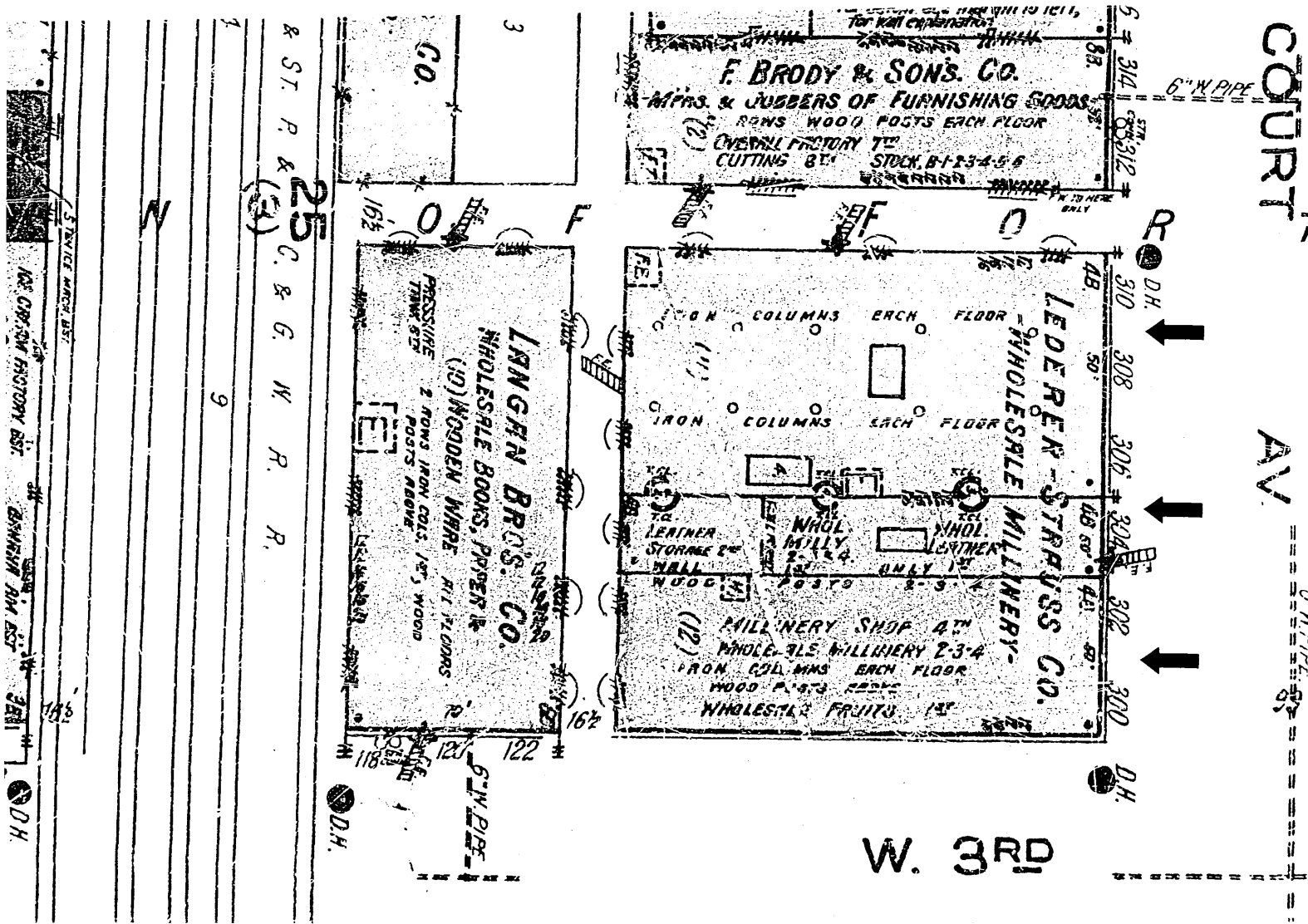
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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

1920 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

ARROWS LOCATE ALL THREE SETH RICHARDS UNITS IN PLACE



Note that Lederer-Strauss occupies most of the complex.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Des Moines, 1920.



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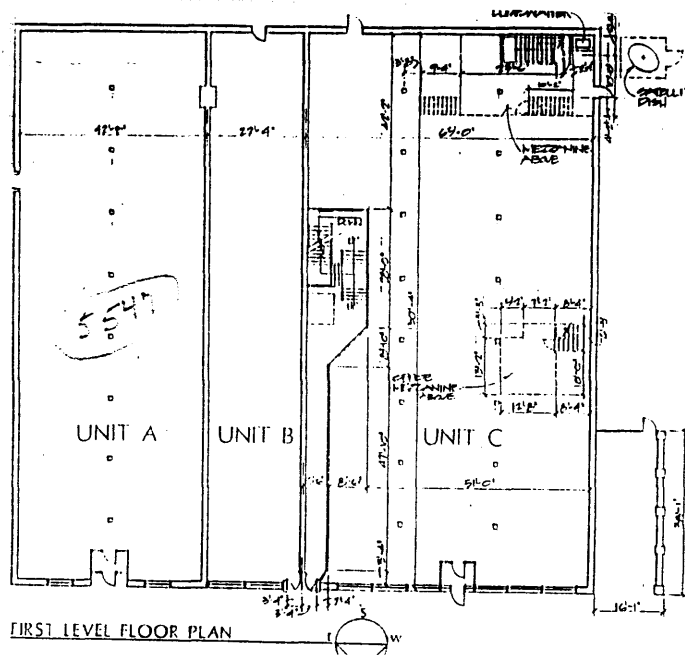
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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

2000



Sketch: Polk County Assessor's Office.

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National Park Service

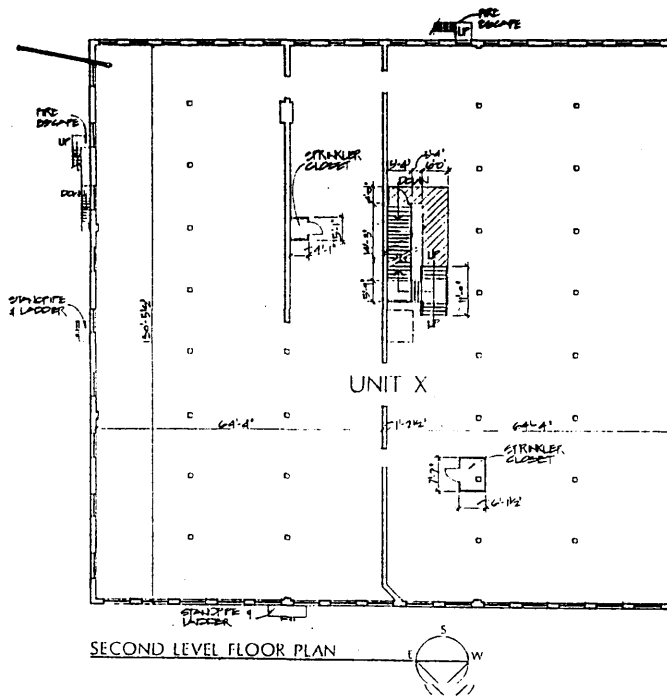
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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

UPPER FLOOR PLAN



Sketch: Polk County Assessor's Office.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

COURT AVENUE

Looking west circa 1905, Seth Richards Commercial Block first on left.



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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

COURT AVENUE

Looking west circa 1912, Seth Richards Commercial Block first on left.



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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

SETH RICHARDS COMMERCIAL BLOCK

Circa 1949



Source: "Meet Me on the Corner," *Des Moines Register*, undated newspaper clipping.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Seth Richards Commercial Block is historically significant, locally and under National Register Criterion A, because it calls attention to the redevelopment of Court Avenue from a retail section of downtown Des Moines to the city's wholesale district. The Seth Richards Commercial Block is a fine example of a wholesale business, representative of the regional leadership Des Moines had achieved in those endeavors by the 1880s. The property illustrates the dominant role that Jews had come to play in wholesaling wearing apparel regionally. Moses Strauss and Alexander Lederer were pioneer Jews in Des Moines. They worked their small dry goods and clothing stores into an important wholesale millinery business, that supplied Iowa and beyond and was based in this building.

The Seth Richards Commercial Block is architecturally significant, locally and under National Register Criterion C. The edifice shows the influence of Romanesque Revival style on its architecture. This influence is most apparent in the arches above the upper floor windows. The Seth Richards Commercial Block is made up of three modular units and, as such, calls attention to Victorian efficiency in the design of a commercial structure.

The period of significance for the Seth Richards Commercial Block, under Criterion A, is 1890-circa 1951, the time of its association with wholesaling and the redevelopment of Court Avenue in downtown Des Moines. The period of significance, under Criterion C, is the year 1890, when the commercial blocks at 300-302 and 304-306 were completed and first occupied, and circa 1897, the time when the commercial block at 308-310 was completed and first occupied.

The property possesses one resource, the complex itself, which is counted as contributing and classified as a building.

BACKGROUND

The site of the Seth Richards Commercial Block is a choice parcel in downtown Des Moines. Situated on Lot 11 and Lot 12 in Block 25 of the original town plat of Fort Des Moines, this site housed a number of business houses prior to its redevelopment by the present building.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows owned this land in the 1880s. In 1887, they transferred the title to Lot 11 to Seth Richards. (*Auditor Deed Record Book*) Apparently, Richards had previously obtained title to Lot 12 (the destruction by fire of records in the Polk County Courthouse precludes a closer analysis) because when Richards transferred the property's title to Sarah Sears in 1892, it included both lots.

Information about Seth Richards is presently limited. His name is not included in city directories from the late Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Centuries. We do know that Richards had lost his wife by 1892 (he is listed in *Auditor Deed Record Book* in 1892 as "widower"). It is assumed that

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

Richards was an out-of-town investment-capitalist, who decided to build in Des Moines. The emergence of Des Moines as a commercial and wholesale center in the late Nineteenth Century encouraged outside capital to invest in the city. Further research might corroborate or contradict this assumption. One Seth Richards is documented living in Afton, Iowa, in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. Engaged in mercantile business as the manager of Howell & Richards and later Richards & Creel, this Seth Richards later relocated to Colorado, where he died in 1920. (*Areba Record*)

After several subsequent transfers of title to this property, the Lederer, Strauss & Co., Inc., purchased Lots 11 and 12 and the commercial block, which housed their wholesale business, in 1922.

REDEVELOPMENT OF COURT AVENUE

The construction of the Seth Richards Commercial Block calls attention to the redevelopment of Court Avenue during the Nineteenth Century from a retail section of downtown Des Moines to part of the city's wholesale district. As the city and its economy grew, the retail sector of downtown Des Moines moved to the north and the west.

Court Avenue had served in the 1860s and 1870s as a principal retail section of the city. The following tables illustrate this fact. Taking "clothing" as a benchmark for retail businesses, they list clothing merchants in Des Moines in 1866 and 1871-72 and their locations.

CLOTHING MERCHANTS IN DES MOINES IN 1866

<u>Name of Business</u>	<u>Address</u>
Arnold's & Co.	66 Court
Betts & Goldsmith	Court Avenue
Goldman & Hyman	Cor. 3rd & Walnut
Kuhn & Co	Unknown
Lederer & Strauss	49 Walnut cor. 3rd
Monroe & Co.	No. 7 Savery Block, 4th & Walnut
E. Schotenfelts	Unknown
Shissler & Jones	106 3rd
Simon & Strauss	48 Court
Stricker & Bro.	34 Court

Source: City Directory, 1866

Of the eight known addresses of clothiers in Des Moines at this time, one-half of them were located on Court Avenue.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

An analysis of clothing merchants a few years later corroborates these finding.

CLOTHING MERCHANTS IN DES MOINES IN 1871-72

<u>Name of Business</u>	<u>Address</u>
E. P. Chase & Co.	129 4th
H. E. Dykeman	91 Walnut op. Savery House
Goldman & Hyman	ne cor. Walnut & 3rd
N. L. Goldstone	34 Court Avenue, branch store, 3 Jones Block (east side of river)
Jacobs & Mandelbaum	39 Court Ave.
Isaac Kuhn	35 Court Avenue
Joseph Kuhn	33 Court Avenue
Lee Gulusha	2nd St. bet. Vine & Court Ave.
H. Monroe	7 Savery Block
Simon & Strauss	43 Court Ave.

Source: City Directory, 1871-72

Of these ten firms, five of them were located on Court Avenue with several others quite nearby.

Analyses of other retail businesses--druggists, dry goods merchants, and boots and shoes dealers, for example--could also be provided. A perusal of such businesses in early city directories corroborates these findings of retail locations clustering on or near Court Avenue.

As the city's population burgeoned in the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, downtown Des Moines expanded. Retail establishments tended to move to the north and to the west--along 3rd and 4th Streets into Walnut and Locust Streets. This trend is already noticeable in the above tables. Using the clothing benchmark as an example, the table on the following page lists the locations of these merchants in Des Moines in 1886:

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

CLOTHING MERCHANTS IN DES MOINES IN 1886

<u>Name of Business</u>	<u>Address</u>
Atkinson Bros.	411 W. Court Avenue
J. K. Barlow	510 E. Locust
Barnett Bros.	329-331 e. n. 5th
Freeland, Loomis & Co.	600 W. Walnut
Goldman & Hyman	409 W. Walnut
Goldstone & Redstone	320 e. n. 5th
A. A. Gutman	220 w. n. 4th
Harris & Friedman	311 W. Walnut
Hirsch Bros.	401 W. Walnut
G. Jacobs	317 W. Walnut
M. Lewy	504 W. Walnut & 229 W. 4th
J. O. Mahana	303 W. Walnut
J. Mandelbaum	319 W. Walnut
Neilson, Gherke & Hansen	527 E. Locust
J. Posner	410 W. Walnut
Soules & Fleming	503 & 505 W. Walnut
Tinsley Bros.	423 W. Walnut
A. Weinstock	416 W. Walnut
Alexander Youngberg	504 E. Locust
August Youngberg	513 E. Locust

Source: City Directory, 1886

Of the city's 20 clothing merchants listed in 1886, only one of them was located on Court Avenue. Also of interest is the rise of westward movement of retail establishments along Walnut and Locust Streets--Soules & Fleming, J. K. Barlow, and Alexander Youngberg, for example, housed in the 500 block, and Freeland, Loomis & Co. housed in the 600 block. (Also of interests is rise of retail clothiers in the East Des Moines business district and the need to include directional locators in the city's street names to distinguish between streets bearing the same names on the east and west sides.)

Other forces were changing downtown Des Moines at the same time. The city's growing role as a regional wholesaling center encouraged the expansion of its wholesale district both to the north and to the south of the city's main railroad lines, located one block to the south of Court Avenue.

The construction of the Seth Richards Commercial Block calls attention to this phenomenon. Prior to its construction, a one-story edifice occupied the site. A comparison of this earlier building's functions with those of the later Seth Richards Commercial Block provides a nice example of Court Avenue's redevelopment.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

In 1884, a brick, one-story complex occupied this site. The following table lists its street addresses and the functions of its occupants:

BUSINESSES ON THE SITE IN 1884

<u>Address</u>	<u>Business</u>
300 Court Avenue	Wholesale liquors (restaurant at rear)
302 Court Avenue	Mill machinery
304 Court Avenue	Auction rooms
306 Court Avenue	Agricultural implements & wagons (agricultural implements wholesale house at rear)
308 Court Avenue	Stores
310 Court Avenue	Hardware

Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1884.

By 1891, the construction of the Seth Richards Commercial Block had increased the density of wholesale operations on this site. Compare the following table with the one above:

BUSINESSES ON THE SITE IN 1891

<u>Address</u>	<u>Business</u>
300-302 Court Avenue	Bently and Olmsted, Wholesale boots and shoes
304-306 Court Avenue	Israel Brothers, wholesale dry goods, also a shirt factory on 4th floor
308 Court Avenue (old building)	Vacant store (as in 1884)
310 Court Avenue (old building)	Hardware (as in 1884)

Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1891

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

With the completion of the Seth Richards Commercial Block in 1890, this site now housed Bently and Olmsted's wholesale boots and shoes establishment and Israel Brothers' wholesale dry goods. A shirt factory was located on the fourth floor of the Israel Brothers operation. The commercial room previously listed as "stores" is now "vacant." The hardware store continues in operation.

BUSINESSES ON THE SITE IN 1901

<u>Address</u>	<u>Business</u>
300-302 Court Avenue	Wholesale boots, shoes, and rubbers
304	Wholesale hats
306-308-310 Court Avenue	Lederer, Strauss & Company, wholesale millinery

Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1901.

One should note that by 1920, the Lederer, Strauss & Co., Inc., occupied the entire property at 300-310 Court Avenue. (Sanborn Map Company 1920)

To summarize these tables: In 1884, the property at 300-310 Court Avenue housed a mix of retail, service, and wholesale businesses. By 1901 (and earlier, too) this property was occupied exclusively by wholesale businesses. The construction of the Seth Richards Commercial Block had transformed the property's land use.

This redevelopment of Court Avenue occurred up and down the street from the Polk County Courthouse square to the Des Moines River. Other notable warehouse buildings along this stretch include the Des Moines Saddlery Company Building at 307 Court Avenue (NRHP), the Warfield, Pratt, and Howell Company Warehouse at 100 Court Avenue (NRHP). Although a sufficient degree of integrity no longer remains along this stretch to qualify as a National Register historic district, these and other individual properties do qualify. The loss of so much historic fabric along Court Avenue increases the historical significance of extant properties along the corridor.

WHOLESALE MERCHANDISING

The Seth Richards Commercial Block is historically significant because it calls attention to the dominance of Des Moines as a premier wholesale center in Iowa and points west in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries and to the leading role Jewish businessmen played in the wholesale apparel business, a key sector of that market. As a premier millinery fabricator and wholesaler, Lederer, Strauss & Co., Inc.--according to its own advertising--became "the most extensive millinery

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

business in the west.” The firm was housed in the Seth Richards Commercial Block and was owned and operated by Jews.

From the earliest times in Des Moines, Jewish businessmen dominated the retail and wholesale markets for wearing apparel. The Younker brothers are the most well-known example of this phenomenon, founding retail and wholesale businesses in Keokuk and in Des Moines. The firm subsequently became the largest department store chain in Iowa.

Alexander Lederer and Moses Strauss were pioneers in Des Moines. Lederer (1832-1898) was born in Carlsbad, Bohemia. Emigrating to Iowa, Lederer resided in Davenport for 11 years before relocating to Des Moines in 1865, where he partnered with Moses Strauss. His career paralleled the American success story. According to one local history,

His only capital at the beginning of his career in the new world consisted of his integrity and energy and a keen business judgment, which he developed to an unusual degree in the course of his contact with his fellowmen. (Brigham:1016)

In 1868, Lederer and Emma Samish were united in marriage. This union subsequently resulted in Emma's family's association with the Lederer and Strauss business. Lederer became a leader in the establishment of Des Moines' first synagogue. He was also noted for his civic benevolence. (*Ibid.*:1019)

Moses Strauss (1833-1913) was also a self-made man,

notable in that he has worked his way upward from a humble position to one of affluence directly through his own labors. (Brigham:182)

Strauss was born in the Kingdom of Bavaria, emigrated to the United States in 1848 and landed at New Orleans. *Wanderlust* continued to dominate his life, and Strauss subsequently relocated to Melbourne, Australia, Africa, and South America. In 1857, he arrived in Des Moines and opened several small stores on 2nd Street with Leopold Strauss, his brother, and L. Simon. The businesses flourished as the city grew. By 1873 Strauss had entered into partnership with Alexander Lederer. In 1876 the partners moved their millinery business to the Cooper Building on Court Avenue. They relocated to Walnut Street but returned again to Court Avenue upon the completion of 308-310 Court Avenue circa 1897. Moses Strauss and Nannie Schloss were united in marriage in Des Moines. This union subsequently resulted in Nannie's family's association with the business, the family later dropping the “c” from the spelling of their last name.

By 1873, Strauss had teamed with Alexander Lederer in the business known as Lederer & Strauss, a clothing business, at 49 Walnut Street. The two men in association with Joseph Simon also operated a

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

millinery and fancy goods retail operation at 91 Walnut Street, known as Lederer, Strauss & Co. (City directory 1973:117)

By the early 1880s, Lederer, Strauss & Co. was specializing in wholesale millinery. By this time, Des Moines' wholesalers had captured a wide-spread market. According to one source:

Wholesale houses of all kinds, sending their merchandise as far as Colorado and New Mexico. . . go far to making the city the metropolis it is. (*Souvenir Des Moines*)

A Samish had joined in the management of the business. Leon Strauss, Moses' son, served as the manager of the firm. Moses also engaged in other enterprises, including the presidency of the State Savings Bank of Des Moines from 1889 to 1911 and the construction of the Majestic Theater in Des Moines. Built in association with Carl Kahler, this amusement house was one of the finest in the city when erected in 1907. Strauss was also instrumental in organizing the first Hebrew Synagogue in Des Moines in 1876.

By 1897, the company had expanded to embrace the western portion of the 304-306 commercial block. At this time, the main entrance to the wholesale business was located in the room at 306 Court Avenue. (City directory 1898:824) In 1899, its officers included Mrs. Alexander Lederer, Morris Samish, and M. Shloss, while Morris Samish, Jr., Morris' son, served as a clerk in the business.

By the early 1900s, Lederer, Strauss & Co. employed between 50 and 300 employees; and these employment figures confirm the significance of the firm's wholesale activities and lend credence to the firm's advertised claim quoted above. The firm marketed their products under the "Landsco" label. Their success was due, in part, to their European agent, who expeditiously sent the latest Parisian millinery fashions to Des Moines for knock-off production.

Moses Strauss retired from the business in 1904, and Leon Strauss, his son, succeeded him.

By 1920, the company occupied almost the entire property at 300-310 Court Avenue. The only exception was a wholesale fruit business on the first floor of 302-304 Court. The second, third, and fourth floors of those 300-302 rooms were occupied by Lederer, Strauss & Co. By this time, the company's operations had expanded to include a wholesale leather operation (located in the 304 room).

The ownership and management of the Lederer, Strauss & Co., Inc., remained closely bound up with the Lederer, Strauss, Samish, and Shloss families. By the turn of the century, the company's ownership included Mrs. Alexander Lederer, Moses Strauss, Morris Samish, and Max Shloss. (City directory 1899) The Hiersteiner family would later become active in the business as well.

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With the passing of the older generation, younger family members assumed leadership roles in the firm. By the 1920s, Max Shloss had become its president, Morris Samish its vice president, Leon Strauss its secretary, and Sam M. Shloss, son of Max, its treasurer.

The line of family ownership and management continued. Max Shloss died in 1931, and Sam M. Shloss became the firm's president-treasurer. Each winter, Sam traveled to New York City to view current millinery fashions and bring representative examples back to Des Moines for models. (Frances Shloss informant interview) During this period, Samuel Hiersteiner served as vice-president of the firm and Morris ("Morry") Hiersteiner as its secretary. During the Great Depression, the firm cut back on its production and its workforce. The latter numbered about 80, and production was said to be limited to about 700 hats a day. These included 60 felt and 10 fabric models. (*Des Moines Register*)

Following World War II more changes occurred at the firm. The Shloss family sold the business and the building to the Hiersteiners in 1944. In May 1946, the new owners incorporated the business as the Landsco Millinery Co. This new name referenced the firm's famous line of millinery products. Sam Hiersteiner served as the firm's president and treasurer, and Morris Hiersteiner served as its vice president and secretary. Following Sam's death, Sadie M. Hiersteiner, his widow, assumed the presidency. By this time, Harry Hiersteiner had become the firm's secretary. (City directory 1954:355)

The Landsco Millinery Co. continued to manufacture and wholesale millinery goods, but the scale of their operations precluded the need for the entire Seth Richards Commercial Block. By the mid-1950s, other businesses occupied parts of it. They included the Iowa Glove & Notion Co., the Prosperity Knitwear Co., and the Des Moines Glove & Manufacturing Co. (*Ibid.*:189)

Fashions in clothing changed following World War II. Men's hats declined in popularity. Landsco, with its emphasis on millinery, weathered this threat more successfully than firms specializing in men's hats, but it too felt the lessening demand. Following the deaths of the Hiersteiner brothers, one in 1948 and the other in 1954, the firm continued operations for a few years. On June 26, 1957, the Landsco Millinery Co. notified the Iowa Secretary of State that it had formally dissolved the corporation.

The presence of the Kaplan Hat Company across the street at 307 Court Avenue is another example of Des Moines as a center for hat fabrication. The Mid-West Hat Company, located at 305 2nd Avenue, was another hat manufacturer in Des Moines during the 1940s. Elisha A. Kaplam wholesaled and jobbed hats and caps from his property at 222 2nd Avenue. (City directory 1943:1095) These firms, together with the Lederer, Strauss & Co. Inc., illustrate the universal demand for hats in America during that period of time.

As one walks into the Spaghetti Works today, a reception room was situated near the entrance. The president's office was located in the northwest corner of the building. The cash register cage, now used by Spaghetti Works, was originally the elevator cage in the building. (Marjorie Spevak and Frances Shloss informant interview)

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

ARCHITECTURE

The Seth Richards Commercial Block is architecturally significant under National Register Criterion C. It stands as one of the largest and most intact examples of Romanesque Revival-influenced commercial design in Des Moines. In its modular approach to architecture, the property is a fine example of Victorian efficiency.

The fenestration of this property illustrates most clearly the influence of Romanesque Revival styling on its design. Each of the property's three units features five sets of paired windows capped with round arches and resting on cast stone corner blocks. The arches are characteristic of the Romanesque Revival influence. This fenestration design and its repetition across the entire facade lends a pleasing rhythm to the edifice, unifies each of the units in the complex with the others, and relieves any feeling of heaviness.

The Seth Richards Commercial Block illustrates Victorian efficiency in commercial architectural design. Made up of three modular units constructed in two phases, the complex shows how a carefully designed modular prototype could be repeated *ad infinitum* along a city street. This approach to architectural design was cost effective and resulted in visual unity of the overall composition.

The modular prototype of the Seth Richards Commercial Block possesses strong vertical and horizontal features. Look at any one of the three modules. Vertical features include pilasters at each of its ends, windows symmetrically banked on top of one another from floor to floor, brick piers between the windows, and pronounced muntins between the paired windows. Horizontal features include the rhythmic movement of the window arches as they flow along the facade. This visual flow is further enhanced by the strong horizontal line of sparkling window glass set against the opaque background of the block's dark-colored brick walls, which encourages the eye to travel along the facade from right to left. Cast stone stringcourses, whose light color contrasts with that of the dark-colored brick, provide further horizontal accents to the design. All of these vertical and horizontal features combine in visual tension. The eye moves up and down and back and forth across the facade of the modular prototype. As more modules are added to the composition along the street, this visual play increases, unifying the total architectural composition.

Although its architect has not yet been identified, the design of the Seth Richards Commercial Block evinces the hand of a professional. The fact that Richards was apparently not a resident of Des Moines lends credence to the possibility that the complex was designed by an out-of-town firm. The identification of such an individual or firm might broaden the case for this property's architectural significance.

Various iron features attached to the complex are important architectural details. They include fire escapes on the north, east, and south elevations and fire shutters on several of the doors and windows on the south elevation. While these were probably required by ordinance and/or building code, the presence of these features calls attention to fire safety for this complex, particularly advisable given the

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

combustible nature of the materials stored and fabricated on its upper floors. The preservation of these features is strongly recommended.

DATES OF CONSTRUCTION

The dates of construction for the Seth Richards Commercial Block are documented by several sources.

Concerning Phase 1, the date 1889 for its beginning is documented by a cornerstone on the northeast corner of the building. "Seth Richards/1889" is faintly visible on this cast stone feature. The date 1890 for the completion of Phase 1 is documented by newspaper citations, stating that the building was under construction in 1889 and first occupied in 1890. A series of advertisements for Israel Brothers provides this documentation. These ads announce the firm's relocation from its previous premises to its new location in the Seth Richards Commercial Block. On November 22, 1889, an advertisement states that:

Israel Bros. dry goods and cloaks our stock must be sold. . . The new wholesale building is under roof and will be completed by January, and we must open our wholesale business on competition. (*Iowa State Register*, November 22, 1889)

Subsequent newspaper advertisements kept the "new wholesale building" in the public eye. Ads similar to the one quoted above appeared in the *Iowa State Register* on November 24 and December 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29, 1889, at weekly intervals. Nothing appears in that newspaper regarding the Israel Brothers until April 6th 1890, when an ad for the firm of John F. Cochran, referring to itself and the successors of Israel Brothers, announces its location at the Israel Brothers previous address at 411 Walnut. Then, on April 8, 1890, in a front page advertisement, Israel Bros. Wholesale dry goods, announces its new location at 304-306 Court Avenue. The 1890 date in the city directory confirms this fact, listing the Israel Bros. at 304-306 Court Avenue. This directory also lists Bentley & Olmsted occupying the 300-302 location.

Concerning Phase 2, city directories list K. Ginsberg, a second-hand goods merchant, occupying 310 West Court Avenue in 1891. Ginsberg remains at this location, becoming Kasel Ginsberg Furniture circa 1892, until 1897.

Prior to its move to Court Avenue, Lederer, Strauss & Co. occupied rooms on Walnut Street. (A photograph in the Paul Ashby Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines pictures these premises as a three story building.)

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

REPRESENTATION IN PREVIOUS SURVEYS

The Seth Richards Commercial Block was surveyed in 1983 as part of the "Court Avenue Historical Area Study." Sponsored in part by the City of Des Moines and written by Sylvia Raabe, this survey determined that the Seth Richards Commercial Block was "a good example of the Commercial style of the 1890s," and that its potential was good for rehabilitation or renovation. National Register criteria were not employed for this survey.

The Seth Richards Commercial Block was surveyed in 1975 as Iowa Site Inventory Number 77-020-125.16 under the direction of John Maves of the Department of Architecture at Iowa State University. That survey determined that the property was "Style: Commercial" and noted that:

Architectural Condition: C. Neutral--The structure is not of architectural significance but contributes to the general visual quality of its surrounds. [See report--Appendix II]
(Maves)

Although the Maves survey rated many extant buildings in Des Moines, it employed its own rating system rather than using National Register criteria and categories. As a result, the Maves ratings are difficult to analyze and use. This survey also provided no architectural or historical evaluations, so its completed site sheets consist solely of Maves' ratings, as exemplified above.

The Seth Richards Commercial Block was surveyed in 1983 as Iowa Site Inventory Numbers 020-882-01323-001 and 77-020-4283 by Barbara Beving Long. That survey determined that the property possessed local historical significance in the fields of commerce (wholesaling) and industry (apparel manufacturing) and for those reasons was individually eligible for nomination to the National Register under Criterion A. This survey also evaluated the building as National Register eligible under Criterion C, although a statement of eligibility was not included on the site form.

On March 16, 1994, the State Historic Society of Iowa certified the property's National Register eligibility under the name "Lederer, Strauss Building" on an Emergency 1994-1994 Iowa Site Inventory Form, inventory number 94-075E, submitted by Brent Lambi, President of I-80 Spaghetti Works Corp. of Omaha, Nebraska.

SELECTION OF HISTORIC NAME

The selection of the "Seth Richards Commercial Block" as the historic name for this property stems from archival research into its origins, as discussed above. Without exception, earlier survey and evaluations of the property have identified it--in one form or another--as the "Lederer-Strauss Building," the name of the longest and most prominent of its occupants. Because this usage has

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CFN-259-1116

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

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N. d. Private published pictorial booklet, circa 1888. Collection William C. Page.

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N. d. "Third and Court." This newspaper article and an accompanying
photograph of the Seth Richards Commercial Block appeared in the "Meet
Me on the Corner" series within the last 15 years. Courtesy Marjorie
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Long, Barbara Beving

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file at the Community Programs Bureau of the State Historical Society of
Iowa, Des Moines.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

Maves, John

1975 "306-310 Court Avenue [no name given]." Iowa Site Inventory Form on file at the Community Programs Bureau of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

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MAPS

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ORAL HISTORY

Shloss, Frances

2001 Informant interview, May 8, 2001. Sam Shloss, her father, was president of Lederer, Strauss & Co. Shloss shared information about her family and knowledge of the building, beginning in the 1920s. With William C. Page.

Spevak, Marjorie

2001 Informant interview, May 7, 2001. Sam Shloss, her father, was president of Lederer, Strauss & Co. Spevak shared information about her family and knowledge of the building, beginning in the 1920s. With William C. Page.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Alley west and adjacent and Lots 11 and 12, Block 25, Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Contains all land associated historically with the property, plus a vacated alley to the west of the building.

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Seth Richards Commercial Block
300-310 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Looking southwest
William C. Page Photographer
August 2, 2001

2. Seth Richards Commercial Block
300-310 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Looking northwest
William C. Page Photographer
August 2, 2001

3. Seth Richards Commercial Block
300-310 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Looking northeast
Detail of ghost signs, awnings, and streetscape
William C. Page Photographer
August 2, 2001

4. Seth Richards Commercial Block
300-310 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Looking southeast
William C. Page Photographer
August 2, 2001

5. Seth Richards Commercial Block
300-310 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Detail north facade
Looking east southeast
William C. Page Photographer
August 2, 2001

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Seth Richards Commercial Block, Polk County, Iowa

6. Seth Richards Commercial Block
300-310 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Detail of second and third floor windows
Looking south
William C. Page Photographer
August 2, 2001

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Seth Richards Commercial Block

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: IOWA, Polk

DATE RECEIVED: 1/27/05 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 2/23/05
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 3/10/05 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 3/12/05
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: ~~05000136~~ 01001460

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 3/11/05 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept

REVIEWER Edson Beall

DISCIPLINE History

TELEPHONE _____

DATE 3/11/05

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

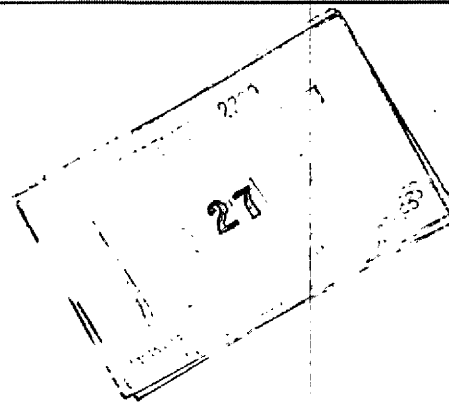
If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

STATE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY of
IOWA

A Division of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs

January 27, 2005

Carol Shull, Chief
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye Street, N.W.-- 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005



Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed is a notarized letter removing the owner objection to listing for the following property:

- Seth Richards Commercial Block, 300-310 Court Avenue, Polk County, Iowa

We look forward to the listing of this property.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Lowell Soike.

Lowell Soike, Deputy SHPO