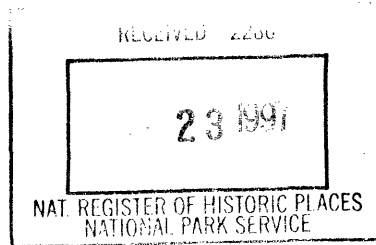


101

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Greek Orthodox Church of St. George

other names/site number Elmwood United Presbyterian Church

2. Location

street & number 1118 35th Street  N/A not for publication

city or town Des Moines  N/A vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Polk code 153 zip code 50311

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).

Patticia Ounkins 1-16-97  
Signature of certifying official/Title 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

hereby certify that the property is:

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

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Linda McClelland 2/27/97

Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

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

**Number of Resources within Property**

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

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

The Architectural Legacy of Proudfoot & Bird  
(1882-1940)

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

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/religious facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/religious facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Neo Classical Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls brick

roof asphalt

other

**Narrative Description**

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

Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Name of Property

Polk, Iowa  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

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

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

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

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

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

**B** removed from its original location.

**C** a birthplace or grave.

**D** a cemetery.

**E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

**F** a commemorative property.

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

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

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

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage/European

**Period of Significance**

1906

1930-1946

**Significant Dates:**

1906

1930

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

Proudfoot, William T. and Bird, George Washington

Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Name of Property

Polk, 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 [115] [44471010] [46052225]  
Zone Easting Northing

2 [ ]  
Zone Easting Northing

3 [ ]

4 [ ]

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 Father Peter Cade

organization Greek Orthodox Church of St. George date August 22, 1996

street & number 1118 35th Street telephone (515) 277-0780

city or town Des Moines state IA zip code 50311

#### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the complete 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 Parish of Greek Orthodox Church of St. George

street & number 1118 35th Street telephone 1-515-277-0780

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50311

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

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

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

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George**  
Polk County, Iowa

### Architectural Description:

#### Exterior Description:

St. George Greek Orthodox Church (constructed in 1906, changed to Greek Orthodox faith 1930) is an exceptionally well preserved example of a turn-of-the century Neo Classical suburban church. The portico design is based on the Parthenon in the Athenian Acropolis. The remainder of the building reflects a Beaux Arts stylistic influence. The church is a single story temple front structure with full basement. It occupies a corner lot, equivalent in size to four houseslots (55' x 155'). An associated frame rectory formerly stood north of the church. A parking lot occupies it's site. A parish hall (1981) adjoins the church to the south. It's site was originally lawn.

Eight broad steps rise to the large classical portico and the double wooden doors of this church, memorable for its Neo Classical styling. Four monumental, fluted columns and a temple form entablature and pediment dominate the east facade of this modest but gracefully proportioned building which is basically a one story brick rectangular box on a raised basement. Other Neo Classical elements, such as the semi-circular Roman arch are also used. Bold, staggered quoins, constructed of the same mottled brown brick as the body of the building create bold shadows, visually balance the large columns and bring the other sides of the building into a total composition which is, none the less, dominated by the 35th Street "Greek temple" facade.

Many typical Neo Classical revival elements contribute to the total composition of the portico of St. George's. These elements follow the Doric order, here rendered in wood, and resemble basic elements of the facade of the Parthenon in Athens, 438 BC, the supreme example of the Doric order. The Doric is the earliest and most restrained of the classical orders. The columns on St. George's are tapered and have no base, typical of the Grecian Doric. The two outside columns (an addition) rest on concrete blocks which make an elevated platform or plinth. A second row of columns is architecturally suggested by two fluted wood pilasters against the brick exterior wall. The columns are 12'-4" in height measured from the bottom to the top of the abacus, and 2'-3" in diameter at the base. The proportions of width to height of the column are distinctly Grecian Doric. The size of capital relative to the size of the column shaft as well as the 20 shallow flutes with intermediate sharp arises also typify the Grecian Doric style. The column capitals have echinus moldings and a large square abacus above each. The entablature above the column capital consists of the architrave, the frieze and cornice also with typical Grecian Doric elements. The architrave on St. George's is very plain, as on the Parthenon, however here it is small in proportion to the frieze above it. The frieze is calibrated with regularly spaced triglyphs, rectangular blocks with three vertical elements, for its length with guttae, the small peg-like projections below each triglyph. Above each triglyph is a mutule, a flat slab-like feature on the underside of a Doric cornice. The wooden

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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George**  
**Polk County, Iowa**

cornice projects out beyond the frieze for almost 2' continuing around the sides of the building and across the back (the west facade), now interrupted by an addition which extended the sacristy space. It now has a 1/2 round rain gutter at its outer edge, although original drawings show built-in gutters.

While the Greek temples were as much sculpture as they were buildings, they were not intended to be places of worship or seats of government. They were shrines and important sites for sacrifice and ceremony. None the less, this form has inspired ecclesiastical, residential and institutional buildings of all types. The double entry door has a stone sill, broad wooden consoles, a Doric entablature above it with an acroterion in the form of acanthus leaves on each side of it and a stylized acanthus leaf ornamental motif at the top of the subtly pedimented entablature. Flanking each side of the door are tall art glass windows surrounded by a single row of bricks in a Roman arch shape with a brick keystone effect and limestone sills. The low, wide brick walls flanking the main steps are capped with limestone which continues at the same elevation around the building as a water table. A catalog purchased iron rail, original to the building extends from the pilasters to the outside columns. Iron rails on the steps appear to have been added at some later date.

Exterior walls are constructed entirely of brick with finish plaster on the interior. There is a limestone cornerstone set in the northwest corner of the building just below the limestone water table, with the date 1906. Some words, presumably *Elmwood United Presbyterian Church*, have been plastered over with concrete. Five major windows are regularly spaced along both the north and south sides of the church, recessed in brick-arched openings with articulated brick keystones. These windows have the proportions of classical Roman architecture and define the nave space from the exterior of the church. They are large in proportion to solid wall surface and are filled with leaded art glass, providing light and drama to the nave. Surface richness on both the side facades is achieved by the detailed brick work: wide quoins, articulated keystones, thrust blocks, arches, recesses and pilasters. the mortar used in the original building was colored to match the brick color. The south side facade is no longer entirely visible because of the 1981 addition. the bulk of the addition however has been set away from the south facade, which can still be seen from the back of the church. Basement windows below each of the main windows originally had window wells but have been replaced by much smaller windows and the window wells filled in.

The addition to the west to expand the sacristy is a shed style which extends the pitch of the west-facing hip roof. Sympathetic design was attempted by repeating the alternating brick quoins of the original building and extending the limestone water table. The brick type is not the same and mortar color is a poor match. No attempt was made to repeat a cornice element.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George**  
Polk County, Iowa

## **Roof Structure:**

According to original building plans, two major trusses formed from multiple 8"x 10" wood members run north-south, defining the edges of the square within which the circular dome is created. These major trusses also establish the approximately 4:5 pitch of the main roof, which then extends east and west as a hip roof. Two secondary trusses run east-west between the larger trusses also framing the dome area and supporting 2x8 rafters between the truss and the ridge and 2x6 rafters between the truss and the outside wall. The ceiling is then suspended from this roof construction. A plaster cove extends around the perimeter of the nave on all sides. Plaster moldings form the base of the dome, with recessed fluorescent lighting above. Wood molding further defines the square area within which the circular dome rises.

## **Interior Description:**

The architects' layout design amounts to a miniature version of the First Methodist Church in Des Moines, combining then-contemporary interior architectural plan features with a small and functional church plan.

### **The Sanctuary-Main Floor:**

The overall interior measurement is 37 feet by 58 feet. The entryway and pulpit areas reduce the longitudinal dimension to approximately 45 feet. The key characteristics of the nave are its ten evenly spaced side windows, its sloped floor, its coved ceiling treatment and the recessed central dome. Each of these is well preserved. The original Greek Revival door trimwork, defined as a square-cut projection of the header and raked sides, is found in all original door openings. Woodwork from the removed parlor door was reincorporated into the framing of a viewing window in the southeast corner of the nave. The original east wall double-door entrance survives with its original interior trimwork. A plain cut broad baseboard, has been largely painted or removed.

The coved ceiling treatment rounds out the upper lines of all four walls. The wall surface is projected forward from the main wall plane, but does not intrude into the attic space above the ceiling.

The side windows, ten in number, are comprised of art glass in lead frames. The lowermost sash pivots open for ventilation. The southern windows depict landscapes from the life of Christ, those on the north trace the parable of the sower.

The original sloped floor descends approximately two feet from east to west. The original flooring survives. Semi-circular support beams are surmounted by a combination of angled and straight-set joists to produce a floor surface that

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Polk County, Iowa**

evenly supports the curved wooden pews. The surface flooring is laid longitudinally. The original seating pattern combined three pew lengths to produce two aisles in addition to two side aisles. The pews have been rearranged to produce a broader central aisle and two side aisles. A rounded and raised pulpit remains at the front of the nave.

The dome has nicely served the purposes of each successive congregation. A projecting square-cut base measures 24.5 feet on each of its sides. Its surface first contained rows of individual light fixtures, set one foot apart. Four corner ventilation grills utilize superimposed wheel motifs which are set into rounded triangular spaces. The rounded base of the dome has a diameter of 21.5 feet and an overall recessed depth at center of seven feet. Originally, but no longer, the dome's recessed interior surface featured a painted motif. A massive central chandelier is centered beneath the dome on triangulated horizontal support cables. Four smaller corner chandeliers, placed at each corner of the dome, surround the main light. All of these date from the Greek Orthodox period of ownership of the church. The original plans called for a pattern of recessed ceiling panels around the dome, but these were not executed.

The original entryway consisted of a central entryway (measuring nine feet wide and eight feet deep) and was flanked by a matching parlor and a pastor's study (each being nearly thirteen feet in width). Side doors at each corner of the nave linked the two front side rooms and the nave. Paired central doors led from the entryway into the nave. Replacement aluminum framed glass doors have replaced the original materials. The parlor and entryway have been merged into a single room narthex and this space connects to a stairway-hall which leads south into the fellowship center and to the basement of the church.

The original church pulpit featured a square-cut recessed rear area that served the Presbyterian liturgy, with formal bench seating set against the rear or west wall, as well as space for a free-standing organ and altar. A choir room stands to the immediate north of the pulpit area, reached from the pulpit area and by a side door off of the nave. Similarly, another door located south of the pulpit area leads from the nave to a stair hall that communicates to the attic and to the basement. The flanking side walls which surround the pulpit and altar area are slightly angled, further reducing the angularity of the nave. The ceiling dome also has the effect of "rounding out" the feeling of the nave. The liturgical needs of the Greek Orthodox service required the addition of an *iconostasis* or icon screen across the front of the pulpit and altar area. In 1983 a centered rear addition added a domed chapel or backdrop to the altar area. The paintings on this new wall date from 1986.



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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Polk County, Iowa**

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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George**  
**Polk County, Iowa**

**The Integrity of the St. George Greek Orthodox Church Interior:**

The original nave, with its key features remains today virtually intact. The original windows, many of which retain the names of their original donors. The structured pulpit-altar area remains untouched as does the choir area and the pastor's study. The original ceiling with its majestic dome survives and only the decoration and lighting arrangement have been changed. Relatively minor interior changes include the replacement of the interior entry nave entry doors and the removal of the door and wall which separated the entryway and parlor. The trimwork from this door was reused in the Narthex viewing window.

The rich visual arrangement of icons and furnishings which are integral to the liturgical needs of the church have been carefully superimposed on and within the original interior surfaces and space with few structural changes. Most of the Greek Orthodox components take the form of furniture rather than structural alteration. The original Greek Orthodox changes are well preserved with the exception of the upper decorative elements of the iconostasis, which were removed to allow for the viewing of the new *Platytera* (Holy Mother and Child representation) which is behind and above that screen.

**The Basement:**

The lower level beneath the nave is a structural clear span save for eight square wooden columns which are arranged in two semi-circular rows to bear the ten by twelve inch thick wooden beams which support the floor above. The present basement area is open in plan save for a kitchen area. The ceiling has been dropped and insulated. The new ceiling surface slopes downward towards the west end of the basement, reflecting the sloped nave floor above. Five half-sized basement windows set into each of the sidewalls, match the window cadence of the main floor above.

The original basement plan went through some plan revisions prior to construction. A turned stair hall (two flights with landing) set in the southwest or rear-left corner was eliminated to provide for a mens' bathroom, and a straight run of stairs was set against the west wall, leading both upstairs and to a southwest corner side entrance. The dark varnish on this stairway woodwork is original. The fuel room was similarly reduced to allow for a womens' bathroom in the northwest corner of the plan. The west one-third of the basement area was subdivided using non-load bearing stud walls into a kitchen area and this room remains. Originally, a short centered hall divided the kitchen and two rectangular rooms to the south. These were to have served as a mens' locker room and bathroom and a second kitchen. These rooms have been removed. In the original plan, a west basement entryway and exterior stairway entered the

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George**  
**Polk County, Iowa**

basement. The 1986 rear addition eliminated this entrance. A southeast corner hall entrance connects the basement and fellowship center to the south. Stairs in that hall connect upstairs.

**The Attic:**

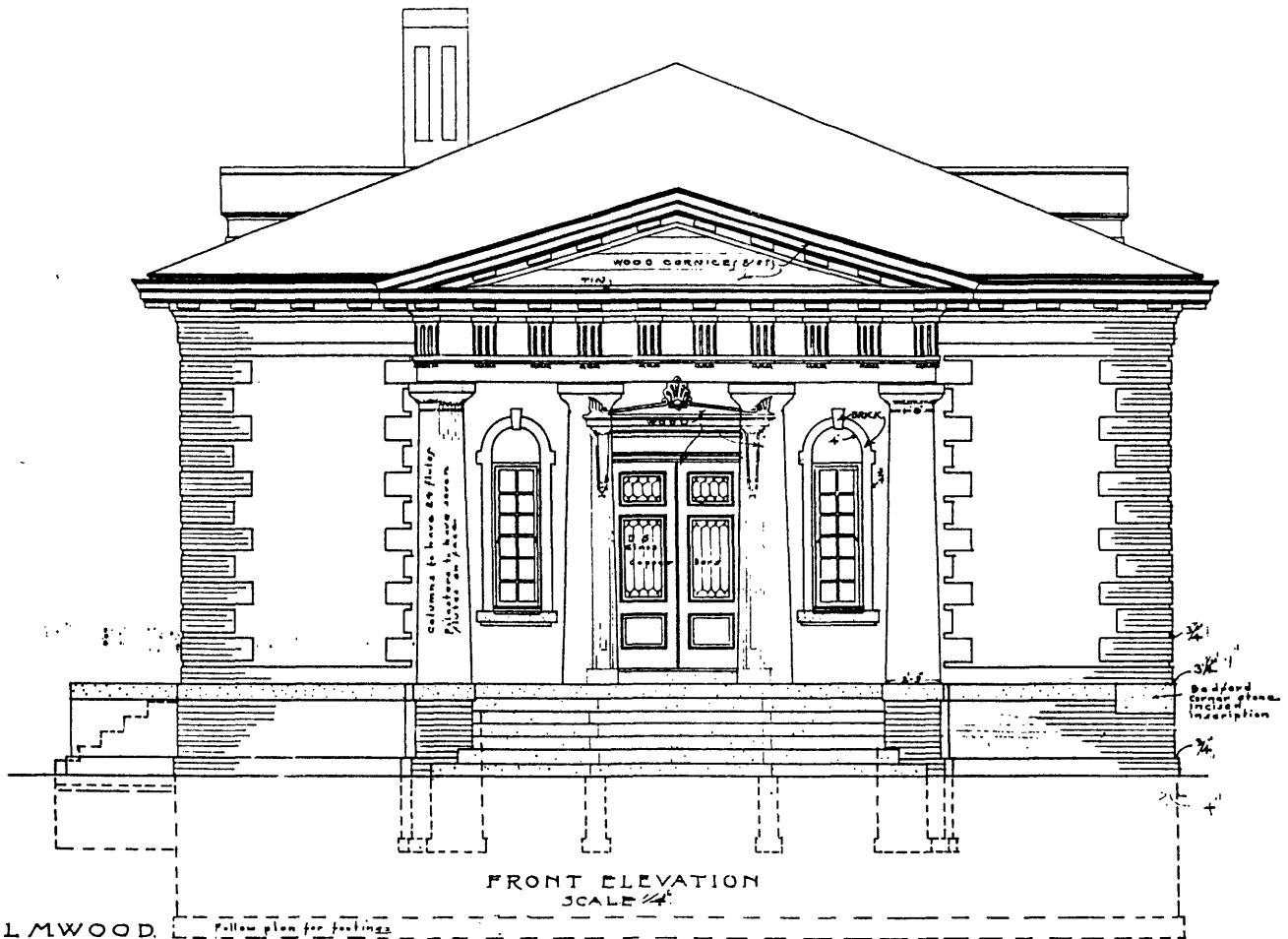
The attic space was not inspected apart from the building plans. It contains an intersecting truss system and the dome. The attic space is defined by the building's shallow pitched hipped roof and the dome fills most of the resulting attic space. The weight of the roof structure that creates the nave's clear-span below is borne by two primary trusses which run laterally across the building plan, flanking the dome on its east and west sides. These trusses are composed of beams which are eight by twelve inches in section (six eight by two members in combination). Two longitudinal trusses appear to be suspended by their upper chords beneath the primary trusses, flanking the north and south sides of the dome. These members bear the weight of the nave's ceiling and joists. Two smaller lateral trusses, also working in compression, straddle these trusses and support the dome itself. The effect of this arrangement is the nesting of three different pairs of trusses to support the whole, and to allow for a clearspan below. Attic entry is gained via the southwest stair hall by means of a hatch and ladder. Originally, a passive ventilation system utilized three evenly spaced roof dormer vents set along the southern roof plane. Battens to open and close these vents were controlled by a cord and pulley system from the choir room and interior air was drawn out of the ceiling grills around the base of the dome and through the dormer windows. Air conditioning has replaced this system..

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Polk County, Iowa



ELMWOOD. Follow plan for footings.  
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH.  
DES MOINES, IOWA.

PROVDFOOT & BIRD.  
ARCHITECT/  
DES MOINES, IOWA.  
DRAWING NO. 425

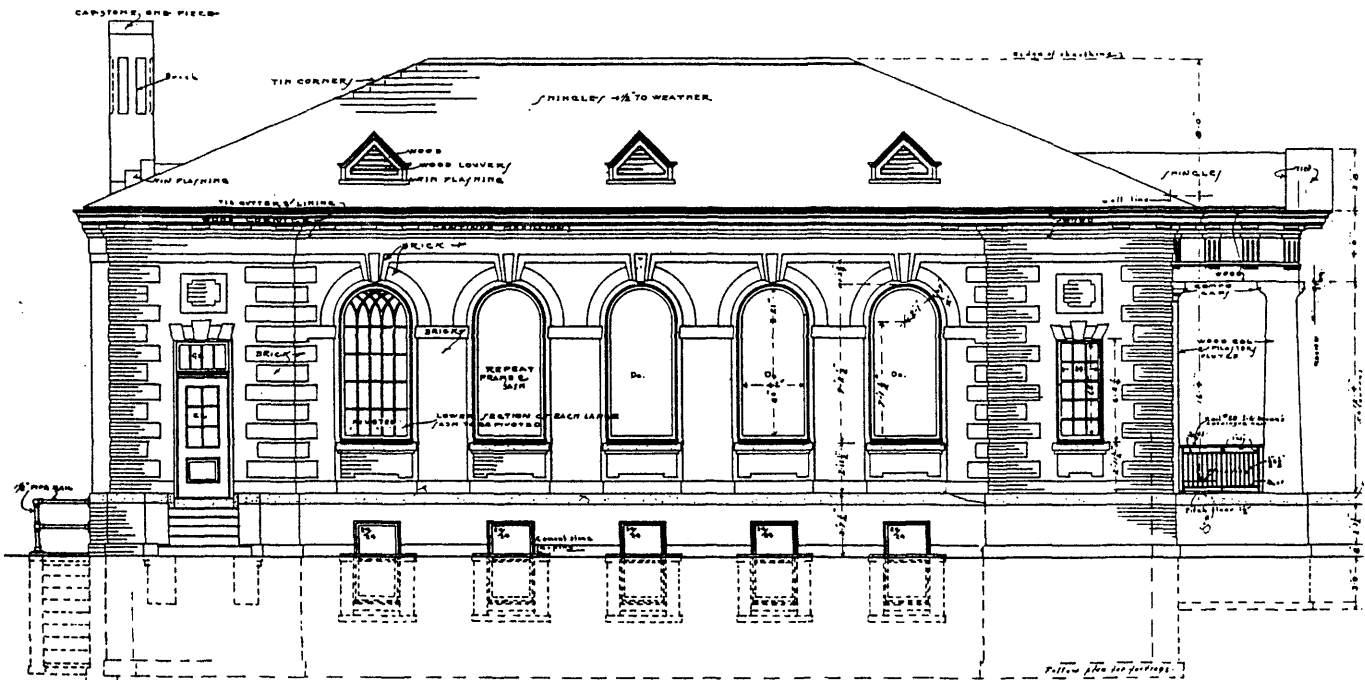
Proudfoot and Bird. Elmwood Presbyterian Church. Original architectural plans,  
Brooks Borg Skiles, Architects and Engineers, Des Moines Iowa.

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The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Polk County, Iowa



SOUTH ELEVATION  
SCALE 1/4"

INDEX:

	BRICK
	FRAME
	STONE
	PLASTER

ELMWOOD  
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN

Proudfoot and Bird. Elmwood Presbyterian Church. Original architectural plans,  
Brooks Borg Skiles. Architects and Engineers, Des Moines Iowa.

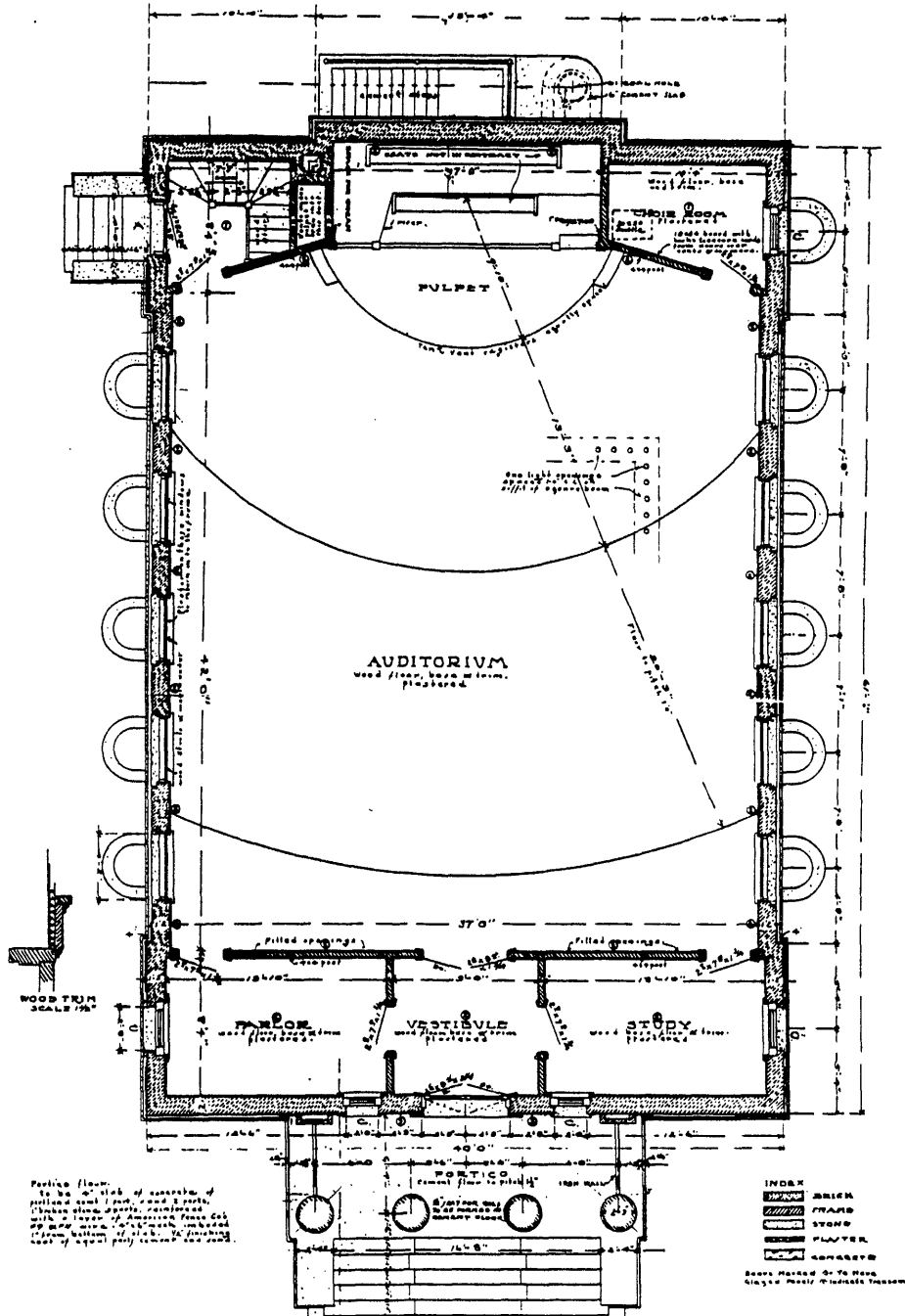
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The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Polk County, Iowa

Proudfoot and Bird. Elmwood Presbyterian Church. Original architectural plans,  
Brooks Borg Skiles, Architects and Engineers, Des Moines Iowa.



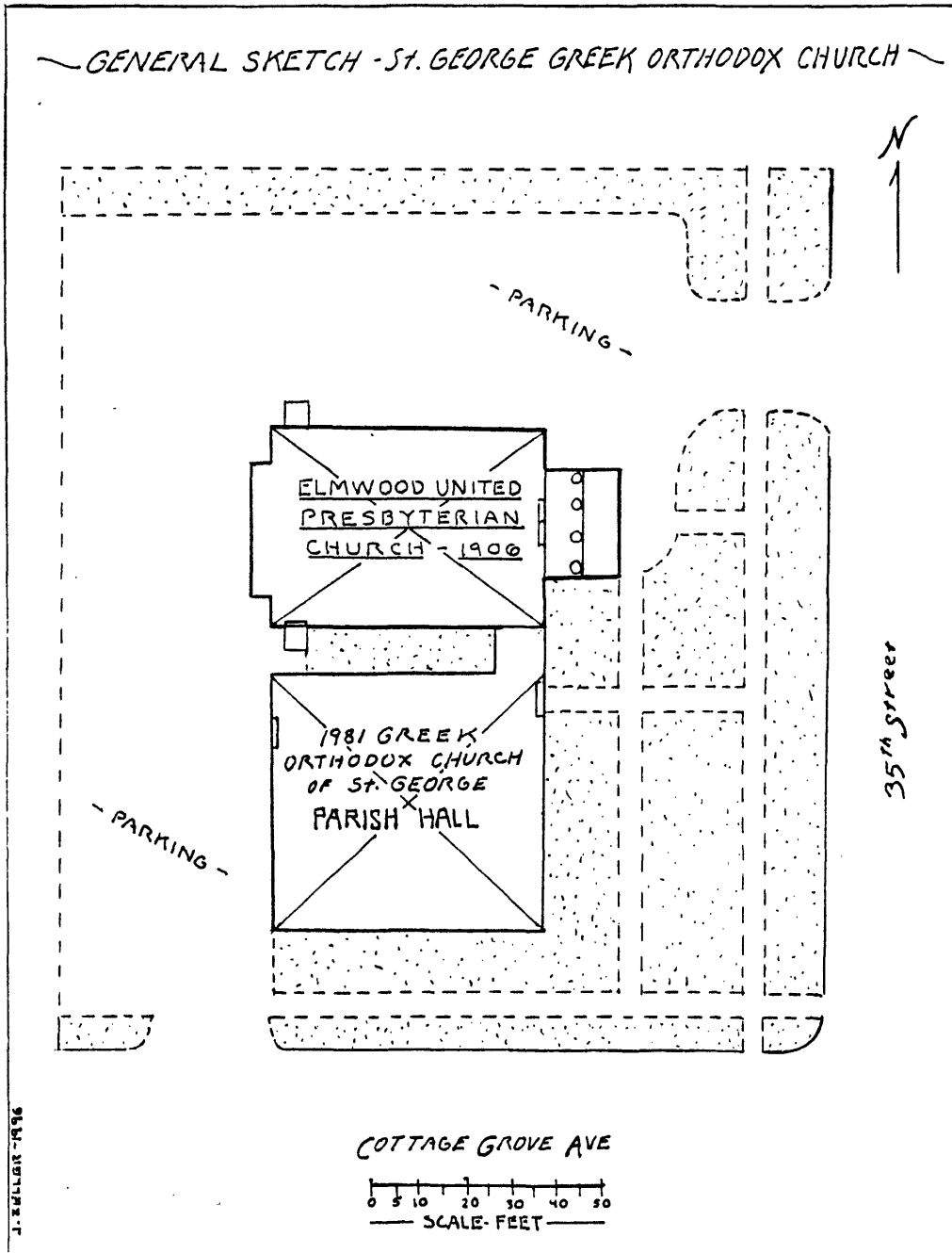
Architects Floorplan, Church Building Main Floor, 1906

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Polk County, Iowa



Site Plan, St. George Greek Orthodox Church, 1996

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
Polk County, Iowa

## Historical Significance:

The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George in Des Moines qualifies for National Register status under Criterion "A" for its association with the settlement and life of Greek-Americans. It is also significant under Criterion "C" because it represents a small-scale church design by the noted Des Moines architectural firm of Proudfoot and Bird. Its combined historical and architectural significance satisfy Criteria Consideration "A" regarding religious properties. This building has served the Greek Orthodox faith since 1930.

## The Design of Original Church Building:

The original (Elmwood Presbyterian) church was designed by one of Iowa's most important architectural firms. The design of the Church is unique in the work of the architects. Its use of Greek temple porch of archaeologically correct proportions was used only this one time in their work. The Doric frieze was used again for the Law library at the University of Iowa in Gilmore Hall (1908). They applied this Doric porch to a rectangular form with Beaux Arts style details. The firm usually employed the Ionic order for most of their work during the first ten years of this century.

Proudfoot and Bird considered themselves part of the American Renaissance tradition. The American Renaissance is the American version of the French Beaux Arts tradition. This tradition uses the great body of classical and Renaissance architecture as a source for structures, and uses its details as an architectural language. The church building, though a simple example, exhibits some of the high-style characteristics of the Beaux Arts tradition. Their most notable buildings in this tradition are Polk County Courthouse, Beardshear Hall at Iowa State University, and First Methodist Church, Des Moines.

There are two aspects of the design for this church which reveal its American Renaissance or Beaux Arts origins. A French example for comparison is the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Marseilles, France published in *Monographies de Batiements Modernes*, a periodical Proudfoot and Bird had in their own library. The first aspect of the Beaux Arts design is the emphasis of the corners of the facade. They are differentiated from the arched nave wall by means of slightly raised brick work outlined by rows of vertical quoins. The windows in these bays are smaller and of a different design than that used for the arched windows. Also, string courses which join the arched windows do not extend into these end "pavilions." First Methodist Church in Des Moines is an example of a fully developed building in the Beaux Arts classical style, and they were constructing it at the same time they were working on this church design. However different these two churches may



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George**  
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seem, they do have some things in common. Both use the same corner 'pavilion' device at the corners of their facades. Polk County Courthouse reveals probably the most emphasized design of an ending or corner pavilion.

The series of arched windows on the side facades reflects the Beaux Arts tradition as well. There were many examples of this in Proudfoot and Bird's French architecture books. Proudfoot and Bird used a facade composition of a series of arches on the front and back facades of Polk County Courthouse and for Seerley Hall at the University of Northern Iowa, both buildings in a similar Beaux Arts classical style.

The use of an interior dome is not without precedent as well. The form of the inner dome fits into the hipped roof and is not visible from the outside. There is again a similarity with the inner dome of First Methodist Church. The dome of First Methodist rises high above the church, but it has two lobes below the glass shell which fit, more or less, beneath the roof.

**Proudfoot and Bird's Churches, 1882-1906:**

Early in their careers Proudfoot and Bird designed a number of churches which are of interest because of their diverse and inventive designs. They did not design very many churches in their prodigious output, but the few they did design are special and reveal the architect's way of working. Each church was designed to serve the needs and tastes of the congregation that built them. They were not "stock" designs by the firm, but rather each was an individual production. They have widely different plans and styles, but there is always a concern that an attractive structure be constructed that fit the resources and size of the congregation. A pleasing and functional interior which worked well in terms of natural light and traffic pattern, etc., was carefully worked out and paired with an exterior which would give the building some distinction and pride to the congregation.

One of the firm's earliest known commissions was First Methodist Church in Huron, South Dakota, 1883. A second church, followed in 1885, First Methodist Church, (non extant), in Indianola, Iowa, 1885. Indianola was Proudfoot's hometown. These churches exhibit characteristics of the late Victorian Gothic style of the period that is composed of picturesque massing of diverse elements (towers, protruding wings, window variety, surface textures). Four more churches were designed between 1889 and 1906 after Proudfoot and Bird had returned to Des Moines. The first two are different versions of the Gothic style mixed with diverse elements from other styles and periods. St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Harlan, Iowa, 1898, exhibits a turn of the century version of carpenter Gothic and an unusual plan incorporating a chapel and a main nave set at right angles to each other. Trinity (First) Presbyterian Church, Indianola, Iowa, 1900, is a charming mix of Gothic, Romanesque and Victorian elements with an exterior which employs various textures and colors of brick.

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The second two churches are explorations in the Classical style. Both were constructed in Des Moines in 1906. One, First Methodist, is grandly Classical Revival. The other, St. George, is archaeologically correct Greek Revival mixed with Beaux Arts elements. A comparison of these two churches is instructive as it reveals the many elements Proudfoot and Bird worked with to achieve a successful church for a particular client.

Although both First Methodist church and St. George employ the classical style they are vastly different. First Methodist follows a grand Beaux Arts Classical model with an Ionic style porch. It was designed for a well-established congregation with the resources to build a substantial facility. The church is large in size and constructed of Bedford limestone. It has a large dome with an inner dome of stained glass. The sanctuary is square and decorated with eight Ionic columns in stone. St. George, in contrast, is constructed in brick and uses the Doric style for its porch. It has a simple, rectangular plan and a plain plaster interior with a minimum of decorative mill work.

However different these two churches may seem, they do have some things in common. As already stated in the discussion of the this church, for instance, both have the corner pavilion device and interior domes. Both churches employ the use of stained glass, but in different ways. First Methodist has its interior glass dome, but St. George has its beautiful arched windows painted with landscape scenes which incorporate the scenes from the life of Christ and others. Proudfoot and Bird always strove to give their buildings distinction and a beautiful interior whether grand or simple, and this is especially true for their churches.

Proudfoot and Bird, became Iowa's pre-eminent architectural firm for 30 years. They designed over 800 building before 1940. Buildings by the firm include major structures on all three state university campuses, Polk County Courthouse, Jasper County Courthouse, and Dallas County Courthouse. In Des Moines they designed First Methodist Church, The Flynn Building, Hotel Ft. Des Moines, the Equitable Building, the Hubbell Building, the Liberty Building, the Des Moines Building, Iowa-Des Moines National Bank, Drake field house, the Tribune Building, Roosevelt and East high schools, and many others. The building under consideration satisfies registration requirements set forth in the multiple property document prepared by Barbara Long entitled "The Architectural Legacy of Proudfoot & Bird 1892-1940."

**The Suburban Church Movement and the Construction of this church building:**

St. George Church, located at 35th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, was constructed in 1906 as Elmwood Presbyterian Church. It was the first downtown Des Moines church to move to the undeveloped western areas of Des Moines, pioneering the migration of many other downtown churches in the 1920's.

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Des Moines churches in the 1860s and 1870s were scattered about downtown. In the 1870s, Court Avenue, just above the Rock Island Railroad tracks, was the wholesale district. One block north of Court Avenue was Walnut Street the primary retail avenue. These two streets connected the east and west sides of town. Some churches remained within the business district, but most found sites one block north on Locust Street or farther to the north on Grand Avenue and High Street.

By the 1880s additional Des Moines River bridges had been built on Locust and Grand Avenues, and the consequent large-scale commercial development among these major streets forced these churches to move farther north to High and Chestnut streets.

High Street ran along the base of a hill bordering on a large residential area later known as the "Near Northside," demolished for urban renewal in the 1960s. This region was made up of a mixture of double houses, row houses and modest single-family homes, along with a few scattered older mansions positioned to overlook downtown. The Near Northside was also the most racially, ethnically and religiously mixed of the emerging residential neighborhoods. Immigrants from Germany (Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Jews) lived amidst Irish and African-Americans. Every workday hundreds of Near Northsiders took the short walk to downtown, crossing a corridor of religious buildings along High Street that separated their home and work lives.

Along High and Chestnut Streets from Tenth Street to Sixth Avenue stood the eight looming spires of "Piety Hill." The scattered downtown congregations of the 1870s (Methodist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Christian and Judaic) had by the 1880s consolidated into this impressive ecclesiastical district. Piety Hill became a famous attraction for visitors to the city, exceeded in popularity only by the State Capital (today, among collections of postcards of early Des Moines, scenes of the Eight Spires are a common category).

Today, only four of these congregations remain downtown, and only two in their original structures. By the 1920s affluent members of the downtown churches were moving to the western edges of the city as automobile ownership opened large areas unserved by the streetcar line to residential development. Downtown churches soon followed their parishioners west. But in 1906, the automobile was still in its infancy, and this church served as a pioneer of the suburban church movement.

The first churches to spring up beyond downtown were brand-new congregations formed by neighbors in the new communities. Most of these neighborhoods in the 1880s were still outside of the city limits of Des Moines. These new suburban communities of North Des Moines, Greenwood Park, Sevastopol, University Place and Capital Park were all swallowed up by the city in a general annexation in 1890. Each of these communities had grown up around the extending street car lines. Each line extended to an attractive terminus which fostered the building of homes and businesses within a narrow corridor along its way.

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New colleges became the nucleus for the streetcar suburbs, often these private schools were partly funded by land sales near their campuses. Drake University, founded in 1881, was a magnet for migration to University Place. Des Moines University, at 17th and Pleasant streets provided an aura of culture to Brown's Addition (later called Sherman Hill) until 1884 when the college was enticed by developers in North Des Moines to disassemble its brick building and reassemble it in that new suburb at the end of the Sixth Street car line. In 1889 Highland Park College provided the terminus for streetcar traffic to newly developed Highland Park. On the east side, the Danish College (now Grand View College) was founded in 1895 and anchored the East Ninth Streetcar Line.

The earliest church to emerge in the new suburbs was Grace Methodist Church, which was built in 1885 in Brown's Addition, at 19th and Crocker streets. (Crocker Street, now Cottage Grove Avenue, ran along the old Fort Dodge Stage Coach route and became the University Street Car Line to Drake University.)

Grace Methodist was a model for subsequent suburban churches in Des Moines. First an general awareness developed that these new neighborhoods needed churches. The Des Moines Register asked in 1884 how these new homes could project respectability when their new owners failed to build churches to serve the community. On the practical side, most people walked to church in those days, and the trek downtown was being stretched to the limit, especially for getting small children to Sunday School. The immediate solution was to organize Sunday schools in the suburbs where the kids could be dropped off on the way to church. These Sunday schools grew and gathered the allegiances of the parents. They soon hired ministers and held services in temporary quarters like storefronts and tents. After a couple of years frame church buildings were constructed, to be followed in ten to fifteen years with a brick or stone structure on the same site. All three earliest west-side suburban churches, Grace Methodist (1885), University Christian Church (now First Christian Church) at 25th Street and University Avenue (1891) and Sixth Presbyterian Church (now Cottage Grove Presbyterian Church) at 24th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue (1889) all followed this pattern of development, and all along the same street car line.

These three churches grew quickly, retired their mortgages early and built larger quarters. West Side Protestant churches prospered because they found new members who were willing to trade a denominational allegiance for the convenience of attending a neighborhood church, and the social prominence to belong to a large and successful congregation.

The west side's experience of a few large prosperous churches contrasts with the poorer east side, where many small churches were built at that time. East side Des Moines was dominated by ethnic minority groups. The orthodox Jewish, Croatian, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish enclaves built small churches to serve their wide variety of religious traditions. Also, African-Americans living on the west side near Bird's Run Creek (Now Keosauqua Way) also attended many small churches.

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The more ethnically homogenous and prosperous west suburbs supported large impressive churches. These churches grew in size and social prominence to rival the grand dames of Piety Row. In spite of the rapid growth of Des Moines' western suburbs during the 1890's, no new churches were built until 1906 when this church was constructed at 35th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue.

By 1905, *The Des Moines Register and Leader* was referring directly to the "suburban church movement". At that point the established downtown churches were not yet directly threatened by these new congregations. (But smaller downtown denominations, such as the United Presbyterian and the Episcopal churches competed with the large Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran and mainline Presbyterian congregations to attract suburban homeowners to affiliate with their brand of neighborhood church). Subsequently, these smaller affiliations built "mission churches." These smaller structures were built by the national or state church organizations, supported by the downtown affiliate in order of attract members among the new suburbanites.

The Episcopal Church in Des Moines accomplished this in 1906 by authorizing the formation of St. Luke's Parish Mission Church in North Des Moines. Contributions for this venture were raised in Sunday collections at St. Paul's Episcopal Church at Ninth and High Streets. Later when it became apparent that its congregation was moving to new homes on the west side, the church literally chased after its parishioners. In 1926 the old church building (non-extant) was physically relocated and moved west two miles to 34th Street and Forest Avenue.

Like the Des Moines' Episcopalians, the numbers of United Presbyterians were too few to supply a ready congregation for a new suburban church. Nationally, the United Presbyterian Church had about half the membership of the mainline Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. United Presbyterians held conservative views, not allowing the singing of hymns since they did not appear in the Bible, allowing only the singing of the Psalms. However by the turn of the century church music had become very important for the success of a church congregation. Many churches in the 1890's were abandoning the long apse and center aisle of their older structures for new churches with auditorium seating to better appreciate larger church choirs and powerful pipe organs. The westside suburban churches; Grace Methodist, Sixth Presbyterian and University Christian all rebuilt their churches with auditorium seating.

Des Moines had then three small United Presbyterian churches and of these the Second United Presbyterian Church was the most strict, having broken away in the 1890s in protest of musical accompaniment and the selling of pews. Located on Sixth Avenue in an area being taken over by 1900 to commercial development and rental properties, the parish was not well situated for growth. As the parish's membership rolls declined, the church sought help from the Iowa Presbytery, which decided to close that church and open a new church in the west edge of town.

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In 1905 local United Presbyterians and the Iowa Anti-Saloon League joined in recruiting the Rev. J. R. McQuiston to Des Moines from Ohio. Reverend McQuiston soon became allied with Mrs. Henry C. Wallace of the prominent Des Moines family of Wallace's Farmer Magazine. Mrs. Wallace's father-in-law, "Uncle Henry," was renowned as a vibrant United Presbyterian preacher.

The history of the original church is intertwined with the Wallace family. Henry C. Wallace (who would be U. S. Secretary of Agriculture under Presidents Harding and Coolidge) headed the building committee and his son Henry A. (future Vice President of the United States) was married in this church on May 20, 1914. The north side stained glass windows, which depict the Parable of the Sower, reflect the Wallace family's love of agriculture.

Reverend McQuiston organized a Sunday school in the summer of 1905 that met in Elmwood Grade School at 31st Street and University Avenue. The school's name was borrowed for the new church. A missionary society was formed in 1905, along with an option on land at the present site.

This initiative impressed the Presbytery of the United Presbyterian Church, who in their annual meeting, in Chariton, Iowa, voted to dissolve the charter of the failing Second Presbyterian Church, sell the building and land on Sixth Avenue and build a new \$12,000 church and \$3,500 parsonage. The presbytery also voted to purchase the vacant lots to the north of the church for resale.

In 1906 the site was at the extreme western edge of Des Moines residential neighborhoods. During the summer months, the street car continued farther west one mile to Waveland Park golf course, but during the rest of the year the University Line rolled to its final stop immediately in front of this church.

For the next ten years this building remained the westernmost church in Des Moines. In 1916 the Waveland Park Congregationalist Society erected the Waveland Park Chapel (extant as a lodge hall) seven blocks farther west, on 42nd St. (The city's expansion to the west had slowed during the teens because the new popularity of the automobile allowed the filling in of closer-in areas that had been bypassed by the street car lines.) As the first downtown church to move to the suburbs, in fact, beyond existing neighborhood, the Elmwood Presbyterian congregation made a bold move to attract pioneer homeowners to the United Presbyterian fold.

On May 10, 1906 ground was broken for the new church. This event coincided with the national convention of the Womens General Missionary Society of the United Presbyterian Church, meeting in downtown Des Moines. The lady delegates adjourned early that day and rode specially provided street cars to the building site. They were greeted by the Reverend McQuiston, and Home Secretary Mrs. H. T. Campbell of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania turned the first spadeful of dirt for what became one of the most successful "mission church" projects in the country.

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The parish hired the most prestigious architectural firm in Des Moines and erected the building in a mere six months, dedicating the church on November 11, 1906.

In its report of the dedication service, the *Register and Leader* praised the building's design, "The structure departs from the conventional Gothic in its style of architecture and adopts a pleasing combination of Doric and Roman styles. The portico with its fluted columns of white stone [actually painted wood] stands out strongly against the dark brown of the vitrified brick, of which the body of the building is made, and the rounded arches of the windows fit superbly into the scheme of the construction."

The first prayer in the new church was delivered at a gala fraternal dedication service on Nov. 11, 1906 by the Wallace family's proud patriarch, "Uncle Henry." The fraternal service was presided over by Charles S. Medbury, pastor of University Christian Church and dean of the College of Divinity, Drake University, along with a dozen local clergymen. The next day's *Register and Leader* enthused, "...to build for itself a \$12,000 home at the end of ten months of organization is the unusual, not to say unique, record of the Elmwood Presbyterian Church which was dedicated yesterday at the corner of 35th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue."

The story further reported that the visiting clergy "...pointed out that there was great need for a church at just this place, in the center of a populous and growing residence district of high class with no place of worship closer than three-quarters of a mile."

The movement of downtown Des Moines churches to the suburbs became a stampede in the Twenties. Plymouth Congregational Church moved to 42nd Street and Ingersoll Avenue in 1927, leaving behind a beautiful and substantial Romanesque-style building of rusticated stone with a commanding tower. This structure was demolished after standing only twenty years. Christian Scientist moved to 38th Street and Grand Avenue in 1932 and Central Presbyterian Church became its neighbor across Grand in 1938. The Temple B'nai Jeshurun moved to Grand Avenue and 51st Street in 1931. Even churches in the near suburbs headed further west, such as St. Luke's move to 34th Street and Forest Avenue in 1927. In the same year Grace Methodist abandoned their second church building built in 1901 at 19th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue for a church building at 37th and Cottage Grove.

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A big factor in promoting the ecclesiastical rush to the suburbs in the Twenties was the tremendous new popularity of the Gothic church style. The period of popularity of classical-style Des Moines churches with auditorium-style seating, pillars and porticos, domes or Romanesque massiveness lasted a mere twenty years, being quickly replaced by affluent congregations with suburban Gothic structures.

Few classical-style church buildings of Des Moines survive. The two best remaining examples are St. George Orthodox (f.k.a. Elmwood Presbyterian) and First Methodist at Tenth and Pleasant streets. Both buildings were designed by Proudfoot and Bird in 1906. Auditorium-style seating can also be found in the firm's 1911 Trinity Methodist Church design, located at Eighth Street and College Avenue and in the rebuilt Cottage Grove Presbyterian (1917), Kingsway Cathedral (f.k.a. Grace Methodist), and First Christian (f.k.a. University Christian) (1907, also designed by Proudfoot and Bird). (Two of the earliest surviving churches on High Street, St. Paul's Episcopal (1884) and St. Ambrose Catholic Cathedral (1891) are fine examples of earlier styles with straight apses).

The founders of Elmwood United Presbyterian realized their goal for the church to evolve into a large suburban church. Twenty years after the church's founding, it merged with the downtown First Presbyterian Church and built Beaver Avenue Presbyterian Church at Beaver and Franklin avenues. In the following year Westminster Presbyterian, an early northside suburban parish of the mainline Presbyterian affiliation joined in, bringing its name to a new large Gothic building housing the largest Presbyterian congregation in Iowa. By 1953, Westminster had grown to be the largest United Presbyterian Church in the United States.

The Presbyterians vacated the church building in June, 1927 and the building remained vacant for eight months, when University Baptist Church, in Highland Park, agreed to purchase the building for \$21,000. Following the stock market crash of 1929, the Baptists were forced to give up the building on April 2, 1930, and the church was again empty until the December 7, 1930 sale to St. George Parish.

The architecture of the St. George Church reflects influences from the suburban church movement. It's modest scale belies a sophisticated design by Des Moines' most successful architectural firm. The use of substantial materials along with the sponsorship of socially prominent families suggests that the church was designed as a magnet to attract up-scale real estate development and sow a seed for the growth of United Presbyterianism in Des Moines' western suburbs.



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**Greek Orthodox Church of St. George; the new home of Central Iowa's Greek Cultural Community:**

On Christmas Day 1930, Central Iowa Greeks opened the doors of their own church for the first service. In the next 65 years to March 1995, the church has seen 570 baptisms, 220 weddings and 357 funerals. Scores of parishioners have traveled from the cradle to the grave in this building. The altar has performed uncounted Holy Eucharists on Sundays and on the numerous Orthodox holy days. The church basement has housed innumerable coffee hours, receptions, meetings, dinners, Sunday school classes and Greek school. Later, a new fellowship hall carried on and strengthened that tradition.

No other existing historic structure so encompasses the life of an ethnic group in Des Moines as does St. George Church for the Greek community. The east side Swedish churches that still exist no longer perform any services in Swedish. Italians in south side Des Moines have many organizations and meeting places. The Jews of Des Moines are divided into three synagogues and a Hasidic group, and many are secular. Also, the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Federation have provided other services to the Jewish community. And the African-American business district in Des Moines on Center Street was torn down in the 1960s to make way for the freeway and urban renewal.

Greeks in Des Moines never formed their own ethnic neighborhood. This contrasts with the Swedish, Jewish, African-American and, especially, the Italian communities. Italian immigrants from Calabria came to southside Des Moines, near the railroad yards, and formed a "Little Italy" with all the necessary social institutions. Northern Italians settled more loosely on the north edge of town to work the coal mines. The two groups did not see themselves as countrymen. The concept of being an "Italian," rather than Calabrian, or Sicilian, slowly worked its way down the boot of the new nation of Italy that had only been unified in the 1870s. Greeks, however, had a firm sense of themselves as a nation, a vision that had survived two thousand years of foreign oppression and outweighed strong regional loyalties.

In her 1975 anthropology thesis on Greeks in Des Moines, Virginia Cuning wrote: "...it is the contention of this paper that the church is the center of the [Des Moines Greek] community." In Greek-Americans; Struggle and Success, George Moskos states "...it is mainly through the Church that new generations ...[share] a destiny ...[as] Greek Americans." It has often been noted that the church has remained much more important in the lives of Greek-Americans than for their urban counterparts in Greece. The continued presence of their parish church has maintained Greek core values of family and religion, even though Greek language and practices have faded.

Greek-Americans now in their fifties grew up in households where Greek was spoken and attended Greek school in the church. For the most part they have married other American-born Greeks but typically speak English in the home. Their children, who as often as not, have married non-Greeks may remember some Greek

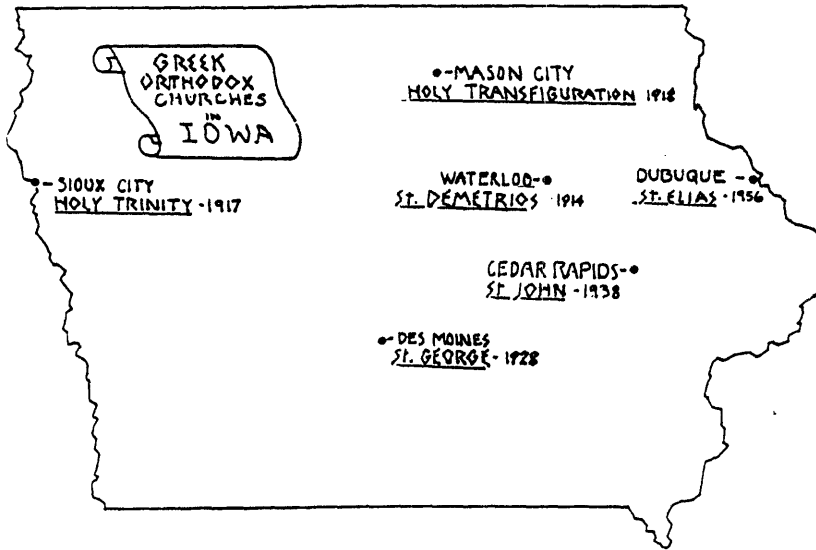
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FATHER MORKIDES AND ST. GEORGE CONGREGATION — 1933

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language from their grandparents, ("Papou" and "Yia Yia") but are passing on few Greek language skills to their kids. At present the church does not offer instruction in Greek. No college or university in Iowa offers Modern Greek language instruction. Spending summer vacations with their relatives in Greece may slow the decline of Greek language skills among the young, but not its inevitability.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America first allowed the use of English in the liturgy in the early 1970s, and St. George's parish priest, Father Peter Cade, now performs about half the liturgy and the entire sermon in English. The Greek of the Church, however, is not modern Greek, but *koine* Greek, for "common," the *lingua franca* of the Eastern Mediterranean in the First Century A.D. A speaker of Modern Greek may understand much of the vocabulary, but the grammar has changed dramatically in two thousand years. The liturgy book includes along with the Greek and English, a transliterated version of the Greek. So, in time, everyone learns to follow the service. (Visiting clergy from other Christian traditions have to struggle with the modern Greek phonetics -- not what they learned in seminary.) The choir sings almost entirely in Greek and the Lord's Prayer and the Creed are recited by the congregation in Greek as well as English. The Gospel readings are also performed in both languages. Ironically, the Greek of the New Testament as used in their parish church may outlive Modern Greek usage among Central Iowa Greek-Americans.

Greek-American parents, who have increasingly accepted marriage to non-Greeks, usually insist that the non-Greek convert to Orthodoxy or at least raise the children in the Orthodox faith (in fact, the parish directory is peppered with the non-Greek surnames to the distaff unions). Non-Greek spouses are now warmly received into the parish, and often become very active members in church activities. One's standing as a contributing church member now counts far more than one's ethnic origins among St. George parishioners. In fact, Father Peter is married to a non-Greek and is himself, only of one-quarter Greek ancestry. Father Peter had never been in a Greek Orthodox church until attending his grandfather's funeral, and soon decided to leave the Methodist ministry to become an orthodox priest. His ordination, on July 15, 1996, at St. George, was a first for the parish.

Serving the Easter Feast communally has strengthened the bonds within the Greek community, while maintaining the church as its center. Greek society and Orthodox Christianity emphatically place Easter as the keystone of the year. At St. George, the most important religious and social event is the Easter Vigil service. The entire community attends, irrespective of their usual churchgoing habits. Orthodox travelers from anywhere find the church. Folding chairs fill every available space. The overflow crowd peeks in from the narthex. As the flame from the altar is passed from candle to candle, slowly illuminating the darkened church, the congregation "receives the light" and awaits the arrival of midnight to triumphantly cry "*Christos Aneste!*" (Christ is Risen!).

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In large parishes, worshipers often slip out right after midnight to their homes for a family Lenten fast-breaking lamb feast. But in Des Moines, everyone stays to the end of the liturgy at around 2 a.m. to receive a piece of blessed bread (the *antidoran*, or "aftergift") and a bright-red Easter egg. Then, the entire congregation retires to the fellowship hall for a communal feast, replete with Retsina wine and Greek dancing. The dinner is always donated, and everyone present at the end of the service, Greek or non-Greek, Des Moines native or out-of-towner, Orthodox or non-Orthodox, is strongly urged to stay for the dinner.

Greek immigration to the United States began in earnest in the 1880s and became a flood after the turn of the century, lasting until the implementation of U.S. immigration quotas in the early 1920s. During this period, approximately five to six thousand Greek males arrived in Iowa with one goal: to make a fortune and return to Greece. Many came to Mason City and Sioux City, and smaller numbers came to Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Davenport, Boone and Dubuque. Most of these immigrants worked as railroad and cement plant laborers, but some immediately began working for themselves as street vendors.

There is little known about the earliest Greek immigrants to Central Iowa. The newspapers of the time have fragmentary reports of trouble-causing "Greeks," (anyone from the Balkans or Levant), but those hard-working laborers who lived in self-imposed poverty in order to send every available dollar home were largely invisible, especially those who became disillusioned with America and returned permanently to Greece.

Those who went into business for themselves and started to climb the ladder of economic success usually chose to stay, marry and raise a family here. Nationally, the passage of the National Origins Act of 1922 was a watershed for Greek-Americans. Until the law was repealed in 1965, this law reduced Greek immigration to a trickle. Without U.S. citizenship, no Greek male could return home to visit or marry and re-enter the United States. Greek-Americans rushed to become U.S. citizens, married, bought homes and built churches. By the late 1920s, Des Moines Greeks owned downtown service shops, lunch counters, candy stores and shoe-repair shops.

Many Central Iowa Greeks came from the region surrounding the town of Filiatra in the southern Peloponnesus. Others came from the Aegean Islands, Asia Minor and mainland Greece. In larger cities, Greeks formed social clubs, coffee houses and, sometimes, churches based on their regional roots, but in Des Moines, not even the Filiatrians had the numbers or money to be overly clannish. In fact, in Des Moines, the Greek community as a whole failed to maintain an ethnic coffee shop, lodge or social hall. This void reinforced the St. George parish as the center of Greeks' social as well as religious lives. Nationally, many Greek communities were torn apart by twenty years of political turmoil in Greece. Starting in 1912, two powerful antagonists, King Constantine I, and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos created a defacto civil war in Greece over the constitutional issue of republic or monarchy. The disharmony was especially strong in large East Coast cities, where the uproar tore apart many Greek Orthodox parishes. But Des Moines-area Greeks refused to allow the political crisis in Greece to divide their community and

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parish. Partly this was because the parish was formed late in the crisis, when passions were cooling, partly because Des Moines did not have a large blue-collar pro-Constantine faction, partly because the Greek community realized it was just too small and struggling for a ruinous fight and largely because by the Twenties most Central Iowa Greeks were primarily concerned with becoming middle class Americans, albeit Greek-Americans. So they certainly argued the Greek politics over cards, (Des Moines was decidedly pro-Venizelos, with a few highly vocal defenders of the King) but kept a lid on their passions.

As soon as finances permitted it, the Greeks of Central Iowa moved to better neighborhoods, or migrated to small Iowa towns to open small businesses. Sunday church service in Des Moines provided these isolated "pioneers" a weekly opportunity to maintain an ethnic social life.

Since there were so few Greeks in central Iowa, and many had moved here from other parts of the Midwest, the church-oriented effective social network extended to surrounding states. The Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA) fellowship group sent Des Moines-area Greek youths on sanctioned trips to other parts of the Midwest with the parents' hope that their son or daughter would meet a nice Greek girl or boy. Many unions resulted, and even today, on nearly every Sunday, the priest welcomes another visitor with a connection to the Des Moines community. On "Greek Time," the visitor may arrive long after the beginning of the service, but not staying for the social hour is a definite *faux pas*. To a modern Greek-American family, often physically dispersed but emotionally close, visits home generally demand a Sunday church visit and a rejoining of ties with the hometown Greek community. In 1992 the parish held a gala reunion, inviting scores of alumni from St. George's Greek school and confirmation classes home to the church of their youth.

During the first two decades of this century, the Greek Orthodox Church in America was weak and disorganized. (In 1911 local Greeks rebuffed an effort by the powerful Church of Russia to create an Pan-Orthodox parish church in Des Moines.) With no strong central authority to help, Des Moines Greeks had to rely on their own initiative and resources to form a church.

The first step in starting a Greek Orthodox Church was to form a *kinotis*, or Greek society, of at least 50 families. This organization would petition for state incorporation and the Greek bishop for the services of a priest, purchase the necessary religious articles and rent a hall. In 1928, approximately 200 Central Iowa Greeks from Des Moines, Boone, Valley Junction, Perry, Fort Dodge, Oskaloosa, Newton and Ottumwa formed St. George Parish. The parish battled U.S. immigration authorities to bring Father Meletios Kestekides from Greece as its first permanent priest. The *kinotis* voted St. George as the parish name because it was the most common given name in the community. Surprisingly, St. George Church was not incorporated until 1965! Pastor emeritus Father George guesses that in light of the generally notoriously independent attitude of early Greek Orthodox parishes in America, St. George's parish council may have resisted accepting the full authority of the Bishop in Chicago.

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Services were first held at the old Des Moines YMCA, until St. Mark's Episcopal Church, then at East 13th and Des Moines streets, rented to the Greeks storage space and use of a hall. Then, in 1930, Central Iowa Greeks purchased a vacant church building, which became their first and only permanent church. Elmwood United Presbyterian Church had moved out of the 1906 Classical-style structure to unify with other churches to form the large Westminster United Presbyterian Church. With enough money, perhaps the community would have built its own Byzantine-style church. But the church's Doric columns and classical portico could have come from a Greek temple. The interior dome was perfect for the mandatory Orthodox icon of Christ *Pantocrator*, illuminated by an ornate chandelier, or *polyleios*, representing the stars in the heavens.

On Christmas Day 1930, Central Iowa Greeks opened the doors of their own church for its first service. In 1937, the Presbyterians agreed to lower the original \$22,000 mortgage to \$16,000 if the balance could be delivered. (It is remembered by parishioner Paul Panagos that the downtown Jewish merchants contributed heavily toward the cause.) On Nov. 14, 1937, Bishop Kallists of Chicago consecrated the building, and more than 800 persons, including Iowa Governor Nelson G. Kraschel, celebrated the mortgage burning at a gala party.

The Greeks have made only absolutely necessary changes to the church building. The beautiful stained-glass windows were retained, even the north wall's centerpiece with the triumphantly majestic Scottish Thistle! So were the original pews, albeit rearranged from theater-style seating to form a center aisle -- this forms an unusual hybrid design; a center aisle with curved pews. The pews' original brackets for individual communion glasses in the Presbyterian style are still in place, unused for nearly 70 years. (Orthodox churches in Europe have no pews, worshippers are expected to stand throughout the long services. But the Greek Orthodox in America accommodated themselves to the use of pews quickly, largely because it was common to for Greeks to buy a "used" church with pews already in place. Other Orthodox Church affiliations, especially from Slavic countries, resisted the use of pews.)

Unfortunately, the building faced the wrong way. Orthodox tradition dictates that the altar be in the east. With the facade of the church on the east side, that was impossible. Some of the most devout argued that portico be moved to the west side of the church. But the slope of the inclined floor would have to be reversed as well, a monumental and expensive task, especially for an immigrant group in the midst of the Great Depression. In the end, the altar was placed on the west wall, (after removing the large baptismal tank left behind by the Baptist church that briefly occupied the building) but the icons of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, which adorn the Deacons' Doors on either end of the icon screens of all Orthodox churches, were reversed right to left to make them correct by the compass.

The United Presbyterian's rejection of musical accompaniment in worship services also served the purposes of the Greek church. But the whole of the chancel was dominated by a wall of pipe organs. Since the church had no pipe organ, the open chancel was well situated for an Orthodox sanctuary. (The Greeks in Des Moines, like elsewhere in America, broke with Orthodox tradition and incorporated the

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organ into their ancient, minor key filled music -- just a small, utilitarian instrument, however; nothing grand or overpowering.)

Renovations continued over the years without any major alteration of the building. The church in 1946 installed large icons imported from Greece between the windows, with a smaller round icons of the twelve apostles place high above each of the large icons. (The narrow, arched icons fortuitously echo the shape of the Presbyterian windows.)

In the 1980s, after the fellowship hall was completed, the parish invested heavily in repairing and renovating the church proper. The altar area ( "the sanctuary" in an Orthodox church) was expanded by carving a cove out of the west wall, which provided a canvas for a striking *Platytera* ("She who is wider than the heavens") an icon of the Virgin Mary and child, surrounded by angels and Mary's parents Joachim and Anna. The top row of small icons on the icon screen were removed to afford a better view of the *Platytera*. On either side and above the icon screen, a painting of the Annunciation appeared, and a new dome painting of Christ *Pantocrator* (all-powerful) replaced one a parish priest created in the 1940s that had been damaged by a leaking roof. All of these later icons are wall egg tempera paintings executed in the Byzantine style, and are much more traditional and less Western in style than St. George's other icons.

Sometime in the early 1980s the church's beautiful original windows were repaired and reinforced to halt their sagging. Lexan protective sheeting was installed over the exterior of the windows to further protect them from vandalism.

More recently, the building has been modernized with air conditioning and alarm systems. The frame house next door to the church, that was built by the Presbyterians and served as the rectory for both congregations, was in bad shape, and was torn down to expand the parking lot.

St. George Church renewed its central position in the Greek community and the parish's commitment to the Drake Neighborhood in 1981, when it built a new fellowship hall adjacent to (this connection is considered reversible) the original church building. The parish was in desperate need for a larger and more modern fellowship hall than the church basement could provide and was seriously exploring opportunities to rebuild in the west side suburbs. As *The Des Moines Register* reported, the parish decided it would "not run" from its beloved church or the Drake Neighborhood. In this case adding a modern facility made it possible to preserve and restore an historic structure. The theme of the fellowship hall's decor represents a decidedly Greek ethnicity and pride; a counterpart to the ecclesiastical role of the church proper. Father George is particularly proud of the fellowship hall's library of books and records on Eastern Orthodoxy and Greek history and culture.

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The new hall and kitchen provide a large modern facility for dinners and other social events. It has also resurrected the Greek Food Fair, which had been moved out of the church for lack of space and then discontinued. The two months of hard work it takes to prepare the meal for the parish's big fund-raiser pulls the Greek community together. The fair brings more than two thousand guests to the church each year. Many visit the church to admire the icons and ornaments of Orthodox Christianity.

The community served by St. George Church has evolved over the years. Few descendants of the parish's founding families remain in the parish. Iowa's Greek-American families saved for their children's higher educations and encouraged them to follow their careers away from home (even Father George's three adult children have moved away). The places of Des Moines's "pioneer" Greek families in the parish have been filled by other Greeks who have followed their own careers to Central Iowa. There are also Serbian, Croatian, and Russian members of the congregation. In fact, St. George Church has acted as a cultural and spiritual resource for the larger community of Christians in Central Iowa. In the 1950s, the Des Moines Council of Churches started the "Tour of Faith" of area churches and synagogues. As the only local representative of a faith with 400 million adherents worldwide, St. George hosts many visiting religious groups, college students and individuals. Attending an Orthodox liturgy is a trip back in time to the roots of all Christians.

For 65 years Greek-Americans of Central Iowa have found spirituality and community at their borrowed but beautiful little place of worship: St. George Greek Orthodox Church. As the Greeks would say: "Axios!," "It is worthy."



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The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George  
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**FORM PREPARED BY:**

"Architectural Description"	Patricia Zingsheim
"Architectural Legacy of Proudfoot and Bird In Iowa"	Patricia Eckhardt
"The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George: New Home of Central Iowa's Greek Cultural Community"	Jim Zeller
Photographs	Jim Zeller
"The Suburban Church Movement And The Elmwood Presbyterian Church"	John Zeller
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**The Greek Orthodox Church of St. George**  
**Polk County, Iowa**

Verbal Boundary Description:

The south 140 feet of Lot 6 Kauffman Place Addition, City of Des Moines.

Boundary Justification:

This property has been directly associated with the Elmwood Presbyterian Church and then with the St. George Greek Orthodox Church since its original construction. The parcel originally contained the frame rectory, church, and church yard. It presently includes parking and the parish hall as well as the original church building.

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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

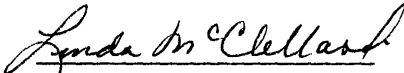
NRIS Reference Number: 97000101      Date Listed: 2/28/97

Property Name: Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George

County: Polk      State: Iowa

Architectural Legacy of Proudfoot and Bird in Iowa MPS  
Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

February 28, 1997  
Date of Action

=====  
=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 3: State Certification

"Locally" is, hereby, indicated as the level at which the property is considered significant by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

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Beth Foster of the Iowa Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment on February 28, 1997.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)