

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

538

APR 18 2001

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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 UNITED BUILDING

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 300 NORTH CEDAR STREET not for publication

city or town ABILENE vicinity

state KANSAS code KS county DICKINSON code 041 zip code 67410

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.)

Richard J. Parkratz DSHP 3-21-01
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
State of Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

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

Edson A. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action
5-25-01

UNITED BUILDING
Name of Property

DICKINSON COUNTY, KANSAS
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply) **Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal
- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

NONE

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: BUSINESS

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: BUSINESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS:
ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof TAR

other

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1904 - 1935

Significant Dates

1904, 1927

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

BROWN, CLEYSON L.

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

JOE MURRAY, ARCHITECT

JOE FARGO, CONSTRUCTION SUPERINTENDENT

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

UNITED BUILDING
Name of Property

DICKINSON COUNTY, KANSAS
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property LESS THAN ONE ACRE

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	4	6	5	4	6	0	0	4	3	0	8	9	2	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

3

Zone		Easting						Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title NANC SCHOLL

organization ABILENE HERITAGE COMMISSION date JULY 10, 2000

street & number 813 N. OLIVE STREET telephone 785-263-7012

city or town ABILENE state KANSAS zip code 67410

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 M. RENEE STOUT-MONTOYA

street & number 934 S. MARYMOUNT ROAD telephone 785-827-5505

city or town SALINA state KANSAS zip code 67401

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.

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The United Building (c. 1887, 1927) is located at 300 North Cedar Street in Abilene, Dickinson County, Kansas (population 6,700). The original three-story brick building had a corner façade orientation, which measured 58 feet from north to south and 75 feet from east to west. Originally owned by T. E. Dewey, it was known as the Brady Building. In 1904, following a disastrous flood, the building was sold to Cleyson L. Brown and became known as the Brown Building until 1911 when the Brown Telephone Company became known as the United Telephone Company. It was then known as the United Building until its sale in 1966 to the J. B. Ehram and Sons Manufacturing Company. In 1927, when the United Companies needed more space, the northern three-story addition increased the measurement to 117 feet from north to south with the east to west measurement remaining 75 feet. A flat roof covers the entire structure. The building's eastern facade provides the exterior with its major character defining features.

The United Building maintains a degree of architectural integrity as a modified example of an Italianate structure.

The original three-story brick Italianate structure followed the most popular model for similar late-nineteenth-century corner building through the state of Kansas, many of which were banks. With the addition and uniform façade the size and proportion of this building remains noteworthy, and at the time of the addition, it must have seemed impressive. As in many small towns, the most important downtown intersections were anchored by a solidly build stone or brick bank building with a corner entry addressing both streets.

Early photograph of the structure show only the public side, which had a corner entrance, and faced North Cedar Street to the east and N. W. 3rd Street to the south. The original building's first floor housed two businesses. From the photographs we are able to see there were two large single lights creating two storefronts with an entrance door to each. Above these windows were small lights set in a quarrel pattern. The doors were recessed with a single light centered in them.

The second floor windows consisted of 14 1/1 single light sash type windows on the public sides. The third floor windows consisted of 12 1/1 single light sash type windows on the public sides. These windows were stoned-trimmed featuring flat stone slightly arched window openings resting on a plain stone sill. The roofline was accented with brackets set between the windows with the corner entrance emphasized with a pediment at the top of the structure in which the name "Brown Block" was written in block letters.

In 1927 the entire look of the structure changed. The first floor storefronts remained the same, although the window treatment at the top of each of the large rectangle windows were changed to a large square class

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with lead between the lites and smaller sections creating the surround. All of this glass looks as if it was marble.

The outside wall construction is of mingled shade matted faced brick, laid in light buff mortar joints. The walls are trimmed in mottled light brown and cream colored terra cotta which tend to brighten up the dark brick. Directly above the two main entrances are large U-shields which are the emblems of the United Companies. They are set in light brown terra cotta. The entrances were also beautified by means of Old Colonial lantern type electric lights.

The size of the building is shown by the huge amount of material, which was used in its construction. The structure included 13 carloads of brick, eight cars of common brick and five cars of face brick. A total of 80 tons of steel were used in the framework.

The three floors include a total of 25,000 square feet of floor space in addition to the big basement, which extends under the entire structure. The framework of the building is composed of steel, while the floors are concrete to insure the fireproof effect. The interior of the building is trimmed with mahogany finished gum woodwork. The doors are made of birch, and are finished to harmonize with the woodwork.

One of the features of the building is the Otis electric elevator which was the only one in use in Abilene. It ran from the basement to the roof of the building and was equipped with automatic leveling devices, which were very effective in the prevention of accidents.

The United Trust Company banking room occupied the southeast corner of the lower floor of the building. The offices on the second floor are connected by large corridors. An underground tunnel and two aerial passageways once joined the new building to the United Telephone Co. Building to the west.

At the base of the structure was a course of brick set in a vertical running pattern 1½ bricks in height. The running pattern is then set horizontally to the top of the first floor upon which rests a multi-level terra cotta frieze set to project from the structure with dentils just below the final two rows at the top of the frieze. Above this is another band consisting of several rows of vertical running patterned brick to the base of the second story windows. This course of terra cotta, which is visible on the south and east facades, creates the sills for the second story windows.

The windows on the second and third stories of the two public facades (NW 3rd Street and N. Cedar Street) are very plain. At the top of the third story windows is a terra cotta frieze imitating, in smaller proportions,

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the terra cotta frieze above the first floor windows. The pattern is again repeated with the brick set in a horizontal running pattern, surmounted by a cornice consisting of a frieze, a row of dentils, another cornice, all of terra cotta, which is surmounted by horizontal brick set in the running pattern and a terra cotta crown coping.

A terra cotta surround flanks the original entrance door, which has a corner façade, and topped with a pulvinated frieze, which has an acone at each side. There are Old Colonial lantern type electric lights flanking this entrance. The door surrounded is flanked by a single row of brick, which is flanked by a terra cotta quoin.

The "new " entrance, which was the main entrance into the structure with the 1927 expansion, is surmounted by terra cotta with an arched transom type 7-light window directly over the door. Flanking the entrance is a terra cotta surround crowned by a fronton centered with the United Company symbol. At each side, just below the fronton is a pulvinus with a corbel table set between. Below the pulvinus is a stylized sculpture with an Old Colonial lantern type electric light flanking each side of the entrance.

All of the windows on the south and east façade at the second and third story level were replaced in November 1999 with 1/1 sash type Worldwide Windows that have a tinted bronze glass surrounded by an aluminum frame. This window frame appears to be of the same white and brown colors and the same width as the original windows, per the 1927 photograph. The windows on the first level appear to be from the 1927 addition. The north side of the structure is flanked by a single story structure. The façade, which is visible from the second and third levels, is very plain. There are eight 4/4 metal sash type windows on each level with what appears to be chicken wire imbedded within the glass. These windows are iron framed with a steel casement which is fixed within the structure. Most of these windows have screens that are original to the 1927 addition. The top of the north façade has a step-down effect creating three separate levels from front to back (east to west) with a coping.

The west side of the structure is flanked by an alley and is also very plain. The windows in the original portion of the structure (to the south) were also replaced in November 1999 with Worldwide Windows that have a tinted bronze glass surrounded by an aluminum frame. This window frame also appears to be of the same white and brown colors and the same width as the original windows. The windows on the first level match the rest of the utilitarian windows seen on the remainder of the western façade. There are three windows with a door between the second and third windows (from the south to the north). There is a door to the north of the third window. On the second floor there

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are five 1/1 sash type windows and four on the third floor. There are three first floor windows and one second floor window that have the original 1927 1/1 screens still attached.

The "new" northern addition windows are basically the same, being 4/4 sash type windows on all levels. There are seven windows with a door to the north of the third and fifth windows on the first floor, seven windows on the second level, and eight windows on the third floor, all being 4/4 sash type windows that also appear to have what looks like "chicken wire" imbedded in the glass. Several of the windows on the west façade have the original 1/1 screens still attached.

The interior and floor plan of the original structure retains a high degree of original character on all three levels. The two vaults remain in tact with a bathroom located behind them to the west. There is a staircase leading to the upper levels, which is accessible from the two storefronts as well as an east entrance. The second level has 11 offices, two bathrooms, with six closets (not original), and the third level having nine offices. A utility "closet" is located at the west portion of the hall. All of the walls at the second and third level of this portion of the structure have been covered with wood paneling.

The interior of the addition also retains a high degree of original character on the first and second levels. Original woodwork is also apparent on these two levels, with the second floor retaining a higher decorative quality of doors (with transoms), interior windows, baseboards and original light fixtures. At the first level is the main entrance, the elevator at the west end of the entrance hall, the storefronts, and a staircase at the very north east corner of the structure, which rises from the first to the third level.

The third level of the 1927 addition has had the most change with only the five most eastern offices remaining. The balance of this level is a large open space, which was last used as a fitness center. There is a bathroom and a furnace room, with a 2x4' suspended tile ceiling.

There is a metal fireproof door between the original and 1927 addition on the second and third levels.

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The United Building (c. 1887, 1927) is being nominated to the National Register under criteria A & B for its historical association with the development of Abilene and for its association with Cleyson L. Brown. The United Building stands as part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial district in Abilene, Kansas. Brown purchased the United Building to conduct his businesses in 1904 and extensively remodeled it in 1926- 1927.

Cleyson L. Brown (1872- 1935) was a benevolent patriarch of Abilene. He managed a multi-million dollar empire in the telephone and electric utilities. He took a paternal interest in his employees welfare and believed that his wealth should be channeled into activities that would benefit the community. At the time of his death his debts exceeded his personal assets but two legacies remained: a billion dollar corporation, United Telecommunications (known today as Sprint) and the Brown Memorial Foundation, which operates a home for the aged.

Cleyson LeRoy Brown personal history – Called C. L. Brown by many people, he came with his family from Brown's Mill in Adams County, Pennsylvania to Kansas in 1880 with a pietistic sect known as the Church of the Brethren, a group prominent in the settlement of Dickinson County. His father, Jacob Brown, was a miller by trade, and obtained rights to a gristmill on the Smoky Hill River south of Abilene. When C. L. was 10 years old, he stood too close to a corn grinder and had his right elbow crushed so badly that the arm had to be amputated. In later years he wore an artificial arm and hand, usually covered by a long-sleeved shirt or coat and a dark gray glove. After graduating from high school, he taught in a country school, attended a two-year business college in Burlington, IA, and managed a creamery in Wichita before venturing into utilities. In 1898 the old gristmill his father had bought was remodeled to generate electricity for Abilene streetlights. The Browns' Abilene Electric Light Works provided electricity to local businesses and residents before extending into other nearby communities. In 1906 the light works was incorporated as Riverside Power & Gas Company. By 1916 the Brown electrical enterprise increased its capacity to serve some 20 communities. He and his associates added more plants, and in 1924 incorporated as the United Power and Light Company. By the time Brown sold his interest in KPL in 1924, United Power had assets of \$17,300,805.46. It was second in size to Kansas Gas and Electric in the state. Between 1926-1929 Brown himself received \$920,000 in cash for his equity in United Power, which comprised only part of his fortune.

1899 Telephones come to Abilene - One year after installing the first electric plant, Brown applied to the Abilene City Council to build a telephone system. As with the electric service, Brown succeeded with his telephones and became the largest employer of labor in the city. He filed a charter for the Brown Telephone Company in 1902. The business expanded and the company was renamed the United Telephone

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Company in 1911. In 1914 the company remained under the management of C. L. Brown and at that time was valued at nearly \$700,000 ranking second in the state of Missouri and Kansas. In 1914 Brown and his business associated relinquished their status as an independent telephone company by selling controlling interest of the stock (64.47%) to the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company. This provided the United Company with capital needed for plant expansion. It was agreed that Brown would manage the company until his retirement or death, with this arrangement serving both Brown and Bell profitably for many years.

Not satisfied to work for Bell, Brown began to purchase small independent phone companies throughout northern and central Kansas, which eventually became the core of his new company, a holding company named United Telephone and Electric, which was incorporated in Delaware in September 1925. This company was organized to purchase stocks of companies throughout Missouri, Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

Brown Diversifies - Brown diversified his interests by buying a grocery store chain and grocery warehouses, a gravel and sand company, hotels, more power companies, a news service and broadcast station, and an oil company. Brown's private enterprises included a life insurance company, a lumber company, a shoe store, mining developments in Colorado, and an interurban based in Junction City. In all he came to control 85 known companies. Except for the grocery chain and several small, obsolescent businesses, profits increased steadily in the 1920's.

Company Pension and Saving Plans Initiated - Conservation of money formed part of Brown's successful business creed and he imposed this on his employees. A hint of what was to come appeared in the March, 1918, issue of *The Voice*, the company newsletter: "Eat less, drink less, and smoke less, and wear your clothes a little longer. Make it a principal. Make it a religion. Make it a habit. There is not a human being in the United States that cannot exist on nine-tenths of what he does exist on. Save the other tenth."

Brown was worried about the spending habits of his employees and their lack of saving. He ordered every employee of the United Telephone Company, and associated companies, to save 10% of his income, starting on July 1, 1922, or seek affiliation with another company, feeling that "employees who did not show thrift were not good employees". David J. Eisenhower (father of Dwight D.), a man respected for his conservative, conscientious habits served as the savings committee secretary. Employees were counceled in spending habits and Brown delt personally with some of the spendthrifts. At the end of the first year about 50% of the employees had put their 10% in preferred stock of the utility companies they served. Since

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his savings plan had been in effect, "Not an employee has lost a dollar in investment in securities for five years."

The Brown Memorial Foundation Formed - Incorporated November 15, 1926 by Brown and his sisters Jennie and Della as a memorial to their parents, Jacob and Mary. By 1930 the Browns had endowed it with more than \$1,000,000. The Foundation began with trust property valued at \$100,000. Back in 1913 Brown had purchased 226 acres south of the Smoky Hill River. The firm of Hare and Hare, Kansas City, landscape architects, submitted a plan which included landscaping the 226-acre site. Construction of a home for the aged and one for children, an executive building, a series of small homes to be used by widows with children, a boys' camp and a girls' camp under the original plans for the property which called for a \$500,00 expenditure over a five year period. The Brown Memorial Home for the Aged, originally scheduled to cost \$75,000, cost at least \$175,000 upon completion. The large, handsome colonial brick structure with a comfortable tastefully decorated interior provided room free of charge for 57 men and women. By the time the home was completed, the park had become the recreation center for Abilene and north-central Kansas with no admission fee charged. The Brown Memorial Home for the Aged has lost none of its usefulness nor its simple elegance over the years.

In 1904 Brown purchased the Brady Building and conducted business from this location. As his business empire grew, the building at 300 N. Cedar Street was filled to capacity and more space was needed. He purchased the lots to the north of the structure in 1926. The remodeling and addition required 13 train carloads of brick, 5 carloads of brick face, and 80 tons of steel for the framework to complete. The finished structure measured 75 feet by 117 feet and contained more than 25,000 square feet of space. It then became known as the United Building.

The Death of Brown - C. L. Brown fell ill while on vacation in early November, 1935, was hospitalized, died on November 12, 1935 at the age of 63, and was buried on the grounds of the Memorial Park he had developed. Though Brown left behind major achievements: United Telephone, which soon became a totally owned subsidiary of Southwestern Bell; several independent telephone companies; a major portion of Kansas Power and Light through its purchase of United Power and Light; and the Brown Memorial Foundation, his most important financial legacy was United Telephone and Electric which became United Utilities, Inc., known as United Telecommunications and today as Sprint, he died a poor man. By the time all the claims had been filed against him, the debts exceeded the estate's capacity to pay them. His wife could keep the large frame home at 800 N. Buckeye in Abilene, Kansas.

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Bibliographical References:

Dickinson County Historical Society, Vertical files, Obituary files.

McCoy, Sondra Van Meter, The Patriarch of Abilene: Cleyson L. Brown and The United empire, 1898-1935.

The Abilene Daily Reflector, June 14, 1927, June 15, 1927.

The Voice, July 1927, June 1925, March 1918, Museum of Independent Telephone archives.

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property is located on the Lots 14, 16, 18, 20, and 22 on Cedar Street in Abilene, Dickinson County, Kansas. It is bounded on the south by N. W. 3rd Street, on the East by N. Cedar Street, on the west by an alley, and on the north by an alley.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the property historically associated with the building.