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NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 1st St bet 2nd Ave N & 1st Ave N [n/a] not for publication  
city or town Mount Vernon [n/a] vicinity  
state Iowa code IA county Linn code 113 zip code 52314

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).

David [Signature] 7/6/93  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historical Society of Iowa  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the property is:
  - entered in the National Register.
    - See continuation sheet.
  - determined eligible for the National Register.
    - See continuation sheet.
  - determined not eligible for the National Register.
  - removed from the National Register.
  - other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Patrick Andrews Date of Action 9/13/93

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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	
16	2	buildings
		_____ sites
		_____ structures
		_____ objects
16	2	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

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

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

0

**Hist Resources of Mt. Vernon, Iowa**

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/specialty store

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/specialty store

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

\_\_\_\_\_

roof asphalt

other stone

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**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.)

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1860-1904

**Significant Date**

n/a

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Josselyn and Taylor

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

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

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

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 3.5

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 [1] [5] [6] [3] [1] [1] [8] [0] [4] [6] [4] [2] [1] [8] [0]  
Zone Easting Northing

2 [1] [5] [6] [3] [1] [2] [6] [0] [4] [6] [4] [2] [2] [0] [0]  
Zone Easting Northing

3 [1] [5] [6] [3] [1] [3] [6] [0] [4] [6] [4] [2] [1] [4] [0]

4 [1] [5] [6] [3] [1] [2] [4] [0] [4] [6] [4] [2] [0] [5] [0]  
[ ] 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 Barbara Beving Long, Historian

organization Loucks & Associates date May 24, 1993

street & number 7200 Hemlock Lane, Ste. 300 telephone 612/424-5505

city or town Maple Grove state MN zip code 55369

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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

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**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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**MT. VERNON COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT  
LINN COUNTY, IOWA**

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**General Characteristics.** The linear Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District extends approximately one and one-half blocks along both sides of First Street. It runs precariously along the ridgeline of the paha<sup>1</sup> that defines Mount Vernon and directed settlement patterns in the "Hill City." The former Military Road, present Highway 1 (First Avenue), intersects with First Street atop the paha, forming a key (and steep) junction.

Commercial use in Mount Vernon is and always has been centered along First Street on the paha. All 18 buildings were built for commercial use, and all but one of them (#10)<sup>2</sup> were in place by 1904. The buildings thus form a cohesive grouping of one- and two-story brick veneered storefronts having a uniform facade line.

Some storefronts have received inappropriate alterations but facades completely covered with replacement siding are rare. Four buildings are especially noteworthy (termed KEY contributing in this nomination). The compact arrangement, similar scale and commercial use that characterize the streetscape combine to present a distinct and harmonious commercial district on Mount Vernon's First Street.

**Unifying Features.** All but three of the 18 were in place by 1900, contributing to the visual cohesiveness of the district. The 1890s comprised the key defining period for the development and appearance of the commercial district, for eight facades date from this decade. Construction dates range from 1860 to the 1930s.

In addition to the many late 19th century construction dates, certain motifs and materials contribute markedly to the unified appearance of the district. These include pressed brick in unusual patterns, ornate metal cornices, heavy pedimented window hoods, and distinctive roughly dressed limestone trim. In particular, brick checkerboard panels, corbelling, and bricks set at an angle and to form dentil courses are repeated in a number of instances. A number of examples have recessed double entries, chamfered corners, decorated metal lintel beams, and round-arched windows.

Continuity of materials, shape, and scale provide the homogeneous nature of the district. Most buildings are faced with brick and are two stories

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<sup>1</sup>A geological term referring to a prominent ridge of silt and clay in the area of the Iowan glacial drift in northeast Iowa.

<sup>2</sup>Refers to building list/map number used in this nomination.

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high. All appear to be flat-roofed (some have gabled rooflines tucked behind their facades). Similar brick facing and rough stone trim unify the district's appearance, despite differences in dates of construction.

Some of the more elaborate examples convey a Romanesque Revival flavor (#2 and #4, for example), particularly through the judicious use of roughly dressed stone trim. The stone highlights distinctive colonettes, forms sills and lintels, and trims courses and other detail. It contrasts well with the reddish face brick that dominates along the street. Round-arched openings of varying form (with radiating voussoirs, moulding, in groups) contribute further to the Romanesque Revival appearance of a number of buildings in the district. In general, stylistic references are muted and are best categorized as examples of late Victorian commercial building design. Two examples from the 1860s (#9, #14) have prominent stone corner quoins, and the use of contrasting stone trim is a unifying feature represented through the decades of the district's development.

Despite thorough research using contemporary Mount Vernon newspapers, little information has come to light about the designers of Mount Vernon's commercial buildings. Construction progress was often noted in the local newspapers, but in only one instance was the architect mentioned. Built in 1893, the Wolfe-Ellison Block (#7) was designed by the noted Cedar Rapids architectural firm of Josselyn and Taylor. The Wolfe brothers built three other buildings along the main commercial street, and it is possible they employed the firm for these commissions as well. The Wolfe-Ellison Block is of rather simple design, but certain of its motifs are found elsewhere in the district, suggesting the Cedar Rapids firm may have obtained several commissions in Mount Vernon. These features include rough stone trim, stepped parapet, corbelling, double recessed entries, metal lintel beams, and corner entrance.

**General Condition.** Sixteen of the 18 buildings are rated as contributing to the architectural significance of the Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District. Two are considered noncontributing because of the amount of alteration or construction date outside the Period of Significance. Few ground floor storefronts have escaped some type of alteration, but the degree of change has generally been moderate and expected in a continuing commercial area.

**Building List.** Mount Vernon has adopted a numbering system based upon numbered streets and directions. The dividing point is the junction of First Street, which runs east-west, and First Avenue, which runs north-south. (See map of the district.) Buildings are listed below in the following order and thus begin on the north side of the street, run from

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west to east, then continue in clockwise fashion to run from east to west on the south side of the street:

117-101 First Street West (north side of street)  
101 First Street East (north side of street)  
100 First Street East (south side of street)  
100-124 First Street West (south side of street)

Because of some discrepancies in address numbers and the duplication of numbers--there is a 100 First Street East and a 100 First Street West--a map/site number has been assigned to each building. This map number is used throughout to refer to the buildings. Particularly significant buildings are termed "KEY contributing."

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps exist for Mount Vernon for 1894, 1900, 1906, 1921, and 1941. Unless specified otherwise, the dates mentioned below are based upon these maps as are references to building use. Other important sources are photographs in the Cornell College Archives, the Mount Vernon Historic Resources Data Base, and contemporary newspaper accounts.

**North Side First Street West**

- 01 Third Wolfe Brothers Building. KEY contributing. 1895. Contemporary newspaper accounts state that the Wolfe brothers began construction late in 1894 and completed it in 1895 for this building, their third project. It was built to house A.L. Reid's Tonsorial Parlor and G.H. Kuebler's restaurant. 1-story with ornate heavy tin cornice having finials, centered raised parapet, small brackets, sawtooth and other moulding; facade is painted in appropriate three-color scheme. Two angled recessed entries; storefront windows appear original. Distinctive, relatively unaltered (historic photos confirm this), and unique in Mount Vernon and therefore KEY contributing. (street number: 117-15.)
- 02 H.A. Collin Bank Building/Charles Brackett Building. KEY contributing. 1891. Construction date based on date plaque on building and contemporary newspaper accounts. Collin died in 1892 and Brackett, a prominent builder, bought it. The 1894 Sanborn showed a men's clothing store here and contemporary newspapers stated that Brackett opened such a business in 1893.

Recently rehabilitated, the 2-story brick building has extremely narrow mortar and rough stone trim, which convey a Romanesque heaviness. Notable features include textured brick effects

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(checkerboard panels, corbels, radiating voussoirs), roughly dressed stone trim (including unusual heavy caps at the entrances) and round arched windows, some with distinctive colored glass. Alterations are minor and expected--part of a small centered stepped cornice removed, replacement doors--and the building is essentially as it appeared in historic photos. Because of its unaltered condition, brick textures, stone trim, and distinctive design, the building is a KEY contributing feature in the district. (street number: 113.)

- 03 Smith-Hogle Block. Contributing. 1894. Shown as "being built" on July 1894 Sanborn. J.S. Smith's jewelry store burned sometime after his 1891 arrival, in 1892 or 1893, prompting construction of this building. 2-story brick with rough stone trim (coping, sills, water table, entry step). Brick patterns: prominent textured checkerboard panels above tall second story windows, narrow "slit" panels, radiating voussoirs. Corbels further highlight the checkerboard panels and act as pilasters. Corner entrance and also centered recessed double entry with steps. Minor alterations include: some openings along alley blocked up, metal replacement windows at second story, signs cover transom windows. Because of its relatively unaltered condition, brick textures, stone trim, alley location, and large size, the building is contributing. (street number: 109.)

- 04 Mount Vernon Bank Building. Contributing. 1891. Construction date based on 1891 date plaque on building and 1891 newspaper accounts. It appears the building was constructed or essentially rebuilt in 1891, perhaps in competition with Collin's bank built the same year (building #2). W.M. Smith and Dr. James Carson organized the bank in 1884 and sold a one-third interest to Col. H.H. Rood in 1893. The building housed a bank from 1891 to at least 1941.

The facade of the 2-story brick building has very narrow mortar joints and distinctive rough stone trim. Rounded brick was used for semi-circular arches (some with patterned brick panels having projecting diamond shapes) above rough stone lintels of second story windows, and fine colonettes frame the cornice, contributing to a rather delicate effect. The ground floor has been altered with wood paneling infill, small high windows, and vaguely Colonial Revival features. The upper story is of considerable distinction and strongly displays important architectural motifs that help define the district. Were it not for the ground floor changes, the building would rank highly, but with them, it still contributes to the appearance of the district. (Street number: 107.)



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- 05 Post Office Building. Contributing. 1888. Construction date based on date plaque on building and contemporary newspaper accounts. Rood & Young built it on speculation, and it contained the post office from 1888 to at least 1941. The facade of the 2-story building is brick that is darker brown than other examples. Notable features include narrow recessed "slit" panels (also seen on #3), corbelling, decorative brickwork (including bricks set at an angle and a heavy row of dentils above the windows), smooth stone, and a centered round brick arch decorated with a row of knobs. The distinctive and unaltered cornice displays a prominent stone horizontal piece that curls at its ends, corner colonettes, and squares punched into the brick. Alterations include small wood panels over upper story window transoms and a new storefront having a broad panel with horizontal lines. Were it not for the ground floor changes, the building would rank highly, but with them, it still contributes to the appearance of the district. (Street number: 105.)
- 06 Waln Building. Contributing. 1881. The building was constructed in 1881 following a fire. Elijah D. Waln then owned the property and operated a grocery store in the west half; Rood & Young Clothiers occupied the other side. By 1895 Rood & Young remained in the east half and E.T. Gough had the grocery store, but even then it was known as the "Waln corner." By 1900 the Masonic Lodge occupied the second story over the grocery.

The 2-story building is faced with red-brown brick and limited stone trim and occupies a strategic corner location. The east half now has modern vertical metal paneling covering the facade, although the heavy metal cornice remains visible. This cornice continues to the relatively unaltered west half and has bold brackets with attractive detail (curving shapes, keystones, spandrels) between them. A simple corbelled moulding tops and calls attention to the second story windows which have prominent pedimented window hoods with incised detail and decorated keystones. Alterations include an altered storefront on the west half (rustic wood framing), although the basic outline of the entry and windows remains, and the vertical metal paneling of the east half. Despite these changes, the prominent features of the upper story contribute to the historic appearance of the district. (street number: 101-103.)

**North Side First Street West**

- 07 Wolfe-Ellison Block. KEY contributing. 1893. Sanborn map notes "destroyed by fire 7/10/93." Architects: Josselyn & Taylor. Contemporary newspaper accounts list the architects and monitor

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construction progress. The Wolfe brothers medical offices and Stewart Ellison and Son's harness and saddlery hardware business were the owner/occupants. Also in the multi-purpose building in 1895 were H.F. Haeseler's pharmacy, attorney William Glen, T.F. Roche's insurance agency, Frank N. Kubler's laundry, and Miss Fitch's art studio.

The 2-story reddish brick building with limited roughly dressed stone trim enjoys a strategic corner location on the old Military Road. Notable elements include corbelling and other brick detail, round-arched windows (with original wood frames), and metal lintel beams and slender pilasters with limited fluting. Like #3 in the district, it has a corner entrance and a recessed double entry. Alterations include rear addition, some re-mortaring, and one set of storefront windows enclosed with wood paneling. With its prominent location, 1890s date, unifying materials and design, and association with the Wolfe brothers, the relatively unaltered building occupies an important position in the district. (street number: 101-103.)

**South Side First Street East**

08 Neff Block. **Contributing.** 1860--remodeled in 1891. A 1957 newspaper article stated the Masons moved to the third floor of this building in 1860. Contemporary newspaper accounts noted that M.K. Neff and Company, a furniture store and undertaking business, bought the building and remodeled it in 1891. The business remained in the building until going bankrupt in 1909; by 1921 it was used as a hall and had a first floor ticket office (probably for motion pictures). Because of its long association with M.K. Neff and Company, that name was chosen for the historic name.

It appears many features dating from the 1890s remodeling (which occurred more than fifty years ago) are extant, although the building was originally 3 stories. The top story was removed following a fire in 1954. As early as 1894 the present rear addition of matching painted brick was in place and used as part of the Neff business (to store coffins). The 2-story red painted brick building has tie rods and occupies a strategic corner spot on the old Military Road. Dressed stone is used for coping, simple pilaster capitals between the three front windows, and for the water table, lintels and sills. Windows are simple, narrow and double-hung. Alterations include a covered transom above the storefront window and metal panels below it, new large replacement window at the side,

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removal of the third story, simplified cornice, and some side openings enclosed. (street address: 100.)

**South Side First Street West**

- 09 W.E. Platner Hardware Store and Tin Shop. **Contributing.** 1869. A building stood at this strategic corner location as early as 1849 when E.D. Waln built what was later known as the Gillett Hotel and sold dry goods out of it. (Waln also owned and built on the northwest corner of the intersection; see building #6.) In 1868 the Gillett Hotel burned, according to an 1871 reminiscence, and apparently was rebuilt. The Platner family acquired the property in the late 1870s, and W.E. Platner is known to have operated a hardware store beginning around 1876. Sanborn maps show that a hardware store and tin shop occupied the building from 1894 to 1906, and in 1921 there was a moving picture hall. Based on its appearance and information from abstracts and contemporary newspapers, it appears the building was erected shortly after the 1868 fire. Because of its long association with Platner and the hardware business, that name was chosen for the historic name.

The narrow 2-story brick building occupies a key corner site and is a prominent visual feature in the district. Notable features include smooth stone corner quoins, a heavy metal cornice, bold brackets with unusual console shapes between them, and heavy pedimented hood molds having moulding and end blocks. These features are similar to others in the district. The centered entry is deeply recessed between storefront windows of original form, and there are three steps up to the entry.

The rough stone chunks that form the foundation have been painted, as has the brick (red on side, white at front). Other changes include some side and rear openings enclosed, replacement metal windows with wood panels in the transom space (on the side and rear), side oriel removed, and covered storefront transoms. With its prominent location and bold motifs, the store is a contributing building. The lack of alteration to the storefront is unusual. (street number: 100.)

- 10 Commercial Building. **Noncontributing.** 1930s? Although the "footprint" or outline of the building has remained constant beginning with the 1894 Sanborn map, as late as 1941 the building, which is now 2-story, was shown as a single story extremely shallow building. Local lore states that Mr. Hoover built it in the 1930s, which is generally consistent with its appearance. He may have added

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the second story. The 2-story building is faced with brick in shades of green, gold and red and has a Chicago Style window centered on the upper story. The ground floor has been altered more recently with the addition of a wood shingle canopy, new entries with modern doors and vertical wood siding. (street number: 102.)

- 11 Captain Charles W. Kepler Building. **Contributing.** 1892. The building is shown as a 2-story dry goods store on the 1894 Sanborn map, and newspaper accounts from 1892 trace construction progress. Kepler's law office occupied the second floor along with his brother's medical office, while H.D. Butterfield sold dry goods on the first floor in the 1890s.

The 2-story red brick building features patterned brick (including diamond and egg-and-dart courses) and roughly dressed stone trim, including for the coping. Moulded brick creates a corbelled effect for the cornice, and below are panels of intriguing grills (openwork masonry squares having flat knobs around them). A prominent rough stone continuous lintel unites the three large openings on the second story. These openings now have metal siding infill and smaller windows. Like others in the district, a metal lintel beam crosses the facade; this example is decorated with six Adamesque rose swags and other floral detail. Were it not for the metal siding filling three upper windows, the building would be a key one in the district, but even with this reversible alteration it contributes to the district's distinctive appearance, especially because it displays motifs found elsewhere in the district. (street number: 104.)

- 12 Humboldt Block/Bockstaller Block. **Noncontributing.** 1860. The 2-story building has seen various commercial uses, especially after the 1890s. Newspaper accounts place Espe & Herman (furniture) and B[o]ckstaller & Zercher (boots and shoes) in the Humboldt Block in 1860. By 1869 Armstrong had a dry goods and grocery business there, and John J. Bockstaller continued to sell shoes. In 1876 he remodeled and enlarged his store, which was in the west half of the building. Sanborn maps show that by 1894 the east half was a drug store, by 1900, a grocery. The west half saw similarly varied use, including a confectionery in 1921.

Later known as the Bockstaller Block because of Bockstaller's long attendance there, the 2-story brick building was built to contain two storefronts. Each has three pointed arch windows at the second story level. The east half retains its cornice of bricks set at an angle and original wood frames on the upper windows and has

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replacement metal siding covering the upper story and rustic vertical wood siding on the ground floor. The west half also has wide metal siding applied to the upper story and replacement metal window frames and an altered ground floor--brick strips and stucco-like tan panels that replace storefront windows. Portions of the original red brick and rough stone bases and capitals are visible at the ends of the ground floor portion of the west half. Because of the alterations, the building is noncontributing. Good candidate for rehabilitation. (street number 106-08.)

- 13 Kopf Brothers Building. **Contributing.** 1904. A 1904 newspaper account notes (and Sanborn maps confirm) that Kopf Brothers constructed the building. They bought the property in 1903. The lower floor was for Henry Byers' Boss Cafe and ice cream shop, which moved from another location. The building displays motifs that help define the district, including cornice of brick corbels and bricks set at an angle, round-arched windows, decorated metal lintel beams, and rough stone trim. There are few changes: metal replacement windows (with original wood decorated panels above). (street number: 110.)

- 14 Clark & Hayzlett Block. **Contributing.** 1869. Thomas Clark and J.G. Hayzlett built the "mammoth block" early in 1869 after an 1867 fire to house their hardware and agricultural implement business, according to contemporary newspaper accounts. In 1873 the firm went bankrupt. In 1886 W.H. Goudy had his dry goods store in the west half of the building, and the Merrit and Alexander grocery occupied the east half. By 1894, when there was a small fire in the building, the I.O.O.F. used the second floor for its hall. The Masons bought the building in 1931 and remodeled the storefronts shortly thereafter.

The prominent 2-story red brick building has distinctive stone corner quoins and a series of round-arched windows with original wood frames and smooth stone sills and window surrounds, motifs similar to those elsewhere in the district. When the present Ben Franklin store assumed ownership, ground floor windows and doors were again changed, some new red brick added as well as an unintrusive rear addition. Historic photos show a heavy bracketed cornice (long removed), and now a simple brick and acceptable cornice is in place. (street number: 118.)

- 15 Fourth Wolfe Brothers Building. **Contributing.** 1894. Finishing touches were put on the building late in 1894, according to newspaper accounts, and by 1900 there had been expansion to the

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rear, as shown on the Sanborn map. Wolfe brothers built the building for the boots and shoes store of George J. Horton and E.E. Kyles. The 1-story brick building has narrow mortar joints and rough stone trim quite similar to other examples in the district, thus contributing well to the district's visual cohesiveness. Another important unifying feature are the paired colonettes marking the corners, for other examples in the district also display this motif. The raised and corbelled parapet of the cornice has been removed. The building now functions as an extension of the adjacent Ben Franklin store (and thus has similar storefront changes) but was built as a separate building. (street number: none.)

- 16 Commercial Building. Contributing. By 1900. The building has had various commercial uses and appears to have replaced an earlier building present in 1894 (meat market). The 1-story red brick building has rough stone coping that rises slightly at the ends to frame the composition. Its materials and design exhibit features typical of the district. Alterations are relatively minor: vertical metal siding in the small transom space and around the storefront window, also an angled recessed entry. (street number: 120.)
- 17 Commercial Building. Contributing. After 1894 and by 1900. Grocery/queensware and millinery stores occupied the 2-unit 1-story commercial building in 1900. The 1-story brick veneered building has reddish brick facing, smooth concrete coping that rises slightly at the ends, and a recessed centered entrance. There are no transoms, the large storefront windows appear unchanged, and no significant alterations are apparent. (street number: 122.)
- 18 Odd Fellows Block. KEY contributing. 1904. The Odd Fellows fraternal organization built the block in 1904 and a longtime Mount Vernon clothier, Rood & Young, was the first ground floor occupant. Following their bankruptcy in 1909, the present Bauman's Clothing Store took over, in 1910. Despite its slightly later construction date, the unusually high 2-story reddish brick block displays familiar motifs: decorated metal lintel beam, cut corner, brick corbels and arches, and shaped stone caps. Alterations are limited to metal replacement windows and a set of newer concrete steps with metal railings. The building is essentially unaltered--including storefront windows and ground floor entrances--and with its prominent size visually anchors this end of the district. (street number: 124.)

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The Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District is significant under Criterion C, for it embodies the distinctive characteristics of types and methods of construction of the period in Mount Vernon. The district matured during the railroad era, and its appearance reflected the availability of manufactured building materials brought in by train. These exotic elements--metal beams with Adamesque swags, heavy decorated cornices, fancy art glass windows--transformed main street and reflected the prosperity of the period. The imported materials and elements complement local brick and stone. The district exhibits clear visual cohesiveness, an important factor in illustrating period characteristics.

The main commercial street that comprises the linear Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District contains a distinctive collection of relatively unaltered late 19th century commercial buildings. Sixteen of the 18 in the approximately one and one-half block area contribute markedly to the district's appealing appearance. By far the majority are two-story, brick-faced, and designed for commercial use. Important unifying features include the many late 19th century construction dates, a variety of brick patterns, heavy bracketed metal cornices, distinctive roughly dressed stone trim, and similar size and shape.

The Multiple Property Documentation Form, the Historic Resources of Mount Vernon, Iowa, and the context, the Railroad Era, 1859-1913, provide contextual information confirming the architectural significance of the Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District. The district meets the registration requirements outlined in that multiple property document. The period of significance for the district dates from 1860 (the earliest date of an extant building) to 1904 (the latest date of an extant building that is within the context's period of significance, 1859-1913).

### History

The development of First Street dated from the beginning of Mount Vernon's settlement in the 1840s. By 1847 general stores and a blacksmith shop provided goods and services. Travelers on the Military Road could find accommodations on First Street at Allison Willits' hotel by 1851. Commercial development continued in the 1850s and included another hotel and two stores on First Street by the Military Road. (No extant commercial buildings in the district are known to date from this initial period.) The establishment of Cornell College in 1853 further contributed to Mount Vernon's early development.

In 1859 the railroad, the Chicago, Iowa & Nebraska, came to Mount Vernon. Later known as the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad, the line offered fine prospects for the community, for it provided the latest transportation

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technology. Cornell College students could simply board a train to reach school. The railroad also offered access to distant markets, brought a wider variety of goods to main street, and shipped out agricultural products. Indeed, the first carloads of cattle and hogs left the station in 1859. An 1895 newspaper article noted that "A great many supplies [for H.D. Butterfield's dry goods store (#12)] come from Chicago and Milwaukee and a vast amount comes too from New York City, Philadelphia and Detroit."<sup>3</sup>

Mount Vernon's commercial district developed in the years following the arrival of the railroad. Four extant buildings date from the 1860s, including the Neff Block (#8) on the southeast corner of First Street and First Avenue and Platner's Hardware Store (#9) on the southwest corner of the intersection. Farther down the street are the other 1860s-era buildings, the Humboldt Block (#12) and the Clark & Hayzlett Block (#14). The latter and Platner's Hardware Store both have distinctive stone corner quoins.

By the 1870s a grocery, doctor's office, bank, store, bakery/hotel, millinery shop, picture gallery, and harness shop were all located east of the Military Road (First Avenue) on First Street. And 19 more commercial buildings were packed together west of the Military Road, forming a solid block on both sides of First Street.

Construction of new or replacement brick commercial buildings along First Street continued during the 1880s. The Waln Building (#6) was built on the northwest corner of First Street and First Avenue following a fire. And the men's clothiers, Rood & Young, built on speculation a post office building (#5) in 1888. It was described as the "handsomest business house in town" with its "windows and cornice...beautifully ornamented with elaborate and tasteful designs."<sup>4</sup>

With characteristic booster enthusiasm the newspaper boasted of these and other changes:

The material improvements now in progress in Mt. Vernon in the way of new buildings is greater [in 1890] than any previous year in its history, and in the matter of additions, repairing and improving real estate, a great amount of work is being

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<sup>3</sup>"Hill City's Bid," Mount Vernon Hawk-eye, March 29, 1895.

<sup>4</sup>"Our new Postoffice Building," Hawk-eye, March 15, 1880.



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done. Taking all in all, the present year is the most prosperous year we have ever enjoyed.<sup>5</sup>

The 1890s heralded even more development in Mount Vernon in general and on main street in particular. Between 1890 and 1895 an estimated 150 new buildings were constructed in town. The local newspaper counted nine new commercial buildings along First Street in the 1894-95 period. (Recent research confirms three extant examples in the district datable to 1894-95.)<sup>6</sup>

A relatively healthy local economy encouraged construction, but another impetus to commercial construction and renovation was a series of three fires between December 6, 1893 and July 10, 1894. The first conflagration destroyed two buildings; the Smith-Hogle Block (#3) was built in the burned out space. It was touted for "having the advantage of a double front and being the only one of modern style of that size on the street." One year after the fire, the local newspaper noted that "since [that fire] there has been no cessation in the ring of hammers upon Main street."<sup>7</sup>

Just over a year later another fire in the commercial district occurred. On February 11, 1894 much of the stock in W.H. Goudy's store in the Clark & Hayzlett Block (#14) was ruined, but it does not appear that the building sustained serious damage. The reported culprit was a smoldering cigar in the Odd Fellows hall also located in the block. An oyster supper had been held the night before the fire.

The third fire, on July 10, 1894, destroyed what was described as "the unsightly tin building on the corner" owned by the Wolfe brothers, as well as Stewart Ellison and Son's harness shop. In their stead rose the Wolfe-Ellison Block (#7) "a handsome brick and stone affair, designed by Messrs. Joslyn [sic] & Taylor, of Cedar Rapids."<sup>8</sup>

Doctors (and brothers) John D. and Thomas L. Wolfe were responsible for four commercial buildings in Mount Vernon. Three are extant within the district, the third was across the street from the district boundaries

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<sup>5</sup>Hawk-Eye, June 13, 1890.

<sup>6</sup>Hawk-eye, May 3, 1895.

<sup>7</sup>Hawk-eye, March 3, 1894.

<sup>8</sup>"Town Improvements," Mount Vernon Remarker, December 20, 1894; Hawk-eye, August 17, 1894.

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and has been razed. Only the Wolfe-Ellison Block appears to have been constructed due to a fire, and the other Wolfe projects joined the ranks of the 1890s construction boom on First Street. Other 1890s activity included the building Captain Charles W. Kepler put up in 1892 (#11) to house his law office on the second story and a dry goods store below. In some cases new larger or more substantial buildings replaced lesser ones. In the fall of 1894 Henry A. Collin's small brick office was razed to provide space for the Third Wolfe Brothers Building (#1). The nationwide financial panic of the early 1890s did not still the sound of construction on First Street.

By 1904 the Mount Vernon commercial district was essentially completed.<sup>9</sup> The Odd Fellows Block (#27) constructed in 1904 at the southeast corner of First Street West and Second Avenue crowned the development of the district. The cornerstone was laid the end of July in a ritual described as "impressive and yet simple enough and brief enough to not be tedious or monotonous."<sup>10</sup> In September it was announced that the longtime clothing store of Rood & Young would rent the first floor; the building continues to house a men's clothing store in 1993.

Electric interurban service came to Mount Vernon in 1913, marking the end of the period of exclusively steam rail service. The Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District lingered as a backdrop to this new transportation technology (whose tracks ran down First Street). The district remained a prominent reminder of the community's late 19th century period of development when it was averred that "Mount Vernon presents advantages and attractions not equaled in Iowa."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The dearth of early 20th century commercial construction is decidedly atypical, for the period through the 1910s was a time of considerable prosperity in the state. Perhaps Mount Vernon's commercial district had essentially "matured," and there was little economic demand or need for more buildings. Automobile-associated construction is known to have occurred on the edges of town and so did not intrude upon main street.

<sup>10</sup>Record, July 22, 1904.

<sup>11</sup>Christmas Hawk-eye Supplement. Hawk-eye, December 24, 1886.

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Benjamin Paul Schmit, a Cornell College student, contributed greatly to the histories of individual commercial buildings in the district and uncovered important previously unknown information. He delved into contemporary newspapers, interviewed owners, poured over abstracts, and thereby added considerable new information to the Mount Vernon Historic Resources Data Base. The data base is designed for continued community use and contains detailed information on Mount Vernon's many historic resources.

Christmas Hawk-eye Supplement (booster edition with business histories and drawings of buildings). Mount Vernon Hawk-eye, December 24, 1886.

Mount Vernon Hawk-eye (booster edition), April 15, 1895.

Mount Vernon Hawk-eye, numerous brief entries referring to specific businesses, especially May 4, 1860; February 19, 1869; December 29, 1871; January 26, 1872; February 28, 1873; March 15, 1880; ("Our new Postoffice Building") March 15, 1889; June 13, 1890; April 24, March 20, 1891; April 1, September 16, 1892; February 17, 1893; February 11 and March 3 and 30, August 17, 1894; March 29, April 26, May 3, 1895.

Mount Vernon Record, June 10, July 22, 1904.

Mount Vernon Remarker, numerous brief entries in 1890s referring to specific businesses, including November 22 and December 20, 1894.

A Centennial History of Mount Vernon, Iowa. Centennial Committee: 1948.

Long, Barbara Beving. The Historic Resources of Mount Vernon, Iowa. Multiple Property Documentation form. 1991.

----- Architectural/Historical Sites Survey. Mount Vernon, Iowa - the Hill City. 1988.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Mount Vernon, Iowa. 1894, 1900, 1906, 1921, and 1941.

Thomas, Richard H. "A Brief History of Mount Vernon, Iowa." 1973.

"Fires That Changed Main Street." Undated unsigned term paper in collection of Richard H. Thomas.

Clark, Jeff. Index to research cards, Mount Vernon businesses referred to in newspapers, 1890-June 1893.

----- "Mt. Vernon in the early 1890's: an Era of Booming Prosperity." Cornell College term paper. January 2, 1988.

Mount Vernon Historic Resources Data Base.

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*Verbal Boundary Description:*

The contiguous, linear district runs on both sides of First Street. At its northwest corner, it commences three storefronts east of the intersection of Second Avenue North and First Street West and continues east along 1st Street West. The district crosses First Avenue to include one building at the northeast corner of First Street East and First Avenue North and one building at the southeast corner of First Street East and First Avenue North. The district then continues west along the south side of First Street West, ending at the Second Avenue South.

*Boundary Justification:*

The boundaries are designed to exclude acreage not directly contributing to the significance of the district. These peripheral areas lack integrity. Since properties lack integrity at the ends of three of four edge blocks for the district, there is a change in character within the block, making it appropriate to exclude these noncontributing commercial buildings within those blocks. The excluded properties are either highly altered, of modern construction, or their date of construction falls outside the district's Period of Significance. Boundaries along the north and south edges of the district are the backs of the commercial buildings, and there is a marked change in the visual character at this juncture.

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PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

1.  
Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District  
Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa  
Photo by BJB Long  
November 1990  
Neg: Iowa Bureau of Historic Preservation  
Camera facing northeast showing north side  
First Street, buildings 1-7  
Photo #1
2.  
Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District  
Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa  
Photo by BJB Long  
November 1990  
Neg: Iowa Bureau of Historic Preservation  
Camera facing northwesterly showing north side First  
Street West, buildings 2-6  
Photo #2
3.  
Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District  
Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa  
Photo by BJB Long  
November 1990  
Neg: Iowa Bureau of Historic Preservation  
Camera facing north, showing building 1  
Photo #3
4.  
Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District  
Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa  
Photo by BJB Long  
November 1990  
Neg: Iowa Bureau of Historic Preservation  
Camera facing north, showing building 2  
Photo #4
5.  
Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District  
Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa  
Photo by BJB Long  
November 1990
6.  
Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District  
Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa  
Photo by BJB Long  
November 1990  
Neg: Iowa Bureau of Historic Preservation  
Camera facing southeast, showing south side First Street,  
buildings 8-15 (from left to right)  
Photo #6
7.  
Mount Vernon Commercial Historic District  
Mount Vernon, Linn County, Iowa  
Photo by BJB Long  
November 1990  
Neg: Iowa Bureau of Historic Preservation  
Camera facing southeasterly, showing south side First  
Street, buildings 14-18 (from left to right)  
Photo #7

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