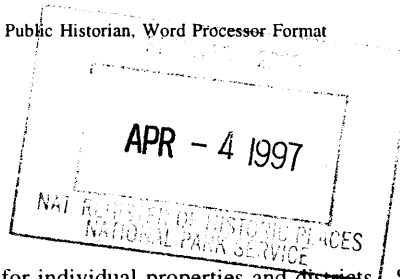


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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" on the appropriate line or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF MASON CITY  
other names/site number Norwest Bank Building, City Center of Mason City

**2. Location**

street & number 5-7 North Federal Avenue N/A not for publication  
city or town Mason City N/A vicinity  
state Iowa code IA county Cerro Gordo code 033 zip code 50402

**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.)  
Patricia Christen 3-31-97  
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 Keeper Patrick Andrus Date of Action 5/2/97

First National Bank of Mason City  
Name of Property

Cerro Gordo County, Iowa  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property Category of Property**  
(Check as many lines as apply) (Check only one line)

- 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	
_____	_____	_____ buildings
_____	_____	_____ sites
_____	_____	_____ structures
_____	_____	_____ objects
_____	_____	_____ 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**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/financial institution  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business  
DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY MOVEMENTS/  
Commercial Style  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Brick  
Terra Cotta  
roof Concrete  
other Stone  
Glass

**Narrative Description**

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

First National Bank of Mason City  
Name of Property

Cerro Gordo County, Iowa  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" on one or more lines for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

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

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" on all the lines that apply)  
Property is:

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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1911

**Significant Dates**

1911

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

Liebe, Nourse, and Rasmussen

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

**9. Major Bibliography References**

**Bibliography**

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

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

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository

Loomis Archive, Mason City Public Library

First National Bank of Mason City  
Name of Property

Cerro Gordo County, Iowa  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 18S1483740 | 14778520 |

Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

2 | | |

Zone Easting Northing

**Boundary Justification**

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

3 | | |

Zone Easting Northing

4 | | |

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title William C. Page, Public Historian

organization City Center of Mason City date December 10, 1995

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

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50313

**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 City Center of Mason City, Inc., Edward J. Kent, President

street & number c/o Kent Prescription Shop, 1 South Federal Avenue telephone 515-233-3141

city or town Mason City state Iowa zip code 50402

**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**

Section number 7 Page 1

CFN-259-1116

First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

The First National Bank of Mason City is a 6-1/2 story, commercial building situated directly adjacent to Central Park in Mason City. First occupied in 1911, the footprint of this building measures 66' x 107'. The edifice features a concrete foundation and a reinforced concrete frame. It is clad with brick curtain walls and embellished with terra cotta. On the exterior, the first floor is 18 feet in height and the five upper floors are each ten feet in height. A half-story attic is situated above the sixth floor with a flat roof above the attic. The building possesses two facades--one facing west and one facing south. These elevations feature a dark red-colored vitrified brick. The north and east elevations face adjacent buildings and are clad with common brick with portions painted white. In 1995-1996, this building was rehabilitated as an affordable housing apartment building with commercial use retained on the first floor.

The exterior of the First National Bank of Mason City possesses very good integrity. Few discernible alterations have taken place except for the replacement of windows on the second, third, and fourth floors in the 1970s. These now contain a single pane rather than their original 1/1 configuration. Windows on the fifth and sixth floors were replaced in 1995 using the original 1/1 double hung sash design. Two major remodelings in the 1950s and the 1970s significantly altered the interior integrity of the building while it was still a bank. The current rehabilitation project has redesigned much of the building's floorplan to conform with its new use.

In 1982, an historic building adjacent on the north of the bank was razed and a 2-story annex built with internal access to the bank. This annex, located at 7 North Federal Avenue, is included in this nomination because it is attached to the bank building at 5 North Federal Avenue and used as a functional part of it..

**BUILDING**

Roughly speaking, the footprint of this building consists of a rectangle, which measures approximately 66' x 107' (north-south by east-west). An airshaft is located on the north elevation above the first floor. It measures 18' x 39' and provides light and air to the upper stories. The basement also extends under the pedestrian sidewalks on the south and west. The extension on the south contains approximately 1,070 square feet, and the extension on the west contains approximately 804 square feet. The main entrance to the building is on the west elevation and faces Central Park. To comply with the local building code, a new stairway, constructed of concrete block, was recently built at the rear of the building on the east elevation. Although a full 6-stories in height, this addition is nonintrusive because it stands in an alley and is effectively masked by the adjacent I.O.O.F. Building.

The building rests on a concrete foundation. Of reinforced concrete structural construction, the building is clad with brick of variegated red colors (called "tapestry brick" at the time) and embellished with gray colored terra cotta detailing. Windows are generally 1/1 double hung sash. As noted above, the window configurations on some floors are now single-paned. On the first floor, the original windows also featured a two-pane configuration, with a small upper pane and large lower pane. These

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CFN-259-1116

First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

windows were replaced in the 1970s with a one-pane configuration. The building has a flat roof of masonry construction covered with tar and gravel.

Overall, the exterior of the building is divided into a series of bays on each floor. The west elevation features seven bays, and the south elevation features eleven bays. These bays are defined by brick pilasters on the first floor. These pilasters rest on the granite base and are surmounted with terra cotta capitals. They support a cornice situated between the first and second floors. This cornice is also constructed of terra cotta and contains the words "First National Bank." The terra cotta of all these details is finished in a gray color to resemble the granite base. The main entrance is flanked by Doric columns supporting a lintel with the word "Bank." This entrance is now situated in the third bay from the north on the west elevation (see Continuation Sheet 8-21). Originally this entrance was located in the fourth bay from the north (see Continuation Sheet 8-21). When the interior of the building was remodeled in 1954, the original entrance was carefully relocated to its present site.

Floors two through six feature restrained architectural detailing. Each of the bays noted above are defined by the window cavity being inset slightly from the plane of the building, lending the feeling of pilasters. Window sills on the upper floors are cast concrete.

The half-story top floor of the First National Bank of Mason City forms an elaborate architectural embellishment to it. Classically-inspired, its elements include an architrave of terra cotta situated between the fifth and sixth floors; an entablature, formed by attic story windows flanked by terra cotta pilasters with Classical designs picked out in pink; and a projecting cornice also of terra cotta and decorated with dentils. The rich architectural detailing of this top floor--including the contrast between dark-colored brick and light-colored terra cotta--calls strong visual attention to it.

The structural system of the building is a reinforced concrete frame with curtain walls of brick and tile. The flooring of the building also features masonry construction. It consists of reinforced concrete I-beams with tile block placed between them. Together, these materials acted as a form for concrete, which was then poured on top as a platform. This method of construction is locally known as the "Sheffield system," from the brick and tile factory at Sheffield, Iowa, where the tile was manufactured. (This firm, located about twenty miles south of Mason City, provided building materials to many early Twentieth Century construction projects in Iowa, including Penn Hall on the campus of William Penn College in Oskaloosa.) This method of construction provided a solid and fireproof flooring system. It is not known if the Sheffield firm patented some aspect of this system, a type of construction in popular across the nation at the time.

When first constructed, the first floor contained public entrances, banking room, vault, and an independently accessed jewelry store. The five upper floors contained a total of 120 offices. The attic has never been used. The basement originally housed a barber shop, a use which remained for many years. The interior of the building has since been reconfigured several times. On the first floor, the banking room has been radically remodeled several times. In 1954, Marlow Ihling, architect of the firm of A. Moorman Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, redesigned the banking room (*Mason City Globe-Gazette* 1954). To implement this plan, original marble was stripped from the walls, the original ceiling and other plaster decorations were badly damaged in the installation of new utility

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

systems, the ceiling was dropped, and the teller cages removed and replaced. The general contractor for this remodeling was Davey and Moen of Mason City, Iowa. This work was completed for Christmas of 1954, and the cost totaled about \$250,000. In the early 1980s, the firm of Bergland and Bianco, architects of Mason City, prepared another remodeling of the building. A second dropped ceiling was installed in the banking room, and the fourth floor was also remodeled. As part of this remodeling, the former building at 7 North Federal Avenue was razed and the present building, with its several internal accesses to 5 North Federal, was built (Robert Bergland personal communication).

The original floor plan of the upper floors featured a series of offices, toilets, and utility spaces (see Continuation Sheet 7-9). Some of these areas were also remodeled by the bank over the years to serve the changing needs of business. Each of the upper floors is now being rehabilitated into residential apartments. There are three types of units--studio, one bedroom, and two bedroom. The one bedroom units predominate. The top half-story has never been used and remains unoccupied today. A large neon sign, mounted on the roof, was for many years a prominent visual feature of the building. Erected sometime between 1950 and 1953, it read "1st" and could be seen for several miles (see Continuation Sheet 8-21). This sign was removed in 1983 or 1984, shortly after the name of the bank was changed to Norwest (Fischbeck Letter of Correspondence).

The former owner of the building recognized that it plays an important role in the cityscape of downtown Mason City. For this reason, the bank sold it with the provision that rehabilitation should take place quickly. Overall the building is in very good condition.

The annex, attached at 7 North Federal Avenue to the bank building, is a 2-story, brick and glass commercial structure with a frontage measuring 22'. It was constructed in 1982.

### **HISTORY OF USE**

Throughout the bank's history in this building--from 1911 to its relocation in 1995--the first floor of the First National Bank served as the institution's banking room. It contained the vestibule, elevators, vault, officers' rooms, safety deposit rooms, and men and women's restrooms. At the time, the First National Bank provided the only public restrooms in downtown Mason City (*Mason City Globe-Gazette* 1911). The vault was a notable feature of the banking room. Constructed by the Remington and Sherman Company of Philadelphia, it was located at the east end banking room and accessed by a manganese circular door (*Ibid.*). An historic view of the banking room pictures it circa 1912 (see Continuation Sheet 8-23). Marble is prominently employed, including an uncomfortable looking bench for customers. The northwest portion of the first floor originally served as a retail space for Potts' Jewelry. A separate entrance for this store was included in the original design of the building (see Continuation Sheets 8-17 and 8-21).

The upper floors have provided office space for a variety of purposes over the years. While much of the space was used for bank purposes, other commercial and professional businesses leased space. These uses, as well as the many changes they affected, are recounted in a letter from Arthur M. Fischbeck, Mason City Historian:

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

I have been familiar with the building since 1926 when my father first established his insurance office in Room 419 of the building. He later moved to 323 and in 1946 that became my office. I remained there until 1957. During those years, there was constant remodeling to satisfy the needs of changing tenants. In the early 1960s that bank determined to close off the upper floors and a[s] leases expired, no new tenants were found. Within a short time, the bank occupied the first and second floors and the upper floors were vacant. Later on, the bank remodeled and occupied the third and fourth floors as well. (Fischbeck Letter of Correspondence.)

**INTEGRITY**

The First National Bank of Mason City retains a high degree of exterior integrity. Its few alterations are noted above. Also noted above are the considerable alterations, which have taken place in the interior. Although the banking room as a space can still be read, its wall surfaces have lost their original integrity. Its ceiling has been lowered twice. When the first drop ceiling was installed, the original plaster decorations--including coffers, moulding, pilasters and capitals, and their painted ivory and beige surfaces--were badly damaged. Although the present rehabilitation project has extensively redesigned spaces on the upper floors, these areas did not form prominent public spaces in the building and featured little architectural embellishment.

The attached, two-story annex situated at 7 North Federal Avenue is included in this nomination for the reasons mentioned above. This annex does not impair the integrity of the First National Bank. The massive size of the bank building dwarfs that of the annex.

**SITE**

This building is situated in Paul Felt's Plat of Mason City, Iowa. This parcel measures approximately 88' x 121' (north-south by east-west). It occupies the northeast corner of the intersection of North Federal Avenue and State Street.

The First National Bank of Mason City stands on the east side of North Federal Avenue and faces west and south. As the tallest building in the immediate area, it visually dominates Central Park, which is situated immediately to the west. Other tall buildings in Mason City's central business district include the 1916 Modern Brotherhood of America Building (an eight story edifice, also known as the Brick & Tile Building) and offices of the Principal Financial Group, a new 6-story building on the southwest corner of Central Park .

Land in this area is level. Its feeling is one of a densely built downtown intersection. Federal Avenue once served as Iowa Highway 65 in Mason City (now rerouted), and State Street is an important east-west corridor into the central business district.



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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

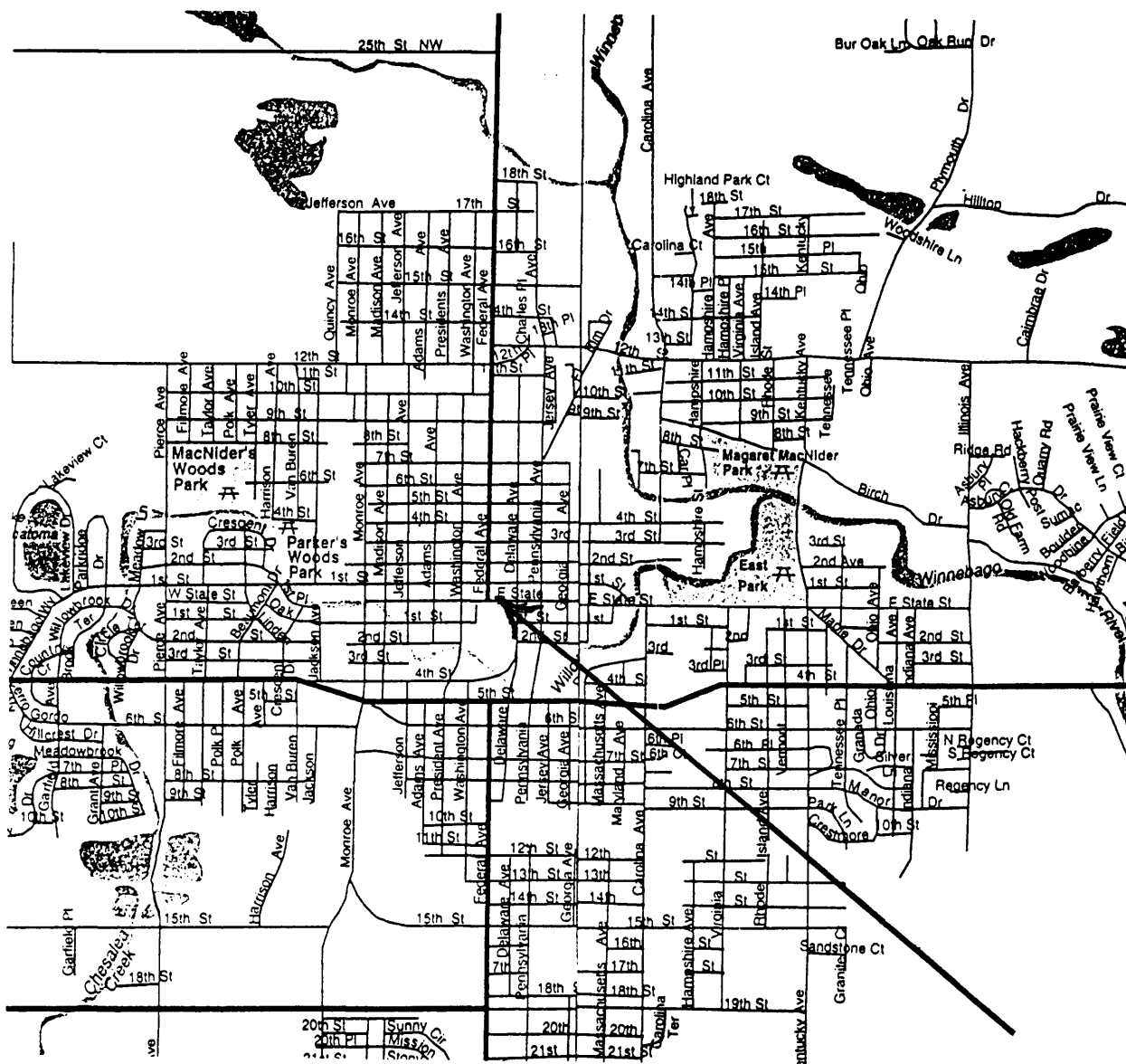
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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

## SITE MAP

ARROW LOCATES PROPERTY



Source: City of Mason City, Iowa, circa 1990.



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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

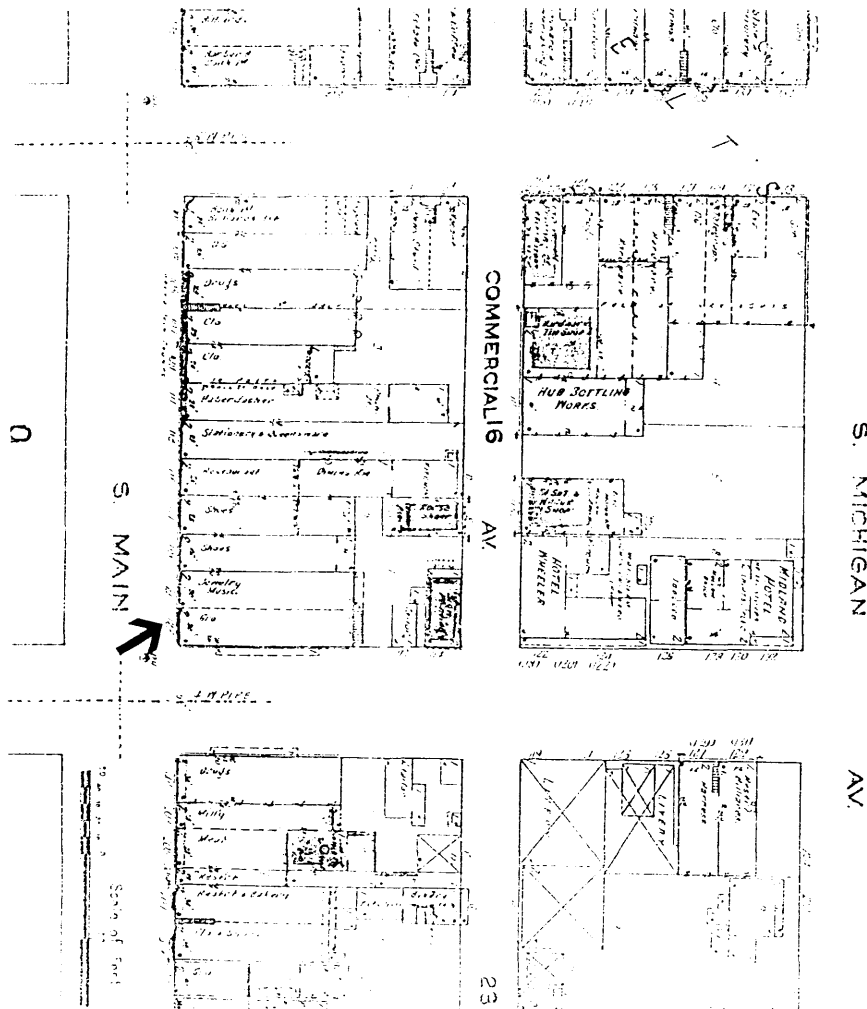
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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

## 1909 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

ARROW LOCATES PREVIOUS LAND USE



Note that Main Street is now Federal Avenue.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Mason City, Iowa, 1909.

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

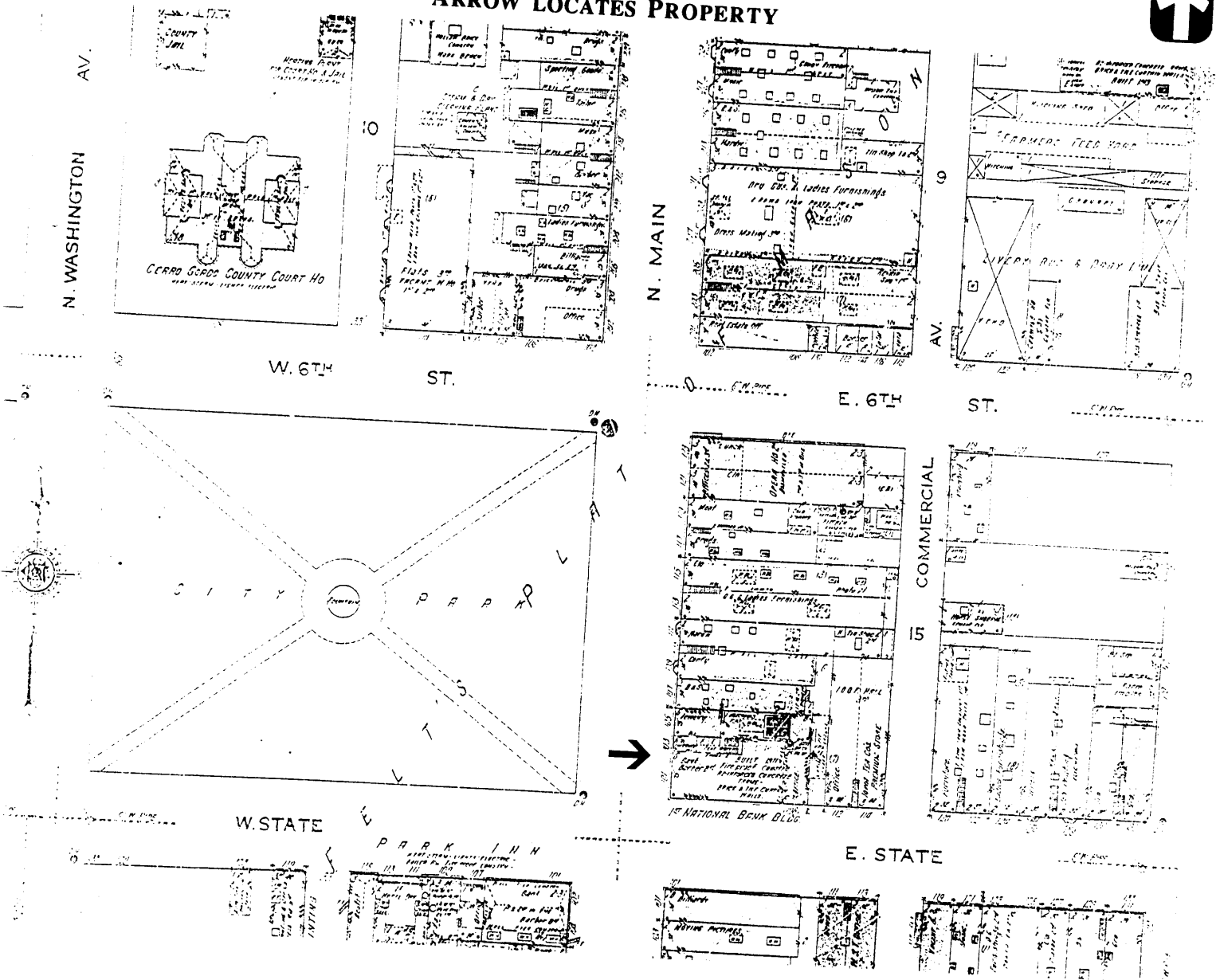
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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

## 1915 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

### ARROW LOCATES PROPERTY



Note that Main Street is now Federal Avenue.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Mason City, Iowa, 1915.

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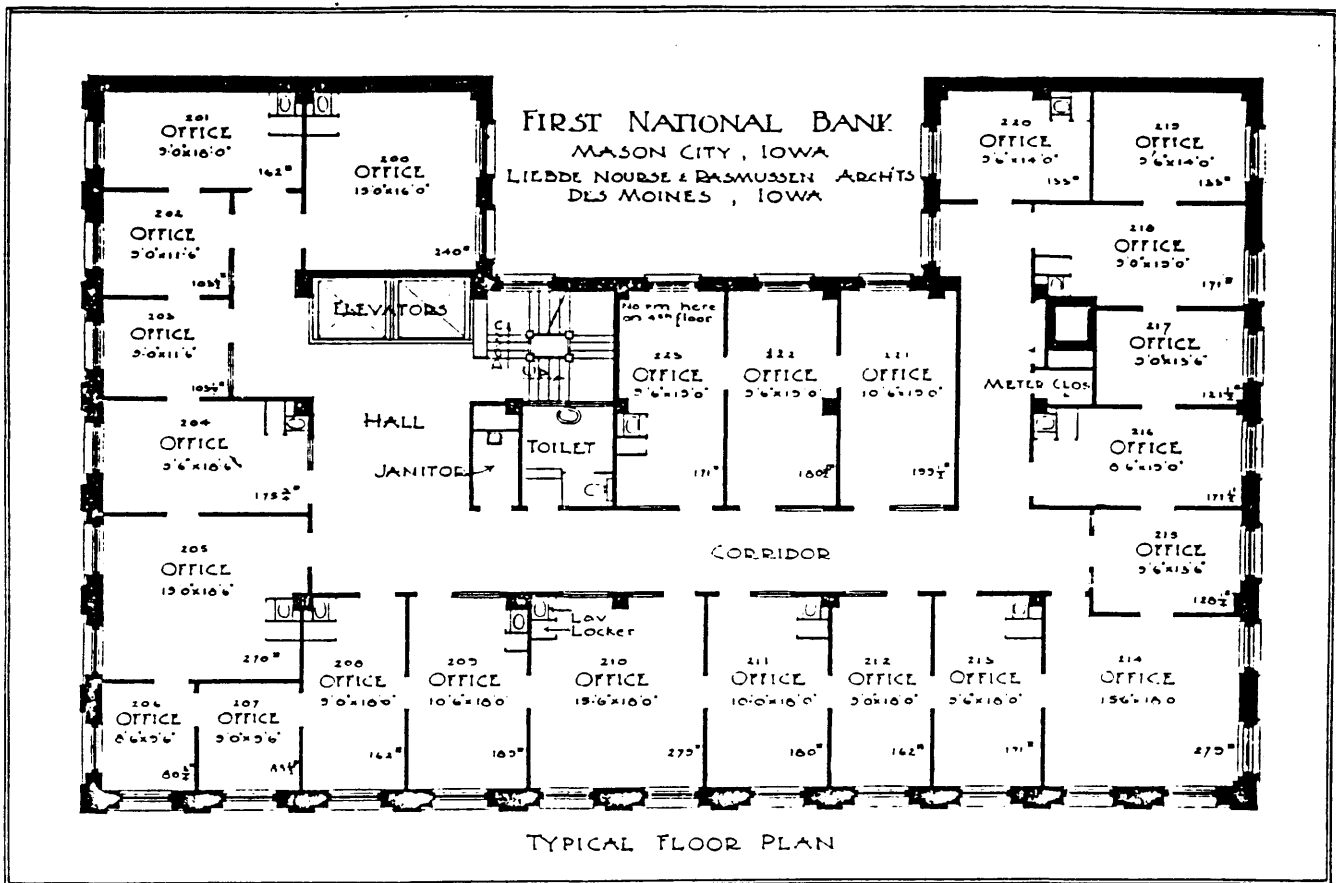
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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

## ORIGINAL PLAN FOR TYPICAL UPPER FLOOR



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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

**SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Completed and first occupied in 1911, the First National Bank of Mason City is locally significant under National Register Criterion C, because it illustrates a new type of architecture emerging in Iowa during the early Twentieth Century--the skyscraper. The building is additionally significant, under Criterion C, in calling attention to the considerable skills of Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen, architects of Des Moines, Iowa, who designed it. First National Bank also illustrates how Classical Revival styling could influence the architectural design of a large, commercial building.

The period of significance, under Criterion C, for this building is 1911, the year it was completed and first occupied. The year 1911 also stands as a significant date for this reason.

The property contains one resource for this nomination--the First National Bank of Mason City, which is contributing and classified as a building.

**ARCHITECTURE**

Skyscraper

The First National Bank of Mason City stands as a fine and early example of a new architectural type emerging in Iowa during the early Twentieth Century--the skyscraper of its time.

The design of skyscrapers offered new challenges to architects. An important design consideration was that the skyscraper must appear firmly situated on its site. The First National Bank achieves this through its massive rectangular shape and by the visual emphasis drawn to the first floor by the heavy cornice above it. This cornice--coupled with the building's granite base course, pilasters and their capitals, and main entrance flanked with Doric columns--solidly anchors the building visually on its site.

A second aesthetic consideration was that the skyscraper should convey a soaring feeling to the viewer. The First National Bank achieves this through several architectural conceits. If the base of the building draws the viewer's first attention, the eye is drawn quickly from it to the top floor. This rapid visual movement is achieved through the architectural restraint of the intervening floors and because the richly detailed top story--with its contrasting color--captures the eye. The verticality of the building is further accented by its uniformly placed fenestration. The pilasters provide a further note of verticality. Finally, a tall flagpole stands at the top of the building (see Continuation Sheet 8-20). Situated near the west elevation, this feature draws yet further attention to the sky, particularly when a flag is flying from it.

Skyscrapers also offered structural challenges to architects. The reinforced concrete frame of the First National Bank provided a commonly employed solution to that problem.

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

The word "skyscraper" appropriately describes the First National Bank both because of its height compared with other commercial buildings in Mason City and because contemporaries used it. For example, "The work of constructing the new sky scraper will be taken up and pushed through to its finish with the utmost rapidity." (*Mason City Times*, April 21, 1910).

Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen

The First National Bank of Mason City illustrates the considerable skills of Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen, a notable architectural firm of Des Moines. The building illustrates specifically the firm's preference for sober architectural compositions, employing monumental massing relieved by judicious accents of detail. The First National Bank of Mason City also illustrates how the firm manipulated these preferences in the design of a skyscraper.

Henry Frantz Liebbe (1851-1927) was born in Bremen, Germany. By 1873, he had relocated to Des Moines, Iowa, at which time city directories list him as an architect with L. W. Foster & Co. (City Directory 1873). In 1879, he married Medora Jones (*Des Moines Register*). By 1904, Liebbe had become "State Architect" for the State of Iowa (Brigham:I-386), a position he retained until his death. Henry Janes Liebbe, his son, followed his father as an architect and succeeded him as state architect upon the elder's death.

Clinton C. Nourse was the son of a prominent pioneer family of Des Moines. According to a biographical sketch written by Neal Vogel, Nourse probably received his architectural training from William Foster or the firm of Foster and Liebbe. Later, Nourse practiced architecture in partnership with George Hallett, another significant local architect. In February, 1899, H. F. Liebbe, C. C. Nourse, and E. F. Rasmussen formed a partnership. (*The Midwestern*:70). Their firm advertised as being the successors of Foster & Liebbe (*Ibid.*). They remained in business until about 1911, at which time Nourse relocated to California. (Architects in Iowa Files, SHSI)

Edward F. Rasmussen (died 1930) was born in 1867 in Owatonna, Minnesota, according to one source, and in 1877 in Hastings, Minnesota, according to another one (Architects in Iowa Files). He came to Des Moines from Sioux City in 1900. At the present time, little is known about him other than information contained in his obituary. About this Neal Vogel has written:

His obituary in the Des Moines Tribune states he studied architecture before he moved to Sioux City where he started practice. This is the only reference to one of the firm's members having studied at a school of architecture. During Rasmussen's early practice in Sioux City he is credited with working in the McLaughlin architectural firm. While in Sioux City Rasmussen is credited with designing the Securities National Bank.

Rasmussen, a bachelor, died in Des Moines on October 13, 1930 at the age of 62. The Tribune obituary stated,

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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CFN-259-1116

First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

"Mr. Rasmussen carried on the business after the withdrawal of Mr. Liebbe, who became State Architect, and the removal of Mr. Nourse, who went to California."

This explanation seems to collaborate the information I have uncovered concerning this firm. . .  
(Architects in Iowa Files, SHSI)

The architectural firm of Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen emerged during the early Twentieth Century as influential in a state-wide context. More than a dozen major commercial buildings designed by the firm have been identified to date. They include the following:

*Identified Commercial Buildings by Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen*

<u>Building</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>
First National Bank	Mason City, IA	1910
Humboldt State Bank	Humboldt, IA	1918
Story City National Bank	Story City, IA	1913
Store and Flats (Boone Marble Works)	Boone, IA	1913
Ames Savings Bank	Ames, IA	1913
Hotel	Cloverton, MN	1913
Residence & Garage	Fort Dodge, IA	1918
First National Bank	Boone, IA	
Holtz Hotel	Boone, IA	
Commercial National Bank	Waterloo, IA	c. 1906
Iowa (Des Moines) National Bank	Des Moines, IA	c. 1904
Citizens National Bank	Des Moines, IA	c. 1906
First National Bank	Webster City, IA	

Source: Architects in Iowa Files, SHSI.

For its skyscraper designs, Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen showed a preference for compositions of monumental form and restrained embellishment. Conceived as massive blocks, the ground floors and the top floors of their skyscrapers feature sober decoration with the intervening floors usually quite plain. The Modern Brotherhood of American building in Mason City provides a contrast in this regard. Designed by Bell and Bentley, architects of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and constructed in 1915, the two facades of this building are broken into numerous horizontal and vertical planes (see Continuation Sheet 8-21).

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Sometimes Liebe, Nourse, and Rasmussen employed Chicago-style windows, as in the Younkers Department Store or the Frankel's Building, both in Des Moines. Sometimes the firm used Romanesque arches to relieve the massing as in the Commercial National Bank in Waterloo or the Citizens National Bank in Des Moines. Usually, however, fenestration remained simple and surfaces plain. The First National Bank of Mason City generally conforms to this characterization of the firm's skyscraper format. Within this context, however, the building is unusual because of its extensive use and delicate design of the terra cotta accenting the top floor.

Liebe, Nourse, and Rasmussen also designed courthouses for Iowa County, Page County, Wapello County, Lucas County, Wright County, and Washington County; and high schools for Muscatine, North Des Moines, West Des Moines, and Oskaloosa. At the present time, it is difficult to determine which of the partners acted as lead for specific commissions. Architectural historian Neal Vogel has attributed the design of the First National Bank of Mason City to E. F. Rasmussen. (*Ibid.*)

Numerous single-family dwellings designed by the firm in Des Moines and elsewhere have also been identified. It is expected that this list will increase as more is learned about the firm. Numerous other buildings were designed, independently, by the three partners. For example, C. C. Nourse is credited with the design of nonextant portions of Old North Des Moines High School. It is not easy to assess which commissions were specifically designed by which partner, a phenomenon frequently encountered in the study of architectural firms. As chief architect for the Iowa State Board of Control, Liebe concentrated much of his effort on public commissions. It is thought that Nourse and Rasmussen were responsible for much of the firm's other work. The research done by Neal Vogel, noted above, provides a beginning point for evaluation of the firm.

It is hoped that further research will explore the Northern European and Scandinavian heritage shared by at least two partners in this firm. Their predilection for architectural designs of sober composition might relate to similar tastes in Northern Europe and Scandinavia.

Other Notes

The First National Bank of Mason City was built by C. E. Atkinson, general contractor of Webster City, Iowa. This was one of several edifices designed by H. F. Liebe and built by Atkinson. Others in Iowa included the Nurses' Cottage at Independence (*American Contractor*, 1913), a residence and garage at Shell Park in Fort Dodge (*Ibid.*, 1918), the Wahkonsa Hotel at Fort Dodge (Iowa Architects Files), and the Humboldt State Bank (*American Contractor*, 1918).

Particularity was observed in the construction of the building. For example, a local newspaper noted that the builders

have been having a little trouble with their brick, having refused several cars and then changing the contract giving it to another firm. Brick is expected to be here now any day and as soon as it arrives work on the brick part of the structure will commence. (*Mason City Times*, October 21, 1910)



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**C. H. McNIDER AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Further research may show that the First National Bank of Mason City is eligible, under National Register Criterion B, based on the career of C. H. McNider and his contributions to the economic development of Mason City. Both these themes have direct associations with the bank building. The following information is included in this nomination as an introduction to them and further research and evaluation are recommended.

The career of C. H. McNider (1850-1928) coincided with a period of great commercial, industrial, and population growth in Mason City. McNider was a banker by occupation, a Republican in politics, and a Mason City booster throughout his professional life. The First National Bank was the largest in the community and dominated its financial life. McNider would also assume the presidency of the Northern States Portland Cement Company, the largest employer in the community. Later, McNider served on the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. His family, who changed the spelling of its name, continued a high public profile. Hanford MacNider, C. H.'s only child, succeeded his father as chairman of the board of the bank. He had served as Assistant Secretary of War from 1925-1928 in the Coolidge Administration, was later named Minister to Canada in 1930, at which time he negotiated the St. Lawrence Waterway Treaty. Hanford MacNider was also a candidate for the U. S. vice-presidency at the 1940 Republican National Convention. Jack MacNider, C. H. McNider's grandson, served, until recently, as president of Northern States.

C. H. McNider epitomized the self-made man. He began working for the Cerro Gordo County Bank in 1871 as janitor and messenger boy and remained with the institution his entire life. When the bank was reorganized in 1881 as the First National Bank of Mason City, McNider became assistant cashier. In 1888 McNider became cashier, a position he retained until bank president H. I. Smith, an early owner of the institution, retired in 1901. At that time, McNider was named president, a position he retained until his death in 1928.

McNider's financial skill and organizational abilities found recognition in many institutions. McNider served as president of the Iowa Bankers Association. For six years, he was a member of the executive council of the American Banker's Association. During the 1920s, McNider became a member of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

To place C. H. McNider in historical perspective requires the development of an historical context outside the scope of this nomination. His career dominated financial interests in Mason City and the surrounding area and exemplified some of the best and some of the worst traits of many of America's business and industrial leaders during the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries.

McNider's participation in the Liberty Loans program sponsored by the United States Government during World War I provides an example. By the time the Third Liberty Loan drive was launched, the Federal Reserve, which administered the program, had learned that organization was critical for its success. As a result, an extensive network of chairmanships were established to promote the loans. Nathaniel R. Whitney discusses in his book *The Sale of War Bonds* in Iowa the role C. H. McNider played in this work:

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Between the second and third campaigns a great change was effected in the methods of conducting the loan drives. C. H. McNider was at this time made director of sales for Iowa . . . Every county in the State subscribed for more than its quota in the Third Loan, and these subscriptions were obtained with such celerity that Iowa was the first State in the Union to exceed its quota, a record which was maintained under Mr. McNider's leadership in the fourth and fifth campaigns as well. For this achievement Iowa won the honor flag of the United States. Iowans can feel proud of the fact that no other State chairman throughout the United States established a record which at all approached that of Mr. McNider. (Whitney:153-154)

On the other side of the coin, the U. S. Treasury Department later filed a complaint with the Iowa organization, citing "strong arm" methods employed in Iowa to encourage subscriptions. (*Ibid.*:125-126)

The philanthropy of C. H. McNider and May McNider, his wife, made substantial contributions to Mason City and to Iowa. Brian Nevermann has outlined these in his sympathetic sketch of MacNider family history.

McNider's influence on local economic development was profound. One indication of this influence occurred posthumously in 1929. At that time, the First National Bank of Mason City became one of the original institutions, which joined to form the Northwest Bancorporation, or Banco, as it was known. The other institutions included the First National Bank and Trust Company of Fargo, North Dakota, and the Northwestern Bank of Minneapolis, along with its members institutions. This institution, now known as Norwest Bank, was an early "group bank" in the nation. Writing about this period, Harold Chucker has noted:

Aggressive, prosperous banks remained, and weak banks were being consolidated into larger, stronger institutions. But as strong as these remaining banks were, there was nonetheless a fear of domination by large Eastern banking interests. It was a fear documented by evidence of stock purchases. (Chucker:2-3)

It is significant that the First National Bank of Mason City was included in this original bank holding company. The goal of its incorporators was to form a strong union of regional banks to withstand encroachments from Eastern capital. As a charter member of this Midwestern financial alliance, First National Bank of Mason City's participation indicates its power and reputation. Although formal action took place several months after C. H. McNider's death, the bank's financial strength and reputation was the result of McNider's work, and this alliance should be seen as a triumph of his career. (*Mason City Globe-Gazette*, January 8, 1929)

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### HISTORY OF CRIME

The First National Bank of Mason City became the scene for the final chapter of John Dillinger's life. Classified at the time as "public enemy number one" by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, John Dillinger robbed this bank on March 13, 1934. He had recently escaped from prison in Indiana and gone to the Twin Cities vicinity. In the Mason City robbery, Dillinger was accompanied by Tommy Carroll, Homer Van Meter, and Lester Gillis ("Baby Face Nelson"). Although this gang was successful in stealing approximately \$50,000 from the institution, Dillinger was wounded in an exchange of gunfire. He was later apprehended in St. Paul, Minnesota, after seeking medical assistance there.

Following the robbery, national publications sensationalized the story. For example, *The New Republic* in June 1934, published an "eyewitness of the bank hold-up here described." While the robbery was taking place within the bank,

... outside the show was going on. In two minutes 5000 people--no one counted them, but there must have been that many--stood on the corner and watched the bandits... The taxi bell on the corner rang. A woman some blocks from the bank heard there was a robbery. She wanted to see it. Would the taxi driver come quick? He would and he charged her for it. He missed a good show. He left his passenger half a block from the bank and she complained because he didn't bring her closer. (*Ibid.*:30)

The slant of this article was robbery as theatrical entertainment. The title of this article--*Dillinger Puts On a Show*--makes this quite clear. This slant is reiterated:

But the people had a good show. Some of them had never seen a bank robbery. Some liked the looks of the boys doing the robbing. They were young. Some were handsome. They had a lot of nerve. You had to give them credit. They had everything planned out and it worked slick, like clockwork. (*Ibid.*)

Shortly after this article was published, *Readers Digest* published a condensed version of it.

Such accounts show how American popular culture during the Great Depression craved entertainment and how sensational crime could provide it. These accounts also show how some Americans glamorized criminals. Dillinger's death, which occurred soon afterwards, provided an end to this story.

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND REGISTRATION**

The career of C. H. McNider and his contributions to economic development in Mason City and Cerro Gordo County are two themes worthy of further investigation. Both have direct associations with the First National Bank of Mason City. The building served as McNider's seat of banking operations. Its entire sixth floor also served as main office for the Northern States Portland Cement Company, an industry largely owned by McNider and the largest employer in the community.

Future investigation may show that this building is a contributing element to an eligible historic district. The possibility exists to register a commercial historic district in this area. Established in 1855, Central Park in Mason City provided an anchor for development of the central business district. Historic commercial buildings stand adjacent to Central Park on the east side and on the south side. Those on the east side include the First National Bank of Mason City. Those on the south include Frank Lloyd Wright's Park Inn Hotel at 15 West State Street (NRHP) and his City National Bank at 4 South Federal Avenue (NRHP). Other architecturally significant buildings, such as the City Bank at 1 South Federal Avenue and the extant Parker Opera Block at 21 North Federal Avenue are also located here.

Numerous other architecturally significant buildings stand within a two block area. Central Park itself would serve as a key resource in such an historic district as a designed historic landscape. In 1977, an architectural survey was undertaken in Mason City. This information was locally updated in 1993.

Although these documents provide a outstanding reservoir of information to begin an intensive survey, such a survey should also address the historical development of the area, using National Register Criterion A as a focus.

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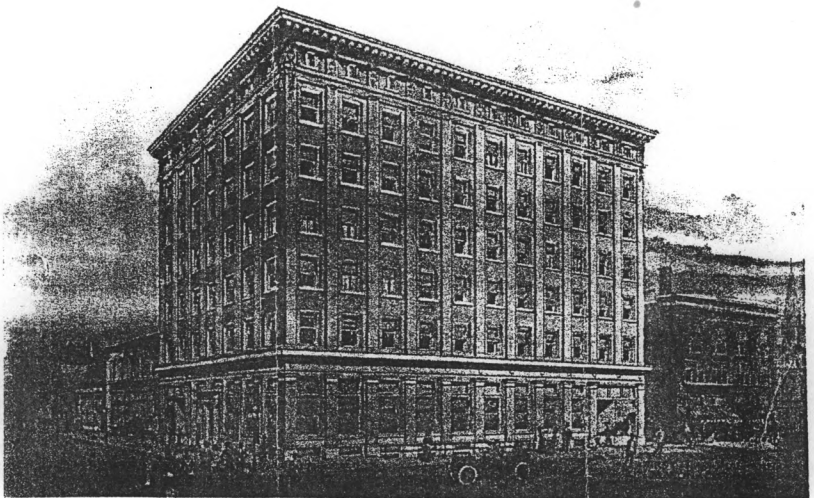
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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

ARCHITECT'S DRAWING

1910



Captioned:

*First National Bank/Mason City, Iowa/Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen/Arch'ts Des Moines, Iowa*

Source: *The Western Architect*, 1911.

This drawing was reproduced as a photographic postcard in 1910 or 1911 and distributed locally.  
(Art Fischbeck Collection, Loomis Archive of Mason City History, Mason City Public Library.)

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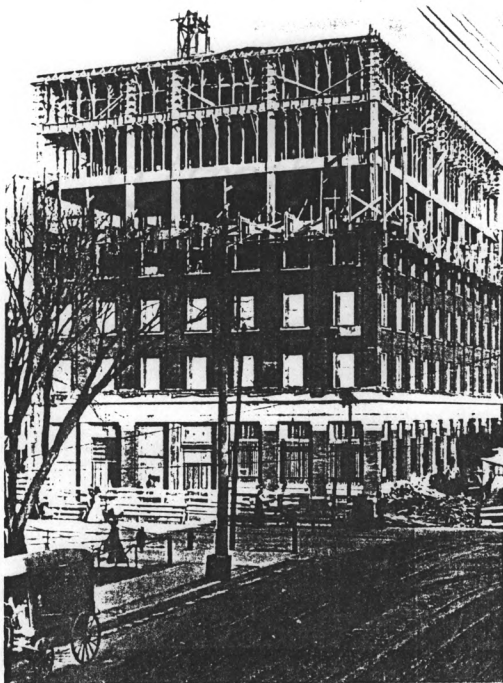
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## FIRST NATIONAL BANK

UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN 1911



Source: Mason City Public Library.

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## FIRST NATIONAL BANK

LOOKING NORTHEAST CIRCA 1913



Source: *Mason City, Iowa, The Cement and Tile Center of the World.*

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

## FIRST NATIONAL BANK



West elevation circa 1912.  
Note original location of main entrance  
in fourth bay from north.

Source: Mason City Public Library.



Bank and streetscape in 1953.  
Note big neon sign and main entrance  
now located in third bay from north.

Source: Mason City Public Library.



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## EARLY SKYSCRAPERS IN MASON CITY



Modern Brotherhood of America  
(Brick & Tile Building) circa 1945.  
Looking southeast.



First National Bank in 1949.  
Looking southeast.

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**FIRST NATIONAL BANK**  
INTERIOR LOOKING SOUTHWEST CIRCA 1912



Two major remodelings have radically altered this space.

Source: Art Fischbeck Collection, Loomis Archives, Mason City Public Library.

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

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". . . had been architect for the Iowa state board of control the last 20 years--and his father was state architect before him."

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Bergland, Robert, AIA; Telephone interview with William C. Page; December 27, 1995. Bergland was partner in the firm of Bergland and Bianco, which designed the 1970s remodeling of the First National Bank. Bergland (b. 1914) was also an eyewitness of the 1934 bank robbery of the institution.

Fischbeck, Arthur M.; Interview with William C. Page; January 11, 1996. Fischbeck is Mason City Historian.

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

Harrison, Terry; Interview with William C. Page; January 11, 1996. Harrison is the Mason City Public Library Historian.

Nielson, Evonka; Telephone interview with William C. Page; December 27, 1995.  
Nielson is a long-time employee of Norwest Bank, Mason City.

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

### **VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Lots 1, 2, and 3 in Subdivision of Lot 7 and Lots 3 and 4 in Subdivision of Lot 6,  
all in Block 15 of Paul Felt's Plat in the City of Mason City, Iowa.

### **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Contains all land associated historically with the resource, also including the annex at 7  
North Federal Avenue, now a structural part of the First National Bank of Mason City.

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First National Bank of Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

### LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. First National Bank of Mason City  
5-7 North Federal Avenue  
Mason City, IA 50402  
Looking east northeast  
William C. Page, Photographer  
December 12, 1995
  
2. First National Bank of Mason City  
5-7 North Federal Avenue  
Mason City, IA 50402  
Annex visible at left of bank  
Looking southwest  
William C. Page, Photographer  
December 12, 1995
  
3. First National Bank of Mason City  
5-7 North Federal Avenue  
Mason City, IA 50402  
Looking northwest  
William C. Page, Photographer  
December 12, 1995
  
4. First National Bank of Mason City  
5-7 North Federal Avenue  
Mason City, IA 50402  
First floor detail on west elevation looking southwest  
William C. Page, Photographer  
December 12, 1995