

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	MAY 23 1979
DATE ENTERED	JUL 10 1979

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Iowa-Des Moines National Bank Building

AND/OR COMMON

Valley National Bank Building

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

520 Walnut Street (south-east corner of Walnut & 6th) NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Des Moines
STATE

VICINITY OF
CODE

COUNTY
Polk

CODE
77

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Valley National Bank

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 906

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

VICINITY OF

STATE

Iowa

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder's Office, Polk County, Polk County Courthouse, Des Moines, IA

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines

STATE

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Des Moines' Heritage: A Survey of Significant Architecture

DATE

Summer, 1976

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Des Moines Plan and Zoning Commission; Iowa State Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN

Des Moines; Iowa City

STATE

Iowa

Office

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Iowa-Des Moines National Bank Building (now the Valley National Bank Building), erected 1931-32, is a large commercial structure in the Moderne or Art Deco style. It comprises a mixed program of retail stores on the ground floor, banking spaces and offices on the second to fifth floors and some rental office space on the fifth floor.

The first four floors occupy the entire ground area of the building, which is approximately 130 feet square. The fifth floor, designed to serve as a base for a 16- or 17-story office tower, which was never built, occupies the full east-west width of the building, but is set back about 14 feet from the principal (north) facade on Walnut Street and set back considerably farther from the alley on the south. The building rests on a ground-floor base of black, polished granite, which frames the rectangular openings of the store windows. Above the base the walls are clad in Bedford limestone. The principal facade is symmetrically composed and divided into seven bays. The center bay is occupied by a tall, recessed entranceway which extends through the third story. The granite facing of the base is wrapped around the entrance opening as a wide, flat frame, into which a decorative metal relief panel containing the monogram of the Iowa-Des Moines Bank is inset at the top. The three bays to either side of the entrance are divided by a giant order of flat, fluted piers, which rise directly from the granite base without bases of their own and terminate, without capitals, above the level of the fourth-floor windows. Between the piers, the windows of second, third and fourth floors are treated as (slightly) recessed vertical units divided horizontally by enriched metal spandrel panels. The facade is finished at the top with a shallow cornice molding, to which are attached widely spaced corbel blocks.

The piers and the tall vertical window bays are continued only partially along the west (Sixth Avenue) facade. The area of the facade underneath the fifth-floor front is treated as a smooth masonry surface. In its center it is occupied by a zone of shorter, narrower windows, which conform in width to those that would have been used on the office tower. The piers are picked up again at the south end of the facade which fronts the main banking room. The windows of the banking room (three along the west facade and seven along the south) are about two-thirds the height of the front window units. Above them, the wall surface is occupied by octagonal stone medallions sculpted in low relief.

The major banking spaces of the interior are arranged formally along a north-south axis, which also controls progression into the building from street to teller and further to the private rooms of the bank officials. The entrance vestibule and ground-floor lobby lead to a pair of escalators (originally a staircase, replaced with the escalators in 1951) in the center of the building, which takes the customer directly up into the main banking room. To the west of the escalators is the elevator lobby, where a pair of elevators and a minor staircase give access to the other floors of the building. A corridor continues the lobby around behind the escalators, where it joins an east-west corridor leading from the west-side entrance. Along the corridors and lobby are interior doors to the shops which occupy the bulk of the floor space on the ground floor.

The main banking room occupies the entire east-west width of the building along the rear end and is three stories in height. The officers' room lies to the north of the main banking room and is connected to it through a monumental passage, a sort of hypostyle hall with large rectangular piers screening the hall from the banking rooms on either side. The officers' room is two stories in height and is surrounded along the

(continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1930-32 ~~BUILDER~~ ARCHITECT Proudfoot, Rawson, Souers and Thomas
Des Moines, Iowa

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Iowa-Des Moines Bank is significant for its architecture. It is one of a small number of commercial buildings in downtown Des Moines built in the late 1920's and 1930's in the Art Deco style. Of these, which include also the Des Moines Building (1930-31), the Bankers' Life Building (1939), the old Montgomery-Ward's Store (1929) and the Kirkwood Hotel (1929), it is by far the most monumental and elegant. The program of the bank lends it additional significance. The elevation of the banking rooms to the second floor, leaving the first floor available for stores, was not usual around 1930 and this may be seen as something of an innovation in banking operations.

The site on the south-east corner of Walnut and Sixth had been occupied by a bank since at least 1882, when the Des Moines National Bank located there. The present building resulted from the merger of the Des Moines National Bank with the Iowa National Bank and the Des Moines Savings Bank and Trust Company in 1929. The building was designed by the prominent Des Moines firm of Proudfoot, Rawson, Souers and Thomas in 1930.¹ It was planned as a 21- or 22-story structure, with a rental office tower, of the stepped or set-back type, above a five-story base housing shops and bank. The building was to be erected in two phases, the base first, followed by the tower. Construction of the base was begun in April 1931 and finished sometime in 1932. The tower was, of course, never built; plans for it may have been abandoned before completion of the base. The Iowa-Des Moines Bank occupied the building until 1974, when it moved to new office space in the Financial Center, a block to the west. In 1977, the Valley National Bank purchased the building and began restoring and renovating it. The work was essentially completed by January 1979, when the Valley Bank moved into its new quarters.

The three-part program - ground-floor shops, second-floor banking rooms and office tower - suggests comparison with Howe and Lescaze's Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building in Philadelphia. PSFS was designed and built concurrently with the Iowa-Des Moines Bank and incorporated a similar program, for which it attracted considerable attention at the time. The idea of the second-floor banking room first appeared in the plans for PSFS late in 1929 and, although as late as April 1930 a final decision on the incorporation of this feature had yet to be reached by the directors, the designs which emerged in the summer of 1930 included it and from there it became part of the final plans. Whether the architects or the directors of the Des Moines building knew of the PSFS plans, which possibly preceded the Des Moines plans slightly, and were influenced by them is not known.

It is difficult to judge exactly how common second-floor banking rooms were in the early 20th century. A prospectus on the building published by the Iowa-Des Moines Bank early in 1932 states that "the general arrangement is along the lines of banks in the larger cities, in that the main banking room is located on the second floor,"

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Facts on the New Home of the Iowa-Des Moines National Bank and Trust Company." Brochure published by the bank early in 1932.

Des Moines Register/Tribune, 21 Sept. 1930, 18 Jan. 1931, 16 June 1978, 2 July 1978, 25 March 1979.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

QUADRANGLE NAME Des Moines SE

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1, 5 | 4, 4, 7, 9, 8, 0 | 4, 6, 0, 3, 2, 4, 0
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B [] | [] | []
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C [] | [] | []

D [] | [] | []

E [] | [] | []

F [] | [] | []

G [] | [] | []

H [] | [] | []

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 1 and 2, Block 14, Original town of Fort Des Moines, now included in and forming a part of the City of Des Moines, Iowa

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Samuel J. Klingensmith, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Division of Historic Preservation, Iowa State Historical Department

April 1979

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

26 East Market Street

319 353 6949/4186

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Iowa City

Iowa

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL xx

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

5/18/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

7.10.79

ATTEST: Bill Blewett
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

July 9, 1979

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

three outer walls by a mezzanine or balcony. Private offices for senior bank officers and small conference rooms are situated along the outer walls on the main level. The mezzanine originally housed the Trust Department (and the Directors' Room) of the Iowa-Des Moines Bank and continues today to house the same department of the Valley Bank. The overall configuration of the main banking spaces, then, is that of a sort of lop-sided "H" or dumbbell, with the main banking room as the heavier end, the officers' room as the lighter end and the hypostyle hall as the arm.

The decor of the main banking room is set by the contrast between travertine walls and a raised plaster ceiling border, richly painted in shades of Pompeian red, dark green and various umber tones, with gilt highlights. Between the high, 22-foot windows, flat, fluted piers, similar to those found on the exterior, rise from a black marble baseboard to the cornice. The cornice is limited to a single molding element, an ovolo enriched with a gilded egg-and-dart. Below this molding is a raised frieze of medallions and swags which extends between the piers. Between the frieze and the tops of the windows are panels of vertical chevron bands which continue around the soffits of the window reveals. The windows are divided into square lights by steel muntins and contain each five ornamental panels of pierced lead and functional case-ment sash in the lowest tier of lights. The decor of the officers' room continues that of the main banking room, with, additionally, walnut panelling around the perimeter of the main level and a handsome metal balustrade along the balcony. The decor of the ground-floor corridors and lobbies features walls of grey, gold-veined marble, plaster cornice and ceiling borders in tones of grey, gold, red and black and bronze entrance and elevator doorframes.

The fourth floor has always been an office floor devoted to bank operations, employee lounges and restrooms and mechanical equipment, and includes floor space on a slightly higher level (in effect a 4½ floor) which is sandwiched in between the trusses spanning the main banking room.* The fifth floor was originally devoted to rental office space. The Valley Bank has located its Directors' Room in part of this floor and rents the remainder of the space. The vault is located in the basement.

Throughout the building decoration and fixtures are restrained and elegant, with much use made, both on exterior and interior, of chevron band motifs, and materials are lush and expensive. Of particular note are: the suspended lamp over the main entrance on the exterior; the clock of Benedict nickel which hangs at the entrance to the main banking room at the head of the escalators; the three chandeliers in the main banking room, of bronze and Benedict nickel, each of which contains two "wheels" of bulbs suspended on a open shaft of rods with a cylindrical crystal lamp in its center; and the banking counters, which have fronts of matched walnut with black marble baseboards, nickel mountings and etched glass wickets.

* This half-floor may have been a later feature of the design. A perspective drawing of the bank published in the Des Moines Register on 21 September 1930 and again on 18 January 1931 shows the banking-room windows rising to the full height of the front windows and does not show the "attic" windows which light the half-floor.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

* (cont.) Plans for the office tower may have been abandoned before completion of the building in 1932 and the desire to get maximum use out of the resultant five-story building may have suggested the inclusion of this level, which then necessitated deepening the trusses to carry the additional loads and lowering the banking-room windows.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 1

implying perhaps that it was not an unusual feature. William Jordy, however, who examined the question in writing the history of PSFS in 1962, located several examples of second-floor banks in Detroit dating from around 1930, as well as a more general, large-city tradition of split-level banks, with stores and/or savings departments on a semi-basement level and main banking spaces up a short flight of stairs. Although he was not able to investigate the problem exhaustively, he concluded (perhaps prematurely) that banks wholly located on the second floor are rare and that this aspect of PSFS found few imitators.²

Whatever its derivation, the second-floor banking room made sense for a building located in a shopping district, as was (and is) the case with both PSFS, located in the high-volume, middle-class shopping area around Reading Terminal, and the Des Moines bank, located in a mixed financial-retail district (Younker's, Des Moines' foremost department store, was only a block away). Instead of taking large street frontages out of circulation, as a ground-floor bank would have done, the second-floor bank contributed to the vitality of the street by generating additional shopping traffic and thus indirectly served the bank's purpose in attracting potential depositors.

Further comparison of the two buildings may point up certain other aspects of the Des Moines bank that lend it architectural interest. Like PSFS, the Des Moines bank expresses its three-part program on the exterior. There the similarities end. The former building, representative of a radical new architecture from Europe, is conceived in a steel aesthetic and the problem, encountered often in the design of large-city banks and department stores, of providing apparent visual support for an office tower consisting of layer upon layer of dense, small spaces straddling monumental, open spaces on the ground, a problem which perplexed architects working in the masonry aesthetic inherited from the Beaux Arts, did not exist for Howe and Lescaze. Howe later wrote: "The functional architect delights [in the] huge torso [of the building] swaying on tendoned ankles. He would no more attach false stone pedestals on them than we would put lead shoes on Pegasus."³ The Des Moines building, representative of a style which attempted to project a modern image but which nonetheless depended heavily on classical ideas (the 1932 brochure characterized the architecture of the building as "simplified Italian Renaissance, modified along modern lines") was, like most Art Deco skyscrapers, conceived in a traditional masonry aesthetic and the problem of a visual base had to be addressed. The architects solved it by restricting the office tower to a small portion of the total ground area and placing it essentially between the two monumental banking spaces, over the joint or hyphen which connects them. This relieves the walls enclosing these spaces of the necessity of providing visual support for the tower and it is thus not inappropriate that the fluted piers seem more like curtains drawn back from the windows than structural members. On the intermediate or hyphen zone of the Sixth Avenue facade, where the mass of the tower intersects that of the base, the tower fenestration is carried through to the granite sub-base. This not only adequately expresses support for the office tower, but it also reflects the dumbbell configuration of the banking spaces, with the two large spaces squeezed out from between the constricted center zone. Thus the fenestration of the Sixth Avenue facade, which seems awkward on first glance, still has a certain meaning even today

(cont.)

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

in the absense of the office tower.

While certainly not immune to the desire to mold interior space in an imposing fashion, Howe and Lescaze religiously sought to allow function to govern the design of PSFS. In the Des Moines bank the creation of monumental interiors and effects of formal grandeur was a conscious consideration. The almost ceremonial approach from the street to the banking rooms is carefully calculated and the building offers one of the most imposing sequences of interior spaces in Des Moines, equal to the city's great public buildings.

Today the Iowa-Des Moines Bank, its interiors restored to their former brilliance, continues to serve as an elegant and vital landmark in the urban fabric of downtown Des Moines.

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1. The Valley National Bank owns a set of 24 sepia prints of working drawings dated November 1930.
 2. William Jordy, "PSFS: Its Development and Its Significance in Modern Architecture," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 21 (1962), n. 11, p. 50.
 3. George Howe in Parnassus, 1936; quoted in Robert Stern, George Howe: Toward a Modern Architecture (New Haven, 1975), pp. 113-14.