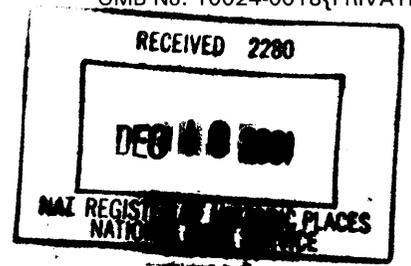


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

OCT 21 2001

1488



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 The Town Clock Building

other names/site number Spensley Building, 31-04014

2. Location

street & number 823-25 Main Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Dubuque [N/A] vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Dubuque code 061 zip code 52004-0389

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).

Donally Locke, DSHPO October 25, 2001
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): _____

for
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson R. Beall

1.24.02

Town Clock Building
Name of Property

Dubuque, Iowa
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade/business/office building

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade/business/office building

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian/Italianate

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

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

Town Clock Building
Name of Property

Dubuque, Iowa
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1873-1945

Period of Significance

1873

1945

1970

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Heer, Fridolin J., Sr., and Naescher, Edward

Farwell, L. T., General Contractor

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

7. Narrative Description:

The nominated property, known as the “Town Clock Building,” supported Dubuque’s landmark town clock and tower from 1873 until the removal of the tower in 1970. The clock tower today is a feature of Clock Tower Plaza, located a block south of this building, on Main Street. The nomination includes only the commercial block that was formerly and intimately linked with the clock tower. The City of Dubuque is now reopening that portion of Main Street that was turned into a pedestrian mall in the early 1970s. The fate of the relocated clock is under consideration and one option, ironically, is to return it to this building. Private funds moved the clock in the 1970s and similar support would be necessary to bring it back. Absent a relocation, the clock and its concrete tower will be relegated to a role of centerpiece within a traffic circle. The National Register eligibility of the Town Clock Building must be determined by its integrity as a commercial block. At the same time, the building cannot be divorced from its structural role of having long supported the clock and tower, and some considerable discussion treats the impact of the clock on the building’s structural design.



Figure 1: Detail, original appearance, view to northwest (courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society)

The Town Clock Building is a very well preserved and early example of the Italianate commercial style of architecture. In its original configuration, with its Second Empire style clock tower in place, the overall design embodied the best aspects of both the Second Empire and Italianate styles. With the removal of the clock and tower, the design is Italianate in style. The then-traditional Italianate style is represented by the elongated triple-window set

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

groupings, while the then-progressive Second Empire style is more strongly represented by the clock tower, the faux central pavilion and the large combination paired window set and ocular window which is capped with a flamboyant stone semi-circular arch and keystone. Contemporary accounts classify the design as "Renaissance" and there is good reason for this classification. Architectural historian Lester Walker dates the origin of the Renaissance Revival to the mid-1850s. It is represented in this design by the altering window arch forms on each floor, the integration of the successive and intensive network of stone belt courses into the façade design, and the Classically-inspired balustrade that originally flanked the clock tower base. John Barnes terms the style the Italian Renaissance and dates its popularity to 1845-60. The style was best adapted to row houses and federal buildings and its use in this instance perhaps bespeaks a conscious effort to visually proclaim the public role to be played out by the Town Clock Building (Walker, pp. 144-45; McAlester, pp. 210-229, 240-53; Baker, pp. 76-77, 80-81, 84-5).

The Façade:

The façade of the building is symmetrical but the internal plan is not. The two storefronts are separated by a stone support wall in the basement and brick party walls above that level. The southern storefront has an 18-foot wide bay width, while the larger northern one is 30 feet in width. This arrangement allowed for the inclusion of the tower support system in the front center of the plan and completely within the larger storefront area. It also meant that the smaller storefront would have a centered entry way, and the larger one an offset one (to the south side). The façade design ignores this hidden structural arrangement and the only admission of the underlying scheme is the alignment of the internal structural wall with the southern pilaster on the façade.



Figure 2: Circus parade, mid-1870s, view northwest
(note three large street number signs, which read 831, 833 and 835, on the Town Clock storefront)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

The façade is divided into three bays, the two outermost 18 feet in width, the center one 15 feet wide. Brick pilasters define the three bays. The façade wall has a single vertical plane despite the architect's effort to create the illusion of a central pavilion. This pavilion effect is created by the use of paired window sets, the larger third floor window, and a projecting cornice line. Originally the clock tower base was set flush with this cornice line, further enhancing the tower or pavilion feel. In truth, the architect was recognizing the ground to rooftop support system for the clock tower in his pavilion design work.

The original image of the storefront (see Figure 1) indicates that a cast iron storefront with French plate glass windows (see historical account below) infilled that part of the front. The flat riveted plates of the structural cast iron work survive in the present storefront (see detail image below). There was no transom window line and the historical image indicates that transom windows per se were found only above the two entrances. A broad cast iron beam capped the storefront and it was supported by a series of projecting column capitals. Full-length half-round classical iron columns were affixed to the structural iron storefront and the plate glass ran from ground to ceiling level. The decorative columns had intermediate decorative elements. An inspection of the inner basement wall indicates that the original storefront had an open cellar front, with a range of half-high windows. These have been blocked in. It is possible that there was a basement level recessed entrance. The detail photo shown above shows that a solid row of stone beams topped the cast iron work. This use of a structural stone lintel is found on three other Dubuque storefronts, all of which date from this same period. Projecting stone belt courses and heavy sills supported by stone brackets formed a row of box-like voids immediately above the storefront. Slightly recessed brick panels were centered beneath each window along this line. The stone pattern at this level mirrored the corbelled brick design work which ran beneath the cornice line.

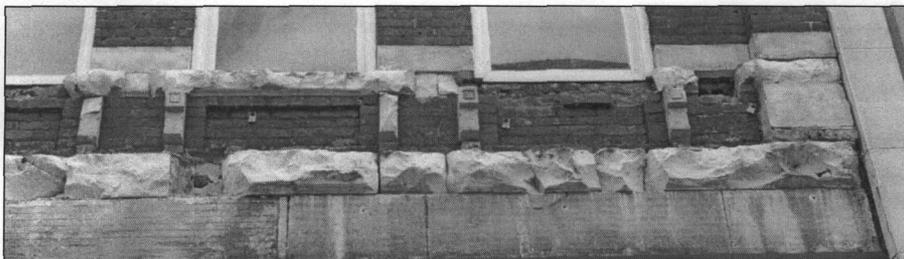


Figure 3: Transom, main floor sill level detail, damage to stonework due to the metal covering (the damage is being repaired) (view west, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

On the second story level the windows are topped with flattened stone arches. Each arch has an elongated "T" shaped keystone. A column like stone form separates the windows in each double or triple opening set. Rectangular stone "capitals" at the spring stone level are aligned with a smooth stone belt course that runs the length of the façade. This belt course appears to weave across the façade, following the arch lines around each window. A matching parallel straight belt course runs along the division line between the floor levels and is aligned with the aforementioned keystone caps. The brickwork on the façade is a brown colored face brick, set in running bond. The historical photo and physical inspection of the apparently original window sash indicate that the original window lights were one over one.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 4: Riveted cast iron center column, c.1970s photo



Figure 5: Façade and cornice detail (view north west, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

The third floor fenestration employs semi-elliptical stone arches with urn-shaped keystones and incised rosettes at the spring stone points. A broad stone panel belt course underscores a broadly projecting stone sill line belt course. The panel wraps around the pilasters and is inscribed with elongated rectangles across the two outer bays, and three shorter rectangles which alternate with two circles beneath the main window on this level. The two circles are set above the two keystones on the floor below. In contrast to the second floor, a single smooth surfaced stone belt course is used at the spring stone level on the third floor front. The line also wraps around the two pilasters but stops at either outer edge of the central bay. The key feature of this level is the window set which is centered on this level. Two narrow semi-elliptical windows are grouped with a centered oculus set above and between them. The broad stone arch is an enlarged version of those which flank it on this level. Above the windows, fanciful corbelled brickwork form bracketed recessed crosses in projecting panels which cap each of the outer bays. Two shallowly

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

recessed crosses flank the window arch in the central bay. A line of brick boxes (painted white), unaligned with the corbel work below it, mirrors the stone boxes described above the transom line below, and underscores the metal cornice line above it. This line does not continue across middle bay.

The metal cornice projects boldly and offers fairly simple design lines. A broad plain frieze is capped with a row of dentils. Single (on each side wall) and paired (at each pilaster cap) brackets with pendants support the cornice and parapet. The cornice line projects as noted across the central bay at which point it bore the clock tower set above it.

The earliest known historic photographs (see Figures 1, 29, and 30) indicate that two projecting horizontal elements, composed either of wood or brick, are missing. Other elements are likely absent from the cornice line above this point. There is a curious semi-circular recessed void with a matching brick arch that is centered above the keystone of the main central window. Its original appearance remains unclear at this time.

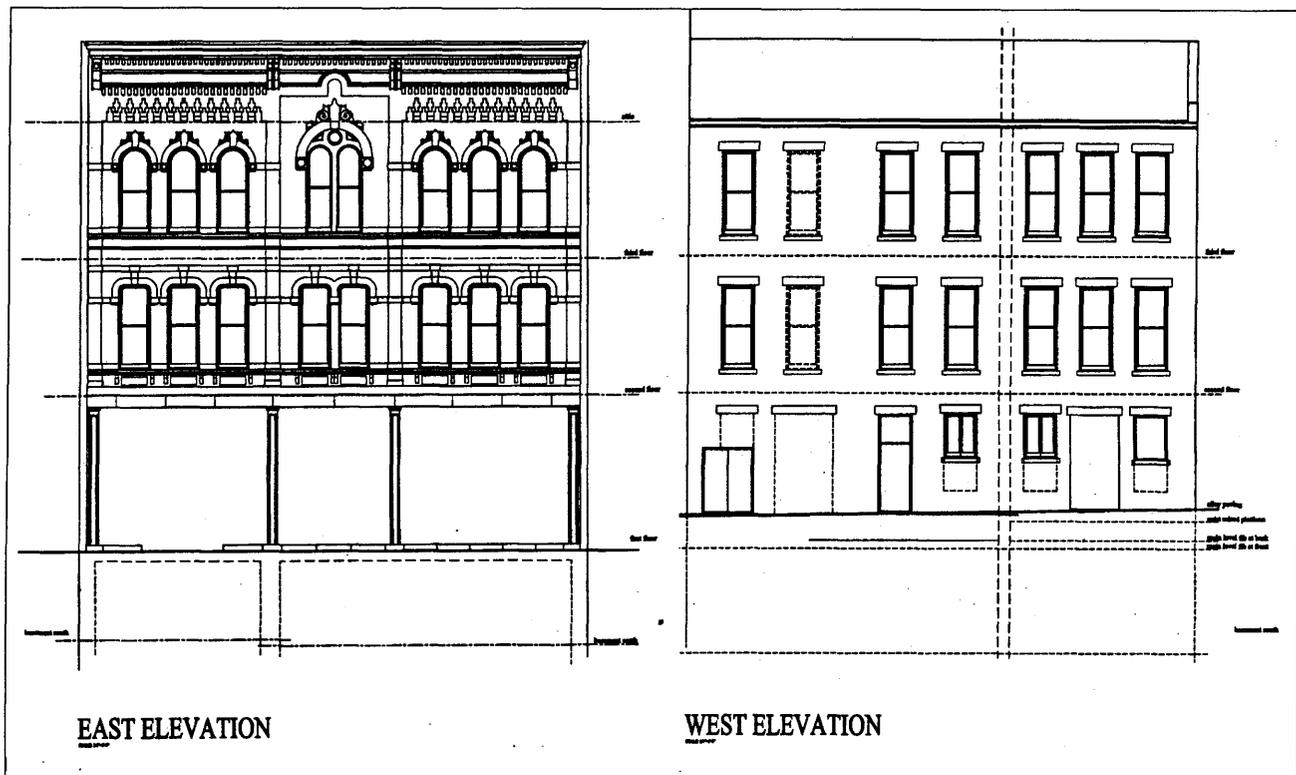


Figure 6: Front and Rear elevation drawings, Jeffrey Morton, Architect

The Rear (West) Wall:

The back wall features symmetrical fenestration, each window being defined by a simple projecting stone sill and a projecting smooth surfaced plain stone lintel. The brickwork is of soft-fired red brick set in running bond. The ground level windows are half-length. There were two original rear openings. The side walls are party walls and are not available for inspection, both were originally party walls with no fenestration. The south wall is presently

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

exposed and has been stuccoed. There is a tile parapet wall cap. Historical images indicate the presence of two in-wall flues on the south side wall and three or more on the north wall.



Figure 7: West or rear wall (view northeast, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

The Overall Building System and Dimensions:

This three-story brick commercial block has a stone foundation and a full-sized basement. The internal elevations between floor levels are 10, 14, 13 and 13 feet respectively, from the basement up. The overall building footprint measures 51x114 feet and each level contains 5,814 square feet of space. The interior load-bearing system consists of stone columns with wood lateral beams; in the basement (north bay only), and cast iron columns on the other levels (again, northern bay only, smaller dimension columns are doubled up in the center of the second floor plan) with wood joists and a flat roof form. The roof actually has a very good pitch downward to the rear of the plan and there is an attic level that diminishes in height. The need to provide a heavy timber base for the clock tower

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 7

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

appears to have mandated the allowance of a full-height attic in the front of the plan. The freight elevator penthouse, visible in the aerial photo below, is of recent origin and has been removed since the photo was taken.



Figure 8: Aerial view (view northeast, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

The limestone is of the typical Dubuque variety, yellow in color, and it is laid up without regard for coursing or the size of stones. The stonework is set in ashlar fashion and there is no indication that larger stones were used quoin-like in the corners as is sometimes seen with stone buildings. An internal dividing wall separates the plan into an 18-foot wide south storefront and a northern double storefront of 30 feet. Continuous joists (2x10) set 12 inches on center span the south bay while overlapping joists are supported by the stone or cast iron piers and columns.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 8

Town Clock Building
Floorplans:

Dubuque County, Iowa

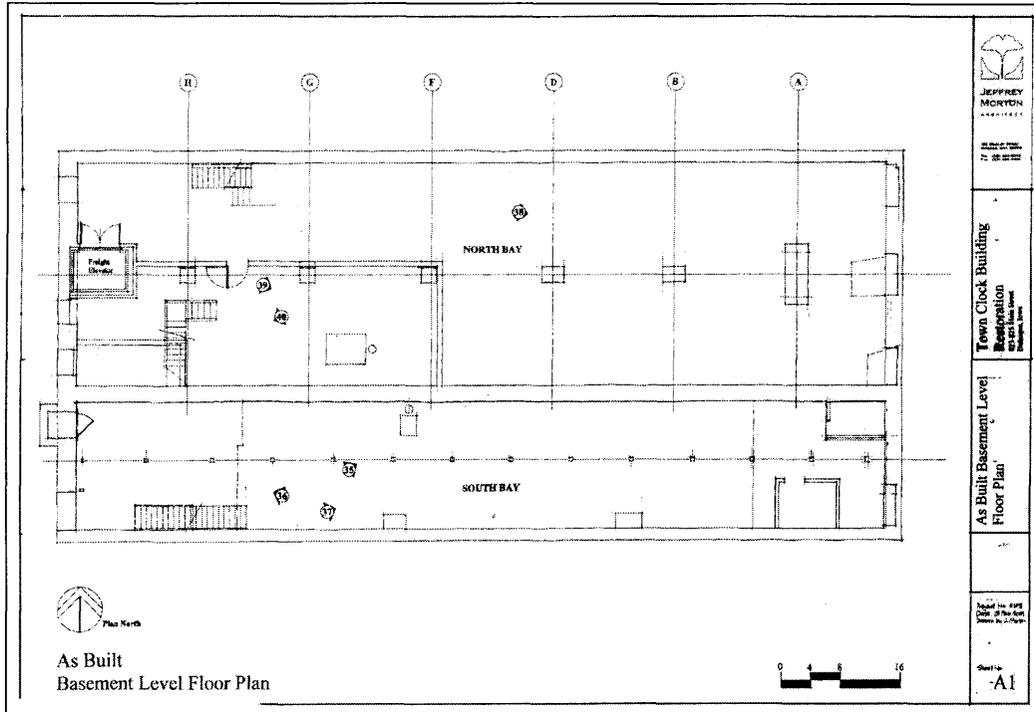


Figure 9: Basement plan, Jeffrey Morton, Architect

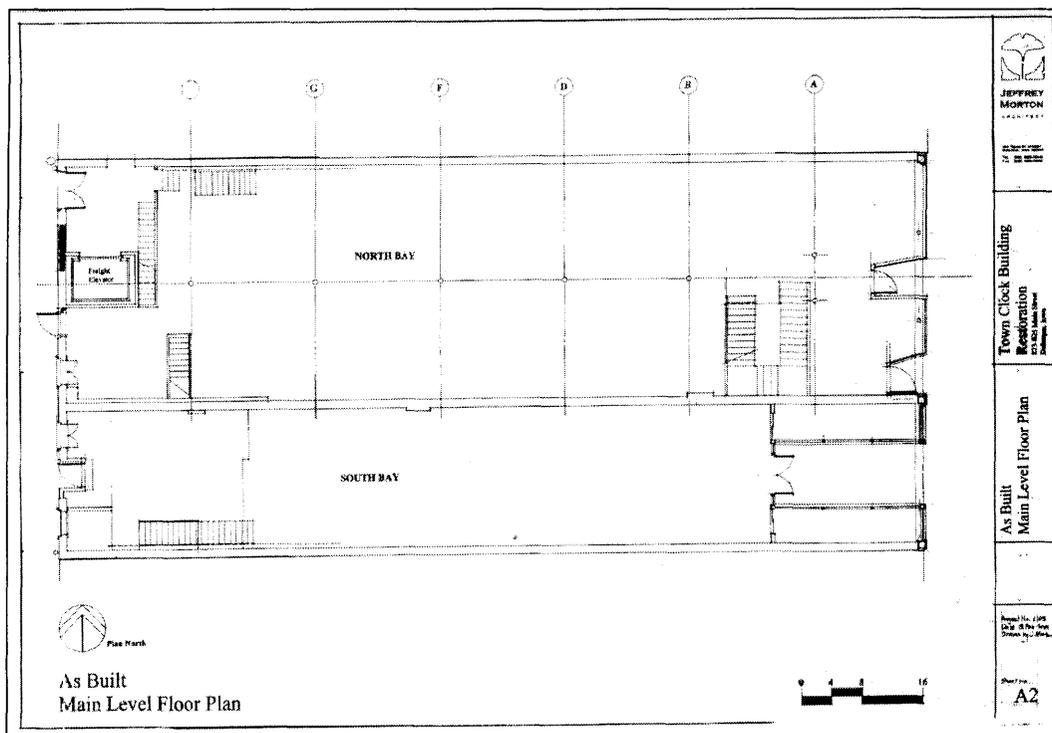


Figure 10: Main floor plan, Jeffrey Morton, Architect

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 9

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

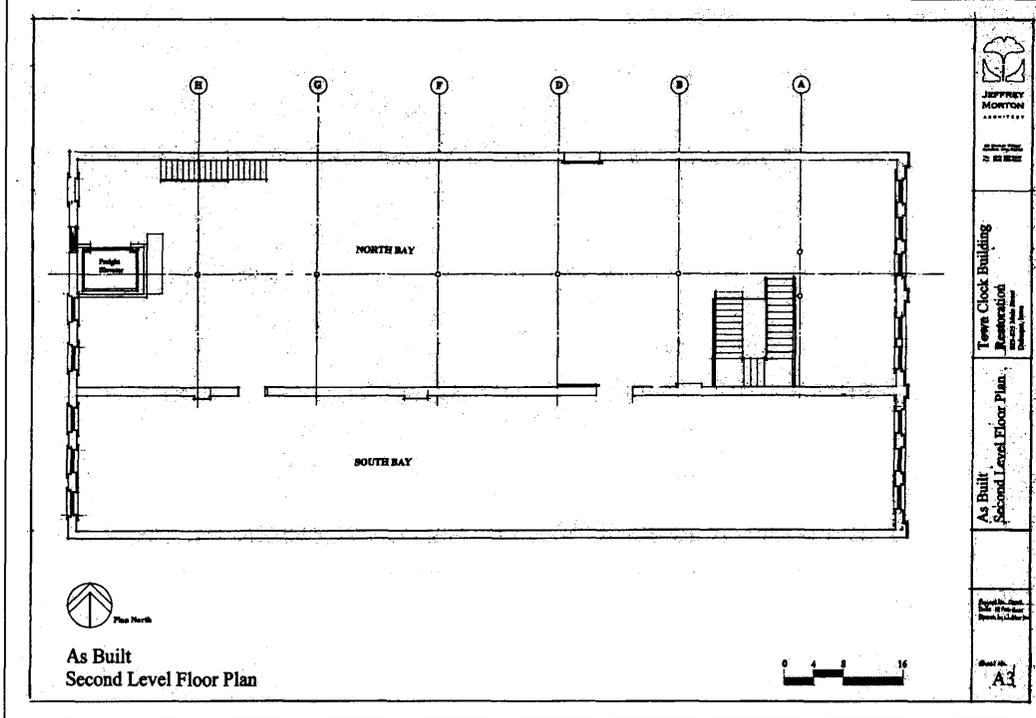


Figure 11: Second floor plan, Jeffrey Morton, Architect

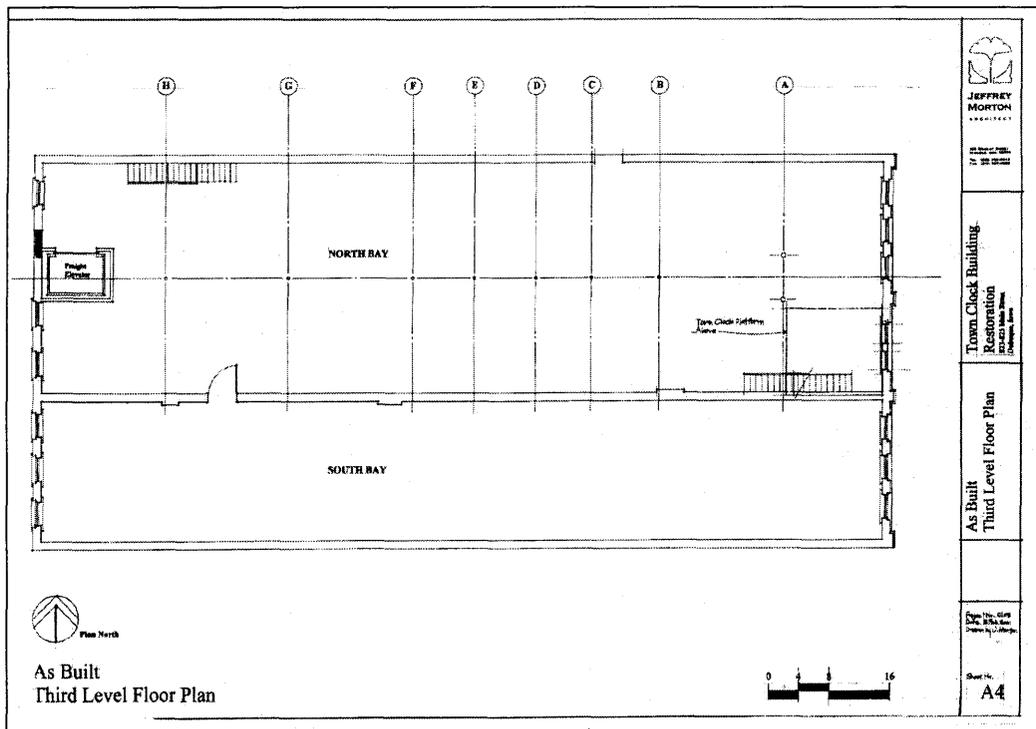


Figure 12: Third floor plan, Jeffrey Morton, Architect

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 10

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Other Internal Observations And Features:

While little internal physical evidence of the historical interior remains, many physical hints and remnants do survive. The rearmost portions of each storefront were elevated two feet, for a mezzanine or office usage. The alley ground level was several feet higher than was that on Main Street. That in the south bay survives, while that to the north has been lowered to the main floor level. A 1x12 baseboard with a slightly angled upper edge, survives in places and was originally common to the entire building. Remnants of a decorative pressed tin ceiling were found in the north bay (remnants removed).

A surprising discovery was the broadscale use of used lumber in the north bay framing. Most of the joists in the north bay bore tapered holes in the centers and at one end of each plank (the taper was four inches on one side and two inches wide on the other). While the photo shown below depicts holes which were roughly aligned, in general they are not so arranged and the holes could not have been drilled once the joists were put in place. At the same time no wear or use marks were apparent within or around the holes. Many of the joists were irregular in width and some showed wear marks on their upper sides. The heavy timberwork in the clock tower was riddled with angled mortise cuts which had never been used (no wear marks or pegs). This timber was apparently cut for another job and reused at this one.

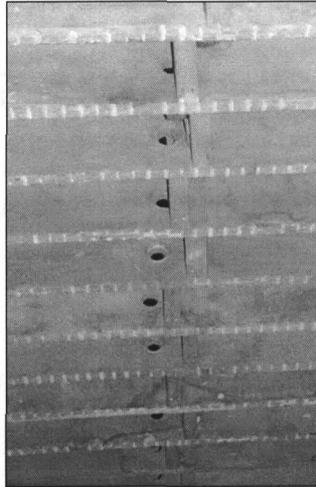


Figure 13: Mystery joist holes (photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

The ground floor in the south bay was resurfaced with an oversized soft-fired brick pavement. This was apparently a fairly recent alteration (within the last 40 years or so). The sub-floor was re-laid and doubled and the wood floor removed. Few surviving storefront components were found. A tile entryway dating from the 1920s was cut into the floor and the original entry ceiling (see below) remained in place, documenting the dimensions and location of the original storefront. Two apparently original cast iron fire doors survive (see photo below) on the upper two floor levels. Originally matching doors of thin metal construction were hinged from either side of the door openings, forming a crude airlock between them. The surviving doors bore no makers' marks or dates. Stone sills in the brick wall indicate that the openings were original to the building. Half a dozen heavy modern fire doors remain

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 11

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

on the upper two levels of the north side wall. All of the openings have been bricked in. These date to the long-term lease by the J. C. Penny Company (c.1941-65) which occupied the building to the north and used the upper two floors of this property for storage.



Figure 14: Dropped floor level, back of plan (note baseboard marks)
(view northwest, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)



Figure 15: Original entry ceiling, north bay (view southeast, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

Assigning dates to these internal and storefront alterations is naturally problematic. The upper level internal changes can be attributed to the J. C. Penny warehouse lease and the mid-1940s. The original two storefront configuration appears to have survived until c.1945, by which time the northern storefront was split into two storefronts. This date is submitted as the last external change that occurred prior to the 50-year significance period cutoff date (1951).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 12

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 16: Original fire door, second floor lateral wall (view southeast, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

A single centered skylight, original to the plan, is centered in the roof of the south bay and these were repeated down to the ground floor (see Sanborn Maps, below).



Figure 17: The Partial Cover-up, early 1970s, view to northwest

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 13

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Alterations:

The most significant alteration is of course the removal of the clock tower from the roof in 1970. The storefront area has been reinvented four or five times according to historic photographs and physical evidence. The present storefront of blue-green metal dates to the 1970s. The south bay was the first to be covered, by the early 1970s.

Eventually the entire front of the building was covered with the same metal front as the owners attempted to fit the 19th Century building into a pedestrian mall setting. Because the bluish color was sky-like, the building virtually disappeared with only its prominent cornice line floating above the storefronts (see Figure 18). Surprisingly little facade damage was inflicted when the coverings went on. Most of the loss was on the lowermost stone windowsills and belt courses, which projected out the furthest from the wall plane. Fortunately, damage above that point was surprisingly minor because the decorative stone work was lower in profile.



Figure 18: Full Metal Jacket, 1988, view northwest

Some infilling of several back wall windows has occurred (see architect's elevation, above) and a freight elevator and penthouse were added to the northwest corner. The city paid for unspecified shoring work within the building during the 1920s but no distinct evidence of this work has been found. The rear raised floor level has been removed in the north bay and the ground floor material replaced in the south storefront. There are three side wall stairways (two in the north bay, one at the back of the south bay) in the plan and several of these have been sealed up. The freight elevator and penthouse were removed in late April 2001. A passenger elevator is to be added at the southeast corner of the north bay.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 14

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 19: Storefront Cover-up, 1988, view northwest

Sanborn Maps:

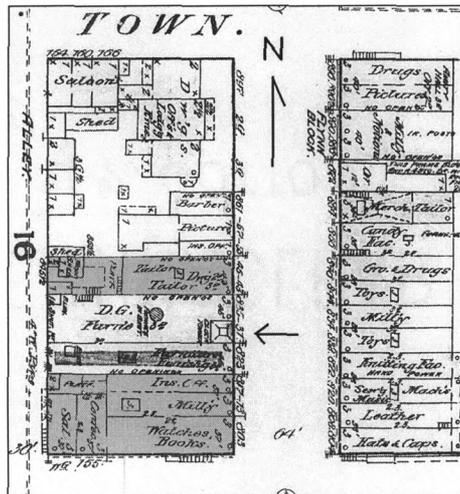


Figure 20: 1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (adjacent properties shaded)

Figure 20 locates the building furnace in the center of the northern storefront. The clock tower elevation, above the cornice line, is given as 45 feet. Freight elevators are located in the northwest corner of the north bay and the rear center of the southern one. The latter bay also has a central skylight present. Iron fire shutters cover the ground level alleyway windows and doors. A dry goods and furniture firm occupies the larger north storefront, and a

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 15

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

furniture and furnishings firm the southern one. The block is uniformly built up to the third story level save for the northern half of Block 16 where a dwelling and single-story frame storefronts remain.

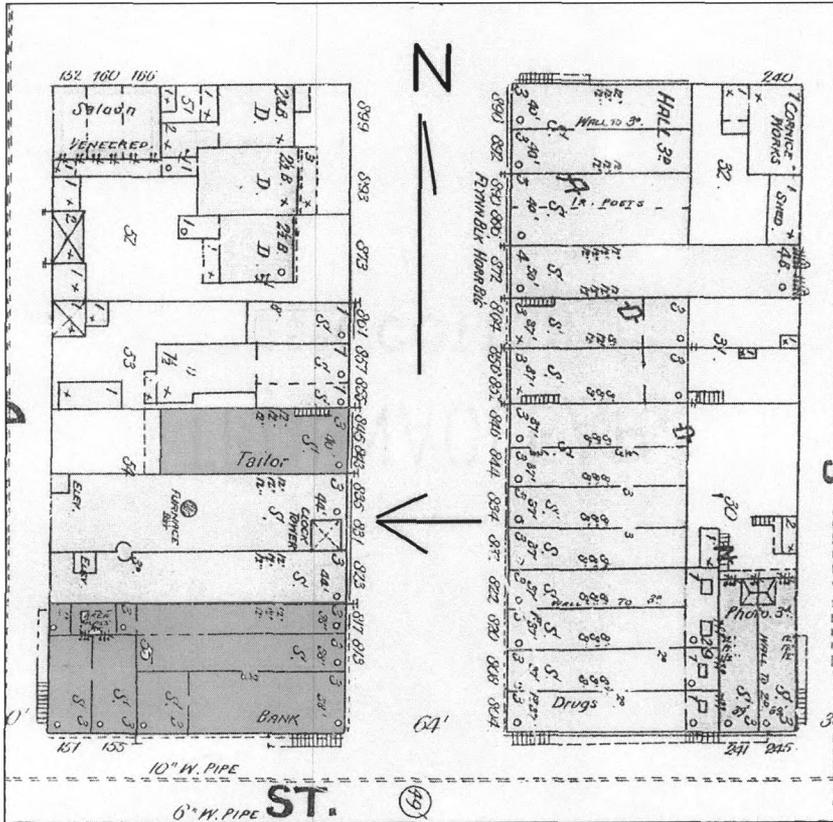


Figure 21: 1891 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (adjacent properties shaded)

No substantial changes are apparent in Figure 21, the updated fire insurance map. The skylight in the southern bay is not depicted but it reappears in the 1909 map shown below. No changes are apparent in the area either.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 16

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

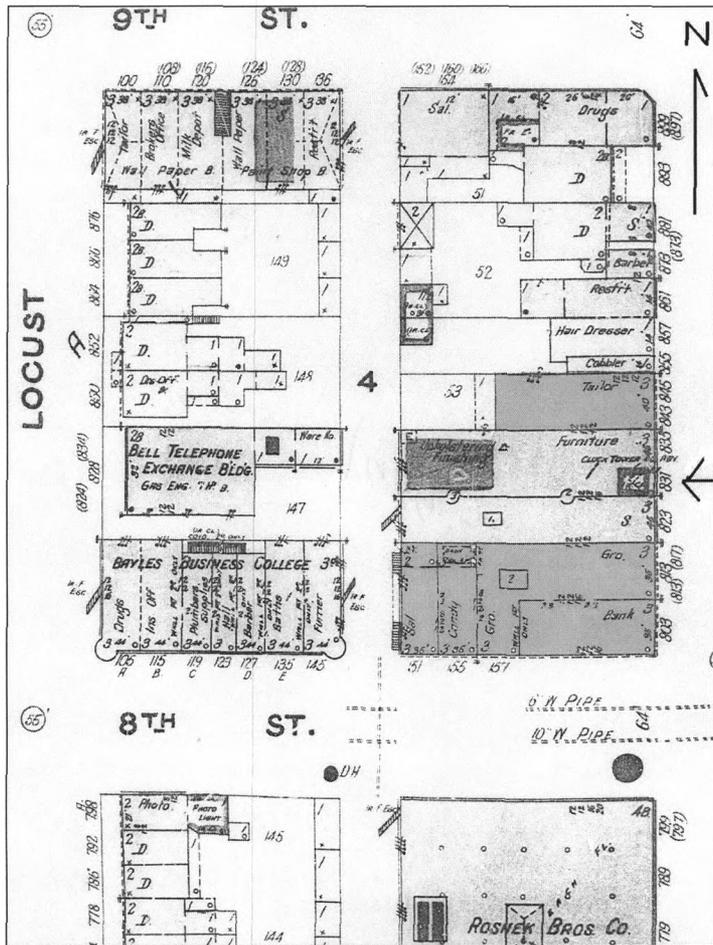


Figure 22: 1909 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (adjacent properties shaded)

In Figure 22 the mapped area has been shifted westward half a block because this is the area where taller buildings would emerge in proximity to the town clock. Changes apparent in the Town Clock Building include fire doors at the second and third floor levels within the building, indicating a common shared usage. A rear fire escape is indicated, a furniture firm is shown in the storefront, and there is an upholstery shop in the back of the plan. At least one window opening is in the rear north side wall, set above the single story porch on the adjoining building. Bayles Business College was located in the Lincoln Block which was built in the 1890s (non-extant).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 17

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

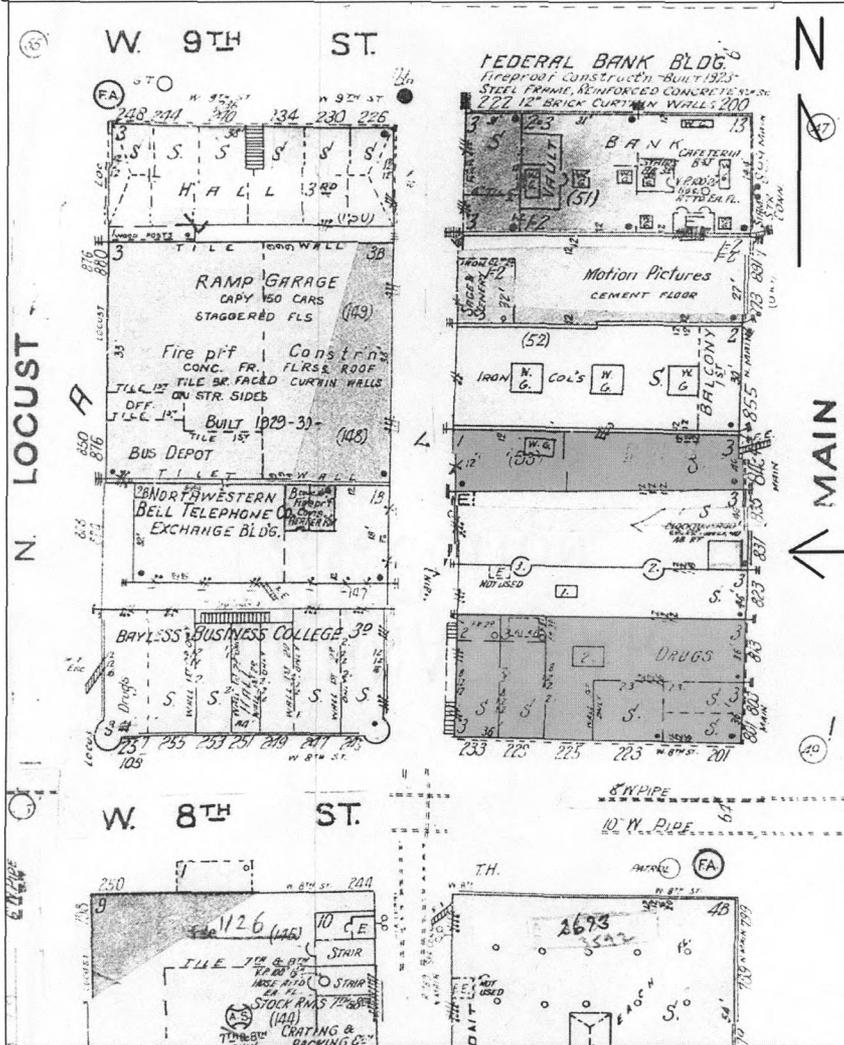


Figure 23: 1909/36 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (adjacent properties shaded)

As late as 1936 (Figure 23) the building remained essentially unchanged in terms of what the Sanborn Company mappers were recording. The fire escape was not depicted, although it remained in place and is there today. The southern freight elevator was no longer in use. The major changes since 1909 were in the neighborhood. At the north end of the block the 13-story high Federal Bank Building (1923) was the first Dubuque "skyscraper." The nine-story Dubuque Building followed, to the southwest. The adjacent 1872 commercial buildings remained standing.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 18

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

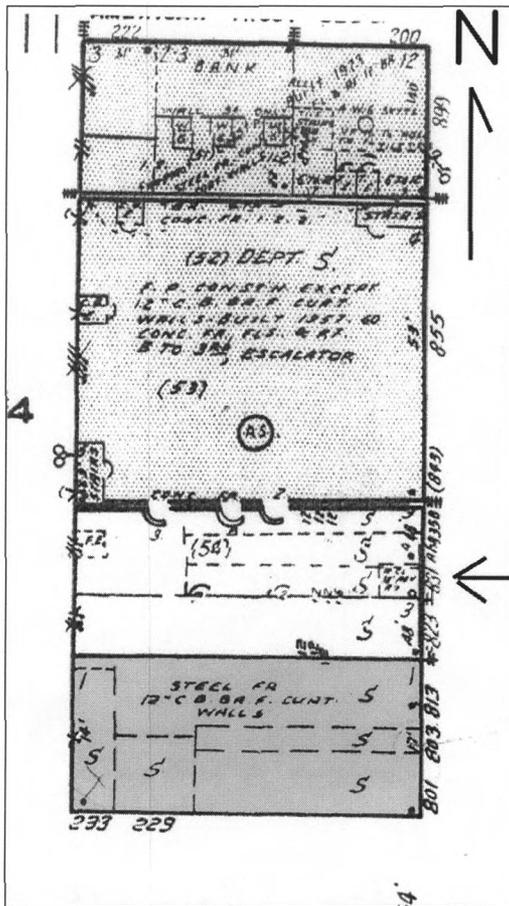


Figure 24: 1909/63 Sanborn Map, subject property is unshaded.

According to Figure 24, the present freight elevator (now removed) replaced the original one and the south freight elevator is no longer depicted. A three-bay subdivision is shown for the northern storefront, along with a cross wall. No traces of these walls have been found. The four-story J. C. Penny Department Store was north of the building. To the west across alley there was a large four story building with large parking lots on either end of that half block.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 19

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

8. Significance Statement:

This commercial block represents a well-designed and well preserved example of an early 1870s Italianate style commercial block. It is locally significant under Criterion C, for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Relatively few commercial blocks from this decade survive in downtown Dubuque and this is the only survivor of 19th Century commercial architecture in what was once the heart of that city's downtown. Built as one of the first "skyscrapers" in what was a low-profile downtown dominated only by church steeples and the surrounding bluff lines, this building was specifically designed to bear its clock tower prominently so that all persons, whether on the river or ashore, could know the time. Devoid of its clock and tower, the building can still be readily recognized and interpreted for its special structural role, that of successfully supporting a massive tower and clock. As such it represents a later 19th Century architectural engineering solution, one that was particularly challenged to avoid the structural failure that doomed the first town clock and its host building.

This building is of historical interest for its long-term association with the Dubuque tradition of providing a publicly visible town clock for its residents. This unusual service was apparently restricted to river valley cities where the flat terrace based downtowns tended to have lower building profiles and where the ground level was set just above the river level. A prominent clock tower could be readily seen from all directions, and if out of sight, the sounding of the bells was sufficient to announce the hour's arrival for miles around. This uncommon combination of private and public interests represents the union of local scientific, philanthropic and promotional interests. A town clock served a basic need, but it also advertised the "wide-awake" and progressive energy of a growing modern city. The clock was placed on a prominent commercial block for civic public service. This building also attests to the prominence of leading merchant George D. Wood (1829-90) and Dr. Asa Horr, the two principals who were the leaders in the local town clock project. George Wood owned and built the two clock tower buildings and forced the city's hand in replacing the lost first town clock.

The Origins of Dubuque's Clock Tower:

Mid-nineteenth century urban American merchants habitually relied upon the local newspaper to keep local time in the days before the adoption of standard time zones by the railroads in 1883. In Waterloo, Iowa, for example a silver ball descended in New Year's Day fashion to announce the arrival of high noon. Merchants and other watch owners would gather in front of their businesses, and wait with watch covers open, for the telegraphed time announcement to cause the sphere to plummet. Watches adjusted, conversation ceased and work was resumed. Some major cities like New Orleans boasted a municipal town clock that served the same function, with its multiple clock faces being visible in every direction. Such an arrangement worked particularly well in cities where high-level construction was limited by the absence of supportive bedrock. Town clocks appear to have been particularly favored in towns along the Mississippi River. Even in diminutive German Guttenberg, just north of Dubuque, local subscribers urged the local Lutheran pastor to place a town clock in a prominent church steeple. This was during the early summer of 1859. In the later 1890s the ground-level corner clock became popular. In Des Moines the Postal Telegraph and Cable Company installed eight 11-foot high corner clocks complete with barometers and thermometers (*Valley Register*, June 23, 1859; *Des Moines Daily News*, May 25, 1897, p. 4, column 3).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 20

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Dr. Asa Horr was particularly taken by the town clock in New Orleans. Time was of particular importance to Dr. Horr because of his broad scientific interests. He organized the Iowa Institute of Science and Arts, was a member of the American Association for Advancement of Science and was particularly interested in astronomy. Horr resettled to Dubuque in 1847. In 1864 he conceived of a Dubuque town clock and organized the movement to make it a reality. The New York firm Naylor & Company produced the clock mechanism. The bell cost \$304. Mr. George D. Wood added an internal cast iron support system to his business block to hold the clock and bell at a cost of \$1,000, and the clock erection cost \$2,000. Chicago architect William Longhurst designed the protective casing for the clock and bell. The clock was in operation by November 1864 and represented a notable city improvement made during the closing months of the Civil War. The question of ownership came up after the fact and the Dubuque Town Clock Company was formed on December 11, 1865, shareholders being those who had subscribed at least \$25 to the project. Signatories on the articles of incorporation were George D. Wood, Sheffield & Scott, Westphal & Hinds, Woodworth & Company, James Cushing, J. K. Graves, L. D. Randall & Company, Rouse & Williams, Andrew & Tredway, R. A. Babbage, H. W. Sanford, Platt Smith and John Bell & Company. Many of these commercial firms were the most prominent ones in the city. The clock company maintained a transit that was mounted on a 17-foot long stone pier, sunken into the earth behind Dr. Horr's office. The transit was used to determine the correct time "with precision to a quarter of a second" based upon the observation of the stars. The same instrument was used by Dr. Horr and Professor James C. Walton, Ann Arbor Michigan, to ascertain the exact longitude of the city, a feat accomplished on December 1, 1865. Dubuque's longitude was "fixed" before the same accomplishment could be claimed for Chicago (Old Dubuque, pp. 30-31; Daily Herald, May 29, 1872; O. E. Root's Dubuque City Directory, 1867, p. 183).

Competent judges say our clock kept the best time of any town clock in the United States; a fact admitted by watchmakers and adepts in time-keeping, and largely due to the skillful superintendence of Dr. Horr.

Herald, May 29, 1872

The first Town Clock building marked the north end of the city's commercial heart. By c.1900 the location emerged as the "100-percent" downtown location, the point where the largest buildings would congregate. The clock was not visible from the river, given the considerable distance (largely unoccupied swampland) which separated the downtown and the riverfront. It served the downtown area and its bells extended its service range to those who were out of sight. The hour bell on the clock had an impressive range on a clear day, being audible in Zollicoffer, six miles to the north, and Flint Hill to the south (Daily Herald, March 6, 1983).

The first Town Clock building was at best a second-hand structure. Built in 1845 by Mr. H. S. Hetherington, it first housed a Congregational church, and then the German "The Odeon" theater. Briefly the post office, then a concert hall, it finally was the home of the John Bell Company, a dry goods firm. By 1872 the building was judged to be "one of the old landmarks of the city" (Daily Herald, May 26, 1872).

Tragedies are a part of every city history and the historical echoes of the collapse of Dubuque's Town Clock in 1872 still linger in the minds of most contemporary Dubuquers. Witnesses remained available when the Telegraph-Herald observed the 50th anniversary of the event in 1922. The paper then noted "There are in Dubuque today several who well remember that Saturday afternoon when disaster occurred, and hundreds who know every detail of the story as it has been related round the family circle in the impressionable period in their lives when it registered upon the

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 21

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

brain cells with Mother Goose and other tales never to be forgotten.” On May 25, 1872, foundation excavations were underway for Alderman Henry Plein’s new block along the north wall of the building. The workers saw the foundation of the Bell building bulge outward and they had time to unhitch their horse team from the wagon they were using, and cleared off. One workman barely stopped three female shoppers from entering the store. The same man ran through the Bell building spreading alarm and finding final refuge in the one-story rear wing of the store. The store clerks had been worried about the stability of the building and they had devised an emergency response. They and the patrons then in the store ducked beneath protective heavy furniture or into the southeast corner of the store where they escaped injury. Three patrons who were on the sidewalk, having just exited the store, were killed or mortally injured, all members of one family, one victim a baby nine months old (*ibid.*, *Telegraph-Herald*, May 25, 1922; *Daily Herald*, May 26, 1872).



Figure 25: John Bell & Company Mercantile Store, the first Town Clock Building, view to the northwest. The building has barely been finished, paper covers the glass-less windows and a sprig of evergreen, apparently hung up by the builders, is visible above the entrance. (*Telegraph-Herald*, August 6, 1933)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 22

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

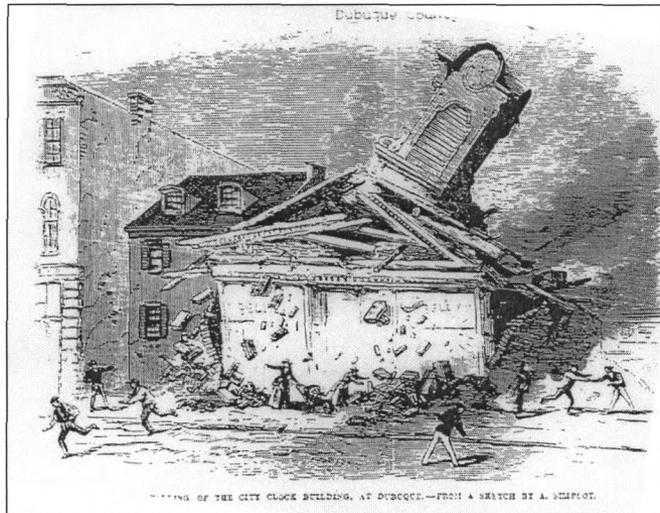


Figure 26: Alec Simplot's sketch of the collapse (*Julien's Journal*, p. 26)

The building literally exploded to the south, east and north, leaving just the rear wall standing intact. The clock tower fell more as an afterthought, falling first forward and then twisting to the north. The front wall and not the tower did the deadly work. Alec Simplot sketched the incident.

The fire alarm sounded across the town but residents saw no sign of smoke. Those nearby noticed instead that the landmark clock was no longer in its proper place on the downtown horizon. The expected "immense crowd" soon assembled even as the dust cloud hovered above the scene and "ruin and confusion seemed on every hand." Mayor Truck finally brought order, swearing in an emergency police force and the area was roped off and an organized rescue effort ensued. The Bell Company loss was estimated at \$25,000. While the excavation triggered the mishap, the *Herald* also blamed the weak building, the heavy load of dry goods stock, and the extreme weight of the clock and bell (3,400 pounds exclusive of the tower itself). The editor observed "with all this within and on top of the rotten shell of one of the oldest buildings in the city, we query [sic] if there is wonderment in any person's mind why it fell" (*Daily-Herald*, May 26, 1872).

We do not think any occurrence in Dubuque ever produced so great a sensation...Our citizens were brought up to the highest pitch of anxiety and dread; for two hours after the event nothing could be heard but talk of it. At the field of ruin the scene was indescribable. The streets were crowded for blocks around; Sanford's block was peopled at the windows and on the roof, and no sightable spot was left unused. The men in the ruins worked with coats off and sleeves rolled up, with the sweat pouring from their faces, unearthing the buried goods, and there was no cessation of labor until the task was finished after sundown.

Daily-Herald, May 26, 1872

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 23

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

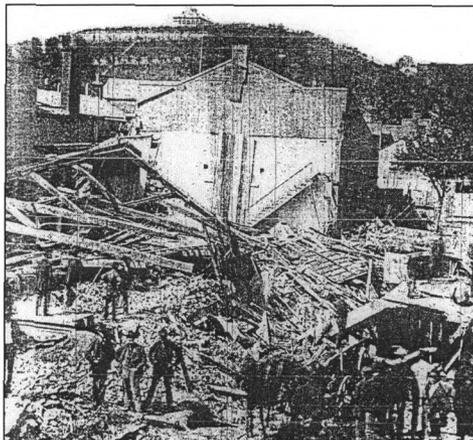


Figure 27: The rubble, view to the west (note bluffs, surviving rear wall, and the clock remnants, right foreground)
(*Telegraph-Herald*, August 25, 1941)

A New Town Clock and Building:

An institution in a community large or small, that people are in constant and daily intercourse with to their benefit and satisfaction, eventually becomes a necessity to them. An event, accidental or otherwise, that loses it to them, makes their discomfort. The town clock was one of Dubuque's pet institutions; every one's friend, and as unchanging as time and tide while it stood on its tower; its face was as broad and genial to the beggar as to Crassus, and it never failed to do its duty with an integrity that man might envy.

Saturday's disaster tumbled the old friend from its eminence; earthly friendships are usually misty and short-lived, but people seem not to forget the old clock, and look wistfully toward the vacant spot in air where it stood, for the well-remembered face, and are then disappointed in spirit when they remember the disaster...

Daily Herald, May 29, 1872

The town clock was sorely missed as the above extract indicates. The *Daily Herald* recommended that "our watchmakers select a clock in town to be put under the supervision of Dr. Horr, in behalf of the Town Clock Company, and have him regulate it for the benefit of the community in general." The *Daily Times* asked "Where Shall The Clock Be Set" and proposed that either the new Levi business block or the Congregational Church would suffice, as long as it remained on Main Street.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 24

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 28: Perspective Map of the City of Dubuque, 1889
(the vertical black line is a seam in the original image)

To get along, keep our clocks in order and spirits sweet, without the aid of the Town Clock is quite out of the range of probability, and...that friendly old reminder of the fleet-lying hours must soon be mounted again on high...It would be a grand advertisement for the [Levi] house—'twould ring its fame far and wide, and indicate by its hands, if properly attended to, how promptly the hands in the store are always on time. Mounted on a handsome case, there it could [be] seen from almost every part of Main Street, in which street it is most needed (*Daily Times*, May 29, 1872).

By June 2, the list of candidate Main Street locations had reached half a dozen in number. The N. V. Ryder Block was on this list. George D. Wood, the owner of the collapsed building was advocating its return to his property but John Bell, the merchant occupant of the demolished store had no interest in once again doing business beneath a clock.¹ Bell and Wood were in negotiation about the property. Another entity apparently anxious to distance themselves from the responsibilities of the clock tower was the town clock association. They let it be known early on their intention to “put the clock in the hands of the city council and allow them to make a suitable disposition of it.” Dr. Horr was unflappable and notified the original clock manufacturers of the disaster and inquired about repairing the fractured timepiece (*Daily Herald*, May 29, 1872).²

Dr. Horr was perhaps a bit embarrassed by the loss of the clock tower. The doctor had invited the American Association for the Advancement of Science to hold their August 1872 annual meeting in Dubuque, as guests of the Iowa Institute of Science. Some second thoughts were now being weighed.

¹ Bell failed to buy the property and instead found temporary quarters in the Parker & West agricultural warehouse. By early 1873 he was safely ensconced at 83 Main Street, the newly completed McCann & Cox building. As late as July 27, 1872, the *Herald* reported that Bell would remain there “until next spring when they take possession of the building to be erected on the site of the demolished town clock.” Indeed the 1873-74 city directory noted that John Bell & Company (J. Wallis and J. V. Rider) “will remove to Town Clock Building” (*Daily Times*, June 4, 1872; *Daily Herald*, July 27, 1872; April 20, 1873; Dubuque City Directory For 1873-74, p. 64).

² The lessons of the building collapse were not lost on other merchants. Architect David Jones was in charge of a replacement for the Herancourt block and urged Mr. Jenkel, an adjacent jeweler, to relocate while excavation was underway next door, “because the walls might tumble on the same principle as those of the town clock did. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” (*Herald*, July 2, 1872).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 25

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

The invitation...was not hastily extended. Leading business men, educationalists, and others were consulted, and pledges received from prominent citizens that the hospitalities appropriate to the occasion would be extended, and that in no grudging manner. The affair has now progressed too far for Dubuque to back out with honor—indeed without disgrace; and we anticipated a united interest and harmonious efforts [sic] in making the next meeting of the American Association for the advancement of sciences a success (*Daily Times*, June 16, 1872).

George Wood made his decision to proceed on his own to build a new building to once again support a town clock tower. By the end of the first week of June 1872 his workmen removed the surviving rear wall of the collapsed building and then tore down the adjacent Dr. Lay residence (*Daily Times*, June 8, 1872).³



Figure 29: The second Town Clock Building, view to the northwest, with the F. Weigle block to the north (right) (courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society, Anna Havens Collection)
(Note the key symbol set atop the tower, Dubuque was known as the “Key City”)

³ Wood didn't purchase the corner lot but it was also commercially developed during the summer and fall of 1872. Wood's ownership of Lot 54 dated back to February 3, 1864, when it passed from the ownership of the Congregational Church to his wife, Emily B. Wood. Dr. Lay, owner of the house on the corner, south of the collapsed building, was also eager to depart the scene of carnage. The doctor moved out of "the building punched in the ribs so fearfully" by the clock collapse and occupied Dr. Horr's recently vacated quarters in the Rebman's Block (*Times*, May 29, 1872).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 26

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

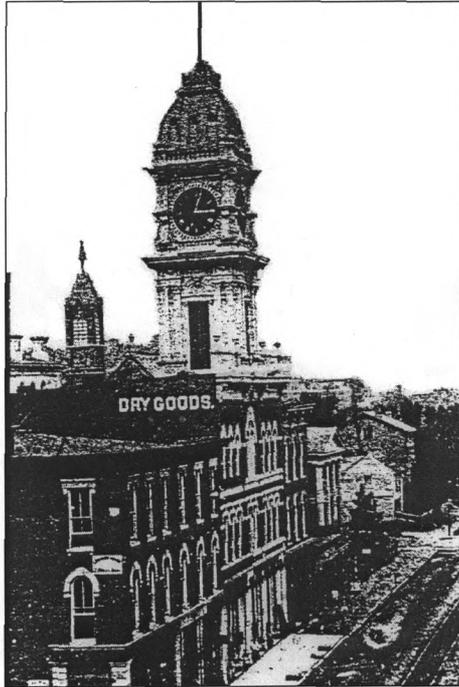


Figure 30: Early view of the second Town Clock Building, note lack of commercial buildings to the north of 9th Street (background), broad sidewalk (Loras College).

The preliminary design for the new Wood building was presented on June 26, 1872. The designers were Duane, LeRoy & Heer, stonecutters. The partnership of Fridolin Joseph Heer, Sr. (1834-1910) and Edward Naescher designed the building. Heer was Swiss-born and was trained as a master stonecutter. He had a Dubuque design presence as early as 1870. Less is known about Naescher, but the 1875-76 city directory noted that “Dubuque has been greatly embellished by their skill in architecture” and their trade area was a regional one. The only local criticism of the design was a lack of elevation, four stories being preferred over the intended three. The *Times* described the design:

The style of architecture is the Renaissance [spelled “Renesas” by the *Herald*]. The front is to be of brick with elaborate stone trimmings. It is to be three stories high, the store front—the lower story—to be French plate glass. Spring caps will crown the windows, while the bell and sill courses will be ornamental with brackets. The building will be 51 feet wide, and its entire height 88 feet—the tower to be of wood. (This will place the clock some 25 feet higher than its elevation on the old building.) The

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 27

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

roof of the building will be ornamented with a galvanized iron cornice of the finest pattern, and will be of depth to secure the finest proportions at its elevation.⁴

The *Herald* gave the height as 82 feet, including a 34-foot high tower (*Herald*, June 27, 1872; J. M. Wolfe's Dubuque City Directory, 1875-76, p. 23).

“[The Town Clock] is built of brick, three stories high, faced with heavy stone caps, lintels, corners, etc. and is an ornament to the street. The style of architecture appears to be a mixture of the Gothic and Corinthian, the roof of the main building serving as a foundation for the clock tower, which latter reaches to an elevation of eighty-eight feet from the pavement...No one investment in the city is of so great utility as this improvement. The business and pleasures of all classes continue and cease by its warnings, It is Time's finger, and in all its features challenges the admiration of the people”

1880 History of Dubuque County, p. 693



Figure 31: Main Street, looking north from Sixth Street, c.1897

Note the prominence of the clock tower and the predominance of ornate Italianate business blocks

The ornamental pressed metal cornice was just now coming into its own. A local manufacturer by the name of Yates was the source. R. Cox's new triple storefront boasted one example in June. McCann's new building was similarly "...crowned with one of Yates' patent metal cornices" in mid-June. The *Herald* noted "How odd those buildings look that have no improvement of that kind. Style is everything these days" (Shank, pp. 79-81; *Herald*, June 4, 27, 1872; *Daily Times*, June 27, 1872).

⁴ Wesley Shank doesn't list Naetcher but dates the Heer-Naetscher partnership to c.1874. The 1874 city directory dates the union to "a few years ago" Shank, p. 79).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 28

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

The first reference is made at this time as to the progress of Wood's new building, with a *Herald* reference to foundation work on the site. L. T. Farwell was the general contractor, Piffner Brothers had the foundation contract and a bricklayer named Wood was to do the brick work. The *Herald* estimated that 10-12 weeks would complete the building but wisely predicted "the finishing strokes will not be put on the clock tower for a much longer period." The cost estimate for the clock tower and belfry was \$4,000, this sum to be raised by subscription. The *Times* enjoined its readers that "This matter deserved the earnest consideration of all our citizens, for the town clock is an every day friend whose kind offices we can on no account dispense with" (ibid.).

Businessmen quickly urged that the city should bear the cost of the clock. By June 28 Wood estimated the added cost for the clock (with an illuminated face) and tower as \$5,000. The stockholders of the Town Clock Association accepted an offer by S. Howard Company, the manufacturers of the original clock, to credit the salvage value of the ruined clock against the cost of a replacement. The members appointed Dr. Horr as the chair of the clock project and named a committee (George Wood, Dr. Horr, D. E. Lyon and William Andrew) to consult with the city as to how to best rebuild the clock tower. By July 4 a dozen similarly worded petitions sought taxpayers' signatures in support of public funding of the clock project. The argument in favor of the public support was that a few persons had paid for the first eight successful years of clock operation and that the benefit should be fairly supported. The *Times* commended the liberal support for the petitions and observed "The people of Dubuque know what an advantage, convenience and benefit to them a town clock has been, and do not propose to long remain without one." By July 7 Mayor Turck, several aldermen and the Town Clock Association representatives came to agreement on the matter of public funding, and reported its recommendation to the City Council. They recommended "...the immediate construction and replacing of tower and clock, on a plan that will not be surpassed by any city in the Union. The new clock will have illuminated dials, to accommodate the people at night, and will be placed in a tower, built from the ground especially for it, a hundred feet in height from base to summit." The Council agreed with one exception on July 8. The *Herald* castigated the unnamed Alderman:

We would suggest, for the benefit of the alderman who seemed inclined to oppose the appropriation because he labored under the impression that the clock was a fit subject for seizure by city creditors, that none of the nightmares bondholders will, in all probability, ever care about adorning their parlors or vest pockets with it. It isn't as portable as an Elgin watch, and there are few creditors so mean as to rob us of our time and money both."

Economists on the Council opposed the dial illumination as well as the second bell to strike the half-hours. The *Herald* noted that 90 percent of the citizenry favored the improvements and that public funding demanded "liberality and enterprise" rather than parsimony if the new clock was to be a source of community pride (*Daily Times*, June 28, 29, July 4, 1872; *Herald*, July 3, 9, 30, 1872).

Two local merchants were loath to wait any longer for the planned town clock. A. W. Kemler set up a "town clock" in his store that was to "serve as the standard time for that part of the city. The *Herald* reported "by the crooks and turns in trade he has become the owner of Cornelyson's clock said to be a splendid time piece." A merchant named Wormood (or Wormwood by one account) imported a \$675 astronomical regulator clock manufactured by the S. Howard Company. The clock and case weighed 325 pounds, the pendulum ball alone 33 pounds. The same mechanism, said to be "the best specimen of clock manufacture we have seen," was in use by the Smithsonian

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 29

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Institute at Ann Arbor, Michigan, and adorned “all the great railway offices in the country.” The clock arrived about August 1 and was, by the next day, “patronized nearly as well as the old town clock, since its arrival...” (Herald, August 2, 3, 1872; *Daily Times*, August 2, 1872).



Figure 32: Main Street, viewed south from north of Ninth Street, c. 1880s
Note the dirt street and parallel streetcar tracks
(courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society)

The construction of the Wood building proceeded and for whatever reason, the progress eluded local editorial comment for the most part. An exceptional reference appeared in the *Herald*:

A Splendid Column—One of the columns to be used in the town clock building has arrived on the ground for erection. It is composed of five sections, finely fastened together, and is ornamented with oval corners, presenting a fine appearance. The column, of which there will be several of the same kind, came from Rouse & Dean’s iron foundry and was cast by Geo. Radford, master mechanic in that department. He is an experienced hand with melted ore and many of the columns seen along Main Street bear evidence of his skill.”

The local (Hammond) Rouse & (George C.) Dean (died 1873) (Iowa Iron Works) firm was reported in mid-July as “doing a great amount of iron work” for projects across northeast Iowa. The firm dated back to 1851, and was Rouse & Dean as of 1865. They produced boilers, engines, bridge iron, waterwheels, and structural iron and the 1875-76 directory observed “The architectural elegance of our own, and other cities and towns in the northwest has received many rare embellishments, and substantial aids from this manufactory in the way of iron caps, columns, sills, stairways, brackets, etc.” A week later, the same source noted “The workmen were setting up the pillars on Geo. D. Wood’s new block yesterday afternoon.” In late October, the new block, like its contemporary new business

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 30

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

buildings was “capped with a handsome metal cornice from Yates manufactory, and [it] sets off the premises to advantage” (*Herald*, July 17, August 29, September 7, 1872; J. M. Wolfe’s Dubuque City Directory, 1876-76, pp. 33-34).

No final completion date was found for the new building but the building name was in general usage as of November 20 when the “Town Clock Exchange,” a new saloon, opened next to Dr. Watson’s residence (a temple-front mansion just north of the Woods block, see photo). The year 1872 witnessed the building of four new business blocks on Main Street, between Seventh and Eighth streets. The Sheffield-Rider Block was a block south and had identical dimensions to the Wood block. Rated “one of the handsomest pieces of architecture in the city” if featured Corinthian style marble columns, “the latest style of cornice capping its beauty,” a grouted basement, all at a cost of \$24,000. H. Plein’s three-story single storefront plan (75x25), south of Wood’s building (replacing Dr. Lay’s residence), had a “plain front” and a \$7,000 price tag. Immediately north of the Woods block was F. Weigle’s, the building that brought down the first town clock building. Three stories tall, it measured 60x26, cost just \$4,000 but was “well finished” and “a decided improvement to the street.” Finally there was Wood’s building (114x51) which cost \$18,000 apart from the clock tower. The *Herald* described the new Woods block:

The clock steeple which rises from a brick column at the summit of the Wood block, is 58 feet in height above the building, is built of frame work of the most solid construction, is nearly completed and costs about \$5,000, including the clock and bell” (*Herald*, November 24, 1872).

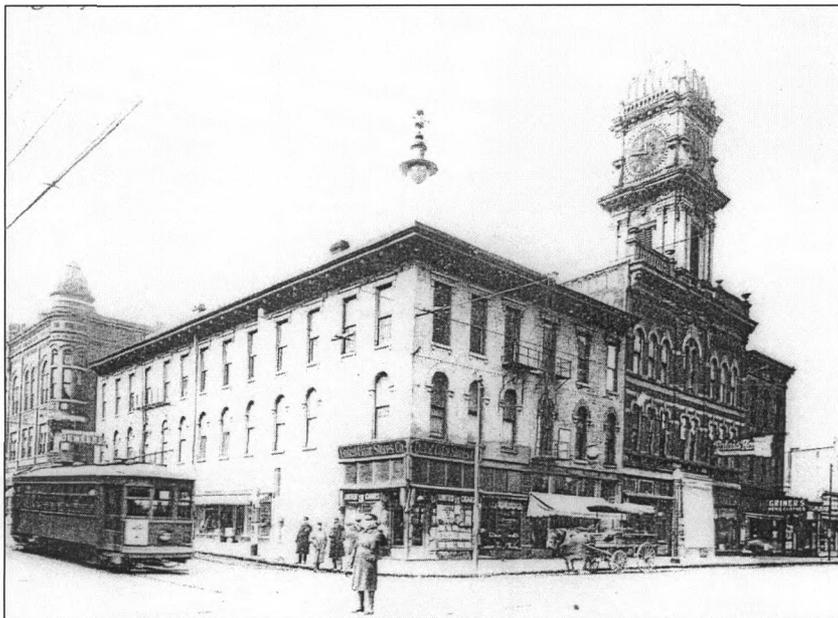


Figure 33: c.1913 view, Eighth and Main streets, view to the northwest
The building entryway has been covered and is being remodeled

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 31

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

The clock tower construction effort began in early October and marked the involvement of the city in the larger building effort. The formal agreement between George Woods and the city was finalized only on September 16, 1872 (and wasn't filed for record until 1888!). Woods granted to the city "the right to erect a tower suitable for said clock, up, through and on said store, and to hold, enjoy and maintain said tower and clock perpetually." The city pledged to "bear all the additional expense that shall or may occur in and about the building by reason of constructing said tower and the said additional expense to be estimated from the ground foundation to the top of the tower...it being understood that the tower begins on the ground." The city further pledged to "place in said tower a first class clock and bell and after the same shall be so put in, to keep the same and the said tower in good condition and time so long as the building in which it is placed shall stand." The city received a right of way for those in charge of managing the clock operations "for the purpose of over seeing, winding and repairing it, up through said store, without hindrance." The owners were to prevent unauthorized access to the tower and the city pledged to deduct the value of the clock and tower from any property assessment (Property Abstract).

L. T. Farwell, the general contractor for the Wood's block, was "fully engrossed" in finished the building, so the Town Clock Committee (and not the city) contracted with John Mullany (1813-1884) to design and complete the clock tower within 30 days, before the advent of cold weather. It is perhaps strange that the original architect completed his design work without including the tower. They must have defined a weight range for the addition. The 1875-76 directory clearly states that Heer & Naesher designed "...[the] Town Clock Building except the tower." The clock and bell were due to arrive within a month of the contract date, about mid-October. Mullany was an Irish-born architect who came to America in 1849. Primarily a house-builder, he was being termed an architect by this time period. He designed the local Episcopal Church in mid-1872, his work being described as "chaste and very proportionate by the *Times*. Mullany went straight to work and by October 13, the *Herald* could report "The Town Clock tower is building up rapidly under the supervision of architect Mullany. The derricks which have been erected are busily operated raising material for the tower." Another report followed at month's end when the same source noted "The galvanized iron work on the tower clock steeple, will cost \$2,000, and Messrs. [Peter] Klauer & Bro.⁵ and T. Henny have taken contract for doing it" (*Daily Times*, June 4, October 10, 1872; *Herald*, October 10, 13, 31, 1872; *Jacobsen*, p. E-146; 1875-76 *J. M. Wolfe's Dubuque City Directory*, p. 23).

The city clock tower may with propriety be considered a public edifice. The building which it embellished was, in its construction, strengthened at an expense of \$3,000, to sustain the tower. The tower, clock and bells are the property of the city and are said to have cost \$20,000. Mr. John Mullany was the architect.

Directory of the City of Dubuque For 1875-76, p. 14

Certainly Architect Heer computed and designed the tower support system well before Mullany came on the scene, and presumably also designed the clock tower. Mullany's role was that of a building superintendent (obituary, *Times*, April 19, 1884).

⁵ Peter Klauer ((1827-1880+) was German born. He reached Dubuque in 1855 and started his iron cornice and tin roof manufacturing company in 1870 (*History of Dubuque County*, 1880, p. 823).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 32

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 34: Panoramic Photo, O. Conneaut, September 25, 1914 (Library of Congress)
View to the north, the clock tower projects in the center of the image.

George D. Wood (1829-1890):

When George Wood died on February 4, 1890, the *Telegraph-Herald* rated him to be "one of Dubuque's most respected and highly esteemed citizens...an honest, careful and conscientious business man, [who] was an active member of the Congregational Church, and was a charitable and exemplary man in many ways." Born in Franklin County, Mass. on January 7, 1829, Wood journeyed from Chicago to California in 1850 and returned east after three years. In the fall of 1853 Wood came to Dubuque where he entered upon the dry goods trade under the initial name of Wood & Luke and then Wood, Luke & Company. They had retail and a wholesale outlets through 1864. The firm became Sheffield, Wood & Company in 1868, and it was again renamed as Wood, Crocker & Company in 1869. The firm became George D. Wood, then Wood, Coates & Company prior to 1872 and through 1889, and finally Wood, Crocker & Company. At the time of his death it was said that only John Bell had a longer involvement in the dry goods trade than did Wood.

Wood converted the former Congregational Church into a store that supported the first town clock and clock tower and he constructed the second Town Clock Building. His dry goods firm occupied the larger northern storefront for 16 years. The firm relocated c.1889 across Main Street, a block to the south, where it remained at the time of Wood's death.

Wood's partner in life, Emily M. (Baker) Wood became his wife in 1856. His wife was from the same home county in Massachusetts. She was the first holder of Lot 54, the Town Clock property (*Telegraph-Herald*, February 5, 1890).

Subsequent Tenant and Property History:

While Wood's dry goods firm, under its various names, occupied the new building for its first 16 years, Wood actually relinquished ownership of the property the year after it was finished. During the construction, he moved his

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 33

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

firm to the north half of the new Sheffield & Rider building, located a block south on Main Street. A special attraction at that location was a full-length mirror that was displayed in the cloak and shawl department at the back of the store (*Herald*, November 1, 1872; *Daily Times*, September 21, 1872).



Figure 35: Mid-1920's view of Main southwest from 900's block (Loras College)

Wood, Coates & Co.

Some of the old merchants of Dubuque have maintained their commercial integrity, and continued their business prosperously. Among such men are Messrs. Wood, Coates, Meredith and Baker, who constitute the firm. The town clock building has become a conspicuous object in our city, and the extensive wholesale and retail trade goods house of Wood, Coates & Co., has rendered it still more attractive.

Dubuque City Directory, 1876, p. VII

Wood sold his interest in the property to partner William Coates, Maria Waller, Alice E. Roberts, Francis A. Coates, John Robert Waller, and Mary J. Spensley on July 8, 1873, cashing out for a princely \$30,500. Coates alone held a one-half interest in the property, as did all of the others collectively. He soon followed Wood's lead, selling his

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 34

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

share to the others on September 27, 1873. Perhaps due to the hard financial times, his purchase price for a half interest was a paltry \$15,250. All of the other owners were related (Property Abstract).

It wasn't until late September 1873 that Wood, Coates & Company were ensconced in the new Town Clock building. The firm reported that it was "receiving the largest and best assorted stock of dry goods and notions that were ever opened in the City of Dubuque. Buyers, either wholesale or retail, should not fail to visit their emporium under the Town Clock, before purchasing." City directories place his company as fully occupying both storefronts through 1889, addressed as 831-833-835 Main Street. Beginning in 1890, Sullivan & Stampfer, dry goods dealers, were ensconced there. By 1896 that firm was at 812 Main (*Herald*, September 27, 1873).

(John J.) Homan & (John) Roehl, dealers in furniture, carpets, stoves, crockery and refrigerators, replaced Sullivan & Stampfer by 1896 and remained in the building under that same name as late as 1912, by which time they offered "complete home furnishings" and advertised themselves as being in the Town Clock Building. By 1915, Homan's Furniture was at 429 Main and the building was occupied by the Palais Royal (C. M. Jensen and M. Mendelson), dealers in ladies' furnishings and goods. By 1922, Mendelson alone ran the same firm, now selling "Ladies ready to wear" goods. Three years later Palais Royal was the "Womens' Outfitters" and reminded its customers that "the exclusive suits, wraps and gowns you admire are usually purchased here where lasting satisfaction follows every transaction." Palais Royal remained the sole building tenant through at least 1929 (1896, 1898-99, 1911-12, 1915, 1921-22, 1925 and 1929 city directories).



Figure 36: Mary Jane Spensley (left) and Alice Woodward (right)
(photo courtesy Mary Alice Spensley Weir)

Maria Waller died May 23, 1878 as a holder of a one-fifth interest in the property. The Waller estate sold its interest to Alice E. Woodward, Francis Coates, and Mary J. Spensely on December 31, 1887. Francis Coates died February 6, 1892. The Coates interest in the property passed to Henrietta Coates Kiesel on November 16, 1904.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 35

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Alice Woodward and Mary J. Spensley emerged as sole property owners effective December 21, 1907, and Spensley became the sole owner on November 26, 1932 (ibid.).

Mary Alice Spensley Weir (1910-), aged 91, recalls her grandmother Mary Jane Spensley (1840-1934), her great aunt, Alice Woodward, and her great uncle, John Robert Waller. Mary Jane Spensley, widowed in 1882, was born in Dubuque, but lived most of her life at Mineral Point, Wisconsin, until 1920, at which time she, and her sister Alice, lived together in Dubuque. Her obituary described Spensley as “a woman of stately mien and gracious personality” who “...maintained to the end of her life a great interest in public affairs.” Mary Alice lived in Dubuque until the late 1940s. She remembered the Palace Royal womens’ clothing store with its mirrors on each floor and its closed closet-like side cabinets behind which clothing was hung. The intersection of Main and Eighth streets was the center of downtown activity because the several streetcar lines interlinked at that point. There was always a policeman on duty on the corner to direct those using the cars (*Times-Journal*, November 9, 1934; interview, Mary Alice Spensley Weir, May 2, 2001).

Milburn’s Ladies Ready-to-Wear was in the building by 1934, with E. C. Benninger as manager. Kraft’s Clothing, dealers in men’s clothing and furnishings, John J. Widmeier manager, was there by 1941. By 1945 there were four storefronts listed, addressed as 823, 831, 833 and 835 Main. Barker’s Shoe Shop was at 823 and had a large suspended sign set above the main entrance. The Cotton Shop Clothing Store (Barbara C. Vandenberg, manager), Fannie Mae Candy Company (Mrs. Agnes M. Linehan, proprietor) and Sibbing’s Jewelry (Nat Teguns, manager) were the tenants (1934, 1941, 1945 city directories).

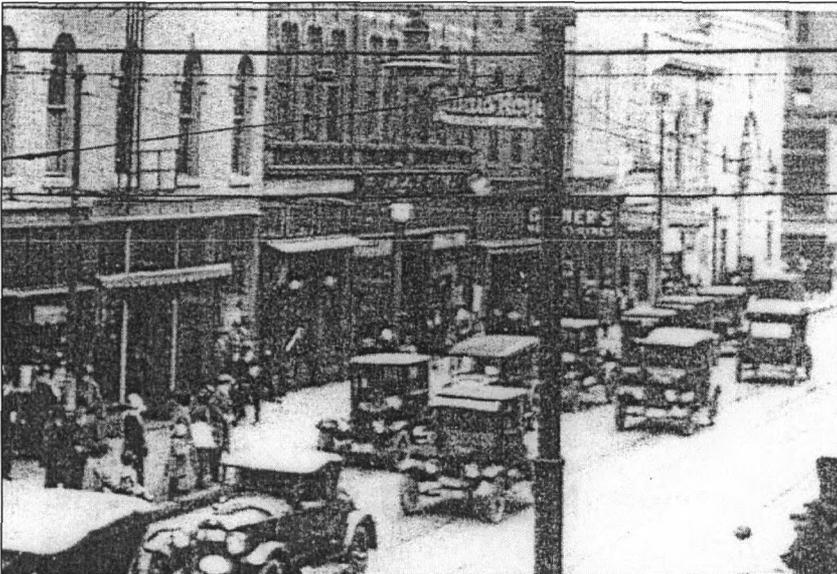


Figure 37: 1924 Main Street view, note the Palace Royal sign on the Town Clock Building, The southernmost storefront bears no separate signage.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 36

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 38: c.1940 view of the Town Clock Building, view to the northwest
The Kraft's sign has replaced Palace Royal and there is another sign, illegible, atop the southern storefront
(Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society)

The 1955 city directory listed Barker's Shoe Store (823), Kolck's Mens Shop (831), Neumode Hosiery (833) and Sibbing's Jewelry (835). By 1960, the last named of the four was replaced by Mode O'Day Shop, dealers in womens' clothing, but Kolck's and Newmode both remained. Figure 53, dated to 1946, shows a replacement storefront with four components, the southern storefront (Barker's Shop), the entryway, and a two-part northern storefront

By the mid-1970s the ground level was divided into four storefronts, the northernmost being the widest, filling roughly one-third of the whole. The entire building was committed to marketing shoes and the three tenants were Trade Home Shoes, Pat's Shoe Box, Ray's Quality Shoes For Men. An effort was made in 1987-88 to partition the ground floor into small office space but this effort appears to have been abandoned.

The Spensley family owned the building until 1986 and many Dubuquers refer to the building as the Spensley Building due to this long-term ownership. The J. C. Penny Company demolished three adjoining buildings to the north of the Town Clock Building in 1967 and erected the present day four story department store. The company leased the upper two floors of the Town Clock building for storage from July 1, 1941 through 1965 at least.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 37

The Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Terence J. O'Neill purchased the building by contract on December 31, 1986 and during his ownership the northern storefront was leased to the Dubuque County Juvenile Court Services (1987-92). The City belatedly vacated its Town Clock agreement from the property on April 5, 1999 and Security Partners purchased the building on January 25, 1999. That corporation became Clock Tower Building effective February 12, 2001 (*ibid.*) funds (*My Old Dubuque*, p. 34).



Figure 39: The malling of Main Street, c.1970s
Tradehome Shoes and Kolck's Men Shop occupy the storefronts

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 38

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 39

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

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Daily Herald, May 26, 28, 29, 1872; February 5, March 6, 8, 12, 25.

Telegraph-Herald, May 25, 1922; August 12, 1924, August 6, 1933; August 25, 1941.

Maps:

Perspective Map of the City of Dubuque, 1889

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company, 1884, 1891, 1909, 1909/36, 1966

Interview:

Mary Alice Spensley Weir, May 7, 2001, interviewed by Mary Lou Baal and Susan Butler

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10-Photos Page 40

Clock Tower Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

10. Geographical Data

Legal Description:

City Lot 54, Original Plat of Dubuque.

Boundary Justification:

The building covers the entire lot and the full lot is included in the nomination. The Clock Tower, located on Clock Tower Plaza, is not included in this nomination.

Photographs:

Photographer: James E. Jacobsen

Date of Photographs: April 23, 1901

Location of Original Negative: Property Owners

Image:	Direction	Description
1	northwest	full façade, street level
2	same	same from roof of Security Building
3	southwest	same
4	northwest	rear wall, south side wall, roof from Dubuque Building
5	southwest	interior, cast iron clock tower supports main floor
6	south	same, third floor
7	same	original clock base with relocated clock visible to south
8	northwest	Main Street contextual view

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 41

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Appendix:

The Clock Tower Support System:

The building is replete with physical manifestations of its principal role and challenge of supporting a massive clock tower. As the historical account notes, this support system began below grade and continued to the rooftop. In the basement a series of massive ashlar limestone piers are centered along the north bay of the plan. The front pier which supports the principal cast iron support columns is simply massive.

A two-level heavy timber lateral beam system is centered on these stone piers and this timber work was reused. The main beams, measuring 16 feet in length with simple lap splices, was adz-finished and was marked with earlier mortice marks. Clearly it predated the building and had been used in earlier ones. One hypothesis is that timber and lumber were reused from the collapsed first Town Clock building.

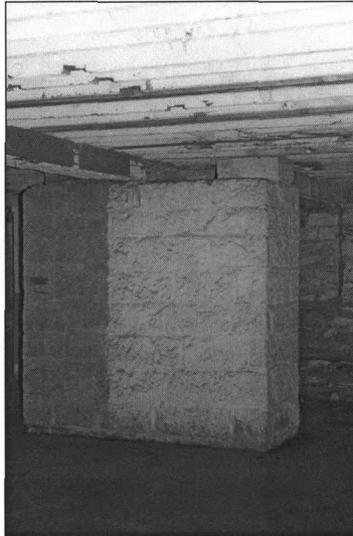


Figure 40: Principal support pier (view southwest, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)
(Refer to basement floor plan, shown above)

The structural support system that bore the weight of the clock tower (a burden that was shared with the internal lateral brick wall) also supported the middle beam line of the north storefront. Thus the twin cast iron columns were not centered beneath the tower as might be expected, but rather the southernmost column was set beneath the northwest rear corner of the clock tower. A second matching column was set to the north and the two supported a composite beam (seven 2x10 planks on the first floor, five on the floors above) that supported the midpoint of the north bay.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 42

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

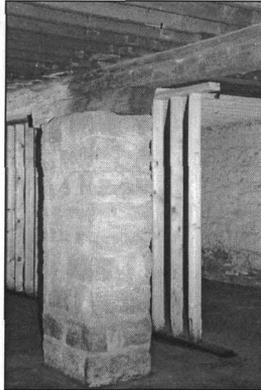


Figure 41: Stone pier (view southeast, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)
(Refer to basement floor plan, shown above)



Figure 42: Ground floor support column set
(view northwest, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 43

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

The cast iron columns are simply fluted, with plain projecting rounded bases and elaborate caps and a decorative pendant. There are no roller marks but they were cast locally by the firm of Dean & Rouse. The columns are reduced in scale and ornamentation on the upper two floors. These have more apparent saddles to support the twin front beams and the single (centered) lateral beam that runs the full length of the plan.



Figure 43: Second floor support column set
(view northwest, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

On the third floor three tension rods link the attic and second floor ceiling levels and metal shoes (see image below) tie these in. This additional support system was apparently put in place to prevent the tower's weight from shifting forward.

A narrow wooden stair leads to the attic level from the third floor. A massive heavy timber box is set into this attic level. Long diagonal braces, one on each side, brace the rear corners of this box to each side wall. Even larger angled braces are set across each of the box corners. Four-inch joists set four inches apart, form the room of the box. Two plastered shafts, set into the internal lateral wall, have wooden door covers at this level. The weights of the clock descended through this shaft, down to the top of the stone foundation wall (see photo below).

A roof top hatch and stairway leads to the roof. The projecting base on the roof fit within the clock tower and the perimeter of the tower was set flush to the front of the cornice.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information **Page** 44

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 44: Tension rod base
(view south, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

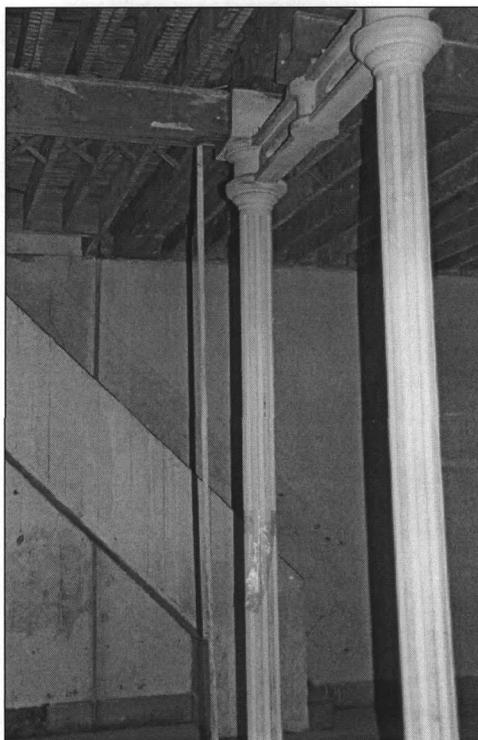


Figure 45: Tension rod, third floor, stairs to attic level
(view southwest, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 45

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 46: Weight well (view down, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

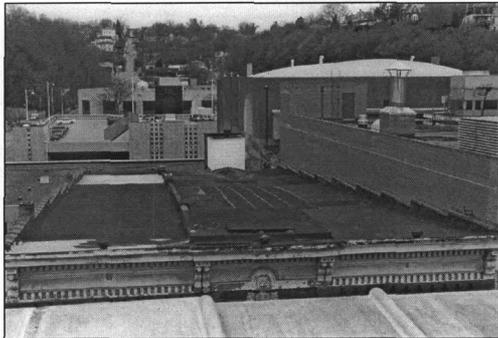


Figure 47: Cornice, clock tower mount Ground floor support column set (view west, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

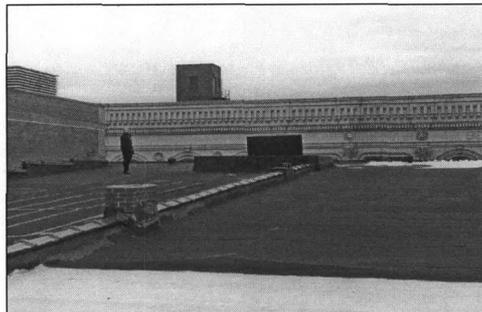


Figure 47: Roof view, tower base with hatch up, Security Building in background (view east, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information **Page** 46

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Locational Context:

The Town Clock Building is located on what is now called Clock Tower Plaza, formerly Main Street. This location is toward the south end of the downtown proper, a few blocks northwest of the landmark county courthouse and jail. The building is the last surviving commercial design of its period in the 700's-800s of Main Street and it has lost all of its contemporary adjoining buildings. There is a single-story storefront to the south. The American Trust building (1923) towers above it to the north. The even taller Dubuque Building is to the southwest, a half block distant. The Security Building (1890s) directly across the street to the east, was built in part by the Spensley family and its height was restricted to preserve the view of the clock tower.



Figure 48: Urban context, Town Clock Building
(view northwest, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

The removed Clock Tower is just a block and a half due south, set atop a replacement concrete base.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 47

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 49: Present tower viewed from its former mount
(view south, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

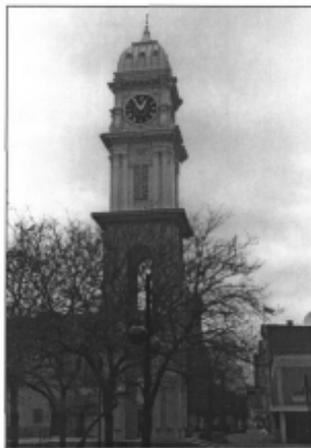


Figure 50: Clock Tower Plaza
The Town Clock Building is located two blocks to the north
(view northwest, photo by Jim Jacobsen, April 23, 2001)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 48

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Installing the clock and bell:

The completion of the building readily outpaced the production of the replacement clock and bell. Although S. Howard was identified early on as the manufacturer of the replacement clock, there was no contract for it as late as August 20. By that date the main bell had been ordered and a decision on the bell was promised within the next few weeks. The decision to illuminate the clock dials (“despite what has been said against it”) and other improvements had been finalized (*Herald*, October 10, 20, 1872).

The new clockworks were manufactured by Howard & Company, Boston, and the 4,581-pound steel bell was cast by Messrs. Vickers Sons & Company of Sheffield, England. The bell measured 68 inches in diameter, “half larger than any other in the city.” A second smaller bell, the original from the old clock tower, was reused in the new mechanism. Both bells would chime the quarter and half hours, while the steel bell would announce the hour. The bell reached New York in early February 1873 and arrived in Dubuque on March 5. The manufacture of the clock was delayed by difficulties “in preparing patterns suitable to the style of those ordered for our use” (*Times*, October 11, 1872; *Daily Herald*, October 10, 1872; February 5, March 6, 1873).

The reuse of the smaller old bell was a particular advantage because of its reputation for being audible at great distances. A bell three times its size, housed in the City Hall bell tower, barely carried its tones to the city limits, let alone well beyond them (*Daily Herald*, March 6, 1873).

The “Briton” bell was conveyed to the new building the afternoon of March 7. En route, it was “the cynosure of many eyes.” It was mounted in the tower on the 11th and first heard that evening. The *Herald* reported “It is quite evident that it has power to be heard all over the city, and, in favorable weather, for miles beyond.” The “anxiously awaited” clockworks reached the city that same evening and the smaller bell was put in place on the 12th. It was predicted that “in one week watchmen can regulate their repeaters, levers, lepins and turneps by the city clock.” W. W. Woodman assembled the clock, he previously having served as the mechanic who both installed and maintained the first clock. Dr. Horr announced that the clock would be assembled in mid-March. An unexpected problem had delayed the installation, as described by the *Herald*:

The delay is caused by the disproportion of the size of the clock weights to the flues in which they will be suspended. The weights have been placed in the hands of the machinists to be made the proper size. The flues will pass from the tower down [to] the basement of the building, so that in case of an accident in the breaking of a rope, the weights will fall upon solid earth and do no damage.

There was also some dissatisfaction with the imported master steel bell. The same source discoursed on its failings.

...the bells, the big bell in particular, does not reach the summit of public expectations in its tones. Every man you meet queries about the big bell and has a theory of his own to remedy the fault in it. Its tones do not ring out clear and penetrating above the smaller bell, and not reach out as far as was promised for it by the gentlemen who purchased it. The tower is wrongly constructed it is said, and impedes the flow of the sound, and a change in the enclosure of the tower and the construction of a sounding board above the bell is talked of. Others believe that the fault lies partly in the way the bell is struck—the clock hammer is too small and does not strike with sufficient momentum to draw out the

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 49

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

entire strength of sound, and also that the stroke should be from the inside of the bell, as recommended by the German musical profession [sic] who tested it at Sheffield, Eng. An effort will be made to correct the difficulty.

The Town Clock Committee met with Mr. Woodman on March 24 to adjust its hammer so that a "longer and more direct blow" was delivered. The *Herald* noted "although this will not begin to give the full power of the bell, it will be a very perceptible improvement on previous results" (*Daily Herald*, May 29, 1872; March 8, 12, 16, 25, 1873).



Figure 50: "Miss Dubuque," clock faces out of sync, 1941
(*Telegraph-Herald*, August 25, 1941)

By April 1 a number of changes had been made to the tower and the bell mechanism. The exterior lattice work on the tower was cut away down to the base of the tower and the strength of the hammer stroke to the master bell was increased. The *Herald* promised that "steel bells, like violins, improve with use—our bell is of the best steel manufacture, and its tones will improve." The problem did not go away and as late as April 20, Dr. Horr was in favor of applying water power to propel the bell hammer. Many were convinced that the bell hammer itself was too small to do the job (*Herald*, April 1, 20, 1873).

On a weekly basis, two sturdy boys spent an hour and a half drawing the weights of the clock to the top of their fall. The weights, on chains, were suspended in a shaft that connected the clock and building basement. This healthy form of employment was available until 1918 when the lifting was mechanized. The replacement clock was a substantial improvement given that it presented its clock faces from a higher elevation and because its bells were presumably of greater range (*Old Dubuque*, p. 33).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 50

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

By 1941 those who maintained the clock used a complex route to reach the clock. They entered through the Penny's building to the north, taking an elevator to the third floor. They then took a flight of stairs to the roof level of the Town Clock Building, went through a trap door and a second flight of steps before passing through another trap door to reach the bell room. Two more flights of stairs led to the clock mechanism (*Telegraph-Herald* Library, typed MS).

The Town Clock Gets Lost In The Shadows:



Figure 51: Aerial view, August 7, 1946, view to the north (State Historical Society of Iowa)
By 1946 the clock tower was engulfed by taller buildings.

The visibility of the clock tower was largely compromised by the construction in 1924 of the American Trust & Savings building, a veritable skyscraper by Dubuque standards. This building was just to the north, at 9th and Main streets. The new construction coincided with a finding by Building Commissioner R. G. Humphrey that the supportive clock tower was unsafe due to dry rot. In the face of an estimated \$4-5,000 repair expense, the City Council voted in mid-August 1924 to remove the tower. The fatalities of the 1872 clock tower collapse were central to the council's determinations, and the vote was made with a full awareness of the high degree of public support for retaining the clock tower. That public support forced the Council to do an about-face and the necessary repair funds were provided. Dubuque at the time was thought to be the only city where a public clock tower was being maintained on a private building (*Telegraph-Herald*, August 12, 1924; *My Old Dubuque*, p. 33).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 51

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

Remodelings of the Town Clock Building are dated to 1918 and 1927 but no specifics are offered as to what was done. In August 1924 Councilman R. G. Humphrey and a fire department official toured the clock tower and reported that dry rot and rusted nails had weakened the structure. They noted "quite a little vibration" when the bell was struck and that a "high wind would sway it considerably." Repairs would coast \$4-5,000. On August 12 the City Council voted to demolish the tower. The Colonial Dames of Iowa and the Dubuque Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution led a petition drive to save the tower. A *Times-Journal* "vote" found 1,879 in favor of saving the tower rather than 172 who wished its removal. The Council voted on August 25 to restore the clock tower. An electric Seth Thomas clock mechanism was installed (undated *Telegraph-Herald* Library, typed MS, "Town Clock History"; *Daily American Tribune*, August 23, 1924).



Figure 52: A landmark engulfed by tall buildings, September 19, 1946 Centennial Parade, view to the north
(Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society)

The same scenario unfolded in 1941 when the Council ordered the removal of the clock and tower and the public again demanded its renovation. During the popularity of streamlining everything from toasters to railroad engines, the clock was "streamlined" by the addition of alternating green and rose neon lights to its northern, southern and western clock faces. The clock, while famous, was infamous for its inaccuracy by this time (see photo, p. 13). The clock was synchronized to run "on Western Union time" and was once again completely overhauled and electrified. The weights and chains were discarded and a Western Union motor operation replaced them (*Telegraph-Herald*, August 25, 1941; *My Old Dubuque*, p. 34).

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 52

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa

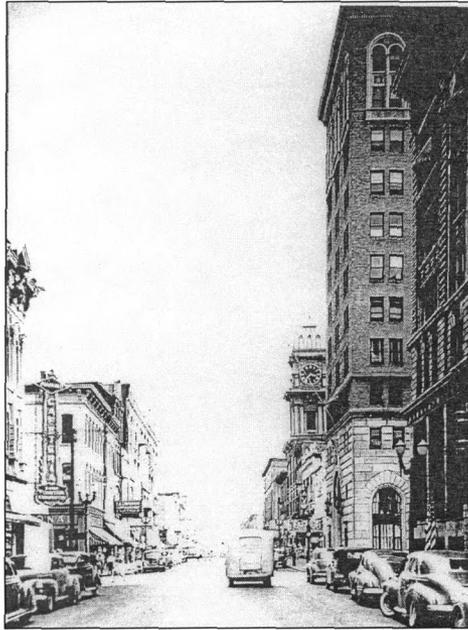


Figure 53: Main Street viewed south, c.1955, American Trust & Savings Building visible to the right
(Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society)

It is interesting to note the growing mythic status of the clock, termed “Miss Dubuque” by 1941. The history of the clock by this time included the fact that it was “an exact duplicate” of the clock first put in place in New Orleans, and further that the second clock was both on the same site as the first clock and was also an “exact duplicate” of the first one.” The *Daily American Tribune* termed the clock tower “a symbol of the struggles, the growth and the aspiration of the west” (*Telegraph-Herald*, August 25, 1941; *Daily American Tribune*, August 23, 1924).

The clock and its building parted their ways in 1970 when the clock was moved to Town Clock Square as the centerpiece of the downtown redevelopment effort. The clock tower and clock were set atop a 100-foot tall tower and it was rededicated in its new prominent home in August 1971. The relocation costs were paid using \$70,000 in private

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Additional Information Page 53

Town Clock Building

Dubuque County, Iowa



Figure 54: The de-clockpitation of the Town Clock Building, 1970.
Note that replacement icon, the American Trust and Savings Bank weather beacon tower
(*Telegraph-Herald*, September 15, 1970)