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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" on the appropriate line or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name MURILLO FLATS  
other names/site number McNamara Flats, The Murillo

2. Location

street & number 605 16<sup>th</sup> Street N/A not for publication  
city or town Des Moines N/A vicinity  
state Iowa code IA county Polk code 153 zip code 50309

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.)

Signature Brian Mitchell DSHPO Date April 16 2009  
**STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA**

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

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

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is :

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register.
- Other, (Explain)

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

Patricia Andrews

6/9/2009

Murillo Flats  
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa  
County and State

**5. Classification**

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

- |                                             |                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local       | <input type="checkbox"/> district               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State       | <input type="checkbox"/> site                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal     | <input type="checkbox"/> structure              |
|                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> object                 |

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	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**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

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

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

VACANT/NOT IN USE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

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

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY  
REVIVALS/Classical Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Brick  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof Asphalt  
other Concrete  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Murillo Flats  
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" on all the lines that apply)

Property is:

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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1905  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1905  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

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

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

**9. Major Bibliography References**

**Bibliography**

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

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

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

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

Murillo Flats  
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 1 5 | 4 4 6 7 6 0 . | 4 6 0 3 9 4 0 .

Zone Easting Northing

2 | . . . . . | . . . . . | . . . . .

Zone Easting Northing

3 | . . . . . | . . . . . | . . . . .

Zone Easting Northing

4 | . . . . . | . . . . . | . . . . .

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

**Boundary Justification**

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

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title William C. Page, Public Historian

organization Preferred Management, L.C., Philip L. Kaser, Solo Member date April 30, 2008

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

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50313-5017

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs** - Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items** - (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Philip L. Kaser

street & number 657 Harwood Drive telephone 515-274-1232

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50012-2313

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

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

Erected in 1905 and relocated to its present site at 605 16<sup>th</sup> Street in March 2008, the Murillo Flats is a 3-story, masonry apartment building originally possessing six living units. At the time of its relocation, the three city blocks surrounding the building were undergoing redevelopment for the new corporate headquarters of Wellmark, Inc., Iowa's largest health insurer. In order to preserve the Murillo Flats, Wellmark, the City of Des Moines, members of the Sherman Hill Association, Inc. (a nearby neighborhood organization), and Philip L. Kaser, a Des Moines developer, came to an agreement to move the building to a new site for rehabilitation as an apartment building.

**ORIGINAL SITE**

The Murillo Flats was originally located at 531-533 14<sup>th</sup> Street on the west end of downtown Des Moines. The building stood on south portion of Lot 35, part of Fourteenth Street Place, an irregularly laid out plat situated where plats oriented to the Des Moines River stand cheek to jowl with those oriented to the cardinal points of the compass.

Lot 35 was 8,645 square feet in size, but by the time of the Murillo's construction, a single-family dwelling already occupied the northern portion of the lot. Because of this density, the south elevation of the Murillo was sited to abut its southern property line, a public alley running east and west between 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets. At the time of the Murillo's relocation, landscaping on its lot and the surrounding lots had been stripped of all improvements.

**EXTERIOR**

The following paragraphs describe the physical status of the Murillo Flats at its present site. They also make note of the minor changes to the building, which occurred as a result of the move.

The Murillo Flats is a rectangular-shaped, 3-story, masonry edifice. The building originally rested on a poured concrete foundation. It presently rests on a concrete block foundation faced with brick. The building features brick walls and is covered with a shed roof clad with rubber membrane. Originally, the building featured a full basement. This basement was gutted to facilitate the relocation of the building.

The footprint of the building measures about 48 x 48 feet. Two, shallow, 3-story bay windows flank the building's front entrance on the west elevation. A 3-story light and airshaft is inset on the east elevation of the building.

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

West Elevation

The front façade of the building features a rough-textured, maroon-colored brick bulkhead, laid in running bond in pink-colored mortar, capped with a cast concrete water table. This bulkhead rose, depending on its orientation along the sloping site, from about six feet to about four feet above the original site's grade. The base of this bulkhead was removed to facilitate the building's relocation. Some of the removed brick could be saved and will be reinstalled during the building's rehabilitation on its new site. The remaining west façade is clad with creamy-yellow colored brick, laid in running bond, and natural-colored mortar. It remains unaffected by the building's relocation.

The first floor features nine symmetrically arranged bays. A 1-story entrance, centrally placed on the front façade, projects slightly from the face of the building. This entrance features cast concrete trim around the door and is surmounted by a denticulated, broken cornice, capped with a large, oculus window and cast concrete arch. The other eight bays on the first floor are filled with windows. A cast concrete name plaque, situated above the entrance reads "Murillo" in Roman letters.

The second and third floors each possess eight symmetrically arranged bays. These openings are filled with windows and are arranged as on the first floor.

Each of the windows on the front façade features 1/1 double-hung vinyl sash. Original, wood brick mold with a curved profile trims these windows. Metal lintels and heavy cast concrete sills provide their structural support. Each of the two windows on the middle of the second and third floors is framed with one course of brick projecting from the face of the main block. The two middle windows on the first floor are also framed with one course of projecting brick, but this frame features corner blocks at its top and bottom. The oculus window above the front door is held within a cast concrete surround.

A cornice surmounts the third story of the building. A belt course, fashioned by two courses of projecting brick, demarks the bottom of the cornice and a cast concrete cornice caps it.

The bulkhead, face brick, and cornice on the west elevation of this building wrap around its north and south elevations by about three feet.

A masonry chimney is centered near the front of the building. The chimney is likely of brick construction but now parged with concrete.

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

North and South Elevations

The north and south elevations are mostly of the same design as each other and remain very much as originally constructed. The exterior brick features mottled colors of orange, brown, purple, and dull red, laid in American bond with reddish-pink-colored mortar in lightly raked joints. The natural finishes of these materials remain intact. The masonry walls are four wythes deep. Six bays are situated on each floor of these elevations, including the basement. The six bays are symmetrically arranged on each floor. All of these bays feature windows with metal lintels, brick sills, and vinyl 1/1 double-hung sash. An exception to this is the most westerly bay on the south elevation. A brick, segmental arch forms the lintel of this opening. A coal chute likely occupied this space, although nothing occupied this void at the time the building was moved.

East Elevation

The east elevation's masonry walls are constructed like those on the north and south elevations. As already noted, a light well, centered on the east elevation, is inset in it. This well penetrates the main block to a depth of about 14 feet and is about seven feet in width. The north and south elevations of the light well feature one window on each floor; two windows are featured on each floor of the east elevation. A metal fire escape ladder, original to the building, is attached flush to the east elevation of the light well.

The light well divides the east elevation of the main block into two projecting wings. Each of these wings features two openings on each floor. One of these openings features a rear door. The other opening features a window. The windows feature metal lintels, brick sills, and vinyl 1/1 double-hung sash.

Originally, two sets of covered, outside stairs and landings of wood provided access to each of the three floors on the east elevation. These stairs and landings are pictured on a 1920 fire insurance map of the building. Within the last twenty years, these stairs and landings were removed and replaced with another set of wood stairs, landings, and interconnecting balconies. Parts of the roofs over the stairs remain original to the 1905 building. The relocation of the building in 2008 included these stairs, landings, and balconies and kept them intact.

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

**INTERIOR**

All three floors of the Murillo reflect the same floor plan. Each floor possesses two apartment units, and each of these units possesses the same floor plan in mirror image. There is a minor exception to this uniformity. The sitting rooms on the first floor are smaller than those on the upper floors. This is because the vestibule of the building occupies some of these areas on the first floor.

Vestibule and Common Hall

One enters the building through the vestibule and climbs a short flight of steps to gain access to a common hall. The walls of the vestibule are clad with panels of white marble removed and reserved prior to the building's relocation and remounted thereupon. Doors to the first floor apartments lead off the common hall, and a flight of steps leads to the upper floors.

The staircase is one of the architectural glories of the building. It features an open well. Two steps lead to a landing from which at 90 degrees a straight flight of stairs rises to the next floor. Each of these flights features a landing midway along it, flanked by wood columns, which provide structural support to the staircase. A balustrade separates the stairwell from the hall on each floor. The staircase is constructed of oak and retains its original finish, now with a handsome patina of age and in excellent condition. This staircase is richly embellished with decorative woodwork, including face stringers with fret-cut scrolling; heavy newel posts, square in plan with carved paterae and denticulated capitals; and densely placed, thinly turned balusters. Although all of this woodwork would have been available commercially in 1905, its custom assembly shows the skill of a master stair-builder.

The common hall on each of the building's three floors features a wainscot of Anaglypta, a stiff, wallpaper-like product of paper and cotton fabrication. This wainscot is in excellent condition and features embossed vertical stripes with Art Nouveau-influenced floral designs. The upper walls and ceiling are finished with plaster and painted. A skylight is situated in the ceiling of the third floor. The present skylight is of a plastic-like material and has replaced the original one.

Apartment Units

Each unit contains a living room and a sitting room arranged across the front façade of the building. A wide opening separates these two areas. A bay window in the living room provides abundant



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natural light. A dining room is situated at the rear of the living room. A hall on the east end of the dining room articulates the rear of the apartment. Doors from this hall lead to two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. All of the walls and ceilings are of plaster with painted surfaces. (Some of the ceilings are now clad with acoustical tile.) All of the floors (except the kitchen and bathroom) are of oak.

Each of the units originally featured in the living room a fireplace with a gas log grate. Urban miners stole most of the fireplace mantels and grates several years ago, when the building was vacant. Most of the hearths remain intact. They feature small, ceramic tile with satin finishes. Original gas pipes remain embedded in the fireboxes. One of the fireplaces remains virtually intact. It features ceramic tile facing and an oak mantel and surround. The design of this fireplace would provide a model for the reconstruction of those missing.

The kitchen features original pine cabinets, some with natural finishes and some now painted. One of the units possesses an original sink supported by cast iron legs. Each kitchen possesses one window, which looks into the light well at the rear of the building. This window is situated above an L-shaped kitchen counter. The surface of this counter is now clad with black and white ceramic tile, a later improvement. A door on the east wall of the kitchen leads to the outside stairs at the rear of the building.

The outside bedroom is situated along the exterior wall of the main block. It features two windows and a large closet.

The interior bedroom is situated at the rear of the light well. It possesses one window in the east wall and a closet on the west wall. This bedroom is unusual because it features a second door to the building's common hall. The purpose of this second door to the common hall remains subject to conjecture. Some have suggested that it might have provided a private entrance to the room, when rented for sleeping quarters. Others have suggested it might have been a private entrance to a maid's room, although this seems unlikely, given the modest households of these apartments. This nomination preparer suggests that this mystery door served to provide ventilation. Without it, this bedroom would have had no cross-room air circulation. Given the Murillo's emphasis on practicality, this lack would have been seen as a serious flaw.

Originally, the bathrooms featured a white porcelain lavatory mounted in a corner of the room. Some of these lavatories remain extant, along with some white porcelain, claw foot bathtubs. Generally speaking, the stools have been replaced with modern fixtures. Some of the units retain original medicine chests mounted above a wooden rail midway up the wall. Each bathroom features

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

a window to the hall, glazed with figured, translucent glass with a pressed star design (described as "Florentine" by some contemporary building supply catalogs). (Carr & Baal Co.: 468).

Woodwork with natural finishes and with rich patina decorates the units. This woodwork includes crown molding, window and door surrounds, mopboard, and paneled doors. The swinging door from the dining room to the back hall features a translucent glass panel. (Some of these doors are missing.) This design provides for the diffusion of natural light into the back hall from the dining room and also to alert those who wish to pass through to others, who might be behind the door. The woodwork in the living room, sitting room, and dining room is of oak. The woodwork in the back of the apartment is of yellow pine. In a nice quest for consistency, the swinging door between the dining room and the back hall is faced with oak on the dining room side and with pine on back hall side.

#### **NEW SITE**

The relocation of the Murillo Flats to its new site at 605 16<sup>th</sup> Street occurred on Saturday, March 22, and Sunday, March 23, 2008. Jeremy Patterson of Washington, Iowa, contracted to move the building, with Kinter Construction Services, Inc., of Des Moines, acting as the general contractor for this and for the building's subsequent rehabilitation. The movers estimated the weight of the building between 700 and 800 tons and stated that this was among the largest building relocation projects in the nation in 2008. The Murillo now faces west, the same direction as it did originally.

#### **CONDITION AND INTEGRITY**

##### Condition

The condition of this building at its new site is excellent. It remained occupied and well maintained throughout almost all of its life at its previous site, and its relocation to the new site did not result in any structural or cosmetic problem. The smoke from years of burning bituminous coal during the winters in Des Moines has smudged the light-colored, yellow brick on the west elevation. While this does not affect the integrity of the building, a light wash would improve the building's appearance.

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

Integrity

At its new site, the Murillo Flats retains a high level of integrity according to five of the National Register's seven qualities.

The Murillo's integrity of *location* is good, although relocated, because it was moved only two city blocks and is now situated within a similar urban setting as formerly. The building now faces the same cardinal point of the compass as built. The preservation of this orientation lends compatibility to the building's new setting because the patterns of natural light, so important to its design, and the building's relationship to the streetscape remain the same. The original and the new sites are also compatible topographically. Both sites slope slightly to the south from the north and are level from east to west.

The integrity of the building's *design* is excellent. All of its character-defining features, including exterior brickwork, cast concrete detailing, floorplan, and interior woodwork remain intact. The Classical Revival influence of the building's design is particularly notable in its interior woodwork. Many of its features—including crown molding, staircase, and door and window surrounds—feature decorative classical-influenced motifs. These include paterae, egg-and-dart, denticulation, and scroll designs. The nearly pristine condition of this woodwork shows this decoration to great advantage. The design to flood the interior of the building with natural light also remains intact, including the glass windows between the bathrooms and the rear hall, many swinging doors between that hall and the dining room, and a skylight opening in the common hall. Original wood cabinets remain intact in the kitchens and convey the emphasis on efficiency, which the building's design sought to provide in that area. Although vinyl windows have replaced the original wood windows, their double-hung, 1/1 design replicated their original configuration. The replacement sash did not remove the original brickmold surrounding the originals.

The *setting* of the Murillo Flats is good. The building's new site is situated two city blocks from its original site. This proximity preserves the building's sense of belonging within its neighborhood. When originally constructed the Murillo Flats was located within a late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhood of single-family dwellings and apartment buildings. The Murillo Flats' new location, directly adjacent to the Sherman Hill Historic District (NRHP 1979), is now situated within a similar context. Most of the buildings within Sherman Hill are two or three stories high and are of masonry or frame construction. Although single-family dwellings predominate, there are also many apartment buildings. Most of the buildings date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as does the Murillo.

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The integrity of *materials* of Murillo Flats is exceptionally high. The north, south, east, and west elevations of the building remain virtually intact, except for the removal of a portion of the brick bulkhead at grade. Some of the brick removed to relocate the building could be reused and was set aside to reface the rebuilt bulkhead. In the interior, the original floorplan, plaster walls, wood floors, and ceiling materials have changed little since 1905. The Anaglypta wainscot in the common halls on all three floors remains nearly pristine. Even most of the building's original hardware remains extant. It includes doorstops for the swinging doors, hand plates for the doors, door knobs, locks, and hinges, and even brackets at the top of the wide doorways between the living, sitting, and dining rooms to hold rods for curtains between them. Most of the building's metal radiators remain extant. They might be removed during the future rehabilitation of the building. The theft of many of the building's fireplace surrounds is regrettable, but one with its original materials remains intact and could be used as a model for the reconstruction of those missing.

The *workmanship* evident in the building today is best seen in the quality of its interior woodwork, which is outstanding both in construction and condition. The staircase in particular shows the hand of a master. This staircase is richly embellished with decorative millwork, whose installation required skillful rectification to fit its parts precisely together. This is much more difficult in a tight area, such as a staircase or hall, than it is in a large room. There is little margin for error in a tight place, and the eye immediately catches any flaw.

The Murillo Flats today possesses the same *feeling* of a densely built-up setting, which characterized the property during its period of significance. The area around 14<sup>th</sup> Street (the building's original site) was close in to downtown Des Moines. The area around High and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets (adjacent to the building's current site) shares this same feeling. The new site is only two city blocks from the original one.

The Murillo Flats retains a high quality of *association*. Former residents from the property's period of significance would recognize the architectural design of the building, although they might wonder how it got to its present location.

#### **FUTURE PLANS**

Preferred Management, L.C., Philip L. Kaser, Solo Member, is currently undertaking a rehabilitation of the Murillo Flats using federal and state historic preservation tax credits to help finance it. This project requires compliance with the "Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation." The project's

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compliance with these guidelines and the building's relocation to its present site ensures its preservation for the foreseeable future.

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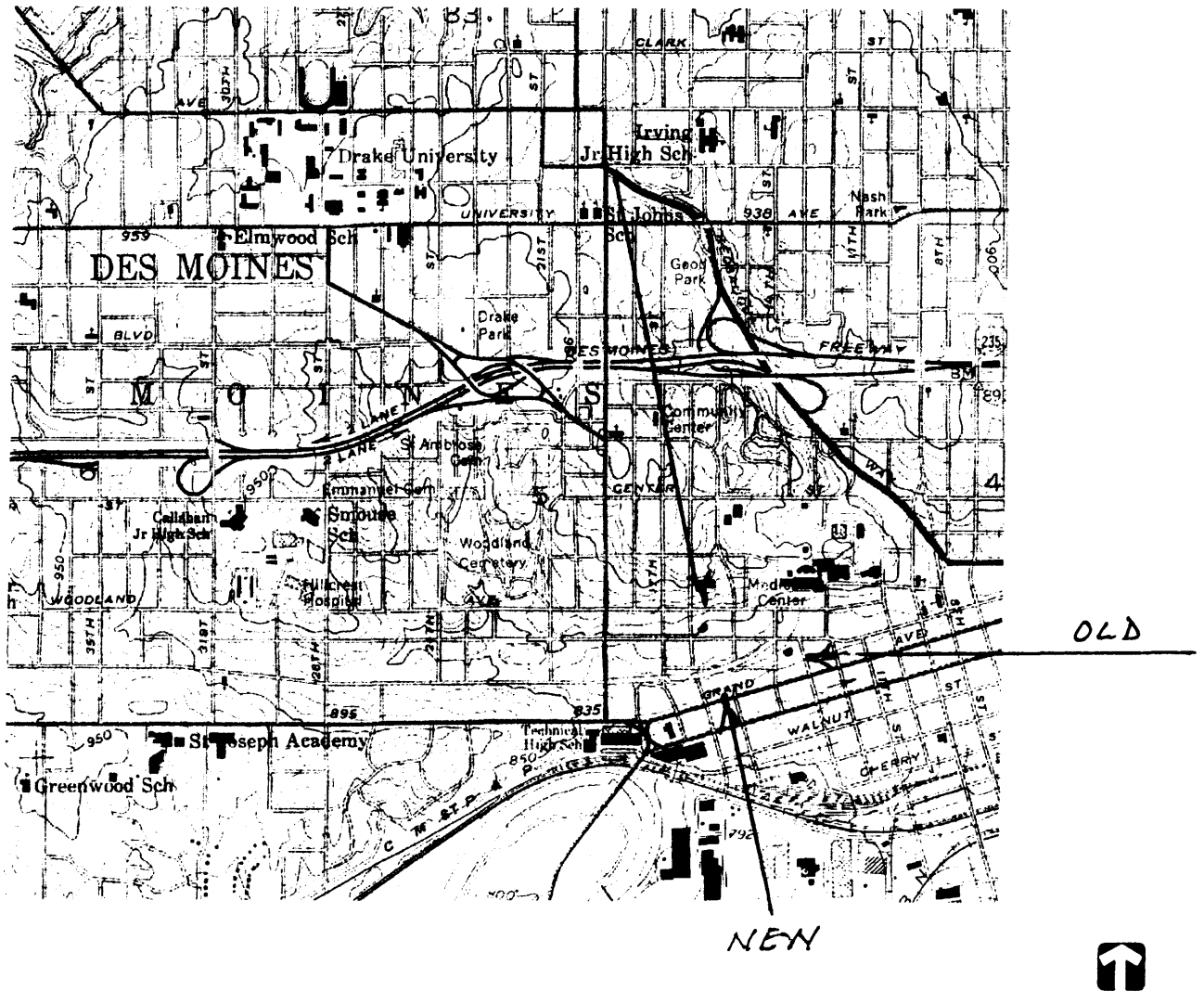
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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

**LOCATIONS**

**SINGLE ARROW LOCATES ORIGINAL SITE. DOUBLE ARROW LOCATES NEW SITE.**



Source: U.S.G.S. Map (7.5 Minute Series), Des Moines SE Quadrangle, 1956, Photorevised 1976.

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## ORIGINAL SITE

ARROW LOCATES ORIGINAL SITE OF MURILLO FLATS



The diagonal swath (upper left) bisecting Lot 35 and High Street is a portion of Ingersoll Avenue begun as bypass around downtown Des Moines begun in the 1950s but never completed. This swath dramatically truncated the site of the Murillo Flats.

Source: The Sidwell Company, 1972, p. 231.

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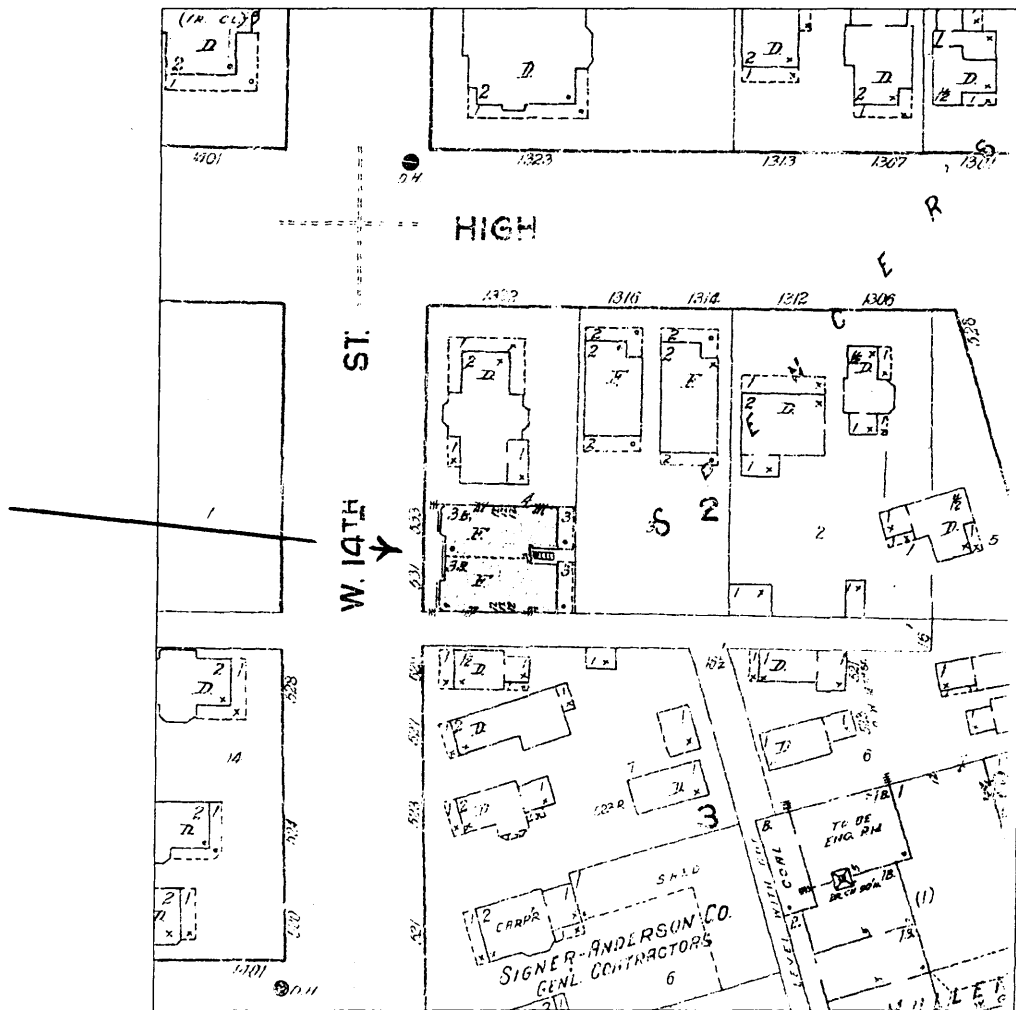
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## 1920 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

ARROW LOCATES MURILLO FLATS



This map pictures the Murillo Flats with a shallow setback from 14<sup>th</sup> Street and directly abutting an east-west alley. The city block to the west remains unimproved. Two other flats (indicated by a "F") abut the property on the northeast.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Des Moines, 1920.



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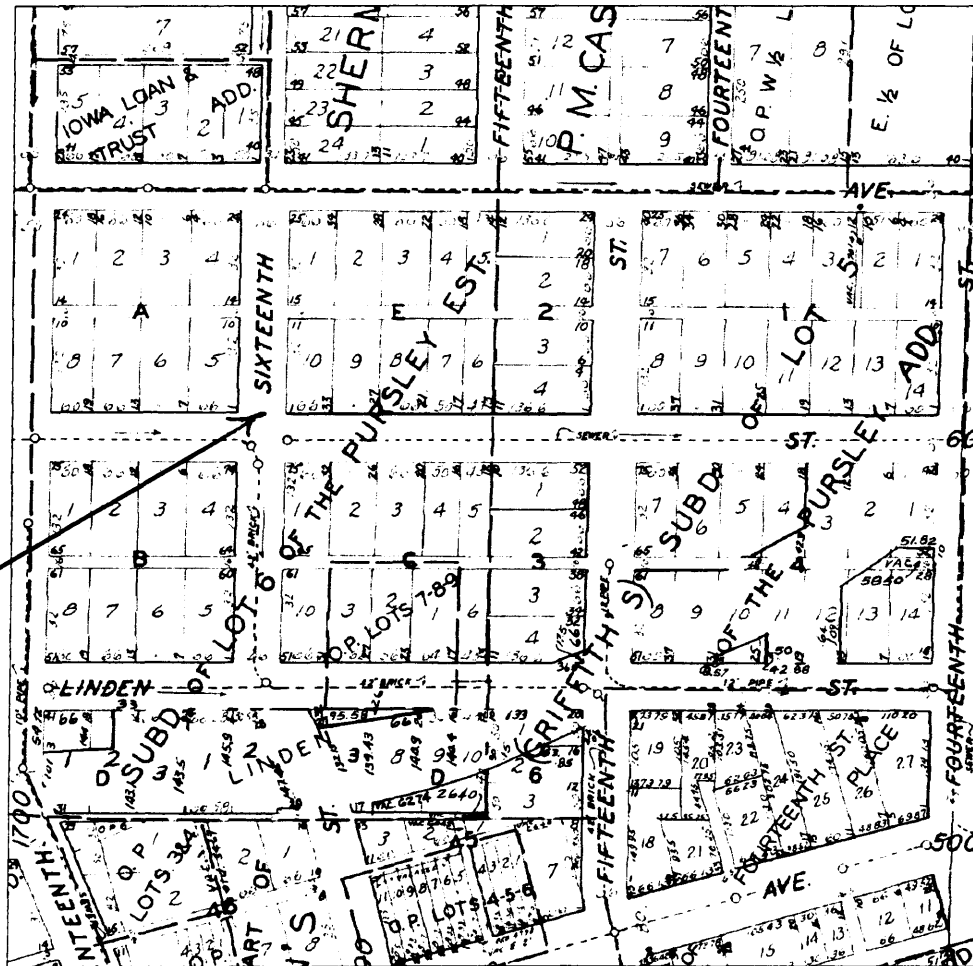
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# NEW SITE

ARROW LOCATES NEW SITE OF MURILLO FLATS



High Street is directly south of the site and Woodland Avenue is to the north.  
This site is only two city blocks from the Murillo's original site.

Source: Sidwell Studio, Inc., 1965, p. 241



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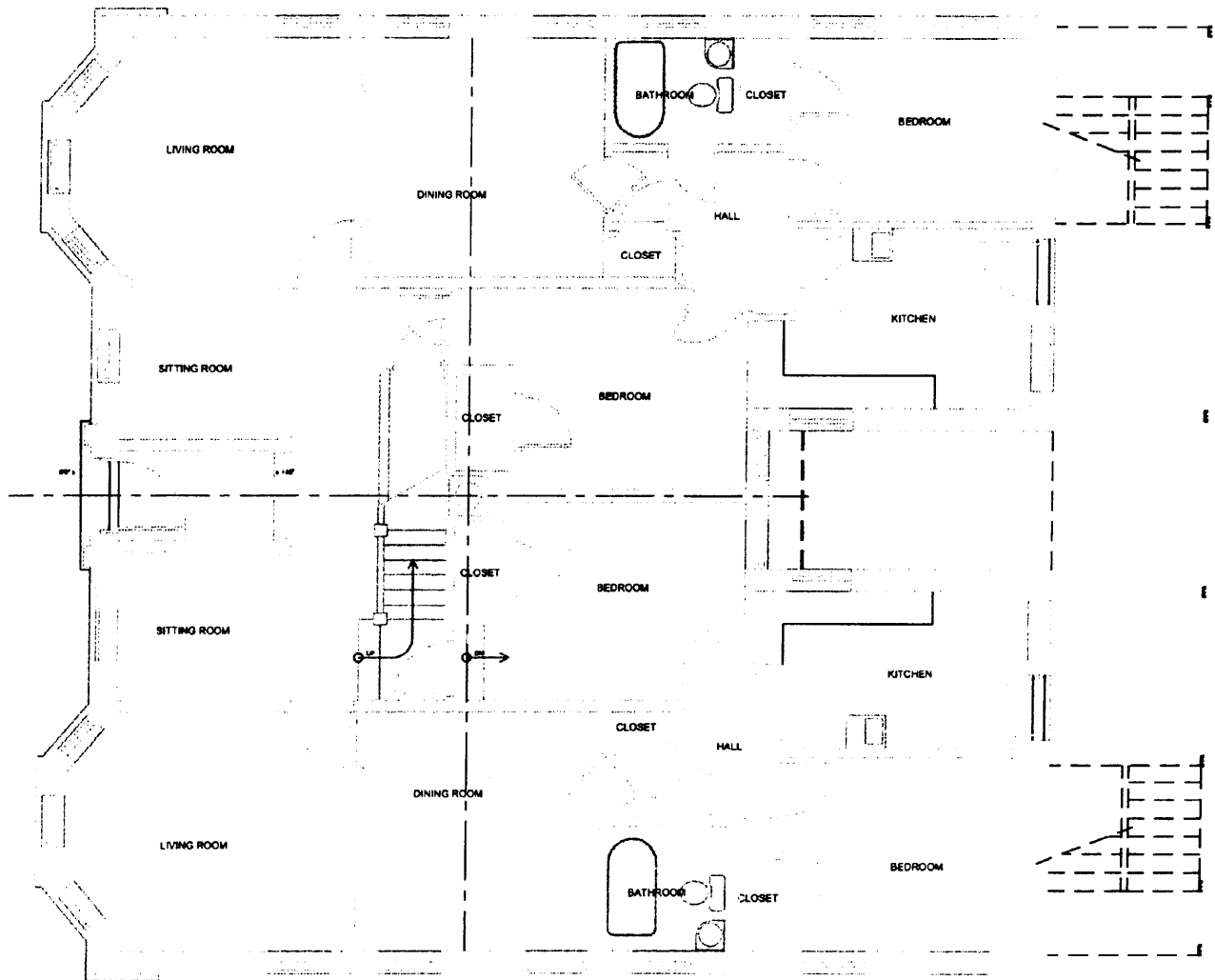
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## FIRST FLOOR PLAN



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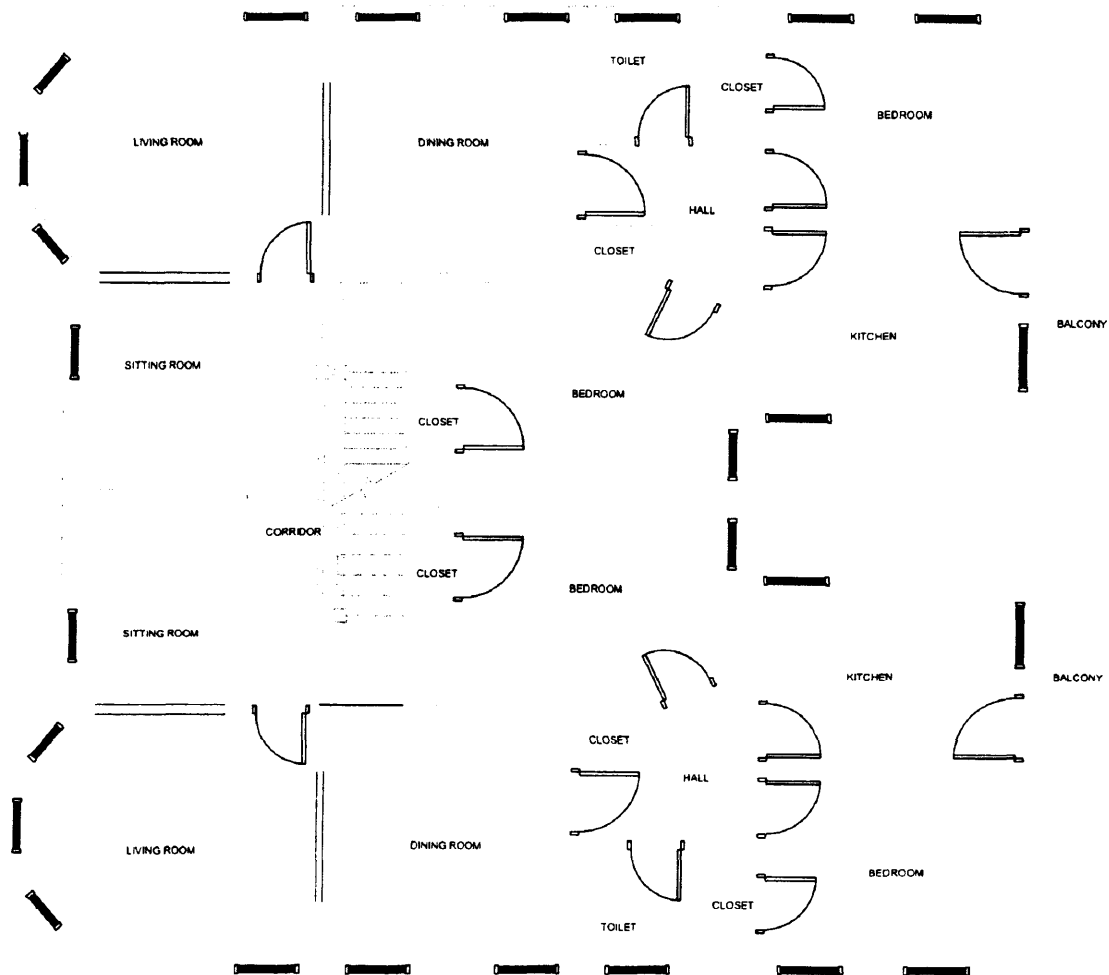
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## SECOND FLOOR PLAN



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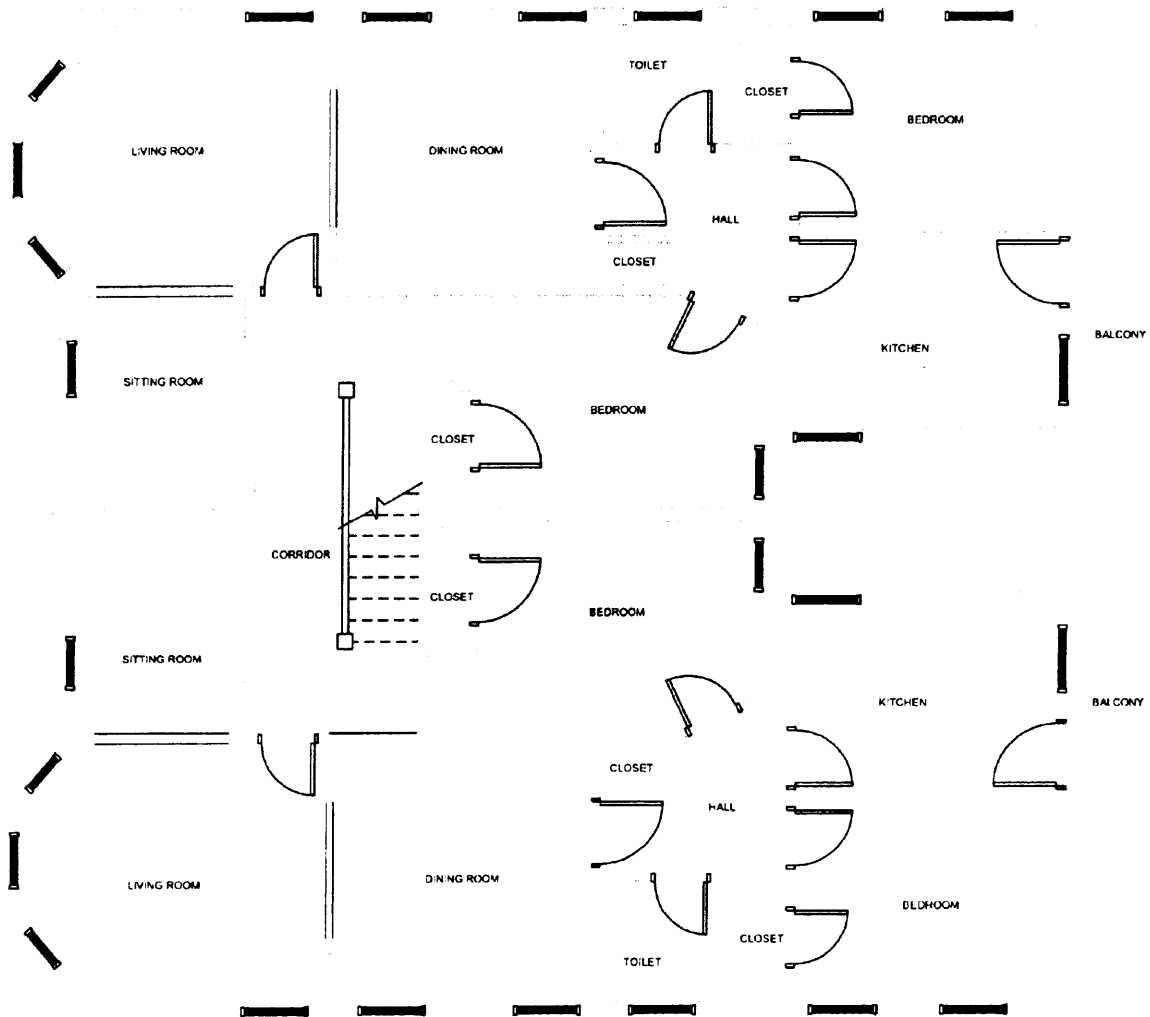
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## THIRD FLOOR PLAN



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#### **SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Completed in 1905, the Murillo Flats is National Register eligible, locally, under Criterion C, as an outstanding example of the "flat building," a new architectural form emerging in Des Moines at the turn of the 20th century. The Murillo Flats is notable for its clean lines, warm colors, rich surface textures, and Classical Revival-influenced styling. The interior of the building emphasizes efficiency and convenience and retains much of its original oak woodwork. The building's restrained design contrasts dramatically with the fussiness of Late Victorian styling then so evident in Des Moines' residential architecture. Architect Charles E. Eastman of Des Moines likely designed the building.

The period of significance for the Murillo Flats, under Criterion C, is 1905, the year in which it was erected and first placed in service. A significant date is 1905 for the same reason.

The Murillo Flats is counted as one contributing resource for this nomination and is classified as a building. Although it has been relocated from its original location, Criteria Consideration B is satisfied because the building is significant primarily for its architectural value.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The emergence of flats and apartment buildings in Des Moines occurred at the turn of the-20<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of several earlier forms of multiple-family housing. The latter included the tenement house and boarding house. The tenement was a pejorative term for an apartment building with cramped and over-crowded quarters, whose condition had deteriorated from age, heavy use, and cheap construction. The boarding house provided sleeping rooms and meals to unrelated people, usually in a single-family dwelling converted to this use, but sometimes in a building specifically built for this purpose. The rowhouse was another 19th century property type designed to increase the density of residential land use. The rowhouse was not really a multiple-family dwelling but rather one unit attached to a series of similar units.

By the 1890s, downtown rental properties in Des Moines had deteriorated. When one local newspaper surveyed this market in 1890, it reported:

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The house renting season is here and never before has there been such a scarcity of houses to rent. The demand has far exceeded the supply. It has been almost impossible to get good houses to rent. The old shells down town [*sic*], which are hardly fit to live in, are for rent and always will be. The long rows of cheap bricks are also to rent and many will never again be occupied. People will not put up with cheap crowded houses or old dilapidated buildings when rapid transit has made it possible to enjoy cheap suburban cottages. (*Iowa State Reporter* 1890)

The boarding house, another type of rental for those lacking home-ownership, provided another kind of housing at this time. In 1893, for example, the city directory listed 70 boarding houses in Des Moines. Apartment houses were rare. The same city directory only listed one, The Iliad, located on the southwest corner of Walnut and 8<sup>th</sup> Street. (City Directory 1893: 692, 700)

The 1913 city directory reveals a dramatic change. The number of boarding houses had declined to only 19 (including the quixotically named "White Elephant Hotel" at 510-512 East Walnut Street), while the number of "Apartment Houses, Flats, Etc." had skyrocketed to 103. (City Directory 1913: 1389, 1414) The tenement house had all but vanished. The 1913 city directory lists none by that name. (*Ibid.*: 1618) By this time, the residential hotel had emerged in Des Moines as a multiple-unit residential building type. Brown Hotel at 4th and Chestnut Streets (nonextant) exemplified this type in Des Moines. A few other residential hotels were built in the city, but their appeal was limited.

As a property type, the flats building became popular in Chicago following the great fire of 1871. In that highly populated city, this kind of multi-family dwelling provided the requisite density for a major metropolitan center, where many people wished to live near the lakeshore. (Kostof: 48) Some of these flats tended to emulate the luxurious high-rise apartment buildings like the Dakota Apartments and the Ansonia in New York City. Many more practical adaptations to middle-class living with far fewer amenities, less ostentatious exteriors, and 3- or 4-story heights arose. (Kostof: 50) Still others, like those on Newport Avenue, constructed mostly from 1891-1895, provided housing for working-class residents. Throughout its history, Des Moines has tended to follow Chicago in its commercial, cultural, and social trends. The Murillo Flats calls attention to this phenomenon in domestic architecture.

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#### **CLASSICISM MEETS EFFICIENCY**

The Murillo Flats is architecturally significant as an outstanding example of the flats building, a new type of architecture in Des Moines, whose floorplan and architectural amenities emphasize efficiency and practicality. The Murillo shows the influence of Classical Revival styling, tailored with an eye towards a restraint commensurate with the building's emphasis on efficiency. Although the architect or architectural firm that prepared the plans for this building has not yet been identified, a professional undoubtedly designed the Murillo Flats.

#### Efficiency and Practicality

The design of the Murillo Flats stresses efficiency, practicality, and hygiene. In this approach, the building is a fine, representative example of the swing away from Victorian fussiness at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The floorplan of the Murillo Flats divides each of its six units into public and private spaces. The public spaces include the living room, sitting room, and dining room. The private space includes the bedrooms, kitchen, and bathroom. A hall, internal to the scheme, separates the two areas. Wide openings without doors stand between the living room, sitting room, and dining room to create the sense of a large and expansive space with rooms flowing into one another. The private spaces are more self-contained.

A hall stands at the rear of the dining room and articulates the entrances to the kitchen, bedrooms, bathroom, and a closet. This hall, less 50 square feet in size, possesses a total of six doors. Swinging doors from the dining room to the hall separates the apartment's public and private quarters. Another swinging door separated the hall from the kitchen, but none of these is extant. These swinging doors facilitated the back-and-forth movement of household chores without encumbering the hands.

The design of the kitchens exemplifies the principle of efficiency. Small and compact with a gross area of about 140 square feet, these kitchens radically differed from the full-room kitchens of the Victorian era. The *sine qua non* of that kitchen—the pantry—is gone, the pantry's cabinets now having been brought into the kitchen itself. Floor to ceiling cabinets are arranged in an el-shaped design to economize space and to reduce the steps required by the homemaker to prepare meals. Efficient kitchens such as this subsequently appeared as galley kitchens in single-family dwellings during the 1920s and 1930s, many with additional domestic conveniences, such as built-in ironing boards. The increasing popularity of such compact kitchens calls attention to changing social patterns among Americans. The decline of

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servants during this period reduced the need for large kitchens to accommodate domestic staff, while the individual homemaker's desire for the step-saving efficiency of a small kitchen increased. Efficient apartment kitchens, like those in the Murillo Flats, helped fuel this trend.

The design of the Murillo Flats seeks to promote hygiene. The building's fenestration provides natural light and ventilation wherever possible. The skylight in the common hall lights this area. Each of the building's living rooms features a large, bay window with abundant natural light. The open feeling of it with the sitting room and dining room further encourages the diffusion of light and ventilation.

The back hall provides an excellent example of the Murillo's quest for natural light. The swinging doors between the dining room and presumably between hall and kitchen and hall originally featured large panels of translucent glass. (All of the kitchen doors have been removed.) A window between the bathroom and the hall supplied additional light to this hall and underscores this design quest. Such an interior bathroom window is quite unusual.

At the rear of the building, a light well allows for the placement of a second window in the kitchen and one window in a bedroom. The architect did not overcome the lack of a second window in this bedroom. On the other hand, the second window situated above the kitchen counter and sink provides natural light to the homemaker at this critical area along with a flow of fresh air across the workspace, an amenity often lacking in a Victorian kitchen.

### Classical Revival

The influence of Classical Revival styling pervades the design of the Murillo Flats. The exterior of the building adheres wherever possible to symmetry and eschews Victorian fussiness in preference for simple lines, sleek surfaces, and cool restraint, cardinal tenets of classicism. Classical motifs abound in the interior, particularly in its woodwork.

The front (west) façade features seven bays arranged in symmetrical order. Situated in the center at the base of the composition, the main entrance provides a strong focal point. A large, oculus window, contained within an arched, cast concrete frame, embellished with scrolls and supported by capitals, accents this entrance with a powerful, classically inspired detail. Shallow bay windows extend from grade up to the top of the building and flank this entrance. These bay windows are tightly compressed to the plane of the main block, yet provide a strong, vertical feeling to the façade, another important



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characteristic of Classical Revival styling. The windows above and to the side of this entrance are framed with a course of projecting brick, a detail, which appears fussy to this writer's eye.

An entablature crowns the front façade and exemplifies a studied simplification of its classical antecedents. Three courses of projecting brick suggest an architrave. The frieze is perhaps 36 inches in height and devoid of decoration. Laid in American bond, it otherwise repeats the design of the façade wall. The cornice is of cast concrete and projects about six inches from the frieze. Taken all together, the design of this entablature is cool and sleek. Its horizontal line effectively acts as a foil for the vertical feeling of the façade's bay windows.

The design of the north and south elevations of the building repeat the strict symmetry employed on the front façade of the building. The six bays on these secondary elevations, including the basement, are perfectly ordered in their vertical and horizontal placement with one another. Each features a window. These windows are loosely paired with one another, reinforcing a feeling of studied arrangement. The rear (east) elevation also presents a symmetrical arrangement of bays, although the present staircases and balconies tend to hide it.

The front façade rests on a bulkhead of maroon-colored brick, capped by a cast concrete water table, and suggestive of a *piano nobile*. This architectural conceit from the Italian Renaissance situates a building's principle floor above grade to convey power and dignity. The use of dark-colored brick with a rusticated finish adds visual weight to this bulkhead and gives it a sense of strength sufficient to bear the weight of the building's upper façade. The balance of the west façade features smooth-surfaced brick, laid in running bond. The contrast of color and texture add visual interest and vitality to the composition.

The use of light-colored brick for the front elevation reflects another influence of Classical Revival styling on the building's design. This use broke with the Late Victorian preference for dark colored brick and gained popularity across the nation at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In conservative Des Moines, however, residents tended to prefer the traditionally dark colors well into the new century. In striking contrast, the Des Moines architect C. E. Eastman championed the use of light-colored brick. The Earle & LeBosquet Block at 407-409 Court Avenue, for example, uses beige-colored brick and terra cotta prominently on the front facade of that 1896-constructed commercial building. Eastman was its architect. (Page 2009)

The classical influence abounds in the interior. Much of the oak woodwork in the interior features classical-influenced motifs. These include paterae and denticulation on newels posts, columns with capitals in the vestibule, egg-and-dart decoration on door and window cornices, and scrolling designs of

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foliage or sea waves on the staircase stringers. The nearly pristine condition of this woodwork shows this decoration to great advantage. One of the few extant mantelpieces in the building features vertical reeding, another classical motif. The classical influence is equally strong in the vestibule of the building with its panels of white marble.

Source of Design

Evidence suggests that Charles E. Eastman designed the Murillo Flats. In 1904 Eastman and James M. McNamara contracted for architectural services. According to *The American Contractor*:

Russell & Vickroy have been awarded the contract for a 6-story apartment flat building of brick, with terra cotta trimmings, 60x87 ft., 3 stories. \$16,000. Plans were drawn by Archt. C. E. Eastman. (*The American Contractor*, December 3, 1904)

The contract for the erection of a 3-story \$12,500 flat building 60 x 87, to be erected on Fourteenth street, near High, for J. M. McNamara, has been awarded to Russell & Vickroy. Charles E. Eastman, architect. Mentioned on December 5th. (*The Contractor News*, December 17, 1904)

Neither of these building descriptions matches that of the Murillo Flats. Both are larger in size, although the second approximates the Murillo's original location. Although it remains unclear whether the second building is an earlier design for the Murillo or for another building altogether, the newspaper articles document that a business relationship existed between McNamara and Eastman at the time the Murillo was in the planning stage, lending credence to Eastman's attribution as its architect.

Charles E. Eastman (1868-1948) was a prominent architect in Des Moines at the turn of the 20th century. A native of Illinois, Eastman studied architecture at the University of Illinois from 1885 to 1888. (Shank: 55) Eastman benefited both from the technical training he received there and from the university's proximity to Chicago and its architectural innovations. Two buildings in Des Moines call attention to this architectural milieu: the Earle & LeBosquet Block at 407-409 Court Avenue with its extensive use of terra cotta detailing and the nonextant Observatory Building, which in 1896 introduced the concept of the skyscraper to Des Moines. The Earle & LeBosquet Block was completed in 1896 and helped introduce the use of light-colored brick to the city's architecture. (Page 2009)

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Other contemporary notices document McNamara's construction projects about the same time:

J. M. McNamara is having plans prepared for a 4-story brick apartment building, to be erected on Linden, nr. 15th st. \$50,000. (*The American Contractor*, August 6, 1904)

A 3-story \$8,000 brick residence will be erected at Des Moines by J. M. McNamara, West Fourteenth street. (*The Contractor News*, December 10, 1904)

Although these projects do not mention Eastman, they show that McNamara was an important developer in Des Moines at the time. The McNamara Flats at 616-618 17th Street (nonextant) was another property associated with McNamara. (City Directory: 696)

Date of Construction

Newspaper articles in the *Des Moines Register* noted that the Murillo Flats was under construction in March 1905 and that its units were available for rent by May of that year. (*Des Moines Register and Leader* 1905b) One official source dates the building's construction to 1903. (Polk County Assessor's Office) The newspaper date is the more reliable of the two because it reported the events contemporaneously rather than recording it after the fact, as with the assessor's office.

Selection of Historic Name

Although initially referred to during construction as the McNamara Flats, in deference to its owner, contemporary newspapers document that by the time the building was completed, its was known as the "Murillo Flats." This nomination uses that styling.

The word "flats," which was used in Britain at the time (and today) to describe an apartment building, enjoyed a certain popularity in the United States during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Des Moines, the Kromer Flats is another example of its early usage in Des Moines.

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The use of "flats" lent a cachet of sophistication to a property. At the time, when apartment buildings were just becoming popular in the Midwest, the words "flats" and "apartment houses" were often used interchangeably before "apartment building" became the standard word to describe essentially the same architectural form. The word flat suggested a living unit occupying only one floor. As indicated above, this was somewhat innovative, as many Americans at the time thought that bedrooms should be situated on an upper floor.

**"FLATS:" A NEW INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY**

The Murillo Flats is of historical interest as an outstanding example of a new investment opportunity in Des Moines during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this era of economic expansion in the city, investors sought to capitalize on the its rapidly increasing population and discovered that flats and apartment buildings produced an attractive financial return on a secure investment. The conjunction of these economic factors propelled a wave of new construction of these buildings. Between circa 1905 and circa 1913 over 70 appeared in Des Moines. The Murillo Flats was one of the earliest examples this phenomenon. It was built for investor James M. McNamara.

By the turn of the 20th century, Des Moines' booming population had increased the demand for residential rentals near the downtown. Following the lead of real estate investment in New York and Chicago and the construction and success of flat buildings, or "apartment houses," as they were also known there, Des Moines' investors like James M. McNamara reasoned that such a property type could succeed locally. The construction of the Murillo Flats in 1905, along with the construction of several other apartment buildings by other investors, pioneered apartment living in Des Moines. These investments quickly proved successful and that success encouraged other investors to follow suit. As stated above, Des Moines possessed 103 of these buildings by 1913.

An article, published by the *Des Moines Register* in 1905, analyzed this phenomenon. For us today, this article provides an historical insight into the local rental market and the financial motivations driving it. According to the article's headline, as shown on the following page:

FLAT BUILDING  
IS POPULAR HERE

Bring Eight Per Cent Net On  
Investment.

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### MANY ARE BEING ERECTED

Residence Property Has A  
Varied Experience.

A Home and Not an Investment Is  
Purpose of Many Buyers in Des  
Moines

(*Des Moines Register*, March 12, 1905)

Citing the experience of a Des Moines architect (later identified as George Hallett), the article made a compelling case for the flat building as an investment.

### FLATS AND APARTMENTS

For close in residence property investments, it is recognized that flats or apartment houses are most excellent investments. A well known architect, himself the owner of valuable and desirable flats, is authority for the statement that eight per cent net is made on an average flat. Some of them are known to pay as high as twelve and sixteen percent.

A man before he has his own experience upon which to base his judgment as to business investments naturally looks to the experiences of others who have made similar investments. There is plenty of evidence to substantiate the statement that flats are profitable. The coming year men who already own flats and apartment houses are planning on building others. Their past experience has proven them profitable. (*Ibid.*)

As these statistics indicate, the lure of an 8%, 12%, or 16% return stimulated a wave of new flat building construction in Des Moines.

The *Register* cautioned the inventor about the careful selection of location for such a building as a *sine qua non* and reiterated the recommendation for "close in" locations for investment security.

Residence lots in Des Moines have gone through all the varied experiences which such properties in all large cities undergo. There have been residence sections which are now business sections and the values enhanced wonderfully. Then there are residence sections

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which have deteriorated just as there are in all cities, due perhaps to neglect of the property owners, neglect bringing low rentals, these in turn [*sic*, attract?] an undesirable class of tenants and then the downward grade continues.

But for the most part residence property has been and is now decidedly good from year to year, the demand, the increases in the number and amounts of transfers and the development of all desirable residence sections.

Returning again to the experience of George Hallett, one of Des Moines' most respected architects, the article also named a number of flats presently under construction or already erected in the city.

George Hallett of the firm of Hallett & Rawson, an owner of some of the valuable apartment properties, expects to invest \$90,000 in a large flat on Thirteenth and Locust streets this summer. The McNamara flats on Fourteenth and High streets are just nearing completion. On Fifteenth at the end of Linden, the Mason flats will be built this year. Mrs. C. W. Sweet will erect a flat building on Nineteenth and Forest. L. Oransky is just completing a \$14,000 flat on Third and Crocker. The Blank flats are to be built on Seventh above School. Lowell Chamberlain will build on Grand avenue and Nineteenth. These are only a few which have already been announced or are being completed. Plans are being drawn for others by the architects which they cannot yet announce. (*Ibid.*)

In identifying the Murillo Flats as one of these "valuable apartment properties," this article justifies the claim that Des Moines recognized the Murillo Flats as innovative among these new types of real estate investments.

By May 1905, the Murillo Flats was completed. As one newspaper announced:

FLATS FOR RENT

For Rent – Murillo Flats 6-room apartments. Ready for occupancy June 1<sup>st</sup>. Inquire south-east corner 14<sup>th</sup> and High Streets.

(*Des Moines Register and Leader*, May 28, 1905)

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In 1906, all six units of the Murillo Flats were occupied. (City Directory 1906) This full occupancy validated James M. McNamara's investment decision. (McNamara lived at the property on the "south-east corner 14<sup>th</sup> and High Streets," where renters were to apply.)

### James M. McNamara

James M. McNamara was a Des Moines businessman with multiple business interests. In addition to his real estate dealings, McNamara served as president of the J. M. McNamara Co., and the McNamara-Kenworthy Co. Both firms retailed office supplies. The latter remains in business in Des Moines to the present day as Storey Kenworthy.

McNamara lived at various locations in Des Moines. He resided briefly at the Murillo Flats in 1905. By 1913, he lived at 1506 High Street (nonextant). In 1928, he lived at 4021 Grand Avenue. (Baldwin: 181) Each successive residence likely reflected advancement in comfort and social prestige for him and his family.

### Location, Location, Location

The location of the Murillo Flats on the west end of downtown Des Moines calls attention to a pattern of historical development for such buildings. Most of the flats constructed in Des Moines at the turn of the 20th century were located on the west end of downtown Des Moines. At this time, most residents of flats generally relied on their feet or on public transportation to move around the city. A network of streetcar lines served all major points of the city with prompt and dependable public transportation, converging on downtown Des Moines, where many residents worked. West end residents easily could reach their workplaces—primarily downtown Des Moines at this time—from "close in" locations near the downtown. Other new flats and apartment buildings followed the construction of those identified in the 1905 newspaper article.

Outlying flats and apartment buildings near public transportation were also popular. This accounts for a series of buildings erected along the Sixth Avenue streetcar corridor north of downtown Des Moines. These buildings included the Kromer Flats, completed in 1905 at 1433-1439 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue (NRHP 1995), New Lawn, built in 1915 at 1245 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue (NRHP 1995), and The Maine, an apartment building constructed in 1913 at 1635 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue (NRHP 1995). Still, the west end of downtown Des Moines remained the most popular location for flats and apartment buildings because

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of its proximity to the commercial center of the city. By the same token, the Des Moines River, on the east edge of downtown, and the Raccoon River on its south edge, hindered movement across the city, and fewer flats and apartment buildings arose there for that reason.

#### **STARDOM**

The relocation of the Murillo Flats enthralled residents of central Iowa. Front-page newspaper stories in the *Des Moines Register* and broadcasts on local television, led up to the event. This story subsequently reached the nation. Videographers from the History Channel recorded the events surrounding the Murillo's relocation, and that channel broadcast the story on one of its "Mega Movers" programs in 2008.

#### **REPRESENTATION IN PREVIOUS SURVEYS**

In the summer of 1974, the Murillo Flats was included in the Maves/Elmets windshield survey. The building was photographed and subsequently given an Iowa Site Inventory number. The survey provided no description or evaluation of it.

In 1995, Patricia A. Eckhardt conducted a reconnaissance survey of downtown Des Moines, prepared an historic context for the area, and completed a series of Iowa Site Inventory Forms. The "Murillo Apartments" was included among the surveyed resources as site #77-03879. (Eckhardt) Eckhardt evaluated the building as not National Register eligible under Criterion C but did not evaluate the building under Criterion A. On the site sheet for the building, she also noted:

This building might be eligible for the National register if it turned out to have an important architect or if more is learned about the owner who built it. We know nothing now, and this small building did not draw enough attention to be featured in a newspaper article. (Ibid.)

Eckhardt made no mention of the interior of the Murillo Flats and its significance because her survey focused on the exterior of buildings.



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**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND REGISTRATION**

As more is learned about the work of Charles E. Eastman, perhaps an explicit link between his name and the design of the Murillo Flats will emerge.

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building materials to the trade.

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

### **VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The West 22 feet of Lot Nine (9) and all of Lot Ten (10) in Block "E" in Subdivision of Lot No. 6 of the Pursley Estate, an Official Plat, now included in and forming a part of the City of Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa.

### **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Contains all land presently associated with the building. The building has been moved and the present parcel is not the one associated with the building historically.

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Murillo Flats, Polk County, Iowa.

**LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF BUILDING AT NEW SITE**

1. Murillo Flats  
605 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
Looking northeast  
William C. Page Photographer  
April 24, 2008
2. Murillo Flats  
605 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
Looking southeast  
William C. Page Photographer  
April 24, 2008
3. Murillo Flats  
605 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
Looking southwest  
William C. Page Photographer  
April 24, 2008
4. Murillo Flats  
605 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
Looking northwest  
William C. Page Photographer  
April 24, 2008
5. Murillo Flats  
605 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
Detail of staircase in common hall  
William C. Page Photographer  
April 24, 2008
6. Murillo Flats  
531-533 14th Street  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
*Building at original site looking southeast*  
William C. Page Photographer  
February 26, 2008