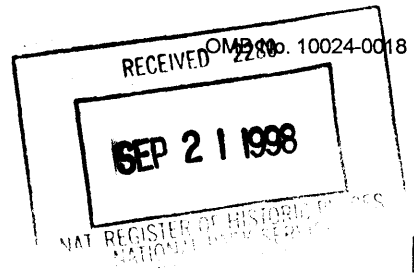


SEP 10 1998



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater

other names/site number Mississippi Hotel/Adler Theatre

2. Location

street & number 106 E. Third Street N/A not for publication

city or town Davenport N/A vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Scott code 163 zip code 52801

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (see continuation sheet for additional comments).

Patricia Opler King 9-10-98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall 10-22-98

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 _____ buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

_____ 1 _____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Historical and Architectural Resources of Davenport, Iowa (Part I)

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: hotel _____

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater _____

COMMERCE: office building _____

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: hotel _____

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater _____

COMMERCE: office building _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco _____

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE _____

walls BRICK _____

METAL _____

roof ASPHALT _____

other _____

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1931

Significant Dates

1931

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Graven, A.S.

Dreyfuss, Henry

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater
Name of Property

Scott County, IA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 [1] [5] [7] [0] [2] [4] [4] [0] [4] [5] [9] [9] [4] [2] [0]
Zone Easting Northing

2 []
Zone Easting Northing

3 []

4 []

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Marlys A. Svendsen, Svendsen Tyler, Inc.

organization for Dial Corporation. date 4/98

street & number N3834 Deep Lake Road telephone (715) 469-3300

city or town Sarona state WI zip code 54870

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the complete form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

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

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name Dial Corporation (Hotel) See Continuation Sheet for Theater Owner

street & number 11506 Nicholas Street telephone (402) 493-2800

city or town Omaha state NE zip code 68154

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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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

Narrative Description

Site: The Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater is located on Lots 1,2, and 3 of Block 57 of Le-Claire's 2nd Addition. Located in the heart of the central business district that abuts the Mississippi River, this parcel comprises one-quarter of a city block at the northeast corner of the intersection of E. Third Street and Brady Street. The sloping parcel rises from south to north along Brady Street, a multi-lane one-way street (north bound) that also serves as U.S. Highway 61. East Third Street is a multi-lane, one-way (east bound) street that serves as a major access route through the downtown connecting the west end industrial districts with the east end industrial and residential neighborhoods. Both streets have wide concrete sidewalks, standard curbs and gutters, and parallel parking spaces along both sides.

Across Brady Street to the west is a three-story stone building, the former Scott County Savings Bank (National Register) built in 1918. To the south across E. Third Street is the 8-story brick and terra-cotta Union Savings Bank and Trust Co. Building (National Register) built in two phases between WW I and the Depression. More recent buildings nearby include a three-story masonry bank building built during the 1970s at the southwest corner of the intersection and the two-story RiverCenter, a municipally owned civic center operated in conjunction with the former Orpheum Theater. The neighborhood is more completely described in the Orientation and Historical Context sections of "Historical and Architectural Resources of Davenport, Iowa (Part I), pp. 7A-3 and 8B-3.

Building Structure: The structure of the Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater combines two distinct uses in a single building - a 10-story hotel with a 7-story theater. Steel pillars surrounded by concrete pilings rest on bed rock approximately 75 feet below street level. The RKO Circuit, operators of the original theater, stressed these qualities as well as the strength of the structural design in promoting the safety of the original building. They noted that "If an earthquake should rock Davenport...one of the buildings that would be certain to withstand the shocks and the heavings of the earth would be the newly completed RKO Orpheum theater."¹ Above ground the hotel/theater complex has a steel structural system, reinforced concrete floors and 12" tile curtain walls clad in brick. The L-shaped hotel floor plan wraps around the rectangular plan of the theater lobby and auditorium that is located in the northeast corner of the building. The combined building measures approximately 100 feet along E. Third Street and 80 feet along Brady Street.

Exterior Appearance: The foundation (30 inches high along E. Third Street and graduated in height along Brady Street) is finished in black glazed terra cotta with the upper walls clad in a light gray (nearly white) colored brick described by contemporary reporters as "Parisian Marble." News accounts stated that the hotel/theater project represented the first large scale use of this brick in the United States. The brick walls are laid in a common bond with several design features incorporated to

¹"New RKO Orpheum Foundation Rests Upon Solid Rock," (RKO Theater Edition), *The Daily Times* (Davenport, Iowa), November 25, 1931, p 16.

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

heighten the building's appearance. Brick piers set at regular intervals extend from the first floor to the parapet. Windows are arranged in vertical columns between the piers (7 bays on the west facade and 9 bays on the south facade). In addition, the central bays on each facade have metal spandrels stacked vertically between the windows of the third and tenth floors. Windows in the upper floors are double-hung wood sash with 1/1 and 3/1 configurations. Multi-story stacks of stretchers extend along the edges of the windows give further vertical definition to the window columns. The building is tied together horizontally with a series of terra cotta panels in floral designs. They contain a series of floral and geometric designs rendered in the Art Deco style. They are located atop the second floor windows and in belt courses above and below the tenth floor windows. Courses of headers and stretchers are again incorporated into the upper belt courses giving a finished cap to the building's ten stories.

Retail shops were incorporated into the building's first floor space along both E. Third and Brady. All of the storefront openings except for the theater entrance bay have been updated to include enameled black metal display windows with vertical muntins and matching metal transoms. The height of the terra cotta foundation sections varies along the Brady Street facade to accommodate the slope of the site. Along the west facade facing Brady Street, the two office suites contain seven storefront openings - five contain display windows, one has an entrance and display windows, and the one at the south corner has a single door and sidelight.

The south facade facing E. Third Street has eleven storefront openings containing various combinations of single and double doors, sidelights and display windows. The west corner office suite has a single door and double-width sidelight. The hotel entrance has its original rectilinear canopy above the entrance doors. It has a projecting center section extending the full depth of the sidewalk. Incandescent bulbs shine from 36 recessed square openings in the ceiling of the canopy. Bands of geometric designs extend above and below the signage space. The hotel lobby has double entrance doors flanked by sidelights. To either side of the hotel's entrance doors are narrower openings with the one to the west containing a separate entrance to the hotel's basement stairwell and the other containing a display window. To the east of the hotel lobby are two office suites with various combinations of entrance doors and display windows.

At the far east end of the building is the theater entrance bay. The storefront opening retains its original components and finishes although the marquee is the fourth the theater has had in nearly seven decades. The current marquee was installed in 1997 and is outlined in neon lights with computer operated changeable signage panels built into all three sides. The first marquee extended vertically up the full height of the building.

The theater entrance bay has its original ticket booth, seven display advertising cases and four sets of double stainless steel and plate glass doors. All but one of the display cases for changeable theater advertising are fabricated of stainless steel with Art Deco motifs in geometric and floral designs placed above them. Internal lighting was provided for the single and double width cases. The largest display case is centered between the entrance/exit doors and has a wood frame and door with a single plate glass light for displaying oversize theater posters.

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

The octagon shaped free-standing ticket booth has a polychromatic appearance with black terra cotta base moldings topped by rust colored faux marble panels and true dark green marble countertops all trimmed in brass. The brass edged window panels have a row of incandescent bulbs across their tops (each set in the center of a flower petals) with Art Deco designs containing both geometric and floral motifs in the brass trim along the finished upper edge. The ticket booth is located at the front edge of the theater's recessed entrance bay and is occasionally used during evening performances.

The north facade of the hotel/theater building faces the alley and contains a series of service entrances into the stage area, a fixed fire escape for the hotel and two movable escapes for emergency theater exits. Double-hung 3/3 windows appear only in the west end of the north facade where guest rooms and apartments are located. A weathered sign painted on the parapet reads "Hotel Mississippi" but is rarely observed since all street traffic travels north away from the sign due to the establishment of one-way traffic on Brady Street today.

Hotel Interior: The Hotel Mississippi originally contained 200 transient rooms and 50 apartments. Each room had modern appointments including ceramic tiled combination shower/tub units (extant in some rooms, converted to kitchens in others). The L-shaped plan of the hotel allowed rooms in the upper three floors to look out to the west and south. Some of the rooms along Brady Street had views of the Mississippi River. Once the hotel rehabilitation is completed, it will contain 80 apartments.

Three passenger elevators provided access to the upper level rooms off the hotel's handsome lobby. The lobby features a multi-colored terrazzo floor with a pinwheel design, mahogany clad walls with channel cut pilasters and decorative panels, and polished metal clad elevator doors. The hotel registration desk was incorporated into the east wall of the lobby and the desk opening is now enclosed with wood paneling. Art Deco floral motifs matching the exterior designs are repeated in carved wood panels in the lobby's upper walls and above the registration desk. The design of the ceiling includes a large square panel that is stepped and recessed. It contains a chandelier (not original) at the center. A geometric design is incorporated into the plaster cornice band. An Art Deco styled female face set amidst leaves is featured on the face of each of the elevator doors. Other stylized floral motifs are incorporated into the finish of the stairwell leading to the basement level located along the west edge of the lobby - radiator covers, balusters, and wall panels.

The basement of the hotel originally contained a restaurant or coffee shop with a dining room capable of seating 150. Other rooms opening onto the public dining room include the kitchen, billiard room, a private dining room, ladies' lounge, mens and women's restrooms, and lobby. Additional space was provided for a chapel and various mechanical rooms. The public areas of the basement have been remodeled extensively and have been largely unused in recent years.

The guest rooms and apartments located in the upper levels of the hotel have been updated on a regular basis through the five decades that the hotel operated as such. Since the early 1980s guest rooms were converted to apartments with walls removed and small kitchenettes added. Finishes in all areas including corridors, elevator lobby areas, and original apartments were updated as well. Original

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

trim and doors remain. The former includes simple square moldings with a painted finish while the latter have two recessed panels - a narrow horizontal upper panel and tall vertical lower panel. The public spaces in the upper floors had little decoration with only the original geometric design of the nickel plated door knobs and key escutcheons alluding to the building's Art Deco design.

RKO Orpheum Theater Interior: The RKO Orpheum Theater consists of a series of public spaces used to direct and hold theater goers while attending a performance or movie as well as semi-private spaces designed to meet specific needs such as a smoking lounge and restrooms. The balance of the theater was given over to the needs of the performers and staff involved in putting on shows.

Theater goers would arrive at the E. Third Street entrance to queue up and purchase a ticket before entering the theater. The free-standing ticket booth was centered in the recessed entrance bay. The first interior space theater goers encounter is the entresol,² a low-ceilinged entrance vestibule that is walled in vertical panels of various shades of green and gray marble. The ceramic tiled floor slopes gently up towards a second set of polished stainless steel and plate glass swinging doors that connect the entresol with the grand lobby. Treated cool or warm air is delivered to the entresol via a decorative rectangular vent which is recessed in the stepped ceiling. Art Deco design motifs are used in the pilaster capitals and display advertising cases located at each end of the entresol and in the vent plate and light fixtures on in the ceiling.

The grand lobby has a height of approximately 22 feet. Square pilasters ring the room with an open staircase at the north end leading to the mezzanine. A series of mirrored openings and curved edge pseudo balconies lines the east or rear wall. Matching balconies look down on the lobby from the mezzanine along the west wall. Five sets of double doors lead to the main auditorium on the first floor. A closed balustrade with horizontal moldings is repeated on the staircase, balconies and along the walk-way above the entresol at the south end of the grand lobby. The ceiling features a series of recessed stepped pyramid openings arranged in a large rectangular panel that extends from above the walk-way to the mezzanine staircase. The two large striking chandeliers set in this area contain crystal strands that drop in a series of graceful curves and rectangular shades to form a geometric pattern consistent with the Art Deco style of other decorative elements in the theater. Matching vertical wall sconces are located between the balconies and pseudo balconies. The ceiling is painted a dramatic gold tone with the walls painted various shades of tan, henna and gold. A reproduction carpet matching the original was installed in 1984. It contains a large floral pattern in the same colors as the walls and ceiling. At the time the Orpheum opened, RKO theater designer Henry Dreyfuss was credited as "successful in his efforts to infuse warmth into the entire scheme."³

The relatively narrow width mezzanine overlooks the grand lobby and provides circulating space for

²The term "entresol" was used by the architect to delineate the entrance vestibule space on the original drawings of the buildings.

³"Interior of New Theater Reflects Luxury, Harmony' Appointments Well Chosen," (RKO Theater Edition), *The Daily Times* (Davenport, Iowa), November 25, 1931, p 15.

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

theater goes with balcony seats. Entrances to smoking lounges, restrooms and auditorium seats are located along the west wall. The mezzanine walkway connects to a second enclosed staircase at the front of the building that continues to additional balcony doors at two upper levels. Because the Orpheum was designed to handle consecutive evening shows, this staircase was important in providing an essential exit route for those with balcony seats while causing minimal conflict with first floor exiters. Theater safety also required alternative exit routes via exterior fire escapes along the alley and one exit that passed through the lobby of the Hotel Mississippi. As a cost cutting measure, a proposed elevator to the balcony was never built.

The lower level of the theater contained a series of public spaces, performer and staff preparation areas and building service spaces. The general lounge along the east wall of the building is accessed via stairs located beneath the open staircase of the grand lobby. This long, low-ceiling room has an artificial fireplace set between two false windows and pairs of fluted pilasters. The windows were lighted artificially behind louvered blinds to give loungers "the feeling of being in some pleasantly light room instead of being below street level."⁴ The blinds have been replaced but the openings continue to be lighted. The relief sculpture above the fireplace is a Hollywood scene depicting a director, movie cameraman and several actors. Cushioned window seats flank the fireplace.

At the south end of the basement lounge is a separate ladies lounge, cosmetic room, wash room and toilet room. Ceramic tile walls and mirrors are original. The men's lounge, wash room and toilet room are located at the north end of the general lounge to the rear of the staircase. A bank of telephones was located in the telephone alcove directly beneath the staircase. Locker rooms for female and male help were located along the west wall. This area has now been converted to a permanent concession counter.

The area beneath the theater auditorium consists of nine parallel unexcavated and excavated channels running east to west with the latter containing exhaust trenches. The area beneath the theater stage originally consisted of a catacomb of small corridors, offices and storage rooms. The south third of the stage area housed a series of small rooms to either side of a narrow passage. They contained an orchestra room, music storage room, orchestra leader's office, stage manager's office, organ console platform and access room (these were never used as intended since the organ was not installed), a toilet room, and animal room. This last room was used for vaudevillian animal acts and was equipped with an oversized concrete bathtub for washing the "performers." The central section beneath the stage contained an orchestra pit at the front, a trap space, another toilet room, and a property room. The north third of the area beneath the stage contained a passage flanked by a receiving room with access to a freight elevator that opened onto the alley and the stage, an organ blower room, an electrician room, remote control room, a stage hand room, a large lavatory and a general storage room.

⁴*Ibid.*

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

The main auditorium is designed with a proscenium shape where the audience faces the performing area on one side only. The stage area of the Orpheum does not contain the typical proscenium arch, however, where an elaborate architectural opening frames the stage. Instead, the 60-foot high stage opening consisted of a series of curved surfaces that stepped down to the stage. The stage itself measures 90 feet wide and 30 feet deep. Another atypical aspect of the auditorium design is the fact that the ceiling extends upward from the rear wall to the stage opening in order to provide better acoustics and to eliminate the closed-in feeling frequently seen in balcony seating arrangements.

The stage curtain is a suspended curtain design and was one of the largest ever put in a Midwestern theater when first installed. It was fabricated of solid henna colored velvet with matching panels of varying lengths hung in sections around the perimeter of the auditorium. Design elements throughout the auditorium continued the Art Deco feel of the balance of the building with geometric shapes dominating door openings ceiling panels, and wall treatments. Color tones were a repetition of the shades and hues of the lobby. The original paint medium for the auditorium ceiling was "tempers" (dry pigment mixed with egg whites - nearly 2,000 in the case of the Orpheum ceiling) and was selected for its fine acoustic qualities.⁵ No other special acoustic measures were identified for this theater when it was constructed.

The auditorium seating plan provides room for 2,700 people in three sections on the main floor and four sections in the balcony. The floor seating pattern was changed in the 1984 theater rehabilitation by the construction of a quiet room at the northeast corner of the main floor, the removal of selective seats to provide space for wheel chairs, and the removal of several rows of seats at the front to allow for the enlargement of the stage. The orchestra pit was also removed and the stage extended approximately 12 feet. The original seats have been retained with new finishes and upholstery. Floors are sealed concrete with carpeting in the aisles.

Additional performance preparation spaces were originally housed in the second floor of the Hotel Mississippi facing Brady Street adjacent to the alley. These areas included a series of dressing rooms, props storage areas, locker areas, shower rooms, etc. A back stage vault used to store valuables of the visiting stars (including Jack Benny's fur coat) is no longer used. Because the RKO offered combined programs of stage and film productions, the Orpheum had a fully equipped projection booth at the rear and a screen formatted for wide-screen productions. The original projection equipment was manufactured by RCA Company and included the 1932 Photophone talking equipment designed to reproduce the human voice with naturalness and sound purity. Some of this equipment is retained in the projection room and is used for special film features. The theater organ originally planned for the Orpheum was never installed due to cost saving measures adopted during its construction.

⁵"Whites of 2,000 Eggs Are Used in Theater Ceiling," (RKO Theater Edition), *The Daily Times* (Davenport, Iowa), November 25, 1931, p 18.

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

Rehabilitation and Restoration: As noted above, rehabilitation on the hotel portion of the building has been completed on a sporadic but on-going basis through the years. Most changes have been confined to the guest rooms where individual rooms were joined to make apartments through the addition of kitchens and removal of bath rooms. Changes in the hotel lobby included the closure of the registration desk window sometime in the mid-1980s when the hotel closed to transient guests and the replacement of the original light fixture with the multi-light chandelier currently in place at an unknown date.

Exterior changes to the building have included the installation of replacement storefronts. The original storefronts facing E. Third Street were individual shop spaces with recessed centered entrances flanked by display windows. The Brady Street storefront openings had metal transoms containing display signs touting the products and services of the tenant - "Drugs," "Lunches," "Toiletries," etc. Retractable awnings were mounted beneath the signs. Only the paint colors of the hotel canopy have been changed with the original scheme of white lettering on a dark background reversed today. The most noticeable change made to the theater was completed when the original six-story high "RKO-Orpheum" sign mounted at the east edge of the building's E. Third St. facade was removed. The marquee has been replaced at three subsequent times once prior to the 1960s, in 1984 and again in 1997 when the current changeable signage marquee was installed.

In the late 1970s plans began for the rehabilitation of the Orpheum Theater for use as a performing arts center in conjunction with the construction of a new civic activities center on the quarter block to the east. The theater's \$4 million rehabilitation included preservation of the interior's Art Deco features including reproduction of the original floral carpet design, restoration of the brass ticket booth, restoration of the original paint schemes, and upholstering the original seats. The theater reopened as the "Adler Theatre" in 1984. Consultants for the project included Paul S. Veneklasen, acoustics consultant from Santa Monica, California and Scholtz-Kuehn, Architects of Davenport.

At the time that the theater was restored, the municipally owned RiverCenter was constructed directly east of the Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater. It was completed in 1983 with connecting openings made in the east wall of the theater into the new civic center. The first floor opening is located just inside the entresol beneath the mezzanine balcony. It leads to a corridor containing the new box office for the theater located inside the RiverCenter. A second opening was made at the mezzanine level. Both openings were located in previously blank walls and no important architectural features of the theater space were modified to accommodate their installation. No false decoration confuses the viewer that these openings are original.

A major rehabilitation of the Hotel Mississippi is planned for 1998-99 with conversion of the building to an assisted living facility. The project will involve new HVAC systems, plumbing, electrical work, re-designing guest rooms as apartments and refurbishing the existing apartments. New public spaces will be created for residents including an independent dining area, coffee shop, general store, beauty/barber shop, and day care area. Additional stairs will be added to meet state code requirements. All work will be completed in conformance with *The Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Historic Buildings* and reviewed by the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service.

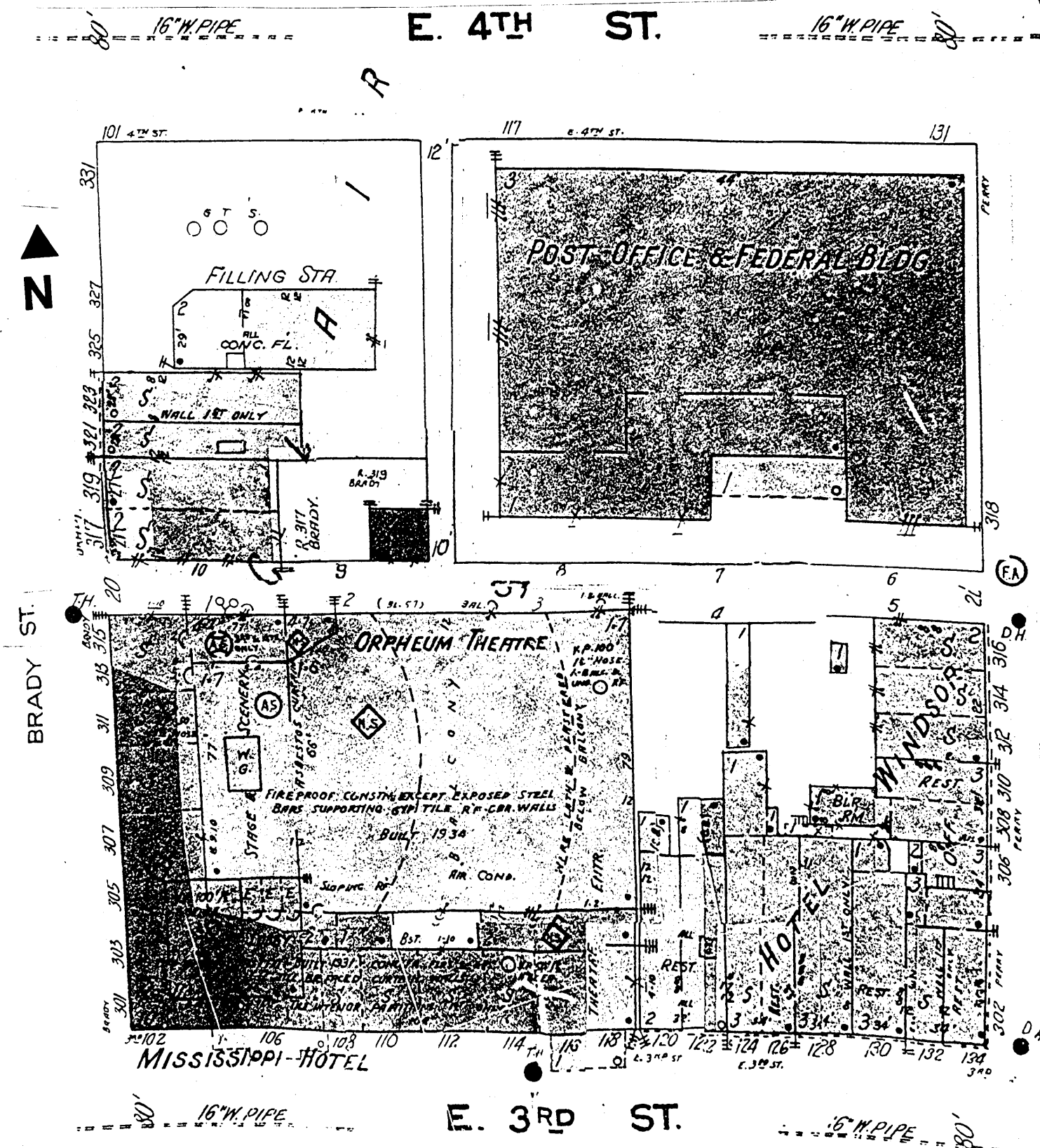
National Register of Historic Places
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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

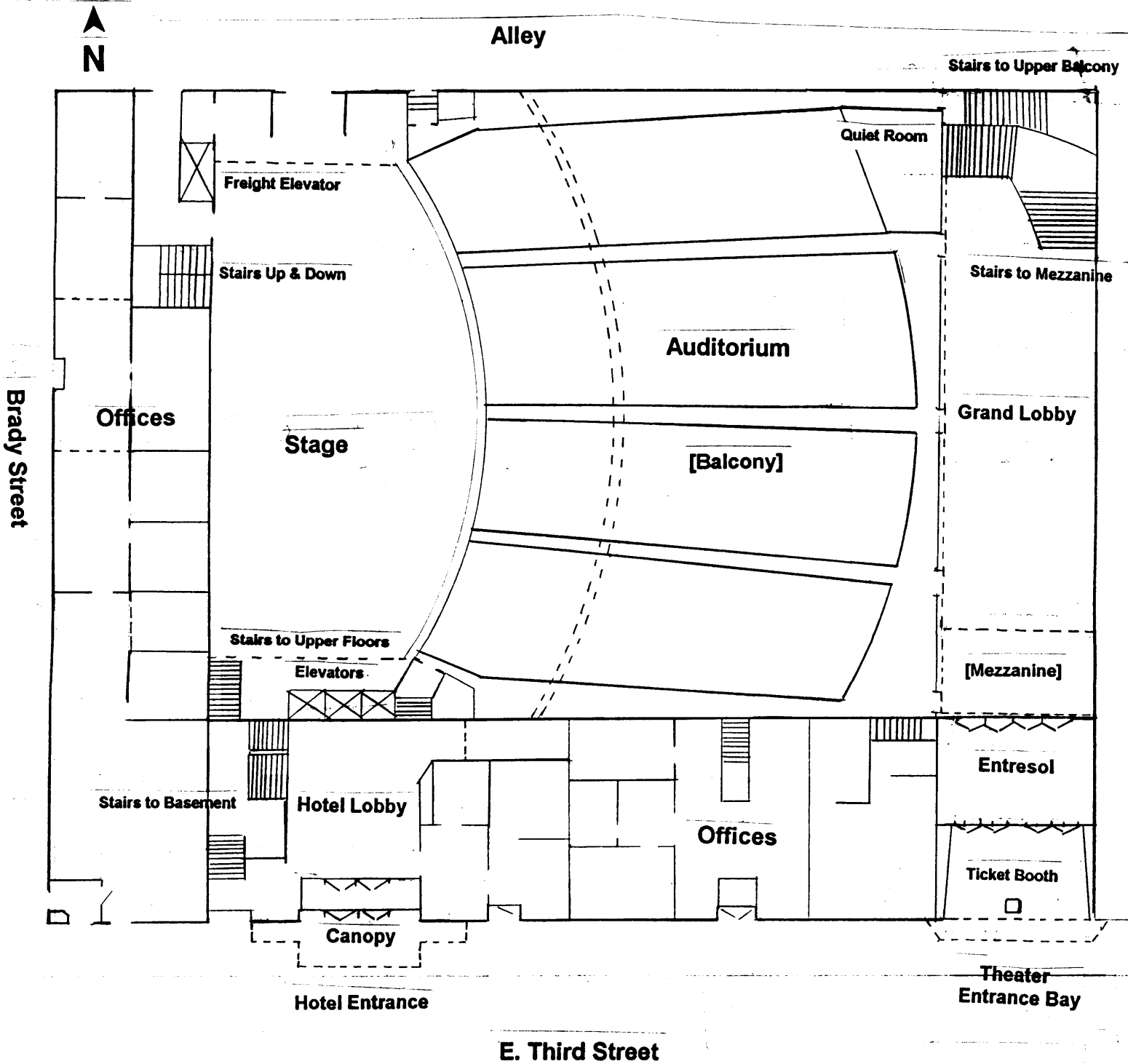
1910 updated to 1940 Plat Map View, Sanborn Map Company, Davenport.



National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

First Floor, Hotel and Theater



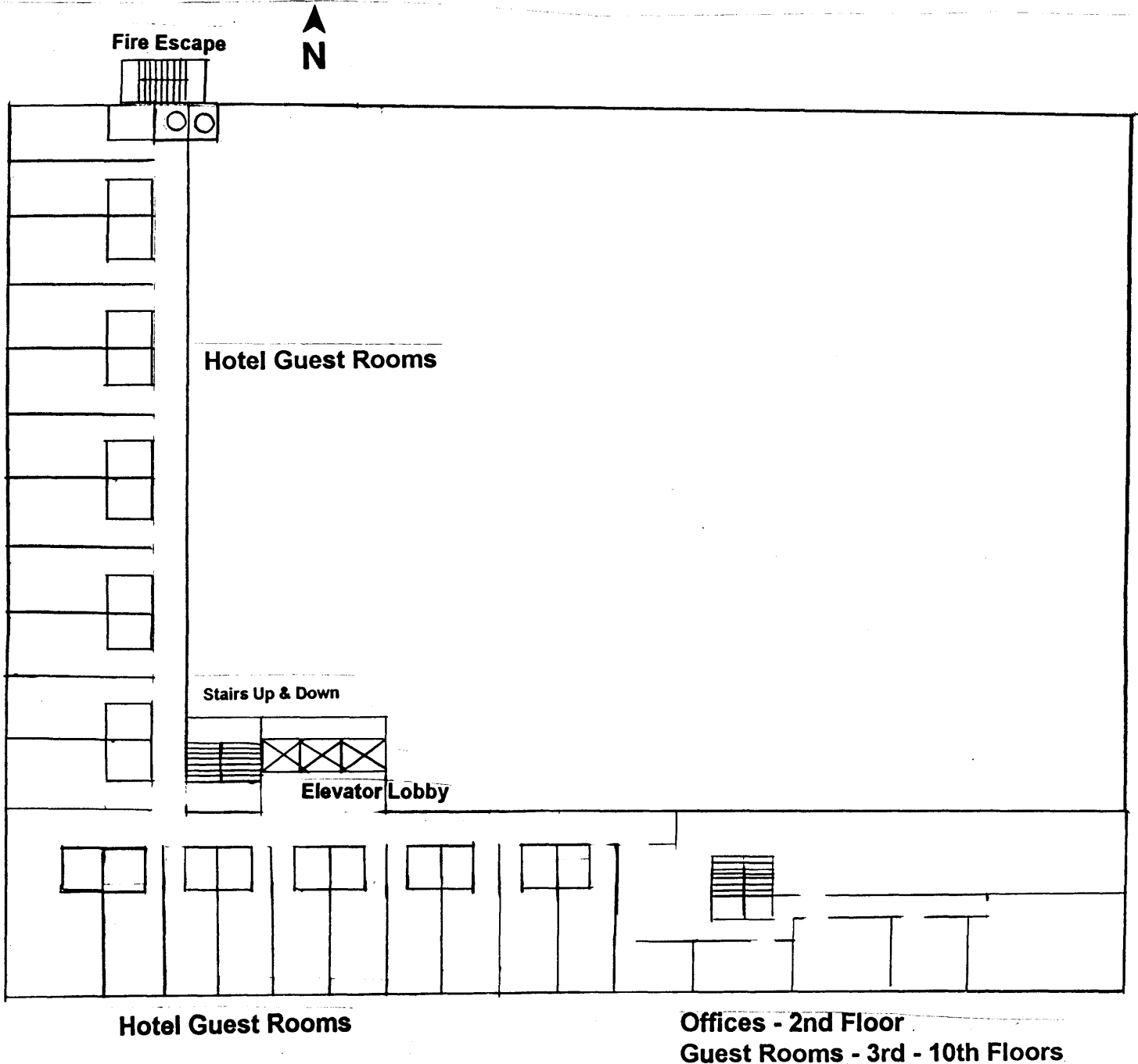
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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

Typical Floor, Levels 2-10, Hotel



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Continuation Sheet**

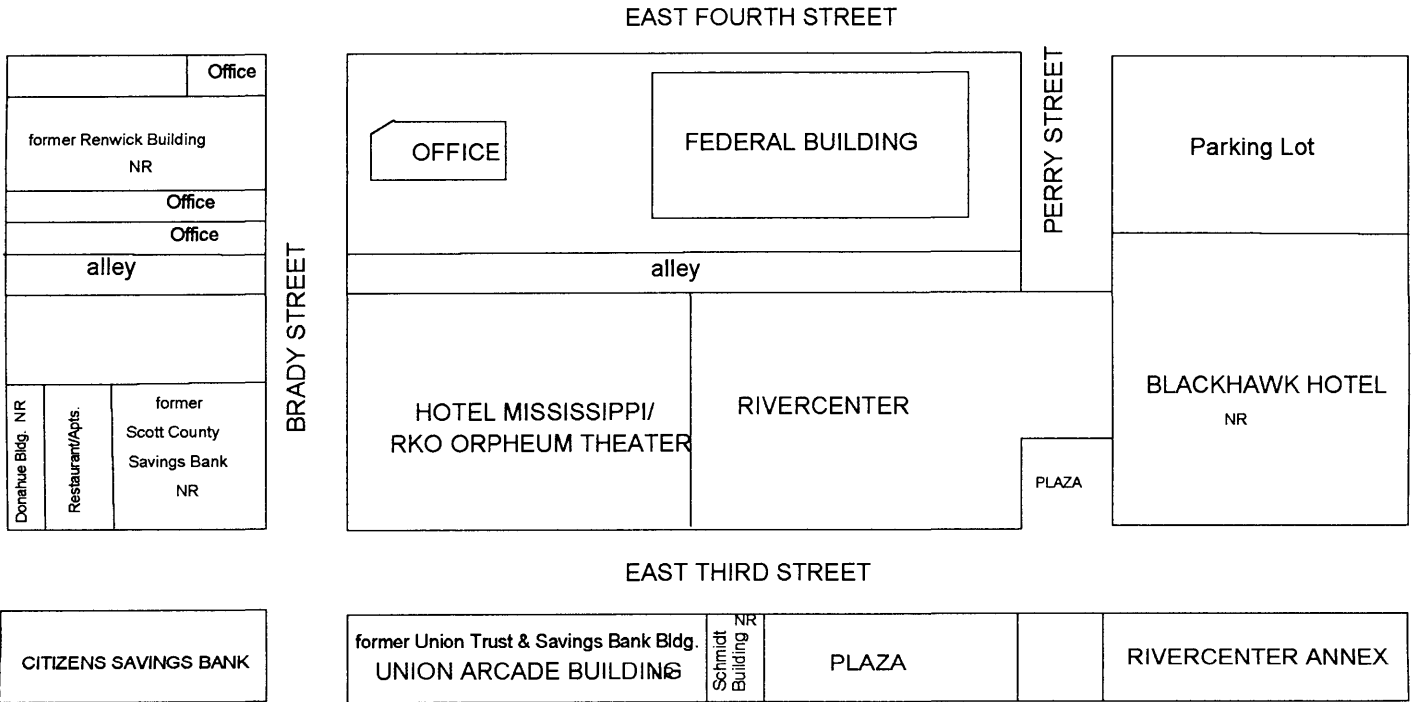
Section number 7

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

Sketch Map of Brady Street and East Third Street Vicinity, 1998

NR = National Register Listed



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Continuation Sheet**

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Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater, Scott County, Iowa

Statement of Significance

Summary: The Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater are significant locally under National Register Criteria A and C within the historic contexts of commercial development, entertainment/recreation, and architecture. The building was identified as individually eligible as part of the commerce theme in the multiple-resource National Register nomination for "Historical and Architectural Resources of Davenport, Iowa (Part I)" listed in 1983. Due to owner objection at the time, the building was not submitted for listing.

Under Criterion A, the Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater are significant as the last of the major downtown hotels and as the largest movie theater built prior to World War II in Davenport. It survives as one of three extant downtown hotels and two theaters⁶ built in the early twentieth century. Conceived during the prosperous decade of the 1920s and built as a joint venture of a local capitalist and a national movie theater syndicate, the hotel/theater complex was completed in 1931 as the economic decline of the Great Depression descended on the Midwest.

Under Criterion C, the Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater is significant as the work of two nationally significant designers - Chicago architect A.W. Graven and New York theater designer Henry Dreyfuss.⁷ Built at the end of the golden age of American theater building, this complex survives as the most important local example of the Art Deco style.

Background: Construction of the Hotel Mississippi/RKO Orpheum Theater was completed in 1931⁸ but its owner and developer, George M. Bechtel, had been part of Davenport's civic life for more than four decades. In 1891 Bechtel organized one of the first investment bond houses in Iowa specializing in the purchase and sale of municipal bonds. In the decades that followed, Bechtel's operation, "George M. Bechtel & Co.," grew to become the most important bond house in Iowa earning him the sobriquet "father of Iowa municipal bonds." His firm eventually located its offices along Brady Street just north of Third Street in the downtown. Through the years Bechtel & Co. secured several real estate holdings in the downtown including the Petersen Block located at the northeast corner of Third and Brady across the street from Bechtel and Co.'s headquarters.

⁶Hotels include the Blackhawk Hotel, 301 E. Third Street and the Hotel Davenport, 324 Main Street. The other theater is the Capitol Theatre, 330 W. Third Street. All of the buildings are National Register listed.

⁷The specific role played by Dreyfuss in the design of the Orpheum is unknown. He was not a licensed architect or engineer but rather an experienced theatrical visionary. Based on contemporary accounts, it is likely that his role was to provide an aesthetic sensibility and theatrical functionality to the theater derived from his years as a theatrical set designer.

⁸Note that the Sanborn Map shown on page 8 shows an incorrect construction date of 1934. Architectural plans and newspaper accounts correctly date completion of the building in November 1931.

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In October 1926, local newspapers announced that negotiations were underway between Bechtel & Co. and a syndicate of Chicago capitalists for the purchase of the Petersen Block site. The Chicago investors were interested in constructing a 3,000 seat vaudeville house that would be leased to the Orpheum Circuit.⁹ The Orpheum Circuit was one of a handful of national theater chains in operation at the time. Plans called for the construction of retail stores at street level along both Brady and Third Streets with office suites on two upper levels. The Orpheum Circuit at the time operated the Columbia Theater in Davenport and was looking for a larger house to show movies and host vaudeville shows. Financing for the theater would be through the sale of building bonds.

Plans with the Chicago syndicate eventually fell through but the idea of building a theater and leasing it to a national theater circuit continued. In the midst of negotiations Bechtel's bond house marked its growth in 1927 when it was renamed the "Bechtel Trust Company" and moved into the former Scott County Savings Bank (National Register listed) at the northwest corner of Brady and Third Streets across from the Petersen Block. In 1930 Bechtel Trust Co. and representatives of the Radio- Keith-Orpheum Circuit (RKO) of New York City, successor to the Orpheum Circuit, concluded a revised plan calling for the construction of a major hotel in conjunction with the theater. The Third and Brady Street Corporation was formed by George Bechtel to take on the project.

With lease negotiations concluded, Bechtel retained national expertise to guide the project's construction. He hired Chicago theater architect A.S. "Bumps" Graven, principal with the firm Graven and Mayger for the overall project. Graven graduated from the University of Illinois and both Graven and his partner had worked for the Chicago architectural firm of Rapp and Rapp, prolific American theater architects, before joining forces and opening their own architectural office in 1925. Graven is credited as having worked with C.W. and George L. Rapp on such projects as New York's Paramount Theater and Cleveland's Palace. Graven and Mayger designed a number of prominent American theaters including the Alabama Theater (1927, Birmingham, extant, National Register listed), Fisher Theatre (1928, Detroit, extant), the Hollywood Theater (1927, Detroit, nonextant), the Minnesota Theater (1928, Minneapolis, nonextant), the Palace Theatre (1928, Rochester, NY, nonextant), and the Tennessee Theater (1928, Knoxville, extant, National Register listed). Graven drowned in a duck hunting accident shortly before the Davenport project was completed.

New York theater consultant and industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss (1904-1972) coordinated the interior design elements of the theater on behalf of the RKO Orpheum Circuit. He began his career de-

⁹"Plan \$1,000,000 Theater Here," *The Davenport Democrat* (Davenport, Iowa), October 13, 1926, pp. 1, 4.

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signing sets for stage presentations at the age of 17 and went on to serve as a consultant in the design of a number of major theaters in the United States. In 1929 he became associated with the RKO Circuit as art director. The same year he formed his first industrial design office and during the next forty years his most well-known industrial designs included the John Deere Power tractor, the Polaroid camera, the Honeywell Round thermostat and the Bell TRIMLINE® telephone.¹⁰

Hotel: The Hotel Mississippi opened in 1931 just eleven months after construction had begun on the project. Builder for the hotel/theater project was the Lundoff-Bicknell Company, contractor for Chicago's Palmer House. The Hotel Mississippi's ten floors contained 200 transient rooms and 50 apartments along with a coffee shop and various guest services. The retail tenant occupying the prime Brady Street frontage during the hotel's early years was Walgreen Drugs.

The Hotel Mississippi opened at the end of downtown Davenport's most important era hotel building. The hotel was operated for Bechtel by the Black Hawk Hotels Corporation. Black Hawk Hotels operated a chain of hotels in Iowa and Minnesota following World War I including two other Davenport Hotels (the Blackhawk Hotel and the Davenport Hotel, both National Register listed), the Fort Des Moines and Savery in Des Moines, the Hanford in Mason City, and the St. Paul in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Though modern and up-to-date in nearly every respect, the Hotel Mississippi was a poor investment for its owner. During the 1930s it had an occupancy rate of about 25% with the other well-established downtown hotels providing stiff competition. By the 1970s the hotel/theater complex was owned by the Verdi Corporation which was in turn owned by Mel Foster, Jr., head of a prominent local real estate company, and Dudley Priester, co-owner of the Davenport based Priester Construction Co. The Mel Foster Company located its corporate headquarters in the former Walgreens space until the 1980s. The hotel gradually converted transient rooms to apartments ceasing hotel functions in the mid-1980s. The Davenport Chamber of Commerce leased office suites along E. Third Street during the 1980s. Apartments in the hotel are largely occupied by elderly residents today.

Theater: The RKO Orpheum Theater was one of five new theaters to open nationally in the RKO chain in the fall of 1931. Its dual use design provided not only up-to-date cinema equipment but a fully equipped stage for vaudeville shows, concerts and road show productions of Broadway hits. In this respect the Orpheum typified national theater building trends of the 1920s which saw pioneer theater architects partner with vaudeville promoters and motion picture companies to design and build halls capable of housing both stage and film productions. Dozens of medium and large scale theaters opened during the decade as movie going became a national pastime. The newly designed "movie palace" be-

¹⁰"Dreyfuss, Henry" *Britannica Online*. <<http://www.eb.com:180/cgi-bin/g?DocF=micro/178/8.html>> {Accessed 27 February 1998}.

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came an essential tool for selling the product of the burgeoning American film industry. The architecture of fantasy which accompanied the new theater building saw exotic designs imported from around the world. Italian baroque and French Second Empire palaces were soon joined by Mayan and Egyptian temples to house theater goers of the '20s.

By the end of the decade the influence of the International Exposition of Decorative Arts hosted in Paris in 1925 was holding sway in new theater design. One theater historian notes that "the baroque and the exotic gave way to the simplified lines and bright colors of Art Deco."¹¹ When the stock market crash came in 1929, most major theater projects were put on hold as movie promoters and theater chain operators waited to test the economic winds. When builders of the RKO Orpheum in Davenport decided to proceed with the hotel/theater project, they were joined by only a handful of theaters across the country. Among the most important were the Fox-Wilshire Theater completed in Los Angeles in 1930, the Oakland Paramount finished in 1931 and Radio City Music Hall completed in 1932, all designed in the Art Deco style. Their construction along with that of the Orpheum saw the golden age of movie palace building draw to an end as the Great Depression settled across the nation.

The gala opening of the RKO Orpheum came on the day before Thanksgiving, November 25, 1931. The theater's 2,700 seats made it the largest movie house in Iowa at the time. The opening night show advertised five acts of "RKO Vaudeville" along with a feature film. Ginger Rogers, star of the main feature, "Suicide Fleet," sent a telegraphic signal from Hollywood to commence the ribbon cutting ceremonies. The stage performers included a Japanese acrobatic team, comedians, dancers and musicians. The vaudevillians were accompanied by the Orpheum Theater's house orchestra. William C. Sears was the first theater manager for the Orpheum.

During its early years, the Orpheum Theater was a greater success than the Hotel Mississippi. Hundreds of vaudeville acts made up theater bills that combined their acts with feature length films and shorts. Acrobats, jugglers, comedians, magicians, and animal acts were booked by the RKO Circuit and played to packed houses. American theater greats included Tallulah Bankhead, Paul Robeson, Imogene Coca, Dorothy Lamour, Phil Ford and Forrest Tucker. They appeared in performances booked by the RKO Circuit, private promoters or, in more recent decades, by Davenport's Broadway Theater League. Dozens of musicians and entertainers also played the Orpheum as part of national tours through the years. They included Pearl Bailey, Jack Benny, Sammy Cahn, Phyllis Diller, Jimmy Dean, Stan Kenton, Liberace, the Beach Boys, Sonny and Cher, the Supremes and the Pointer Sisters.

Due to its size and modern appointments, the Orpheum soon became the cinema showplace of the Tri-Cities (Davenport, Iowa and Rock Island and Moline, Illinois) hosting all of Hollywood's major releases. Air-conditioned seating, excellent acoustic engineering and a thoroughly modern decor brought thousands of theater goers to the Orpheum. The decision to forgo installation of a theater organ due to the

¹¹Naylor, David, *Great American Movie Theaters*, (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press), p.25.

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economies necessitated by the Depression had no adverse impact on the Orpheum's operation since it was outfitted for "talkies" from the start. The long-term success or failure of the theater had more to do with changes in the entertainment industry. During the 1940s through the 1960s all of Hollywood's major releases opened at the Orpheum. *The Graduate* (1967) ran for ten weeks and *Pillow Talk* (1959) for six weeks. Disney's original *101 Dalmatians* drew crowds of 10,000 people a day when it opened in 1961.

The house size of the Orpheum once touted as a competitive advantage eventually became its downfall. The construction of multi-plex, small-screen theater complexes located adjacent to convenient parking in shopping centers created stiff competition. When the last film, *Cleopatra Jones*, was shown on September 11, 1973, the RKO-Stanley Warner Corporation still had a long term lease on the theater. Five years later they sold the lease back to the building owners, Verdi Corporation.

The Orpheum Theater continued to be used for special performances, closed-circuit television events, and traveling Broadway shows after the RKO lease lapsed. In 1978 a study was undertaken by a task force of the Davenport Chamber of Commerce to determine the feasibility of converting the theater into a performing arts center and home of the Tri-Cities Symphony and the Broadway Theatre League. A non-profit corporation was formed and funds were raised to buy the theater in 1981 and rehabilitate it during the next several years. It reopened in early 1984 and is now operated in conjunction with the adjoining RiverCenter, a municipally owned civic activities center and exhibition hall.

Central Business District History: Downtown Davenport extends for five blocks along the north bank of the Mississippi River between the Government Bridge to the Centennial Bridge. During its first 150 years the central business district experienced at least five generations of building. The first began with the construction of modest one and two-story buildings during the 1840s and 1850s. Most were frame but a scattering of masonry buildings was constructed by the more progressive and prosperous property owners. These frontier buildings all but disappeared in the boom Davenport experienced during the Civil War and post-Civil War era. The fires and deterioration experienced by the frontier buildings dictated more substantial replacements. The new commercial blocks and warehouses were built of brick with stone, wood and cast iron trim. Building practice and technology limited this second generation of buildings to four stories. Dozens of hotels, public halls, and specialty shops lined Front Street, Second Street, and Third Street.

The prosperity of the 1880s and 1890s required a third generation of upscale commercial buildings to keep pace with Davenport's expanding economy. Their construction was epitomized by the city's first department store - a five-story building modeled after the Rookery Building in Chicago and designed by a European trained local architect. This third generation of downtown buildings saw land use intensify in the CBD. A series of new multi-story bank buildings, commercial blocks, opera houses and public buildings appeared by the turn-of-the-century. Only one church remained in the downtown.

By 1910 in the midst of continuing economic boom, the fourth and most important period of downtown building was underway. Taking advantage of the new technology of skeletal construction and eleva-

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tors, buildings began to reach upward with 8, 10 and 12-story buildings giving Davenport's riverfront business district a modern skyline. This last generation of building continued into the 1930s and the early years of the Great Depression. New railroad stations, national franchise stores, local department stores, hotels, vaudeville theaters, movie palaces, and several important office buildings appeared in just two decades.

Several factors combined to create a dearth of building construction between 1930 and 1970. Economic stagnation limited demand for new space while the surplus of office space kept pace with what demand arose. Retail practices shifted dramatically and irreversibly. Construction of Davenport's first shopping center and the development of neighborhood banks and retail centers closer to new residential neighborhoods stifled growth of the downtown. The fifth generation of building began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the construction of new parking ramps, a few smaller scale office buildings, and several bank buildings. None of the new buildings, save for the public library, rivaled the design or scale of those built forty to fifty years earlier. The downtown skyline remained virtually unchanged until the mid-1980s and 1990s when another wave of building and redevelopment occurred. The demolition of smaller scale nineteenth century buildings allowed the assemblage of larger parcels for the construction of a new hotel, major office building and a plethora of parking lots. A number of important landmarks from the post-1910 building boom survived to be rehabilitated and reused as the twentieth century comes to a close.

Summary: The Hotel Mississippi/ RKO Orpheum Theater is an outstanding local example of the Art Deco Style that became the signature style of American movie palaces during the late 1920s and 1930s. Completed in 1931, the building marked the end of an era in downtown hotel and theater building in Davenport. It stands out as the work of an important American architect, A.S. Graven of the Chicago firm of Graven and Mayger, and of an internationally significant theater designer, Henry Dreyfuss. Its completion in the midst of the Great Depression was testimony of the confidence of its local owner, George Bechtel, and anchor tenant, the Radio-Keith-Orpheum Circuit, in the local economy.

Period of Significance: The period of significance under Criterion A and C is 1931. The date marks the year the building was constructed and put in service by the Hotel Mississippi and RKO Theater Syndicate. Both the hotel and theater continue in use nearly seven decades later with the hotel now housing permanent residents and the theater now operated as part of the RiverCenter, a civic activities center owned and maintained by the City of Davenport.

Resources Nominated: The property contains one resource with ownership divided between the hotel portion of the property and the theater. Ownership of the building prior to the early 1980s was with a single owner and, as a result, it is considered a single resource with dual ownership. The archeological potential of buildings previously on this property has not been determined and has not been addressed in this nomination. Given the substantial scale of the hotel/theater building relative to the buildings it replaced, the presence of archeological remains from any earlier structures is remote.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 1, 2 and 3 in Block 57 of LeClaire's Second Addition to the City of Davenport, Iowa.

Boundary Justification

This parcel includes the quarter block of land assembled and developed by George Bechtel for his new hotel and theater building in 1931.

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Photographs: Photographs taken February, 1998 by Marlys A. Svendsen, Sarona, Wisconsin.
Negatives stored with Svendsen Tyler, Inc., Sarona, Wisconsin.

1. Exterior, looking northeast, hotel at intersection
2. Exterior, looking southeast, rear of hotel and theater
3. Exterior, looking northwest, theater entrance at right
4. Exterior, looking north, 10th floor window and beltcourse detail
5. Exterior, storefront at southwest corner of building, looking northeast
6. Exterior, looking north, hotel entrance and canopy
7. Exterior, looking north, theater entrance and canopy
8. Exterior, looking north, theater ticket booth
9. Interior, looking west, entresol
10. Interior, looking north, theater lobby and staircase to mezzanine level
11. Interior, theater auditorium, looking towards north wall and balcony seating on east wall

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Property Ownership: The Hotel Mississippi and the RKO Orpheum Theater were originally owned and built as a single building with one owner. Prior to the restoration of the theater portion of the building in the early 1980s, ownership in the building was divided with the theater portions sold to the City of Davenport and the hotel and commercial space retained under private ownership.

Owner Address for Theater: City Administrator, City of Davenport, City Hall, 226 W. 4th Street, Davenport, Iowa 52801

Owner Address for Hotel: Patrick Day, c/o Dial Corporation, 11506 Nicholas Street, Omaha, NE 68154