

PH0662585

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED FEB 10 1978  
DATE ENTERED OCT 19 1978

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

May's Island Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

between 1st & 5th Aves. on May's Island

CITY, TOWN

Cedar Rapids

VICINITY OF

STATE

Iowa

CODE

COUNTY

Linn

CODE

113

CLASSIFICATION

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

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Multiple, see continuation sheet

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Linn County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

3rd Avenue Bridge

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Cedar Rapids

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Cedar Rapids is located on the Cedar River, which bisects the city into two roughly equal portions. At the point where the river flows through the central business district is a narrow island, approximately 1250 feet long. This natural feature (artificially lengthened at the upper end) is the basis for an arrangement of government buildings (city, county, federal), three of which are on the island itself, and the fourth on the northeast bank. Three concrete arched deck bridges cross the upper two-thirds of the island and serve, like mooring lines, to tie the battleship-shaped island to the riverbanks. The buildings (except, perhaps for the county jail) are executed in monumental scale and design, replete with classical features in a somewhat late (1923-33) expression of "city beautiful" planning and architecture. The principal feature is the Memorial Building (city hall) located at the extreme upper end of May's Island. The Linn County Courthouse, on the lower third of the island, faces the Memorial Building across a now rather bleak, once landscaped sward which now covers an underground parking garage. The county jail, small, plain, functional, is located behind the courthouse, toward the lower tip of May's Island. On the right bank, directly across from the Memorial Building is the Federal Building, always considered part of the complex, but whose orientation is away from the island.

(by Hunter and Hatton, Cedar Rapids)

The Memorial Building fills the whole upper end of May's Island. Its interior combines community center facilities and administrative space (including a large coliseum), used by veterans' groups, the Chamber of Commerce, and others. At the south end of this section is a seven-story office tower, whose stepped arrangement houses city government offices. The verticality of Moderne commercial design suggesting newer currents of architectural expression contrasts with the use of classical forms in decoration which were a holdover from the earlier Beaux Arts.

Three-quarters of the Memorial Building's length is occupied by the auditorium and attendant facilities. This section is four stories high, with parapet roof, narrow cornice and balustrade around the roof at the extreme north end. An arcade of high round-arched windows marks the auditorium proper. The extreme length is broken by short, 2½-story wings. The office tower, with its flanking, 3-story wings, is ponderously symbolic both in form and decoration. The principal ground-level feature is the two-story stained-glass window by Grant Wood, which on the exterior forms a "triumphal arch" below a terracotta spread eagle with shield and memorial panel. Centered in the second stage are two recessed Doric columns. Crowning the assemblage is a cenotaph on which is set a replica of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Facing the Memorial Building is the Linn County Courthouse. The first of the present May's Island structures, it is Beaux Arts in style, executed in limestone on a granite foundation, from designs by Urbana architect Joseph Royer. It consists of a main block with two short wings, all parapetted, the whole presenting a massive, earthbound appearance. Appropriate classical elements are found in the full entablature and in the protruding, 9-bay entrance porch. The latter features freestanding, fluted Ionic columns which support the entablature and parapet. The two floors of windows are separated by decorative stone panels. Additional detail is found in the stone balustrade around the terrace, and the small balconies on the first floor windows flanking the entrance pavilion. The sides and rear of the courthouse are much simpler in execution, although the cornice is carried round to the rear corners. No major exterior alterations have been made to the building, although an espalade  
see continuation sheet

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May's Island Historic District

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below the entrance staircase has been reworked. The interior features a central, three-story rotunda, with rooms opening onto corridors which ring the open area. Much of this area has been occupied by office activities.

The county jail, also by Joseph Royer, is a utilitarian structure which lacks architectural significance, but is important as it serves as a counterweight to the massive Memorial Building on the opposite end of the island. The jail is two stories high, with a T-shaped plan and protruding central pavilion on the main elevation. The raised basement is marked off with a stone stringcourse. Bricks used in construction are laid in stretcher bond, and headers are used in panels between the stories and as a frieze below the narrow cornice. Plain windows are found singly and in pairs. A modicum of decoration is offered in the balustraded cornice and frieze panel above the front entrance. Public access is gained via a small vestibule on the east side.

(by J.A. Wetmore, Treasury Dept.)

The Federal Building is located on the east bank of the river, directly across from the Memorial Building. In function and architecture, it is compatible with the island complex; however, its originally-planned orientation toward the river was reversed in execution, and it faces the CBD, rather than the Island, which gives this structure an air of being set apart psychologically as well as physically. The Federal Building is E-shaped in plan, with a parapetted hipped roof. It is three stories high, constructed of Indiana limestone, in a three-stage composition typical of Beaux Arts. Windows are recessed, with narrow 4/4 sash grouped in pairs or triplets, with single lights above stone mullions. Entrances are at northeast and southeast corners, and centered in the first story of the east (front) elevation. All have narrow cornices supported by scroll brackets. Most decorative detail is concentrated in the two-story second stage. The front features a 13-bay arcade of partially engaged, fluted Ionic columns and decorative panels below the third-story windows. On north and south, pilasters separate the five window bays which are centrally-grouped in the facades. The wide frieze is slightly decorated with small, square medallions. The third stage consists of the parapet, with groupings of balusters inset at intervals above the cornice.

The Memorial Building, Federal Building and County Courthouse are all in good condition. The jail is less so, and the county is considering its replacement. The bridges, originally built in the early decades of this century, were extensively remodelled in the 1960's. The river walls, on the island and the riverbanks, are in rather poor condition. A feasibility study is underway to consider the possibility of replacing the Memorial coliseum space with offices for the city, while at the same time retaining the external characteristics of the building as they presently are.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1923-1933

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Joseph Royer, Urbana; Hunter and Hatton, Cedar Rapids; James

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

A. Wetmore, U.S. Treasury Dept.

May's Island Historic District is principally significant as an example of creative urban planning. A natural feature -- the island in the river which bisects the CBD -- was developed to create a link, both physical and psychological, between the two parts of the city of Cedar Rapids. On the island are concentrated facilities of local and county government, which are complemented, in style and function, but the Federal building on the east bank. This fortuitous concentration of government activity contributes to a local sense of civic and commercial unity seldom found in cities bisected by rivers: another Iowa city, Waterloo, is divided by the same river, and for much of its history exhibited a fair amount of disharmony and competition between the communities on each side of the waterway.

The arrangement of buildings is a consequence of the island's shape: long and narrow. Most prominent is the Memorial Building, which anchors the north end. It is balanced by the Linn County Courthouse and jail toward the south end of the island; the jail, though architecturally unremarkable, is a crucial physical element in the balanced configuration. The fact that the fronts of the city and county buildings face one another gives the complex an extra insular quality: a 1908 plan originally proposed that buildings on the island be double-fronted, oriented not toward one another but to the river bank.

Architecturally, the Federal Building and county courthouse are straightforward examples of Beaux Arts civic design. The Memorial Building, on the other hand, combines elements of this style with the verticality of the Moderne, the whole topped with classical funerary features which advertise its purpose as a war memorial. Beyond this obvious visual symbolism, this building represents a joint effort on the part of veterans' groups, local government, and commercial and business interests, to combine in this structure a variety of functions: war memorial, city hall, and convention center.

Although the present configuration of buildings on May's Island was not realized until 1927, the river and its island were from the turn of the century the focus of civic planning. About 1900, a local attorney, T.H. Simmons, proposed the connection of May's Island to the east bank with a fill, and the erection of a municipal building on the newly-created neck of land. The integrity of the island, however, was apparently of local concern: the next suggestion, part of an urban planning study by C.M. Robinson in 1908, was that the city purchase the island and erect civic facilities thereon. The city acquired the island that same year, and began development by the building of balustraded retaining walls on both sides of the island from 2nd to 4th Avenues. A brick warehouse on the island was converted into a city hall. Concrete bridges were constructed across the river at 2nd Ave. (1906), 3rd Ave. (1911) and 1st Ave. (1914) and two more blocks of river wall built along the west bank.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Murray, Janette S., and Frederick G. Murray. The Story of Cedar Rapids. New York: Stratford House, 1950.
- Federal Writers' Project. Guide to Cedar Rapids and Northeast Iowa. Cedar Rapids: Laurance Press, 1937.
- Rall, J.F. "The City Plan of Cedar Rapids, Iowa," American Landscape Architect, February, 1930, pp. 23-27.
- SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 35 acres

UTM REFERENCES - see map dated 5.11.78 E: 15 609040 4647920

A	1,5	61,0	2,2,0	4,6	4,8	0,0,0	B	1,5	61,0	3,0,0	4,6	4,7	9,2,0	
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,5	61,0	4,8,0	4,6	4,7	5,7,0	D	1,5	61,0	3,2,0	4,6	4,7	4,6,0	
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

District is bounded on east and west by the river walls along the east and west banks of the Cedar River, and on north and south by lines drawn approximately 40 feet north and south (respectively) of the upper and lower ends of May's Island. Also included is the contiguous property bounded on the north by 1st Avenue, on the east by 1st Street, on the south by 2nd Avenue, and on the west by the Cedar River, all in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Edward Sauter M.H. Bowers

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Brown Healey Bock Division of Historic Preservation

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1035 3rd Ave. SE 26 East Market Street

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Cedar Rapids Iowa City

Iowa

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Adrian A. Anderson*

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE 1-30-78

## FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*William LeBaruch*

DATE 10/19/78

ATTEST: *William LeBaruch*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
DATE Oct 13, 1978

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Political events after WWI offered a major opportunity to further develop May's Island. In 1920, after nearly 65 years of controversy, the county seat was by public vote removed from its original location at Marion to Cedar Rapids. The previous year, Cedar Rapids deeded a portion of the island to the county, clearly in anticipation of (or to further ensure) a favorable vote. The Linn County Courthouse and jail, completed by 1925, became the first elements in the development of the "government island".

The Memorial Building, completed in 1927, combined a variety of interests so wide as to virtually guarantee its existence. As a war memorial, it fulfilled the desire of local veterans' groups for some symbol of patriotism and remembrance. City government, too, realized their plan for substantial office space of a quality higher than that of their former-warehouse facility. Business and community leaders lent support to both these aims, but were lured principally by the idea of a coliseum, which would help Cedar Rapids compete with Des Moines in the lucrative convention business.

The proposed Memorial Building received wide local press coverage during 1925 and 1926. Interestingly, the first design by architects Harry Hunter and Norman Hatton was not carried through. This initial proposal called for a traditional civic building in the Beaux Arts tradition, similar to the county courthouse. However, in comparison with the building ultimately erected, this early attempt would have been termed "insufficiently symbolic", lacking the features with which to "perpetuate...the spirit of those men who went and did not come back" (Cedar Rapids Gazette, 18 May 1925). The final plans filled this lack: Grant Wood's memorial window, which from the outside suggests a triumphal arch; and the cenotaph crowned with the replica of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, make the symbolic purpose of the structure unmistakable.

The completion, in 1933, of the Federal Building (originally a post office), rounded out the development of the May's Island Historic District as a government complex. The only further development was the addition of an underground parking garage, which, although not visible, rendered the central green space unsuitable for future landscaping efforts.

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Baughman, C.W. "Notes on Civic Center of Cedar Rapids," American Landscape Architect, February, 1930, p. 27.

Robinson, Charles Mulford. "Civic Improvement and Beautification, City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa". Cedar Rapids: The Torch Press, 1908.

Memorial Building Campaign Committee. "Questions and Answers about the combined Memorial Coliseum and City Hall", pamphlet, 1925.

"A City Plan for Cedar Rapids", published by City Plan Commission, Cedar Rapids, 1931.

Cedar Rapids Gazette, May 7, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 1925.

Fowler, Francis E. "A Short History of the Linn County Courthouse, 1855-1925", ms.

-----  
Item 4: Owner of Property

City of Cedar Rapids, City Hall, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401 ✓

Linn County, Courthouse, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401 ✓

General Services Administration (US):

Local: 101 1st St. SE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401

Regional: Region 6, 1500 East Bannister Road, Kansas City, MO 64131

*Buell*

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May's Island Historic District, Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa

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Boundary Revision:

The area included in this nomination comprises a discontinuous district made up of May's Island, its river walls, and structures located thereon (Memorial Building, Linn County Courthouse, Linn County Jail); and a portion of land on the east bank of the Cedar River (on which is located the Federal Building), bounded on the north by 1st Avenue, on the east by 1st Street, on the south by 2nd Avenue, and on the west by the Cedar River. Due to the fact that the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Avenue bridges, as well as the river walls on the east and west banks of the Cedar River, have been extensively altered since their original construction, these elements are not considered significant in terms of this nomination.

Acreage: May's Island, approximately 9½ acres  
Federal Building lot, approximately 2 acres

Revised UTM:

May's Island:

- A 15/610400 ~~4648~~<sup>4647</sup>520
- B 15/610345 4648480
- C 15/610000 4648880
- D 15/610100 4648940

Federal Building:

- A 15/610290 4648<sup>7</sup>90
- B 15/610240 4648860
- C 15/610165 4648940
- D 15/610220 4648980