

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received MAY 30 1985

date entered JUN 27 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Des Moines Saddlery Company Building

and or common Saddlery Building

2. Location

street & number 307-09-11 Court Avenue not for publication

city, town Des Moines vicinity of

state Iowa code 019 county Polk code 153

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Bruce W. Gerleman

street & number 303 Locust Street, Suite 250

city, town Des Moines vicinity of state Iowa 50309

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Recorder's Office

street & number Polk County Courthouse

city, town Des Moines vicinity of state Iowa 50309

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Des Moines, Center of Iowa, Survey of
title Historic Sites. has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date September 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records Office of Historic Preservation, Iowa State Historical Department

city, town Historical Building, E. 12th & Grand Ave., Des Moines state Iowa 50319

7. Description

Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

Check one

unaltered

altered

Check one

original site

moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Des Moines Saddlery Company Building (c. 1878, 1887, 1901, 1920) is the largest and most intact example of commercial Italianate architecture still standing in Des Moines. The structure features an outstanding cast iron front an elaborate cornice and hoodmolds on its main facade. Constructed in four phases, the building is a key structure in the city's oldest extant commercial and warehouse district.

The south-facing five story building has a rectangular plan, which measures sixty six by one hundred and thirty two feet. It is a load-bearing brick building. Footings are limestone slabs on a sandy soil base. The foundation is composed of varied sizes of limestone block, with a face brick veneer. The bearing walls themselves naturally are stepped back in thickness as the height increases, but measurements for this are not available. The interior support system consists primarily of load bearing walls between each structural bay. The exception is the fifth floor, between the west and central bays, where a row of eleven cast iron columns are used to create a single open space. The use of interior bearing walls to this extent is unusual, and reflects both the gradual development of the building as well as the apparent needs of the saddlery trade in terms of working space. The first floor was never open as would be common for a retail outlet, but rather contained the same long narrow rectangular plan.

The easternmost storefront has a double door entrance on the right hand side, the central storefront, a similar entrance, not recessed, on the left hand side, and the westernmost storefront, a single door entrance on the right hand side. Structural flooring is of heavy timber, utilizing twenty-two foot long joists which measure 2" x 12" in section. Floor coverings are 2" hardwood tongue and grove. An identical ceiling is found in the front of the eastern bay, but all other ceilings are simply exposed joists. The south facade, facing Court Avenue, consists of three structural bays, each of which has three radius corner double hung windows per floor, with a series of three cast iron framed storefronts below. Each storefront bay consists of a side entrance and two large windows with transoms. Each opening has a Tudor-like arch at the transom top level. Each bay is defined by a fluted cast iron pilaster with bracketted cap. Fluted cast iron columns separate each window and door. A stone watertable defines the front and supports a raised and recessed entryway. A first floor cornice line provides signage space above each bay.

Precast concrete window hoods, with a flattened arched form, and gabled keystone, cap each of the main windows. Concrete sills are at each floorlevel incorporated into a projecting string course, defining each floor. Similarly, the brackets of each window hood spring stone are in line with another concrete string course which runs across each floor just below the window top level. Brick pilasters separate the bays. A massive pressed tin cornice, with main brackets at each end and between each bay, and smaller scrolled brackets within each bay, surmounts the facade with a broad overhang.

The building evolved in four phases, and to some extent the present day building visually reflects that growth. Two slightly different colors of brick (purplish brown on the facade, redish brown soft brick on the side walls) distinguish the earliest portion of the building from the later ones. Three brick sizes reflect this same growth. The facade is uniformly composed of bricks which measure 2 1/4 by 8 1/2 inches with consistantly narrow 1/8" mortar joints. Sidewalls are laid with 2 1/2" by 8" brick, with mortar joints which range from 3/8" through 3/4" inches in width, while the rear or north wall uses an eight inch long brick and the identical range of mortar joint sizes. In short, a conscious attempt was made to produce a finely worked facade with narrow mortar joints. Throughout the development of the building

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	xx architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater
xx 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
___ 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates 1878, 1887, 1901, 1920 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Des Moines Saddlery Company Building (c. 1878, 1887, 1901, 1920) is the largest and most intact example of commercial Italianate architecture still standing in Des Moines. The structure features an outstanding cast iron front an elaborate cornice and hoodmolds on its main facade. Constructed in four phases, the building is a key structure in the city's oldest extant commercial and warehouse district.

Jacob Rubelmann, of J. Rubelman & Company, dealer in wholesale harness and saddlery products, organized this firm in Des Moines in 1878, and employed his two sons. The original building, a single bay, four story warehouse and factory, probably dates from 1878. Little is known about this firm. It was not in existence in time for the 1878 city directory, but it was one of four saddlery firms which clustered for some fifty years within a two block area on Walnut and Court. In early 1886, J. Rubelman & Co. advertised itself as "Wholesale manufacturers of custom made light and heavy harness collars and saddlery." A notice which appeared in the same issue described the firm.

"Among the prominent wholesale houses is that of Rubelman & Co. of 309 Court Ave. They are the leading manufacturer of custom made light and heavy harness, collars and saddlery. In the manufacture of their harness they use only J. G. Hoffman & Son's celebrated Star Oak leather, which has the reputation for being the best in the market. All goods sold by this firm are first-class in every particular -the harness being manufactured under personal supervision - the one order filled by them is sure to make lasting friends and customers.

The firm incorporated as the Des Moines Saddlery and Hardware Company on 21 January 1887, with William E. Hoffman, president, (1826-1902), Peter G. Hoffman, secretary (1865-1916), and Anna C. Hoffman as incorporators. It is not known whether the second phase of building expansion pre or post-dated this incorporation, but it is probable that it followed this recapitalization.

The saddlery business was clearly important to Des Moines and this firm emerged over time as the most significant of a number of similar firms. In 1888 they boasted seventy-five employees, and by 1909, that number had increased to ninety. A 1911 advertisement pictured three buildings being operated by the firm, including an adjacent storefront to the north, and a warehouse. An 1888 the firm manufactured harness, collars and saddles, leather fly nets and conducted a jobbing trade in leather, saddlery hardware, horse clothing, whips, etc. The occupied the west two thirds of their building (this implies that the eastern bay was built for rental purposes as part of the original plan), using the central bay for storage rooms. The factory occupied the fourth floor. Offices and salesrooms filled the ground floor. Concerning their products, a descriptive account stated as follows;

"They turn out on the average ten dozen collars per week...The machinery is all of the latest pattern and design, constructed of the best material by the highest grade of skilled labor. The harness made are strong and very durable, adapted to all kinds of wear. Special attention is given to fine harness, which has become bery popular among harness makers, liverymen, and people of wealth. This company manufacture no less than fifty-five different grades of harness-fine, medium and heavy-which are adapted to meet every possible requirement of service. Saddles are made in the latest style of the most durable leather, and give general

9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet 9-2

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Des Moines Southeast

Quadrangle scale 1/24,000

UTM References

A

1	5	4	4	8	2	4	0	4	6	0	3	7	1	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D

Zone				Easting				Northing						

E

Zone				Easting				Northing						

F

Zone				Easting				Northing						

G

Zone				Easting				Northing						

H

Zone				Easting				Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 7 of Block 24, Original Town of Fort Des Moines, now included in the City of Des Moines. Includes only subject building.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator

Office of Historic Preservation

organization Iowa State Historical Department

date 30 April 1985

street & number E. 12th & Grand Ave.

telephone 515-281-4137

city or town Des Moines

state Iowa 50319

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

Ronell G. Sike

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

date May 9, 1985

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Eleanor Byers
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 6-27-85

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

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the same or similar brick were employed, and more importantly, the same window hoods and facade design were duplicated. The cornice appears to have simply been raised as stories were added, at least in the final two phases of expansion.

An explanation of this growth will best explain the present day appearance of the building. The first phase of construction, c. 1878, involved the construction of a four story building with a twenty-two foot width, alongside the alley which borders the present property to the west. At some time, prior to 1884, what is possibly a rear addition was added, of equal height (50') (there is no break in the brick work to indicate an addition). The building had full west side fenestration, ten windows per floor beginning at the second floor level (still extant). Openings which date from this first building, have segmental brick arches. At least three doors were placed in the west wall center and rear. The north wall had a centered door with flanking side windows on the ground floor, and three windows per floor above. Only the rearmost three bays on the east wall had windows, on all levels, implying that expansion was in the mind of the builder. Stairs were alongside the east rear center wall on either side of an elevator. A raked roof of tin and a cornice completed the picture. The upper level of this first installment remains visible on three sides due to the use of a darker brick.

Phase two, extant by 1888, involved the addition of two structural bays, four stories in height to the east. It is probable that the easternmost storefront was constructed for rental purposes, and was never functionally linked with the overall building. The rear walls of this addition did not reach the alley, and in fact, left uncovered the three bays of windows allowed for on the east side of the original building. Full height interior load bearing walls were constructed. Elevators were provided in the rear of each bay. The easternmost bay provided a storefront, and an interior side stair led upstairs. Iron shutters covered rear windows during non-business hours. A single story metal roofed building stood in the rear of the lot. Floor heights within the four story building were somewhat irregular, the basement had a 10'6" clearance, the main floor 16'1 1/2", and the floors above some variant of a 13 foot clearance.

By 1901, phase three was in place and consisted of the addition of a fifth floor above the two westernmost bays. An eleven foot high floor with open interior plan, supported by cast iron columns, was the result. The pre-existing cornice was apparently simply replaced above the addition. It is probable that the infilling of the open rear of the four story core was also accomplished at this time. The rear windows and doors of this phase also featured the semi-elliptical brick arches and repeated the same fenestration pattern. A full band of eleven windows on the east wall of the five story part of the building provided light for the upper floor. The power plant was in the rear center of the building with the main flue on the northeast corner of the rear center bay wall.

The final phase of growth post dated 1905 and pre-dated 1920 and involved the addition of a final fifth floor component to the easternmost bay. The east side wall had been totally devoid of fenestration up to this point, a remarkable fact considering the fact that single story adjoining structures on that side had been the rule since the construction of the first phase of the Saddlery building. The final construction provided for four windows (again with segmental brick arch caps) amidships on the fifth floor. An elevator housing projected to the rear of that short band of windows. By 1920 an alley catwalk connected the building to another building to the immediate north. Sometime after the cessation of building, some window alterations took place on the west and rear walls. These are identified by their

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their flat headings and include an interior row of ground level windows along the alley side, the provision of two rear alley doors (one an elevator door in the rear of the west bay) and the recasting of second and third floor windows on the front two bays of the west wall. Fire escapes have come and gone. The 1905 photo of the building shows a full height straight fire escape ladder with landings on the east end of the middle bay (remarkably still extant). An identical simple system survives in the eight bay on the west sidewall. A more substantial fireplace, on the northwest corner of the building does not appear on any Sanborn maps.

The existing building retains two elevators, one towards the front of the central bay, on the west wall, and a main elevator in the northeast corner of the west bay. Three stairways are extant, a main stairway, situated in front of the secondary elevator in the middle bay, and one which connects only the lower two floors, in the center of the east wall of the central bay. A c. 1920's stairway is in the front of the eastern bay. While the cast iron storefront is intact, it too has been rearranged over time at least on the eastern most bay. A 1916 photograph indicates that at time a centered entrance preceded the present day off-center entrance. Apparently the cast iron components were simply reshuffled to meet changing needs. The proposed renovation envisions redevelopment for office and commercial use, and the city skywalk system would access at the northwest second floor level.

In terms of local context, the Des Moines Saddlery Company Building is one of handful of surviving 19th Century warehouse/factory edifices which survive, unchanged, along West Court Avenue. This district of light industry, jobbing and warehousing developed in the third quarter of that century along the southern edge of the west side Des Moines downtown. Court Avenue itself was a major east-west thoroughfare, measuring 99 feet across, which, along with Walnut Street to the immediate north, provided the focal point for economic development during this period. Visually speaking, this growth was somewhat scattered, small scale buildings persisting even to this day alongside their massive neighbors. The Saddlery Building is a case in point. Commercial development by 1884 was, on its immediate quarter block, lagging. The Saddlery in fact was the first brick building on its site, replacing B. F. Allen's frame boarding house. The remainder of Lot 7, on which this building stands, remained vacant until filled by the expansion of the Saddlery. Single and two story small frame and finally brick buildings, to the immediate east butted against the nearly windowless east wall up to the present day. Insurance companies and newspapers found housing within a block of the subject property and remained through 1900. Solid three and four story brick development would not be realized until the early 1890s on the immediate block.

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C. 1905 View to West on Court Avenue. Saddlery Company Building is to right hand side. Note lack of fifth floor on easternmost bay and lack of fifth

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satisfaction. The assortment of leather, whips, blankets, etc., is exceptionally fine. The fly nets are among the best known to the trade, and meet with a ready sale. The business has a large patronage in this vicinity, and employs several traveling men who carry the trade through Iowa, Nebraska, Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri and Kansas. All raw material is procured from leading tanneries in the East, whose established reputation is a guarantee of the superior quality of their leather. Notwithstanding the small yield of crops throughout Iowa during the past few years as a result of dry weather, the business done is greater by fifty per cent than at this time last year.¹²

By 1901, the factory area was on the fifth floor and a wholesale boots, shoes, and rubbers firm was at 307 Court. Albert H. Mabis is listed as secretary-treasurer for the Saddlery Company during the early and mid 1890's, but J. G. Hoffman remains as president as late as 1902. By 1920 the firm had constructed a three story brick building at 214 W. Third, just north across the alley, connected same by a catwalk, and located their horse collar department therein. Shipping occupied the first floor west, and offices of the first floor center of the Saddlery building. The building by this time boasted a "Grinnell Automatic Sprinkler" system throughout, and a pressurized water tank on the fifth floor held 4,500 gallons of water as part of that system. The storefront at 307 Court housed Des Moines Rubber Company as early as 1908, and through 1912. In 1916 the Model Stove Company was there, and by 1921 shared space with Home Stove and Buffalo Forge Companies. Kaplan Hat Company was present by 1923 and occupied the building through 1985. The Des Moines Saddlery Company is last listed in its building in 1933. By 1943, the west third of the building housed a printing firm on the second floor, the middle third a glove factory on the second floor, Kaplan Hat Manufacturing Company occupied 307 Court, and storefronts apparently filled the ground levels of 309 and 311 Court. By 1957 the glove factory filled 309-11 Court. Kaplan Hat Manufacturing Company had their factory in the rear of the fifth floor and the catwalk connection to 214 W. 3rd was gone and the entrance to same, at the rear of 311 Court sealed.

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FOOTNOTES:

¹ Iowa State Register, 13 March 1886.

² The Leading Industries of Des Moines, Iowa; A Review of Its Banking, Commercial, Real Estate and Manufacturing Interests. Des Moines: People's Publishing & Advertising Company, 1888, pp. 152-3.

SOURCES:

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