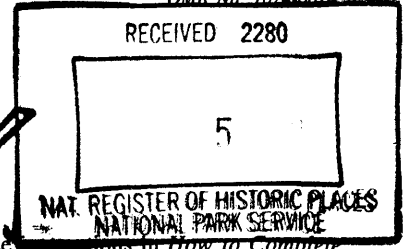


1102

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

COPY



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

1. Name of Property

historic name TAFT-WEST WAREHOUSE

other names/site number C. C. Taft Company Building; Plumb Supply Company; Ben's Furniture Warehouse; Nacho Mamma's

2. Location

street & number 216-222 Court Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Des Moines N/A vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Polk code 153 zip code 50309

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Donell J. Sova, Deputy SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

July 26, 2006
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)

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

12/20/06
Date of Action

Taft-West Warehouse
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many lines as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one line)

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/warehouse

COMMERCE/TRADE/professional
VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Commercial Style
MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

foundation Brick
walls Brick
roof Asphalt
other Stone

Narrative Description

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

Taft-West Warehouse
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1923-1956

Significant Dates

1923

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch

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

9. Major Bibliography References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

previous determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Record

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by American Buildings Survey

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historical Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository

Taft-West Warehouse
Name of Property

Polk County, Iowa
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 1 5 | 4 4 82 0 0 | 4 6 0 3 6 8 5 |

Zone Easting Northing

2 | | | |

Zone Easting Northing

3 | | | |

Zone Easting Northing

4 | | | |

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title William C. Page, Public Historian; Joanne R. Walroth, Project Associate

organization Under contract with Gateway Real Estate date February 9, 2006

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

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

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

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

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

Property Owner

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

name Court Center, L.L.C.

street & number Post Office Box 1099 telephone 515-598-9400

city or town Ames state Iowa zip code 50014

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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Section number 7

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CFN-259-1116

Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Taft-West Warehouse is located on the southeast corner of Court Avenue and 3rd Street, an important intersection in the area. The block directly abuts the public rights-of-way on the north and on the west. Parking lots are situated to the east and to the south. The Seth Richards Commercial Block (NRHP) is situated directly across 3rd Street at 300-310 Court Avenue, and the Des Moines Saddlery Company Building (NRHP) is situated across the street nearby at 307-311 Court Avenue.

SITE

Court Avenue is a thoroughfare in downtown Des Moines, running east from the public square, where the Polk County Courthouse is situated, to the Des Moines River. Originally, the street was called West Court Avenue. East Court Avenue (still called by that name to distinguish it) runs from the river to the eastern reaches of the city. The western stretch of Court Avenue formed the principal retail and financial corridor of Des Moines during the city's early years. The street was located one block north of the railroad lines into the city. As Des Moines grew in population during the mid- and late 19th century, the city's retail and financial center moved to the north and west of Court Avenue. At the same time, the city's burgeoning wholesale and light industrial manufacturing moved in to take their place.

By 1884, many buildings along Court Avenue housed wholesale establishments, including liquors, cigars and tobacco, notions, millinery, boots and shoes, hardware, drugs, oils, gasification supplies, and glasses. Retail establishments for agricultural implements and wagons, plumbing, carriages and plows, pipe fittings, and brass goods also flourished. (Sanborn 1884) Establishments south of Court Avenue and the railroad lines tended to concentrate on heavier goods, such as lumber, agricultural equipment, and storage transfer. Their architecture tended to reflect these purposes. Establishments along Court Avenue resembled commercial buildings, while those to the south of the tracks looked more like warehouses.

Following World War II, the decline of the American railroad systems and the rise of the motorized trucking industry changed wholesaling operations in Des Moines. With proximity to the railroad lines no longer a prerequisite, wholesale establishments gravitated to locations more convenient to the highways and away from the congested downtown. Court Avenue declined as Des Moines' wholesale district and became a rendezvous for the demimonde.

Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, a combination of factors—including low rental costs, the area's architectural and historical ambiance, and its adjacent location to downtown—attracted a new breed of entertainment-oriented businesses. In 1983 the Community Development Department of the City of Des Moines surveyed the Court Avenue area to assess the area's potential for adaptive reuse. From then on, the area grew in popularity for restaurants, pubs, events, and as a place to see and be seen.

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

Each year now, on Saturdays from May to October, a farmers market is held along Court Avenue, and scores of new rental and condominium units recently have arisen.

BACKGROUND

The Taft-West Warehouse is a later generation improvement on its site. An analysis of this site's earlier improvements is essential to the understanding of the building, because the warehouse employed parts of an earlier building in its construction.

Earlier On-Site Improvements

The appearance of earlier improvements on this site is presently unknown. By 1884, however, several structures stood on it. (See Continuation Sheet 7-8.) One, located at 216-218 Court Avenue, was a 2-story commercial block. Another structure stood at 220-222 Court Avenue. This was a 3-story edifice, possibly a commercial block but perhaps two commercial buildings. Another structure, located at 127-129 3rd Street, might have been connected with the 216-218 block. Another structure stood at 125 3rd Street.

(By way of definition, a "commercial room" is a Victorian phrase used to define a multi-story edifice with one long and narrow room on the first floor. A "commercial block" is a Victorian phrase used to define a multi-story edifice of unified facade design possessing two or more adjacent commercial rooms. The upper floors of commercial buildings and commercial rooms have various floorplans.)

The block at 216-218 was two stories in height. Its Court Avenue frontage measured about 42 feet. Iron posts provided structural support for its upper floor and divided the floor plan into two rooms open to one another. In 1884, a carriage and agricultural implement business occupied the block. (Sanborn 1884) By 1899 (if not before) a branch office of Deere & Co., Moline, Illinois, occupied it. (City Directory 1899: 851) By 1901, McCormick Farm Implements had taken over its occupancy. (See Continuation Sheet 7-10.)

The block at 220-222 was three stories in height. Its Court Avenue frontage measured about 38 feet. A brick, load-bearing wall supported its upper floors and divided the first floor into two separate rooms. In 1884, a drug store occupied the room on the corner, and a saloon occupied the room adjacent to it on the east. (Sanborn 1884)

The building at 127-129 3rd Street was three stories in height. Its 3rd Street frontage measured about 39 feet. Iron posts ran down the middle of the building and provided structural support for its upper floors. In 1884, a carriage and agricultural implement business occupied the first floor, likely the same business as at 216-218 Court Avenue. Caledonian Hall, a Celtic social organization, occupied space on the upper floor of the 125 and 127-129 properties.

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

Sometime between 1891 and 1901, the 2-story block at 216-218 Court Avenue was enlarged by the construction of a third floor. This is evident on Sanborn maps. (Compare Continuation Sheets 7-9 and 7-10.)

Site Redevelopment

In 1922, the C. C. Taft Company razed most of these improvements and erected the present commercial block on the site. Its footprint corresponded almost exactly with the earlier improvements on this site. This new construction retained the existing east wall of the 216-218 Court Avenue block and used it as the new building's east wall. This wall is constructed of soft, Victorian brick. Remnants of a flue and chimney for a wood- or coal-burning stove are visible on the east wall of the third floor near the south end and ceiling.

EXTERIOR

Completed late in 1923, the Taft-West Warehouse is a large, 3-story, brick structure. The edifice rests on a brick foundation, features solid masonry and load-bearing walls, and is covered with a flat roof of built-up composition. The foundation under the east wall is stone. The footprint of the building measures 88 x 133 feet, the longer measurement facing east and west. The north and west elevations of the block form its principal facades.

The north facade features four bays. These bays are defined by storefront and upper story fenestration, inset slightly from the face of the facade. The storefront windows have been replaced with contemporary, fixed, metal frame windows and with Gothic-arched, colored glass windows recycled from a church. Each of the upper floors features a series of four 1/1 double-hung sash windows in each of the four bays. (The four windows on the second floor of the west bay are now covered.) Inset panels of decorative brickwork are situated between the second and third floor windows. Brick pilasters separate each of these windows and run from the bottom of the second floor to the top of the third floor. Tile coping caps a parapet, which surmounts the north elevation. The parapet is stepped in two places, one above the east bay and one above the west bay. Decorative cast concrete plaques are situated directly below these steps. These plaques feature shields impressed with a stylized monogram of the C. C. Taft Company flanked by small, square panels. Fixed, canvas awnings are situated above each of the storefront windows.

The face brick employed on the north and west facades of this building features striated finish and tapestry colors, including red, brown, purple-red, and orange. A detailed description of these materials and their design effect is given in Section 8 in the analysis of the building's architectural significance.

The architectural design of the west elevation conforms to that of the north elevation, except that the west elevation features eight bays instead of four bays and each of these bays features three instead of four windows. (The south bay has four.) The three storefront windows on the north end of the west elevation have been covered with wood siding. Tri-fold, wooden doors are hidden behind these

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

materials in two of these bays. The other storefront windows have been replaced with contemporary, glass and metal windows and transoms. First floor entrances to the building are situated in three bays. They bear the addresses of 123, 111, and 109 3rd Street. (See Continuation Sheet 7-13.) Although the entrances at these locations are original, their glass and metal doors and surrounds are contemporary. Fixed canvas awnings are situated above two of the storefront windows. A brick chimney rises flush from the face of the west elevation between the two northern bays.

The south elevation of the block is of common brick, orange-red in color, and laid in common bond. Fenestration is irregularly placed. Of its nine windows, six feature commercial style, metal windows with wire glass panes. One of the windows is a 2/2 double-hung sash. One window opening has been infilled with brick. One has been filled with opaque glass block with a small, clear glass pane. Three door openings have also been infilled with brick. The two on the upper floors likely accessed a nonextant fire escape. Six small, brick caps surmount the parapet, which tops the south elevation.

The east elevation of the building is of common brick, orange in color, and laid in common bond. The east elevation features no windows because it served as a party wall with a nonextant block at 212-214 Court Avenue, a Victorian block, which collapsed and was razed in 1970. (Raabe: 77) Plaster rectangles are visible on the second floor of the east elevation and formed interior surfaces of the nonextant structure. Three door openings also are visible, two on the second floor and one on the third floor. Now closed with masonry, these openings provided accesses between the upper floors of the 212-214 block and the 216-222 block. Three door openings stand on the first floor of the east elevation. The northern two provide access from the building to a parking lot and a patio. The third is now infilled with brick.

Two disasters have damaged this commercial block, but this damage was quickly repaired. On December 10, 1956, a fire destroyed its roof and damaged its second and third floors. (See Continuation Sheets 7-17 and 7-18.) The caption of a newspaper photograph of this fire read:

Flames burst through roof of warehouse building at Third street and Court avenue Monday night at height of spectacular fire that badly damaged top two floors. (*The Des Moines Register*, December 11, 1956)

The roof of the building was completely replaced, and the interior damage to the third floor was repaired, including the installation of metal columns, metal floor joists, new elevator housing, and combination, 1/1 double-hung metal windows. The front section of the second floor was substantially remodeled with the installation of office cubicles. A staircase was built in the northwest corner of the building from the first to the third floors. A fixed canopy, which was situated above the first floor on the north and west elevations of the building, survived the fire but was subsequently removed.

Some damage also occurred to the building during the Great Flood of 1993 in Des Moines. On July 11th, floodwaters from the Raccoon River and the Des Moines River crested at the same time. Flooding resulted in downtown Des Moines, particularly at the confluence of the two rivers, and covered Court Avenue. During this time, water penetrated the basement of the Taft-West Warehouse. This water

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

damage was relatively minor, confined to the basement and first floor, and quickly remedied. The damage to the business climate of Court Avenue suffered more, as the flood curtailed business operations for some time, and customers found other venues for dining and entertainment.

INTERIOR

The first floor of the Taft-West Warehouse is divided into three units—a room at the front of the building, accessed by a door at 222 Court Avenue; a middle room, accessed by a door at 109 South 3rd Street; and a rear room, accessed by a door at 111 South 3rd Street. The 109 unit is sometimes referred to today as the “Court III Building” and the 111 unit as the “Court IV Building.” Both are nonhistoric names. The entire building possesses a gross area of 35,112 square feet.

The front room was remodeled in 1981 and presently features many partitions, which divide the space into a vestibule, dining rooms, kitchens, freezer, cooler, and rest rooms. (See Continuation Sheet 7-13.) Originally, this space was probably one open area. A staircase is situated near the entrance at 222 Court Avenue and leads to the upper floors. The 109 3rd Street entry provides a hallway to access the building’s two elevators and a staircase to the upper floors, as well as an entrance to the rear room. The rear room stretches from 3rd Street to the east elevation of the building. A series of modern partitions has subdivided this space into a reception room and several offices. The law offices of William J. Trout presently occupy this space.

The second floor interior is presently divided into two areas—north and south. A series of modern partitions divide the north area into offices, some large and some small. One section of the north area has a recessed floor, a modern alteration. The south area is completely open, except for a shaft located near the middle of the area. (See Continuation Sheet 7-14.) This shaft features two freight elevators and a steel, spiral staircase. Metal fire doors close off the staircase from the second floor room. The walls on this floor are unfinished with exposed brick painted white. The floors on the second floor are of soft wood.

The third floor interior consists of one large room completely open, except for the elevator and staircase shaft noted above. (See Continuation Sheet 7-15.) The walls on this floor are unfinished with exposed brick painted white. The residual traces of a flue opening and a chimney can be seen on the east wall near its south corner and call attention to the older structure on this site. The floors on the third floor are of soft wood. Following the 1956 fire, the roof of the Taft-West Warehouse was rebuilt using a modern steel column and floor joist system. These structural elements retain their original gray-paint finishes. Also following the fire, all of the original windows on the north and west elevations of the third floor were replaced with metal combination, 1/1 double-hung sash.

The basement remains unfinished with an area of 11,704 square feet. The basement features brick walls, a concrete floor, and a ceiling with exposed floor joists. At one time, portions of the basement extended out under the public right-of-way on the north and west elevations. Concrete block now infill the openings between the basement and these areas. Portions of the south wall are clad with cork

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

paneling, installed to promote a cool environment for the fresh produce stored there during the building's service as a wholesale house for fruits and vegetables.

PATIO AND PARKING LOT

A concrete patio, constructed in 1988, is situated on the east elevation of the building near its northeast corner. Measuring about 40 x 40 feet, this patio abuts the warehouse and is covered with a canvas canopy. Five pole lamps with five fixtures each illuminate the patio. A wood fence surrounds the patio on the south and east, and a metal fence separates the patio from the public right-of-way on the north. The patio can be accessed by the pedestrian walk on the north side of the building and by a door in the building's east elevation.

A metal railing is situated along the north elevation of the building and separates it from the public pedestrian walk. This space has a depth of about seven feet and is furnished with metal tables and chairs. When the Taft-West Warehouse served as a restaurant in the 1980s and 1990s, customers used the patio and the fenced portion of the pedestrian walk for dining during clement weather.

A parking lot is on the east side of the Taft-West Warehouse on the site of 212-214 Court Avenue. This parking lot possesses 4,310 square feet and is surfaced with PVA/asphalt.

INTEGRITY AND PRESENT CONDITION

The Taft-West Warehouse possesses excellent integrity and is in excellent condition. The building is located on its original site with its architectural design unimpaired except for the repairs to the third floor, as noted above. The building's setting has also been preserved with Court Avenue still recognizable as a wholesaling center. Workmanship, an important aspect of this building's integrity because of its brickwork, has suffered no damage to its integrity. The property's feeling and association with its significant historic events also remain intact. Those individuals involved in these events would immediately recognize the building as it appears today.

The foundation is solid with no evidence of settling. The exterior and interior load-bearing walls show no sign of deterioration. The exterior walls of the building retain their original surfaces intact. While it is true that the 1956 fire badly damaged the roof of the building, this damage was quickly repaired. The damage to the third floor was not extensive, given the fact that it was one large, open warehouse space without partition walls or finished surfaces. Also following the fire, all of the windows on the north and west elevations of the third floor were replaced with combination aluminum windows. While these windows are unattractive, their 1/1 double-hung configuration matches that of the original wood windows. These replacement windows are also not readily visible from the street because of their third story location. Although the present storefront features cover-up materials over its original transoms and storefront window openings, the transoms appear to remain intact behind the cover-up materials. The piers, which define the storefront windows, also remain intact.

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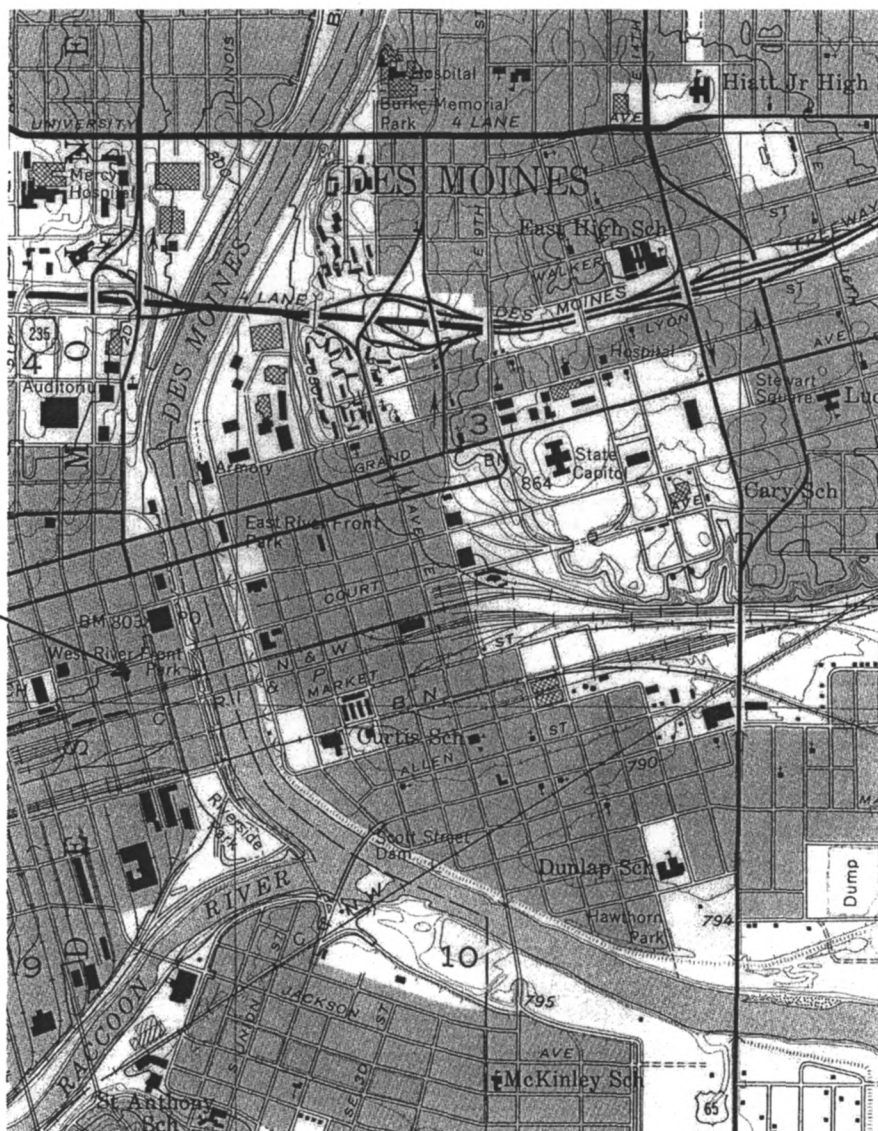
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

SITE MAP

ARROW LOCATES PROPERTY



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



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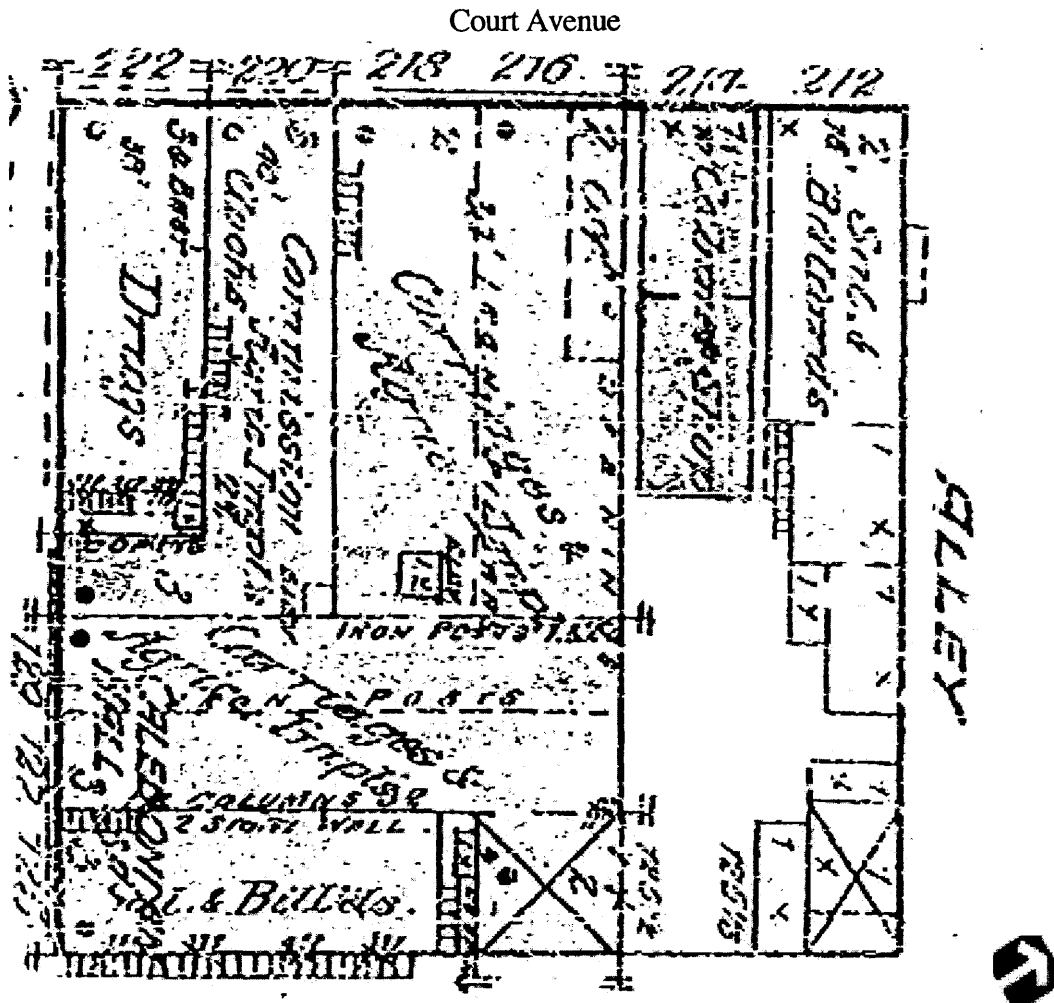
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

1884 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

PREVIOUS IMPROVEMENTS ON SITE



The C. C. Taft Company Commercial Block replaced the structures at 216-222 Court Avenue and 129, 127, and 125 South 3rd Street. The footprint of the new block conformed to that of these earlier structures.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Des Moines, 1884.

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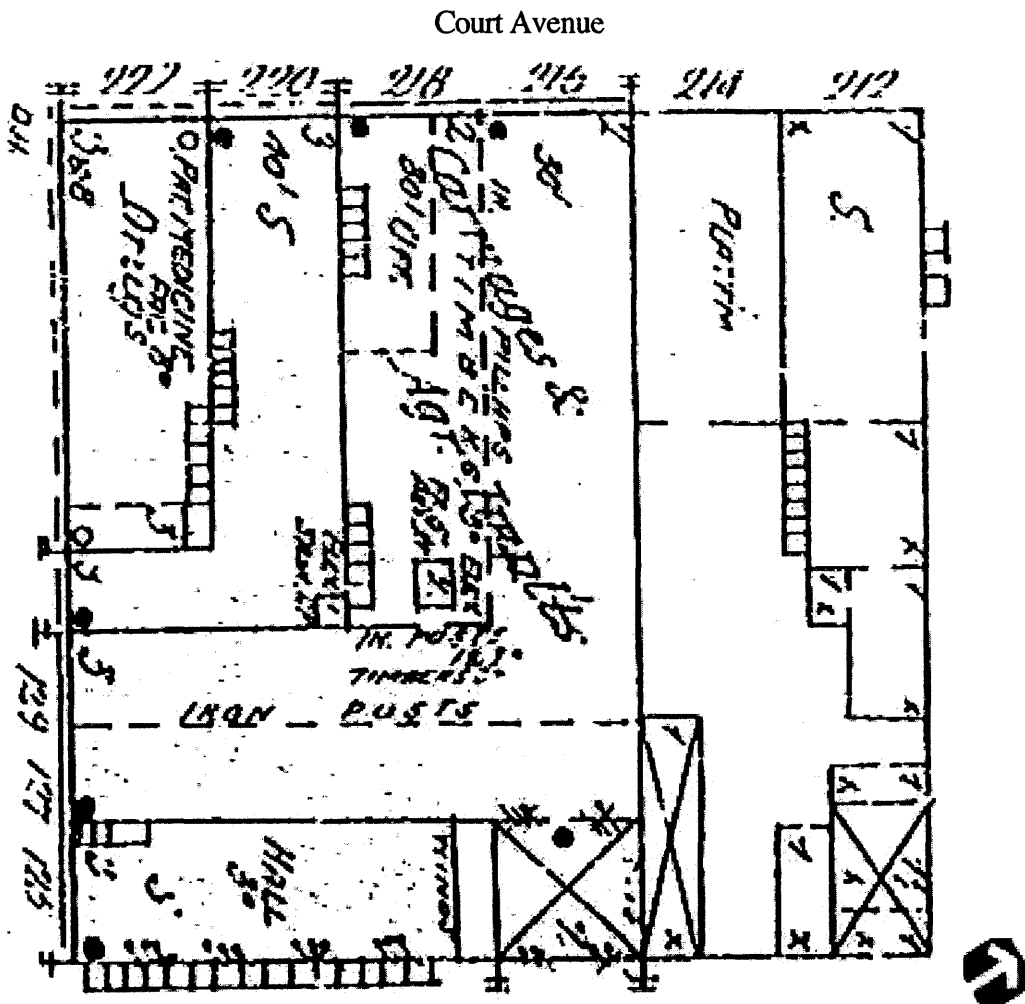
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

1891 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

PREVIOUS IMPROVEMENTS ON SITE



Since 1884, a new block has been erected at 212-214 Court Avenue and increased the density of the area.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Des Moines, 1891.

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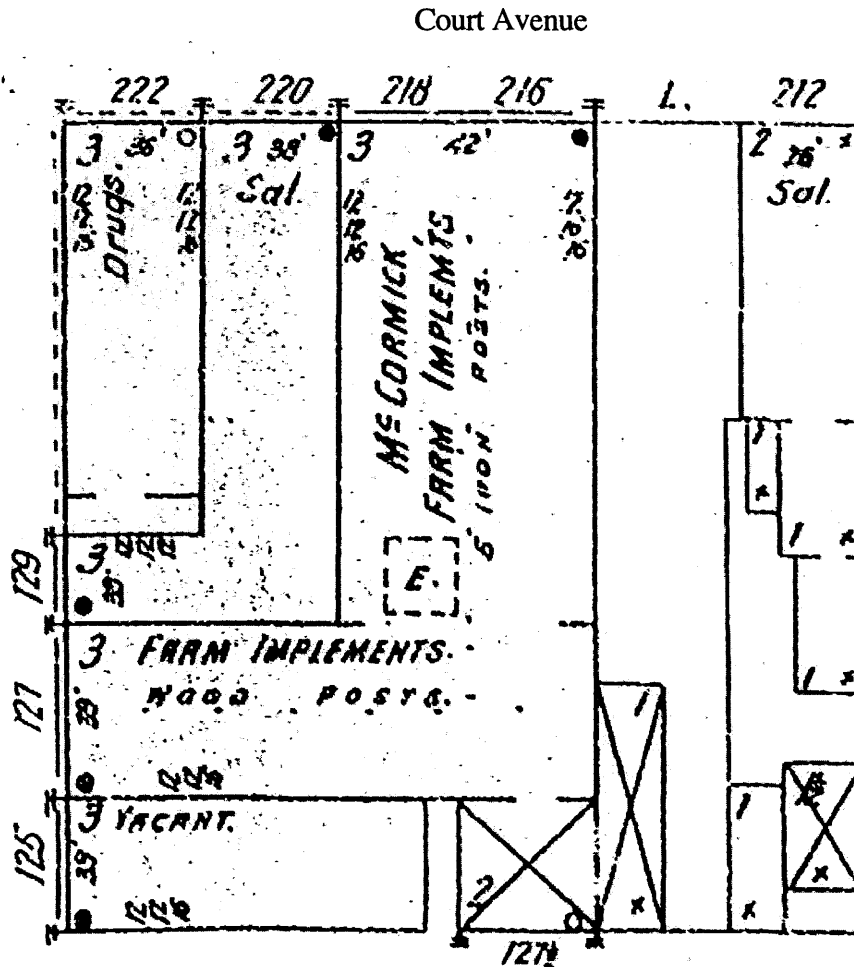
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

1901 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

PREVIOUS IMPROVEMENTS ON SITE



This map shows the previous improvements on the site, the internal link between the 216-218 Court Avenue block and the 127 3rd Street building (left).

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Des Moines, 1901, p. 1.

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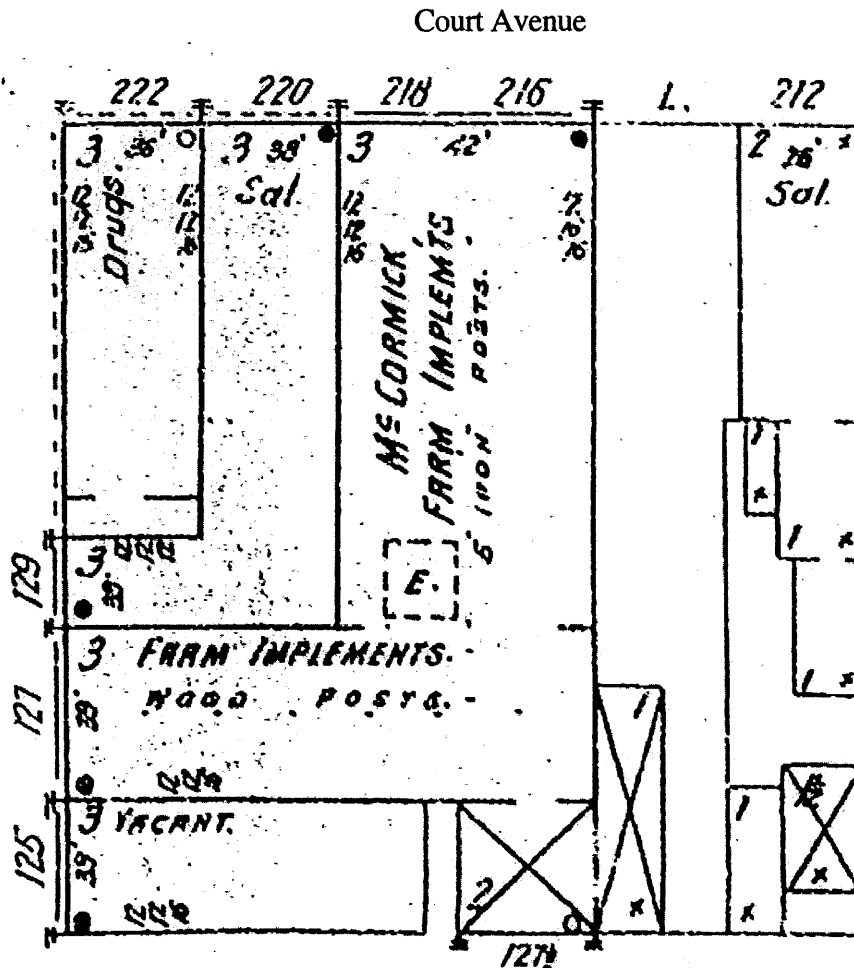
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

1920 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

PREVIOUS IMPROVEMENTS ON SITE



This map shows the previous improvements on the site at 216-222 Court Avenue and the internal link between 216-218 Court Avenue and the room then numbered 127 3rd Street (left). The parcel to the east of 216-222 Court is mostly unimproved.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Des Moines, 1920.

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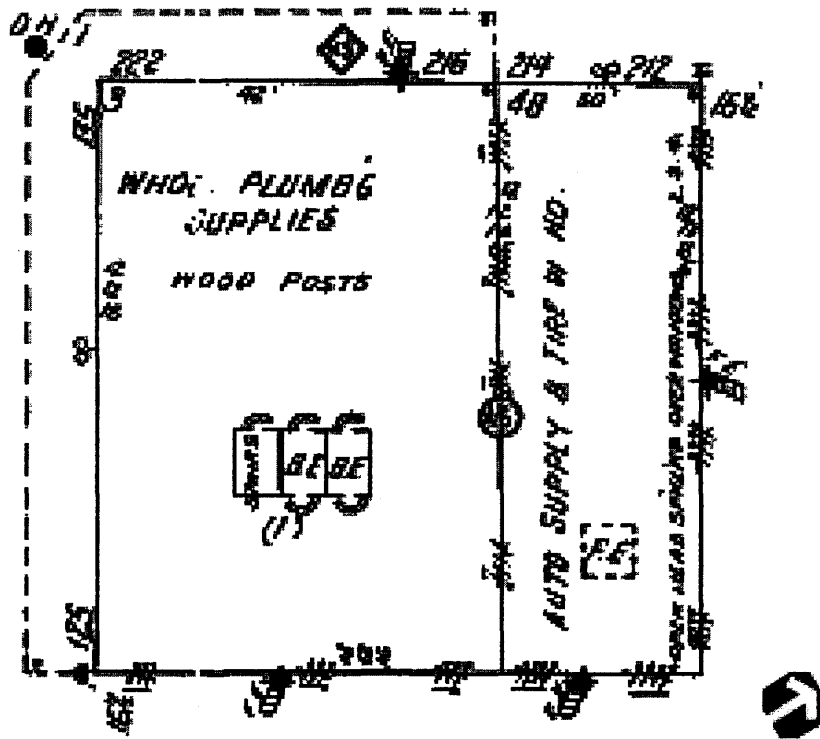
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

1957 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

PRESENT WAREHOUSE



This map, compared with the 1920 map (above) shows how the footprint of the Taft-West Warehouse (216-222 Court Avenue) corresponded with that of earlier structures on the site. The dashed line on the north and west elevations outline the nonextant canopy. The party wall between the Taft-West Warehouse and the building at 212-214 Court Avenue remains extant, although the latter, 4-story building was razed some years ago.

Source: Sanborn Map Company, Des Moines, 1920 Republished 1957, Vol. 1a, p. 72a.

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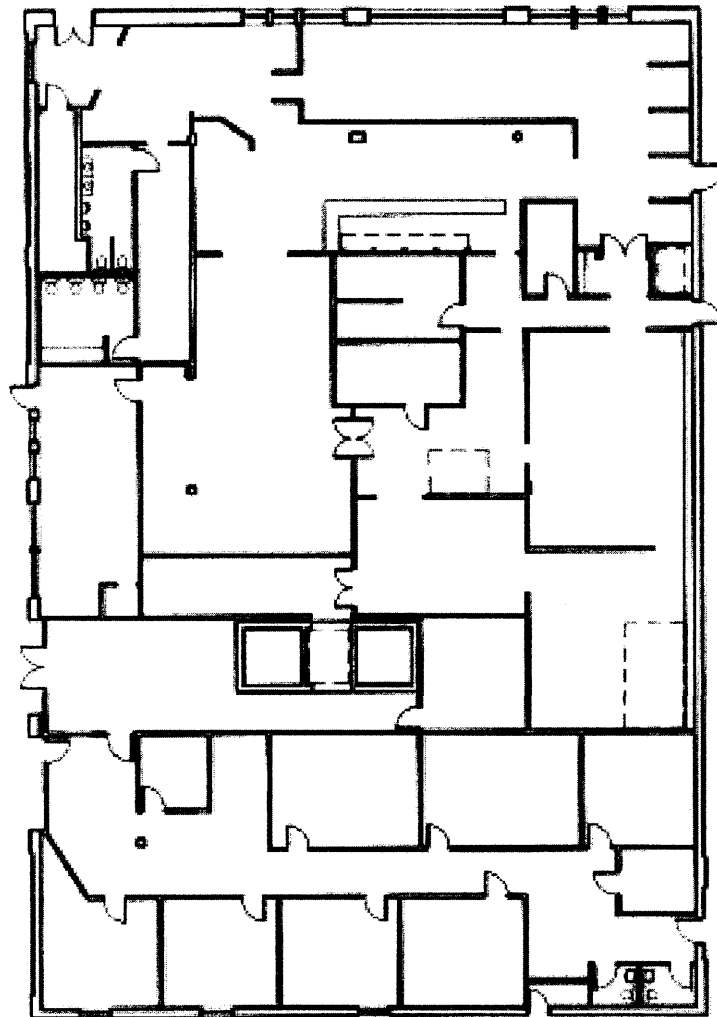
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

2005



Scale: 1/16 inch = 1 inch.

Sketch: G. W. Wattier Architecture, Inc., 2005.



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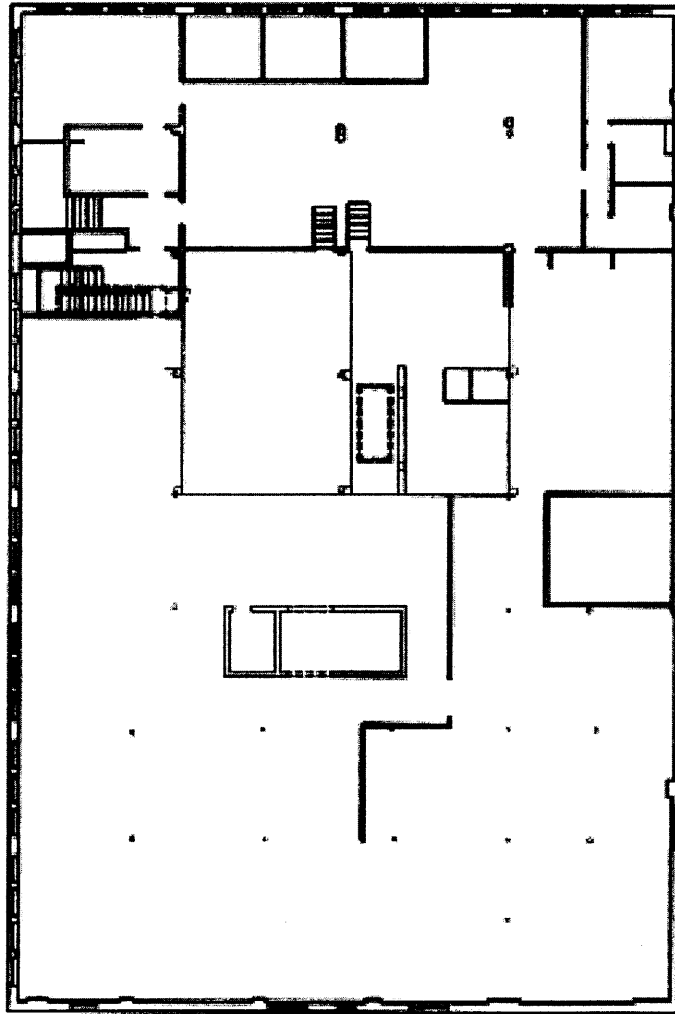
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

2005



Scale: 1/16 inch = 1 inch.

Sketch: G. W. Wattier Architecture, Inc., 2005.



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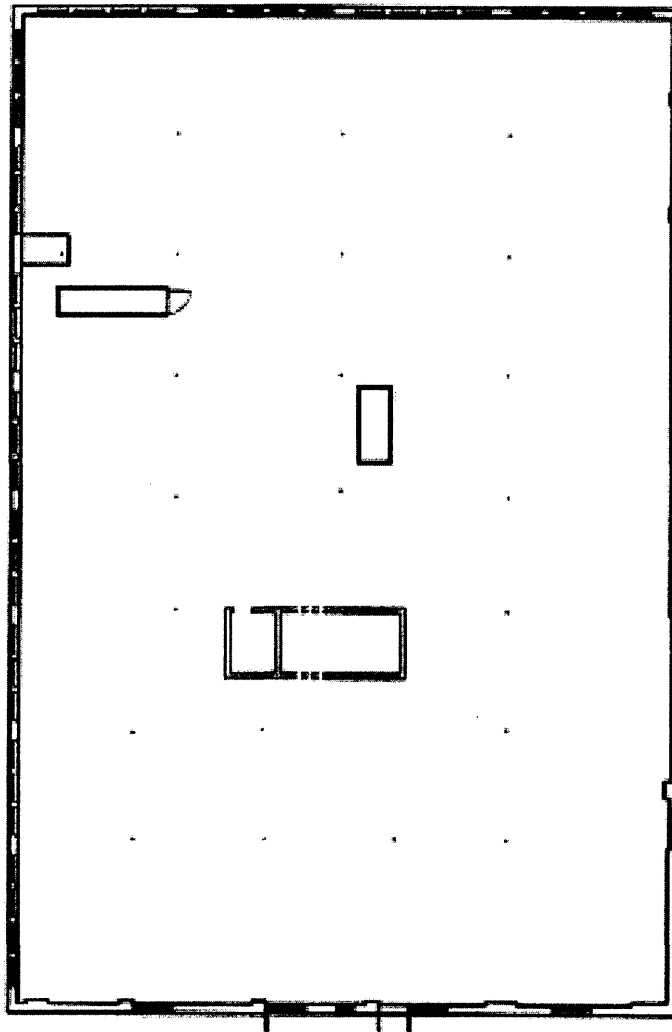
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

THIRD FLOOR PLAN

2005



Scale: 1/16 inch = 1 inch.

Sketch: G. W. Wattier Architecture, Inc., 2005.



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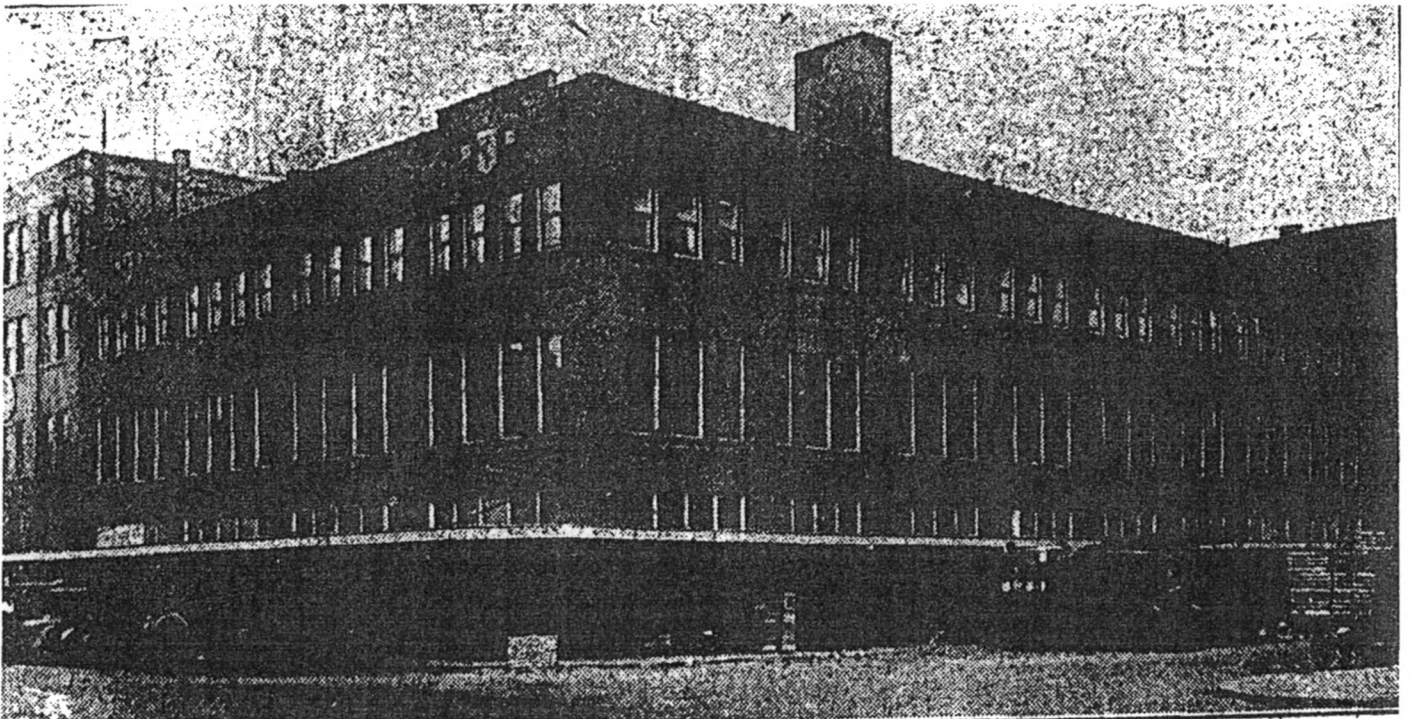
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

“TAFT COMPANY’S WAREHOUSE BUILDING COMPLETED”



Although the quality of Des Moines' newspaper microfilm (the only source for this archive) is not good and this photography is fuzzy, it is the earliest photograph of the Taft-West Warehouse found to date. The picture clearly shows the canopy, which surrounded the north and west facades of the building.

Source: *The Des Moines Sunday Register*, December 24, 1922.

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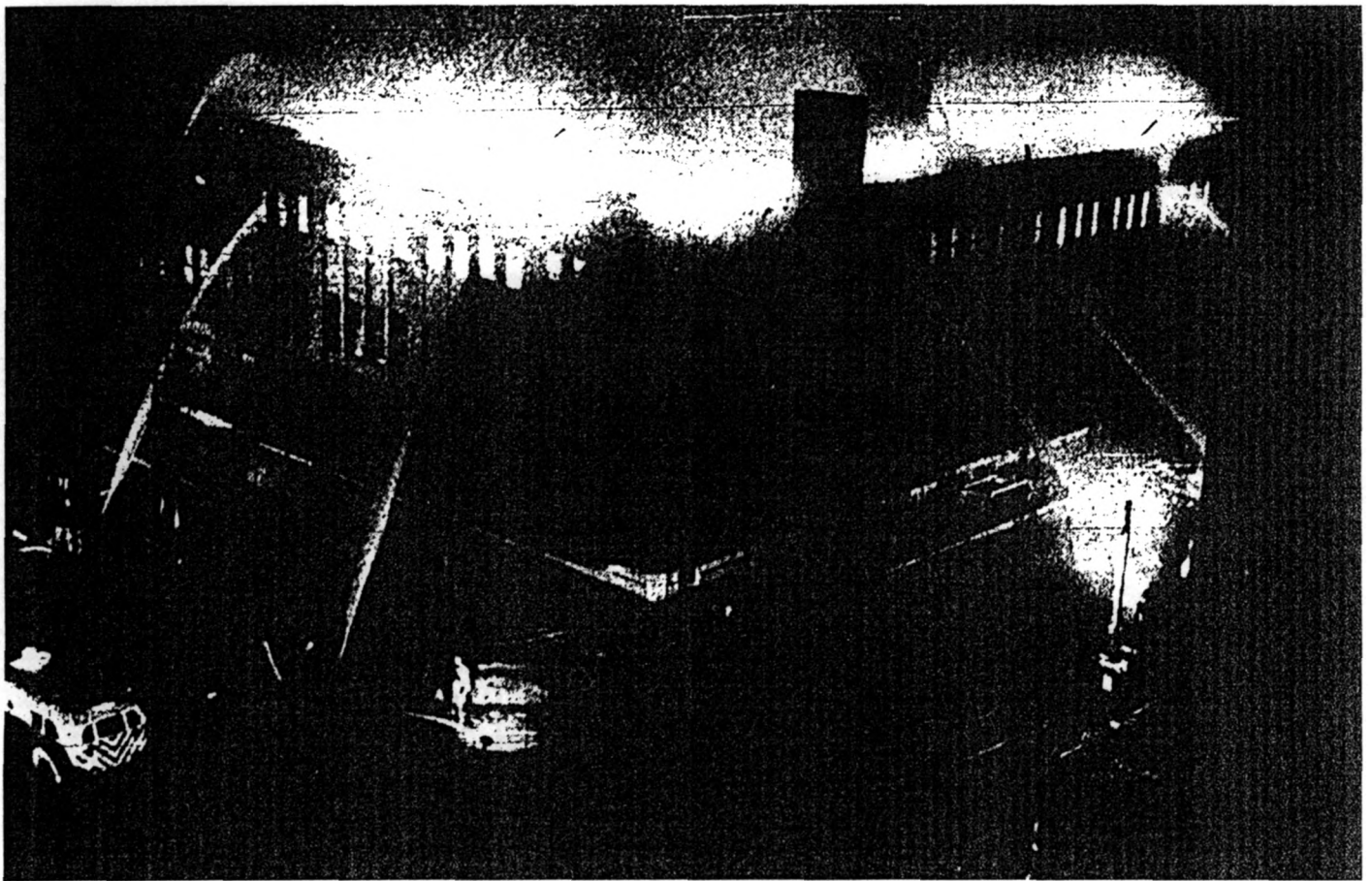
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

“QUARTER-BLOCK WAREHOUSE BURNS”



This spectacular fire broke out late at night as a remodeling project neared completion. Although very dark, this historic photograph shows how the entire roof of the building became engulfed in flame. The interiors on the third floor and portions of the second floor were heavily damaged, but the entire building was quickly repaired.

Source: *The Des Moines Register*, December 11, 1956.

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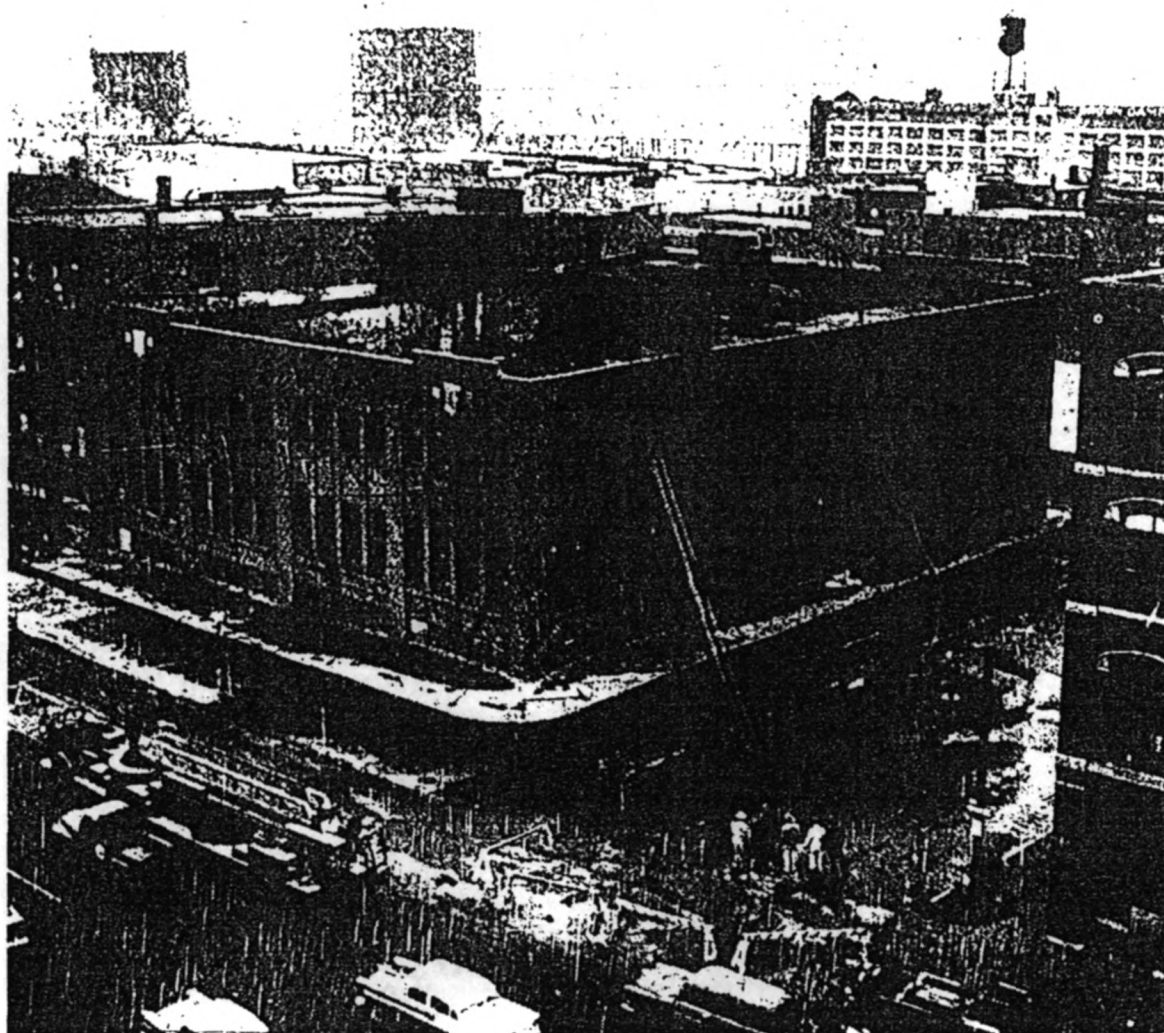
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

DAY AFTER FIRE

“\$300,000 LOSS IN FIRE HERE”



With its roof totally destroyed, the upper shell of the building remained intact.

Source: *The Des Moines Tribune*, December 11, 1956.

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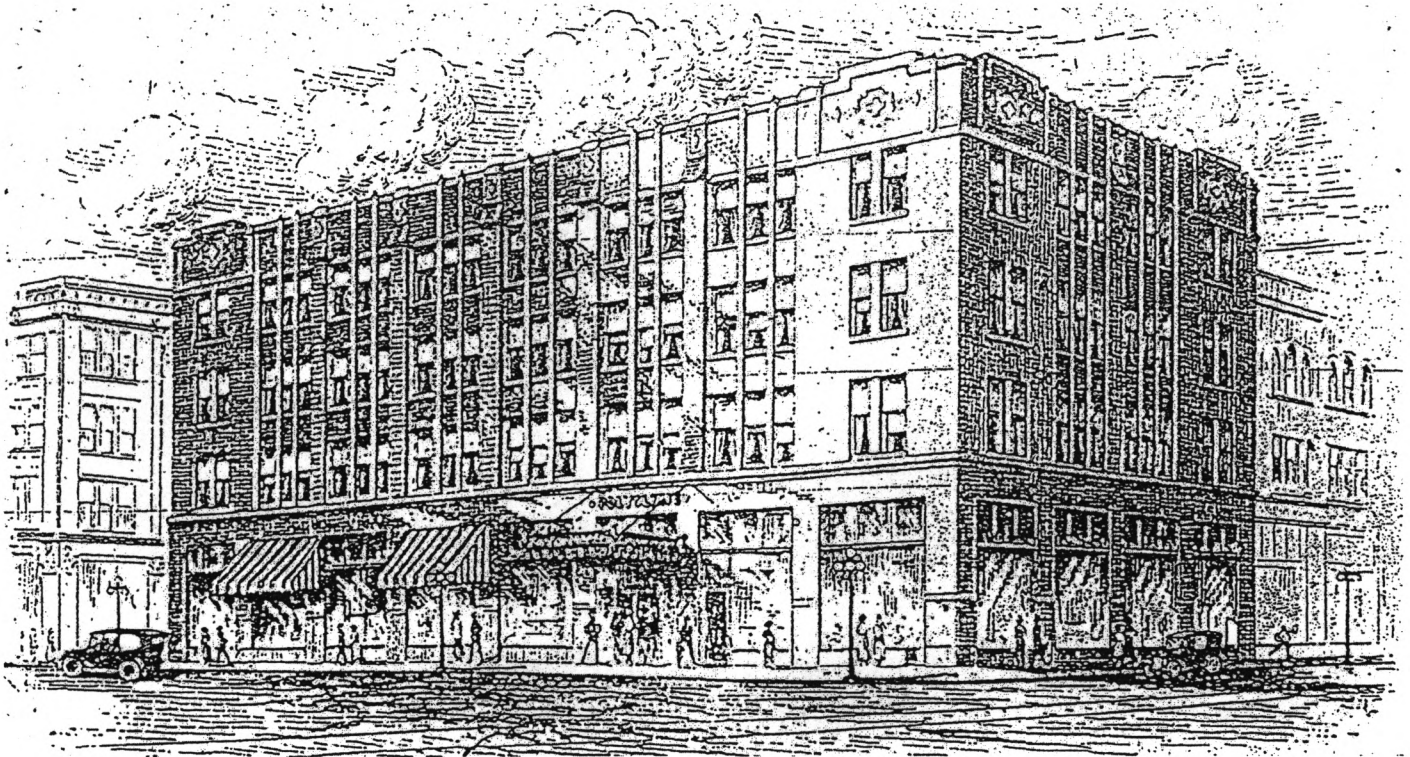
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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

SIMILAR DESIGN

1923



Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch prepared this design for the Poly-Clinic Hospital (a.k.a. American Institute of Business Building) at 410 10th Street in Des Moines one year after designing the Taft-West Warehouse. This drawing shows many similarities with it. Piers define bays on the facades and flank sets of windows on the upper floors. Narrow piers separate each window. The parapets capping the building are stepped on the corners and surmount cast concrete medallions. As built, these medallions featured shields similar to the warehouse. The Poly-Clinic Hospital was razed under public outcry in 2002 for controversial redevelopment.

Source: *The Des Moines Capitol*, April 8, 1923, p. 3-A.

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

C. C. TAFT COMPANY STAND

Hubbell Building circa 1949



Throughout the early 20th century, the C. C. Taft Company retailed tobacco and other sundry products from kiosks in hotels and office buildings like the company's stand shown here in downtown Des Moines.

Source: Hubbell Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

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SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Completed in 1923, the Taft-West Warehouse is architecturally significant, locally under National Register Criterion C, as a fine example of the Commercial Style of architecture as practiced in Des Moines during the early 20th century. Designed by the local firm of Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch, the edifice is notable for its clean lines and rich surface textures. This subtle approach to design contrasted with the fussiness of Late Victorian styling then so evident in much of the city's commercial architecture.

The Taft-West Warehouse is significant, locally under National Register Criterion A, as a fine, surviving example of a wholesale house, a once common property type during the early 20th century in the Court Avenue wholesale district of Des Moines. Built by the C. C. Taft Company, this firm and its successor in the building, the O. B. West Company, wholesaled fruits, vegetables, and other specialties like candy and tobacco. The Taft-West Warehouse stands at a transition point within this historic context. While earlier warehouses in Des Moines relied strictly on the railroads for the importation of products, the Taft West Warehouse calls attention to the growing use of trucks in the 1920s for this purpose and for distribution. Of the many historic wholesale properties that once lined Court Avenue, only five or six remain extant. The Taft-West property is prominent among them as one of the last constructed and designed for trucks.

The period of significance, under Criterion C, is 1923, the year the building was put in service. The period of significance for the Taft-West Warehouse, under Criterion A, is 1923-1956, the time of its historic association with wholesaling on Court Avenue.

The property possesses one resource, the warehouse itself, which is counted as contributing and classified as a building.

ARCHITECTURE

The Taft-West Warehouse shows how Des Moines architects Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch manipulated the Commercial Style of architecture in the design of a warehouse building.

Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch

Architectural historian Wesley I. Shank has provided biographical sketches of Carl Kraetsch, George Alexander Kraetsch, William James Kraetsch, and Norman T. Vorse, who at various times worked in partnership with one another. The partnership of Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch operated in Des Moines between 1919 and 1933. The firm was responsible for an extensive variety of commissions, including churches, courthouses, apartment buildings, residences, office buildings, theaters, and other property types. Many of these commissions were based in Des Moines, but others were located across Iowa. The Kraetsch & Kraetsch design for the Earl Butler House, built in the 1930s at 2633 Fleur Drive in Des Moines, is one

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

of the most notable architectural creations in the state. The building is significant for its modern design and laborsaving conveniences.

The Kraetsch brothers were born in Des Moines of German parents. All were university trained. Carl Kraetsch (1883-c. 1950) and William Kraetsch (1892-1948) studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. George Kraetsch (1884-1940) studied architecture at Washington University in St. Louis. (Shank: 99-102)

Norman Terrell Vorse (1879-1964) likewise was born in Des Moines. He worked for Proudfoot & Bird off-and-on during the late 1890s, studied architecture in Washington, D. C., and Paris, France, and returned to Des Moines, where he again worked for Proudfoot & Bird before establishing his own practice in 1912. Following the dissolution of the Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch firm in 1933, Vorse relocated to Texas, where he died. (*Ibid.*: 168-169) In 2001, Kent Carlson researched the life and work of Vorse, identifying numerous buildings designed by him but since forgotten.

It remains unclear which, if any, of the Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch partners served as lead architect for the Taft-West Warehouse.

Design

The Commercial Style of architecture is apparent in the clean lines of the building, which exemplify a utilitarian approach to architecture. The north and west facades are devoid of stringcourses, hood molds, and cornices, leaving the repetition of the building's fenestration as the design's chief element.

In true Commercial Style fashion, fenestration delineates the character of the design. Double-hung sash are situated in groups of three or four. These groups provide a rhythm across the two principle facades and emphasize the horizontal feeling of the design. Indeed, the total area of glass exceeds that of the brick. This provides a massive infusion of natural light into the building, a hallmark of the Commercial Style, and contrasts with Late Victorian commercial buildings in Des Moines. The Seth Richards Commercial Block, situated directly to the west of the Taft Block, provides an excellent comparison. The ratio of window to wall at Seth Richards favors the wall.

The Taft-West Warehouse balances this horizontal feeling with vertical lines. The block's fenestration, recessed slightly from the straight front plane of the facade, introduces these lines into the design. As a result, the facades appear to project from the front plane as pilaster-like piers. These, combined with similar albeit narrower piers between the windows, add more vertical lines. As a result, the viewer's eye moves up and down and back and forth in visual excitement.

The Taft-West Warehouse also shows, albeit tentatively, the emerging influence of what would be eventually known as Art Deco styling on its design. The employment of narrow piers between the upper floor windows lends a vertical thrust to the building and resembles skyscraper treatments

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

becoming popular at the time in the United States. Eliel Saarinen's design for the Chicago Tribune building, for example, employed such a motif in 1922, although another design was accepted.

Subtle, decorative brickwork—another hallmark of the Commercial Style—further enriches the design of the Taft-West Warehouse without detracting from its essential utilitarianism. These details include a variety of brick colors, brick texture, brick bonding, and brick patterns. The face brick employed for the block features striated finish and tapestry colors, including red, brown, purple-red, and orange. The first floor of the building is laid in modified Flemish bond, with one course Flemish bond laid between every five courses of running bond. The panels between the second and third floor windows are richly textured. They are laid in geometric patterns of header brick, eight of which in each panel project and add visual interest. Header brick form the window sills, and stretcher brick laid vertically form the lintels. A brick parapet surmounts the block. Laid flush with the facade, it features stretcher brick in vertical and horizontal patterns.

The use of cast concrete plaques provides another indication of the Commercial Style's influence on this design. Located beneath the parapet steps on the north facade, their light color contrast with the dark colored brick of the facade and provide accents to it. The use of cast concrete name plaques became a popular hallmark of the Commercial Style of architecture during the early years of the 20th century.

In many ways, the Taft-West Warehouse is a simplified version of Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch's Poly-Clinic Hospital at 421 10th Street in Des Moines, designed in 1923 and completed a year later. Also known as the American Institute of Business (AIB) Building, the facades of this edifice exhibit pilasters flanking inset windows, themselves separated by narrower piers, stepped parapets, and medallion details—all similar in feeling with the Taft-West Warehouse. (See Continuation Sheet 7-19.)

COMMERCE

The Taft-West Warehouse exemplifies the kind of wholesale business that made Court Avenue the wholesale center of Des Moines during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The C. C. Taft Company and the O. B. West Company, the occupants of the building from 1923 to 1956, wholesaled perishable foods and other specialties. Although many other wholesale businesses once lined Court Avenue, only about half a dozen of these historic buildings retain their integrity. The Taft-West Warehouse is one.

Food Wholesaling

Food products counted as one of the biggest items wholesaled in the Court Avenue wholesale district during the early 20th century. In 1938, one commercial publication noted that:

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Des Moines handles more implements than any other city its size in the U.S. and ranks among the highest in distribution of groceries. The jobbing business alone is approximately \$165,000,000. (*Iowa State Commercial Directory*: 276)

R. C. Webb, C. C. Prouty, Warfield-Pratt-Howell, Menning & Slate, and C. C. Taft were prominent among these food wholesalers. There were many others. According to one land use analysis of Court Avenue, "few buildings throughout the [Court Avenue] study area have not at some time seen service in some form of the food industry." (Raabe: 14) That study further identified more than 20 firms, which specialized in food products and operated in the area in the early 20th century. (*Ibid.*: 14-15) Some of these firms constructed big buildings to house their operations. They included the Warfield, Pratt, and Howell Company Warehouse, built in 1901 and enlarged in 1907. This is a 6-story building located at 100-110 Court Avenue. The Taft-West Warehouse is another of these large buildings.

Decline of Court Avenue Wholesale Center

Court Avenue declined as a wholesale center in the 1960s and 1970s, and its historic buildings began to deteriorate. In 1970, the brick block at 212-214 Court Avenue collapsed from lack of maintenance, and its ruins were razed. The Tone Bros. Warehouse at 109-111 Court Avenue (a spice manufacturer and wholesale house) was subsequently demolished for the construction of a new Polk County Administration Building. In the 1980s, fire destroyed an 8-story brick building at 312-314 Court Avenue. The F. Brody & Sons Co. and Brody Manufacturing Co. had built and occupied this building to fabricate and wholesale clothing. In the 1980s and 1990s, several new parking garages and a drive-up bank were constructed along Court Avenue.

In spite of these losses, a few notable warehouse buildings remain extant on Court Avenue, including the Des Moines Saddlery Company Building at 307 Court Avenue (NRHP), the Warfield, Pratt, and Howell Company Warehouse at 100 Court Avenue (NRHP), and the Seth Richards Commercial Block (NRHP) at 300-310 Court Avenue. Although a sufficient degree of integrity no longer remains along this stretch to qualify it as a National Register historic district, these and other properties qualify individually. Indeed, the loss of so much historic fabric along Court Avenue increases the historical significance of its extant properties.

C. C. Taft Company

The C. C. Taft Company was incorporated on January 10, 1896 with C. C. Taft as its president and J. B. Walker as its vice-president. O. B. West subsequently became president of the firm. In 1916, the firm's stockholders voted to renew its corporate status.

As the technology of refrigeration improved during the late 19th century, the availability of perishable foodstuffs for consumers increased dramatically. Firms like the C. C. Taft Company prospered as they

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wholesaled and brokered fresh fruits and vegetables from various locales across the nation. The Taft firm augmented this line of produce with candy, tobacco, and other specialties.

The buildings occupied by the C. C. Taft Company provide a clue to its growth. In 1910, the firm conducted operations from its headquarters at 107-113 3rd Street. At that time, 3rd Street served as Des Moines' principal grocery wholesaling center. By 1912, the C. C. Taft firm had moved around the corner to occupy the commercial block at 216-218 Court Avenue. Then, in 1922, the firm razed that commercial block along with its neighbor to the west—220-222 Court Avenue—to construct the present structure at 216-222 Court Avenue.

The C. C. Taft Company purchased fruit from as far away as the East coast. A commercial dispute between the C. C. Taft Company and the Fruit Dispatch Company of New Jersey documents the fact that local wholesalers in Des Moines patronized New Jersey growers. Nicknamed the "Garden State" and for good reason, New Jersey farmers had raised fruit and produce as cash crops since the 18th century. As a result of a 1922 court judgment, the C. C. Taft Company owed the Fruit Dispatch Company \$1,147.78. (Abstract of Title)

In addition to wholesaling fruit, the C. C. Taft Company retailed tobacco at a number of downtown Des Moines establishments. They included a cigar shop at 500 6th Avenue and cigar stands in the Register and Tribune Building at 715 Locust Street, the Franklin Hotel at 5th and Locust (City Directory 1920: 1716), and the Hubbell Building at 901 Walnut Street. An historic photograph pictures the Taft tobacco stand in the Hubbell Building. (See Continuation Sheet 7-20.)

In 1924, the C. C. Taft Company sold its property at 216-222 Court Avenue to the O. B. West Co., Inc., relocated to several different nearby locations, and continued wholesale operations into the late 1950s or early 1960s. (City Directory 1929: 1679) Thriftway Stores, Inc., later acquired the firm, but by the early 1960s, the C. C. Taft Company had disappeared from the city directory. In a poignant footnote, Jessie Taft, daughter of the company's founder, later sold cigars at the Savery Hotel's tobacco stand. (City Directory 1962: 779)

O. B. West Co., Inc.

In 1924, Orville B. West (1878-1939) acquired the Taft-West Warehouse and formed his own wholesale business there under the name of the O. B. West Co., Inc. ("Men & Women of Iowa Biographies," Vol. 12). West's firm also wholesaled fruits and food specialties.

West was a Des Moines businessman and had served as president of the C. C. Taft Company from 1917 to 1924. In addition to his wholesaling activities, O. B. West served as president of the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce in 1923. ("Men & Women of Iowa Biographies": Vol. 12, n. p.)

Following West's death in 1939, Harold H. West and Wayne M. West, his sons, continued to operate the business, the former as its president and the latter as its secretary-treasurer. The firm continued to

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

wholesale fruits, cigars, candies and specialties from its headquarters in the Taft-West Warehouse. (City Directory 1942: 867) As an associated business, the two West brothers formed the West Distributing Company Subsidiary.

In 1943, the West brothers and their spouses formed West Brothers, Inc., and filed articles of incorporation for the firm on November 19, 1943. By 1954, Harold was operating the H. B. West Sales Co. and Wayne the West Bros. Co. (City Directory 1954: 836) Then, in 1956, the two brothers sold the Taft-West Warehouse to Weston Investment, Inc. (Abstract of Title)

Plumb Supply Company

The Plumb Supply Company of Des Moines purchased the Taft-West Warehouse in 1956 soon after the Weston Investment, Inc., had acquired it from the West brothers. (Abstract of Title) Paul M. Weston was the president of Plumb Supply, an officer of Weston Investment, and active as a real estate broker. Plumb Supply wholesaled plumbing and heating supplies.

Upon the acquisition of the Taft-West Warehouse, Plumb Supply immediately set about to remodel its interior. Only a few days later, on December 10, 1956 near midnight, a spectacular fire broke out in the building. The fire heavily damaged the second and third floors and destroyed the roof. (See Continuation Sheet 7-17 and 7-18.) The firm immediately repaired the damage and occupied the building.

History of the Site

The site of this parcel is a choice parcel in downtown Des Moines. Situated on Lot 1 and Lot 2 in Block 30 of the original town plat of Fort Des Moines, this site housed a number of businesses in the 19th and early 20th centuries prior to the construction of the present building in 1923.

The history of this parcel vividly illustrates the parcelization of land during the Victorian period. By the 1800s, these two lots had been subdivided into a number of fractional units. In the early 20th century, it took C. C. Taft about ten years to assemble these parcels and their improvements under one ownership. Finally, after gaining title to all the property, Taft razed the existing buildings and erected the present edifice.

The story of Taft's acquisition of the different parcels is complicated and illustrates the difficulty facing developers, when contemplating new construction in downtown Des Moines at the time. In 1912, Taft acquired, by warranty deed from the Prouty family, the west one-third of Lot 2, the north 80 feet of the east one-third of Lot 1, and the north 30 feet of the south 52 feet of Lot 1 (\$26,000 cost). It took another ten years before Taft could acquire from another property owner the undivided two-thirds of the south one-sixth of Lot 1 (\$8,000 cost) and an undivided one-third of the south one-sixth of Lot 1 (\$4,000 cost). By 1922, the C. C. Taft Company held title to all of Lot 1, the west 22 feet of Lot 2,

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and all of the improvements. The firm quickly moved to erect the present edifice on the site. Since the 1920s, this site has remained one entity.

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION

Although the Taft-West Warehouse was nearly completed by December of 1922, the year 1923 marked the date of its opening and the beginning of its period of significance.

The Polk County Assessor's Office places the date of construction of the Taft-West Warehouse to the year 1885. This date likely refers to earlier buildings standing on this site. A photograph of the present building appeared on the front page of *The Des Moines Sunday Register* on December 24, 1922 and documents its date of construction. The story's headline read "Taft Company's Warehouse Building Completed," adding that "Finishing touches are being put to the C. C. Taft company's new building at Third and Court."

REPRESENTATION IN PREVIOUS SURVEYS

The Taft-West Warehouse was surveyed in 1975 under the direction of John Maves of the Department of Architecture at Iowa State University. That survey determined that the property was "Style: Commercial" and noted that:

Architectural Condition: C. Neutral--The structure is not of architectural significance but contributes to the general visual quality of its surrounds. [See report--Appendix II]
(Maves)

Although the Maves survey rated many extant buildings in Des Moines, it employed its own rating system rather than using National Register criteria and categories. As a result, the Maves ratings are difficult to analyze and apply. This survey also provided no architectural or historical evaluations, so its site sheets consist solely of Maves' sketchy ratings, as noted above.

Barbara Beving Long surveyed the Taft-West Warehouse in 1983 in "Des Moines, Center of Iowa: Survey of Historic Sites." That survey provided thumbnail sketches of the building's history and architectural design and evaluated it as a "contributing structure," under National Register Criteria A and C, but offered no explanation for the finding.

The Taft-West Warehouse was surveyed in 1983 as part of the "Court Avenue Historical Area Study." Sponsored in part by the City of Des Moines and written by Sylvia Raabe, this survey determined that:

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

the 1920s Commercial influence is evident in this handsome building. In the interior a central circular fire escape and the remaining vestiges of a sidewalk elevator on the north are still in place. The east portion of the basement still has 12 inch cork lined walls in the spaces originally used for fruit storage" (Raabe: 76)

This survey also noted that the building's potential for rehabilitation or renovation was good. (*Ibid.*) National Register criteria were not employed for this survey.

In 2005, the State Historical Society of Iowa determined that the Taft Block was National Register eligible under Criteria A and C.

SELECTION OF HISTORIC NAME

The historic name for this property, "Taft-West Warehouse," reflects its function and the names of the firms that occupied it during its period of significance. The names of later occupants—Plumb Supply Company, Ben's Furniture Warehouse, and Nacho Mammias (a restaurant and most recent occupant of the building)—are included as common names.

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MAPS

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps; 1884, 1891, 1901, 1920, 1957 (1920 updated).

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ORAL HISTORY

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2005 Informant interview, May 8, 2005, with William C. Page. Trout, a part owner of this building, shared information about its history.

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Taft-West Warehouse, Polk County, Iowa.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 1 and Lot 2 in Block 30 of the original town of Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Contains all land associated historically with the property.

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William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 | 7. | Taft-West Warehouse
216-222 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Interior, second floor
Looking northeast
William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 |
| 2. | Taft-West Warehouse
216-222 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Looking southwest
William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 | 8. | Taft-West Warehouse
216-222 Court Avenue
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Interior, third floor
Looking southeast
William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 |
| 3. | Taft-West Warehouse
216-222 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Looking southeast
William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 | | |
| 4. | Taft-West Warehouse
216-222 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Looking northeast
William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 | | |
| 5. | Taft-West Warehouse
216-222 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Detail north facade
Looking northwest
William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 | | |
| 6. | Taft-West Warehouse
216-222 Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50309
Interior, first floor
Looking northwest
William C. Page Photographer
September 12, 2003 | | |