

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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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 Merchants' National Bank

AND/OR COMMON Poweshiek County National Bank

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Northwest corner Fourth Avenue and Broad Street

CITY, TOWN Grinnell --- NOT FOR PUBLICATION CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1st

STATE Iowa --- VICINITY OF CODE COUNTY Poweshiek CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input 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 checked="" 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 |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME The Poweshiek County National Bank, Max A. Smith, President
515-236-7575

STREET & NUMBER Northwest corner Fourth Avenue and Broad Street

CITY, TOWN Grinnell --- VICINITY OF STATE Iowa 50112

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, Poweshiek County Courthouse
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN Montezuma STATE Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN STATE

98

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

Although small in scale, the Grinnell Bank is extremely efficient. A simple cubic plan, the walls present two elevations both quite different in treatment--the front and side walls vary in fenestration, rhythm and ornament. The material used for exterior walls is wire-cut shale brick of mixed shades, ranging in color from blue-black to a golden brown giving the overall effect of a deep tapestry red to the building.

"The cornice is of brown terra cotta, richly modelled and inlaid with gold. Although it does not project beyond the face of the building, small finials rise against the skyline, causing a slight indistinctness in the silhouette which does not accord with the otherwise clean-cut geometry of the mass. The great window on the east side, measuring about fifteen feet in height by forty feet in length, is an impressive feature. Enclosed in a rectangular opening, and recessed from the wall surface, it is fronted by nine slender colonets. As far as their attenuated proportions suggest, these colonets are of iron, but they are sheathed in gold leaf and the combination of gold and dull red is in stunning harmony. The window itself is of double thickness, as at Owatonna, with plate glass outside and leaded colored glass inside. The two small windows at the corner light the directors' room, and the window to the left of the door lights the women's lounge."¹

The interior is detailed in brick and tile with the same ornament--a decorative gold frieze at the rear of the main corridor repeats the same pattern that appears in the exterior cornice. The oak frames of the hanging lights repeat the motifs of the door lintels. "The walls have a high brick dado topped by a finishing strip of dark-stained oak. Above this they are of light plaster. The brick wall at the back, over the vault and the safe deposit room, has a rich band of fire-gilt terra cotta ornament. Gold terra cotta trim also occurs on the tellers' cage at the back, and on the capitals of the square piers carrying large flower-bowls. The large window of the east wall is of leaded glass, with a ground of marbled yellow and lavender, with central insets in peacock blue and bright green colors. The skylight colors are cream and turquoise blue...the clock over the entrance is set in a glass mosaic field; the suspended lighting fixtures are of oak and frosted glass and the circular window of the facade is set in brilliant colors."²

There has been little or no remodelling--some work was done in 1950 and again in 1963. A new larger banking facility is currently being built at the rear.

¹Morrison, Hugh. Louis Sullivan, Prophet of Modern Architecture. W. W. Norton, 1935, p. 218.

²Ibid. p. 219.

100

8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input 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 1914

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Louis Sullivan

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The three best preserved banks by Sullivan are at Owatonna, Minnesota, Columbus, Wisconsin and the Merchants' National Bank in Grinnell, Iowa. This Iowa bank retains most of its original ornament and glass and in particular, its exterior remains as Sullivan designed it. Small in scale, it is monumental in effect--the exterior is bold and solid--the interior is aglow with light and color.

An architectural journal (The Western Architect, February, 1916) was emphatic: at Grinnell, Iowa, there has been completed recently, a bank building, which not only brings distinction to that city, but adds another interesting example to the list of those unique banking institutions designed by Louis H. Sullivan of Chicago. The structure is cubical in form, Oriental brick in wall composition, substantial and dignified, representative of the business conducted within its walls.

The most interesting exterior feature is the entrance door with a huge sunburst of ornament above. Morrison describes it: "All of this detail is executed in gray terra cotta, except the heraldic lions and certain portions of the ornament which are gilded. The sunburst above the door centers about a kind of 'rose-window' in stained glass, and is a remarkable fantasy in superimposed circles, squares and diamonds, with both naturalistic and geometric details. As a study in decorative design per se it is of great interest....like similar features on other late buildings, it must be ascribed to Sullivan's innate tendency to burst out at times into overwrought lyricism."¹

The clock standing at the corner of the site was left from an earlier building and was made by the McClintock-Loomis Company of Minneapolis.

This Grinnell bank exemplifies not only Sullivan's principles of design and appropriateness, his great respect for materials, the use to which the building should be put, but is also a demonstration of that magnificent ornamental detail that was his special gift.

¹Morrison, Hugh. Louis Sullivan, Prophet of Modern Architecture. W. W. Norton, 1935, p. 218.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | |
|---|------|-------------|---------------|
| A | 1 5 | 5 2 2 8 0 0 | 4 6 2 1 2 0 0 |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |

| | | | |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| B | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

East 42 feet 10 inches of lot 1 in lot 12, block #7 Grinnell, Iowa.

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

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

July 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Merchants' National Bank, Grinnell, Poweshiek County, Iowa (NHL 1976)

CONTINUATION SHEET

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Addendum to physical description, May, 1978:

In 1976, a large addition was made to the rear of Sullivan's original bank. Designed by Douglas Robison, of Stewart-Robison-Laffan, Davenport, Iowa, this addition is remarkably sympathetic to the older structure. It is constructed of dark red brick, and although longer and wider than the original, is not as high and therefore does not dominate Sullivan's bank. Sullivan's use of tall, vertical windows, closely spaced, is repeated in the new addition. A principal feature of Robison's addition are the wide, glass-filled arches on east and north sides, which are reminiscent of Sullivan's bank at Owatonna, Minnesota.

One access to the addition is through the rear (north) wall of Sullivan's bank. The original third teller's cage, "customers' room", and the vault immediately behind them, were removed, and the area became an open passageway into the new addition. However, the wide, gilded terracotta bands over the vault, teller's cage, and "customers' room" are still in place, as are the square piers with their urns, so the sense of loss is quite minimal.

The other principal change in Sullivan's interior involves the opening up of the tellers' cages on the east wall and the original savings department, both of which were semi-enclosed, with metal grilles. They are now quite open, after current banking fashion.