

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

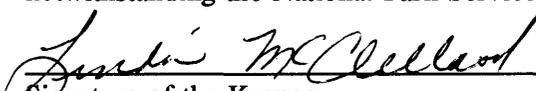
NRIS Reference Number: 98001325

Property Name: Parker's Opera House

County: Cerro Gordo State: Iowa

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.



Signature of the Keeper

November 20, 1998
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 8. Significance:

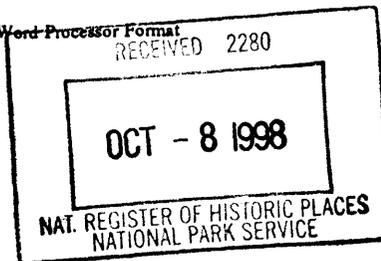
"1909" is, hereby, dropped from the entry for significant dates because the alterations that occurred at that time do not relate to the significance of the property as the work of master architect, William Foster.

Beth Foster of the Iowa State Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



1325

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" 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 PARKER'S OPERA HOUSE
other names/site number Parker's Grand Opera House, Opera House Store, Woolworth's, Parker Place

2. Location

street & number 23 North Federal Avenue N/A not for publication
city or town Mason City N/A vicinity
state Iowa code IA county Cerro Gordo code 033 zip code 50402

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.)
Faticia Christy PSH 9-29-98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is :
 entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
- See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register.
- Other. (Explain)

Signature of Keeper Linda M. Clillard Date of Action 11/20/98

Parker's Opera House
Name of Property

Cerro Gordo 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		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)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

COMMERCE/TRADE/department store

HEALTH CARE/medical business/office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN

foundation Stone

walls Stone

Brick

roof Asphalt

other Metal

Glass

Narrative Description

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

Parker's Opera House
Name of Property

Cerro Gordo 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)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1883

Significant Dates

1883

1909

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Foster, William

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

Loomis Archive, Mason City Public Library

Parker's Opera House
Name of Property

Cerro Gordo County, Iowa
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 15 | 483700 | 4777600 |

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. Page, Project Associate

organization Jay Lala, D.D.S. date May 10, 1998

street & number 520 East Sheridan Avenue (Page) telephone 515-243-5740; FAX 515-243-7285

city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50313

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 Jay Lala, D.D.S.

street & number 23 North Federal Avenue telephone 515-423-4225

city or town Mason City state Iowa zip code 50402

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.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1

CFN-259-1116

Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Parker's Opera House is a 3-story, commercial block situated at the northeast corner of Central Park in downtown Mason City, Iowa. (See Continuation Sheet 7-6.) Completed and first occupied in 1883, the footprint of this block measures 44' x 161' and possesses the facade width of two standard-sized commercial buildings. It features a stone foundation, stone walls, and a trussed roof with composition cladding. The building possesses two facades--one facing west and one facing north. Both these elevations feature exterior walls constructed of ashlar, square-cut stone laid in regular courses and embellished with smooth-finished stone trim. The east elevation faces an alley and features rubble, rough-cut stone laid in regular courses. The west elevation shares a party wall with the adjacent, 2-story building. The third floor of the west elevation features rubble, rough-cut stone laid in regular courses.

With the few discernible alterations discussed below, the exterior of Parker's Opera House possesses very good integrity.

EDIFICE

Parker's Opera House possesses a rectangularly-shaped footprint, measuring approximately 44' x 161' (north-south by east-west). This footprint consists of two portions. The largest and most prominent portion is the historic commercial block. It is three stories in height and measures 44' x 131'. A rear wing is attached to this block. It was constructed circa 1960, is two stories in height, and measures 44' x 30'.

Commercial Block

This commercial block rests on a stone foundation. Of masonry load-bearing construction, it is clad with a dark beige-colored limestone and embellished with light beige-colored stone detailing. A pressed-metal cornice surrounds the block on the west and north elevations. The block is covered with a roof supported by a series of trusses. (See Continuation Sheet 7-8.) The surface of the roof is made up of composition materials. Although not usual for commercial buildings during the period, such a trussed roof is not unusual for a building with an auditorium to span. A full basement is situated under this block.

The main entrance to the block is on the west elevation and faces Central Park. Another entrance is situated near the rear of the north elevation. This entrance provided access to the opera house auditorium on the second floor and continues today to provide an entrance to the upper floors.

The west (or primary) facade of the building is divided vertically into two sections, each 22 feet in width, and suggesting by their design the juxtaposition of two 3-story commercial rooms. Each room possesses a storefront featuring an entrance door symmetrically situated in the center and flanked on both sides by large storefront windows surmounting bulkheads. The floors above these storefronts

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

each possess three bays. A series of stone pilasters mark the divisions between the two commercial rooms. One pilaster is situated at the center of this facade, and one pilaster is situated at each of its corners. Windows are 1/1 double hung sash surmounted by a transom. The original storefront windows have been replaced with multi-pane infill windows. Although the original entrance doors on the north facade have also been replaced, they are positioned in the same location as originally designed--one door flanking the central pilaster to the south, and one door flanking it to the north. Fixed canvass awnings are situated at the top of these storefronts.

The north (or secondary) facade of the building was remodeled somewhat when the auditorium was converted into separate floors. Originally each of the north facade's nine bays on the upper floors featured windows. (See Continuation Sheet 8-17.) (One of these windows is now infilled with brick.) Most of these bays feature paired windows with 1/1 double hung sash configurations. Transoms are situated above these sash. The most easterly of these bays is narrower than the others. It features one only 1/1 double hung sash. This bay features, on the first floor, the exterior entrance to the auditorium. This doorway is of Romanesque arch design, featuring a stone keystone, embellished with a harp and a star, symbolic of the auditorium's purpose. The building's storefront wraps-around about eight feet on the north elevation, as discussed below.

Rear Wing

Constructed circa 1960, this two-story rear wing is faced with beige-colored brick above which is a flat roof. This wing abuts the public rights-of way on the north and the east and shares a party wall with the building to the south and with the historic building on the west.

The fenestration of the rear wing is of mixed design. Some of the windows are metal, commercial type and date from the wing's construction. Some of these windows have been replaced with more modern designs.

The entrance to the rear wing is through a door at the rear of the north elevation door. This door originally provided access to the opera house. The rear wing contains a series of offices on the first and second floors.

INTEGRITY

The exterior integrity of Parker's Opera House is very good. The physical condition of the building is excellent, and its historic fabric largely unchanged. The only discernible alterations are the 1924 redesign of the storefront and the circa 1909 redesign of the second and third floor fenestration on the north and south elevations. The first floor of the west facade originally consisted of two storefront windows. In 1924, the F. W. Woolworth Company altered this design with the addition of another window at the corner of the north facade. (Compare the historic images on Continuation Sheets 8-17 and 8-19.) The fenestration alterations are discussed below.

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

Some major changes have taken place on the interior. One rehabilitation occurred circa 1909, another in the 1970s, and one in 1997. Originally, the auditorium occupied the space which now serves as the second and third floors of the building. At the time of the 1909 rehabilitation, a floor was constructed midway across the auditorium, creating a third floor. The staircase entrances to the opera house (located on the north elevation and on the west elevation) were also rebuilt to access both the second and the third floors. The fenestration on the upper floors of the north elevation was also redesigned. Originally, six of its bays featured very tall windows. When the third floor was installed, these windows were removed and replaced with 1/1 double-hung sash windows situated in the same window cavities but foreshortened, so that each floor possessed one of these windows, where a tall window had previously been located. (Compare Continuation Sheet 7-8 and Photograph #3.) Some in-fill was required for these changes, and yellow brick was employed for that purpose. The first floor remained unaffected throughout this rehabilitation project.

In the 1970s another interior rehabilitation took place. The floorplans of the second and third floors were redesigned, drop ceilings and new woodwork were installed, and wall surfaces were covered with sheet rock.

Throughout all these alterations to the upper portion of the building, the first floor has remained largely unchanged. It consists of one large room with a ceiling 15 feet in height. In 1997, this room was redesigned as the Central Park Dentistry office by Henkel Architects of Mason City, Iowa. A series of cubicles were constructed for use as offices, laboratories, and examination rooms. One series of cubicles is situated in a line down the middle of the first floor, running from the front to the rear of the room. Another series of cubicles is situated along the south wall, and a third series is along the north wall of the room. (See Continuation Sheet 7-9.) A clear space of some seven feet is situated between the ceilings of these cubicles and that of the room itself. The pressed metal ceiling of this room remains intact, as well as the cast iron columns, which support it. The viewer, therefore, experiences the open feeling of the entire first floor upon entering the building. The cubicles are reversible.

SITE

This building is situated in Paul Felt's Plat of Mason City, Iowa. This parcel measures approximately 44' x 165' (north-south by east-west). It occupies the southeast corner of the intersection of North Federal Avenue and 3rd Street.

Parker's Opera House stands on the east side of North Federal Avenue and faces west and north. Central Park is situated in the city block immediately to the west. Parker's Opera House has contributed historically to the urban setting of this site because it provides a visual anchor to the park. (See Continuation Sheet 8-18.) The building continues to do so today. The First National Bank of Mason City (NRHP) provides another anchor on the southeast corner.

Land in this area is level. Its feeling is one of a densely built downtown intersection. Federal Avenue once served as Iowa Highway 65 in Mason City (now rerouted). Third Street runs adjacent to Central Park on the north. Mason City City Hall is situated directly north of the park on 3rd Street.

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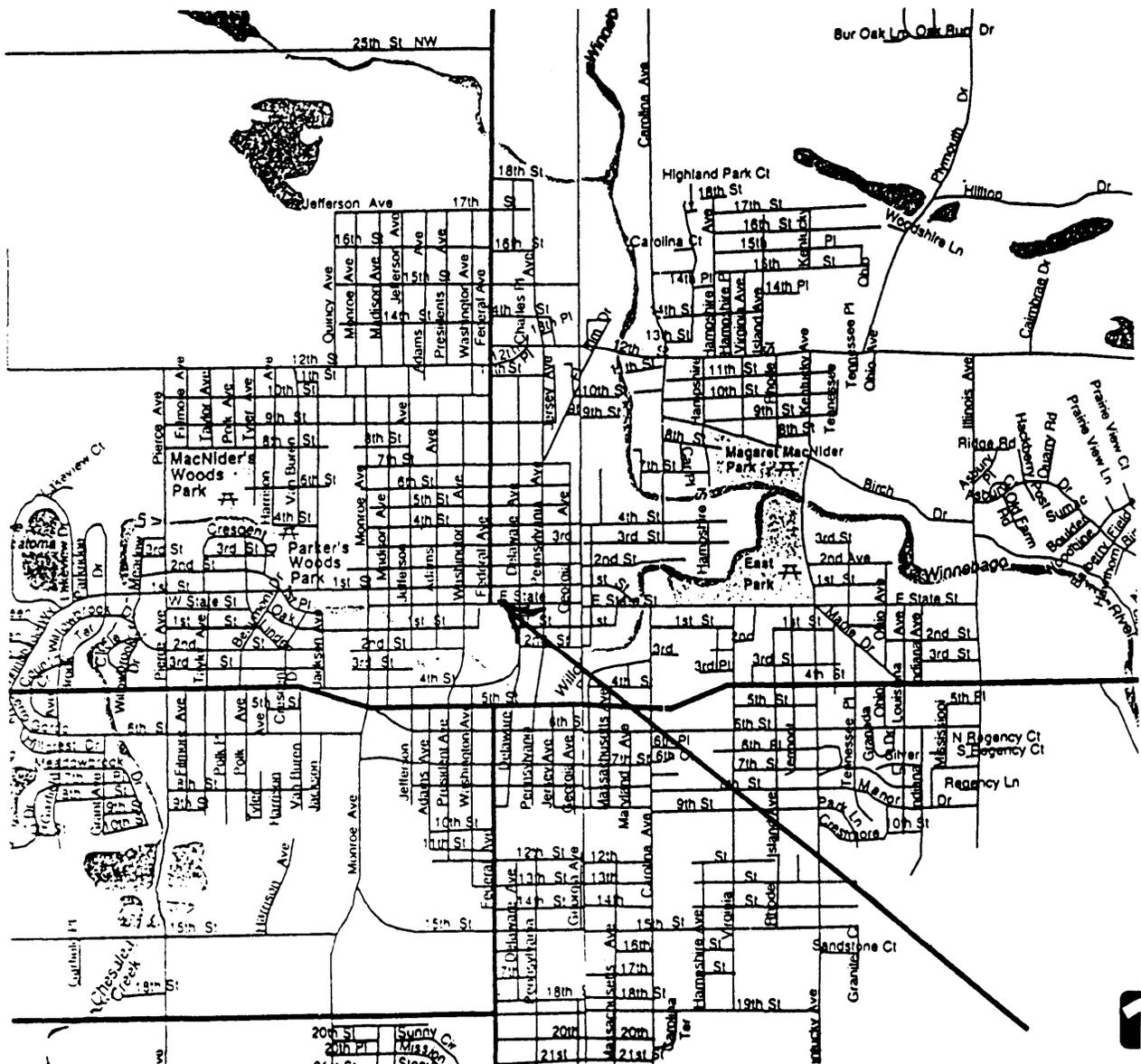
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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

SITE MAP

ARROW LOCATES PROPERTY



Source: City of Mason City, Iowa, circa 1900.

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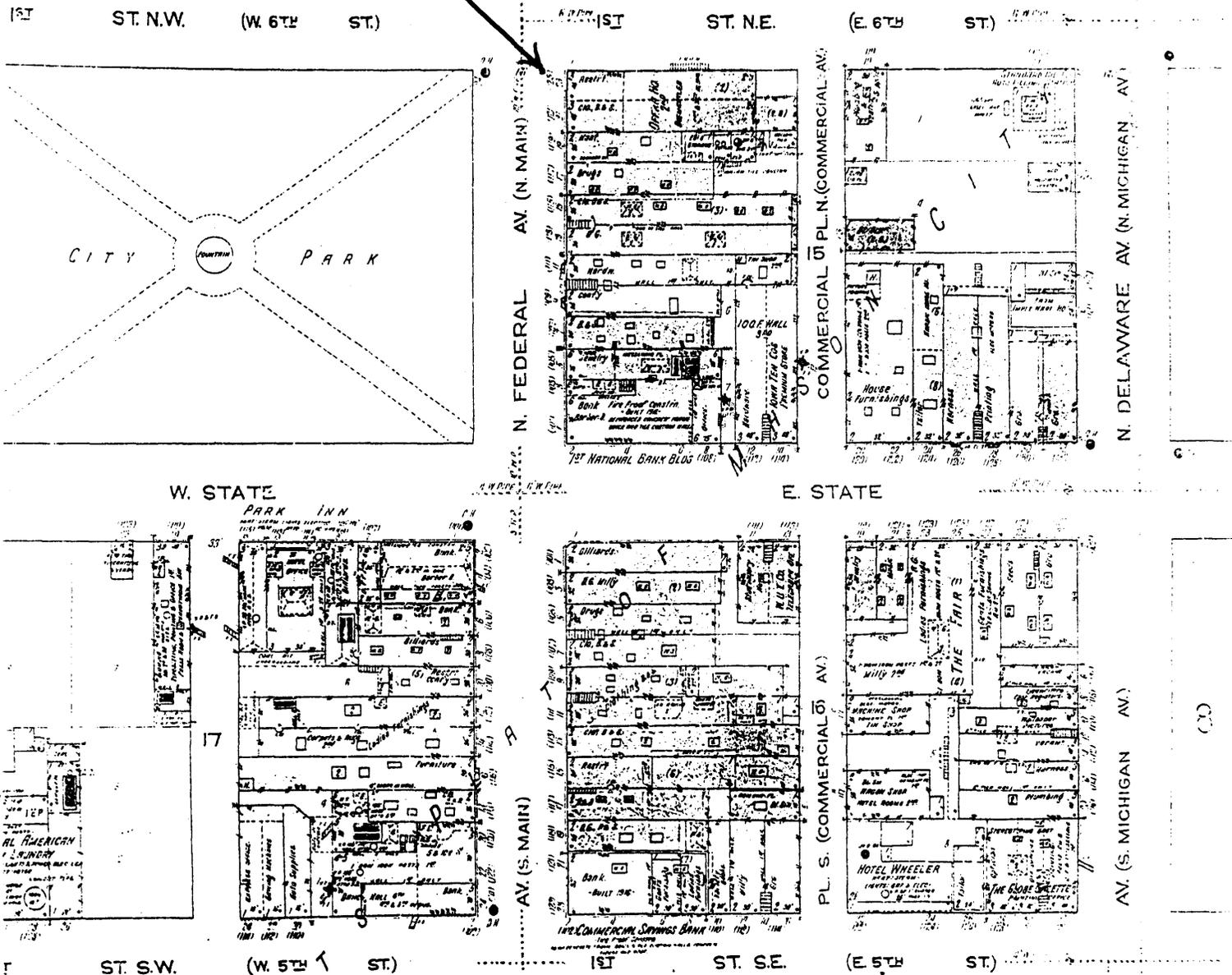
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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

1918 FIRE INSURANCE MAP

ARROW LOCATES BUILDING



Source: Sanborn Map Company, Mason City, Iowa, 1918.



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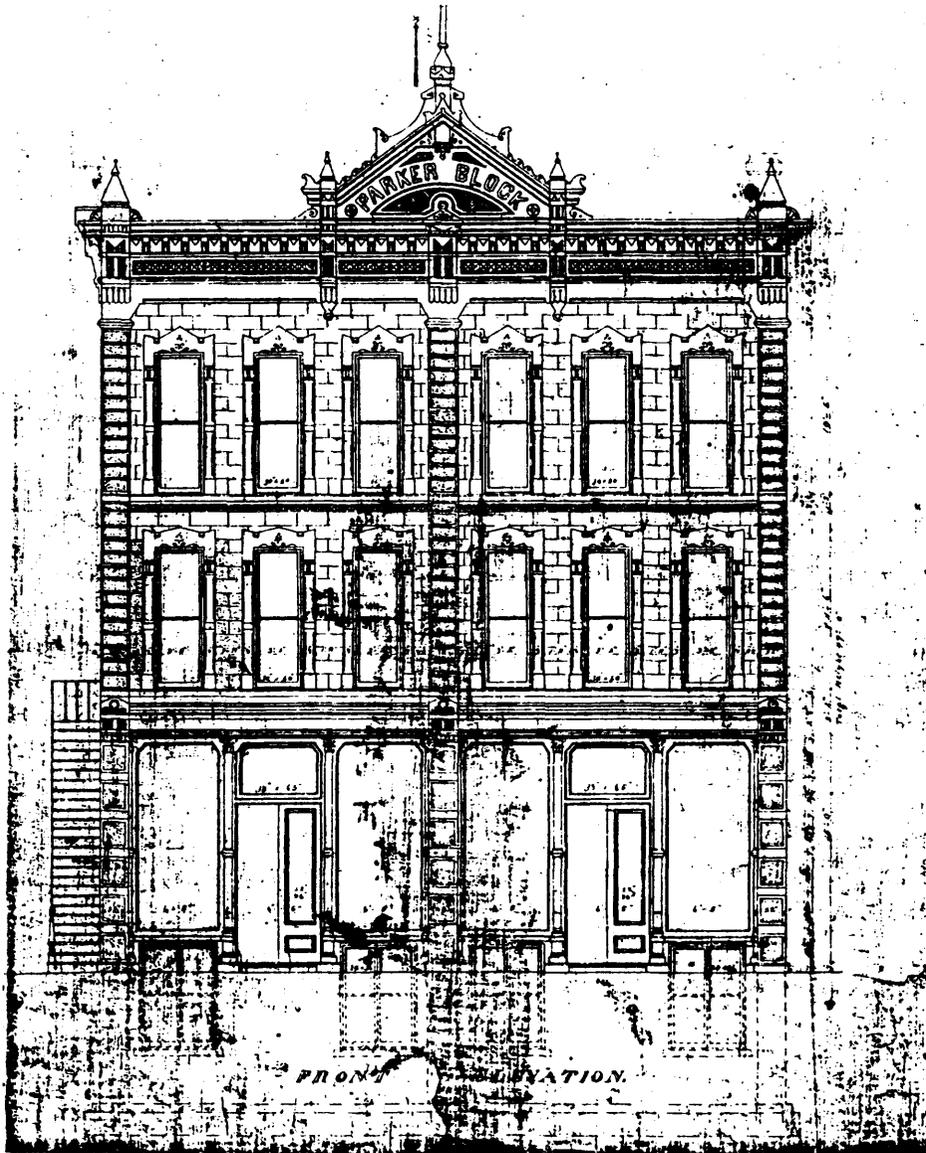
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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

WEST (PRIMARY) FACADE



Source: William Foster's Drawing courtesy of Dr. Jay Lala, D.D.S.

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National Park Service

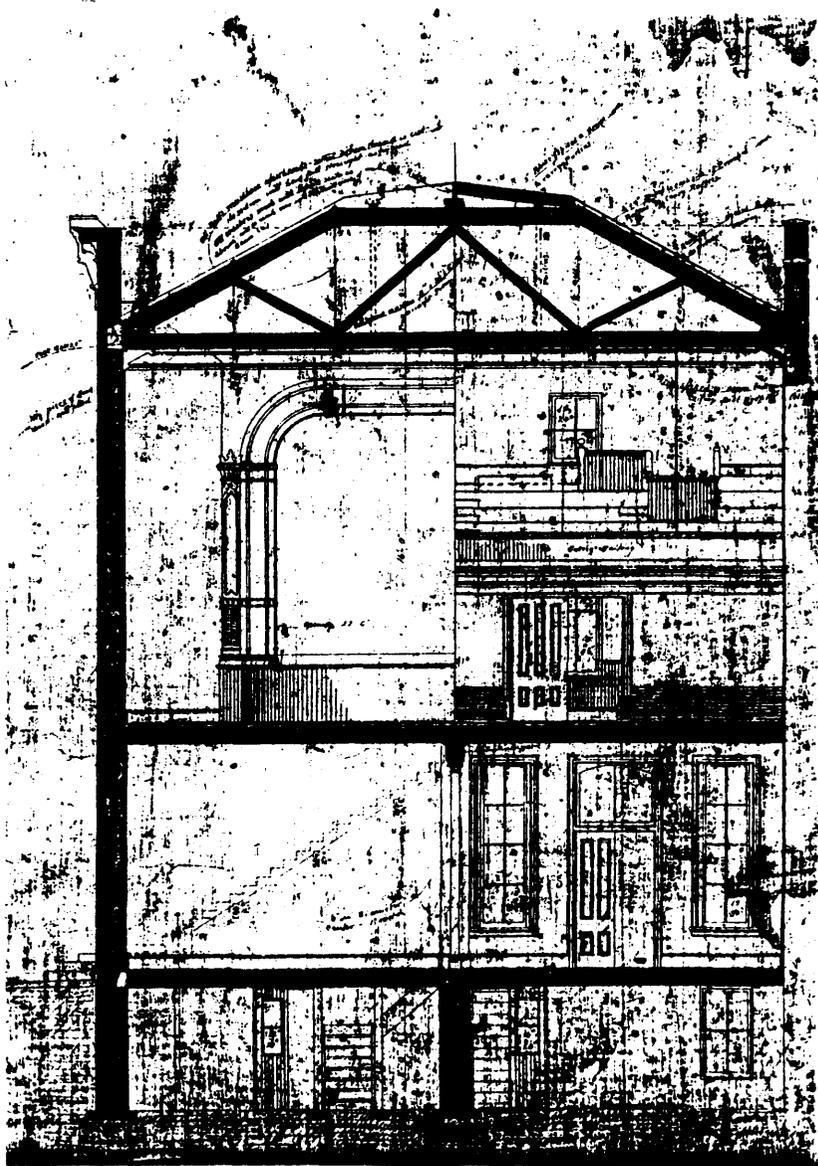
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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

LONGITUDINAL SECTION LOOKING EAST



Source: William Foster's Drawing courtesy of Dr. Jay Lala, D.D.S.

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CFN-259-1116

Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Completed and first occupied in 1883, Parker's Opera House is locally significant under National Register Criterion C, as an excellent example of architecture designed by William Foster, one of Iowa's leading architects in the Nineteenth Century. The extensive use of stone also distinguishes Parker's Opera House. The building illustrates how stone could be manipulated under the influence of Late Victorian styling.

The period of significance, under Criterion C, for this building is 1883, the year it was completed and first occupied. The year 1883 also stands as a significant date for this reason.

The property contains one resource for this nomination--the opera house--which is classified as a building.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Designed and built as an opera house, this edifice served that purpose for a relatively brief time. According to one local history:

Parker's Opera House was the first serious attempt made in Mason City to meet the growing demand for a show house commensurate with the growing needs of the new city. This was built by H. G. and A. T. Parker in 1883, and was at the time considered an important feature. It was, however, inadequate and antiquated and has long since been put to the use of a public hall. Twenty years after the building of Parker's Opera House, Charles Wilson, the builder of the Hotel Wilson and the rebuilder of the Hotel Charles, built a strictly modern opera house and named it after himself. This is one of the finest opera houses in this part of the country. Besides the Wilson there are three other play houses in the city. These are all vaudeville places, but of good quality. They are the Bijou, the Star and the Airdome. (Wheeler:I-unpaginated)

A number of well-known theatrical personalities, as well as local talent, performed in Parker's Opera House. According to a later newspaper report:

With the gala opening of this theater on Jan. 18 and 19, 1882, [sic] theatrical history in Mason City got off to a fine start. Lizzie Evans and company was the opening attraction, playing "Fogg's Ferry" on the eighteenth and a forgotten play entitled "Dew Drop" on the nineteenth.

Thomas W. Keene played "Richard III" in this house and Robert Mantell is another famous name connected with its history. Here also a performance of the famous "Black Crook" created a great furor, because it was the first production to use abbreviated costumes--more or less. . .

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

An excellent testimonial to Mason City's tastes and talent along musical lines was the fine series of light operas ably presented in this theater in which the townspeople took parts. Among those who acted and sang in this series were C. B. Higgins, Herbert Quick, the novelist, John Stevens, C. P. Shipley, Ernest Hitchcock, Mrs. May Wheeler Moore, Mrs. Will Allen, Etta Evans and Mrs. George Bowen. (Anonymous newspaper clipping)

Although Parker's Opera House was later supplanted by other facilities for live entertainment (for example, the Wilson theater constructed in 1902), the building's strategic commercial location in Mason City's central business district assured its future. The first floor originally served as a clothing store. In the 1920s, the F. W. Woolworth Company purchased the building and located a retail variety store on the first floor. Alan Beck, a Mason City real estate broker, later recalled how Woolworth's came to own the Parker Opera House:

We had business property going good by early 1924 and we made several good sales. Our largest was one that we ourselves created our own buyer and that was Woolworth's. Late in 1923 J. E. E. Markley called me and said the Parker heirs were in his office and wished me to come over. After that meeting they gave me an exclusive option on the old Parker Opera House at \$150,000.00 allowing us \$2,500.00 commission. The price seemed high but I decided to make every effort to sell it at their price. I worked out a letter to the President of Woolworth Company in New York and did all I could in that letter to sell them Mason City and suggested that they should be next to Kressge's. At that time their store was located at the corner of Federal Avenue and Second Street Northeast, where the Gamble Store has been located. My letter brought results and when Woolworth's sent their Chief Engineer and a man from their real estate department arrived in Mason City a few weeks later I sold the building to Woolworth's for \$150,000.00. The following year they spent \$45,000 remodeling, and I rented the 2nd and 3rd floors to the Standard Oil Company for their offices on a long term lease. This sale required the moving of two tenants--the Green Mill and the Hentjes Clothing Company, formerly the McNeil clothing store. (Beck:10)

In addition to his work as an entrepreneur, A. T. Parker also held local public office. From 1887 to 1889, he served as a city councilman from the first ward. (Wheeler:I-323)

ARCHITECTURE

William Foster

Parker's Opera House calls attention to the considerable skills of William Foster, a Victorian-era architect based in Des Moines, who enjoyed a state-wide reputation during the last two quarters of the

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

Nineteenth Century. Parker's Opera House illustrates specifically Foster's expertise in designing that form of architecture and manipulating stone as a building material.

The career of William Foster (1841-1909) calls attention to architecture as a profession in Iowa during the Victorian period. Prior to the 1880s, the quality of local architects was very mixed. For example, John Browne, an architect based in Des Moines, won the contract for Main Building on the campus of Iowa State University in Ames, but according to one scholar, "appears to have been capable neither of designing the building nor of preparing the necessary working drawings for its construction . . . [he] was dismissed and a more competent architect, Charles Dunham of Burlington, replaced him early in 1865." (Shank:55-57.) During the 1870s and 1880s, however, more experienced practitioners, known as "builder-architects," were attracted to Iowa. They often combined construction trades with architectural design, hence the name.

Foster's career provides an outstanding example of the builder-architect in Iowa and illustrates the growing professionalism emerging in architecture during this era. Born in Little Neck, New York, Foster's first business was as a planing mill operator and contractor in Flushing, New York. In 1870 he relocated to Des Moines, where he soon opened a planing mill in partnership with his brother Samuel. This firm remained in operation until 1875, when William dissolved it to open an office as an architect. Foster later entered into partnership with Henry F. Liebke, a native of Germany, and together they built Des Moines' most successful Nineteenth Century architectural practice. About the same time, Foster also opened a music academy at 4th and Walnut Streets. Gradually the music business occupied more and more of his time, until he dissolved his architectural partnership, although he may have continued to design some buildings. During the great Des Moines housing boom of the 1880s and 1890s, Foster was heavily involved in these other pursuits, and the extent of his practice as an architect during this period is unclear. In music, Foster locally held almost a monopoly, through his ownership of the Foster and Grand Opera Houses and his lease of the Auditorium. Foster married twice and fathered three daughters. He resided at 3920 Grand Avenue (nonextant), where he met his death by accidental gas asphyxiation in 1909. His estate was valued at over \$250,000, including the Foster Opera House and its real estate (\$150,000), the Grand Opera House (\$75,000), and his home on Grand Avenue (\$25,000). He owned all three properties free of debt (*Des Moines Tribune*, December 30, 1909, p. 1, col. 5).

Foster established a state-wide reputation, and his client list included Iowa institutions and notables. Had Foster continued to practice full-time, this legacy would have been even greater. Foster's designs in Des Moines included St. Paul's Episcopal Church (1885, 8th and High Streets, with Henry F. Liebke); Central Christian Church (1889-1890, 9th and Pleasant Streets, nonextant, with Henry F. Liebke); the nonextant J. O. Wells House, which stood on Arlington Avenue in North Des Moines; the William Foster House (as noted above); and the Wesley Redhead Barn (1757 Dean Avenue, nonextant). The Thomas Naylor House, at 944 9th Street in Des Moines, may be a Foster design. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. A short list of Foster's out-of-town commissions includes Main Building for Penn College at Oskaloosa (1875, nonextant), the Iowa Hospital for the Insane at Clarinda, Iowa (1884-1899, with Henry F. Liebke), the state penitentiary at Anamosa (NRHP), and an hotel in Avoca, Iowa (1887). In Des Moines, Foster's clientele included many notables within the local business community and society, and it is safe to assume that his residential practice reflected these connections. His nonextant home at 3920 Grand Avenue on the city's west side was a notable residence in itself.

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

Within the context of Foster's work, Parker's Opera House stands out as particularly significant. Foster had a very personal regard for the opera house as an architectural form, as is evident from his ownership of such a business in Des Moines. Designed near the height of Foster's full-time career as an architect, Parker's Opera House illustrates the full-blown maturity of his abilities in this regard. Other identified examples of this form include the following:

Opera House Designs by William Foster

<u>Name of Building</u>	<u>Year of Construction</u>	<u>Location</u>
W. W. Moore's Opera House	1874	Des Moines, IA
Academy of Music (Foster's Opera House)	1870s-1880s*	Des Moines, IA
M. W. Stover's Opera House	c. 1886	Marengo, IA
Opera House	1887	Muscatine, IA

* "It burnt down a number of times and [Foster] used his building skills to rebuild it each time bigger."

Source: Iowa Architects Files, State Historical Society of Iowa.

The fact that Foster's opera houses in Des Moines are now nonextant increases the significance of those, like Parker's Opera House, which remain.

Stone

Constructed of limestone used both for structural and decorative purposes, Parker's Opera House is one of the largest and most elaborate edifices in Mason City employing that building material. It was constructed during that period of time when stone enjoyed its greatest popularity in Mason City for commercial purposes. Although cast iron was already supplanting stone as a building material of preference for commercial construction where cost was a factor, Parker's Opera House illustrates how stone conveys the rich opulence befitting the cultural mission it was intended to serve. The use of stone might also have allayed patrons' fear of fire. The letterhead of Parker's Opera House advertised the building as "An Imposing Structure, Entirely of Stone."

In Mason City, stone as a building material has been employed primarily for commercial and institutional buildings, particularly during the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century. Although stone had been employed earlier as a building material for residences, few stone houses survive in Mason City today, one indication suggesting it was not a widely used building material for housing.

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Concerning the use of stone for commercial construction, a 1977 architectural survey of Mason City noted:

many of the commercial structures built in the 1880's and 1890's were of native stone, although many used it only for the party walls. Many of these buildings have survived but the fronts of most have been altered. (Community Development Department:5)

This analysis underlines the use of local stone for functional rather than decorative purposes.

Within this context, Parker's Opera House is distinctive because it employs stone for both functional and decorative purposes. The decorative uses of stone are notable. These uses include the building's window lintels, embellished with a carved, floral motif; window sills; columns flanking the windows; pilasters topped with capitals; a belt course between the second and third floor; and a frieze. The use of stone as a decorative material is further accented by its surface finish and its color. While the finish of the main walls is rough faced, the finish of the decorative elements (itemized above) is smooth. The decorative elements are fashioned from a light beige-colored stone, while the stone of the main walls is a darker beige color. These differences of surface texture and color accent the decorative uses of stone from its functional use.

As might be expected, the main (or west) facade of Parker's Opera House employs most elaborately the building's stonework. This include stone quoins, situated on each corner of the facade's first and second floors. These quoins are laid in square-cut ashlar courses and feature quarry face finishing. Stone belt courses divide the first and second floors and the second and third floors. While the belt course between the first and second floors is plain, the other one is embellished with dentil-like decorations. Stone is also employed as a part of the facade's frieze.

While the north elevation of the building employs stone less elaborately than the facade, it too possess stone in decorative uses. For example, the keystone over the opera house entrance, located near the rear of the building, features the image of a harp carved in stone.

The sources of the stone for Parker's Opera House are unknown. While local quarries might have provided the structural stone, the elaborately cut and dressed stone for the building's architectural embellishments, such as the hood molds, were probably imported to Mason City from elsewhere by the railroad.

Style

Parker's Opera House also illustrates how Late Victorian styling could influence the architectural design of a large, multi-purpose commercial block, particularly when such an edifice was constructed of stone. An important characteristic of this influence is the feeling of verticality, most apparent on the building's main facade.

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This feeling is achieved through the use of tall and narrow windows and the pointed pediment, which crowns the facade. The employment of a series of three pilasters on the facade also contribute to this feeling. Parker's Opera House is conceived within the tradition of the Victorian commercial block, that is a building possessing two commercial storefronts on the first floor. These three pilasters help define each of these two rooms. One pilaster is situated on each side of this block's facade. The third is situated in its center. These pilasters draw the viewer's eye upward and contribute to the vertical feeling of the facade. A series of three brackets, which form a portion of the facade's frieze and are situated directly above these pilasters, further accent them.

These vertical elements are held in check by an elaborate entablature, constructed of pressed metal, which surmounts the third floor of the facade. This entablature consists of a number of different elements of the Classical orders as applied to a Victorian commercial building. The elements include an architrave, frieze, and cornice. The latter is embellished with dentils and brackets. Three brackets are situated at the center of the entablature immediately beneath a triangularly-shaped pediment. This pediment originally contained the name "Parker Block." These letters have been removed. The three brackets mentioned above accent this pediment.

Opera House

Parker's Opera House stands as a fine and early example of a new architectural type emerging in Iowa during the fourth quarter of the Nineteenth Century--the opera house.

The design of opera houses offered new challenges to architects. An important design consideration was the unobstructed vision of patrons viewing the stage. To achieve this end, a clear-span truss system was devised for the ceiling of the building's second floor auditorium. This clear-span provided the audience with unimpeded vision from all sections.

A second aesthetic consideration was that the opera house should convey a feeling of opulence to the viewer. Parker's Opera House achieves this by several means. The employment of stone, discussed above, conferred dignity on the building. The 3-story height of the building further emphasized its importance in the community. Few buildings in Mason City during the 1880s possessed three stories.

Although the interior of the auditorium has been completely reconfigured, this cannot be discerned from the exterior of the building for reasons discussed above. The north entrance to the auditorium, with its harp-decorated keystone, also remains extant.

REPRESENTATION IN OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEYS

Parker's Opera House was surveyed in 1977 as part of a city-wide survey, *Mason City, Iowa, An Architectural Heritage: An Inventory of Historic and Architecturally Significant Buildings*. Although National Register evaluations were not specifically made in that document for each surveyed resource, a ranking system for their significance was developed and resources were then grouped according to

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their significance. Four groups were created. The highest ranking of them, Group I, contained 23 sites. Parker's Opera House (Inventory CBD #5) was one of those 23 resources. (*Mason City, Iowa, An Architectural Heritage:78*)

In 1993 Tracy Cuning prepared a Multiple Property Documentation Form entitled "Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera House, 1835-1940." This study provides an historic context for these resources in Iowa. The document employs a typology for opera halls and houses as developed by Reynolds Keith Allen in his "Nineteenth Century Theater Structures in Iowa and Nebraska 1857-1900." Allen groups these theaters as: utility halls (1850s-late 1870s); opera halls; and opera houses (late 1860s-1925). Although "Footlights in Farm Country" provided a rich source of information about Iowa opera houses, it focused largely on how the interior design of buildings facilitated live, on-stage entertainment. The removal of the stage and auditorium from Parker's Opera House obviated the utility of that approach for this nomination. Instead this building is being nominated on another basis, namely the work of William Foster.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND REGISTRATION

A good potential exists for the nomination of the Mason City Commercial Historic District to the National Register. In 1977, an architectural survey was undertaken in Mason City and updated in 1993. These documents show how Central Park, laid out in 1855, provided an anchor for development of the central business district. They also identify and evaluate the historic commercial buildings, which cluster around this public square and form Mason City's central business district. Those buildings on the east side include Parker's Opera House and the First National Bank of Mason City (NRHP). Those on the south include Frank Lloyd Wright's Park Inn Hotel at 15 West State Street (NRHP) and his City National Bank at 4 South Federal Avenue (NRHP). Other architecturally significant buildings, such as the City Bank at 1 South Federal Avenue, are also located here.

Although this survey information provides an outstanding beginning point for such a National Register nomination, an intensive survey of the central business district, using National Register criteria, should be undertaken. Such an intensive survey would help inform property owners of the benefits of National Register listing and stimulate further interest in good design in Mason City. It would also provide the groundwork for a National Register nomination as the next step.

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

PHOTOGRAPH CIRCA 1883



Source: *Mason City through Camera.*

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

MASON CITY CENTRAL PARK CIRCA 1890

ARROW LOCATES PARKER'S OPERA HOUSE



Source: *Mason City Illustrated*.



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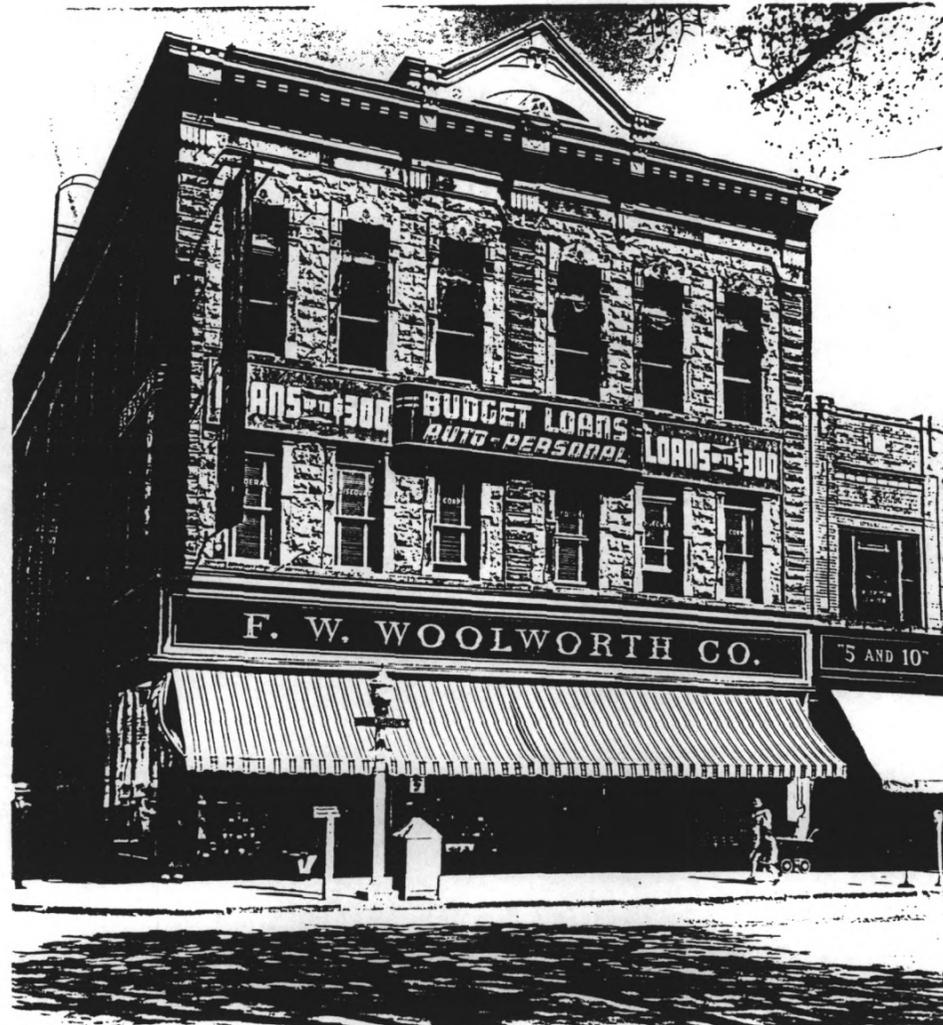
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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

PARKER OPERA HOUSE AS WOOLWORTH'S

PHOTOGRAPHED ON MAY 7, 1947



Source: SL #16522, Loomis Archive of Mason City History, Mason City Public Library.

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

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Front Elevation
Side Elevation
Second Floor Plan
Third Story Plan
Longitudinal Section

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 1 and Lot 2 in Subdivision of Lot 2 in Block 15 of Paul Felt's Plat in the City of Mason City, Iowa.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Contains all land associated historically with the resource.

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Parker's Opera House, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa.

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Looking east southeast
William C. Page, Photographer
April 23, 1998 | 6. Parker's Opera House
23 North Federal Avenue
Mason City, IA 50402
Detail of second floor interior
William C. Page, Photographer
April 23, 1998 |
| 2. Parker's Opera House
23 North Federal Avenue
Mason City, IA 50402
Looking northeast
William C. Page, Photographer
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| 3. Parker's Opera House
23 North Federal Avenue
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Looking northwest
William C. Page, Photographer
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| 4. Parker's Opera House
23 North Federal Avenue
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Looking southwest
William C. Page, Photographer
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| 5. Parker's Opera House
23 North Federal Avenue
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Interior of first floor showing design of cubicles
William C. Page, Photographer
April 23, 1998 | |