

Municipal Building
Name of Property

Story 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)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1916-1946

1916

Significant Dates

1916

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Liebe, Nourse & Rasmussen, architects

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

Ames Public Library, Ames City Hall

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Municipal Building, Story County, Iowa.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Constructed between 1915 and 1916, the Municipal Building is locally significant, under National Register Criterion A, because it embodies that city's efforts to implement Progressive government reforms during the early Twentieth Century. These reforms included infrastructure improvements--such as hard-surfaced streets and sidewalks, sewers, and improved municipal electric and heating plants--as well as increased professionalism, efficiency, and scope in municipal services. The Municipal Building combined under one roof facilities for the city council, mayor, municipal offices, police department (including jail and police court), and fire department. Previously, these functions were inefficiently housed in several different buildings. The floorplan of the new city hall also illustrates the Progressive Movement's concern for well-organized government because it provided distinct work zones for these different functions. The building also provided public rest rooms, including a women's lounge, facilities hitherto unavailable in Ames. Finally, the building was designed to provide for many years of city growth. The Municipal Building also calls attention to the political career of Parley Sheldon, "perennial mayor" of Ames during the early Twentieth Century, and his leadership in effecting Progressive government reforms in the community.

The Municipal Building is also locally significant, under National Register Criterion C. Constructed of quality building materials and conveying through its massing and architectural detailing the impression of strength and integrity, the building stands as a fine example in Ames of the Classical Revival styling as applied to a public building by Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen, the architectural firm of Des Moines who designed it and whose architectural skills it demonstrates.

The period of significance, under Criterion A, for this building is 1916 through 1946, the period of time within the National Register's 50-year requirement in which the Municipal Building served the community in this capacity. A significant date within this period is 1916, the year in which Parley Sheldon served the City of Ames as mayor within this new building. The period of significance, under Criterion C, is also 1916, the year in which it was completed.

The property contains one resource for this nomination--the municipal building, which is contributing and classified as a building.

PROGRESSIVISM AND PARLEY SHELDON

The career of Parley Sheldon (1844-1932) epitomized the Progressive era in Ames. Known as "the perennial mayor" for his long-time service to the community in that position, Sheldon was a banker by occupation, a Democrat in politics, and an Ames booster by avocation. Sheldon served as mayor of Ames for 18 years, serving various terms over a period of 32 years. These years included 1884-1886, 1890-1894, 1902-1908, and 1910-1916.

The years between 1891 and 1918 marked a transformation of city government in Ames. The City embarked on a new era of professional administration, capital improvement, regulatory action, and expansion. Municipal infrastructure was improved with the construction of hard-surfaced streets and

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sidewalks, sewer lines, and public utilities, including electric and waterworks. The city instituted new regulations over construction in the city, including signage, fire zones, and building permits. When the city annexed the western portion of the community about 1893, it increased the size of the municipal corporation almost twofold. This action showed the willingness of the city to govern that portion of the community adjacent to Iowa State College and to extend municipal services to that institution. Also during this period, A. B. Maxwell was appointed city clerk (he remained for many years in this office) and provided continuity to local government.

Within this context, Parley Sheldon's career as mayor stands out because of his successful actions to retain public ownership of Ames municipal light plant and for his efforts to build the new municipal building.

Planning for the new municipal building in Ames also illustrates the efforts of the Progressive Movement in the city. The Ames city council appointed a committee to study this matter. According to one source:

Under the direction of the building committee of the city council a number of architects are preparing preliminary sketches for a new city hall at Ames. The building committee has been working on the project for several months. Letters have been exchanged with officials of other cities regarding municipal building and a large amount of material collected for presentation to the council when the proper time comes.

The committee thought it best to have some rough sketches made, and it is expected that these will be presented to the council for consideration at some meeting in the near future. One set of sketches has already been filed in the city clerk's office. (*Ames Evening Times*:1914)

These planning efforts illustrate the long-range vision taken by the Progressive Movement in Ames. As a local newspaper reported later in 1914:

The committee of the city council appointed to consider the matter of a new city hall and make a report at the September [1914] meeting of the council, is busily engaged in investigating city halls in other towns. Dr. A. B. Maxwell, city clerk, has received a large number of letters from other cities in the state setting forth the details of their city hall and giving the cost of construction.

The opinion seems to be held quite generally held [sic] that in building a new city hall, Ames must look far into the future and build for a city of even 20,000 or 25,000 population. The city now has an excellent site for a city hall and from the investigations under way it may be expected that an adequate report will be made by the committee. (*Ibid.*)

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An additional benefit engendered by the construction of the Municipal Building in Ames was the growth of a considerable level of local pride. An extensive contemporary newspaper report confirms this, as well as the fact that about one-half of Ames' population attended the cornerstone-laying ceremonies in 1915. (See Continuation Sheet 8-18 and Rollenhagen and Svec:17-19.)

ARCHITECTURE

The Municipal Building is architecturally significant because it illustrates a new type of architecture emerging in Iowa during the early Twentieth Century, the multi-functional municipal building; because it calls attention to the architectural firm of Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen; and because it shows how Classical Revival styling could influence the architectural design of a public building. The current rehabilitation of this building is respecting this architectural significance.

Multi-Functional Municipal Building

The Municipal Building stands as a fine example of a new architectural type emerging in Iowa during the early Twentieth Century--the multi-functional municipal building. During the Nineteenth Century, local government services--such as the fire department, jail, and city clerk's office--were often located in separate buildings. Frequently, as in Ames, the name "town hall" was given to the building housing city offices. Toward the close of the Nineteenth Century and rapidly accelerating during the first decade of the Twentieth Century, Progressive reformers in mid-sized cities found that housing municipal services under one roof promoted efficiency and well-organized government, an important goal of the Progressive Movement. While large cities in Iowa like Des Moines and Cedar Rapids might require separate buildings for these services, smaller cities led by Progressive reformers, like Ames and Oskaloosa, experimented with a new type of architecture--the multi-functional municipal building.

The Municipal Building calls direct attention to this new type of public architecture. When first opened for use in 1916, a local newspaper described the "commodious quarters for various departments of City's official life." They included: Fire Department, Wagon Room, Firemen's Quarters (shower baths, lockers, and sleeping quarters connected to wagon room by circular opening and brass pole), Police Department, Jail, Police Court, Street Commissioner's Office, Ladies Rest Room, City Clerk's Office, Office Vault, Reception Room, Women's Cells, Council Chamber, Mayor and City Solicitor's Office, City Engineer's Office, and Drafting Room (*Ames Evening Times*:1916).

The Oskaloosa City Hall (NRHP), in Oskaloosa, Iowa, provides another outstanding example of this phenomenon in Iowa. The central fire station for the city was constructed about 1900. It featured equipment storage on the first floor, fireman's hall on the second story, and a 2-1/2 story bell tower adjacent to the main block. In 1916, the City of Oskaloosa improved this facility by the construction of a 2-1/2 story city hall directly abutting the fire station. This construction project also added a third floor to the fire station, removed the previous bell tower, and added a higher one. As a result, the new facility combined under one roof the municipal fire department, police department, city clerk's office,

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and council chambers. Previous to this time, these services had been housed in separate buildings. By circa 1918, an ambulance service had been added to Oskaloosa's municipal services, with the ambulance housed in the fire station. (Chuck Russell Postcard Collection)

The design of this new type of multi-functional municipal building provided new challenges to architects. These buildings had to combine very different working environments. The siting of fire department exits required careful planning to facilitate their most efficient and rapid deployment of fire equipment onto city streets.

Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen

The Municipal Building illustrates the considerable architectural skills of the firm Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen. Specifically, this edifice illustrates the preference of this firm for monumental form and sleek architectural detailing. The building is also one of only two municipal buildings credited to that firm, which rivaled Proudfoot and Bird as a premier architectural firm in Iowa during the early Twentieth Century. The Municipal Building calls attention to the work of E. F. Rasmussen, lead architect for the project (*Ames Evening Times* 1915).

Henry F. Liebbe (1851-1927) was born in Germany, trained in the architectural firm of William Foster of Des Moines (Shank:59), and became a partner. In 1899, following Foster's departure from the firm, its successor, Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen, was formed. It advertised:

Messrs. Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen are constantly engaged in planning and supervising the erection of the most advanced classes of public and private buildings, and are prepared to execute all commissions not only promptly, but with that intelligent apprehension of design which has served to make their efforts so highly appreciated. (*The Midwestern*:October 1906).

By 1904, Henry F. Liebbe had become chief architect for the Iowa State Board of Control (Brigham:I-386) and concentrated much of his effort on state commissions. It is thought that Nourse and Rasmussen were responsible for much of the firm's other work. This is corroborated by the Municipal Building. In 1915, a local newspaper reported that:

EMPLOY ARCHITECT
FOR NEW CITY HALL

RASMUSSEN OF DES MOINES INSTRUCTED TO PREPARE FURTHER PLANS.

At the regular meeting of the city council held Monday evening, the building committee with the matter of a new city hall under consideration, reported in favor of Rasmussen of Des Moines as architect for the new building. Following the report the council gave the

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committee authority to secure plans and specifications for the structure to be approved by the council in general. (*Ames Evening Times*:1915)

Additional information about the Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen firm is available in a folder of primary source material, gathered by architectural historian Neal Vogel, at the State Historical Society of Iowa.

In terms of its architecture, the Municipal Building provides a good example of Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen's design, particularly as conceived for a moderate-sized municipal building. The west and north facades of the Municipal Building are monumental and sleek. These characteristics are also discernible in other Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen designs in Iowa, such as the Iowa City Public Library, Kromer Flats (Des Moines), and First National Bank Building (Mason City).

A number of architectural qualities lend a monumental feeling to the Municipal Building. This feeling is achieved because the mass of the building is emphasized by horizontal details. The limestone foundation, raised some five feet above grade, provides a strong visual base for the Municipal Building and is accentuated by the building's limestone cornice. This cornice features three heavy bands and imparts a strong horizontal line to the building. The eye is immediately drawn to this cornice and then to the foundation because their light color contrasts with that of the red-colored brick of the walls. The subtle design of the parapet also adds to the horizontal feeling of the building. Its two-stepped configuration leads the eye back to the horizontal line of the cornice. While it is true that the walls of the building are relieved by the suggestion of pilasters (formed by the inset bays), these pilasters impart little verticality to the building. It is as if the weight of the cornice is pressing on these pilasters and keeping them in check with the foundation.

At the same time, architect Rasmussen eschewed rich textures and elaborate embellishments in preference for smooth surfaces and a few, substantial details. These smooth finishes impart a sleek feeling to the building. This feeling in turn emphasizes the building's massing and contributes to its monumental feeling. The main entrance to the building provides a good example. It features heavy stone piers supporting an equally heavy stone lintel, which imparts a substantial feeling to the entrance. Architectural detailing is restricted. The severity of this design originally was relieved by a series of classically-styled windows in the transom area, which were never implemented. (Compare Continuation Sheets 8-17 and 8-19.)

Rasmussen set back the facade of the fire department by some two feet from that of the city hall. As a result, these two components of building can be read quickly as distinct. At the same time, the continuation of the cornice from city hall to fire department visually unites them. Finally, Rasmussen accented the two vehicular doors to the fire department by cast stone embellishments in the hood molds above these openings. These details call public attention to this portion of the building and remind passing traffic that emergency vehicles are housed behind it.

It is hoped that further research will flesh out the Northern European and Scandinavian roots of this architectural firm. The partners' predilection for architectural designs of massive form shows an affinity to a similar traditions in Northern Europe and Scandinavia.

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Other Information

The Municipal Building was constructed by J. E. Tusan, contractors of Des Moines, Iowa, at a cost of \$37,310. The heating and plumbing was contracted to McCauley Heating and Plumbing Company of Ames and Des Moines. The electrical work was contracted to Best Electric Company of Ames. (*American Contractor*:1915.)

INTEGRITY

The Municipal Building remained in public service until 1990 when it was vacated. After standing unoccupied for several years, a purchase agreement was made between the City of Ames and Youth and Shelter Services, Inc. It is now being rehabilitated for service again as an office building.

Over the years, the City of Ames remodeled the building several times. Although numerous partitions were removed, the overall floorplan of the building remained intact. Overall, the building remains structurally sound and in good condition.

REPRESENTATION IN OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEYS

In 1990, Ralph J. Christian of the State Historical Society of Iowa succinctly summarized the status of survey work completed to that date concerning the Municipal Building:

Building was included in 1979 CIRALG Survey and evaluated as a Category 3 property, meaning that it did not appear to have exceptional significance but was in original condition. Unfortunately, this survey did not produce a written contextual analysis. It is my understanding that the city is in process of hiring a consultant to develop historic contexts and conduct an intensive survey of the downtown. At time of survey, no one knew the building was designed by Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen, one of the state's leading architectural firms of the early 20th century. There have been no full blown surveys of that firm and its works. (Letter of Communication 1990.)

In 1990, Rose Rollenhagen and Kathy Svec submitted on behalf of the Ames Heritage Association an application for the designation of the Municipal Building (then known as the Public Safety Building) as a local historic landmark. This extensively researched document made the case for the building's eligibility under three criteria, including its architectural and historical significance. (Rollenhagen and Svec:3-4.) This application was subsequently reviewed and approved by the Ames Historic Preservation Commission and the Ames City Council. The Municipal Building was declared a local landmark in 1991.

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In 1992, William C. Page completed for the City of Ames a reconnaissance survey of Ames and an intensive survey of the central business district. The Municipal Building was included as one resource within the intensive survey. This work determined that the building was eligible, under Criteria A and C, for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Under Criterion A, the report noted that the Municipal Building was significant "because the building calls direct attention to Ames city government during the Progressive Era and to Parley Sheldon, Ames' 'Perennial Mayor,' [who] epitomized civic duty" during the period. (Page 1992:I-Site 8.)

POTENTIAL FOR HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The site's potential for archaeological significance is, as yet, unevaluated. Although historical archaeological investigations may uncover traces of previous construction on the site, this is unlikely because the 1915-1916 construction project affected radical change upon it.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research concerning Progressivism in Iowa should examine the extent to which other communities in the state centralized their municipal operations--particularly office, fire, and police functions--under one roof, as well as their reasons for doing so. This information could then be employed to compare (or contrast) that of the two progressive communities identified in this report, which undertook such improvements--Ames and Oskaloosa.

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MUNICIPAL BUILDING

ORIGINAL DRAWING OF WEST FACADE



Source: Architects Rudi/Lee/Dreyer & Associates from original drawing by Liebke, Nourse & Rasmussen.
The original is dark and difficult to reproduce mechanically.