

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs
State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 _____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 1 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

Address _____ 320 (320-336) W. 3rd Street _____ City _____ Davenport _____

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre is located on Lots 1, 2, and 3, Block 20 of the Original Town of Davenport. The structure is sited on the northeast corner of the intersection of West Third and Ripley Streets; its facade faces south, with a secondary elevation facing west. The building is the first in a line of contiguous commercial structures, all of significantly smaller scale and earlier construction dates. A public sidewalk provides access to the building's entrances on Ripley and West Third Streets.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The ten-story Kahl Building is a steel frame construction with stone and terra cotta facing materials. As discussed in the 1983 Svendsen/Bowers MRA, the building's design was clearly inspired by the work of the Chicago architects, specifically, Louis Sullivan's Wainwright Building (1890-1891). In the Kahl Building, white terra cotta ornaments the building with classically inspired moldings, floral panels, and caryatid inspired pilasters.

Despite the vigorous use of applied ornamentation, the Kahl building exhibits the technological advances of the Chicago School, seen in the clear expression of the structure, the great height, and the abundance of glass surface.

Condition

In the Kahl Building, the condition of the terra cotta is of greatest concern. Given the scale of the structure, an assessment from ground level is of little use. However, there is evidence that the building's terra cotta (southeast corner and along the second story frieze) has sustained some damage, which appears to be in the process of being restored. Terra cotta has a long lifespan, but is notoriously difficult to repair and/or replace; maintenance of the tile and the metal strapping system is critical to maximizing its longevity.

The Kahl Building retains a very high level of historic integrity, remaining a signature building of the Davenport Central Business District and epitomizing the economic prosperity of its construction era.

PROPERTY HISTORY

Henry "Hummer" Kahl constructed the \$1.5 million Kahl Building in 1920, after a design by local architect Arthur Ebeling. Kahl was vice-president and partner of the general contracting firm of Walsh-Kahl Construction, one of the nation's major construction firms in the early years of the twentieth century. The company is best known for its work on the Metropolitan Water District's tunnel system, which was designed to move water from the Colorado River to Southern California. The firm also worked on railroad transit stations in Buffalo, NY and South Bend, Indiana, and on the Memorial Bridge in Wilmington, Delaware.

Co-owner, Pat Walsh, a Davenport native with Irish parents, had a background in railroad construction and stonemasonry. Walsh, inspired by his personal creed to "move up", rose from the work of sewer line repair and road construction, to owner of Walsh Construction, which, through the merger of multiple companies, became, under his direction, the prominent engineering firm described above.

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs
State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 _____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 2 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

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In addition to the Kahl building, Walsh-Kahl Construction is associated locally with the construction of the Hotel Blackhawk (1915/1920) and the American Commercial and Savings Bank in 1927.

Historically, the Kahl Building accommodated one hundred eighty four office suites, multiple retail shops, a restaurant, and the Capitol Theatre. A book, "The Kahl Legacy", written by Connie Heckert for the Scott Community College Foundation, includes a manifest of the building's original tenants.

The Capital Theatre opened on Christmas Day, 1920. The facility had a seating capacity of twenty-five hundred and, by 1928, featured an organ manufactured by the Wicks Pipe Organ Co. The \$30,000 instrument replaced the theater's original Moeller organ. In March of 2000, the Quad-Cities Times reported the completion of a \$75,000 restoration of the Wicks organ, notably, the world's only Wicks theater organ retained in its original home.

In 1994 the V.O. Figge family, and heirs of Henry Kahl, gifted the Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre to the Scott County Community College Foundation. Figge was the long-time chairman of the Davenport Bank & Trust Co. and husband of Henry Kahl's daughter, Elizabeth. Today the building is known as the Kahl Educational Center. The college has plans to restore the Capital Theatre, which is a stunning space in keeping with the tradition of early twentieth century theaters. The theater continues to be used periodically.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Kahl Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. As was true at the time of its listing, the building is considered significant under Criterion C as an exceptional example of the influence of the Chicago School on commercial architecture. As noted in the 1983 Svendsen MRA, the Kahl Building was "certainly inspired by, if not directly modeled on such earlier works as Sullivan's Wainwright Building (1890-1891)."

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs
State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 3 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

Address _____ 320 (320-336) W. 3rd Street _____ City _____ Davenport _____



View of the Kahl Building/Capitol Theater, looking west along West Third Street.

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs
State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 4 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

Address _____ 320 (320-336) W. 3rd Street _____ City _____ Davenport _____



View of west and south elevations, looking northeast from the 400 block of West Third Street.

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 5 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

Address _____ 320 (320-336) W. 3rd Street _____ City _____ Davenport _____



View of north and west elevations, looking south from the intersection of Ripley and West Fourth Streets.

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 6 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

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Detail view of street level, west and south elevations, looking northeast from the intersection of Ripley and West Third Streets.

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 7 __

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Address _____ 320 (320-336) W. 3rd Street _____ City _____ Davenport _____



Detail view of the Capitol Theatre marquee located on the building's south elevation. An image of the historic canopy can be found in the Richardson-Sloane Special Collections of the Davenport Public Library (Image #VM89-000195). Regretfully, it is not included here.

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 8 __

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Detail view of the upper story fenestration and terra cotta details (south elevation.)

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 9 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

Address _____ 320 (320-336) W. 3rd Street _____ City _____ Davenport _____



Judging from the automobiles parked on the street, this undated historic image documents the Kahl Building within a few short years after its construction in 1920.

(SOURCE: Image courtesy of the Richardson-Sloane Special Collections of the Davenport Public Library.)
Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs

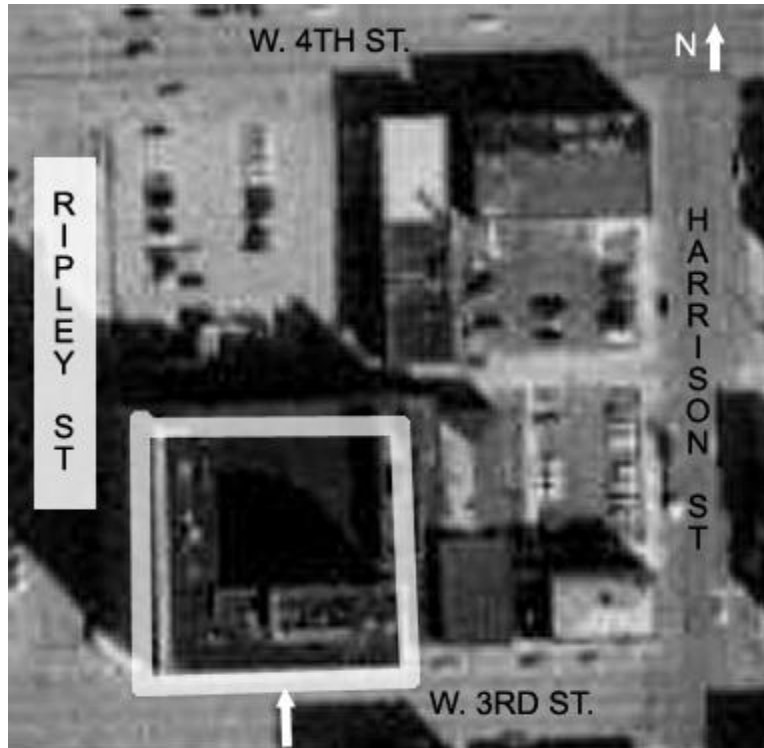
State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 ____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 10 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

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The arrow indicates the location of the Kahl Building.

(SOURCE: City of Davenport – Planning Department – 1/2005)

State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Site Inventory Form
Continuation Sheet

Site Number __ 82-00281 _____
Related District Number _____

Page __ 11 __

Name of Property _____ Kahl Building/Capitol Theatre _____ County _____ Scott _____

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Special Collections

Davenport Public Library; Richardson-Sloane Special Collections
Davenport City Directory Collection 1890-1940
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Collection
Quad Cities Photograph Collection

Local Publications

Svendsen, Marlys. "Davenport, Where the River Runs West: A Survey of Davenport History & Architecture". ND.

Internet Resources

www.scottcountyiowa.com/assessor. Scott County Assessor.

www.qctoday.com. Quad-Cities Times internet archive.

www.rootsweb.com/~iascott.