



RIPS NEWS

Advocates for Historic Architecture

Membership Meetings

Our normal meeting schedule has been disrupted by the Stay at Home if You Can status of our nation, state, and city. Uncertainty of when public gatherings will be safe to attend means we will be addressing meetings on a month to month basis. Watch for email updates and keep abreast of the latest happenings on our Facebook page.

November 17, 2020 A virtual meeting on Zoom is planned. You will receive login information the day before the meeting.

December 15, 2020 Virtual Membership Holiday Gathering. Grab a holiday cookie or a snack and a beverage of your choice and attend our holiday gathering where we will share holiday memories, success stories and look forward to the year ahead. Log-in information will be emailed prior to the meeting.

January 19, 2021 Meeting information will be emailed in January. Happy New Year!

Remember to keep the third Tuesday of each month marked on your calendar for monthly RIPS meetings and activities

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

As we begin to celebrate and promote our downtown as a National Register Historic District, we thought this would be a good time to look at what this listing means. The National Register of Historic Places is the United States government's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed worthy of preservation for their historical significance. Listings can help tell the story of a community and build community pride. Historic districts can be centers of heritage tourism and help spur economic vitality. Commercial buildings can be eligible for significant tax credits for rehabilitation and restoration. Listing on the register alone comes without restrictions. Only when tax incentives are involved are there reviews. However, if a property or district's integrity is substantially lost, designation can be withdrawn.

What's the difference between a locally designated Landmark Building (Landmark) and one that's individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NR)? It can be confusing, especially for business owners in the new NR downtown district. The Landmark designation is administered locally, and the review of exterior changes (not interior) is done by the Preservation Commission. It primarily protects the exterior of a building from inappropriate changes. No tax credits are involved.



The NR tax credit program, which is completely optional, also covers important existing interior features and changes are reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office. The individual NR listing (as well as those listed as 'contributing' to a NR district), gives a business owner the ability to apply for significant tax credits, both federal and state, for rehabilitation and restoration. When tax credits are used, interior changes are also considered. Tax credit participation does not require that parts of a building be restored to an earlier condition.

This RIPS quarterly newsletter features the downtown Landmarks and the individually listed NR buildings.

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Local Landmark Properties in Downtown Rock Island

Star Block, 1874, 1817-1827 2nd Avenue, Landmarked 1991

This is the oldest of the downtown Landmarks, and is the oldest, mostly intact, downtown commercial building as well. The Italianate architectural style was common at the time, but examples are now rare. The historic name “Star Block” was rediscovered by RIPS in the 1980s while researching buildings for a downtown tour. The outline of the star and words atop the Second Avenue gable suddenly made sense. While the term ‘block’ would seem to mean a single building, this was actually four separate buildings under four different owners when it was designed by local architect Isaac N. Holmes. Today there are only three buildings, under a single owner, because the upper floors of the fourth one, to the west, were destroyed, probably by a fire. The first story remains, however.



The block was Landmarked in 1991 and recently underwent a major restoration and renovation. Upper stories, which once served such a variety of uses as a boiler works and small residential units (even a hotel annex) are now apartments. The first story, which features recessed doorways and cast iron structure, always was used as commercial space. Some front windows even have historic “prism” glass transoms.

In its earliest years, the Star Block featured an iron balcony that surrounded the street sides of the building on the second story level. This disappeared soon after the beginning of the 1900s. Today, with the initiative of Rock Island Growth Corp, the buildings have been painted in graduated complementary shades of red and the awnings, which are very functional, have been given a unified treatment.

Centennial Bridge Commission Building, 1941, 201 15th Street, Landmarked 1999

This is a comparatively new building in historic downtown, but is clearly representative of a style era when few buildings were being constructed. Although the Great Depression was just ending, thanks to the persistent efforts of Mayor Robert P. Galbraith, Rock Island got a new Centennial Bridge (named for the 1941 Centennial of the city) as well as a small jewel box for the Centennial Bridge Commission that was located at the foot of the bridge on 15th Street, just opposite the County Courthouse. Both bridge and building were designed by Howard, Needles, Tammen, and Bergendoff (HNTB). Actual construction of the smooth white stone building was done by local contractor, Sam Weisman, who also built many prominent Rock Island buildings including Longview Apartments, the Weisman Apartments on 20th Street, and many private homes.



The simple but elegant style is known as Modernistic and it still appears much as it did in 1941. Even the integral garage is original although the door is a replacement. When the state of Illinois took over the bridge, there was no need for a Commission in charge of tolls and maintenance, so the city took over the building. In 2008, it was restored and became a Visitor Center for the area. The interior space has a display of the areas historic bridges, created by historian Curt Roseman.

Robinson Hardware, ca 1875, 1926, 1706 3rd Avenue, Landmarked 1996

This simple building in what is known as the Commercial style (but with an Arts & Crafts flavor) started its life as a more ornate Italianate style but a mid-1920s remodeling created the current appearance. Over the years, the building served many commercial functions – from a “flour, feed & straw” business to a grocery to a liquor store. Its longest tenant/owner was a hardware store and, at the time it was landmarked, the interior retained the historic retail accouterments. From a hand-cranked elevator to a sliding ladder and dozens (hundreds?) of tiny wood drawers and shelves, the function as a retail center was clear. By the early 2000s, the interior had been stripped.

The second and third stories had a more checkered past. Early tenants included the King Solomon Masons. After that, rooms or apartments were rented. However, the room rental in later years evolved into a house of ill repute. Sometimes simply called “furnished rooms,” later they were known as the Savoy Hotel and the Annetta Hotel.



1706 3rd Ave as a grocery

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Rock Island Public Library, 1903, 401 19th Street, Landmarked 1985

The very first building designated a Landmark under the Preservation Ordinance is still one of Rock Island's most beautiful buildings. A large 1987 addition at the rear – east – as well as a complementary accessible entrance to the south, have permitted the historic structure to serve the community continuously. It was designed by the architectural firm of Drack & Kerns, who also designed the old Modern Woodmen HQ (now the County Office Building) and the former Immanuel Lutheran Church, as well as many important homes.

Rock Island is proud to have had the very first public library in the entire state, in 1872. However, the local library dates to an even earlier “private” library in 1855.

This building was called a “Temple of Literature” and the Classical Revival style recalls the columned Greek and Roman temples. One interesting detail is its “Gray Canyon Stone” from Ohio. The iron content of the originally gray stone has caused it to weather to a soft golden shade. A notable feature is the decorative cornice giving the building a wedding cake look. Beneath that is a frieze inscribed with names of well-known and not-so-well-known authors. During the 1987 construction, an interior glass dome was uncovered and restored. It can be seen on the second floor. *(Photo on page 1)*

YMCA, 1912, 500 20th Street, Landmarked 2020



This recently Landmarked Arts & Crafts/Craftsman structure, designed by architect Cyrus D. McLane, has been featured in recent RIPS newsletters, so look at the [February 2020 RIPS News](#) for more detail. It is nearly five stories high, thanks to the exposed stone basement level, and shares similarities with other YMCAs designed by McLane throughout the Midwest. Although most windows have been covered or changed, the overall appearance looks much like it did when completed. The simple yet cohesive decorative elements – definitely not Victorian - indicate a forward-thinking architect and client and create a building that adapts perfectly to its current adaptive use as a furniture store. The prominent location ensures this building will not be forgotten.

Ghost Landmark – Original First National Bank, 1964, 1639 Second Avenue, Landmarked 2020; Demolished 2020

Landmark designations generally do protect buildings, but the owners of the original First National Bank appealed the designation to the City Council who overturned the Preservation Commission decision. The old bank was demolished a few months later

National Register Properties in Downtown Rock Island

The following buildings not only contribute to our Downtown National Register District, they are listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places.

Fort Armstrong Hotel, 1900 3rd Avenue



Constructed in 1925-26, the Fort Armstrong Hotel is the last surviving grand hotel in Rock Island. Italian Renaissance Revival in architectural style, the nine-story building has deep corner setbacks above the second floor keeping it from dominating the streetscape. The upper stories are trimmed in white terra cotta and the lower two stories in cast concrete. Initial funding for the hotel came from local citizens who bought over \$450,000 in stock purchases in only one week. The hotel provided 160 guest rooms plus ten top floor apartments. It also included a banquet room, three dining rooms, a bar, bowling alley, billiard room, barbershop and several retail shops.

Fort Armstrong Theater (Circa 21), 1828 3rd Avenue

This Art Deco three-story building is known for its fabulous terra cotta decoration. The main focal points of the Indian red brick building are its curved northwest corner, the semi-circular areas above the windows and the terra cotta designs. Walk around the building and look for an Indian chief, spears, arrows, birds, snakes, corn and more. Credit for the terra cotta designs goes, at least in part, to a young draftsman named Rudolph Sandberg who worked for a Chicago architectural firm. He came to Rock Island, used local authentic Indian artifacts to inspire his drawings, and oversaw the installation of the artwork. As the story goes, he and his wife enjoyed living in Rock Island and spending time in Long View Park. They ultimately decided to move here, joining the Cervin & Horn architectural firm. The theater opened on January 19, 1921 to the silent film “Midsummer Madness” accompanied by a ten-piece orchestra. Adult admission was 36 cents plus four cents tax.

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Peoples National Bank / Fries Building, 1723-31 2nd Avenue



These buildings were constructed as two separate buildings, a four-story bank and a three-story department store. They are now connected on the first, second and third floors. The bank building was built around 1876 by an unknown person. Peoples National purchased the building around 1904, adding the fourth floor and rebuilding the 2nd Avenue façade with its impressive cornice at the top of the building.

Frank Young and William McCombs commissioned the Fries Building after having outgrown their current department store location. The store with its large cornice and a frieze that contains a row of distinctive round windows opened with much fanfare in 1897. Its 60 feet of frontage on 2nd Avenue enticed customers with large display windows edged with

electric lights.

Sala Apartments, 320- 330 19th Street



The Sala Apartments are the last remaining historical apartment building in our downtown. The original building (the south side) built in 1903 was commissioned by Dr. Elmo Sala and his wife who lived at 322 19th Street. They asked architect Leonard Drack to design an apartment building to be built just south of their house. Italian Renaissance Revival in style, the front entrances feature stone corner pilasters, a narrow Roman Ionic capital with egg-and-dart detail and a stone entablature across the top bearing the name “Sala”. Inside there were 25 apartments arranged around five interior light wells, in addition to the raised basement, which had three commercial spaces, three apartments and storage. When the building was completed, the Salas moved into apartment 101 and Dr. Sala located his offices directly below.

The northern section of the building was built in 1913 and designed by architect C.D. McLane to be compatible with the original. Where you see differences is in the interior finishing. The newer building has Craftsman detailing such as vertical panel wainscoting, high plate rails and stair rails and fireplaces far simpler than in the older more Victorian section.

Best Building, 1701-1703 2nd Avenue



The Best Building was built by Louis Best, an industrialist and real estate magnate from Davenport in 1908. The six-story structure is where Young and McCombs moved when they outgrew the Fries Building. It is another of our downtown buildings designed in the Classical Revival style with Commercial Style (“Chicago School”) influences such as large display windows and a height and mass that would “give Rock Island a skyline”. An elegant, glassed roof portico hung over the 2nd Avenue entrances supported by chains suspended from the second floor. Inside the store carried dry goods, notions, clothing and shoes for men, women, misses and children along with curtains, rugs, suitcases, cigars, drugs, and china. It was also reported to be the first store outside of Chicago to be equipped with a pneumatic tube system for cash transactions. In 1992 artist Richard Haas painted a 60-foot tall trompe l’oeil of Black Hawk on the north side of the building.

Many of these buildings were featured in our series, “Postcards From Home”. Check out

www.RockIslandPreservation.org/Postcards-From-Home for more information about these and other Landmark and National Register buildings in Rock Island.

Other Rock Island Districts and Properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Districts

Broadway Historic District

north, east, and west of
7th Avenue & 20th Street

Chippinnock National Register Historic District

2901 12th Street

World War 1

Multi-Property Listing

north and east of
18th Avenue & 40th Street

Buildings

Connor-Parker House

702 20th Street

Denkmann - Hauberg Estate

1300 24th Street

Old Main (Augustana College)

3600 7th Avenue

Potter House

1906 7th Avenue

Rock Island Lines Depot

3031 5th Avenue

Stauduhar House

1608 21st Street

Wagner House

904 23rd Street

Weyerhaeuser House

(House on the Hill)

3052 10th Avenue