

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

Site Number \_\_ 82-05366 \_\_\_\_\_  
Related District Number \_\_\_\_\_

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Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_ Burtis Opera House \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_ Scott \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ 415 Perry Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Davenport \_\_\_\_\_

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#### SITE DESCRIPTION

The Burtis Opera House is located on Lot 2, Block 56 of LeClaire's 2nd Addition. The building is sited on the east side of Perry Street, near the middle of the block; its façade faces west. The Burtis is bound on the north by a parking lot, former site of the C.R.I & P. Railroad depot (1892) and on the south by the former site of the Kimball House (aka Vale Apartments), also now a parking lot. A public sidewalk provides access to the building's main entrance on the west.

#### PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

When constructed, the Burtis Opera House presented a beautiful example of French Second Empire architecture. The French Second Empire was a Victorian era style not widely found in Iowa, but more commonly used in Davenport, particularly in residential construction. Several significant examples remain today.

In the Burtis Opera House, the French Second Empire was seen in the building's mansard roof, which was punctuated by heavily hooded dormer windows, with a bracketed cornice defining the transition from roofline to wall elevation. A central, projecting pavilion combined with the mansard roof to create an exceptionally elegant building.

By 1938 (see historic image on page eight), the Burtis had lost its original, regal appearance. The building's upper story was removed and with it, the mansard roof. Through the exterior transformation, the building became more Classical Revival in style. Now the roof was flat, with a raised parapet to define the entrance. A simplified cornice added visual definition at the roofline. The arched windows flanking the center pavilion were retained and, with the classical corner piers, lent the structure a real sense of classicism. If a person were not aware of the building's original appearance, the new, Classical Revival façade would appear as original.

#### Condition

Although the building today suffers from a measure of neglect, it appears much as it did in 1938. Important changes to note include the retrofitting of the first floor, façade windows and the glass block infill of the basement windows. Also, the building is currently painted, but it should be said that that might have been the case very early in the building's history. However, given the limitations of black and white photography, the possibility cannot be confirmed. What can be confirmed is that the present paint scheme is opposite of the palette used in the 1938 building.

Generally speaking, the building stands in a fair state of repair. Some evidence of deterioration due to water infiltration was noted in the cornice area of the façade. An assessment of the condition of the brick is difficult because it has been painted. However, no major areas of joint loss or spalling were noted.

#### PROPERTY HISTORY

The Burtis Opera House was constructed in 1867. At the time of its construction, the building was capable of seating an audience of up to sixteen hundred and was a widely used facility.

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By 1925 the building was being used by the General Outdoor Advertising Company, which occupied the space through 1940. As the historic image (1938) on page eight indicates, the building's façade had been modified by that time - the current building looks much as it did at that time.

Currently Tri-City Electric occupies the building.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Although the present appearance of the Burtis Opera House dates to more than fifty years, it is not that associated with its period of significance – the era in which it housed the opera house. As a result, the building cannot be considered individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, given the lack of historic context on this block of the Davenport Central Business District, no potential as a contributing resource to a historic district exists.

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View of the primary (west) and south elevations, looking northeast from across Perry Street.

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

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View of the primary (west) and north elevations, looking southeast from across Perry Street.

(SOURCE: AKAY Consulting – November 2004)

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This amazing image from 1887 captures a view of Perry Street looking south from near 7th Street. The Burtis Opera House was sited beyond the large building seen in this view.

(SOURCE: Putnam Museum of History and Natural Science. Davenport, Iowa)

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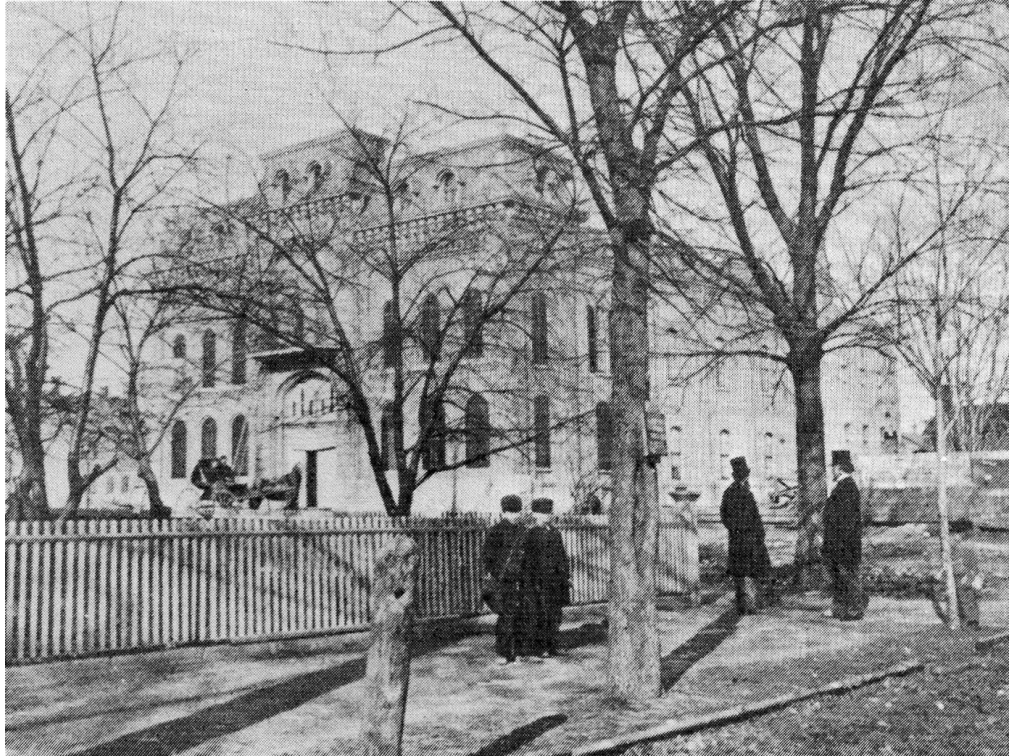
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This undated historic image captures the Burtis Opera House at an early point in time, when the building sat in a park-like setting; a stark contrast to the historic image on the following page.

(SOURCE: Image courtesy of the Richardson-Sloane Special Collections of the Davenport Public Library)

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This undated historic image documents the Burtis Opera House along side its neighbor, the Kimball House, later known as the Vale Apartments. The Kimball is non-extant.

(SOURCE: Image courtesy of the Richardson-Sloane Special Collections of the Davenport Public Library)



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This 1938 image of the Burtis Opera House reveals that many of the changes to the historic façade had been made by this time. Notice the loss of the upper stories (particularly the mansard roof).

(SOURCE: Putnam Museum of History and Natural Science. Davenport, Iowa)



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The arrow indicates the location of the Burtis Opera House.

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

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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

Putnam Museum of History and Natural Science. Davenport, Iowa.

Local Publications

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

Internet Resources

[www.scottcountyiowa.com/assessor](http://www.scottcountyiowa.com/assessor). Scott County Assessor.