



Date June 29, 2026

**CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST FROM GRAHAM INVESTMENT COMPANY,
REPRESENTED BY JEFF HATFIELD TO DEMOLISH THREE STRUCTURES
LOCATED IN THE VICINITY OF 401 GRAND AVENUE PURSUANT TO SECTION
58-70 OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE**

WHEREAS, Graham Investment Company owns the real property located at 401 Grand Avenue, 411 Grand Avenue, 417 Grand Avenue, and 516 4th Street, (collectively, the “Buildings”) and has proposed to demolish the Buildings; and

WHEREAS, the Buildings are not on the National Register of Historic Places, they are not located within a local historic district, and they are not a local landmark; and

WHEREAS, the Development Services Director has determined the Buildings are greater than 50 years old, are deemed historically significant, and they meet the criteria for landmark designation set forth in City of Des Moines Municipal Code § 58-58; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the Historic Preservation Ordinance, the Development Services Director has referred the application to City Council for review; and

WHEREAS, City Council is required to consider oral and written comments from all interested parties and determine if the proposed demolition should be referred to the City’s Historic Preservation Commission for further study and review.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the City Council of the City of Des Moines, Iowa, as follows:

Upon due consideration of the facts, and any and all statements of interested persons and arguments of counsel, any objections to the proposed demolition, are hereby received and filed.

(Council Communication No. 26-236)



Roll Call Number

Agenda Item Number

63

Date June 29, 2026

Alternative A

MOVED by _____ to **REFER** the application requesting approval to demolish the Buildings located at 401 Grand Avenue, 411 Grand Avenue, 417 Grand Avenue and 516 4th Street to the Historic Preservation Commission for further study and review.

Second by _____.

Alternative B

MOVED by _____ to **APPROVE** the request to demolish the Buildings at 401 Grand Avenue, 411 Grand Avenue, 417 Grand Avenue, and 516 4th Street, subject to all conditions and requirements set forth in City of Des Moines Municipal Code § 58-70(d).

Second by _____.

/s/ Emily A. Duffy

Emily A. Duffy
Assistant City Attorney

COUNCIL ACTION	YEAS	NAYS	PASS	ABSENT
BOESEN				
SIMONSON				
VOSS				
BARRON				
WESTERGAARD				
MANDELBAUM				
GATTO				
TOTAL				

MOTION CARRIED APPROVED

Mayor

CERTIFICATE

I, LAURA BAUMGARTNER, City Clerk of said City hereby certify that at a meeting of the City Council of said City of Des Moines, held on the above date, among other proceedings the above was adopted.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal the day and year first above written.

City Clerk

THE GRAHAM GROUP, INC.



505 5th Ave. #200
DES MOINES, IOWA 50309

REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT
PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

May 19, 2026

Jason Van Essen, AICP
Planning and Urban Design Administrator
1200 Locust Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

RE: Brown Garage at 401 Grand Avenue, Des Moines

Dear Jason:

This letter confirms our emails and discussions with the City of Des Moines staff that we intend to demolish the Brown Garage in 2026 due to its functional obsolescence. It is not conducive to modern parking of automobiles, and the structure dates back to the 1920's and earlier.

We met with the following local companies over the last year to discuss their interest in buying the Brown Garage and reusing the structure: Knapp Properties, Rypma Properties, High Properties, Graham Construction, Christiansen Development and Lawmark Capital. None of the representatives had an interest in keeping or developing the existing Brown Garage structure. These companies made the following comments about the current building conditions:

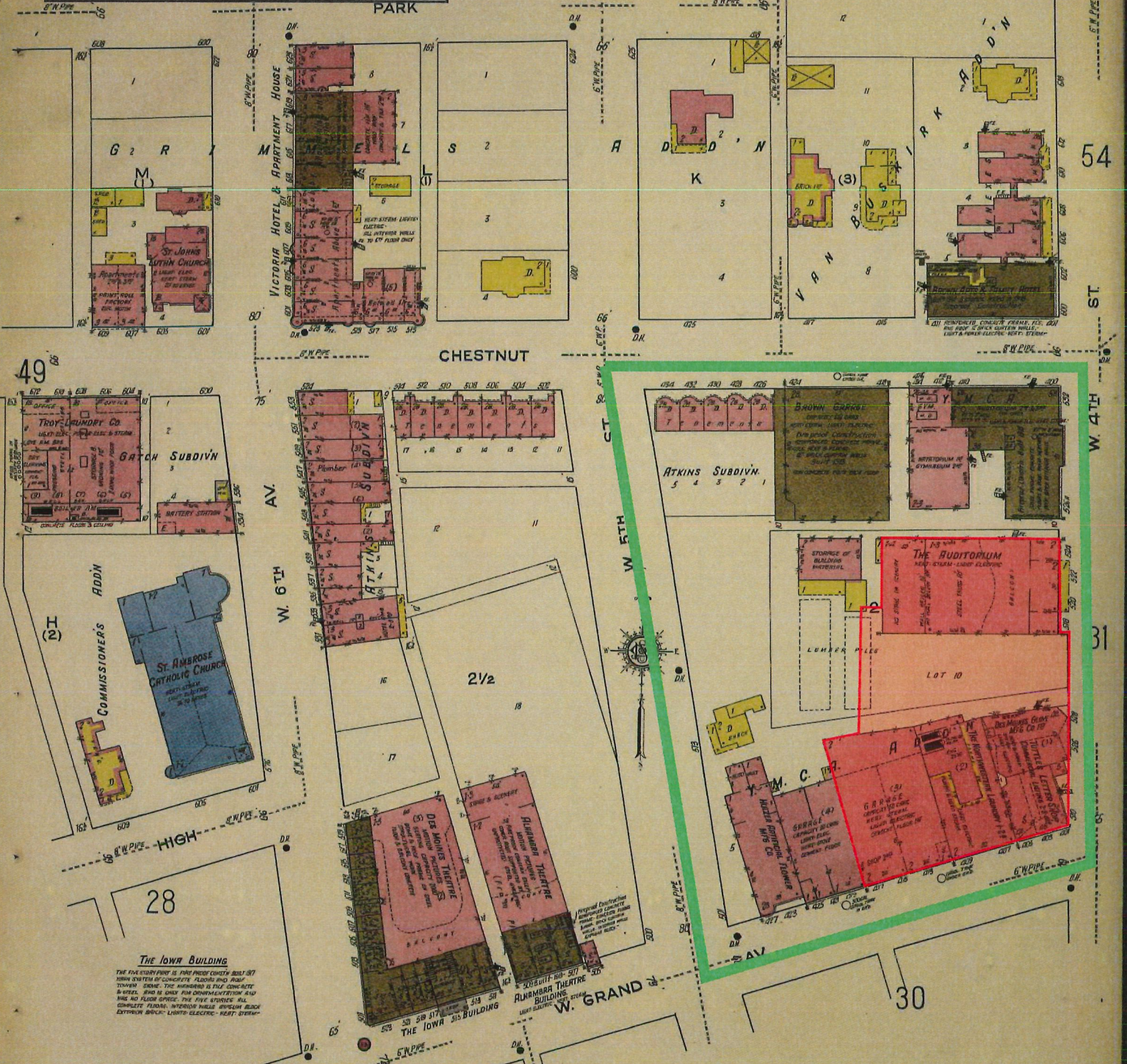
- The Brown Garage lacks structural integrity (it would be very difficult to remove the steel infrastructure without having the exterior facades collapse)
- The Brown Garage is an odd shape for efficient commercial development
- Parking demand is very low in downtown Des Moines
- The building has outlived its useful life

Please let us know if you have any questions, and what the next steps are regarding this process. Thank you in advance for your assistance during this process.

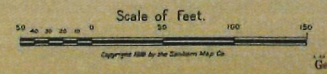
Sincerely yours,

Doug Den Adel, President
The Graham Group, Inc.

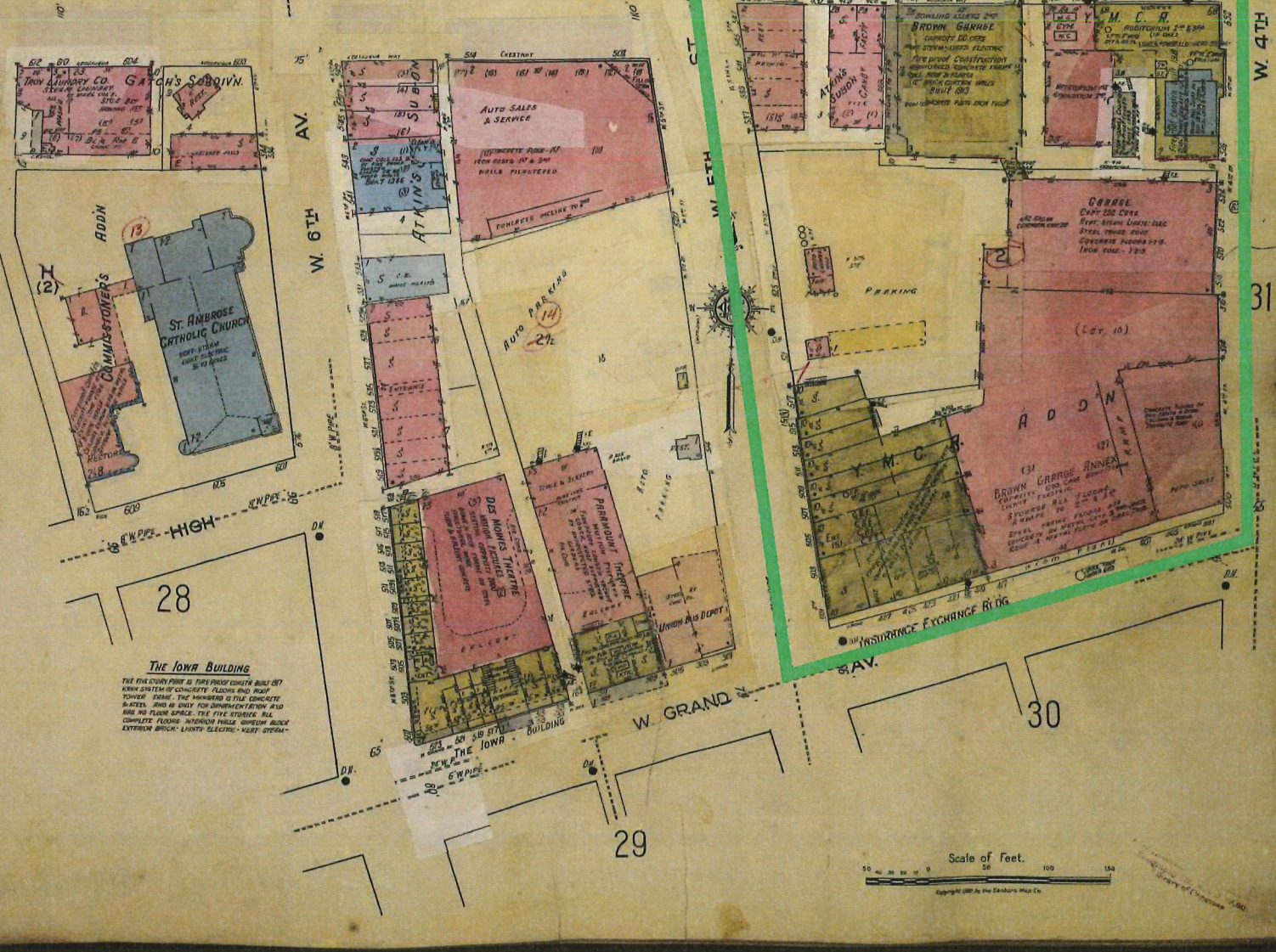
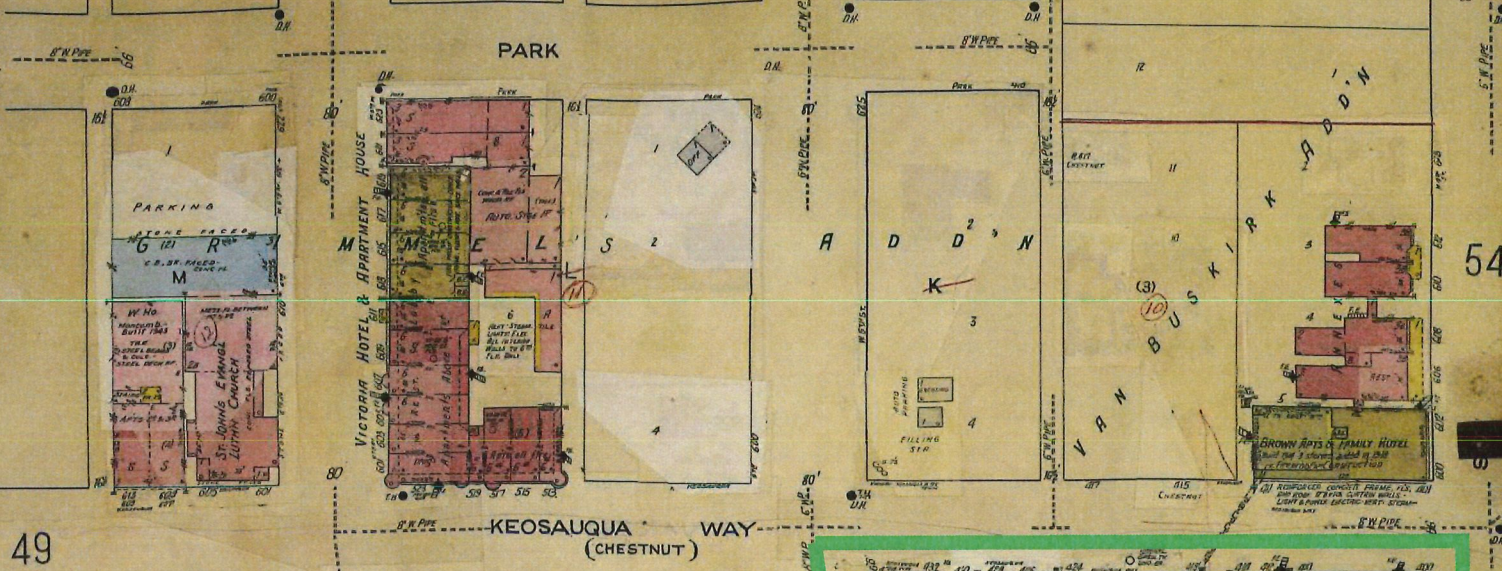
1920 Sanborn Map



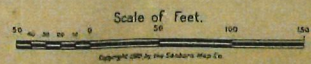
The Iowa Building
 THE IOWA BUILDING IS THE FIRST CONCRETE BUILT BY
 THE STATE OF IOWA. IT WAS BUILT BY THE IOWA
 TRADING COMPANY. THE BUILDING IS 12 1/2
 STORIES HIGH. THE IOWA BUILDING IS THE
 FIRST CONCRETE BUILT IN IOWA. IT WAS
 BUILT BY THE IOWA TRADING COMPANY. THE
 BUILDING IS 12 1/2 STORIES HIGH. THE IOWA
 BUILDING IS THE FIRST CONCRETE BUILT IN
 IOWA. IT WAS BUILT BY THE IOWA TRADING
 COMPANY. THE BUILDING IS 12 1/2 STORIES
 HIGH. THE IOWA BUILDING IS THE FIRST
 CONCRETE BUILT IN IOWA. IT WAS BUILT BY
 THE IOWA TRADING COMPANY. THE BUILDING
 IS 12 1/2 STORIES HIGH. THE IOWA BUILDING
 IS THE FIRST CONCRETE BUILT IN IOWA.



1950 Sanborn Map



The Iowa Building
 THE FIVE STORY PART IS FIRST STORY BUILT BY
 IOWA SYSTEM OF CONCRETE FLOORS AND ROOF
 TOWER TOWER. THE MEMBER IS FIVE CONCRETE
 BEAMS, AND IS ONLY FOR DIMENSIONAL AND
 HAS NO FLOOR SPACE. THE FIVE STORIES ALL
 COMPLETE FLOORING INTERIOR WALL SYSTEM ABOUT
 EXTERIOR BRICK. LIGHTS ELECTRIC. HEAT STEAM.













Decorative frieze with geometric patterns and diamond motifs.



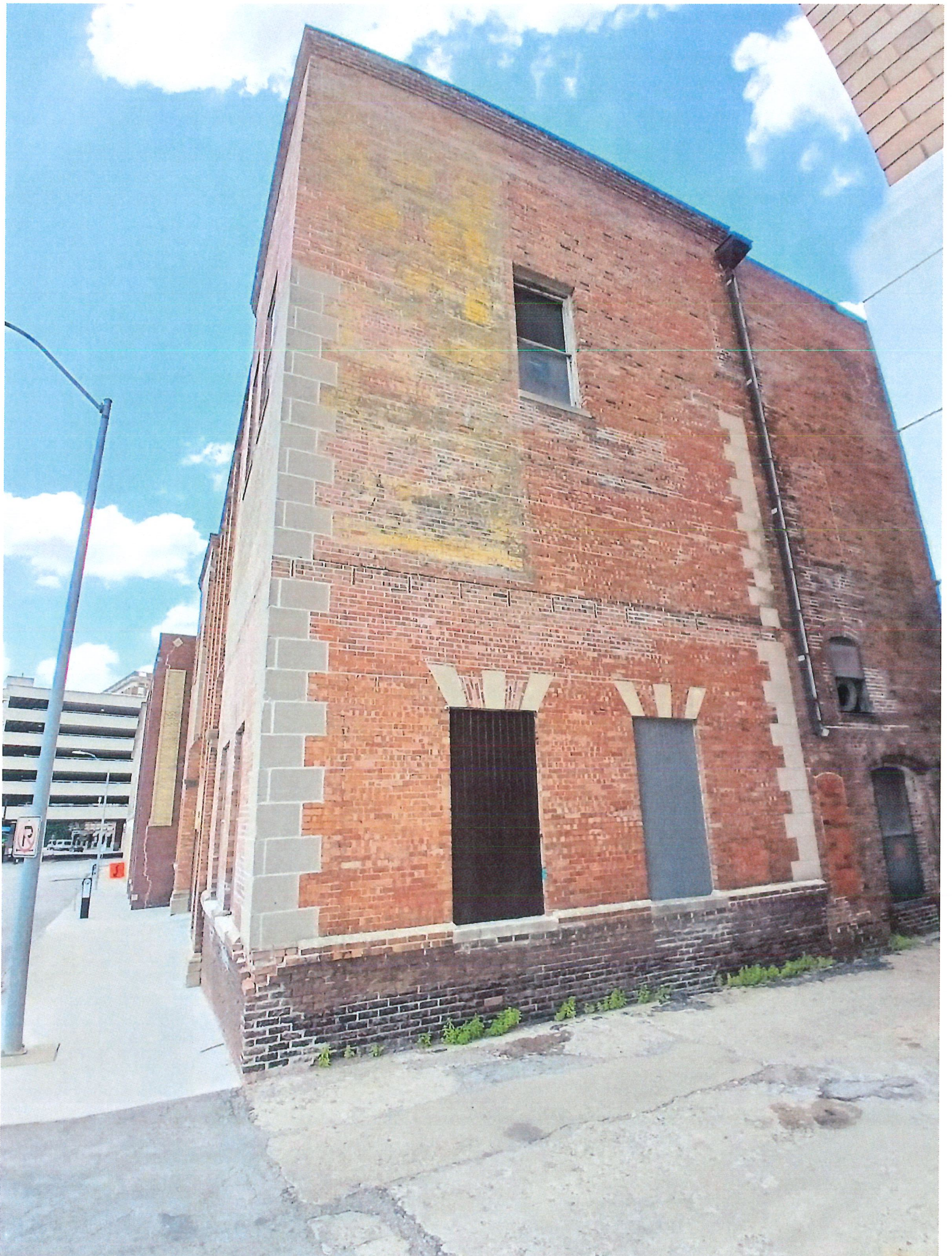
No Smoking

Max Vehicle Weight 95
Max Axle Weight 42000

NO









Des Moines' Brown Garage

A PARKING PLACE FOR MANY MEMORIES

By Gene Erb

The old Brown Garage at Fourth Street and Grand Avenue is an ugly gray thing.

It crouches in apparent embarrassment, with tired glass eyes staring south across Grand at its spanking-streamlined cousin — the city's new parking garage.

But it has heart, and the apparent tenacity to continue operating as it has for years.

It's got warmth, too, and memories.

Ah, those memories: Wild WACs carousing with the locals up in the top-floor parking area during World War II, electric cars plugged in for the day to recharge for the trip home, rough characters hanging out at the old Greyhound bus depot just down the street.

... Big bands attracting men in tuxedos and women in fancy gowns, a visit by Adolph Hitler's armored staff car and a magnificent marine display of mounted fish, amphibians and waterfowl in the adjacent Brown Hotel, which was razed in 1969.

... Memories of the ups — and downs — of downtown Des Moines.

And, covered in 52 years' accumulation of grease, gas and grime, are memories long forgotten by passersby and the people who drive their cars and trod the pavement in the tired concrete structure.

It opened in 1928 with a gala ball that featured a 100-piece orchestra and flowers for the ladies. With a capacity of 1,250 cars, it was billed as the third largest in the country, ranking behind one in Boston that parked 2,000 cars and one in St. Louis that parked 1,700.

Hugh Williams, 64, the garage's manager now, and John 'Red' Hesselning, 65, the foreman, remember almost as much as anybody about the place. Williams has worked there 41 years; Hesselning, 39.

"The original section was a coliseum," built around the turn of the century, where Des Moines area residents gathered for stage shows and concerts, said Williams.

"Somebody told me there was a stable in there somewhere. I don't know where," he added.

In the early days, there were three majestic theaters downtown, plenty of restaurants and six or eight bustling hotels. Cars carrying men in tuxedos and dazzlingly dressed women kept the place bustling evenings and weekends.

"We handled all the parking for the theaters," said Williams.

Hesselning added, "We used to handle several hundred cars on a Saturday night, had to have eight or nine part-time parkers. Now, we handle it all with five guys during the week. There's very little business on weekends."

There were plenty of businesses in the building in the early days, too: a Buick dealership, a bowling alley, the Jewish News and Hawkeye Bindery, to name a few.

Just about all of the space now is used for parking, and the little space left for businesses is vacant.

"Stoner was our last tenant," quipped Williams, referring to Republican Tom Stoner, who closed his campaign headquarters in the building after losing a U.S. Senate primary bid against Congressman Charles Grassley in June.

And the parking business has changed, too.



HUGH WILLIAMS



JOHN HESSELNING

"After World War II, we had a lot of night business for awhile," said Hesselning. "I don't know where it all went. Things started changing in the late 50s and early 60s."

Restaurants and theaters started closing and the hotels' clientele changed as businesses and people moved to the suburbs.

Downtown Des Moines' low point, the men agreed, came about 10 years ago.

"It looked like it was going to dry up," said Hesselning. "It looked pretty sad for awhile. You'd see so many vacancies and no sign of anything coming in. Everything was going out to the shopping malls."

He termed the downtown's redevel-

opment, including the city's new parking garage being built across the street, "a great thing."

Downtown Des Moines, he added, "needed John Ruan and a few others" to bring culture, life and business back to the city core.

Hesselning and Williams figure the aging Brown Garage can hold its own, even if it is an ugly duckling among a growing flock of swans.

They take pride in their "clientele" being "85 percent professional people" — lawyers and doctors.

And they note that Brown Garage, unlike the new fangled ones, is enclosed and heated.

"We're full-service now, and we've got a waiting list," Hesselning said with pride.

"Our fellows give personal service. We've got a mechanic who'll service your car while you're working."

"And when a car goes past that damn gasoline pump, it gets full service — gas, oil, battery and windshield."

Sure, he conceded, the new parking garage will be "competition."

But, somehow, he didn't seem too worried.

Des Moines Tribune - 1980

MEET ME ON THE CORNER

Des Moines Register - 2001

516 Fourth Street



SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Then: The Des Moines Auditorium was rebuilt after a fire in 1900.



RENDA LUTZ/THE REGISTER

Now: The Brown Garage, shown as it is today, was dedicated in 1928.

Brown Garage was once debated events center

By **RENDA LUTZ**
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

The remains of Des Moines' first municipal auditorium stand a few blocks from the planned site of the Iowa Events Center. The Des Moines Auditorium was built in 1899 at 516 Fourth St. A portion of this building has been the Brown Garage since 1928.

The auditorium faced many naysayers to plans for such a large auditorium in Des Moines, and many residents worried about the costs. The auditorium was eventually built in part through the purchase of bonds by community residents.

The auditorium had a capacity of 4,500 and was the largest auditorium in the United States with the exception of the Chicago Auditorium. Seating was provided on the first floor, in two balconies and in 26 boxes that could seat six people each.

Construction of the building was debated for years. George E. Hallett designed and oversaw the completion of the brick auditorium, which was built in just 55 days.

The building was dedicated on Aug. 28, 1899. Speeches were given by Albert B. Cummins, president of the auditorium committee and a future Iowa governor; Mayor John MacVicar; Sidney Foster, owner of the Foster Opera house and the holder of the auditorium lease and Gov. Leslie Shaw.

Dedication week for the auditorium brought in audiences for five straight days. Famed Iowa

Des Moines' first municipal auditorium faced many naysayers; many residents worried about the costs.

soprano Elsie Lincoln and the Heft string quartet entertained a crowd of 2,000. Concerts featuring 500 singers, the Iowa State Military Band and a traveling men's minstrel show also drew large crowds. The week closed with a frolic made up of skits and vaudeville-style entertainment.

Fire damaged the auditorium on June 17, 1900. The building was only insured for \$25,000, but the next day up to \$30,000 was pledged at a citizen's meeting to build a larger and better auditorium.

Leaders made sure the building was completed by Aug. 1 for the state Republican convention. The rebuilt auditorium is pictured top left.

As the number of conventions, shows and entertainers increased in Des Moines, capacity crowds soon spilled out of the auditorium. To relieve the crowding, an 8,500-seat coliseum was built in 1909 at First and Locust streets. The auditorium then came under the lease of Sam and Lee Shubert,

nationally-known theater owners.

The Shuberts spent \$20,000 renovating the auditorium and preparing for its 32-week run of live entertainment and motion pictures. Conventions were booked during the playhouse's off-season.

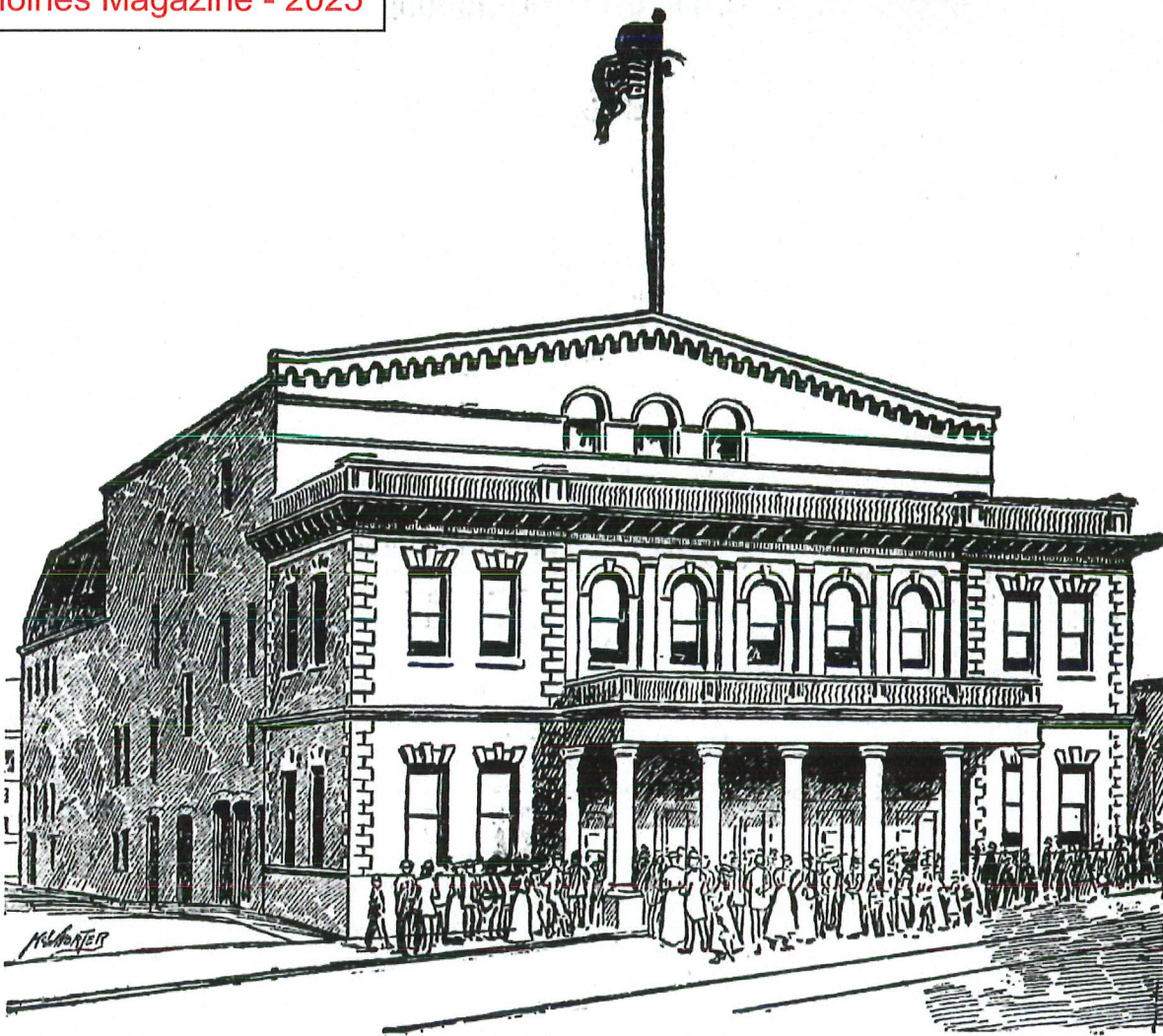
The auditorium again was gutted by fire in 1911. This second fire left even less of the original building. Editorial writers at the Register were among those urging that the structure be rebuilt.

A concert by the Minneapolis Orchestra marked the May 24, 1912, reopening of the auditorium. City directories list the auditorium until 1924. What led to the auditorium's closing is unclear.

Music was brought back to the old building during a gala ball to dedicate the Brown Garage in February 1928. A 100-piece orchestra played as dancers filled the spacious parking garage. With a capacity of 1,250 cars, the Brown Garage became the third-largest parking garage in the country.

Descendants of Ernest W. Brown, the founder of the parking garage, Interstate Assurance Company and the Brown Hotel sold the parking garage to the Graham Investment Co. in 1982. Today the old auditorium is used for storage and for a portion of the parking garage.

Reporter Renda Lutz can be reached at (515) 284-8529 or lutzr@news.dmreg.com



SOMETHING OF THE GREAT AUDITORIUM ENTERTAINMENTS AND HOW THE GREAT BUILDING IS TO BE DEDICATED.

An 1899 rendering of the Des Moines Auditorium

PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

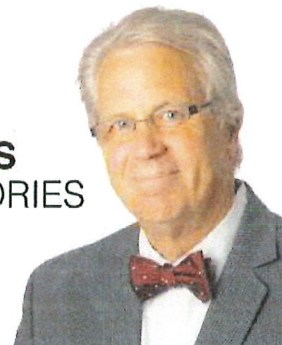
Stage names: A history of performance venues in three acts

By Dave Elbert

Two components of the 20-year-old Iowa Events Center were [renamed this week](#). As of Tuesday, Wells Fargo Arena is now Casey's Center and Hy-Vee Hall is EMC Expo Center.

This is not the first, and surely not the last, change for Des Moines' performance venues. The first three major ones — the Auditorium, Coliseum and KRNT Theater — no longer exist.

ELBERT'S BACKSTORIES



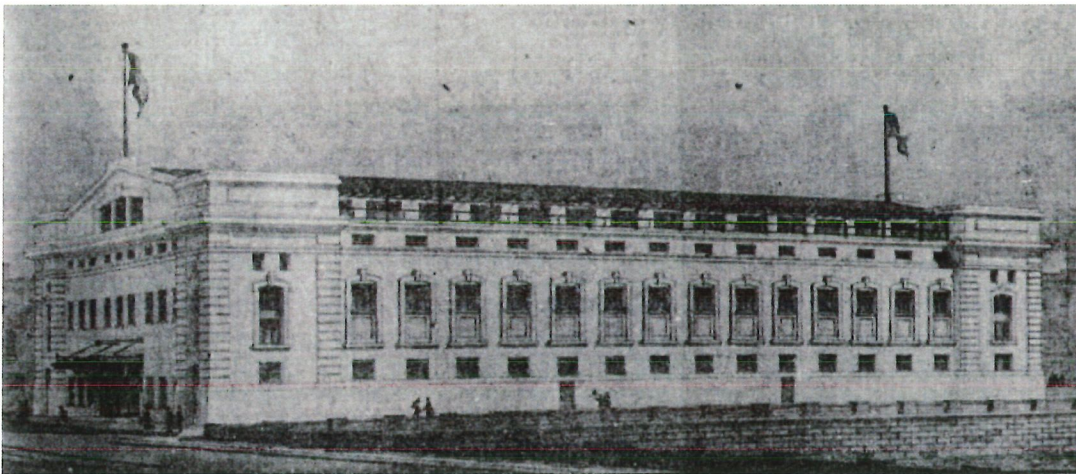
The Auditorium

The city's first big space for events was the 3,000-seat Des Moines Auditorium, built in 1899 at 516 Fourth St., two blocks south of today's Events Center. That building still stands, minus most of its 19th-century architectural features, as a garage and warehouse.

When the Auditorium opened in August 1899, it had two balconies and a stage that could hold as many as 500 performers. Supporters claimed only one opera house in the country, in Chicago, was larger. Opening night featured music and speeches by Gov. Leslie M. Shaw and Mayor John MacVicar Sr.

It took three years to raise the \$35,000 to finance the three-story building but only 55 working days to erect it. According to materials from the chamber of commerce, officials hoped the Auditorium and the city's early adoption of electric street lights and "dry roads that are available for bicycling," would attract tourists and conventioners.

They did. More than 80 conventions were held in Des Moines the first year the auditorium was open, including a Mothers' Congress and a national gathering of music teachers.



A 1908 rendering of the Des Moines Coliseum

The Coliseum

The rapid increase of conventions required a larger venue, and in 1908 a fundraising goal of \$100,000 was set for a Coliseum that would hold 10,000 people.

There were a few stumbles, and the cost climbed to \$125,000. But by the end of 1909, the new Coliseum stood more than three stories tall on the west bank of the Des Moines River, north of the new 1903 library and directly across the river from where a new city hall would be built in 1912.

The Coliseum opened with an agricultural exposition that featured a 3-foot ear of corn from Peru and a state-of-the-art biplane. Six-day bicycle races were held inside during the early years, and on Sept. 11, 1941, the Coliseum hosted Charles Lindbergh's famous anti-war speech during the America First movement before World War II. It drew a crowd of 8,000 who alternately booed and cheered both Lindbergh and President Roosevelt, whose nationwide radio address preceded Lindbergh's talk.

The Coliseum had been advertised as "fireproof," but it burned down in 1949 and was replaced in 1955 with Veterans Memorial Auditorium. Built on a hill overlooking downtown, the new \$5.25 million auditorium could hold more than 15,000 people.

KRNT Theater

The Auditorium was replaced in 1927 by the Shrine Temple Auditorium at Ninth and Pleasant streets. Backed by local Masons, the theater cost \$1.3 million and could seat 4,200. The humorist Will Rogers performed at its opening, on April 6. (Photo courtesy of the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce.)



Following World War II, the Shrine was renamed KRNT Theater for the radio station that had broadcast from its stage since the 1930s. (The station's owners, the Cowles family, chose the call letters RNT as a nod to their newspapers, the Register and Tribune.) The newly renamed theater hosted Des Moines' first Broadway musical, "Oklahoma!" At the premiere on Sept. 9, 1946, the governors of Iowa and Oklahoma arrived in a "surrey with the fringe on top."

The KRNT Theater was replaced in 1979 with the \$9.7 million Des Moines Civic Center at 221 Walnut St. The old theater was acquired by Principal Financial Group in 1983 and torn down.

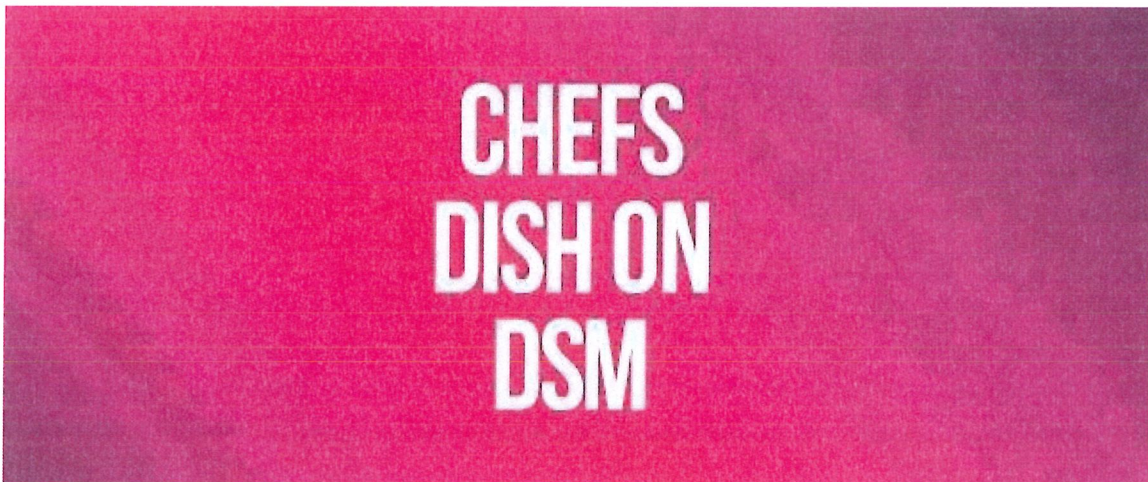
Today, the 2,700-seat Civic Center is one of several venues owned and operated by Des Moines Performing Arts, along with Cowles Commons across the street and the Temple Theater in the beautifully preserved Temple for Performing Arts, which Masons built at 1011 Locust St. in 1913.

After 46 years, the Civic Center remains an essential part of Des Moines cultural life. The former Auditorium is now storage space, the long-gone Coliseum has been replaced by the new federal courthouse, the KRNT Theater is now a pocket park — and the newly renamed Casey's Center serves some of Iowa's most popular pizza.

Dave Elbert has covered Iowa business news and local history for more than 40 years, first for the Des Moines Register and then the Business Record. Read more of [*Elbert's Backstories*](#) at dsmmagazine.com.

[SHARE THIS STORY](#)

WEEKEND SECTION PRESENTED BY CATCH DES MOINES



Business Record - 2026



(/NEWSLETTERS/)GET OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER >

The Brown Garage at Fourth Street and Grand Avenue could be demolished later this summer if the Des Moines City Council approves a request to raze the parking garage. Photo by JLL

The Des Moines City Council will consider a request to demolish the Brown Garage at Fourth Street and Grand Avenue at its meeting on June 29.

Demolishing the parking garage will open the area for redevelopment, said Doug Den Adel, president of Graham Group, the owner of the garage.

“That’s our game plan,” he said. “We don’t have an idea or a plan for it other than we’re looking to market it.”

If approved, demolition would occur in late August or early September, Den Adel said.

The Brown Garage has about 450 parking spaces. Keck Parking managed the parking operation, and Domino’s and Operation Downtown Des Moines also leased space in the building. Those leases expired at the end of 2025, so the time seemed right to move ahead with demolishing the building, Den Adel said.

He also cited other parking garages in the area that have low occupancy in the decision to raze the Brown Garage.

According to the Polk County Assessor’s website, the more than 35,000-square-foot parking garage was built in 1925. It sits on about 1.15 acres.

Carrie Kruse, economic development administrator with the city of Des Moines, said the city is working with Graham Group to retain the skywalk corridor that goes through the garage after it is demolished.

“That skywalk corridor is a really important connection point in maintaining the connectivity of the Iowa Events Center and the various skywalk-connected hotels from a convention business standpoint,” she said. “Both the city and Polk County are interested in making sure the skywalk corridor does not get demolished as part of the garage demolition.”

Kruse said the city is working on various agreements that could come forward soon for consideration to ensure the skywalk corridor is retained.

Den Adel said ensuring that the skywalk remains intact is a top priority.

“We are working with engineers and planners to make sure that it doesn’t get disturbed,” he said.

Den Adel said to accommodate keeping the skywalk intact, a small section of the Brown Garage will remain after demolition.

“We’re going to take it as close to the skywalk bridge as possible with the demo, so there will be a little bit of the old Brown Garage remaining, a 30-foot-wide section or so,” he said.

Substance Architecture and KCL Engineering have been hired to navigate the demolition around the skywalk.

Den Adel said the skywalk will remain open during demolition, with the exception of a few days when it will close out of an abundance of caution as those sections of the garage nearest to the skywalk are razed.

The Brown Garage actually is made up of three buildings. The garage, the YMCA building at the corner of Fourth and Grand where Domino’s was located, and the old Des Moines Theater on Fourth Street.

Those buildings were gutted, and with the addition of steel and concrete they were converted into parking spaces when the garage was built in 1925 by Ernest Brown, the owner of the Brown Hotel.

The hotel opened in 1911 and was considered one of the premier hotels in the city at that time, said Jeff Hatfield, senior vice president at Graham Group.

(/NEWSLETTERS/)GET OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER >

6/17/26, 4:39 PM

City council to consider request to raze Brown Garage - Business Record

The now long-demolished hotel was across Fourth Street from where the Brown Garage stands.

The garage originally had more than 600 spaces but as the size of cars increased, the number of spaces were reduced, Hatfield said.

Kruse said the city isn't aware of any proposals to redevelop the site.

"But it will be a really great redevelopment site once the garage is demolished," she said.

Hi Jacob and the City of Des Moines team,

The Brown Garage – 401 Grand Avenue is undoubtedly eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and as a City of Des Moines local landmark. This build represents a unique purpose-built design for the early automotive influence on downtown Des Moines. This block expresses important historical significance in design, association with the development of Des Moines, scale and historic building materials. The demolition of this block would pose a significant adverse impact to the City of Des Moines.

I strongly oppose the issuance of a demolition permit and encourage the delays available to the City to consider alternatives to demolition of this block.

Please let me know if there is additional information I can provide.

Best,
Ann H. Schmid
Commissioner, City of Des Moines, Historic Preservation Commission.