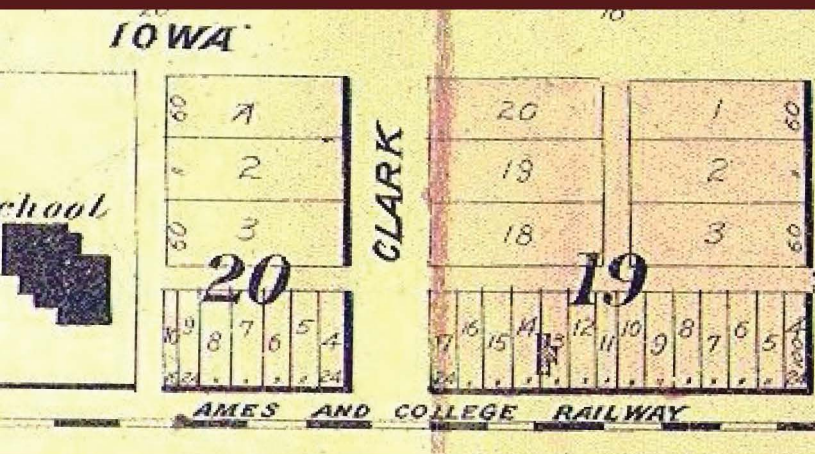


# Ames Historical Society



## History Walk *through* Downtown Ames



a self-guided  
walking tour



including 29  
places of interest

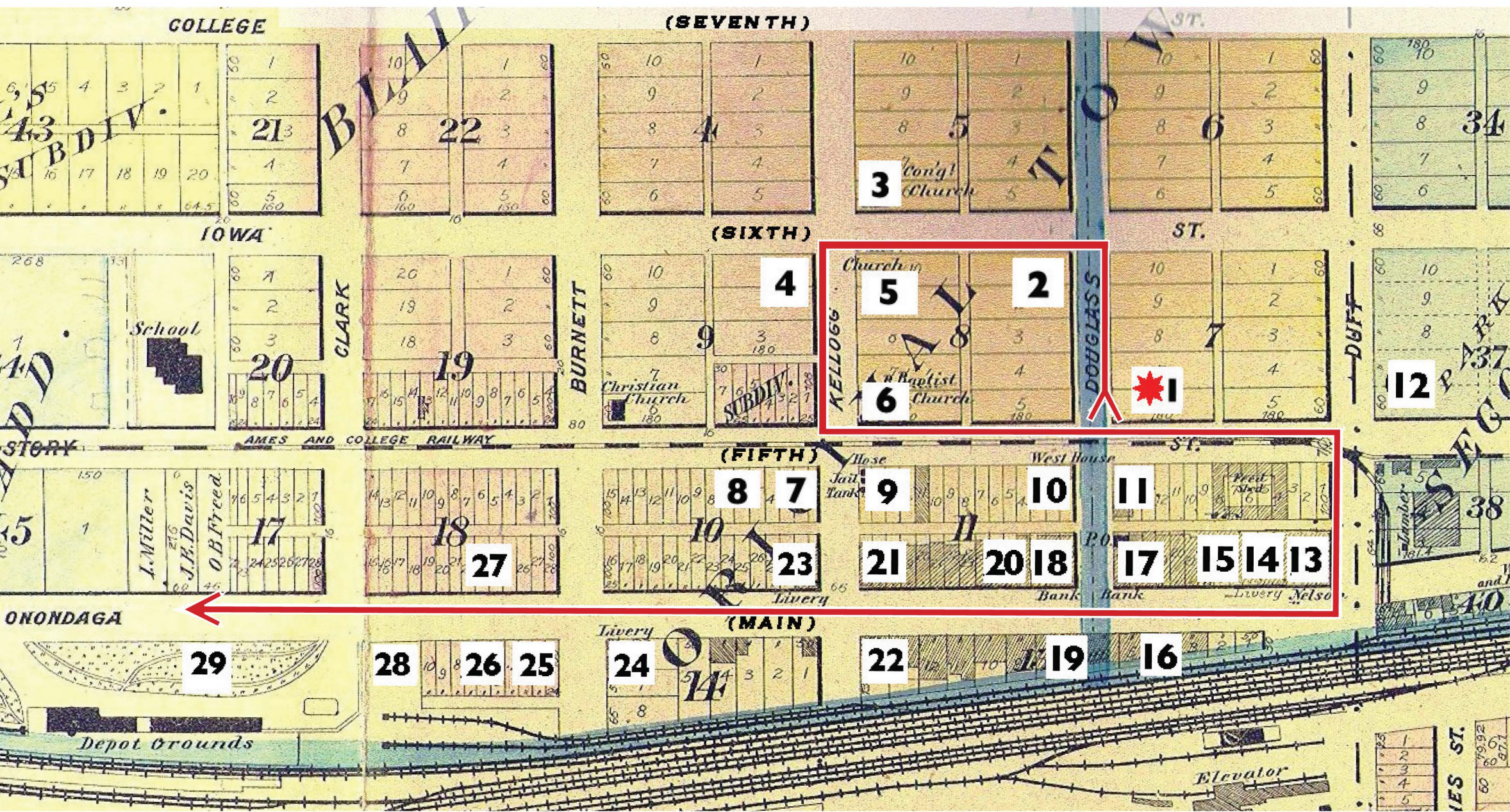


# Legend

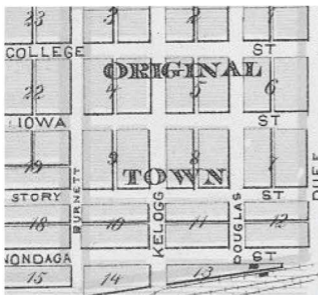
- 1** Greeley Mansion – 1882
- 2** Ames Public Library – 1904
- 3** First Congregational Church – 1900
- 4** U.S. Post Office – 1935
- 5** First Methodist Church – 1908
- 6** First Baptist Church – 1910
- 7** Old U.S. Post Office – 1912
- 8** National Guard Armory – 1905
- 9** Municipal Building – 1915

- 10** Masonic Building – 1916
- 11** Hotel Ames – 1880
- 12** Municipal Bandshell – 1935
- 13** Kaynor House
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- 15** Princess Theater – 1913
- 16** Bosworth Drug Store
- 17** Story County Bank – 1891
- 18** Union National Bank – 1890
- 19** Bauge's Shoe Store

- 20** Tilden Store – 1883
- 21** Grove Grocery & Opera House - 1891
- 22** Ames Trust & Savings Bank – 1913
- 23** Sheldon-Munn Hotel – 1916
- 24** Morris Livery – 1909
- 25** Olsan Building – 1911
- 26** Roberson's Garage – 1914
- 27** Collegian Theater – 1937
- 28** Overland Cafe & Bus Depot – 1949
- 29** C&NW Railroad Depot – 1900







## Ames... in the beginning



Ames was established toward the end of the Civil War – late in 1864 – by railroad magnate **John Insley Blair**, who was building his Cedar Rapids & Missouri Railway west to Omaha and beyond. Ames was named after Blair's investor and friend,



Congressman **Oakes Ames** of Massachusetts. In 1863, the two made an inspection tour of the CR&M as far as Marshalltown, the end of the line. By stagecoach, they traveled Story County to select sites at stream crossings, to provide water for steam trains.



A year later, after purchasing a parcel of land through local settler **Cynthia Duff**, Blair built a depot on the flatlands between the Skunk River and Squaw Creek, naming it Ames. The legislature planned to start a college nearby, and Blair thought it would

be a good place for a town. His hunch paid off. Ames is noteworthy to this day for its strong working relationship with Iowa State University.

Our downtown was in the first plat drawn in 1865. On the cover you can see the 12-block area labeled "Blair's Original Town." Expanding from that first wooden depot – near today's Main and Duff corner – Ames' city center has seen many changes in a century and a half, yet retains the easy charm and small scale that evoke the classic idea of "Main Street, U.S.A."



Capt. Wallace Greeley, founder of the Union Bank (**18** on your map), built this fine home on Story St. (now 5th) and Douglas in 1882. Mary, his wife, was short of stature, and the design of the home placed the doorknobs closer to the floor. She is memorialized by Mary Greeley Hospital, “Cap’s” gift to the city of Ames in 1916.

The Adams brothers bought the house in 1924 when they separated their funeral home from their carpentry business. There have been several additions, before and since that time.

## 2 Ames Public Library, 1940

515 Douglas



Our public library was established with a Carnegie Foundation gift of \$10,000 in 1904. The land for the library was donated by Capt. Wallace Greeley. The library has seen two major additions, along 6th Street in 1940 and fronting Douglas in 1985. The original entrance, seen above, is now the Community Room, minus the steps and walk.

### 3 Congregational Church, 1900

217 6th



The first church built in Ames was the Congregational, in 1867, at Iowa (now 6th) and Kellogg. The current red brick church, above, replaced the original frame structure in 1900.

Noteworthy among the founders was Cynthia Duff, an early settler who acted as land agent for railroader John Blair, purchasing the original Ames plat land from the U.S. government. Congressman Oakes Ames provided a bell for the belfry – which still resides there.

### 4 U.S. Post Office, 1935

525 Kellogg



Ames' main post office was erected under the depression-era federal Works Progress Administration. It replaced a smaller facility (7), built in 1912, that had stood one block south. Prominent in the lobby is Ames native Lowell Houser's 1937 mural, *The Evolution of Corn*.

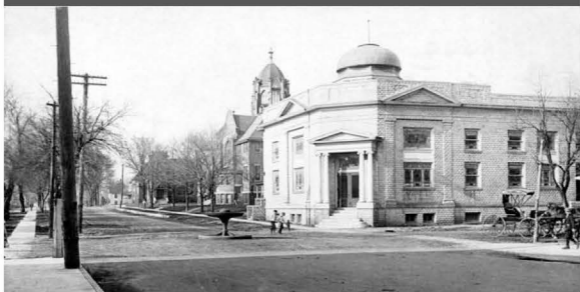


## 5 First Methodist Church, 1908 516 Kellogg



This church's sanctuary was Ames' largest auditorium when completed. Ten stained glass windows were reused from an earlier 1887 church that stood on the same site. With its seating for 1,000, community and college events were also held here. The impressive dome, lighted at night, is a signature downtown sight.

## 6 First Baptist Church, 1910 demolished



First Baptist stood on the northeast corner of 5th and Kellogg. This 1915 photo shows a dirt street and watering troughs – upper for people, lower for horses. Decades later, this inspired George Belitsos of Youth and Shelter Services (9) to commission the “Icarus” fountain, located across 5th Street.



This church met demolition in 1949 when its congregation built a new home in Campustown.



## 7 Old U.S. Post Office, 1912 demolished



This handsome Greek Revival post office at 413 Kellogg served the city until 1937, when a new facility (4) opened one block north. First National Bank was built on this site in 1941; when the bank moved, it became an office building.

## 8 National Guard Armory, 1905 demolished



Built of “Miracle Construction Blocks” made by local dealer H.L. Munn Co., this solid edifice at 308 5th saw many different uses in its eighty-plus years. A multi-purpose facility, it included the gymnasium where Iowa State played its first intercollegiate game of basketball. It also served as an opera house. The last occupant was the O’Neil Dairy Company, which operated



here from 1922 until its closing. After several years empty, the building met the wrecking ball in the 1980s.



Ames' dignified red-brick city hall was constructed at a cost of \$41,500. It combined offices and council chambers with a courtroom, police and fire station, and jail. On May 22, 1970, a bomb exploded outside the jail on the south (alley) side, injuring nine people and breaking windows on Main Street. No arrests were ever made in the case. Since 1997, the building has been home to Youth and Shelter Services.



Capt. Wallace Greeley built the AF&AM Lodge 249 at the corner of 5th and Douglas in 1916. Tilden Grocery faced Douglas and Tilden

Manufacturing Company, renamed Collegiate Manufacturing Company after 1931, took over most of the second floor manufacturing school pennants and mascots.

In World War II, Collegiate – by then expanded into the adjoining building on 5th – received the Army-Navy “E”



Award for making military raincoats. The Octagon Art Center and Shop occupy the Lodge building today.





## Hotel Ames, 1880 demolished



Dr. Charles Hunt, a local dentist, built this home on Story (now 5th) at Douglas in 1880. Late in the 1920s the dwelling became Hotel Ames, and continued until the '70s, when it briefly became a rooming house. In the 1980s it was demolished. The Ames Historical Society building now occupies the lot at 416 Douglas.

## 12

## Municipal Bandshell, 1935 125 E. 5th



Ames' original City Park was donated by the Chicago & North Western Railway in 1882. Early bands gave concerts here on an open wooden bandstand.

City Park became Bandshell Park after it gained a modern acoustically designed music pavilion in 1935. Acclaimed one of the best such facilities in existence at that time, it is still the home of the Municipal Band, whose June and July concerts draw crowds of up to 1,000.

## 13 Kaynor House

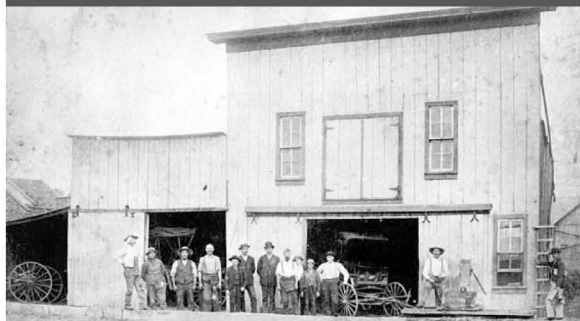
demolished



Located at Main and Duff – across from Ames’ original depot, that was south of the tracks – this brick hotel operated under various names such as the Kaynor House, Davis House, Nelson House, Ames Hotel, and Hotel Ames. After losing the traveling business to the new Sheldon-Munn (23), it became a residential hotel. It was taken down in about 1928.

## 14 Nichols Livery

demolished



Next to the Kaynor House was the Nichols Brothers Livery and Feed Store. Liveries were common enterprises in pre-automobile communities, renting horses and carriages. Co-owner George “Fatty” Nichols – just five feet tall, but well over 500 pounds – once toured the Midwest in his own carnival sideshow.





West of the old hotel on Main Street were several theaters. The Twin Star at 121 Main (center of photo) opened as the Scenic in 1907. In 1913, Ames' theater king, Joe Gerbracht, bought it as his first property. After World War I, Joe expanded by buying the Princess (right), later renaming it the Capitol.

The Twin Star closed in 1937, when Gerbracht's ultra-modern Collegian (**27** on your map) opened at the other end of Main Street. The Capitol's run ended in the mid-1950s. The Twin Star location became Pyle Photo Service, a downtown fixture which left business in 2009.

## 16 Bosworth Drug Store

132 Main



This 1909 view shows an ornately corniced building where L.M. Bosworth ran a drug store on the ground floor, as well as selling postcards and other printed goods.

In the 1970s – the cornice long gone – Mondo's tavern opened here, giving way in the '80s to Whiskey River.

## 17 Story County Bank, 1891

131 Main



Parley Sheldon, Ames' mayor for a total of 18 years, founded the Story County Bank at the corner of Onondaga (now Main) and Douglas in 1891. He also partnered with lumberman Alfred Munn to build a modern hotel, the Sheldon-Munn (**23** on your map), in 1916. The Story Bank and its neighbor, the Union National (**18**, below), merged as Union Story Bank upon Sheldon's death in 1932. For many years after, this building was Iowa Power's local gas office.

## 18 Union National Bank, 1890

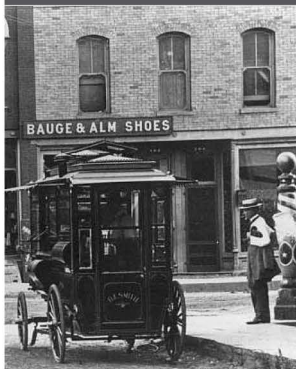
201 Main



"Cap" Greeley's bank was a friendly competitor to Mayor Sheldon's institution just across Douglas. The basement of the building housed the five-chair OK Barber Shop, which shaved many a mover and shaker in early Ames.

This 1907 view shows Onondaga (Main) Street not yet out of the mud (it would be wood-block paved in 1910). The Tilden Stores (**20** on your map) were quartered just to the west, at the center of the picture.





Ole Bauge was born to Norwegian settlers near Huxley in 1855. He spent seven decades in the shoe trade in Ames, first at Tilden's (20, below), then with Charles Alm, and finally with his son Jennings. Ole died at

96 in 1951, still holding his interest in the store.

This 1909 view – from the same photo as Bosworth Drug (16) – is from the middle of Douglas Avenue, not yet paved. A popcorn wagon operated here until 1939. The Bauge store site is now Cynthia Duff Plaza.



From 1869 to 1971, the Tilden family was at the heart of downtown Ames' commercial life. In its heyday, Tilden's was a home-grown, full-service department store that sold everything from clothes to shoes to groceries – proudly advertising, *"If you can't get it in Des Moines, try us."*

The two-story, double-front 1883 store was refaced in 1917 to form a unit with its neighbor, the Union Bank (18). Here it is shown bannered for holiday shopping in about 1938. After several eateries, the space was next occupied by an antiques mall.

**21**

Grove Bros. &amp; Opera House, 1891 233 Main



The Grove Brothers dry goods and grocery was at Main and Kellogg for 25 years till 1916. Upstairs over the storefront was the Opera House, an auditorium space that served both the town and college until the new Armory (8 on your map) opened in 1905. In the '30s and '40s, the Rainbow Coffee Shop operated here, followed by a succession of clothing stores.

**22**

Ames Trust &amp; Savings Bank, 1913 238 Main



This local bank – today known as First National – did business at the southeast corner of Main and Kellogg from 1913 to 1941, when it erected a new home at 5th and Kellogg (7 on your map). Ames Stationers Inc. was at this address by 1945. In 1987, the top floor was destroyed by fire and removed. ASI renovated and continued on the ground floor till 2005, when a quilting and fabric business occupied the space.





Banker Parley Sheldon and lumberman Alfred Munn joined forces to build a modern, fireproof hostelry at Kellogg and Main. By 1926, with business good, a west wing was added. Its restaurants and public rooms made it as much the locals' gathering place as visitors'.

The 1912 Post Office (7) is visible at the right in this 1919 view. Like many others, the hotel transitioned to subsidized housing in the 1980s.



Frank Morris' stables had been at Main and Kellogg for 16 years before plans formed for the Sheldon-Munn to go up on the site. Morris moved across the street, building a solid brick structure that remains the only building on Main Street with a peaked roof.

Frank's brother Lynn Morris, another livery operator, served Ames as fire chief from 1909 to 1942 – spanning the eras of horse-drawn, hand-pump wagons and modern motor trucks.



Czech immigrant Frank Olsan, who operated a greenhouse farm where ISU's College of Design now stands, built the first fireproof concrete building in downtown Ames when he entered the retail flower shop trade. Legend has it that the structure was reinforced with light rail from the decommissioned "Dinkey" college line.

A succession of retailers and restaurants have occupied the building. The lot just to the east is today known as Tom Evans Park.



George Roberson, a Danish gunsmith, arrived in Ames in 1883 and began a mechanic's shop which later became one of Ames' earliest automobile garages (at right, with the Olsan Building to the left). Roberson powered his machinery with Ames' first gas engine, and was legendary for his ability to fix anything.

Inside the restaurant at 316 Main, an exposed brick wall still bears a painted advertisement for Roberson's.



This classic Art Deco theater was built for \$70,000 in the 400 block of Main Street in 1937. Ames movie entrepreneur Joe Gerbracht, who had started in the business in 1913 with the purchase of Main Street's Twin Star, closed that theater when he opened the Collegian.

With a capacity of 900, it was Ames' largest movie house – described as one of the finest in the Midwest. It closed in 1974, was refaced in plain brick, and is now office space for USBank.



Our history walk is nearing the end of the 400 block of Main Street, now occupied by the Wells Fargo Bank. In 1949, this modern cafe and bus stop opened at 424 Main. Buses had long stopped at the Sheldon-Munn Hotel, but downtown was always busy, and they caused constant traffic tieups. It relieved much congestion when the Overland Cafe and Bus Depot was built, just a block from the train station.





Ames' first small wooden depot at Duff Avenue was replaced in 1900 by a brick station on Main west of Clark – the grand portal to our city until the Chicago & North Western ended passenger service in 1960. There was an underground walkway to the south tracks, and elaborate flower gardens tended by the Iowa State College horticulturist. In the post-rail era, the depot housed City of Ames offices before it was renovated to retail and commercial space.

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*A presentation of*

Ames  
 Historical  
 Society

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