

Commercial and Industrial Buildings,

Bell Block  
470 Central Avenue  
Dubuque  
Dubuque County  
Iowa

HABS No. IA-160-S

HABS  
IOWA,  
31-DUBU,  
13-5-

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**PHOTOGRAPHS  
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver Colorado 80225

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## Bell Block

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**Site Location:** 470 Central Avenue  
Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa  
DOT designation: Resource Site No. 7.17  
Cadastral grid : NE1/4 NE1/4 S25 T89N R2E  
USGS quadrangle: Dubuque South Iowa 7.5'  
UTM coordinates: 15.692003.4707460  
Lot dimensions : 51.7' x 100' : .12 acre  
Lot description: City Lot 300

**Present Owner:** Lavonne Eisbach  
**Present Usage:** 1st floor: retail sales store; 2nd floor: vacant  
**Present Condition :** good

**Overall Dimensions:** 51'6" x 100'; 3 stories  
**Orientation :** west  
**Architectural Description :** Plan type : rectangular  
Foundation: (below grade)  
Structure : wood frame with brick masonry bearing walls.  
Ext. walls: common red brick laid in common bond; composition siding on oriel windows.  
Roof : flat composition roof with brick parapets.  
Chimneys : exterior brick chimney extends along center of rear of wall on three-story block.  
Windows : oriel windows project from the second and third stories on the two outside bays of front; each facet of the oriels has a 1/1 double-hung window with plain casings and continuous sills. In the middle and third bays of the same stories, the windows are paired, divided by substantial wood mullions, and are 1/1 double hung with continuous stone sills and segmental brick arch heads with ornamental stone spring blocks and keystones. The windows on the first floor front are large fixed-sash showcase windows, framed by ornamental cast iron storefront; all rear windows boarded up or infilled with concrete block.  
Openings : The street elevation has two entrances that are recessed from front plane of building within the cast iron storefront; doors are double-leafed, with long glass lites and one cross

panel. On the extreme right and left of this elevation are six panel doors with transoms - these doors lead up to the apartments above. On the rear wall there is a single door - it looks as though this used to be a much larger opening - maybe a garage, as concrete blocks surround the current entrance. Above the door is a small cantilevered awning.

Details : ornamental cast iron storefront columns with fluted shafts and fish-scale plinths; oversized metal cornice on front parapet with decorative paired brackets, modillions and large central Italianate arch; wood boxed cornices on oriel windows.

**Construction Date :** 1892

**Architecture Style:** Italianate

**Physical History :** In 1892 Dubuque contractor John Bell constructed this three-story brick block on Clay (now Central) Street for the reported cost of \$6,000. The building was organized typically for a speculative commercial structure, with an open-plan commercial space on the first floor and residential apartments on the floors above. The first recorded commercial tenant was John Theisen, a retail grocer. By 1897 Theisen had been succeeded by another grocer, Florence Hemmer. The building functioned as a saloon around the turn of the century, and then in 1910 it was occupied by the Dubuque Cornice and Ceiling Works. Managed by R.H. Duncan, the small firm produced architectural sheet metal components from this address until 1916. After a period of vacancy, the building by 1921 housed the Fluckiger Motor Company, which had expanded from its showroom on the corner of Fourth and Clay streets [HABS No. IA-160-T]. In the late 1960s Fluckiger was succeeded by the Wilson Brothers Dubuque, Inc. auto company, and this building was used as a parts warehouse. Presently the first floor is occupied by the Fireplace Shoppe; the upper floor apartments are vacant. Throughout this extended occupation, the structure has undergone essentially no alterations of its facade, and only minor changes on the rear wall.

**Significance:** Born in Scotland in 1827, John Bell moved to Montreal in 1844 and then to Dubuque in November 1853 to work as a carpenter and joiner. After military service in the Civil War he returned to Dubuque, and engaged as a contractor. As part of Bell and Green or by himself, he "built many of the best buildings in the city." This brick block is one of the speculative structures constructed by Bell around town. It is architecturally significant as a representative and well-preserved example of Victorian commercial design.

**References:**

Dubuque City Directories: 1857 - 1970.  
Sanborn Insurance Maps: 1879, 1884, 1891, 1909, 1972.  
Iowa State Gazetteer and Business Directory: 1882-1923.  
Dubuque County Assessment Record: 4-5-20-7.  
Iowa Department of Transportation, "Draft Environmental  
Impact Statement - Cultural Resources Assessment."  
*The History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western  
Historical Company, 1880), page 765.  
*Dubuque Daily Herald*: 12 December 1892; 23 March 1913.

**Compiler:**

Clayton B. Fraser, Fraserdesign, Loveland Colorado  
December 1988.