

109 West Second St. (American Legion Hall)  
Crookston Commercial District  
Crookston  
Polk County  
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-154

HABS  
MINN  
60-CROK,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

109 WEST SECOND ST.  
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Location: 109 West Second St., Crookston, Minnesota.

Significance: The commercial building located at 109 West Second St., commonly known as the old American Legion Hall, was built sometime between 1880 and 1884. The building is one of the first masonry structures on the block and may be the oldest extant building on the entire block.<sup>1</sup>

Description: Located near the center of the southwestern side of the 100 block of West Second Street, this two-story brick structure dates from the early 1880s. (Although the building is oriented to the northeast, for the sake of simplicity the following discussion assumes that the front facade faces north.) Side and rear exterior walls are beige brick, common to buildings in the Crookston Commercial District. The front (north) facade has been completely altered. Brown, vertical-grooved siding covers the entire second-floor facade. The siding flares out at the top, indicating that the original cornice probably remains underneath. Wood siding has also been applied on the first floor over the center and end piers and above the windows. It is not known when the siding was installed, but it is not seen in a 1954 aerial photograph.<sup>2</sup>

Historical photos show the original appearance of the facade, which is presumably still intact under the wood siding. Four tall windows were evenly spaced across the second story. Each window had a detailed hood and a simple, stone sill. The windows have also been covered on the interior, although small holes show that the original glass and frames are still in place. The brick of the front facade was either glazed or painted white. A corbel table was located above the windows. Originally, a plain wood or metal cornice marked the roofline. A

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<sup>1</sup>An 1884 Sanborn map shows four buildings on the block which may be brick. Because the author had access only to maps microfilmed in black and white, it was difficult to determine the meaning of some of the shading. Two of the three other buildings may still be in place -- 105 West Second St. and 118-120 North Main St. Sanborn maps from 1884 to 1922 show what appear to be the same buildings, although the National Register Nomination dates those buildings to ca. 1896-1900 and ca. 1906, respectively. See Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1884 (New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co., 1884); Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1890 (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1890); Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1896 (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1896); Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1900 (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1900); Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1906 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1907); Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1913 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1914); Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1922 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1922); and Norene Roberts, "Crookston Commercial Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, prepared for Historic Resources, Inc., 1983, section 8. The Sanborn maps are in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup>The 1954 aerial photograph is in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

ballustraded, stone parapet, with solid center and end sections, is first seen in a photo taken after the building to the east (107 West Second St.) was built in around 1906. 107 West Second St. also has a ballustraded parapet. It is likely that the owners of 109 West Second St., wanting to keep up with changing styles, added their parapet around that time to match the one next door.<sup>3</sup> A flat, tarred roof tops the building. Evidence of three skylights, all covered by some means, can be found on the roof and inside on the second-floor ceiling.

The first floor of the front facade is divided into two distinct storefronts. Historical views show that the center and end piers are brick with stone caps. The east storefront appears to have maintained its original configuration. The doorway, which is accessed by a single stone step, is recessed on the east side. Brown siding covers portions of the window display area and the transom above the door. The interior reveals the original woodwork and glass of the continuous transom light and the large, square transom above the door. The wooden door, which has one large light with a horizontal panel below it, also appears to be original.

The west side has seen more alterations. The doorway is deeply recessed in the center of the space, creating large window displays on either side. All of the original materials have been replaced except for the door, which matches the one to the east and was probably moved when the storefront was redesigned. These changes probably took place in the 1930s or 1940s. The plate glass of the display area is trimmed with a narrow band of carrara glass on the top and bottom. Etched glass occupies the continuous transom-light area. Evidence that the west storefront originally mirrored the east side can be found on the interior. The tin ceiling shows what appears to be a slightly recessed area on the extreme west side with a window area to the east of it.<sup>4</sup>

The south (rear) facade of the building is in poor condition. Sanborn maps from 1884 and 1890 show that the back was rectangular in shape. A one-story addition to the west side of the south facade first appears on an 1896 Sanborn map. This addition, which is approximately 15' by 15', was constructed with brick similar to the rest of the structure. Another addition was later put on the top of the first addition. The 1922 Sanborn map indicates

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<sup>3</sup>Historical views include a photograph which appears in both Crookston's Ninety Years (Crookston, MN: Pioneer Days Association, 1969), n.p., and Crookston at the Turn of the Century (n.p., 1954), n.p., where the photo is dated June 14, 1900. One postcard, which is titled "2nd Street & G.N. Depot, Crookston, Minn.," is particularly useful. This postcard and other somewhat useful views can be found in the photograph collection at the Minnesota Historical Society. Because of the distance and angles at which they were taken, the information gleaned from these historical views is not highly detailed.

<sup>4</sup>In the postcard "2nd Street & G.N. Depot, Crookston, Minn.," it appears that a doorway, similar in appearance to the present one on the east side, is located on the west side of the first floor. As mentioned before, available historical photographs provide little concrete evidence in determining the original appearance of the building, including the configuration of the storefronts.

the existence of a porch in this location, which today is enclosed by obtrusive concrete-block walls and a gabled roof.<sup>5</sup> Segmental arches, composed of two layers of rowlock brick, are located over window and door openings of the original building and first addition. The only extant historic windows, two-over-two, double-hung sash in wood frames, are located on the south and east walls of the original addition. An historic door, located along the east side of the south wall of the addition, has one large light with a horizontal panel beneath it. All other historic openings have been boarded up or are open to the elements.

Interior spaces of the building have deteriorated, and recent asbestos abatement has left debris everywhere. Removal of false ceilings and other newer materials, however, has exposed original features, or what is left of them. The first floor, as noted in the exterior description, is divided in half. A brick wall divides the sides, but four doorways provide access between them. Only one of the openings, located in approximately the middle of the wall, is of historical significance. This doorway is now square, but a segmental arch with two layers of rowlock brick, similar to the exterior openings, can still be seen above the opening.

The east side is divided into two main spaces. The north room encompasses approximately two-thirds of the space, and the south room the other one-third. Another room, accessed by a door in the south wall of the north room, was built inside of the south room. This room is constructed of drywall and other newer materials, and has no access to the south half of the south room.

As with the exterior, much of the historical fabric of the interior of the eastern storefront remains. A tin ceiling, in nearly perfect condition except for peeling paint, runs the length of the north room. Painted plaster covers the brick walls. The doorway which leads to the south half was downsized when the newer room was added. The remains of the original opening, visible above the line of the former false ceiling, show a tall doorway, which may have had a transom, surrounded by a wood frame with bull's-eye corner blocks. An original window opening on the east wall, near the doorway, has been altered and the frame removed. In the south half of the south room, two original windows are located on the east wall. The north one is partially covered by the added room. Another window and a door opening are on the south wall. All openings are boarded.

The west side is in worse condition than the east. This side is also divided into two distinct north and south rooms, each accounting for approximately half of the overall length. Included as part of the south room is the rear addition discussed earlier; only a ridge in the ceiling indicates where the addition begins. The north and south room are separated by a large, flat-arched opening. The pressed-tin ceiling remains above the storefront area and in the south

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<sup>5</sup>Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1884; Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1890; Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1896; Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1922.

room. Traces of a stairway leading to the second floor can be seen along the west wall of the north room. A trapdoor leading to the basement stairs is located beneath the former stairway. Fragments of wallpaper, a small area of tongue-and-groove wainscoting by the door on the south wall, and parts of the molding around the back door are the only other historic materials remaining.

The second floor of the building has suffered both from neglect and deterioration. The building has been unoccupied for approximately three years. In that time, the roof has decayed and water has damaged nearly all areas of the building, the second floor in particular. Most ceiling finishes have fallen off, and nearly all of the plaster on the walls has crumbled due to the water infiltration. A hole in the ceiling near the northwest corner of the room allows water direct access to the interior. Pigeons, which gain entry via the hole in the roof and a hole in the south wall, have left waste throughout the room. Wood framing for interior walls constructed at unknown dates is the only clue to how the room was laid out. As noted earlier, the four windows on the north wall have been covered by plywood. It is not known how many openings originally spanned the south wall, because the west side of the wall was altered to permit access to the concrete block addition. The current door opening, near the east side, may have initially been a window, similar to the window west of it.

Access to the second floor is gained by two sets of stairs. Metal stairs lead from the back alley to the door in the south wall. An enclosed stairway is located on the east side of the building in the space between 109 and 107 West Second St. It opens into the second floor of 109 West Second St. at about the midway point of the east wall. Two flights of stairs, plastered walls, and a carved wood hand rail are in relatively good condition. At the bottom of the stairs is a wood-framed doorway with a large, square transom above. A small vestibule lies to the north of this doorway. A brick wall, approximately four feet wide, is flush with the front of the buildings, and encloses the area. An area of glass block provides light for the vestibule. Oddly, the vestibule is not directly linked to the first floor of 109 West Second St. Instead, a door to the east provides access to a small hallway in 107 West Second St., where an exterior door on the front of that building is located. The hallway in 107 also leads to another stairway, which parallels the one in 109. At some point, the second-floor landings of both buildings were connected by a doorway. It is not known why or when this arrangement was made, but it is assumed that the American Legion, who used the second floors of both buildings, made the alterations during their ownership. The doorways between the two buildings have been bricked up in preparation for the demolition of 109.

Although the reason for the unusual stairway configuration remains a mystery, it does have historical precedent. As early as 1884, stairs of some sort were shown in that location on

a Sanborn map.<sup>6</sup> It is assumed that due to the narrowness of the building, the stairs were placed outside to conserve space.

History: Built sometime before 1884, little is known about the earliest history of the building. Fletcher and Houston's Addition to Crookston, in which the property is located, was platted and annexed in 1877. The building first appears on an 1884 Sanborn map with a meat market, board of trade, millinery, and dentist listed as occupants.<sup>7</sup> Between 1890 and 1896, the Crookston Times newspaper office began to occupy the first floor, with a dentist still using the second floor. The newspaper office remained in this location until around 1912. The Crookston Times was first published in 1885 and is still in print today. William E. McKenzie was associated with the Times from the beginning, and became owner by 1886. The McKenzie family also used the building as their home. City directories show members of the family living in the building from at least 1915 to 1941.<sup>8</sup>

In 1946, the McKenzie family sold the property to the Crookston American Legion Post No. 20, which had been organized in 1919. Sometime around the early 1940s, they acquired the building at 107 West Second St. By 1949, their address was listed as 107 1/2-109 1/2 West Second St., indicating that they had probably joined the interiors of the two buildings by then. The American Legion's impact on 109 West Second St. has been dramatic. During their ownership, the wood siding was applied to the exterior, interior doorways were created between 109 and 107, and, finally, the building was allowed to fall into disrepair. The Legion moved out of the buildings by 1987 and tax forfeited the property at 109 in 1991.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1894.

<sup>7</sup>In Crookston, Minnesota, Historical Commercial District Booklet, by Stephen G. Sylvester, (n.p., 1988), 31, it is noted that the building was built for the Iverson Sisters' Millinery Emporium. His source is unknown. For other references, see Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1884; and Miscellaneous Record Book A, pages 202 and 203, Polk County Courthouse.

<sup>8</sup>Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1890; Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1896; William H. Bingham and R.I. Holcombe, eds., Compendium of History and Biography of Polk County, Minnesota (Minneapolis: W.H. Bingham and Co., 1916), 94, 233-235; City Directory of Crookston, Minnesota, 1911-12 (Crookston, MN: McKenzie-Robbins Printing Co., 1911); Crookston City Directory, 1915-16 (St. Cloud, MN: John H. Ley, Directory Publisher, 1915); Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory, 1935 (Moorhead, MN: Steidl and Sands, 1935); Polk's Crookston City Directory, 1940-41 (St. Paul: R.L. Polk and Co., 1940); Polk's Crookston City Directory, 1949 (St. Paul: R.L. Polk and Co., 1949).

<sup>9</sup>Deed Record Book 232, page 201; Deed Record Book 234, page 116; Polk County Courthouse. Dorothy McCulla and Cathy Wright, eds., Footprints of Yesterday (Crookston, MN: Crookston Centennial Committee, 1979), 102; Polk's Crookston City Directory, 1940-41; Polk's Crookston City Directory, 1949; 1987-88 Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory (Kansas City: R.L. Polk and Co., 1987).

It is important to note that the businesses located at 109 West Second St. have not always used that address. On the first floor, the east half has always been 109, but the west half has been 109, 109 1/2, and 111. Today, the number 111 can be found above the west door. It is not known when or why the west half was first called 111, especially since there is a 111 West Second St. next door. Available city directories from 1935 to 1987 list one business at 109 and two separate businesses at 111. Due to the layout of 111, it seems unlikely that two businesses would be located on its first floor. Also, the first business in 111 listed in each directory is a shoe store, which local sources recall being in the west half of 109. Other businesses which have been located in the building over the years include a florist, music and musical instruments retailer, a barber, land company, dress and hat shop, and a baseball card shop.<sup>10</sup> In 1985, this building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Crookston Commercial District.

This Historic American Buildings Survey study has been completed voluntarily by Polk County. It was undertaken in order to document the building before its imminent removal.

Sources:

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City Directory of Crookston, Minnesota, 1906. Crookston, MN: Times Publishers, 1906.

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<sup>10</sup>Address and tenant information comes primarily from city directories and Sanborn maps: Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1922; City Directory of Crookston, Minnesota, 1904 (Crookston, MN: Times Publishers, 1904); City Directory of Crookston, Minnesota, 1906 (Crookston, MN: Times Publishers, 1906); City Directory of Crookston, Minnesota, 1911-12; Crookston City Directory, 1915-16; Polk's Crookston City Directory, 1956 (St. Paul: R.L. Polk and Co., 1957); 1978 Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory (Kansas City: R.L. Polk and Co., 1978); 1979 Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory (Kansas City: R.L. Polk and Co., 1979); 1980 Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory (Kansas City: R.L. Polk and Co., 1980); 1984 Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory (Kansas City: R.L. Polk and Co., 1984); 1986 Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory (Kansas City: R.L. Polk and Co., 1986); 1987-88 Crookston, Minnesota, City Directory. Gerald J. Amiot and Bruno Jurchen, both of Crookston, recalled in conversations with Chad J. Perkins on 28 September and 30 September 1994, respectively, that the west half of 109 West Second St. had been a shoe store for many years.

Co., 1911.

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Unpublished

Deed and Miscellaneous Record books are located at the Polk County Recorder's Office, Polk County Courthouse, Crookston, Minnesota.

Photographs and postcards located in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Roberts, Norene. "Crookston Commercial Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, prepared for Historical Research, Inc., November, 1983.

Historians: Chad J. Perkins and Charlene K. Roise, Hess, Roise and Company, October 1994.