

111 West Second St. (Alley Building)
Crookston Commercial District
Crookston
Polk County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-155

HABS
MINN
60-CROK,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

111 WEST SECOND ST.
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Location: 111 West Second St., Crookston, Minnesota.

Significance: In 1891, construction began on the commercial building located at 111 West Second St.¹ The building materials and distinctive architectural style of the structure are unique to the area and set the building apart from others in the Crookston Commercial District.

Description: This three-story brick structure dates from the early 1890s. The front facade, which faces northeast, is distinguished by the variety of materials used for the three stories. (For the sake of simplicity, the building will be referred to as if the front facade faced north.) The configuration of the first-floor storefront has been maintained, but some original materials have been removed or covered. Rock-faced, red sandstone piers, which flare out at the base, and a molded stringcourse, adorned with dentils, frame the area. Identical, recessed entries are located on either side of the central display window. A large stone slab creates a step to both doorways and also goes under the display area. Relatively new wood paneling lines the walls of the entries. The west door provides access to the second- and third-floor stairs, and the east door leads to the first-floor commercial area. Original doors have been replaced on both sides. Horizontal wood siding covers much of the storefront area below the stringcourse. Three fixed-sash windows, which are not original, are located in the display area. The front window consists of a wide, single light. It is accompanied by two single lights inside the entryways. Both the doors and windows originally had transoms, which have been covered on the outside by the wood paneling and hidden on the inside by a false ceiling. On the interior, original woodwork of the display window and doors is visible.

Beige, rock-faced brick, laid in Flemish bond with reddish-brown mortar, is the dominant feature of the second floor of the front facade. This level has four one-over-one, double-hung, sash windows, which are recessed. The center windows are divided only by a narrow stone mullion, but have brick pilasters between them and the outer windows. Stone molding, similar to the mullion, separates the windows from the transoms above, which have been covered by wood or another opaque material. In the central window area, the transom has been divided into three sections. Extant materials on the interior reveal that only the two outside sections of the central transom were windows, with a decorative panel in the middle.² Massive, rock-faced, red sandstone lintels are located above the transoms. The windows are delineated by a

¹The building's construction date comes from the Crookston Times (Weekly), 19 September 1891, 8.

²Removal of part of the false ceiling on the interior of the second floor allowed inspection of the original frames of the windows and transoms. A small frame and glass are extant for the outer transom sections, but the middle area is plastered.

continuous sill and stringcourse, which are similar in style to the denticulated stringcourse over the first story.

A corbel table divides the second story from the third, which is the most distinctive section of the front facade. A plain, molded-stone, continuous sill/stringcourse below the windows sits atop the brick corbel table. Four evenly spaced, one-over-one, double-hung, sash windows span the bottom of the third floor facade. The windows are tall and narrow, with the outer windows slightly wider than the center ones. A plain, continuous, wood lintel separates the windows from the transoms, which have been covered. The transoms are divided from a row of recessed panels, similar in size, by a simple, carved-wood stringcourse. The gable-topped wall area of the third-floor facade is faced with wood, which is painted white. Half-timbering in the gable is accented by denticulated raking molding terminated by scrolls encircling acanthus leaves. A gabled roof extends approximately one-fourth of the distance toward the rear. A flat, tarred roof is located from the gable section to the back of the building.

Other exterior walls are less distinctive. The side and back exterior walls are beige brick, common to buildings in the Crookston Commercial District. Originally, four segmentally arched windows were located on the third floor of the east wall. The second one from the south has been turned into a doorway, which leads onto the roof of the building next door. The third window from the south has been divided in half because of an added interior wall.

Corrugated sheet metal covers the brick on the second and third stories of the south facade. The first floor of the south facade has a shed-roofed addition. This intrusive extension to the rear has vertical wood siding, a central door, and side-by-side, one-over-one windows west of the door. It is not known exactly when this addition was added, but a 1913 Sanborn map shows something built in that location, while a 1906 Sanborn map does not.³ The interior reveals the original openings of the south facade. On the first floor, two segmentally arched windows flanked a central door with a large transom, all of which have been extensively altered. Three evenly spaced, tall, narrow window openings were originally located on the second floor. The two to the west have been maintained as one-over-one, double-hung sash. The third was turned into a doorway that leads to a small shed-roofed room, measuring approximately 5' x 5', that was added at some point. Two, one-over-one, double-hung sash windows are located on the third floor above the outside windows on the second floor.

Historical views provide little help in examining the earlier appearance of the building. One of the few areas that can be clearly seen in the historic photos is the front gable. A picture

³All Crookston Sanborn maps can be found in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota. See Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1906 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1907), Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1913 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1914), and Crookston, Polk County, Minnesota, 1922 (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1922).

postcard shows that the recesses between the half-timbering were darker, drawing more visual attention to the diagonal members. The storefront area of the front facade appears to correspond with the present layout.⁴

The interior of the building has seen many alterations through the years. Recent asbestos abatement has left debris everywhere, but removal of false ceilings and other newer materials has exposed remaining original features. An approximately 14'-high, pressed-tin ceiling, in nearly perfect condition except for peeling paint, runs the length of the first floor. The floor space is divided by partition walls, but the ceiling reveals that the space was originally long and narrow, with no interior walls. The brick walls are plastered and covered with paint, and, in some locations, at least six layers of wallpaper. Access to the basement is gained by two sets of stairs. An enclosed stairway is located along the west wall near the front, beneath the stairs going to the second floor. In the shed addition, a bulkhead door leading to steps can be found on the east side. A narrow, modern door, located in the west wall near the front, leads to the foot of the main stairwell. Also accessed by the west exterior door of the north facade, this stairway is composed of two flights to the second floor, and one more to the third.

The second floor has a small vestibule near the stair landing, and then is divided into north and south apartments. Determining the earliest layout of this space is difficult. A lowered plaster ceiling was added, but the original high plaster ceiling can be seen in some areas where the new ceiling has been removed. Entrances to the apartments appear to be in their initial locations. The south apartment has a wide, five-panel, wood door with a horizontal transom above. The north apartment doorway has been altered, but part of the original frame can be seen above where the false ceiling was located. The north apartment has several newer door frames, and the moldings around the south apartment interior doorways also appear to be later than the building's construction date. The height of the south apartment doorways corresponds with the lower plaster ceiling. The windows have original, simple, wood surrounds. Two sets of interior windows are the most unique feature on this floor. Three side-by-side, one-over-one, double-hung, sash windows are located in walls set perpendicular to the east wall, approximately 10' from the north and south walls of the building. The window walls extend about half-way across the width of the building. The windows, which hold textured panes, reach to the original ceiling height, and the sills are around 3'6" from the floor. The use for the windows is not known, but they may have allowed light into the middle areas of the apartments, which had no windows, and provided air circulation.

⁴Historical 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 of the Minnesota Historical Society. Because of the distance and angles at which they were taken, only minimal information can be gleaned from these historical views.

The third floor, which is divided into north and south apartments, has also seen many interior changes. The shell of a large skylight, now covered, is located above the stairwell. A large hallway is at the top of the stairs, with doorways leading to the apartments. Three original, wood doors, one on the south wall and two on the east wall of the hallway, lead to the south apartment. These doors have five panels, simple frames, and horizontal transoms above. The doorway to the north apartment, located on the north wall of the hallway, has a relatively new wood frame. The original plaster ceiling can only be seen in a few areas where the later, lower plaster ceiling has been removed. Except for two partially altered door frames in the south apartment, which may be original, all interior door frames are relatively new. All windows have their original, plain, interior frames, with the exception of the two altered window openings on the east side of the building, which still retain parts of their frames. Due to the lowered ceilings, doorways with newer materials, and changes to interior walls, it is difficult to accurately determine which walls are original.

History: A newspaper article shows that around late September 1891, a contract was let for the erection of a building at 111 West Second St. The article notes that despite its mere 20' width, the structure was to be "the handsomest block ever put up in the Northwest." The narrow width of the building was necessitated by its location in a former alley right-of-way.⁵ The building was even known as the "Alley Building" in its early years. A.E. Permain, architect for the project, was described in a local newspaper as "a young gentleman of considerable experience at St. Paul, Spokane and other growing cities." The architect's skill had been shown in his earlier 1891 design for the hotel block which still stands on the west side of 111 West Second St.⁶ Francis Reckitt, an Englishman, owned the "Alley Building" property, along with the hotel next door. In 1898, the property was sold to Reckitt's son Charles, who in turn sold it to William E. McKenzie in 1904. McKenzie also owned the building to the east, 109 West Second St., which housed the Crookston Times newspaper office, of which he was publisher. The property was owned by the McKenzie family until 1946.⁷

The building has held a variety of commercial tenants on the first floor, while the upper floors have generally been used for apartments. The building first appears on an 1896 Sanborn map with a fruit and cigar store noted as the occupant. Previous Sanborn maps show that the

⁵The construction date and building details come from the Crookston Times (Weekly), 19 September 1891, 8. Deed Record Book 44, page 574, discusses the alley being vacated by the city in 1891. Deed books can be found at the Recorder's Office, Polk County Courthouse, Crookston, Minnesota.

⁶Reference to the name "Alley Building" can be found in Deed Record Book 70, page 526; and Deed Record Book 87, page 473. Information on A.E. Permain and the Reckitt Block can be found in the Crookston Times (Weekly), 18 April 1891, 1; and Crookston Times (Weekly), 15 August 1891, 1.

⁷Deed Record Book 44, page 574; Deed Record Book 70, page 526; Deed Record Book 108, page 147; Deed Record Book 232, page 359; Deed Record Book 234, page 428; and Deed Record Book 234, page 581.

site was an alley. In 1900, the post office was located in the building, followed by a saloon for a short period. Other businesses have included a millinery and notions store, billiards hall, music and musical instruments retailer, arts and crafts store, childrens clothing store, and a cable television office.⁸ 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.

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