

The Downtown Bloomington Historic District



Roughly a 12 block area bounded by East, Center, Front and Locust Streets, this district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in February 1985. Within the Downtown Bloomington Historic District are two properties individually listed on the National Register, The McLean County Courthouse Square (February 1973) and the restored Miller-Davis Law Buildings at 101-103 N. Main and 102-104 E. Front (April 1979).

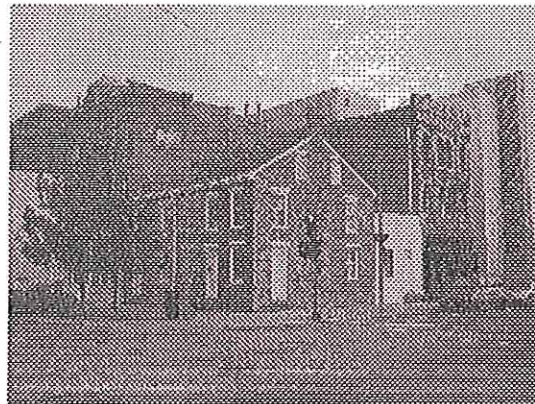
The historical time frame for the downtown district is a 100 year span; from 1842 to 1942. Resiliency and determination can be read in the range of building materials and styles found in this central part of the community. For early town leaders and businessmen of subsequent years, the buildings are the realization of pride and a commitment to making Bloomington an important regional commercial and governmental center.

Distinct periods of development can be followed along a north-south axis beginning at Front Street and going north to Locust Street. The area was surveyed in a grid pattern, in 1831, shortly after it was named the county seat for the just named McLean County. The commercial lots are long and narrow, and many of the buildings fully occupy their lots, some sharing a common wall with neighboring structures.

Until the arrival of the railroad in 1853, the town grew slowly and had to rely on locally produced building materials. A natural feature of the town site was a large grove of hardwood trees that began south of Front Street. Locally processed lumber and hand-molded bricks from Bloomington brickyards were the mainstays of construction supplies.

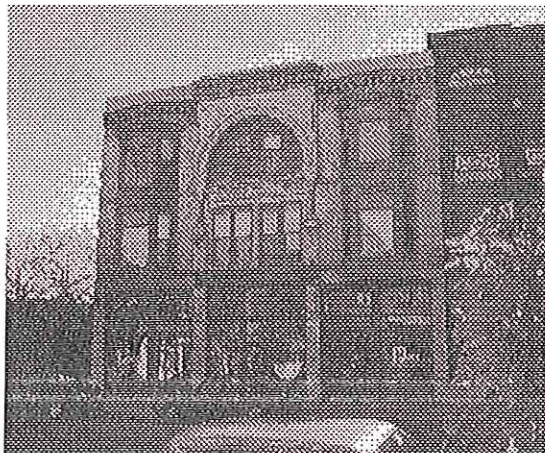
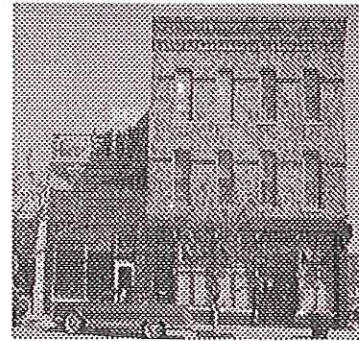
The lone survivors of the pre-railroad era are the **Miller-Davis Law Buildings** on the corner of Front and Main Streets. Built in 1842, they are modest constructions of hardwood frame and hand-molded brick, typifying the techniques and the structural form that was prevalent for that time. These buildings have been restored to museum quality appearance.

Two railroad lines, the Chicago and Alton Railroad repair shops, and a growing commercial trade more than quadrupled the population of Bloomington before the Civil War. extensive new construction and frequent rebuilding marked the building activities from the 1850's through 60's.



Most of the structures continued to be built from hand molded bricks made by local suppliers, but by the 1880's additional technology allowed them to produce a hard-faced, pressed brick and many offerings of brick in colors other than the standard red. The town now supported several men who were engaged in the design and construction of buildings, and they used a variety of materials which became available because of the railroads. Decorative elements, produced in contrasting materials, were a favorite façade technique with stone, stamped tin and ironwork the typical choices. George Miller became a popular architect in this period before the twentieth century. Born and raised in Bloomington, his earliest drafting experience was training by Rudolph Richter. After furthering his design education outside of Bloomington, he returned and eventually developed his own practice which was in full swing by the 1880's. His work shows a preference for colors and varied textures and his designs were influenced by the late nineteenth century interest in Romanesque and revivalism styles. The **Elder Building** (1884) and the neighboring **Mason & Elder Block** (1883) at 416 and 418-420 North Main Street were designed by Miller.

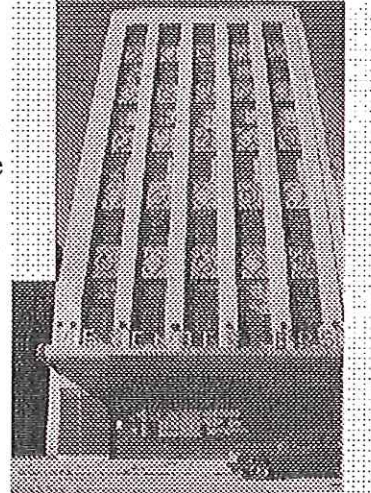
At the same time that commerce was stretching out on Main Street, another arm of the business district was reaching out along East Front Street. Activity was divided between light manufacturing, as in a cigar factory and a medicine factory and several horse related concerns, the evidence of which **Dr. W.T. William's Horse Hospital** (1883) at 236 East Front Street is one of the few remaining survivors. A nationally respected veterinary surgeon, Dr. Williams published widely in national and international professional journals. His building is basically what it was when he practiced in Bloomington. On the east wall it is possible to see the wide outline of the entrance used by his equine "patients." One of the most interesting visual contributions to East Front is located at 227-229, it was specially designed by George Miller for its artisan occupants. The name of the business is visible above the center bay of second-story windows, "**H.J. Higgins & Co. Marble Works.**" Its appearance attests to the stone cutters skill and medium with detailing in Bedford Limestone, Indiana Marble, and St. Cloud Granite. Miller orchestrated these materials in a Victorian Romanesque manner taking full advantage of the craftsmen's talent.



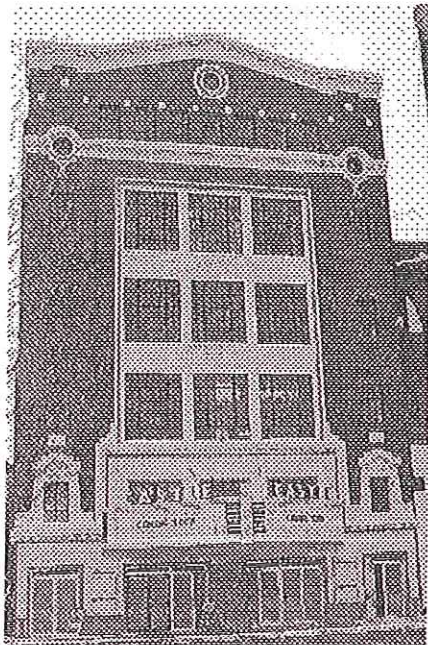
Two new decorative materials began appearing about this time, terra cotta panels and later on, terra-cotta elements such as cornices, medallions and moldings, none of which were produced locally; and cast iron columns, usually added to the first floor as structural supports and to hold plate glass display windows. Two early examples of the use of terra cotta details are the panels on the **Elder Building** on North Main Street and the **Chisholm Building** at 221-223 East Front Street. Both are buildings designed by George Miller.



Most of the post-fire structures are relatively restrained in appearance favoring symmetrical forms with classical influenced details. Other common traits among these buildings are plate glass display windows on the street and recessed entries. One of Pillsbury's last projects before his untimely death in 1925 was **Ensenberger's Furniture Store** (1925) at 212-214 North Center Street. It was the last new large building to be built facing the courthouse square. Visually striking, its seven floors are separated by spandrels of large terra cotta panels executed in a raised olive green, gold and red pattern of medieval inspiration.

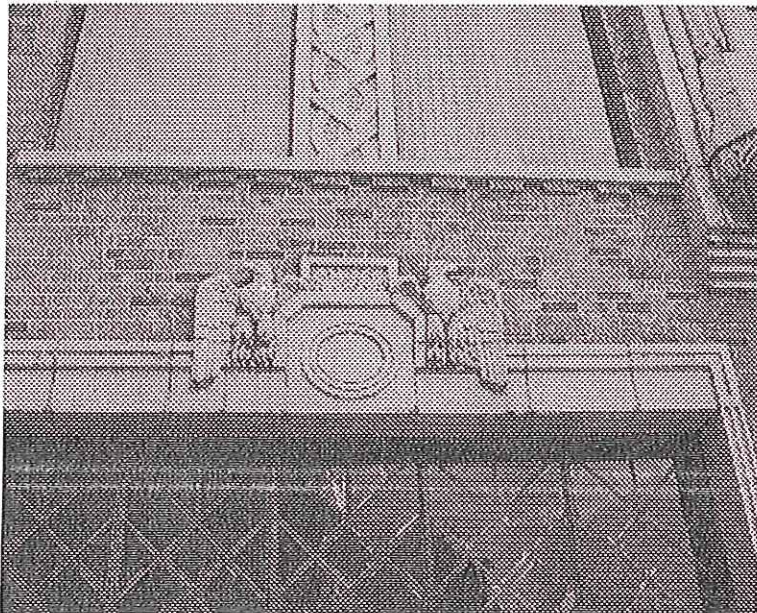
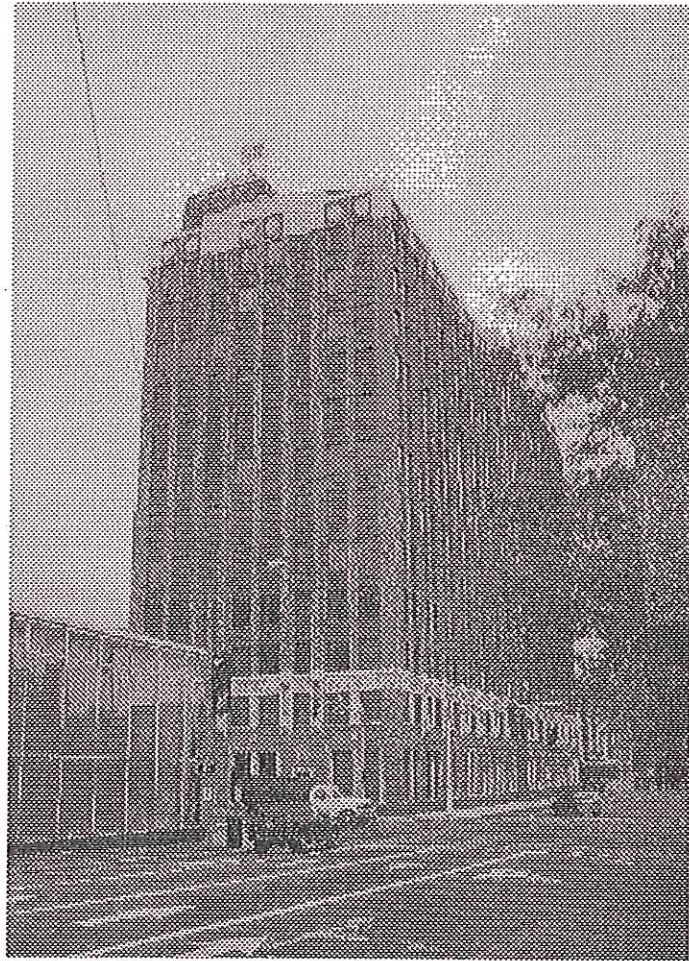


Later building additions took place on the perimeter of the core downtown district. They reflect changes in marketing strategy and a progression of stylistic trends. **The C.U. Williams and Son Building** (1911) and its annex (1915), the **Castle Theatre**, at 207-209 East Washington Street were built to sell automobiles. The car was rapidly becoming a vital part of the social and commercial mainstream, yet marketing strategies were still experimental. As a product, it required a considerable amount of space for storage and display. Williams' first building features wide display windows on the first and second stories. Eventually more space was needed and in the six-story annex Williams arranged for cars to be hung from the ceilings allowing as much of the inventory as possible to be visible to buyers.



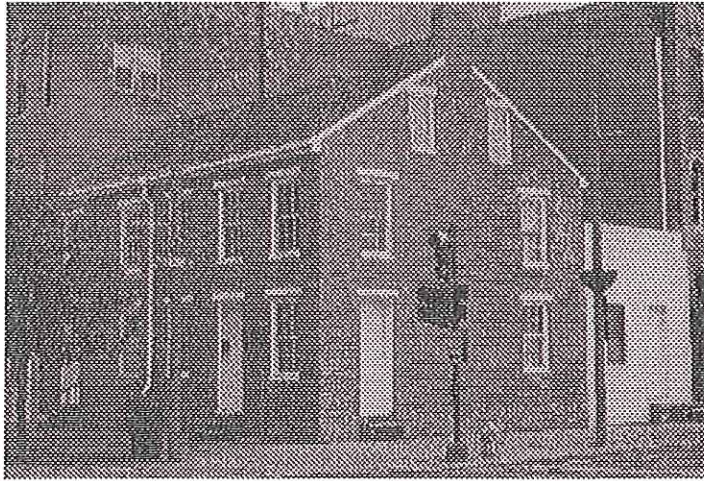
Within view of C.U. Williams showrooms, is the 13 story **State Farm Building** (1929 / 1941), at the corner of East Washington and Center Streets. It was designed by the firm of Hooten and Schaefer and is by far the largest single building complex in the downtown district. The building houses the company created to provide low-cost insurance for rural drivers. The block long structure was the third home for the fast-growing company. Developed in stages, it began as an eight story office building in 1929. Five additional stories were required only five years later and by 1941 an adjacent building, equal in size to the home base, was attached on the north side. Throughout the expansions the structure retained a basic Art Deco appearance with terra cotta medallions and a variety of stone details.

Subsequent additions along the district's edge came from two architectural firms that evolved from Pillsbury's practice. Among the



plans designed by the firm of Schaefer and Hooten is the **Kaiser-Van Leer Building** (1938) at 503 North East Street which is the only building in the downtown district with the simplified horizontal lines and materials suggestive of the International Style.

The second firm, Lundeen and Hilfinger also preferred the streamline style as is evident in the form and design of the **Wabash Telephone Building** (1942) at 109 East Market Street.



Miller-Davis Law Buildings: 101-103 North Main Street and 102-104 East Front Street. Designated a *National Register* site in April, 1979.

These are the oldest surviving commercial buildings in Bloomington. They are excellent examples of the Federal Vernacular style commonly used in the Midwestern commercial architecture. The brick and the frame structures share a common foundation and a common wall. Under lot owner James T. Miller's direction, both were erected by local men: James Goodheart; William T.M. Miller, (mason), Zachariah Lawrence, and Andy Matthews of Danvers.

The building was put up with locally made, hand-molded brick, and wood was supplied from the local timber groves. All hardware and glass was imported by ox-drawn wagons from Pekin.

The two-story brick structure was built as an income property for local businessman, James T. Miller. Miller later was elected State Treasurer on the Republican ticket in 1856. The main floor was rented to a druggist and the upper floor contained, at different times, the law offices of Ashael Gridley, William Hanna and John M. Scott. When the 8th Illinois Judicial Circuit Court was in session the law offices became a convenient gathering place for the traveling circuit lawyers to borrow working space and discuss current issues. It was an impressive list of young men who later made their mark in the Civil War, or through state or national forums; William Orme, Leonard Swett, Ward Hill Lamon, David Davis, Kershey Fell, and Abraham Lincoln.

The building remained in continuous retail use until 1978. It is now a museum quality restoration completed by the McLean County Historical Society in 1980-81. The small one-story frame structure is a reconstruction of the offices built by David Davis for the firm of Davis and Colton. At the time it was considered unusual to build office space solely for a law practice. Davis's office remained at this site until his election to Circuit Judge in 1848. The offices were rented to various attorneys until 1859 when the building was sold to a shoemaker.

After a brief stint as a museum following restoration, the buildings have returned to office space and use as a law practice.

Central Business Historic District Property Descriptions

West Locust Street (south side)

102-116 R. Loudon Flats; 1897 (C)

East Mulberry Street (south side)

103-103 1/2 Pike Building; 1877 (C)

West Market Street (North side)

109-111 Bloomington Furniture and Stove Exchange Building; 1910 (C)

107 Granada Theatre; 1928 (C)

105 R.R. McGregor Plumbing Building; 1890 (C)

West Market Street (south side)

108-114 Kirkpatrick 2nd Hand Furniture; 1890 (C)

106 Mueller Building; 1895 (C)

East Market Street (north side)

106-114 Chatterton Opera House; 1909; George Miller, Architect (C)

116 Lucca Grill; c. 1908 (C)

East Market Street (south side)

109 Wabash Telephone Company Building; 1942;
Lundeen and Hilfinger, Architects. (C)

West Monroe Street (north side)

109-111 Market House; 1867 (C)

107 Fruit House; 1868 (C)

101-105 McClun Block; 1872; Rudolph Richter , Architect(?) (C)

West Monroe Street (south side)

106-110 Charles H. Burr Building; 1901 Arthur A. Pillsbury, Architect (C)

104 Lyman Graham Building; 1901 Arthur A. Pillsbury, Architect (C)

East Monroe Street (north side)

No Sites

East Monroe Street (south side)

111 Commercial Structure (NC)

115-117 B.S. Green Building; 1901; Arthur A. Pillsbury, Architect (C)

West Front Street (south side)

Not in District

East Front Street (north side)

- 106 Heffernan Building; c. 1870 (C)
 220-228 Central Station; 1902; George Miller, Architect (C)
 230 Medicine Factory; 1876/19— (C)
 232-234 Sein-Advance Building; c. 1927 (C)
 234 1/2 Bloomington Battery Annex; c. 1927 (C)
 236 Williams Horse Hospital; 1883 (C)

East Front Street (south side)

- 213 Myres Cabinet Shop; c. 1908 (C)
 215 Harwood & Cass Building c. 1908 (C)
 217-219 Bloomington Journal; 1875 (C)
 221-223 John Y. Chisholm; 1888; George Miller, Architect (C)
 227-229 Higgins Marble Works; 1886; George Miller, Architect (C)
 235 Michael Wilson Office Building ; 1993 (NC)
 301 B & M Bakery; c. 1925 (C)
 305 Commercial Structure (C)
 315 Sill Pneumatic Horse Collar Company; c. 1903 (C)

North Center Street (west side)

- 102-106 Newmarket Department Store; c. 1926 (NC)
 110 Greenwald Building; 1880 (NC)
 116-120 Peoples Bank; 1909; Arthur L. Pillsbury, Architect (C)
 202 Snyder Building; c. 1980 (NC)
 208 Marblestone Building; 1869; Rudolph Richter, Architect (C)
 210 Benjamin & Schermerhorn Building; 1857;
 Rudolph Richter, Architect (C)
 212-214 Ensenbergers; 1925/41; Arthur L. Pillsbury, Architect
 (1941 alterations by Schaefer and Hooten) (C)
 216 Winters Building; 1900 (NC)
 218-220 Braley-fields; 1901; Arthur L. Pillsbury, Architect (C)

North Center Street (east side)

- 105-109 Hanna Building; 1900 (C)
 111-113 Crothers & Chew Building; 1856 (C)
 315 Capen Building; 1927; Schaefer and Hooten, Architects (C)
 317 Belle Plumb Building; 1900 (C)
 411-413 B. F. Hoopes & Sons
 415 Steffens Carriage Factory; c.1893 (C)
 417 Putnam Building; 1992 (C)
 511 J.W. Evans Planing Mill; c. 1900 (C)

North Main Street (east side)

501-503	Mini-Offices (NC)
505	Cable Piano Building; 1904 (C)
507-511	Akers Building; 1905; George Miller, Architect (NC)
513-515	Jacoby Building; 1899; Arthur L. Pillsbury, Architect (C)
519	Copy Shop (NC)
523	John Maloney Building; c. 1894 (C)
525	C.A.R. Smith Building; c. 1870 (NC)
527	Stutzman Building; c. 1886 / c.1945 (NC)
529	Lutz Building; 1913; Arthur L. Pillsbury, Architect (C)
531-533	Pike Building; 1877 (C)

North East Street (west side)

508	Stevenson Auto Repair; c. 1916 (C)
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North East Street (east side)

503	Kaisner-Van Leer; c. 1900 / 1938; Schaefer and Hooten Architects (NC)
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South East Street (west side)

Not in District

South East Street (east side)

102	CII East Building; 1974 (NC)
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Key to Abbreviations:

- (C) Contributing Structure: A building, site, structure or object that adds to the historic architectural qualities, historic associations, or archeological values for which a property is significant because a) it was present during the period of significance, and possesses historic integrity reflecting its character at that time or is capable of yielding important information about the period, or b) it independently meets the National Register criteria.
- (NC) Noncontributing Structure: A building, site, structure, or object, that does not add to the historic architectural qualities, historic associations, or archeological values for which a property is significant because a) it was not present during the period of significance, b) due to alterations, disturbances, additions, or other changes, it no longer possesses historic integrity reflecting its character at that time or is incapable of yielding important information about the period, or c) it does not independently meet the National Register criteria.

National Register Listed on the National Register for historic places.

BLOOMINGTON CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

