

**Site Inventory Form**  
**State Historical Society of Iowa**  
 (December 1, 1999)

**State Inventory No. 00190**  New  Supplemental  
 Part of a district with known boundaries (enter inventory no.) 22-01381  
 Relationship:  Contributing  Noncontributing  
 Contributes to a potential district with yet unknown boundaries  
 National Register Status:(any that apply)  Listed  De-listed  NHL  DOE  
 9-Digit SHPO Review & Compliance Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Non-Extant (enter year) \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Elkader Theatre

other names/site number Elkader Post Office Building; Checkerboard Restaurant

**2. Location**

street & number 108-110 North Main Street

city or town Elkader

vicinity, county Clayton

Legal Description: (If Rural) Township Name \_\_\_\_\_ Township No. \_\_\_\_\_ Range No. \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_ Quarter \_\_\_\_\_ of Quarter \_\_\_\_\_  
 (If Urban) Subdivision Original Town \_\_\_\_\_ Block(s) Fractional Blk 4 \_\_\_\_\_ Lot(s) N. 40 Ft of Lot 6

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification [Skip this Section]**

**4. National Park Service Certification [Skip this Section]**

**5. Classification**

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

*If Non-Eligible Property*

Enter number of:

— buildings  
 — sites  
 — structures  
 — objects  
 — Total

*If Eligible Property, enter number of:*

Contributing Noncontributing

1 — buildings  
 — — sites  
 — — structures  
 — — objects  
1 — Total

**Name of related project report or multiple property study** (Enter "N/A" if the property is not part of a multiple property examination).

*Title*  
Arch. & Hist. Resources of the Elkader Downtown Historic District MPD

*Historical Architectural Data Base Number*  
22-030

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

02G04 Tavern

04F Post Office

08A02 Movie Theatre

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

08A02 Movie Theatre

01B02 Apartments

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

09F05 Brick Front

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation 03 Brick; 04 Stone

walls 03 Brick

roof 15C01 Rubber Membrane

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description** ( SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" representing your opinion of eligibility after applying relevant National Register criteria)

- Yes  No  More Research Recommended
- Yes  No  More Research Recommended
- Yes  No  More Research Recommended
- Yes  No  More Research Recommended

- A Property is associated with significant events.
- B Property is associated with the lives of significant persons.
- C Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.
- D Property yields significant information in archaeology or history.

County Clayton Address 108 North Main Street

Site Number Error!

**Reference source not found.**

City Elkader

District Number 22-01381

**Criteria Considerations**

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B Removed from its original location.
- C A birthplace or grave.
- D A cemetery.
- E A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F A commemorative property.
- G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

02 ARCHITECTURE

05 COMMERCE

**Significant Dates**

Construction date

1901  check if circa or estimated date

Other dates

**Significant Person**

(Complete if National Register Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Architect

Builder

**Narrative Statement of Significance** ( SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Bibliography  See continuation sheet for citations of the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form

**10. Geographic Data**

UTM References (OPTIONAL)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	_____	_____	2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet for additional UTM references or comments

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Marlys Svendsen, Svendsen Tyler, Inc.

organization City of Elkader

date 7/2011

street & number N3834 Deep Lake Road

telephone 715/469-3300

city or town Sarona

state WI

zip code 54870

**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION** (Submit the following items with the completed form)

**FOR ALL PROPERTIES**

- Map:** showing the property's location in a town/city or township.
- Site plan:** showing position of buildings and structures on the site in relation to public road(s).
- Photographs:** representative black and white photos. If the photos are taken as part of a survey for which the Society is to be curator of the negatives or color slides, a photo/catalog sheet needs to be included with the negatives/slides and the following needs to be provided below on this particular inventory site:

Roll/slide sheet # _____	Frame/slot # _____	Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____	Frame/slot # _____	Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____	Frame/slot # _____	Date Taken _____

- See continuation sheet or attached *photo & slide catalog sheet* for list of photo roll or slide entries.
- Photos/illustrations without negatives are also in this site inventory file.

**FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF PROPERTIES, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING AS WELL**

- Farmstead & District:** (List of structures and buildings, known or estimated year built, and contributing or non-contributing status)
- Barn:**
  - A sketch of the frame/truss configuration in the form of drawing a typical middle bent of the barn.
  - A photograph of the loft showing the frame configuration along one side.
  - A sketch floor plan of the interior space arrangements along with the barn's exterior dimensions in feet.

**State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Use Only Below This Line**

Concur with above survey opinion on National Register eligibility:  Yes  No  More Research Recommended

This is a locally designated property or part of a locally designated district.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluated by (name/title): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Elkader Theatre	Clayton
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## 7. Description:

This building is estimated by the Clayton County Assessor to have been built in 1890. The building was not in place until sometime between 1895 and 1902 according to the Sanborn Maps for Elkader published in those years. Property transfer records show the property being acquired by the Elkader Real Estate & Building Co. in 1901 following the June 1899 fire that destroyed the adjacent Borman Building and did damage to the previous building on this site. Construction commenced after September 1901 and was completed by the time data was collected for the 1902 Sanborn Map. A building date of ca. 1901 is consistent with the design of the building and public records.

The Elkader Theatre at 108-110 N. Main Street is an example of a vernacular Brick Front commercial building from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This 2-story double-wide building has a limestone foundation, light-brown colored brick walls and dressed brownstone trim. The brick patternwork is similar to parts of the Elkader State Bank building next door to the south designed by Dubuque architect Guido Beck. A flat roof is set behind the brick corbelled cornice that also features terra cotta tiles, brick dentils, and a crown molding.

On the upper level, the building retains its original window arrangement that includes three 1/1 windows with transoms in each half with two of the windows in each half grouped together. The sills and lintels are dressed Brownstone. The first floor was reworked when the building was converted from two shop spaces into a movie theatre. A wide band of glass block was installed between levels to either side of the a lighted, metal marquee with changeable lettering. Small shop spaces were retained to either side of paired doors that feature stacked circular windows. The original exterior ticket booth was centered on the front and has been replaced with a flat display window. The shop space north of the entrance doors has a shallowly recessed entrance and a plate glass display window. The shop space south of the entrance doors has a similar arrangement.

## 8. Significance:

The Elkader Theatre at 108-110 N. Main Street is a good example of a vernacular Brick Front commercial building. The building occupies a site along North Main Street and is a contributing resource in the Elkader Downtown Historic District. The district derives significance under both Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, the district's commercial buildings are associated with the historic contexts developed for the downtown in the "Architectural and Historical Resources of the Elkader Downtown Historic District" Multiple Property Documentation form covering the years 1846 to 1960. Under Criterion C, the building's Brick Front design is representative of commercial architectural development that took place at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the downtown.

### *Elkader Downtown Historic District Background:*

The town of Elkader was laid out in 1846 along the banks of the Turkey River approximately 16 miles upstream from the Turkey River's confluence with the Mississippi River. The town was surveyed and laid out in 1846 with the Original Town Plat filed in June 22, 1846 by Timothy Davis, Chester Sage and John Thompson, friends and business partners, who began operating a sawmill on North Front (Main)

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Street in 1845 before the town was even platted. By 1849 they had a successful flour mill in operation. The new town was named for Abd el-Kader, an Algerian freedom fighter and world figure who was admired by Davis. The principal building stimulating development in the 1840s and 1850s was the Elkader Mill. After 1860 when the Clayton County voters selected Elkader as the permanent county seat, the downtown saw a variety of merchants set up shops, several hotels open, a number of newspapers begin publication, and small manufacturing concerns get underway in the city center. Elkader numbered 440 residents in 1860.

The new county court house saw its first section completed in 1869 opposite the downtown. New limestone buildings were erected along both North and South Main Street with public halls frequently located on upper floors. During the 1870s and 1880s 2-story brick buildings began replacing frame business houses. A permanent railroad connection was completed by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul RR in 1886 but service remained poor as Elkader was located at the end of a spur rather than along a main line route. A more important transportation improvement during the 1880s was the completion of the Keystone Bridge across the Turkey River in 1880. Its completion prompted a period of economic vitality and community investment. The community was officially incorporated two years later in 1891 and a new waterworks system and city well were completed in 1896. Electricity was rejected by locals until the end of the decade in 1900, however. In the meantime, new churches were built in 1897 for the Congregationalists on the east side of the river and in 1897-1899 for the Catholics on the west side of the river. Coupled with a series of major fires during the 1890s, the downtown saw a period of rebuilding with a new hotel and bank at the entrance to the business district at the turn of the century. The new opera house was completed on North Main Street while other 2 and 3-story brick blocks appeared both north and south of Bridge Street.

By 1900, Elkader's population stood at its peak of 1,321 – an increase of 77 percent during the decade of the 1890s. Development continued in the downtown before and after World War I but at a much slower pace. Floods and fires damaged the Elkader Mill in 1902, 1906 and 1908, but it was nevertheless rebuilt by Schmidt Brothers & Co., retaining a key employer and anchor for Elkader's downtown. The business district began to extend to the west before and after the war with the principal changes seen along West Bridge Street. Here livery stables and wagon shops were replaced by automobile dealerships, implement companies and filling stations. Five stations eventually located along West Bridge with a sixth one block to the south along First Street SW. The national economic depression of the 1930s was coupled by the closing of the Elkader Mill in 1939 following a major fire. Natural disasters after World War I included major floods in 1922, 1947, and 1958 with a tornado destroying section of South Main Street in 1958 as well.

Despite these natural and human made disasters, Elkader saw steady but modest population growth from 1,223 in 1920 to 1,526 in 1960. The impact of the automobile was seen in traffic patterns, parking patterns, and traffic signs and the introduction of electricity saw several generations of street lighting come and go. The popularity of the opera house waned and the first floor became the municipal fire station while two movie houses came and one stayed in the downtown drawing evening crowds for entertainment and shopping. As many as 130 people resided in downtown flats during this period. A good system of inter and intra-state highways connected Elkader and its downtown to other parts of the state and country in a way that railroads had never served the community. By 1960, downtown Elkader

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was well-established as one of several geographically dispersed retail centers serving Clayton County. Virtually every storefront was filled with start-up businesses or multi-generational family stores as Elkader's downtown achieved a stable and healthy status for local and countywide residents.

### *Historic Background for the Elkader Theatre at 108-110 N. Main Street:*

In June 1899 fire destroyed the Borman Building at the northeast corner of Main and Bridge streets. Among the important rebuilding projects that took place in the wake of this fire and the damage done to buildings to the north, was the construction of a new brick building at 108-110 North Main Street immediately adjacent to the new Elkader State Bank. Owners of parcel beginning in September 1901 were a group of Elkader business leaders who acquired the vacant parcel under the firm they had organized a decade earlier – the “Elkader Real Estate & Building Company.” The firm was organized after the national economic Panic of 1893 undermined confidence in property development. Members of the company included Joseph J. Kann, Frank J. Uriell, P.J. Cain, H.H. Hagensick (first president of the Elkader State Bank and mayor in the early 1890s), and D.D. Murphy.

In 1902, Sanborn maps show the building had two shop spaces with the north one used as a saloon and the south one used as a retail shop. By 1913, the north space was in use as the Elkader Post Office and the south one is believed to have housed the W.W. Davidson law office. Later the south one housed the Pahlas Jewelry Store, which later moved into 112 North Main Street. Between the Post Office and the law office, an undated historic photograph shows a giant thermometer was mounted on the wall. In 1931, Elkader's two banks merged leaving the former First National Bank located at 122-124 North Main vacant. In the spirit of community pride, the owners of the building at 108-110 N. Main agreed to release the post office from their lease so that the post office could relocate to the former bank building. This took place in 1935 and the former post office space was leased P.C. Buckman to establish a restaurant in the space. The “Checkerboard Café” opened in May 1935 with the restaurant spaced decorated in red and black with each booth's tabletop containing a checkerboard. The café included four booths, eight tables, a lunch counter seating six, and a soda fountain. On the opening Sunday, May 23, 1935, the Checkerboard Café served 80 dinners. Two years later in 1937 after a heat wave the previous summer, the Checkerboard added air conditioning. The following year the Buckmans sold the Checkerboard to Phyllis Patterson.

In December 1940, the building was sold to Harold and Belma Hall for conversion to a movie theatre to replace the Rivola Theatre operated by the Halls on the other side of Main Street. During World War II and in the years that followed, Belma Hall took the principal responsibility for operation of the theatre. It was the only theatre in the county by the 1970s and was a major draw for downtown business activity including highly successful “bank nights” when lucky theatre goers had a chance to win money while attending a movie.

In the 1970s the theatre was taken over by Duane and Merolda Vorwold who bought it from Belma Hall. After several years of declining attendance, the theatre closed in May 1975 but continued to operate on several owners in later years. In 2002-2003 under the efforts of the nonprofit Elkader Cinema Development Corporation, the theater was renovated and sold to Lee and Diane Akin to operate. The Akins reside in the second floor loft apartment that features 11 foot ceilings and vies of the Turkey

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River. The couple continue to own and operate the theatre as "Circle Theatre" under Akin Ventures Inc. in 2011.

## 9. Major Sources:

*1984 History of Clayton County.* Clayton County Genealogical Society, Elkader, Iowa: Griffith Press, 1984.

Anderson, David C. *Reconnaissance Survey of Elkader Clayton County, Iowa.* Clayton County Historic Preservation Commission and Main Street Elkader, March 1, 1994.

Andreas, A.T. *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa.* Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co., 1875.

Appraisal Records for Elkader Downtown Properties, Clayton County Assessor's Office, 1949 – 1965.

"Bird's Eye View Map, Elkader, Iowa, 1871." Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Doniat and Zastrow.

Elkader Historical Society/Carter House Museum research file for 108-110 North Main Street; files focusing on downtown Elkader buildings, businesses, civic leaders and related information. Compiled by Marge Costigan and other museum volunteers. Research files contain hundreds of historic photos, newspaper articles, publication transcriptions, property ownership records, and information from interviews. Digital copies of some research files were loaned to Marlys Svendsen, October 2010 and others were made available in March 2011 for duplication.

*Census of State of Iowa* for the years 1856, 1867, 1875, 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, and 1925 as printed by various State Printers.

*Clayton County, Iowa, Memories & Heritage from the Photo Albums of Clayton County.* Elkader, Iowa: The Clayton County Register, 1997.

Downtown Building Survey (73 surveyed buildings) records including survey questionnaires, draft Iowa Site Inventory Forms and digital photographs. Main Street Elkader, 2009.

Downtown Elkader Business Questionnaires completed by property/business owners, 2010.

Downtown Elkader Individual Property Site Maps compiled by Eli Garms, Clayton County GIS, Engineer's Office, Elkader, November 2010.

Elkader Building Survey (62 surveyed buildings). Main Street Elkader, 1994-1996.

Elkader Historic Photograph Collection (digital). Elkader Public Library, Elkader. Digital files loaned to Marlys Svendsen, December 2008.

"Elkader, Iowa 1846-1971, the Past, the Present the Future." 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, *The Clayton County Register*, Elkader, Iowa, July 21, 1971.

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Elkader Telephone Directories, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1932, 1933, 1960 and 1966.

Gottfried, Herbert and Jan Jennings. *American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1985.

Insurance Maps for Elkader. (New York: The Sanborn Company), 1895, 1902, 1913, 1930, and 1951.

“Keystone Bridge Centennial Edition.” *The Clayton County Register*, Elkader, Iowa, July 26, 1989.

Olson, Edward W. *Look What you Started Mr. Davis...Elkader, Iowa: History, Facts and Folklore about Elkader, Iowa U.S.A.*, ca. 2010.

*Plat Book of Clayton County, Iowa*, Minneapolis: Warner & Foote, 1886.

“Pages from the Past”, *Clayton County Register*, June 19, 2001

“Plat of Elkader, June 22, 1846.” Recorder’s Office, Clayton County, Court House, Elkader, Iowa,.

Powell, Harry. “The Elkader Story.” unpublished first draft, December 1980; copy available at Elkader Public Library.

Price, Realto E., editor. *History of Clayton County, Iowa from the Earliest historical Times Down to the Present, Volumes I and II*. Chicago: Robert O. Law Company, 1916.

Property Transfer Records for Blocks 3 – 10 and Fractional Blocks 3-6 in Town of Elkader, Clayton County Auditor’s Office and Recorder’s Office, Clayton County Court House, Elkader, Iowa.

Shank, Wesley I. *Iowa’s Historic Architects: A Biographical Dictionary*. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

*Standard Atlas of Clayton County, Iowa*. Chicago: George A. Ogle & Co., 1902.

United States Census, 1850-2010. (population figures provided by State Library of Iowa, January 2011 and City of Elkader, March 2011).

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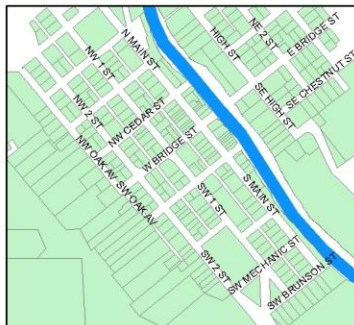
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**Additional Information:**

Full Legal Description: Original Town of Elkader, LOT 6, FRACTIONAL BLK 4.

**Address: 110 North Main**



Map Created By:  
Eli Garms  
Clayton County GIS  
2010



# Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

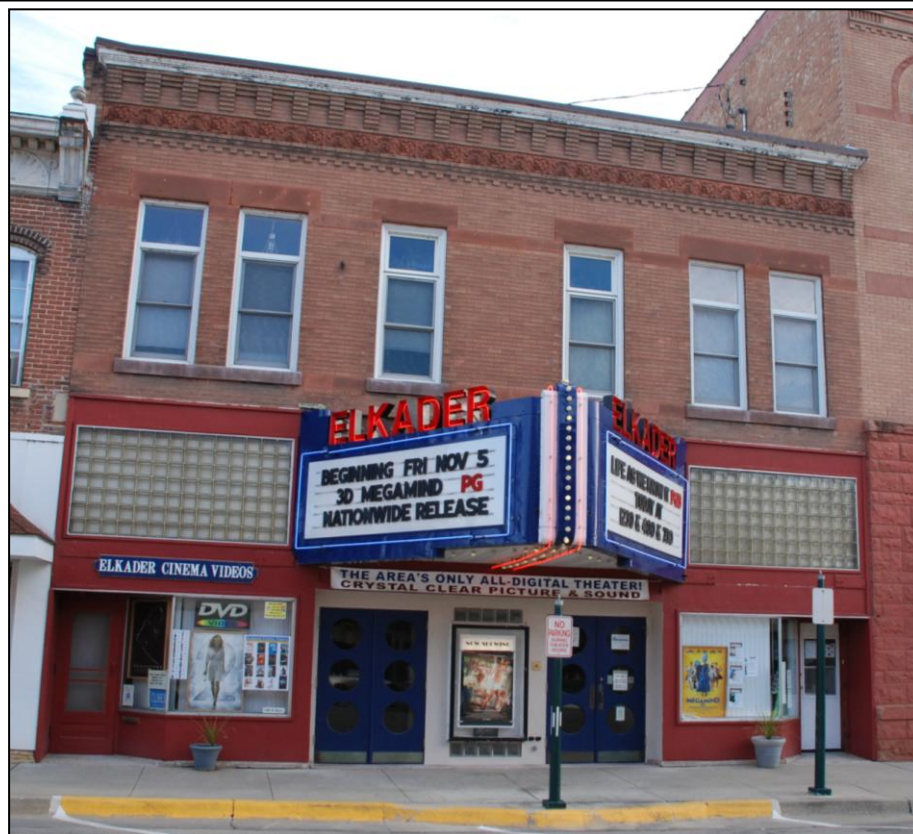
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**Photographs:** 108 North Main Street, historic view – Elkader Theatre (left side) is opposite the Rivola Theatre (right side), 100 block of North Main Street looking south; photo date is 1942 according to date for two movies showing on the Elkader Theater marquee - *Lucky Jordan* and Alan Ladd in *March of Time* – both appeared in 1942 (Elkader Historical Society/Carter House Museum photo collection); contemporary view, looking east (Elkader Downtown Survey Photograph, 10/29/2010, Marlys Svendsen, photographer)



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**Photographs:** 108 North Main Street, historic view – Elkader Theatre (left side) is opposite the Rivola Theatre (right side), 100 block of North Main Street looking south; photo date is 1942 according to date for two movies showing on the Elkader Theater marquee - *Lucky Jordan* and Alan Ladd in *March of Time* – both appeared in 1942 (Elkader Historical Society/Carter House Museum photo collection); contemporary view, looking east (Elkader Downtown Survey Photograph, 10/29/2010, Marlys Svendsen, photographer)





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**Photographs:** 108 North Main Street, street view, looking southeast and rear façade overlooking the Turkey River, looking northwest (Elkader Downtown Survey Photograph, 10/29/2010, Marlys Svendsen, photographer)

