



"The Finest Warehouse West of Chicago" Bishop's Block in Dubuque

by *Carmen Tschofen*

Architect Franklin D. Hyde worked hard. In late 19th-century Dubuque, commissions flew into his office. A house on the hill here, a public elevator up the bluffs there, commercial business buildings, factories, a hotel, a school, and dozens more private homes enlivened the growing town. All told, well over a hundred structures built between 1879 and 1893 have been attributed to Hyde. His influence on the face of Dubuque still lingers today, particularly in the downtown area.

Hyde's legacy in Dubuque is architecture brewed of art, craft, and finance. A master of the preeminent building styles of the era, Hyde also knew how to attract clients of means and social prominence in an era

of financial growth. Thus, an imposing downtown warehouse commissioned by Bishop (and entrepreneur) John Hennessey fell easily in Hyde's purview.

This Victorian Romanesque structure was known as "Bishop's Block" even before completion in 1889. With its decorative Main Street facade, its considerable mass anchoring the base of lower Main Street, and its pointed turret visible from the Mississippi

This image of the Bishop's Block warehouse building (above) appeared with pictures of several other imposing structures showcased in an 1891 souvenir book of Dubuque. Artist and publisher Alexander Simplot considered these buildings evidence that Dubuque "will maintain her position as the commercial metropolis of Iowa." The building still stands today.

River bluffs, Bishop's Block presented an immediately recognizable "architectural advertisement" for Hyde, as well as for Bishop Hennessey and the businesses that would occupy the building. But while Bishop's Block would exemplify Hyde's mastery of architectural fashion and business savvy, it would also be one of the last, big hurrahs of commercial Victorian architecture in Dubuque, and virtually the swan song of Hyde's Iowa career.

Born in Maine in 1849, Hyde was raised in Wisconsin and Minnesota and studied architecture in St. Paul, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Boston. He arrived in Dubuque in January 1878, after 16 years as an assistant to several "nationally prominent architects," according to literature published by town boosters. Set up for business in the Bradley Block at the southwest corner of Seventh and Main, Hyde began promoting himself as "Architect and Building Superintendent," willing and able to design or remodel public and private buildings. By 1887, the *Dubuque Business Annual and Trade Review* hailed Hyde as "a pronounced architect of the first order" and considered him "by taste, natural talent, education and experience . . . peculiarly fitted to give satisfaction in his line" with business "rapidly increasing with him." Industries of Dubuque applauded his design and construction as "new and substantial, contributing strength, utility and elegance."

Hyde's career leading up to Bishop's Block followed a route similar to that of other prolific architects of his era. Like his contemporary Richard Morris Hunt, who catered to wealthy East Coast industrialists

PHOTOGRAPHED AT DUBUQUE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BY THOMAS GOODMAN

F. D. HYDE,
ARCHITECT
AND
BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT,
Room 6, Bradley Block,
DUBUQUE, IOWA.

Designs and Working Drawings Prepared for
all kinds of Buildings, Interior
Decorations, &c.

CORRESPONDENCE SOLICITED.

Hyde advertised his architectural business in the 1886 *Dubuque Business Annual and Trade Review*.

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



This French Second Empire home, designed by Hyde in 1879 for Dubuque entrepreneur Jesse P. Farley, helped launch his successful career in Dubuque. Farley sold it to the Sisters of St. Francis in 1892 after he suffered business losses. It became known as the Mary of the Angels Home.

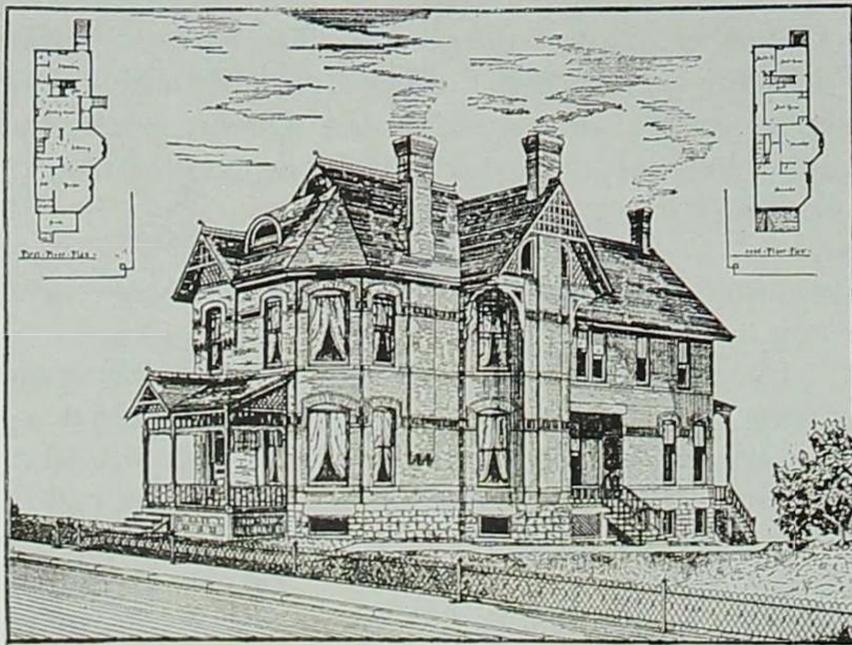
by designing their commercial and residential structures, Hyde received multiple commissions from Dubuque's business elite for commercial blocks, manufacturing establishments, and private homes. An auspicious early commission for a French Second Empire home built in 1879 for Jesse P. Farley set the tone for Hyde's clientele; a local entrepreneur, Farley held railroad and river shipping interests and served as a three-time Dubuque mayor.

Hyde's many commissions for private homes thereafter exemplified the era's most desirable residential styles, in particular the Queen Anne and Gothic Revival forms. Overall, Hyde masterfully applied the creative eclecticism of the mid- and late 19th century to homes throughout the growing city of Dubuque, gaining praise—and more business—from community leaders.

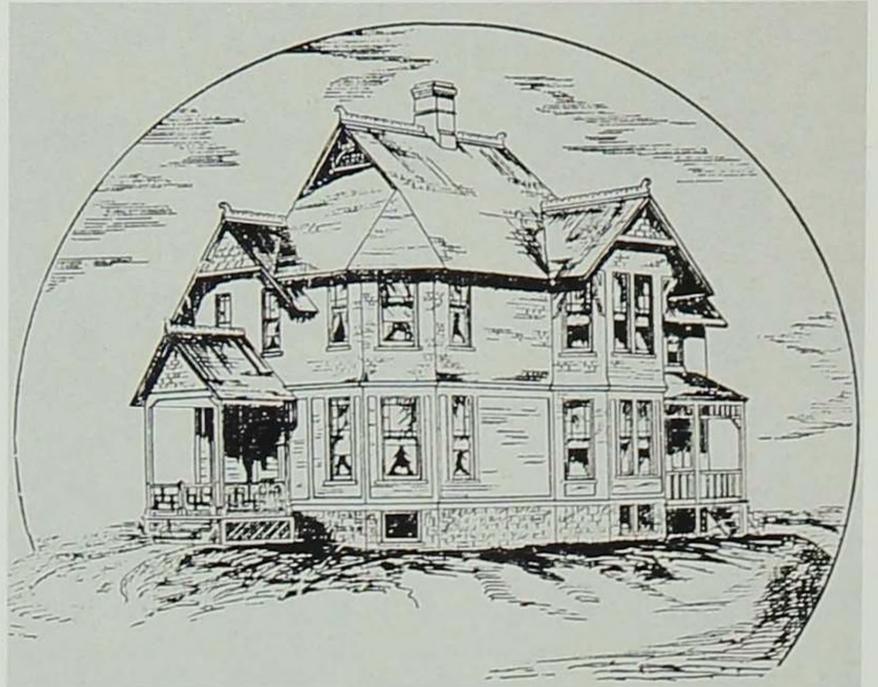
The business easily transferred to the commercial sphere, and Hyde's commercial structures best demonstrate his obvious versatility as an architect. Outside Dubuque, his commissions included school additions, churches, wards for the mentally ill, a university dining hall, banks, and hotels. Within Dubuque, Hyde's commissions added to the town's infrastructure, including stables for the Dubuque Omnibus Company (in 1883), a brick pumping station for the Water Works Company (1888), and the Fourth Street



BOTH SKETCHES FROM DUBUQUE, THE KEY CITY OF IOWA (1889)



RESIDENCE OF A. J. PARKER.
F. D. HYDE, Architect.



RESIDENCE OF H. L. CONGAR.
F. D. HYDE, Architect.



Among the elegant Dubuque homes designed by Hyde were these Victorian giants: above, an 1883 Eastlake-style home for B.B. Richards, owner of a boot and shoe factory; "Greystone" (top left) built for wagon manufacturer A.A. Cooper; and homes for A. J. Parker and H.L. Congar (bottom left). More homes designed by Hyde appear on page 96.

Elevator (1887). Replacing an earlier one destroyed by fire, Hyde's elevator carried pedestrians up one of Dubuque's daunting hills "as if one were set afloat in mid air," and inspired the *Dubuque Trade Review* to rhapsodize over the Swiss-cottage style elevator station, with reception hall, lookout porch, and "pleasure balcony."

Dubuque's Main Street, an area significant throughout the town's history, would also profit from Hyde's designs and remodeling. Dubuque's early promotional name of the "Key City of Iowa" bespoke the town's desire to serve as a trade center for the Midwest. In particular, lower Main Street supported considerable commercial development beginning in the territorial period because of the area's easy access to multiple transportation possibilities. By 1838, the military road from Iowa City ended there. Mississippi ferries and riverboats plied the town's harbors. With the addition of rail service in 1855, commercial development boomed. Retail buildings, small manufactories, wholesale warehouses, hotels, and taverns sprang up in the inviting blocks stretching from First to Sixth, just south of the town's business district.

By the time Hyde arrived in the late 1870s and continuing through the next decade, Main Street space was at such a premium that local newspapers noted the need to tear down old buildings to make room for new construction. Commercial and warehouse structures began to replace the buildings below Third Street. Hyde made his mark, creating a storefront for the Thedinga Block (1880); a pressed-brick front and extension to a J.F. Steiner store (1884); a four-story warehouse (1885) and a five-story factory (1890) for wagon manufacturer A.A. Cooper; and the Horr Block building (circa 1884) and the Staples and Vibber Block (1887). All were fine examples of Victorian styles, with Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne features. Perhaps one of his most unique Main Street commissions came from Hyde Clark, who first wanted a roller-skating rink but then changed his request to a natatorium for indoor swimming.

In 1887 and 1889, Hyde received commissions that would dominate lower Main Street for the next decade. One was the design and construction of the new Hotel Julien at Second and Main. A massive construction of Gothic Revival roof lines, Queen Anne turrets,



Hyde designed the Hotel Julien for A. A. Cooper. Together with the Bishop's Block building (opposite), the hotel would dominate lower Main Street in the late 19th century.

riel windows, and Richardsonian stonework, the hotel clearly served as a focal point until fire destroyed it two decades later.

Franklin Hyde's second commission on lower Main Street was for Bishop's Block, begun in 1887 and finished in 1889. Like many of Hyde's works, Bishop's Block was one of several commissions for a single person. A native of Ireland, Bishop John Hennessey was consecrated as Dubuque's third Roman Catholic bishop in 1865. He established new schools, churches, and convents throughout Iowa, and speculated in real estate and business ventures in the Dubuque area, buying or building dozens of structures around Dubuque. He had called on Hyde to create at least two sizable residential buildings before the Bishop's Block commission.

Hennessey's selection of the lower Main Street site, which was adjacent to a harbor, a main road, and a railroad and therefore at the virtual hub of transportation access in the city, was ideal for a warehouse that required delivery and shipment of wholesale goods. Trains would follow the course of the Ice Harbor just off the eastern side of the building, and a larger Illinois Central depot had just replaced the existing depot immediately to the southeast. Streetcar tracks and later an Illinois Central spur ran through the area, linking Bishop's Block with a wagon repository, agricultural implements shop, harness shop, bakery, candy factory, book bindery, flour and grain operation, boarding houses, and other nearby enterprises.

Bishop Hennessey apparently had not decided on the warehouse's specific future occupants while it was under construction. But it was built to accommodate the heftiest equipment or goods: "The walls and timbers are as strong as they could be built, and the flooring laid with the heaviest planking," commented the *Dubuque Herald* in 1887. "The building will support as much of the heaviest kind of merchandise as can be crowded into it." This superior construction has assisted in maintaining the building's integrity to this day.

In designing Bishop's Block, Hyde applied the same fashionable Victorian building styles reflected in his residential structures, and appropriately selected Victorian Romanesque for this commercial structure of considerable size and mass. The building's composition—a two-part block divided horizontally into a clearly defined street-level zone with large windows for pedestrians, and a more removed, brick and terra cotta facade on the second, multi-story zone above—is yet today the most common design for commercial buildings.

The building's five-story height followed national tendencies to build upward, as limited urban space encouraged increasingly vertical construction. (The inclusion of two elevators made this height practical.) On the street level, iron construction supported the masonry above the large windows. Inside, load-bearing iron posts added support. The closely spaced windows on the upper stories were a common modification to Victorian commercial buildings, bringing ample light into upper office or warehouse spaces.

Each exterior wall reflected its varied form and function. On the west side facing Main Street (the primary facade), huge showcase windows advertised merchandise, and entrance doors beckoned pedestrians. Brick piers stretched from the sidewalk to the roof, dividing the front of the building into six bays. On top of the single block of limestone that formed each pier foundation, a red terra cotta pedestal decorated with a floral and shell motif led into courses of brick. The piers continued visually all the way above the roof line, capped by parapets of double-stacked terra cotta pyramids. Hyde and other

Finished in 1889 and still standing today, Bishop's Block continues to reflect Franklin Hyde's knowledge of significant building styles and artistic values of the late 19th century.



PHOTO BY THOMAS GOODMAN

Victorian commercial architects frequently used terra cotta because it could be cast into almost any form to add ornamental and picturesque detail.

As one rounded the building's northwest corner, a large terra cotta tile set just above the foundation caught one's eye; the tile bore the date "1887" in free-flowing Moorish script. Five stories above, a turret capped by a steeply pitched witch's cap softened the angle formed by the west and north walls, taking form through several courses of brick corbeling that began about the fourth floor.

On the north side, facing First Street, the upper four stories resembled the Main Street side in form and decoration but were divided into eight bays instead of six. Chimneys rose above the roof line over the second bay from each end.

The east side, or rear of the building, served as the "working side," with double doors for loading and unloading goods and access to train tracks. The south side was entirely without openings; one third of that side shared a wall with a neighboring building.

Inside Bishop's Block, beaded and painted wainscoting on the first floor walls suggest that this area was used as office or retail space. A heavy masonry wall divided the first floor into two long rooms. Decorative caps on the cast-iron support columns spread into fan-like beams on the ceiling. Elevator shafts and stairwells connected rear doors and the loading dock to the upper stories, where iron columns supported large, open warehouse spaces.

In Bishop's Block, Hyde created a prime example of a late Victorian-era warehouse, one that combined the latest technologies with Victorian sensibilities and

PHOTO BY THOMAS GOODMAN



Terra cotta lent itself well to decorative flourishes, such as this cornerstone bearing the date construction began.

FROM DUBUQUE, IOWA, ON THE MISSISSIPPI, SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Wagons wait at a loading dock on the north side of Bishop's Block, facing First Street. A series of grocery wholesalers (M. M. Walker, John T. Hancock, and Western Grocery Company) occupied the building until the 1950s.

tastes. But the economic challenges of the coming years would greatly limit similar construction, and alter Hyde's career as well.

The financial panics of the 1890s considerably slowed commercial development in Dubuque, and, at what appears to be the pinnacle of his career, Hyde disappears from local records, apparently leaving town. If this was a purely business-related decision, it was not without foreshadowing.

As early as 1885, Hyde had remarked in the midwestern architecture journal *Inland Architect and Builder* (to which he was a regular contributor) that, given economic difficulties, "Building outlook not good." In 1886 he worried that the country's labor difficulties would hinder the building trades, although he noted no immediate ill effects for his business besides a general rise in prices. But following a boom in 1889, the national Panic of 1893 clearly affected his business; his reporting of new commissions in *Inland Architect* reflected only a handful of contracts.

As the 1893 panic spread to Dubuque's business leaders and entrepreneurs, it appears that Hyde, active in national professional organizations and still in mid-career at age 43, was able to make a transition to more fertile professional fields. Hyde's name reappears in New York, where he is credited as the archi-

PHOTO BY THOMAS GOODMAN



Brick piers, which define the bays on the west facade, are still ornamented with rich terra cotta detailing.

tect of a Gothic Revival railroad station built in Rochester in 1905, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

21nlike Hyde, Bishop's Block did not disappear from the local scene. From 1889 until the 1950s, it housed three different wholesale grocers and continued thereafter as a warehouse. Today, Bishop's Block is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a significant example of Franklin D. Hyde's prolific architectural career in Dubuque and as a high-style commercial warehouse in the once-thriving 19th-century market district on Dubuque's lower Main Street. Long considered one of Dubuque's most imposing structures, it became a local success story of adaptive reuse as affordable housing when the current owner, Gleichman & Company, Inc., rehabilitated the building in 1994 and turned it into apartments.

Although a new access street curving off Highways 61 and 151 has created a dead end to Main Street a few buildings past Bishop's Block, automobile traffic can access it from the north and west. Bishop's Block is adjacent to Old Main Historic District, a concentration of architecturally significant 19th-century commercial buildings; many of them now house antique and second-hand shops and other retail operations.

In 1887, the *Dubuque Herald* extolled, "This magnificent building is the finest warehouse west of Chicago, and is constructed to last for years." As elegant as warehouses ever come, Bishop's Block has indeed lasted—110 years and counting. ❖

Carmen Tschofen lives in the Minneapolis suburbs. As a consultant specializing in history education and interpretation of historic and cultural resources, she most recently designed and authored an interdisciplinary local history curriculum for the Faribault Public Schools. This article is adapted from the 1993 nomination of Bishop's Block to the National Register of Historic Places, authored by Tschofen and produced by Tallgrass Historians L.C.

NOTE ON SOURCES

A wide array of local sources, including the many publications on Dubuque's rich architectural heritage, was used for the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination of Bishop's Block, which was the foundation of this article. Special thanks to Michael Gibson (Director, Center for Dubuque History, Loras College), Dubuque photographer Thomas Goodman, Pam Myhre-Gonyier (Dubuque Historic Preservation staff person), Tacie Campbell and Bob Wiederaenders (Dubuque County Historical Society), and Kevin Moist (*Iowa Heritage Illustrated* editorial assistant) for assistance with this article. Annotations are held in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).