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APRIL 2022 NEWSLETTER

MPS board member, Brandon Tidwell will present a program on the history of Molette titled, **“Molette” The American Dream Realized in Moline: Celebrating 75 years of Affordable Housing.** The program is open to both members and non-members and will be held at Butterworth Center **May 23, 2022, at 6:30 p.m.** More information to follow in May newsletter.



Award Memory

In May of 2008 the Quality of Life Award was given to the Moline Historic Preservation Commission for the creation of the Downtown Commercial Historic District. Here is the presentation from that evening.

The creation the Downtown Commercial Historic District got an innocent start. A local developer eyed dilapidated buildings on Fifth Avenue, but the costs of acquisition and development were too high without state historic preservation incentives, specifically a 20% tax credit for substantial rehabilitation projects. The only problem was that such incentives required the buildings to be in a historic district. The developer went to the Commission, which contacted an architectural historian. Services would cost only...\$10,000!

Enter Barb Sandberg and the Moline Historic Preservation Commission, who spearheaded the effort to nominate the district, coordinating activities from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the Rock Island County Historical Society, the Moline Preservation Society, and the City of Moline.

Hundreds of hours later, on August 30, 2007, the Moline Downtown Commercial Historic District was officially placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Collectively, the district includes 113 buildings and the Josephson's Jewelers clock, spread out on 33 acres, and centered on Fifth Avenue between 12th Street and 18th Street.

One hundred of the buildings contribute to the significance of the district owing to the retention of their historic and architectural integrity. Together they reflect decades of change, reflecting the unique character of the historic.

In the last half of the nineteenth century, Moline's main downtown commercial business district was located near factories along the Mississippi River and only as far north as modern day Fourth Avenue, primarily along Third Avenue between 15th Street and 18th Street. Included were brick Italianate two and three-story commercial buildings, taverns, theatres and hotels lining the Avenue. However, the railroad tracks – which by 1895 carried 75 trains per day – separated most residents from that commercial district.

By the turn of the century many businesses began relocating south of the tracks, at first along to trolley line on 15th Street. Then during the 1910s, several large commercial buildings were built along Fifth Avenue, establishing that street as the primary axis of a “new downtown.” In the process, dozens of stately homes that graced those avenues were replaced by commercial buildings.

About two thirds of the buildings that contribute to the historic character of the district today were built between 1900 and 1930. By the 1920s, the area clearly had been established as a quintessential American central business district, with the main axis along Fifth and a secondary axis along Sixth Avenue. It included office and bank buildings, whose upper floors housed offices for a great variety of professional services. It also had department stores, scores of first-floor specialty shops, theatres, hotels, bars, and restaurants. Several institutional structures joined the mix, including the 1904 Carnegie Library, and the 1914 City Hall.

The most common historic building style is the one, two, or three-story brick commercial building. Two eight-story anchor block buildings are located near the

center of the district, the Fifth Avenue Building and today's Chase Bank. Anchoring the eastern end of the district is the 1922 LeClaire Hotel, which is listed as an individual building on the National Register of Historic Places. At the western end of the district, acting as a visual counterpoise to the fifteen-story hotel, is the tall steeple of the First Lutheran Church, which was built in 1876.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the historic district continued to be the business and social center of the city. Parades, always drawing big crowds, had celebrated the end of World Wars I and II, along with Homecoming, Fourth of July, and Labor Day parades. Five major department stores now served the area, and by the 1940s auto dealerships and gas stations appeared. Storefronts were modernized during the 50's and 60's, but in the decades that followed major department stores made their move away from the downtown to South Park Mall, forever changing the usage of many of the buildings.

The new historic district has already made contributions to the continued revitalization of downtown. And by the way, the developer that got the project started is one of our award winners tonight, Dave Wise.

It is my pleasure to present the Quality of Life Award to the Moline Historic Preservation Commission for their efforts to create a downtown commercial historic district in Moline. We would like to especially recognize Barb Sandberg contributing countless hours of research to earn Moline the distinction of attaining National Trust status for a Downtown Commercial Historic District. I wish I was handing you a \$10,000 check, but we hope that this plaque will do.

