

National Registry of Historic Places Application for the Moslem Temple, 1996

MPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)
5/15/96
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

57-02195
OMB No. 10024-0018

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Moslem Temple
other names/site number The Rose of Fraternity Lodge; Islamic Center; Mother Mosque of America

2. Location

street & number 1335 9th Street NW n/a not for publication
city or town Cedar Rapids n/a vicinity
state Iowa code IA county Linn code 113 zip code 52405

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant X rationally statewide X locally, (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patricia Ohlerking 3-20-96
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historical Society of Iowa
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria (see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that the property is: entered in the National Register	Signature	Date of Action
See continuation sheet.	_____	
Determined eligible for the National Register	_____	
See continuation sheet.	_____	
Determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	
Removed from the National Register	_____	
Other, (explained:) _____	_____	

Moslem Temple Linn County, Iowa
Name of Property; County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)	Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)
	<u>Religion</u>

X **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Ethnic Heritage/other

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. _____

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and _____

Period of Significance
1934-194

distinguishable entity whose components lack Individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Significant Dates

1934

Property is:

A owned by a religious institution or used for Religious purposes.

Significant Person

B removed from its original location

(complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

C a birthplace or grave

D a cemetery

Cultural Affiliation

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.

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): Primary location of additional data:

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

X State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

previously listed in the National Register

Federal agency

previously determined eligible by the

Local government

National Register

University

designated a National Historic Landmark

X Other

recorded by Historic American Buildings

Name of repository:

Survey # _____

Mother Mosque Archives (at site)

recorded by Historic American

Engineering Record # _____

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Moslem Temple
Linn County, Iowa

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The Moslem Temple (now the Mother Mosque) is simple, one-story wood frame "prairie schoolhouse style" building with a concrete basement. The walls are finished with **Vinyl** siding and the flat roof is asphalt. At the front entrance, ten steps lead to an extended foyer. Atop sits a dome capped with the traditional Islamic symbol of a crescent, marking the building as a place of worship. The mosque is located in an old residential area in Cedar Rapids' Northwest district (Time Check), facing west onto 9th Street NW between "L" and "M" Streets. The mosque's interior is simple, with walls painted white with wood trim on the first floor, which contains a prayer area, a classroom, an area for ablutions, and two offices. The basement, finished with gray wood paneling, contains a hall, used for social functions and meetings, and a kitchen. (See **sketches** submitted.)

The property is in excellent condition, partially due to restoration work in 1991 and 1992 to correct damage sustained the preceding decade when the property fell into disuse and disrepair. The original foundation and structure remain largely intact, although the roof had decayed and had to be replaced. Significant renovations were also undertaken to the interior. Despite this work, the historic integrity of the building survives. First, the building retains the same **location** as during its period significance. As in that period, the **setting** is a residential neighborhood. The **external design** of the mosque is little altered. The Islamic dome and crescent, which were removed at one point when a church occupied the building, have been restored (the dome is purely ornamental and lacks any structural significance), and the wide clapboard siding which had been used in earlier renovations was replaced with narrower siding conforming to the original design. The dome designs over the windows have also been replaced. A canopy was added over the front steps with the name of the mosque; this addition does not significantly detract from the integrity of the original design. During restoration, the **internal design** of the mosque was kept as close as possible to the original design. Thus, the prayer area occupies the same space as it originally did; there is a classroom now where religious instruction took place from 1934 through the 1960s; the basement social hall and kitchen are still used for social and community functions. 'Some minor modifications were made in the restoration, such as the transformation of a former storage closet into an area for ablutions and the installation of a stairway elevator/chair to meet disabled accessibility requirements; however, the overall design maintains its historical integrity. The **materials** used in the building's restoration are generally either the same as or similar to those originally used (for example, the siding noted above). In some cases, however, the use of different materials, such as wood paneling in the basement and linoleum in the kitchen, was dictated by cost and availability considerations. The **workmanship** in the building is similar to that used in the original construction, although there are minor differences of style. It is in terms of the last two categories of **association** and **feeling**, however, that the historic integrity of the mosque is most visible. The mosque retains the overall simplicity and atmosphere intended by the original builders, and the continuity in the prayer area and social hall space is evident.

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Statement of Significance

Summary

The Moslem Temple is significant under Criterion A as first building designed and constructed specifically as a house of worship for Muslims in the United States. It also meets the Criteria Consideration A as the oldest surviving place of worship for Muslims in America. It was completed in 1934 by a group of immigrants from Greater Syria (present-day Syria and Lebanon) who settled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Renamed by the Mother Mosque of America in recognition of its historic significance, it is today used as a mosque and Islamic Cultural and Heritage Center, in 1994 the mosque celebrated its 60th anniversary. The Moslem Temple in Cedar Rapids is of national significance within the context of two historical trends. First, it illustrates an important aspect of the immigration history of the United States, as it was built by a group of Arab immigrants with concerns and a history similar to that of other contemporary Arab immigrant groups settling elsewhere in the United States. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it marks a vital starting point for the development of Islam as an established religion in the United States. Today, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States, and Muslims will soon comprise (if they do not already) the second-largest religious community in the nation after Christianity. Thus, it is vital to recognize and preserve this essential piece of American religious history, which symbolizes tolerance and acceptance of Islam and Muslims in the United States.

Historical Context

Arab immigrants began arriving in the United States in the late 1800s; the flow increased in the early 1900s as a result of changed political conditions within the Ottoman Empire. These migrants, who came mostly from Greater Syria, were “homesick, cut off by language, custom, race and religion” and “they strove to preserve their identity, dignity and heritage by forming cultural clubs where they could eat familiar food, speak a familiar language, listen to familiar music, teach and practice their religions- and celebrate weddings, births and funerals in traditional ways.” (**Arameo World**, “The Arab Immigrants,” September/October 1986, pp. 14-15) and formed religious associations fairly early on, “the first mosque, in Cedar Rapids, was not built until 1934” (p. 27).

A booklet entitled **Islam in Iowa**, prepared by the Islamic Center of Cedar Rapids, relates these national historic trends of formation of Muslim immigrants communities and the need for mosque to the local context of Cedar Rapids. It describes work activities and settlement patterns that are consistent with those of other contemporary Arab groups elsewhere in the Midwest:

“Muslim immigrants to Cedar Rapids numbered about 45 by 1914. Mostly single men, they hoped to earn enough, mostly as peddlers, to return home and find Muslim wives. The Allick and DeHook families were the first Muslims to settle in the city.

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Immigration increased, and before long there was a full-scale Muslim community featuring such family names as Sheronick, Aosse, Igram, Kallel, Habhab, Bedra, Hamed and Omar. (...) By the mid-1920's Cedar Rapids, which of all the cities in the area attracted the largest number of Muslims, could claim more than 50 shops and grocery stores owned and operated by Arabs.

“The ancestor of the present-day Islamic Center was a group known as “The Rose of Fraternity Lodge,’ organized in 1925. Using a rented building as a temporary mosque these young men, number numbering less than 20, meeting for Friday prayers, started to make plans and prayed for the day when they would have their own building.

“In 1929, just as the United States was entering the Great Depression, the Muslims set into motion their plans for what was to be the first mosque constructed in North America. The hardships of the era both heightened their desire for their own house of worship and frustrated their efforts to complete it.”

With community members doing much of the construction themselves, the first building specifically designed and built as a mosque in the United States was opened on February 15, 1934. **Islam in Iowa** describes the building: “The mostly wooden structure somewhat resembled a prairie schoolhouse, except that its protruding entrance foyer was capped by a dome, from which extended a crescent-topped spire. On each side of the door were signs, Arabic to the right and English to the left, which proclaimed it as a Muslim house of worship. It served as both a mosque and a social center[.]”

Throughout its period of significance, regular prayer services and religious education took place in the mosque. With a growing Arab Muslim community, the congregation of the Moslem Temple (eventually renamed the Islamic Center) became an important force for changing the status of Muslims in the United States. A generous donation by William Aosse and his family led to the foundation of the first Muslim National Cemetery in 1948 in Cedar Rapids. The cemetery served as a final resting place for Muslims from the whole Midwestern region. Several years later, the work of community member Abdallah Igram gained recognition for Islam as a valid religion within the United States military, meaning that Muslims would no longer be buried as atheists. Members of the Cedar Rapids mosque were among the “founding organizers of the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada. The first International Muslim Convention for the U.S. and Canada was held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa” in 1952. (Yahya Aosse Jr., “Fifty Years of Islam in Iowa,” Unity Publishing Company, Cedar Rapids (IA), 1975) Thus, it can be seen that the 9th Street Moslem Temple served an important historic function in the development of organized Islam in America.

With the Muslim population growing rapidly, by 1970 the community had outgrown the small building; a new mosque was built on First Avenue SW in Cedar Rapids. The original mosque was sold and served various functions before it was abandoned in the late 1980s, falling into a state of neglect and disrepair.

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The newly formed Islamic Council of Iowa, the current owner of the building, repurchases the building and renovated it, restoring the building to its original appearances and function. Sixty years after its founding, the Moslem Temple serves again as a place of worship for Muslims and also as a resource center for information about Islam and the history of Muslims in America.

The Moslem Temple/ Mother Mosque (a name coined by Dr. Thomas Ballantine Irving, an internationally renowned Muslim scholar and long-time Cedar Rapids resident, to recognize the historic importance of the original Cedar Rapids mosque) thus represents an important turning point in the history of Islam in America. Organized groups of Muslim immigrants had been meeting for prayer since at least 1900, in homes or rented spaces. A simple log building, with no identifying Islamic characteristics- no longer existing- was built by the Muslim community in 1929 in Ross, North Dakota.

Irving's research showed, however, that the Cedar Rapids mosque was the first specifically designed as a mosque- with a prayer area, dome and crescent. In one of the publications which Dr. T.B. Irving compiled called "A critical analysis of Islamic Studies at North American Universities" and was updated in March, 1975 for distribution and consideration by Unity Publishing Co, Cedar Rapids, he stated on page 14 that "Cedar Rapids, Iowa is important... this small community has built many pillars of Islam in North America: the first Mosque in North America was erected here in 1934; the first independent Muslim Cemetery of 6 acres was established in 1948..."

The Islamic Affairs Programs, at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC, produced an occasional paper (No. 4), by Dr. Yvonne Y. Haddad "A Century of Islam in America". On page 10 of that publication under "Moments in American Muslim History" it says, "1934: First Building designed as a mosque, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa."

Also in the "Pluralism Project interactive", (Harvard University, Committee on the Study of Religion, Phillips Brooks House.) a Ph.D. Harvard student was sent to conduct research for the Pluralism Project, which is a three-year research project looking at the new religious diversity of America. Her research and speculation were concluded with the fact that "Iowa became the home to the First Islamic Mosque in North America, symbolizing the permanence of Islam in Iowa, and the United States". Her studies were nominated from among many others for the final presentation of this Pluralism Project in front of the committee on the Study of Religion.

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The Mother Mosque of America received a letter dated April 12, 1995 from Professor Rachel Antell, the Senior Researcher of the Pluralism Project Interactive, from Harvard University stating "... Beginning in July of this year, we've started work on an interactive CD-ROM exploring the new religious landscape of America, for the use in colleges, universities, high schools and various interfaith centers across the country. In CD-ROM, we will showcase a number of thriving, successful and prominent religious and interfaith center in the United States. Your center has been selected as one of the approximately 300 centers to be highlighted in our geographic section!"

This is only a few of the written documentation that exists to support the claim for National significance, the mosque thus commemorates the early establishment of Islam as one of the three major religious traditions in the United States. Today, there are hundreds if not thousands of mosques and prayer centers across the country, including dozens in major cities such as New York and Chicago.

Criteria Consideration:

In the list of criteria considerations, it is stated that, "properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes... shall not be considered eligible for the National Register." In terms of both ownership and function, the Moslem Temple/ Mother Mosque fits within this category. However, the text goes on to state that "such properties will qualify if they... fall within the following categories: (...) *A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance[.]*" (National Register Bulletin #15, "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, Section II, emphasis added).

Because of its role as the oldest surviving place of worship for Muslims in America, the Moslem Temple clearly falls into the category of "A religious property deriving primary significance from... historical importance".