

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

State Inventory No. 70-00138 New Supplemental
 Part of a district with known boundaries (enter inventory no.) _____
 Relationship: Contributing Noncontributing
 Contributes to a potential district with yet unknown boundaries
 National Register Status: (any that apply) Listed De-listed NHL DOE
 Review & Compliance No. _____
 Non-Extant (enter year) _____

1. Name of Property

historic name Molis & Beil Gunshop
 other names/site number Field Site #: FS-078

2. Location

street & number 225 E. 2nd St
 city or town Muscatine, Iowa vicinity, county _____
 Legal Description: (If Rural) Township Name _____ Township No. _____ Range No. _____ Section _____ Quarter of Quarter _____
 (If Urban) Subdivision _____ Original Town _____ Block(s) 32 Lot(s) W 1/3 Lot 5

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)	Number of Resources within Property		
	If Non-Eligible Property Enter number of:	If Eligible Property, enter number of:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	_____	Contributing <u>1</u>	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____	Noncontributing _____	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____	structures
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____	objects
<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____	Total
	_____	Contributing <u>1</u>	
	_____	Noncontributing _____	
	_____	_____	
	_____	_____	
	_____	_____	
	_____	_____	

Name of related project report or multiple property study (Enter "N/A" if the property is not part of a multiple property examination).
 Title _____ Historical Architectural Data Base Number _____
Historical and Architectural Survey and Evaluation of the Downtown Commercial District 70-013

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions) **Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)
02E: Commerce / Specialty Store - Gunsmith 02E03: Commerce/Dry Goods - Clothing

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions) **Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)
05B: Victorian / Italianate foundation _____
 walls 03: Brick
 roof 08B: Asphalt Rolled
 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 A Property is associated with significant events.
 Yes No More Research Recommended B Property is associated with the lives of significant persons.
 Yes No More Research Recommended C Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.
 Yes No More Research Recommended D Property yields significant information in archaeology or history.

County Muscatine Address 225 E. 2nd St Site Number 70-00138
City Muscatine District Number _____

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)

05: Commerce

Significant Dates

Construction date 1875 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 Jay Brady, Chair (R.L. McCarley, Consultant)

organization Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission date February 21, 2005

street & number 215 Sycamore telephone 563-264-1554

city or town Muscatine state IA zip code 52761

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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<u>Molis & Beil Gunshop</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>225 E. 2nd Street</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

7. Narrative Description

This is a c.1875, three story, three bay, Italianate building that replaced an earlier two-story building. The preceding two story building is shown in the 1869-70 Graham photograph of this block (GR22). The three-story building appears to be present in an 1879 Graham Collection Photograph, so the building appears to have been built in the mid-1870s (GR160). An 1888 Graham photograph clearly shows the building in its present configuration (GR165).

The original storefront has been modified, but the second and third stories are relatively intact. This building is somewhat different from most in downtown Muscatine in that it doesn't have obvious brick pilasters at each side of the front elevation. However, the neighboring buildings do have pilasters. The storefront has been remodeled with a modern glass entry door, plate glass windows with glass tile surround, and non-historic upper entry door. The entry to the upper floors is offset to the east side of the storefront, and is not the historic size. The store entry is slightly offset to the east of center and the windows are placed asymmetrically. There are four single lights two of same size and one smaller located to the west of the store door and one single light to the east of the store door. The west windows are set with outermost parallel to the street, the next angled towards the door to a small transition window set parallel to the street with the final window angled back to the store entry door. The east window is set on angle from the walk to the store entry. The windows have glass tile surround top and bottom. A metal awning is suspended from the wall by four steel rods, and metal clads the remainder of the storefront frieze above the awning. The covering over the storefront frieze was added after the 1930s based on a c.1930 photograph. The second and third story windows are single-over-single-light double-hung wood windows that appear to be non-historic. The windows have decorative, angled arch wood hoods with the arch section above the window sash now filled in. A keystone motif is used at the center of the window hoods. The window sills appear to be wood. This building appear to retain its original cornice supported by four brackets – two larger outer and two smaller intermediate brackets at the building thirds. Rectangular outlines decorate the frieze.

The east and west elevations are party walls with the adjacent buildings. A one-story rear addition was constructed between 1912 and 1919 based on the Sanborn Maps. This addition now extends to the alley, which is not yet shown on the 1946 Sanborn Maps. The first floor of the rear elevation consists of a centered modern double door entrance with small viewing glass windows set in the upper quarter of each door. The doors are set in a central plywood section with brick on each end of the elevation. Steel or cast iron stairs to the second level are offset to the west side. The brick second story rear elevation consists of a two single-over-single-light double-hung windows set in the east and center thirds with an entry set in a protruding brick entrance foyer in the west third. The windows have wood sashes and aluminum storm windows. Each window has a plywood section above with a straight segmental brick lintel. Sills appear to be wood. The brick third floor elevation consists of a non-original door set in the east third with a plywood section above the door and two plywood covered windows with wood sills in the center and west thirds. Modern wooden decking and stair connect the second level with the third level. Of interest is a section of what appears to be a covered old skylight frame centered over the single level back portion of the building.

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8. Narrative Statement of Significance

This building appears to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its long association with the Molis gunsmith shop. It does not appear individually eligible under Criteria B or C. Additionally, it appears to be a contributing building in a potential downtown historic district.

This building appears to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its long association with the Molis gunsmith shop from the mid-1870s to 1919. Molis operated a gunshop in the 200 E. block of 2nd from at least 1856 through 1919 with the business locating in the present building upon its construction in the 1870s. In the 1876-77 city directory, Molis is the only supplier of guns and pistols in Muscatine. Likewise, Molis and Co. is the only listing under gunsmiths in the later directories in the 1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s, through the 1916 city directory. Neither Henry Molis nor Molis & Co. was listed in the 1919 City Directory. While the gunsmith shop proprietors, Henry Molis, Sr. and Barnard Beil, were both fairly prominent citizens of Muscatine, their influence was limited and the building therefore does not appear to be individually eligible under Criterion B. While the building has some interesting architectural elements including the decorative window hoods and bracketed cornice, the extensive modern storefront styling has caused some loss of integrity that would likely preclude the building from being listed under Criteria C.

Finally, this building would likely be a strong contributing structure in a potential downtown commercial historic district. The building is located in a key central block in the business district. It falls within two historic contexts identified for this district: "19th century Business and Industry" and "20th century Business and Industry." Its 63 years of association with a leading gunshop in Muscatine and its over 58 years as a shoe store contributes to the historic business context of the downtown district. Additionally, its architectural style contains interesting elements that as would contribute to a downtown district, including its overall three-story construction, decorative window hoods, and bracketed cornice.

The Molis gunsmith operated at this address from at least 1856 to 1919. Henry Mollis, Gunsmith, was listed in 1856, followed by Molis & Bernhart Beil gunshop in 1859-60. The business is listed as H. Mollis & Co. in 1866 and Molis & Co. from 1869 to 1919. He operated out of an earlier building on this site prior to constructing this building in the mid-1870s. Henry Molis, Sr. was a native of Germany, apprenticed in the gunsmith trade, and immigrated to Columbus, Ohio. In 1841 he moved to Muscatine and established his gunsmith business. He returned briefly to Ohio to marry, and then he made this city his home for the remainder of his life. Bernhard Beil was also a German who immigrated to Columbus, where he apparently apprenticed with Molis. On July 3, 1845, he came to Muscatine with Molis and continued with Mr. Molis as an employee until about 1852. At this time, Molis and Beil officially formed a partnership. It appears that the business was listed by a variety of names in the early years with Henry Molis gunsmith, Molis & Bernhart Beil Gun Shop, and H. Molis & Co. all used until the name Molis & Co. became the prevalent listing in the late 1860s. According to the City Directory, Julius Molis worked at the shop starting in 1866 continuing through 1879. The 1870 census lists Henry Molis as a 53-year-old gunsmith with eight children, two of which were also gunsmiths (Julius, Augustus). They operated at this site, prior

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to the construction of this building in the mid-1870s. Thus, it appears that this building was built for the gunsmiths. In 1889, Molis was described as “the pioneer gunsmith of Muscatine, Iowa.” He was actively in city government, serving as alderman in the 1860s and as mayor in 1875 (*Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County, Iowa* 1889: 368, 390).

The early residence of Henry Molis Sr. and family is not listed in the 1850s and 1860s directories, and they likely lived above the storefront in this period. By 1874, Henry Molis Sr. had his residence on the north side of 3rd east of Cedar (307 E. 3rd) and the family would continue to live their through 1900. The Molis family appears to be adept at mechanical items with Henry Molis Jr. starting as a printer prior to succeeding his father as gunshop proprietor. While the 1870 census listed Augustus as a gunsmith, he eventually became a railroad engineer and was listed as such starting with the 1877 City Directory. C.E. Molis was a gunsmith initially and then became an engineer at the Muscatine Water Works. William Molis was an engineer eventually becoming the superintendent of the Muscatine Water Works, and Edward B. became a job printer foreman for a series of newspapers. Henry Molis Jr. would take over Molis & Co. after Henry Sr.’s death in 1884. Henry Molis Jr. served as Deputy Treasurer of Muscatine County from 1874 through 1879. Henry Molis Sr. also served the community by serving as City Treasurer in 1866 and in 1877.

The partnership of Molis and Beil lasted until the death of Henry Molis Sr. in March 1884. Beil continued the business in connection with Mr. Henry Molis, Jr. under the moniker Molis & Co. In 1889, Beil was noted to have been permanently identified with the gunsmith business of this city, and widely and favorably known as an expert workman, a conscientious business man, and a most worthy citizen. Their establishment was not only the oldest in Muscatine, but one of the very oldest and best known in its line in the State. The business kept a large stock of the different lines of goods embraced in their trade, and have a first class establishment. They did the largest business in their line in the city at this time (*Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County, Iowa*, 1889: 390, 594).

The 72-year-old Bernhard Beil is listed with his wife Anna in the 1900 census as a gunsmith. Beil continues to be listed as owner of a gun shop in the 1910 census, now at the age of 82. The 1910 census also lists Henry Molis, Jr. as a proprietor of a gun shop. Beil was listed as retired in 1913, dying within a year or two. The Molis family continued to live at 307 E. 3rd Street until Henry Molis Jr. died in June 1918. The gunsmith business at 225 E. 2nd was last listed in 1917, apparently closing in 1918 after Henry died. It had a run of 76 years with two generations of the Molis family and the long standing Beil.

Cherry’s Daylight shoe shop was here from 1919 to 1927. Cherry’s Daylight shoe store was founded at 117 E. 2nd St by T.W. Cherry between 1900 and 1904. T.W. Cherry was part of the Wilson and Cherry shoe store in 1900 breaking away from that partnership to open his own store. In 1919 he moved the store to 225 E. 2nd renaming the business as Cherry’s New Daylight Shoe Store. He continued operating the store until 1928. In 1928, Brownbilt Shoe Co. opened at this location and operated here through 1977. The Brownbilt Shoe Store was established in November of 1928 by William C. Ruthenberg at 225 E. 2nd. The firm carried the well known Airstep and Odette line of women’s shoes, Robber and Jolly Stride in the men’s line, and Buster Brown, and Robin Hood for children. Mr. Ruthenberg, son of William Ruthenberg, had been clerking at Wilson’s shoe store since 1916 before opening the Brownbilt.

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(*Muscatine Journal*, May 31, 1940, P. 6, Section 7). Mr. Rughenberg continued to manage the Brownbilt through the 1950s. The shoe business in Muscatine has always been fairly competitive with generally a half dozen boot and shoe stores present at any one time during the 1800s and early 1900s growing to a dozen in the 1910s and fifteen by the early 1920s. Wilson and the Cherry-Brownbilt lineage were two of the longer lasting shoe stores with by enduring for most of the 20th Century.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"Brownbilt Shoe Store", *Centennial Edition of Muscatine Journal*, May 31, 1940, Section 7, Pg 6.

City Directories, Muscatine, Various publishers, 1869-1959. Available at the Musser Public Library.

GR22, Second West from Cedar Photograph, 1869, Graham Photo Collection, Volume 1. Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa.

GR160, Arch build by Co. C. Photograph, 1879, Graham Photo Collection, Volume 4. Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa.

GR164, Second East from Sycamore Photograph, 1879, Graham Photo Collection, Volume 4. Available at the Musser Public Library.

GR165, Hook & Ladder Co. Arch on E. 2nd Photograph, 1888, Graham Photo Collection, Volume 4. Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa.

History of Muscatine County, Iowa. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879.

OG #A-42, 2nd St at Cedar looking West, c.1906, Grossheim Photo Collection. Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa.

OG #A-107, Vol 27, Street Fair, September 10-15, 1900, Grossheim Photo Collection. Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa.

Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County, Iowa. Chicago: Acme Publishing, 1889.

Sanborn Map Company. "Muscatine, Iowa," Sanborn fire insurance maps. Pelham, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1883, 1888, 1892, 1899, 1907, 1912, 1919, 1928, 1946. Accessed online at: sanborn.umi.com.

Second Street Muscatine, Randallman's Post Card Collection, 1907. Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa.

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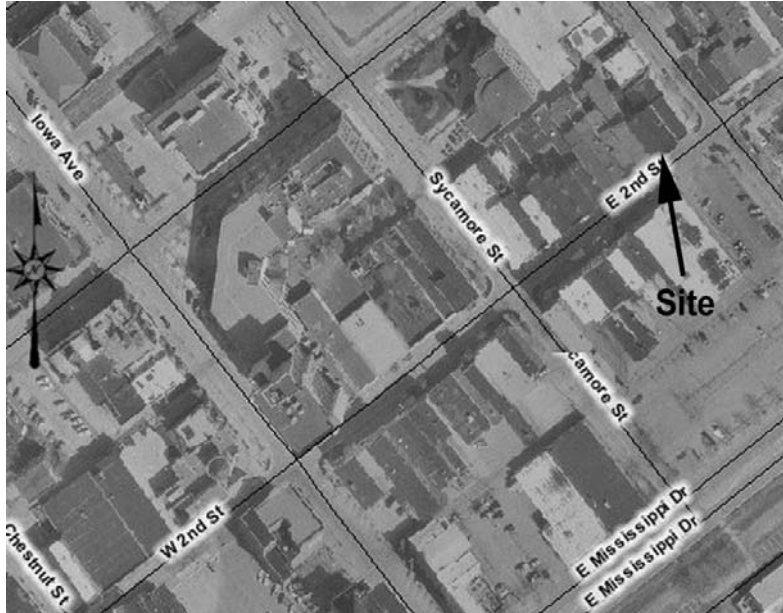
Molis & Beil Gunshop
Name of Property

Muscatine
County

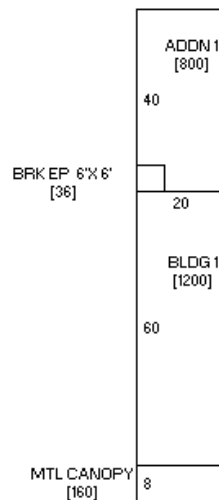
225 E. 2nd Street
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Muscatine
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Location Map



Plan (from assessor's office)



(front – 2nd Street)

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Photograph of building (digital image)

